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## **“Decorators may be compared to doctors”**

An analysis of Rhoda and Agnes Garretts’

*Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork and Furniture* (1876)

### **Abstract**

Domestic advice manuals are, like any other texts, constructed discourses that cannot be used as conventional historical evidence. They need to be understood both as historical documents that engage with contemporary notions of design and taste, *and* as a genre of Victorian narrative: they need to be placed in a context of other narratives, both historical and literary, and explored using both historical methodologies *and* literary theories. Of the twelve volumes that comprise the “Art at Home” series published by Macmillan (1876- 83), four deal exclusively with interior design and decoration. Written by “Lady Experts” these texts seem to contribute to the Victorian ideology of the proper sphere of womanhood and to the cult of the “House Beautiful”. This paper considers perhaps the best known of these texts, *Suggestions for House Decoration*, written by Rhoda and Agnes Garrett. Ostensibly a text defending the “Queen Anne” style and offering advice on the design and decoration of the home, when read analytically, it can also be understood as a resistance to patriarchy and a subversion of Victorian domestic ideology through its demonstration of the hard-won knowledge and skills gained by England’s first professional female interior decorators.

### **Introduction**

Of the twelve volumes that comprise the “Art at Home” series [1] published by Macmillan (1876- 83), four deal exclusively with aspects of interior design and decoration. Written by “Lady Experts” described recently as ‘the professional advisers of the middle-classes’<sup>1</sup>, these texts indicate the gendered nature of the Victorian interior, and emphasize the role of women in furnishing and decorating the home during this period. Superficially, they contribute both to Victorian domestic ideology and to the cult of the “House Beautiful”. However, these sources also demonstrate the paradox (or perhaps the inevitability) of upper middle-class women – both married and single - earning a living by writing about aspects of the home. Elaine Showalter has noted that the first professional activities of Victorian women

were based in the home<sup>2</sup>; the work of these women exemplifies this process and demands closer examination. Unravelling the history and the works of these “Lady Experts” also highlights the inadequacies of the concept of “separate spheres” as an organising principle, since research indicates that they were far from stereotypical “Angels in the House”. This paper considers the best known and most popular of the “Art at Home” series, *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork and Furniture*, written and illustrated by Rhoda and Agnes Garrett in 1876.

A methodological model for considering the work of these women as professional writers is Elaine Showalter’s “gynocritical” theory<sup>3</sup>; an early variant of feminist criticism that concerns itself with an assessment of the specificity and difference of women’s writing. Showalter has drawn on the work of historian Gerda Lerner<sup>4</sup>, and used the model of female culture devised by the anthropologists Shirley and Edwin Ardener<sup>5</sup>. The Ardeners have analysed society in terms of dominant and muted groups: women constitute a muted group, ‘the boundaries of whose culture and reality overlap, but are not wholly contained by, the dominant (male) group.’<sup>6</sup> This model allows a reading of women’s writing as ‘a “double-voiced discourse” that always embodies the social, literary, and cultural heritages of both the muted and dominant.’<sup>7</sup> Gynocriticism, based on the Ardeners’ concept of overlapping dominant-muted groups rather than the notion of “separate spheres”, fulfils ‘the need for a theory based on women’s experience and analysing women’s perception of reality’.<sup>8</sup> Most of the feminist critics writing within the model of gynocriticism offer an analysis of women’s writing both as a response and as a challenge to patriarchy<sup>9</sup>. This paper aims to present an analysis of *House Decoration* ‘as a reflection of women’s repression under patriarchy, but also as a subtle and limited resistance to that patriarchy’<sup>10</sup> expressed through this double-voiced discourse.

Showalter has examined English nineteenth-century female novelists and the tradition of women's fiction, but this model can be extended to the domestic advice manuals written during this period. Published in 1876, *House Decoration* belongs to what Showalter identifies as the *feminine* phase of women's writing: 'the period from the appearance of the male pseudonym in the 1840s to the death of George Eliot in 1880'<sup>11</sup>. This was a time when 'women wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture, and internalised its assumptions about female nature.'<sup>12</sup> Significantly, Showalter also points out that the feminist content of this feminine writing 'is typically oblique, displaced, ironic, and subversive; one has to read it between the lines, in the missed possibilities of the text.'<sup>13</sup> *House Decoration* is ostensibly a text that defends and defines "Queen Anne" style and offers advice on the decoration and furnishing of the homes of middle-class would-be aesthetes. However, read analytically using this model of dominant- muted discourse and set in the context of contemporary domestic design advice written by men, the text becomes a far more complex document that can be understood as a subversion of rather than contribution to Victorian domestic ideology. This presents us with

a radical alteration of our vision. A demand that we see meaning in what has previously been empty space. The orthodox plot recedes, and another plot, hitherto submerged in the anonymity of the background, stands out in bold relief like a thumbprint.<sup>14</sup>

In offering an alternative reading of *House Decoration*, this paper also aims to highlight the problems of using prescriptive domestic advice literature as a conventional historical source. Advice literature may be used to provide information about the Victorian period, but it can never be treated as straightforward evidence of how people lived or furnished their homes in the past. Indeed, in her introduction to

the recently reissued quintessential advice book, *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management* (1861; 2000), Nicola Humble stresses the value of studying this type of non-fictional text and adds a note of caution:

It is precisely because they are an ephemeral, market-led form of writing that cookery books reveal so much about the features of a particular historical moment. We must remember, though, that like any other text they consist of constructed discourse, and can never be clear windows onto the kitchens of the past.<sup>15</sup>

Domestic design advice books therefore need to be understood both as historical documents that engage with contemporary notions of design and taste, *and* as a genre of Victorian narrative: they need to be placed in a context of other narratives, both historical and literary, and explored using both historical methodologies *and* literary theories. Thus, before identifying and discussing the muted discourse of *House Decoration* this paper begins by recovering the history of Rhoda and Agnes Garrett.

### **R. & A. Garrett – House Decorators**

In analysing *House Decoration* - and indeed any form of advice literature - the notion of authorship is crucial: any advice worth buying should after all be given by someone of repute with acknowledged expertise. Rhoda and Agnes Garrett were the first English women to train in an architect's office and subsequently to work professionally as "house decorators". They took part in the agitation against the Contagious Diseases Acts and were both active Suffragists - Rhoda in particular was an effective public speaker<sup>16</sup>, as her obituary in the *Englishwoman's Review* noted:

There are few among us who cannot recollect the passionate eloquence, and appealing pathos of the speeches which from time to time have come from her lips at Women's Suffrage Meetings.<sup>17</sup>

This knowledge of their personal histories questions Anthea Callen's assertion that 'they were inevitably engaged in reinforcing middle-class values, an accepted notion of the family home and woman's role within it.'<sup>18</sup>

Surprisingly, very little is written about the Garrett cousins. The biographical file on Rhoda Garrett at the RIBA library simply contains a photocopy of her obituary from *The Builder*. The authors of *House Decoration* are partially "hidden from history"<sup>19</sup>, overshadowed by male contemporaries and their own relations.<sup>20</sup> Very often they have been the victims of repeated and misleading errors. In *Victorian Things* (1988), Asa Briggs, for instance, claims that

Agnes and Rhoda Garrett's *House Decoration* (1875), written in collaboration with Owen Jones and singing Morris's praises, had gone through six editions by 1879.<sup>21</sup>

That the book was published in 1876, that Owen Jones had died in 1874, and, that William Morris<sup>22</sup> is mentioned nowhere in the text serves to demonstrate that Agnes and Rhoda Garrett are not significant enough to deserve historical accuracy. Yet contemporaries compared their breaking through 'the usual restrictions of home life ... to earn an honest independence'<sup>23</sup> with the struggle of Elizabeth Garrett to storm the medical citadel<sup>24</sup> and achieve her M.D. in 1870.

