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Fashioning the Artist:
Artistic Dress in Victorian Britain, 1848 - 1900

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for the Degree of PhD

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Abstract

My research comprises a study focused on Artistic Dress circa 1848-1900, presenting a roughly chronological survey that seeks to further our knowledge on its development, varied manifestations, and influence, both during its time and on subsequent fashion trends. While Artistic Dress is a category that is acknowledged in the current literature on fashion history, it has had limited and at times conflicting treatment. It is most often employed to describe sartorial codes in which significant arts practitioners and patrons—particularly those associated with Pre-Raphaelitism, the Arts and Crafts Movement, Aestheticism, and Art Nouveau—wore (and at times designed and promoted) clothes that were frequently labelled in contemporary literature as ‘artistic’ or ‘aesthetic’. These descriptors designated such clothing to be of a unique and creative calibre, but also outside the norm. As such, it has been a subject of interest for art and fashion historians, but usually only approached marginally within the scope of larger studies on related artistic movements, or within studies of larger fashion histories on nineteenth century dress and/or Dress Reform.

This thesis offers a closer examination of Artistic Dress than has previously been undertaken. The methodology for this research was to compile a history of the phenomenon of Artistic Dress derived from relevant primary source material, including (where possible) actual clothing, images (photographs and paintings), and text (correspondence, memoirs, and periodicals) related to selected ‘artistic dressers.’ Through this, I hope to identify whether there are in fact differences in the aforementioned related terms, and whether we might be able to position Artistic Dress as an umbrella term that is the most appropriate classification for the alternative sartorial trends found in artistic circles in Victorian Britain, offering a solution to this terminological quandary in dress history. It is hoped that in clarifying this term, other styles such as Aesthetic Dress and Reform Dress—and their relation to artistic practice—may be better understood. In this way, it is intended that this research will enrich the body of knowledge in the areas of both the History of Fashion, and of British Visual Culture.

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Acknowledgements & Dedication

I say, beware of all enterprises that require new clothes, and not rather a new wearer of clothes.

-Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, 1854

Although the context for Walden's quote is a more serious comment on the transcendentalist philosophy of simple living, many years ago it made my grandmother and I laugh enough to put it on our refrigerator as a reminder. I think of her as I often do, and how she would now find it ironic that I have essentially dedicated the past five years of my life studying 'old clothes', and through the process, have in fact become a 'new wearer' (in the philosophical sense) at the same time I will most assuredly require new clothes for my future endeavours.

There are many people I must acknowledge for my 'new wearer' status, and my first inclination is to express gratitude to all the unconventional Victorians who cast off the trappings of mainstream dress to find something that they felt was most suitable to their creative and at times eccentric tastes: Artistic Dress. Obviously without their rebellious streak, this research would not exist.

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It is with certain sadness that I extend my deepest thanks to—and fond wishes in memory of—Steve Banks, for including me in his extraordinary research on his 'Fan of Lady X' with infectious enthusiasm. I will ever regret we could not solve the mystery of its 'Exalted' owner before his passing last year, but I have not given up on this puzzle, and enjoy continuing the academic adventure along with his family, notably his daughter Cindy.

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I dedicate this thesis to the stylish Findley women...

My striking great-grandmother Nettie Findley, whose lovely coat I discuss in chapter six;
My beloved grandmother Margaret Findley, who taught me to paint and love art, and who allowed me to steal vintage dresses from her closet;
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Their beauty is only outdone by their intelligence, and they are all an inspiration to me.

Author's Declaration

This thesis represents the original work of Robyne Erica Calvert, unless otherwise stated in the text. The research upon which it is based was carried out for the Department of History of Art, University of Glasgow, under the supervision of Professor Margaret F. MacDonald, Professor Alison Yarrington, and Dr Clare Willson, between September 2007 and February 2012.

Chapter One: Introduction

*After all, though there be principles of dress and canons of taste, there is no one artistic dress, either real or ideal.*¹

What is ‘Artistic Dress’?

An 1885 exchange in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, in which correspondents debate the difference between ‘Artists’ and ‘Aesthetes’ in relation to dress practices, illustrates that even in the Victorian era, the answer to this question was somewhat elusive. One woman wrote:

I must draw a wide line between an aesthete (as the word is now known) and an artist—a person can quite well be one without the other at the present day... The Aesthete, I have found by long experience, is as a rule eminently unpractical in ‘l’art de s’habiller.’ I aspire to be the reverse.²

In response, a lady with the initials C.W. remarked, ‘...No one deprecates more than I do the untidiness of many who wear a so-called artistic dress, but they are not the aesthetic people who do this...’ She concludes ‘After all, though there be principles of dress and canons of taste, there is no one artistic dress, either real or ideal.’³

A few years prior, in 1881, an article titled ‘Aesthetic Dress’ from *The Queen* magazine (later *Harper’s & Queen*) also indicated the vagueness and exchangeability of these terms:

Among the records of fashion during the last few years, one of the most noteworthy is the way in which the apparel variously termed “Pre-Raphaelite,” “Artistic,” “High Art,” or more generally “Æsthetic,” has become a recognised factor in the dress of English women.⁴

This terminological issue still exists in sartorial studies today, and was the first problem I was confronted with in attempting to research the history of Artistic Dress in the Victorian era.

While Artistic Dress is a category that is acknowledged in the current literature on fashion history, it has had limited and at times conflicting treatment. It is most often employed to describe sartorial codes in which significant arts practitioners and patrons—particularly those associated with Pre-Raphaelitism, the Arts and Crafts Movement, Aestheticism, and Art Nouveau—wore (and at times designed and promoted) clothes that were frequently labelled in contemporary literature as ‘artistic’ or ‘aesthetic’.⁵ These descriptors designated such clothing to be of a unique and creative calibre,

¹ (Constance Wilde?) C.W., “Ladies Dress--Aesthetic and Artistic,” *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, 1885).

² Anonymous, “Ladies Dress - Real and Ideal I & II,” *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, 1885). This exchange is discussed more fully in chapter five.

³ C.W., “Ladies Dress--Aesthetic and Artistic.”

⁴ Anonymous, “Aesthetic Dress,” *The Queen*, 1881.

⁵ While this research is not focused on the complications of stylistic classifications in Victorian Art, it is worth noting that Artistic Dress does provide another area through which to question this approach to visual culture studies.

but also outside the norm. As such, it has been a subject of interest for art and fashion historians, but usually only approached marginally within the scope of larger studies on related artistic movements, or within studies of larger fashion histories on nineteenth century dress and/or Dress Reform.

My research comprises a study focused on Artistic Dress circa 1848-1900, presenting a roughly chronological survey that seeks to further our knowledge on its development, varied manifestations, and influence, both during its time and on subsequent fashion trends. Through this, I hope to identify whether there are in fact differences in these related terms, and whether we might be able to position Artistic Dress as an umbrella term that is the most appropriate classification for the alternative sartorial trends found in artistic circles in Victorian Britain, offering a solution to this terminological quandary in dress history.

Review of Key Literature

There is a great deal of literature on the art and design of this period, and it would not be useful to review it all here. Likewise I cannot possibly include the entire array of sources consulted and utilised in this section. Instead, I will discuss briefly the key primary and secondary sources that are most relevant to this exploration of Artistic Dress, particularly relating to the gaps in knowledge I seek to address. Many of these sources are reviewed in more detail as they become relevant to my case studies throughout this research, and as such I will use this space to introduce them and place them in context.

There are several period texts specifically on art and dress that are important to this research, including the writings of Mary Merrifield, Lady Eastlake, E. W. Godwin, Mary Eliza Haweis, and the journal of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union, *Aglaia*, particularly essays by the artists Henry Holiday and Walter Crane. Unfortunately, the bulk of the rest of the extant historical commentary is largely found in short passages in articles, comments in diaries, and observations in personal letters, which as any historian knows, can never be as thorough or exhaustive as one hopes. The notable exception to this is the prolific amount of literature available in the 1880s and 1890s, when Dress Reform spurs much public discussion in popular magazines and newspapers on alternative fashion trends, which I explore in greater detail in chapters five and six.

In fact, chapter five is in essence a review of the literature of the 1880s, which was prolific on issues of dress and taste related to this subject, as it was the peak of both Aestheticism and Dress Reform activities. This textual discussion is tempered by key examples of dress to illustrate the fashion debates of this time. Within this, Walter Hamilton's *The Aesthetic Movement in England* is included. Hamilton discusses dress only in relation to the influence of the Aesthetic movement, but does not go into great detail on the subject with the notable exception of his discussion of Oscar Wilde. I agree with Leonée Ormond's assessment of Hamilton's work that it 'does much to redress

the balance of ridicule,’ in regards to Aestheticism and in particular Wilde, and that ‘[m]uddled as he is about the Pre-Raphaelite connection, he is a useful guide to the events and atmosphere of the period.’⁶

Two primary sources which, perhaps surprisingly, I have chosen *not* to focus on are George du Maurier’s cartoons for *Punch* (ca. 1865-1891), particularly those of the ‘Cimabue Browns’ (ca. 1880s) and Gilbert & Sullivan’s operetta *Patience* (1881). Both of these are satirical looks at the ‘Aesthetic Craze’, and are often cited to show the way in which Aestheticism – and Aesthetic Dress – had become a popular trend. I have consulted them here; but because they are works of fiction (if based on fact), I have chosen to use them only selectively and instead focus my study on other sources which I feel are more tangible and as well have been underexplored.

In terms of secondary sources, it must be noted that there is one work that seems to underpin all of the recent studies on Artistic Dress, Aesthetic Dress, and Dress Reform, and that is Stella Mary Newton’s *Health, Art & Reason: Dress Reformers of the 19th Century* (1974). This text will be discussed below in relation to terminology, and will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter. It might be considered that Patricia Cunningham’s *Reforming Women’s Fashion* (2002), also discussed below, is an updated and expanded version of Newton’s text. Both are excellent sources on Dress Reform that weight it equally with the study of Artistic Dress, but in doing so leave the subject open to the aforementioned confusion of terms. They lay the groundwork for an analysis focused on Artistic Dress, as opposed to coming from the angle of reform, however neither ever comes to a clear definition of the term (see further discussion on this in the terminology section below).

There are also two previous PhD dissertations (as they are called in North America) which have explored similar topics, but as we can see from their titles, do not focus strictly on the question of Artistic Dress: Pamela Radcliffe’s *Pre-Raphaelite Influences on Women’s Dress in the Victorian Era* (1990); and Kim Wahl’s *Fashioning the Female Artistic Self: Aesthetic Dress in Nineteenth-Century British Visual Culture* (2004). Both of these use many of the same sources as my research, and cover similar ground; however I depart from both of them in some important ways, which will be explored in subsequent chapters, most notably my assertions regarding terminology and my reinvestigation of assertions on Pre-Raphaelite Dress as established by Newton. I have had access to primary source materials that have enabled an object-based study in this area, which has in turn assisted in analysing and in some cases deconstructing some of the assumptions that have been made in these and other earlier studies.

⁶ Leonée Ormond, *George Du Maurier* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969), 251–252.

A third dissertation was more recently completed by Jennifer Barrows titled *The sources, rhetoric and gender of Artistic Dress, 1893 to 1911* (2009). Barrows identifies Artistic Dress as a term that became more common in the late nineteenth century, and as her title suggests, focused her study on the *fin de siècle*.⁷ Her research also encompasses a wider geographic scope, approaching it as a ‘pan-European movement’, and in fact is focused heavily on the Austrian and German *Kunstlerkleid*; but includes the work of the artists associated with the Glasgow School of Art, which I examine toward the end of this thesis. Barrows identifies the term Artistic Dress as being used ‘between 1890 and 1912’ and that it ‘relates specifically to clothing that was produced for everyday use, designed in accordance with contemporary art principles, intended to challenge fashion, and considered a work of art in and of itself.’⁸ I agree with much of this definition, with the exception that I aim to show the chronological span goes further back, and although ‘Artistic Dress’ was not in common parlance during the early part of this period, it was definitely in use before 1890. In fact, although Barrows’ investigation is excellent in the pan-European aspect, my position fundamentally disagrees with the distinction she draws that Artistic Dress is separate from the Arts and Crafts and Aesthetic Movements. As such, the present research may be seen as a precursor to that which Barrows presents, and the chronological approach aids in illustrating the development of Artistic Dress from an earlier point.

In this regard, this research seeks to preface the numerous other studies that focus on the twentieth century as the site where fashion merges with and emerges as art, steeped in the avante-garde milieu of the ‘Modern’. Included in the best of these studies are Nancy J. Troy’s *Couture Culture: A study in Modern Art and Fashion* (2003); Christopher Breward and Caroline Evans’s *Fashion and Modernity* (2005); and Mark Wigley’s *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture* (2001); all of which influenced this thesis from a theoretical standpoint.

Gender is also an important aspect of fashion studies, and perhaps unsurprisingly, less has been written about male dress during this period, and most of what has been is either side-lined by the discussion of female dress, or focused on mainstream fashion. Christopher Breward’s research is amongst the most balanced on this front, including discussions of masculinity as well as femininity in his highly regarded theoretical texts. In particular, his 1999 text *The hidden consumer: masculinities, fashion and city life 1860-1914* explores ‘the consumption habits and fashion identities of men’ in order to dispel the myth that fashion and shopping were strictly in the realm of women.⁹ Also, like Breward, John Harvey problematizes assumptions about nineteenth century

⁷ Jennifer Ann Barrows, *The Sources, Rhetoric, and Gender of Artistic Dress* (ProQuest, 2009); See also the electronic resource based on her research at: Jennifer Ann Barrows, “Artistic Dress”, n.d., <http://www.deltacollege.edu/emp/jbarrows/index.html>.

⁸ Barrows, *The Sources, Rhetoric, and Gender of Artistic Dress*, 2.

⁹ Christopher Breward, *The Hidden Consumer: Masculinities, Fashion and City Life 1860-1914* (Manchester University Press, 1999), 1.

men's dress in his 1996 text *Men in Black*, challenging and deconstructing both period and contemporary perceptions that the wearing of black was merely due to lack of imagination, and rather considering whether it had more to do with concepts like democracy and power.¹⁰

However, I only discovered one article which focuses solely on what we may call male Artistic Dress from this period: Colin Cruise's 'Artists' clothes: some observations on male artists and their clothes in the nineteenth century' (1996). Although brief (and I hope he returns to the topic again), it was critically important to shaping my opinion on the broader scope of Artistic Dress through his observations that men broke from mainstream fashion in a subtler manner, through styling (he coins the phrase the 'garret-assembly style'); this is a concept I expand upon to apply to women's dress as well. Cruise is also amongst the few to see a difference between Aesthetic Dress and Artistic Dress, defining the latter as a much more deliberate construction, 'designed, contrived, and presented.'¹¹ This is very much in line with my own views, discussed in chapters four and five.

In addition to the many useful surveys and biographies on the art and artists of this period written by notable scholars such as Leoneé Ormond, Lionel Lambourne, Elizabeth Prettejohn, Jan Marsh, Pamela Gerrish Nunn, and Margaret F. MacDonald, two texts in particular have helped shape the contextual scope of this research, for their focused study on circles and societies of artistic production and patronage. The first is Caroline Dakers' *The Holland Part Circle: Artists and Victorian Society* (1999), which has been an invaluable source on the group centred at Little Holland House, particularly the Pattle sisters and G.F. Watts. More recently, Charlotte Gere's *Artistic Circles: Design and Decoration in the Aesthetic Movement* (2010) goes beyond the South Kensington neighbourhood to explore the myriad connections that fostered artistic production in Aesthetic groups. Both of these include discussions of fashion in a tangential manner, however they also acknowledge it as an important aspect of social identity to the individuals they discuss, often mentioning it to reinforce their conclusions about artistic (or aesthetic) convictions.

Although mine is not a primarily theoretical study, several key texts on theory and methodology were consulted in preparation for this research. In addition to those mentioned in the 'Methodology' section below, Lou Taylor's *The study of dress history* (2002) and Valerie Cumming's *Understanding Fashion History* (2004) offered valuable introductions to the study of dress. Both books provide excellent overviews of the discipline by discussing the history of dress/costume/fashion studies; offering discussions of both object-based and theoretical approaches to the subject; and pointing to other key works which should be consulted for a more in-depth understanding of the field. Furthermore, since its inception in 1997, *Fashion Theory: the Journal of*

¹⁰ John Harvey, *Men in Black* (University of Chicago Press, 1996).

¹¹ Colin Cruise, "Artists' Clothes: Some Observations on Male Artists and Their Clothes in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Gendered Object*, ed. Pat Kirkham (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 112.

Dress, Body, and Culture has provided a venue for cutting edge research to be presented, helping to elevate the status of the subject which had traditionally been marginalised in both academic and cultural institutions. The editor of the journal, Valerie Steele, is the current curator of the Museum of the Fashion Institute of New York. This thesis owes much to Steele's research, both in terms of subject (she has written on nineteenth century fashion and, in particular, the corset), and the manner in which she relates the history of fashion to more subversive contemporary sartorial codes, such as Goth style in her recent exhibit *Gothic: Dark Nightmares*, which is considered briefly at the conclusion of this thesis.

Three other exhibitions should be noted as central to this research. The first was a smaller exhibit at the Cheltenham Art Gallery in 1996 titled *Simply Stunning: the Pre-Raphaelite Art of Dressing*. For this exhibit, a catalogue was produced, although it was not widely distributed. However the essays are important sources for this research, particularly those of Geoffrey Squire, who, like Cruise, also saw critical differences in the development of Artistic and Aesthetic Dress, as well as Dress Reform; and he is one of the few to identify the Pattle sisters, discussed here in chapters two and three, as an early source for the rise of Artistic Dress:

To aim at looking picturesque had been a long-recurrent tendency in English art of every kind. This latest manifestation in respect to dress had been pioneered over twenty years before among a few individuals like the Pattle sisters, the wives of Pre-Raphaelite artists, and Ellen Terry, whose personal circumstances and voluntary segregation from more conventional society had encouraged them to do so in the direct cause of art and beauty. But those initial responses coincided with others, made quite independently by women more concerned with such ethical matters as health and hygiene, the deprivations of the masses education, literature, and their own position in relationship to men. The two superficially distinct factions in practice often coalesced.¹²

I was glad to have my hypotheses in this area encouraged by his reasoned account of Artistic Dress, and consider that my research builds upon his. Squire also wrote one of the most detailed accounts of Godwin's affiliation with Liberty, which relevant sections of this thesis draw upon.

Secondly, the 2003 exhibit *Whistler, Women, and Fashion* at the Frick Collection in New York chronicled Whistler's interest in dress, particularly as modelling costume (whether mainstream dress or more often of his own devising). The accompanying catalogue included essays by Frick curator Susan Grace Gallassi, exhibit co-curator Margaret F. MacDonald (advisor to this thesis), fashion historian Aileen Ribeiro, and Whistler specialist Patricia DeMontfort. The sections of this thesis that discuss Whistler build upon their very thorough research by considering their conclusions in the context of my findings on Artistic and Aesthetic Dress.

Just last year, Stephen Calloway curated *The Cult of Beauty: The Aesthetic Movement 1860-1900*, setting a very broad timeframe for the period. A wide-ranging catalogue was also produced, and

¹² Geoffrey Squire, "E. W. Godwin and the House of Liberty," *Costume*, no. Number 34 (2000): 92.

although only a very small portion of the exhibit included dress, two items were included which were examined in-depth for this research: a dress designed by the sculptor Hamo Thornycroft and his wife Agatha in 1885, which is discussed in detail in chapter five; and an autograph fan which I originally thought would form part of this study, but as it is a decorative object rather than a functional accessory, I have included this research only as a segue at the conclusion, rather than make it part of the main study. Nevertheless, along with my investigation of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union, these two items in fact represent perhaps the most original aspects of my contribution, for though they have been mentioned briefly elsewhere, I am the first to investigate them fully as sartorial art objects.

Finally, in terms of primary resource material, it must be mentioned that even since beginning this thesis in late 2007, the proliferation of excellent electronic sources has exploded. In particular, the launch of several museum collections online has greatly aided in this research, most notably the expansive online collection and essays of the Victoria & Albert Museum. Also important to note are: the Whistler Correspondence at the University of Glasgow; the Rossetti Archive; the Victorian Web; Nineteenth Century Newspapers Online; Project Gutenberg; and Archive.org; all of which have made readily available primary source material which has enriched this research greatly.

Terminology

To facilitate the aim of defining Artistic Dress, it is useful to set out definitions for key terms and categories as they are used in this thesis. This is particularly important for those terms that relate directly to Artistic Dress, and are often used interchangeably with it, as one of the central aims of this thesis is to clarify differences in these classifications where possible. This will also allow me to more specifically point to the problems between the terms Artistic Dress, Pre-Raphaelite Dress, and Aesthetic Dress as they exist in literature presently. The following terms will no doubt be familiar to the reader, however I wish to clarify how they will be used in the context of this study.

Art and Artistic

Aside from their obvious definitions, these two words were often employed in an almost brand-like sense, as mentioned in the above Liberty context. Art Silks, Art Furniture, and of course Art Dress were all common linguistic devices used in commodity culture, aimed at appealing to an elite clientele. We might consider its usage in the same way we employ 'Designer' today. The reader should be aware of the implications of these words in Victorian parlance as signifying a certain set of cultured preferences that was more than simply one who enjoyed art or had refined tastes, but rather displayed an attitude that might be seen as exotic, eccentric, or even bohemian. In my investigations into the periodicals of this era, I strived to be judicious in selecting examples that treated Artistic Dress as a label, rather than simply a description of dress that was 'artistic'.

Aesthetic Movement and Aestheticism

Despite the V&A continuing to use the term ‘Aesthetic Movement’ in their recent *Cult of Beauty* exhibit, there is a growing preference for using the term ‘Aestheticism’ in the current literature, for as Geoffrey Squire rightfully observed in 1996:

So the Aesthetic Movement was not a movement in the sense generally understood when the term is applied by art historians to the Pre-Raphaelites, Impressionism, Symbolism, or the Arts & Crafts Movement. It did not, like those originate among a group of like-minded creative artists concerned with themes or techniques, or working to a defined theory or programme related to the practice of a particular visual art...

The many professionals – poets, painters, architects, designers and critics – whose names, then and since, have been claimed by, or for, the Movement were usually involved with one or another of the more specifically defined groups existing at the time – or were simply following their own personal interests.¹³

The term comes from Walter Hamilton’s 1892 text *The Aesthetic Movement in England*; at least this is the first place we are aware of it in print.¹⁴ It may have been used in common parlance, however as Squire points out, it was not a cohesive movement. It is for this reason that recent scholarship, such as that of Elizabeth Prettejohn, prefers ‘Aestheticism’, as it exhibits a more personal, philosophical approach rather than some form of crusade.¹⁵

Although a preference is shown here for ‘Aestheticism’ where possible, this thesis is not focused on taking a stand on this terminological issue, and employs both uses as appropriate to the text from both an historical and semantic standpoint.

***Aesthetic Dress, Pre-Raphaelite Dress, Dress Reform*¹⁶**

These are the three terms that are often used interchangeably with Artistic Dress. Some authors show distinctions, usually in labelling Pre-Raphaelite Dress as a precursor to Aesthetic and/or Artistic Dress; and in recognising that Dress Reform was more concerned with issues of health and women’s social change (examples will be discussed in detail further on). However the boundaries of these categories are quite blurred, which has resulted in vague and confusing definitions for each. It is this problem that I aim to address through my chronological examination of this subject, however I will make clear at the outset: these boundaries *are* blurred, and although I do see these as distinct categories, they blend, overlap, and influence each other.

To briefly overview how these terms relate, and how they become confused, let us look at some of the primary and secondary literature that discusses them. While Artistic and Aesthetic Dress may

¹³ Geoffrey Squire, “The Union of Persons of Cultivated Taste,” in *Simply Stunning: The Pre-Raphaelite Art of Dressing* (Cheltenham: Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museums, 1996), 6.

¹⁴ Walter Hamilton, *The Aesthetic Movement in England (1882)* (Kessinger Publishing, 2008).

¹⁵ See Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art for Art’s Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007).

¹⁶ For the purposes of this research I have decided to capitalise these terms for emphasis throughout this thesis. Exceptions to this occur only when in a direct quote from another source that does not follow this convention.

be seen as reformist activities, Dress Reform is most often used in relation to the Rational Dress Movement, which was happening concurrently. A significant social and political crusade of the time, advocates of Rational Dress argued for change in costume based on arguments of health, fitness, and, as the century progressed, the concerns of the ‘New Woman.’ The American women’s movement pioneers Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) and Amelia Bloomer (1818-1894), for example, wrote about Rational Dress in the early 1850s in Bloomer’s bi-weekly newspaper *The Lily*, arguing for the freedom of movement and safety the garments allowed, rather than any sense of gender equity.¹⁷ The aesthetic aspect of these garments was not a consideration at that time.

This contrasted with the early writings on dress of artists and designers in the 1860s. Chief among these was Godwin, who delivered ‘A Lecture on Dress’ in 1868 that was more of an historical sketch of costume from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries—gleaned from literature, costume books, and artworks in collections like the British Museum—with an eye to relating dress to the overall consideration of art, architecture and design: ‘If you really desire noble buildings, strange as it may sound, you must have an eye to your boots.’¹⁸ By the 1880s Godwin was fully incorporating issues of health into his discussions, culminating in his lecture ‘Dress and its Relation to Health and Climate’ at the International Health Exhibition in 1884.¹⁹ At the same time, another disciple of Aestheticism—a follower of Godwin and others—was making a name for himself as an arbiter of Aesthetic taste: Oscar Wilde.

Wilde had completed his famous lecture tour of America in 1882, and by 1885 was publishing on dress with regularity in the *Pall Mall Gazette* as well as in *Woman’s World*, where he was editor. Wilde borrowed heavily from Godwin’s ideas (as well as those of others such as Walter Pater and William Morris), but also showed interest in the health-related concerns of the dress reformists:

I am not proposing any antiquarian revival of an ancient costume, but trying merely to point out the right laws of dress, laws which are dictated by art and not by archaeology, by science and not by fashion; and just as the best work of art in our days is that which combines classic grace with absolute reality, so from a continuation of the Greek principles of beauty with the German principles of health will come, I feel certain, the costume of the future.²⁰

These last two points are significant. The citing of the Greeks as the model of beauty in physique and dress was a key tenet of Aesthetic Dress as well as Dress Reform. The ‘German principles of health’ refer specifically to the reform undergarments made by Dr Jaeger, which were frequently

¹⁷ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “The New Dress,” *The Lily*, 1852; Amelia Bloomer, “Dress Reform,” *The Lily*, 1853.

¹⁸ E.W. Godwin, “A Lecture on Dress (1868),” *The Mask* (April 6, 1914): 95.

¹⁹ E.W. Godwin, “Dress and Its Relation to Health and Climate,” in *Handbook for the International Health Exhibition* (London: William Clowes & Sons, 1884) See chapter five for a detailed discussion of this text.

²⁰ Oscar Wilde, “Mr. Oscar Wilde on Woman’s Dress,” *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, 1884).

advertised at this time. Here we begin to see the common ground, and how these terms can become confused.

However, some sought to clarify the differences between aesthetic and artistic practices, as the exchange cited at the opening of this chapter suggests. This debate (discussed in greater detail in chapter five), and others like it appeared frequently in popular periodicals of the time, and paved the path for the creation of a reformist group that would perhaps finally clarify the tenets of Artistic Dress: *The Healthy and Artistic Dress Union* (H&ADU), founded on 2 July, 1890 ‘for the propagation of sound ideas on the subject of dress.’²¹ Through social activities and publications like the short-lived *Aglaiia*, the H&ADU defined a form of dressing that was not just about aesthetics, but also about issues of health and the body. Henry Holiday, a Pre-Raphaelite painter and designer who became the president of the H&ADU, clarified the difference between pure health reform dress and artistic dressing in an article in the first issue of *Aglaiia*, ‘The Artistic Aspect of Dress’:

It is, I think, clear then that Health is a necessary condition of Beauty in a person, and suitability an equally necessary condition of Beauty in Dress. It follows then that we cannot regard Dress from the artistic point of view without including collaterally the question of Health and Utility.

The converse is unquestionably not true. A dress might be healthy and useful and yet lack beauty of form and colour, so that I think I am justified in giving Beauty the first place, not because it would take higher rank if all three could be treated independently, but because it cannot be treated independently and must include the other two.²²

This, finally, codifies Artistic Dress as superseding Aesthetic Dress (and arguably, the popularity of Aesthetic Dress was on the decline at this time), in that the former incorporated the concerns with ‘Health and Utility’, while proponents of the latter may have shown some interest in these matters, yet their primary concern was with beauty. In fact, as this study will show, several extant Aesthetic dresses appear to have the features of Artistic and/or Reform dresses (loose draping of fabric, for example), but upon closer examination are structurally similar to typical Victorian fashions, made to be worn with corsets and sometimes even crinolines.

The myriad historical variations of these terms have certainly not made it very easy for later dress historians to secure clear and useful definitions. While the key sources for this research are highlighted in the review of literature above, it is appropriate to discuss some of them in greater detail here as I am responding to them directly as a result of how they define (and conflate) Artistic and Aesthetic Dress. I wish to make clear, however, that I’ve found each of these to be excellent sources in a larger sense, and this research would not be possible without the groundwork they have provided, and the problems they have laid bare as a result.

²¹Henry Holiday, ed., *Aglaiia: The Journal of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union*, vol. 1 (London: Healthy and Artistic Dress Union, 1893). See detailed discussion in chapter six. See detailed discussion in chapter six.

²²Henry Holiday, “The Artistic Aspect of Dress,” *Aglaiia: The Journal of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union* 1, no. July (1893): 13–30.

Patricia Cunningham's *Reforming Women's Fashion 1850 – 1920: Politics Health and Art* (2002) is seminal to the current understanding of Dress Reform movements.²³ Cunningham's research was first presented as an exhibition at Ohio State University (April 13 – December 16, 2000), and then the text was subsequently published.²⁴ In the text Cunningham suggests that Artistic Dress encompasses different kinds of costume throughout the period, however the definition of terms is unclear, often using the words artistic and aesthetic synonymously, as in this statement on the origins of Artistic Dress (underlined for emphasis):

Among the earliest aesthetic dress reformers were those associated with the English Pre-Raphaelite painters. As the Pre-Raphaelites and their devotees gained recognition in the 1860s and 1870s, the public had opportunity to see historic and aesthetic dress in paintings and on women who attended exhibitions at the Royal Academy and the Grosvenor Gallery in London. Many of the fabrics for artistic dress were supplied by Liberty's...²⁵

Cunningham continues to use these words interchangeably, particularly in the section 'Artistic Dress in America':

Aesthetic dress in America was greatly influenced by the British aesthetic movement. Ideas regarding artistic styles were rapidly dispersed through various print media. Rather than being solely confined to elite circles of artists, artistic dress appeared to have a middle-class following. Indeed, American magazines did not miss the opportunity to report an aesthetic dress.²⁶

Thus in her text, Aesthetic Dress and Artistic Dress are virtually the same thing, two terms that signify the same sartorial code, used interchangeably perhaps to avoid repetitive language. This usage does, in fact, reflect the historical accounts of the 1880s in particular, as noted at the start of this chapter, and where these words were used in literature to describe an object or person with qualities associated with art – creativity, taste, refinement – that were perhaps somewhat outside the norm.

This conflation of terms is also seen in Radu Stern's *Against Fashion: Clothing as Art 1850 – 1930*, an edited volume of essays and excerpts of original writing by artists on fashion, particularly in the section in his introduction titled 'Rational, Artistic, and Aesthetic Dress in England.'²⁷ While both Rational and Aesthetic Dress are clearly defined as specific movements, 'artistic' is a term again used more ambiguously throughout the text. Additionally, although he provides a good

²³ Patricia A. Cunningham, *Reforming Women's Fashion, 1850 - 1920: Politics, Health and Art*, vol. 1 (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2002).

²⁴ Patricia A. Cunningham, *Reforming Women's Fashion, 1850 - 1914: Politics, Health, and Art - Online Exhibition* (Ohio State University, The Historic Costume and Textile Collection, 2000 - 2008 [cited 18-11-2008 2008]); Excerpts of the book are also available in an online exhibition at the Ohio State University 'Historic Costume and Textile Collection' website, with a section titled 'Artistic Dress' available from <http://costume.osu.edu/exhibitions/reformingfashion/>.

²⁵ Ibid. <http://costume.osu.edu/exhibitions/reformingfashion/#artistic>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Radu Stern, *Against Fashion: Clothing as Art, 1850-1930* (The MIT Press, 2005).

introduction to the topics, Stern also presents some statements regarding Artistic and Aesthetic Dress that are based on misconceptions. For example, he states ‘Dante Gabriel Rossetti shifted from accurately reproducing medieval or early Renaissance costumes in his painting to creating nonfashionable [*sic*] timeless clothes for his models.’²⁸ While it is well documented that Rossetti did craft his own fashions (both in paint as well as costumes worn—and likely sewn—by his models), Stern then goes on to say that ‘this type of garment was soon worn outside Rossetti’s studio by his wife, Elizabeth Siddal, the first muse of the Pre-Raphaelites,’ a point which has not been satisfactorily substantiated in any research to date, and which will be analysed further in the next chapter. Stern also states that Aesthetic Dress was ‘[v]aguely medieval and largely inspired by paintings,’ and that ‘Aesthetic dresses escaped any influence from “official” Victorian fashion.’²⁹ In fact there were many ways in which Aesthetic Dress adopted and adhered to acceptable Victorian clothing standards, particularly in terms of basic structure. Both of these inaccuracies indicate the misunderstood history and definitions of these forms of dress, arguably the result of research based on text and artworks alone without the benefit of closely studying actual garments.

This problem appears in purely academic scholarship as well, as in Pamela Radcliffe’s 1990 PhD dissertation *Pre-Raphaelite Influences on Women’s Dress in the Victorian Era*. She specifically defines Artistic Dress in her list of terms, and labels it as the same as Aesthetic Dress:

Artistic Dress: Inclusive term referring to the dress of intellectuals, progressive thinkers, and others developed as a protest against the unhealthiness and ugliness of contemporary fashion and admired on the basis of hygienic, rational, and artistic grounds; also known as “aesthetic dress” [See Laver 1982, 200, Nunn 1984, 137]; dress of the “consciously nonfashionable” (Ginsberg 1984, 43).³⁰

I do not think all Artistic Dress can be called a ‘protest’, as it was not always so consciously undertaken; likewise, as we shall see, not all Aesthetic Dress was crafted with the socio-political concerns of health and reform.

In contrast, some texts are very clear on the meaning of these terms, delineating Artistic Dress and Aesthetic Dress as two specific and slightly different phenomena. In some literature on fashion history, Aesthetic Dress is clarified as meaning clothing specifically associated with the Aesthetic Movement (or Aestheticism) in art and design. In these texts, clothing worn by Pre-Raphaelite models is sometimes cited as a source of influence, but these are generally excluded along with other sartorial practices such as the wearing of exotic costume (although these provided much inspiration), fancy dress, or later clothing such as dress associated with the Art Nouveau movement. For example, the very title of Kim Wahl’s 2004 PhD dissertation, *Fashioning the Female Artistic Self: Aesthetic Dress in Nineteenth-Century British Visual Culture*, sets out a

²⁸ Ibid., 7.

²⁹ Ibid., 9.

³⁰ Pamela Radcliffe, *Pre-raphaelite Influences on Women’s Dress in the Victorian Era* (Florida State University, 1990), 9.

relationship between Artistic identity and Aesthetic Dress.³¹ However, early in her text she clarifies:

Although Aesthetic Dress had its strongest presence in Victorian popular culture in the 1880s, its origins and influence spanned a far greater time frame, from the 1850s well into the twentieth century. Early Pre-Raphaelite forms of dress exemplify many of the stylistic features and design ideals which would later characterize Aesthetic Dress in the 1880s.³²

Wahl also observes in a footnote that ‘[a]lthough the term “Aesthetic Dress” was most frequently used in the late 1870s and 80s, the terms “Pre-Raphaelite Dress” and “Artistic Dress” were also utilized, sometimes interchangeably.’³³ Thus Wahl begins to present these as distinct categories, while pointing to the fact that the terms have been conflated. Likewise, in the catalogue for the *Simply Stunning* exhibition, Sophia Wilson also wished to show the distinction: ‘Pre-Raphaelite dress, which in its later stages became known as aesthetic dress, was the complete antithesis to contemporary Victorian fashion.’³⁴ However, the statement that opens her chapter again points to the vagueness of the subject:

An aesthetic style of dress was worn initially by the Pre-Raphaelites from the early 1850s onwards but was most popular during the early 1880s. Thereafter its popularity diminished, but its influence continued until the early twentieth century.³⁵

Which Pre-Raphaelites wore this? Men and women? And what exactly is meant by ‘an aesthetic style of dress’? Additionally, in the foreword to the *Simply Stunning* catalogue, George Breeze (Head of Gallery and Museums for Cheltenham at the time) stated:

Aesthetic dress had its origins in the founding of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1848. The artists’ insistence on using accurate historical costume in their pictures led to the making of similar dresses by their models, who were chosen for their unusual beauty and described by the artists as ‘stunners’. The dresses were loose and flowing, taking beauty, comfort and practicality into account to create a simple and elegant style.³⁶

This is again an assumption based on previous texts that this thesis seeks to examine, and one that continues even in extremely recent texts. For example, the newest definitive dictionary of fashion, *The Berg Companion to Fashion* (2010) edited by Valerie Steele, has left Artistic Dress out altogether. Aesthetic Dress is included in an entry written by Oriole Cullen, V&A Curator of Modern Dress. Cullen cites many of the aforementioned texts, including Haweis, and her definitions seem to be strongly based upon Stella Mary Newton’s arguments in *Health, Art &*

³¹ Kim Wahl, “Fashioning the Female Artistic Self: Aesthetic Dress in Nineteenth-century British Visual Culture” (Queen’s University, History of Art, 2004).

³² *Ibid.*, 3.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Sophia Wilson, “Away with the Corsets, On with the Shifts,” in *Simply Stunning: The Pre-Raphaelite Art of Dressing* (Cheltenham: Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museums, 1996), 20.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museums, *Simply Stunning: The Pre-Raphaelite Art of Dressing* (Cheltenham: Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museums, 1996), 4.

Reason: Dress Reformers of the 19th Century.³⁷ In fact, outside of Cunningham's text, Newton's is the most important and often-cited analysis, underpinning every discussion of the subject since its publication (and as such, relevant sections will be examined in detail in the next chapter). In this regard, Cullen's definition is accurate in terms of a concise presentation of the subject as it stands. However, this thesis problematizes these classifications in order to more clearly understand the manifestations of Artistic Dress in this period, and in doing so, will raise challenges to certain aspects of Cullen's definition (see chapter three), most notably that an 1865 photograph of Jane Morris is 'the perfect embodiment of this [aesthetic] ideal.'³⁸

While none of these conclusions are wholly inaccurate, I feel they are oversimplified views of the complex set of influences that gave rise to Artistic Dress, and that there is room for clarification for the purposes of dress studies. As such, I would like to make two of my own hypotheses clear at the outset, to help frame the arguments I shall set out in the coming chapters. First, in the course of my research, I have come to question whether there was a formal style or movement called Pre-Raphaelite Dress as it has come to be called today. There was Pre-Raphaelite modelling costume, and clothing—Artistic Dress—inspired by this. But the notion that during the days of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the wives and models were going about in bohemian attire in public is, possibly, a misinterpretation, which I examine in the next chapter.

Second, I tend to examine the boundaries for Aesthetic Dress and whether was the same thing as Artistic Dress, or whether it happened during a very specific time, roughly from the early 1870s through to the 1890s, and in a slightly different manner. While I suspect that there is overlap, some extant examples have been referred to as Aesthetic Dress that I do not believe fall under that classification. It seems necessary to examine what this term may legitimately define, which is discussed in chapters four through six.

Dress, Fashion, Style, and Sartorial

I am grouping these terms together as they are so closely related, however I strive to use them in somewhat different manners throughout this thesis. *Dress* is used broadly, referring to actual items of clothing, as well as the topic of dress study in general. *Fashion* may also refer to specific clothes, but I endeavour to restrict its use to its more theoretical meaning as a construct (see discussion of Barthes below). This is not always possible, however, particularly when quoting external material.

Style can refer to the specific cut or appearance of a garment, but as well the overall appearance as it relates to *Fashion*. It is this latter aspect that I am most interested in, as I argue that Artistic Dress

³⁷ Oriole Cullen, "Aesthetic Dress," ed. Valerie Steele, *The Berg Companion to Fashion* (London: Berg, 2010), 7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

is not just situated in clothing, but in the ‘look’ as we might say in contemporary parlance, which includes how a garment is worn, how it is accessorised, and how an overall outfit might come together.

Finally, the term *Sartorial* is used in an all-encompassing manner, comprising aspects of *Dress*, *Fashion*, and *Style* together. I will often refer to sartorial codes to suggest the deliberate implementation of various aspects of these three concepts.

Personae (and Artistic Personae)

In this introduction I have already used ‘personae’ deliberately in reference to those in artistic circles who wore Artistic Dress. This is because I believe the term suggests the notion that artistic dressers were consciously evoking an aspect of their character—an identity, if you will—which they wished to project outwardly. In some cases it may have been merely trend, but for many of the key figures discussed here, it would appear to have been a very considered act. Thus I do not use ‘personae’ to suggest they were being false (or ‘acting’ in a theatrical sense, though there is a strong relationship to the theatre in this topic), but rather to conjure the sense of personality and/or identity which the wearing of Artistic Dress constructs.

Pre-Raphaelite and Pre-Raphaelitism³⁹

I include these two terms only to clarify that while my own inclinations are to apply ‘Pre-Raphaelite’ only to those involved with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood; and ‘Pre-Raphaelitism’ to those involved in what has been called the ‘Second Wave’ of this group (including those such as William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones), I must recognise that even in Victorian literature these words were used as adjectives in a much broader manner. We can see this in the aforementioned discussion by Haws, and as well in other commentaries that use ‘Pre-Raphaelite’ as an adjective referring to any person who might have sympathetic inclinations (or even style) to these artists.

Contribution to Knowledge, Methodology, and Approach

This thesis offers a closer examination of Artistic Dress than has previously been undertaken. In positioning Artistic Dress as an umbrella term encompassing various sartorial practices during this era, it is hoped that other styles such as Aesthetic Dress and Reform Dress—and their relation to artistic practice—may be better understood. In this way, it is intended that this research will enrich the body of knowledge in the areas of both the History of Fashion, and of British Visual Culture.

The methodology for this research was to compile a history of the phenomenon of Artistic Dress derived from relevant primary source material, including (where possible) actual clothing, images (photographs and paintings), and text (correspondence, memoirs, and periodicals) related to

³⁹ It is also appropriate here to make a note on language and spelling: words such as Pre-Raphaelite have a varied spelling, and these have been retained where quoting original sources.

selected ‘artistic dressers.’ However, this was not undertaken without the awareness that artworks, photographs, and even periodical reports might have been biased and carefully crafted to present a particular version of the individual rather than an accurate portrait. The accuracy of such renderings is in fact in many ways irrelevant, as it is the perceived persona that is of interest, constructed through sartorial practices and preferences.

Although this study focuses on Artistic Dress, the individual wearers in question were not always artists *per se*, but also those associated and/or had relations with artistic circles as patrons, critics, and quite often family, models and muses. These groups are vital in identifying the artistic communities for which Artistic Dress was a signifier – in particular the ways in which some of these fashions ‘filtered up’ from artists and models to be adopted by the upper echelons of society; and as well the ways in which some of the more aristocratic (if slightly unconventional) personae may have influenced artists, thus creating a more reciprocal relationship of sartorial development. This study examines these issues, closely considering the situations and ways in which artistic dressing was deemed acceptable to popular culture and, in some cases, dispelling myths of flagrant disregard for Victorian conventions of dress (as in some views of the Pre-Raphaelites). In this regard, it will be important to understand at least in a basic manner what constituted everyday dress – particularly professional and societal dress. However, this is presented throughout the text strictly as a point of reference for examining the subject at hand, rather than providing a comprehensive view of Victorian dress, which is readily available in other sources.⁴⁰

In particular, I seek to evaluate certain assumptions that have been made about Artistic Dress which may have been based either on older research and may have left to the side a close study of actual clothing, which in some cases alters popular assumptions. These suppositions are often made within the context of larger studies and as such get somewhat buried so that their veracity is not questioned. For example, the observation by Sophia Wilson that ‘When the cage crinoline became fashionable from about 1856 to 1867 the women of the Pre-Raphaelite circle generally refused to wear it, nor did they or their associates wear tightly laced corsets,’ is perhaps not wholly inaccurate. However we do have extant photographs of Pre-Raphaelite women, like Elizabeth Siddal, Jane Morris, and Kate Holiday, wearing cage crinolines (and possibly even corsets, though not tightly-laced), as I discuss in the following chapters.⁴¹ While I am not actively seeking to prove any of this scholarship wrong, I aim for my research to illustrate the ways in which the sartorial codes of these groups were more complex than has been previously stated; and to shed light on new

⁴⁰ See for example: Stella Blum, *Victorian Fashions and Costumes from Harper’s Bazar, 1867-1898* (Courier Dover Publications, 1974); C. Willett Cunnington, *English Women’s Costume in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987); and Lucy Johnstone, *Nineteenth-Century Fashion in Detail* (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2006).

⁴¹ Wilson, “Away with the Corsets, On with the Shifts,” 21. See chapters two and three for more discussion.

and underexplored aspects of Artistic Dress that give it a much broader definition, considering examples as both social phenomenon as well as art object.

In order to develop a clearer answer to the question ‘What was Artistic Dress?’, this study is primarily object- and literature-based as opposed to theoretical. However, it has not been composed without an awareness of theoretical issues that arise in fashion history research, particularly in relation to gender and identity construction. In her study *Fashion and its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing* (2000), Diana Crane observes that ‘[c]lothing as a form of symbolic communication was enormously important in the nineteenth century as a means of conveying information about the wearer’s social role, social standing, and personal character.’⁴² Crane discusses the semiology of clothing in the 19th century, and points to an important discrepancy that previous sociologists studying clothing and fashion had overlooked:

Social theorists from Marx to Foucault tend to emphasize the ways in which dominant discourses concerning, for example, class and sexuality influence behaviour and attitudes. Foucault (1978) argued that Victorian discourse about sexuality constituted a “technology” for exerting power over the individual and the family. What such theories tend to neglect are the ways in which marginal discourses survive and continue to exert an influence alongside hegemonic discourses, which they may eventually modify or displace.⁴³

Thus Crane points out that it wasn’t just popular fashion that exerted influence, but also marginal fashion which, if given the proper opportunity and context, may even come to the fore to ‘modify or displace’ what is considered to be fashionable from a hegemonic standpoint. She clarifies that clothing discourses always include those that ‘support conformity to dominant conceptions of social roles and those that express social tensions that are pushing widely accepted conceptions of social roles in new directions.’⁴⁴ The alternative dress fashions of the nineteenth century can certainly be seen in this second light, and Crane states that ‘the latter include the perspectives of marginal groups that are seeking acceptance for clothing behaviour that is deviant or marginal according to dominant conceptions of status or gender roles.’⁴⁵ Although she applies this discussion to dynamics of power and mainstream Victorian women’s dress, this idea can be applied across the study of fashion into present day, most certainly in thinking about trends like contemporary Goth fashion.⁴⁶ In fact, the Goth/Industrial musical group Ministry expressed these very same ideas fifteen years before Crane’s text, albeit less academically, in their 1984 single ‘Every Day Is Halloween’:

*Well any time, any place, anywhere that I go
all the people seem to stop and stare;*

⁴² Diana Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing* (University Of Chicago Press, 2001), 100.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ This will be discussed further in the conclusion. See Valerie Steele, *Gothic: Dark Glamour* (Yale University Press, 2008).

*they say 'Why are you dressed like it's Halloween?
You look so absurd, you look so obscene.'
Oh, why can't I live a life for me?
Why should I take the abuse that's served?
Why can't they see they're just like me,
it's the same, it's the same in the whole wide world...'*⁴⁷

The tension between alternative or transgressive self-expression and social acceptance whimsically commented on by Ministry is exactly what Crane's discussion on fashion, discourse, and power seek to communicate. My insertion of this contemporary dynamic may seem slightly out of place at this juncture, however, part of my interest in the subject is to open the way for new understanding of contemporary alternative fashion trends through the close study of what I see as one of the earliest instances of non-political sartorial codes being deliberately introduced by and for a marginal and transgressive societal group.⁴⁸ I see this as a strong area for potential future research, and will touch upon this more in the conclusion.

Crane goes on to explain how these discourses gain mobility and either fail, modify, or displace the current hegemonic trend:

Discourses that express dominant cultural norms and values are supported by more powerful groups, while those that express subculture or marginal norms are supported by minorities and by groups that are in different ways socially marginal, such as intellectuals, artists, and entertainers. Over time, the social impact of each discourse shifts as social and economic changes create a more or less favourable environment for it. The influence of these discourses often depends on factors over which their proponents have little control, such as changes in levels of social mobility, availability of employment for women, and the relative importance attached to work as compared with leisure activities.⁴⁹

The examples that Crane uses – intellectuals, artists, and entertainers – are exactly those who developed the sartorial codes and discourses of Artistic Dress, both as practitioners and commentators.

Crane's research in *Fashion and Its Social Agendas* is rooted in Roland Barthes' mid-1960s semiotic investigation of French fashion magazines, which forms the basis of his analysis *The Fashion System* (1967).⁵⁰ This text is among the first to look in-depth at fashion as a social construct separate from actual clothing. This 'fashion' is not 'dress', but rather an abstract idea created through the representation of the 'real garment' (the actual item of clothing) via 'image-clothing' (the graphic representation of the item in a fashion magazine or catalogue) and the 'written garment' (the text which accompanies the image-clothing). Thus these two latter concepts intersect with the former to construct 'fashion', with the goal of stimulating desire in the consumer.

⁴⁷ Ministry, *Everyday Is Halloween* (Wax Trax Records, 1984).

⁴⁸ By non-political I am thinking of dress which signalled political resistance, such as in defiance of sumptuary laws, or some codes adopted in the French Revolution.

⁴⁹ Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas*, 100.

⁵⁰ Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1990).

These theories can be applied to the analysis of the dissemination of Artistic Dress, in particular to later, more commercial artistic endeavours such as those of Arthur Lasenby Liberty (1843-1917). At his (still extant) store Liberty, the ‘Art Dress’ department, under the leadership of E.W. Godwin (1833-1886), produced costumes made from their Liberty ‘Art Silk’ (and in fact in ‘Art Colours’) from 1884.⁵¹ Garments were custom-made from a catalogue pattern: the customer would have selected a style from the catalogue options, then specified the fabric they desired, creating a clothing manufacture process that lies somewhere between a custom-tailored garment and contemporary ready-to-wear clothes. The patterns were marketed in elaborate catalogues that presented an image of the garment, as well as a description, such as the ‘Nina’ from the 1894-95 season [fig. 1.1]. The descriptive text reads:

“Nina.”

A handsome EVENING CAPE in “LIBERTY” THETIS BROCADE, RUCHE lined “LIBERTY” SATIN and Bow of “LIBERTY” SATIN.
Price 57/6

In the discourse between image and text, a presentation of the particular fashion is constructed: for example, the ‘Nina’ (all of the Liberty styles are given an exotic, literary or heroic female name), is quite close to a cape in the collection of the Fashion Museum, Bath [fig. 1.2], and is labelled ‘a handsome evening cape’, with a description of the fabric, construction, and price. Other cloaks are similarly described and designated as ‘useful’ (showing the influence of the language of the Arts and Crafts Movement), or even specifically instruct that they are for ‘Walking and Driving’ or ‘Theatre or Carriage Wear.’ The written garment therefore instructed the consumer both on its usefulness and on appropriate venues to which it could be worn, and makes assumptions that potential buyers engage in such activities. This intersects with the image-clothing to create the artistic fashion construct – the style, pattern, construction, context, and signification that will all be associated in the mind of the consumer with the actual garment. Furthermore, these individual examples carry a discourse with the overall catalogue, which is particularly interesting for they often read as periodicals, with articles educating the consumer on taste and artistic selection of consumables, thereby crafting what would now be termed a ‘brand’ that suggests Liberty fashions are directly related to refined, educated taste. This model can also be applied to the examination of some of the journals and periodicals of the dress reform movements, because although their contents were more discursive, critical and educational, these texts did include both visual and written examples of the clothing they were trying to promote, and did also include advertisements for healthy and artistic dress (including ads from Liberty).⁵²

⁵¹ A small note on use of ‘Liberty’: in many texts, the store is referred to as Liberty’s. However, the store was originally called ‘Liberty & Co.’, and was also known then, as it is now, as simply ‘Liberty’, without a possessive. As such, I strive to use the proper store name Liberty where possible. I differentiate from Liberty the person by always referring to him as A. L. Liberty.

⁵² See for example the nineteenth century women’s magazines *Women’s World*, or *The Queen*.

However, this research does not seek to provide an in-depth semiotic investigation of Artistic Dress; rather it is useful to mention these concepts at the outset since Barthes' ideas of fashion as a construct have influenced the reading of the art and texts discussed. At times, the implications of garment construction, style, and presentation will be considered in a symbolic light to understand their signification in terms of artistic and/or social identity. However, these are employed to further the larger aim of clarifying the broader definition of Artistic Dress (and in that it may be argued the aim of this thesis is semiotic, or more specifically semantic, in overall context).

Scope and Limitations

Beginning with the year 1848, which saw the founding of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, this study originates just before the height of the Industrial Revolution, marked by the Great Exhibition of 1851. This places the start of this research just two years after Elias Howe patented the sewing machine, and spans important technical developments such as aniline dye, developed in 1856 by William Perkin. The study concludes in 1900, by which time significant shifts in artistic – and sartorial – practices were already underway.

One key problem with the literature on fashion is that even mainstream styles and sartorial practices are often discussed in tandem that, in actuality, span decades. There has been a tendency to view fashion in this period as if it did not change rapidly. While this is perhaps true in comparison to twentieth and twenty-first century fashion trends, nineteenth century style did indeed shift quite regularly, as Oscar Wilde observed when considering the necessity of reforming women's work dress in a note in the November 1887 issue of *Women's World*: 'And, after all, what is a fashion? From the artistic point of view, it is usually a form of ugliness so intolerable that we have to alter it every six months.'⁵³ While styles may have lingered longer than the contemporary mind is used to, this thesis proposes to show that there were important relationships between artistic fashions of these decades, while establishing a chronology of influence and change. Consequently, the structure of this thesis will follow a chronological format, examining Artistic Dress roughly by decade. However, there is certainly overlap in each chapter to develop a well-rounded assessment of the topic.

In terms of geography, the title of this thesis suggests I will examine the breadth of 'Victorian Britain.' However, because a great deal of the artistic culture relevant to this study centres around London, this research has ultimately been focused in that region. It would be impossible in this limited space to explore the whole of Britain, or even of England. In fact, the notion of the

⁵³ Oscar Wilde, "Literary and Other Notes—I", *Women's World* (November 1887). Reprinted in *Reviews*, by *Oscar Wilde*, Edited by Robert Ross, and transcribed at Project Gutenberg, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14240/14240.txt> .

‘Victorian’ is slippery itself, often used in places like America which were not even part of the British Empire. ‘Victorian Britain’ is a problematic term as well in terms of scope (do we mean just Great Britain, or does it include the outlying empire?), but it reflects the rich historiography of this subject, and its familiarity automatically confers a certain set of social, political, and cultural circumstances to which the reader may relate. As such, I chose to keep this title to frame this research, and to reflect the overarching fact that London was not the only site of Artistic Dress. Where relevant, I discuss examples in cities such as Manchester and Glasgow. The conclusion offers even broader areas of potential further research.

Despite my strong desire to weight my discussion of male and female dress equally, I have found this task challenging and ultimately impractical for two main reasons. First, in wanting to make this study object-based, reliance on extant materials meant that I was mostly looking at female costume. Extant male dress is extremely limited in this area, and in fact even the V&A had difficulty finding examples of it when they were organising the *Cult of Beauty* exhibition recently (2010), judging by the inquiries they emailed on the Dress and Textile Society list-serve. Second, the topic has traditionally focused on female dress, even in the period literature. Godwin, Wilde, and others certainly discussed male dress, and I reference their discourse on it; however, even their writings were heavily weighted towards the discussion of woman’s dress. Female dress is the site of the greatest departure in terms of style, while male Artistic Dress is subtler. I have not excluded it from this research, but it does not get equal weight in the end.

Most of the artists who promoted Artistic Dress were deeply involved in the Arts and Crafts Movement, perhaps most notably Walter Crane, who became the head of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1888. However, while the textile arts were an essential part of the Arts and Crafts Movement (and Linda Parry’s text on the subject covers this very well), there was no formal, focused agenda to promote Artistic Dress in the literature of the movement (though ultimately it arose as a sub-topic, as we shall see). Nor was there any fashion house which opened under its aegis (for example, there was no Morris & Co. department of dress). Yet the principals of beauty and utility that underpin the movement are surely at the core of Artistic Dress. In fact, the practice of dressing artistically at home, which this thesis argues is the primary origin of Artistic Dress, may be considered an extension of William Morris’ famous statement ‘Have nothing in your homes that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful.’ Thus, while this research presents a series of case studies as examples of Artistic Dress to show its development, rather than discreet looks at individual art movements, it should be understood that I assume throughout that Arts and Crafts ideals underpin Artistic Dress, and that in the end, the common ideals of use and beauty fundamentally unite them.

Finally, I must clarify that this thesis is almost strictly concerned with those connected to the visual arts, with a few notable exceptions such as Oscar Wilde and Ellen Terry (who both had very strong

ties to the visual arts, although it was not their primary profession). However, it should be noted that the breadth of Artistic Dress as a style goes well beyond those involved in the visual arts, and certainly encompasses figures in other aspects of the arts such as theatre, literature, and music. Tracing this scope, however, would simply be too large for this thesis, and it is my hope that this research may be built on by others wishing to explore these tangential groups.

Chapter Structure

This first chapter introduces the subject, while chapter two covers the origins of Artistic Dress, from ca. 1848 until ca. 1860. After a brief introduction into the fashion of this era, the category of ‘Pre-Raphaelite Dress’ is examined, particularly in the cases of Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal. Male sartorial habits are also introduced. Then, an investigation of the artist G.F. Watts and his association with Little Holland House in Chelsea is considered. The influence of this artistic community, now known as the Holland Park Circle, is not only critical to the development of so many Victorian artists of the time, but it is argued that the bohemian atmosphere surrounding the Pattle sisters – the core family at Little Holland House—was seminal in the development of the artistic fashion adopted by these associates.

Chapter three continues with the years ca. 1860 to ca. 1870, with the continued development of Pre-Raphaelite principles into the Arts and Crafts Movement, with particular attention paid to Jane Morris for the Pre-Raphaelites, and the photography of Julia Margaret Cameron in relation to Holland Park. Issues of masculine attire in relation to bohemianism and dandyism are also considered here, including the introduction of James McNeill Whistler and analysis of his early ‘White Girl’ paintings of this period.

