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## The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine's Influence on Nineteenth-Century Middle-Class Women

Amber Cook  
amberlc1@uw.edu

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The *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine's* Influence on Nineteenth-Century Middle-Class  
Women

A Senior Paper

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation  
Undergraduate History Program of the University of Washington Tacoma

By

Amber Cook

University of Washington Tacoma

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Advisor: Dr. Elizabeth Sundermann

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## Abstract

Depictions and study of women's fashion from mid-nineteenth-century England have largely focused on upper-class women and suffragettes. The purpose of this research is to highlight another group, middle-class women, and their fashion choices through analysis of the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*. This magazine not only gave fashion advice and instruction but guided middle-class women's choices on what materials to purchase and where to purchase them. The fashion columns steered women into building a new middle-class identity that was unique and set them apart from the extravagant upper class.

By examining the articles printed in the magazine I was able to derive key factors in the fashion advice being given to middle-class women: maintaining class values, budgeting, and setting themselves apart from both the working and upper classes. With the use of secondary scholarship about mid-nineteenth-century English women's fashion, along with digitally archived copies of the original magazine, we can see that literature such as the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* was crucial in building a new identity for the middle-class Victorian woman. Over the three decades of publication, this magazine underwent an evolution through its content and tone which reflected the values of the growing middle class and helped build the identity of the new middle-class woman.

## Introduction

The story of the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* and its evolution begins as a story of love: the marriage of Samuel Beeton and Isabella Mayson (Fig. 1). The two most likely met as children, as their families were intricately connected.<sup>1</sup> Isabella attended school with Samuel's sisters and their fathers eventually worked together in publishing, so it was a world that both Samuel and Isabella knew well.<sup>2</sup> Samuel had first made his living by reprinting American books for distribution in England, including *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.<sup>3</sup> By 1856 during their year-long engagement, Samuel was editor and publisher of three magazines: *Boy's Own Magazine*, *Boy's*



Figure 1. *Isabella Beeton*  
by Maull & Polyblank, 1857  
7 1/4 in. x 5 7/8 in. (184 mm x 149 mm)  
National Portrait Gallery, London

*Own Journal*, and the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*.<sup>4</sup> Within nine months of their marriage Isabella became a journalist and within a year began compiling material for her book, *The Book of Household Management*. By 1860 she was co-editor for the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*.<sup>5</sup> It was in this year that she began to write about the fashions of upper-class Parisian women as well, a project that would help shape the magazine's content.<sup>6</sup>

The middle-class woman during the mid-nineteenth century needed to learn what to wear, how to keep her household, and what was proper and improper. She had to learn these things herself because it is likely she was the first generation of middle status in her family. One major source of the middle-class woman's information was periodicals such as the *Englishwoman's*

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<sup>1</sup> Kathryn Hughes, *The Short Life and Long Times of Mrs. Beeton* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 97.

<sup>2</sup> Hughes, 98.

<sup>3</sup> Hughes, 154.

<sup>4</sup> Hughes, 103.

<sup>5</sup> Hughes, 152.

<sup>6</sup> Hughes, 105.

*Domestic Magazine*. The material it provided gave instructions regarding clothing, influenced the way the middle-class woman presented herself and gave information about the materials necessary to do so. This publication was not only showing the readers how they could build their new identity as a middle-class woman but also the material goods that would solidify them in the world of consumerism.

From its beginning in 1852, the magazine's purpose was to give advice, much like women's magazines today. It had sections on must-have household goods, beauty tips, essays, gardening, pets, advice columns, and most importantly for the purpose of this paper, fashion advice, and instructions.<sup>7</sup> The magazine gave middle-class women in England not only instruction on how a proper middle-class family should dress but also advice on how to improve their station through the use of material goods. The magazine sought to educate the women of the middle class in the domestic sphere and to broaden their knowledge of the world, knowing that many of these women would never have the chance to travel. This aspect of the magazine was likely encouraged by events like the Great Exhibition of 1851 and increasing middle class exposure to the wonders of the world displayed in its exhibits. Isabella herself used products, like her Leamington Kitchen Stove, that were found at the exhibition and described their benefits to her readers in detail.<sup>8</sup>

With each decade of its existence, the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* and its content evolved with its readership. During the 1850s the middle-class woman was a new entity, trying to establish herself in the world. She needed new information to help build her material identity: sewing patterns, what fabrics to use, and how to make these clothes for herself. The magazine provided that information. As time went on, however, the inclusion of that information

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<sup>7</sup> Hughes, 155.

<sup>8</sup> Hughes, 144.

in a periodical became less important, most likely because they could be purchased at many other places. The magazine had to change with the times so that it could continue to fulfill the needs of its readers. Again, Isabella's leadership helped shape the magazine. Her articles on fashion emphasized economy, practicality, and that the middle-class garments could be fashionable without the frivolity and waste of the upper-class fashion.