Agnes Garrett (1845 - 1935) was the seventh child of Newson Garrett and Louisa Dunnell: her sisters included Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Millicent Garrett Fawcett. Rhoda Garrett (1841- 82) [2] was their cousin<sup>25</sup> from Elton in Derbyshire. Having studied French and German in Alsace, Rhoda finished her education with her

cousins at the school run by the Misses Browning at Blackheath, intending to become a governess, ‘practically the only professional career open to a woman.’<sup>26</sup> Newson Garrett proposed that Agnes should join the family malting business<sup>27</sup> and in an interview published in the *Women’s Penny Paper* in 1890, she recalled that

Her father who was in a very large business as a brewer, was most anxious one or two of his daughters should become lady malsters, and enter his own business. Agnes consented to try it, and for some period devoted her energies busily to brewing, acting chiefly as her father’s secretary, and very useful he found her.<sup>28</sup>

However, in 1867<sup>29</sup>, Rhoda and Agnes chose a very different career, having ‘determined to live together and get themselves trained as house-decorators, a thing quite as unprecedented then as women becoming doctors.’<sup>30</sup>

Most of the information known about their professional training comes from Moncure D. Conway’s books, *Travels in South Kensington* (1882), and his later *Autobiography* (1904). Conway too comments on the similarity of Elizabeth Garrett’s battle to become a qualified physician and Agnes and Rhoda Garrett’s decision to train as “house decorators”:

By the side of the long struggle through which she [Elizabeth Garrett] had to go to obtain her present position – a struggle in which many a woman with less means and courage has succumbed – I am able to place the experience of her younger sister and of her cousin, Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, who have entered into a partnership as decorative artists.<sup>31</sup>

It is significant that in *House Decoration* the Garretts explain their professional role using medical metaphors<sup>32</sup>:

Decorators may be compared to doctors. It is useless to put yourself under their direction unless you mean to carry out their *regime*; if a patient takes an

allopathic dose one day and a homeopathic dose the next, it is extremely unlikely that on the third he feels any benefit from either.<sup>33</sup>

Presumably in the Garrett family, decorators were often compared to doctors; again this appropriation of the language of the emerging medical profession stresses their perception of themselves as female professionals.

Originally they planned to train as architects, but experienced ‘much difficulty in finding an office open to a lady pupil’<sup>34</sup>: according to Conway one architect doubted whether the Garretts would be able to swear effectively at workmen or climb ladders.<sup>35</sup> The Garrett cousins began their training in the London office of the Scottish glass-stainer, decorator and furnisher, Daniel Cottier at 2 Langham Place. At the time Cottier was in partnership with the architect John MacKean Brydon, an ‘unashamed Queen Annist’<sup>36</sup> who had formerly worked as an assistant to Nesfield and Shaw. When his partnership with Cottier dissolved in 1872, Brydon, who later designed the New Hospital for Women for Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and the Ladies Residential Chambers in Chenies Street, set up his own practice and moved to an office at 39 Great Marlborough Street, which, until 1875, he shared with another architect, Basil Champneys. It was following this move that the Garretts became formally articulated as apprentices to Brydon ‘during which they punctually fulfilled their engagement, working from ten to five each day’.<sup>37</sup> The available sources disagree over the length of this apprenticeship: Conway claims that it lasted eighteen months, while Rhoda’s posthumous “Trade Biography” in *The Cabinet-Maker & Art Furnisher* (1883) and Agnes’ interview in the *Women’s Penny Paper* (1890) put the duration of their training at three years.<sup>38</sup> However, having completed their training, the Garretts ‘went on a tour throughout England, sketching the interiors and furniture of the best houses, which were freely thrown open to them.’<sup>39</sup> It is significant that *House Decoration*



with its emphasis on “Queen Anne” style contains many references to all aspects of their training, both at Cottier’s and with Brydon, and finally in studying the decorative schemes of the “best houses”.

It is perhaps important to stress that, certainly for Rhoda, this decision to train and work as professional house decorators was born of financial necessity not dilettantism. Conway claims that they had ‘by no means been driven to their undertaking by the necessity of earning a livelihood.’<sup>40</sup> However, Dame Ethel Smyth (1919), commenting on Rhoda’s financial situation recalled that

One knew of the terrible struggle in the past to support herself and the young brothers and sisters; that she had been dogged by ill-health as well as poverty – heroic, unflinching through all.<sup>41</sup>

The Garretts set up their business at their home at 2 Gower Street<sup>42</sup>, on the corner of Bedford Square and also later had a warehouse at 4 Morwell Street<sup>43</sup>. Conway’s book, published shortly before Rhoda’s death, describes them as ‘an independent firm, with extensive business’, which had

gained fame, not only by their successful decoration of many private houses, but by their admirable treatment of the new female colleges connected with the English Universities.<sup>44</sup>

It is possible that they were involved with the interior decoration of Girton, but perhaps it is more likely that they worked at Newnham<sup>45</sup>. However, the archives of these Cambridge colleges hold no documentary evidence to support Conway’s comments. Indeed, there is very little surviving information about any of their business activities: the only archival material relating to the Garretts held by Women’s Library is a notice of a Christmas sale of furniture dated December 1896.

Several sources note their success and popularity, particularly after exhibiting a cottage room in the Palace of the Trocadero at the Paris Exhibition of 1878<sup>46</sup>. Others mention private house commissions: Philippa Levine, for example, comments that having set themselves up in business the Garrett cousins ‘were enormously successful as interior designers, their services being in great demand both within feminist circles and beyond’<sup>47</sup>. One certain Garrett interior appears to be that of No. 4 Upper Berkeley Street<sup>48</sup>, the home of Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and her husband James Skelton Anderson, which they undertook in 1874: David Rubinstein notes that they also advised Millicent Garrett Fawcett on the decoration of her London and Cambridge homes<sup>49</sup>. Other recorded commissions are Lincoln House in Phillimore Place, Kensington and Knight’s Croft at Rustington, near Littlehampton, which were the London house and country home of their friend the composer Sir Hubert Parry<sup>50</sup>.

When Rhoda Garrett died<sup>51</sup> in November 1882, the obituaries<sup>52</sup> that appeared in *The Builder*, the *Englishwoman’s Review*, and the *Women’s Suffrage Journal*, reflected both her political and her professional life:

In conjunction with her cousin, Miss Agnes Garrett, she has some years ago established a business of Art Decoration, and fully proved that this was a profession in which the artistic instincts no less than the sound common sense of women had ample scope. Their joint book on House Decoration is one of the best and simplest that has been written on the subject, and many delicate harmonies, and beautiful forms adapted to household comfort are due to her taste and talents. If this useful and congenial pursuit is in future open to women, it is due in large measure to her courage and enterprise.<sup>53</sup>

Rhoda’s death is also recorded in Charles Graves’ biography of Hubert Parry (1926), but she most movingly remembered in *Impressions That Remained* (1919), the memoirs of the composer, Dame Ethel Smyth, with whom she shared a romantic friendship. Agnes Garrett continued to run their business – still known as R. & A.

Garrett - from Gower Street.<sup>54</sup> She exhibited a room ‘decorated and furnished by R. & A. Garrett’ at the 1885 Exhibition of Women’s Industries in Bristol<sup>55</sup>, and three years later designed an entire interior for the exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1888<sup>56</sup>. At the age of eighty, her long career was celebrated in an article in *The Woman’s Leader* published in 1925, entitled “Agnes Garrett: pioneer of women house decorators”.

The Garretts seem to have undertaken no architectural work and little is known about their commissions for house decoration; however, attributed examples of their furniture designs have survived. These are pieces bought by the Beale family<sup>57</sup> for their London home at 32 Holland Park during the late 1870s. When this house was sold in 1912 some of the furniture, including the Garrett designs, was taken to the Beale’s country house, Standen, at East Grinstead in West Sussex, now owned by the National Trust. Several of these objects, which can be seen at Standen, also appear in the illustrations to *House Decoration*.<sup>58</sup>

These surviving items – a settee, a pair of armchairs, a corner cupboard, a day-bed, bookcases and three footstools – exemplify the Garrett style. Simple, restrained designs with distinctive square tapering legs, inspired by eighteenth century models, the pieces are constructed in mahogany and upholstered in Utrecht velvet, and all avoid what the Garretts’ describe as ‘the “solicitous wriggings” of the chairs and tables and the want of refinement in the details of ornament throughout the furniture and fittings of the room.’<sup>59</sup> The mirror-backed corner cupboard on show at Standen [3] is easily identifiable in the illustration “View of Drawing-Room” [4] and is particularly advocated in *House Decoration*:

If the cabinet is intended to hold china, the recesses and shelves might have a background of mirror, which would reflect the ornaments and give a brilliant

effect to the whole. A piece of furniture such as this takes up the principal place in the room, and the rest of the wall-space may be utilised for hanging book and china shelves and smaller cabinets; perhaps a corner cabinet, if the room is small, would be more convenient than a piece of furniture that takes up more space.<sup>60</sup>

Bookcases designed by the Garretts are also at Standen and perhaps, given the political activities of the Garretts, these were the most ideologically significant pieces of furniture they were to design and to insist upon. They also suggested large, sturdy footstools [5] such as those upon which ‘our grandmothers rested their feet’<sup>61</sup>: the footstools and the day-bed [6] on show at Standen appear together in the illustration “Drawing-Room Chimney-Piece” in *House Decoration* [7].