Chapter four begins to explore the relationship between Artistic Dress and the rise of Aestheticism. The intention is to try and find the boundaries of Aesthetic Dress through examining the clothing worn in more aristocratic circles, both in public and for modelling, from ca. 1870 to ca. 1880. It begins with a discussion of the philosophies of E.W. Godwin, alongside a brief look at some of the clothing worn by himself and his then-partner Ellen Terry. Then, society figures such as George and Rosalind Howard, Laura Alma-Tadema, and Madeline Wyndham are examined alongside artworks by, for example, Whistler, G. F. Watts, and W.B. Richmond.

Chapter five then focuses on the sartorial debates instigated by the discourses of Aestheticism and Dress Reform ca. 1880- ca. 1890. This chapter concentrates less on art objects and extant fashion, and more upon the literature surrounding these. This was a deliberate choice as much of the extant dress that has been included in previous exhibitions and texts is from this period, and instead I wished to focus my argument on new and under examined and less well-known material. Included in this is an in-depth look at Haweis’ *The Art of Dress* (although published in 1879, it was more

appropriate in this chapter); an examination of articles on fashion in the 1882 *Magazine of Art* to illustrate the discourse on Artistic Dress; a review of the dress-related writing of Walter Hamilton; and a focused analysis of the feud between Whistler and Oscar Wilde subsequent to the former's 'Ten O'Clock' lecture. Some related artwork is considered as it pertains to these debates, notably Frith's *A Private View at the Royal Academy, 1881* (exhibited 1883); William Blake Richmond's *Mrs Luke Ionides* (1882); and the aforementioned Artistic Dress designed by Hamo and Agatha Thornycroft in 1885.

Chapter six rounds out this study by examining Artistic Dress in perhaps its fullest fruition, ca. 1890 – 1900, and a consideration of the ways in which artistic fashion relates to art objects. This begins by looking at Liberty's didactic agenda in their catalogues during this time, then turns to focus on the Healthy & Artistic Dress Union, particularly the contribution of Henry Holiday and Walter Crane, including their writing and public participation in *Tableaux Vivant* as a means of disseminating their sartorial agenda. This leads on to a brief discussion of the Art Education system, as art schools were arguably key places for the dissemination of these fashion philosophies; and by way of example of the 'diaspora' of Artistic Dress, the artists active at the Glasgow School of Art during this time are discussed. The final, seventh chapter summarises these ideas and concludes with a look to the legacy of all of these practices alongside considerations for further research.

Chapter Two: Early Artistic Dress (ca. 1848-1860)

*The Pre-Raphaelites provided one of the first alternative vestimentary movements in 19th-century England to the fashion excesses of the Victorians. Whistler's dresses, echoing the beauty of the natural form, were similar to those worn by, for example, Elizabeth Siddal, herself a Pre-Raphaelite painter and poet, in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's drawings of her.*¹

When discussing influences for the Aesthetic fashions depicted in James McNeill Whistler's paintings, Alice Mackrell makes the assumption that the Pre-Raphaelites promoted a particular mode of dress, and that it was prevalent enough to be referred to as an 'alternative vestimentary movement.' This is a well-established supposition that seems almost taken for granted in fashion literature on the nineteenth century, particularly concerning Aesthetic Dress, for which it is usually listed as the precursor. From Wahl's dissertation:

Most nineteenth-century fashion historians agree that the origins of Aesthetic dress lay in the innovative yet historicized approach to merging art and life outlined by the Pre-Raphaelites. Many of the women involved in the movement, whether they painted, sat as models, wrote poetry, or engaged in various forms of needlework, weaving, or textile and tapestry production, wore a form of dress that was both artistic and comfortable, the designs for which they often devised themselves. They dispensed with the crinoline and designed the bodices of their gowns to be worn without tight-laced stays.²

Some art historians state the origins of this form of dress with conviction: 'the first women to wear, and therefore promote, Pre-Raphaelite dress were the models of these artists, notably Elizabeth Siddal and Jane Morris.'³ This statement is exemplary of the assumption that Pre-Raphaelite women, especially those who sat for Rossetti, wore clothing in their everyday life similar to that in which they sat as models. These dresses are usually described as being loose in the bodice and sleeves to allow more freedom of movement than more restrictive fashionable dress, and worn without corsets or crinolines. The fact that the aforementioned women were all skilled seamstresses who made modelling costume for Rossetti and other artists has reinforced the notion that they must have made similar clothing for themselves that they wore as everyday dress. Altogether, these views have led to the popular conclusion that the Pre-Raphaelite circle regularly dressed in a radical bohemian fashion, the consequence of which can be seen in the completely unconventional costume and styling used in the 2009 BBC television drama *Desperate Romantics* [fig. 2.1]. While perhaps capturing the rebellious spirit of the group for a fictionalised account, the visual portrayal of the characters – particularly of Elizabeth Siddal, walking through the streets of London with her hair down and dressed in tunic tops with skirts – would have been more than shocking to Victorian society; it would have been disgraceful. Siddal, a respectable if poor member of the lower middle class, and a milliner (dressmaker) besides, would have hardly appeared publically in such a fashion.

¹ Alice Mackrell, *Art and Fashion: The Impact of Art on Fashion and Fashion on Art* (London: Batsford, 2005), 88.

² Wahl, "Fashioning the Female Artistic Self: Aesthetic Dress in Nineteenth-century British Visual Culture," 36.

³ Wilson, "Away with the Corsets, On with the Shifts," 20.

Whilst it is true that the Pre-Raphaelites were an important source of inspiration for later Artistic Dress practices, these assumptions about Pre-Raphaelite clothing can be seen to be inaccurate; at the same time, there were other important sources of influence that have been as yet under-explored. This chapter begins to challenge established notions of how the Pre-Raphaelites (particularly Elizabeth Siddal) dressed in their early days, and argues that the origins of Artistic Dress were actually much more complex than is often reported. It examines the assumption that there was such a style as 'Pre-Raphaelite Dress' in these years, analysing frequently cited examples to determine if and how these dresses departed from fashionable clothing. While it has been convincingly shown by some fashion historians that what has been perceived as Pre-Raphaelite Dress was influential to later forms of dressing, there is evidence to show that it was probably not the case that these women wore clothes as some sort of conscious 'movement', as Mackrell's wording implies. Rather it is more likely that in these early days, such sartorial choices were made for more personal and practical reasons, perhaps related to artistic practice, either for modelling or for physical (work-related) practicalities; comfort; or perhaps even economical reasons. In fact, if any 'fashion statements' were made, it was more likely through the somewhat unconventional (dishevelled) appearance of male artists that may have signified an 'artistic' temperament. Therefore, the extant images that are often used as examples of Pre-Raphaelite Dress must be re-analysed in consideration of these ideas, and alongside what we know of the actual attire of both genders.

Alongside this re-evaluation of Pre-Raphaelite Dress, this chapter will also consider the sartorial habits of another group which has been largely overlooked in terms of the development of Artistic Dress, but who did in fact wear alternative modes of costume publicly, and may have been in a better social position to influence fashion: the Holland Park Circle. Through an examination of this set, it shall emerge that these two parallel (and at times overlapping) socio-artistic groups combined in influence to drive forward sartorial practices that would shape Artistic Dress in the subsequent decades.

Victorian Women's Fashion at Mid-century

*Fashion is the only tyrant against whom modern civilization has not carried on a crusade, and its power is still as unlimited and despotic as it ever was.*⁴

A. Mary Merrifield, *Dress as Fine Art*, 1854

Mary Merrifield (1804-1889) was what we would today call an art historian: one of her earliest publications was a translation of Cennino Cennini's *Treatise on Painting* (1844).⁵ The success of this led to her consultancy with the Royal Commission on the Fine Arts, investigating the history of painters' materials and techniques, which resulted in the publication of *The Art of Fresco Painting* (1846). The impassioned declaration above is from her 1854 text *Dress as Fine Art*, a collection of essays that had first appeared in the *London Magazine* and the *Art Journal*. By this time, small waists shaped by corsets and voluminous skirts formed by cage crinolines were at the height of fashion, and Merrifield's adverse views on these styles were clearly shaped by her close study of Italian Art.

Stella Mary Newton described the restrictive aspects of fashion at mid-century:

Fashionable dress of the 1840s, although gentle in outline, was physically restrictive, partly because it was laced very tightly around the ribs, partly because a number of petticoats were necessary to build the skirt out to the required bell shape, but above all because the sleeve was set, not on to the top of the shoulder but into a line two or three inches below it, on the upper arm. This meant that since the bodice was held firmly down round the waist the arms could only be raised to a very limited extent. This dropped shoulder-seam was still fashionable in the middle of the 1860s.⁶

Two bodices in the collection of Glasgow Museums exemplify the style of sleeves that Newton describes [figs. 2.2-3]. Both have a sloped shoulder and sleeves that would have fit snugly, but not necessarily tightly. More restrictive would have been the fit of the bodice, as both of these cuts show. Each of these fastens down the back with hooks and eyes (the buttons on the purple bodice are decorative), and is structured with boning in the front and back. This shape is typical of ca. 1850 bodices, particularly in the pointed waist. Gathering was also fashionable in both skirts and bodices, the latter of which were often pleated in 'fan-like folds' that 'helped to suggest a rounded bosom above a narrow waist.'⁷ Dresses were frequently fashioned as separates for ease and versatility: skirts often had both a matching day and evening bodice to which they were fastened with either hooks and eyes or tapes, and they were cut extremely generously according to the shape of the hoop. While most fashion plates of this period reflect this silhouette, there was a burgeoning backlash in some periodicals, marking the early days of the Dress Reform Movement.

⁴ Mary Merrifield, *Dress as Fine Art* (London: Arthur Hall, 1854), 18.

⁵ Rosemary Mitchell, "Merrifield, Mary Philadelphia," ed. Lawrence Goldman, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: OUP, May 2010), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/59016>.

⁶ Stella Mary Newton, *Health, Art, and Reason: Dress Reformers of the Nineteenth Century*. (London: John Murray, 1974), 31–32.

⁷ Johnstone, *Nineteenth-Century Fashion in Detail*, 174.

Merrifield's essays show sympathy with the reform ideals seen at the same time in America, where in 1849 reformists Amelia Bloomer and Elizabeth Cady Stanton published *The Lily: A Ladies' Journal Devoted to Temperance and Literature*, a bi-weekly publication which was focused on social issues and was an early advocate for women's suffrage. It also promoted 'rational dress'—clothing which, as the name suggests, made more practical sense for women, particularly in light of freedom of movement, than the current trends.⁸ Although the Bloomer costume was known and sold in Britain, it never quite caught on in the often colder, more sartorially conservative climate. However there was still a rise of critical resistance to what would be termed the 'unnatural' shape created by the corset and crinoline. Merrifield's 1854 book *Dress as Fine Art* is an example of this, and is instrumental in helping to establish the language that would be picked up by reformers. She begins by laying out the practicalities of dress:

The immediate objects of dress are twofold—namely, decency and warmth; but so many minor considerations are suffered to influence us in choosing our habiliments, that these primary objects are too frequently kept out of sight. Dress should be not only adapted to the climate, it should also be light in weight, should yield to the movements of the body, and should be easily put on or removed. It should also be adapted to the station in society, and to the age, of the individual. These are essential conditions; yet in practice how frequently are they overlooked; in fact, how seldom are they observed! Next in importance are general elegance of form, harmony in the arrangement and selection of the colors, and special adaptation in form and color to the person of the individual."⁹

The weight of a garment and its appropriateness to climate are key issues to the healthy dress debates of the 1860s onward. Reformists such as Lady Harberton, as well as Aesthetes like Godwin, will later echo these issues. Merrifield also discusses at length the issue of physical appropriateness in terms of age, station (class), body shape, and colouring. All of these hint not just at criticism of blindly adopting fashion, but also a sense of blossoming aesthetic individuality based on issues of the body; that is, a dress cannot be beautiful if it does not suit the wearer. On this point she comments:

The new fashions are exhibited on the elegant person of one of the dress maker's assistants, who is selected for this purpose, and are adopted by the purchaser without reflecting how much of the attraction of the dress is to be ascribed to the fine figure of the wearer, how much to the beauty of the dress, or whether it will look equally well on herself.¹⁰

Merrifield's astute observation is a point that is relevant even today, in consideration of contemporary fashion media and the reverence of the 'Supermodel'. And similar to today's debates over the unrealistic physical proportions that the fashion media set as examples, Merrifield railed against the practice of tight-lacing:

If the proportions of the figure were generally understood, we should not hear of those deplorable, and in many cases fatal, results of tight lacing which have unfortunately been

⁸ See Amelia Bloomer, "Dress Reform," *The Lily*, March 1853. See also Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "The New Dress," *The Lily*, April 1852.

⁹ Merrifield, *Dress as Fine Art*, 16. Spelling is as it appears in the text.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

so numerous. So general has the pernicious practice been in this country, that a medical friend, who is professor of anatomy in a provincial academy, informed us that there was great difficulty in procuring a model whose waist had not been compressed by stays.¹¹

She suggests throughout her text that the solution to this problem is to craft an artistic understanding of the body, that to be so educated would relieve the desire to craft an unnatural form:

The most efficient method of putting an end to the practice of tight lacing will be, not merely to point out its unhealthiness, and even dangerous consequences, because these, though imminent, are uncertain, -- every lady who resorts to the practice hoping that she, individually, may escape the penalty, -- but to prove that the practice, so far from adding to the beauty of the figure, actually deteriorates it... The remedy is easy: give to every young lady a general knowledge of form, and of the principles of beauty as applied to the human frame, and when these are better understood, and acted on, tight lacing will die a natural death.¹²

Merrifield then selects specific works of art as examples for the study of the human body, using examples that were widely accessible by way of reproduction in the *Art Journal*, ‘which, though very beautiful, are not distinguished by small waists.’¹³ She also reveals the influence of Academic painting subjects on her thinking in her favour of ‘Greek and Oriental’ costume, which was also a great inspiration to Artistic Dress, lauding Eastlake’s painting *Haidee, a Greek Girl* of 1827 [fig. 2.4]:

The graceful figure of “The Greek Girl,” (engraved in the *Art Journal* for 1850,)... is not compressed by stays, but is easy and natural. The white under-drapery is confined at the waist, which is short, by a broad girdle, which appears to encircle it more than once, and adds to the apparent length of the waist; the open jacket, without a collar, falls gracefully from the shoulders, and conceals the limits of the waist; every thing is easy, natural, and graceful.¹⁴

Thus Merrifield’s text already suggests the intersection of the discourses of art and fashion at mid-century. It is this blurring of boundaries which makes possible the retrospective view that there was, at the same time as this text, a burgeoning sartorial code that would later come to be referred to as Pre-Raphaelite Dress.

However, in the years 1848 – 1860, there is scant evidence that Pre-Raphaelite women (those associated with the male artists as models, mistresses, and wives) did in fact wear ‘alternative vestments’ in public. In fact, upon closer inspection of the paintings and drawings that are often cited as examples of Pre-Raphaelite Dress, it becomes clear that where the clothing in question is not meant to be historical costume, the dresses bear much similarity to Victorian fashion.

Furthermore, because very little everyday work dress is extant outside of some rare photographs

¹¹ Ibid., 29.

¹² Ibid., 32-33.

¹³ Ibid., 40.

¹⁴ Ibid., 49-50. Merrifield also uses this image as an example of an appropriate waistline (p.67). [Punctuation as printed.]

(for it is the fashionable clothing of the wealthy, made of fine fabrics, which is cherished and saved), we have little proof that what was worn by these women was in fact any different from that donned by working women throughout Britain, or even middle-class women working in the home.

What is Pre-Raphaelite Dress?

It is possible to conclude that Pre-Raphaelite Dress was not an actual sartorial movement, but rather is a retrospective term that was adopted nearly three decades after the formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood to describe clothing seen first in image, which inspired what we should be more properly calling Artistic Dress. Nonetheless, while the category ‘Pre-Raphaelite’ was used a descriptor for art and decoration in this period, one of the earliest print references to ‘Præ-Raphaelite Dress’ was made by Mary Eliza Haweis in her 1878 articles for *Queen*, a ladies’ magazine,¹⁵ and subsequently reprinted and elaborated on in her 1879 text *The Art of Dress*¹⁶ and related 1880 article in *The Art Journal*.¹⁷ Even in these early days, she indicates semiotic problems with the term:

In the first place, what is meant by ‘Præ-Raphaelitism’ in Dress? If one were required to furnish an exact definition of that term it would be very hard; for everybody who catches it up means a different thing. But we may say, in a general way, that the present movement in dress under the above name is gradually spreading; first among art circles who have discovered, then among æsthetic circles who appreciate, the laws which govern beauty; and it represents the common reaction that follows any bad system carried on long... But this loose term ‘Præ-Raphaelite’ is extremely misleading.¹⁸

Haweis thereby applies the term to a style which we now label Aesthetic Dress; but which she herself goes on to suggest should rather be called ‘Art-Protestant’. She argues that this term is more accurate, as the clothing in question references historic costume from ‘roughly speaking, the period of Edward III’s reign, from 1327 to 1377,’ rather than just costume before the age of Raphael.¹⁹ Although Art-Protestant never really caught on, Haweis’ desire to more accurately define this style again points to the semiotic confusion of these terms outlined in the introduction to this research. More will be said on Haweis’ writing in chapter five, but it is important to note here that this is one of the earliest references to Pre-Raphaelite Dress as a particular sartorial style, and which Haweis herself indicates is unclear.

More recently, there has been a limited, sporadic discussion of Pre-Raphaelite Dress in fashion history literature, most of it occurring in the past four decades. The early 1970s saw a brief flurry of scholarly activity concerning the Pre-Raphaelites and dress. In 1973, Roger Smith published

¹⁵ (Mrs) Mary Eliza Haweis, “Pre-Raphaelite Dress,” *The Queen*, January 9, 1878. See chapter five for a detailed discussion of Haweis’ writing.

¹⁶ (Mrs) Mary Eliza Haweis, *The Art of Dress* (London, 1879).

¹⁷ (Mrs) Mary Eliza Haweis, “The Æsthetics of Dress,” *The Art Journal (1875-1887)* 6, New Series (January 1, 1880): 129–131.

¹⁸ Haweis, *The Art of Dress*, 98.

¹⁹ Haweis, *The Art of Dress*, 99.

‘Bonnard’s *Costume Historique*—a Pre-Raphaelite Source Book’,²⁰ and Leonée Ormond gave a lecture on ‘Dress in the Painting of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’ that was published the following year.²¹ Also, in 1974, Stella Mary Newton published *Health, Art & Reason: Dress Reformers of the 19th Century*, which includes a chapter simply titled ‘PreRaphaelite Clothing.’²² Generally speaking, these three texts—and particularly Newton’s—seem to be the basis for the notion that there was such a phenomenon as Pre-Raphaelite Dress that was worn by the Pre-Raphaelite circle even in the early days, and that it was worn by models not just as sitters, but in everyday life. These texts also underpinned the 1996 exhibition ‘Simply Stunning: the Pre-Raphaelite Art of Dressing’ at the Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museums (the only exhibition to date focused on this subject), which was not limited to just the Pre-Raphaelite circle, but also included later nineteenth-century artist-designers such as Kate Greenaway—again pointing to the way in which this term has been used with a broad brushstroke. In fact the greater part of the catalogue essays discuss Aesthetic Dress, rather than specifically the dress of the Pre-Raphaelites.

The Smith and Ormond articles, as their titles suggest, both focus on the use and depiction of costume in the artwork of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Smith’s research analysed Bonnard’s *Costume Historique* as an important source for Ford Madox Brown, Holman Hunt, Millais, and perhaps most significantly Rossetti, who we know had his own copy of this expensive two-volume text in his library at his death (along with other costume books such as a 1664 edition of *Habiti Antichi*).²³ Smith argued that the engravings in *Costume Historique*, which were by Paul Mercury (1803 – 1884), were ‘greatly admired by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and appear to have been used extensively as the basis, not only for their mediaeval costumes, but in certain instances, as the basis for whole figures in their paintings and drawings of the 1848–50 period.’²⁴ Smith compared to the engravings, tracings made by Brown and Millais as well as drawings made by Hunt and Rossetti, discussing the cut of garments, pose of figures, and overall sartorial depictions, showing very clearly how engaged with sartorial research these artists were. While very effectively demonstrating the Pre-Raphaelites’ deep interest in historical costume, Smith does not discuss any possible real-world manifestations of these costumes as everyday clothing for either themselves or their models.

Ormond’s article is much more specific in that it both focuses on Rossetti’s work, and uses his correspondence with his assistant Henry Treffry Dunn to discuss actual garments in his personal collection which were used for his models. While the main thread of her argument concentrates on

²⁰ Roger Smith, “Bonnard’s *Costume Historique*-a Pre-Raphaelite Source Book,” *Costume* 7 (1973).

²¹ Mackrell, *Art and Fashion*.

²² Stella Mary Newton, *Health, Art, and Reason: Dress Reformers of the Nineteenth Century* (London: John Murray, 1974).

²³ Anonymous, “Sale of Rossetti’s Library,” *Liverpool Mercury Issue 10745* (Liverpool, June 19, 1882).

²⁴ Smith, “Bonnard’s *Costume Historique*-a Pre-Raphaelite Source Book,” 28.

costumes worn for modelling, towards the end of her essay she makes one statement that begins to point toward the blurring of boundaries between modelling costume and dress:

[Rossetti] wrote of Jane Morris's 'old olive green velvet dress which I painted in that old fiddle picture' [*Veronica Veronese* (fig. 2.5)]. This dress, with full sleeves ruched at the wrists and with a gathered neckline, clearly influenced the so-called aesthetic taste in dress, which swept through London in the 1870s and 1880s.²⁵

Ormond's conclusion is significant to understanding how this notion of Pre-Raphaelite Dress has continued, as she is the first modern scholar to point to the influence of Pre-Raphaelite modelling costume on the Aesthetic Dress of subsequent decades, as Haweis and others indicated contemporarily in the nineteenth century. In fact she makes a sound conclusion, however she does not note the fact that *Veronica Veronese* was painted in 1872, at a time when Aestheticism was already on the rise (see discussion in chapter four). The dress fits that period.

Newton is the first to really investigate the subject not as just costume for painting, but as actual sartorial practice. She is the first modern dress historian to draw conclusions connecting what these artists were painting with what their female associates were wearing during these early days of the movement. She begins by rightfully pointing out that the 'truth to nature' strictures followed by the Brotherhood were what drove them to paint from life – including the construction of appropriate clothing for their subject matter to study and paint. Although Smith and Ormond have effectively shown how carefully the Pre-Raphaelites studied costume from pictorial and textual sources, Newton further argues that this would not have been enough to satiate their need for the accurate depiction of light, shape, and texture in their images. She also points out the problem of finding authentic period clothing, as 'even surviving garments (few, if any, from periods that the PreRaphaelites were most tempted to paint) were usually shabby and fragmentary.'²⁶ Millais, for example, was able to find 'a really splendid lady's ancient dress – all flowered over in silver embroidery,' about which he commented in a letter 'I am going to paint it for "Ophelia". You may imagine it is something rather good when I tell you it cost me, old and dirty as it is, four pounds.'²⁷ It is likely that Elizabeth Siddal posed in this dress, lying in a bathtub (although it is never specifically stated that she was submerged in this dress, Millais' desire to get the proper 'atmosphere and aqueous affects' of the garment floating in the water would make it highly likely that she was) and famously fell ill when, oblivious in his concentration on his painting, Millais failed to note the flames which kept the water warm burning out.²⁸ The fate of the dress is unknown, but the discovery of it was rare, and as Newton concludes, in addition to the aforementioned secondary sources, '[t]he only expedients left to the Brotherhood, therefore,

²⁵ Ormond, "Dress in the Painting of Dante Gabriel Rossetti" 29. Quote was taken from Surtees' *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* I (1971), 128.

²⁶ Newton, *Health, Art, and Reason: Dress Reformers of the Nineteenth Century*. 27.

²⁷ John Guille Millais, *The Life and Letters of John Everett Millais*, vol. I (London: Methuen & Co., 1899). 162.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 144.

were... to have specially designed clothing made for their sitters to be painted in...²⁹ An excellent example of this is the 14th c. style velvet tunic dress worn by Millais' *Mariana*, for which he himself selected the fabric, to be made into a dress by his mother for the purpose.³⁰

Through reporting these tales in a chapter entitled 'PreRaphaelite Clothing', Newton rightfully draws attention to the actual garments used and worn by models in the paintings, but also inadvertently cultivates a supposition that these were clothes to be worn in everyday situations as well. Subsequent academic and popular discussions pick up on this and go further to state that Pre-Raphaelite Dress was a fashion that departed significantly from fashionable Victorian dress (as Mackrell's quote at the outset suggests) and that it was designed by the artists, made by the models, and worn by them in public. Texts which support this idea include Cunningham's *Reforming Women's Fashion, 1850 – 1920* (2003); and the two PhD dissertations on this subject: Pamela M. Radcliffe's *Pre-raphaelite [sic] influences on women's dress in the Victorian era* (1990); and Kimberly Wahl's *Fashioning the Female Artistic Self: Aesthetic Dress in Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (2004).³¹

More recently, Oriole Cullen's definition of Aesthetic Dress in the Berg Companion to Fashion (2010) does not question these assumptions. In discussing the Pre-Raphaelites, she states: 'The type of dress that emerged was worn by female members of the artists' circle.'³² Certainly this is ultimately the case, as shall be seen in later chapters of this thesis, but with a close examination of the most frequently cited examples of Pre-Raphaelite women that allegedly wore the clothing in which they modelled – Siddal and Jane Morris – this statement is not altogether accurate. However, to begin examining this possibility, we must look to the earliest model about which this assumption has been made: Christina Rossetti.

Along with her mother, who posed for St. Anne, Christina sat for her brother Gabriel's first known painting (and the first to be marked with the enigmatic "PRB" brand), *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* [fig. 2.6]. Newton states that she 'almost certainly wore, for the painting, a dress from her own wardrobe, very near in style to what was, twenty years later, to be labelled by fashion journalists, PreRaphaelite dress.'³³ She does not state any reason or evidence for this assumption; it may be accurate, but an early drawing for the painting shows the model in a historic costume of tunic and chemise, suggesting that the model may or may not have sat in the dress we now see [fig. 2.7]. The dress as it stands today is a simple, neutral grey one piece garment, gathered at the waist, with a

²⁹ Newton, *Health, Art, and Reason: Dress Reformers of the Nineteenth Century*. 27.

³⁰ Millais, *The Life and Letters of John Everett Millais*. 94.

³¹ Radcliffe, *Pre-raphaelite Influences on Women's Dress in the Victorian Era*; Wahl, "Fashioning the Female Artistic Self: Aesthetic Dress in Nineteenth-century British Visual Culture."

³² Cullen, "Aesthetic Dress," 7.

³³ Newton, *Health, Art, and Reason: Dress Reformers of the Nineteenth Century*, 44.

plain rounded neckline, worn over a white shift. The sleeves are loose and folded back at the cuff to reveal the brown sleeve of an under-dress (which is somewhat incongruous given the white shift showing at her throat). We know that the dress was repainted: first in 1849 before the painting was sent to its new owner, the Dowager Marchioness of Bath; then in 1864, Lady Louisa Fielding, its owner at the time, sent it to Rossetti where the picture was reframed and he 'altered the angel's wings from white to deep pink and the Virgin's sleeves from yellow to brown.'³⁴ This shows Rossetti's willingness to alter his work for aesthetic reasons, and raises the question of how accurate even the original representation of this garment is. For all that is known, it could be a belted nightgown that the artist has chosen to render to appear as a simple dress appropriate to his vision of the chaste Virgin at her embroidery lesson. The natural tone and simple cut breaks from both Victorian conventions as well as the medieval references seen in the sketch, making the garment more timelessly appropriate to a Biblical scene.

Although she claimed that the garment came from Christina's wardrobe, Newton also goes on to state:

In 1848, when Rossetti was painting his *Girlhood of the Virgin*, this pale grey dress, if worn on the street, would have looked affectedly lumpish and only the quietness of its colour and its complete absence of ornament could have saved it from ridicule, if it was so saved... Since this is a 'costume picture' the fact that Christina wore no petticoats beneath her dress could be accepted; in a drawing-room the sharp outline of her knees would have given offence.³⁵

This is not to suggest that the dress was *not* a personal garment of Christina's, as that is certainly within the realm of possibility. Earlier drawings made by Rossetti of his sister and other women also show these kinds of garments, such as 'a pen and ink study of 1846 for a *Hermia and Helena* [fig. 2.8] group which Rossetti apparently carried no further.'³⁶ It is simply a difficult case to prove. It was Newton's assumption, however, which led Radcliffe to make the conclusion that 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti created the first "Pre-Raphaelite" dress in his painting, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*,' reiterating Newton's argument and relating the garment to 'quattrocento painters,' without consideration of how the evolution of the painted garment may or may not correlate to actual clothing.³⁷ In the end, we simply do not know if this was an actual dress of Christina's, or Rossetti's invention; and though it may be a source of inspiration for later stylistic shifts in fashion, it is perhaps a step too far to label it the first Artistic (or Pre-Raphaelite, or Aesthetic) Dress.

³⁴ "The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti [Rossetti Archive]." ed Jerome J. McGann. (Place Published: Freely distributed by IATH and the NINES consortium under a Creative Commons License, 2008), <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/index.html> (accessed 2008 - 2009). <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/s40.rap.html> (2009-01-26). Quoting *The Pre-Raphaelites*, Tate 1984, 64.

³⁵ Newton, *Health, Art, and Reason: Dress Reformers of the Nineteenth Century*, 30.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁷ Radcliffe, *Pre-raphaelite Influences on Women's Dress in the Victorian Era*, 301.

Elizabeth Siddal

Similar conclusions have been drawn about the clothing worn in the drawings Rossetti made of his muse and, later, wife Elizabeth Siddal. That she was a skilled seamstress has been fairly well-established; both Marsh and Squire make compelling arguments that it was through her possible work as a dressmaker for Walter Deverrel's mother that he first encountered Siddal, not from seeing the 'stunner' in a bonnet shop as is popularly told.³⁸ But it has been repeatedly assumed that she made and wore dresses similar to those she modelled in, something for which we have little to no factual evidence. For example, Radcliffe makes the following supposition on Siddal's clothes:

While Rossetti created the prototype of the "Pre-Raphaelite" dress [in *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin*], Elizabeth Siddall actually made it up and wore it. Rossetti described Lizzie's dressmaking in a letter to his sister in 1852, "That love has lately made herself a grey dress, also a black one, the first bringing out her characteristics as a 'meek unconscious dove,' while the second enhances her qualifications as 'rara avis in terries,' by rendering her 'nigro simillima cygno'" (D.G. Rossetti, No. 77, Doughty and Wahl 1965). Furthermore, numerous studies and drawings of her in 1854 and 1855 depict her in this type of dress.³⁹

While Rossetti's letter certainly further proves that Siddal made dresses for herself, and perhaps shows us something of the colour and impression left on Rossetti, this statement tells us next to nothing of what these dresses actually looked like. How do we then truly understand how this 'type of dress' appeared? There is also confusion here in terms of the 'creator.' Radcliffe ascribes creative power to Rossetti, leaving Siddal as the 'maker,' when from his letter it seems that the dresses were her invention.

Again, Radcliffe's assumptions seem to be based on Newton's text:

Less obsessed with verisimilitude than Hunt, it was Rossetti, nevertheless, who recorded the exact form of dress later to be labelled 'PreRaphaelite'. The form of dress, that is to say, which was certainly worn by Elizabeth Siddal and, a little modified to conflict less with the later fashion, by Jane Morris. Its prototype probably belonged as we have seen, to Christina Rossetti...⁴⁰

Newton then goes on to discuss the series of drawings Rossetti made of Siddal, which are at the heart of this debate on early Pre-Raphaelite Dress. The sketches may be viewed in varying ways: as intimate portraits evocative of a quiet, companionable relationship between the two artists; as preliminary drawings for other works; and, as costume studies, for, as his aforementioned research on historical costume shows, Rossetti fixed a great deal of interest on the cut of the garments and, in particular, the draping of cloth. His interest in drapery (shared with the other members of the Brotherhood, and as shall be seen, other contemporaries such as Watts and Whistler) in fact pays tribute to the Italian masters of whom he was so fond. Newton discusses these images as a means to describe Pre-Raphaelite clothing in the following passage:

³⁸ See Jan Marsh, *The Legend of Elizabeth Siddal* (Interlink Pub Group Inc, 2010) and ; Geoffrey Squire, "'Clothed in Our Right Minds': Some Wearers of Aesthetic Dress," in *Simply Stunning: The Pre-Raphaelite Art of Dressing* (Cheltenham: Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museums, 1996), 29.

³⁹ Radcliffe, *Pre-raphaelite Influences on Women's Dress in the Victorian Era*, 302.

⁴⁰ Newton, *Health, Art, and Reason: Dress Reformers of the Nineteenth Century*, 31.

In drawings of Elizabeth Siddal, done in 1855... Rossetti made it clear that not only was Miss Siddal not wearing a crinoline (in fashionable dress approaching its widest span at this date) but that the sleeves of her dress were set well up on to the shoulder, thus giving complete freedom of arm movement. Furthermore the front of her bodice is concealed by an arrangement of drapery probably designed to hide the fact that it was not very tightly laced.⁴¹

This argument is echoed by Wahl in her thesis:

Many of the women involved in the movement, whether they painted, sat as models, wrote poetry or engaged in various forms of needlework, weaving, or textile and tapestry production, wore a form of dress that was both artistic and comfortable, the designs for which they often devised themselves... In several sketches of Elizabeth Siddal by Rossetti, executed during the mid 1850s, the looseness of the bodice can be noted, along with the wide upper sleeves placed high on the shoulder for ease of movement. I will refer to these dress designs as Pre-Raphaelite. The construction of these gowns went against contemporary conventions of fashionable dress at the time which required the sleeve to be tight and set so low that the upper arm could barely be lifted away from the body. Similarly, in a series of 1865 photographs of Jane Morris, her gown is Pre-Raphaelite in appearance, but suggests a growing fullness in the back along with a rising waistline.⁴²

Both of these passages, while not necessarily inaccurate, point to some of the main problematic questions raised by this research on Pre-Raphaelite Dress. First, does the set of these sleeves well and truly go against conventions of the time; and, if the sleeve is singled out, why is there also no discussion of the waistline, which is straight and gathered like the styles of the 1820s and 30s, rather than tight and pointed as in the bodices from the Glasgow collection? In other words, do these dresses actually depart from all conventions of Victorian dress, or were there perhaps more fashion options for nineteenth century women than we acknowledge or may presently be aware?⁴³ Secondly, it may be noted that in Wahl's passage, as in others previously mentioned, the garments worn by Siddal are too easily compared to those worn by Morris a decade later (see chapter three for a detailed discussion of the 1865 photos taken of her at Tudor House), and even to those worn during the Aesthetic Movement two-to-three decades later. As noted in the introduction, this is prevalent problem in this topic: discussion and comparisons are made across decades as if fashion did not change rapidly, and without regard to any intervening influences which might have been found outside the paintings of these artists (which themselves were mitigated by much socio-cultural change over this time period). I hope to clarify some of these assumptions through presenting this material chronologically.

Returning to Siddal's dress, there is no doubt that in Rossetti's drawings she is wearing clothing that seems looser and more comfortable than those generally seen in mid-century fashion plates. But how often would Siddal, or any middle class woman, be sitting about her house in her hoops

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴² Wahl, "Fashioning the Female Artistic Self: Aesthetic Dress in Nineteenth-century British Visual Culture," 36–37.

⁴³ We know, for example, of working costume through, for example, the photographs Hill & Adamson made of the Newhaven Fishwives (1843–47). See National Galleries of Scotland, Accession number PGP HA 328.

and corset? What did women wear as everyday dress? And do Siddal's dresses depart so drastically from fashionable dress?

First, let us address the matter of the sleeves. While it is generally true that the shoulder seam was set low during this period, this was not always the case. There are some examples, seen in plates and in costume collections, where the shoulder is set at the joint of the arm, with ruffles falling over the seam so as to *appear* that the shoulder is lower set [fig. 2.9]. Providing the seam itself was not too tight, this could offer the same freedom of movement that the so-called Pre-Raphaelite Dress would have, while still giving the aesthetic appearance of the rounded shoulder. In a drawing of the artist at her easel [fig. 2.10], Siddal wears a dress with shoulder joints constructed similarly to the Glasgow dress. The shoulder seam is set low *and* has a ruffle, but the garment retains the plain appearance and bell sleeve, which has been hallmarked by some as particularly Pre-Raphaelite. But it is also worth noting that the open bell sleeve, which is seen in many of these drawings, was actually quite fashionable at the time, as seen in an 1856 fashion plate [fig 2.11]. In fact, Merrifield praised it highly:

The lines of the sleeves should be flowing; and they are much more graceful when they are wide in the lower part, especially when so open as to display to advantage the beautiful form of the wrist and forearm.⁴⁴

As seen in the same fashion plate, the snug fit of Siddal's bodice is also within the realm of mid-1850s fashionable dress. While Siddal is obviously not wearing hoops, the fullness of her skirt bunched about her suggests that it was designed for fullness in undergarments that would have been provided by petticoats, much like the woman seated in the blue gown in the plate. The bell sleeve, when constructed in layers, is also called a 'pagoda sleeve', and was very popular as well. In a drawing Rossetti made of her at Hastings in 1854 [fig. 2.12], Siddal wears a pagoda sleeved day dress, which, from the fall of the drapery, appears to be of starched muslin. A very similar dress is in the collection of Glasgow Museums, also of muslin but with an indigo roller print pattern [fig. 2.13].

Conversely, while the drawings show that Siddal favoured loose sleeves, she does appear in tight ones as well, as seen in a drawing of her seated, resting her head on her hand.⁴⁵ The bodice of this gown appears to fit more snugly as well, but there was more variation in this aspect of Siddal's gowns. Many appear to be loose in the front, as the above day dresses, with pleating from the shoulders to the centre torso as was the fashion. Others appear to button down the front, or even take the form of short jackets. She is also seen wearing layers – short capes and jackets – presumably for warmth, as one can imagine in a perhaps cold study and with her poor constitution. Sometimes, though, these capes seem more as day bodices layered over tunics that button at her

⁴⁴ Mary Merrifield, *Dress as Fine Art* (London: Arthur Hall, 1854), 62.

⁴⁵ See plate 47, Virginia Surtees, *Rossetti's Portraits of Elizabeth Siddal: a Catalogue of the Drawings and Watercolours* (Oxford: Aldershot and the Ashmolean Museum, 1991).

cuff. All of the skirts are full, and appear to have petticoats some of the time, but other times the fabric falls in soft folds all about her, suggesting the absence of any supportive undergarments.

These layers of clothing would have also provided Rossetti with further opportunity to enjoy drapery studies on his favourite subject. Rossetti's interest in the fall of the drapery is in fact so keen that he fails to depict the pattern and texture of the fabric in any of these sketches, leaving the impression that the gowns were plain and colourless, which may reflect Siddal's preference for the aforementioned muted colours such as grey, but may also suggest that the artist wasn't concerned with rendering pattern for the purpose of these studies.

Thus in comparing the drawings Rossetti made of Siddal to these extant Victorian garments, we can see that while she did seem to prefer styles which adopted loose sleeves and bodices, she wore gowns that were both practical and fashionable, which is unsurprising considering that she was working as a milliner when she first encountered members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. It is also worth remembering Rossetti's passion for costume, and that these drawings can also be seen as drapery studies that may or may not accurately reflect the actual fit, fall, and detail of the fabric Siddal wore.

It is curious also that definitions of Pre-Raphaelite Dress have emphasized the bodice of dresses at the site of departure from fashionable dress, when, as has been shown, they may not have departed drastically, as opposed to the styling of the skirts. Just as it is possible that dresses worn in Pre-Raphaelite paintings were fashionable but worn without corsets, they were certainly worn without petticoat or crinoline. Newton points to this only briefly in the midst of again making a point about sleeves.⁴⁶ This is a much more drastic departure from high Victorian fashion than the bodice argument, as by the mid 1850s, the cage crinoline was at the height of fashion, creating skirts that were in a wide bell shape (much lampooned in publications such as *Punch*).

On this point, one painting that has also been lauded as showing examples of Pre-Raphaelite Dress is Millais' *Spring (Apple Blossoms)* of 1856-9 [fig. 2.14]. Wahl refers to it as 'an early example of a genre piece featuring Pre-Raphaelite dress.'⁴⁷ The scene depicts eight young girls, ostensibly milkmaids, at rest after cutting flowers on a spring afternoon. They sit in various states of repose, some enjoying curds and whey. The palette is colourful and rich, and although the presence of the scythe, as well as the seasonal subject matter, makes a *momento mori* of the work, it is still a visual feast for the senses, enhancing the *momento mori* aspect. In fact the catalogue of the recent Millais

⁴⁶ Newton, *Health, Art, and Reason: Dress Reformers of the Nineteenth Century*, 32.

⁴⁷ Wahl, "Fashioning the Female Artistic Self: Aesthetic Dress in Nineteenth-century British Visual Culture," 37.

exhibition at the Tate Britain categorizes this painting under the chapter ‘Aestheticism,’ signalling Millais’ move towards this kind of painting early on.

In terms of the dress, however, we find the same dilemma with the aforementioned discussions of Siddal. The girls wear colourful garments, however they are in cut and material certainly Victorian dresses. Shot silks, muslin chemises, decorative dolmans, and high collars are all exhibited here. In fact, the central kneeling figure, modelled by Georgina Elisabeth Moncreiffe (later Lady Dudley)⁴⁸ very clearly wears her dress with some kind of undergarment, be it stays or a corset, which models her figure. As these are girls, walking about in the country after gathering flowers, it would not be expected that they would necessarily be wearing hoops. Thus it is again in this work that conventional dress has been identified, incorrectly, as Pre-Raphaelite Dress.

Unfortunately, too many assumptions have been made regarding Siddal and others wearing Pre-Raphaelite dresses, with very little structural examination and comparison to actual Victorian fashion. Obviously the main problem is that none of these supposed garments are extant; however if one wishes to use Rossetti’s drawings as proof, then they should also be compared to extant examples of Victorian dress, as above. Furthermore, while the only evidence we have of Siddal wearing ‘Pre-Raphaelite Dress’ is in the fiction of Rossetti’s artwork, there is other photographic and textual evidence to support her wearing Victorian fashion.

After nearly a decade of an on-again off-again courtship, Rossetti suddenly – and unexpectedly – married Siddal in 1860. Tragically, within two years of their marriage, he lost her to an overdose of laudanum, possibly by suicide, and arguably due to severe illness and depression after a stillborn daughter arrived on 2 May 1861. Siddal died on 11 February 1862.

In the years before Siddal’s death, the Rossettis spent a great deal of time with their friends William and Jane Morris, and Edward and Georgiana Burne-Jones, and others such as William Allingham and the Ford Madox Browns (it was, in fact, to the Morris’ home Red House that Siddal went to recover from her grief at losing her child). Although accounts of Siddal are limited, it is from these days that we have a brief but particularly important description of her sartorial habits. In her biography of Rossetti, Jan Marsh relates an account of an outing with the Burne-Joneses to the Zoological Gardens, where Siddal ‘dressed in a graceful and simple style, with neat jacket over hooped crinoline.’⁴⁹ Upon returning to the Rossetti’s rooms at Hampstead that day, Georgiana

⁴⁸ Jason Rosenfeld, *Millais* (London: Tate, 2007), 137.

⁴⁹ Jan Marsh, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Painter and Poet* (London: Orion Books, 1999), 217.

describes ‘the mass of her beautiful deep-red hair as she took off her bonnet: she wore her hair very loosely fastened up, so that it fell in soft heavy wings.’⁵⁰

This style can be seen in several of Rossetti’s renderings, as well as in the only extant photograph of Siddal, a sombre carte-de-visite reportedly taken in May 1861 while she was convalescing, and which was later hand-tinted by Rossetti and given as a gift to Siddal’s nurse [fig. 2.15].⁵¹ She holds her hands clasped and has her eyes closed in a manner that is reminiscent of Rossetti’s posthumous portrait of her as *Beata Beatrix* [fig. 2.16]. The painting imagines her as Dante’s love in the moment of her death, and, on one hand, the simple medieval-style tunic dress provides the costume that situates the time and place of the scene. For the audience in the know, however, the simplicity of the cut calls to mind some of the costume in the numerous sketches of Siddal,⁵² strengthening the connection that the image has to their own tragic tale, as well as the perception that this costume was exemplary of her personal wardrobe, and by extension, her identity.

Rossetti may have also posed Siddal for the photograph; however, as an image of the actual woman, his manipulation of the portrait was more limited than if he had the creative control of paint. Although he could have given “stage direction”, he could not easily adjust her features or her gaze, but was limited to arranging her pose, and selecting her garments.

Knowing the circumstances of her life, we might read this photo as an image of great sadness, with the swaying tilt of her head and hands clasped to her bosom. Here we find a portrait of the Victorian woman, rather than a character in a visual narrative, and she is dressed as such. In addition to the loosely gathered hair, she wears a fashionable gown of a striped material, with a high-necked bodice and full skirt over a chemise or perhaps *engageantes* (she wears a shawl which obscures the waistline, but this was likely a two piece dress). While it is difficult to tell if she is wearing a corset, she clearly has hoops under her full skirt, and the gown is in fact very similar to one in the Glasgow Collection [fig. 2.17], a three piece dress from c.1858-60 comprising a skirt, an evening bodice with a low décolletage, and a day bodice with a high neck and full pagoda sleeves like those Siddal wears. Thus in arranging this intimate and somewhat tragic portrait, Rossetti chose not to dress her up in costume, but to depict her in her own clothes – typical Victorian ones – to portray, perhaps for once, the woman she truly was in that place and time.

Although they come late in Siddal’s short life, these two examples depict a woman who wore not loose fitting Pre-Raphaelite Dress, but standard Victorian dresses with proper undergarments. She would have chosen her own fabrics, trim, and perhaps even made up these dresses herself, to her

⁵⁰ Georgiana Burne-Jones and Lady Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones: 1833-1867* (Lund Humphries, 1993), 220; Quoted in Marsh, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Painter and Poet*, 217.

⁵¹ Rossetti archive. <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/sa269.raw.html>.

⁵² See Surtees, *Rossetti’s Portraits of Elizabeth Siddal: a Catalogue of the Drawings and Watercolours*.

own tastes, as many middle-class women did. Georgiana Burne-Jones called her ‘graceful and simple’ style ‘the incarnate opposite of the “tailor made” young lady’; however this can be read as a reference to Siddal’s preference for sedate prints and fabrics *sans* unnecessary embellishments (like the trim seen on the Glasgow Dress), rather than a wholesale rejection of Victorian fashion.⁵³ There is no extant data, written contemporarily, or in photographs, to suggest that she wore, in public, the clothing in which she modelled, and what we do have supports the contrary. And, as shown by comparing images of Siddal with extant contemporary garments, her clothing was not just mainstream, but *la mode*.

However, it cannot be ignored that the aforementioned suppositions conclude that there was such a thing as Pre-Raphaelite Dress, and that such an oft-repeated notion must have come from somewhere. Is Pre-Raphaelite Dress then a myth, or at least a later reconstruction of a style that wasn’t originally worn by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and their circle, outside of modelling for artworks? The term was usually used in reference to the dress of artistic and/or aesthetic people, as Haweis declared above, and more particularly in examples of women’s clothing. At some point, there must have been a cross-over between the works of art (and the costumes used for them), and the actual wearing of clothes that attempted to mimic the sensibilities expressed in Pre-Raphaelite art; it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when that happened, but I argue that the assumptions that it was Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal who began this shift are misapplied.

Thus far this discussion has been focused on female dress, and that is because previous discussions of Pre-Raphaelite Dress have been centred on women’s clothes. However it is worth considering that the sartorial habits of Pre-Raphaelite men did, at the very least, contribute to the view of these groups as being outside the norm; and that there was, in fact, a burgeoning form of Artistic Dress for men as well.

Early Male Artistic Dress: ‘Sartorial Disregard’

From what we know of their early days, the men who formed the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood dressed eccentrically by Victorian standards (see chapter three for a discussion of Victorian male dress), as many art students of their gender did. Deborah Cherry points out that this unconventional dress ‘could not be adopted by women artists for whom, unlike men, disorderly conduct or dishevelled appearance endangered respectability and professional activity.’⁵⁴ This statement is true in general, however some marginal groups of women artists, such as Barbara Leigh-Smith (later Bodichon) and Joanna Boyce, close friends of Rossetti and Siddal, also participated in early

⁵³ Burne-Jones and Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, 220.

⁵⁴ Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (Routledge, 1993). 91. Quoted in Colin Cruise, "Artists' Clothes: Some Observations on Male Artists and Their Clothes in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Gendered Object*, ed. Pat Kirkham (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996). 114.

emancipation activities which found them, at times, wearing reform dress, such as bifurcated skirts. Nonetheless, male artists enjoyed much more flexibility in what would be accepted as merely artistic eccentricity in dress, as the visual canon of the slightly unkempt, baggy-clothed and scruffy male artist was well established through portraiture (and particularly self-portraiture) via the likes of Rembrandt, Salvatore Rosa, and countless others; as well as through subsequent caricature resulting from these signifiers. However it is still important to consider these styles as what sociologist Diana Crane has labelled a marginal discourse in the history of fashion (see discussion in chapter one).

At the outset, the men of the Pre-Raphaelite circle seemed to wear typical dress for their background. However it was reported early on by Hunt in his recollections that Rossetti favoured baggier, ill-fitting clothes and had an unkempt, devil-may-care appearance. In her biography of the artist, Jan Marsh used these descriptions to sketch a romantic vision of Rossetti entering the Antique School of the Royal Academy in 1846:

As the freshman arrived, the other students turned, seeing among the group a slight, dark lad, with loose-curved masses of rich brown hair, strong brows over deep-set dark-ringed eyes and a rather scowling, intense expression... He dressed with deliberate slovenliness – a none-too-clean collar, unblackened boots, a well-worn coat. Sartorial disregard was common for art students, but his was marked.⁵⁵

It may be that some of the reason for his appearance was due to the somewhat impoverished condition of his family at the time, however Rossetti managed to turn this into an artistic affectation rather than a blemish. This vision can be seen in the romanticized self-portrait drawing Rossetti made in 1847 [fig. 2.18]. Rendering himself as a poet, the young, clean-shaven face, sensuous mouth, and thick, windswept hair (his brother William called them ‘elf-locks’)⁵⁶ is singular in the artist’s self-portraits; modes of representation left for the female muses he will come to paint. However the folded collar and short bow tie, which might to the modern eye look old-fashioned, are important to note, for they depart significantly from the preceding decades’ fashion for high collars and elaborately tied cravats. Rossetti’s tie here is that of an artist: short, loose, and practical. Likewise, in an 1854 photograph by Herbert Watkins, Millais wears a loose ‘floppy’ bow tie [fig. 2.19] as becomes common practice for many male artists, as we shall see. In fact, the wearing of the tie was, for men, a language of its own, signifying a range of attitudes from refinement to decadence. The artistic dress of men, when not bordering on fancy dress, was often found in more subtle ways, in the details and accessories of their clothing, and the way they wear their hair – particularly facial hair. This will again become evident as the century progresses.

Thus in the years 1848 – 1860, the Pre-Raphaelites and their circle were not necessarily establishing new modes of dress (or ‘alternative vestimentary movements’) as has been suggested,

⁵⁵ Jan Marsh, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Painter and Poet*. 19-20.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 22.

but rather they served as models for a kind of sensibility that influenced later modes of dressing in their own group and others through the artworks they created, their interest in historical costume, as well as the affectations they presented in their sartorial habits. The anecdote Marsh has presented is not an indicator of Pre-Raphaelite Dress, but rather of Artistic Dress; or rather the dress of an artist, which affected an air of rebellion via ‘sartorial disregard’ that would become more extreme in subsequent decades, as shall be seen. But the Pre-Raphaelites were not the only group to dress in non-normative styles during these years. There was another artistic group of friends and colleagues who were better positioned to express alternative trends to a more elite and influential public: the Holland Park Circle.

G.F. Watts and the Holland Park Circle

At the same time as Rossetti was fashioning an artistic self-image at the Royal Academy, the painter G.F. Watts was rendering a similarly Romantic vision of himself while studying art and building a career as a portrait painter in Italy. He had gone there with the encouragement of his earliest patron, Alexander Constantine Ionides, and much as Michelangelo enjoyed the cultivation of the Medicis, Watts lived under the care of Lord & Lady Holland at Casa Feroni in Florence. Baron Holland was British Minister at the Court of Tuscany, and Watts gained introduction to him through a mutual acquaintance.⁵⁷ The Hollands were probably just as happy to have styled themselves as great Florentine patrons as Watts was to accept their patronage, and so Watts lived with them as an artist in residence from 1843 – 1847.⁵⁸ While Holland engaged Watts’ services for portraiture, the artist began studying fresco painting, and the influence of the old masters is clear in his self-portrait of 1846 [fig. 2.20]. After making armour studies at Casa Feroni, he painted himself in such a suit at the Villa Medicea, Careggi.⁵⁹ In style the portrait echoes both Renaissance and 18th century Grand Tour portraiture, but the warm lighting against the cool palette, as well as the loose brushwork on the armour, shows the development of Watts’ own style. Although the armour and landscape are antique, Watts bears Van Dykian facial hair, and a Victorian gentleman’s coiffure. Here we see the artist as a fashionable gentleman modelling a beautiful object; the armour is more an accessory than anything related to *who* the man is, for we find no helm, no weapon, nor any other accoutrements of war to suggest he is posing as a soldier. The armour is as a fine jacket or robe – something to catch the light, and to give aesthetic pleasure and interest to what would otherwise be a standard portrait. It also shows his early interest in historic and exotic costume, and his own interest in fashioning an artistic self-image that was equal parts academic and sensual.

⁵⁷ Dr. Caroline Dakers, *The Holland Park Circle: Artists and Victorian Society* (Yale University Press, 1999), 10.

⁵⁸ This relationship was not without strain, particularly in regard to gossip about a relationship between Watts and Lady Holland. See Dakers, 10-14.

⁵⁹ Dakers, *The Holland Park Circle*, 12.

In that vein, an 1849 portrait made of Watts by his friend Charles Couzens, with whom he shared a studio for a time after his return to England in 1847, depicts the artist at work [fig. 2.21]. He is shown full-length, standing in front of a plaster frieze of the Elgin marbles, and as we follow his downcast gaze to the floor, we notice he is contemplating the sketch he has just made, his foot keeping the paper from rolling up. He still has the same medium-length hair cropped well above his shoulders, but now he is clean-shaven and in fashionable trousers and waistcoat. However he wears a velvet smock over this ensemble, the cuff of the left sleeve casually rolled back, and a short, unfussy bow tie (similar to that in the Rossetti portrait) in the same blue shade as his waistcoat. The smock is an interesting signifier – while it is functional in keeping his clothes free from charcoal, it is not a working-class smock (an item favoured by Millais and Hunt, as we shall see), but rather one of velvet, probably lined in fine linen. The fabric itself signifies wealth, elegance, and refinement. Couzens's image is not the unkempt artist that Rossetti seems to have affected, but rather the artist-scholar, finely and neatly dressed, perhaps a further example of the self-fashioning which would depict him on par to those with whom he was socializing.

Upon his return to England, Watts was, through his connections with the Hollands, admitted into the respectably bohemian social circle at Little Holland House.⁶⁰ At the heart of the circle were the Anglo-Indian Pattle sisters, whose wealth and excellent connections positioned them well to be arbiters of taste. Watts saw the 'startlingly beautiful' Virginia Pattle in a neighbourhood street, and arranged a meeting through a mutual friend.⁶¹ He became fast friends with the family, particularly Sara Pattle, who had married Toby Prinsep, a wealthy member of the Indian Civil Service. When he found that Little Holland House – the dower house at Holland Park – was going to be let by Lord Holland, Watts suggested that the Prinseps move in. Thus launched nearly three decades of socio-artistic activity at this Aesthetic haven. Also included in the circle were Sara and Virginia's other sisters: Lady Sophia Dalrymple, Maria Jackson (who would become the grandmother of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell), and perhaps most well-known, Julia Margaret Cameron. Counted amongst their friends and frequent visitors were not only artists, but other great Victorian minds: poets, politicians, academics, and social reformers, for example, all made appearances at Sunday afternoon 'At Homes', including such illustrious figures as Tennyson, Disraeli, John Herschel, and Janie Nassau Senior. Hunt, in fact visited in his early days, and had this to say about Watts and the circle:

It was indeed a delight to see a painter of the day with such dream-like opportunities and powers of exercising his genius. It was more than a happy combination, for one may safely assert that nowhere else in England would it have been possible to enter a house with such a singular variety of beautiful persons inhabiting it. The sisters of the lady were seen in all their dignified beauty in Watts' fine portraits, and other beautiful sitters had been attracted to his studio, as was witnessed by their delightful portraits upon his walls... In respect to

⁶⁰ For a detailed account of Watts and the Holland Park Circle, see Dakers.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

his fullness of rendering of the human form, I was fain to regard Watts as an ideal Pre-Raphaelite.⁶²

Like their friends the Ionides, the Prinseps were great artistic patrons, particularly to G.F. Watts, who went to stay with them when he fell ill in 1850, then remained there with them for another 25 years! The sisters, largely raised near Calcutta, were described to have ‘adopted a graceful and beautiful style of dress that seemed inspired by the Italian Renaissance... with flowing robes... made of rare Indian stuffs.’⁶³ They were described as ‘unconventional’ and as ‘making bohemian respectable.’ Of particular interest is an anecdote which described their social and sartorial interactions:

Amongst themselves the sisters talked in Hindustani, and when they met together at one or other of their houses they generally sat up all night in an orgie [sic] of dressmaking, pulling their robes to bits and sewing them up in a new way, or designing and cutting out new clothes, chattering all the time in Hindustani, that seemed to an outsider the language best suited to express their superabundant vitality.⁶⁴

Thus at mid-century, the Pattle sisters were not only wearing exotic costume in everyday life, they were actively engaging in its creation.⁶⁵ In fact, as early as 1851, Watts painted Sophia Dalrymple, in a flowing white gown [fig 2.22], more than a decade before other famous paintings of women in white, such as Whistler’s *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* of 1864 [fig 3.23], or Rossetti’s *Lady Lilith* of 1864-68 [fig. 3.26] (both are discussed in greater detail in chapter three), and yet the Holland Park Circle has not been given much consideration in literature on the origins of Aesthetic Dress. And Watts’s was not the only ‘woman in white’ portrait of this era: in 1858-9, future Holland Park resident and Royal Academy president Frederic Leighton painted his favourite model, the exotic Italian Nanna Risi, in a full sleeved pristinely white garment in *Pavonia* [fig. 2.23].⁶⁶

Sophia Dalrymple’s dress, as well as descriptions and images of those of her sisters, were far more radical than any in which Elizabeth Siddal or the other Pre-Raphaelite models were depicted. This dress has very little structure to it; the garment is a plain white sheath, tightly pleated at the neck and shoulder sleeves, then it simply drops loosely in long sleeves and a skirt to the ground. It is gathered at the natural line of her waist with a simple white cord, the long tassels of which form the only ornament on this garment. Furthermore, it is clear that Dalrymple is not wearing a corset or a

⁶² William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (The Macmillan Company, 1905), 122–23. v. 2, 122-123.