The magazine underwent another shift in the 1870s after Isabella's untimely death at 28. The magazine started to emphasize gossip rather than advice. Isabella's mark remained, however, as the magazine writers do stick with the theme of economy; it must be searched for within the articles, but it is there. For example, in the article "The August Fashions" from 1870 the writer describes the new fashionable use of unbleached fabrics which can be bought at a lower price because they take less time to process and produce.<sup>9</sup> This tonal shift allowed the magazine to appeal to a more upper-middle-class readership. The middle class was made up of a diverse spectrum of incomes, so it is no surprise a magazine would want to attract the attentions of those at the upper echelons of that spectrum.

The *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* gives important insight into where the middle-class woman of the mid-nineteenth century was getting her information about what it meant to be above the working class and below the upper class. It shows that there were values taken from the other classes and solidified together within the middle class, such as propriety from the upper and budget from the working. It was important for them to look well put together and proper but not spend excessive amounts of money in order to do so. Middle-class women needed guidance as housewives and mothers as this was now their main occupation, and literature like this

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<sup>9</sup> "The August Fashions," *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, August 1, 1870, 96.

magazine was where they found the advice they were seeking. This publication sold the idea of a new identity, a new woman who valued specific things, and the goods that went along with it.

## **Methodology**

To gain a clear understanding of the information middle-class women of the mid-nineteenth century were receiving about their clothing, I have chosen to study one particular periodical over the course of three decades. The *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* in its original format was published by Samuel Beeton from 1852-1879 and edited by Samuel and Isabella. I have taken a sample size of one issue from every year during that time to analyze. I wanted to gain that understanding by looking at the evolution of the magazine through the content they were providing. Fortunately, all the issues were available through digital archive as scanned copies of the original publications.

## **Literature Review**

The lives of upper-class women in mid-nineteenth-century England have been studied and written about often. Upper-class woman's clothing, known for its exaggerated decoration and complicated construction, has also been depicted ad nauseum. Even the lives and clothing of working-class women have been talked about often by scholars. Surprisingly, discussion of the middle-class woman and her fashion choices has largely fallen by the wayside. Beginning from the mid-twentieth century an interest in the Victorian woman's clothing emerged with the study of fashion plates, women's magazine, letters, and especially extant garments from museums and private collections. Historians such as Norah Waugh and Patricia Branca wrote the first major works that are most referenced when it comes to the clothing and daily lives of Victorian women. Major scholarship about Victorian clothing specifically was not published until the 2000s, when authors Patricia Cunningham and Helene Roberts began to discuss how the

Victorian woman's clothing reflected the politics and values of their time. While all these pieces lend to our understanding of the Victorian woman there is a missing piece in scholarship: none discuss in depth where the women were getting their information about fashion.

The first major work about women's clothing appeared in 1954 from Norah Waugh. Waugh's focus in *Corsets and Crinolines* was the literal cut and construction of women's clothing and how it evolved through the nineteenth century. She argues that it would be difficult to understand how clothes of the past were constructed and worn without a solid understanding of the shape and structure of the foundation clothing worn beneath it.<sup>10</sup> Each decade of the century had its own unique trends and silhouettes. In her book, Waugh discusses the importance of the silhouette and how it could only be achieved using structured undergarments, in particular stays or corsets (depending on the decade being discussed) and hooped skirts.<sup>11</sup> Waugh examined fashion plates to have some understanding of the shapes that were trying to be achieved. However, to fully understand, she believes the best reference is one that was made and worn during the time, extant garments. Waugh studied existing garments to make patterns so that the construction could be broken down, stitch by stitch. She believes that understanding how the clothing was made is imperative to understanding the people who wore them.<sup>12</sup> This work is important to our insight into Victorian women's clothing in general but does not focus on the middle-class woman specifically.

To better understand the middle-class woman, we must look to Patricia Branca's study of middle-class women during the Victorian era. Branca argues that the middle-class woman in the mid-nineteenth century was a new entity that came into being with the rise of the middle class,

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<sup>10</sup> Norah Waugh, *Corsets and Crinolines*. (New York: Theater Arts Books, 1954), 7.

<sup>11</sup> Waugh, 75.

<sup>12</sup> Waugh, 47.

but her ideals were still very much based in traditional values. She is quick to point out that most of what we know of middle-class women during this time is based on stereotypes rather than studied facts.<sup>13</sup> Branca asserts that focusing our attention on a small portion of the population, like fictional characters or suffragettes, gives a distorted view of the remaining portion, the ordinary woman.<sup>14</sup> She uses statistical data such as marriage and birth rates, prices for common household goods, and middle-class income distribution to paint a picture of what the everyday life of a middle-class woman looked like.<sup>15</sup> Branca shows how the middle-class woman strove to show her newfound prosperity through the “paraphernalia of gentility:” having a large elegant home and expensive-looking clothing were important but had to be done on a budget.<sup>16</sup> Branca aids in the understanding of how the average middle-class woman would be able to dress above her station and give an outward appearance closer to that of the upper class while on a budget; she does this from a financial and statistical perspective.

