Domesticity + queer semiotics in the aesthetic movement

Collin Douglas Powell

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Domesticity + queer semiotics in the aesthetic movement

by

Collin Douglas Powell

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: Interior Design

Program of Study Committee:
Diane Al Shihabi, Major Professor
    Julie Irish
    Paul Bruski

The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this thesis. The Graduate College will ensure this thesis is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2019

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Diane Al Shihabi, and my committee members, Dr. Julie Irish, and Dr. Paul Bruski for their guidance and support throughout the course of this research. A special thank you to Ross Exo Adams for his initial guidance and support.

This thesis has been a process of self-discovery, personal realization, and actualization. It would have been impossible to manifest without the grounding force of some of my closest friends and trusted mentors. Their ever-present guidance, warm encouragements, and attentive ears have continually provided me emotional support. Words cannot fully express the gratitude I feel towards them. Thank you to Dr. Sandra Looft, dear friend, inspiration, and mentor. Thank you to Meredith Foley for your positivity and willingness to laugh, guide, and always support me. Thank you to Dr. Lee Cagley, for pointing the way and providing me not only with a career, but a life-long passion for interior design and its inclusivity. Thank you to Dr. Mark Looney for sparking a passion for criticism and the importance of interpretive meaning. Thank you to the ISU Honors Department for supporting and providing me with out-of-this-world opportunities. Thank you to Andra Castle, your candor, intensity, and commiseration will forever be appreciated. Thank you to Zach Frazier and Kayley Tuchek, my fiery Sagittarians and permanent partners in crime. Your sarcasm, frustrations, and constant check-ins have saved my life, as you well know. Finally, thank you to my parents Kevin and Lisa Powell. Thank you for teaching me the value of determination and forgiveness. This road has been long, and I thank you for allowing me to blossom into the individual I am today.
ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the economic, social, and semiotic landscape surrounding the Aesthetic Movement in Britain that aided in the birth of what may be one of the first expressions of a recognizable queer sub-culture: namely a culture of queer domesticity in the nascent modern movement. This research argue that this queer expression was hidden in plain sight, deftly embedded into the complex construction of the late nineteenth-century interior, in a meta-language of objects and materiality that was symbolic and readable. Erwin Panofsky’s studies of iconography and iconology, as well as Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of taste and social class-stratification provide the framework from which a material culture analysis of this queer domesticity can begin. Objects and images analyzed have been gathered through the online archive of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, as well as through in-depth literature review of both period and contemporary sources.

The Aesthetic Movement was uniquely placed in European design history to manifest the ideal conditions necessary to birth the beginnings of a queer domesticity in the nineteenth century that would continue to develop in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Spanning the decades of the 1870s to the 1890s, the Aesthetic Movement was sandwiched between the twilight of the Victorian era and the rise of early modern movements such as Art Nouveau. Yet, from a contemporary perspective, it was simultaneously anachronistic, yet presciently forward in its design intent, as it looked towards traditional forms of design but with a burgeoning modernist sensibility. The Aesthetic Movement advocated for a moral re-valuation of beauty, in favor of “Art for arts sake”, with Lambourne and Stankiewicz both arguing that the movement

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elevated beauty to a spiritual (or self-actualizing), rather than secular level, wherein Aesthetes firmly believed that one could “accrue spiritual benefits” from correctly interpreting aesthetic forms.³ Both Stankiewicz and Lambourne approach the word “spiritual” as something separate from a simple religious preference. Rather “spiritual” in an Aesthetic period context was used to convey the appreciation of art and intellectual growth in these capacities, ultimately leading to the betterment of self.⁴

In the nineteenth-century, the British home and the domestic sphere were places of education and culture, both enforcing and re-producing the cultural norms necessary to support a class-stratified, gender-divided, industrialized landscape, while firmly establishing a “cult of domesticity” with its own particular rules of engagement.⁵ By the time the Aesthetic Movement arrived, British polite society was well acquainted with the idea that an interior, or the amalgamation of objects within it, shaped the minds of individuals who inhabited these spaces, often claiming or aspiring to elevated levels of taste and culture.⁶ Thus, with the rise of the Aesthetic Movement, and its hedonistic doctrine of beauty, the minds of the middle to upper class were already primed to receive new ideas through the semiotic language of objects, in this case being a nascent conception of early-modern queer identity and domesticity.

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⁴ ibid.
⁶ Stankiewicz, “From the Aesthetic Movement to the Arts and Crafts Movement,” 165.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose Statement

Ever-increasing processes of industrialization heavily impacted the economic, cultural, and social landscape of London and Great Britain of the late nineteenth century, altering patterns and procedures of living. However, gender roles, the woman’s “place”, male masculinity, and class stratifications, were norms still strongly influenced by staunch Victorian moral sensibilities. This tension of split-progress, economic and industrial increase, contrasted by restrictive social and gender norms characterized late nineteenth-century Britain, especially in urban city areas such as London.

Despite this political environment’s constricted view of gender and sexuality, it was not altogether hostile to expressions of a queer identity. Granted, under the Labouchère Amendment of 1885, sodomy was punishable by death and was publically reviled by a large majority of the English population. However, London specifically, has had a rich history of queer life and community threaded throughout its history, as evidenced by the historical network of bars catered toward homosexual men, drag balls, and a permissively flamboyant theatre culture. The queer culture of London, while present, was still largely underground, and intolerable in polite society, where expressions of male effeminacy drew immediate critique from the media of the time. For example, the figure of the Aesthete often carried much of this ire, as seen in the satirical cartoon from Punch Magazine below. The Aesthete is

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7 See Note 4
not only rendered in a loose, affected, feminine pose, the cartoon also depicts him as uninterested in the day-to-day, enslaved by the artisan qualities of his collected artifacts.

Figure 1.1. Published in Punch Magazine on the 5th of February 1876. The caption reads “Steeped in Aesthetic Culture, and surrounded by artistic wall-papers, blue china, Japanese fans, mediæval snuff-boxes, and his favorite periodicals of the eighteenth century, the dilettante de Tomkyns complacently boasts that he never reads a newspaper, and that the events of the outer world possess no interest for him whatsoever.” Courtesy of victorianweb.org, the University of Toronto Library, and the Internet Archive.

Central to this thesis is the construction of queer interiors/identities within a movement fraught with semiotic meaning and social implications. Queer, in this context, refers to sexual identities that fall outside of the heterosexual spectrum. Enabled by the new economic freedoms provided by the Industrial Revolution and British Imperialism, the middle or upper class single male in cosmopolitan English cities, was able to construct a private domestic environment outside the confining requirements of marriage, leading to a
rise in English bachelor culture.\textsuperscript{10} Although certainly not all bachelors were queer, John Potvin contends that, “through their perceived excessive, immature, unnatural and antisocial needs and desires, the twin figures of the bachelor and the homosexual were all too often conflated as equally deviant and queer characters”.\textsuperscript{11} This thesis contends that, due to these increasing economic freedoms, the Aesthetic Movement represented a distinct moment in history where middle to upper class queer men could begin to establish a domestic life of their own, thereby creating a semi-public queer culture.

Of course, this expression of queerness could not be truly public, again due to England’s Labouchère Amendment, which criminalized homosexuality.\textsuperscript{12} Therefore, queer identity expression had to exist in plain sight, arguably co-opting the same language used by the heteronormative majority, roughly echoing Bourdieu’s theory of power struggle among social classes, where the accretion of cultural capital is tantamount and indicative of class security.\textsuperscript{13} This language was the semiotic language of objects, already inherent in the social consciousness of the late nineteenth-century.\textsuperscript{14} Following this line of thinking, it stands to reason that queer identity was consciously expressed in the individual selection of “virtue objects”, or symbolically interpretable objects that “drew on the artistic styles of cultures removed in time and space”, purported to imbue their owner with spiritual gifts such as an appreciation for aesthetic beauty, spiritual enlightenment, and moral rightness, qualities hungered after by the Aesthete in his search for the “right objects”.\textsuperscript{15} Spirituality, for the Aesthetes—including those identifying as queer—was not necessarily religious, rather an

\textsuperscript{10} Potvin, \textit{Bachelors of a Different Sort}, 15.
\textsuperscript{11} Potvin, 4.
\textsuperscript{14} Logan, \textit{The Victorian Parlour}, 66.
\textsuperscript{15} Stankiewicz, “From the Aesthetic Movement to the Arts and Crafts Movement,” 165,168.
emotional and mental intensity that valued depth of thought and self-awareness. The virtue objects were then used to furnish and decorate an already meaning-full interior, striking a delicate balance between expected societal conventions and a burgeoning queer identity. A dichotomy exists then in the selection of objects during the Aesthetic Movement period, namely between those selected by queer individuals and objects selected by hetero-normative individuals. This thesis develops the theory that queer-identified individuals imbued objects with layers of semiotic meaning that were readable and understandable to fellow queer-identified Aesthetes, creating a language of queer domestic expression.

The Aesthetic Movement was a design ethos that surrendered itself to the cult of beauty, believing only in the transformative properties of “sweetness and light” – “‘Sweetness’ being the enjoyment or creation of beauty, and ‘Light’ being the desire to see, to learn the truth”. However, despite the Aesthetic Movement’s claim to be furthering a spiritual doctrine of beauty and simplicity, echoed by its vanguard of hedonistic aesthetes, a gnawing materialism seemed to underpin its intentions, fueled by a growing reliance on mass-production, industrialization, and capitalism. Although the Aesthetic Movement was certainly lambasted for its excess, for instance in Gilbert and Sullivan’s 1881 opera, *Patience*, this critique of materialism could certainly be extended to the entirety of the mid to late nineteenth-century as a reliance on reproduction resulted in a loss of what Walter Benjamin refers to as “authenticity”, or in some cases, “aura”.

The Aesthetic Movement centered its lust after beauty in the processual accumulation of material objects considered beautiful. Walter Hamilton noted this in 1882 when he wrote

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17 *ibid*.
18 Stankiewicz, “From the Aesthetic Movement to the Arts and Crafts Movement,” 166, 168.
that “Chippendale furniture, dados, old-fashioned brass and wrought iron work, mediæval lamps, stained glass in small squares and old china are held to be the outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace and intensity”. 21 Furniture, finishings, and materials used within the Aesthetic interior were imbued with meaning and moral interpretations (the Aesthete’s highest aims always being Beauty, Veracity, or the enjoyment thereof), functioning as industrially produced “objects of virtue” aiding in the aesthete’s quest for the material and artistic “improvement of society”. 22 Regardless of whether these “objects of virtue” were simply for contemplation, such as old china, or intended for actual use, these decorative items, ever-more frequently industrially produced, spoke on a symbolic and semiotic level, laden with meaning and interpretable by those who spoke the language of Aestheticism, a language characterized by its reliance on imagery, artistic theory, and mythology. 23

1.2 Research Questions

The following two inquiries are the driving questions that inform the body of this thesis research.

1. How does queerness manifest itself in identifiable ways in Aesthetic Movement interiors?

Sub-questions:

   a. Is there a particular symbolic representation or understanding of the space?

   b. Are there specific design techniques that lead to a queer interpretation?

   c. Is it manifested physically through choice of objects and collections?

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22 Stankiewicz, “From the Aesthetic Movement to the Arts and Crafts Movement,” 165.
2. What were the economic, cultural, or social drivers that allowed Aesthetic Movement domestic interiors to be queered? How did these drivers stimulate or give impetus to expression of queerness?

One of the strengths of the word “queer” is its inclusivity and breadth of acknowledgement of the many different lifestyles and realities that fall under its umbrella, avoiding linguistic and gender-based pigeonholing that comes with other terms such as “gay” or “lesbian”. However, this also means, that the breadth and depth of “queerness” in an interior space is varied and far from “static, stable, and easily identifiable” allowing for different readings and interpretations of a singular space based on the viewer. This makes the concrete cataloguing of queer techniques in the Aesthetic Movement difficult, but there is common thread that helps to deconstruct varied modes of expression. In this thesis the term “queer” will largely be used to refer to queer men.

Within this thesis, the period interiors considered are those of the late nineteenth century, specifically the Aesthetic Movement. While queer expressions within interiors exist both before and after this time period, this body of research identifies this particular movement as a pivotal moment in conceptions of both homosexuality and interior design. As this thesis has chosen to study this period in particular, the interiors and objects examined span largely from 1870 through the 1890s. This span of nearly thirty years was the Aesthetic Movement’s prime, and thus the temporal focus of this thesis.

1.3 Methodologies

To effectively study a historical system of semiotics in Aesthetic Movement Britain, photographic and archival analyses are important parts of the research methodology.

Surviving photographic and archival material of interiors from this period is focused on middle to upper class residences, largely of well-known artists, thereby excluding the discussion of queer domesticities from lower social-economic levels. Photographs of interiors and objects that have been gathered are from the Historic England Online Archive, Lord Ronald Gower’s 1888 self-published catalogue *Bric-Á-Brac*, and the photo collection of Henriette Sturge Moore published through Stephen Calloway’s research, all of which could not have been found without referencing Charlotte Gere’s work in *Artistic Circles*. Supplemental object information has been gathered from the Victoria and Albert Museum of London, whose Aesthetic Movement period collection of objects is searchable online. These sources both inform and support the semiotic analyses conducted within this thesis. Seventeen photos from these collections have been analyzed in the thesis. The highest resolution of the images available has been used.

To answer the research questions posed these photographs will be analyzed:

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Figure 1.2. Hall and Staircase, Bedford Lemere, Lord Frederic Leighton Collection, 1888. Courtesy of Historic England Online Archive
Figure 1.3. Narcissus Hall leading to Arab Hall, Bedford Lemere, Historic England Online Archive
Figure 1.4. Arab Hall, Bedford Lemere, Historic England Online Archive
Figure 1.5. Picture Room, Bedford Lemere, Historic England Online Archive
Figure 1.6. Artist's Studio, Bedford Lemere, Historic England Online Archive
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Various Residences - Charles Ricketts + Charles Shannon – 6 Images

Figure 1.8. “Ricketts in his room at 164, Kennington Park Road, c. 1884” 26

Figure 1.9. "Shannon in the studio at Edith Terrace, Chelsea c. 1888"²⁷

²⁷ Calloway, 21.
Figure 1.10. “Parlour in The Vale, Chelsea, c. 1889”\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{28} Calloway, 22.
Figure 1.11. “Little drawing-room at Spring Terrace, Richmond, c. 1899”

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29 Calloway, 23.
Figure 1.12. “Drawing-room at Spring Terrace, Richmond, c. 1901”\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{30} Calloway, 24.
Figure 1.13. “Drawing-room in Lansdowne House, Holland Park, c. 1902”\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{31} Calloway, 25.
Gower Lodge, Windsor- Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower – 5 Images

Figure 1.14. Saloon, published in Gower’s *Bric-À-Brac*
Figure 1.15. Sitting Room No. 1, published in Gower’s *Bric-À-Brac*
Figure 1.16. Sitting Room No. 2 - published in Gower’s *Bric-À-Brac*
Figure 1.17. Ground Floor Sitting Room, published in Gower’s *Bric-À-Brac*
According to the sources for each group of images, these photographs were all taken during or near the time of the Aesthetic Movement, minimizing the potential for historical reconstruction. In total this image selection includes seventeen photographs, split across three domestic interiors belonging to Lord Frederic Leighton, Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon, and Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower. These men are part of a group of historically queer Aesthetes and close contemporaries, which also included other queer artists, designers, and socialites such Oscar Wilde, Simeon Solomon, and C.R. Ashbee. These particular Aesthetes were selected as they were either historically under suspicion of homosexuality, ensnared in homosexual scandal, exhibited behavior atypical to the late nineteenth century.

32 Cook, London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885 - 1914, 41.
domestic norm, or, in post-historical analysis have exhibited queer tendencies such as living together with the same male partner across various residences for over 40 years, in the case of Ricketts and Shannon.

The interior photographs and their descriptions of objects will be analyzed according to the following methodologies that support this thesis, which are largely grounded in an iconographic/iconological and semiotic analysis, first posited by Irwin Panofsky in his *Studies of Iconology*.\(^3^3\) Panofsky developed a way to discuss not only what art/objects look like or express to the viewer, but what they *mean* on a deeper level. Panofsky refers to this as layered understanding in three parts: Primary or Natural Subject Matter, Secondary or Conventional Matter (Image/Story/Allegory), and Intrinsic (or hidden) meaning.\(^3^4\) Objects then, can be understood through a variety of interpretations, much as the Aesthetic Movement placed spiritually enlightening (self-actualization) and aesthetic virtue into objects of artistic value.

Roland Barthes further evolves upon Panofsky’s systems, and introduced the terms “denotative, connotative, and myth” which correspond roughly to Panofsky’s three-part dissection of image and object.\(^3^5\) The Aesthetic domestic interior, neither fully public nor private, was a production site for late nineteenth-century cultural norms, often-reinforcing tastes, class, or gender roles. Industrial capitalism introduced material and object choice to the middle class through mass-production, who ultimately mirrored styles of the aristocratic echelons in an aspirational, if perhaps misguided effort.\(^3^6\) Logan reminds us that these interiors were constructed more by the objects and narratives inherent to them, rather than the

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\(^3^4\) Panofsky, 14.
\(^3^6\) Stankiewicz, “From the Aesthetic Movement to the Arts and Crafts Movement,” 167.
physical form of these buildings, as most of them were architecturally similar across the typology of urban housing for the middle to upper class.\textsuperscript{37} Objects speak a language that is to be understood by the cultural cognoscenti and tastemakers of the period.

Industrial Capitalism also provided a starting point for privileged minority identities, such as queer men, to begin to construct their own distinct expressions of (queer) domesticity, previously restricted to wealthy or married individuals. Historically, as the female was in charge of the decoration and finishing of the interior, it was considered subversively effeminate for a single man to take full control of his interior.\textsuperscript{38} Queer domestic expression similarly found an expression in objects, and this thesis argue that this use of objects demonstrates a particular design tendency to define queer identity through the use of collected objects amalgamated into a realized interior.

A need to examine this emergence of queer culture from a social-economic perspective remains. Bourdieu’s theories of taste and class stratification lend themselves well to this application. Taste, or cultural competence, is something that Bourdieu theorizes is learned and maintained by the upper class, allowing them to control the dialogue surrounding cultural objects, preventing middle to lower-class individuals from “decoding” objects’ meanings and keeping them from joining the conversation.\textsuperscript{39} Within the Aesthetic Movement, queer aesthetes were simultaneously both included and excluded from upper-society. Those who were artists and designers were a part of the group of tastemakers, literati, or those generally considered “in-the-know”.\textsuperscript{40} Despite their privilege, however, such

\textsuperscript{37} Logan, \textit{The Victorian Parlour}, 17.
\textsuperscript{38} Logan, 31–33; Potvin, \textit{Bachelors of a Different Sort}, 12–15.
\textsuperscript{40} While Leighton’s sexuality was never confirmed, he never married in his life, lived completely alone, and had homoerotic undertones in his art. The architecture of Leighton House has been considered by some to be a covertly flirtatious expression of identity and architecture. For more information see Jason Edwards and Imogen
figures had to present their queerness in “acceptable” and often hidden means during the late nineteenth-century period, like wearing a green carnation as Oscar Wilde and his followers were wont to do. Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital speaks to this struggle of belonging/not-belonging, where cultural knowledge is treated as “irreducible forms of power”, and accretion thereof is one of the only ways to progress upwards outside the gain of social and economic capital.