⁶³ Anon. [member of Pattle-Prinsep family], extract from article in possession of Watts Gallery, Compton [c.1900], Quoted in Dakers, 28.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶⁵ It is possible that there may have been socio-political implications of the Pattle’s mode of dress relating to their Indian heritage, particularly in light of the 1857 Indian Mutiny and the resultant abolition of the British East India Company, with India coming fully under British rule in 1858. However the scope of this research does not allow for an in-depth study of that dimension at this time.

⁶⁶ We see what is likely the same garment as an undertunic in Leighton’s *A Roman Lady (La Nanna)* [Philadelphia Museum of Art], painted around the same time.

petticoat, and the shape is simply draped on along the natural lines of her body. There would be a lack of issues with freedom of movement here. Her hair is loosely gathered at her nape, and the only other adornment is her Indian jewellery: simple earring and necklace in blue and gold, and the *rakhi* tied around her wrist, a ‘Hindu sacred thread... symbolic of the love between siblings.’⁶⁷

The Pattle sisters were often depicted in Watts’ paintings, and in photographs of this period, in very similar loose fitting robes that were very simply adorned with ribbon trim, that recall their exotic heritage [fig 2.24]. They also seemed to enjoy historically inspired costume as well: Dalrymple was photographed with Watts in the 1850s, both of them wearing unusual attire [fig 2.25]. She appears in an Italian Renaissance-inspired ensemble of a light coloured underdress, topped with an overdress that is open down the skirt, with decorative bands about the upper arm and wide, ballooned sleeves. Watts is shown in an unadorned, loose, light-coloured coat, a round-brimmed velvet hat (which earned him the moniker ‘Signor’ from the Pattles), and has a full-grown beard that, according to subsequent portraits, he will continue to keep the rest of his long life. Neither sitters can be said to be wearing Victorian attire in this image, and whether this was a deliberately constructed image or not, there is something in the pose – Watts’s casual posture, and Dalrymple’s lean towards him – that makes one think this is a candid photo of an intimate moment between friends, perhaps caught by a photographer in mid-conversation (although they would have had to hold that post a significant amount of time at this point in photographic history). There is an aspect to these photos, and to Watts’s portraits, that makes the wearing of these exotic garments more natural, more *believable*, as they are simply part of the presentation of the sitter; that is they become attributes, *signifiers*, of the person that is being portrayed, and their everyday life.

The contextual subject matter in these images is an important point of comparison when considering the presentation of self here, versus that of the Pre-Raphaelites. So many of the examples of Pre-Raphaelite Dress put forward by Haweis and others were based on paintings of fictitious, often historical subjects. Even the later arguments based on Rossetti’s drawings of Siddal did not take into consideration that these were as much drapery studies (and sometimes historical costume studies) as they were portraits of Siddal. The images of the Holland Park Circle feel more like true-to-life portraits, even to a greater extent than Rossetti’s Romantic self-portrait. In the 1850s, Watts was enjoying success as a portrait painter, and painted many women (and men) in Victorian fashionable dress. However, as indicated in the aforementioned self-portrait and echoed in other portrait commissions (discussed further in subsequent chapters), Watts understood how to use costume as a visual attribute, and was gifted in constructing images that used exotic costume as a means of conveying both sensual visual pleasure, as well as aspects of personality. Perhaps the sisters choose these garments (with Watts’ encouragement) because they say something of their

⁶⁷ Barbara Bryant, *G.F. Watts Portraits: Fame & Beauty in Victorian Society* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2004), 83.

heritage; perhaps they simply liked to see themselves as exotic. But again, with the aforementioned reports that they did dress this way in mixed company, they were certainly better positioned to influence the well-connected visitors that came to their home. It is well within the realm of possibility that this really was the way they dressed at home, and in public – which was likely *not* the case with the women who modelled for the Pre-Raphaelites.

Sophia Dalrymple is a key figure of comparison for these two groups, for towards the end of the decade Rossetti made a drawing of her as well.⁶⁸ Rossetti's sketch, made sometime between 1858-1862, is already showing signs of the highly stylized depictions of his models, and does not very much resemble either photographs or portraits of her (and in fact, greatly resembles Jane Morris, who he met in 1857). This highlights the difference in how the same model was treated by these two artists: Watts seemed to paint Dalrymple as her saw her, while Rossetti made her fit the mould of his vision (his gaze, as it were), as he did with so many others. It is perhaps a stretch of the imagination to then say Watts is a more reliable source than Rossetti for accurate costume, but it is certainly an important point to consider when studying either artist as evidence for sartorial codes.

Consequently, although the previous arguments in support of Pre-Raphaelite Dress are not unfounded, they are flawed in that they haven't fully examined the actual garments that were worn in everyday life by Pre-Raphaelite women, nor have they considered other possible sources of sartorial inspiration, such as the Holland Park Circle. After all, the latter elite circle, did ultimately include the former in their socio-artistic activities. Through the evidence presented in this chapter, it is suggested that a re-evaluation of the position of so-called Pre-Raphaelite Dress as instigator of subsequent styles – most notably Aesthetic Dress – should be undertaken. Pre-Raphaelite Dress should not be considered an active 'vestimentary movement,' but rather a mode of sartorial representation found in the artworks of the Pre-Raphaelites that served as a source of inspiration for later styles.

More importantly, it can perhaps be argued that these years saw the beginning of nineteenth-century Artistic Dress not just in the costume worn by Pre-Raphaelite models, but rather in the alternative sartorial discourses of the marginal groups of artists and patrons. These manifested themselves in the dishevelled and irreverent appearance of Rossetti alongside his fellow art students; as well as in the exotic attire of the Holland Park Circle; and no doubt within other artistic groups in London and Britain (such as the St John's Wood Clique) which the scope of this study will not be able to fully explore. That is not to say that the narrative artworks did not influence the clothing of these groups; these individuals did in fact engage with historical and exotic costume via

⁶⁸ See no. 312 in Virginia Surtees, *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882): A Catalogue Raisonné*, vol. 1 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971), 164.

their artwork, and as the aforementioned arguments and subsequent chapters will show, it certainly had an impact.

Chapter Three: Artistic Dress and Second Wave Pre-Raphaelitism (ca. 1860-1870)

Imagine a tall lean woman in a long dress of some dead purple stuff, guiltless of hoops (or of anything else, I should say), with a mass of crisp black hair heaped into great wavy projections on each of her temples, a thin pale face, a pair of strange sad, deep, dark Swinburnian eyes...a mouth like the 'Oriana' in our illustrated Tennyson, a long neck, without any collar, and in lieu thereof some dozen strings of outlandish beads.

A. Henry James writing about Jane Morris in a letter to his sister, 1869¹

Henry James' 1869 description of Jane Morris is exemplary of both the bohemian impression she gave to her contemporaries, and the romanticized vision we have of her today. At the time of this encounter, Jane had been married to William Morris for a decade, during which period she became one of the primary faces of Pre-Raphaelitism in becoming Rossetti's favoured model. With the dissolution of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood around 1855, the Pre-Raphaelite style moved into its second wave, which was predominantly identified with the painting of Rossetti and Burne-Jones; the artists associated with Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co. (formed in 1861); and the burgeoning Arts and Crafts movement.

It is during this time that we first begin to see these artists and models truly exploring alternative modes of dress in a more public manner. As Henry James' impression of her illustrates, by the end of the decade, Morris was appearing in semi-public wearing garments that were outside the norm. And it was in 1865 that the famous photographs of her—much used as examples of 'Pre-Raphaelite Dress'—were taken in Rossetti's garden at Tudor House. However, the sartorial habits of Jane Morris were more complicated than fashion history might currently suggest. Did she give rise to the concept of Pre-Raphaelite Dress? Was she, like the Pattle sisters, in a position to influence fashion trends?

This chapter will consider these questions, as well as expand the previous chapter's examination of artistic circles in London, focusing on the photography of David Wilkie Wynfield and Julia Margaret Cameron, and introducing the work of James McNeill Whistler. Before considering these cases, a brief overview of mainstream fashion of the 1860s, as well as the cult of dandyism and its influence on male dress, will aid in understanding how these artists both conformed to and broke the sartorial codes of the time.

Towards Couture: Victorian Women's Fashion in the 1860s

In general, the bodices of the early 1860s were similar in both cut and variety to those shown in the previous chapter, however the shape of skirts changed significantly. The girth of skirts in the 1850s

¹ Henry James, Letter to his sister dated 10 March 1869, in Henry James, *Letters* (Harvard University Press, 1984).

continued to expand until, by the end of the decade, they were at their fullest. The warm, ‘unhygienic’ layers of petticoats had been first lightened by crinolines, and then, in 1855, by sprung steel hoops. The round, umbrella-like shape stayed in fashion for the first two years of the following decade, but by 1863, the shape was flattening at the front, with the bulk of the skirt at the back, as seen in an advertisement for ‘Sansflectum Crinolines’ from *Le Follet* [fig. 3.1]. A quotation taken from the *Lady’s Newspaper* supports the ad, and seems to refute the notion that these were in any way inconvenient to movement, or dangerous:

The *patent ondina*, or *waved jupon*, does away with the unsightly results of the ordinary Hoops ; and, so perfect are the wave-like bands, that a lady may ascend a steep stair, lean against a table, throw herself into and arm-chair, pass to her stall at the opera, or occupy a fourth seat in a carriage, without inconvenience to herself or others, or provoking the rude remarks of the observers ; and lastly, it allows the Dress to fall into graceful folds.²

However there are many accounts of the perils of the crinoline in contemporary periodicals, from the parodies of it found in *Punch*, to more alarming accounts of injuries and fatalities caused by the expansive hoops covered by highly flammable silks and muslin:

On Wednesday an inquest was held... on the body of Mary Anne Winterbotham, aged 22, a servant in the employ of Dr. Allen... [who] deposed that the deceased told him that she got a shovel-full of burning coals to light the drawing-room fire, and placed it on the ground, and while she stooped to get wood from a cupboard she thought her dress must have swept over the coals and caught fire. She wore a cane crinoline.³

How Dr. Allen was ‘told’ this by the deceased is unclear, however the jury came to the verdict of accidental death by burning, but not without registering their ‘disgust’ that she was allowed to work in her crinoline, and ‘hope that the present case might serve a warning.’⁴ This is an important point in regards to some of the clothing worn by women artists and models – practicality was certainly a consideration. Thinking again on the drawings of Siddal, this supports the notion that, although she was not engaged in the same kind of ‘work’ as a servant, she may have been sketched in her more practical (and less restrictive) ‘studio’ clothes.

Cases such as these also fanned the flames of dress reformists. However V&A Fashion Curator Lucy Johnstone is keen to point out that crinolines were perhaps not as perilous as the popular press suggested:

Many of these stories did have some foundation of truth... But one should bear in mind that moralists, publicists and satirists were often out to condemn the fripperies of fashion and tended to focus on the most extreme situations. The story about ladies not being able to fit into carriages or through narrow doorways, for example, is clearly exaggerated. The cage crinolines might look very rigid but spring steel is in fact incredibly flexible and could

² Advertisement for ‘Sansflectum Crinolines’ from *Le Follet, Journal Du Grand Monde, Fashion, Polite Literature, Beaux Arts, &c. &c.*, September, 1863.

³ Anonymous, “Accidents and Offences,” *John Bull* (London, November 23, 1861).

⁴ *Ibid.*

be compressed. Accidents did happen but women would learn how to walk in crinolines and how to sit down so that they did not reveal all their underclothes.⁵

Nonetheless, this wide skirt began to disappear rapidly in 1868, replaced briefly by a long, trained skirt—the trailing of fabric left unsupported without the crinoline—which was eventually picked up and arranged over the *derrière* into a bustle in the early 1870s.

Additionally, ladies' fashion periodicals had become quite popular by this time. *The English Woman's Domestic Magazine* had been launched in 1852 by Samuel Beeton, and with contributions from his wife Isabella (which she would later publish in her famous *Book of Household Management*); it appealed to the middle-class woman and had a circulation of 50,000 by 1860.⁶ In addition to fashion commentary, it included fiction, articles on food, early paper dressmaking patterns, and reprints of Parisian fashion plates [fig. 3.2]. Beeton followed his success with the launch of *The Queen* in 1861, a topical weekly newspaper with a 'focus on French fashion.'⁷

Articles in these and other fashion periodicals reveal that styles changed just as rapidly as they do today. For example, from the same journal as the 'Sansflectum' advertisement, *Le Follet*, an article titled 'La Mode' was translated from the French for the English reader. Just like the September issue of *Vogue* might today, this article from 1 September 1863 not just advises on what is fashionable, but attempts to predict trends for the coming seasons, as seen in this selection:

All there is to say on the subject of materials and styles for summer has been said, and it is almost too early to speak definitely about the autumn fashions; still we will, however, do our best to give our fair readers an idea of the intermediate *toilettes* to be worn in the interval between the end of one season and the beginning of another.

There is also some difficulty in selecting materials suitable to the weather; for, warm as it is during the day, it is quite cool in the mornings and evenings... Mohair, *foulard*, and alpaca, we may safely say will be the materials most in request for September...

As to colour, the new 'turtle dove' is the last introduced, but we do not think it will be very long in favour; as our Parisian models seem to have a decided *penchant* for decided hues, no very pale or undecided tints having been worn lately...

Dresses are almost invariably accompanied by cloaks of the same. This fashion will, we believe, last during the autumn; but we are not so assured of its continuance after the commencement of the winter season.

Plaid dresses are fashionably worn; they are as yet uncommon, but will become more general in the autumn...⁸

⁵ Lucy Johnstone, "Corsets & Crinolines in Victorian Fashion - Victoria and Albert Museum", n.d., <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/c/corsets-and-crinolines-in-victorian-fashion/>.

⁶ "Women's Clothes, 1830s-1860s," *Victoria & Albert Museum*, n.d., <http://www.vam.ac.uk/images/image/59425-popup.html>.

⁷ Aileen Ribeiro, "Fashion and Whistler," in *Whistler, Women, & Fashion*, ed. Aileen Ribiero, Margaret MacDonald, and Susan Grace Galassi (New York: The Frick Collection and Yale University Press, 2003), 28.

⁸ "La Mode," *Le Follet: Journal Du Grand Monde, Fashion, Polite Literature, Beaux Arts &c. &c.*, September 1, 1863.

Radcliffe generalizes the shape of women's fashion in this period by stating: '[s]een outside, women of the 1860s had a tent-like, triangular silhouette.'⁹ However the above article emphasizes the importance of not over-simplifying our view of Victorian fashion, showing that the range and variety available was something approaching what we have today. Contrary to today's ready-to-wear culture, Victorian fashion was in many ways more driven and controlled by the female consumer, as she selected her own fabrics, and constructed gowns either in consultation with her *modiste*, or perhaps her maid, or, in many cases, made the garment herself (an activity that was made increasingly easier as the sewing machine became more reliable in subsequent decades). It is this latter situation that made the rise of the fashion magazine so critical to the middle-class woman who desired to be fashionable. The sewing machine and the discovery of aniline dyes also crafted a new world of fashion possibilities for women, but in addition, there was one other important event at this time that would significantly affect the history of fashion: the rise of the fashion designer.

After apprenticing – and becoming very successful – in the drapery industry in London, the Englishman Charles Frederick Worth (1825 – 1895) decided to seek his fortune in Paris. After learning French he secured a position in the première drapery store Gagelin-Opigez, where he exhibited a talent for cutting and draping.¹⁰ With the opening of his own dressmaking business (in partnership with Otto Bobergh) in 1858, and the successful patronage of Princess Metternich and Empress Eugénie, Worth was a success – and internationally renowned – by the late 1860s.¹¹ The House of Worth (*Maison Worth*) was born, and with it, *haute couture* as we know it, for Worth was the first to provide not just dressmaking services, but to design dresses—including fabric and trim—entirely on his own, without input from clientele. He even exhibited models of his dresses at seasonal fashion shows, thereby becoming the first modern fashion designer.

However, the majority of female 'artistics' (burgeoning aesthetes) were not patrons of Worth – at least not yet. The origins of their garments were much more modest, and often likely made by their own hands. Did their own creative freedom seep into their attire, at least in style if not actual construction? And, to what extent did their male counterparts – the artists – play a role in the shaping of Artistic Dress through their work? Before we address this, let us pay a bit more attention to male dress at this time, and how men were themselves departing from mainstream fashion.

⁹ Radcliffe, *Pre-raphaelite Influences on Women's Dress in the Victorian Era*, 270.

¹⁰ Christopher Breward, *Fashion* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 30–31.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Manly Modes: Gentleman, Bohemian, and Dandy

Dandyism is the last flicker of heroism in decadent ages...

Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, 1859-60¹²

Although the term Dandy may conjure images of flamboyance, or romantic visions of Brummel and Byron, Dandyism was often a more understated refinement that sat at the boundaries of traditional Victorian dress—which by many accounts bordered on the plain. In 1852, David W. Bartlett wrote: ‘A man of the world may in the morning put on his dashing colors if he please — his flashing vest and pants, but as soon as evening comes he becomes sober, and a rigid etiquette obliges him to wear a dress of black.’¹³ Many Victorian men interested in fashion—amongst them several of the artists included here, as shall be seen—lamented the ‘funerary’ quality of men’s dress, and seemed puzzled by the proliferation of predominantly black clothes.¹⁴ Fashionable gentlemen may have frequented tailors such as those on the famed Saville Row (Jermyn Street for shirts), but their costume was fairly straightforward in cut, with variety found in the details. In fact, from 1848 — 1870, the overall composition of men’s clothes did not change much at all compared to women’s, and mainly comprised coat, waistcoat, and trousers, of an average cut (not too snug, not too baggy), made from woollens, tweeds, and linens, depending on the season. The three-quarter length skirted frock coat was still popular at this time, but would increasingly signify ‘formality and conservatism’ towards the end of the century.¹⁵ In the 1860s, this was worn in a dark colour over ‘plaid, striped or plain contrasting narrow trousers.’¹⁶

It should not be misconstrued, however, that men were without interest in fashion, and were not themselves avid consumers. Christopher Breward’s 1999 study *The hidden consumer: masculinities, fashion and city life 1860-1914* calls attention to this fact, and points to some of the underlying problematic reasons for the assumption that fashion consumption was predominantly in the realm of women:

Masculine fashion items have been subsumed by the familiar assumption that the discourse of separate spheres enforced a model of masculinity in which an overt interest in clothing and appearances automatically implied a tendency towards unmanliness and effeminacy. The lack of space devoted to male dress in the historical record is thus ‘naturalised’ as an entirely appropriate reflection of the minimal time and attention assumed to have been lavished on sartorial matters by nineteenth-century men.¹⁷

¹² Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. Jonathan Mayne (Phaidon Press, 1995) Baudelaire wrote this in 1859-60, but it was originally published in 1863.

¹³ David Bartlett, *London by Day and Night*, 1852, 87; Full text available at: Lee Jackson, “Dictionary of Victorian London”, n.d., <http://www.victorianlondon.org/>.

¹⁴ For an in-depth assessment of the political and social history of men’s black dress, see Harvey, *Men in Black*.

¹⁵ Cynthia Cooper, “The Victorian and Edwardian Eras: 1860-1910,” in *The Fashion Reader*, ed. Abby Lillethun and Linda Welters (Berg Publishers, 2007), 35.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Breward, *The Hidden Consumer*, 10–11.

Beward's study goes on to convincingly show that the dedication men had to fashion was as enthusiastic as that of most female consumers, but the lack of material evidence in contemporary collections is still a problem. However, it may be that to better understand male sartorial habits, we need not confine ourselves to the cut and colour of garments, but rather look to the particulars of styling and accessories. Individualism in men's dress was found in the details, as Cynthia Cooper suggests in her essay on Victorian and Edwardian fashion:

Status and fashionability in men's dress was expressed through the quality of the fabric and cutting... In public, only a colorful handkerchief or an ornate walking stick might denote a man's interest in dress. In the domestic sphere, men could indulge an interest in fashion to a much greater extent. Indoor caps, also known as smoking caps, and dressing gowns were colorful and embroidered or otherwise embellished.¹⁸

Transgressing the boundaries of public and private was how some men chose to express artistic identity. For example, although Worth designed almost exclusively for women, he was himself a well-known Dandy, and was in a position to explore all facets of male dress. In one photograph, probably from the 1870s, [fig. 3.3] we see him wearing this 'indoor' attire: velvet cap, floppy bowtie, and with fur-lined velvet cape lying open over what appears to be a finely tailored suit. As noted in chapter two, by the 1880s, several artists wore their smoking caps, dressing gowns, and other bohemian attire in public, as seen in the photograph of Worth, as well as Frith's *A Private View at the Royal Academy, 1881* [fig. 5.1] and Brooks' *A Private View of the Old Masters Exhibition, Royal Academy, 1888* [fig. 5.25] (see chapter five for further discussion of these works). However, in the 1860s, this alternative mode of dress may have only been seen at the more intimate 'At Homes' given in places such as Holland Park, and the Pre-Raphaelite's homes such as Red House (the Morris' house in Bexleyheath) and Tudor House (Rossetti's home in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea); as well as in portraits made with the relatively new medium of photography (for example in the photos of Watts and the Pattle sisters discussed in the previous chapter). Here, 'artistic dressing' meant having the freedom to wear more casual, comfortable items in the company of like-minded friends and acquaintances: caps, wide-brimmed hats, velvet jackets, smocks, baggy suits, and such for men; loose fitting gowns free from corsets and/or crinolines for women; exotic or foreign costumes and robes for both (including kimonos, which by the mid 1860s were becoming as popular to collect as blue and white china for many artists). These were manners of dressing that represented not just style, but a philosophical attitude that was referred to as 'Bohemian'.

In her essay 'Bohemian Dress and the Heroism of Everyday Life', Elizabeth Wilson discusses the evolution of alternative sartorial modes in the artistic and literary communities of late eighteenth

¹⁸ Ibid.

and early nineteenth century France.¹⁹ She relates these styles to a variety of cultural and political associations, and suggests that ‘the bohemian was as ambiguous a character as any on the kaleidoscopic urban scene, and different forms of bohemian dress were emblematic of the shifting and protean character of the bohemian him- or herself.’²⁰ For instance, in 1800 a group of Jacques Louis David’s students known as *Les Barbus* reportedly wore dress modelled on ancient Greek costume for men, while ‘women members of the group wore black crepe, veils and wreaths of flowers, imitating “the veil of Andromache or that of the priestess Cassandra.”’²¹ Wilson also points to the ‘hairy band of artists’ who frequented the Louvre from 1828 to 1834 wearing ‘pseudo-medieval dress’; and as well the English sculptor John Gibson’s mid-century comments on the anachronistic dress of the Nazarenes, who were so influential on Ford Madox Brown and, by extension, the Pre-Raphaelites.²²

By 1855, Bohemianism had turned more towards a vision of romanticized poverty. Writing in that year, the writer Champfleury stated:

Today poverty forms the basis of the painter’s costume. No more medieval dress, no more pointed hats and hardly any long hair... You now see... only ancient hats, jackets and trousers stained with oil, and shoes whose owners tremble at the least sign of rain.²³

Perhaps this explains some of Rossetti’s ‘sartorial disregard’ as an art student, in terms of his ‘deliberate slovenliness – a none-too-clean collar, unblackened boots, a well-worn coat...’, to which Marsh pointed.²⁴

Photographic historian Juliet Hacking suggests that the concept of ‘bohemia—that elusive realm populated by the young, creative and penniless’ was relatively new to London in 1860, imported from Paris largely by the novels of Thackeray (a figure included in the ‘list of Immortals’ of the manifesto drafted by the young Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood when they were forming their group); but was, perhaps, somewhat ‘radical and immoral’ for English tastes.²⁵ By 1863 – the year of Thackeray’s death – bohemia had been reinvented in a more refined, British manner:

The true Bohemia, must, above all things, be a region whose inhabitants are artists and live by art. Whatever the genuine Bohemian may be, it is absolute and essential that he must never be vulgar, and that he must always at least have the sympathies of a scholar and an artist, and something of the native grace of a gentlemen. Whoever would paint him must give him, under whatever circumstances, a dash of the picturesque.²⁶

¹⁹ Elizabeth Wilson, “Bohemian Dress and the Heroism of Everyday Life,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 2, no. 3 (Berg 1998): 225–244.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 228.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 226.

²² *Ibid.*, 227.

²³ *Ibid.*, 230; quoting Champfleury, *Les Excentriques* (Paris: Michel Levey Frères, 1855), 235.

²⁴ Marsh, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Painter and Poet*, 19–20.

²⁵ Juliet Hacking, *Princes of Victorian Bohemia* (Prestel, 2000), 12.

²⁶ Justin McCarthy, *Westminster Review 1863*, 79, p. 50; quoted in Hacking, 12.

The year 1863 also saw the publication of Charles Baudelaire's *The Painter of Modern Life*, which includes his seminal discussion on *The Dandy*. Baudelaire argued his view that dandyism in the mid-nineteenth century was not simply focused on one's attire and physical presentation, but rather that the outer state was a reflection of the interior self:

Contrary to what a lot of thoughtless people seem to believe, dandyism is not even an excessive delight in clothes and material elegance. For the perfect dandy, these things are no more than the symbol of the aristocratic superiority of his mind. Thus, in his eyes, enamoured as he is above all of distinction, perfection in dress consists in absolute simplicity, which is, indeed, the best way of being distinguished... It is, above all, the burning desire to create a personal form of originality, within the external limits of social conventions... It is the pleasure of causing surprise in others, and the proud satisfaction of never showing any oneself. A dandy may be blasé, he may even suffer pain, but in the latter case he will keep smiling, like the Spartan under the bite of the fox.²⁷

However Baudelaire was also critical of the Dandy, not wishing to paint his 'Painter of Modern Life', Constantine Guys, with that brush:

I might perhaps call him a dandy, and I should have several good reasons for that; for the word 'dandy' implies a quintessence of character and a subtle understanding of the entire moral mechanism of this world; with another part of his nature, however, the dandy aspires to insensitivity... The dandy is blasé, or pretends to be so, for reasons of policy and caste. Monsieur G. has a horror of blasé people. He is a master of that only too difficult art – sensitive spirits will understand me – of being sincere without being absurd, I would bestow upon him the title of philosopher...²⁸

Thus it was these two related but slightly differing archetypes of 'Bohemian' and 'Dandy' which began to shape Artistic Dress in the 1860s. The former, with its more radical roots in post-revolutionary France, was cultivated at the intersection of artistic production and political resistance; while the latter developed from aspirations of social acceptance from the bourgeois male (for example Brummel, and his association with the Prince Regent), but was then arguably tempered by Baudelaire's criticism to become the *flâneur*, the well-dressed man of Modernity. By the end of the 1860s, each comes to represent a more aesthetic aspiration to express originality and individuality at the margins – but not precisely outside of – Victorian societal and sartorial codes.

Colin Cruise observes this to be the case in the dress of Baudelaire himself:

Delacroix and Baudelaire both adopted versions of English upper-class tailoring formerly identified with dandies. In doing so Baudelaire stressed an intellectual and aesthetic quality to be found precisely in the rejection of highly personalized bohemian dress. He recognised that the ultra-conformity of bourgeois fashions in which the wearer's personality was submerged or withheld, permitted the dandy to 'create an originality for [himself] within the limits of decorum.'²⁹

The adoption of these ideals by the educated elite, such as those at Little Holland House who, if we may recall, 'made bohemia respectable', created a framework for Artistic Dress that ultimately allowed it to be disseminated to the public at large.

²⁷ Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Cruise, "Artists' Clothes: Some Observations on Male Artists and Their Clothes in the Nineteenth Century," 115.

Baudelaire could also be severe in his assessment of artists, supporting ‘Monsieur G.’s’ reluctance to be called an artist, stating:

Is he not perhaps a little right? His interest is the whole world; he wants to know, understand and appreciate everything that happens on the surface of our globe. The artist lives very little, if at all, in the world of morals and politics... Apart from one or two exceptions whom I need not name, it must be admitted that the majority of artists are no more than highly skilled animals, pure artisans, village insects, cottage brains. Their conversation, which is necessarily limited to the narrowest circles, becomes very quickly unbearable to the man of the world, to the spiritual citizen of the universe.³⁰

Thus in constructing his vision of the *flâneur*, Baudelaire makes the distinction that this man of modernity goes well beyond the bounds of ‘dandy’ or ‘artist’.

A photograph of the young James McNeill Whistler (11 July 1834 — 17 July 1903) [fig.3.4] reflects this idea quite well. Taken by an unknown photographer sometime between 1860-65, we find the artist in an extremely casual pose, his left leg slung over the arm of the claw-foot chair in which he slouches. The long line of his extended right-leg shows us that though his suit may be baggy, it is well-cut (if slightly rumpled looking), and made of a light-coloured medium weight fabric – a linen or summer tweed perhaps. The jacket is detailed with a three-button closure and a darker reverse on the collar, above the lapel. He wears a roomy white cotton shirt, which is accented by a loosely tied dark ascot. He rounds out his outfit with a jaunty bowler (an early example of this style, which became popular in the following decade) precariously angled on his head (perhaps so as not to muss his signature curls), and his pose reveals for us that in matters of style, he doesn’t miss a detail: he wears light coloured socks with narrow horizontal stripes of a tone matching his suit, which makes a striking contrast to his darker toned pumps.

Whistler had already developed a reputation for his sense of style, particularly in the details of his ensemble. In the 1850s, fellow student Thomas Armstrong described his ‘summer suit of white duck, with the jaunty little flat-crowned Yankee Hat.’ We also see a very similar, if not the same, ensemble in a sketch by his friend (and fellow student) George du Maurier [fig. 3.5] titled *Whistler in ‘Q’* made for an 1860 issue of *Punch*.³¹ Here he also wears an artistic tie – that is the loose, ‘floppy’ tie favoured by Rossetti and others, discussed in the previous chapter (it is interesting to consider the roots of this style as perhaps relating to a relaxed, even tattered, ascot). Though the sketch is small, Du Maurier effectively characterizes Whistler and his dress, as Margaret MacDonald observes ‘Even without the paintbrush, the figure reads as a bohemian artist, wearing his clothes with verve, an ‘enchanted vagabond.’³² This hat in particular was clearly a much-

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See chapter five for more discussion on du Maurier and *Punch*.

³² Margaret F MacDonald, Susan Grace Galassi, and Aileen Ribiero, eds., *Whistler, Women, and Fashion* (Yale University Press, 2003), 30.

loved accessory, for he was captured by his friend Edward John Poynter in Paris, 1858 [fig. 3.6]; and again in his own self-portrait etching of 1859 [fig. 3.7].

In each of these images, Whistler's sense of style is reminiscent of those descriptions of Rossetti as a student, as well as similar to attire seen in photos of him during this period. Whistler had in fact moved to Lindsey Row in 1863, shortly after Rossetti took over Tudor House nearby on the river in 1862 (where he remained until his death), and became his friend and neighbour. But by this point he had already become well acquainted with the writings of Baudelaire, who at this stage he named as a friend, through his studies in Paris and consequent entrance into the circle of Courbet in the 1850s. Their mutual friend Fantin-Latour in fact painted him alongside Baudelaire in his 1864 group portrait *Homage to Delacroix* (Musée D'Orsay) (however here he wears a more severe black alongside his cohorts, the more Baudelarian colour choice). Whistler's devil-may-care appearance, loose and relaxed body language, and arguably thoughtful gaze in this photograph depict him not as a stiff Victorian gentleman, but as a man as aware of his appearance as he is comfortable with it. And while the bohemian fit and styling might signify him as artistic, it doesn't necessarily label him an artist. This image in fact presents him as a bit of a paradox – a *flâneur au repos* – the unresting man about town, at rest, but still observant.

Whistler's casual self-presentation may in fact reflect his own unconventional views on the artist, but surely reflects Baudelaire's attitude as well. The artists whom Baudelaire was criticizing were of course largely the Academicians that the Pre-Raphaelites and others also railed against; however Baudelaire's criticism in relation to costume in painting might apply to 'Victorian Bohemia' as well:

Casting an eye over our exhibitions of modern pictures, we are struck by a general tendency among artists to dress all their subjects in the garments of the past. Almost all of them make use of the costumes and furnishings of the Renaissance, just as David, by choosing subjects which were specifically Greek or Roman, had no alternative but to dress them in antique garb, whereas the painters of today, though choosing subjects of a general nature and applicable to all ages, nevertheless persist in rigging them out in the costumes of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance or the Orient. This is clearly symptomatic of a great deal of laziness; for it is much easier to decide outright that everything about the garb of an age is absolutely ugly than to devote oneself to the task of distilling from it the mysterious element of beauty that it may contain, however slight or minimal that element may be.³³

Although Baudelaire is speaking of painting here, this last statement is exactly the attitude of the majority of Artistic Dressers. Cruise affirms:

Male artists, therefore, commented upon their relationship to society and to their own profession in their choice of clothes. This was not simply an issue of occupational dress; artists were not usually seen *at work*; rather they were perceived as *being* artists, bearers of temperament rather than possessors of skills.³⁴

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Cruise, "Artists' Clothes: Some Observations on Male Artists and Their Clothes in the Nineteenth Century," 114.

In fact, with the new medium of photography, many artists chose to photograph themselves in historic ‘fancy dress’ – signifying that they were of an artistic nature – but more often they blended historic and exotic items with Victorian dress, keeping them fashionable, but with an artistic flair.

Perhaps the first pronounced example of male Victorian artists represented in alternative sartorial modes can be seen in a series of photographic portraits made around 1863 by David Wilkie Wynfield, a painter and ‘amateur’ photographer associated with the St. John’s Wood Clique of artists. While this group never received much critical acclaim for their narrative and historic paintings,³⁵ Wynfield’s photographs of his circle dressed in historic costume, along with a wider group of Victorian artists including Millais, Hunt, Val Prinsep, Burne-Jones, Du Maurier, Leighton and Watts, form a unique series that are critical to both the crafting of a bohemian artistic identity for the sitters, and the development of portrait photography in general.³⁶ The series was published under the title, *A Collection of Photographic Portraits of Living Artists, Taken in the Style of Old Masters, by an Amateur*.

Wynfield, who was also a frequent visitor to Little Holland House, chose to photograph the majority of his sitters in period costume of the 15th and 16th centuries. Hacking states:

The members of the St. John’s Wood Clique were, like so many of their generation, addicted to amateur theatricals and fancy-dress parties and Wynfield’s photographic portraits are often regarded as little more than an extension of these leisure activities. Such an assessment is in part a response to the fact that only a handful of his portraits have ever been exhibited or reproduced. In fact, over seventy different portraits by Wynfield of over fifty sitters have been preserved in British photographic collections alone. Both the consistency of treatment and the number of artists depicted suggest that the portraits form a related project.³⁷

In his own self-portrait, Wynfield wears an Elizabethan cap and cape while he reads a book [fig. 3.8], an image that recalls Rembrandt self-portraits, which, as we shall see, is likewise invoked by other artists such as Whistler [fig. 4.18]. Wynfield posed Millais as Dante [fig. 3.9], and Hunt with his full beard neatly cropped, in a Tudor costume. The majority of the other sitters are similarly attired in velvet coats, capes, and caps, with the notable exceptions of the architect William Swinden Barber (fl.1855 – 1898) and the Pre-Raphaelite painter Simeon Solomon (1840 – 1905), who are both dressed in ‘Oriental’ robes, and wear turbans. These are not the first instances of photographs of artists in costume: in the 1840s, Hill and Adamson photographed the Glaswegian painter William L Leitch and William B Johnstone, first Director of the Scottish National Gallery,

³⁵ Liverpool Museums, “St John’s Wood Clique and WF Yeames”, 2012, <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/walker/collections/andwhendidyoulastseeyourfather/circle/index.aspx>.

³⁶ For a complete account of these photographs, see Hacking, *Princes of Victorian Bohemia*.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 10–11.

dressed as ‘The Monks of Kennequahair’ from Sir Walter Scott’s *The Abbot*.³⁸ The Hill and Adamson photos are stages as *tableaux*, however, not close-up portraits like Wynfield’s. Are Wynfield’s artists merely dressing up, or do these portraits somehow suggest something of their character – perhaps their burgeoning bohemian predilections? It would seem that these images are more than just costume portraits, but ‘sketches’ of sumptuously attired men of letters, the close-up, three-quarter length portraits directly quoting Renaissance portraits (and self-portraits) by the likes of Titian, Bellini, and Da Vinci. The photographs situate these men – a group which includes not just painters, but architects, graphic designers (du Maurier and Walker), and patrons (Thoby Prinsep, Coutts Lindsay) as well—within the trajectory of Humanist artistic tradition via their costumes and poses, re-inventing the prestigious Vasari Corridor of artist’s self-portraits at the Uffizi through the photographic medium. In their time, however, these were not necessarily seen to be anything other than costume portraits, as the artist and poet Edward Lear (1812-1888) wrote to Hunt: ‘They are picturesque subjects, but not likenesses – at least one may be excused for not recognizing J. Millais as Dante, or Phillip in a Spanish dress – seeing as they seldom walk about so attired.’³⁹

‘Pattledom’: Respectable Bohemia

While Wynfield was beginning his project, one of the Pattle sisters, Julia Margaret Cameron, was embarking on her first photographic experiments at Freshwater, on the Isle of Wight. She was given her first glass plate camera by her daughter and son-in-law in December 1863, and began exhibiting her images the very next year.⁴⁰ Earlier in 1863, a photograph was taken of her at ‘Dimbola’, her Freshwater cottage named after one of her family’s estates in Ceylon and situated next door to her close friend Tennyson.⁴¹ The photograph shows her seated reading a book in a loose dark robe with no embellishments [fig. 3.10]. It is very similar to those worn by her sisters Sara, Virginia, and Sophia in photographs and paintings of the previous decade [figs. 2.22, 2.24-25]. This would seem to support the notion that these were not simply robes selected for their aesthetically pleasing fall of drapery (although these do lend a richness of texture and contrast to the black and white images), but likely the ‘At Home’ garments of choice, which may signify their exotic heritage. Recalling the comments on their sartorial habits mentioned in the previous chapter, close family friend Anne Thackeray Ritchie wrote of the ‘Pattledom’ (as her father dubbed them):

At a time when a young lady’s wildest aspiration did not reach beyond crinolines and frisettes, Mrs. Cameron and other members of her family... realized for themselves the artistic fitness of things, the natural affinity between use and beauty, and being a very

³⁸ A selection of these photographs are in the Hill and Adamson Collection at the University of Glasgow Archives, and can be viewed online at <http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/hillandadamson/search/>

³⁹ Vivian Noakes, ed., Edward Lear, *Selected Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 176. Julian Cox et al., *Julia Margaret Cameron: The Complete Photographs* (Getty Publications, 2003), 26.

⁴⁰ Cox et al., *Julia Margaret Cameron*.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 7. Cox & Ford identify the image as being by Oscar Rejlander, however Getty Images, who administer the Hulton Archive, identify the image as being by Lewis Carroll.

beautiful and interesting family of sisters, they were able to live out their own theories and to illustrate them... among other gifts, some of these ladies had that of uniting Paris art and the draperies of Raphael into a happy combination for their own daily wear and use. To see one of the sisterhood float into a room with sweeping robes and falling folds, was almost an event in itself, and not to be forgotten.⁴²

It is interesting to note that Ritchie identifies their garments as referencing Raphael, rather than calling them Pre-Raphaelite. In doing so, she points to the overarching influence of historic costume, and specifically, the drapery found in Italian Renaissance art, which as we have already seen was similarly influencing the Pre-Raphaelites. In fact these artists were amongst the visitors to the Sunday afternoon salons at Little Holland House, which reached their height in these years, as shown in this comment by George du Maurier (who became friends with Sarah and Thoby's son Val Prinsep while both were art students in Paris):

... the nobilitee, the gentree, the litherathure, polithics and art of the counthree, by jasus! It's a nest of proe-raphaelites, where Hunt, Millais, Rossetti, Watts, Leighton, etc., Tennyson, the Brownings, Thackaray etc. and tutti quanti receive dinners and incense, and cups of tea handed to them by these women almost kneeling.⁴³

These represent but a few of the artists and intellectuals who visited Sarah Prinsep's salon, and some of whom Cameron came to photograph, largely at Little Holland House, but also at Freshwater. In his letters to family and friends, du Maurier alternately praised the Pattle sisters for their beauty (referring to Mrs Dalrymple as 'such a handsome woman'⁴⁴, for example), and criticized them for their manners and habits, which he found to be both 'superficial and immoral', an opinion which was likely driven by his own insecurities and feelings of inadequacy.⁴⁵ His reports—laden with gossip—on their manners, particularly in relation to dress, exemplified the sardonic wit he displayed when he lampooned his associates in *Punch* cartoons:

I've been fraternising most extensively with Val Prinsep who is such a stunning fellow... awful prœraphaelite [*sic*]—pupil of Watts, who lives at... Little Holland House. I've dined there 2 or 3 times and am going to dine there again this evening... Instead of dressing for dinner there, you undress; Watts without a shirt collar, and in long velvet painting jacket & list slippers; dines frugally on toast & butter; handsome romantic fellow, said to have been desperately in love with Mrs Prinsep's beautiful sister Countess Somers (probably does private soda waters besides his toast & butter).⁴⁶

Perhaps his most severe criticism came after dining with Lord and Lady Somers on Wednesday the 9th of April, 1862:

Milor is a jolly sort of a little fellow with a squeaky voice; Miladi very handsome woman; but she & all the women were décolletées in a beastly fashion—damn the aristocratic standard of fashion; nothing will ever make me think it right or decent that I should see a

⁴² Ibid., 19; quoting Ritchie and Cameron, *Lord Tennyson*, 13.

⁴³ Ibid., 18; quoting Du Maurier *The Young George Du Maurier letters 1860 – 67*, p.112

⁴⁴ George Du Maurier, *The Young George Du Maurier: a Selection of His Letters, 1860-67.*, [1st American ed.]. (Garden City N.Y.: Doubleday, 1952).

⁴⁵ Ormond, *George Du Maurier*, 103.

⁴⁶ Du Maurier, *Letters*, 119.

lady's armpit flesh folds when I am speaking to her. About 30 or 40 upstairs after dinner nearly all in the same state of partial nudity as per diagram [fig. 3.11].⁴⁷

Du Maurier's comments give us a great deal of insight into the environment in which Cameron's aesthetic sensibilities developed. While Cameron's early understanding of photographic processes came from her close friend, the astronomer and photographic scientist Sir John Herschel [fig. 3.12], it seems her compositions and subjects were very much inspired by Wynfield's portraits. In a letter to Herschel of 26 February 1864, she stated: 'I have had one lesson from the great Amateur photographer Mr. Wynfield & I consult him in correspondence whenever I am in difficulty but he has not yet seen my successes.'⁴⁸

This influence is very clear in her 1864 portraits of Hunt, who wears attire that he most likely acquired during his journey to the Holy Land in the mid 1850s. In her 2008 catalogue essay for the exhibition *Holman Hunt and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision*, Linda Parry examined Hunt's keen interest in textiles from an early age, and discusses his own personal collection, some of which is now in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto.⁴⁹ This collection, which included various textiles and garments including kaftans, smocks, robes, caps, sashes, and even slippers [fig. 3.13], was used for costume props, home decorations, and most notably, everyday clothing by Hunt. Two extant photographs [figs. 3.14-15] from a sitting with Cameron on 30 June, 1864, show him in a pinstriped robe which extends to perhaps mid-calf, the stripes aligned vertically down the torso, but horizontally across the arms in the same material, and closed at the waist with a lighter toned silk sash. Although a black and white image, we know the robe was indigo with lighter blue or white stripes, with red trim and lining, for he painted himself in the same costume for a self-portrait he made for the prestigious Vasari Corridor at the Uffizi [fig. 3.16]. For Hunt, these garments referenced the clothing of biblical times, as well as signifying his own spiritual pilgrimage. Thus in choosing the identity he wanted preserved for posterity, in both the photograph and the painting, he selected exotic clothing that may have appeared simply bohemian to the average observer, but which, for him, reflected his inner spiritual state and religious conviction.

Furthermore, we know of one gown designed by Hunt that relates to his attendance at Little Holland House in 1864 – a mushroom-coloured silk wedding dress for Ellen Terry's marriage to Watts. It was an ill-fated match, as the forty-six-year-old Watts married the sixteen-year-old Terry in order to 'rescue her from the abominations of the stage' and 'give her an education.'⁵⁰ Terry was back with her parents and on the stage inside of a year. It wasn't an entirely unhappy time, however; in her own words:

⁴⁷ Du Maurier, *Letters*, 126.

⁴⁸ Cameron to John Herschel, Feb. 26, 1864 (RS.HS.5.159), quoted in Cox et al., 46.

⁴⁹ Linda Parry, "Textile Background: Cloth and Costume," in *Holman Hunt & the Pre-Raphaelite Vision* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 2008).

⁵⁰ Dakers, 20; quoting letter to Lady Constance Leslie.

‘The marriage was not a happy one,’ they will probably say after my death, and I forestall them by saying that it in many ways was very happy indeed. What bitterness there was effaced itself in a very remarkable way.⁵¹

Years later, Watts sent her one of the happier remnants of their days together, a painting of Terry in her wedding dress titled *Choosing* [fig. 3.17]. While very little of the gown is visible, we can see a plain bodice, rounded neck with delicate sheer white trim, and full, ruched Renaissance-style sleeves with velvet cord trim. The gown is well-suited to the sweet, romantically symbolic image of the young girl deciding between the beautiful but nearly scentless camelia on the bush, or the simple but fragrant lavender in her hand.

Terry also posed for Cameron in 1864, inside the Freshwater cottage. She titled the photograph *Sadness* [fig. 3.18], perhaps so named well after the image was taken. Yet while this certainly could be a pose conjured by the skilled actress, Terry’s comments on these days perhaps offer some intriguing insight on this image:

At Freshwater, where I soon went after my marriage, I first saw Tennyson. As I write these great names I feel almost guilty of an imposture! ... I sat, shrinking and timid, in a corner—the girl-wife of a famous painter. I was, if I was anything at all, more of a curiosity, a side-show, than a hostess to these distinguished visitors.⁵²

Cameron is known for her portraits of women in ethereal poses, their hair often down, with stark, dream-like expressions—often in historic, exotic, or fanciful costume [fig. 3.19-20]. Yet there is something unique about this particular portrait, perhaps due in part to the fact that Terry is indoors (many of the other images are shot outside in more ambiguous settings, mostly due to lighting concerns), leaning against a wall, and is in fairly sharp focus, which is in contrast to the soft, blurry focus of many of Cameron’s other images. But even more pronounced is the choice of costume in this image. *Sadness* captures Terry *en déshabillé*. She wears a loose, sleeveless chemise that sits around her shoulders, and her turned head and swept-back hair leaves the long, elegant curve of her shoulder and neck exposed, accentuated by her bare arms. The only other adornments are Terry’s jewellery: a bangle about her wrist, rings on her fourth finger, and the beaded necklace to which she clings as she rests her head against the wall. There is a great deal of skin on display in this image, an unusual occurrence even in Cameron’s unconventional oeuvre. By contrast, Cameron’s models are often dressed in flowing robes and cloaks, even when they are meant to be portraits (instead of narrative subjects). For example, images of her niece Julia Jackson [figs 3.21-22] focus on her face and long, loose hair. In terms of styling, it is the unbound hair and loose robes which give a timeless, sensual, otherworldly quality to these women. All of these photos are a far cry from rigid studio photographs, and exemplify the artistic attitude that Cameron strove to capture.

⁵¹ Dame Ellen Terry, *The Story of My Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1909), 59.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 53-54.

The clothing choices are key to the expression of these ideals and, by extension, influence the development of Artistic Dress.

In consideration of Terry, we can also begin pointing to one other critical development in Artistic Dress: the sartorial discourse with theatrical costume. After barely a year of marriage, a separation from Watts was neatly orchestrated by ‘those kind friends whose chief business in life seems to be the care of others’; a situation which ultimately required her return to the stage, where she acted with Irving until she again left to live with the architect-designer E. W. Godwin in 1868.⁵³ She had met Godwin in the early years of the decade while performing in Bristol, and clearly continued the acquaintance for she writes in 1863 that he showed her an exotic method of fabric treatment when he designed her costume for Titania in ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’:

He showed me how to damp it and ‘wring’ it while it was wet, tying up the material as the Orientals do in their ‘tie and dry’ process, so that when it was dry and untied, it was all crinkled and clinging. This was the first lovely dress that I ever wore, and I learned a great deal from it.⁵⁴

Godwin himself was vitally important to the development of Artistic Dress, and his views and influence on Terry will be discussed in the next chapter. But through these years—encompassing her return to the theatre and subsequent departure for six years—Terry becomes increasingly particular about and involved in her costume design for on the stage, as well as her personal wardrobe, practices which position her to become a leading arbiter of Aesthetic taste, and Aesthetic Dress, in the coming decades.

The women of ‘Pattledom’ began to set the tone for artistic dressing. The atmosphere of their home, their exotic origins, their patronage of art, and their role as models and muses cultivates a new kind of sartorial expression, which did in fact began to bleed from life to art and back again. We see this in many of Watts’ portraits (and more will be discussed in the next chapter), as well as those of other rising stars of the Victorian art world. Perhaps one of the best examples of this exchange between sartorial life and art are Whistler’s *Symphony in White* paintings.

(‘Uncrinolined’) Women in White

In her 1889 autobiography, the poet Mary Howitt described a studio party given by Rossetti in 1861:

The uncrinolined women, with their wild hair, which was very beautiful, their picturesque dress and rich colouring, looking like figures out of the pre-Raphaelite pictures... I can think of it now like some hot struggling dream, in which the gorgeous and fantastic forms

⁵³ Ibid., 38. See also Michael R. Booth, “Terry, Dame Ellen Alice (1847–1928),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36460?docPos=1>.

⁵⁴ Terry, *The Story of My Life*, 31.

moved slowly about. They seemed all so young and kindred to each other, that I felt as if I were out of my place, though I admired them all.⁵⁵

In February 1862, George du Maurier described a visit paid to him by his friend ‘Jimmy’ Whistler, and his mistress (and model) Joanna Hiffernan:

Joe came with him to me on the Monday afternoon, got up like a duchess, without crinoline—the mere making up of her bonnet by Madame somebody or other in Paris cost 50 fr. And Jimmy describes all the Parisians on the boulevard as aghast at ‘la belle Anglaise!’⁵⁶

Here, at the start of this decade, we have two instances where models – women entrenched in artistic circles – are publically seen without their crinolines. As evidenced in the images of the Pattle sisters during the 1850s, this was not a new, but a growing trend amongst this set. As seen in the previous chapter, Pre-Raphaelite painting also depicts uncrinolined costume, but the historic and literary subject matter (in essence, fantasy) allows for these liberties. Watts’ 1851 portrait of Sophia Dalrymple [fig. 2.22], however, pushes these boundaries in that the distinction is blurred between a possibly classically attired subject, and an intimate contemporary portrait. Is Dalrymple in costume, or is she simply dressed in the kind of garments she and her sisters wore in their intimate circle? Was the costume of art bleeding into life at the start of the 1860s, as these quotes suggest?

It was an exciting time to be in Holland Park, as was discovered by a new denizen of the circle: James McNeill Whistler. After seeing Whistler’s *At the Piano* at the Royal Academy, Watts brought him to the attention of Luke Ionides, the now adult son of Watt’s early patron Alexander Ionides. Through this connection, Whistler began to gain commissions from – and thereby entrance to – the Holland Park Circle. There, he would have seen at least paintings of women in white, Watts’s portrait of Dalrymple and possibly Leighton’s portrait of his favourite model Nanna Risi as *Pavonia* [fig. 2.23]. Perhaps following in their footsteps after spending time at Little Holland House, Whistler also painted Hiffernan in a white gown, but certainly with a more daring edge. *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* [fig. 3.23], painted during the winter of 1861-62, shows her in a simple white dress falling straight to the floor, ‘uncrinolined’ and with ‘wild hair’, much like the descriptions in the aforementioned quotations. Alongside Manet’s *Déjeuner sur l’herbe*, it caused a sensation when it was exhibited at the 1863 *Salon des Refusés*, for the depiction of her was surely a signifier of her fallen state.

⁵⁵ Mary Botham Howitt and Margaret Howitt, *Mary Howitt: Volume 2: An Autobiography* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁵⁶ Margaret F MacDonald, “East and West: Sources and Influences,” in *Whistler, Women, & Fashion*, ed. Aileen Ribeiro, Margaret MacDonald, and Susan Grace Galassi (New York: The Frick Collection and Yale University Press, 2003), 85.

In terms of symbolism, *The White Girl* has been discussed in numerous other places—in particular, the signification of her white dress, from its alignment to virginal purity to its relationship to Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*, published just two years prior.⁵⁷ In terms of costume, it was given careful attention alongside Whistler's other two 'symphony' portraits of Hiffernan in white, *Symphony in White, No. 2: The Little White Girl* (1864) [fig. 3.24] and *Symphony in White No. 3* (1865-67) [fig. 3.25], in Patricia de Montfort's 2003 essay 'White Muslin: Joanna Hiffernan and the 1860s.'⁵⁸ Drawing connections between these depictions and domesticity, rather than the typical 'fall from grace', de Montfort points to the deliberate choice of fabric colour in relation to Whistler's own aesthetics:

Cambric, the finely woven linen Whistler used in *The White Girl*, and muslin, a sheer plain-weave cotton of soft texture used for Hiffernan's dress in *The Little White Girl*, are fabrics associated with modesty and home life rather than showy public display. In 1864 white was the antithesis of the new chemically produced aniline dyes in colors such as electric blue and magenta, popular for modish outdoor and day wear... Whistler sought out the appropriate fabric to create the luminescent effect he desired.⁵⁹

Furthermore, the dress evokes a sense of modesty in its high neckline and long sleeves, which is not far removed from respectable conventions of the time. It is the styling, however, which raises eyebrows, the loose hair, the lack of supportive undergarments. But it is worth considering whether the 'whiteness' of this dress renders it more respectable – and perhaps even 'artistic' rather than scandalous, even though it is worn in such a fashion. In terms of the signification of the dress, another 'white girl' painted in the same year makes for an interesting comparison: Rossetti's *Lady Lilith* [fig. 3.26], which was, in fact, painted for Frederick R. Leyland, a patron who would become critical for Whistler in the coming years.

Rossetti's painting depicts Lilith, the original 'fallen woman', at her toilette, and was modelled first by Fanny Cornforth, and then Rossetti later repainted the face with that of Alexa Wilding. She is depicted *en déshabillé* at her dressing table, surrounded by symbolic flowers as she combs out her rich red hair. Lilith is dressed in a loose white gown save for a red ribbon wrapped about her wrist, which falls suggestively along her lap. White roses surround her, with a single, large red poppy rising prominently in front of her in the lower right. All of these suggest the complex purity/impurity Venus connotations of this first wife of Adam. Although Rossetti's intention is to depict a 'Modern Lilith', the fantastical aspects of his rendering of space relate a more timeless aspect.

In contrast, both of Whistler's white girls present such complexity in a somewhat more subversive manner, and through the use of less-revealing Victorian dresses, and more contemporary,

⁵⁷ See for example Robin Spencer, "Whistler's 'The White Girl': Painting, Poetry and Meaning," *The Burlington Magazine* Vol. 140, no. No. 1142 (May 1998): 300–311.

⁵⁸ MacDonald, "East and West: Sources and Influences."

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

recognisable spaces, which are of course suitable in that they are contemporary subjects rather than a historical motif. However, both *The Little White Girl* and *Lady Lilith* have a similar inventory of objects: mirrors, flowers, and a decorative vase. But whereas Rossetti's is an undefined, almost claustrophobic space, Whistler presents us with an elegant example of *Japonisme* that would have been much more familiar and comfortable to the Victorian viewer (despite the 'vague sense of time and place'⁶⁰ Whistler creates) – a real scene, as it was painted in Whistler and Hiffernan's own dining room in their house on Lindsey Row. One final, important touch separates the Little White Girl from Lilith: the former wears a wedding band, which we are visually drawn to by her gaze and the positioning of her finger on the mantle.

It could be argued that both artists use the white dresses symbolically to raise questions about the sexual state of the subject. In each case, the white dress is entrenched in the symbolism of the painting, and as such become little more than another prop for artistic expression. But perhaps that is a way to think about the same dresses as worn by these women in their real-world social interactions? Would Joanna Hiffernan, so exquisitely (if controversially) articulated by Whistler's hand in these images, not wish to be seen as the White Girl 'in the flesh', as it were? In particular, being from a working class background, a certain self-fashioning – a sense of artistic style – would perhaps be the thing that admitted her to the aforementioned social circles Whistler inhabited.

It would possibly be ill-conceived to consider these works as examples of Hiffernan's personal sartorial codes, were it not for Du Maurier's observations, the Victorian cut of the garments, and perhaps one final bit of visual evidence: in Whistler's 1865-6 painting *The Artist in his Studio*, Hiffernan reclines in the dress from *The White Girl* (or one very similar), casually chatting with another model holding a Japanese fan and wearing a loose pale pink gown reminiscent of a kimono. It evokes the sense of a moment captured (albeit clearly posed and conceived by the artist) which allows us to consider that this might be an example of her style, either of her own doing or at the hands of Whistler.

And the dresses are not historic costume, but examples of Victorian garments. In fact, de Montfort identifies a dress very near identical to the one in *The Little White Girl*, in the collection of the Museum of the City of New York [fig. 3.27]. A bleached linen tarlatan dress with ruched sleeves and bodice, likely a day dress made for walking in the summer months. The full skirt would have certainly been worn with a crinoline. In Whistler's painting, however, we can see from the fall of the skirt in the painting that Hiffernan posed without crinoline; the ruched fabric provides what fullness is there. Is this, perhaps, an example of what du Maurier witnessed? She is without crinoline in the other symphonies, as well as *The Artist in his Studio*. Whistler, like Rossetti, was very interested in the fall of drapery, something which the ballooning effect of hoops or crinoline

⁶⁰ Ibid.

would have detrimentally marred. Is it too great a leap (perhaps too lacking in feminist principles) to suggest that the women who associated with these artists would have shared such aesthetics – whether under the influence of the ‘male gaze’, or through their own senses of beauty and comfort?

But to return to the styling of the models, the white dresses are in my view representative of developing Artistic fashion, and as well foreshadowing the coming demise of the bell skirt. Hiffernan wears them sans crinoline, just as Pre-Raphaelite women in the 1860s were doing in studio parties, and the Pattle sisters doing in their ‘At Homes’ from the 1850s on. It should be becoming clear that, rather than examining sleeve construction, perhaps we should be looking to the skirt as the first place of departure for Artistic Dress. The complex relations between artist and model, male and female, woman and muse, are crafting an intriguing dynamic whereby garments of costume are becoming garments of use. To explore this a bit further, let us examine what is perhaps the most oft-cited example of ‘Pre-Raphaelite Dress’ – the photographs of Jane Morris at Tudor House.