While Branca’s focus was the ordinary woman, Patricia Cunningham looks at the extraordinary woman. It is easy to get lost in a deep hole of the rise of the feminist movement when discussing middle-class women in Victorian England during the mid-nineteenth century. This is especially true for scholarship to be found during the early 2000s. In 2003, Cunningham argued that the dress reform movement had a major impact on clothing during the time and in future fashion trends and how it influenced the suffragettes.<sup>17</sup> She delves into the claims of the

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<sup>13</sup> Patricia Branca, *Silent Sisterhood Middle Class Women in the Victorian Home*, Routledge Library Editions. Women’s History; Volume 3 (Oxfordshire; New York: Routledge, 1975), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Branca, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Branca, 26–28.

<sup>16</sup> Branca, 8.

<sup>17</sup> The dress reform movement was an international effort by the First Wave Feminist movement to free women from the constricting principles of fashion. Their efforts during the mid-nineteenth century focused mainly on altering the undergarments worn by women: corsets, petticoats, bustles, etc. These garments were considered restrictive and the reformers believed the garment’s intent was to hinder women’s ability to do tasks by literally holding them down.

reformers, such as the undergarments being unhealthy by constricting movement, causing overheating from too many layers, and causing a woman's internal organs to shift because of tight lacing.<sup>18</sup> Like scholars before her, she examined extant garments, fashion plates, and magazines. However, she also uses the writings of physicians from the time who were strongly suggesting that women's clothing was the source of their health problems.<sup>19</sup> Cunningham shows how this information from medical professionals was used by suffragettes in order to show the unequal treatment and expectations placed on women. This book shows the influence and long-lasting consequences on fashion from politics and the medical field.

As we move further into the 2000s the focus changed back to what daily life looked like for the middle-class woman. Helene Roberts work is clearly a continuation of Branca and can be easily identified as such through their shared themes. Roberts begins with a similar stereotype as Branca of a woman who is supposed to be viewed as delicate, frivolous, inactive, and submissive; and that these traits were reflected in their clothing.<sup>20</sup> She argues that the Victorian woman's clothing not only expressed her role to the outside world but was used as a reminder of the restrictions that were to be followed as well.<sup>21</sup> She uses examples from illustrations of women's clothing versus men's clothing, articles from magazines, and many books written in the nineteenth century to support her argument. Roberts attempts to point out why the clothing of the Victorian women was masochistic by comparing tight lacing to bondage.<sup>22</sup> This bondage was both physical and metaphorical, the corset and many layers were made to keep a woman inactive

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<sup>18</sup> Patricia A. Cunningham, *Reforming Women's Fashion, 1850-1920: Politics, Health, and Art* (Kent, Ohio; London: The Kent State University Press, 2003), 76.

<sup>19</sup> Cunningham, 25.

<sup>20</sup> Helene Roberts, "The Exquisite Slave: The Role of Clothes in the Making of the Victorian Woman," in *Classic and Modern Writings on Fashion* (Oxford: Berg, 2009), 554.

<sup>21</sup> Roberts, 554.

<sup>22</sup> Roberts, 559.

and complacent. Roberts' goal is to show the message that the clothing was supposed to send to both the wearer and the world.

While historians have been discussing and writing about the Victorian age since it ended, only a small portion of it is dedicated solely to the middle-class woman and her fashion though. The scholarship, understandably, relies on the images of the upper-class women because they are extravagant, sometimes ostentatious, and pretty. However, the middle class was the largest emerging population during this time and there is plenty of evidence available to be able to discuss the middle-class woman and her clothes. The question remains: where were these women getting their fashion tips? Combining the information provided in the scholarly and primary sources, a comprehensive presentation of where and what kind of information middle-class women were getting can be made.

## **Background**

England's population of middle-class citizens boomed in the mid-nineteenth century. Our story begins during the height of that growth. It can be punctuated by an event, the Great Exhibition of 1851, that seems unrelated but that showcased the growth England was experiencing after a decade of hardship known as the "Hungry Forties" caused by a combination of economic depression, bad harvests, and the Corn Laws.<sup>23</sup> The Exhibition consisted of over 100,000 displays and demonstrations from all over the world.<sup>24</sup> It was the start of a new era of modernity where class lines began to blur and innovative ideas were allowed to flourish.<sup>25</sup> It was

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<sup>23</sup> Peter J. Gurney, "'Rejoicing in Potatoes': The Politics of Consumption in England during the 'Hungry Forties,'" *Past & Present*, no. 203 (2009): 101.

<sup>24</sup> Yaffa Draznin, *Victorian London's Middle-Class Housewife: What She Did All Day*, Contributions in Women's Studies ; No. 179 (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2001), 24.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathon Shears, *The Great Exhibition 1851: A Sourcebook* (Manchester, UNITED KINGDOM: Manchester University Press, 2017), 2, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/washington/detail.action?docID=4850519>.

during this event that classes mingled and the middle-class woman began to learn what was available to her when it came to goods.