### The “Art at Home” Series

*House Decoration* belongs to the market-led phenomenon of the nineteenth-century “Household Book”. Deana Attar’s introduction to her invaluable *Bibliography of Household Books Published in Britain 1800 – 1914* (1987), discusses the economic and social reasons for the massive growth in the publication and sales of this literary genre. She classifies books dealing with decorating and furnishing the home as a specialised form of the domestic economy manual. This was a type which became increasingly popular in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when not only did ‘decorating become an occupation open to a few women as professional employment’, but ‘for most middle-class women the changes in fashion ... meant at the least a greater self-consciousness about how their homes were furnished.’<sup>62</sup>

Deana Attar also points out that

Specialized books on furnishing and decoration were never published in large numbers but set against the small minority of readers who actually bought such books, a much larger number of women were able to follow the latest ideas in general domestic economy books and in magazines.<sup>63</sup>

However, unlike many of the other “Lady Experts”, such as, Lady Barker, Mrs Haweis or Mrs Panton, the Garretts did not write articles on interior decoration for women’s magazines. *House Decoration* is not composed of chatty advice about where to shop and what to buy, nor is it based on personal experience of household management. The Garretts do not venture into the Kitchen, the broom-cupboard or the Nursery: *House Decoration* contains no recipes, no cleaning routines, and no advice on rearing children. Moreover, it is not a journalistic description of the homes of the rich and famous, like Mrs Haweis’ *Beautiful Houses* (1882). The Garretts were primarily “house decorators” rather than writers of domestic advice, and were commissioned to write *House Decoration* for the “Art at Home” series because of their well-known and fashionable professional expertise.

Devised and edited by the Reverend William John Loftie, the “Art at Home” series was published by Macmillan between 1876 and 1883<sup>64</sup>: the other titles included Mrs Orrinsmith’s *The Drawing Room* (1877), Mrs Loftie’s *The Dining Room* (1877 but dated 1878), and Lady Barker’s *The Bedroom and the Boudoir* (1878). The Miss Garretts’ ‘little manual of *House Decoration*’<sup>65</sup> was the second volume in the series, and one of the most successful, running to six editions by 1879, with 7500 copies printed. It was planned as

an account of the more simple ways in which, without great expense a home might be made pretty and also wholesome; with designs & illustrations of furniture; the whole to consist of a kind of narrative, in which a house is described on which a great deal of money has been spent with a bad result & the simple cheap way in which the same house was made to look well.<sup>66</sup>

The American publishers Porter & Coates of Philadelphia also issued several of the final twelve volumes, including *House Decoration*: an early letter from Loftie to Macmillan suggests that originally Coates had commissioned *House Decoration*. Furthermore, it reveals that only one of the Garrett cousins is responsible for the text:

This was to be written by Miss Garrett, & was to contain her own experiences. She was to have £30 or £40 from the Coates's, but no arrangement has been made with her as to the English copyright<sup>67</sup>.

It is not known which is the 'Miss Garrett' to whom Loftie refers: they have become an inseparable "Rhoda and Agnes", rather like Sellar and Yeatman's "William and Mary"<sup>68</sup>.

In correspondence with Macmillan, Loftie outlined his scheme for an entire series of small "Art at Home" books aimed at a readership composed of 'people of moderate or small income'<sup>69</sup>. This explicit reference to class accounts for the inclusion of seven of the "Art at Home" volumes in a reprint of 'forty-eight of the most important books'<sup>70</sup> from "The Æsthetic Movement and the Arts and Crafts Movement". Peter Stansky and Rodney Shewan, who edited this reprint, noted:

This series of short handbooks presented practical applications of Aesthetic theories for people of relatively limited means, its aim being to encourage the average citizen to break away from prevailing heavy-handed practice<sup>71</sup>.

Certainly, in *House Decoration*, the Garretts waste little time in constructing their imagined readers as the urban – or rather London-based – lower-middle classes:

... this small handbook is addressed only to the decoration and furnishing of middle-class houses, and is therefore suited more especially to those people of moderate means, who, while wishing to live in an atmosphere of refinement

and cultivation, are neither willing nor able to spend large sums upon their rooms.<sup>72</sup>

This passage from the “Introduction” stresses those notions of “cultivation” and “refinement” in constructing and instructing the ‘courteous reader’<sup>73</sup> of moderate means that are continued throughout the book. They explicitly set about to bring an affordable version of the aesthetic interior to a broader section of society. Conway suggest something similar in noting that:

The Misses Garrett appear to have an aim of especial importance in one particular. They tell me that they have recognized it as a want that a beautiful decoration should be brought within the reach of the middle-class families, who are not prepared or disposed to go to the vast expense which the very wealthy are able and willing to defray, thereby occupying the most eminent firms. They believe that with care they are able to make beautiful interior which shall not be too costly for persons of moderate means.<sup>74</sup>

Although they put the beautiful interior within the reach of anyone with 2/- 6d to spend on *House Decoration*, their book reinforces class differences. Excluding both the upper classes and the working classes, *House Decoration* is largely an exercise in suggesting inconspicuous consumption for their middle-class readership:

Let those who cannot afford the more costly styles of decoration be contented with simple designs which they can, if they will, obtain in really good taste at a comparatively small cost. It is that pernicious habit of struggling to imitate costly effects in cheap materials which has done more than anything else to debase decorative art.<sup>75</sup>

Victorian class identities pervade the whole of *House Decoration*, even in the small space described as an Entrance Hall<sup>76</sup>:

The hall seat may be taken as the protest of the well-to-do classes against undue luxury in those beneath them; for it generally constructed in such a

manner as to form a stool of repentance for the unfortunate servant or messenger who is destined to occupy it.<sup>77</sup>

Themselves members of the well-to-do classes, the Garretts offer the alternative of a Windsor arm-chair with a brightly coloured cushion, which they suggest ‘looks severe enough to discourage unbecoming lounging, and yet sufficiently comfortable to secure a proper degree of rest for the weary.’<sup>78</sup>

Significantly, the Garretts end their treatise with a chapter that focuses on class. Once more recommending inconspicuous consumption, the final chapter “What Will It Cost?” exemplifies this process, reminding the reader that *House Decoration* is a ‘manual written expressly for the guidance of those to whom cost of furnishing and decorating their houses is by no means the last consideration.’<sup>79</sup> They urge the reader required to “cut their coat according to their cloth” to consider “How long will it last?” when furnishing their homes. They end however, by offering hope to the reader of moderate means:

What is wanted is not more money, but more discrimination; if you have acquired the discrimination yourself, or if you have entrusted your work to one who has it, no money need be spent over making your home beautiful than has hitherto been expended in making it ugly...<sup>80</sup>

While the class construct is made explicit in *House Decoration*, the gender identities suggested by the Garretts are more complex. Historians and literary critics, in examining advice manuals from the eighteenth century onwards have discussed the relationship between class and gender identities. This type of didactic literature, which actively constructs a middle-class domestic female identity<sup>81</sup>, has been described as evidence that traditionally forms one of the buttresses of the ‘separate spheres framework’<sup>82</sup>. Despite constructing the same middle-class urban readership,



as other contemporary domestic design and taste manuals, including other volumes in the “Art at Home” series, *House Decoration* remains quite distinct, and is more than domestic design advice aimed at lower middle class women. This “little manual” can be read as a double-voiced discourse that in a subtle and limited manner challenges the dominant discourse of male design advice writers of the 1870s: consequently it can be interpreted as a subversion of, rather than a contribution to, domestic ideology.

### **The Woman Question:**

*House Decoration* is roughly contemporary with the four editions of Charles Locke Eastlake’s *Hints on Household Taste* (1868) and with Christopher Dresser’s *Principles of Decorative Design* (1873). The misogynistic comments of Eastlake and Dresser are well known. Eastlake famously admonishes his ‘fair readers’, both the “Materfamilias” and “young ladies”, for their ignorance of taste:

The faculty of distinguishing good from bad design in the familiar objects of domestic life is a faculty which most educated people – and women especially – conceive that they possess. How it has been acquired, few would be able to explain. The general impression seems to be, that it is the peculiar inheritance of gentle blood, and independent of all training; that, while a young lady is devoting at school, or under a governess, so many hours a day to music, so many to languages, and so many to general science, she is all this time unconsciously forming that sense of the beautiful, which we call taste: ... there is no single point on which well-bred women are more jealous of disparagement than on this. We may condemn a lady’s opinion on politics – criticise her handwriting – correct her pronunciation of Latin, and disparage her favourite author with a chance of escaping displeasure. But if we venture to question her taste – in the most ordinary sense of the word, we are sure to offend<sup>83</sup>.