Following these methodologies, the selected images will be analyzed and identified in a variety of different ways. To begin with, each interior will be considered semiotically, identifying Panofsky’s iconographic/iconological split, in an attempt to grasp the deeper, potentially queer, meaning of each object. When this is complete, Barthean semiotic theory will be applied to identify the myth, or accepted cultural “truth”, of each object or interior. At the same time, each image and the collections represented therein will be cross-examined to identify any similarities between them, including patterns of objects, materials, and symbols. At this point, supplemental information about Aesthetic Movement objects from the Victoria and Albert archive will be introduced, thereby including the accepted history and connotation of the object under review, and contrasted with any queer interpretation. This should succinctly answer this thesis’s first research question.

To discuss economic, cultural, and social drivers, the theories of Bourdieu and Veblen will be applied. Veblen’s theories will be used to discuss the necessity of the display of domestic objects in an economic and social sense, perhaps leading to enlightenment on performative queer visibility within the shifting domestic realm. Bourdieu’s theories of

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41 Potvin, *Bachelors of a Different Sort*, 97.

capital gain will follow after Veblen and introduce an analysis that questions the existence of a marginalized identity and it’s hypothetical struggle for “acceptance”, or in this case, the expression of a queer identity that is simultaneously allowed within the boundaries of Victorian morality but decidedly queer in taste. This struggle would play out along the lines of gaining capital both socially, economically, as well as culturally. By applying these two theories, Aesthetic domestic queer interiors will become easier to read and understand in terms of power struggle as well as why queer individuals need coded objects in interiors.

1.4 Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitations surrounding this body of research must be addressed before continuing into the Literature Review. This thesis has an intentionally limited scope on four aesthetes, across three sets of interiors. Lord Frederic Leighton and Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower were both men of wealth and members of the upper-class. Ricketts and Shannon, while not originally as wealthy as Leighton or Gower, were afforded access into these upper circles of Aestheticism due to their position as artists, designers, and collectors. All four of these men have been linked in prior research to queer identity or expressions thereof. The male focus of this thesis is due to the immediate availability of materials surrounding the histories and records of these Aesthetes and their relation to queerness. This research is also limited to the urban area of London, England, as the discourse of Aestheticism was situated there during the late Victorian era.

Limitations include the following items. The analysis of the interiors chosen for this thesis are limited to photographs as none of the interiors, outside of Leighton House, have survived. The original photos are only available in black and white, as they were shot before color photography had been invented. The photographs presented here are digitized versions thereof, thus the image quality can be impacted. This body of research was compiled over the
course of one year during the Master of Arts Interior Design degree program at Iowa State University. Travel to Leighton House, the only surviving interior, was not possible due to limited travel funds and external time constraints. Finally, the use of historical semiotic analysis limits the generalizability of the research results to other time periods.

1.5 Literature Review

1.5.1. How does queerness manifest itself in identifiable ways in Aesthetic Movement interiors? Sub-questions:

   a. Is there a particular symbolic representation or understanding of the space?
   
   b. Are there specific design techniques that lead to a queer interpretation?
   
   c. Is it manifested physically through choice of objects and collections?

   As mentioned, “queer” is a very useful term as the word is relatively inclusive and allows for the understanding that queer expression varies across lifestyle and experience. Queer functions as a sort of catch-all term, including identities that do not exist within a heteronormative dichotomy. Queerness is also not as limited by ideas of gender and stereotype, traps which terms like “gay and “lesbian” can fall into. The looseness of this terminology also supports a variety of queer expression in interior spaces, thereby precluding “static, stable, and easily identifiable” spatial interpretations, allowing for diverse readings and potential meanings of a singular space based on the viewer.\(^43\) This makes the concrete cataloguing of queer techniques in the Aesthetic Movement challenging, yet this thesis attempts to identify common thread of queerness in the Aesthetic Movement that begin to help to deconstruct and interpret various modes of expression.

   Gorman-Murray and Cook note that queer spaces exhibit a “self-conscious queer twist – encouraging an ironic distancing which often exposes convention or normativity

\(^{43}\) Gorman-Murray and Cook, *Queering the Interior*, 2.
[within accepted design norms] as contingent and invented."\(^{44}\) This love of self-reflexivity and irony was present within the late nineteenth century as Victorians were certainly not completely “immune to the discourse of camp, kitsch, and pastiche” seen in their interiors, but especially within the self-mythologizing decadence of the Aesthetic Movement.\(^{45}\) As this literature review will show, Symbology, Materiality, and Collectivity are three probable manifestations of queerness in the Aesthetic Movement, reinforcing theories posited by John Potvin (symbology) and Thad Logan (objects/collectivity).\(^{46}\) These three manifestations also find particular resonance within interior spaces, and are components of the analysis interpretive theory that this thesis will develop. Self-reflexivity and irony are not exclusive to historical context either. They are established components of design and academic critique, most recently brought to the fore by postmodernist architecture (PoMo). According to Hoesterey, PoMo building forms often decoratively reference past architecture elements in a contemporary context.\(^{47}\) This thesis will argue that in a sense reliance on past forms within PoMo as “atavistic” or as a “recurrence of or reversion to a past style, manner, outlook, approach, or activity” was also a characteristic of queer interiors in the Aesthetic Movement.\(^{48}\) Similarly, queer interiors added a breath of levity and humor within architectural and design practice, poking fun at the strict rules and regulations of the Victorian period.

\(^{44}\) Gorman-Murray and Cook, 2.

\(^{45}\) Edwards and Hart, Rethinking the Interior, c.1867-1896, 13; Potvin, Bachelors of a Different Sort, 48.


1.5.1.1 Symbology

Figure 1.19. Dulac, Edmund, “Charles Ricketts (1866-1931) and Charles Shannon (1863-1937), as Medieval Saints”, tempera on linen, 1920, The Fitzwilliam Museum, courtesy of ArtUK.org

Symbology was extremely prevalent throughout the Aesthetic Movement, providing it with decorative motifs and sustaining its allegorical mythos. This thesis will attempt to categorize Aesthetic Movement symbology into potential queer sub-sections, allowing for identification and discussion. Returning to actual symbology, Walter Hamilton, writing in 1882, identified the lily, sunflower, and peacock feather “as distinctively the badge of the true Æsthete…” once again citing Wilde as a major influence in their symbolic establishment, although these floral motifs also benefitted from their inclusion within the Pre-Raphaelite movement, which was of great influence to the Aesthetic Movement. Of these, the peacock feather demands the most dissection as a symbol for queerness. This symbol appears throughout the period perhaps most famously as a motif in Whistler’s Peacock Room. In Edmund Dulac’s painting Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon as

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Medieval Saints (Seen above), the two aesthetes who lived and worked together for over 40 years, are portrayed in an iconographical style, Ricketts holding a peacock feather. In Christian symbolism, the peacock represented immortality and resurrection: In Greek and Roman mythology, the peacock was correspondent to Hera/Juno and represented pride and perhaps misfortune, yet Lambourne denotes a queer interpretation stating that the “darker side” of the feather “materialised [sic.] as a ‘pass word’ by which people ‘of the same feather’ could recognize each other, and men could confess the sins which they so vividly imagined and wrote about…” 50 This these argues that these so-called “sins” were not simply imagined, but rather consummated, as Oscar Wilde’s trials attest to, and demonstrates the existence of queer longing, desire, and action in the Aesthetic Movement.

The sunflower and lily also carried a deep level of meaning within the context of the Aesthetic movement. The Sunflower was reminiscent of the Golden Section and other Renaissance concepts of Divine geometries, while its simple shape allowed it to be melded into a variety of aesthetic forms with “potent visual appeal” 51, finding applications across the spectrum of design architecture to decorative arts. Anne Anderson while noting that the sunflower and lily were typically ascribed to the male and female gender, deftly queers the sunflower motif as it also existed as an “emblem of aesthetic longing” related to both unconditional, yet unrequited love, originating in the myth of Apollo and Clytie. 52 This research suggests that this unrequited love and longing can imply the same homosexual urges and desires that Lambourne hinted at earlier with his discussion of a “darker side” to the peacock feather. It may also speak to a very lived reality of queer individuals of the time, the

50 Lambourne, The Aesthetic Movement, 56, 60, 78.
51 Lambourne, 36.
52 Anne Anderson, “‘Fearful Consequences . . . of Living up to One’s Teapot’: Men, Women, and ‘Cultchah’ in the English Aesthetic Movement c. 1870–1900,” Victorian Literature and Culture 37, no. 01 (March 2009): 233, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150309090147.
desire to performatively express emotions toward someone, but being unable to do so due to cultural or political reasons, in this case homophobia, or so this thesis posits. The lily is also a thorny symbol to contend with. Historically symbolizing purity of desire, the lily as symbol also lead to the proliferation of artistic imagery of “'High Art Maidens’ clutching lilies and mooning over sunflowers”\textsuperscript{53}. This thesis will argue and show that the image of the lily was also used by critics of the Aesthetic Movement to emasculate male Aesthetes, as seen in comic and parodic depictions of Oscar Wilde. American E.B. Duval’s depiction of Wilde is in an 1882 series of trade cards entitled “National Aesthetics” (Figure 1.2), was an example thereof, where a large lily seems to be tucked under or perhaps growing from Wilde’s arm, mimicking the curvature of his form and hair.\textsuperscript{54} Three final symbols within the Aesthetic Movement deserve clarification. The Butterfly as a motif (also used by Whistler as signature), was “the iridescent symbol of immortality and the ephemeral nature of natural beauty”, dovetailing nicely with the themes of longing, and desire, adding a beautiful, yet decidedly temporal dimension to the movement, speaking to the realities of change, growth, and death.\textsuperscript{55} The classic myth of Narcissus, including its corresponding flower, the jonquil, perhaps negatively imparted a self-absorbed paralyzing fascination with (self-absorbed) beauty to the movement, although its themes served as inspiration for Frederic Leighton’s Narcissus Hall.\textsuperscript{56} The image of a man overly obsessed with himself, particularly his beauty, carries latent queer undertones, as the desired object (one’s self) is of course, the same gender. Narcissus also effectively

\textsuperscript{53} ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Lambourne, \textit{The Aesthetic Movement}, 35, 25.
rejected Echo’s love, a female nature spirit who approached the youth, preferring his own, male, self. Unsurprisingly, narcissism was a common critique of then contemporary media against Aesthetes as a group, particularly of the male gender, as a further attempt to emasculate them. Figure 1.20 below, depicts a satirical cartoon of Oscar Wilde as Narcissus, questioning his self-absorption and desire for recognition. Naturally, consort to this image is the inclusion of a sunflower in Wilde’s hands, and pond lilies.

Finally, perhaps the queerest symbol of the Aesthetic Movement was the (artificially dyed) green carnation. The color green was emblematic of a taste for decadence and artifice, including its homosexual undercurrents. Writing in 1896, poet Richard Le Gallienne critiques the color green. This thesis suggests that his comments regarding the color green (intertwined with the figure of the Aesthete) hint at the perception of Victorian society toward those who identify as queer. Gallienne’s comments are worth repeating at some length here:

Green must always have a large following among artists and art lovers…it is a sure sign of a subtle artistic temperament. There is something not quite good, something almost sinister, about it… Innocence has but two colours, white or green…and the green of the aesthete does not suggest innocence.  

Wilde also speaks to the harried nature of green in his essay “Pen, Pencil, and Poisoner”, concerning Thomas Wainewright, whom, Wilde designates, “had that curious love of green, which in individuals is always the sign of a subtle artistic temperament, and in nations is said to denote a laxity, if not a decadence of morals.” However, the implications of the color green found physical form in the carnation.

57 Le Gallienne, Richard, Prose Fancies (Second Series) (Project Gutenberg, 2004).
58 Oscar Wilde, Intentions, 6th ed. (Project Gutenberg, 1997).
Figure 1.20. The caption reads "Mr. O’Wilde, you are not the first one that has grasped at shadow." The hills behind Wilde include a fictional quote from Echo, Narcissus’s erstwhile lover stating, "He is an aesthetic sham". The text on the right retells the myth. Courtesy of the British Library https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/caricature-of-oscar-wilde-as-narcissus

The true origin of the carnation, then, is difficult to identify, as an 1897 study of “sexual inversion” by J.A. Symonds and H. Ellis identifies the carnation with nineteenth century Paris. However, Karl Beckson disagrees and dissects this conflation further. Beckson finds no concrete evidence supporting the theory that green carnations were worn by Parisian homosexuals during the time, but he uncovers that green cravats were worn by a group of “pederasts” and that the French word for carnation, oeillet, which also meant “little eye” was used as slang for the anus. The green carnation (and to an extent, Wilde himself) was further vilified in publications such as Robert Hichens novel The Green Carnation and Violet Hunt’s short story “The Green Carnation” where the green flower represents an “unnatural sin”, both works interestingly stemming from the author’s personal relationships.

with the Aesthete. These unnatural sins that the authors make euphemism to, suggest homosexuality. Wilde is credited by Beckson for combining the “implications” of the color green and French slang “lay[ing] claim to the green carnation as his…invention” all without speaking to its potential erotic undertone as he was known to frequently wear one in his buttonhole during appearances. This thesis will argue that the color green and the carnation flower were queered representations of the homosexual “underbelly” of the Aesthetic Movement. Specifically, this thesis argues that Wilde and his entourage intentionally chose and wore the green carnation for its strong queer symbolism and that this bold choice was clearly interpretable by the public, as evidenced in the plethora of media produced surrounding the vices of the Green Carnation.

1.5.1.2 Materiality

A theory of queer semiotic domesticity in the Aesthetic Movement must include materiality and its application to an interior space. Materiality differs upon application and “queering it” in a standardized form would be difficult as queer expressions are highly individual and interiors are, as Beckson states, often a way of “demonstrating culture…or alignment with a … class or community” such as the late nineteenth-century aesthetic circle. Materiality is easiest to discuss in broader strokes, allowing for specificity within individual case studies, looking at how one inhabitant potentially “queered” their environment. While acknowledged, this research suggests that there is some merit to be found in a comparative analysis of queer Aesthetic Movement Interiors. While each interior may have its own eccentricities, queer expression requires a common language, and a common language

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61 Beckson, 388–89, 391–92.
62 Beckson, 391,395.
63 Gorman-Murray and Cook, Queering the Interior, 4.
requires shared building blocks of expression and identification. Therefore, both a singular and comparative analysis of interiors would yield worthy results.

The queer experience of materiality is best described using a term borrowed from Charles Baudelaire and Algernon Charles Swinburne who believed that aesthetic goals were “best …achieved by synaesthesia- the blending of differing senses and emotions using interrelationships described…as correspondences.”

Correspondences make reference to or point towards a larger narrative that an artwork or an interior attempts to encompass either in spirit or in part. Within the context of this thesis, correspondences will be considered as material reference points to larger mythic or emotional narratives, examining objects as a signpost pointing to identifiable motifs that inform the construction of a space. Correspondences were often visual, but could be transferred to the written page as well. Mary Elizabeth Haweis, British essayist and author of Beautiful Houses (1882), a compilation of essays introducing many residences designed in the Aesthetic style, was a master of this style of writing. At the time however, Mark Taylor notices that her writing was often ridiculed for being unreadable as it was too flowery or emotionally invested in the subject, instead of being appreciated for the philosophically aesthetic style and importance placed on emotion, expression, and experience present both linguistically and in her descriptions of space. A contemporary feminist synaesthetic technique also extends into the realm of the literary, where the writing attempts to deeply engage the senses. Historically then, Haweis, captured an early version of this synaesthetic technique when she wrote about many of the most

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66 *ibid*. 32.
famous Aesthetes and their interiors at the time.\textsuperscript{67} Take for example, Haweis’ description of Frederic Leighton’s Narcissus Hall, an emotional and sensory narrative begins to develop around this space in particular.

Turning aside from the foot of the stairs, we pass through peacock-greeny arches, with deep gold incision, into the third Hall, called of Narcissus, which strikes a full deep chord of colour, and deepens the impression of antique magnificence. A bronze statuette of the fair son of Cepheus, from that in the Naples Museum, stands in the midst of it. Here the walls are deepest sea-blue tiles, that shades make dark; the floor is pallid (the well-known mosaic of the Caesar’s palaces), and casts up shimmering reflected lights upon the greeny-silver ceiling, like water itself. There is something poetic and original in thus echoing here and there the points in the story of Narcissus – not repeating point-blank the hackneyed tale, or showing the fair boy adoring his mirror’d self in the ‘lily-paven lake,’ but just recalling it piecemeal – the lilies in the pavement, the shining lake above, and all the joy and sorrow, the luxury and the pain of his loneliness and aberration, told by the colours, the purple and the gloom, and the boy’s own attitude.\textsuperscript{68}

This mythic interpretation of space leads to what Potvin calls the “resulting matrix of aesthetic, cultural, social, psychological, and memorializing that register in the life of queer men” instructing not only gender expression but also the “domestic as a site for the enactment of difference.”\textsuperscript{69} Continuing an earlier discussion of Narcissism, Leighton’s Narcissus Hall also captures the important themes of reflection and self-image in the queer interior. Michael Hatt reminds us that “narcissism was… the key means by which Aesthete and sexual deviance were connected” noting that, while not all Aesthetes were homosexual, “aesthetic identity…was the pivot of a moral slide from norm to deviance”.\textsuperscript{70} Hatt also notes that many of Du Maurier’s cartoons in \textit{Punch} lambasted narcissist aesthetes for finding loveliness both in themselves and seeing their loveliness reflected in the world around them:

\“Self and other collapse into each other and the world is no more than the surface of

\textsuperscript{67} ibid. 33, 37.

\textsuperscript{68} Mary Eliza Joy Haweis, \textit{Beautiful Houses; Being a Description of Certain Well-Known Artistic Houses: By Mrs. Haweis, With a Preface.}, 2nd ed. (London: S. Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1882), 4.

\textsuperscript{69} Potvin, \textit{Bachelors of a Different Sort}, 43.

Narcissus’ pool.”  

In a final note on mirrors and reflectivity, Potvin reports that Charles Ricketts believed mirrors and their reflected objects provided gateways to conversation for the inhabitants of a space. This thesis argues that narcissism existed as a key element in queer Aesthetic Movement spaces, expressed through literal material choices such as mirrors or objects that were theoretically self-reflective of the personal, hidden queer identity that could not be expressed openly in the late nineteenth-century.