In this era, the middle class was incredibly diverse. In her book, *Victorian London's Middle-Class Housewife: What She Did All Day*, Yaffa Draznin explains that there was no clear definition for who was considered middle class; it was simply the population that fell between the working-class laborers and the landowning upper class.<sup>26</sup> For this reason, the income levels, professions, house sizes, and goods available varied greatly among the middle class. A trade merchant, clergymen, barrister, doctor, and architect each fell into the category of the middle class, but all had vastly different incomes.<sup>27</sup> There were families who had incomes of over £300 (about \$54,000 in today's money) and some who lived on less than £100 per year (about \$17,500 in today's money).<sup>28</sup> These figures show the vast disparity of income that existed in the middle class in 1850.

Understanding the diversity of the middle class is important when discussing the media sources these women were consuming. Magazines had to appeal to a broad audience. A woman whose husband could only give her £20 per year for all the clothing needs for their entire family had to learn how to do so on a budget. The average two-parent family during the 1850s had six children: that means eight people who needed to be clothed.<sup>29</sup>

The blurring of class lines needs to be taken into consideration when discussing clothing as well. Middle-class women were increasingly able to mingle with those of the upper class. In order for them to be received well and make friends in high places, they had to fit in. Therefore,

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<sup>26</sup> Draznin, *Victorian London's Middle-Class Housewife*, 24.

<sup>27</sup> Draznin, 25.

<sup>28</sup> "Inflation Calculator," accessed November 5, 2020, <http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>.

<sup>29</sup> Draznin, *Victorian London's Middle-Class Housewife*, 26.

their clothing had to appear to be of high quality. Magazines are where they learned how to do this.<sup>30</sup> Many middle-class women did not have the luxury of their clothing being made especially for them; instead, they either bought ready-made clothes and altered them or constructed the clothing entirely on their own. Until the 1870s, most of those garments were entirely sewn by hand.<sup>31</sup> A lot of work and care went into clothing, especially when one was attempting to emulate the upper class whose clothing tended to have more intricate detail. The clothing for a woman's entire family had to be sewn, cleaned, altered, and mended.<sup>32</sup> This would have taken up a significant portion of the middle-class woman's time; it was her responsibility to make sure her family was presented well. Therefore, clothing her family would be a priority.

The magazines of the mid-nineteenth century addressed all these issues. They gave patterns for home sewing of garments, discussed how to purchase fabric on a budget, gave advice on what would be fashionable in the coming season, talked about proper undergarments, and many other topics that would have been incredibly relevant to the middle-class woman. There is even clothing for men and children included. The *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* is symbolic of nineteenth-century media directed at middle-class women. Its evolution in the way



Figure 2 Title Page from May 1, 1860

Digital scan of print

This image shows the elaborate way the magazine's title was presented. It gave it a high-class appearance for a low price.

it presented the information, emphasized the importance of budgeting, and told its readers what products would suit them best can be seen through the three

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<sup>30</sup> Draznin, 56.

<sup>31</sup> Draznin, 58.

<sup>32</sup> Draznin, 59.

decades it was in publication. The periodicals purpose was to appeal to the middle-class woman first through its low price (2 shillings) and then for its content (Fig. 2). That fashion was included from day one of the magazines run shows how important it was to the readership, even if the information contained within those first issues was minimal.

### 1852-1859: The Practical Dress Instructor

In the earliest editions of the magazine the fashion articles were short but packed with useful information for the readers and the writer of the article was never stated. The 1850s articles were titled either, “Our Practical Dress Instructor” or “Practical Dress Instructor.” They would be only a few pages long, made up mostly of illustrations. The most important of these

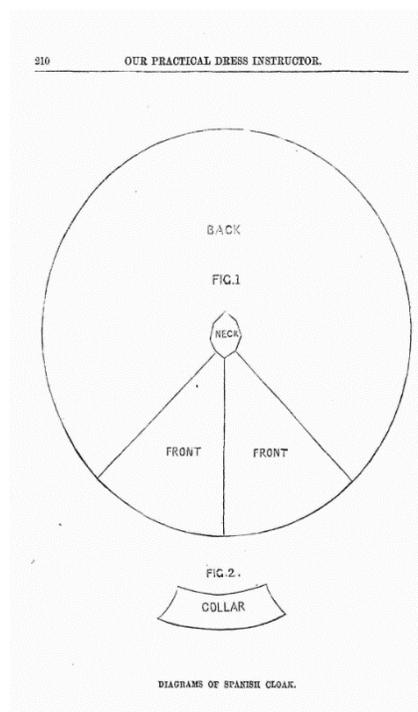


Figure 3. *Diagrams of a Spanish Cloak*, 1852, print in magazine. From *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*. London.

being a pattern with brief instructions on the construction of the clothing being shown. Many of these pieces were showcased because of their ease of construction. This was important because many of these women would be completing other domestic duties like cooking and cleaning; the shorter the time it took to construct a fashionable garment, the better. In the article from November 1, 1852, a simple round cloak is shown (Fig.3).<sup>33</sup> The writer says that this garment was popular during the mourning period for the Duke of Wellington and will continue to be after that period is over.<sup>34</sup> More

importantly, though, it is easy to sew and make look elegant with the right trim. As can be seen from the illustration, the

construction is simple: one piece of fabric was cut into four parts. This could easily be adapted to

<sup>33</sup> “Our Practical Dress Instructor,” *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, November 1, 1852, 210.