Jane Morris at Tudor House

In 1865, Rossetti arranged for his new favourite model, Jane Morris, to be photographed in the garden of Tudor House, in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. Rossetti set up residence for himself there in 1862 after Siddal’s death and, according to Jan Marsh’s biography, rather than falling into a deep mourning, he sunk himself into his work, becoming more productive—and successful—than he had been thus far.⁶¹ In addition to receiving frequent visitors from the artistic world at Tudor House, Rossetti rather famously kept a menagerie of exotic animals that included racoons, armadillos, peacocks, a white bull (which, according to Terry, he purchased because it had ‘eyes like Janey Morris’⁶²), and perhaps most notably, a much beloved wombat. It is uncertain which, if any, of these beasts were milling about the garden when Morris sat for the photographer John Parsons on 7 July 1865, but their presence would have certainly lent something to the exotic atmosphere that was carefully controlled by Rossetti as he directed the poses for these photographs.

These images are often referenced as examples of Pre-Raphaelite Dress, and/or as examples of early ‘Aesthetic dressing’.⁶³ However, as has been shown already, Morris was not the first to pose for a portrait in a loose, flowing gown, nor was she known to have regularly dressed in an alternative manner until after the date of these photographs. It may be true, however, that what these images do signal is a transitional time, during the rise of the Arts and Crafts Movement (Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. had formed in 1861), in which the associated women – wives and daughters – began dressing in unconventional styles at home, if not amongst their socio-artistic

⁶¹ Marsh, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Painter and Poet*, 247–48.

⁶² Terry, *The Story of My Life*, 62.

⁶³ See chapter one.

circles. As such, and because these images have become iconic to the wider discussion of Aesthetic/Artistic Dress, they are worth a more detailed analysis than has been made in previous texts.

The main extant source for these images is an album made by May Morris, which is now in the collection of the V&A, although there are copies of some of the included photographs in other collections.⁶⁴ One point that has not previously been made plain is that there are actually two different gowns that Morris poses in for the outdoor shots. Perhaps due to the nature of the images – their condition, and the lack of colour for distinction – this fact has gone largely unnoticed, or seems to have been considered irrelevant. However both dresses have distinct features that are worth consideration in the context of this discussion.

The first – *Dress A* [fig. 3.28-29] – Morris wears in the photos of her seated in or standing by a wicker barrel chair. It has a loosely fitted bodice that falls in pleats from the shoulder, with a round collar closed around the base of the throat; not outside typical fashion of this period. One photo shows the back clearly, and it is made from a single piece of fabric, so it is likely that the bodice fastens in the front, or perhaps even the side. The sleeves are pleated into the bodice at the shoulder joint and are very loose, and the skirt is also very full, with a large ‘v’ pleats falling from centre-back and at intervals along the waistline. Both the structure of the bodice and skirt suggest that this gown was designed to be worn with with a corset and hoops. Which, from careful examination of the photos, it appears Morris does not do.

In the seated photos, it is difficult to tell from the sharp bunching of the fabric over her breasts whether she wears stays or not, but certainly the shape of her torso is not unnaturally compressed at the waist by a boned and tightly-laced corset. The skirt falls straight, the crinoline obviously absent, most clearly seen in the image of her standing, back to the viewer [fig. 3.29], the fabric creased and clinging closely to her *derrière* from having been seated. She rounds out this unconventional ‘look’ by tying a thin cord about her wrists and folding back the loose cuffs around it, and wearing a decorative, embroidered belt (likely her own work) around her waist.

Thus it is the styling of this dress that makes it unusual. Whether this is at the suggestion of Rossetti or her own choice is unclear, but this idea is pushed even further in the images of the second dress – *Dress B* [fig. 30-32] – which were taken inside a pavilion erected in the garden and decorated with pillows, rugs, and furnishings for an exotic atmosphere. It is perhaps also the case that these were the second images to be photographed, as Morris’ hair – so neatly and smoothly

⁶⁴ For a complete list, see: Jerome J. McGann, ed., *The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti [Rossetti Archive]* (Freely distributed by IATH and the NINES consortium under a Creative Commons License, 2008), <http://www.rossettiarchive.org/index.html>.

coifed while seated in the wicker chair – begins to look looser, wiry, and even unruly in some of the images.

Dress B is even less structured than *Dress A*, appearing to be a voluminous, satiny floor-length tunic with a train, which Morris wears belted in some images, and loose in others. The neckline is of similar shape to *Dress A*, but with a slight ‘v’ and edged in lace. While the sleeves are likewise pleated into the shoulder and loose, they are fitted from the elbow to wrist. Even so, these dresses could easily be mistaken as the same if we didn’t have clear images of the back of both: while *Dress A* is structured and cut from a single piece, *Dress B* clearly fastens up the back [fig. 3.31-32], likely with buttons, under a covered seam. The clear lack of structure to this dress suggests that it may have been made specifically as a piece of modelling costume, perhaps worn as an under-dress for an Italianate picture such as Rossetti’s *La Donna della Finestra* of 1879 (Collection: Fogg Art Museum, Harvard).

The supposition that we are seeing Morris in ‘snapshots’ of her daily life is also highly problematic. Not only were these styled by Rossetti’s artistic eye, but they were done so with a very specific purpose: to serve as models for painting. It has been well-discussed that image sa140e [fig. 3.32], for example, became the basis for *Jane Morris (The Blue Silk Dress)* (1868) [fig. 3.33] which, if the dress is in fact the same one, gives us the colour that we cannot see in the photograph. Furthermore, three other images – an earlier drawing made by Rossetti in Oxford, 1858, [fig. 3.34] and two other photographs [figs. 3.35-36] likely taken at the same time as the Tudor House garden photos – clearly show Morris wearing fashionable Victorian dress and, in the case of the photos, undergarments: her full skirts are supported by hoops.

The assumption has also been made that not only did Morris dress this way in public, but that her clothes were designed by her husband, and in Radu Stern’s statement:

In order to put his theories into practice, [William] Morris probably designed around 1865 a number of loose-fitting dresses for his wife, Jane, which strongly contrasted in their simplicity with the devilishly complicated decoration of contemporary fashion.⁶⁵

Then, rather than providing evidence to substantiate this claim, Stern includes the following note: ‘Though it has not been proven that Morris designed his wife’s clothes, it is likely that he did so and persuaded her to wear such dresses.’⁶⁶

Why is this likely? It is perhaps just as unlikely, considering that Morris was a skilled dressmaker and embroiderer herself, working in partnership with Morris from the earliest days, for example on the furnishings for their first home, Red House. Given Morris’ lower class background in

⁶⁵ Stern, *Against Fashion*, 5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

comparison to that of her husband, it has been very easy to make presumptions about her education and the degree to which her taste was shaped by the men in her life. However, we cannot presume that she did not design – and prefer – such garments herself; and as seen in the above analysis, we can also see that she wore traditional fashion as well as modelling costume as appropriate.

We likewise cannot presume that Morris was in a position to influence or promote alternative fashion trends, as Stern's subsequent comment indicates: 'Many other artists' wives were to imitate Jane Morris's example.'⁶⁷ It is only in descriptions of seeing her in the context of 'At Homes', or in her own domain, that we hear of her wearing alternative dress. As noted in the opening of this chapter, the author Henry James visited the Morrises for the first time in 1869, and in addition to being greatly impressed with William Morris' 'superb and beautiful' art objects, he was quite struck by the ethereal and strange visage of Jane Morris:

Ah, *ma chère*, such a wife! *Je n'en reviens pas*—she haunts me still. A figure cut out of a missal—out of one of Rossetti's or Hunt's pictures—to say this gives but a faint idea of her, because when such an image puts on flesh and blood, it is an apparition of fearful and wonderful intensity. It's hard to say [whether] she's a grand synthesis of all the pre-Raphaelite pictures ever made—or they a 'keen analysis' of her—whether she's an original or a copy. In either case she is a wonder. Imagine a tall lean woman in a long dress of some dead purple stuff, guiltless of hoops (or of anything else, I should say,) with a mass of crisp black hair heaped into great wavy projections on each of her temples, a thin pale face, a pair of strange sad, deep, dark Swinburnish eyes, with great thick black oblique brows, joined in the middle and tucking themselves away under her hair, a mouth like the 'Oriana' in our illustrated Tennyson, a long neck, without any collar, and in lieu thereof some dozen strings of outlandish beads—in fine Complete. On the wall was a large and nearly full-length portrait of her by Rossetti, so strange and unreal that if you hadn't seen her, you'd pronounce it a distempered vision, but in fact an extremely good likeness.⁶⁸

This is the only written evidence we have that Jane Morris was seen in semi-public without proper undergarments supporting her dress during the 1860s, as the Tudor House photos suggest. While James no doubt embellished this account for the enjoyment of his sister, certainly he would not have dreamed of such a suggestion were he not to have witnessed it as inspiration. Later in the 1880s, Jeanette Marshall, the daughter of Rossetti's physician, describes her with somewhat less sublime awe than James. She calls Jane Morris' dress 'sloppy' and on another occasion states she looked 'like a maniac.'⁶⁹ These and her other criticism of the aesthetes are discussed in the next chapter, but are mentioned here briefly to illustrate Morris' continued practice of dressing in a manner outside the norm over the next several decades. Thus while we can certainly say that Jane Morris dressed in unconventional manners in both the private and in the semi-public sphere, it is again difficult to place the development of Artistic Dress at her feet. This is not to discredit the

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁸ James, *Letters*, 93–94.

⁶⁹ See Zuzanna Shonfield, *The Precariously Privileged: A Professional Family in Victorian London* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 117–188 see also chapters four and five; and Charlotte Gere, *Artistic Circles: Design and Decoration in the Aesthetic Movement* (V & A Publishing, 2010), 130.

earlier texts which have cited her – and specifically the Tudor House photos – as an example, but rather to examine more critically how these styles developed.

What Morris' sartorial choices – as well as those of the other art personas discussed in this chapter – *do* reveal is that modes of artistic dressing developed privately first, amongst circles which were, as Diana Crane suggested, on the margins of society.⁷⁰ In the subsequent decades, clothing and art reflect these influences in a more forthright manner, as the later texts that shall be examined reveal. They look back to these images in a self-reflective way, signalling the 'dress of the Pre-Raphaelites' – identified here as the costume in which models posed, and/or wore in the intimacy of their homes – as the point of departure for new sartorial codes that emphasize colour, sumptuous texture, historicity, and the natural line of the body. These translate into new fashions that come to be known as Aesthetic Dress in the 1870s-90s.

Artistic Dress and Second-wave Pre-Raphaelitism

Through the 1860s, alternative sartorial codes become more distinct amongst the artistic set. For men, it is a subtle shift towards bohemian and/or dandified fashions as discussed by Baudelaire, and influenced through the rising interest in exotic aesthetics. For women, it is progressively related to the costume picture made manifest, and hence the adoption of styles which are thought to be more natural, graceful, and which allow her to be freed from restrictive undergarments. Rather than breaking entirely from Victorian garment patterns, she wears her clothes (be they fashionable dress or historicised costume) *sans* crinoline, and sometimes *sans* corset. For both men and women, what we are beginning to see is not a complete rejection of Victorian clothes, but a break from Victorian sartorial codes in the way the clothes are worn and styled. It is this break that begins to shape and codify Artistic Dress for the rest of the century. But perhaps most importantly we are seeing the sorts of alternative dress that are acceptable in private circumstances being worn in semi-public; and as artists increasingly mix with polite society, we find these garments adapting and shifting, maintaining their bohemian flavour but as well blending with conventional dress into a new type of clothing that would be favoured by the leading artistic circles of the coming decades: Aesthetic Dress.

⁷⁰ Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas*, 100.

Chapter Four: Artistic Dress and the Rise of Aestheticism (ca. 1870 - 1880)

Your modern style then, my lady, can best be described by one syllable—you are loud. Moreover, your exaggerations have wrapped you in a tissue of falsities. Your buttons are not fastenings, your laces do not lace, your bows are a sham, your sashes are delusions, and your whole costume is a snare.

A. E.W. Godwin, 'Dress', 1 June 1872¹

While E.W. Godwin's critique of ladies' dress may sound rather harsh, he did not offer it without suggesting solutions. His article 'Dress', written for *Globe and Traveller* magazine in 1872, goes on to discuss Artistic Dress as 'the most refreshing exceptions to the general condition of things.' What was this general condition of things that had Godwin so incensed?

In women's dress, Godwin seems most offended by an overabundance of trim and 'frippery' as seen in many of the latest fashions [fig.4.1], and by an approach to fashion that was not honest, an attitude that again stems from discourses on the natural figure. There was, however, a rather pronounced transformation in the female silhouette at this time that reflected the criticisms of the unnatural female shape: at the end of the 1860s; the bustle began to replace the bell shape as the fabric of the full skirt was picked up in the rear over narrower, more manageable cages. Newton sees this transformation in relation to the burgeoning reform movements that were gaining a greater audience:

Those who see in the design of clothes a reflection of at least some aspects of the society which produces it, would be justified in regarding the transformations of the late 1860s as vindicating their theory. From the point of view of composition women could be thought of as having stepped out of the encircling bird-cage to assume a forward-looking attitude well suited to their sociological and educational aspirations, while, at the same time, the insipid charm of earlier colour-schemes was replaced by effects which if not actually violent were certainly aggressive.²

At the start of the 1870s, the reaction to the demise of the crinoline (which Newton claims happened in 1868) was a brief fashion for straight skirts with trains, then 'what *Women's World* and others quite irrationally called the "Watteau toilette"', about which Newton observes 'while the frontal elevation... had little character to commend it, its side elevation was very striking indeed.'³ Unlike the general umbrella shape of the previous decades, the new silhouette appeared quite different from the front/back and side views, examples of which can be seen in James Tissot's 1873 painting *Too Early* [fig. 4.2]. The 'striking' side elevation Newton speaks of is based on the development of the bustle, which at the start is produced with a fuller (but still significantly reduced by comparison) skirt, then becomes slimmer by the end of the decade.

¹ E.W. Godwin, "Dress," *Globe and Traveller*, June 1, 1872, 2.

² Newton, *Health, Art, and Reason: Dress Reformers of the Nineteenth Century*, 38.

³ *Ibid.*, 37–38.

This slimmer frontal view is actually a consequence of an innovation in dress construction: the Princess line, developed by Worth c.1875 (named after the fashionable Princess of Wales).⁴ Rather than being constructed as a top and bottom ensemble, these dresses had the full front length (torso and skirt) cut from a single piece, and ‘darts from bust to hip, designed to draw attention to the smooth lines of the upper body.’⁵ The effect of this was a slim, sinuous outline which flattered curves (as constructed with the aid of the corset). This allowed a tighter fit to the front of the dress, and the fullness of fabric to be lifted up and behind to the bustle. Thus, while women were perhaps being freed from the birdcages of the crinoline, they were finding a whole new mode of constriction in the new tight, mermaid-like skirt.

Technological advances again helped to make these fashions easier for women. Rather than employing an uplift of a bulk of fabric (really caused by the recycling of older dresses into the new fashion), bustle pads were developed [fig.4.3], then a whole new system of cage constructions, to provide a structure for the new shape.

Technology pushed change in fashion in another manner as well, via fashion magazines, which were becoming more common and therefore accessible to the middle class. These increasingly included not just fashion advice, but actual paper patterns for those able to construct garments for themselves – a task made easier by the new mass production of sewing machines. Thus fashion begins to become more accessible to the middle classes, at least. In fact, it may be this very circumstance to which Godwin responds: anyone might construct a dress, but do they have the educated artistic taste to select fabric and trim appropriate to the style they have chosen? And does the wealth of selections available in terms of materials leave them drowning in a sea of flounces and furbelows?

Godwin is equally critical of male dress, but for the opposite reason of it being dreary and boring to his eye. For men, fashion once again varied relatively little from the previous decade [fig. 4.4]. The baggier cut of trousers does seem to become slimmer and coats more tailored, perhaps in relation to the slimming of women’s dress during this period. Facial hair became more popular in this decade, and bowler hats were in vogue by 1880. The Inverness cape came into fashion around 1875, and was worn through the end of the century. Along with the fashion for leaving the bottom button of waistcoats unfastened, this was an innovation prompted by the personal tastes (and shape) of the future King Edward VII. However, from an artistic point of view such as Godwin’s, the overall effect was still melancholic: baggy, drab, colourless, and without charm.

⁴ Ribeiro, “Fashion and Whistler,” 28.

⁵ Ibid.

We can begin to see how the Artistic Dress from the previous decade (chapter three) was already very different from these new fashions. This chapter looks at how the previously discussed semi-private modes of Artistic Dress moved into the more public sphere. It continues to look at examples from artistic communities alongside upper societal circles. The continuing involvement of previously discussed artists like Watts, Rossetti, and Whistler in sartorial development is considered, expanding to include other key figures like Godwin, the Cranes and the Alma-Tademas. Finally, it examines the dress of some of the women from aristocratic circles who were critical in paving the way for Artistic Dress to be worn in society, moving beyond the artistic home – the so-called ‘Palace of Art.’ As Charlotte Gere notes:

The guiding principle in planning a Palace of Art was that of a harmonious whole, including fitting costume for the inhabitants. One of the most conspicuous borrowings by the upper-class intelligentsia from the art world was a distinctive way of dressing.⁶

Through these societal exchanges, and encouraged by the artistic discourses of Godwin and others, Aestheticism—and hence Aesthetic Dress—becomes not just a mode of expression, but a way of living, which starts and ends with one’s own person, and blossoms in the Palace of Art.

Artistic Dress ‘At Home’

Just as it was at Holland Park in previous years, in the 1870s, ‘At Home’ social gatherings were key places for the development of Artistic Dress. When photographer J.P. Mayall and art critic F.G. Stephens (one of the founding members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood) produced the folio *Artists at Home* in 1884, the ‘Artistic Home’ was already something of a phenomenon, especially in what today is the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.⁷ As successful artists and the upper-class intelligentsia increasingly mixed in domestic social engagements—salons, ‘Studio Sunday’ open days, ‘At Homes’, musicales, etc.—so too did the lines begin to increasingly blur in what was acceptable, and even fashionable, to wear in mixed artistic company.

One of the rising stars of Aestheticism who would come to be a trendsetter in artistic society in the coming years made her debut in in the early 1870s – Laura Alma-Tadema. She was a budding painter and the youngest daughter of the homeopathic physician George Napoleon Epps, and met the painter Lawrence Alma-Tadema during a Boxing Day dance at the Ford Madox Brown’s in 1869, when she was just seventeen.⁸ Alma-Tadema, a Dutchman, was a widower of seven months with two young girls, and had come to England on the advice of his physician. According to the art dealer Ernest Gambart, Alma-Tadema fell in love with the red-haired Laura at first sight.⁹ He moved to England permanently and the two married in 1871. In the early years of their marriage,

⁶ Gere, *Artistic Circles*, 17.

⁷ J.P. Mayall, with notes by F.G. Stephens, *Artists at Home* (London, 1884). Most of these photographs are available at the National Portrait Gallery online, <http://www.npg.org.uk>.

⁸ Gere, *Artistic Circles*, 196.

⁹ *Ibid.*; See also R.J. Barrow, *Lawrence Alma-Tadema* (London: Phaidon, 2001), 60.

around 1873, her sister Ellen (Nellie) Epps (later Mrs Edmund Gosse), who was a pupil of Ford Madox Brown, made a portrait of Laura at the Alma-Tademas' new home, Townshend House [fig. 4.5]. It was auctioned at Christie's London in 2004, and the lot notes offered a detailed description of the scene:

The present picture depicts Laura, 'aesthetically' dressed in a loose, uncorseted robe, returning cloths to a 17th Century Dutch linen press. Her husband's collection of 17th Century portraits, and eastern ceramics is evident, displayed against what might be Morris's pomegranate wall paper [*sic*] (chosen by Laura for her studio in the house) and a distinctive matting dado, then much in favour with those of advanced taste, such as the Ionides family of Holland Park.¹⁰

Although this is not a scholarly commentary but rather a description to garner interest in potential buyers, it is interesting to consider the level of detail Christie's experts are able to apply to the furnishings, while only vaguely describing her dress, arguably the most unusual aspect of the work, as her being 'aesthetically' attired in a loose robe. This is once again indicative of the dearth of terminology for these fashions.

Laura wears a sage green dress much like the ones seen in the earlier photograph of Sara Prinsep and Virginia Pattle [fig. 2.24], an unstructured gown with wide loose sleeves, decorated only with a simple embroidered band around the loose round collar and cuffs. She is mid-step, and has gathered the skirt in her left hand so it does not drag on the floor; we have a glimpse of a white underskirt with thin horizontal red stripes, and a yellow slipper. Her thick, wavy red hair is pinned back from her face, but falls loose down her back, and she wears a chunky turquoise bead necklace made of six strands of varying lengths, and small drop earrings, possibly of amber. While it is certainly an excellent rendering of the Dutch Room at Townshend House, the inclusion of Laura makes it a charming portrait of a domestic moment, captured by an affectionate sister, crafting the feel that a snapshot might today. The informality and intimacy of the scene makes it clear that this is domestic dress, not something she was likely to wear outside.

However, another portrait of Laura, made around the same time, shows her in a more formal, structured Artistic Dress [fig.4.6]. Painted by her friend Catherine Madox Hueffer, the daughter of Ford Madox Brown, it was well-received when it was shown at the Royal Academy in April 1873.¹¹ The watercolour shows Laura walking her little black dog down a garden path. Her dress is a rich dark green, possibly made from velvet, and cut similarly to the previous dress, but the full sleeves are gathered at the cuffs, causing them to balloon. She also wears a black lace fichu crossed over her bodice, which makes the garment look fitted and structured. The neckline is more modest, and she wears a small strand of beads with a cross around her neck. Similar to the Epps portrait,

¹⁰ Christies, *Catalogue of the Sale "Victorian Pictures Including the John J Schaeffer Collection"*, Sale 6909, Lot 163. (London King Street, 2004).

¹¹ Jan Marsh and Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999), 130.

she is lifting up her long skirt as she walks (although this dress has a rather pronounced train), and again we glimpse a white underskirt with thin vertical stripes, this time in a cool tone. It is curious to see these two small details appear in both portraits, these deliberate glances at ladies' underskirts. But it was a matter of fashion to make sure one's underskirts (whether they be a plain skirt or a petticoat) have a bit of something decorative along the trim for moments such as these. Clearly, Laura favoured hers striped.

Another noteworthy detail is the arrangement of her hair. She has the front pinned under a small round hat, but the back is left long and waving under her shoulders. In high fashion, the sleek chignon was very much in style at this point. However, we do see other women artists wearing their hair semi-loose at this time. Emma Sandys makes a drawing of *A Fashionable Lady* in 1873 [fig. 4.7] which shows a beautiful fair-complexioned woman seated in front of a Japanese screen. We cannot make out much of her dress, but her hair is pinned up beneath a rather elaborate broad-brimmed hat, with the back left long over her shoulders. We find this again in a self-portrait by Marie Spartali-Stillman [fig. 4.8], who was a much sought-after model for her beauty. A cousin of the Anglo-Greek Ionides family, she was entrenched in the Holland Park Circle. Spartali and her cousins Aglaia Coronio (daughter of Alexander Ionides and sister of Luke) and Maria Zambaco (who famously and scandalously had a rather public affair with Burne-Jones from 1866-69)¹² were referred to as 'The Three Graces' for their beauty, and like them she sat for many of the associated artists including Watts, Burne-Jones, Rossetti and Cameron. However, she was also an accomplished painter, her skill equally rivalling and in some cases surpassing those of her male associates. In her self-portrait of 1871, we find her wearing a Renaissance-style dress and with her hair arranged very similarly to photos Cameron took of her in the 1860s [fig. 4.9]. However in the drawing, the back of her hair is down and spilling over her shoulders. Thus we may hypothesise that it was perhaps an artistic style to wear one's hair partially down, even in public. It may even be the case that the ethereal photographs of Cameron's women may have helped to popularise this fashion, at least in these more intimate circles.

Returning to Laura's dresses, one other account from 1873 depicts her in much more exotic attire. Shonfield relates an account from the diaries of the American Marion Adams, who saw Laura at a Royal Academy event that year dressed 'like a lymphatic tigress draped in yellow Japanese embroidered silk, bracelets at the top of her arms, hair the colour of tiger lilies and that fiery flower hanging in bunches from it. She waved up and down the room like a serpent and we trotted round after her.'¹³ Laura Alma-Tadema was a trend-setter from even the earliest days of her marriage.

¹² William Morris and Norman Kelvin, *The Collected Letters of William Morris: 1893-1896* (Princeton University Press, 1996), iii. Maria Zambaco (nee Kassavetti) was also a sculptor.

¹³ Zuzanna Shonfield, "Miss Marshall and the Cimabue Browns," *Costume* 13 (1979): 65.

We continue to find these styles worn by women artists and artists' wives throughout these years. Another young couple, Walter and Mary Crane, shared similar sensibilities with the Alma-Tademas. Crane was already a force to be reckoned with in the design community, working on interiors in many of the new 'Palaces of Art'; he will become central to the analysis of Artistic Dress in chapter six. But for now, it is worth mentioning an image he made of his new bride while they were on extended honeymoon in Italy in 1871. Titled *At Home, A Portrait* [fig. 4.10], it seems to be the ideal of an artistic wife. Mary stands with her arm resting on the mantle of a tiled hearth, upon which also sits an Italian ceramic vase in the style of blue and white china. Her dress is a simple reddish brown, belted at the natural waist, with no corset or crinoline. The neck is high with a small white lace ruff, and the skirt falls fairly straight to her ankles (it does not pool on the floor like Laura Alma-Tadema's), with a wide scalloped or quilted band in a dark blue. It looks very practical for walking, though she is at rest reading her book, a paper fan in her right hand, and to underscore the calm disposition, a cat perches comfortably in front of the fire next to her. The most unusual aspect of this dress, however is the sleeves. At first glance, they appear long and straight, fitted but not tight. However, closer inspection reveals that a second, wide outer sleeve in the same material is attached from the underarm and around the back of the shoulder seam, and it hangs open (that is to say there is no seam closing the length of the sleeve), so that it falls rather like elegant wings. It lends a decidedly medieval effect to the dress, and foretells the historicised fashion the Cranes will advocate in coming years.

We find more of these simple gowns in a rather sombre-looking portrait of the Morris & Burne-Jones families from 1874 [fig. 4.11]. Jane and her daughters May and Jenny all wear long simple dresses that seem to be belted at the natural waist, and wear no corset or crinoline. Likewise, Georgina Burne-Jones has a dress that seems slightly more conventional in the bodice, but the sleeves have a Renaissance-style ruching, and she is *sans* crinoline as well. Amusingly, the Morris ladies' dresses have much in common with 8-year-old Margaret Burne-Jones' dress (Jenny was 13 and May 12); and Margaret wears a string of natural beads much like the Morris women. The men all seem to be wearing fairly average suits, though Morris's tend to always be rather baggy, and Burne-Jones appears to be wearing a velvet coat.

It is unsurprising that these kinds of dresses were not to everyone's taste. Recall the diarist Jeanette Marshall's comments about Jane Morris looking like a maniac, mentioned in the previous chapter. Marshall had a great deal of rather acerbic commentary about many of these artistic women. In her book *The Precariously Privileged*, Zuzanna Shonfield published an examination of the Marshall family gleaned through Jeannette's diaries; but there was enough material from just Jeanette's comments on fashion also to publish an article for *Costume*, 'Miss Marshall and the Cimabue Browns.' Much of the commentary spans the 1870s and 1880s, and Jeanette speaks about her father's friends with an acid tongue that makes Whistler and Wilde's exchanges sound tame. Shonfield reports:

‘I daresay it will be a collection of slow old artists with excentric [*sic*] clothing and long hair as rough as birds’ nests’ she wrote at the age of nineteen before an [1874] ‘at home’ at the Ford Madox Browns, and afterwards commented: ‘The flood of “artistics” in everything hideous in the way of costume was appalling!’... in 1908, she noted that the crowd at the Ford Madox Browns had worn... ‘velveteen coats, coloured shirts + other atrocities’ At her 1878 ‘at home’, ... [Lucy Madox Brown]... was clad in a dress of the fashionable peacock blue; her visitors ‘were most singularly attired, the ladies sad + the gentlemen mad-looking.’¹⁴

She described people as ‘sloppy’, ‘dirty’, the colours they wore ‘bileous’ [*sic*], and their clothing as rags. In fact, two of the only people she appreciated were Laura Alma-Tadema (whose clothes she liked but whose looks weren’t to her ‘taste’), and Marie Spartali Stilman, who she described as ‘languid, very tall + still pretty’ in 1872, but who she could not help but criticise two years later for Spartali’s penchant for wearing black, which Marshall thought didn’t suit her.¹⁵

Although Marshall’s opinion is clearly a biased one (for reasons we may only guess, perhaps jealousy, perhaps an unfulfilled social climbing desire), they are also useful in showing the negative views and stereotypes about these forms of clothing. But there are other aspects to her discussion which are very useful indeed: she catalogues many of her own clothes, which allowed Shonfield to consider the economic aspect of Artistic Dress (which is a more suitable discussion for the next chapter); and she gives us a glimpse into her lingerie cabinet, which was influenced by the ‘healthy’ opinions of her father:

As befits the daughter of an anatomist to whom a tract on the evils of tight lacing had been dedicated, as early as 1874 she chose to wear boneless stays, which had been bought ready-made after some searching; when boneless corsets were unprocurable, she removed the bones—on one occasion all fifty-two of them—from the conventional stays.¹⁶

While she apparently wore bones in her dresses and also used a light bustle pad later on, this fact reveals to us that perhaps not all artistic women went ‘sans corset’, but rather wore light stays with no bones. As connected as Marshall was to these groups, it is highly likely that he could pass on information as to where to procure such garments—or indeed said information may have been passed to him from health-conscious ‘artistics’. Finally, it is certainly not at all out of the realm of possibility that these women, skilled seamstresses, could have made such garments for themselves.

In these communities, the discourses of fashion and beauty were rapidly intersecting with those of health. While much of the development of Artistic Dress progresses along Aesthetic routes in this decade, there is an underlying issue of health as it relates to the natural body that rapidly becomes the basis for much heated debate into the 1880s. One of the central figures to start these discussions, and ultimately become an authority on Artistic Dress, was already one of the more sought after architect-designers of the day: E.W. Godwin.

¹⁴ Ibid., 62–63.

¹⁵ Ibid., 67.

¹⁶ Ibid., 69.

Godwin on Dress

Godwin's first known public lecture on dress was in 1868, the same year he set up house with Ellen Terry. Edward Gordon Craig – his son of Godwin and Terry, also an actor – later published the text of this talk in his theatre journal *The Mask* in 1914. It seems to have been given to a group interested in architecture and archaeology (which at this time can also be understood to refer to art history), a society perhaps, for Godwin addresses the question of what Dress has to do with those topics at the outset:

...by showing dress in its relation to architecture and archaeology and to prove to you that we ought to be accepting the “advice” for the simple reason that the study of dress is or ought to be so much the business of the architect as the study of animal or vegetable life or indeed of any of the studies accessional to the main science of building.¹⁷

What Godwin is ultimately trying to impart is a ‘truth to materials’ philosophy in regards to dress; and the essential nature of beautiful dress to the ‘Temple of Art’; that is the all-encompassing aspect of art & architecture that is ‘the expression of man’s delight in God’s works.’ He divides dress into two categories, historical and conventional, then proceeds to offer a lengthy history of English dress as a means of exemplifying practicalities (but mostly impracticalities) in the form and material of conventional costume. His discussion focuses on what he feels are the three most important features of dress: the cut of the sleeves; the neck piece; and the trimming, which, as seen at the outset of this chapter, becomes the bane of his sartorial comments in his subsequent writings.

When he comes to his discussion of Victorian clothing, he first lambasts the lack of ‘all natural relative proportion’, noting that ‘the man is deprived of every vestige of drapery in the artistic sense of the word, and his limbs are disguised in bag-like coverings, whilst the woman... clothes herself in a wasteful amplitude of skirt.’¹⁸ Godwin is here hinting at the argument that so many others will take up and carry on – that these garments conceal the body in forms that are not harmonious with the natural figure; and conversely, it is the natural body that is beautiful and should be complemented by clothes. Furthermore, the beauty of the body is dependent on not just the cut of a garment, but on the colour and choice of material:

We know how linen, wool, silk, satin, velvet, were used in old times for the clothing of men as well as for that of women; but, (as in the matter of drapery) the men have been forced by fashion to give up all claim to the richer materials and to encase themselves in gloomy monotony of broad-cloth...

An English crowd, (no matter how brightly coloured certain of its *details* may be), always resolves itself into a dull grey owing to the preponderance of black and white.¹⁹

¹⁷ Godwin, “A Lecture on Dress (1868)”; reprinted in Stern, *Against Fashion*, 83.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Godwin very clearly feels deprived by the limitations of male dress. He tried to resolve this by incorporating more artistic aspects into his everyday dress:

He was also a debonair figure... spied in the 1860s with felt hat, floppy tie and velvet jacket or black cloak, frequently sporting a silk umbrella in one hand and cigar in the other. Later he advocated a Norfolk jacket, knee breeches and woollen 'combinations'...²⁰

This ensemble in fact echoes his own nostalgic view on costume of the recent past related in the 1868 lecture:

A few years ago the male costume was equally hopeful: coloured stockings and knickerbockers with the short coat or Norfolk shirt and felt hat or cap were felt to be appropriate and artistic. What has become of this most artistic costume? ... the cut of the sleeve is the only point of difference between the cut of a modern Norfolk shirt and the very picturesque jacket or doublet introduced early in the reign of Edward IV.²¹

In fact the Norfolk jacket, a long single-breasted belted jacket with a low collar, was ultimately made popular for sporting by the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII), who Godwin also credits with saving men's drab black evening wear by reintroducing the white waistcoat as part of the ensemble. With breeches, it became the favoured sportsman's outfit, particularly for golfing, by the end of the century – probably more for practical purposes than for the aesthetic qualities Godwin advocates. We can see this sort of attire worn by those 'Princes of Victorian Bohemia' photographed by David Wilkie Wynfield in a c.1860s photo of the St John's Wood Clique [fig. 4.12.1]; and as well in a self-portrait photo with the artists P.H. Calderon and W.F. Yeames from c.1866 [fig. 4.12.2]. Two of the men in the first photo, and Yeames in the second, all wear knickerbockers tucked into their socks; Yeames, a successful history painter, is shown sitting at his easel, sporting a beret.

Godwin may have been wearing a similar outfit with a Norfolk cut jacket in one of the few extant photos of him [fig. 4.13], quite possibly made from velvet, with a light handkerchief in his coat pocket, probably a colourful silk accent. His hair is cropped but curls over his ear, and he sports a van dyke beard. Most striking is his broad-brimmed hat, its shallow bowl fitting snugly on his head. It seems eminently more practical than the fashionable stove-pipe hat, while calling to mind a Renaissance helm such as the one perched on the head of Donatello's *David*. In both this photo and the aforementioned descriptions, we see that it is in the details and accessories that men like Godwin styled their Artistic Dress.

Godwin clearly enjoyed the opportunity to exploit historic costume in his own sartorial adventures, especially through his work designing theatre costumes. The stage allowed a safe place to explore these ideas, and as well a creative environment which embraced sartorial eccentricities, particularly

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 93.

in his participation in amateur theatricals with friends.²² For example, we know from Wilde and others that Godwin directed productions for Lady Archibald Campbell (one of the leading ladies of Aestheticism) in Coombe Wood of plays such as *Robin Hood* and, in 1884, *As You Like It*, for which we have one of the rare extant photos of Godwin, showing him dressed as a friar [fig. 4.14].²³ Kinchin and Stirton observe, ‘Such outfits offered a welcome release from the regulation black baggy trousers, frock coat and chimney-pot hat worn by middle-class men, all of which Godwin roundly condemned.’²⁴ But he indulged in fancy dress even earlier, as a ca. 1861-65 photograph illustrates. From Ellen Terry’s collection at Smallhythe (National Trust), we see Godwin attired as if he just stepped from a Chaucer illustration, in a hooded tunic, stockings, and ankle boots [fig. 4.15]. While he certainly didn’t go about the street in such costume, he allowed it to influence his view on fashion, and in particular the flaws he saw in everyday dress.

One of his greatest condemnations of male dress came in his June 1876 essay ‘Modern Dress’ for *Architect*. He begins his essay by introducing the reader to ‘a small settlement of “artistic folk” in Bedford Park who ‘have established a little world of fashion among themselves.’²⁵ He then goes on to comparatively discuss the ways in which Modern Dress is problematic, particularly in menswear, humorously criticising frock coats and baggy trousers at length:

If the frock-coat is so much opposed to all that constitutes the fine art of dress, if this highly respectable, dull and prosy-looking garment is in artistic eyes an abomination, what shall be said of the trousers? These, whether old, creasy, and baggy... or new and block shaped... are equally offensive. In whatever aspect they are looked at, in front, at the side, behind, standing or sitting, they offend every nerve in the head that ever pulsed to a form of beauty... How much longer the chimney-pot hat, the respectable frock coat, and the baggy trousers are to enslave one-half of the civilised world is a question not by any means without interest to art.²⁶

He again exhibits a somewhat more hopeful view in regard to women’s dress, but as in 1868, Godwin is very concerned with the danger of trimming, which he defines more clearly for the reader:

The errors in modern dress are not so much in general form as in the exaggeration of this form (exaggeration peculiar to the English) and what I will venture broadly to call the trimmings. One very favourite trimming is the plaited flounce. As a rule, all plaited flounces, especially those that are bordered by frills, are destructive to the beauty of drapery. The long skirt of a lady’s dress is full of the most lovely possibilities, but not if stiffened at the end and treated in imitation of an irate fish tail.²⁷

²² Artistic Dress and its relation to theatre is, in fact, a topic worthy of its own exploration, and while it is outside the scope of this thesis, it is worth noting Godwin and Terry’s habits in this arena as noted aesthetes who, as already established, moved within the circles examined here.

²³ Thanks to Paul Stirton for identifying the production in this image. See also S.W. Soros, *E.W. Godwin: Aesthetic Movement Architect and Designer* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 37.

²⁴ Juliet Kinchin and Paul Stirton, *Is Mr Ruskin Living Too Long?: Selected Writings of E.W. Godwin on Victorian Architecture, Design and Culture* (Oxford: White Cockade Publishing, 2005), 307.

²⁵ E.W. Godwin, “Modern Dress,” *The Architect* 15 (June 10, 1876): 368.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

For Godwin, trim is the ultimate offender for it disrupts fine draping through breaking the line and weighing down the natural fall of fabric. Godwin does not limit his advocacy of fine draping to women, but thinks male dress can incorporate the use of draping in more varied fabrics, as noted above. In fact, it could be said that in terms of aesthetics and gender, Godwin's view is radical: while he sees differences in the appropriate construction of male and female clothing, the underlying principals of sartorial beauty – those of colour, texture, and draping – are to him the same for both sexes.

It is perhaps becoming clear that there is one very basic aesthetic ideal that underlies the development of Artistic Dress, particularly for women: the draping of fabric. The beautiful fall of drapery, the lines it creates as it shifts about the body, is a sensual concept that remains at the heart of contemporary fashion design. Well-draped garments show off the beauty of the fabric itself, and we might even consider the social and economic signification of this, particularly if we go back further in history to the European courts where fabric was equal to luxury, wealth, and hence social status—and truthfully, little has changed in that aspect. To bring this discussion round to the present for a moment, the 2010 retrospective exhibition of Yves Saint Laurent at the Petit Palais, Paris, ended with a display of his very last collection, *Le Choc des Couleurs* (The Collision of Colours, 2002), a series of dresses that were nothing more than exquisitely draped lengths of silk chiffon in a variety of colours and arrangements.²⁸ One might even trace the development of couture in terms of draping, backwards from Saint Laurent, who trained at the feet of Christian Dior; Dior who rose up amidst the bias-cut jersey dresses of Coco Chanel; Chanel who surpassed Paul Poiret's radical designs centred on theories of draping; and finally to Worth, where Poiret found his feet but was cut loose for the 'brazen modernity' of his draped designs. As noted in the previous chapter, Worth was a master tailor and the first modern designer (though the condition of some extant gowns belies the rushed nature of some of his constructions, likely a victim of the great demand for his designs).

But all of these great designers (and they are really just a small sampling) understood the importance of draping, which I believe, in terms of the modern fashion designer, is partially the legacy of the discourses of Artistic Dress in the nineteenth century. The importance of drapery to the Pre-Raphaelites is well-established, and as noted previously, the sketches of Elizabeth Siddal and photographs of Jane Morris were in large part drapery studies for Rossetti. And although Watts does not write about costume until later, in his early days he was obviously similarly inspired, immersed in the milieu of Holland Park and the exotic robes of the Pattles. When he does finally throw his 'sombbrero' into the discussion in 1883, he states, 'Quality of material should govern

²⁸ "Yves Saint Laurent Retrospective" Exhibition at the Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, 11 March – 29 August 2010.

form...'²⁹ Then after much discussion on the appropriateness of colour and form to material weight and texture, he declares:

... but it is always to be remembered that folds, with their infinite changeableness of shape, and light, and shadow, are more beautiful than anything, excepting that perfection of form which is very rarely found, and of which neither our climate, our habits, not modern sense of modesty would permit the exhibition.³⁰

In other words, only nudity is more beautiful than the artful arrangement of drapery. And of course, a masterfully arranged drapery can modestly hint at the nude form beneath. To some, these loose-fitting styles may have seemed like an overlarge, shapeless sack. To those with a creative eye, however, the way in which these garments shifted, flowed, and moulded around a body undoubtedly provided sensually charged inspiration for the artistic imagination. It is this notion that subversively underpins Godwin's arguments as well: that concealing the body in the 'tissue of falsities', the 'crinkum-crankum fooleries' of Victorian fashion, is to subvert the beauty (and eroticism) of the natural physique. For Godwin, dress should respect, and enhance, the living body:

To dress well you must possess the gift of colour, and be a master of form. But this is not enough; with these accomplishments you might clothe a dummy or a corpse satisfactorily, but not a living human being; for there comes into the problem with this word *living* the element of motion. I do not mean the mere action of moving the limbs; but the action of breathing, of growth and of decay.³¹

While Godwin has become more famous for his legacy as an architect and furniture designer, he was well known – and respected – for his sartorial wisdom at the time. So much so that after writing on the subject for nearly two decades, he became a founding member of the Costume Society in 1882, then the first director of the Art Dress department at Liberty & Company in 1884, just two years before his death. It is his legacy at Liberty that truly brought Artistic Dress to its full and final force at the end of the century, standardising costume and making it available via catalogue for any who had the means and desire (see chapter five for more on this). It is clear in these efforts that his goal was to educate the public on beauty in dress. Not only did he advocate a consideration of the architecture of garment construction in relation to the natural body, but he also discussed the ways in which textiles are suited (or not) to clothing forms in the manner that brick may or may not be suited to a building.³² His writings and lectures on dress always discussed it in terms of the whole of the arts, relating dress particularly to architecture, and as such introduced the very early seeds of what would become the modernist *gesamtkunstwerk* philosophy.

We cannot leave this discussion of Godwin in these years without considering the influence of these explorations on Ellen Terry, who was herself in a position to set fashion trends by virtue of her celebrity. As noted in the previous chapter, it was Godwin who first showed her that costume

²⁹ G.F. Watts, "On Taste in Dress," *Nineteenth Century* 13 (1883): 50.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Godwin, "Dress and Its Relation to Health and Climate," 323.

³² Godwin, "A Lecture on Dress (1868)," 83.

could be beautiful. No doubt her experience prior to her time at Little Holland House helped in some way to prepare her for the sartorial experiments of ‘Pattledom’. Her social relations in artistic circles continue by virtue of her own friendships, and those cultivated through her sister Kate, who left the stage to marry Arthur Lewis, a wealthy silk merchant and amateur artist, in 1867. Prior to the marriage, Lewis led a somewhat bohemian lifestyle similar to that of his close friend Rossetti, and was a founding member of the Arts Club in 1863. He was associated with the St John’s Wood Clique (who came to merry gatherings at his Campden Hill home Moray Lodge) and was photographed by Wynfield as a Renaissance gentleman in a tooled leather and velvet doublet and velvet beret.³³ After marrying Kate, his social interactions transformed into somewhat more formal gatherings:

...she set about entertaining artists, actors, patrons, dealers and musicians at Moray Lodge, which became, according to one historian of the Victorian social scene, ‘a central gathering point where widely distinct circles meet on common ground.’³⁴

Ellen Terry was no doubt a regular guest at these gatherings, as the sisters remained close. Despite retiring from the theatre for six years while she lived with Godwin (and they had two children during that time), her absence did not seem to affect her ongoing celebrity or the success of her 1874 return to the stage. Terry is perhaps one of the most photographed figures of the Victorian era; her face was well known, and her costume, both on and off stage, was the subject of many reports, particularly in the 1880s when she began to design costumes with her friend Alice Comyns Carr (see chapter five). There is a diversity of images which show Terry in Victorian dress as well as her theatrical costume, many of the photos made by her friend Samuel Walker. In fact Walker captures her in some of her most unusual ensembles, in particular a lovely 1874 portrait [fig. 4.16] of a smiling Terry modelling a kimono, worn in a more authentic manner than one finds on Whistler’s models (see discussion below). She was dressed similarly when an actor friend visited her around that time: a ‘vision of loveliness’ attired to match the artistic surroundings ‘in a blue kimono [and she seemed] to melt into the surroundings and appeared almost intangible.’³⁵

One particular Walker *carte-de-visite* from 1873 [fig. 4.17], the year before her return to the stage, depicts her in an Artistic Dress that is very different from conventional fashion, and much closer to dresses worn at Holland Park. The photograph shows Terry seated in an indistinct interior, perhaps upon steps and leaning on a low table or platform covered in a decorative textile. Her one-piece dress is long and tunic-like, loosely fitted, but not baggy. It is detailed with shirring all the way down the front from neck to hem, and at the shoulder seam and cuffs, allowing the bulk of the sleeve fabric to billow from the top of the arm to just past the elbow. The down-turned collar is large and pointed, and trimmed with what appears to be lace dyed to match the gown. The bottom

³³ See plate 26, Hacking, *Princes of Victorian Bohemia*.

³⁴ Gere, *Artistic Circles*, 118.

³⁵ Valerie Cumming, “Ellen Terry: An Aesthetic Actress and Her Costumes,” *Costume* 21 (1987): 67.

of the skirt cannot be seen; it is possible that there is a small train. She appears to wear a white underdress or chemise, which can only be seen as trim at her cuffs and in a small round ruff about the high neckline. While the modest gown covers her entirely, the loose fit gathers gently about her body, hinting at her natural shape. In combination with her posture, it is very clear she is wearing neither corset nor crinoline. The photographer Samuel Walker has captured Terry in a natural pose, as she is seated quite comfortably and leaning casually to the side, having just looked away from the book in her hand (a play, one imagines), and up at the camera. Her hair is cropped short and loose, not styled; comfortable to the modern eye, but surely quite unusual in 1873. The comfortable costume, relaxed pose, and intelligent gaze directed at the viewer gives the effect of intimacy, capturing the actress at home, and allowing a glimpse into her private world.

Just as we begin to see Rossetti's models wear their modelling costume in their daily roles, so too does Ellen Terry begin to wear Artistic Dress in public. Squire suggests such outfits came naturally to her from her life on the stage:

Much of every actor's working life required the wearing of fancifully exotic costumes, or dresses of 'the olden times', with calculated bravura and an eye for effect. Before she was nine Ellen Terry was being trained to walk quickly, decisively, with an upright carriage, and without tripping, while wearing a blanket pinned on her shoulders and left to fall several inches onto the floor in front as well as behind. 'Somehow I never had difficulty in moving gracefully', she later remembered. When fully grown she was tall, with a notably long free stride, and easy expressive movements... From a hard-working impecunious family foreign to fashionable life (though perfectly well able to 'perform' it when necessary) she was happy in the freedoms and usages of her profession.³⁶

Terry's celebrity status put her in a position of societal influence in terms of fashion, supported by the proliferation of her image. Godwin and Terry's brand of Artistic Dress is exemplary of a group of artists who, throughout the decade, would become arbiters of Aesthetic taste through both their work and everyday life. Prominent amongst those was, of course, Whistler.

Whistler the Modiste

In his self-portrait of 1867/72, Whistler fashioned himself as Rembrandt. *Arrangement in Grey: Portrait of the Painter* [fig. 4.18] is a half-length view of the artist, his body facing left but his face turned outward towards the viewer. Like Rembrandt's iconic self-portraits, the palette is monochromatic, rendered in earthy tones save the warm flesh tones in the artist's face. The artist wears a smock and a wide-brimmed hat, which mimics a Rembrandt beret (we can see a hint of his white forelock, giving the effect that his hat is perched back upon his head), and as well references Velazquez's self-portrait in *Las Meninas*, which has been a much-discussed source of influence for Whistler.³⁷ We see a hint of a thin black bow at his throat, and he holds two long thin brushes in his

³⁶ Squire, "E. W. Godwin and the House of Liberty," 86.

³⁷ See for example Rhonda L. Reymond, "Fashioning the Artist: James McNeill Whistler's the Artist in His Studio," *The International Journal of the Humanities* 8 (n.d.), no. 5: 115-128.

raised right hand. The thinly painted canvas appears unfinished at the bottom, rendering his left hand indistinct. The shallow space behind the artist is a plain wall in a rich coffee colour and is emphasised by the dark grey dado in the lower quarter, above which we find the artist's butterfly signature. It is simple and graceful, and the costume signifies 'artist'. It signals his own self-fashioning during this period as being equal to the masters of the past, as well as a great (Baudelarian) painter of modern life. In this, it makes an interesting contrast with Godwin's vision, for as much as he finds black boring, Baudelaire finds black the hallmark of an elegant dandy. Whistler's self-fashioning straddles both of these by adopting a somewhat more muted palette in combination with an eye for cut and draping in his personal attire – as well as that he crafted for his models. By this time, Whistler, like his close friend Godwin, was noted as an arbiter of taste.³⁸ Through his connections in Chelsea, he was moving in the same social circles as Rossetti and Watts, and was being sought after as a portrait painter. He was at the heart of an artistic climate which gave rise to Aestheticism during this decade, and within this, Aesthetic Dress.

As I have already discussed, the exchangeability of this term with Artistic Dress in fashion literature is one of the root vagaries I hope to clarify with this research. However, I argue that Aesthetic Dress is attached to a much more specific moment, beginning in the 1870s and moving through the 1880s, and is concerned more with ideals of beauty and fashionability than with issues of health, comfort, or practicality. It is not necessarily bohemian, and in fact in many cases bears much in common with the conventional Victorian silhouette. This is, of course, a very generalised definition, and the aforementioned vagaries are indicative of the fact that these areas all overlap. Godwin was, of course, an advocate of healthy and hygienic movements; and Wilde himself reiterates these arguments in his own discourse on fashion (see discussion in chapter five). But in my view, the overlap relates to the notion that Aesthetic Dress is a specific category of Artistic Dress, something that grows out of the loose bohemian gowns of the 1860s in combination with the influence of the Aesthetic philosophy of artistic production, then fades into the later Artistic gowns of the 1880s forward. I will seek to clarify this further in the subsequent discussion, which for the remainder of the chapter will be focused specifically on women's dress. Let us begin with an examination of Whistler as fashion designer for Mrs Frances Leyland. Galassi's essay "Whistler and Aesthetic Dress: Mrs Frances Leyland" in *Whistler Women and Fashion* provides an in-depth look at Whistler's *Symphony in Flesh-colour and Pink: Mrs F.R. Leyland* (1871-74) [fig. 4.19]; and the evolution of the dress designed by the artist for the specific purpose of the painting; however, my research would be incomplete without its inclusion here.³⁹ Therefore I will use her

³⁸ See Margaret F. MacDonald, Susan Grace Galassi, and Aileen Ribiero, eds., *Whistler, Women, and Fashion* (Yale University Press, 2003).

³⁹ Susan Grace Galassi, "Whistler and Aesthetic Dress: Mrs Frances Leyland," in *Whistler, Women, & Fashion*, ed. Aileen Ribiero, Margaret MacDonald, and Susan Grace Galassi (New York: The Frick Collection and Yale University Press, 2003), 92–115.

study as a basis to focus on Whistler's part in the development of Aesthetic Dress, which will be further examined in the next chapter in discussing fashion debates in the 1880s.

To discuss Mrs Leyland as a model, it is perhaps useful to begin not with Whistler, but with Rossetti. Towards the end of the 1860s, Rossetti enjoyed the patronage of Frederick Leyland, a self-made shipping magnate based in Liverpool, but whose upwardly mobile aspirations and newly acquired wealth had cultivated in him a desire to be fashionable. He became a collector of Pre-Raphaelite art, and commissioned several works from Rossetti, including a portrait of his wife Frances, which the artist titled *Monna Rosa* [fig. 4.20]. Newton selected it as an example of Rossetti's interest in fashion, and the ways in which he may have responded to (or even influenced) shifts in style:

It is impossible to estimate the extent to which Rossetti's personal inventions influenced the clothes worn by his women friends and his friends' wives. That he showed a feeling for developments in contemporary fashion is demonstrated by a portrait of Mrs F.R. Leyland called *Monna Rosa*, painted in 1867 when the crinoline was rapidly disappearing from fashion. Rossetti painted Mrs Leyland draped in a piece of 18th-century brocade which can be found in several of his pictures and which evidently belonged to him. It is significant that the lines of the tucked-in and pinned-together stuff in which Mrs Leyland is draped foreshadow exactly the composition which was to replace the crinoline.⁴⁰

Made a year before he painted Jane Morris in the *Blue Silk Dress* [fig. 3.33], *Monna Rosa* is representative of Rossetti's symbolic art and, looking in hindsight, a harbinger of Aestheticism. It is practically a catalogue of aesthetic signifiers: the sunflower pattern on the brocade, the blue and white china vase on the bamboo stand, and the peacock feather fan adorning the wall. Leyland herself is shown with her famous auburn hair artfully arranged in a fashionable chignon, but her face, which appears slimmer and delicate in other images, has been cast in Rossetti's mould – strong jaw, aquiline nose, cherub lips. As she reaches up to clip a rose from the bush, she is yet another of Rossetti's symbolically sensual women, not quite as lush as *Lady Lilith*, but likewise an object of decorative beauty, elegantly displaying the artfully arranged brocade and beautifying the interior. In this aspect, is Whistler's portrait very different from Rossetti's? Is it a rendering of Frances Leyland, the woman, or is she a prop in the artist's decorative vision – the mannequin on which the dress is displayed?

Whistler certainly saw *Monna Rosa*, and Galassi suggests that he 'undoubtedly sought to surpass' Rossetti's portrait. He enjoyed a close, personal friendship with Frances, and speculation abounded over their relationship; there is no proof that they were lovers, but theirs was definitely a close and affectionate meeting of artist and muse, if not more.⁴¹ It was through Rossetti that Leyland first met Whistler in the late 1860s.⁴² The approximately ten years in which Whistler enjoyed the Leylands'

⁴⁰ Newton, *Health, Art, and Reason: Dress Reformers of the Nineteenth Century*, 34.

⁴¹ Galassi, "Whistler and Aesthetic Dress: Mrs Frances Leyland," 103.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 96.

patronage included extended stays at their home in Liverpool, and of course the decoration of their home in Prince's Gate, in which the debacle of the Peacock room effectively ended their benefaction. These were also years of increasing strain on the Leylands' marriage, which ended in divorce in 1879; Whistler was likely not the cause, but perhaps more a symptom of their problems. This is the context for the construction of the portrait, which saw Whistler pose Frances Leyland in a gown of his own devising, made to match the room – his own Chelsea drawing room – in which she was painted.⁴³ Galassi expresses how this element is manifest in the painting, and specifically signified by the dress:

Her artistic garb may have been difficult to categorize by contemporary viewers; all, however, would have recognized it as a type of informal attire, worn only in the privacy of one's home. The dress signifies the privileged access of the painter to his subject's private world, yet the world represented in the painting is Whistler's own drawing room—not her own, nor the more neutral space of his studio... Yet Mrs. Leyland is represented as unreachable, her back turned to the artist, gaze to the side, and absorbed in thought, a woman whom Whistler could only possess by means of his art.⁴⁴

The 'artistic garb' in this case is a Tea Gown designed by Whistler, as evident from a series of pastels which show its evolution, and which Galassi discusses thoroughly in her text.⁴⁵ The pastels show Whistler experimenting with different styles for the dress, incorporating historicised details such as standing collars, puffed sleeves, and the Watteau pleat which is the focus of the final painting, but which does not appear in all of the sketches. Several of the sketches show the front of the gown as having the material crossing diagonally over the bodice, as a fichu might; whether this is the case in the final garment, we cannot tell. In one sketch, Whistler designed the skirt in elaborate flounces tucked up with rosettes [fig. 4.21]. Although he experiments with lemon yellow and orange accent colours, the material is always diaphanous. We do not know the order of the drawings, as they are undated, nor do we know who exactly constructed the gown, and when (although there are some instructional notes made in French on some of the drawings). It would be interesting to know how much the selection of material shaped the final garment, which is viewed from the back and arranged in a graceful waterfall of pale pink silk chiffon, accented with blossoms to balance the ones appearing on the branches entering the canvas at left.

Although we cannot see the whole gown, we can tell that it is comprised of a long-sleeved robe of chiffon, a mass of it gathered between the shoulder blades in a Watteau pleat, but the rest of it a single sheer layer. It is worn over a sleeveless white underdress, leaving the bare skin of the arms visible under the sheer sleeves, which are bound with a golden brown cord from a rosette at the shoulder, then wound down to be tied at the wrist. It is further trimmed with rosettes on the bottom of the train, but whether these are accurately depicted or artfully arranged accents of Whistler's brush is uncertain. The model's hands are clasped behind her back, her head turned, and her neck

⁴³ Ibid., 95.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 115.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 105-111.

exposed. Galassi notes, ‘In Japanese dress, the back of the neck—considered an erogenous zone—is often revealed.’⁴⁶ This form of draping, evocative of a kimono, underpins much of Whistler’s aesthetic taste in women’s vestments, and in what he preferred to pose them. In light of his amorous nature, the erotic aspect of these garments certainly was not lost on him.