While identities may not have been publically expressed, domestic interiors often invited the gaze of the “other”, in this specific case being queer case hetero-normative society, into the home. This research argues that this exposure was another facet of queer materiality, blending narcissism and voyeurism together, focusing attention on the inhabitant of a space, while giving a small, controlled peek into one’s true queer identity to outsiders. Glass, specifically windows, is one component of a queer materiality that needs to be discussed. As previously mentioned, the boundaries of the domestic Victorian interior were porous, thus what happened both within and directly without was subject to scrutiny. Recognizing this important question of visibility, Potvin behooves us to see “the relationship of the window to the home [as] akin to the relationship of the eyes to the body; where the window operates as the eye in to the domestic interior and its occupant, so too the eye is the window into the interiority of the body’s occupant, the very soul of his identity.”

Windows could allow literal and figurative views into an aesthete’s private life, potentially revealing secrets such as a non-heterosexual identity. In fact, environmental factors such as darkness, artificial lighting, and the general seclusion of Alfred Taylor’s rented rooms (i.e. brothel space) were used as damning evidence in the Oscar Wilde Trials of 1895, leading to a

71 Hatt, 109.
72 Potvin, Bachelors of a Different Sort, 101.
73 Potvin, 117.
convicting decision based almost solely on objects and aspects of interior design.\textsuperscript{74} Queerness manifests itself not only in materials, but also in how others consider those materials out of context, strengthening this research’s argument for the necessity of the development of a theory of Aesthetic Movement queer interior interpretation.

1.5.1.3 Collectivity

The act of collecting and displaying objects in Victorian England and the Aesthetic Movement was common and this research posits that this practice could be coupled with a deep subtext in sublimated or hidden queer identity. Collecting was an activity that both genders participated in during this period, however Potvin demonstrates that women were typically shunned for their amalgamation of bric-a-brac, whereas men could often viably pursue collection as an academic pastime if the collection served to benefit in an educational capacity.\textsuperscript{75} Thad Logan in her in-depth study of Victorian collecting, notes that the Victorian interior “allows us to read traces of anxiety, longing, and repulsion” that are latent in space and deserve deeper dissection.\textsuperscript{76} Are these the only feelings that manifest in space? How then are these feelings conjured in a domestic interior? Potvin agrees with Logan but further expands upon her ideas, stating that the representative link between a home and its owner was only strengthened in the latter years of nineteenth-century Britain: Collections and their objects “exposed and incited carnal desires, sensualist pleasures, familial pressures, social obligation and the political will of the collector” thereby “thickening”, borrowing the author’s term, the space itself.\textsuperscript{77} This paper suggests that spaces may have been “thickened” or “queered” then with implications, hints, asides, and gestures at the queer aesthete’s true

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{74} Potvin, 116,122.
\bibitem{75} Potvin, 47–48.
\bibitem{76} Logan, \textit{The Victorian Parlour}, 9.
\bibitem{77} Potvin, \textit{Bachelors of a Different Sort}, 55.
\end{thebibliography}
identity. This thesis does not argue that each singular object is a signpost for a queer identity, nor that collections themselves are always queer, rather that, when taking in the contextual, collaged whole of an Aesthetic Movement interior, a queer semiotic interpretation can be derived from the relationships and references each object makes in concert with one another, the viewer, or the owner. Potvin believes that these relationships and references exist in and between space as “phenomenological impressions” that are more sensed, rather than seen clearly.\(^{78}\)

Decoration and collection served much more than a visual imperative, it was inherently “ideological”\(^{79}\) as well, says Thad Logan, but two parties could interpret decoration and chosen objects in drastically different ways, depending on their political and social opinions. Anne Anderson presents critiques leveled at the Aesthetic Movement often centering around collecting and decoration. Aesthetes of both genders were seen to be sexually imbalanced individuals who used collecting as a way to sublimate their desires, which were, naturally, performing domestic duties and the repression of (hetero-normative) sexual urges.\(^{80}\) Potvin presents that collecting could potentially be interpreted as a masking technique for homosexuality, yet some aesthetes like Ricketts and Shannon, who lived together and amassed a large collection over the course of their lives, were not questioned on their sexuality, as they appeared to maintain “the middle-class values of safety, order, cleanliness, and peace attributed to the domestic realm.”\(^{81}\) Personal Identities, such as homosexuality are grafted onto objects as the “collector acquires and projects” their imagined realities and goals into physical form through objects, thereby engaging in a “constant

\(^{78}\) Potvin, 55.
\(^{79}\) Logan, The Victorian Parlour, 204.
\(^{80}\) Anderson, “Fearful Consequences . . . of Living up to One’s Teapot,” 223.
\(^{81}\) Potvin, Bachelors of a Different Sort, 122.
[identity] formulation through acquisition”.

Queer expression, this thesis postulates, could co-exist within an Aesthetic Movement collection by truly hiding in plain sight, within the decorative artworks, fancies, and tchotchkes gathered by a collector, a collector who communicated their identity in the language of object and intention. Thus, it argues that the research of Potvin and Logan should be synthesized together, thereby creating a system of understanding Aesthetic Movement interiors that allows for expressions of queerness. This thesis posits that understanding both the symbolic and social meaning of objects (two components of semiotics) can lead to interpretations of spaces that allow for the inclusion of non-hetero-normative realities, identifies, and lived experiences missing from the historical record.

1.5.2 Queerness in Nineteenth Century Britain

The British Aesthetic Movement found itself trapped between two cultural modalities, that of Victorianism and nascent modernism. Although the Aesthetic Movement ushered in new modes of decorative expression, such as Art Nouveau, the cultural landscape that gave birth to the movement was uniquely shaped by nineteenth-century ways of thinking, or so argues John Potvin. Central to a discussion of queer identities, however, is a brief overview of historical queer expression and social norms during this era, in order to understand the historical framework from which this thesis is built.

The term “homosexual”, implying an individual whose identity was in part influenced by their supposedly deviant sexuality, was not coined until 1869. Despite this, conceptions of “homosexual activity” were actively changing throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

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82 Potvin, 48.
83 Potvin, 58.
84 Lambourne, The Aesthetic Movement, 175.
85 Potvin, Material and Visual Cultures beyond Male Bonding, 1870-1914, 1–2.
centuries, shifting towards a rigid exclusivity in preference of other homosexual partners, as well as problematically assuming effeminacy to be part and parcel of homosexual behaviors, a trend that would continue well into the contemporary era. While these assertions may not hold up to current scrutiny, nevertheless they were defining factors in understanding homosexuality of the period. Such assertions found themselves reflected in the urban environments and legal predicaments that queer men often found themselves throughout this era.

The history of Britain, London specifically, has a long relationship to queer spaces, expressions, and even punishments. London was a veritable hotbed of queerness throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as a sub-culture of bars and inns catered toward homosexual needs, creating opportunities for community and carnality. Interestingly, while sodomy could carry the death penalty and was considered a crime akin to bestiality, Matt Cook argues that at times there existed an almost burgeoning tolerance of queer expression. For example, the trial of Fanny and Stella (the female personas of Thomas Boulton and Frederick Park) in 1871 was lenient and granted the two individuals a level of clemency, allowing them off “scot-free” with no punishment. Boulton and Park, who frequently presented themselves publically as Fanny and Stella, were brought in on suspicion of sodomy, yet the jury could find no evidence linking their effeminate behavior to actual anal intercourse, thus resulting in the charges being dropped. However, this draws attention to the problematization of linking femininity with homosexual expression. Although Fanny and Stella often gained access to (and even acceptance within) spaces as women, their biological

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86 Cook, London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885 - 1914, 7–8.
87 Cook, 8–9.
88 Cook, 22.
sex determined in the public’s eye, that they must, in fact, be homosexuals.\footnote{Cook, 16–17.} Regardless of the veracity of the claims, the desire to unmask and punish homosexuals was culturally prevalent. Thus, this thesis claims to deconstruct one method of “masked” homosexual expression, within an interior design context.

Unfortunately, for the majority of queer men, judges and juries were not so lenient towards them as in the case of Fanny and Stella. The “sodomite” and the “molly” were seen to “embod[y] a threat to the nation, not the least by challenging standards of masculinity and constituting a supposedly alien presence”.\footnote{Cook, 11.} Homophobia was no stranger to British urban society and being “outed” was certainly a real fear among homosexuals at the time. Pillories and punishments were practically a form of public entertainment and as accused men were dragged through the streets, passerby pelted them with all manner of objects such as mud and rotten food.\footnote{ibid.} Cook states “ideas of visibility and invisibility, secrecy and exposure, were crucial to the genesis of ideas about homosexual identity in the city.” \footnote{Cook, London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885 - 1914, 12.} In an effort to mitigate such exposure, an elaborate system of cruising was “incorporated into the visual economy of the city”, where men could safely meet other men, under the guise of public parks, clubs, and places of business, although there was never any guarantee of safety or secrecy.\footnote{ibid.} This thesis takes Cook’s “system of cruising”, and reconstructs its secrecy and symbology in a domestic environment, where the focus wasn’t carnality, rather personal and psychological identity.

John Potvin indicates that keeping up appearances was a firm doctrine of the nineteenth-century, ensuring that the maintenance of “proper social codes, respectable
decorum, and masculine integrity”, would keep desires of male intimacy at bay, “forc[ing] [one] to come to terms with the ever-shifting parameters of interior/exterior, posing/passing and distance/proximity in … relationship with other men”. This proximity to other men was, however, an integral part of late nineteenth-century society. Due to the doctrine of separate spheres, men were granted almost exclusive access to public space while women were largely relegated to environments of domesticity. This unfettered access to other men certainly enabled homosexual activity, but it also created homosocial spaces, where (heterosexual) men could comfortably interact with each other. Potvin believes this reliance on a homosocial spaces, such as gentlemen’s clubs, is an example of performative masculinity, grounded in homophobia that defines its existence based on what it separates itself from. These homosocial spaces were testament to how a man presented his masculinity publically, yet “it only recognizes social performances of masculinity and does not take into account how the self performs masculinity in the private domains of personal pleasures, fantasies, and desires.”

New levels of privacy and domesticity were attainable for single men during the late nineteenth century, afforded by the rise of capitalism, industrialization, and mass production. As purchasing power increased for the middle class, it did the same for bachelors. The bachelor, or single male, could also begin to construct a narrative contradictory to Victorian mores; Purchasing and furnishing his own private domestic space was a new modality of, and perhaps threat to, domesticity. This new typology of bachelor living was a complete shift in

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94 Potvin, Material and Visual Cultures beyond Male Bonding, 1870-1914, 1.
96 Potvin, Material and Visual Cultures beyond Male Bonding, 1870-1914, 4.
97 ibid.
98 Potvin, Bachelors of a Different Sort, 41.
the “the ethics of design and codes of gender and sexuality”, thereby cementing the bachelor’s relationship to a dubious, perhaps even queer, sexual status.\textsuperscript{99} The domestic interior then, was fertile ground to establish one’s own personal identity, an idea already largely accepted by scholars such as Logan in her studies focusing on gender roles within the Victorian period.\textsuperscript{100}

The Aesthetic Movement’s relationship to queerness is perhaps easiest explored through this theme of male domestic identity. Potvin notes that conceptions of domesticity were radically shifting during the Aesthetic Movement as the Victorian era slowly ground to a close and new, more modernist, in fact masculinist, ideals were taking the helm.\textsuperscript{101} This domestic turning point makes the Aesthetic Movement an interesting period to examine what “feminine” ideals were disvalued or left behind, in favor of a more masculine ideology. This thesis, recognizing this gap, examines conceptions of queerness during this period, queerness which diverged from Victorian conceptions of both masculinity and femininity. As noted, the progression of industrial capitalism and imperialism enabled societal changes surrounding the home, as gender roles, responsibilities, and the doctrine of separate spheres began to be transgressed.\textsuperscript{102} These changes allowed for new, progressive paradigms of living to develop within the domestic space, paradigms that, at the time, seemed unnatural and “out of step with normative prescriptions”.\textsuperscript{103}

Queer Domesticity then revolves around “home and homemaking practices” of the LGBTQ+ community, including how it may, or may not, differ from traditional (read:

\textsuperscript{99} Potvin, 18.
\textsuperscript{100} Logan, \textit{The Victorian Parlour}, 31, 33–34.
\textsuperscript{101} Potvin, \textit{Bachelors of a Different Sort}, 11–12.
\textsuperscript{102} Potvin, 15.
\textsuperscript{103} Potvin, 115.
heteronormative) domestic life. Andrew Gorman-Murray and Matt Cook state that “the domestic interior is a way of simultaneously fitting [in] and standing out” while at the same time providing queer individuals a seat at the table in the “culturally central space of the home”. The home however is a politicized site of cultural and societal shift, thus rendering it neither private nor public space, rather “porous” as influences from both the interior and exterior mix and mingle at this locus. This mingling of public, private, and political lives is what allows the domestic interior of the Aesthetic Movement to be studied within this analysis as a reflective narrative of personal identities and ideals.

Domestic interiors are inhabited and constructed by diverse individuals with contrasting experiences, leading to numerous interpretations of what home means. Often, these interpretations are evinced through the design and decoration of the space. Thad Logan, specifically referencing the Victorians and their preoccupation with the home as a site of purity separated from the public world, states that interior “decoration does ideological work”. This attempt to detach the interior through decoration from the capitalist marketplace is ironic at best, as the objects necessary to decorate a home were directly marketed to the women attempting to protect said purity, “inevitably link[ing]” capitalism and design.

The objects produced under this economic reliance on capitalism may simply be copies or “simulacra”, a term philosopher Jean Baudrillard is famous for coining, yet they are also “objects of virtue” or objects that Stankiewicz’s argues could hearken back to past cultures, periods, and form while “falsely” in search of spiritual enlightenment or aesthetic

105 Gorman-Murray and Cook, 2.
106 Gorman-Murray and Cook, 4.
107 Logan, *The Victorian Parlour*, 204.
beauty.\(^{109}\) How these objects exhibit “falsity” in their creation is left undisclosed by Stankiewicz, whether due in part to historical inaccuracies or other factors. This thesis would posit that these objects are perhaps not so much as false as more “out of context”, temporally speaking.

One goal of the Aesthetic Movement was to revolutionize design by re-instatement of a standard of beauty and engendering aesthetic engagement among the people, although much of this original mission was forgotten in the more decadent years of the 1890s, or so argues Penny Sparke.\(^{110}\) However, Sparke continues and notes that this valiant aesthetic, if not spiritual (or self-actualizing) goal led to a certain fervor or intenseness among the aesthetes, most prominently exhibited by (and later parodied of) Oscar Wilde, often noticed by the “philistine” public though the latter’s “unguarded utterances, and peculiarities of garb…”\(^{111}\)

These eccentricities were parodied in contemporary media reinforcing the underlying current of homophobia in the late nineteenth century.

Take for example, the below trade card depicting Oscar Wilde. The card seems entirely intended to emasculate Wilde. He is portrayed in foppish dress and assuming a Pre-Raphaelite pose, and contemplating a sunflower. While the dollar sign within the sunflower likely speaks to Wilde’s North American tour and the commodity-based nature of the Aesthetic Movement, the sunflower and lily are symbols of aesthetic longing and purity, respectively.\(^{112}\) This thesis posits that, in a queer interior, perhaps, the sunflower speaks to an unrequited love that “dares not speak its name” as Wilde is oft quoted, or a love that could

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\(^{110}\) Sparke, *Design in Context*, 71.


\(^{112}\) “1882 Oscar Wilde Antique Strike Me with a Sunflower Quote Lily Stock Trade Card | #1786650636”; Anderson, “‘Fearful Consequences . . . of Living up to One’s Teapot,’” 233.
not find valid acceptance in nineteenth-century society. It continues this line of thought by considering the lily as loss of traditional interpretations of purity, or perhaps a re-valuation of what purity means, arguing for a perception of queer identity that isn’t considered “dirty”. Within the context of this card however, the accepted thematic meanings of those symbols seem to be challenged or parodied, perhaps due to Wilde’s portrayal in a light that questions his masculinity (further evinced by his rouge and delicate hand positioning) as well as his “aesthetic” desires, be they monetary or perhaps sexual. These negative interpretations and stereotypes are often still associated with queer identity, despite ever-increasing social progress, and this research argues that, to some extent, they find their roots in the Aesthetic Movement figure of the Aesthete.

Figure 1.21. Duval, E.B., ”National Aesthetics”, trade card, 1882, courtesy of Worthopedia.
1.5.2.1 Economic structures of industrialization

Desire, or consumption, played a large role within the Aesthetic Movement. The creation and production of household objects was integral to the dissemination of the style, as was the accumulation thereof.113 According to Thad Logan, the manufacturing of objects was simply the first step, as after they are purchased, consumers then “produce” their own interiors from an amalgamation of acquired objects as well as personal and hand-made additions.114 This consumer culture and emphasis on consumption stemmed from the economic and social progress of the Industrial Revolution, which despite its advancements was not always as straightforward a process as many think.

Generally speaking, industrialization describes the transition of an economy from an agrarian to a service-based industry.115 This process is not native to any particularly country nor is it simultaneous, although the term “Industrial Revolution” is often used haphazardly to describe the entirety of Western economic shift. Surprisingly, the actual term “Industrial Revolution” was not popularized in the English lexicon until 1884, due to a lecture by social reformer Arnold Toynbee entitled Lectures on the Industrial Revolution in England.116 Despite the late terminology, it is estimated that the British Industrial Revolution, began in the second half of the eighteenth century and “gained steam” if you will, throughout a majority of the nineteenth century. Rondo Cameron believes that industrialization requires four interactive factors, namely “population, resources, technology, and institutions”, and in the case of Britain, coal and human capital were important expressions thereof.117

113 Stankiewicz, “From the Aesthetic Movement to the Arts and Crafts Movement,” 165.
114 Logan, The Victorian Parlour, 36.
116 Cameron, 3.
117 Cameron, 2.
The “British Model” of industrialization was afforded by strong advances in technology, such as the development of steam power, increasing options for production of various consumer goods as well as extending the reach of product and consumer, due to transport innovations. This consequences of this shift extended beyond the economy, fundamentally “transform[ing] the way people lived, loved, and performed their gender”, as new economic opportunities opened doors for new modalities of living. Potvin argues then that these new economic freedoms, advanced by industrialization, enabled single men to construct domestic spheres outside of the traditional family model, often as bachelors. This thesis argues then, that the new modality of living (coordinated through rising industrialism) and its opportunity for queer expression through semiotic object valuation is a lacuna in current academic research.