<sup>34</sup> “Our Practical Dress Instructor,” 208.

fit any body size and could be made up of any fabric. It was simple designs like this that could be made elegant with the right trim that appealed to readers. They also gave detailed instructions on the trim seen in the fashion plate. This was the extent of the content seen in the earliest editions of the magazine.

In the second year of the magazine's existence, 1853, an evolution in the fashion articles had begun. The information being given is essentially the same, but the writers start go more in depth with their explanations. It is in these articles the subject of insider information begins to emerge. The articles are being written by a woman who visited the dressing rooms of those in the upper echelons of society and then could relay what would be upcoming to the readers. Not only were the readers able to see illustrations of high society dress and get patterns on how to make some of them, but they were also learning why the garments were important for their image. In the article published January 1, 1853, a walking jacket is shown, and the writer advises that this will be the most fashionable attire for the coming season.<sup>35</sup> She goes on to describe the most popular fabric to make this garment out of, velvet, but also that "fine cloth" would be acceptable as well.<sup>36</sup> This shift is evidence that the writers were already beginning to think about their middle-class audience who may have been living on a budget. Velvet was extremely costly, but by showing there were alternatives that still allowed a woman to be considered fashionable, the magazine would appeal to a larger audience. There was no single definition of what it meant to be middle class and therefore no set amount of money that could be spent on clothing. However, by showing alternatives to what the upper class was using the magazine applied to a larger audience.

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<sup>35</sup> "Our Practical Dress Instructor," *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, January 1, 1853, 273.

<sup>36</sup> "Our Practical Dress Instructor," 273.

This same article does this for another aspect of clothing, the undergarments. The proper construction of undergarments was “by which ease, comfort, and economy are secured.”<sup>37</sup> The undergarments of a woman’s clothing at this time were of vital importance. They protected the out layers of clothing from sweat, oils, and smells that emanated from the skin. The outer garments were often made of more expensive materials like silk, velvet, or wool which could not be washed on a normal basis.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, proper undergarments were not only important for modesty but economy as well. Keeping within a budget is another emerging theme that can be seen here, one that will continue in the next decade.

### **1860-1869: The Fashions**

With a new decade beginning so did a new era for the *Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine*. The tone, content, and style of the magazine took a drastic shift during the beginning of the 1860s. It can be assumed this was Isabella Beeton’s influence on the magazine as she wrote this section from 1860 until her death in 1865. Luckily, many of Isabella’s letters have been archived so we know precisely when she began to work for her husband’s publication.<sup>39</sup> The tone of her articles was on propriety and economy while still being fashionable. Instead of just showing the readers simple illustrations of popular clothing they could make at home, there was explanation and detail given so that the readers understood how this advice was both similar and different than the information that was coming from the upper class.

The first major change came with the title of the article; it was now named “The Fashions.” The evolution from what is practical to what is fashionable is notable here. While the point of the article remains the same: to inform middle-class women what upper-class women are

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<sup>37</sup> “Our Practical Dress Instructor,” 275.

<sup>38</sup> Janet Arnold, *Patterns of Fashion* (London: Hollywood, CA: Macmillan; Quite Specific Media Group, 2002), 4.

<sup>39</sup> Hughes, *The Short Life and Long Times of Mrs. Beeton*, 105, 152–54.

wearing and how they can emulate that; the new title implies a romantic view of fashions. The word practical itself carried a sense of dullness, while the new title carried a sense of excitement. A May 1, 1860, article makes a point of saying these were the garments seen in the “show-rooms of our first houses.”<sup>40</sup> Isabella wanted the reader to know the ideas being portrayed were from the upper tiers of society and she was going to show you how to achieve what they have.

It is during this decade that color fashion plates are beginning to be incorporated into the magazine as well. These images would have been so important to a woman of the middle class who was making her own clothing. It gave her a taste of what colors she should be using rather than just reading descriptions. For example, in this image from April 1864 (Fig. 4) there are jeweled tones being used, rich purple, gold, and blue. The text itself simply says the materials are, “Double Berlin wool of the following shade: yellow, white, green, magenta, blue and black.”<sup>41</sup> Without the image

provided there could be many interpretations of those colors.

The tone and textual content shifted during this decade as well. The articles are longer than the previous decade in terms of the amount of text provided. They average two to four pages of text alone per article, whereas in the 1850s the amount of text was usual limited to a few brief paragraphs. The dresses shown in the fashion plates are described in detail especially when it came to the most important pieces of that season and the occasions where they would be appropriate. For example, the May 1860 issue describes a



Figure 4. Color Fashion Plate, April 1, 1864, print in magazine. Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine, London.

<sup>40</sup> “The Fashions,” *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, May 1, 1860, 47.