Similarly, in the very first pages of *Principles of Decorative Design*, Dresser tells his supposedly artisan readers:

In your study of the beautiful, do not be led away by the false judgement of ignorant persons who may suppose themselves possessed of good taste. It is common to assume that women have better taste than men, and some women seem to consider themselves the possessors of even authoritative taste from which there can be no appeal. They may be right, only we must be pardoned for not accepting such authority, for should there be any over-estimation of the accuracy of this good taste, serious loss of progress in art-judgement might result.<sup>84</sup>

This then is the design-literature arena of the last quarter of the nineteenth century in which the Garrett cousins pursued their struggle, armed with professional knowledge and reputation, irony and subversive intent. In order to fully appreciate *House Decoration*, it must be read in the context of contemporary gender and class politics, with an understanding of “the struggle” in which the Garretts took an active part as well as the social group to which they belonged. In the years immediately before the publication of *House Decoration* there were partial but nonetheless significant successes in the campaigns for equal rights to suffrage, higher education, and employment opportunities. Conway suggested that

artists, architects, decorators, and the numerous workmen they employ have great respect for any woman who can do anything well, which contrasts favourably with the jealousy which the efforts of that sex to find occupation in other professions appear to have aroused.<sup>85</sup>

However, the *Athenaeum* notes that tradesmen initially refused the Garretts’ business orders<sup>86</sup>, and certainly, the RIBA and the Architectural Association resisted the entry of women to the profession for far longer than say, the British Medical Association. Perhaps in this light, *House Decoration* needs to be understood as a document of the contemporary “Woman Question” as well as belonging to the genre of late-nineteenth century design writing and domestic advice.

It is interesting that one of the Garretts' most severe critics was a female design advice writer and active Suffragist, Mary Eliza Haweis<sup>87</sup>. The author of *The Art of Beauty*, *The Art of Dress* and *The Art of Decoration*, Mrs Haweis was highly critical of the "Queen Anne" style favoured by 'Annamaniacs'<sup>88</sup> like the Garretts, devoting a whole chapter of *The Art of Decoration* to a condemnation of its "key-notes"; its hard, square chairs, 'covered with dingy velvets ... recalling in colour mud-mildew-ironmould-nothing clean or healthy', the small windows, the convex mirrors 'which make our faces seem bloated with toothache', the wallpapers and carpets, the "inescapable" blue china' ... 'the bare, comfortless bed-room furniture; the austere Dining Room furniture' ...<sup>89</sup> She quotes directly from *House Decoration* and later comments on work of the Misses Garrett, in a barely veiled reference:

All these fashionable rooms resemble each other. The Queen-Anne-mad decorators (some conspicuously) have but one idea and drive it to death. One hears that Mr. Brown or the Misses Smith have decorated So and So's house. We know without ever entering it what that house is like. That house is a bore.<sup>90</sup>

She was just as harsh in her comments on the "Art at Home" series as a whole:

... I vainly overhauled the many manuals of good advice now daily pouring from the press – among them '*House Decoration*' in the Art at Home series – a series, by the way, which, considering how good was the primal notion, has been ill-carried out by the writers, and is meagre in suggestions to a miracle. Not a hint for the real beautifying of stoves, nor of the house inside or out, was to be found, save the time worn command to destroy mirrors and have 'Queen Anne' fenders; and the illustrations, which are peculiarly American in character, better suited the articles in '*Scribner's Illustrated Monthly*', where they first appeared, than the English series, which they probably fettered.<sup>91</sup>

The illustrations, many by Inglis, Sandier and Lathrop, for several of the other volumes<sup>92</sup>, were indeed taken from "Beds and Tables, Stools and Candlesticks", a

series of eleven illustrated articles on house furnishing by Clarence M. Cook. Originally published in *Scribner's Illustrated Monthly* between June 1875 and May 1877, they were published as *The House Beautiful* in 1878.<sup>93</sup> The illustrations for *House Decoration* were, however, undertaken by one or both of the Garretts, and as has already been noted, show examples of their furniture designs. This is confirmed by the Loftie correspondence with Macmillan in the British Library:

The title should indicate clearly the object of the book, & so I suppose nothing can be better than simply "House Decoration". The full title might run: Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork & Furniture with illustrations by Rhoda and Agnes Garrett., Art at Home Series No.ii.<sup>94</sup>

### **Subverting Separate Spheres**

In *House Decoration*, domestic ideology, is subverted in two ways. First, the Garretts invert the gender identities created by Eastlake in *Hints on Household Taste*. Secondly they use the text to demonstrate their professional status as trained "house decorators" rather than domestic "home-makers".

In many ways *House Decoration* is clearly imitative of Eastlake's *Hints on Household Taste*, though thankfully less verbose. Despite advocating different styles, the similarities remain clear. Compare, for example, the following comments on the front door, first by Eastlake:

A good flat tint of olive green or chocolate colour will, however, answer all practical purposes, and besides being a more honest and artistic, is really a less expensive style of decoration. It is a great pity that the old-fashioned brass knocker has become obsolete ... The present cast-iron knocker is a frightful invention ... Good *wrought*-iron knockers of very fair design and manufacture, may be bought...<sup>95</sup>

and then by the Garretts:

... the bronzed front door and railing may be painted some good uniform shade of green or brown, and the cast-iron knocker and other door furniture exchanged for brass or wrought iron of simple design.<sup>96</sup>

Eastlake goes on to remark that ‘Ladies are seldom called upon to choose between the merits of wrought and cast-iron for objects of domestic use’<sup>97</sup>, but clearly the Garretts were more than able to make such judgements. There are countless other examples of similarity between the two texts. Moreover, Eastlake is one of the few nineteenth-century writer-designers that the Garretts make reference to:

What is commonly sold as Gothic furniture, with gables and chamferings and gashes here and there to indicate carving, is for the most part a gross libel upon the sketches given by Mr. Eastlake, in his *Hints on Household Taste*, of a style of furniture which is simple and direct in its outline, and entirely free from those pretentious attempts at ornament with which even the simplest and cheapest furniture is now abundantly disfigured.<sup>98</sup>

While complimentary, it is notable that this comment, which appears in the chapter “Houses As They Are” links Eastlake with machine-made Gothic furniture.

Clearly the Garretts have appropriated the dominant discourse of Eastlake, but by reading between the lines it is possible to discern the muted discourse. Throughout, the reader of *House Decoration*, the aspiring purchaser of the services of a decorator or upholsterer is referred to as “he” – a “he” just as likely to be seduced by fashion as a “she”:

In the foregoing principles it is hoped that a general idea has been given for a basis of operations which would prevent an amateur going very far wrong in the colouring of *his* rooms or the structure of *his* furniture. They may also enable *him* to speak with more authority to the upholsterer or the paper-hanger whom *he* employs, and may save *him* from being compelled to purchase furniture or to hang paper, not that they suit *his* rooms or *his* requirements, but

because “they are very tasty”, or because “we are selling a great number of them” [my italics].<sup>99</sup>

This can be read as an ironic inversion of flustered female consumers succumbing – rather more melodramatically - to the persuasions of the upholsterer in Eastlake’s *Hints on Household Taste* (1868):

When Materfamilias enters an ordinary upholsterer’s warehouse, how can she possibly decide on the pattern of her new carpet, when bale after bale of Brussels is unrolled by the indefatigable youth, who is equal in his praises of every piece in turn? ... The shopman remarks of one piece of goods that it is ‘elegant’; of another that it is ‘striking’; of a third, that it is ‘unique’, and so forth. The good lady looks from one carpet to another until her eyes are fairly dazzled by their hues. She is utterly unable to explain why she should, or why she should not like any of them.<sup>100</sup>

These inversions and gender references become more apparent when the Garretts consider the decoration and furnishing of the two most obviously gendered rooms in the house, the masculine Dining Room and the feminine Drawing Room.<sup>101</sup> In “House As They Are”, a small ten-paged section, they present a room-by-room analysis, examining the Hall, the Dining Room, the Drawing Room, and the Bedroom, exposing the horrors of the interior of an ordinary modern London house, and criticizing many of the “unprincipled” decorative practices of the period. Significantly, the Garretts comment on the gendered nature of the principle rooms, particularly the Dining Room:

...the gloomy appearance of the rest of the room, remind one of the British boast that every Englishman’s house is his castle, and that he wishes neither to observe nor to be observed when he retires into the dignified seclusion of this, the especially masculine department of the household.<sup>102</sup>

In the feminine Drawing Room, the Garretts censure the work of ‘some fashionable decorator and upholsterer’<sup>103</sup> who has been employed by the anxious ladies of the house, and, describe with irony the inharmonious decorative scheme of this ‘lamentably commonplace apartment’.<sup>104</sup> The following chapter, which also includes and refers to illustrations of their own furniture designs, is entitled “Houses As They Might Be”. This is the most important section in *House Decoration* for appreciating the style the Garretts produced. Advocating neutral tones, harmonious drapery in soft velvets, and simple, well-constructed furniture based on eighteenth century models, the Garretts return to the imaginary ordinary London house to re-decorate it, creating a Utopian<sup>105</sup> vision of the “Queen Anne” style home.