Cameron’s view of industrialism isn’t all positive however. Despite the prosperous economic advantages that the Industrial Revolution brought to Great Britain, it was not without its fair share of criticism. Toynbee’s popular lecture was truly critical of the Industrial Revolution, specifically in regards to the “deleterious consequences” that were enacted upon the now marginalized worker due to the ravages of industrialization. Thorstein Veblen, the American economist, was also critical of the societal changes enacted during this period, and founded much of his theory within a cultural analysis based in consumption, the display of objects, and the intent of the display for social goals of the Victorian era and humankind’s relationship to consumption. Veblen’s critiques of the late nineteenth-century centered on his maxim that “consumption symbolically enacts economic

118 Cameron, 9.
119 Potvin, Bachelors of a Different Sort, 11–12.
120 See Page 2
121 Cameron, “A New View of European Industrialization,” 3.
competition”, creating a cycle of purchasing. Importantly however, is that Veblen’s theories engage directly with an object on it semiotic and cultural level, while still discussing broad economic patterns.¹²²

Specifically, Veblen’s doctrine of “conspicuous consumption” is not unfamiliar within a late nineteenth-century, or even Aesthetic Movement context. Stankiewicz argues that Aesthetes were no strangers to the vices of capitalism, writing “aesthetes tended to be modern in their willingness to participate in the growth of industrial capitalism”.¹²³ The Aesthetic Movement relied on consumption as a method to spread its doctrine of beauty and light, for if an individual did not have these new miracle objects; they had to be purchased, of course.¹²⁴ Veblen noted that individuals or groups detrimentally over-consume items (be it food, material goods, houses, etc.) beyond their financial means, in an attempt to prove social status.¹²⁵ These objects of over-consumption are key to the semiotic application of Veblen’s theories. It becomes important to ask the following: What were these objects? Did they carry any particular social meaning, if any? Did they relate to queer identity? It is well supported that domestic interiors of the period were seen as environments of moral edification, in no small part due to an interior’s supporting cast of objects.¹²⁶ Thad Logan, recognizing the moral significance of these objects, also notices how “the bourgeois interior becomes increasingly full of objects, cluttered…. [with things] that do not have obvious use-value, but rather participate in a decorative, semiotic, economy.”¹²⁷ In this case, the semiotic economy would be the symbolically edifying relationship objects grant to their owners, as well as

¹²² Logan, The Victorian Parlour, 85.
¹²³ Stankiewicz, “From the Aesthetic Movement to the Arts and Crafts Movement,” 170.
¹²⁵ Logan, The Victorian Parlour, 83.
¹²⁶ Potvin, Bachelors of a Different Sort, 18.
¹²⁷ Logan, The Victorian Parlour, 26.
Veblen’s theory that the possession and public display of such objects was an attempt at being perceived of a higher social status.

Theories of social status via object consumption did not die in the nineteenth-century. As patterns of consumption have continued, theories have also continued to develop. Pierre Bourdieu’s critiques can be linked to Veblen’s as a sort of thematic successor. In his book *Distinction*, Bourdieu lays out his theories of taste and social class stratification, analyzing acquisitions and their performative aspects in creating types of value in class relationships. Bourdieu’s theories mainly concern capital, be it social or economic, and treat the accumulation thereof as tantamount. He theorizes that “taste”, or cultural competence, is something learned and maintained by the upper classes, allowing them to control the dialogue surrounding cultural objects and their interpretations. As a direct result, middle to lower-class individuals are hindered from “decoding” objects’ accepted cultural meanings and kept from the conversation. It is then advantageous to the lower classes to attain knowledge or proficiency (i.e. capital) to join these cultural discussions, in a performative move not dissimilar to Veblen’s idea of conspicuous consumption. The middle class certainly purchased and displayed replicas (simulacra) of objects to associate with the upper class, but Bourdieu and Veblen theories would argue that they did not understand the meanings or significance of the originals.

Within nineteenth-century interiors, joining the realm of the cognoscenti would entail constructing a space that mimics upper class tastes, which, if done incorrectly, could come across as cheap and inauthentic. *Nouveau-riche* families, often industrialists who had

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131 Logan, *The Victorian Parlour*, 84.
recently come into large sums of money, were eager to hire designers to outfit their rooms in the peak of Aesthetic style, to stake their claim to social class and wealth; For example, Frederick Leyland, a transatlantic trade magnate, commissioned James McNeill Whistler to design his family’s dining room, or what came to be known as the Peacock Room.\footnote{Lambourne, \textit{The Aesthetic Movement}, 50–51.} At face value, engaging a designer to “aestheticize” one’s interiors was indicative of a desire to be “in good taste”, yet within Bourdieu and Veblen’s framework this was a game of social position and perception. So, as queer individuals began to construct spaces of their own, what were their goals? This research argues that queer Aesthetic interiors attempted to strike a balance between creating space that could “pass” as sufficiently contemporary, while subversively introducing elements of their own queer experience through imagery and semiotics, thereby presenting a subject considered taboo, in a covertly acceptable manner. Theoretically, it would be an early attempt at queer representation, an early attempt for visibility and perhaps inclusivity.

1.6 Overview of Chapters

Chapter One of this thesis includes the Abstract, Introduction, Research Questions, Methodology, and Literature Review. Chapter Two contains a brief historical overview of the Aesthetic Movement, to further cement the understanding of the period and it’s particularities. Moving on, Chapter Three will be a semiotic analysis of the identified interiors and their objects using theories from Panofsky and Barthes Following that, Chapter Four will continue semiotic analysis of the identified interiors and objects using a framework of cultural capital and power from Veblen and Bourdieu as well as additional semiotic interpretation. To summarize, Chapter Five will Discuss the analyses of Chapters Three and Four And finally, Chapter Six will be a Conclusion and Call to Action.
CHAPTER 2.  BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE AESTHETIC MOVEMENT

The Aesthetic Movement in Britain ran from the 1870s through the 1890s, with the high point of the period falling in its earlier years. The Aesthetic Movement was characterized by its devotion to concepts of physical beauty, expressed in the Aesthete’s desire to exemplify the virtues of “sweetness and light”, or the joy of the creation of beauty and truth, respectively. However, as Lionel Lambourne reminds, the philosophical doctrine of modern aesthetic theory was not new to late-nineteenth century Britain, having been formalized in the prior century by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten and his book *Aesthetica* (1750-1758). Succeeding Baumgarten, perhaps the most well known philosophical system of aesthetics is attributed to Immanuel Kant who, as Paul Oskar Kristeller surmises, introduced aesthetics “as the philosophical theory of beauty and the arts, acquiring equal standing with the theory of truth (metaphysics or epistemology) and the theory of goodness (ethics)”. A modern system of aesthetic theory found its most cogent and articulate expression in the works of Kant, but Kristeller traces the long process of western aesthetic theoretical development throughout European history, particularly in France and Renaissance Italy, although he credits Kant with creating the most cohesive iteration. It is interesting to note that Kant’s theories of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty seem to be echoed in the Aesthetic virtues above, prioritizing the development of art and beauty as paramount.

Within England, Lambourne regards Walter Pater as one of the earliest adopters of an Aesthetic approach, whose writings on the art of the Renaissance and his charge to love “art

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133 Lambourne, 20.
134 ibid., 10.
for art’s sake” would dovetail with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood’s medievalism and create “a new emphasis on the decorative arts, and the value of ornament.”  

According to the Victoria and Albert Museum, tastemakers within the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood began to focus their energies within the realm of domestic and design objects, “with a refined sensibility to line and geometric form…natural ornament and harmonious colour”, thereby transgressing the divide that separated the Fine Arts from the decorative. Such tastemakers included well-known designers and artists such as William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones. This aim to reconceptualize the intersection between life and art was mimicked within the Aesthetic movement, where Stankiewicz posits that Aesthetes also believed in “a vision of unity among the arts”, with a goal to unite diverse artistic forms within the realm of the home.

This union of the arts can be considered as a Gesamtkunstwerk, in this case, a total work of art as an inhabitable environment, nestled within the domestic realm. At the time of the Aesthetic Movement however, domestic space was traditionally relegated to the female sex. Yet, for John Ruskin, this gendered divide of separate spheres enabled the woman to fulfill a duty of moral importance. Lambourne posits that Ruskin viewed women as “aesthetic missionaries” who, through the purchase of domestic objects, inhabited a role of positive familial influence, surrounding their family with objects of high artistic merit, which, in Ruskin’s view, “was the expression of man’s delight in God’s work.”

While Stankiewicz argues that Aesthetes were not keenly invested in truly religious interpretations

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139 Stankiewicz, “From the Aesthetic Movement to the Arts and Crafts Movement,” 168.
of their art (rather deriving their morals from questions of visual pleasure), Ruskin does introduce a key element regarding the development of the Aesthetic movement, namely that of capitalism.

As mentioned in the Literature Review, the rise of industrialization drastically changed the political and economic landscape of nineteenth-century Britain. The technological shift certainly impacted all parts of contemporary society, however this thesis is focused on the domestic environment and the diverse identities that populated it during the Aesthetic Movement. Thad Logan identifies industrialization’s development of mass-production, both as a benefit to and point of anxiety for those involved in work around the domestic sphere. She draws into question the “relation[ship] between ‘art’ and manufacturing” largely concerning the replacement of hand-made items with those produced by machines, noting the disparity in quality of industrially mass-produced products despite their affordability.141 Some movements opposed mass-production, such as the Arts and Crafts Movement, but Stankiewicz identifies the Aesthetic Movement as willing to work with and endeavoring to benefit from the rise in mass-production.142 Stankiewicz also notes that domestic purchases in the English marketplace at the time were largely dictated by fashion, or what the upper-classes considered to be of good taste and desirable, a point that supports Veblen’s theories of conspicuous consumption and class competition.143 Lambourne, who considers the Aesthetic Movement largely as a middle-class event, also echoes these sentiments, noting however that with mass-production, the middle-class individual could exercise choice in purchasing particular styles of furniture or decoration.144

141 Logan, *The Victorian Parlour*, 162.
142 Stankiewicz, “From the Aesthetic Movement to the Arts and Crafts Movement,” 170.
143 *ibid*, 166.
Domestic Aesthetic Movement interiors, traditionally outfitted by the woman of the (presumably heteronormative) household, were afforded a diversity of objects, styles, decorations, and choices in the aesthetic decisions of a home. The Aesthetic Movement found much of its inspiration in locales beyond the geographical boundaries of England, including the influx of new objects coming in from Japan, and a cultural fascination with the Middle East as well as classical western Antiquity. Logan suggests that these “foreign objects” were used as attempts to signify status or to hint at an understanding or appreciation of the “exotic” world beyond Great Britain. Despite the problematic nature of equating the ownership of an object to an understanding of a foreign people, the Aesthetic Movement certainly valued objects from other cultures. Within domestic English society however, the Aesthetic Movement delineated boundaries between those who were considered informed aesthetes with an understanding of artistic theory and the poetically named “Philistines”. Lambourne suggests that Philistines were those who were beholden to more traditional ideals when it came to art, decoration, and experience, whereas the bohemian Aesthete was invested in an “artistic idealism” that held the tenets of “Art for Art’s sake” as its vanguard truth. This aesthetic idealism attempted to provide a sense of order to Victorian sensibilities, which, after the Great Exhibition of 1851, drew much stylistic ire from reformers, according to Raizman, due to a lack of cohesivity and unsightliness among the presented designs.

However, Raizman overlooks the importance that the Great Exhibition of 1851 had in setting the stage for the later development of the Aesthetic Movement. Occurring

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146 Logan, The Victorian Parlour, 182.
approximately twenty years before Aestheticism, the Great Exhibition was an opportunity unlike any other. Charlotte Gere, in describing the Exhibition’s importance, notes that over six million people from a variety of different economic backgrounds visited the exhibition, roughly amounting to one fifth of the then current population of England.\footnote{Charlotte Gere, \textit{The House Beautiful: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetic Interior}\ (London: Lund Humphries in association with the Gefrye Museum, 2000), 36.} The Great Exhibition of 1851 was not only notable for its extensive size, just as importantly, it showcased industrialization’s sheer power in the production of decorative goods, denoting a system shift away from handcraft firmly toward mass-production, a fact purported both by Lambourne and Gere.\footnote{Lambourne, \textit{The Aesthetic Movement}, 17; Gere, \textit{The House Beautiful}, 36.}

The exhaustive capabilities of mass-production allowed for the creation and display of thousands of different styles and products, catered to practically any level of taste (or lack thereof), which Gere cites as a necessitating factor for the publication of Owen Jones’s \textit{Grammar of Ornament} in 1856.\footnote{Gere, \textit{The House Beautiful}, 36, 38–39.} Lambourne looks to \textit{The Grammar of Ornament} as a monumental contribution to the establishment of the Aesthetic Movement, as he finds the book instrumental in “introducing” decorative schemes, oftentimes foreign, to the English public.\footnote{Lambourne, \textit{The Aesthetic Movement}, 14–15.} This penchant for the foreign and exotic, could, as Logan argued earlier, lead to the accumulation and domestic display of foreign objects in an attempt to show a level of worldliness and status.\footnote{See note 146.} The Great Exhibition of 1851’s exerted major importance in the development of the Aesthetic Movement and it’s breadth of decorative ideals, despite the criticism Gere noted it later received for its “lapses in taste” and “direct imitation of nature”.\footnote{Gere, \textit{The House Beautiful}, 39.}
Idealism, however, can only carry one so far. Due to the Aesthetic Movement’s varied points of interest and inspiration, eclecticism, as Logan reports, “was the rule, not the exception”. Rather unsurprising, given the sheer volumes of styles upheld as acceptable expressions of Aesthetic tendencies. Lambourne’s research suggests that perhaps the movement’s “intellectual and visual diversity gave it great appeal,” due to an inclusiveness of taste, style preference, and market choice made possible through the advances of industrialism and mass production. On the other hand, the eccentricities and “flamboyance” of extreme strains within the Aesthetic Movement did cause hesitation among bourgeois audiences, causing confusion to a public largely instructed to find vestiges of morality in fine art, according to Stankiewicz. One important, common facet of the Aesthetic Movement interior (and other English styles before it) is the prevalence of collections. Collections could be comprised of a great many types of different objects, but what is interesting is that the practice was derided based more so on gender and less by collection content. Thad Logan notes that “serious” collecting, or collections that attempted to contribute knowledge towards “intellectual discipline[s]” through their comprised objects, much like a Wunderkammer or a cabinet of curiosities, were considered to be under male jurisdiction. Conversely, the women’s collection, often used to furnish the parlor was seen as derivative and frivolous, even clutter-inducing.

This double standard in Victorian collecting is rather unsurprising during an historical era where strict gender roles were reinforced practically at every turn. Anne Anderson investigates what happens when an individual goes too far in their collecting, or oversteps the

155 Logan, The Victorian Parlour, 72.
156 Lambourne, The Aesthetic Movement, 22.
157 Stankiewicz, “From the Aesthetic Movement to the Arts and Crafts Movement,” 169.
boundaries prescribed to the practice by their gender. She reports that opponents of the Aesthetic movement, believed excessive collecting “led to unnatural desires; in women the need for things resulted in the negation of motherly affection; in men, sexual libido was suppressed by the urge to collect.”

159 Thoroughly “unsexed”, Anderson writes that these aesthetes sublimated their desires into the act of collecting and displaying objects, even “self-identifying” with them.

160 Here, a hint of queerness begins to develop within domestic realm of the Aesthetic Interior. If, as Anderson argues, aesthetic collections can be viewed as attempts to sublimate sexual desires, and men’s collections were arguably not meant to “integrate” with the interior, what should one make of the high-profile male aesthetes who were prone to collecting?

161 A figure like Oscar Wilde, who was routinely lambasted and ridiculed for his flamboyant nature in the contemporary press, was known to have a passion for blue and white china.

162 Might there be an underlying truth in the male collector’s object collection? Can a sublimation of personal or private emotion and identities be uncovered? This thesis will argue in the following chapters that some queer aesthetes accumulated objects that were a semiotically symbolic expression of their queer identities; identities unable to be spoken about publically in late Victorian England. Anderson would seem to agree with this point when she states that “men who engage[d] in accumulation without classification are read as transgressing gender boundaries.”

163 Potvin’s research further bolsters the conceptions of both Anderson and this thesis. He reports that identities, including those in queer contexts, are re-enforced and supported by
collected objects in addition to deriving pleasure from each object individually.\textsuperscript{164} This imbuation of objects with personal meaning is a key tenet of this research. However, Anderson argues that the Aesthetic interior is defined by its “transience”, as the aesthete was invested in what was new, what was most beautiful, often leading to veritable waves of objects and stylistic choices that came and went through interiors.\textsuperscript{165} This intrinsic impermanence was, in fact, perhaps a death knell for the short-lived Aesthetic Movement. Despite the Aesthetic Movement’s belief in the transformative values of beauty, truth, and artistic integrity, its theoretical goals were belied by its reliance on continuous consumption. Lambourne notes that “this mixture of clashing styles and the speed of such eclectic change produced a feeling of world weariness” tiring both critics and proponents of the Aesthetic Movement alike.\textsuperscript{166} While it is intriguing to entertain the idea that the sheer stereotypical “clutter” ended the Aesthetic Movement alone, the Victoria and Albert Museum blames Oscar Wilde’s trials for homosexuality as the final straw, “effectively discredit[ing] the Aesthetic Movement with the general public, though many of its ideas and styles remained popular into the 20th century.”\textsuperscript{167}

While this thesis does not necessarily pinpoint Oscar Wilde’s trials for homosexual acts as tantamount to the end of the Aesthetic Movement as a whole, the conception is certainly an interesting one. Could the homosexuality so latent in the interiors of queer aesthetes, which this thesis believes was prevalent, actually have led to the total collapse of the Aesthetic Movement? Other scholars identify different reasons for the end of the Aesthetic Movement. John Potvin, for example does in fact find expressions of queerness

\textsuperscript{164} Potvin, Bachelors of a Different Sort, 102–4.
\textsuperscript{165} Anderson, “‘Fearful Consequences . . . of Living up to One’s Teapot,’” 247–48.
\textsuperscript{166} Lambourne, The Aesthetic Movement, 24.
\textsuperscript{167} Victoria and Albert Museum, “An Introduction to the Aesthetic Movement.”
culpable, although he does not label Wilde’s trials exclusively responsible. In fact, Potvin believes that responsibility, in part, lies with the surplus of objects in domestic interiors, writing that

these objects would collectively stand foursquare as the material index of Victorian and effeminate excess, emblems of idle, meaningless accumulation, by twentieth century modernists who rejected the material attachments of sentimentality, heritage, and posterity…\textsuperscript{168}

Potvin effectively identifies the reliance on objects and perhaps the “gender transgression” earlier mentioned by Anderson, as prime reasons for the early Modernist’s disgust with the Aesthetic Movement.