<sup>41</sup> “The Fashions,” *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, April 1, 1864, 287.

jacket that would be appropriate for a visit to the seaside that summer, meaning it was not suitable to be worn in London.<sup>42</sup> This shows that not only were the magazine's authors educating their readership on the items that they needed to be considered fashionable but also the etiquette that goes along with clothing. Middle-class women had to distinguish themselves from their working-class roots, which meant changing their outfits multiple times a day. A day dress, a walking dress, an evening gown, all are for different occasions, locations, and times of day. This could be done with the addition of accessories such as a pelisse (short jacket) or a shawl.<sup>43</sup>

In the 1860s the theme of moderation also emerged. While much of the writing leading up to the 1860s was how the middle class can emulate the upper class and fit in better with them, the tone of these articles showed how the middle class can distinguish themselves. From these articles it seems that many in the upper class had the tendency to go over the top with their dress, this is not anything new. The articles themselves frequently reference the extravagance of the French court during the time of Marie Antionette.<sup>44</sup> While times had changed, the ostentatious dressing of the upper class, had not. However, Isabella cautions our middle-class ladies from following the upper class lead here. In an article from 1861 she specifically states, "To dress really in good taste, extremes should always be avoided, and a little moderation exercised in seeking for fashionable novelties."<sup>45</sup> In this case Isabella is describing the gowns seen recently at a wedding of an heiress, where the trim on the gowns were gaudy at best. She goes on to say that being of high quality and understated is much more desirable. Stating, "a measure of velvet" isn't too much money when it is only for a waistband.<sup>46</sup> This can also be seen in an issue from

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<sup>42</sup> "The Fashions," May 1, 1860, 47.

<sup>43</sup> "The Fashions," 47.

<sup>44</sup> "The Fashions," April 1, 1864, 285.

<sup>45</sup> "The Fashions," *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, January 1, 1861, 190.

<sup>46</sup> "The Fashions," 189.

1863 where she is discussing undergarments.<sup>47</sup> Isabella says that there have been rumors that it will be soon be the height of fashion to have underskirts that are “made a beautiful as the upper ones,” but they caution against such extravagance.<sup>48</sup> The middle-class woman could be just as fashionable while keeping economy in mind and not being frivolous with their clothing choices.

Along the lines of economy there is a great emphasis in these articles about substituting of more affordable items rather than paying top dollar for the passing fancy of the season. This can be seen in an article from an 1864 issue, which argued, “There is generally some new material...put forth as a novelty, though not seldom only a fresh name adapted to a well-known thing every spring; this year it calls itself *toile de Sarc* in Paris and is a kind of stiff mohair.”<sup>49</sup> The implication here is that a middle-class woman could purchase a stiff mohair for a lesser price and still be in the new fashionable fabric of the season. There are other examples of this throughout the 1860s as well. This is also about the time that subtle advertisements begin to pop up with the fashion plates. In the article from April 1866 underneath the fashion plate in



Figure 5 Advertisement under fashion plate, April 1866. Digital scan of print in magazine. Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine, London.

exceedingly small print it says, “The skirts arranged upon THOMSON’S Crinolines” (Fig.5).<sup>50</sup>

While the magazine had been selling goods to the readership the entire time, this is the first time that an explicit advertisement is seen. It is tiny and may seem like an insignificant detail but a woman sitting at home studying this fashion plate would be sure to notice it. A fact that both the editors and Thomson’s were surely aware of. The readers of this periodical would have been

<sup>47</sup> “The Fashions,” *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, April 1, 1863, 285.

<sup>48</sup> “The Fashions,” 285.

<sup>49</sup> “The Fashions,” 285.

<sup>50</sup> “The Fashions,” *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, April 1, 1866, 1.

convinced based on the content that their budget was being kept in mind. Therefore, they would have trusted that if there was an advertisement included in the magazine, it was an important piece to be added to her wardrobe.

The 1860s editions of the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* were marked with substantial changes to both the quantity and quality of its content. No longer was it just giving short tutorials but in addition giving explicit detail and advice when it came to clothing. They were showcasing how to both emulate the upper class and differentiate yourself as middle class. The writing focused on being fashionable while still being reasonable.

### **1870-1879: The Final Phase**

The 1870s begin a new era for the fashion section of the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*. This decade changed the look and feel of the articles that can be seen from the 1860s. However, it brought back the use of patterns and with the patterns even more advertisements. Not only were the writers showing women what they needed to make and should buy for them, but where to do it. While the tone slowly shifted to more gossip and to being less informative, patterns and advice were still hidden within the writing. The titles have once again been changed, this time to reflect the month or time of year they are being published in, for example, "New Year Paris Fashions."<sup>51</sup> From the title it can be seen the focus has shifted to Paris fashions specifically (the epicenter of popular fashion historically), whereas the focus before was just the upper class. The next major change that can be instantly seen is the length of the articles. The 1870s fashions articles are about three times the length of those seen in the 1860s. In the first one from January 1870, the article is nine pages long (in the 1860s the articles averaged about three

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<sup>51</sup> "New Year Paris Fashions," *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, January 1, 1870, 32.

pages) and within that there are seven illustrations and fashion plates.<sup>52</sup> Most importantly though, there is a change in the tone of these articles.