In an inversion of Eastlake’s flustered, novelty-driven *Materfamilias*, the Garretts present their readers with the *Paterfamilias* who is resistant to change:

In the dingy and dreary solemnity of the modern London Dining Room we have but a melancholy survival of the stately hospitable-looking rooms of the last century. Yet there is no other room in the house where innovations are more grudgingly permitted, and an Englishman would suspect you of every other revolutionary tendency, if you proposed any radical changes in the colour of the walls, or in the forms and arrangements of the furniture.<sup>106</sup>

Women – at least women like the Garretts who have acquired the ‘faculty of distinguishing good from bad design in the familiar objects of domestic life’<sup>107</sup> - are now positive agents of change and innovation. In spite of the glowering *Paterfamilias* – who seems to be their biggest problem, with perhaps the exception of the black marble chimneypiece – the Garretts re-decorate the Dining Room, and, having completed their refurbishment ‘leaving the master of the house to decide whether his digestion will be able to assimilate the novel treatment just proposed’<sup>108</sup>, they return to the Drawing Room. Whereas in the “Houses As They Are”, ‘the ladies of the

family *are told* that it is now their turn to have their tastes consulted’<sup>109</sup> in “Houses As They Might Be”, ‘the ladies of the household *demand* the right of having their particular tastes consulted’<sup>110</sup> [my italics]. It seems, however, that the taste of these ladies, is largely inspired by the decorative schemes of

Mrs. A’s beautiful Drawing Room “in the dado style, I think they call it”, and Mrs B’s charming idea of having flowers painted on the panels of the doors, “so beautifully done they were exactly like real flowers”.<sup>111</sup>

Confident that the faults of these rooms can be explained, the Garretts go on to alter the Drawing Room ‘in accordance with a more cultivated view of the principles of decorative art.’<sup>112</sup> Consequently, the Drawing Room is transformed into an affordably “Queen Anne” style ‘shrine’<sup>113</sup>. This section of “Houses As They Might Be” concludes with a reminder of the need for aesthetic appreciation by the occupant of the re-decorated home. Here, like Eastlake, they argue that decorative art should be judged by the same standards applied to other forms of art; but, while Eastlake admonishes that ‘class of *young ladies* who are in the habit of anticipating all differences of opinion in a picture-gallery or concert-room by saying that they “know what they like”<sup>114</sup>, the Garretts advise *people* who claim to “know what they like” to take care that their tastes ‘are so far cultivated as to make it desirable to display them.’<sup>115</sup>

Perhaps the most intriguing chapter in *House Decoration* is devoted to draperies. Here the Garretts make their only explicit statement about the role of women:

We hear a great deal nowadays of women’s work and women’s sphere. Here at any rate there can be no difference of opinion. Whether the arrangements of an ordinary household be sufficient, even if ordered with the greatest nicety, to



occupy the whole of the housewife's time and thought, may be a disputed question, but every one will agree that when a woman undertakes to guide a household, all these things should be of interest to her, and that the refinement and beauty of a house will, in the main, depend upon the trouble which she is willing to bestow upon small and comparatively insignificant details.<sup>116</sup>

One of these comparatively insignificant details seems to be household linen:

Since the days of our grandmothers<sup>117</sup>, who spun their own linen, it seems that housewives and spinsters (now, properly speaking spinsters no longer) have neglected that important part of housekeeping, the household linen.<sup>118</sup>

Though a connection can be made between making and marking household linen and the Married Women's Property legislation of the period<sup>119</sup>, here the Garretts have returned to an idealized historical vision, seeing the home as a site of production rather than consumption.

Surely the work of marking, wherein the cleverness of the worker might devise some fresh conceit on each article, would be more interesting than half the busy idleness with which the daughters of England now beguile their time.<sup>120</sup>

Considering the 'exhausting fight against the stream of prejudice, such as the Garretts had waged for many years'<sup>121</sup> it is perhaps not surprising that they should express their impatience with the less politicised "daughters of England" who waste their time in useless rather than 'useful and congenial'<sup>122</sup> pursuits.

The Garretts are clearly not engaged in busy idleness. Rather than naturally gifted amateurs, they are trained professionals working in a male-dominated world. The clearest demonstration of their professional status occurs throughout the "Introduction", which begins with a reference to a paper given by J. J. Stevenson upon "the Queen Anne Style of Architecture" in 1874.<sup>123</sup> By defending and defining

the style ‘to the study of which the Miss Garretts have devoted their attention’<sup>124</sup> they place themselves immediately in the context of their professional life. Demonstrating knowledge and understanding of one of the recent heated debates<sup>125</sup> of the architectural world, the merits of “Queen Anne” style versus the Gothic Revival, they describe the rapid popularity of the new style and its suitability for new buildings:

all we would urge is that for ordinary English houses, the style of house which was built during the eighteenth century, whose walls were of brick, and whose staircases were of wood (the houses, that is, which are now designated “Queen Anne”), are more suitable than the so-called Gothic house.<sup>126</sup>

Clearly belonging to the “Queen Anne” camp, the Garretts go on to explain the appeal of this style by comparing two London houses, one from Bloomsbury and one from South Kensington, ‘each built originally for the same class.’<sup>127</sup> They invoke ideas of national identity, hoping that

The fashionable world of London may one day return and live in the houses which were built in the solid and unpretentious style so much in accordance with the best characteristics of the English people.<sup>128</sup>

Having thus established their stylistic approach, they return to the subject of their treatise, ‘the internal fittings and decorations of houses’<sup>129</sup>. They begin by defining their profession, describing the skills of the consummate “house decorator” who:

Should be able to design and arrange all the internal fittings of a house, the chimney-pieces, grates, and door-heads, as well as the wall-hangings, curtains, carpets, and furniture.<sup>130</sup>

They perceive the “house decorator” (i.e. R. & A. Garrett) as a professional able to judge both the total effect and the minute details of the decorative scheme, and who aims to create a ‘harmonious whole’.<sup>131</sup> The Garretts also underline their professional status by dealing at length with the relationship between client and decorator, no doubt speaking from experience when they comment, ‘A great of trouble and vexation would often be saved if people would make up their minds beforehand how much they wish to spend.’<sup>132</sup>

Throughout *House Decoration* the Garretts also engage, as professionals, in contemporary design debates. In the “Introduction” for example, they defend their use of antique furniture in furnishing schemes. Arguing in favour of the well-designed and constructed furniture of the days of Queen Anne ‘(by which courteous reader, you surely will not compel us to mean strictly the years between 1702 – 1714)’<sup>133</sup> enables them to comment on the deterioration of craft skills, the alienation of the Victorian workman, and a lack of discernment in the consumer:

The public themselves are mainly to blame. They demand cheap and showy furniture, and the only way to make furniture at once cheap and showy is to make it by machinery, and to turn the men who make it as nearly as one can into machines.<sup>134</sup>

Consequently, within *House Decoration* the Garretts attempt to instruct their readers in “true artistic principles” in every area of domestic decoration including, wall-papers, colour theory, metalwork, glass staining, embroidery, wood carving, and furniture construction. Their didactic methods differ from their male contemporaries:

A great deal is said nowadays about the ignorance of the public. They have been told hitherto in a hard and dogmatic manner what they ought to admire and what they ought to avoid. A straightforward answer to a few of their whys and wherefores generally has the effect of convincing them of the

reasonableness of the method pursued; and when once convinced that there is an intelligible reason for a mode of action, three-fourths of their prejudice against it vanishes.<sup>135</sup>

Perhaps as an ironic comment on the dogma of Christopher Dresser's *Principles of Decorative Design* (1873), they warn their readers with self-deprecating humour

that all principles (and especially those of house decorators) must be taken *cum grano salis* [with a grain of salt]. Principles are indeed necessary, but they must be the servant of the decorator and not his master.<sup>136</sup>

Appealing to their readers as 'those who love to be surrounded by graceful forms and harmonious colours, and who wish to make their houses pleasant and attractive to look upon'<sup>137</sup>, the Garretts recommend "Queen Anne" style while stressing their professional skills, as "house decorators" trained to design, select and judge between good and bad decorative schemes. Thus *House Decoration* is used primarily by the Garretts to define their professional position, and provides ample evidence of their training, their practical experience and proof of professional rather than domestic status. They achieve this in a number of ways: by defining the role of house decorator and discussing the decorator-client relationship; by engaging with contemporary architectural, art and design issues; through their use of appropriate architectural terms; by demonstrating knowledge of materials and construction techniques; and, by instructing their readers in "principles of decorative art". Furthermore, amid the quotes from Samuel Johnson's *Preface to Shakespeare* (1765) and the medical metaphors, the text contains numerous references to the Garretts' careful study of seventeenth and eighteenth century architects, designers and decorators, including Charles-Alphonse Du Fresnoy, Inigo Jones, Grinling Gibbons, Christopher Wren, Thomas Chippendale, Sir William Chambers, and the brothers Adam. Even the

structure of *House Decoration* is a reference to historical precedent, in that it uses the powerful rhetoric of “Before” and “After” like one of Humphry Repton’s Red Books.