Despite the apparent disgust engendered by Modernists towards the Aesthetic Movement, Lambourne suggests that it laid the groundwork for the immediately following design movements, including the Arts and Crafts Movement, Art Nouveau, and the literary style known as Decadence.\textsuperscript{169} While Stankiewicz might argue that the Arts and Crafts movement was more simultaneous with the Aesthetic movement, it certainly outlasted the teachings of Aestheticism, reaching as far as the 1920s.\textsuperscript{170} While the Aesthetic Movement may not have been beloved by contemporary critics of its time, evidenced by George du Maurier’s \textit{Punch} cartoon in Figure 2.1, the Movement inspired opinions and critique from members of late Victorian society. In Lambourne’s opinion, the death of the Aesthetic Movement implied that “Philistinism” had overcome the nuanced and intellectual teachings of the Aesthetes, again largely due, in fact, to the “flagrantly overt” actions of Oscar Wilde who linked Aesthetic practice with an exposed undercurrent of homosexuality.\textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{168} Potvin, \textit{Bachelors of a Different Sort}, 59.
\textsuperscript{169} Lambourne, \textit{The Aesthetic Movement}, 214.
\textsuperscript{170} Stankiewicz, “From the Aesthetic Movement to the Arts and Crafts Movement,” 169.
This thesis explores this latent undercurrent of homosexuality within the Aesthetic Movement in order to identify expressions of queerness in the domestic semiotic landscape created by a surplus of objects owned and displayed by aesthetes suspected of being queer or those who expressed queer tendencies. In the same vein, this thesis aims to fill gaps in the historical record of the Aesthetic Movement, by identifying physical design manifestations (semiotic symbols) of queerness during the period, rather than identifying the personal sexual acts of Oscar Wilde or other aesthetes, as indicative of and the baseline for an expression of diverse queer identities in the late nineteenth century of Great Britain.
CHAPTER 3. SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

The semiotic analyses conducted within this chapter utilize the frameworks of both Erwin Panofsky\textsuperscript{172} and Roland Barthes\textsuperscript{173}. Specifically, Panofsky’s theories of iconology and iconography, which revolve around three layers of interpretative meaning, beginning first with the pre-iconographical, implying a factual, obvious analysis, the iconographical, where conventional symbology is analyzed, and ending on the iconological meaning or intrinsic, deeper level.\textsuperscript{174} Barthes also theorizes a tripartite delineation of an image’s meaning(s), although he refers to them as the denotative, the connotative, and the myth.\textsuperscript{175} The systems proposed by these two semioticians are compatible and their integration is necessary for the comprehensive analysis of the thesis subject matter. Both seek to gain a deeper understanding of “hidden” cultural meanings embedded in image-based texts. Panofsky’s system divides the images into three layers. The first layer, known as the Primary or Natural, does not rely on iconography to make sense of an image. Simply put, what is depicted is what is shown. A sheep, for all intents and purposes, may just be a sheep. Panofsky’s second layer, the iconographic, relies on conventional meanings, themes, and stories related to an image. In the western art tradition, an image of a lamb, however, may be symbolic of Christ, if one can A) Identify the animal and B) Grasp Christian art conventions. Finally, Panofsky’s third level is known as the iconological, or the socio-cultural, intrinsic meaning behind an image. This refers to the implied or even innately understood meaning of an image, although perhaps subconsciously realized. Following the Lamb/Christ metaphor, this concept could be

\textsuperscript{172} Panofsky, \textit{Studies in Iconology}, 3–17.
interpreted as a reminder that death of Christ on the cross, was effectively a transactional exchange, much like the sacrifice of a lamb at the altar, reminding parishioners that Christ died for their sins.\textsuperscript{176}

Roland Barthes’ semiotic system also follows a three-part division. The \textit{denotative} element of an image refers to its formal or identifying factors. For example, in a Renaissance painting, the defining qualities and figure of a dog should be relatively easy to recognize. Technically, this identification process relies on an innate understanding of de Saussure’s Sign/Signifier relationship, or knowing that the combined forms depicting the image, do in fact, constitute what is culturally referred to, or recognized as, a “dog”.\textsuperscript{177} The \textit{connotative} meaning of a dog, however, would be the suggestive implications, feelings, or emotions an image might pique, such as “faithfulness”, following the dog metaphor. Finally then, the \textit{myth} or \textit{mythic} understanding could imply that whomever the dog is depicted near would be a symbol of commitment and fidelity in a relationship.\textsuperscript{178}

These analytical frameworks can be applied to interiors to parse apart their various objects and items to understand them semiotically. This thesis suggests that a semiotic understanding of interiors is particularly helpful in order to reconstruct identities and personalities of prior inhabitants and their identity expression within a physical space. As this thesis investigates queer identities during a period in England where homosexuality and deviance from strict gender norms resulted in corporeal punishment or death, these expressions needed to be nuanced and “passable” in late Victorian society, meaning that the encoded objects were recognizable to fellow queer men, yet unrecognizable as queer signifiers to hetero-normative groups.

\textsuperscript{177} Howells and Negreiros, \textit{Visual Culture}, 113.
The images and interiors studied in the following pages are, as this thesis attempts to establish, instances of queer expression and identity construction within the domestic realm. However, to be able to exert the necessary level of economic, social, and aesthetic control over a personal domicile requires privilege. The interiors selected here belong to white, male, largely upper class, artists and collectors. These men were afforded privileges (due to their social standings, jobs, and positions) to construct a paradigm of domesticity outside of the traditional familial husband-wife model, wherein queerness could be expressed.

In order to provide structure, system, and legitimacy to the analysis of these images, a table of images, objects, and symbols has been devised based largely on the Literature Review of this thesis. This table lists nine criteria previously linked to homosexual or queer expressions that will be searched for within the interiors presented in the gathered images. This table serves to streamline the analysis and discussion of the semiotics of each interior.

Table 1. Queer Objects + Symbols Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUEER OBJECTS + SYMBOLS</th>
<th>LEIGHTON HOUSE</th>
<th>RICKETTS + SHANNON RESIDENCES</th>
<th>LORD SUTHERLAND GOWER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peacock</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunflower</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Floral Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narcissus/Mirror/Reflection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China / Chinamania</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Exotic/Foreign” Objects Greek / Ancient Objects (homophilic)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voyeuristic Apertures /Privacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of the nine criteria will be analyzed individually, and then interpreted through the interior images when applicable. The creation of a table also allows for easier cross-referencing of the symbols across the three sets of artist’s residences selected through this
research. It is also of visual aid to the discussion held within this chapter. The original table is shown below.

The objects and symbols included within this table matrix are as follows: Peacock, Lily, Sunflowers, Floral Themes, elements of the Narcissus myth or Mirrors/Reflection, the color Green, Voyeuristic opportunities or disintegrations of privacy, Blue China, “Exotic” Foreign Objects, and objects from the Ancient World. Some broader trends such as “Floral Themes” or “Voyeurism” are identified by thesis as additional symbols of queerness that, through image investigation, have suggested deeper significance to a queer interpretation. All of these objects, themes and their reasonings will be semiotically analyzed as they are discussed within this chapter. A note must be made for the inclusion of the color green, which due to the black and white nature of the images is practically impossible to identify. However, some period sources, including Oscar Wilde, documented the colors of Ricketts and Shannon’s residences in writing, and the Leighton House was captured in color image photography throughout its restoration, knowing this, some arguments can be drawn in regards to color and symbology.¹⁷⁹

3.1 Semiotic Analysis of Criteria

3.1.1 Peacock

The first symbol that must be contended with is the peacock. Figure 3.1 below depicts the taxidermy peacock that stood in the stairwell of the Narcissus Hall in the Leighton House. As mentioned in the Literature Review, the peacock was a favorite motif of the Aesthetic Movement, perhaps because the symbol carried a two-fold correspondence, or meaning in

both a contemporary and ancient context. However, before the iconographic or connotative levels are discussed, the denotative and natural must be addressed. The peacock is identifiable as an animal, more specifically of an avian grouping, and is relatively easy to distinguish from other birds with its distinct fan effect around the tail plumage, displayed by the male during its mating rituals. Additionally, the bright jewel tones of the male peacock render it rather quickly identifiable.

Figure 3.1. Leighton House Peacock, Courtesy of Leighton House Museum

Iconographically, the peacock has a multiplicity of symbolic meanings and referents to enumerate. For the Ancient Greeks, the peacock was the icon of Hera, divine goddess of women, childbirth, familial ties, and marriages. The peacock also relates to Hera on an attitudinal level. Well recognized for her jealousy and vengeance due to her husband’s

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numerous trysts, Hera’s vanity is associated with that of the peacock’s, commonly acknowledged to be a prideful and vain bird, often at the expense of its beauty. Relatedly, the image of the fighting peacocks in Whistler’s Peacock Room seems to suggest revenge, misfortune, or both.\footnote{Lambourne, \textit{The Aesthetic Movement}, 51–54.} In the Greek tradition, the peacock would also implied watchfulness, as Hera placed the hundred eyes of Argo, her loyal servant, into the fan of the peacock, after Zeus killed him in a tactical move.\footnote{Ovid, “Metamorphoses,” trans. Sir Samuel Garth and John Dryden, The Internet Classics Archive, accessed June 17, 2019, http://classics.mit.edu/Ovid/metam.1.first.html.} In the Roman tradition, Hera was recognized as Juno, and her peacock symbology was carried with her, however a peacock also denoted the “apotheosis” (or: ideal example of) a young princess, reinforcing a connection to both femininity and a royal disposition.\footnote{Cirlot, \textit{A Dictionary of Symbols}, 251.} The regality, attitude, and the specifically male beauty of the peacock dovetails interestingly with a dialogue of queerness.

The peacock was also a prevalent symbol in other cultures, including those of Islamic, Persian, and Hindu origin. Cirlot’s dictionary states that the peacock was a cosmic symbol of man’s link to a divine unity for Persian and Islamic cultures, while the colorful bird’s eye like shapes on its feathers denoted a link to the “starry firmament” in Hindu thinking.\footnote{ibid.} Being also a favored symbol of the Aesthetic Movement, and recognizing the orientalizing tastes of the movement, it exemplifies how the average aesthete ascribed to a certain level of exoticism through the many-feathered peacock, and elevated the species to an even higher level of aesthetic “appreciation” or \textit{appropriation} than ancient or near eastern cultures. The peacock was also established within the western art tradition as a symbol of Christ and the Resurrection, although as noted by Hennie Stander, the peacock is not...
included in any accurate translation of the Bible.\textsuperscript{185} Stander articulates that the Peacock’s link with everlasting life exists for a variety of reasons; its flesh was believed to never decay, it’s plumage follows a cycle of growth similar to the seasons, and its plumage also suggests a “cosmic” circle of continuation.\textsuperscript{186}

Moving into the final level, the iconological or mythic, theoretical \textit{meanings} of the peacock begin to become clear. The symbol clearly exists at the intersection of a diversity of influences. During the Aesthetic Movement, the peacock feather was directly associated with queer identity, and at times in a negative and derogatory vein that was characteristic of the cultural attitudes of the period. As stated by Lambourne:

\begin{quote}
There was a darker side to the cult for peacock feathers. They became a kind of materialised ‘pass word’ by which people ‘of the same feather’ could recognize each other, and men could confess the sins which they so vividly imagined and wrote about, but seldom really committed…\textsuperscript{187}
\end{quote}

Lambourne clearly identifies the peacock as a symbol for queer expression, particularly of the male aesthete, but also aligns homosexual behavior with the “darker side” and as a “sin” necessary to “confess.” It is unclear whether Lambourne is presenting the thoughts as his own view or if he sought to dramatize the duress and literal threat homosexual and queer individuals found themselves under during the late nineteenth century in England. Lambourne’s statement that men “seldom” had physical relations is also suspect, since it is impossible to know the specifics of sexual encounters that queer individuals may have had during the period. As the trials of Oscar Wilde, Simeon Solomon and many other men prove attest, not to mention other clandestine meetings, sexual encounters among queer individuals

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{186} \textit{ibid}, 184. \\
\textsuperscript{187} Lambourne, \textit{The Aesthetic Movement}, 78.
\end{flushleft}
did occur, and apparently with some frequency. While this thesis agrees with Lambourne that the peacock was a symbol of queer identity in the Aesthetic Movement, it seeks to reframe the negative and ill-informed narratives perpetuated in late Victorian England to create a more nuanced understanding of the marginalized and misunderstood queer faction of English society during the Aesthetic Movement.

During the Movement, the queer aesthete, befittingly schooled in the interpretation of the arts and imagery, could recognize some, if not a majority of the peacock associations. In one sense, the peacock is an almost perfect encapsulation of male queer expression during the Aesthetic Movement. The bird, prized for its beauty and elegance, is in fact male. The brownish female peahen does not exhibit the same vivid coloration as a male peacock, while the colors of the male are seen as enticing and desirable, particularly during the mating process. The male peacock then, has attributes largely considered feminine, and attributes that Aesthetes strived to achieve in their works, mainly beauty, as Stankiewicz has noted. The aesthete’s masculinity was already under fire among the contemporary media of the time, as Talia Schaffer posits, and the use of the peacock as the aesthetic “mascot” of sorts, certainly did not re-enforce a position of masculinity, rather one of feminine sensitivity and beauty.

The symbolic peacock then, could be understood as representative or personally reflective of an aesthete himself. A man, invested in fervent ideals of artistic beauty and

189 Logan, The Victorian Parlour, 62–63.
191 Stankiewicz, “From the Aesthetic Movement to the Arts and Crafts Movement,” 165.
grace, who at the same time (attempts) to exhibit those very qualities he loves, through his life, work, or other outlet. The very color scheme of the bird itself is mimicked in the Aesthetic palette, greens and blues. The peacock exudes a sense of decadence and exoticism, and mystery, analogous to the double-life one might have to lead behind closed doors, including, but not limited to one’s sexuality. Oscar Wilde led such a double life, having a wife and family, while still physically acting out his queer identity. The peacock also comes pre-packaged in publically digestible symbology, with its links to Christianity and Antiquity. Subversively, however, the symbol therefore can fly under the radar, epitomizing one meaning in a certain setting, and something completely different in another. This subversion and shifting of truths, might have appealed to the multiplicities of requirements and identities a queer individual was expected to meet in order to “pass” as normative in polite society.

3.1.2 Lily

The lily is one of the most iconic flowers associated with the Aesthetic Movement, used by both aesthete and critic to represent the (often contested) values present within the movement. Walter Hamilton, writing in 1882, identified the lily as one symbol that could be called the “badge of the true aesthete”. How then, did a simple flower like the lily become simultaneously a symbol of the Aesthetic Movement itself and perhaps a telling icon for the queer individuals involved within it?

At the natural level, the lily simply appears to be a fragrant flowering plant with approximately six large petals. In addition to the classic lily form, the cupped calla lily,
technically a separate order of plant and not truly a lily, seems to have been evoked rather interchangeably to some extent. Figure 1.21 shows Oscar Wilde satirized with a calla lily instead of the more traditional form. It is unclear whether this inconsistency is due to this particular image’s North American provenance, or simply out of artistic temperament. Yet as Figure 3.2 shows, Aesthetic Movement period artists and designers such as William Morris used the traditional six petal-form in their works as well. Morris’s lily in this particular textile is also portrayed with a stylized stem and stamens, both of which are very recognizable parts of the plant, as the lily commonly grows fairly tall often multiple feet above the ground, and its stamens protrude out from the blossoms.

Figure 3.2. “Rose and Lily”, woven silk and wool, 1893, William Morris (1835-1896). Courtesy of Artstor https://library-artstor-org.proxy.lib.iastate.edu/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822001377645.

The connotative and iconographic layer of analysis is where the lily begins to unfold interesting layers of meaning. Perhaps most important is the connotation that Anne
Anderson discusses, noting that the lily, “the flower of purity, implied that Aesthetic desire was chaste and spiritual”. However, the lily as a symbol of purity was established long before the Aesthetic Movement. There is a long history of symbolism in art history that many people would have been aware of in the 19th C, particularly painters. Cirlot notes that the lily has been linked to purity, especially as an icon of the Virgin Mary, since at least the early Medieval period. Beverly Seaton’s *Semiotics of Literary Flower Personification* links the lily as one of the three flowers (including the rose and violet) used to personify Christianity and its values, particularly linking the lily and “its cooler aspects, purity and chastity…” While lilies come in a variety of colors, the stark white of the lily represented a link to the concept of “purity”. The color white, in western culture is traditionally linked to concepts of purification and holiness, and Cirlot suggests that part of this symbolism, while prevalent in multiple settings, is inherently an alchemical process, as the “white” or “albedo” stage of metaphysical transmutation relates to ablution or cleansing (purification).

As multiple flowers will be discussed within these semiotic analyses, it is prudent to discuss a concept known as “the language of flowers” or floriography. This thesis largely relies largely on the interpretation presented by Seaton in her *Historical Semiotics*. Seaton presents that the “language of flowers” is comprised of a long history of applying meanings, personification, and identification to flowers that crystallized in continental Europe, likely France, into a system of interpretation. Floriography was also common in Victorian England where it interpolated with multiple aspects of life, including art, literature, and even

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196 Anderson, “‘Fearful Consequences . . . of Living up to One’s Teapot,’” 233.
religion. Flowers could be interpreted as “God’s messages”, if one knew how to read or understand their meanings, which were accessible either by printing press or pulpit. Elizabeth Petrino applies floriography to poetic interpretation, recognizing that homosexual desires could be expressed through literature, provided it was couched in “covert yet thoroughly understood discourse... like the language of flowers.”

Understanding the historical and socio-cultural background of the lily allows a Barthean myth to develop. For the lily to function on an iconological level, this thesis argues that the lily must relate to an underlying queer expression or desire. The lily was positioned as a recognizable icon of the Aesthetic Movement, and was used frequently as a decorative motif. Of course, not every single depiction of a lily necessarily relates to queer experience or identity. But for the aesthete, the prevalence of the lily could also be of benefit. While not worn as the green carnation to theoretically identify oneself as a homosexual as noted in the literature review, lily motifs or actual lilies themselves were present in Aesthetic domestic interiors. In Leighton House, the tiled floors in the Narcissus Hall included a mosaic lily pattern that encircled areas of the floor (See Figure 1.2).

The concept of purity is also important to a queer interpretation of the lily. Homosexuality and purity were certainly disparate concepts during late nineteenth-century England, as the Labouchère Amendment’s criminal punishments made aggressively clear. However, if the goal of the aesthete’s artistic life was to “worship” the lily (read: purity) and other aesthetic virtues such as beauty and truth, as Lambourne suggests, it becomes difficult

201 ibid.
204 Mary Eliza Joy Haweis, Beautiful Houses; Being a Description of Certain Well-Known Artistic Houses: By Mrs. Haweis. With a Preface, 4.
to reconcile these beliefs with societally unacceptable queer actions associated with some of the Aesthetic Movement’s vanguard. Unless, of course, queer aesthetes didn’t see their identities to be in violation of the very virtues that formed the cornerstone of their movement. This thesis argues that if queer expression isn’t seen as impure or sodomitical, the lily can still represent purity. Like the lily, the actions of queer couples could be and were viewed as natural and organic within this cultural subset. Natural, beautiful, and pure, the lily could thus be invoked as the apotheosis of the Aesthetic Movement, while simultaneously being a symbol and defense of homosexuality.