Whistler collected kimonos, and often used them in his work; in fact, a catalogue of the women in draped kimonos or robes (whether kimono-like or evocative of classical chitons), painted, sketched, and etched by him would be vast indeed.⁴⁷ The Tea Gown would have provided Whistler with a type of garment that harnessed the more scintillating aspects of a kimono, but in a more appropriate form for a lady of society. This is not to say Whistler didn’t manage to pose such women in kimonos. The focal piece for Leyland’s dining room (the Peacock Room) was *La Princesse du pays de la porcelaine* (1863-64) [fig. 4.22], modelled by Christine Spartali, Marie’s sister and another one of the beautiful cousins of the Greek Ionides clan.⁴⁸ It could be argued, however, that Spartali, by virtue of her family connections in Holland Park, represented a more bohemian aspect of artistic society than Frances Leyland – or her husband – would have wished to present. As Galassi observes, Whistler incorporates the Japanese element in the harmonized décor with the dress, while keeping the western element of the Watteau pleat, which evokes the refinement of French style (if not the French court), creating a hybrid style that evoked, and perhaps even influenced, the new fashion for Tea Gowns.

According to fashion historian Anne Bissonnette, Tea Gowns emerged and became fashionable in the 1870s, when ‘a whimsical type of gown [was] worn by hostesses in their homes at five o’clock tea,’⁴⁹ while Galassi additionally suggests that for some sticklers, the loose fabric may have been associated with loose morals because it was ‘typically worn in the afternoon, during the famous five to seven when lovers met.’⁵⁰ Ribeiro points out that it was worn in the more relaxed time in-between more formal afternoon and evening dress, when a lady might entertain only family and very intimate friends for tea.⁵¹ All agree that it was probably derived from the French *peignoir* or *robe d’intérieur*, and in 1873 such gowns were sold under this latter name with a Watteau pleat, which became a ‘standard feature of the tea gown, often mixed with other revival styles.’⁵² This type of garment evolved into the twentieth century housecoat, and was arguably in fashion for middle-to-upper class ladies to wear at home all the way through the 1960s (and can still be

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁴⁷ See MacDonald, “East and West: Sources and Influences.”

⁴⁸ See Chapters two, three. For more on the Ionides, see Dakers or Gere.

⁴⁹ Anne Bissonnette, “Tea Gown,” ed. Valerie Steele, *The Berg Companion to Fashion* (London: Berg, 2010), 679–81. Bissonnette is Assistant Professor and Curator of the Costume and Textile Collection at the University of Alberta, and has a forthcoming publication on Tea Gowns from Kent State University Press.

⁵⁰ Galassi, “Whistler and Aesthetic Dress: Mrs Frances Leyland,” 104.

⁵¹ Ribeiro, “Fashion and Whistler,” 32.

⁵² Galassi, “Whistler and Aesthetic Dress: Mrs Frances Leyland,” 104.

purchased today). Tea Gowns became very popular in the 1880s and 90s, and will be examined further in the following chapters. In terms of Mrs Leyland's Tea Gown, we can see through the process of the sketches that this was Whistler's grand foray into fashion design (though not his first, for he had his hand in conceiving the dresses for the *White Girls* and for his portrait of Miss Cicely Alexander [1874] as well⁵³); an artistic sartorial project similar to those taken on by friends like Rossetti and Godwin.

Mrs Frances Leyland undoubtedly fell under the influence of her fashionable friend and adopted this style, as one of this circle of Aesthetes rising in London society. She was not alone in taking the sartorial advice of her artistic friends, however, unlike Terry, we have no indication that she took an active hand in the production of these garments, nor that she was overly radical in her choice of dress. Hers seems to be a more passive role, dressed up for her portraits, and then perhaps a wearer of Aesthetic Dress by virtue of her associations. Yet she was one of many society women who seemed to have a desire to embody the rising aesthetic ideal. Let us turn to some of these examples to examine how Artistic Dress became increasingly public, and in some cases developed into Aesthetic Dress, during this decade.

Artistic Dress and Society

I found her... dressed as I remember well in a way then absolutely new to me, and contrary to all the fashions of the day... a green stuff gown, with tight sleeves slashed at the shoulders, and skirt looped up, while at one side a satchel hung from her girdle by a chain attached to her waist.

A. Wilfred Scawen Blunt writing about Rosalind Howard in his diary, 1872⁵⁴

The writer Wilfrid Scawen Blunt was not the first person to comment on Rosalind Howard's unusual habits of dress. The 'Radical Countess' was known for wearing unusual dress well before she gained her political and aristocratic clout. A year after the future Countess of Carlisle's 1864 marriage to George Howard, Lady Frederick Cavendish observed 'she dresses madly in odd-coloured gowns with long trains, which cling around her *unbecrinolined*.'⁵⁵ Rosalind became known for her fervent left-wing political and social activism, particularly her advocacy of women's rights (her mother Henrietta Stanley was one of the founders of Girton College alongside Rossetti's friend Barbara Bodichon) and leadership in the temperance movement.

But she was also deeply entrenched in the artistic milieu of the day; her husband was a landscape painter who moved in Pre-Raphaelite circles, and in fact it was discussions of architecture and

⁵³ See discussion in MacDonald, "East and West: Sources and Influences."

⁵⁴ Quoted in Gere, *Artistic Circles*, 52. Gere does not provide a full citation for this quotation.

⁵⁵ Ibid. Footnote 14.

Burne-Jones stained glass that first attracted the pair.⁵⁶ George Howard was an accomplished artist, and pursued art as much as his aristocratic standing (and Rosalind) would allow – in some ways pushing this further than was normally acceptable. In a diary entry from 16 January 1868, Rosalind commented on the selling of his first painting at the Dudley Gallery: ‘...now he is no longer a mere amateur. For better or worse he has taken his stand amongst the artists.’⁵⁷ He counted Burne-Jones, Morris, Ruskin, Leighton and others among his chief influences and friends; and his preference of an artistic path over a patrician one is evident in depictions of him, such as an 1870 terracotta bust by the French sculptor Dalou, now in the collection of Castle Howard, which shows a bearded Howard with a full beard and that signifying artist’s beret perched comfortably on his head.⁵⁸

Castle Howard mounted an exhibit of Howard’s impressive work in the summer of 2011, and according to the accompanying text, it was commented that he was never without his sketchbook in hand. An undated photograph of the couple [fig. 4.23], perhaps ca. 1870, shows George Howard seated with his sketchbook, in dark suit with a broad lapel, and what appears to be a colourful silk ascot tied loosely at his neck. Rosalind stands behind him leaning on his shoulder. She wears an Artistic Dress: loose, uncorseted and ‘unbecrinolined’, in plain monochrome fabric, with a simple braided trim that matches the belt accenting her waist. The high round collar is trimmed in wide, flat white lace, which is also glimpsed at the cuff. Her hair is parted in the middle and smooth, and her jewellery appears to be simple beads. The ensemble is very similar to that seen in the photos of the Pattle sisters at Holland Park, if a bit more structured (and hence less bohemian).

Similarly, the couple each had a portrait painted by their friend William Blake Richmond during this decade, which now hang in the grand China Landing at Castle Howard in Yorkshire [fig. 4.24]. The Earl is shown as an artist, sporting a beret, floppy bow tie, full beard, and holding his palette and brush. The Countess is in a loose, brown velvet gown trimmed with a wide brown satin ribbon at the natural waist, and the loose sleeves are bound in this satin below the elbow, at mid-forearm, and a smaller band at the wrist.

Rosalind Howard was, like the Pattle sisters, one of several individuals from the upper strata of society who, by the 1870s, were moving in artistic circles. These social interactions, and their patterns of influence, have been the subject of recent scholarly attention, particularly in Caroline Dakers’ *The Holland Park Circle: Artists and Victorian Society* (1999) and Charlotte Gere’s *Artistic Circles: Design and Decoration in the Aesthetic Movement* (2010). These studies, like so many others, mention aspects of dress as a means of expressing the artistic (and at times bohemian) values of these individuals, but they are largely treated as supplementary to the discussion of

⁵⁶ Dakers, *The Holland Park Circle*, 83.

⁵⁷ *George Howard, Artist and Aristocrat, A Centenary Exhibition* (York: Castle Howard, 2011), 12.

⁵⁸ For image, see *ibid.*, 6.

painting, architecture, and interiors. In fact, the anecdotal references, such as those regarding Rosalind Howard, sometimes have the feel of an aside regarding a humorous personality quirk rather than an important mode of self-expression. While Howard's dress seems to have sympathy with the changes in Victorian fashion outlined at the start of this chapter, particularly in the loose draping and the train, the description also brings to mind Terry's simple gown in the *carte-de-visite*, and the historicized gowns worn by several women in portraits painted by Watts, particularly his 1860-69 portrait of Virginia Pattle (Countess Somers) [fig. 4.25], and of her niece Virginia Dalrymple (Sophia's daughter whom Watts had known her whole life) in 1870-71 [fig. 4.26].

In fact, the green velvet dress in Dalrymple's portrait is one of the rare extant examples of Aesthetic Dress, and is in the collection of the Watts Gallery in Compton, Surrey [figs. 4.27-28]. In their catalogue entry for the painting, curator Mark Bills and Watts scholar Barbara Bryant discuss the dress, which was analysed by V&A Dress and Textile curator Edwina Ehrman:

Virginia wears a green velvet day or walking dress... It comprises two sections: a gored skirt and a bodice with its neckline decorated with orange silk braid with bow-knot ties. From ruched velvet epaulettes on the shoulders a similar trim of tiny bows flows down the sleeve. Black silk bows on the front of the bodice relate to the black silk tie around the waist... Probably dating from c.1870, as Edwina Ehrman notes, the dress accords with the fashionable silhouette of c.1868-9, so it was a relatively recent fashion statement, without being absolutely up to the minute. The colour was certainly unusual and, along with the style of the dress, serves to characterise Virginia's Aesthetic taste.⁵⁹

In considering the detailed construction, as well as the aforementioned description of Rosalind Howard, we can assume that these dresses were not mere costume crafted for an artist's model (as Frances Leyland's dress), but in fact were their own garments. They may have looked unusual (and even 'mad') in comparison to Victorian fashion, but they were still structured in ways which made wearing them in public acceptable in terms of propriety (high necklines, full sleeves, long skirts), even if they were odd in terms of style. I feel this is one of the ways we may determine Aesthetic Dress—it was uncommon, but never so different as to be inappropriate (except perhaps to the highest sticklers). These Renaissance-inspired dresses are those which Haweis identifies as 'Prae-Raphaelite' towards the end of the decade (see discussion in chapters one and five). There are some other examples of these styles in portraits, mostly by Watts, which should be noted and examined for what they reveal about what is – and isn't – an Aesthetic Dress, as defined in this thesis.

Watts was already well-established as a painter of society portraits in the Italianate style he honed in his youth.⁶⁰ In the late 60s and early 70s he produced his 'last successfully completed full-length portrait' (and one of his most celebrated), of Madeline (The Honourable Mrs Percy) Wyndham

⁵⁹ Mark Bills and Barbara Bryant, *G.F. Watts: Victorian Visionary* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 182.

⁶⁰ See discussion in chapter two, and Bryant, *G.F. Watts Portraits: Fame & Beauty in Victorian Society*; Mark Bills, *G. F. Watts* (Yale University Press, 2009).

[fig. 4.29].⁶¹ This painting and its preparatory sketches in the Watts Gallery collection have been taken up as examples of early Aestheticism, for the dress Madeline wears is emblazoned with huge, bursting sunflowers. However, when examined closely, the highly unusual structure of the gown makes one wonder whether it was an actual dress, or merely a careful arrangement of textiles by Watts and/or Wyndham—as Rossetti did with Leyland and others, shaping material rather than designing a garment.

During the time of painting, the Wyndhams were creating their own ‘Palace of Art’ at 44 Belgrave Square, designed by the architect George Aitchison with interiors by Leighton.⁶² Gere points out that Madeline was an active participant in the design and furnishing of her homes:

Madeline Wyndham, who was a more than competent amateur artist, possessed true flair, and she was adept at the art of contriving original decorative results from old and unusual fragments. Her advice was often very practical and down-to-earth, and she bombarded her daughters with lengthy instructions on the use of remnants and silk turned wrong side out to produce a particular effect.⁶³

This type of creative ingenuity has interesting implications when examining the garment she wears in Watts’ portrait. While the overall shape is that of a Renaissance-inspired Artistic Dress (overdress with full puffed sleeves, long trailing skirt, white underdress), the low bodice is arranged to display a broad expanse of shoulder and décolletage. The sheer fabric of the chemise is twisted from her left shoulder diagonally across her bosom and into a belt that has a silver medallion and long tassels hanging from her right hip. The décolletage is very low, and with the transparent fabric loosely arranged about her right shoulder and chest, we can even glimpse a hint of breast—a feature that is not part of the usual Aesthetic ensemble (in fact, most dresses that are labelled ‘Aesthetic’ have a very high, respectable neckline). This evocative detail, in combination with the foliage and decorative architectural props, gives the portrait a decidedly Italian flavour. However, in regards to clothing, this artful arrangement does not make clear sense in terms of traditional garment construction.

Furthermore, comparing the sketches to the final painting raises questions about the fabric of the overdress. In the finished painting, we see large golden brown sunflowers, monochromatic, on a field of a deep dark bluish-green. What seem to be leaves, almost resembling acanthus, are glimpsed here and there on the bodice and sleeve. In the sketch [fig. 4.30] we find the same tone of cloth, and the flowers are loosely sketched in relatively the same position, but with large white leaves. Also the tassels and leaf detail are absent. This could simply be a matter of it being a (rather large) oil sketch for the painting, and so it only has a suggestion of detail. But one wonders whether this pattern existed on the original fabric at all, or was an invention of the artist, either painted on

⁶¹ Bryant, *G.F. Watts Portraits: Fame & Beauty in Victorian Society*, 154.

⁶² Gere, *Artistic Circles*, 118.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 119.

the fabric, or merely on the canvas. Another possibility, in consideration of the aforementioned interest Madeline had in the creative use of fabrics, is whether this is actually upholstery fabric (including the tassel detail), which has been recovered and used to craft this ‘dress’.

Due to all these facts and questions, I would hesitate to call this an Aesthetic Dress, as I do not think it was a truly functional garment, and it is unlikely to have been worn in public (however the painting does fit within the genre of Aestheticism with its use of the sunflower motif). I would certainly classify it as an Artistic Dress, however, in terms of it being an artistic construction of costume for the purposes of modelling, evocative of a sartorial fantasy. In my view, Aesthetic Dress develops when Artistic Dress leaves the studio and home, and is crafted to be artistically expressive, but also appropriate for public presentation. As such, from the 1870s and into the 1890s, we have an overlap of these terms where, in many cases, either is appropriate. All Aesthetic Dress is Artistic Dress; but not all Artistic Dress is strictly Aesthetic Dress. In addition to being worn in private social functions, such gowns began to be seen in more public artistic spaces such as the Royal Academy. Then, in 1877, these new ‘Aesthetes’ were given their own temple in which they might display their sartorial taste: The Grosvenor Gallery.

No discussion of Aesthetic Dress can be made without including the Grosvenor Gallery, and in fact, most treatments of this subject are born out of examining this new art venture, which even had the nod of approval from the Royal Academy. As Hamilton put it in his 1882 *The Aesthetic Movement in England*:

It was by the foundation of Sir Coutts Lindsay’s Grosvenor Gallery a few years ago that strength and solidity were first given to the movement amongst the artists of the school. They thus obtained a head quarters for their art, and the founder was one of themselves in his opinions. Although nothing can take from the venerable Royal Academy its historical prestige, yet it has certainly found a formidable rival in the Bond-street gallery.⁶⁴

As the Grosvenor Gallery has been so well and thoroughly covered elsewhere, I will not focus on the gallery or its importance in artistic society here.⁶⁵ For the purposes of this research, it is simply important to understand that, like the Royal Academy, the Grosvenor Gallery became, from its opening in 1877 and through the 1880s, the main gathering point for artists and elite society to mingle, to see and be seen. This has obvious important implications for setting trends in dress, for these private views were reported on in the fashionable press. In fact, an 1881 report from *The Queen*, titled ‘Dress at the Private Views of the Grosvenor Gallery and the Royal Academy’ might even be a description of the same scene Frith rendered in his famous *Private View* painting [fig. 5.1] (see discussion next chapter). The article verifies the importance of these events to the dissemination of Artistic Dress:

⁶⁴ Hamilton, *The Aesthetic Movement in England* (1882), 23.

⁶⁵ There are numerous texts on the Grosvenor Gallery which discuss fashion, but perhaps the most thorough discussion of this is chapter four of Kim Wahl’s 2004 PhD dissertation *Fashioning the Female Artistic Self*, ‘The Grosvenor Gallery as Context and Climate for Artistic Dressing.’

If it be frankly admitted by those who go to private views that they go to see the people rather than the pictures, it must be allowed that the sight is a notable one at the Grosvenor Gallery. Perhaps nowhere could we see better expressed than we do in those crimson-draped rooms, some of the characteristics of the day's fashions and eccentricities in dress and manners, or carry away, after having scanned the crowd, a more vivid impression of the artistic and intellectual activity of the present... Every other person would seem to be one whom it is worth seeing... Here is Mr Browning, Professor Huxley... Mr Holman Hunt, Mr Burne-Jones, Mr Morris... Miss Terry... Mr Leslie Stevens, Mr Thackeray-Ritchie...

No wonder that the pictures on the walls occupy but the background of our thoughts...⁶⁶

The article also reports on what was worn in great detail, as many of these kind of reports did. I will not repeat these lengthy descriptions here, but rather note that the author confirms that Aesthetic Dress is both fashionable, and for some, recognises that for some, it is used as a means of creative self-identification:

The ladies' dresses showed last Friday at the Grosvenor Gallery that the aesthetic impulse is still active. There were many quaint and gracefully wrought-out costumes, pleasant in their quiet tinting, brightened by a strong touch of colour; and there were not a few garbs that proclaimed an appreciation on the part of the wearer of the art of dress regarded as means of expression.⁶⁷

Of particular note in this aspect is the patroness of the Grosvenor, Blanche, Lady Lindsay, who alongside her husband Sir Coutts Lindsay (another amateur artist) built this gallery (and financed it with her own sizable fortune).⁶⁸ As the woman behind the Grosvenor, she was certainly in the right place and position to set fashion trends, and, like the other women mentioned here – all regular attendees at the Grosvenor – she became an Aesthetic style icon. In fact, visitors to the grand opening were greeted by a portrait of Lady Lindsay in Aesthetic Dress [fig. 4.31], made by Watts in 1876-7 expressly for the purpose. An accomplished artist and musician, Lady Lindsay stands playing her beloved Stradivarius, her body turned away but her head turned back towards the viewer, so that we may see the elaborate back of her gown. Made of what appears to be satin in the artistically fashionable olive green (which we have seen repeatedly now), the sleeves are puffed and gathered with four embroidered floral bands down the arms. We cannot see the front of the broad white collar, but it may be a v-neck, mirroring the back. But notice the skirt does not depart too far from conventional fashion, and is closely fitted to her body and gathered into an ornate bustle in the back.

Lady Lindsay was already an Aesthetic dresser by this point; she wears a somewhat less conventional gown in an earlier portrait [fig. 4.32] made in 1874 by Joseph Middleton Jopling (his

⁶⁶ Anonymous, "Dress at the Private Views of the Grosvenor Gallery and the Royal Academy," *The Queen*, 1881.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Gere's *Artistic Circles* includes a chapter 'Amateurs and Aesthetes' which discusses the ways in which aristocratic society participated in artistic life, but as well were limited by their position to fully pursue it. Sir Coutts Lindsay and Lord George Howard are quintessential examples of this.

wife, Louise, famously painted by Millais, was also an artist, noted Aesthete, and a close friend of Lady Lindsay). Here she is seated, holding her violin and looking straight on at the viewer. The dress is closer in style to those worn by Virginia Dalrymple and the Hueffer portrait of Laura Alma-Tadema: a high round neck, and long puffed sleeves, although here they are slashed. The dress is dark blue velvet, and appears to have some small ruffled detail of self in the skirt. White lace trim is apparent at the cuffs and collar, and may indicate a light chemise or underdress. We cannot see the fullness of the skirt clearly, nor the back, but it is likely straight as the other examples indicate.

The dresses discussed in this chapter are examples of alternative fashion worn by society ladies at this time that were clearly expressive of their artistic interests and pursuits. From these, we can begin to catalogue the defining characteristics of the new Aesthetic Dress: sumptuous fabrics (velvet or silk), cut to flatter the ‘natural’ figure (whether corseted or not), skirts that fall with little or no supporting undergarments, and nostalgic, historicised references which have been updated so as not to stray too far from an acceptable silhouette. While we often find rich ‘natural’ colours (olive green, dark blue, earth-toned oranges, yellows and browns) and loose sleeves, the range of dresses show that these are often down to personal taste, and cannot necessarily be used to characterise Aesthetic Dress as a whole (Whistler’s gown for Frances Leyland is a case in point). But it can be said that, in a general sense, it is a simpler, purer style than conventional fashion, void of the decorative buttons and trimmings that Godwin saw as a ‘sham.’ It is a category of Artistic Dress; and the simpler ‘At Home’ wear in the examples worn by Ellen Terry, Laura Alma-Tadema, and earlier by the Pattles, are exemplary of Artistic Dress without strictly being Aesthetic Dress. There are certainly grey areas, but these latter dresses are simply too unstructured – and hence informal – to be worn in public.

One final point that arises in this period of Aestheticism is worth noting. There has been uncertainty in crediting women as the driving force behind Artistic Dress in earlier decades (and indeed a tendency to credit male artists like Rossetti, Morris, and Whistler with dress designs, even when proof is scant or contrary). Throughout the 1870s, we find incontrovertible evidence that this is not necessarily the case, and that women have as much to do with their sartorial decisions in regards to Artistic Dress as the men in their sphere—perhaps more. A small article written on the very cusp of the following decade indicates the way in which the women associated with artists were coming in to their own. ‘Artists’ Wives’, published in the *Aberdeen Weekly Journal* on 27 November 1879, discusses the transformation of this woman who, the author opines, formerly wore a ‘limp gown, depressed aspect, and generally faded appearance.’⁶⁹ The contemporary artist’s wife was nonesuch wallflower:

⁶⁹ Anonymous, “Artists’ Wives,” *Aberdeen Weekly Journal Issue 7731* (Aberdeen, Scotland, November 27, 1879). Possibly syndicated from a larger newspaper.

In the present day the artist's wife is by no means the social cypher; the last ten years, or rather the ten that came before the present decade, have been a golden time for artists, and their fair help-meets were among the first to profit by the fact of pictures being at a premium, in more ways than one. Artistic dress, a large circle of acquaintance, life made as beautiful as it is in the power of divine art... Robes of peacock plush, of olive brocades, of blood-red silks, of dull orange velvet, pleasingly relieved with light blue slashes; on attire of such modest device and tint does the artist's wife ring the changes...⁷⁰

While speaking specifically of artist's wives, this can certainly be applied to sisters, daughters, patrons, and lovers as well. Through their dress, these women made their presence, and attitudes, known. But dress is just the hallmark of an artistic character that is all her own:

As a rule, an artist's wife, nowadays, has some distinct metier of her own, so that the glory round her brows is not all reflected from the aureole which surrounds her lord's; she is no pale moon merely bowing his light. Perhaps she is an artist herself, or she has written a book of art criticism... or she is a musician... and has even published one or two little songs, words and music both by herself, and with aesthetic titles and pages, designed by some artistic friend; these she will even be good enough to sing at aesthetic reunions, and is highly delighted when they are noticed in the *Queen*. It is very likely that she may play the violin, and far from improbable that she has a great fondness for private theatricals... or she may even turn novelist or poetess.⁷¹

These lines remind us very specifically of the women mentioned here, particularly the artist Laura Alma-Tadema, and the violinist Lady Blanche Lindsay. The author, although perhaps somewhat condescending to contemporary ears, means to impress the individuality and importance of these women and their achievements in their own right, and as complementary to their more celebrated husbands. And, perhaps, she also means to empower other women who yet find themselves lost in the shadow of an illustrious spouse, to find their own talents and see how they can shine.

No doubt the inspiration for new forms of costume is mutual between men and women, and each other, occurring in these years of increased interaction between artists and the upper class, a meeting of intelligentsia to create a beautiful and refined way of living. This artistic cultivation gives way to further discussion on the subject of dress, first perhaps through journalistic reportage on who wore what; then through more theoretical discussions in the manner of Merrifield and Godwin, such as Margaret Oliphant's 'Dress' for the *Art at Home* series in 1878, and Eliza Haweis' articles for *Queen* and her publication of *The Art of Dress* in 1879 [see the next chapter]. The 1870s were the years when Artistic Dress moves out of the home and into the public domain, but it is the 1880s which give rise to heated debates on fashion, which will shape artistic sartorial habits through the end of the century.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Chapter Five: The Artistic Dress Debate (ca. 1880 - 1890)

Dress is an Index.

The science of clothes, which we call dress, is no doubt a legitimate branch of Art, however mismanaged. So surely does dress, in its broad outlines, betray the measure of Art feeling, and less directly the condition of Art knowledge and culture, and so certain an outcome is it of the conditions of life, that is almost possible to say, "Tell me what sort of people they are, and I will tell you what sort of dresses they wear."

A. Mrs Haweis, 'The Aesthetics of Dress', *Art Journal*, 1880.¹

In her 1880 article 'The Aesthetics of Dress', Mrs (Mary Eliza) Haweis echoes the views of Eastlake, Godwin and others that dress should be the purview of the artist, and is itself an art.² Whilst Haweis is an advocate for what this thesis labels Artistic Dress, she applies her theory more broadly in this article, which is a condensed version of the ideas she put forth in her 1879 text *The Art of Dress* and 1878 articles for the *Art Journal*. In particular, the article opens with the above lines, setting forth the notion that dress is not only 'a legitimate branch of Art', but that what individuals wear speaks directly to the 'sort of people they are'; in other words, fashion discloses identity.

Those who adopted Artistic Dress were conscious about the type of identity they wished to convey, whether it was from a genuine 'Art feeling' as Haweis puts it, or perhaps in the less lofty sense of being part of a trend. Either way, they were making choices about their wardrobe that set them somewhat outside the norm. However, by the end of the 1870s and into the 1880s, such individuals were moving well within fashionable society, as we have seen in the previous chapter. William Powell Frith's painting *A Private View at the Royal Academy, 1881* [fig. 5.1] shows the way in which those who adopted Artistic Dress (and we are still within the period where this might also be referred to as Aesthetic Dress) intermingled with those who chose more mainstream fashionable Victorian dress.

Painted throughout 1881-82, and finished and exhibited in 1883, Frith meant it to be a satirical commentary on Aestheticism, as he commented in his 1888 autobiography:

Seven years ago certain ladies delighted to display themselves at public gatherings in what are called æsthetic dresses; in some cases the costumes were pretty enough, in others they seemed to rival each other in ugliness of form and oddity of color. There were – and still are, I believe—preachers of æstheticism in dress; but I think, and hope, that the preaching is much less effective than it used to be. The contrast between the really beautiful costumes

¹ (Mrs) Mary Eliza Haweis, 'The Aesthetics of Dress' in *The Art Journal* (London: Hodgson & Graves, 1880), 97.

² Another text which discusses these matters is: (Mrs) Margaret Oliphant, *Dress* (London, 1878). Written at the same time as Haweis' it is somewhat more limited in its approach, but discusses similar concerns in terms of freedom of movement and historical dress.

of some of the lady *habituées* of our private view and the eccentric garments of others, together with the opportunity offered for portraits of eminent persons, suggested a subject for a picture, and I hastened to avail myself for it. Beyond the desire of recording for posterity the aesthetic craze as regards dress, I wished to hit the folly of listening to self-elected critics in matters of taste, whether in dress or art. I therefore planned a group, consisting of a well-known apostle of the beautiful, with a herd of eager worshippers surrounding him. He is supposed to be explaining his theories to willing ears, taking some picture on the Academy walls for his text.³

That ‘apostle of the beautiful,’ seen in the foreground at centre right, is of course Oscar Wilde, who in 1881 was a new neighbour to Whistler & Rossetti in Chelsea. By the time the painting was displayed, however, Wilde had already conducted his lecture tour of America in service of Gilbert & Sullivan’s satirical operetta *Patience*, which famously lampooned Aestheticism (Wilde was sent to ‘educate’ Americans on Aestheticism, ostensibly so they understood the farce). Frith surrounds Wilde, who is still in his bachelor days, with adoring ladies who seem to hang on his every word. The gathering must have caused Wilde’s more sceptical critics to chuckle when it was displayed in 1883.

Frith’s painting echoes the kind of reportage seen in fashionable magazines of the day, which catalogued in great detail the clothing seen at social events like private views, as noted at the end of the last chapter. In addition to capturing a quintessential private view event, Frith achieved his goal of ‘recording for posterity the aesthetic craze as regards dress’ by rendering three excellent examples of ladies’ Aesthetic Dress, which were surely painted from life. At left, two ladies are presented in green and ochre (along with a child in an earthy orange dress with matching bonnet), all natural colours lauded in Aesthetic circles, as we have seen. The woman at left wears a golden ochre gown shaped by loose pleats, and styled so that it is gathered up to reveal an ivory ruffled satin underskirt. The green dress worn by the woman at right is a nod to a more medieval style, with sleeves that are puffed and slashed at the top then tight to the wrist; a low, square décolletage over a high-collared chemise; and a long, comparatively straight skirt with a castellated hem. Her dress is accessorised with a sunflower to match the gold trim, and she wears a dark green velvet beret-like cap.

One of Wilde’s admirers wears the third and perhaps most unique of the dresses. Seen from the back, it employs a Watteau pleat which, rather than trailing over the long train of the Princess-line gown, is looped up through a strap that cleverly buttons to the side of the skirt. The sleeves are ruched above and below the elbow, and loose at the shoulder and elbow, which is both pleasing to

³ William Powell Frith, *My Autobiography and Reminiscences* (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1888), 441. Frith also gives a brief account of his experience with the model Jenny Trip, who he employed to pose for an aesthete. He states that he was not a great employer of models, and only did so for the aesthetes, which reveals that although the more famous people sat for him, he did not recruit ‘actual aesthetes’ for these figures, but composed them himself.

the eye and functional in providing freedom of movement. The gown is otherwise unadorned, the warm salmon tone and the draping of the fabric itself providing the only ornamentation.

In placing these unique gowns side by side with more traditional Victorian ladies' dress, with their hourglass corseted figures and pronounced bustles, this painting demonstrates the differences between mainstream and Aesthetic fashion that would cause further debate in the 1880s. As well, Frith hints at the mounting strain within the artistic circles themselves. Wilde is dressed in an earthy brown suit, much like that of Leighton at centre, but he has a signature lily tucked in his buttonhole as a nod to his Aesthetic tendencies. He does, however, also wear a silk top hat like many of the other proper gentlemen (an item he would later criticise), like the older, more conservative John Everett Millais at right.⁴ Wilde's costume as rendered by Frith, and as well Frith's intention for representing him as noted above, seems to almost foreshadow the coming debates of the mid-1880s Wilde would engage in, very publicly, with Whistler on dress and the arbitration of taste.

Frith's work relates to an attitude on fashion reflected in Haweis' quote that opens this chapter: *Dress is an Index*. Frith catalogues people – some very recognisable (note Ellen Terry just over Wilde's left shoulder) – by their dress. He has stereotyped them, so that as Haweis states, 'Tell me what sort of people they are, and I will tell you what sort of dresses they wear.' Frith shows us what sort of dresses they wear, and thereby tells us what sort of people they are. Dress relates directly to social identity for Haweis and Frith, and as we have seen in the previous chapters, many others. By the start of 1880, the phenomenon of Artistic Dress was prevalent enough to be the subject of much discussion and debate in the literature of the day. The aforementioned rise of the fashion magazine enabled a very public forum for this, as did the popularity of public lectures by artistic luminaries such as Godwin, Whistler and Wilde; alongside the fashion for advice manuals such as those by Eliza Haweis and others.

This chapter explores examples of the debates that erupt throughout this decade (and there were many) which construct and sometimes deconstruct sartorial codes for artistic identity. The discussion here will largely focus on key textual examples of these debates, as a great deal of the extant Aesthetic costume is from this decade, and as such has been discussed thoroughly elsewhere, particularly in the exhibits and texts mentioned throughout this thesis. However, one notable exception, a dress ostensibly designed by the sculptor Hamo Thornycroft [fig 5.21], will be

⁴ Millais' paintings of this period has been recently considered within the context of Aestheticism in exhibitions ('Millais' at the Tate Britain and 'Cult of Beauty' at the V&A), particularly his portraits of Louise Jopling (1879; National Portrait Gallery: NPG6612) and Kate Perugini (1880; Private Collection). However, labelling him an Aesthete has been a subject of debate. In 1882, Hamilton stated that neither Millais nor Hunt could 'be actually identified with the present Æsthetic movement, and indeed, in the magnificent residence of Millais, at Palace Gate, Æstheticism is conspicuous by its absence, and no Æsthetic poet dedicates sonnets to him.' Hamilton, *The Aesthetic Movement in England* (1882), 5.

discussed because new information sheds light on how this significant dress (now in the collection of the V&A) came to be made. The Dress Reform societies will also be considered briefly in this chapter, as this is the time they are at their most active, and they have substantial bearing on Artistic Dress as it comes to fruition in the 1890s. Through these examples, the way in which Aesthetic Dress and Dress Reform intersect and conflate under the umbrella of Artistic Dress in this decade shall become clear.

Haweis' writing launches this discussion of the debates surrounding dress in the 1880s as so much of what she says either borrows from earlier and concomitant arguments, or underpins much of the discourse that will be discussed in this chapter. An overview of the text itself is useful in understanding these discourses, and a more focused look at her section on 'Præ-Raphaelite Dress' will serve to elucidate the ways in which Artistic Dress becomes a more codified and far-reaching style in these years.

Mrs Haweis and The Art of Dress

As indicated in chapter two, Mary Eliza Haweis is one of the earliest to discuss, in print, the concept of Pre-Raphaelite Dress; however she does not do so until 1878-79, at which time Pre-Raphaelitism is well into its second wave, and its key practitioners, such as Rossetti, Morris and Burne-Jones, might be better placed within the contexts of the Arts and Crafts and Aestheticism. However, Haweis' adoption of the label 'Præ-Raphaelite' where she refers to those who we might today call 'Aesthetes' indicates the term's on-going usage and signification to her readership of a certain artistic set of society—to which those discussed in the previous chapter were integral.

From the first chapter, Haweis positions 'Dress' as a form of 'Art.' Like Lady Eastlake did in her own *Art of Dress* in 1852, Haweis points to Renaissance artists as her foremost examples, and specifically points to those that were known to have designed costume:

But 'fashion' is no phantasy of idle minds, no random despot, but a tendency worth study, an eminently instructive, rightly understood, being, with all its blunders, as direct an outcome of the love of beauty as schools of sculpture and painting. It is the last expression of the underlying impulse, the dancing, changing waves which vibrate alternately between the desire to reveal and the necessity to conceal human beauty; and the fashion of Dress was certainly recognised as the legitimate province of the artist, in the days when art was most precious and most vigorous. We know that Holbein, Jan Van Eyck, and the mighty Michael Angelo designed 'fashions' while at the pinnacle of their fame.⁵

She keenly points out the tension between revealing and concealing the body that was previously discussed in relation to paintings by Whistler and Watts in the last chapter. By the second chapter on 'Taste in Dress', she moves towards more contemporary thinkers and critics, echoing William Morris' Arts and Crafts sentiments in her opening statement: 'Everything without purpose is

⁵ Haweis, *The Art of Dress*, 13-14.

without beauty.⁶ As well, she vaguely quotes Ruskin (“‘A fault in feeling induces also a fault in style,” says Ruskin somewhere...’);⁷ and in a section titled ‘Imbecile Ornament’, she relates views similar to Godwin’s on fashion and architecture:

Natural taste will detect at once a flagrant breach of natural laws; and this is why nothing that us purposeless is in any high sense beautiful. Any part of dress, like any part of architecture, which has no *raison d’être*, and does not belong to the rest, and form part of an harmonious whole, is ungraceful and uncomfortable-looking—in fact, bad in art. How much better is the kerchief that really folds, than a bodice trimmed to imitate a kerchief!... No detail ought to be admitted in a dress that is not indispensable there.⁸

She furthermore evokes Ruskin and Arts and Crafts ideals in her section ‘Truth in Art’, in which she points to the celebration of construction seen in medieval craftsmanship. This leads to her final section of this chapter, ‘Freedom in Art’, where she makes a democratic appeal to the wearer to know their own mind, and use dress to express themselves:

It is no part of a milliner’s business to think for us. It is not her province to consider what amount, form, or fabric best accords with our tone of mind, habits, and appearance; that is the wearer’s province. And until individual opinion is admitted to be free, we can have no true, original art in England, in dress, nor anything else: for the secret of all true art is freedom, to *think for ourselves*, and *to do as we like*.⁹

In this, she again echoes Eastlake, who as we read earlier criticised women for wearing styles inappropriate to their body and/or age; and Godwin who blames the problems of fashion on the Milliner. She also presses these points in a similar manner to them by referring to antique costume in her third chapter ‘The Use of Dress’, particularly that of the Greeks (this forms a large part of her *Queen* article as well).

I make these comparisons not to suggest that Haweis was merely a copyist in her attitudes, but rather to illustrate her engagement with the fashion discourse of the period. She was clearly reading and listening to the guidance of those whom she deemed expert, and was distilling them into articles and advice books which may have been more accessible or appealing to her reader. Haweis translates these concepts into instructional recommendations for the wearer, and applies them specifically to contemporary dress as a female voice of authority and understanding.

For example, she instructs that ‘The three great *requirements* of dress are (1) to protect, (2) to conceal, (3) to display.’¹⁰ It is interesting that while the first two might be considered practical considerations, she labels ‘to display’ as a requirement, thereby suggesting that a core function of fashion is to show off the human form (and by extension, the personality or identity). She also shows that she is aware that for many women beauty is a priority in her somewhat sexist remark,

⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁸ Ibid., 19-20.

⁹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰ Ibid., 24.

‘Now, dress *ought* to be beautiful, useful, and comfortable (I invert the common order advisedly, out of regard for feminine obstinacy)...’¹¹

These three requirements may be related to the ‘Three Rules of Dress’ that begin her next chapter on the ‘Abuse of Dress’ with:

1. That it shall not contradict the natural lines of the body.
2. That the proportions of dress shall obey the proportions of the body.
3. That the dress shall reasonably express the character of the wearer.¹²

Haweis, concerned with natural lines and proportions of the body, again uses these practical considerations in relation to a third more conceptual rule about the ‘character of the wearer.’ Because how might one judge what sort of person one is if they are wearing garments that are out of character with their personality (or their age, or position)? To Haweis, dress should serve to classify as well as clothe.

In these chapters, Haweis also begins to discuss dress problems that relate less to art and more to health, showing sympathy for Dress Reform. She quips: ‘The Englishwoman has indeed for many generations refused to confess to legs, but she has “come to”; not as wisely as the Turkish woman, but as well—too well.’¹³ Later, in the chapter titled ‘Wasteful Dress’, she includes an amusing illustration of two women venturing to enjoy lawn tennis in highly impractical, tightly bound skirts, and subtitles the image ‘Live Mummies’ [fig. 5.2]. But her discussion turns more serious when she launches an attack on what becomes the greatest common enemy of both Artistic Dress and Dress Reform: the corset. In a section called ‘Tight Lacing is Mischievous’ she states:

Tight lacing destroys the law of proportion and balance—for it is never necessary except in stout persons, and in them it distorts the natural lines of the body into a coarse immoderate curve, and gives an appearance of uncertainty and unsafeness.¹⁴

Haweis even makes the rather extreme suggestion that tight lacing is worse than Chinese foot binding, as in that case no internal organs are harmed. She accompanies her arguments with illustrations that show the unnatural effects on the anatomy [figs. 5.3]. Images like these were often used in Dress Reform texts, and were as well debated as to their veracity. Only recently has Valerie Steele been able to show that they do hold some degree of accuracy when she X-rayed a contemporary tight-lacer for her book *The Corset* [fig. 5.4].¹⁵ While the organs are not perhaps as drastically rearranged, the compression of the ribs is marked.

One of the more surprising chapters in this book is entitled ‘Cheap Dress’, where Haweis lauds the economical value of dress inspired by art history. This aspect is something we find in Jeanette

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 33.

¹³ Ibid., 25.

¹⁴ Ibid., 39.

¹⁵ Valerie Steele, *The Corset: A Cultural History* (2005: Library of Congress, 2006), 110.

Marshall's diaries as well. Shonfield tells us 'the attraction of "artistic" costumes may to a considerable extent have been their economy: "As we cannot do the ultra-fashionable," [Marshall] wrote in 1883, about to don a remodelled eighteenth-months-old aesthetic dress, "we'll be artistic at any rate."¹⁶ Shonfield makes the astute conclusion that, as Haweis suggests in her text, the materials used can be much less costly than those employed in high Victorian fashion:

And the conventional high-fashion effects of the 1870s and 1880s were expensive in labour, material and trimming, and also difficult to achieve for a home dressmaker.

On the other hand, by incorporating some of the least outré aesthetic affects in one's wardrobe, one could dress becomingly and quite inexpensively. The fabrics of Miss Marshall's aesthetic wardrobe—muslins, poplins, velveteens, heather mixtures—were relatively cheap; some of the secondary colours could be achieved by dyeing; embroidery—one of the mainstays of aesthetic decoration—was her favourite craft; the accessories of aesthetic costume—amber beads, peacock feathers, Liberty silk handkerchiefs in subtle tones—fitted comfortably into a restricted budget.¹⁷

Thus we may consider that some of the purpose of Artistic Dress, particularly women's dresses, evolved for economic reasons. However the actual creative pleasure derived from making them must be considered as well. For men, this came largely in designing dresses for the purpose of rendering them (Whistler, for example); for women, however, it may have been in making the actual objects, whether made for modelling costume or, ultimately, daily wear.¹⁸ There was certainly the joy of creative expression as well as practicality involved in the conception and crafting of such gowns, and Haweis is keen to point this out through encouraging a sense of individual expression:

One is, not following the fashion, but adopting the style of some period to be studied from pictures, which is soon seen to be a 'fad' of yours, and people get tired of making fun of it if you hold out, having right on your side. The economy of this is wonderful: for your dress never goes out of fashion, having never been in it, and you are, in all educated eyes, a pleasing object. A few dresses, all in first-rate material, thus carry you over many years.¹⁹

Hence Haweis rather astonishingly encourages bucking actual fashion trends, suffering through being made a mockery, and then enjoying one's own trend once people tire of making fun of it. In this section, she seems to have those 'Præ-Raphaelites' in mind, who are the focus of her tenth chapter.

As pointed out in the second chapter of this thesis, Haweis makes some of the earliest references to 'Præ-Raphaelite' Dress in print, some two decades after it supposedly began (but as this research has illustrated, there was not an actual Pre-Raphaelite Dress movement). She uses it in a retrospective manner, showing how these artists used what she calls 'Art-Protestant' costume in painting in styles which fashionable ladies might replicate in life. In seeking to make 'fourteenth-

¹⁶ Shonfield, "Miss Marshall and the Cimabue Browns," 68.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁸ For more on this, see: Barbara Burman, *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking* (Berg, 1999); and also: Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (Women's Press, 1984).

¹⁹ Haweis, *The Art of Dress*, 52.

century costumes applicable to the present day,' Haweis divides her discussion into considerations of I. Shape; II. Colours and Materials; and III. Hair-dressing, and other details.²⁰ In discussing shape, she points to the discourse of the body that we have already seen repeatedly, and debates which are reaching a peak at this time:

One of the most important features in a graceful figure—hence one of the most conspicuous and valuable innovations of the 'Præ-Raphaelite' school—is the waist. The first aim is to have an 'antique' waist, which a vulgar mind would pronounce horribly thick—thick, like the Venus de Medici's—thick, like that far nobler Venus of Milo... it is impossible to preach too strongly against the folly and ugliness of tight lacing...

The waist of a 'Præ-Raphaelite' is rather short, where a waist ought to be, in fact, between the hips and the last rib. Her skirt is cut full or scanty, as she chooses, but is never tied to her legs with strings and elastics. She can, therefore, stoop without gasping or cracking her corset-bone, and can sit down or walk upstairs at will, unlike some votaries of present fashions...

Her sleeves are cut extraordinarily high on the shoulder, sometimes a little fuller to fit the shoulder-bone, for it is *de rigueur* that a 'Præ-Raphaelite' should be capable of moving her arms when dressed as freely as when undressed...

Thus a 'Præ-Raphaelite' woman is an active, and independent woman; not only does she possess mobility in her attire, she requires it.²¹

Here we can see in her descriptions the dresses which were being worn by many of the women discussed thus far, like Ellen Terry, Jane Morris, and Rosalind Howard, at the same time she was writing this.

One of the more technical aspects of her text is her address of colour. Haweis doesn't just discuss the problems of the garish colours produced with the invention of aniline dye, but she employs colour theory – complete with diagrams – to educate the reader. She discusses tonality, hue, and once again blames people's lack of knowledge on the milliner:

But the milliner has never told them *what shades* of blue and yellow, what shades of red and green, are alone tolerable together, for she does not know herself. She has never had an art-education, and is paid by her employer for the activity of her fingers, not for her faculty for harmonising tints, which is a rare gift of nature, not always supplied even by an art-education.²²

Finally, her discussion of treatment of hair, in which she declares 'There is no ornament so pretty as good hair well arranged,'²³ results in perhaps one of her most amusing passages:

Too few persons recognise the responsibility which belongs to everyone who enters society at all—that of not becoming a nuisance to the rest, in looks as well as in speech and in deed. Certain rules for speech and bearing have been found absolutely necessary for the machinery of life to go on smoothly, and they are called courtesy. Dirty nails would be probably held as much a sign of ill-breeding as improper behaviour or the habit of flat contradiction. Is not an uncared-for head as discourteous to others as an uncared-for hand? May it not be even more distressing? For one cannot put one's head into a glove.²⁴

²⁰ Ibid., 100.

²¹ Ibid., 101-102.

²² Ibid., 114.

²³ Ibid., 118.

²⁴ Ibid.

Wit aside, this is an important passage in consideration of one point that I hope to press as a salient aspect of Artistic Dress: *style*. Artistic Dress is not merely about the cut and colour of garment, but of the overall *look*. While we might not wish to give too much credence to Jeanette Marshall's rather unkind reports on the 'doubtful cleanliness' of some of these individuals, we do know that some, such as Rossetti, were somewhat unkempt.²⁵ Haweis incorporates here the importance of taking care of all aspects of one's appearance to look properly turned out. Style includes not just clothing, but arrangement of hair, accessories, and the general cleanliness of one's person. Clearly there must have been an impetus for her inclusion of these points.

Haweis' popular text was important for bringing together a set of values that reflected a growing consciousness in Victorian society about fashion in terms of personal artistic expression. This is surely not an invention of the nineteenth century, as the comparatively larger body of scholarship on eighteenth century fashion reveals. However, I do argue that the direct relationship of fashion to personal creative expression at this time is one of the early hallmarks of modernism that will certainly come into its fullness in the early twentieth century. Haweis' texts are published at the cusp of the 1880s, which subsequently sees an explosion of theories, advices, and arguments over what one should wear—and what one should not.

1882

There is little doubt that by the start of the 1880s, Aestheticism was a trend in fashionable circles, and was discussed increasingly in periodicals of the time. And if it had been unknown to the middle classes, this was rectified through popular parody at the very least, but notably in Du Maurier's caricatures of the fictional Aesthetes 'Postlethwaite', 'Maudle' and the 'Cimabue Browns' in *Punch* [fig. 5.5]; and in two popular stage productions: *The Colonel* by *Punch's* editor F.C. Burnand (opened 2 February 1881) and the even more successful *Patience, or Bunthorne's Bride* [fig. 5.6], produced by W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan (opened 23 April 1881). Each of these mocked the 'aesthetic craze', but as a consequence promoted it as well, even if unintentionally. Godwin reported that he had seen the lead actress of *The Colonel* leaving the theatre wearing an outfit that 'was modelled line for line on that she had worn as an aesthete in the comedy, and which the audience had been invited to ridicule.'²⁶ But it was *Patience* that arguably mocked with the most warmth, partially through the display of costumes designed by Gilbert from Liberty & Co. 'Art' textiles [figs. 5.7-10], which were reaching their peak of success (more on this below). In this manner, there is an inherent irony to the farce, in that while it mocked the trend, it

²⁵ See discussions of Marshall's comments in chapter three, and Marsh's descriptions of Rossetti in chapter two.

²⁶ From Godwin's review for *The Colonel* from the 29 July 1881 issue of *The Architect*; quoted in Squire, "E. W. Godwin and the House of Liberty," 92.

did so self-consciously as both Gilbert and Sullivan were well received in artistic circles, and enjoyed friendships with noted Aesthetes. The costumes, though somewhat more absurd and flamboyant for the stage (particularly the placement of large flowers on the women's dresses and the overlarge hats worn by the men), made the wearing of Artistic Dress even more fashionable, as well as accessible, given that audience members could acquire the same fabrics from Liberty (which, it could be argued, was receiving a nice bit of free advertising).²⁷ *Patience*, which ran until November 1882, had a rapid effect on dress in certain circles:

What is called the aesthetic craze in dress is a sort of reaction from the stiffened, overweighted, and tightened fashion perpetuated by the tyranny of the modiste, whose chief idea is to put as much material as possible into a feminine garment without regard to convenience or health. The suggestions conveyed by such costumes as were seen on the stage in Mr. W. S. Gilbert's "Patience" are certainly not without their value; and the taste for subdued and harmonious colours has become so general, that a glaring red, an emerald green, or a cerulean blue, is never seen now in what is commonly known as polite society.²⁸

These three parodies are usually cited in discussions of Aesthetic Dress, and in particular the *Punch* cartoons are often used as examples for dress study. Leoneé Ormond devotes a chapter of her Du Maurier biography to his view on Aestheticism, and the evaluation of aesthetic clothes here is largely based on *Punch*. However she observes, '[h]ow far Du Maurier is an accurate guide to real aesthete fashions it is difficult to say.'²⁹ While certainly their foundations lie in the reality of Aesthetic Dress, and point to it as a fashionable trend, I have chosen not to focus my research on these examples, as they are fictive resources, if based on fact. Instead, I would like to steer this study on into 1882, in the wake of these parodies, to a time when Aestheticism is being treated by practitioners as a serious topic worthy of discussion and, of course, debate.

It was, for example, the year Godwin helped establish the Costume Society, becoming its honorary secretary. The membership included many luminaries of the Aesthetic art world: the Alma-Tademas, George Aitchison (architect for Leighton House), George Boughton, the Comyns Carrs, Henry Holiday, Constantine Ionides, Leighton, Coutts Lindsay, Whistler, Wilde and his wife Constance, to name just a few. Upon its formation, the *Magazine of Art* reported Society's aims:

The newly-formed Costume Society will publish a quarterly volume—of prints and chromo-lithographs—of the costumes of the world. Mr. Alma-Tadema, Mr. Godwin, Mr. Boughton, and Mr. Linton are members of the society; and promises of all imaginable assistance have been received from the curators of the libraries and museums of Berlin, Paris, St. Petersburg, Brussels, Florence and other cities.³⁰

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

²⁸ Anonymous, "Fitness and Fashion," *The Magazine of Art*, 1882, 336.

²⁹ Ormond, *George Du Maurier*, 273.

³⁰ William Ernest Henley, ed., *The Magazine of Art*, vol. V (London & Paris: Cassell, Peter, Galpin & Co., 1882), xlvi, <http://www.archive.org/details/magazineofart05londonuoft>.

Surrounding this event there seemed to be a flurry of activity in fashion discourse in this particular year. As such, I wish to focus on a few key examples to examine the way in which these sometimes heated debates begin to shape fashion and sartorial theory for the remainder of the century.

William Morris and ‘The Lesser Arts of Life’

At the start of the year, on the 21st of January, William Morris gave a lecture to the Birmingham and Midlands Institute, titled ‘Some of the Minor Arts of Life’. This was an expanded and refined version of his earlier 1877 lecture ‘The Lesser Arts’, and was published later in the year as part of a collection titled *Lectures in support for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings*, of which Morris was a central patron.

One of the areas which Morris decided to expand his discussion was on dress, a subject on which he had heretofore been silent, at least in print. We have already noted that in his personal life at least, Artistic Dress was prevalent in the wardrobe of his wife, and by this time, that of his daughters (see below). Morris himself was not particularly known as an eccentric dresser, unless one considers his pragmatic and unkempt style, which seems more down to the practicalities of being an artist than any overt fashion statement. His posthumous biographer, John Mackail, doesn’t have a lot to say about his dress, save a few passages which underscore that his clothing choices were unique, but related to his life as an artistic practitioner:

His dress always seemed full of his individuality. Certain youthful indiscretions in the way of purple trousers are remembered as having belonged to the time of the Oxford Brotherhood. But his ordinary dress had no special quality except great simplicity and untidiness... it was only in conventional dress that he looked really peculiar... In his suit of blue serge and soft felt hat, he had something of the look of a working engineer and something of that of a sailor... Indeed a stranger might very well, not only from his clothing, but from his rocking walk and ruddy complexion, have taken him for a Baltic sea-captain. In those days he had not yet adopted the blue cotton shirts which, in later years, became his invariable dress and almost of the essence of his appearance.³¹

It was perhaps Morris’ practical approach to dress which kept him from including it in his writings and lectures in a focused manner until the 1880s, when it had become a widely discussed topic. In his lecture on the ‘Lesser Arts’ of ‘pottery and glass-making; weaving, with its necessary servant dyeing; the craft of printing patterns on cloth and on paper; furniture;’ he opted to also include ‘the art of dress’ with ‘fear and trembling,’ no doubt an amusing reference to the heated debates this chapter seeks to impart, and of which his audience would have been keenly aware.³² He begins with a criticism of male dress, which like his peers centres on the drab tones and the problematic

³¹ J.W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris*, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1899), 216–17.

³² William Morris, “The Lesser Arts of Life (A Lecture Delivered 21 January 1882),” in *Lectures on Art Delivered in Support for the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1882), 174–232.

chimney-pot hat. However her approaches the subject with humour and charm marked with self-awareness that he is, perhaps, not the most fashionable of commentators:

The last of the Lesser Arts I have to speak of I come to with some trepidation; but it is so important to one half of the race of civilized mankind, the male half, that I will venture. Indeed I speak of the art of dress with the more terror because civilization has settled for us males that art shall have no place in our clothes, and that we must in this matter occupy the unamiable position of critics of our betters. Rebel as I am, I bow to that decision... I have not near enough courage even to suggest a rebellion against these stern sartorial laws; and after all one can slip into and out of the queer things with great ease, and that being the case, it is far more important to me what other people wear than what I wear: so that I ask leave to be an irresponsible critic for a few moments.³³

He then moves on to a more detailed discussion of female dress, but rather than merely attacking the corset and crinoline (which he does) through a promotion of classical and historic costume, he offers a reasoned and humourous look at more recent dress history, calling mid-eighteenth century dress ‘a kind of enchanted wood of abominations into which we need not venture.’ He showed an appreciation for the subsequent ‘graceful and simple’ style that followed ‘just before the French Revolution’; then blames the ‘affectations’ and ‘extravagances’ of Napoleonic period Neoclassical garments for the conservative backlash of fashion in the 1830s, calling their ‘grim modern respectability’ a ‘dire revenge.’ From here he discussed the ‘two periods of feminine dress’ he has lived through: first of the 1830s-40s (‘I well remember its horrors’), and then the period of the crinoline, about which he states ‘I have good hopes that one may say that the degradation of costume reached its lowest depth in this costume of the Second Empire.’

From here, Morris again takes a rather unique tactic to his advice on dress, one which stems from his Arts and Crafts ideals and the larger Socialist concerns that underpin them. He presents similar arguments in terms of female dress as Haweis did, particularly in relation to freedom, individuality, and resistance to the recommendations of milliners; however his language seems more sympathetic, almost feminist, in appreciating the new choices for female garments and what they mean for women’s emancipation:

...when woman’s dress is or may be on the whole graceful and sensible (please note that I say it may be); for the most hopeful sign of the present period is its freedom: in the two previous periods there was no freedom. In that of grim respectability a lady was positively under well-understood penalties not allowed to dress gracefully, she could not do it; under the reign of [the] crinoline, if she had dressed simply and beautifully, like a lady, in short, she would have been hooted in the streets; but nowadays, and for years past, a lady may dress quite simply and beautifully, and yet not be noticed as having anything peculiar or theatrical in her costume. Extravagances of fashion have not been lacking to us, but no one has been compelled to adopt them; every one might dress herself in the way which her own good sense told her suited her best. Now this, ladies, is the first and greatest necessity of rational and beautiful costume, that you should keep your liberty of choice; so I beg you to battle stoutly for it, or we shall all tumble into exploded follies again.³⁴

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

Morris encourages a sense of freedom and individuality and assures women that they will not be looked at askance for their choice in clothing. This assurance is somewhat questionable if we are to judge by the parodies of punch, and perhaps indicates the artistically privileged and liberal milieu in which Morris (& Company) dwelled.

Morris' advice isn't entirely altruistic, however, and is as much rooted in aesthetics as it is in social equality. Specifically, he shows a kinship with many of his fellow artists in his love of drapery, however he manages to cleverly link the desire to see the draped female form with the idea of maintaining her freedom:

Then next, your only chance of keeping that liberty is, to resist the imposition on costume of unnatural monstrosities. Garments should veil the human form, and neither caricature it, nor obliterate its lines: the body should be draped, and neither sewn up in a sack, nor stuck in the middle of a box: drapery, properly managed, is not a dead thing, but a living one, expressive of the endless beauty of motion; and if this be lost, half the pleasure of the eyes in common life is lost... the fashionable milliner has chiefly one end in view, how to hide and degrade the human body in the most expensive manner... Now, ladies, if you do not resist this to the bitter end, costume is ruined again, and all we males are rendered inexpressibly unhappy. So I beg of you fervently, do not allow yourselves to be upholstered like armchairs, but drape yourselves like women.³⁵

It is both an empowering and a sensual speech by Victorian standards, suggesting that to resist the unnatural aspect of the corset in favour of clothing which falls about the body (in a manner pleasing to the male gaze, the 'pleasure of the eyes') is to dress like a woman. Not a girl, not a lady, but a woman. This is arguably an innovative tactic, very different than previous experts who have focused on deprecating Victorian fashion (Godwin for example, though as we have seen he also was a champion of drapery); or handed down advice from on high as an authority (Haweis, who certainly wished to empower female choice, but did so in a high-handed manner). Morris seems to be appealing directly to women as both a respected design expert, and a man who who unabashedly loves the female form.

Morris never seemed to make a direct, focused contribution on the subject of dress outside of including it as one of the 'Lesser Arts', and as we know his focus in this area was centred more on decorative textiles. However it is worth noting that this highly influential figure found the subject important enough to insert himself into the Artistic Dress debate at this time, even if briefly, to lend his voice to the cause of change in sartorial practice for the betterment of art and life.

Hamilton's 'Aesthetic Movement' and Defence of Wilde

The year also 1882 saw the publication of Walter Hamilton's *The Aesthetic Movement in England*, which is in fact where we first hear this attitude referred to as a 'movement'. The text was largely shaped by two other events of that year. The first was the unfortunate death of Rossetti on the 9th of

³⁵ Ibid.