## Conclusion

In *Principles of Decorative Design*, Christopher Dresser comments on “knowledge”:

It may be taken as an invariable truth that knowledge, and knowledge alone, can enable us to form an accurate judgement respecting the beauty or want of beauty of an object, and he who has the greater knowledge of art can judge best of the ornamental qualities of an object. He who would judge rightly of art-works must have knowledge.<sup>138</sup>

Conway relates an anecdote that demonstrate the knowledge possessed by the Garretts:

They directed that a certain kind of mixture with which paint is generally adulterated should not be used. When they came to look at the work they found that the mixture had been used, though it is what no untrained eye could detect. They called the painter to account, and he said he had used very little of the mixture indeed.  
 “That is true”, said one of the ladies, “but we told you not to use a particle of it”.  
 The painter was amazed, and at last said, “Will you be kind enough to tell me how you knew that mixture had been used?”  
 It is precisely this *knowledge* which everywhere secures respect.<sup>139</sup>

Written in the style of an architectural treatise by England’s first professional female interior designers, *House Decoration* is a clear demonstration of this knowledge.

However, it also exemplifies Showalter’s model of a double-voiced discourse, which arises from the prescribed circumstances of the Garretts’ engagement with the domestic design discourse of the 1870s. This article has demonstrated how the use of recent feminist literary and historical techniques can illuminate this double-voiced

discourse, or subversive sub-text, in women's writing of the late nineteenth century. In reclaiming the domestic sphere from the professional male interior designers, *House Decoration* imitates, mocks and inverts the dominant models produced by Dresser and Eastlake, replacing the ignorant and flustered *Materfamilias* with the resistant and bewildered *Paterfamilias*. Highlighting the emerging professionalization of women during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, *House Decoration* becomes an important case study both for the histories of gender, taste, domesticity and design and also for the use of advice literature as historical evidence.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> N. Cooper, *The Opulent Eye: Late Victorian and Edwardian Taste in Interior Design*, Architectural Press, 1979, p. 8
- <sup>2</sup> E. Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, (revised and expanded edition) Virago Press, 1999, p. 14
- <sup>3</sup> This is explained in detail in her two essays "Towards a Feminist Poetics" in M. Jacobus, (ed.), *Women's Writing and Writing About Women*, Croom Helm, 1979 and "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" in *Critical Inquiry* 8, (Winter) 1981. Both essays were re-printed in E. Showalter (ed), *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, Virago Press, 1986
- <sup>4</sup> G. Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History*, Oxford: OUP, 1979
- <sup>5</sup> See: E. Ardener, 'Belief and the problem of women' in S. Ardener (ed.), *Perceiving Women*, Dent & Sons Ltd., 1975
- <sup>6</sup> E. Showalter, 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness', 1986, p. 261.
- <sup>7</sup> E. Showalter, 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness', 1986, p. 263.
- <sup>8</sup> S. Spaul, "Gynocriticism" in S. Mills et al, *Feminist Readings Feminist Reading*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989, p. 117
- <sup>9</sup> See, S. Spaul, "Gynocriticism", 1989
- <sup>10</sup> S. Spaul, 1989, p. 85 on Nina Baym's *Women's Fiction: A guide to Novels by and about Women in America 1820 – 1970*. Cornell University Press, 1978.
- <sup>11</sup> E. Showalter, 1977; 1999, p. 13
- <sup>12</sup> E. Showalter, 'Towards a Feminist Poetics', 1986 p. 137
- <sup>13</sup> *ibid*, p. 138
- <sup>14</sup> E. Showalter, 'Literary Criticism', Review Essay, *Signs* 1 (Winter 1975) p. 435
- <sup>15</sup> N. Humble, introduction to *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management*, 1861, Oxford World Classics, 2000, p. xv - xvi
- <sup>16</sup> Rhoda published a lecture entitled "*The Electoral Disabilities of Women*", which she delivered in the Corn Exchange, Cheltenham, on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1872.
- <sup>17</sup> *Englishwoman's Review*, 15 December 1882, pp. 547 - 548
- <sup>18</sup> A. Callen, *Angel in the Studio: Women in the Arts and Crafts Movement 1870 – 1914*, Astragal Books, 1979, p. 172
- <sup>19</sup> S. Rowbotham, *Hidden from History*, Pluto Press, 1973
- <sup>20</sup> The literature written by and about the more famous Garretts has been invaluable in piecing together the personal histories of Agnes and Rhoda. See for example: E.T. Cook, *Edmund Garrett, a Memoir*, Edward Arnold, 1909; M. Garrett Fawcett, *What I Remember*, T. Fisher Unwin, 1925; R. Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett*, 1931; J. Manton, *Elizabeth Garrett Anderson*, Methuen & Co., 1965; A. Oakley, "Millicent Garrett Fawcett: Duty and Determination" in D. Spender, (ed.) *Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of women's Intellectual Traditions*, 1983; D. Rubinstein, *A Different World For Women: the life of Millicent Garrett Fawcett*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 199; B. Caine, *Victorian Feminists*, Oxford University Press, 1993; and J. Purvis and H. S. Stanley, *Votes for Women*, Routledge, 2000. This article was written before the publication of E. Crawford's study of the Garrett family, *Enterprising Women: The Garretts and their Circle*, Francis Boutle, September 2002.
- <sup>21</sup> A. Briggs, *Victorian Things*, Penguin Books, 1988
- <sup>22</sup> The illustration of the "Dining Room" in *House Decoration* shows Morris's 'Trellis' wallpaper. The Garretts certainly knew Morris: Rhoda's obituary in the *Englishwoman's Review*, 15 December 1882 notes that she was a committee member of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings formed in 1877. She was in fact the only female committee member, and it is interesting that several of the other authors for the "Art at Home" series including W. J. Loftie and C. G. Leland were involved with the SPAB. I am grateful to Dr. Jenny West at the SPAB for information about Rhoda's committee attendances.
- <sup>23</sup> *The Builder*, volume 43, 1882, p. 765
- <sup>24</sup> See E. Moberly Bell, *Storming the Citadel: The Rise of the Woman Doctor*, Constable & Co., 1953
- <sup>25</sup> M. Garrett Fawcett, 1924, p. 48: '... the relationship was not very close. But that is the best of cousins, you can make much or little of the relationship, according to your taste and fancy; in Rhoda's case it meant much, especially to Agnes and myself.'
- <sup>26</sup> *ibid*, p. 48
- <sup>27</sup> J. Manton, 1965, p. 221 n3, Edmund Garrett, Agnes's brother objected to the scandal this would cause.
- <sup>28</sup> *Women's Penny Paper*, January 18, 1890, p.145