3.1.3 Sunflower

Continuing within the realm of flora, the sunflower vies with the lily for preeminence among the flowers of the Aesthetic Movement. Lambourne suggests that it could have even been considered the “logo” for this circle, as its simple geometry provided “visual appeal” and easy application to design motifs. The sunflower works on the primal level, as it is almost instantly recognizable among flowers, with its distinctive, yet simple, shape and coloration. Its broad leaves, tall stalk, and iconic circular head are all important parts of its basic design elements. The sunflower’s yellow-gold coloration and its proclivity to turn and “follow” the sun, can shine some light on to the origin of its naming. Oscar Wilde, in his lecture The English Renaissance, highlights the sunflower (as well as the lily), as “perfect models of design”, extremely applicable to art, due in part to the sunflower’s “gaudy leonine beauty”.

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205 Lambourne, The Aesthetic Movement, 12.
206 Lambourne, 36.
207 Oscar Wilde, The English Renaissance, a Lecture Delivered by Oscar Wilde on the Occasion of His Visit to America (Boston: John W. Luce, 1906), 41–42.
The sunflower has a particularly rich symbolic history. In particular, the flower features strongly in the Greek mythological story of Apollo and Clytie, a story that Anne Anderson believes is crucial in understanding aesthetic desire.\(^{208}\) The story of Apollo and Clytie revolves around unrequited love. Effectively, the sun deity Apollo rejected the advances of Clytie, a water nymph. After continual sordid attempts to garner Apollo’s attention, Clytie starved herself in the wilderness while staring at the sun, in a last ditch attempt to win Apollo over. The sun god’s heart was hardened, and Clytie was left to transform into a flower, often translated as the common sunflower. Anderson thus ascribes Clytie’s longing as similar to that of the aesthete’s longing to live as art, noting that the sunflower encapsulates “desire, unconditional love, constancy but also unrequited love, longing, sorrow and … hope.”\(^{209}\) The sunflower then, played an active role of energy and activity, compared to the lily’s more passive embodiment of purity, echoing Anderson’s argument that a gendered split existed between the two flowers, with the sunflower’s masculine energies contrasted by the femininity of the lily.\(^{210}\)

For the queer aesthete, the sunflower’s association with unrequited love seems to take on an even more poignant meaning. As it was not easy for a queer aesthete to act upon their desires during a morally restrictive period such as late Victorian England, the sunflower could be seen as a sublimation of that repressed sexual energy. If the sunflower represented active energy compared to the lily’s static virtue of purity, sexual energy could be envisioned and partitioned as two distinct areas (1) the acquisition and striving after aesthetic virtues in an effort to enhance one’s life and (2) the satisfaction of carnal desires considered undesirable by contemporary society. Like the lily, the sunflower was ubiquitous in its

\(^{208}\) Anderson, “‘Fearful Consequences . . . of Living up to One’s Teapot,’” 233.
\(^{209}\) Anderson, 233.
\(^{210}\) ibid, 232.
interior applications, stretching from products such as textiles to tiles and andirons, seen in Figure 3.3 below. The virility of the sunflower could serve as a reminder to an aesthete then, of identity and desire, perhaps even ad nauseam, considering the multiple applications the “logo” of the Aesthetic Movement was available in for domestic decoration. The presence of a sunflower in an interior had the potential to elicit a far more sexually charged interpretation of domestic queer identities during the Aesthetic Movement.

Figure 3.3. Sunflower Andirons, brass, 1876, Thomas Jeckyll (1827-1881). Courtesy of Artstor https://library-artstor-org.proxy.lib.iastate.edu/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822003851662
3.1.4 Other Floral Themes

While the sunflower and the lily were certainly the most recognizable floral icons of the Aesthetic Movement, they were not the only flowers utilized in the construction of domestic Aesthetic Movement interiors. Lambourne suggests that flowers and floral motifs attempted to create a unity or “common ground” between the various stylistic influences present in the Aesthetic Movement, especially those of Japanese origin, citing the inclusion of peonies, chrysanthemums, and cherry blossoms as an effective counterpoint to the more Victorian “primroses and violets, …roses and bunches of bluebells.” The designs of William Morris also reflect the inclusion of a variety of floral elements beyond the sunflower and the lily, such as the wild tulip, seen below in Figure 3.4 as an 1884 wallpaper design. These other flowers, while a part of Aesthetic Movement symbology, do not have immediately apparent links to queer society.

This thesis has included general floral motifs as a semiotic element, outside of the lily and sunflower, due largely in part to the varied residences of Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon. The six images (Figs. 1.8-1.13) this thesis analyzes of their multiple domestic environments do not seem to include any representation or physical manifestations of a lily or sunflower, however flowers are present in five of the six of the images identified here. Calloway has also noticed this trend within Ricketts and Shannon’s homes. In discussing guests’ perception of their interiors, Calloway notes that the couple’s cohesive and tasteful interiors were largely “harmonious…as flowers played a part in casting this spell.” Calloway’s observation, agrees with Lamourne’s statement that flowers were used to unify domestic interiors. This seems to indicate a trend, but it falls outside of the understood iconic

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floral symbols of the Aesthetic Movement. Therefore, this thesis approaches diverse floral elements, in general, as a potential symbol of queerness that deserves discussion in the context of a domestic interior. This thesis reifies diverse concepts of floral interpretation and their intersections with queerness to take a new stance in the interpretation of interiors.


Within the interiors that Ricketts and Shannon inhabited, the importance of their shared art collection seemed to largely take preeminence in design considerations, especially when one looks at Figs. 1.11 through 1.13. Calloway looks at Ricketts and Shannon as “natural arrangers” of their collection, displayed prominently throughout their homes whereas Cook suggests that the artists’ shared collection was, in fact, integral to the
construction of their domesticity. However, the lush florals in the background may have been a larger part of the collection than Calloway originally considered. Cook notes the importance of flowers for the couple, citing a letter written by Ricketts to a friend, where “florid” descriptive metaphors were used to describe the flowers and their scents, going even so far as to suggest that Ricketts’ language bridges into a style of sensual literary decadence. Hearkening back to the earlier discussion of the “language of flowers”, it is intriguing to consider the possible meanings Ricketts and Shannon might’ve ascribed to each blossom. It is quite possible that the couple would’ve been familiar with the socially ascribed floral language, as Petrino remarks that a large quantity of English books on the language of flowers were published in the 1840’s and 1850s. It is not clear whether Ricketts or Shannon owned any of these books, but recognizing their intense interest in flowers, it is entirely plausible. This thesis would argue that the physical presence of flowers alone was clearly of strong importance to the interiors constructed by Ricketts and Shannon, and perhaps that the inclusion thereof added a further layer of identity, emotion, and sexuality to a domestic collection already shaped by its owners’ tastes.

It is difficult to enumerate the varied forms of physical flowers, however blooms are often colloquially identified and grouped together under the term “flower” regardless of the scientific differences between them. Broadly speaking, flowers did carry one important association during the Aesthetic Movement, namely that of femininity. Schaffer, in her discussion of aesthetic sartorial choices, presents that the flower was often utilized in aesthetic fashion, where it “invited yet repudiated feminine associations” particularly because

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214 ibid., 624
a fair quantity of aesthetic male dress involved the inclusion of a flower in the ensemble.\textsuperscript{216} Schaffer’s argument implies that flower traditionally carried feminine associations rather than masculine, and thus when roles were inverted, “female Aesthetes … looked like men, and when male Aesthetes wore flowers, feathers, and jewels, they looked like women”, inverting late Victorian concepts of gender expression.\textsuperscript{217} The flower then, even during the time of Ricketts and Shannon’s earliest residences (Figure 1.8, 1884), carried a traditionally feminine meaning that had begun to be subverted by artists and aesthetes, a group that Ricketts and Shannon were certainly party to.

While associations of flowers and femininity existed, this thesis argues that during the aesthetic movement queer society viewed men wearing flowers not as feminine but as a more feminized version of a man and a symbol of a gay man. Flowers, in the case of Ricketts and Shannon, were practically elements of their ever-growing collection. As mentioned by Calloway, this proliferation of flowers was consciously noted by their guests and the pair exhibited a particular poetic fondness for the blooms present throughout the entirety of their interiors between the 1880s and early 1900s. Ricketts and Shannon employed flowers as a design element within their interiors. Semiotically, much like the inclusion of the sunflower or the lily, flower motifs or their physical flowers were applied almost anywhere in the interior, spreading them across the visual field, “filling in” the space. Cirlot notes that flowers often imply a fragile, passing connection to the earth, or a commentary on the brevity of beauty, as flowers too must fade.\textsuperscript{218} However, the power and problem of the flower during the Aesthetic Movement was its connection to femininity and a reversal of gender roles and expectations, which Anderson and Schaffer note in their discussions of the effeminate male

\textsuperscript{216} Schaffer, “Fashioning Aestheticism by Aestheticizing Fashion,” 44.
\textsuperscript{217} ibid.
\textsuperscript{218} Cirlot, \textit{A Dictionary of Symbols}, 110.
aesthete. The underlying floral intentions of Ricketts and Shannon cannot be known, but the concurrence of decoration and subversive gender roles is of interest.

3.1.5 Narcissus/Mirror/Reflection

Critiques of self-love and self-absorption plagued aesthetes throughout the Aesthetic Movement, as cartoons such as Figure 1.20 show, depicts Oscar Wilde as the classical figure of Narcissus. The period’s media conceptualized the aesthete as a self-absorbed and self-interested human being, a stereotype that Michael Hatt suggests was “often implicit in representation of the aesthete”. Narcissus could be evoked as a literal figure, such as in the Narcissus Hall in Leighton House, but the same tenets of self-image and obsession can be explored through a physical manifestation of narcissism; the mirror. Mirrors are an instructional example in artifice, extension, and perhaps even self-image. As an element in Aesthetic Movement interiors, the mirror may very well blend into the setting, as it literally reflects back its surroundings into the interior.

Mirrors are identifiable in images across the residence of Lord Frederic Leighton, Ricketts and Shannon, as well as Lord Sutherland Gower (see particularly Figs. 1.10, 1.11, 1.13, 1.15, 1.17). While a certainly functional part of an interior, on a semiotic level, the mirror seems to unlock deeper psychological meanings. First and foremost the mirror needs to be considered on the denotative level. Generally a mirror is constructed out of a glass surface that has been treated with a chemical process to create a reflective surface. If the purpose of the mirror is to be used decoratively, this surface is then likely placed in some sort of frame to provide stability as well as visual interest. Likely hung on a wall, or frequently

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219 Anderson, “‘Fearful Consequences . . . of Living up to One’s Teapot,’” 219; Schaffer, “Fashioning Aestheticism by Aestheticizing Fashion,” 44.
over the mantel (as was the vogue in the Aesthetic Movement), the mirror simultaneously takes up space while almost fading into the background.\footnote{Logan, \textit{The Victorian Parlour}, 114, 117.}

Connotatively, the mirror as symbol has a rich history. According to Cirlot, the mirror is reminiscent of “self-contemplation, consciousness, revelation”, while carrying associations to water, femininity, and lunar cycles, due to the mirror’s reflectiveness and “phasing” capacity, where it’s passivity necessitates an object it can reflect, thus moving in and out of periods of reflection or absence.\footnote{Cirlot, \textit{A Dictionary of Symbols}, 211.} The mirror’s classic connection to water, reflectivity, and self-absorption are nowhere more clear than in the classic Greek myth of Narcissus, who cursed by Nemesis, fell in love with his own reflection in a pool of water, eschewing the love of Echo. The mirror also exists as a potential mode of transport, from which humans or spirits can leave this material plane for another, much like Lewis Carroll’s Alice, as well as a symbol of doubling, doppelgängers, or the Jungian unconscious.\footnote{ibid.} The mirror’s vitality as a symbol seems to rely largely on the “mystery” of what it reflected back to the viewer, perhaps a good omen or a portent of some underlying evil plaguing the mind or body. Dorian Gray, Oscar Wilde’s fictional character (yet recognizably similar to Wilde), had a portrait that functioned much like a duplicitous mirror, a living record of the crimes committed against the body, invisible to the naked eye, but marring the subconscious (i.e. Gray’s portrait).

The mirror finds particular resonance within the oeuvre of the Aesthetic Movement. Briefly straying from the symbolic, Potvin provides an anecdote for the use of mirrors in the domestic interiors constructed by Ricketts and Shannon. Ricketts is quoted in a personal letter to a friend as saying that “mirrors should be allowed to talk”, which Potvin interprets as
the use of mirrors to “elicit a conversation between objects as well as between objects and people”.

Figure 3.5. “Andy Brill, Edwin and Angelina in Paris” (1878), 2012, https://www.flickr.com/photos/angeljim46/8019445658.

This analysis of mirrors would certainly make sense recognizing how pervasive the art collection of Ricketts and Shannon was in all their interiors, including their floral backdrops. Mirrors were certainly points of contention within the Aesthetic Movement, as the latent homosexuality implied in the self-absorption of Narcissus was not lost on contemporary critics. The aesthetic pining and longing present in many of Punch Magazine’s cartoon (Figs. 1.1, 2.1) is a common recurring theme, and Narcissism was often depicted in

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the classical form of an aesthete staring into the placid surface of a lake (Figure 1.20). However, the *Punch* cartoon “Edwin and Angelina in Paris” (Figure 3.5), directly utilizes the mirror to equate self-absorption and homosexuality. The original caption reads as follows:

Angelina. ‘Do you like the style of mural decoration, Edwin?’
Edwin. ‘Yes, love! It enables me to See on every wall the face and form I love best in the world.’
Angelina. ‘Oh, Edwin! darling!—You make me blush!’
Edwin. ‘I didn’t mean yours, love! I meant mine.’

This research argues that an understanding of self-absorption as a slippery slope to homosexuality was, if not developed, at least relied upon as a system of identification during the Aesthetic Movement. Hatt suggests that there existed “an unmistakable slippage from heterosexuality, through Aesthetic identity, to homosexuality, as if the Aesthete was the pivot of a moral slide from norm to deviance”, although narcissism was naturally not limited to those of queer identity. The Aesthete then, in the “philistine mind” existed as a figure that was rather like an arbiter of all things decadent and bridging on salacious, regardless of suspected or professed sexual orientation.

The iconologic or mythic interpretation of a mirror for a queer aesthete is not particularly difficult to construct. Recognizing the already contested relationship between the aesthete and the mirror, a thread of legitimate queerness does seem to emerge. While this research does not argue that the simple inclusion of a mirror effectively queers a space on its own, it does seem to elude to ideas of a split or questioning identity and sublimated or hidden desires especially when contextualized within the domestic interiors of men embroiled in and around queerness and the Aesthetic community. Within the interiors of Ricketts and Shannon, a couple whose decades long cohabitation was rarely questioned by the public due, as Potvin suggests, to their presentation of “middle class values of safety, order, cleanliness, 

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and peace”, the prevalence of mirrors becomes tentatively indicative of a hidden or underlying queer fascination with the self, duplicity, and beauty.226

3.1.6 Blue China / Chinamania

Another iconic symbol of the Aesthetic Movement is blue china. A particular fetish of Aesthetes, the fascination with blue china during the Aesthetic Movement was historically cemented when, during his time at Oxford, Oscar Wilde supposedly pronounced one of his most famous dictums; “I find it harder and harder every day to live up to my blue china,” which Lambourne suggests was the career “lift-off” point for the young Wilde.227 The craze for blue china, however, would not have been possible without England’s prowess in international trade, as antique artifacts from the far East, namely China and Japan, filtered into the English market with growing frequency in 1860 while domestically, English porcelain production increased.228

On the denotative level, “old blue” china is a white porcelain product that exhibits hand-painted patterns in blue, including flowers, plants, birds, nature scenes, and other patterns, similar in theme to the Japanese products, as Logan notes, also entering Aesthetic vogue around the same time.229 Old blue came in a variety of shapes and sizes from decorative plates to vases, urns, etc., and although domestic English productions of porcelain were not always faithful reproductions, as Logan is quick to point out, it added to the availability of porcelain for the middle class.230 As a decorative object this china was largely

226 Potvin, Bachelors of a Different Sort, 123.
227 Lambourne, The Aesthetic Movement, 40.
229 Logan, The Victorian Parlour, 189.
230 ibid.
meant for contemplation and aesthetic pleasure, rather than utility, a facet of the chinamania phenomena that was routinely ridiculed as noted by Anderson (see Figure 2.1).231

The iconography of blue porcelain china during the Aesthetic Movement is an interesting case. While the history of authentic Chinese blue porcelain is certainly rich, this analysis focuses on the European contextualization (or in some cases, appropriation) of the porcelain’s style. Porcelain was certainly not a new introduction into European high society, as tea-culture had prized and utilized porcelain since at least the early 18th century which, according to Anderson, ascribed porcelain (and tea service) to be representative of “refinement [and] gentility”, but also of a threatening “femininity” that could besmirch men’s social status if they expressed too much interest therein.232 Anderson also theorizes that the “femininity” of china also extended to perceptions of late nineteenth-century women as “delicate and fragile”, implying that women’s desires and emotional needs were simply based on the “vagaries of fashion”.233 Following this logic, if women simply embodied the qualities and domestic values of their decorative objects, a woman could simultaneously be fragile and hyper-feminine, yet necessary to upholding a certain sense of proper domesticity, despite the critique of excess concerning the chinamania craze.

For a woman of aesthetic disposition, to be interested in china was perhaps expected, despite the various critiques of chinamania and excessive collecting. On the other hand, however, for a man to take a strong interest in china, was almost anathema to his prescribed gender role and social responsibility, especially as a collector. For example, Anderson draws a distinction between the responsibilities of the male and female collector, noting that female collections were tasked to “integrate” with the home and its changing fashions, whereas the

231 Anderson, “‘Fearful Consequences . . . of Living up to One’s Teapot,’” 238.
232 ibid., 221
233 ibid., 222
man’s was intended to educate and provide for academic posterity: Collecting the “wrong way” for one’s gender was seen as a form of gender betrayal.\textsuperscript{234} This is also evident in period satirical cartoons of the time, (see for example Figures 1.1, 2.1) where the male aesthete is portrayed with either effeminate pose, language, or both, in regards to his consummate fascination with old blue and china. These cartoons present Chinamania as an almost debilitating disease, where the acquisition and contemplation of objects is critical to the life and well-being of the aesthetic individual.