April, 1882, who was and is still considered by many to be the artist who truly inspired what became Aestheticism in both his art and poetry; his passing was felt keenly in the artistic community. Due to Rossetti's 'genius' in both poetry and painting, Hamilton devotes much ink to him, declaring, 'in him we find that union of the artistic faculties which is held to constitute a true Æsthete developed to the fullest extent, and indeed he must be held the foremost member of a school which mainly relies upon the correlation of the arts.'³⁶ Secondly, Oscar Wilde spent the year on his famous lecture tour of North America. While Wilde's views and practices on dress met with mixed reviews, his escapades were widely reported and avidly followed in the British press, cultivating his celebrity even while abroad, which Hamilton includes in his text.

However, at the outset, Hamilton states that his purpose for writing the text was to take 'a few steps back into the past. To discover the origin of the Æsthetic movement, note the characteristics of its founders and their principal followers, the development of the school, and the influence it has exercised over modern art and poetry.'³⁷ He also sets as his goal to prove the very existence of the 'movement', with the added benefit of discrediting the jibes of *Punch*, and specifically Du Maurier:

It has been insinuated that the school has no existence, save in the brain of M. Du Maurier, or that if it existed, it was yet merely a very insignificant clique of nobodies, whose vanity was gratified by the attention thus called to them, and to their paltry works. But the school does exist, and its leaders are men of mark, who have long been at work educating public taste, hence *Punch* found it to its interest to ridicule it, and parody its works...³⁸

He is again critical of Du Maurier in how he depicts his females, calling them, 'the sickly, namby-pamby, over-dressed, all-alike-at-the-price, young ladies of Mr Du Maurier, whose ideal of female beauty consists of one stereotyped face at the top of an abnormally tall and slender figure.'³⁹

However, he himself gives a rather poor impression of Aesthetic women when he describes the 'peculiar' portrayal of female beauty in Aesthetic art as 'a pale, distraught body with matted dark auburn hair falling in masses over the brow, and shading eyes full of love-lorn languor, or feverish despair; emaciated cheeks and somewhat heavy jaws; protruding upper lips, the lower being undrawn, long craned neck, flat breasts, and long thin nervous hands.'⁴⁰ This statement signifies that Aesthetic Dress was not simply a matter of what was worn or how one presented oneself, but that the body itself was seen as a site of fashion, at least in artistic reproduction.

But nowhere is Hamilton quite so vehement as in his defence of Oscar Wilde, who he thinks has been treated most unjustly in the press:

³⁶ Hamilton, *The Aesthetic Movement in England (1882)*, 5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, viii.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, vii.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 83. Hamilton is as well critical of Whistler throughout his text, which assuredly stems from his obvious championing of Ruskin.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

Nothing can excuse the gross personal abuse which some journals, but more particularly *Punch*, have showered on him... The ridicule that has been lavished on his actions and dress is as unreasonable, as the excessive adulation which his poems have earned from some of the more intense Æsthetes, who look upon him as the exponent of their most extreme ideas.⁴¹

He devotes a chapter to Wilde, and gives a rather thorough account of his North American adventure up to publication. Again, Wilde's tour was widely reported in the press and the subject of much social interest. Hamilton also relates that while in Boston, Wilde was notoriously mocked by a group of Harvard students who attended in knee breeches, with long wigs, green scarves, and sporting lilies and sunflowers.⁴² However, Wilde himself did not wear breeches at this event. In fact, while in Nova Scotia, the Halifax *Morning Herald* of 10 October 1882 reported:

The apostle had no lily, nor yet a sunflower. He wore a velvet jacket which seemed to be a good jacket. He has an ordinary neck tie and wore a linen collar about number eighteen on a neck half a dozen sizes smaller. His legs were in trousers, and his boots were apparently the product of New York art, judging by their pointed toes. His hair is the color of straw, slightly leonine, and when not looked after, goes climbing all over his features.⁴³

Hamilton subversively suggests through this reportage that perhaps Wilde's reputation for his unusual costume is overblown, observing that 'No doubt some of the popular ridicule of the Æsthetic School has been brought about by Mr. Oscar Wilde, whose peculiarities of garb have been seized upon by sapient critics, who find it easier to laugh at his knee breeches than his poetry, which for the greater part they appear not to have read.'⁴⁴ However, we do have the now famous photographs taken in New York by the Canadian-American photographer Napoleon Sarony, which have sealed the image of Wilde the Aesthete in our historical memory. They depict the young Wilde in his breeches, velvet coat, stockings, and slippers [fig. 5.11]; the very same costume suggested by Godwin in the previous decade (if perhaps a bit less sporting and more dandified by Wilde), and also donned by the male characters in *Patience*. Some of the images also show him in the luxurious beaver fur-trimmed coat he acquired in Canada [fig. 5.12]; and in a cape and low-brimmed fedora that would ironically come to be called a Trilby after Du Maurier's 1894 novel, in which the lead character sported one [fig. 5.13].

Hamilton defends Wilde's choice of costume in a passage which is worth repeating here in its entirety, for it neatly encapsulates the arguments on male dress that have been carried on from Godwin, and points towards the coming fusion of the issues of art and health:

On the not unimportant topic of dress there are few men who would deny that the costume they wear is at once ugly and uncomfortable, but they would sadly urge that deference to usage and conventionality compels them to retain it.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 117.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 120–121.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 109. Although an art critic, the greater portion of Hamilton's attention is devoted to poetry and literature in this text.

Oscar Wilde defies conventionality, and has set a fashion of garb which one might well wish to be universally adopted. Yet, alas! What suits *his* figure might not in all its details be adapted for the every-day wear of ordinary mortals of less heroic proportions and statuesque form. To begin with the *hat*; the tall hat is becoming to few countenances, and how eager we all are to exchange it for a polo cap or a deer-stalker, or any other form less heavy, more yielding to the brow, and less attractive to the heat of the sun. Tennyson goes about in a wide-brimmed felt hat, a “swart sombrero” it is indeed—and bears a cloak almost toga-like in its proportions...

Why are we for ever to be tied up in black frock or cutaway coats, a velvet or cloth tunic like those worn by the converted dragoons in *Patience* would be far more comfortable, and more comely.

But, indeed, we well know what is the more comfortable; it is the garb that most men assume when out for pleasure, one that interferes least with the actions and movements of the body; and somewhat *modified* as to *colour* and *texture*, there is no good reason why men should not adopt a similar costume for their daily avocations to what they now wear when boating, riding, or bicycling. The gain in comfort, appearance, and economy, would be great indeed.

Mr. Wilde’s exertions in this direction are certainly praiseworthy, and if he can succeed in banishing tall hats, black frock coats, stand-up collars, and loose trousers, the world will owe him a vast debt of gratitude.⁴⁵

Some of Hamilton’s arguments here bring to mind those of Godwin in regards to sporting costume being more comfortable and pleasing to the eye. It is also interesting that rather than turning to Godwin or even Watts, he calls upon Tennyson to make his case for an alternative to the stove-pipe hat. Tennyson was of course very close with the Pattle sisters, and spent a great deal of time with them on the Isle of Wight. Hamilton wishes to show that Wilde is not singular in his sartorial practices, and aligns him with well-respected figures. He as well points to the manner in which Wilde’s choices are more artistic, and shows his awareness of the reform debate brewing at the time:

In this matter he is not alone, for of late many people have been raising an outcry in favour of rationalism in dress, both for men and women, and Mr. J. Alfred Gotch, in his pamphlet styled “Art in Costume” (published by Kegan, Paul and Co., London) has most effectively backed up Oscar Wilde’s views in favour of soft low-crowned hats, jackets, knee breeches, and stockings, either with or without high boots, according to the season.

Mr. Gotch please for the sake of comfort, utility and economy, Mr. Wilde for the sake of Beauty. It rarely happens that such various attributes can be so surely reconciled and brought together as in this agitation for a reform in Dress.⁴⁶

While these are of course Hamilton’s opinions on the subject of male dress; he was clearly engaged on these debates by virtue of writing this book, and as well reflected the attitude that fashion was an important aspect of Aestheticism. Reconciling these practical and aesthetic issues is precisely what fashion theorists at this time were trying to achieve.

The Helpful Advice of ‘The Magazine of Art’

Let us take by way of example three articles published in the 1882 *Magazine of Art*, designed to

⁴⁵ Ibid., 123–124.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

instruct on matters of artistic taste in dress. In his discussion of Godwin's association with Liberty & Co., Geoffrey Squire points to these articles too, as a 'precedent' in positioning 'modern dress as a suitable subject for such a publication;' but he also rightfully pointed out that:

Most of the aspects summarized between the three contributors had already been hotly debated in private and public for several years. They were certainly all familiar to Godwin, who agreed with most of them. And they provided the working basis for Liberty's Historic and Artistic Studios, to be opened within two years.⁴⁷

Liberty was by this time flourishing as a provider of 'Art' textiles and furnishings. After a successful run as a dealer in Oriental wares at Messrs Farmer and Rogers (to clients including Godwin and Whistler), Arthur Lasenby Liberty opened his own shop in Regent Street in 1875.⁴⁸ He began with just imported textiles, but soon expanded to sell a full compliment of furnishings. However, as the import quality diminished on some items, A. L. Liberty began to commission work from Aesthetic artists, of which Godwin was among the first, to sell amongst the exotic wares.⁴⁹ Squire sees A. L. Liberty as a successor to Worth, who 'was still at the height of his international fame', observing that:

By 1877 the showy (but limited) British social group able or willing to order clothes regularly in Paris was so addicted to novelty that its choice of dress began to be temporarily deflected by new minority tendencies originating at home. One of these recently attracting public attention, and just identified as the 'Aesthetic Movement', suddenly became an amusing 'stunt' for the moneyed leisure class.⁵⁰

A. L. Liberty and Godwin's creative partnership will be discussed further below, however it is helpful to understand the cultural agency of Liberty's store at this juncture as a context for the articles in *The Magazine of Art*. The first article, 'Colour in Dress' by L. Hemingham, specifically mentions the shop as it seeks to provide advice on colour theory in relation to dress and the body. Like earlier fashion writers, Hemingham encourages individuality, but more importantly appropriateness to the individual, in this case, to their complexion:

The complexion, hair, and eyes of the wearer must always be considered... It is ridiculous to see people of all complexions donning the "colour of the season," in obedience to the dictates of fashion, without the slightest regard to fitness or propriety. I am constantly told that some lovely colour is old-fashioned, fortunately there are some shops yet—as Burnet's and Liberty's—where you can buy old-fashioned colours; so that you may still practise in your own garments a refreshing change from the general livery.⁵¹

Additionally, the author's language reveals Aesthetic leanings: 'Green-blues, for instance, harmonise with blue-greens; as we may see in peacock's feathers'; 'In the Canariensis is displayed an exquisite combination of yellow and yellowish-green'; and 'Autumn... gives us beautiful

⁴⁷ Squire, "E. W. Godwin and the House of Liberty," 93–94.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 81–82. For more on the history of Liberty's Department Store, see Alison Adburgham, *Liberty's: a Biography of a Shop* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1975) and; Barbara Morris, *Liberty Design 1874-1914* (London: Pyramid, 1989).

⁴⁹ Squire, "E. W. Godwin and the House of Liberty," 82.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ L. Hemingham, "Colour in Dress," *The Magazine of Art*, 1882, 159.

harmonies of yellow-browns and olive-greens.⁵² One might imagine these tones available in Liberty's catalogue. Squire confirms this through his elegant description of Liberty's display around this time:

Current preferences in colour and texture were also being challenged in Regent Street where Liberty's windows were hung for their second year with exotic fabrics remarkably complementary to pictures at the Grosvenor. Supple cashmeres, delicate pongee, and matt-surfaced slubby wild-silk tussos, all soft to handle, were shown in infinitely nuanced ranges of delectable new colours. Initially imported for furnishing, these distinctive textiles incidentally made the stiff, heavy silks and positive dyes long dominant in fashionable dress seem suddenly out-dated.⁵³

The second *Magazine of Art* article was written by another one of Liberty's more renowned patrons: Alice Comyns Carr. Wife of the Director of the Grosvenor Gallery, and a friend of the Du Mauriers, she was widely thought to be the inspiration for Mrs Cimabue Brown (and apparently owned the fact). Ormond tells us: 'Vernon Lee described her as a ghoul, and wrote that she was considered by some to be "the artistic siren". Mrs Cimabue Brown seems, however, to have been a syntheses of the more extreme aesthetic women whom Du Maurier had met, rather than a particular individual.'⁵⁴ Comyns Carr was well known in society to sport Artistic Dress, as she confirms in her memoirs forty years later:

I had long been accustomed to supporting a certain amount of ridicule in the matter of clothes, because in the days when bustles and skin tight dresses were the fashion, and a twenty-inch waist the aim of every self-respecting woman, my frocks followed the simple, straight line as waistless of those to-day.⁵⁵

Comyns Carr's contribution, 'The Artistic Aspect of Modern Dress', is interesting and arguably unique because unlike so many other authors, she was not an advice columnist nor popular artist-designer, but did in fact design costumes for the stage (as well as off stage), and was knowledgeable about garment construction in a manner which comes through in her writing.⁵⁶ Much like Godwin, she is critical of the inappropriate use of trim, and she suggests historical models as a source for dress design. Through her technical expertise, she offers a knowledgeable critique of dressmakers who adopt the style of the past without authenticity:

For instance, slashed sleeves and bodices have been in vogue among us lately; and it may sometimes be noticed that the "slash," instead of being a material, presumably that of an undergarment, pulled through the holes in the top wear, has been a piece of stuff palpably sewn on outside the dress or sleeve, in the guise of a puff. So, again, with velvet collars and cuffs put on to trim a stuff dress; they should suggest an underdress turning back at the

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Squire, "E. W. Godwin and the House of Liberty," 91.

⁵⁴ Ormond, *George Du Maurier*, 251.

⁵⁵ Alice Comyns Carr, *Mrs. J. Comyns Carr's Reminiscences* (London, 1926), 85; Ormond, *George Du Maurier*, 274.

⁵⁶ While it is true that from the late 1880s Comyns Carr designed dresses for Ellen Terry (most famously her Beetle-wing Dress for Lady MacBeth), most of Terry's dresses were made by Mrs Nettleship, a successful dressmaker who also provided Terry with her personal wardrobe. For more on Mrs Nettleship, see: Cumming, "Ellen Terry: An Aesthetic Actress and Her Costumes," 69; Wilson, "Away with the Corsets, On with the Shifts," 23.

throat and wrists, but they are often separate, and removed from the edges, thus effectually dispelling the illusion... The unfortunate wearer of these marvels of concoction would often appear... to be carrying three or four robes, one above the other.⁵⁷

It is a little discussed fact (only murmured amongst costume historians and curators in museum stores, it seems), that many extant so-called ‘Aesthetic Dresses’ are actually quite structured. Some even have boning inside them, and in fact there are a few examples, which while appearing to be loose Tea Gowns from the outside, are, upon examination of internal construction, actually sham layers over a fitted dress [fig. 5.14]. They might have easily been worn with a corset if a lady wanted the ‘look’ without abandoning her appropriate undergarments (which she may even wished to have worn for bodily comfort and support). This becomes more common as Artistic Dress influences mainstream fashion in the 1890s, as we shall see.

In 1882, however, reformists are increasingly concerned with issues of both health and beauty, and how the two may work in harmony, as the third *Magazine of Art* article, ‘Fitness and Fashion’, reveals:

Dress must of necessity be regarded from two points of view, and I think it can be shown that the one is almost identical with the other. I mean that the first thing to consider is what gives and secures health to our bodies; the second, what gives pleasure to the eye of ourselves and others, by reason of its beauty.⁵⁸

‘Fitness and Fashion’ was published anonymously, but it seems the author was very well acquainted with Dress Reform groups, including the Rational Dress Society that had been newly formed under the leadership of the formidable Florence Wallace Pomeroy, Viscountess Harberton (1843-1911). Lectures by the society are discussed, as well as an early exhibition with an emphasis on ‘hygienic garments’, on which the author reports: ‘a collection was made of such things as, I suppose, were never before exhibited; they were on view no more than five days; but during that time thousands of women saw that consideration of the subject had already borne fruit, and that there was room for improvement and suggestion still.’⁵⁹ The clothing from these is discussed at length, particularly items leant and worn by ‘Mrs Pfeiffer’:

A somewhat modernised Greek dress — figured in our first picture — had its place in the exhibition. It was lent by Mrs. Pfeiffer, who, attired in one, most simple and well suited to the occasion, herself took frequent opportunity to explain its merits and its adaptability to modern life...

Mrs. Pfeiffer wears a perfectly plain princess dress, made much like a teagown—of silk, velvet, cashmere, and so forth—above which there is arranged the typical drapery—the shawl, or chiton—which must of necessity be of soft and yielding material. The under-dress may be worn high or low according to circumstances; and when full dress is required the sleeves may be dispensed with, for the drapery when properly arranged hangs gracefully over the arm.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Alice Comyns Carr, “The Artistic Aspect of Modern Dress,” *The Magazine of Art*, 1882, 243.

⁵⁸ Anonymous, “Fitness and Fashion,” 336.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 337–338.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 338.

‘Mrs Pfeiffer’ is the poet Emily Jane Pfeiffer (1827-1890), who was an advocate for woman’s social issues.⁶¹ Interestingly, though her entry in the most current version of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* expands on her literary contribution, it has deleted her participation in Dress Reform movements, mentioned in an 1896 entry: ‘She also desired to reform modern female costume, and wrote in the “Cornhill Magazine” in advocacy of a modified return to classical precedents.’⁶² *Fitness and Fashion* relates how she was an active campaigner for reform, and as well illustrates the ways in which Artistic Dress was promoted not just by those involved in the visual arts (although Pfeiffer apparently studied painting as well), but across the span of the arts. The fusion of health and art is the key message in this article, and one particular passage is rather compelling for this study, when the author makes note of the forthcoming exhibition of the Rational Dress Society, ‘when new lights may possibly be thrown on the difficult question, “how best to combine health, freedom of movement, and the artistic requirements of beauty with the exigencies of modern life.”’⁶³ She continues:

It must be confessed that up to this time no perfect solution of the difficulty has appeared. Many creditable attempts have been made, and each suggestive costume has something to recommend it in one direction or another. The overflowing attendance at the recent exhibition, where there was comparatively little to see, proves that the female mind is deeply exercised by the question; and very ready for practical hints about reform.⁶⁴

If the subsequent explosion of literary attention and social activism on the subject is any indication, this assessment was spot on.

Mrs Luke Ionides’ Artistic Dress

Finally, 1882 saw William Blake Richmond paint a somewhat more genuine homage to Aestheticism than Frith’s ironic version: a portrait of Elfrida Ionides, wife of Luke Ionides, seated in a sumptuous Aesthetic interior [fig. 5.15]. Richmond was a follower of the Pre-Raphaelites and successful portrait painter (recall his paintings of the Howards discussed previously) who had succeeded Ruskin as Slade Professor at Oxford in 1878. While it is Constantine Ionides’ donation of his private collection that has greatly contributed to the V&A’s rich holdings in Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic Movement art & design, his brother Luke also followed in the footsteps of their father Alexander as a great collector and patron of the period. Richmond’s painting reflects this, exhibiting a catalogue of exotic objects that displayed the Aesthetic sensibilities of the Ionides. Elfrida sits upon a green and gold Empire sofa, placed in front of a screen made from Japanese kimono silk. To her left is a North African table of inlaid wood, and she holds between her hands a

⁶¹ Jessica Hinings, “Pfeiffer, Emily Jane,” ed. Lawrence Goldman, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: OUP, n.d.), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22084>.

⁶² Richard Garnett, “Pfeiffer, Emily Jane,” *Dictionary of National Biography, 1885-1900* (London: Elder Smith & Co, 1896), <http://www.archive.org/details/dictionaryofnati45stepuoft>.

⁶³ Anonymous, “Fitness and Fashion,” 337–338.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

long strand of Middle Eastern prayer beads in amber, a material which, like turquoise and jade, was very popular in artistic circles due to its ‘natural’ colour and qualities.

But it is her dress that is of course most interesting for this study: made from a salmon pink silk (Richmond conveys this by applying a soft sheen where the light catches it), the gown is exemplary of Artistic Dress. This dress is not a modelling costume, but a structured gown which obeys the guidelines set out by Godwin, Haweis and others: the loose bodice, skirt, shoulder seam and elbow allow freedom of movement; the ruching at the arm, lace trim at the low bodice and cuff, and the gilt silver belt buckle depicting Faith, Hope, and Charity (also in the collection of the V&A, museum number M.1:1-2004) provide useful ornamentation and embrace aspects of historical costume, yet the overall silhouette, although worn sans corset, crinoline, or bustle, does not stray too far from fashionable Victorian dress. As we have seen, Elfrida certainly isn’t the first to wear this form, but I would argue that this dress is one of the earliest to show how Artistic Dress, by 1882, is coming into full, fashionable fruition, as it begins to find more common ground with the motives of Dress Reform. Squire points to this burgeoning coalition at the start of this decade:

To interpret all nineteenth-century revivalism in art and design as mere nostalgia for a lost world is to mistake its real motivation and intentions. In the course of looking to the past, Victorians became conscious of the distinctive characteristics of the present – of the true meaning of modernity as part of a vital continuum of time, to which they themselves were contributing. This is why the old aesthetic tension between self-sufficient beauty and the power of art to improve the mind, could, by 1881, allow a new liaison between artistic dress and the demands of health and reason, linked with the complex associations aroused by historical eclecticism.⁶⁵

This ‘new liaison’ is what was encouraged in the writing of Godwin and Haweis; and as well what the aforementioned writers were looking for in 1882. We see it increasingly in the actual clothing; in Elfrida Ionides’ dress, and in the items that shall be examined presently.

Artistic Dress & Dress Reform

Advocates of the Dress Reform movement (largely women, but men number amongst them) rebelled against the strictures of Victorian Dress through social action and the redesign of clothing. Fashion historian Patricia Cunningham tells us:

[T]he appeals against fashion were clear: advocates of reform believed that corsets adversely affected internal organs, that long skirts swept up filthy debris from the streets, that the weight of the skirts and petticoats impaired movement, that uneven temperatures caused by clothing brought on sickness, and, finally, that faulty suspension of garments put undue stress on the anatomy.⁶⁶

The movement, which was supported in both England and America (recall Amelia Bloomer), was promoted through reason and logic based in the science and medicine of the time, and included

⁶⁵ Squire, “‘Clothed in Our Right Minds’: Some Wearers of Aesthetic Dress,” 34.

⁶⁶ Cunningham, *Reforming Women’s Fashion, 1850 - 1920: Politics, Health and Art*, 1:24.

female physicians among its staunchest advocates. One of these was Dr Mary Walker, who, in the 1870s was one of the first designers of the ‘Union Suit’ [fig 5.16], a one-piece undergarment that she was convinced ‘improved female health and discouraged seduction and even rape.’⁶⁷ This position indicates both sensitivity to the sexualized nature of the corset, and a perceived danger presented to women by the presentation of their body in fashionable attire. Dr Walker later improved her design, aptly calling the new incarnation the ‘Emancipation Suit’ [fig. 5.17]. Later, the 1885 book *The Science of Dress in Theory and Practice*, written by Ada S. Ballin, lecturer to the National Health Society, included an illustration of the malformations caused to the body by the corset [fig. 5.18], similar to those shown by Haweis. Ballin hoped to educate women to the dangers of tight-lacing, stating in her book: ‘If our girls were taught the health and a few of the principles of art as known to the ancient Greeks, they would soon see “what a reformed thief this fashion is.”’⁶⁸

By the 1880s, the wearing of alternative undergarments was *de rigueur* for dress reformists. ‘Fitness and Fashion’ reports this from the first Rational Dress Society exhibit:

All dress reformers insist on the minimum amount of underclothing being worn, so as to diminish weight. To secure warmth, the use is advocated of the garment known as a “Combination,” made of warm flannel or other material, according to climate. Over this is worn a boneless or very light form of corset, specimens of which were on view ; and to this again is buttoned an upper skirt, made usually in the divided form.⁶⁹

The philosophy of Dress Reform was perhaps fully codified at the Rational Dress Society Exhibition, Princes Hall, in May 1883. Their ‘Requirements of the Perfect Dress’ echo much of the same criteria put forward by Eastlake, Godwin, Haweis, and the others we have examined:

1. Freedom of Movement
2. Absence of pressure over any part of the body
3. Not more weight than is necessary for warmth, and both weight and warmth evenly distributed
4. Grace and beauty combined with comfort and convenience
5. Not depart too conspicuously from the ordinary dress of the time.⁷⁰

This last tenet indicates a lingering sensitivity to the desire to still look fashionable. Award-winning fashions ostensibly met all of these tenets, and were diverse in their presentations, however it is debatable whether some of them actually meet the final requirement [fig. 5.19]; they differ radically from even Artistic Dress, let alone high Victorian fashion. We can see here how the ideals of healthful dress were not quite harmonising with what was considered beautiful by artistic standards, a point which Ormond notes: ‘The early aesthete women were less concerned with the practical and medical side of costume, and were intent only on looking beautiful.’⁷¹ The selections, which the average person saw as eccentric and ‘mannish’, were lampooned in a poem in the June

⁶⁷ Ibid., 1:79.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 1:94.

⁶⁹ Anonymous, “Fitness and Fashion,” 338.

⁷⁰ Cunningham, *Reforming Women’s Fashion, 1850 - 1920: Politics, Health and Art*, 1:69.

⁷¹ Ormond, *George Du Maurier*, 268.

2nd issue of *Punch*:

We look at the models — they puzzle our noddles —
Regarding- them all with alarm and surprise !
Each artful customer revives Mrs. Bloomer,
And often produces an army of guys.
The costume elastic, the dresses gymnastic,
The wonderful suits for the tricycle-ess —
Though skirts be divided, I'm clearly decided,
It isn't my notion of Rational Dress !

See gowns hygienic, and frocks calisthenic.
And dresses quite worthy a modern burlesque;
With garments for walking, and tennis, and talking.
All terribly manful and too trouseresque !
And habits for riding, for skating, or sliding.
With "rational" features they claim to possess;
The thought I can't banish, they're somewhat too mannish,
And not quite the thing for a Rational Dress !

Note robes there for rinking, and gowns for tea-drinking.
For yachting, for climbing, for cricketing too;
The dresses for boating, the new petticoating,
The tunics in brown and the trousers in blue.
The fabrics for frockings, the shoes and the stockings.
And corsets that ne'er will the figure compress;

But in the whole placeful there's little that's graceful
And girlish enough for a Rational Dress !
'TJs hardy and boyish, not girlful and coyish —
We think, as we stroll round the gaily-dight room —
A masculine coldness, a brusqueness, a boldness.

Appears to pervade all this novel costume !
In ribbons and laces, and feminine graces,
And soft flowing robes, there's a charm more or less —
I don't think I'll venture on dual garmenture,

I fancy my own is the Rational Dress.

But attempts were certainly made to create reform dress that incorporated and was even disguised in traditional fashion. This is particularly true of items like the 'divided skirt', an item less scandalous than bloomers, but still rather radical, 'which, its advocates say, does away with the inconveniences attached to heavy drapery and to dresses which prevent the leg from moving freely.'⁷² Lady Harberton championed it in an 1880 column in *The Queen*, after discussing the difficulty of walking in the stylish tight skirts:

There seems to me only one way out of it, and that is to have the present tight skirt divided, so as to be something like the trousers worn by women in the East... I mean literally what I say, a skirt divided from half way above the knees, and made full down to the ankles, where it might finish with bands or a tiny flounce, according to the taste of the wearer.⁷³

⁷² Anonymous, "Fitness and Fashion," 338.

⁷³ F.W. Harberton, "A Plea for Dress Reform," *Queen*, 1880.

She even goes so far as to suggest that the looseness would provide more decency than the current figure-hugging fashion, ‘which would be no small gain to society.’ Subsequently, the Rational Dress Society advocated them also, as ‘Fitness and Fashion’ reports:

In order not to offend popular prejudice, the skirt—as may be seen from our second illustration—is so arranged and dissembled by the kilting round its edge as to be scarcely distinguishable from an ordinary dress. The lady who was the first in society to wear this form of skirt speaks highly of it, and adds that, hygienically, its value is doubled by the fact that it does not rest on the waist for support, but is fastened by buttons on to a waistcoat fitted to the shoulders.⁷⁴

Seeing common goals in ‘rational dress’ that might be used to support their own sartorial objectives, artists became increasingly interested and involved in these reform activities. In 1883, spurred on by all this activity, Watts finally put pen to paper on the topic. He wrote ‘On Taste in Dress’ for *The Nineteenth Century* magazine/journal. His lengthy essay eloquently follows those arguments previously laid out by Godwin and Haweis, particularly on the unnatural vs. natural body, anti-corset and —crinoline views, and that taste and individuality should govern choice. However, he brings to bear his own artistic sensibilities to the discussion of material, as noted in the previous chapter. He also holds the medical industry culpable for some of the ‘mischievous’ problems in dress, particularly in regards to safety (he even discusses children’s play clothes and sports injuries). He calls upon the medical profession to come together and end their silence on the matter:

Members of the medical profession know very well how much Nature is outraged, and how she avenges herself... Hitherto most doctors, when they do speak upon the subject, do not sufficiently insist upon the disagreeable theme, perhaps accepting the fact as part of a condition of things... But surely the whole body collectively might be expected to testify strenuously against an obstinate perversity that is nothing short of disastrous.⁷⁵

The following year, Godwin’s acknowledged expertise on costume was called upon when he became what today we might call Creative Director for Liberty’s new Art Dress department. Squire notes: ‘Much of the actual designing (as with most of the great couturiers in Paris) would have been carried out by unnamed employees of the workroom, or by freelance artists whose sketches were bought-in by the house and, as it were, certificated by its head.’⁷⁶ In fact, the majority of his six hours per week were spent in consulting, and the first catalogue of Art Dress was not produced until after his death, in 1887.⁷⁷ Squire’s article ‘Godwin and the House of Liberty’ offers a thorough account of his short time there; sadly, Godwin died just two years later, in 1886. However, in the following decade, it would have a profound influence on not just Artistic Dress, but the ready-to-wear industry as a whole (see next chapter for further discussion).

⁷⁴ Anonymous, “Fitness and Fashion,” 338.

⁷⁵ Watts, “On Taste in Dress,” 56–57.

⁷⁶ Squire, “E. W. Godwin and the House of Liberty,” 96.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 97. See chapter six for further discussion on Liberty catalogues.

Godwin's work at Liberty began to go some way towards reconciling the issues of health and beauty. However, there was still some discord between what was referred to as 'Artistic' and 'Aesthetic' in terms of dress (a problem underscoring this entire thesis), as an 1885 exchange in the *Pall Mall Gazette* perfectly illustrates. Through a series of articles and responses between April and May of that year, a debate ensued on the subject "Ladies Dress—Real and Ideal."⁷⁸ The original article, published anonymously in two parts on the 14th and 16th of April, asserted the superiority and beauty of Aesthetic Dress (generally described as loose and flowing garments, and accompanied by illustrations), and did in fact make a connection to artists designing and wearing this form of dress by using examples from illustrations by Kate Greenaway, whose art, by this time was seen as an example of Artistic Dress (especially for children). Subsequent letters to the editor at first thanked him for publishing these radical views, however one letter, published on 30 April, was critical and written in support of Victorian fashion over Aesthetic Dress. A 'lady correspondent' who claims to have 'come from a race of artists on both sides of [her] family' wrote the letter, stating:

I must draw a wide line between an aesthete (as the word is now known) and an artist—a person can quite well be one without the other at the present day... The Aesthete, I have found by long experience, is as a rule eminently unpractical in 'l'art de s'habiller.' I aspire to be the reverse.⁷⁹

In response, a lady with the initials C.W. retorted a few days later:

SIR,--Will you allow me as one of the much abused aesthetes to say few words in reference to the letter... from a lady correspondent calling herself an artist but not an aesthete, a position which, I confess, I am unable to realize.
...No one deprecates more than I do the untidiness of many who wear a so-called artistic dress, but they are not the aesthetic people who do this. They are generally Girton students or dreamers of dreams, who care only to wear what is least trouble to them to put on and least burdensome to them to wear, and have no thought whatsoever of pleasing the eye or appearing smart.
After all, though there be principles of dress and canons of taste, there is no one artistic dress, either real or ideal.⁸⁰

This last letter is significant for several reasons. Not only does C.W. outline in it the differences between aesthetic and artistic modes of dress as she sees them, she clarifies that aesthetes are concerned with not just beauty, but also taste ('appearing smart'), while those who simply adopt what she calls 'artistic dress' are doing so without care. Furthermore, in her statement that they are Girton students, she aligns these artistic women with a very specific group—the Pre-Raphaelites—as one of the founders of Girton, the first residential college for women founded at Cambridge in 1869, was none other than Barbara Bodichon (née Leigh-Smith, 1827 – 1891), an artist and leader of the women's movement in Britain who was a close personal friend of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal. The statement 'there is no one artistic dress' is certainly a conundrum plaguing this research. C.W.'s opinion is extremely insightful in illustrating that there was in fact a

⁷⁸ Anonymous, "Ladies Dress - Real and Ideal I & II."

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ C.W., "Ladies Dress--Aesthetic and Artistic."

division within artistic circles as to what constituted Aesthetic Dress, and what was meant by Artistic Dress. And there was of course the third category of Dress Reform to contend with as well. Finally, the entire tone of the letter, including one particular line, '[n]either untidiness nor puffs are an essential part of artistic costume, nor is archaeological accuracy in dress to be at all encouraged excepting for stage purposes,' recall the views espoused by both Godwin and Wilde, and reveal that the likely identity of C.W. is Constance Wilde, Oscar Wilde's wife and an active Aesthete and Dress Reformist herself.

Constance Wilde was in fact serving alongside Viscountess Harberton as the Rational Dress Society's editor at the time, and thus it perhaps follows (if indeed she was the C.W. in question) that the final letter in this sequence is from none other than the formidable backbone of the Rational Dress Movement herself. Lady Harberton neatly quells the debate encapsulating what she sees as a futile dispute in these letters:

As far as I could make out, the point at issue was much like the notorious differences between Tweedledum and Tweedledee. What possible matter can it make whether the dress is long, plain, and clinging, or whether it is "tailor-made" and a trifle shorter? Both are equally unfit to be the clothing of a creature which is provided by nature with two legs as its means of locomotion.⁸¹

Liberty sought to create a space where these ideals could be reconciled, either through purchasing their own designs or through providing the materials for those of sufficient creative skill to craft their own artistic solutions.

Godwin was already working towards this goal of creating a more sartorially educated public. Shortly before he began to work for Liberty, he published what might be called his greatest treatise on fashion theory: *Dress and its Relation to Health and Climate*, written for the 1884 International Health Exhibition. It begins by clearly stating Godwin's view from his earliest writing on the subject: 'As Architecture is the art and science of building, so Dress is the art and science of clothing.'⁸² He then offers a detailed history of dress from Egyptian times to the present, critically relating it, as the title suggests, to the environment in which it was worn (climate), and in terms of its success in practical terms (health). His goal is of course to educate the reader so that they may adopt the characteristics to suit their own necessities. At the very end of the text, he brings the discussion back round to his main objective:

Lastly, whatever wisdom we may display in our selection of material and colour, healthy or hygienic dress will not be possible until it has at least as much beauty of form and cut to recommend it as that which may be seen in most lawn-tennis grounds. And, thus, I have come round to the proposition with which I started, that health without beauty was after all a mere compromise with disease.⁸³

⁸¹ F.W. Harberton, "Women's Dress - Real, Not Ideal," *Pall Mall Gazette* (London, 1885).

⁸² Godwin, "Dress and Its Relation to Health and Climate," 1.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 79.

In these words we find the seeds of what Artistic Dress was becoming: the fusion of practical principles of and health, mingled with the sensual ideals of Aestheticism. We see this principles at work in a photograph of May Morris, taken by Frederick Hollyer in 1884 [fig. 5.20]. May, now a young woman and budding designer following in her parents' footsteps, appears as a Pre-Raphaelite illustration come to life. She is seated in profile facing left, her right elbow propped on the armrest of an Arts and Crafts settle. She rests her chin delicately on that hand while reading a page that she holds in her left. She wears a dark-toned velvet Artistic Dress, which is of a comfortable but not overly roomy fit, with a round collar and loose but not full sleeves that taper to wrist, where the sleeves of her white-toned underdress (possibly linen) are turned back over the velvet sleeves to form a cuff. The dress is otherwise plain, accentuated only by a thick almost choker-like necklace and hair arranged in a Greek style with a thin fillet. Her dress is both beautiful (aesthetic) and useful (practical), in line with the Arts and Crafts principles with which she was raised.

By this point, the language and ideals of the Arts and Crafts Movement were the core artistic values of many of the artists discussed here, and this certainly informed their attitudes on dress. Let us turn and examine closely one extant gown which embodies all of these principles, and one of the only for which we have record of its creation: the Thornycroft Gown.

The Thornycroft Gown: a Liberty Dress?

In 1884, the same year of May Morris' photo and in which Godwin began the 'Art Dress' department at Liberty, the sculptor Hamo Thornycroft and his wife Agatha created what is for me the quintessential example of an Artistic Dress [fig. 5.21]. According to their daughter (Mrs W.O. Manning), who donated the dress to the V&A in 1973, this was Agatha's wedding gown.

Both Hamo and Agatha had a well-established interest in both historic costume as well as dress reform, judging from photographs. One photo shows a young Hamo dressed as Proteus from *Two Gentleman of Verona* (perhaps for a fancy dress party or a tableau vivant) [fig. 5.22]; and another photo shows an even younger Agatha as the Queen of Hearts [fig. 5.23]. But costume balls were a popular pastime for many Victorians; more interesting is a photo of the couple taken in 1884, probably shortly after their marriage [fig. 5.24]. Hamo wears the sort of comfortable outdoors attire that Godwin and Hamilton spoke of (less so Wilde in that Hamo's choice of fabrics is less dandified and more sporting): checked breeches tucked in woollen socks, a loose comfortable coat, and a short-brimmed cap. Agatha wears what was certainly a 'rational' ensemble, appearing to be a walking dress that is loosely fitted (comfortable but not straying too far for the fashionable silhouette), and a long mantle-like overdress topped with a shorter cape that ties artistically at her throat. From her posture and the fit of the outfit it is plain to see she wears neither corset nor bustle

or crinoline; one imagines she has chosen the woollen combinations promoted by dress reform societies. It is a comfortable and candid portrait of the young couple.

The Thornycrofts' affection is plain in a series of letters written by Agatha that relate to the Artistic Dress she wore for her wedding. The gown, which at the time of writing is travelling with the *Cult of Beauty* exhibition, has been labelled by the V&A as a Liberty dress, designed by Hamo Thornycroft. Specifically, the object file lists 'Liberty & Co. Ltd' as the maker, then in the summary states:

The dress was made and worn by the wife of Sir Hamo Thornycroft (1850-1926). He was a sculptor and designed it for her. They were both interested in the dress reform movement and conceived the dress in accordance with the movement's principles so it did not restrict the waist and arms...

The sewing is not professional and the dress has been altered. The Liberty material is a thin, probably Indian, washing silk of a type that seldom survives.⁸⁴

The information in the entry is conflicting: the maker is listed as Liberty, yet the discussion states it was made by Agatha, and designed by Hamo. It also states the sewing is not professional, which would also negate authorship of Liberty & Co. as maker.⁸⁵ This conflictive listing is possibly due to cataloguing necessities mixed with information given to the museum by Mrs Manning.

However, new evidence gives us a clearer picture of how the gown came to be: there is reference to it in three letters written by Agatha, which were not accessible until their daughter left Hamo's personal papers to the Henry Moore Institute in the 1980s.

In a letter dated Jan 1st 1884, just after their engagement, Agatha wrote to Hamo while she was staying outside of London:

Dearest. The box from Liberty caused me a great deal of surprise and delight at your kindness in sending me such a lovely present. The stuff is beautiful and it has often been my ambition to have a dress of it but I cannot help reproaching you at the same time for indulging me to such an extent... The question that arises is, how can I get it made into a wearable form? I am afraid the genius of the Tonbridge dressmakers is not sufficiently great to induce me to let them try their hands on it. But I cannot yet make up my mind on such a weighty and important subject. You see women are all alike; just as vain as one another! I have been considering already the design of the dress but I think you must help me with that. It requires great consideration...

A week later, she wrote:

I am going to get my dress made by a dress maker here, the only one I think who can carry out instructions at all near the mark. I shall keep her well under my eye which will be possible if she comes here to work. I think the conclusions we came to very satisfactory with regard to the dress the other night. I have a good idea of what it should be like. It was sweet of you to make so much trouble about it.

⁸⁴ From the online catalogue for: Liberty & Co. Ltd. (maker), *Dress (Thornycroft/Liberty)*, Striped washing silk, with hand-smocked and gathered sleeves, lined with cotton, ca 1885, T.171-1973, Victoria & Albert Museum, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O13850/dress/>.

⁸⁵ For more on amateur and professional sewing and dressmaking at this time, see: Burman, *The Culture of Sewing*.

Then finally, on the 21st, she wrote to thank Hamo for lace and mittens he sent, and observed ‘The lace is lovely and will suit the Liberty gown.’⁸⁶ Thus these letters offer us rare insight into one way these clothes were made. It is also interesting to note that she refers to this as a ‘Liberty gown’, although it was not made by Liberty & Co., merely the fabric came from there.

The final design encompasses all the aspects of a proper Artistic Dress. It is made of fine, lightweight silk, dyed in natural colours – an off-white, with a turquoise blue stripe (now badly faded so the dress appears ivory, see detail images). One can imagine it being worn with the turquoise jewellery that was very popular with the artistic set at this time. The dress design the Thornycrofts concocted was modest yet graceful, and in fact, according to V&A Senior Textile Conservator Frances Hartog, the stitching itself is rather basic, hinting perhaps at the uncertain skill of that Tonbridge dressmaker.⁸⁷

The bodice has a low square neckline and is decorated only with flattering smocking that gives it a rustic charm. Wilson tells us that smocking was revived in the 1870s ‘to give movement to the sleeves and yoke, and by the 1880s it was fashionable for conventional dress.’⁸⁸ I would add to this that smocking also had a specific social significance related to both a more picturesque, romantic (and historicised) attitude; and the joy and usefulness of handicraft promoted through the Arts and Crafts movement.⁸⁹ Smocking is beautiful and useful, a kind of ornamentation of which Godwin and his followers approved; that it becomes a popular feature of Artistic Dress (and subsequently fashionable dress) is unsurprising.

The back is adorned simply with pleating and a row of functional buttons. The sleeves are fitted above and below the elbow, allowing the coveted freedom of movement. The skirt is beautifully draped in the front in a Greek style that hints at coming Edwardian fashion, while the back is gathered up to create an illusion of a soft bustle, without the added weight of a crinoline. The overall effect is an elegant gown which in its healthful and aesthetic qualities embodies all the tenets of Artistic Dress, without straying too far from the fashionable Victorian silhouette.

Thus it stands that this dress, although made from Liberty silk, is not actually a ‘Liberty & Co.’ brand or make of dress, as we might understand it today. It is an excellent example, however, of the way in which Liberty supported the home arts industry through providing materials for Artistic

⁸⁶ Liberty & Co. Ltd. (maker), *Dress (Thornycroft/Liberty)*.

⁸⁷ Frances Hartog, related to the author in a conversation at the Victoria & Albert Museum, March 2010.

⁸⁸ Wilson, “Away with the Corsets, On with the Shifts,” 21.

⁸⁹ For more on this, see: Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*; and: Janice Helland, *British and Irish Home Arts and Industries, 1880-1914: Marketing Craft, Making Fashion* (Irish Academic Press, 2007).

Dress. They were proactive and even didactic in this respect, as the next chapter's investigation of their catalogues, reveals.

While this dress may appear to represent a resolution between the various factions of Aestheticism and Dress Reform, there was one very public exchange on art and dress which no amount of charming costume could quell: the battle of wits being played out in the press between James McNeill Whistler and Oscar Wilde.

Whistler & Wilde

In 1885, the public became aware of the strained relationship of former friends Whistler and Wilde, through a series of articles published in the press after Whistler's famous 'Ten O'Clock' lecture. The full extent of the vitriol, however, was perhaps not made clear to the world at large until 1892, when Whistler chose to include the exchange (complete with personal telegrams between the two and Whistler's own 'reflections' on the matter) in his book *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*.⁹⁰

Although it could be said that many of Wilde's views on Aestheticism were taken first from Pater, then from Morris, and finally, in terms of dress, Godwin, by the mid-1880s he was certainly considered an authority on the subject. After returning from America, Wilde continued to lecture and write on issues of fashion in, for example the *Pall Mall Gazette* ('Woman's Dress', Tuesday, October 14, 1884 and 'More Radical Ideas Upon Dress Reform', Tuesday, 11 November, 1884), then later as editor of *The Woman's World* magazine (1887-89). His relationship with Whistler seemed friendly enough in 1883, according to an exchange of telegrams after they had been mocked by *Punch*, and printed in *The World*, 14 November 1883:

A Correction

A supposititious conversation in *Punch* brought about the following interchange of telegrams:—

From Oscar Wilde, Exeter, to J. McNeill Whistler, Tite Street.—*Punch* too ridiculous—when you and I are together we never talk about anything except ourselves.

From Whistler, Tite Street, to Oscar Wilde, Exeter.—No, no, Oscar, you forget—when you and I are together, we never talk about anything except me.⁹¹

However, in the years after his famous libel suit with Ruskin, Whistler was more irascible than ever. Understandably fed up with many of the Aesthetes he once called friends (and who failed to take up his side against Ruskin), he had grown tired of hearing the proselytizing of others on matters which, in his view, they were ill-equipped to discuss. This attitude underpins his famous

⁹⁰ James McNeill Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, n.d., <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/24650/24650-h/24650-h.htm>. A similar exchange was also reprinted between Whistler and Swinburne regarding the 'Ten O'Clock', but as it does not concern dress, it is excluded here.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

‘Ten O’Clock’ lecture, first delivered at the Prince’s Hall, London, on 20 February 1885, repeated in Cambridge on 24 March and Oxford on 30 April, and then published in his text *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, the book conceived to chronicle his grievances with all of his critics after the Ruskin libel suit.

‘Art is upon the Town!’ he declares at the start, ‘—to be chucked under the chill by the passing gallant—to be enticed within the gates of the householder—to be coaxed into company, as a proof of culture and refinement.

If familiarity can breed contempt, certainly Art—or what is currently taken for it—has been brought to its lowest stage of intimacy.’⁹² Whistler expresses wry contempt at the manner in which art has become what today we might call ‘trendy’. It is an ironic piece considering his own role in making the artistic fashionable, and calls to mind a recent article written in the *Guardian* by Charles Saatchi entitled *The Hideousness of the Art World* in which he remarks: ‘Even a show-off like me finds this new, super-rich art-buying crowd vulgar and depressingly shallow.’⁹³

Whistler clearly had some very specific people in mind when he wrote his speech. Although he doesn’t name Wilde specifically, he is undoubtedly referencing him when he states, ‘And now from their midst the Dilettante stalks abroad. The amateur is loosed. The voice of the aesthete is heard in the land, and catastrophe is upon us.’

Wilde, who attended the London lecture, wasted no time in firing off a retort in the *Pall Mall Gazette* the very next day (which Whistler reprinted in his book):

Last night, at Prince’s Hall, Mr. Whistler made his first public appearance as a lecturer on Art.... There were some arrows ... shot off ... *Pall Mall Gazette*, Feb. 21, 1885. And (O, mea culpa!) at dress reformers most of all.... That an artist will find beauty in ugliness, le beau dans l’horrible, is now a commonplace of the schools.... I differ entirely from Mr. Whistler. An Artist is not an isolated fact; he is the resultant of a certain milieu and a certain entourage, and can no more be born of a nation that is devoid of any sense of beauty than a fig can grow from a thorn or a rose blossom from a thistle.... The poet is the supreme Artist, for he is the master of colour and of form, and the real musician besides, and is lord over all life and all arts; and so to the poet beyond all others are these mysteries known; to Edgar Allan Poe and Baudelaire, not to Benjamin West and Paul Delaroche....⁹⁴

Another exchange of telegrams reveals Whistler’s resentment as he fires back a retort regarding ‘the naïveté of “the Poet,” in the choice of his Painters—Benjamin West and Paul Delaroche!’ He quips, ‘You have pointed out that “the Painter’s” mission is to find “le beau dans l’horrible,” and have left to “the Poet” the discovery of “l’horrible” dans “le beau”!’ Wilde responded:

⁹² James McNeill Whistler, “Ten O’Clock Lecture (20 February 1885),” in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (London, 1892).

⁹³ Charles Saatchi, “Charles Saatchi: The Hideousness of the Art World,” *The Guardian*, December 2, 2011, sec. Comment is free, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/dec/02/saatchi-hideousness-art-world>.

⁹⁴ Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*.

Dear Butterfly—By the aid of a biographical dictionary, I made the discovery that there were once two painters, called Benjamin West and Paul Delaroche, who rashly lectured upon Art. As of their works nothing at all remains, I conclude that they explained themselves away.

We of course now can point to the failing of both critics to recognise these two artists whose work is still very well-known; it is in fact ironic in this rather fruitless exchange, considering that much of it centred around the ideas of what made culture ‘great’. For Whistler, it was the pretension of claiming that other artistic periods were somehow superior to the present, and that there was a lack of understanding of art which somehow those of the past (particularly the Greeks) seemed to grasp much more fully, which rankled most. This view is one we have seen repeated throughout this research, and although Whistler himself incorporated nods to the past in his own dress and those he designed for painting (Mrs Leyland’s Watteau pleat), he was very much a modern, Baudelarian kind of Aesthete. On the attitude of superiority towards the past, he said simply:

Listen! There never was an artistic period.
There never was an Art-loving nation.⁹⁵

Not content with his first brief response, Wilde wrote a longer and more considered article in the *Pall Mall Gazette* the following Saturday the 28th of February titled ‘The Relation of Dress to Art. A Note in Black and White on Mr Whistler’s Lecture.’ With the specific goal of discussing the importance of beautiful dress to culture in a larger sense, Wilde takes on Whistler’s comment on the ‘artistic period’:

For Art is not to be taught in Academies. It is what one looks at, not what one listens to, that makes the artist. The real schools should be the streets. There is not, for instance, a single delicate line, or delightful proportion, in the dress of the Greeks, which is not echoed exquisitely in their architecture. A nation arrayed in stove-pipe hats, and dress improvers, might have built the Pantechnicon, possibly, but the Parthenon, never.⁹⁶

Whistler’s Aestheticism, if it can be continued to be called that, did not seek to be part of the continuum of Pre-Raphaelitism. It perhaps shares more with Impressionism, particularly in his later career. The women that he painted were often fashionable (wearing corseted dresses with bustles as often as not), and his concern in portraiture was more with harmony of colour and arrangement than rendering an accurate or picturesque composition. When his models wore something more unconventional, such as kimonos, they did so because they are beautiful garments, and exotic; he draped them on and about the figure because of the way they fall and catch the light, not out of some moral design to attire his models in healthful dress; and he certainly had no care for accuracy in how these culturally symbolic robes were worn by his models. Yet though his intentions may differ from some, Wilde still called him on the hypocrisy of his commentary:

⁹⁵ Whistler, “Ten O’Clock Lecture (20 February 1885).”

⁹⁶ Oscar Wilde, “The Relation of Dress to Art: A Note in Black and White on Mr. Whistler’s Lecture,” *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, 1885). The Pantechnicon was a well-known storage warehouse in Belgravia Square, considered to be cutting edge in terms of security and fireproofedness when it was built in the early 19th century. It burned down in 1874 causing the destruction of millions of pounds worth of property.

Nor do I feel quite sure that Mr. Whistler has been himself always true to the dogma he seems to lay down, that a painter should only paint the dress of his age, and of his actual surroundings: far be it from me to burden a butterfly with the heavy responsibility of its past: I have always been of opinion that consistency is the last refuge of the unimaginative: but have we not all seen, and most of us admired, a picture from his hand of exquisite English girls strolling by an opal sea in the fantastic dresses of Japan? Has not Tite-street been thrilled with the tidings that the models of Chelsea were posing to the master, in peplums, for pastels?⁹⁷

However ironic considering some of his patrons discussed in the previous chapter, Whistler showed his scorn for Aesthetic women, perhaps whom he saw as followers of Wilde, particularly in the passage:

And there are curious converts to a weird *culte*, in which all instinct for attractiveness—all freshness and sparkle—all woman's winsomeness—is to give way to a strange vocation for the unlovely—and this desecration in the name of the Graces !
 Shall this gaunt, ill-at-ease, distressed, abashed
 mixture of *mauvaise honte* and desperate assertion call itself artistic, and claim cousinship
 with the artist—who delights in the dainty, the sharp, bright gaiety of beauty !
 No !—a thousand times no ! Here are no connections of ours.
 We will have nothing to do with them.⁹⁸

He then encourages women not to listen to the advice of the 'Dilletante', but that their own instincts on fashion are in the right, and the true artist knows this and supports wearers of modern dress:

Know, then, all beautiful women, that we are with you. Pay no heed, we pray you, to this outcry of the unbecoming—this last plea for the plain.
 It concerns you not.
 Your own instinct is near the truth—your own wit far surer guide than the untaught ventures of thick heeled Apollos.
 What ! will you up and follow the first piper that leads you down Petticoat Lane, there, on a Sabbath, to gather, for the week, from the dull rags of ages wherewith to bedeck yourselves ? that, beneath your travestied awkwardness, we have trouble to find your own dainty selves ?

In these rather poetic lines lies a perhaps more sensual truth: Whistler wants to see the female form modelled by clothes, not have it hidden in loose gowns. He reinforces these ideas with somewhat surprising lines, especially in consideration of his own creative practice, and his close friendship with Godwin:

Costume is not dress.
 And the wearers of wardrobes may not be doctors of taste !
 For by what authority shall these be pretty masters ? Look well, and nothing have they invented—nothing put together for comeliness' sake.
 Haphazard from their shoulders hang the garments of the hawker—combining in their person the motley of many manners with the medley of the mummers closet.
 Set up as a warning, and a finger-post of danger, they point to the disastrous effect of Art upon the middle classes.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Whistler, "Ten O'Clock Lecture (20 February 1885)."

In other words, he considers what many call dress, mere ‘costume’, or ‘fancy dress’ as it is called in Britain today, and it is artless and lacking in originality. Wilde of course disagrees with this position and responds:

For all costumes are caricatures. The basis of Art is not the Fancy Ball. Where there is loveliness of dress, there is no dressing up. And so, were our national attire delightful in colour, and in construction simple and sincere; were dress the expression of the loveliness that is shields, and of the swiftness and motion that it does not impede; did its lines break from the shoulder, instead of bulging from the waist; did the inverted wineglass cease to be the ideal of form: were these things brought about, as brought about they will be, then would painting be no longer an artificial reaction against the ugliness of life, but become, as it should be, the natural expression of life’s beauty.

In his article, Wilde attempts to show the reader (for he surely knows that attempting to change Whistler’s view is futile) that the ‘Relation of Dress to Art’ is a reciprocal one, and that, in fact, as we are not walking about in a painted world, the employment of beautiful dress is all the more a necessity:

Were we able to carry our *chiaroscuro* about with us, as we do our umbrellas, all would be well; but, this being impossible, I hardly think that pretty and delightful people will continue to wear a style of dress, as ugly as it is useless, and as meaningless as it is monstrous, even on the chance of such a master as Mr. Whistler is spiritualising them into a symphony, or refining them into a mist. For the arts are made for life, and not life for the arts.

After their public exchange, their relationship soured, and their feud was still evident in 1890 when Whistler sent a rather mean-spirited letter to *Truth* accusing Wilde of plagiarising ideas on art (notably, his), in a recent column.⁹⁹ I mention this only as Whistler includes the exchange in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, just before a witty but unkind inclusion of his thoughts ‘upon perceiving the Poet, in Polish cap and green overcoat, befrogged, and wonderfully befurred’:

Oscar—How dare you! What means this disguise?
Restore those things to Nathan’s, and never again let me find you masquerading the streets of my Chelsea in the combined costumes of Kossuth and Mr. Mantalini!¹⁰⁰

Whistler refers to Lajos Kossuth, a well-known Hungarian politician and freedom fighter who was Regent-President in 1849; and Mantalini the unsavory character from Dickens’ *Nicholas Nickleby* who dresses extravagantly and ends up bankrupting his wife’s millinery business. According to the V&A: ‘Nathan’s, established in 1790, was the leading house for historical costume as well as supplying Court dress, military uniforms and fancy dress. They dressed both professional and amateur productions (Charles Dickens was a client).’¹⁰¹ Thus Whistler essentially mocks Wilde’s ensemble as fancy dress and more than a little bizarre and certainly not modern.

⁹⁹ Quoted in Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Online Museum Victoria and Albert Museum, “Costume House - Nathan’s”, n.d., <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/n/nathans-costume-house/>.

Whistler and Wilde's exchange does not resolve any issues concerning the debates on Artistic Dress at the time, but is symptomatic of them. As in contemporary fashion, their debate comes down to matters of taste (and perceived taste), and erupts in a climate of change and uncertainty in regards to sartorial habits. In many ways, it is a deeply personal exchange played out on a public front, but one to which many in their social circles may relate.

Public and Private Views

We find numerous examples of the kinds of debates and discussions exemplified in this chapter throughout the rest of the decade. However, sartorial change progressed slowly but steadily in the 1880s. By way of example, we might compare Henry Jamyn Brooks' 1889 painting *Private View of the Old Masters Exhibition, Royal Academy, 1888* [fig. 5.25] to Frith's *Private View* we examined at the start of this chapter. Brooks' piece is a much more sober, ordered composition, the palette in earth tones, lacking the spots of colour provided by Frith's Aesthetic ladies. However, with the notable exception of Wilde (and Ellen Terry), many of the other key art world figures are again present: Leighton (seeming to wear the same brown suit) and Millais are visible with the addition of Frith himself, the Alma-Tademas (Laura is barely visible by her red hair in the centre back), Ruskin, Hunt (appearing rather Bohemian even in the small portrait, with a Middle Eastern jacket no doubt collected during his travels and a full beard), and Watts (in a smoking cap).

But in a striking difference to Frith's version, only one figure stands out due to her truly unusual attire. To the far right, a young woman stands with another lady and three gentlemen, reading her exhibit guide. The woman is Margaret Tennant, a socialite at the centre of a group of aristocrats known as 'The Souls', who would in seven years become the wife of the future Prime Minister Lord Asquith.¹⁰² Her long-sleeved dress is dark and indiscernible in the shadow, but over it she wears a long cape in a pale blue satin silk, fixed with a long wide ribbon about her throat. The upper section seems to be a layer that is more like an opera cape, which appears to be trimmed in a wide band of golden brown velvet. Upon her head, she wears a brimless hat of a similar blue tone, with almost a conical shape to the bowl of it. While not standing out boldly, it is much in line with what might be called Artistic Dress.