- <sup>29</sup> However, in Agnes' interview for the *Women's Penny Paper*, January 18, 1890, it is noted that 'about the year 1874, it first entered her head that she should like much to become a house decorator'.
- <sup>30</sup> M. Garrett Fawcett, 1924, p. 48
- <sup>31</sup> M. D. Conway, *Travels in South Kensington: with notes on decorative arts and architecture in England*, Trübner, 1882 p. 168
- <sup>32</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly in "the century of nerves", references to medicine and illness, particularly to nervous symptoms, occur throughout the text. In particular there are a remarkable number of comments throughout the text relating to the notion of rest for the weary eye and mind.
- <sup>33</sup> R. & A. Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork and Furniture*, Macmillan & Co., 1876, pp. 9 - 10
- <sup>34</sup> *Englishwoman's Review*, 15 December 1882, p. 548
- <sup>35</sup> M.D. Conway, *Autobiography, Memories and Experiences of Moncure Daniel Conway*, Volume 1, Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1904, p. 403
- <sup>36</sup> J. Manton, 1965, p. 289 n1
- <sup>37</sup> M.D Conway, 1882 p. 169
- <sup>38</sup> *ibid*, p. 169; *The Cabinet-Maker & Art Furnisher*, 2 April 1883; and, *Women's Penny Paper*, 1890.
- <sup>39</sup> M.D. Conway, 1882 p. 169
- <sup>40</sup> *ibid*, p. 168
- <sup>41</sup> E. Smyth, *Impressions That Remained*, Longmans, Green & Co., 2 volumes, 1919, vol. ii. p. 7
- <sup>42</sup> Microfiche: 1881 Census: London, St. Giles-in-the-Field, 03241204, page, 31675: Rhoda is described as the head of the house, and both women give their profession as "house decorator". Among their four domestic servants is listed Charles A. Essam, Servant and Assistant Decorator, aged twenty-one.
- <sup>43</sup> "Notice of a Christmas Sale of Furniture by the Misses Rhoda and Agnes Garrett, December 1896": Women's Library Autograph letter collection.
- <sup>44</sup> M.D. Conway, 1882 p. 169
- <sup>45</sup> Basil Champneys, who shared an office with J. M. Brydon and who must have known the Garrett cousins, was the college architect for Newnham College from 1874 until 1910. It is very tempting to imagine that Rhoda and Agnes Garrett may have decorated rooms there in the "Queen Anne" manner. Moreover, given that Millicent Fawcett, her husband and daughter, Philippa had long and close links with Newnham, it seems highly likely that the Garretts were involved.
- <sup>46</sup> *The Cabinet-Maker and Art Furnisher*, "Trade Biographies: The Late Miss Rhoda Garrett", April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1883, p. 194: 'These enterprising ladies were represented at the Paris Exhibition by a cottage room shown in the Palace of the Trocadero, in addition to an exhibit which appeared in the ordinary furniture section of the Exhibition'.
- <sup>47</sup> P. Levine, *Victorian Feminism 1850 – 1900*, London: Hutchinson, 1987, p. 92
- <sup>48</sup> J. Manton, 1965, p. 239; M. Girouard, *Sweetness and Light: The 'Queen Anne Movement' 1860 - 1900*, Yale University Press, 1984, pp. 53 – 54. This building, one of a new block of six-storey red brick mansions, designed by T. H. Wyatt for the Portman Estate has been demolished.
- <sup>49</sup> D. Rubinstein, 1991, pp. 18 - 19 'in 1874 they [Henry and Millicent Fawcett] were able to move to permanent homes in Vauxhall, Lambeth, an unfashionable but convenient part of south London, and 18 Brookside, Cambridge. In both places Millicent's taste as a home furnisher and decorator, aided by Agnes and Rhoda Garrett was admired by their visitors.'
- <sup>50</sup> The Garrett cousins were his neighbours, having leased a cottage at Rustington, which they used as a holiday retreat. See Smyth, E., 1919, p. 12 and E.T. Cook, 1909, p.8
- <sup>51</sup> Rhoda Garrett's death certificate, dated 22 November 1882 and signed by Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, shows that she died of typhoid fever and bronchitis.
- <sup>52</sup> See Obituaries for Rhoda Garrett: *The Builder*, volume 43, 1882, p. 765; *Englishwoman's Review*, 15 December 1882, pp. 547 - 548; and, *Women's Suffrage Journal*, 1 December 1882, p. 195
- <sup>53</sup> *Englishwoman's Review*, 15 December 1882, p. 548
- <sup>54</sup> Reading University Library: Macmillan & Co Ltd, publishers, 1875 – 1964: Ref. MS 1089. Letter from Agnes Garrett to Macmillan dated January 17<sup>th</sup> 1902, hand-written on paper with the business letterhead "R. & A. Garrett". Millicent Garrett Fawcett and her daughter Philippa joined Agnes at Gower Street in 1884, following the death of Henry Fawcett. The two sisters lived together until Millicent's death in 1929.
- <sup>55</sup> *Women's Penny Paper*, January 18, 1890. p.146 mentions Agnes exhibiting at Bristol 'where only women's work was admitted'. I am grateful to Anthony Beeson, the Art Librarian at Bristol Central Library for providing me with information from the catalogue for the 1885 Exhibition of Women's Industries. This exhibition was held in Queen's Villa, Queen's Road, Bristol and was devised to show



the work of professional women artists and tradeswomen. The exhibition ran from 26<sup>th</sup> February to 28<sup>th</sup> April 1885.

<sup>56</sup> Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society: *Catalogue of the 1<sup>st</sup> Exhibition 1888*, London: The Society, 1888. Lynn Walker, in her essay 'The Arts and Crafts Alternative' in J. Attfield and P. Kirkham, (eds.), *A View from the Interior: Women and Design*, The Women's Press Ltd., 1995 edition, seems unaware of Rhoda's early death writing that 'The Garretts designed a complete interior which consisted of furniture, metalwork, carpets, wallpaper and woodwork' for the 1888 exhibition p. 168. In a separate essay in this publication, 'Women Architects', she also gives the impression that they were commissioned to design furniture for the Drawing Room at Standen, p. 99

<sup>57</sup> W. Hitchmough, *The Arts and Crafts Home*, Pavilion Books, 2000, p. 101 claims that the Garretts were cousins of the Beales.

<sup>58</sup> I am very grateful to Sophie Chessum and Kevin Rogers at the South East Region of the National Trust for their help with my work on the Garretts.

<sup>59</sup> R. & A. Garrett, 1876 pp. 29 - 30

<sup>60</sup> *ibid*, pp. 62 - 3

<sup>61</sup> *ibid*, p. 64

<sup>62</sup> D. Attar, *A Bibliography of Household Books Published in Britain 1800 – 1914*, Prospect Books, 1987, pp.31 - 32

<sup>63</sup> *ibid*, p. 32

<sup>64</sup> I am very grateful to Robert Machesney at the Macmillan Archive for providing me with details of the full list of titles, which is as follows: Rev. W J Loftie, *A Plea for Art in the House*, (1876); Rhoda & Agnes Garrett, *Suggestions for House Decoration*, (1876); Mrs Orrinsmith, *The Drawing-Room*, (1877); Rev. J. Hullah, *Music in the House*, (1877); Mrs WJ Loftie, *The Dining Room*, (1877 but dated 1878); Lady Barker, *The Bedroom and Boudoir*, (1878); Mrs Oliphant, *Dress*, (1878); Lady Pollock, *Amateur Theatricals*, (1879); C G Leland, *The Minor Arts*, (1880); E Glaister, *Needlework*, (1880); A Lang, *The Library*, (1881); and T. J. Ellis, *Sketching from Nature*, (1883).

<sup>65</sup> Rev. W. J. Loftie, *A Plea for Art in the Home*, London: Macmillan & Co., 1876, p. 29

<sup>66</sup> Rev. W. J. Loftie (1839 – 1911), correspondence with Macmillan: 1875 – 81. British Library, Manuscripts Collections, Reference: Add MS 55075. Letter to Macmillan dated 11 March 1876.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid*

<sup>68</sup> See W.C. Sellar & R. J. Yeatman, *1066 and All That. A memorable history of England: comprising all the parts you can remember ...*, London: 1930, Chapter XXXVIII "Williamanmary. England Ruled by an Orange". E.T. Cook (*Edmund Garrett, a Memoir*, Edward Arnold, 1909) notes that 'many of Edmund's early letters are addressed collectively to "Rhodagnes".'

<sup>69</sup> Rev. W. J. Loftie (1839 – 1911), correspondence with Macmillan: 1875 – 81. British Library, Manuscripts Collections, Reference: Add MS 55075. Letter to Macmillan dated 11 March 1876.

<sup>70</sup> Brochure: *The Aesthetic Movement & the Arts and Crafts Movement*, edited by Peter Stansky and Rodney Shewan. 48 of the most important books, reprinted in 38 volumes, including over 1000 illustrations, Garland Publishing. I am very grateful to Professor Peter Stansky at Stanford University, California, for sending me this brochure and discussing the Garland reprinting.

<sup>71</sup> Brochure: *The Aesthetic Movement & the Arts and Crafts Movement*, edited by Peter Stansky and Rodney Shewan, describing the "Art at Home" series.