For the queer aesthete, the collecting of old blue draws a tenuous line between socially acceptable design trends and an almost public subversion of traditional gender norms. Even men of the early nineteenth century were very familiar with the feminine associations of china as a quote by the poet Charles Lamb almost embarrassingly admits:

I have an almost feminine partiality for old china. When I go to see any great house, I inquire for the china-closet, and next for the picture gallery. I cannot defend the order of preference, but by saying, that we have all some taste or other, of too ancient a date to admit of our remembering distinctly that it was an acquired one.\textsuperscript{235}

This line opens Lamb’s essay entitled “Old China” and, as if an attempt to distance himself from any untoward interpretation, Lamb addresses that he recognizes the purposed femininity of china, before assuring the reader he has a particular interest in it, stereotyping the enjoyment of china collecting as something to be ashamed of. Writing in 1823, the feminization that Lamb associated with china continually followed “old blue” all the way to the Aesthetic Movement approximately five decades later.

The contemporary aesthete, while not the origin point of the conflation between porcelain and femininity, rather exacerbated the connection. Oscar Wilde’s re-invigoration of

\textsuperscript{234} Anderson, ““Fearful Consequences . . . of Living up to One’s Teapot,’” 247.

\textsuperscript{235} Charles Lamb, \textit{Old China, Being One of the Last Essays of Elia}, Reading Circle (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1895), 69.
porcelain as an aesthetic object to be collected and coveted was, according to Anderson, construed by critics as a sickness, restricting the libido of men and the familial instincts of women. As effeminacy was already associated with aesthetic men, particularly if they were in some way involved with china, the Aesthetic Movement’s contemporary narrative already points to an interpretation of queerness regarding these individuals. China was condemned by critics, yet canonized by the Aesthetes. This thesis argues that queer aesthetes also struck a similar balance between those of philistine or aesthetic temperament. On the one hand, queerness, effeminacy, and certainly homosexuality were derided and mistrusted by the large majority of English society near the end of the nineteenth century. However, within the artistic havens and pockets that existed within the cognoscenti of the Aesthetic Movement, a certain tolerance seems to have developed or existed for these kinds of expressions, if one considers the various eccentricities in tastes (artistic, sexual, and otherwise), dress, and even domesticities (see Ricketts and Shannon) that existed under the umbrella of Aestheticism. The queer aesthete arguably carved out a status of security between Aestheticism and the Philistinism of the everyday, despite the criticism and subtle allowance of gender-deviant practices and expressions, uniquely similar to the nineteenth century dialogue surrounding blue china.

3.1.7 “Exotic” Objects / Ancient Objects

Less of a symbol and more of a thematic element within itself, the Aesthetic Movement had a fascination with the “Other” or styles and objects that either hearkened back to, aestheticized, orientalized, or often appropriated past foreign or historical cultures for decorative use. In this context, the word “appropriate” means “to take or make use of without authority or right”, and in the case of the Aesthetic Movement is often seen hand-in-

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236 Anderson, “‘Fearful Consequences . . . of Living up to One’s Teapot,’” 223.
hand with “orientalize”, or “to make Asian: give Asian qualities to”. Lambourne theorizes that this wealth of “new” and diverse cultural influences stems largely from the publication of a book, namely Owen Jones’s “The Grammar of Ornament” in 1856. Thad Logan presents an additional factor, which is the rapidly increasing accessibility of travel for the middle class as it became cheaper, faster, and more common with industrialization. This increase in continental traffic exposed English citizens to (literally) new horizons and urbanities, while artists could diversify their offerings, including representations of the far away locales such as the Middle East. This thesis argues that this new exposure to international geographies, whether through travel, artistic representation, or image, resulted in a proliferation of “foreign” objects in the domestic interior that could also function as suggestions of queer identity.

The terms “foreign” or “exotic” are loaded terms to contend with as they can take on different meanings depending on their context. To mitigate this, an explanation of what these terms mean in the context of Aesthetic Movement Victorian domesticity is necessitated. Logan presents a malleable definition of “foreign objects” that allows for both specificity and flexibility within a late Victorian era context. Logan defines “foreign objects” as objects that “originated outside [the home’s] horizon and articulated a sense of difference from it” or objects that “by virtue of their provenance or their design or their outright narrative elements, allude to a world distinct from the middle-class Victorian home…some objects gesture[ing] toward the far ends of the earth.” Most importantly for Logan, however, is that these

239 Logan, The Victorian Parlour, 138.
240 Logan, 181–82.
objects are “recognizable as foreign” due to their diverse points of stylistic origin.\textsuperscript{241} This thesis agrees with Logan’s analysis of the foreign object. Arguably, the foreign object gains real relevance to the domestic interior because it is “other” or outside of the average day-to-day of the Victorian citizen which, this thesis argues, is also key to the queer aesthete’s experience and their construction of domesticity.

Of course, foreign influence in interior design is not a concept original to the Aesthetic Movement let alone England. Take for example, the development of chinoiserie in France, which Hsai defines as “denoting Early European interest in Chinese arts: interior decorations, furniture, architecture, gardening, pottery, and textiles.”\textsuperscript{242} The vogue for chinoiserie in England developed in the eighteenth century, but a continuing fascination for elements reminiscent of the “Orient” was still prevalent during the Aesthetic Movement. Hsai, however, makes an important point that is, in the opinion of this thesis, often overlooked when it comes to chinoiserie and other “orientalist” tastes. Namely, the accuracy of these “Chinese” pieces were largely incongruent with their source material, but were still largely enjoyed by their intended public audiences. Hsai states that chinoiserie “presented a false vision of the real Chinese prospect” due to its only partial assimilation of Chinese style and an apparent combination with Gothic tastes, leading to an “appealing fusion” between East and West.\textsuperscript{243} What, at the time, may have been an appealing fusion or design ethos, would now perhaps be seen as cultural appropriation, in the sense that European chinoiserie essentially poorly copied off of and profited from Chinese and Asian cultures without

\textsuperscript{241} ibid.
\textsuperscript{243} Hsai, 239–40.
affording them their due respects. Foreign influence in domestic interiors did not end with chinoiserie as the Aesthetic Movement and Jones’s *Grammar of Ornament* can certainly attest to. However, this thesis contends that many of these “foreign objects” may exhibit a questionable cultural authenticity depending on their provenance, i.e. whether they were European copies or original pieces. There is even room for a larger dialogue to be held about the use of authentic foreign objects as decoration in a culturally incongruent interior, or an interior where the foreign object is removed from its context, which this thesis bridges on.

Interestingly, the use of the foreign or exotic object as interior decoration within the Aesthetic Movement seems to be a fairly common practice. Logan notes the same, mentioning that the foreign object was often relegated to a particular area or corner of the parlor, which seems to suggest its utility as a conversation starter or similar “pretty thing”. Some interiors, however, dedicated entire rooms to be decorated in an exotic or foreign style. In the case of Frederic Leighton, the Arab Hall was an homage to the Moorish style, taking particular inspiration from a temple that pastiched both Norman and Moorish influences together. Of course, complete *gesamtkunstwerk* interiors like Lord Leighton’s were largely attainable only by those of significant means, likely of the upper class. However, the application and acceptability of the foreign or exotic object was embraced by upper and middle class alike perhaps, in the opinion of this thesis, due to the supposed sense of worldliness and experience such objects implied, constructing a new, travelled, form of the “virtue object”, returning to Stankiewicz’s earlier concept of value identification in domestic interiors of the Aesthetic Movement.

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244 *ibid.*
247 Stankiewicz, “From the Aesthetic Movement to the Arts and Crafts Movement,” 165, 168.
This newly minted, “exotic” virtue object represented cultures and ideals foreign to period English society. However, during the mid to late nineteenth-century, it was not only foreign locales that were under revaluation, but also the world of the Ancient Greeks and the Romans that were welcomed back into contemporary society. Stefano Evangelista notes that the works of Plato were of particular relevance to “a community of scholars close to the aesthetic movement” including Oscar Wilde, Walter Pater, and John Addington Symonds. Of most interest, is Evangelista’s hypothesis that these particular scholars developed interpretations of Plato focusing on “the suppressed significance of Plato’s mythic conception of eros” (understood as homosexual love), which they believed could be applied towards a beginning for the “emancipation of homosexuality”. The works of Greek philosophy have been important to a wide range of design and academic movements, and were likely somewhat familiar to the educated man, to some extent. However, the Aesthetic interest in Plato, according to Linda Dowling, was largely due to Benjamin Jowett’s Complete Dialogues of Plato, the very first complete English translation of the entirety of Plato’s works, originally going to publication in 1871. The completion of Jowett’s translation, presenting the entirety of Plato’s work, allowed for students young and old alike to access knowledge that was previously difficult to obtain. Plato’s works were considered edifying literature, and as Evangelista notes, “stumbling across” Plato during the course of one’s education was quite common for middle-class male students, therefore also stumbling across academic vindication of one’s homosexuality. This thesis holds that the

249 ibid.
251 Evangelista, “‘Lovers and Philosophers at Once’: Aesthetic Platonism in the Victorian ‘Fin de Siècle,’” 232.
democratization of knowledge and visibility of diverse identities are important to the social edification of an individual. Thus, for a young queer individual to be able to find identity or recognition within the respect, ancient, works of Plato can be seen as a form of empowerment.

The queer fascination with Hellenism may have found its theoretical base in Plato, but it certainly extended beyond the works of the philosopher. Particularly, within the plastic arts, Greek sculpture (both ancient and nineteenth century works in the style of) and the fascination with the (naked) body found resonance within the Victorian Movement at large. As Logan reports, nudity became an acceptable artistic theme, assuming that it followed a canon of respectability or “purity”, adhering to “conventional prohibitions of color, body hair and details of genitalia” specifically regarding the female nude.252 Nudity, if presented appropriately, could find purchase within the domestic interior, while avoiding connotations of overt sexuality or pornographic interpretations. Conversely, the sculptural nudes of Lord Frederic Leighton seem to take on a homoerotic interpretation, at least in current contemporary consideration. Rictor Norton finds Leighton’s male nude sculptures The Sluggard and Athlete Struggling with a Python as homoerotic, perhaps based on a series of intimate letters sent between Leighton and his first patron, Henry Greville.253 This evidence feels rather tenuous, but Keren Rosa Hammerschlag provides a more supportive stance for grounding Leighton’s male sculptural nudes as homoerotic. Hammerschlag cites a photograph of Leighton in his studio (Figure 3.6) where Leighton is shown holding a miniature of Aphrodite Torso (fragmented, female body), while looking at a model of The Sluggard (complete, male body). She argues that this fondling of the broken female form,  

252 Logan, The Victorian Parlour, 129.  
while gazing at the “perfect” male body can be seen as a form of displacement of homosexual desire, and the placement of the Aphrodite statuette in relation to Leighton’s body is almost phallic and perhaps masturbatory. Leighton’s sculptural work can be read as a dialogue of sublimated or displaced desires realized through the sculptural male and female body.

Although it is difficult to parse Leighton’s true intent with his sculptures, the nude body during the late Victorian period capitalized on hidden anxieties and carnal desires of the populace at the time. However, Hatt presents a convincing argument that many period thinkers such as Pater, Symonds, and Leighton, yet again, attempted to find ways to re-invigorate classical sculpture where they could “move the heart” or spark an engrossing synaesthetic experience, not attainable within museum walls. This attempt at a synaesthetic approach seems to mimic Haweis’ earlier approach at encapsulating Aesthetic interiors through lush and descriptive writing. Interestingly, Hatt cites Leighton’s Narcissus Hall (which Haweis discussed in Beautiful Houses) as an example that invigorates classical sculpture, referring to the bronze copy of Narcissus from the Naples Archaeological Museum, removed from both museum and Ancient Greek context, but enlivened by the wash of colors, textures, and experiential nature of Leighton’s Narcissus Hall. As Hatt posits, experiencing a Classical sculpture in a space similar to Narcissus Hall would likely be more immersive, emotional and fascinating. Cook, in separate article, notes that Ricketts and Shannon also had a plethora of Hellenic sculptures in their collection, further linking them to

256 ibid., 779-781
a “self-consciously cultured homophile milieu”. Classical sculptures also appear to be present in Figs. 1.14 and 1.17 in Lord Gower’s residence. While these last two examples may not have presented their Hellenic sculptures with the grandeur of Leighton, these symbols were part and parcel of their interiors. This thesis argues, that the presence of these Classical figures in a queer domestic interior generated powerful emotions of displaced desire and queer identification, despite a setting’s grandeur or presumed historical accuracy to Antiquity.

Figure 3.6. **Frederic Leighton, Baron Leighton**, Ralph Winwood Robinson, published by C. Whittingham & Co platinum print, published 1892. © National Portrait Gallery, London

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Understanding the theoretical significances of both “foreign/exotic” objects and those stemming in part from Antiquity is important in deciphering the dialogue of queer semiotic interpretation on the third and final level. It must include not only what these objects represent, but additionally what they mean and imply about the individuals who placed them in their domestic environments. A definitive answer may be challenging, but there are certainly grounds for discussion. The “foreign” or exotic object and the ancient object both make reference to a time or place that is likely outside of the queer aesthete’s immediate ken. These objects represent an ideal, something either fantasized about or perhaps even longed after. In the case of Antiquity, this represented both the longing after a somewhat more inclusive society for the homosexual, or a masking technique for sexual desire, utilizing socially acceptable nudity as a way to communicate one’s desires or preferences. The foreign object strikes a similar tone, and themes of longing and desire can be seen within them as well. Interestingly, the foreign object is routinely out of cultural context, or designed as an imperfect representation of a particular style. The queer aesthete is, in a sense, out of context as well with their immediate cultural landscape. While they were not “valued” for their differences by late Victorian society, the inherent exoticism and mystery surrounding these objects of foreign influence or origin mimic some themes of a stereotypical bohemian lifestyle, of which many aesthetes exhibited. Of course, speaking plainly, there is an element of play, fantasy, and frivolity to these foreign styles that was not lost on the aesthete. Potvin mentions the Victorian Turkish Bath as a site of homosocial/homosexual activity, in part due to its exoticism.258 The queer aesthete was able to construct, piece together, or fantasize about an existence where their queerness was either encouraged or allowable, with objects

from shores both foreign and ancient, pointing towards escape, new beginnings, and unfamiliar traditions.

3.1.8 Voyeuristic Apertures /Privacy

Visibility and privacy are two major principles in the construction of domestic interiors within the Aesthetic Movement, just as they are considerations for the queer person who must live within them. The porosity of the Victorian interior, as spoken to by Potvin, Stankiewicz, and Logan, results in a shifting cast of characters who may at times inhabit a queer individual’s supposedly “personal” space.\(^{259}\) Assuming Judith Butler is correct in saying that gender is a performance, this thesis argues that one’s own interior is the stage for that performance.\(^{260}\) How the process of accumulating and constructing an interior changed based on one’s sexual identity is one of the major questions that this thesis addressed. An important aspect of “constructing” an interior, however, is controlling who has access to a space, and what level of privacy or openness the primary inhabitant requires. Privacy and control are doubly important for the interiors of queer-identified individuals, as Urbach makes clear with his discussion of the closet, both physical and theoretical, as a space for controlled access to a hidden identity.\(^{261}\) In modern parlance, to be “closeted”, usually refers to a queer individual who, whether due to concerns of safety or otherwise, has not publicly pronounced their identity to a group of people, often family or friends. During the late nineteenth-century in England, a public “coming out” was not necessarily a milestone for the queer individual, due to the deleterious effects that that could have across one’s life, including social, economic, and physical consequences, as evidenced by public shaming of


and legalized criminalization for sodomy.\footnote{262} Public presentation of queer identity was limited, but the domestic interior presented a veritable stage for performance and presentation of one’s identity, as this thesis argues.

This presentational relationship between the domestic interior and a queer identity is also advocated by Betsky in a more modern context when he argues the following.

By providing a choreography of sensual delights, you can create your own relationship to the physical world. By decorating that world, you can create a technology of comfort that can form a buffer between you and the world, while creating another, fantasy-full environment that you can construct within the world.\footnote{263}

Although Betsky is referring to a more contemporary era, what he suggests is applicable to the queer aesthetes of the Aesthetic Movement. This thesis identified the objects and techniques that helped construct and create a personal fantasy-like environment. Privacy can be achieved in a variety of ways within an interior. At the denotative level, within the Aesthetic Movement, visual privacy was largely achieved through the use of window coverings and decorative screens, both of which could prevent or provide visual access to particular areas of an interior (or exterior) depending on their particular application.\footnote{264}

Within the period photos assembled in this thesis, windows do not feature prominently perhaps due to an attempt to control light, but within Figs. 1.4, 1.10, 1.13, and 1.14 either windows or a screen can be identified. Other images of Leighton House (Figs. 1.2, 1.3, 1.5-1.7) exhibit evidence of directional shadows on the floor, reflections on walls, and what appears to be a window nook and skylight, gives clues to the potential existence of natural light in these spaces as well. Again recognizing the Aesthetic Movement’s tenets of

\footnote{262} Henderson, “The Voiceless Colonizer,” 2,4.
\footnote{264} Logan, _The Victorian Parlour_, 120; Potvin, _Bachelors of a Different Sort_, 117.
“Sweetness and Light”, a fondness for natural light would seem to fall in line with Aesthetic ideals.\(^{265}\) Moving on to the connotative level, it is important to remember that “Light” within the Aesthetic Movement also implied the virtue of Truth, or the search for it, as if one was casting a light to reveal something hidden.\(^{266}\) Thus windows could serve a dual purpose of providing functional light, while conveniently appearing to strive toward an Aesthetic doctrinal maxim. Windows, the aperture through which natural light was most likely to enter the interior through have been characterized by Potvin as follows:

[Akin to the] relationship of the eyes to the body; where the window operates as the eye in to the domestic interior and its occupant, so too the eye is the window into the interiority of the body’s occupant, the very soul of his identity.\(^{267}\)

Windows were thus both literally and figuratively a way for individuals to see into the home. Peering into an environment might reveal things that the inhabitant would rather keep hidden, such as a non-normative sexuality or acts considered “indecent” or not for public display. Thus the management of the window aperture, and a subtle level of voyeurism, could be mediated through the use of window coverings. Windows however, work both ways, one can look either in or out, depending on perspective.

The window opening, according to Cirlot, has historically symbolized outlets, hopes of salvation or escape, new understanding, and communication: Whereas a lack of windows could even be perceived as chastity or virginity.\(^{268}\) While one cannot suggest that these symbolic meanings were at the forefront of an inhabitant’s mind when planning an interior, the importance of windows and lighting were certainly not lost to society. In late Victorian

\(^{266}\) *ibid.*
\(^{267}\) Potvin, *Bachelors of a Different Sort*, 117.
England windows and lighting were important points within sanitation and health reform efforts, as noted by Logan in her discussion of the domestic interior.\textsuperscript{269} The window could help air a room, and Logan presents a multitude of debates around the virtues of particular forms of artificial lighting. However, accusations of artificiality and darkness within the interior could be the death knell for queer aesthetes. As mentioned in Chapter One, the environmental factors of lighting, darkness, and private seclusion, were used as evidence in the Wilde trials to convict him of acts of sodomy.\textsuperscript{270} Thus the appropriate application of visual openness, acceptable levels of privacy, and particular lighting schemes could effectively allow a queer aesthete to “pass” and meet standards of respectability, truly standards of interior design, that Oscar Wilde apparently irrevocably violated in his relationship with Alfred Taylor.