Brooks' painting shows not so much how Artistic Dress became accepted in society, but how much artists and society mingled throughout this decade to the point that such dress would not be considered so outlandish as to cause concern. But the more radical examples of this were still being promoted, and the fusion of Aestheticism and Dress Reform principles became the agenda of those who advocated Artistic Dress. By the end of the decade, after Godwin's death, all this debate gave way to a concerted effort towards the promotion of sartorial change. Several other artists took up

¹⁰² 'The Souls' might be seen as a group that grew out of many of the society that was discussed in chapter four, and included notable families (and artistic patrons) such as the Wyndhams, the Lindsays, and Lord Elcho. This next generation would be a useful inclusion in an expanded study of this topic.

the banner of leadership to champion Artistic Dress into the new century, forming societies for education on 'Healthy and Artistic Dress'; alongside the growing success of Liberty, who began to outfit not just London, but the New World as well. The next chapter explores these in detail.

Chapter Six: Healthy and Artistic Dress (ca. 1890 - 1900)

The signs are many that the educated world is endeavouring to introduce beauty into its daily life, that the time is past when Art was supposed to mean pictures in frames.¹

After nearly three decades of exposure to the holistic design philosophies promoted first by the Arts and Crafts Movement, and then expressed through the ‘Cult of Beauty’ associated with Aestheticism, Victorian Society was inculcated with the concept that Art was not just something to hang upon the wall, but could in fact be a way of life. Those who produced the journal *Aglaia* for the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union (H&ADU) understood this well, and included the above statement in their introduction to the first issue, in July 1893.²

The fusion of art and life is really what underpins the evolution of Artistic Dress, and there was an ever-increasing desire to educate the general public on what were seen to be more beautiful and healthful forms of dress to improve oneself. In the 1890s, we find the sartorial discussions and debates of the 1880s, of which the last chapter provided just a few key examples, evolve into a more focused didactic agenda, which is exemplified in the activities of the H&ADU. Comprised of a fusion of artists and dress reformers, the group promoted Artistic Dress through what we would nowadays call activism, particularly awareness and promotional activities such as meetings, publication, exhibitions, and even performances. They actively encouraged sartorial codes, which, they hoped, would become ingrained in society, or at the very least, become a basic aspect of artistic training and production.

Although the H&ADU is almost always mentioned in the literature on this subject, there has not as yet been a focused exploration of this group’s history or impact. Although there was always a society secretary who kept accounts and reports, the papers of the H&ADU sadly seem to be lost. What has been discussed of them in literature thus far has been gleaned from the pages of *Aglaia*; but with so many historic periodicals and newspapers now available and easily searchable electronically, it is possible to give a more extensive survey of their history and activities. First, however, it is helpful to make a brief related exploration of the pedagogical dissemination of Artistic Dress in the 1890s as evolved from consumer resources, specifically Liberty catalogues.

¹ Holiday, *Aglaia: The Journal of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union*, 1:3.

² H.&A.D.U. is the acronym the society uses in *Aglaia*, and is adopted here for simplicity.

Liberty's 'School of Personal Adornment'

The didactic legacy of Godwin is evident in the Liberty catalogues produced just after his death in 1886. In the first catalogue, a copy of which is now in the National Art Library, the pedagogical agenda was laid out:

Costumes.

This department, which was opened in the early part of 1884, under the direction of the late Mr. E.W. Godwin, F.S.A., &c., has been arranged for the study the study and execution of *Costumes*, embracing all periods of *Historic Dress*, together with such modification of really beautiful examples as may be adapted to the conventionalities of modern life, without rendering them eccentric or *bizarre*.

It is purposed to make a continued and systematic attempt to establish an *Educational School of Personal Adornment*, where shall be secured such forms, draperies, colours and ornaments as harmonize most perfectly with the natural characteristics of the wearer; and where shall be provided, for amateurs, artists and the stage, the most beautiful types of modern dresses, and the most reliable reproductions of ancient costume, plain or rich, according to the requirements of the person or the character.³

It is rather extraordinary for a department store, or a fashion designer, to take on an educational agenda. While this approach was surely not altogether altruistic—it was undoubtedly an excellent marketing strategy (A.L. Liberty sought to appeal to the educated, cultured consumer)—his desire to educate taste was not disingenuous, judging by his active involvement in dress reform societies. But the tactic was unprecedented and very clever; and I would in fact argue that Liberty's adoption of 'Art' as an underlying principle of his business (from philosophy, to product design, to marketing) is perhaps one of the first places we see what would today be called 'Branding', some two decades before Peter Behrens takes this approach at AEG in Germany.⁴

Liberty furthers this agenda by including extracts from M. Chevreul's 'admirable work, "The Laws of Contrast of Colour,"' which the catalogue notes 'will be found of great service in deciding upon the colour of costume.'⁵ Although there are numerous articles and texts discussing this very subject (as we have seen), Liberty makes it easy for the customer and includes the advice right where they shop. Also included, at the end of the catalogue, is a series of press extracts extolling the virtues of Liberty, including a rather lengthy article from an American customer named Annie Wakeman.⁶ 'The opinion of an American Visitor' is a very detailed account of her visit on the 29th of January 1884 (before the 'Costume' department was fully up and running), and as such is more focused on the *objets d'art* on offer. However one passage is telling of the atmosphere Liberty evoked,

³ Liberty & Co, Ltd., "*Liberty*" *Art (dress) Fabrics & Personal Specialities* (London: Liberty & Co, 1886), 13.

⁴ Behrens, and architect and designer, worked as a consultant for AEG, the German electrical company, designing everything from their headquarters to products, catalogues, logos, etc. He is often considered to be the first Corporate Designer in this regard.

⁵ Liberty & Co, Ltd., "*Liberty*" *Art (dress) Fabrics & Personal Specialities*, 13.

⁶ Possibly an American stage actress.

describing the ‘quiet peace’, the ‘easy chairs and Turkish divans by the dozens’, and the employees, such as the ‘soft-slippered, noiseless young lady, who wears a pretty draped apron of some art fabric, and has her head adorned with a silken cap...’⁷ She finishes, ‘No one even vaguely suggests that you purchase a single article, and you are treated as a guest, the proprietors loving art for art’s sake, while being in a worldly sense compelled to turn their tastes into practice “L. t. d.”’ Through these devices, the catalogue tempts the consumer with not just their wares, but also entices them to visit and sample what might today be called the Liberty ‘experience’.

The catalogue is of course functional too, and offers several illustrations of ‘Art’ Costumes, ‘Artistic Dress for Children’, ‘Artistic Millinery’ for ladies and children, and reproductions of Greek and Renaissance jewellery. Liberty also provided material and haberdashery, and the catalogue poetically details the fine embroideries, sashes, silks, velveteen, and their famous ‘Umritza Cashmere’ (named for the Indian city), which was very popular. The ‘Art’ costumes on offer could be constructed from materials of the customer’s choice.

Four ‘Art’ Costumes show the Liberty interest in both Historic and Aesthetic styles. The first is the ‘Athene’ [fig. 6.1], which was a long loose tunic dress in a classical Greek style, the top held in place by cording that crosses over the chest, and comes accompanied by a silk *himation* which the illustration shows artfully draped over one shoulder, wrapped around the back then draped low across the front and over the arm. It was available in cotton with silk himation, or for a little more in ‘Nagpore Silk’, and with an option for a gauze himation. An accompanying head dress is advertised as extra. One might wonder whether this costume was intended to be fancy dress, or whether Liberty thought it should be worn as everyday clothing. Nothing is revealed here; however much later, in 1894, a small illustration [fig. 6.2] accompanying an article A.L. Liberty wrote in *Aglaia* (see more below) shows a woman sitting serenely in a *klismos* chair (a reproduction of which could also be acquired at Liberty). Next to this is a second image of a woman in the same dress, walking through a rainy London street with an umbrella that provides little protection from the sideways torrent. The caption reads ‘Appropriate and Inappropriate Applications of Æsthetic Costume.’⁸

The second costume is the less exotically named ‘Heathcote’ [fig. 6.3], a mantle in either thick or thin cashmere, lined with ‘Liberty’ silk. The mantle is long, and topped with a shorter cape that is held about the shoulders by a decorative clasp. It also has a hood large enough to cover the picturesque feathered silk bonnet (which is again advertised as extra). We might imagine this being worn over the next costume, a medieval-inspired Aesthetic Dress called the ‘Greta’ [fig. 6.4]. The

⁷ Liberty & Co, Ltd., “*Liberty*” *Art (dress) Fabrics & Personal Specialities*, 54.

⁸ Arthur Lasenby Liberty, “On the Progress of Taste in Dress, In Relation To Manufacture,” *Aglaia: The Journal of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union* 3 (Autumn 1894): 29.

cut and styling follows those historically-inspired gowns discussed previously: the dress is ‘Embroidered and Smocked’, with loose sleeves, a low-necked overdress on top of a high-collared underdress, and layered skirts which are artfully draped through a low-slung belt. What is interesting, however, is that the dress is also belted tightly around a rather small waist, which might even appear to be corseted—thus not departing too far from the mainstream silhouette, and perhaps appealing to a wider customer base. The ‘Greta’ was available in Umritza or Himalayan Cashmere, or in ‘any kind of “Liberty” silk or Arabian Cotton.’

Finally, the ‘Valeria’ [fig. 6.5] was Liberty’s Tea Gown ‘in thin Umritza Cashmere and Silk Embroidered at Neck and Waist.’⁹ It is a simple, loose ‘At Home’ dress, topped by a short-sleeved coat with a long train. As previously discussed, Tea Gowns were very fashionable at that point, and it is quite conceivable that, as other scholars have argued, it was their popularity that made the ultimate demise of the corset possible. As women were able to free themselves from it in the home and in the company of intimate friends and family, and as alternatives such as ‘combinations’ became available, the option of being bound into a corset at other times must have been, for some, rather less appealing.

The Liberty catalogue of Art Dress offerings grew over the next several years until, by 1894, the catalogue became a much smaller ‘flip book’ of styles on offer (which doubled as perforated order sheets), without the lengthier didactic essays. These were perhaps unnecessary at this juncture due to having developed a successful (and cultured) client base. However, although the advisory guides were reduced, as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the descriptions for the garments themselves became concisely instructive. Recall the ‘Nina’ [fig. 1.2], a ‘handsome evening cape’, and others that were described as ‘useful’, or for their functions: walking, driving, the opera, etc. This continues through the turn of the century, where in 1902 coloured illustrations advertise options like the ‘Francesca’, for ‘Home Dinner Dress, or Tea Gown’ [fig. 6.6].¹⁰ By this date, however, we find a much wider diversity of functions and styles: dresses for morning, day, and evening; blouse and skirt combinations; long cloaks and capes with high ruffed necks and ruffled trims; and coats of all shapes and lengths such as the lovely three-quarter visiting or opera coat called the ‘Mariana’ [fig. 6.7]; and a long dust coat called the ‘Veronica’ [fig. 6.8]. These last two cuts of coat proved to be very popular, and in fact, a three-quarter coat with collar and sleeves very similar to the ‘Veronica’ is worn by my own great-grandmother, Nettie Findley, in a photograph from around this time [fig. 6.9]. Though I’m certain hers was not a Liberty, it does show the popularity of the style, and as also the breadth of the trend, as the photo was taken in Pennsylvania.

⁹ Liberty & Co, Ltd., “*Liberty” Art (dress) Fabrics & Personal Specialities*, 20. See also the discussion of Tea Gowns in chapter four, under ‘Whistler the Modiste’.

¹⁰ Liberty & Co. Ltd., “*Liberty” Costumes, Spring and Summer Designs, 1902 [Catalogue]* (London: Liberty & Co., 1902).

Although the didactic aspect of the catalogues diminished, A.L. Liberty himself was happy to apply his expertise to an article for the Autumn 1894 issue for *Aglaia* titled ‘On the Progress of Taste in Dress In Relation to Manufacture’ (part of a series of three; the others are discussed in the next section). Within this, he offers us some insight into the development of taste over the last couple of decades as he saw it. Of particular interest are his views on the misuse of ‘art’ as a trend:

During the period 1878 to 1880, a more general appreciation and demand spread for softer draperies, daintier fabrics, more skilful and intelligent designs, and especially for more luminous colour-tones. The facilities for satisfactory supply were still, however, sadly inefficient and restricted.

About the year 1881, crude and hasty attempts to meet the now advanced and pronounced public taste were indiscriminately multiplied, and, as a natural consequence, imitations and exaggerations resulted. Grace and simplicity were confused with negligent eccentricity, the new colour schemes misapplied, and the new fabrics adopted for unsuitable purposes. In short, unreflecting enthusiasm made the movement a “fashion” in which all canons or taste were forgotten or ignored.¹¹

He tells us that all was not lost, however, and that ‘the earlier movement had thoroughly aroused the attention of the more cultured as to the importance of the exercise of critical taste on the subject of dress’ and that they ‘but awaited only more favourable circumstances to be re-asserted.’ He then mentions ‘a collateral movement, founded on hygienic principles, attracted attention’ as well in 1881, identifying the conditions of both the Aestheticism trend and Dress Reform debates discussed previously. These comments are couched within a wider discussion of the influence of historical and exotic styles, particularly those of the East (recall that Eastern imports were how Liberty got its start). Readers could of course purchase these new fusion styles of Art and Reform from Liberty. Throughout this period Liberty became the main establishment where one might acquire the materials for one’s own artistic ensembles (as seen in the Thornycroft Dress) or simply purchase Artistic Dress outright. Though Liberty himself was not listed as an executive member of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union, his articles and involvement implies that he was an active subscriber. And the group’s leaders—and readers—must have included some of his best customers.

The Healthy and Artistic Dress Union

Foundation

It should be clear at this point that one of the main ways Artistic Dress was cultivated was through the close personal connections in the artistic social circles of the time. It was out of these associations, and from a growing affinity with the Dress Reform movement, that the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union was formed at a crowded meeting at Morley Hall, London, on Wednesday the 2nd of July 1890.¹² Perhaps surprisingly, however, none of the artistic luminaries who were to

¹¹ Liberty, “On the Progress of Taste in Dress, In Relation To Manufacture,” 28.

¹² Anonymous, “Down on the Dressmakers,” *North Wales Chronicle* (Bangor, Wales, July 12, 1890), Issue 3267 edition.

become leaders of the group seem to have been at the very first meeting—or at least not active enough to have made the press reports.

Many of these news items were brief and came under a header ‘To Teach Women to Dress Sensibly’ (or something similar), and the reports do in fact seem to indicate that much of the discussion was initially related to women’s clothing. One report, however, gives us much greater detail: an article in the North Wales Chronicle titled ‘Down on the Dressmakers’.¹³ Dr Sophie Bryant—amongst the first women to earn a Doctorate of Science in England—presided over this meeting, which also prominently included two physicians who were seemed to be central to the cause, W. Wilberforce Smith and Charles Read.¹⁴ Both Bryant and Smith continue to be active in the H&ADU, writing articles for *Aglaia*, but Read, about whom little is known, doesn’t seem to appear actively again in the extant literature. This is rather unfortunate since he offered the third resolution at this inaugural meeting, ‘That the society should be called the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union.’¹⁵

A ‘Miss Orms’ proposed the first resolution ‘in a speech in which she deprecated the idea of anything conspicuous or eccentric.’ This led to the now routine discussion on the evils of the corset, and the ‘inconvenience of dress made by ordinary dressmakers.’ Madame Antoinette Stirling, a popular Anglo-American singer, made this remark and commented that they ‘objected to her broad shoulders,’ and ‘it would be well if “dressmakers would fit the person instead of squeezing the person into the dress.”’ She continued, ‘Put gentlemen into stays and in one week they will be banished for ever from society.’

The second resolution was proposed by ‘Miss Hughes of the Cambridge Training College’ and was to recommend that full members should pay a subscription of 2s and 5d per annum; and associates pay no fee. These seem to have been adopted amidst further discussion and commiserating on how those in attendance had been the butt of jokes, including John Callcott Horsley, R.A., who revealed that he had been called ‘Clothes-Horsely’ after a cartoon in *Punch* represented him ‘as a draped

¹³ Ibid. This article may have been syndicated from a London source, but at present this is the only version I have found. A sub headline states that ‘Mrs Mary Davies Helps To Found Another Dress Reform League’, but I have been unable to determine who this was. She may have been local to or affiliated with Bangor, as Davies is a common Welsh surname.

¹⁴ Kathleen E. McCrone, *Playing the Game: Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women, 1870-1914* (University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 95; and “The First New Graduates - 150th Anniversary - University of London External System”, n.d., http://www.londoninternational.ac.uk/150/history/first_graduates.shtml. Sophie Bryant (1850-1922) ‘was an avid cyclist and encouraged students and teachers to ride; she also rowed on the Thames, was a great walker and even climbed the Matterhorn.’ According to the University of London, she was ‘An early candidate for the University of London’s Special Examination for Women. A brilliant scholar and teacher, and one of the first two women to graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree, she was the first woman Doctor of Science and the first woman to be elected to the University of London Senate.’

¹⁵ Anonymous, “Down on the Dressmakers.” Little is known about W. Wilberforce Smith, but he published articles on anatomical studies in medical journals; further information on Charles Read is unavailable.

clothes-horse.’¹⁶ Horsley was the only artist mentioned in this article. However, one other person familiar to this research was in attendance, and vocally so: Lady Harberton, the founder and leader of the Rational Dress Society.

The Viscountess apparently did not agree with the idea that clothing should not be ‘conspicuous or eccentric’, which was likely to be understood as referring to the Rational Dress she promoted. She conceded, however, that the group would be likely to ‘win many members’ under those conditions, and ‘inferred that it ran a better chance of popularity than her own—the Rational Dress Society.’ She wished them luck, yet made it clear that to her mind their proposals were not radical enough, thinking they would merely be ‘limping feebly along in the wake of fashion, and more likely to degenerate into a dowdy, frumpish and unattractive style of dress...’ To this, Bryant reportedly commented that ‘Lady Harberton’s was the doctrine of revolution, while the new society’s was that of evolution.’

And so the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union was born. Through clubs, exhibition societies, ‘At Homes’, and other social gatherings, they furthered their didactic agenda. The activities of the group subsequent to the first meeting are unclear, however there is a news item reporting a recent meeting in the *Woman’s Herald* on 28 November 1891, this time at the Cavendish Rooms where many future meetings would take place.¹⁷ Dr Wilberforce Smith was again present and ‘gave an interesting resumé of the scope and future work of the Union,’ which included the publication of a ‘periodical well illustrated’, telling us *Aglaia* was already being developed. This meeting was not presided over by Sophie Bryant, however, but by the man who would ultimately become the President and leading voice of the H&ADU: Henry Holiday.

Holiday, a successful painter, stained glass designer, sculptor and illustrator, came under the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites while still a student at the Royal Academy in the 1850s, having met Rossetti, Morris, and Burne-Jones through his friends Simeon Solomon and Albert Moore. Like them, he had a great interest in costume and fancy dress [fig. 6.10], and very quickly became associated with the second wave of Pre-Raphaelitism, and a follower of Arts and Crafts design principles.¹⁸ In fact, his wife Catherine, whom he married in 1864, was one of Morris’ most

¹⁶ Rather than his manner of dress, this jest was aimed at his criticism of the new fashion for nudes at the Royal Academy, influenced by the French salon, which he objected to in a lecture at the Church Congress according to *Punch*, 31 October 1885, p. 195: ‘Lady (interested in Mr Horsley’s model speech at the Church Congress, to artist friend): “What are Mr Horsley’s initials?” Artist: “J.C. Horsley. ‘J’ is John.” Lady. “And ‘C’, what’s that?” Artist. “Evidently, Clothes-Horsley.”’ Thanks to Margaret MacDonald for finding this.

¹⁷ Anonymous, “English News: The Healthy and Artistic Dress Union,” *The Woman’s Herald*, November 28, 1891.

¹⁸ A photograph of Holiday in chainmail [6.10] was likely the suit he had made for himself, which he used for his mural of the Magna Carta in Rochdale City Hall. See Henry Holiday, *Reminiscences of My Life*, 1914, 175–6; and Clare A. P. Willsdon, *Mural Painting in Britain 1840-1940: Image and Meaning* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 175. Thanks to Clare Willsdon for calling this to my attention.

talented embroiderers, and through this was very likely a good friend of Jane Morris. While Holiday perhaps didn't achieve the lasting fame of some of his friends, he was certainly amidst the artistic circles discussed here, for example successfully working with William Burgess on interiors for Worcester College, Oxford; and exhibiting works like his acclaimed *Dante and Beatrice* [fig. 6.11] at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1883. This painting would in fact inform one of his principal endeavours for the H&ADU, as we shall see shortly. But it was first his role as the 'Artistic Editor' of the Union's journal *Aglaia* that made him the most prominent voice of their undertakings.

Aglaia

In late 1892 Holiday was interviewed by *Hearth and Home* magazine in an article called 'The Crusade against Corsets. A chat with one of the Crusaders.'¹⁹ As the annual meetings of the H&ADU seemed to take place in November each year, this interview would have been not long after it, and Holiday speaks of the progress they have made toward the publication of *Aglaia*. In fact, he kindly allowed the magazine to print a proof of the cover [fig. 6.12], designed by Holiday himself. The author states, 'its charming design, reflects Mr. Holiday's love of Greek art, his clever treatment of drapery, and his general artistic feeling.' The design is a thoughtful arrangement of the three Graces: Aglaia, the 'patroness of personal adornment', takes pride of place at left in a full length chiton; and her sisters Thalia, representing health and youth, and Euphrosyne, symbolising mirth and merriment, are perched at right, arranged around the space reserved for the contents of each issue. This design became the 'brand' for the H&ADU, used not for just *Aglaia* but for their pamphlets, advertisements, and later publications.

Hearth and Home was enthusiastic about *Aglaia*, and related the journal's mission according to Holiday (and it may or may not be a direct quote from him), which echoes the sentiments expressed in the group's founding meeting:

In no sense is its aim strictly that of a fashion book, but rather a deduction of what is pure as relates to art and health from adoption. *Aglaia* will propose no violent revolution in matters of attire, such as the Rational Dress Association advocates, but its contents will be directed to teaching both men and women how to discriminate by choosing and rejecting, and so gradually moulding the exigencies of our climate and situation, the claims of artistic arrangement of drapery, and harmony of colour. The *Aglaia* neither befriends the Bloomer costume nor the Harberton divided skirt, nor does it claim kinship with Æstheticism. It casts in its lot with the world of fashion, but more as a mentor than a censor.²⁰

Later, in his 1914 memoirs, Holiday recalled this mission and stated that the journal's name:

...distinguished it from Lady Harberton's "Rational Dress" movement, which aimed at health and utility, but ignored beauty. I felt very soon that our work would be ineffective unless we issued a journal, and in 1892 we decided to start one and to call it "Aglaia."²¹

¹⁹ Anonymous, "The Crusade Against Corsets," *Hearth and Home*, December 22, 1892.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Holiday, 403

Aglaia was sadly short-lived. Two issues were to be produced in its inaugural year, and then it was to be quarterly. However only three issues were ever produced, the first in July 1893 (six months after the *Hearth and Home* preview), and then a Spring and an Autumn issue in 1894. The group was working on a fourth issue, and there seems to have been some production on it judging by a comment in *The Girl's Own Paper* by a correspondent calling herself 'The Lady Dressmaker' on 28 November, 1896:

So I must begin by mentioning our old friend the "Healthy and Artistic Dress Union," which last month issued its Sixth Annual Report. From this it appears that the Union is making steady progress, though somewhat slow, and that it has at present two hundred members. A review of the magazine, *Aglaia*, published by the Union, has already been given in THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER, and the committee are anxious to issue a fourth number, which they cannot do while they are hampered by want of funds.²²

Two years had passed since the last publication, so the assessment of 'slow but steady' progress was generous. Why was the group not able to produce another issue? Cost was certainly a consideration, particularly if their membership was not growing sufficiently. A note to readers in the second issue explains that 'all contributions to "Aglaia" are given for love' and says that they hope to be able to provide remuneration in order to fairly compensate the busy contributors and as well attract writers 'whose position is such that their words will carry weight.'²³ It also clarifies that the cost of printing and publishing were heavy, and borne by a small committee.

But the financial difficulties that stymied *Aglaia* might have been exacerbated by another occurrence. While the first issue of *Aglaia* lists no publisher, the second very clearly shows that it was 'Published by Hope-Hoskins, 110, Strand, W.C.' By 1894, Helena Hope-Hoskins was the society's Editor and Publisher, an occupation with which she had limited experience. She was very active in the Dress Reform movement, and had in fact started her own magazine in 1893, called the *Pioneer of Fashion*. It received positive reviews from several fashion magazines, particularly for being a publication led by a woman. *Le Follet* stated:

WE cannot too warmly recommend to our readers a new quarterly magazine entitled the Pioneer of Fashion, of which Miss Hope-Hoskins is the editor and proprietor, and we believe she enjoys the distinction of being the first girl to start such an undertaking single-handed. Her enterprise and energy, combined with talents of no ordinary calibre, have enabled her to achieve a well-deserved success.²⁴

Le Follet also praised the magazine for 'the decided superiority of language over that which appears to be sometimes considered good enough for contributions to ladies' papers.' So it was smart, diverse, well-received, and run 'single-handedly' by a woman. An accomplished woman as well, for Hope-Hoskins had won awards for her Reform Dress designs, most notably the Sanitary

²² The Lady Dressmaker, "The Day's Apparel," *The Girl's Own Paper*, November 28, 1896.

²³ Holiday, *Aglaia: The Journal of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union*, 1:6.

²⁴ Anonymous, "The Pioneer of Fashion," *Le Follet: Journal Du Grand Monde, Fashion, Polite Literature, Beaux Arts &c. &c.*, July 1, 1893.

Institute prize medal for Jaeger woollen underclothing at the Exhibition of Sanitary Apparatus and Appliances in Liverpool, 1894.²⁵ That same year, she established yet another dress society, the ‘Anti-Corset League’; the name explains itself. However, while lecturing in Liverpool, she explained a bit more about her position on this matter:

Many health reformers, in their endeavours to crush the pernicious practice of tight-lacing, have preached total abolition of the corset, but the league clearly sees the necessity of something of a corset nature which shall possess the good features of a ‘figure support’ without the many drawbacks of the ordinary cuirass of today...²⁶

Perhaps this gives us a hint at what her award-winning Jaeger woollen underclothing was? For her lecture, she apparently ‘wore clothing entirely composed of Jaeger material, which was nevertheless of pretty colour and artistic design’ and spoke of ‘her wish to see rational yet artistic dress generally worn.’ She seemed to be a well-known figure in reform circles by this time, and her dress was described in the press, such as in reports of the H&ADU meetings:

A conspicuous figure was that of a lady [revealed in other reports to be Hope-Hoskins] clad in the walking dress advocated by the Union, consisting of a petticoat and drapery over it, both quite short enough to avoid contact with the ground, and loose enough to afford perfect freedom to the limbs of the wearer. It was carried out in very pale green, with hat to match, a colour which would be rather conspicuous for walking costume.²⁷

So what then does the seemingly confident, tireless and successful Hope-Hoskins have to do with the demise of *Aglaiia*? The last mention that I was able to find of Hope-Hoskins in the press—or anywhere—offers a rather depressing conclusion:

A LADY’S BANKRUPTCY.—At the London Court of Bankruptcy, yesterday, the Official Receiver reported in the case of Miss Helena Hope Hoskins that the debtor in January 1892, without capital, commenced business as an advertising agent ; that from December, 1892, she had been the proprietor of a quarterly journal, the *Pioneer of Fashion*, which she produced and published until the end of 1893 ; and that in October last she also established a society styled “The Anti-Corset League,” with a small subscription for membership, of which she was nominally secretary. The accounts show liabilities £1,043, and assets £419.²⁸

Although *Aglaiia* was not mentioned (she had no ownership in it), Hope-Hoskins’ bankruptcy could have certainly caused difficulty for the H&ADU. She seems to no longer be involved after this date (in anything), and as such we may only postulate theories. But her story does certainly paint a fascinating picture of one of the Reformist members of the H&ADU.

²⁵ Anonymous, “The Sanitary Institute,” *Liverpool Mercury Etc Issue 14580* (Liverpool, September 25, 1894).

²⁶ Anonymous, “Day to Day in Liverpool,” *Liverpool Mercury Etc Issue 14601* (Liverpool, October 19, 1894).

²⁷ Anonymous, “The Healthy and Artistic Dress Union,” *Daily News* (London, April 28, 1894).

²⁸ Anonymous, “A Lady’s Bankruptcy,” *Birmingham Daily Post Issue 11461* (Birmingham, March 13, 1895).

The three issues of *Aglaia* that were produced, however, were rich in their research and information. They began with an introduction that laid out their manifesto, which by the second issue was fairly refined:

The Union is in no way connected with any professional house; its object is purely educational. We propose to create a healthy taste in dress by the following methods:-

1. By inculcating right principles.
2. By rendering familiar the form which has to be clothed.
3. By presenting ideals from past ages, and suggesting ideals for the future.
4. By critically examining existing forms showing their good points and defects, thus encouraging every favourable variety, discouraging all that is unwholesome or tasteless, and, when occasion offers, suggesting further improvements.
5. By giving occasional designs.²⁹

Aglaia contained not only detailed reports of the Union's activities, but also articles on improving dress and taste by leading artistic figures of the time such as Holiday himself, Walter Crane, and G.F. Watts. In terms of the history of Artistic Dress (and Dress Reform), the subjects of these articles are by this point almost redundant. They are the same arguments which had been repeated over the past few decades: the corset malforms the body; the natural form is beautiful; male dress is drab and dull; colour should be natural and complementary to complexion; clothing should be appropriate to climate, and not constrict the body, etc. Lesser-discussed additions to these debates include a focus on the feet (proper shoes, which mould to the shape of the foot, was a subject of interest); and a very detailed discussion by Wilberforce Smith on 'Corset Wearing: The Medical Side of the Attack', which was spread over the first two issues.

Holiday's contribution to the first issue was titled 'The Artistic Aspect of Dress', a paper that he had given at the 6 May 1892 meeting of the H&ADU. In this he offers a brief history of the best forms of dress (Greek and Medieval), and then discusses the aforementioned 'usual suspects' of those things that cause ugliness in dress. He includes a series of clever illustrations showing classically draped figures in a variety of poses [figs. 6.13-14], some with a corset superimposed over them, so the reader may see exactly how the corset interferes with natural motion. He titled these drawings 'Nature Proposes, But The Corset Disposes.'

Holiday also discusses 'Work Dress' for women at some length, which, although he states that 'It is now understood that [women] are rational human beings, capable of healthy exercise, whether in work or in games, and of active pursuits, intellectual and artistic,' it seems his idea of 'work' is still rather gentle, and discusses dress suitable for 'practising the piano or the violin, modelling, embroidery, and needlework generally.'³⁰ Within this, he encourages women to be experimental in these sorts of dresses, and in their Tea Gowns, observing:

²⁹ Holiday, *Aglaia: The Journal of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union*, 1:5.

³⁰ Holiday, "The Artistic Aspect of Dress," 23.

...they might at least give themselves as much liberty in dresses intended for the studio. When engaged in artistic pursuits, there would be an eminent suitability in the cultivation of especially artistic dresses... experiments... if successful, might be susceptible to more general adoption... others might try varieties of it for tea-gowns, and a decided success might ultimately start a distinct fashion.

He was no doubt thinking of his own wife in this case, and others of his friends such as Jane Morris. Holiday is highlighting something for the general public (hopefully) which has already been taking place, and which I have been stressing in the development of Artistic Dress: that it evolves as alternative fashion, leaves the home and studio, and enters the public sphere.

Holiday then turns to the recurrent subject of sleeves, discusses as many others have the comfort of full sleeves, but also that the fullness should not extend below the elbow for practicality's sake ('they catch in things and upset them, get caught in one's plate in eating, and are a continual cause of annoyance'). He then turns to a dress of his own design, which he says was shown at a previous meeting of the union, and provides illustrations of it [fig. 6.15]. He wished it to be a dress for indoor work and outdoor play, and provides a description that shows that he was not averse to using new technology to meet his aims:

I endeavoured to attain this end by constructing a dress which should fall loose from the shoulders, opening all down the front. This was gathered round the waist by a double girdle containing two loops in front, into one or both of which the dress could be drawn to any height that might be convenient... You will see... that in one drawing the sleeves are tucked up to the elbow, while in the others they descend to the wrists; this is managed by elastics, which give the effect of a puffed sleeve when it is drawn up to the elbow. A lady, who had the dress made, tells me she finds it very convenient and comfortable, not for outdoor work only, and I think you will see by the drawing that, when drawn up into the loops, it takes of itself very graceful folds.³¹

The illustrated dress is certainly picturesque, and looks as if it was taken directly from a Pre-Raphaelite painting. In an ironic manner, at least in this particular example, Artistic Dress has not changed much at all over the past several decades. And we know now that this type of dress never became exactly mainstream, but rather paved the way for more practical clothing at the start of the next century. But perhaps it is as Liberty states, the artists involved in the H&ADU saw a second chance to promote Artistic Dress after the 'craze' of Aestheticism had died down, and within the new milieu of Dress Reform.

From a feminist perspective, however, Holiday's design is certainly progressive, but still might be seen as serving both to liberate and objectify the female wearer. Part of his motivation is to have a more picturesque appearance to everyday life:

I venture to think that we might add considerable more charm to our gardens if ladies, walking and gardening in them, would wear something of this kind, and while on this subject, may I suggest that for all walking purposes where the dress has to be gathered up in any way, it falls far more gracefully if drawn up to one side, than if pulled into bunches

³¹ Ibid., 23–24.

all round. Some of these points if generally understood would almost revolutionise the appearance of our streets; we have all of us seen various ways adopted of reefing up dresses for walking purposes, and it is hardly too much to hope that a new way and a better way, if suggested, might be generally adopted if it was found to be efficacious and far more graceful than the old.³²

To be fair, however, he desired to do this for male dress as well, observing that the ‘hideous uniformity of black chimney-pot hat, black coat, black boots, trousers nearly black—all shapeless and colourless—would be enough to persuade one that there was no such thing as love of beauty in man, were it not for the important reflection that such a barbarous spectacle was never seen in any country until this century.’³³

Holiday elaborated on these problems in *Aglaia* No. 2 with an article on ‘Men’s Dress’ (which he again illustrates with comparative drawings that heavily advocate loose knee breeches), while drafting in G.F. Watts to write about ‘Women’s Dress’. Watts’s article is much briefer than the one he wrote for *The Nineteenth Century* in 1883, and rather than give a diatribe on the ills of contemporary dress, he focuses instead on matters of taste, about which he begins:

Taste is a very difficult quality to define since it will be, to a great extent, merely a matter of opinion and individual sentiment; and it is impossible to guide it in the matter of feminine costume, excepting in so far as some governing principles can be laid down.³⁴

He then proceeds to state succinctly what should be avoided in terms of good taste, and does so with an artist’s eye by discussing lines that should not be broken (‘any arrangement that diminishes or disturbs the effect of the upright spring of the neck from the level shoulders, more beautiful than anything else in the world’), and drawing comparisons with the shape and poise of the Venus de Milo (also illustrated in this issue). Both Watts and Holiday, in discussing how a dress might be worn to suit (and display) the body, are pointing to more than just clothing, but styling of clothing, as essential to Artistic Dress. Holiday doesn’t just offer a garment pattern, but discusses *how* it might be worn. Watts focuses on the body, and what should be highlighted in terms of its form, rather than discussing an actual garment to wear, recognising that he is less likely to influence taste, and may perhaps instead act as an authority and guide on matters of artistic style.

Watts and his wife Mary (like Catherine Holiday, a practicing artist) were Vice-Presidents of the H&ADU alongside several other notable figures, some of whom have been considered in this study, notably Hamo and Agatha Thornycroft, and Louise Jopling. Someone who was not listed on the original Executive Committee (but joined later on), who had an active role in the group, was Walter Crane.

³² Ibid., 24.

³³ Ibid., 18.

³⁴ G.F. Watts, “Women’s Dress,” *Aglaia: The Journal of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union* 2, no. Spring (1884): 23.

Like Holiday, Crane had a long-standing interest in costume through his Pre-Raphaelite-influenced Arts and Crafts work (see chapter four), and my personal opinion is that he was one of the more dapper artists in this study, including Whistler. In every extant photograph he seems impeccably turned out, his Van Dyck beard neatly and sharply waxed to points from even an early age, as an 1875 Elliot & Fry photo shows [fig. 6.16], and he was often photographed wearing a silver tie clip with a large round stone, reminiscent of Indian or perhaps Native American folk jewellery [fig. 6.17]. Even when he is wearing a painting smock, one can tell his outfit underneath is something rather special. Mary Crane also shows her own artistic inclinations in one of the few extant photos of her [fig. 6.18], in a loose printed gown with a silk sash, which, judging by her posture, is clearly worn *sans* corset. It was possibly of her own (or Crane's) design.

Crane left behind many designs for dresses that can now be seen in the Walter Crane Archive at the Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester. These designs show how Crane adopted Artistic Dress principles by combining the inspiration of Greek Dress (the *chiton* in particular) and modified them to blend with contemporary style [fig. 6.19]. They are cleverly designed not to depart too drastically from Victorian fashion, yet clearly provide comfort and freedom of movement. And though these are sketches, the figures clearly have natural, uncorseted waists. Some even have notes for construction, such as one [fig. 6.20] which states it is a 'Gown of Liberty silk made straight from a yoke & held only by band of same at waist. Yoke quilted. Sleeves full to elbow.'³⁵ Another sketch, depicting an empire-waist gown (another style H&ADU advocated) that crosses over the bosom [fig. 6.21], is very similar to a velvet dress now in the collection of the V&A [fig. 6.22], which I would argue is perhaps one of the more famous (and reproduced) of the extant Artistic Dresses.

Crane was also a noted lecturer and advocate for Arts and Crafts education (nominally the South Kensington System, see more below), having been one of the founders, and elected first President, of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1888. As such he was an ideal candidate to contribute to a series of articles in what was to be the final, Autumn 1894 issue of *Aglaia*. These were a succession of three essays on the 'progress of taste in dress' as related to three specific topics: 'Art Education', 'the Stage' (theatre), and 'Manufacture.' We have already seen an excerpt from the third article by A.L. Liberty, above. Similarly, Crane wrote 'On the Progress of Taste in Dress in Relation to Art Education', echoing the advice we have heard repeated throughout this thesis. Crane analysed the contemporary dress of both genders, which he found particularly dull in the case of men's 'tubular' clothing and lack of colour, similar to the criticisms that Holiday and Watts levelled (and not to forget the original remarks of Godwin almost twenty-five years before).

³⁵ Drawing by Walter Crane (WCA.1.2.3.1.48), Walter Crane Archive, Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester.

This is not to say Crane's thoughts are unoriginal, but, much like this thesis, build upon those of his predecessors. One way he does this is through an illustration that compares late Victorian male dress unfavourably to the 'medieval simplicity' of 14th century dress [fig. 6.23]. Interestingly, the costume he illustrates is a real one: not only did he use it for the figure of Cimabue in his watercolour *The Arts of Italy* of 1886 (Collection of the Whitworth Gallery), but he wore it himself on the occasion of a 'Coming of Age' ball given for his son in 1897, seen in a photograph with his wife Mary dressed as Laura [fig. 6.24]. While the occasion was one that allowed this sartorial play, Crane yet advocates medieval dress over contemporary fashion in *Aglaia*, and in numerous drawings he made of dress designs (see above):

I think there can be no doubt, for instance, of the influence in our time of what is commonly known as the pre-Raphaelistic [*sic*] school and its later representatives in this direction, from the influence of Rossetti (which lately, indeed, seems to have revived and renewed itself in various ways) and the influence of William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones. But it is an influence which never owed anything to academic teaching. Under the new impulse, the new inspiration of the mid-century from the purer and simpler tones, forms, and colours of early mediaeval art, the dress of women in our own time may be said to have been quite transformed for a while, and, though the pendulum of fashion swings to and fro, it does not much affect, except, in some small details, a distinct type of dress which has become associated with artistic people—those who seriously study and consider of the highest value and importance beautiful and harmonious surroundings in daily life.³⁶

The subsequent article in *Aglaia* turns to the theatre as a place of sartorial innovation. 'Taste in dress in relation to the Stage,' was written by the artist and critic A.L. Baldry and his wife, the actress and dancer Lily Linfield. They presented the stage as the ideal place to instruct the public on appropriate fashion, for not only was it a popular form of entertainment, but it offered a ready, captive audience who were already participating in a creative suspension of reality via their reception of the performance – and were therefore susceptible to ideas outside the norm. We have already seen this idea at work through the costumes of Ellen Terry, and in the example of *Patience*. Baldry and Linfield argue:

...to give the stage its present due, it has made good a claim to be considered in the front rank of dress reformers, for, in the first place, it has long endorsed with all strength the principle that costume should be appropriate to action, and suited to the physical needs of the wearer. ...the theatrical rule not only permits a costume which is of the slightest, but also secures as well the acceptance by all classes of society of this necessary scantiness. In other ways, too the stage has established as more than possibilities—has, indeed, presented as actually accomplished facts—dresses which are more definite departures from outside custom than any theoretical reformers have been able to devise... It has, in fact, combined the offices of practical experimentalist and of teacher by illustrations.³⁷

The flaw in this argument is, of course, that these progressive and sometimes scanty costumes were accepted by society precisely because they were worn as part of performances, often with historical

³⁶ Walter Crane, "On the Progress of Taste in Dress, in Relation to Art Education," *Aglaia: The Journal of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union*, no. 3 (1894): 7–8.

³⁷ A.L. Baldry and Lily Linfield, "On the Progress of Taste in Dress In Relation to the Stage," *Aglaia: The Journal of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union*, no. 3 (1894): 21–22.

or fantastical themes, rather than being worn on the street. But like so many of the artists mentioned here, these two moved in artistic circles that were more readily accepting of alternative fashion possibilities: Baldry, like Holiday, was a former pupil and close friend of Albert Moore and, by association, of Whistler. And like Godwin, he also worked in the theatre designing sets and costumes. These ideas were no doubt shaped through their social connections as well as performances in which Baldry and Linfield participated, sometimes together, such as a *tableau vivant* (see on this more below) shortly before this article was written.

The third *Aglaia* was rounded out by the usual notices and reports, with one pointing to the possible source of struggle that the group had: ‘We have received numerous complaints from persons interested in the movement, of difficulties they have experienced in communicating with us, owing to the absence of any permanent head quarters and a resident secretary.’³⁸ The solution announced here is that Miss Hope-Hoskins was to take care of these matters at her place of business. However, we have already seen her fate. What then became of the H&ADU subsequently?

Meetings and Exhibitions

The activities of the group always included quarterly meetings where members would exhibit artistic and healthy clothing made with Liberty fabrics as well as the hygienic woollens of Dr. Jaeger. These continued, and according to press reports, Holiday chaired many of the subsequent meetings, which we can suppose, led to his ultimate presidency.

These were also the main places to see Artistic Dress first hand, some of which were related in the press, as in the case of Helena Hope-Hoskins. Other examples include this one from a meeting on Friday 27 April 1894 at the Cavendish Rooms:

One of the most artistic gowns was shown at the Jaeger stall, consisting of a medieval white woollen, shaped to the figure, and trimmed with bands of green and mauve embroidery. The sleeves were in a mauve woollen fabric.³⁹

This example shows the attention paid to colour theory, as green and gold are secondary complementary colours. At the following meeting on the 10th of July, Holiday was wearing one of his own creations:

The Chairman and one other gentleman appeared in the new evening dress devised by the society for gentleman’s wear, consisting of evening coat and vest in velvet, faced with silk; silk stockings, and knee-breeches. One gentleman wore brown, the other green, each substituting a soft, unstarched white silk shirt, with turned down collar, instead of the orthodox starched linen or ordinary wear. The coats had rolled collars and deep cuffs of the shape known as gauntlets to milliners and others. It is suggested, in a leaflet issued by the

³⁸ Holiday, *Aglaia: The Journal of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union*, 1:36.

³⁹ Anonymous, “The Healthy and Artistic Dress Union.”

Union, that the cuffs might be frilled, to hang over the hands, and that the tie should be of very thin silk trimmed with lace. The stockings are to be harmonious in colour with the velvet or velveteen of the coat, and the vest may be of watered silk, white or coloured. It may also be composed of brocade or corded silk.⁴⁰

These meetings also included small exhibitions of items, but the popular press seemed most interested to focus on what people wore, reports of which often appeared in gossip columns. The *Hampshire Telegraph* wrote about the June 1895 meeting in a tone that somewhat expressed its disapproval:

The majority of the costumes worn by those present were of an extraordinary and unique character, and attracted considerable attention in the public streets near by, as the members walked through them to the meeting. Every possible eccentricity of design in feminine attire appeared to be represented, with the one exception of the old “Bloomer” dress. Most of the ladies wore a newly-designed costume consisting of a jersey, like that worn by seamen, with knickerbockers and a short skirt... The gentlemen wore a peculiar kind of evening dress designed especially for the Union, and consisting of knee breeches and a crimson-coloured dress coat.⁴¹

However, four days later, a somewhat humorous clarification appeared in another Hampshire paper, the *Advertiser*, under the column ‘Gossip on Men and Things’:

Two ladies, who act as honorary secretaries of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union, are anxious it should be known that the few women who wore eccentric costumes at a recent meeting of the association must not be taken as representing the aims of the Union, which simply seeks to promote healthy and becoming dress without marked singularity. The costumes which caused comment were illustrative of bicycle and gymnastic habits, and only showed their wearers’ particularities... It still, however, remains a mystery why women should attend a public meeting in gymnastic dress. Did they expect a scrimmage, and were they prepared at a moment’s notice to act as ‘chuckers out’ of the gentlemen in silken knee breeches?⁴²

This exchange, though highly amusing, reveals the ongoing resistance to these ideas, and perhaps gives us another reason why the H&ADU subscription wasn’t moving as quickly as they had hoped. This is perhaps an underlying reason why they decided to put on one of the most ambitious endeavours they had yet taken on, the following year: The Exhibition of Living Pictures.

The Exhibition of Living Pictures

It was decided that the H&ADU would organise a major exhibition of living pictures, or *tableaux vivants*, to promote their mission to the public in an entertaining manner. The press picked this up with alacrity when it was announced in late 1895, and it seems that many were looking forward to the event.

⁴⁰ Anonymous, “Annual Summer Meeting,” *Daily News*, July 11, 1894.

⁴¹ Anonymous, “The Rational Dress Movement,” *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle Etc Issue 5936* (Portsmouth, England, June 15, 1895).

⁴² Anonymous, “Gossip on Men and Things,” *The Hampshire Advertiser Issue 5115* (Southampton, England, June 19, 1895).

Tableaux vivants, sometimes called living pictures or more rarely *poses plastiques* or living statuary, had been a popular form of entertainment for centuries. In one of the very few articles on the subject, Brenda Assael tells us that ‘while dating back to antiquity, living pictures can be traced to the eighteenth century Neopolitan drawing room displays by Lady Emma Hamilton, who famously covered her semi-nude form with shawls. Once they dropped, she was said to portray a series of grand gestures as if the statues she represented, like Helena, Cassandra, and Andromache, had come to life.’⁴³ In the late Victorian era, however, these performances were usually not so titillating, and some found these forms of entertainment a bit antiquated and dull. On February 2, 1893, a correspondent for the ladies magazine *Hearth and Home* wrote:

I do not always like *tableaux*. They are apt to be formal, dull, horribly respectable in the worst sense of the term, a sort of vague compromise between the debauching frivolity of a ‘stage play’ and the inept enervation of a back drawing-room conjurer—of the egg-producing species. You sit, as a rule, for about half-an-hour in dreary expectation, then a curtain goes up for a quarter of a minute and you behold a plain woman of your acquaintance masquerading as Mary, Queen of Scots, or a tea-party young man simpering as Charles the First about to be decapitated. It is not lively, and life is so short we cannot afford to waste half-hours with such unbridled prodigality.’⁴⁴

Nonetheless, the reviewer goes on to give a favourable review of *tableaux* arranged in aid of the poor at Chelsea Town Hall. While perhaps not of great import in the very large London theatrical world, this small event is significant for the research at hand, for amongst those participating in the *tableaux* were key members of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union: the artists Louise Jopling, G.A. Storey, Baldry and Linfield. Jopling arranged some of the *tableaux*, and ‘was also seen in the wonderful *tableau* of Bluebeard’s unfortunate wives, quite a gruesome masterpiece.’⁴⁵ Baldry played the role of Bluebeard, and his ‘clever wife a charming and pathetic Fatima.’

It is as yet undiscovered whether these two, or other members of the H&ADU, performed other *tableaux vivants* in these years, but in 1896 the group put on an exhibition of ‘Living Pictures’ at St. George’s Hall. In addition to press reports, a set of photographs of the *tableaux*, belonging to Crane, survived and are in the Crane Archive. The event, which was performed three times on the 14th to the 16th of May, was led by their then-president Holiday. The title *tableau* cleverly reconstructed his illustration for the cover of *Aglaiia* [fig. 6.25]. Holiday arranged a scene on ancient Egypt comprising ‘a pavilion looking upon the façade of the Temple of Luxor, in which was seated a princess with companions and attendants.’⁴⁶ A reviewer for the *London Daily News* assured potential visitors that ‘the dresses of the ladies taking part in this scene are not transparent, as were those of the ladies of Egypt in the time of Rameses II, but they are so made as to conceal as

⁴³ Brenda Assael, “Art or Indecency? Tableaux Vivants on the London Stage and the Failure of Late Victorian Moral Reform,” *Journal of British Studies* 45 (2006): 746.

⁴⁴ Anonymous, “Untitled (Tableau Vivant),” *Hearth and Home*, February 22, 1893.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Holiday, 406.

little as possible the outline of the form.’⁴⁷ When considering the Union’s view that historical garments complemented the natural form, these dresses no doubt served a delightfully didactic function. Likewise for the garments in the ancient Greek tableau, arranged by Mr. John Fulleylove, whereby the *Daily News* reviewer was somewhat more practical in his/her criticism of this scene, observing: ‘The dresses are charming enough to invite imitation, but they are, unfortunately, but ill suited to the requirements of our countrywomen in a climate like our own.’⁴⁸

The Medieval Italy tableau was also arranged by Holiday [fig. 6.26], and was in fact directly based on his aforementioned painting ‘Dante and Beatrice’ of 1884.⁴⁹ This scene from the *Vita Nuova*, where Beatrice denies the poet her greeting, is not only the perfect subject with which to represent the elegant tunic dresses of this era, but is also a reference to the lingering influence of the Pre-Raphaelites in both the rendering of subject matter, which recalls Hunt’s ‘Lorenzo and Isabella’, and theme, which was a favourite amongst the group, particularly Rossetti. Holiday was likewise taken with this particular scene, travelling to Italy to make studies for the view of the Arno; making numerous sketches for the work, and even going to far as to make maquettes of the figures (now in the collection of the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool). We also have a related photograph [fig. 6.27] which survives that depicts Holiday with Ada Mansel (later Forestier-Walker) as Beatrice, and an unknown man as Dante. Holiday stands between them wearing Artistic Dress in the form of a velvet suit, complete with knee-breeches.

The painter G.A. Storey, who like Baldry was a pupil of Albert Moore, chose to bring to life Joshua Reynold’s ‘Three Ladies Waldegrave’, to represent 18th century England. The views on the dreariness of contemporary fashion were arranged by Mrs Carol E. Kelsey (who was reported in the press often as speaking out against the corset), depicting ‘the genteel, the shabby-genteel, and the shabby’ through figures in ‘black top hats, straight coats, and boots’ on the men ‘while the women show all the views of distorted waists, pinched toes, high heels, and balloon sleeves.’ By contrast, the Future street scene arranged by Holiday and George Herbert Kitchen reflected broad streets with houses that looked ‘roomy, airy, and comfortable’, with clothing that reflected ‘suitability to various pursuits.’

Walter Crane styled a pastoral scene that the *Daily News* comments would ‘appeal for its rustic charm’ and that ‘the dresses are bright and sweet in colour, picturesque in form, and the picture needs only something resembling sunshine to make it perfect.’ The scene is hardly what one might

⁴⁷ Anonymous, “Healthy and Artistic Dress Union,” *Daily News* (London, May 14, 1896).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Dr Clare Willson pointed me to a quote from Holiday’s reminiscences which makes his concentration and repetition of this scene somewhat ironic: “My life has been a continued protest against Medievalism.” (Henry Holiday, *Reminiscences of My Life*, 1914, 164.) In much of his work, he seems to embrace Medieval revival, so the contrast in this comment is perhaps an area worth some future analysis.

imagine as futuristic, even in the *fin de siècle*. But it may be better understood in consideration of Crane's Socialist interest in labour.⁵⁰ This scene complements the elegance of the Aesthetic party tableau styled by Louise Jopling, with dresses chosen and provided by Liberty himself [fig. 6.28]. According to the Daily News, 'several well known ladies and gentleman take part in it', but unfortunately does not mention who they are. This final scene was meant to encapsulate the ideals of healthy and artistic dress, with the ladies wearing loose fitting tea gowns, and the gentlemen in velvet coats, breeches, and silk stockings. Holiday left his thoughts on the success of this exhibition in his 1914 memoirs:

The Hall was crowded, and they were voted a great success. Looking back to that time, it is satisfactory to be able to say that a decided improvement has taken place; even the top-hat, which had resisted all attacks for nearly a century, has almost disappeared, and colour is beginning to be seen in men's dress. As for ladies, the change for the better is striking; they seem to have learnt, what we constantly urged in "Aglaiia," that dress, if it is to be beautiful, must conform to the figure, and this seems happily to be the rule with most of the dresses now worn.⁵¹

Later Work

I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis that even since I have started this research, so much new information has become available through electronic archives. The majority of this study of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union exemplifies this, as I was able to easily search the British Library periodicals and find new information, a task which would have previously taken more time and resources than I have had at my disposal. And although we must be incredibly vigilant when using the internet for research, sometimes new and exciting discoveries come from unexpected (and not necessarily academic) places.

For the past two years, Catherine Eyre has been, out of her own sheer interest, writing an informative blog on the Haslemere Peasant Movement.⁵² These fringe artist colonies are in fact important to the history of the spread of Artistic Dress. In the course of researching Ethel and Godfrey Blount, two of the founders of Haslemere, she discovered that they were members of the H&ADU ca. 1900. What is extremely interesting about this, however, is that she discovered an early twentieth century journal called *The Dress Review*, published by the H&ADU, and the cover for it was exactly that of *Aglaiia* [fig. 6.29], but with the name changed. They in fact continued to use this design for their pamphlets and other ephemera. *The Dress Review* seems to have similar goals (and similar articles) as the original *Aglaiia*, and a somewhat more successful run: the Women's Library at London Metropolitan University holds several issues, and from the range it appears the journal ran approximately quarterly from 1902-1906.

⁵⁰ For more on this, see: Morna O'Neill, *Art and Labour's Cause Is One: Walter Crane and Manchester, 1880-1915* (Whitworth Art Gallery, 2008).

⁵¹ Holiday, *Reminiscences of My Life*, 51.

⁵² Catherine Eyre, "Peasant Arts - Haslemere", October 2010, <http://peasant-arts.blogspot.com/>. Many thanks to Catherine for kindly sharing her research with me.

In addition to continuing the didactic mission of *Aglaia*, the *Dress Review* included more photographs of dresses (rather than hand drawings), and in fact reprinted some from international magazines like *The Studio*, which was a critical place for the dissemination of design culture from its first issue in 1893. As such we see H&ADU beginning to recognise the pan-European scope of Artistic Dress, particularly that in Belgium, Germany, and Austria.⁵³

More research is needed on these volumes, and to determine what the fate of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union finally was. Many of the original patrons were getting old (or in some cases deceased) by this point, and one letter printed in the October 1905 *Dress Review*, written by Walter Crane, speaks of the ‘slow evolution’ of dress, and perhaps for the first time, of technological change which may come to bear on it:

Until great social and economic changes take place in the constitution of society, therefore, I do not think we can expect any very general adoption of new types of dress except special adaptations to practical purposes of new inventions, such as the motor, which has brought in quite a distinct type of costume, both for men and women, not without a certain weird picturesqueness sometimes (the linen coats of the chauffeurs are quite a good feature).

When again in a community of workers, people are proud of their employments, and consider it an honourable distinction to wear the distinctive dress appropriate to their work, we might again have great variety and beauty, bringing character and colour into common life.⁵⁴

It remains true that the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union played an important role in the distillation and dissemination of Artistic Dress principles throughout this decade and into the next century.

Art School Style

Before I bring this research to a close, I want to make clear that although the majority of this study has been based in and around London, Artistic Dress was practised in a much wider manner than the scope of this thesis can reasonably explore, as the Haslemere group shows. At the very least, the individuals discussed here travelled, and many of them worked in other centres of artistic production such as Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, and Leeds—and left their mark in each place. And the press examples related to the H&ADU show that the interest in dress alternatives was not just limited to large cities, but smaller populations in the thriving Victorian empire were intrigued as well. But there is one key environment in which Artistic Dress thrived that should be mentioned in a bit more detail, and which helps illustrate how the style spread, and was received, in the *fin de siècle*: Art Schools. Government Schools of Art and Design boomed after the 1851 Great Exhibition, and satellite schools cropped up throughout Britain to train new artisans in the wake of

⁵³ For more on this, see: Barrows, *The Sources, Rhetoric, and Gender of Artistic Dress*. This pan-european aspect is largely the focus of her dissertation.

⁵⁴ Walter Crane, “Letter from Walter Crane,” *The Dress Review* 1, no. 14 (October 1905).

mass industrialisation. There is one particular school, and group, whose absence from this study would make it woefully incomplete; and although they have been fairly well-researched elsewhere in terms of their sartorial activities, I feel it is vital to include them, even if briefly, as the *dénouement* to this thesis.

Throughout the 1890s, a talented circle of friends became associated with the Glasgow School of Art (GSA). Much of what has been written about them has centred on their most famous member, the architect and designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh, but he was just one of several creative individuals to come out of Glasgow, many of whom went on to have successful careers. Mackintosh has often been credited as a ‘leader’ of sorts, however if there was to be such a figurehead (which is a problematic designation anyway), we might consider Francis ‘Fra’ Newbery, the school’s Headmaster during these years. Trained under the South Kensington system of art education, and by extension in the milieu of Walter Crane and William Morris (with both of whom he was on friendly terms), Newbery created not just an educational programme based on Arts and Crafts principles, but an environment of collaboration and community throughout his faculty and student body. To foster this communal creative spirit, he encouraged extracurricular activities, such as clubs, exhibitions, fancy dress balls, *tableaux vivants*, and sketch parties in the country. It was through these that a particular circle of friends formed, probably around 1892, which included Mackintosh and Herbert McNair, both night students while apprentice architects at the firm of Honeyman & Keppie, and the sisters Margaret and Frances Macdonald, who from 1890 studied design courses in the daytime.