<sup>72</sup> R. & A. Garrett, 1876 p. 6

<sup>73</sup> *ibid*, p. 12

<sup>74</sup> M.D. Conway, 1882 p. 171

<sup>75</sup> R. & A. Garrett, 1876, p. 59

<sup>76</sup> It is notable that Clarence Cook's chapter on "The Entrance" makes a similar reference to the likely occupants of the hall chair: C. Cook, *The House Beautiful: Essays on beds and tables, stools and candlesticks*, Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1878; Dover Editions 1980, p. 33. '... these settees and arm-chairs are comfortable, though there is nothing soft about them. They are not recommended for the parlour or sitting-room, however, but only for the hall, where it is true their comfort will be wasted on messenger-boys, book-agents, the census-man, and the bereaved lady who offers us soap at merely nominal prices, with a falsetto story of her woes thrown in. As visitors of this class are the only ones who will sit in the hall, considerations of comfort may be allowed to yield to picturesqueness.'

<sup>77</sup> R. & A. Garrett, 1876, p. 41

<sup>78</sup> *ibid*, p. 41

<sup>79</sup> *ibid*, p.85

<sup>80</sup> *ibid*, p. 90

- <sup>81</sup> See for example N. Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, Oxford University Press, 1987; J. Newton, 'Making and Re-making Patriarchy' in S. Benstock, *Feminist Issues in Literary Scholarship*, Indiana University Press, 1987; A. Vickery, "Golden Age to separate Spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English Women's History, *Historical Journal* 36 (2), 1993 and, E. Langland, *Nobody's Angels: Middle-class women and domestic ideology in Victorian Culture*, Cornell University Press, 1995
- <sup>82</sup> A. Vickery, 1993, p. 389
- <sup>83</sup> C. L. Eastlake, *Hints on Household Taste*, Longman & Co., 1868; 1878, pp. 8 - 9
- <sup>84</sup> C. Dresser, *Principles of Decorative Design*, Cassell Petter & Galpin, 1873; Academy Editions, 1973, pp. 1- 2
- <sup>85</sup> M.D. Conway, 1882 p. 168
- <sup>86</sup> Mentioned in the *Englishwoman's Review*, 15 December 1882, p. 548
- <sup>87</sup> Mrs Haweis's doctor was Elizabeth Garrett Anderson.
- <sup>88</sup> M.E. Haweis, *The Art of Decoration*, Chatto & Windus, 1881, p. 200
- <sup>89</sup> *ibid*, p. 51
- <sup>90</sup> *ibid*, pp. 52 - 53
- <sup>91</sup> *ibid*, pp. 336-33. These comments are echoed by Mark Girouard nearly 100 years later, who writes 'This was on the whole, a very superficial series of little books, aimed at the popular market. It plagiarized large numbers of Clarence Cook's illustration, all without acknowledgment. It was an early and curious example of aesthetic influence running from America to England rather than the other way round, and one that reflected little credit on either Macmillan or Loftie.' See M. Girouard, 1984, p. 211
- <sup>92</sup> Including Mrs Orrinsmith's *The Drawing Room* (1877), Mrs Loftie's *The Dining Room* (1877 but dated 1878) and Lady Barker's *The Bedroom and the Boudoir* (1878): all were published by Macmillan.
- <sup>93</sup> *Scribner's Illustrated Monthly*: June 1875, January, February, April, June, October, November 1876, May 1877. *House Beautiful* (1878) had a cover designed by Daniel Cottier – who is mentioned in almost every article - and a frontispiece by Walter Crane entitled 'My Lady's Chamber', showing a lady in aesthetic dress standing in her 'Queen Anne' Drawing Room.
- <sup>94</sup> Rev. W. J. Loftie (1839 – 1911), correspondence with Macmillan: 1875 – 81. British Library, Manuscripts Collections, Reference: Add MS 55075. Letter to Macmillan dated 2 August 1876.
- <sup>95</sup> C. L. Eastlake, 1868; 1878, pp. 43 - 44
- <sup>96</sup> R. & A. Garrett, 1876, p. 36
- <sup>97</sup> C. L. Eastlake, 1868; 1878, p. 44
- <sup>98</sup> R. & A. Garrett, 1876, p. 32
- <sup>99</sup> *ibid*, p. 21
- <sup>100</sup> C.L. Eastlake, 1868; 1878, p. 11
- <sup>101</sup> See J. Kinchin, 'The Gendered Interior: Nineteenth Century Essays on the 'Masculine' and the 'Feminine' room' in *The Gendered Object*, edited by P. Kirkham, Manchester University Press, 1996, pp. 12 - 29
- <sup>102</sup> R. & A. Garrett, 1876, p. 28
- <sup>103</sup> *ibid*, p. 28 - 29
- <sup>104</sup> *ibid*, p. 28 – 29 in another volume of the "Art at Home" series, Mrs Orrinsmith opens with a description of a very similar room, which she identifies as the 'ordinary lower middle-class Drawing Room of the Victorian era'. See Mrs L. Orrinsmith, 1877, p. 1
- <sup>105</sup> The inversion is a classic technique of Utopian fiction.
- <sup>106</sup> R. & A. Garrett, 1876, p. 43
- <sup>107</sup> C. L. Eastlake, 1868; 1878, pp. 8 - 9
- <sup>108</sup> R. & A. Garrett, 1876, p. 55
- <sup>109</sup> *ibid*, p. 28
- <sup>110</sup> *ibid*, p. 55
- <sup>111</sup> *ibid*, 1876, p. 56
- <sup>112</sup> *ibid*, 1876, p. 56
- <sup>113</sup> *ibid*, 1876, p. 67
- <sup>114</sup> C.L. Eastlake, 1868; 1878, pp. 14 - 15
- <sup>115</sup> R. & A. Garrett, 1876 p. 68
- <sup>116</sup> *ibid*, p.84
- <sup>117</sup> *House Decoration* contains many references to "the days of our grandmothers", a time when footstools were much bigger and ladies had far fewer dresses. This can be partially explained by Girouard's analysis of the English Aesthete and the development of "Queen Anne" style: 'As an

antidote to the present they recreated the past as an ideal world of pre-industrial simplicity, at once homely and Arcadian.' See M. Girouard, 1984, p. 5

<sup>118</sup> R. & A. Garrett, 1876, p. 81

<sup>119</sup> See L. Holcombe, *Wives & Property: Reform of the Married Women's Property Law in Nineteenth-Century England*, Martin Robertson, 1983. See Lynn Walker's discussion of this legislation in her essay "Women Architects" in J. Attfield and P. Kirkham (eds.), 1995, in which she identifies the legal restrictions imposed on married women as an obstruction to their gaining access to the architectural profession, and suggests that the 'removal of the legal, ideological and psychological impediments by the Married Women's Property Acts, therefore had great significance for all women, and it had particular importance for the entry of women into the architectural profession.' p. 96. The Garretts, however, were financially independent unmarried women.

<sup>120</sup> R. & A. Garrett, 1876, p. 75

<sup>121</sup> E. Smyth, 1919, p. 12

<sup>122</sup> *Englishwoman's Review*, 15 December 1882, p. 548

<sup>123</sup> *Building News*, 26 June 1874, pp. 689 – 92; *The Builder*, 27 June, 1874, pp. 537 - 8

<sup>124</sup> Rev. W. J. Loftie, "Advertisement" in R. & A. Garrett, 1876, notes that the next volume of this series would be J. J. Stevenson's *Domestic Architecture* which 'will apply the same principles to the exterior that are here applied to the interior of our houses'. J. J. Stevenson's *House Architecture* although part of Loftie's original scheme was not issued as part of the "Art at Home" series, being published separately in two volumes by Macmillan in 1880.

<sup>125</sup> See M. Girouard, 1984, pp. 57 - 63

<sup>126</sup> R. & A. Garrett, 1876, pp. 3- 4. The Garretts acknowledge the importance of Pugin, but reject Gothic Revival architecture as a suitable style for ordinary modern housing on the grounds of the inappropriate sham materials used by builders: 'When a large house or cathedral is to be built ... money will be forthcoming and the building will be of stone. But if a builder is "running up a street of Gothic houses", what happens? It is out of the question that he should use so costly a material as stone, and stucco therefore takes its place. It is we know, unreasonable to blame a pure and beautiful style for requiring a beautiful material ...'

<sup>127</sup> R. & A. Garrett, 1876, p. 4

<sup>128</sup> *ibid*, p. 5

<sup>129</sup> *ibid*, p. 5

<sup>130</sup> *ibid*, pp. 5 - 6

<sup>131</sup> *ibid*, p. 6

<sup>132</sup> *ibid*, p. 88 - 9

<sup>133</sup> *ibid*, p. 12

<sup>134</sup> *ibid*, p. 14

<sup>135</sup> *ibid*, p. 22

<sup>136</sup> *ibid*, p. 14

<sup>137</sup> *ibid*, p. 31

<sup>138</sup> C. Dresser, 1873; Academy Editions, 1973, p. 2

<sup>139</sup> M.D. Conway, 1882 p. 170