The monthly fashion articles during the 1870s read more like a journalist reporting news rather than giving advice to her cohorts. It is more opinion than information giving. In the January article the writer says, “At any rate the lady’s taste must ratify the inventive mantua-maker’s choice.”<sup>53</sup> Here she is giving an opinion of the lady in question’s taste and that of her dressmaker, not discussing the actual cut and construction of the clothing itself. The detailed descriptions of garments are still included, which would be informative to the reader; it is simply the way they are delivered that has changed. This tone change will have its final evolution towards the end of the magazine’s run in 1878. The title again changes to “Our Paris Letter of Fashion and Gossip;” no longer is the focus solely on fashion but instead on what is fashionable in Paris specifically and the tales of the people that go along with it (gossip).<sup>54</sup> It no longer discusses how the middle-class woman can emulate these fantastical characters of the upper class but simply describes what the upper-class woman does. In one excerpt they talk about a Duchess who has fresh flowers brought to her country home from Paris for a ball so that when the flowers adorning her coiffure begin to droop, she can have them replaced instantly.<sup>55</sup> It talks endlessly about the beau-monde and not at all about how those trends translate to the middle class.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> “New Year Paris Fashions,” 32-39.

<sup>53</sup> “New Year Paris Fashions,” 34.

<sup>54</sup> “Our Paris Letter of Fashions and Gossip,” *Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine*, November 1, 1878, 249.

<sup>55</sup> “Our Paris Letter of Fashions and Gossip,” 249.

<sup>56</sup> Beau monde- Fashionable society.

The 1870s editions of the magazine seem to be leaving the middle class behind.

However, the one way they continue to emulate the earlier articles is through the theme of

economy. In an article from August 1870, there is even a pattern included which had not been seen regularly since the 1850s. More interesting, though, is what is included with the pattern: a price list for a number of paper patterns and dress models that can be purchased at Madame Goubaud's in Covent Garden, London (Fig. 6).<sup>57</sup> This not subtle advertisement is telling women directly where they can find the patterns and materials, they need to make all the garments they might see in the magazine. Unlike the previous advertisements seen, this is not for any one specific item but many different items. These types of advertisements were meant to show women that they would no longer have to take the time to draft patterns themselves but instead could just buy the pattern and save themselves time in their busy schedules.

This same article also talks about the upcoming

popularity of a fabric that will be a coup for

middle-class women on a budget: unbleached materials.<sup>58</sup> The importance of this would not have

been lost on the readership. Unbleached materials take less time and effort to process and

**MADAME GOUBAUD'S  
PAPER PATTERNS AND DRESS MODELS,  
20, HENRIETTA ST., COVENT GARDEN, W.C**

**LIST OF PRICES.**

**MANTLES &c.**

Mantles, Walking and Yachting Jackets, Ca- saques, Mantillas, Paletots, ordinary size and trimmings ... ..	s. d.
With Elaborate Trimming, or of special make ...	2 9
3 6	
<b>INDOOR JACKETS, PELERINES, FICHUS, AND VESTS.</b>	
Veste Russe, for wearing under Zouave Jackets	1 0
Square Pelerins ... ..	1 0
Lace Pelerins ... ..	1 0
Fichu Marie Antoinette, with sash ends ... ..	1 0
Ditto, ditto, outdoor wear ... ..	1 0
Fichu with waistband ... ..	1 0
Loreley Capelino ... ..	1 0
Garden Hoods ... ..	1 0
The new Sash with waistband ... ..	1 0
Zouave Jackets ... ..	1 6
Chemise Russe ... ..	1 6
Short loose Jacket, for the house ... ..	1 6
Fichu Jacket ... ..	2 0
Fanler Tunic ... ..	2 0
Tunics for evening wear ... ..	2 0
Bachlik Hood ... ..	2 0

**DRESSES**

Princess Morning or Breakfast Dress ... ..	4 0
Eugenie Breakfast Dress ... ..	4 0
Ditto, ditto, elaborately and fashionably trimmed	5 0
Short Walking Costume, complete, including Skirt, Underskirt, Bodice, and Fichu ... ..	5 0
Indoor Dress ... ..	4 0
Ditto, elaborately trimmed ... ..	5 0
Ball Dress ... ..	5 0
More elaborate ... ..	6 0
Dinner Dress ... ..	5 0
Dressing Gowns ... ..	2 6

Train Gored Skirts ... ..	2 6
Gored Skirt, trimmed ... ..	2 6
The New Fanler Skirt ... ..	2 6
Short Skirt and Petticoat ... ..	2 6

**BODICES AND SLEEVES.**

Short Sleeves ... ..	0 9
Fashionably cut and trimmed Open or Closed Sleeves ... ..	1 0
Plain High Bodice ... ..	1 0
Ditto, trimmed ... ..	1 6
Ditto, ditto, and with sleeve ... ..	2 6
Bodice with Flavers ... ..	1 6
Bodice à la Russe ... ..	1 6
Cornets for wearing over white Muslin Bodices	1 6
Full Bodice for muslin ... ..	2 0
Low Bodice for evening wear, including Berthe and Sleeve ... ..	2 0