McNair married Frances in 1899, while Margaret and Charles married in 1900; and though each couple worked exclusively with their spouse after they married, for the better part of 1890s ‘the four’ (as they were later dubbed) worked collaboratively and demonstrated mutual stylistic influence. The sisters in particular shared an art studio where they worked together on prints, drawings, watercolours, embroideries, and repoussé work. But these four were not the only artists to develop the ‘Glasgow Style’ as it has come to be known.

Their circle of close friends can be seen in an album of photographs now in the collection of the Glasgow School of Art archives. These photos are perhaps most striking in that they are not dour Victorian group portraits, but depict friends at ‘the Roaring Camp’ (as the album labels the location) at the fishing village of Dunure, simply enjoying the countryside. ‘The Roaring Camp’ comprised the house of Mainslea, just across from the ruins of Dunure Castle, and a small cottage in the back garden, rented by John Keppie for himself, his sister Jessie, and their friends ca. 1895. In addition to the Keppies, Mackintosh, McNair, and the Macdonalds, the rest of the party that we know of was female, and all fellow students: Agnes Raeburn, Janet Aitken, and Katherine Cameron.

What mischief the name ‘Roaring Camp’ evokes, and the pictures only hint at the fun the group must have had. One photo [fig. 6.30] shows them standing in a row on a stone wall, some clasping hands (McNair stands between Margaret and Frances at right). A second rather amusing photo [fig. 6.31] shows them seated behind a rail fence: Cameron, Mackintosh, Keppie, and Raeburn, who each wore rather large bow ties around their necks, have them untied and hanging over the fence rail; at right, McNair is again seated between the Macdonald sisters, and the three have their hands on the rail in a ‘thumbs up’ gesture. Even more comically, Frances has a rather large detachable collar drawn up over her head like a wimple.

Two other photographs show the six ladies, one from the front [fig. 6.32], facing each other three and three, with Aitken and Cameron holding their hands up and clasped like a bridge, and Mackintosh crouched in the centre; the other rather beautiful image [fig 6.33] shows the six ladies from the back, arms linked, gazing over the countryside.

A rather good costume sketch can be made from these images. First: the ‘floppy’ ties, particularly for men, are something which have already been associated with Artistic Dress for a while, as we have seen. One of the most famous portraits of Mackintosh, a series made by his friend Thomas Annan, depicts him with his signature large, loose bow, which he purposefully chose over the much less conspicuous ‘work’ bow tie he wore for his professional architectural endeavours [fig. 6.34]. It is a portrait of an artist. McNair wears this tie as well, and goes a step further by wearing loose knee breeches, both comfortable for the country and, in combination with the low brimmed straw hat (which Mackintosh also sports), an outfit of which the H&ADU would have approved.

As for the women, while we cannot necessarily characterise these as following the models set forth by the H&ADU for example, most of them are wearing comfortable, light dresses for the country, appearing to make use of light materials in both colour and weight (Cameron’s appears to be printed with flowers), and while the skirts are long, they are loose and stop at the ankle, so they do not drag. And from the posture and fit, it seems that these women are not wearing form-fitting corsets (though some perhaps have on some form of stays), with one notable exception: surprisingly, Margaret Macdonald is very clearly wearing a corset in the darker of the two dresses we see her wear.⁵⁵ In the frontal and side views, she appears very trim, and one might say it was due to the cut of her fashionable dress (much more formal-looking than the other country dresses). But seeing her from the back one can very clearly make out the sharp curve of her corset in the snug princess-line dress, particularly when comparing it to the less-structured pleated skirts of her friends, and even her sister, whose dress has a modified empire waist.

⁵⁵ The photo of the group seated by the rail was taken at a different time from the others mentioned, as the clothing is different for all the women.

This is a stark contrast to two later photographs of her, both taken by Annan, which show her in what can only be called Artistic Dress. She is seated in both, wearing a blouse and skirt combination, and they are from after her marriage to Mackintosh, c.1901, judging by the collaborative furnishings surrounding her, and the wedding ring visible in one image. This image [fig. 6.35] shows her seated in one of Mackintosh's nook-like chairs, leaning forward and resting her chin upon her hand, so her smiling face is in the light from the window at right (over which we can see curtains which she likely embroidered). She wears what can only be described as a loose tunic top in a dark tone, with elbow-length sleeves trimmed in a ruffle of self, and a neckline which is plain, round, and collarless, trimmed in a lighter toned ribbon. This she wears over a white shirt of a gauzy material that is very loose, and of this we can only see the long, puffed sleeves that come to her wrist with a wide cuff. Her skirt is also dark, but very textured: comfortably loose, it appears to have a narrow vertical pleat (or possibly even a broad stitch that gives this effect) from waist to mid-calf, where it is trimmed in three layers of wide ruffle. The ruffles themselves appear to be trimmed in a single thin then wide dark (possibly even black) ribbon. She finished this look with art jewellery, an oval brooch at her throat and a very long chain necklace, from which hangs a pendant that appears to be Celtic revival, from the glimpse we have. The overall effect is a comfortable yet striking ensemble, even in black and white. It must have had a rather stellar effect in colour.

The second photo [fig. 6.36] shows Margaret in a comparatively more reserved outfit. It is lighter in colour, with a long-sleeved tunic blouse, again with that vertical decorative pleat or stitch down the bodice and from shoulder to mid sleeve, where the stitch ends and allows the lower sleeve to expand into a large, artful puff. These she then gathers again into a practical cuff, an effect that might look somewhat piratical to a contemporary eye. This again has a plain, round collar, and the blouse is loosely tucked into a plain, comfortable skirt that sits at the natural waist, and is trimmed only by a thin, dark satin ribbon a few inches above the hem. She again wears a series of necklaces and a black ribbon about her throat. Her pose here is very confident as she makes direct, unsmiling eye contact, and she sits relaxed, leaning to one side, and her leg crossed. It is a very 'modern' pose, that of a 'New Woman.'

Glasgow was arguably a progressive place for women, and particularly for women artists.

According to Jude Burkhauser, the Glasgow Society of Lady Artists, founded in 1882, was the first of its kind in the country.⁵⁶ It is a fair assumption that the women at the GSA were by-and-large fairly progressive in their attitudes, and in their dress, and that this was encouraged by the culture of the school itself. The women at the GSA, at least those in this particular circle, were certainly amongst the emancipated set. Lucy Raeburn, sister of Agnes, took it upon herself to start a

⁵⁶ Jude Burkhauser, ed., *Glasgow Girls: Women in Art and Design 1880 - 1920* (Edinburgh: Canongate Publishing Ltd., 1990), 47.

publication, perhaps following in the footsteps of *The Studio*, which she called *The Magazine of Art*. However, unlike many of the printed art journals that were becoming more common, this endeavour was what today we would call ‘DIY’, and a ‘Zine’. It is really just a series of albums with handwritten stories, articles, poetry, and filled with drawing and watercolours, including some of the most beautiful illustrations by Mackintosh and Frances Macdonald.⁵⁷ This is one of the first places we can see what might be called the language of fashion informing these women’s work. In a rather clever illustration from ca. 1893 [fig. 6.37], for example, Katherine Cameron takes a stab at a Du Maurier-esque type cartoon in which two women walk along in broad, drooping black hats, made rather worse for the wear by the Glaswegian rain. The caption reads: ‘Morale: Velvet umbrellas are not serviceable.’ The language of fashion also cropped up in Frances McNair’s later illustrations, in particular two of her small Symbolist watercolours, one titled *Bows, Beads, and Birds* (n.d.) [fig. 6.38] and the other thought-provokingly titled *Man Makes the Beads of Life but Woman Must Thread Them* (c.1912-15) [fig. 6.39].

The relationship between what has been considered ‘women’s work’, particularly embroidery, sewing and textiles and how it translates into art is an important one for the Glasgow artists, and ultimately for early the twentieth century stage of Artistic Dress. Most of the extant materials are post-1899, and the needlework and embroidery programme was not established at the school until 1894. However, these ‘lesser arts’ had long been considered a vital part of the Arts and Crafts Movement. In fact, William Morris himself assisted Princess Helena, daughter of Queen Victoria, in establishing the Royal School of Needlework in 1874, alongside other noted artists discussed in this research.⁵⁸ The application of embroidery and needlework to Artistic Dress is something we have seen suggested as a cost-effective way to enhance a garment and make it beautiful, and this particularly appealed to Glaswegian practitioners, who often did not come from wealthy or aristocratic backgrounds.⁵⁹ Many of these women were known as master embroiderers, and we have evidence of them using it in a pronounced manner in the Artistic Dress they created (I would argue Margaret Macdonald’s creative stitching above is related to this in fact).

In terms of this connection with embroidery, two figures who are often pointed to in studies of Artistic Dress in Glasgow are Jessie Newbery (Fra Newbery’s wife) and her student Ann Macbeth, who ultimately became head of the embroidery programme (1908-1920) and wrote curricula on the

⁵⁷ These are currently in the archives of the Glasgow School of Art, and have just become available online as an electronic resource at <http://www.gsathemagazine.net/>.

⁵⁸ “Royal School of Needlework History”, n.d., http://www.royal-needlework.org.uk/content/13/royal_school_of_needlework_history. The school is active today, most famously having hand made all the lace applique on Katherine Middleton’s (now the Duchess of Cambridge) wedding gown, designed by Sarah Burton of Alexander McQueen.

⁵⁹ See Burkhauser, *Glasgow Girls: Women in Art and Design 1880 - 1920*. Alison Brown, Curator of European Decorative Arts at Glasgow Museums, has also been recently researching Ann MacBeth and the Embroidery Curriculum she produced for Scotland Public Schools in the early twentieth century.

subject for the Scottish school system.⁶⁰ Sadly, we have very few extant examples of their early work, aside from some rather beautiful embroidered collars, often made with the decorative motifs typical to the ‘Glasgow Style’, which is in some respects derivative of Arts and Crafts and Celtic Revival ornamentation, but also has its own set of symbolic imagery in particular that of a stylized rose [fig. 6.40]. These collars became a fashionable way of dressing up a simple blouse amongst this set, as noted in a photograph of Ann MacBeth [fig. 6.41] wearing one of her creations with a loose chemise similar to that worn by Macdonald in the earlier photo. MacBeth also uses stylised roses in her design, a motif that is found in both the textiles and decorative work of artists associated with Glasgow, including the famous bookbindings Talwin Morris made for Blackie and Sons Publishers; and most notably, the collaborative interiors of the Mackintoshes.⁶¹

In one of the few extant photographs of Frances Macdonald McNair [fig. 6.42], ca. 1903, she wears an elegant Tea Gown of her own design, in a very light, possibly white fabric, with sheer sleeves and long wide strips of fabric which hang like wide ribbon from a large elaborate bow at the low décolletage, upon which is sewn a large, dark (possibly red) and very three dimensional rose. Four smaller dark roses are sewn at the end of the fabric ribbon around mid-thigh. The gown has three light layers of ruffles at the hem, and finishes in a short train at the back. She has accented the dress with a double strand of pearls or beads, which are tight about the throat then hang very long (like Margaret’s necklaces, a style which would become extremely popular in the coming decades). This dress was clearly meant to be something of a showpiece, and not something to be worn everyday, like an item we might think of as *haute couture* today.⁶² The Tea Gown was reproduced in a 1903 German text on Artistic Dress titled *Das Eigenkleid der Frau* (Women’s Handmade Dress) by Anna Muthesius, another skilled textile artist and the wife of Hermann Muthesius, for which Frances McNair designed the cover [fig 6.43]. Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh’s dark skirt and blouse combination with the frothy white sleeves was also included (the photo is reversed from the original), alongside many other German examples of what they called *Künstlerkleid* (Artistic Dress) and/or *Reformkleid* (Reform Dress), including a striking dress by Muthesius herself [fig. 6.44].⁶³ Their inclusion in this text indicates the international connections of the Glasgow Style, and also the spread of Artistic Dress at the turn of the century.

⁶⁰ Alison Brown, “The Glasgow Style Embroidery and Textiles,” *Glasgow Museums Website*, 2008, <http://collections.glasgowmuseums.com/cld.html?cid=534538>.

⁶¹ See Robyne Erica Calvert, “The Heart of the Rose: The Gesso Panels of Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh” (Masters Dissertation, University of Glasgow, Department of Art History, 2007); and Robyne Erica Calvert, “Two for Tea: The Tearoom Designs of Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh and Charles Rennie Mackintosh” (Masters Thesis, University of Oregon, Department of Art History, 2009) This subject has received considerable treatment in many sources on Glasgow artists, but I here refer to my own research because it specifically focuses on the work of Mackintosh and Macdonald in their tearooms interiors, and in Macdonald’s gesso panels.

⁶² This might be contrasted with another smaller photo of her with her son Sylvan, taken ca. 1904, depicting Frances in the blouse and skirt combinations similar to her sister.

⁶³ The close relation of these terms in the German points to a similar problem to what I am considering in this research. However I think that in the case of Germany and Austria, where both Artistic and Reform Dress

In all of these instances, the garments are not just an expression of fashion, but of artistic identity, and the items of clothing are made to be works of art themselves. This idea ties into the larger concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the ‘total work of art’, which is the underlying philosophy of Austrian and German design after the turn of the century, and one which developed out of the work of the Arts and Crafts Movement and found pride of place in the interior designs of Mackintosh. Throughout this study we have seen how fashion has been a critical part of the environment, whether it was dressing in a painting, or sitting in an interior scheme. This idea had roots with Godwin, and with Morris, who hinted at it in their writings; then later with Crane, Watts, Holiday, and many others who understood that beautiful spaces required beautiful clothing for a full appreciation of the Aesthetic experience. This is one of the main reasons why some wish to include Mackintosh in discussion of Aestheticism; many recognised that his spaces seemed to somehow ‘instruct’ on how one should dress through colour, light, and motif.⁶⁴ In the Glasgow group we see the culmination of Artistic Dress: functional, picturesque, healthful, and artistically produced clothing that is intentional in its existence... to clothe practically, to dress beautifully, and thereby to express a personal and group identity.

came along much later through the influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement, these two are somewhat more related than perhaps they were in their earlier incarnations in Britain. Stating this with certainty would require more research, however, and is beyond the scope of this thesis. For more on this, see: Barrows, *The Sources, Rhetoric, and Gender of Artistic Dress*.

⁶⁴ It has been said (though without definitive proof) that Mackintosh designed the dresses for the waitresses at the Willow Tea Room.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Let me remind you that beautiful objects are the nourishment of the artist; unless he can be constantly taking in and assimilating beautiful ideas, he is starved, he is without the tissue absolutely necessary for his work. The artists who lived when dress was beautiful show the influence of this healthy nourishment in their work.

-Henry Holiday, 'The Artistic Aspect of Dress', 1892.¹

Henry Holiday's observation encapsulates the importance of access to 'beautiful objects', including dress, to the capacity for artistic production. This was evident in the decoration of their homes, which were graced with the decorative items they collected and produced: painting, sculpture, furnishings, textiles, wall coverings, metalwork, and even more unusual items that signified their artistic nature and connections. For example, in 1895, just two years after Holiday's above declaration in *Aglaia*, a group of forty well-known artists, musicians, and men of letters crafted a rather rare and beautiful object: a wooden *brisé* fan [fig. 7.1-2], with its twenty blades signed and decorated by these luminaries of the Victorian art world.² Walter Crane, who decorated the guards and the peacock ornamentation that spans the sticks, likely had the most to do with its creation; but also present were several of the artists discussed here, notably Whistler, Millais, Du Maurier, Burne-Jones, and the Alma-Tademas. It physically represents the critical importance of social connections to artistic circles at this time.

The importance of social connections to artistic success is perhaps an obvious point, however it is intriguing to see them displayed in such an unusual manner, in an object that is decorative at the same time that it represents a certain artistic sensibility. Fans were popular items to collect for both men and women, and the late nineteenth-century trend of autograph fans reflected this fashion. As such, this fan is not unique, but is perhaps the finest of a small number of extant autograph fans that were made from the late 1870s through the end of the century.³ Nor was it made to be used, but rather to be on display in one's home, representing one's social connections in a prominent decorative manner—which is why, although I was privileged to research this object for its owner, I decided it did not fit within the main arguments of my thesis. However, I mention it here at the conclusion because even though it was meant for display and not use, it is a sartorial object, a

¹ Holiday, "The Artistic Aspect of Dress."

² Robyne Erica Calvert, "An Artistic Fan in Victorian Society," *Connecting Whistler: Essays in Honour of Margaret F. Macdonald* (2010): 35-42. The publication can be downloaded at http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_182035_en.pdf. This fan has been the subject of a related research project I have undertaken on behalf of the present owners. My conclusions here are based on my research on this object, which is an ongoing project. The fan is currently on tour with the V&A's "Cult of Beauty" exhibition, see Stephen Calloway and Lynn Federle Orr, *The Cult of Beauty: The Aesthetic Movement 1860-1900* (V & A Publishing, 2011).

³ Calvert, "An Artistic Fan for Victorian Society."

conflation of practical article with *objet d'art*. It represents more than just the intricate social circles that were integral to artistic society at the time, but also signifies the importance of fashion to these circles, and its vital role in the 'nourishment of the artist.'

For these artists, fashion could be, and *was*, a mode of artistic expression; perhaps even the most personal mode, as it was an extension of the artist's (or artistic person's) body, and the way in which they expressed to the outside world their self-identification as artistic personae. Objects like autograph fans identified their owners as being artistic, and part of an artistic set. The same was true for Artistic Dress, a fashion trend that began with a select group of individuals, then evolved and was disseminated through social connections, mutually influencing and inspiring those within the artistic circles in which it thrived.

Artistic Dress was the physical and visual agent for expressing one's artistic identity. Yet this still does not tell us what, exactly, Artistic Dress was. To offer my conclusion, I will recap the chronology of Artistic Dress as I have presented it, and then explain the definition that I have come to through this research.

Chronology of Artistic Dress

Artistic Dress progressed through phases, and this thesis strives to make an original contribution to the body of knowledge on nineteenth century visual culture by investigating its development and varied manifestations in the Victorian Period, relating better-known cases as well as offering new examples. While at mid-century there was already a notion that artists might have a certain bohemian flair about the way they dressed, it began to grow more noticeable that certain artists, and individuals who associated with them, were dressing somewhat unconventionally in the semi-public sphere. For women, this meant looser, more comfortable gowns in 'natural' toned fabrics, and without the highly modelled undergarments (corset and crinoline) that were popular at the time. Early examples were inspired by the modelling costume of the Pre-Raphaelites as well as the exotic garments of some of the more radical representatives of the upper class, such as those at Holland Park. For men, early Artistic Dress might be identified as clothing that was similarly comfortably cut, and perhaps a bit on the dishevelled side, which was a combination of practical work clothes and mainstream items thrown together in a mildly unconventional way – the 'garret-assembly style' as Cruise called it.⁴ Except in the case of Aesthetic costume—and particularly the adoption of knee-breeches—male Artistic Dress is seen in more subtle expressions through fabric and colour selection, and through accessories like hats, smoking jackets, and various other

⁴ Colin Cruise, "Artists' Clothes: Some Observations on Male Artists and Their Clothes in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Gendered Object*, ed. Pat Kirkham (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 112.

accoutrements which styled an outfit, adding artistic touches rather than wholesale garment reconstruction.

It is difficult to say exactly when Artistic Dress became a regular feature for these particular circles; this was the first problem I set out to examine by looking closely at the extant examples of so-called Pre-Raphaelite Dress, notably the clothing worn by Elizabeth Siddal. I came to this research ready to accept the popular conclusion that Siddal dressed unconventionally, but was surprised to find that the evidence did not necessarily support this conclusion. First, the examples which are usually cited as evidence for this are not photographic, but based on her modelling costume for paintings and in particular the many sketches of her by Rossetti. If we consider that these were costume, or more specifically drapery studies, then it makes sense she would not be wearing a corset or crinoline for them. We also might consider that these were made in the privacy of the study, when she was dressed for 'work' and comfort. I have shown that some of the dresses she wore, even in these sketches, did not depart too radically from conventional fashion, even in sleeve construction, which is where Newman (and others after her) argue that she broke from mainstream trends. Finally, the only extant photograph of Siddal shows her in a typical circa 1860 dress, worn with a crinoline.

Many others point to the 1865 Tudor House photos of Jane Morris as key examples; others cite these as instances of Pre-Raphaelite or even Aesthetic Dress. But as I argued in chapter three, these photographs, closely examined, reveal a combination of modelling costume and mainstream dress, both worn without supportive undergarments, for the purpose of artistic draping as constructed through Rossetti's creative direction. These photographs do not prove that this was how Morris dressed on a regular basis at this time; but they suggest that such comfort was conceivably part of her wardrobe in semi-private circumstances. We know that Morris was dressing in such a manner later, in 1869 from Henry James' observation of her being 'guiltless of hoops (or of anything else, I should say).' However many studies of Artistic Dress and its related subjects do not account for this gap of time, and simply point to Siddal, Morris, and others as the place of origin, without considering other potentially more viable possibilities. Specifically, we saw alternative dress practices earlier in the habits of the Pattle sisters at Holland Park, depicted in photographs and in Watts' 1851 portrait of Sophia Dalrymple.

Very little examination has been made of the Pattle sisters in this respect, who were in fact breaking conventional fashion trends in the company of friends at Little Holland House as early as 1850, at least. We know of their manner of dress not just in the portraits of Watts, but in photographs of Sara Prinsep, Sophia Dalrymple, and Virginia Pattle; and in reports of the Anglo-Indian sisters (which also included the photographer Julia Margaret Cameron) gathering together and speaking 'in Hindustani, and when they met together at one or other of their houses they generally sat up all night in an orgie [sic] of dressmaking, pulling their robes to bits and sewing

them up in a new way, or designing and cutting out new clothes.’⁵ The Pattles, notoriously beautiful, charming, and well-received in society, were in a much better position to influence fashion trends than any of the women modelling for the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in the early years.

Pre-Raphaelite images did, undoubtedly, influence the development of Artistic Dress, particularly during the years of Aestheticism; and the women of Holland Park and their friends of the Ionides clan—Aglaia Coronio, Marie Spartali (Stillman), and Maria Zambaco—also graced the canvases of second wave Pre-Raphaelitism (especially the work of Burne-Jones). The roots of Aestheticism were taking hold in these circles, and manifesting in the work of Whistler in the 1860s. The dresses seen in the *Symphony in White* paintings of 1862, 1864, and 1865-7, have been called Aesthetic Dress, even though they are conventional white day dresses that any lady might wear for walking in the summer. The manner in which the model wears them, however, without full hoops (which were in fashion at the time), and the richly painted and textured surroundings make them seem more ‘Aesthetic.’ However, I argue that these are themselves early examples, and Aesthetic Dress manifested slightly later in the following decade through a direct engagement with Aestheticism, during the period in which it became something of a trend. We see this reach a height in the early 1880s, as demonstrated in Frith’s *A Private View*.

Tied in to this was an interest in historical costume, which was also an integral part of the key debates surrounding alternative modes of dress at this time, and drove the increasing concern with corporeal aesthetics. These issues were discussed in advice books at first (such as Mary Merrifield’s *Dress as Fine Art*), then in lectures (notably by Godwin) and periodicals (as seen in fashion magazines like *Queen*), and finally through socio-political groups and societies (particularly the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union). While much of this was driven by the dress reform debates from mid-century, it was also very tied in to an artistic and in some cases sensual interest in the human form. For proponents of Artistic Dress, cases in favour of it opposed to the ‘deformation’ causes by corsets, bustles, crinolines, and even tight skirts and ‘columnar’ male ensembles were not only unhealthy in the medical sense, but also unnatural in an aesthetic sense. Such costume detracted from the sinuous lines of the body, whether the curve of a woman’s waist or a man’s leg.

Those interested in historic costume could hardly be seen on the street wearing a doublet and tights, or tunic and mantle; but the theatre provided a solution for this interest and its practical application. Godwin, for example, engaged in this directly by designing costumes for many productions, including those of his partner Ellen Terry; and more indirectly through amateur theatricals produced by friends— even those of the aristocratic variety such as Lady Archibald Campbell.

⁵ Dakers, *The Holland Park Circle*, 28.

Many other artists designed for the stage as well as amateur theatre and *tableaux vivants*, all of which became safe havens for the practice of more extreme ‘fashionable fantasies’; which certainly bore some impact on the development of Artistic Dress. This manifested in the adoption of more richly coloured and textured fabrics, cuts that were inspired by medieval costumes, and embellishments such as hand embroidery that offered decoration without the harshness of typical Victorian prints and textiles made with aniline dyes.

Theatricals, *tableaux vivantes*, and even fancy dress balls (of which there were many) allowed artistic circles to ‘practice what they preached’—and preach they most certainly did. Art was usually at the core of these discussions (and increasingly debates), whether in a reference to the Greek statue, or to a more contemporary Pre-Raphaelite painting. What we begin to see, perhaps, is the merging of art and life – when the model steps from the canvas, metaphorically speaking. Women in particular seem to begin to make wardrobe choices that reflect the costume in which they posed for artworks, particularly those who sat for Watts, Rossetti, and Whistler.

However, I do not wish to oversimplify what I believe was a more complex system of exchange between model, artist, and artwork itself. As we have seen, scholars in the past more easily credited artists like Rossetti with ‘dressing’ the women in their groups, and these assumptions are not without a certain degree of logic. Yet we simply do not know to what extent this was true, and to what extent the women, many of whom were skilled artists themselves, opted for (and designed) Artistic Dress. One woman writing in *The Queen* in 1881 felt it important to remind her peers that there were those among them who had championed alternative trends for some time. She begins with the observation that opened this thesis, on the varied names of such trends:

Among the records of fashion during the last few years, one of the most noteworthy is the way in which the apparel variously termed “Pre-Raphaelite,” “Artistic,” “High Art,” or more generally “Æsthetic,” has become a recognised factor in the dress of English women. So much attention has been classed to it during the last three or four years, that many people fancy the “craze,” as they term it, has only sprung up within the last decade or so; but many among us can remember that we always numbered among our friends women whose art-sense and knowledge of the beautiful prevented their blindly resigning themselves to the tyrannous dictates of “La Mode.”⁶

She follows with a description of these friends from earlier days, and here I ask the reader to think on (and perhaps even look at) the images of the Pattle sisters that have been discussed in this thesis, while reading this next passage:

There were ladies, even in the most Philistine epoch of our times, who would not wear a crinoline... They loved the soft, heavy folds of Indian cashmere, wrought in delicate borders by the embroiderer’s hand; the richness of velvet and plush and the dim delicacy of muslin unspoilt by starch; their eyes were open to the mellow colour of long strings of amber beads, rich oriental neckalets of quaint device, &c. They recognised the value and beauty of all such things, and shrank from the gaudy extravagant ugliness and the *bizarrerie* without grace of the fashions of the Second Empire; they turned to the noble and

⁶ Anonymous, “Æsthetic Dress.”

beautiful raiment they saw in pictures of a time when costume reached the dignity of an art; and they leant the laws of drapery from Greek statues.⁷

One wonders if the author was familiar with that portrait of Sophia Dalrymple, or even knew the woman herself. Yet although she stresses these decisions came from artistic-minded women themselves, it was not without the influence of their male counterparts, and in fact she argues that it was their approval which gave them the strength to carry on their sartorial experiments:

So, when such women as I have described made their dress according to their own artistic fancy, the artists they knew—often their fathers or husbands, lovers or brothers—wondered and approved and praised, and gave them strength to disregard the sneer they could see on many an acquaintance's face, the good-humoured laughter or open remonstrance of friends, and even the conviction that every member of their female circle regarded them either as dowdies or frights, whilst most men, seeing dresses simpler and freer in line, at once more sensible and graceful than those of the mass of womankind, honoured the reformers with lordly disapprobation.⁸

This supports the idea I suggested in chapter four, that it is likely that these women (and in some cases men) enjoyed their status as muses, and increasingly dressed in a manner outside the studio that signified 'artisticness,' thus personifying (or roleplaying) those subjects and themes for which they modelled—even when the subjects were not historic or mythological, but their own portraits. This latter artistic self-imaging becomes more common during the years of Aestheticism, where we might recall the portraits of women such as Laura Alma-Tadema, Frances Leyland, Rosalind Howard, Blanche Lindsay, and in particular Madeline Wyndham in the sunflower dress. In these portraits, this system of exchange comes full circle, as the model who has self-signified as artistic through the wearing of Artistic Dress steps back into the canvas to be painted as the artistic persona she has become.

These views naturally reflect the move toward gender equality, and the rise of the 'New Woman'. This is an important aspect of the socialist utopian concerns of many of the artists we have examined, and at the core of the new systems of art education that were encouraged throughout Britain. It is perhaps no coincidence that, as the arts took a more prominent place in society through the programmes of the new South Kensington Museum and school, and through the growing popularity of the Arts and Crafts Movement in certain circles, Artistic Dress became more accepted socially. This coincided with the growing debate around dress and style, driven by the Dress Reform societies like the Rational Dress Association, which began to take shape and came to prominence in the 1870s. At the same time, the new artistic trend of Aestheticism gave cause for new attention to clothing options, particularly in the way of fabric and draping. Concern for beauty mingled with concerns for health (at least for some Aesthetes), and while some choices were thought to be too eccentric for mainstream society (particularly in the case of knee breeches), Aesthetic Dress became accepted as a respectable if unconventional option for fashionable society.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

Aesthetic Dress in fact became popular enough to be called a ‘craze’, as indicated in the above passage from *The Queen*; the satires found in Du Maurier’s ‘Cimabue Brown’ cartoons for *Punch*, Gilbert & Sullivan’s *Patience*, and the humorous depiction of Wilde and his worshippers in Frith’s *A Private View*. Some took the trend more seriously, however, which is what drove Walter Hamilton to pen his *The Aesthetic Movement in England* (1882), which at its core was a celebration of Rossetti, a scolding of *Punch*, and a defence of Wilde. Wilde did much to popularise the trend of Aesthetic Dress in this period through his lectures, writings, and ultimately through his role as the editor of *The Woman’s World* from 1887-89. His role as fashion critic developed despite (and perhaps even because of) the public debate waged with Whistler over taste (and who was fit to be arbiter of such things) via the ‘Ten O’Clock Lecture’ and subsequent verbal spars in the press.

Aesthetic Dress was also spurred on in no little part by fashionable retail establishments like Liberty opening departments devoted to Artistic Dress. As Godwin established Liberty’s department of Art Dress, their marketing scheme had the somewhat unusual aspect of being didactic in nature, offering helpful guidance and instruction to their customers via their catalogues. A.L. Liberty was clearly a follower of Godwin’s philosophies, and he positioned himself as an authority on all matters of taste, most notably dress. This is how we come to find writing on such matters for *Aglaia* in the 1890s.

As the Dress Reform debates continued, and as the popularity of Aestheticism waned, some saw the fusion of these ideals of health and beauty as the only way forward for fashion (and as we have seen, many had deemed this as the path all along). We see this ideal developing in the actual garments these individuals wore. Sadly, there are relatively few surviving garments, which is why most of the examples examined here have been from paintings and photographs—although I have striven to put emphasis on instances where the clothing in question seemed to be that which might have been worn by the sitter in reality, versus that which may have just been modelling costume. Most extant costume is from the period at the end of this study – the 1890s onward – mostly in the form of Tea Gowns, which had become popular enough by that time as to almost be ubiquitous. However, we do have a few key examples in public collections—the V&A for example—which are from the Liberty Art Dress department, or bear a direct relationship to gowns designed by artists like Walter Crane and others of his persuasion. These are the dresses that are most often cited in other studies. It is for this reason I chose to focus attention specifically on one such dress as a case study: the Thornycroft Gown.

Although they have likewise been included in other studies, letters from Agatha Thornycroft to Hamo in the Thornycroft archive at the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, reveal heretofore-unreported information about its history. We now know that the dress is not in actuality a Liberty gown (as the V&A catalogue labels it, likely for simplicity), but a gown made from Liberty silk fabric,

constructed by an unnamed dressmaker from Tonbridge to a design devised by Agatha in consultation with Hamo. From a close study by V&A textile conservator Frances Hartog, the craftsmanship of the sewing is of middling skill, which matches with Agatha's concerns in her letters. However, the gown itself is quite creative in the manner that it produces a fashionable silhouette through the draping and pinning and pleating of fabric (which even goes so far as to mimic a bustle in the back, but with a much softer outline). At the same time, the dress incorporates aspects of rational dress in the ruching above and below the elbow and the cut, which is very clearly to be worn without corset or crinoline; while the column-like drape of the skirt and decorative smocking adopts elements advocated by artists. It is for this reason that I feel the Thornycroft gown is the quintessential Artistic Dress, and one which may be seen as one of the best extant models for the style at its height.

The principles of art and reform that this dress represents become codified, finally, in the formation of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union. The history of this association that I have provided in chapter six is more in-depth than any previous study, yet there is undoubtedly more on this fascinating group to be uncovered. Although they come at the end of this research, I think they are critically important for the way in which they coalesce previous thought on the subject of Artistic Dress, and formally and proactively attempt to find a solution for problems in fashion at a time of rapid change, the *fin de siècle*. Although it struggled, the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union lasted through the close of the century and, judging by the fashions that came to the fore in the early 1900s, was not an entirely unsuccessful endeavour. As the century draws to a close, we find Artistic Dress adopted in the milieu of art training environments, as at the Glasgow School of Art; and through the various art colonies, guilds, and home arts industries which result from the spread of Arts and Crafts ideals.

It is perhaps unsurprising, looking back over this chronology, that Artistic Dress developed and spread in much the same manner that contemporary fashion does: beginning with an elite, radical few, then expanding to wider society. What is distinctive about it, however, is that, with the exception of Aesthetic Dress being adopted during a limited period by an exclusive minority, Artistic Dress never did become mainstream. It remained a subculture trend which, although never popularly adopted, certainly played an important role in changing fundamental aspects of fashion—both in the physical sense by promoting the rejection of 'unnatural' shapes; and in the psychological sense, by encouraging individualism and creative expression in dress.

Definition of Artistic Dress

As I have emphasized throughout this thesis, a clear definition of Artistic Dress has been very difficult to come by. I have come to believe that one of the main reasons for this uncertainty has to do with the approach to the material, as most previous treatments of Artistic Dress have either

been: 1) Studies based on previous scholarship (mostly Stella Mary Newton's *Health, Art and Reason*) without re-evaluation; or 2) Studies based largely on texts and painted or graphic images without a close study of extant costume and/or photographs of such clothing—particularly as they compare to mainstream dress. Artistic Dress cannot be defined by a particular cut of garment or colour of cloth; but neither can it be solely understood through art and literature. Recall the comment that launched this thesis: 'After all, though there be principles of dress and canons of taste, there is no one artistic dress, either real or ideal.'⁹ I propose that Artistic Dress encompassed a much broader scope than it has at times been credited with, and is the most suitable umbrella term for the sartorial practices of those who embraced ideals that could alternately be described as 'artistic', 'bohemian', or '*avant-garde*'. I will sum up my terminological arguments for this in what follows.

First, I do not think that Artistic Dress began as a consequence of so-called Pre-Raphaelite Dress in the same way as has been previously asserted by much of the literature reviewed here, as I do not think Pre-Raphaelite Dress existed as a formal 'movement.' So much credit has been given to Pre-Raphaelitism in regards to the development of women's Artistic Dress, particularly to Elizabeth Siddal and Jane Morris. But as I have recounted above, neither were in a socially influential position to promote such clothing in the early days, and it is questionable whether Siddal was even that eccentric in her sartorial practices. The more likely place for such an influence to thrive, initially, was in the 'At Homes' given by the likes of the Prinseps at Holland Park, for example, or their friends and neighbours, such as the Ionides.

This is not to say the Pre-Raphaelites were without influence (and they were ultimately included in 'Pattledom', as it were). However, as the second chapter illustrates, theirs was a subtler inspiration at first, made more through the images they created than the way they dressed on a daily basis. These images were looked to for inspiration and ultimately influenced styles adopted in artistic circles. As such, I do not think that 'Pre-Raphaelite Dress' was ever a true style or trend circa 1848-1860, but rather was a term applied retrospectively, notably by Haweis in 1879, to describe those dresses worn in Pre-Raphaelite images, which then influenced the development of Artistic Dress in actuality. I do not wish to dismiss the term Pre-Raphaelite Dress outright as it has historical agency in the literature; but rather I want to clarify that it was never a 'movement', and perhaps consider that Artistic Dress is a better term for styles, which arose—in part—from emulation of or inspiration from the images. Pre-Raphaelite Dress has subsequently been used in contemporary discussions related to the clothing of Pre-Raphaelite women specifically, and while many scholars such as Ormond only referred to it as modelling costume, the consequence overall is that Pre-Raphaelite Dress has become part of the mythos of this group, causing a false impression of how these women dressed in more popular representations of them.

⁹ C.W. (Constance Wilde?), "Ladies Dress--Aesthetic and Artistic," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 May 1885.

The discussion of art and dress as related subject came together during this period, however, in the work of Mary Merrifield, as discussed in chapter two. It is also in these years that we find the term ‘artistic’ being applied to dress in the same way it is being used to describe certain kinds of furnishings or textiles. Its use evolves in a subtler manner until by the 1880s we see it used more prominently, as the aforementioned quote from *The Queen* indicates. One might rightfully say, then, that Artistic Dress as a term suffers from the same problem as Aesthetic Dress, and I wish to recognise this. However, if we are to apply terms retrospectively to classify this style, I feel Artistic Dress is the ‘best fit’ for its ability to be broad in scope, when considered against the options. The dress of the Anglo-Indian Pattle sisters might be called ‘bohemian’, for instance, but one could not apply this label to some of the creations worn by Whistler’s models from the same period, which have closer ties to burgeoning Aestheticism.

I also feel the term Aesthetic Dress relates to clothing very consciously constructed to Aesthetic principles of beauty and taste (however varied those may be); but also self-consciously made to be on public display. Colin Cruise is one of the few to clarify the difference between Aesthetic Dress and the more bohemian clothing choices of artists: ‘Whereas the dress of previous generations of artists was an *ad hoc* affair put together from various shreds by the artists themselves, with Aesthetic dress the effect was, to a greater or lesser extent, designed, contrived, and presented.’¹⁰ I agree with this view, and build upon it in postulating that Aesthetic Dress had the intention of being seen in public, and while perhaps unconventional, was always designed to be acceptable (particularly in terms of covering the female body). Artistic Dress need not confine itself to these guidelines, and could encompass that which was more bohemian, and perhaps only worn in private or semi-private (‘At Home’) situations. But I maintain that Aesthetic Dress is a *type* of Artistic Dress; just as Aestheticism, for all its deeper philosophical issues, manifested as a form of Victorian art and design practice. Artistic Dress is a superlative category, rather than separate as Jennifer Barrows suggested in her PhD dissertation:

But while Artistic Dress clearly has roots in Pre-Raphaelite, Arts and Crafts, and Aesthetic Dress, it also distinctly breaks from them in two ways. First, it was pan-European. Second, and far more significant, its designers viewed their products as art. They exhibited them in museums and galleries, published photographs and essays on the work in art journals, and called them art.¹¹

I depart from Barrows definition in that I do not think that the British wearers and makers saw their clothing strictly as art, but also as functional garments. They were not making these items for the express purpose of display, but rather as beautiful and useful objects, consistent with the ideal of life as art, and art as life. This is true even if I were to believe Artistic Dress was limited to the

¹⁰ Cruise, “Artists’ Clothes: Some Observations on Male Artists and Their Clothes in the Nineteenth Century,” 112.

¹¹ Barrows, *The Sources, Rhetoric, and Gender of Artistic Dress*, 9–10.

range she presents (post-1890), as she cites the Glasgow Style artists as key practitioners, and as we have seen, their clothing was not just for artistic display, but also for *use*. And in that, Artistic Dress relates directly to the Arts and Crafts Movement, which saw other functional objects as art as well. I do not see this as a break, but rather a synchronicity. Artistic Dress develops alongside these other sartorial philosophies, and in some cases, as in Aesthetic Dress, completely overlaps them. As I have stated, Aesthetic Dress may be generally considered a category of Artistic Dress concerned specifically with aspects of beauty (and less concerned with issues of health or social reform). One might point to the sartorial theories of Godwin, considered an Aesthete, to counter this conclusion, calling the garments he proposed (which were very much driven by issues of health) Aesthetic Dress due to his inclusion in Aestheticism. However, I would use these as quintessential examples of why Artistic Dress is the best term, as adopting the label in a general way that encompasses aspects of both beauty *and* health alleviates the confusion over whether to classify such garments as ‘Aesthetic’ or not.

Neither can all the examples discussed here be called Reform Dress (or Rational Dress), because many, particularly Aesthetic Dress, are not always concerned with notions of health or utility. Likewise, there are examples of Reform Dress that are well outside the realm of Artistic Dress for they have little or no concern with art. This has been the clearest distinction in the literature on the subject, and the one that has caused the least trouble. To summarize these categories as I see them, *all* dresses which have been called Pre-Raphaelite or Aesthetic may be referred to as Artistic Dress; and *some* Artistic Dresses (particularly late examples) may also possess the qualities of Rational or Reform Dress, and can possibly be considered under this category as well.

As such, I feel we may apply the term ‘Artistic Dress’ in a retrospective manner for the purposes of Dress History. I think we can adopt this as a useful, broad category to explain an array of clothing, styles, and *styling*, which was embraced by artistic circles from the mid-nineteenth century onward. For example, we may identify a particular garment as being Artistic Dress, but we may as also identify a more mainstream piece of clothing as this way if it is worn, or styled, in a manner that sets it apart from the norm. This was the case in the Jane Morris photographs at Tudor House in 1865, and in many other cases where garments which do not depart too far from Victorian fashion are worn without corset, crinoline, or bustle for women; or are perhaps accentuated with decorative ties, exotic caps, or jackets from fine silks, for men. Colin Cruise pointed to this in his essay on male Artistic Dress: ‘Assembling a ‘look’ from diverse elements taken out of their social contexts, allowed the artist to become an object of his own devising and included him in an alternative group identifiable through clothing.’¹² I believe this idea of the ‘look’ included women as well, and argue it is not just in the garment, but the overall styling, that we may find Artistic Dress.

¹² Cruise, “Artists’ Clothes: Some Observations on Male Artists and Their Clothes in the Nineteenth Century,” 112.

Thus I define Artistic Dress in simple, broad terms, as the alternative sartorial style first found in artistic circles in Victorian Britain (including Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic Dress), which departed from mainstream fashion in its concern with ‘artistic’ principles of beauty and taste, and, at times, issues of health and dress reform; and through which wearers outwardly communicated their identification with artistic identity.

Legacy of Artistic Dress

The legacy of Artistic Dress—of the radical changes in fashion that the wearers of these styles attempted to promote—can be seen in the development of the fashion industry as more than just garment production, and in its intersection with art. Fashion was hardly a new concept in the nineteenth century, and though most earlier tailor and mantua-maker’s names are lost to time, their art is extant in a few rare surviving garments, and of course in paintings. But what *was* radical in the development of Artistic Dress in this regard was the notion, argued repeatedly in the literature, that the Victorian dress-maker was unreliable. Not being a trained artist, the average dressmaker or tailor’s idea of what was *la mode* was not based on an understanding of artistic principles (or those of health). This radical view encouraged the development of not just new clothing styles, but a new, arguably modern attitude that fashion was a form of art, and that those with an art education were most suited to create it. As such, we have in these discourses the birth of the fashion designer, as we know him or her today.

The cut and styling of Artistic Dress also most certainly influenced this new world of fashion. Paul Poiret claimed to have freed women from the corset, but surely he became aware of women’s desire to be rid of it—and choice not to wear it—early in his career at the House of Worth, which by the end of the century followed Liberty’s lead in producing the popular Tea Gown (although to be fair, his own designs were deemed too radical for Worth, ultimately).¹³

The most recent definition for Artistic Dress, included in the newly-launched electronic resource the *Berg Fashion Library* (2011), points to this influence:

This alternative style, one of the first successful movements antithetical to fashion, continued and evolved, and was caricatured and satirized, but the ideas of comfort and timeless elegance influenced designers such as Paul Poiret and Mariano Fortuny in the 20th century.¹⁴

¹³ For more on Poiret and examples of his fashion, see Harold Koda and Andrew Bolton, “Paul Poiret (1879–1944),” *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, September 2008, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/poir/hd_poir.htm.

¹⁴ “Artistic Dress : Berg Fashion Library”, 2011, <http://www.bergfashionlibrary.com/view/bdfh/bdfh-div10466.xml>.

This thesis closes where many other studies begin: with the intersections and interventions of art and fashion from the early twentieth century onwards. I would like to make clear that I do not think that Artistic Dress ended in 1900, and in fact one might argue that it is still present today – a point I will return to momentarily. I had originally thought to end this study in 1914, however the turn of the century ultimately seemed a more logical stopping point in terms of Artistic Dress in Britain for two main reasons. The first is that the mainstream fashions of the Edwardian era exhibit a marked shift from the Victorian, particularly in female dress, as the corset begins to be abandoned and the waistline rises again to an Empire style (although there were still complaints about the columnar line of dress, and the tall chimney hat was still in fashion for men). Whether this shift was due in some regard to the influence of Artistic Dress is perhaps an area for further study.

Secondly, I do not think one can embark on a study of Artistic Dress post-1900 without a thorough inclusion of its diaspora in Europe and America, particularly in Belgium, Austria, and Germany. I briefly mentioned Anna Muthesius' text on Artistic Dress at the end of the last chapter; and one must not forget the pioneering work of Jaeger. But theirs was not the only European interest in this subject. Towards the close of the century, the interest in loose-fitting garments that were both beautiful and considered to be healthy spread not just throughout Britain, but also to the continent, where these principles became very popular with architect-designers like Henry Van der Velde in Belgium, and the Vienna Secessionist artists Gustav Klimt and Josef Hoffman.¹⁵ Each of these artists designed dresses for and/or with their female friends and lovers, and wrote about this new form of dressing which they called *Künstlerkied*, or to translate: Artist's Dress. These manifestations of Artistic Dress have been the focus of other studies such as Barrows' aforementioned research, and Mark Wigley's pioneering work *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture* (2001).¹⁶ Amidst his discussion on avant-garde fashion and modern architecture, Wigley makes an astute observation on the larger impact of clothing reform:

Yet this influential alliance of clothing reformers did not merely transform modern dress. It produced the very sense that dress could be modern, as in timely, a form of its time, one consistent with the realities of a new epoch instead of a means of covering up these realities: the sense, that is, that one could, and should, move from 'mode' to 'modern' For all its ostensible functionalism, reform dress produced foremost an *image* of modernity that was actually understood as the very possibility of a modern life, rather than an adjustment to it or representation of it.¹⁷

This image of fashion and modern life extends the Baudelarian conception of such things; it imagines a fashion that embraces technology, that breaks from historical representation, and that is

¹⁵ For more on the Vienna Secession and fashion, see: Barrows, *The Sources, Rhetoric, and Gender of Artistic Dress*; Christian Brandstätter, *Klimt & Fashion* (Assouline, 2003); Rebecca Houze, "Fashionable Reform Dress and the Invention of 'Style' in Fin-de-siecle Vienna," *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 5, no. 1 (2001): 29–55; Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995).

¹⁶ Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

an expression of self as part of the modern world. Furthermore, we might push this examination forward and look to the places where fashion and art intersect to transcend mere functionality in dress. In a continued discussion of Artistic Dress, we might include, for example, the Bloomsbury Group (comprised of the actual and spiritual successors of those at Holland Park, notably the sisters Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf, granddaughters of Maria Jackson, a Pattle sister, through their mother Julia Jackson). Their Omega Workshop (1913-1918) produced textiles – and dresses made from them – amongst their other decorative endeavours.¹⁸ We might also look slightly later to the collaborations of Italian fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli (1890-1973) with Surrealists such as Salvador Dalí, with their 1935 *Lobster Dress* [fig. 7.3], or Alberto Giacometti.¹⁹ Then, with a continued look to the increasing importance of *haute couture*, we might consider Yves Saint Laurent's famous Fall 1965 colour block dress, inspired by Mondrian [fig. 7.4].²⁰ Is this too Artistic Dress?

Artistic Dress is not a term we use in relation to contemporary dress, however we might not find it so difficult to establish a meaning for it, between our general fascination with *haute couture* and a long-established tradition of artists (perhaps now replaced by musicians, specifically 'rock stars') who dress in an *avant-garde* manner. Today, if it were to be used, Artistic Dress might refer to clothing worn by artists which is somehow transgressive or performative, for example in the case of the contemporary ceramicist Grayson Perry, a well-known transvestite who often appears as his female alter-ego 'Claire'.²¹ Or perhaps Artistic Dress might be applied to the kinds of couture only seen on the runway, for example, as some of the designs of the late, great Alexander McQueen, whose runway shows often took the form of theatrical tableaux, and in fact, two gowns from their recent Pre-Autumn/Winter 2012 collection have more than a little in common with *fin de siècle* Tea Gowns [fig. 7.5].²² It is highly doubtful one would see ensembles such as these on the street. Both Victorian Artistic Dress and the clothing constructed by Alexander McQueen are concerned with the perceptions, margins and polarities of beauty, and the ever-shifting characterization of aesthetic individuals—although Alexander McQueen's expressions are of course far more extreme.²³

¹⁸ See R. S. Koppen and Randi Koppen, *Virginia Woolf, Fashion and Literary Modernity* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

¹⁹ See Dilys Blum, *Shocking!: The Art and Fashion of Elsa Schiaparelli* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2003).

²⁰ Although I have questioned some of her suppositions related to Artistic Dress in this thesis, Alice Mackrell offers a sound assessment of Art and Fashion in the twentieth century. See Mackrell, *Art and Fashion*.

²¹ See Wendy Jones, *Grayson Perry: Portrait of The Artist As a Young Girl* (Random House, 2007).

²² Alexander McQueen (1969-2010) was the subject of a recent blockbuster exhibition, "Savage Beauty" at the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (the exhibit is currently on tour). See: Andrew Bolton et al., *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* (Yale University Press, 2011); and "Women's Pre Autumn/Winter 2012 - Alexander McQueen", 2012,

http://www.alexandermcqueen.com/int/en/corporate/archive2012_pawlook_womens.aspx.

²³ I have chosen to refer to Alexander McQueen in the present tense here, as the fashion house has continued after McQueen's 2010 death under the Creative Directorship of McQueen's former assistant and subsequent Head of Womenswear Sarah Burton, who shared his vision.

I am not attempting to make a case here for the continued usage of Artistic Dress as a category of fashion; rather I am trying to underscore the legacy it has created, and the way in which it may have been, as the Berg definition pointed out, ‘the first successful movement antithetical to fashion’ – the first of many. As such, Artistic Dress might be considered in the context of more subversive subculture styles, with which it shares theoretical and stylistic characteristics. As a final point on this matter, I want to briefly mention a recent exhibition that I think illustrates the power not just of anti-fashion, but also specifically of Artistic Dress, in contemporary culture.

On 5 September 2008, the exhibition *Gothic: Dark Glamour* opened at the Museum of the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) in New York City. Curated by fashion historian Valerie Steele, it was the first in-depth critical and historical analysis of ‘Goth’ fashion [fig. 7.6] from subculture to a highly theatrical and artistic mode of dress and self-expression. The exhibition and accompanying text trace the “genealogy of the gothic sensibility” over the past three centuries through various cultural phenomena, including the gothic novel, the Romantic and Decadent movements, Victorian mourning dress, German Expressionist cinema, the Hollywood horror film, and the development of the Goth music genre over the past 25 years.²⁴ In exploring the history of this alternative sartorial movement, *Gothic: Dark Glamour* reveals the critical influence of the Victorian era to Goth fashion, citing several sources of inspiration which were likewise influential to nineteenth century artistic practices: medieval art and architecture; d’Aurevilly’s and Baudelaire’s writings on fashion and Dandyism; the transition of costume (fancy dress) into couture; interest in exoticism; and, perhaps most notably, the English fashion for wearing black.

The non-normative perception of contemporary alternative fashion trends, such as those exhibited in *Gothic: Dark Glamour*, is not a new phenomenon, and in fact echoes the reception of Artistic Dress in the nineteenth century. This, coupled with the shared sources of inspiration, suggests the importance and relevance of Artistic Dress as a catalyst for an increasingly avant-garde mode of sartorial self-expression that continues into the present day.

Further Research

There are several areas for potential further research that have arisen in the course of this examination. The most obvious would be to take a more focused look at aspects of male dress and historic style that have only been touched upon here. A focused study of Aesthetic costume, for example, and how it appropriates and reinvents historical dress, might be useful (particularly in the case of knee-breeches). There is also more to be explored in terms of comparing artists’ work dress with everyday wear. An early photo of Henry Holiday [fig. 7.7], for example, shows him in a tweed woollen suit, but he wears an unusual shirt, what today might be called a turtleneck,

²⁴ Steele, *Gothic*.

buttoned to mid-chest like a Henley. Was this a work shirt, or an example of the new rational woollens? What might this signify? This thesis has opened new questions in this area.

A study on male dress and historic style might also be more readily approached through expanding the scope beyond the visual arts, which in itself is a new direction to take this subject. Artistic Dress was not just adopted by visual artists, as this thesis has indicated. I think a broader study, particularly looking at the realms of theatre and music, would certainly be a worthwhile undertaking. There is certainly an element of ‘dressing up’ in the theatrical sense in Artistic Dress in general. As seen in the writings of Godwin, the sartorial choices (and trendsetting) of Ellen Terry, and in the interest in *tableaux vivants*, costume (in the modern sense of the word) was part of the development of Artistic Dress. This was fed through the interest in historical costume and the love of ‘fancy dress’ that many of these artists had. This aspect of Artistic Dress has only been touched upon in this research, but as seen in the activities and writings of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union, the stage was an important source of sartorial research and study for artistic circles. It is certainly an area which bears further research, and one which supports the concept of ‘artistic persona’ that I suggested earlier in this thesis.

Another approach to an overall survey of Artistic Dress would of course be to include its wider geographic scope, notably Europe and North America.²⁵ As I have mentioned, much work has already been done in regards to the Art Nouveau, Secession, and Jugendstil connections. More work could be done on American and lesser-known European manifestations, such as Austro-Hungarian and Dutch examples, where pronounced Arts and Crafts and Secession/Jugendstil movements were prevalent; it is a logical conclusion that Artistic Dress followed.²⁶ The research on American examples could focus particularly on cases such as the dress designs of architect Frank Lloyd Wright in the early twentieth century.²⁷

Two perhaps more theoretical studies that may arise from this research are those concerning identity and material culture. This discussion of artistic circles and artistic personae gives rise to issues of identity construction and self-fashioning which would make for an engaging sociological study. This thesis has made me keenly aware of the ways in which we each style ourselves to express our self-perceptions, or conceal our insecurities. Scholars like Diana Crane have done a great deal of work in this area already, but I feel this subject is ripe for such an exploration with specific reference to Artistic Dress as I have defined it.

²⁵ Based on this thesis, I have received a month-long residential fellowship at the Winterthur Museum in Delaware, USA, to pursue further research on Artistic Dress in America, which I will undertake in June 2012.

²⁶ See Marianne Carlano, “Wild and Waxy: Dutch Art Nouveau Artistic Dress,” *Art Journal* 54, no. 1 (April 1, 1995): 30–33.

²⁷ See Carma R. Gorman, “Fitting Rooms: The Dress Designs of Frank Lloyd Wright,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 30, no. 4 (December 1, 1995): 259–277.

However, I personally hope to pursue further research relating to Artistic Dress in a more material sense, considering these garments as art objects much like the fan mentioned at the outset of this chapter. I am very interested in the concept of ‘sartorial objects’ as modes of artistic and personal expression, whether functional or not. This relates to the more contemporary fashion concept of ‘styling’: not just the cut and construction of a garment, but the *way* it is worn. I have touched upon this throughout this research, particularly in way in which these sartorial choices were as much about styling a look as they were to do with wearing alternative clothing: for example, wearing dresses without corset or crinoline; donning of ‘At Home’ garments in public; accessorizing with exotic textiles, natural gemstones, and in particular, utilising symbolic motifs (peacocks, sunflowers, roses) associated with ‘artisticness’. An area of further pursuit would be to connect sartorial objects – notably accessories – to these codes. For example, the article on ‘Artists’ Wives’ I discussed briefly in chapter four includes the following passage:

As to her bangles, her strings of beads, her turquoises, her Castellani jewellery, who shall number them, any more than her Indian shawls, her old point, her eastern scarves? We knew of one artist’s wife, who appeared at a dance, with apparently every finger ring she possessed, about 30, string on a piece of ribbon, and tied round her neck.²⁸

This issue of styling intrigues me, as my own sartorial code—or my personal style—is expressed through plain, monochrome clothing (largely black), with the addition of select accessories such as vintage scarves, brooches, hats, glasses, and gloves which add touches of interest to my ensemble. I consider these items to have artistic agency, and I am curious to pursue this avenue further in the realm of Artistic Dress—which, I feel would also be a good way to examine men’s dress more closely, since as I have stated, their artistic expression similarly lies in styling and accessories, more than alternative cuts of garments. I also think such a study would further support the examination of Artistic Dress in a broader context, and perhaps even open new avenues in the study of fashion history in general, through an exploration of what might be termed ‘styling theory.’

²⁸ Anonymous, “Artists’ Wives.”

Conclusion

For the purposes of visual culture studies, including art and fashion history, I suggest that the term Artistic Dress is the best fit for the alternative sartorial practices of artistic circles of the second half of the nineteenth century. This term is not limited to this era, but here it rises and comes to a head, which has significant impact on the development of fashion into the twentieth century. Using Artistic Dress solves the issues of inaccuracy and lack of clarity that exist when using other terms like Pre-Raphaelite Dress (which was never a form of actual dress per se, and inherently ascribes credit to the Pre-Raphaelites for a clothing movement); Aesthetic Dress (which occurred at a very specific timeframe and place only); or Dress Reform (which shares certain values in consideration of health, but which has its own specific agenda that does not fully coincide with Artistic Dress). Artistic Dress may then be more easily understood in its wider context, as it spreads to Europe and America.

At its core, Artistic Dress was another form of creative expression, in which wearers not only expressed their artistic proclivities, but also immersed themselves in a creative milieu through the very clothing and accessories they wore. Artistic Dress was the mode through which artistic personae could identify philosophically with like-minded individuals, and become both physically and mentally part of the artistic environments in which they sought to surround themselves. The love of beauty, and the higher ideals associated with it, drove this trend, as stated in the words of Henry Holiday, which open this chapter. Holiday's sentiments echo those of William Morris, who made an observation on fashion inspired by his utopian Arts and Crafts beliefs which relates the importance of Artistic Dress to the individuals discussed here; and which, though made in 1882, is yet an inspiring ideal still relevant to contemporary fashion:

But one good thing breeds another; and most assuredly a steadiness in fashion, when a good fashion has been attained, and a love of beautiful things for other own sakes and not because they are novelties, is both human, reasonable, and civilized, and will help the makers of wares, both master and man, and give them also time to think of beautiful things, and thus to raise their lives to a higher level.²⁹

²⁹ Morris, "The Lesser Arts of Life (A Lecture Delivered 21 January 1882)."

Appendix I: Figures

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