**UNDER-LINEN.**

Nightcap, with or without strings ... ..	0 6
Petticoat Band ... ..	1 0
Petticoat Body, high or low ... ..	1 0
Chemise ... ..	1 6
Nightdress ... ..	1 6
Drawers ... ..	1 6
Ladies' Knickerbockers for Scarlet Flannel ...	1 6
Set of Under-Linen, including the before-named articles ... ..	7 6
Filled-gored Petticoat ... ..	2 0
Bathing Dress complete, including Trousers, Tunic, and Cap ... ..	2 6

Figure 6. Cut out from magazine August 1, 1870. Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine, London.

<sup>57</sup> "The August Fashions," 103.

<sup>58</sup> "The August Fashions," 98.

therefore would have cost less money to buy. The writer explains that these are now coming into fashion, so the readers better stock up on their natural-colored silks and linens.<sup>59</sup> For the reader on a budget this would have been amazing news because she could be in the most fashionable fabrics without spending too much money.

The theme of economy can be seen throughout the 1870s. While the tone may have shifted away from that of Isabella Beeton's, her legacy of helping the middle-class woman seems to have survived. In 1872 an article opens,

“The moderate toiles of the best society in Paris have greatly influence ladies' dress in every part of Europe. Economy is supposed to reign in the wardrobes of our *grandes dames*; we say supposed, because the toiles, though few in number, are irreproachable in taste and costly in material. The dresses required by ladies at the present time are by no means numerous.”<sup>60</sup>

The writer here is saying that while it is acceptable to try to emulate what their dresses look like, there is no need to own three dresses for every day as some of the upper class do. They go on to say that a woman only really needs two costumes for each season and one evening dress, meaning that any woman of taste is only required to possess nine gowns for an entire year.<sup>61</sup> She can update these simply by changing the trim.<sup>62</sup> This quote is significant because it shows that to be fashionable you didn't have to have the funds to constantly buy new dresses, only the means to change them up when necessary. It also is significant because of the mention of the cost of materials. The magazine goes to great pains to show women how they can purchase fashionable materials in an economic way. Therefore, a diligent reader would know that these materials do not always have to be expensive if you shop the right way. In 1874, there is a

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<sup>59</sup> “The August Fashions,” 98.

<sup>60</sup> “The March Fashions,” *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, March 1, 1872, 160.

<sup>61</sup> “The March Fashions,” 160.

<sup>62</sup> “The March Fashions,” 162.

similar article that talks about items going in and out of fashion.<sup>63</sup> The writer encourages the readers to not simply discard those items that are no longer fashionable but to update them to fit with the current trends. They discuss that fashions do not immediately go out of style but instead slowly fade from one fad to the next.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, it is not necessary to quickly update one's wardrobe with each passing phase.

## **Conclusion**

Victorian women's clothing helped to define their class identity. For middle-class women, this meant that they should be fashionable but not extravagant. Many middle-class women knew how to make their clothes regarding the construction but had little to no knowledge of what they should be wearing to be considered fashionable. Literature such as the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* was crucial to their training as housewives, mothers, and women trying to forge a new identity. Over three decades the magazine helped shape women's fashion by giving them instruction on how to sew, how to choose materials, and how to define their place within polite society. The middle class was diverse, from a wide range of income and social levels. At first their goal was simply to emulate those who were most fashionable, upper-class women. Quickly though, the literature reflects how the middle-class woman should set herself apart. By focusing on things like economy and modesty, the middle-class woman was able to use advice and tools given to her through periodicals like the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* and forge a unique place in society. The ideals of the middle class were reflected by the direction of the middle-class woman guiding them, Isabella Beeton. Through analysis of the literature, it is clear Isabella's voice was an important influence over the direction of the magazine.

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<sup>63</sup> "The September Fashions," *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, September 1, 1874, 138.

<sup>64</sup> "The September Fashions," 138.

Fashion is so much more than just the clothes people put on every day. It reflects the wearer's values and identity. The clothing we choose to wear says something about what we want the outside world to think of us. For the Victorian middle-class woman, the message was that she be modest, economically minded, but also well informed. Through this messaging the middle-class woman was able to shape her identity and influence society. Women's magazines like the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* give us precious insight into what was important to women during the nineteenth century. These sources show us that they were trying to educate themselves and better their place in society, while still maintaining their traditional values of modesty and economy.

In historical scholarship, aspects of women's history have long been glossed over. That is why it so important to focus scholarship on literature like the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, a periodical that was written by and for women. While the focus of this research was fashion writing, many other sections of the magazine deserve further analysis as does Isabella Beeton's *The Book of Household Management*. Women's popular literature helped to build nineteenth-century middle-class identity and its influence can still be seen today. Open a woman's magazine and you will see that women of today are still writing about and reading the same kind of information: fashion, homemaking, and other beauty and domestic tips and advice. The *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* may have been published over 150 years ago, but its legacy lives on.

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