However, other aesthetes were able to apply these principles effectively, or at least acceptably. In particular, the interiors of Ricketts and Shannon stand out as being effective examples of navigating these particular terms of engagement. Claire Wintle has researched the social dimension of collecting during the Victorian and Edwardian eras and posits that collecting is truly an act of “public relations” as the collection is meticulously constructed by its owner, meant to be displayed (i.e. viewed), and imparts a particular message to “both imaginary and actual audiences.”\textsuperscript{271} While this thesis has discussed the social implications of collecting previously, Wintle’s concept of “public relations” applies directly to the case of Ricketts and Shannon. The artistic couple’s art collection was not merely private, it was meant to be shared and enjoyed by those individuals they invited into their home, effectively

\textsuperscript{269} Logan, \textit{The Victorian Parlour}, 48, 123.
\textsuperscript{270} Potvin, \textit{Bachelors of a Different Sort}, 116, 122.
a form of public relation. Cook states that it was this collection that “legitimized” the pair within normative Victorian sensibilities, cementing Ricketts and Shannon within the “masculine tradition [of academic collecting] and within metropolitan bohemian and artistic culture that linked [them] to national and imperial investments in particular histories and civilizations.”

Principles of privacy and public openness in the home of Ricketts and Shannon were achieved largely through their collected artifacts. Their collection and social status as artists allowed “transparency” into their personal domestic life for those who came to visit their shared home. The use of windows, draperies, and screens as forms of masking did not seem to be prominent. Yet, Ricketts and Shannon clearly used window coverings, as visible in the interiors of the Value and Lansdowne House (Figs. 1.10 and 1.13 respectively). The sheerness of the curtains in Lansdowne House is of particular interest. According to Calloway, these particular curtains are Morris patterns “printed without their dark background” that were specially ordered by the pair, allowing light to flood the space. Light, as mentioned was a prime aesthetic virtue, and also imparts concepts of cleanliness. Perhaps Ricketts and Shannon simply wanted to maximize light to better show off their collection in Lansdowne house, or the light may have represented a change of taste in the early 1900s. This influx of light, and sheerness of drapery highlighting a quasi-public collection seems to be asking for scrutiny, and inviting the outside visitor in. Almost as if in rebuttal to the darkness and separation commonly associated with queer identities at the time, Ricketts and Shannon seem to step into their own as acceptable post-Victorian figures,

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infused with the clarity of light and status granted by an academic collection, giving no grounds to any implication of sexual impropriety.

Leighton House, specifically the Arab Hall is another example of privacy, openness, and perhaps even voyeurism. Constructed by architect George Aitchinson in 1877-1888, this orientalist interior was literally pieced together from historic Iznik tiles that Leighton had collected from Damascus, combined with tiles made by artist William de Morgan, resulting in an interior that, as Gere purports, existed purely to house Leighton’s tile collection. Exotic, foreign, and other, Frederic Leighton’s Arab Hall already seems to hint at an underlying queer, sexual tension. Bearing in mind the homoerotic undertones in Leighton’s art, including the theme of Narcissus adjacent to the Arab Hall, the space’s interpretation as queer seems fitting. In fact, Jason Edwards finds the entirety of the home to be a queer expression. For example, Edwards cites a “screening” or “closeting” effect as one moves throughout the house, where “experience of sublime, unexpected changes in scale and style, again resonant of potentially unpredictable riches and spaces within Leighton’s subjectivity” often occurred.

Leighton House can be read then as a series of closet-metaphors, where identity and perception shift upon entering new spaces. Edwards also notes the inclusion of the zenana (a manipulable window screen, similar to a mashrabiya) in the antechamber near the Picture Room, that functions as a screening technique, providing porosity, visibility, and secrecy depending on one’s physical viewpoint within the space. This feeling of visibility/non-visibility continues into the Arab Hall where it could even be seen as voyeurism, due to the mashrabiyas that literally screen vision but allow light to filter in from above, without direct

274 Gere, Artistic Circles, 145, 148.
275 Edwards and Hart, Rethinking the Interior, c.1867-1896, 97–98.
276 ibid., 98
visual access either in or out. Voyeurism and sexual urges are also hinted at, as Edwards notes, by the “multiple viewpoints” into the Arab Hall, as well as the auditory stimuli of the water fountain, reminiscent of the popular Turkish baths, a known locale for cruising where artist Simeon Solomon had been caught in the act. Visibility, viewpoint, and privacy were thus important elements to Leighton House. Although not necessarily discussed through a language of traditional window and curtain, the concept of screening and transparency mixed with a penchant for exoticism, resulted in an erotically charged space, again perhaps seen as acceptable due to Leighton’s position and social standing, both as an aesthete and President of the Royal Academy.

What then, do visibility and voyeurism imply within a queer interior? As seen with the case studies of Frederic Leighton and Ricketts and Shannon, these concepts can be applied differently within individual domesticities. Whereas Ricketts and Shannon welcomed light into their home, Leighton seemed to screen and diffuse it. Leighton valued surprise, multi-perspective views, and experience, whereas Ricketts and Shannon lived a more traditional domestic life. Letting the “outside” in was a personal question, with a personal solution. However, this tension between the public and private, already present in late nineteenth-century interiors, found deeper footing with the queer individual. Public display could be disastrous, yet it was imperative to present somewhat normatively for safety’s sake. Thus the domestic interior apertures to the outside world, such as windows and natural light, were valued differentially between queer individuals. This thesis argues that proper manipulation of the public/private divide through the agents of screen, window, and light can

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277 ibid., 140.
278 Potvin, Material and Visual Cultures beyond Male Bonding, 1870-1914, 1.
serve as important indicators of queer identity expression, especially in relation to one’s society at large.

### 3.1.9 Color

The final symbol of queerness that this thesis considers is rather contentious. Color is certainly an important part of the Aesthetics Movement’s history and style, yet black and white photography could not capture the richness of the Aesthetic Movement’s palette. Thus, all of the images selected for analysis are not in color. However, due to extant texts, references, as well as to faithful restorations, colors of particular interiors are known. Therefore, this thesis can gather some interpretations surrounding the use of color in the Aesthetic Movement, although limited. The literature review spoke to the prevalence of the color green within the Movement, both as a color of “artistic temperament” and a “decadence of morals” as Wilde himself said.²⁷⁹ The Aesthetic Movement was satirized for its obsession with the color green, as Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Patience* attests with its description of the “greenery-yallery” of the Grosvenor Gallery, referring to the greens and golds that the famous Aesthetic Movement locale’s walls were painted with.²⁸⁰

On the denotative level, the color green is very recognizable, and exists between blue and yellow on the visible spectrum. Green’s symbolic richness is discoverable when considered connotatively. Cirlot writes that green is associated with nature, fertility, growth, and physical sensation.²⁸¹ This association with sensation and physicality seems to mimic green’s attribution of “decadent” as prescribed by Wilde above. At the same time during the Aesthetic Movement, the color green was being linked to the Aesthete as a sign of

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²⁷⁹ Oscar Wilde, *Intentions*.
immorality and, particularly, homosexuality. As discussed on pages 36-37, green had taken on a queer connotation of homosexuality, largely due to Wilde’s adoption of the artificial green carnation as a personal, and identifying symbol, mimicked by those in his group. While embraced in a design context, the color green was simultaneously derided by critics as suspect of some underlying malady, such as Le Gallienne’s charge of sexual immorality.282 Of course not every individual who applied green to their walls or interiors was queer, despite how Aesthetes were characterized.

Interestingly, all three of the aesthetic interiors chosen for this thesis seem to include rooms with green walls, according to secondary sources. Unfortunately, due to the photographs coloration, it is impossible to identify. Lord Leighton’s Picture Gallery (Figure 1.5) has been restored to its green wall color through paint sample research and reconstruction by a conservation team. (See Figure 3.7 below).283 During her tour of Leighton House, Haweis also noticed “peacock-greeny arches” and a “greeny-silver ceiling”.284 Although no color photos exist of Ricketts and Shannon’s home at the Vale (Figure 1.10), Calloway notes that the residence had previously been kept by Whistler for a mistress and, as such, the two “inherited…the master’s decorative schemes such as walls distempered in ‘artistic colors’ like primrose yellow or moss green.”285 Wilde notably commented on their walls as well, enjoying the yellow “color of joy” in a certain room.286 Finally, referring to his ground floor sitting room (Figure 1.17), Lord Gower writes in *Bric-Á-Brac*, that:

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282 Le Gallienne, Richard, *Prose Fancies (Second Series)*.
286 *ibid.*, 21
On the walls of this little room I have had the colour that Sir Edwin Landseer recommended as best for pictures hung - namely, a dull pale green, as like the colour of a grouse's egg as possible. This colour harmonises admirably with the gilded cornice, door, and mirror frames and outer frame of the fire place…

Although the color of Gower’s gilding is not known, it is tempting to believe that it may’ve been gold in hue. It is however intriguing to note that the color green does, in fact, seem to be a color of artists. Leighton, himself an artist, used green in his interiors. Ricketts and Shannon, also artists, inherited and apparently kept Whistler’s artistic color scheme. Lastly, Lord Gower took the advice of artist Sir Edwin Landseer, for the color of his sitting room.

Figure 3.7. Leighton House, Restored Picture Room, Courtesy of Purcell
https://www.purcelluk.com/projects/leighton-house-museum-kensington

287 Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower, “Bric À Brac”; or, Some Photoprints Illustrating Art Objects at Gower Lodge, Windsor, 8.
At the final, mythic layer, the color green does seem to have connections to an artistic or bohemian lifestyle. Perhaps this is simply because the Aesthetic Movement prized green, and it was adopted by artistic circles. Wilde however, capitalized on the connotations of green when he introduced the green carnation as his symbol, and nineteenth-century sexologist Havelock Ellis was under the suspicion that green was the preferred color for homosexuals. Disregarding the precarious veracity of Ellis’s statement, green does appear to be linked to queerness. Its utilization in an Aesthetic Movement interior does not solely imply that the inhabitant is queer. But when individuals who are demonstrably queer (or at least non-normative in comparison to their historical counterparts), part of the Aesthetic circle, likely aware of then contemporary critiques around green, still choose to use it in an interior, this thesis posits that the answer might simply go beyond “taste”. The use of green by queer aesthetes is perhaps more like a marker rather than an identifiable, cut and dry sign for sexual identity. Both in vogue and linked to non-heteronormative activities, green could be used by these aesthetes to essentially delineate or mark out the liminal space that they inhabited. These aesthetes were men of society, artistic and cultured, yet faced with the reality of public shame should their sexual desires be revealed openly. Green, as an artistic or “temperamental” color, linked with fertility, sensation, and nature, could encapsulate these anxieties and bodily desires felt by these aesthetes, yet present it in a socially palatable, if conflicted, covert method.

3.1.10 Summary

There existed identifiable objects and symbols within the Aesthetic Movement interior that elucidate links between the inhabitant and their presumed queer identity. These objects existed as layered semiotic symbols that functioned as everyday items as well as

288 Potvin, Bachelors of a Different Sort, 97; Ellis, Symonds, and Crozier, Sexual Inversion, 197.
covert markers of a hidden identity. Often times, the semiotic history of these objects is entwined within history and myth. Or the symbol existed within the Aesthetic Movement as an object or theme of particular influence, such as the color green or the use of the sunflower and lily. Additionally, these nine motifs all broached upon dialogues of queerness in different ways, whether through period criticism, a perceived reversal of gender roles, or a strangely intense appreciation for their inclusion in a space. These aesthetic symbols are ubiquitously applicable within the interior either as object, pattern, or art, due to their flexible nature as design motifs. This thesis holds that the educated aesthete, fluent in a langue of art and symbology, could read and interpret this object-based language, thereby providing a code through which queer individuals spoke. Despite this shared meta-language, there existed a diversity of application and usage of these symbols across the domestic interior as Chapter Four addresses. The interiors of Lord Frederic Leighton, Charles Ricketts, Charles Shannon, and Lord Sutherland Gower all present different ways of interfacing and utilizing some or all of the nine aforementioned queer symbols, highlighting or minimizing different aspects of their queer identities.
CHAPTER 4. VISUAL ANALYSIS

Recognizing the semiotic importance of objects in interiors and how they relate to and inform one’s identity forms the crux of this thesis. When decoded, the objects chosen by queer individuals for their interiors elucidate a more comprehensive and informative depictions understanding of the symbolism and meaning underlying the aesthetics on display.

While Chapter Three focused on the semiotic analysis and interpretation of objects implemented by Lord Frederic Leighton, Charles Ricketts, Charles Shannon, and Lord Sutherland Gower, Chapter Four focuses on identifying these particular queer objects and their spaces, represented originally by Figures 1.2-1.18. Denoting objects within an interior was accomplished by highlighting signifiers within the original image, labeling each callout, and providing an explanatory legend beneath each image to identify the theme. Additionally, the table below provides a graphic checklist for all themes, and indicates which interiors they were found within, and their respective figure number. The purpose is to demonstrate the prevalence of like symbols in Aesthetic interiors of individuals identified as queer.

Table 2. Queer Objects + Symbols Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUEER OBJECTS + SYMBOLS</th>
<th>LEIGHTON HOUSE</th>
<th>RICKETTS + SHANNON RESIDENCES</th>
<th>LORD SUTHERLAND GOWER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peacock</td>
<td>Figure 4.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Figure 4.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>Figs. 4.1, 4.5, 4.6, 4.10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunflower</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Figure 4.12</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Floral Themes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Figs. 4.11, 4.12, 4.13, 4.16</td>
<td>Figs. 4.17, 4.18, 4.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narcissus/Mirror/Reflection</td>
<td>Figs. 4.5, 4.8, 4.10</td>
<td>Figs. 4.13, 4.14, 4.15, 4.16</td>
<td>Figs. 4.18, 4.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China / Chinamania</td>
<td>Figs. 4.1,4.5,4.8</td>
<td>Figs. 4.11, 4.12, 4.13</td>
<td>Figs. 4.17, 4.18, 4.19, 4.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Exotic/Foreign” Objects Greek / Ancient Objects (homophilic)</td>
<td>Figs. 4.1, 4.5, 4.6, 4.8, 4.10</td>
<td>Figs. 4.11, 4.12, 4.14, 4.15</td>
<td>Figs. 4.17, 4.19, 4.20, 4.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voyeuristic Apertures /Privacy</td>
<td>Figure 4.8</td>
<td>Figure 4.16</td>
<td>Figure 4.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Color</td>
<td>Figs. 4.9, (3.7)</td>
<td>Figure 4.13</td>
<td>Figure 4.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.1. Hall and Staircase, Lord Frederic Leighton Collection, 1888. Courtesy of Historic England Online Archive

Legend:

1- The red circle identifies the peacock that stands in the Staircase Hall of Leighton House
2- The orange circle identifies the “lily-paven lake” pattern in the Narcissus Hall

3- The green circle/rectangle identify a bronze replica of the Pompeian Faun and Iznik tiles

4- The blue circle identifies porcelain china vessels

**Analysis:**

![First Floor Plan of Leighton House](image-url)

Figure 4.2. First Floor Plan of Leighton House, Virtual Tour Screenshot Courtesy of The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

This Bedford Lemere photograph captures the Staircase Hall and a portion of the Narcissus Hall in the Leighton House interior. Within this image, four of the nine objects or themes have been identified. These include the following: Peacock, Lily, Exotic/Foreign Objects, as well as Porcelain China. The peacock sits at the base of the stairs in the Staircase Hall, almost as if guarding the ascent upwards to Lord Leighton’s personal studio and bedroom (Figure 4.2).²⁸⁹ The placement of the peacock, a symbol of decadence and male beauty leading up to Leighton’s private rooms is of interest, especially considering the stark simplicity of Leighton’s sleeping quarters, noted by Edwards, in comparison to the

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The extravagant of the rest of the house. The bedroom and the studio are both spaces considered personal, that were safe for the exploration of a queer identity, whether through art or physical action. Edward also indicates that Leighton’s bedroom also included a window looking out to a park, voyeuristically inviting the outsider in. The lily pattern on the floor of the Narcissus Hall evokes themes of purity, effeminacy, and masculinity, as explicated in the semiotic analysis of the lily in Chapter Three. While it is not visible in this photo, the statue of Narcissus stands central in this lake of lilies, semiotically a reference to his eventual transformation into a flower.

Themes of exoticism and Hellenistic tastes are also present in this photo. The wall leading to the landing of the staircase is tiled with Iznik tiles, that Gere suggests Leighton gathered from his travels in Damascus (Figure 4.3). The sculpture is actually a bronze replica of the statue found at the House of the Faun in Pompeii, a Roman city of antiquity that displayed an acceptance of homosexuality among men in art and on public buildings (Figure 4.4). While a signifier of the normalization of a more liberal social culture for men the Faun’s nudity and defined musculature somewhat reminiscent of Leighton’s own male nude sculptures (The Sluggard, An Athlete Wrestling with a Python), passed as acceptable by late-nineteenth century art standards, due to its association with an art piece from Antiquity. Finally, a prevalence for porcelain in evident in this space, perhaps indicative of an appreciation or passion for china. Although the blue circle identified two examples, there appears to be at least one to two more examples of porcelain products on the ledge next to the column on the right, and on the side table at the front left of the image.

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291 ibid.  
292 Gere, Artistic Circles, 145, 148.
Figure 4.3. Stairway Tiling, Leighton House Museum, Virtual Tour Screenshot Courtesy of The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
http://www.panoramea.co.uk/leightonhousemuseum/

Figure 4.4. Dancing Faun, Leighton House Museum, Virtual Tour Screenshot Courtesy of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
http://www.panoramea.co.uk/leightonhousemuseum/
Figure 4.5. Narcissus Hall leading to Arab Hall, Historic England Online Archive

Legend:
1- The red circle/rectangle identifies the Narcissus bronze and the ceiling of the Hall
2- The orange circle identifies the lily pattern in the flooring
3- The green circle identifies china and porcelain integrated throughout the space
4- The blue circle identifies “exotic” Iznik tiling in the Arab Hall

Analysis:

The Narcissus Hall proper shares many thematic similarities with both the Staircase Hall and the Arab Hall, largely due to the spaces all being connected. Beginning with the
bronze statue of Narcissus, called out in the red circle, Haweis identifies this as “a bronze statuette of the fair son of Cephissus”, more commonly referred to by his name in the Greek Canon. The statue is a copy of the Narcissus figure excavated at Pompeii, now residing at the Naples Archaeological Museum. The figures of the Dancing Faun and the Narcissus share symbolic links to a classical mythological system and to a literal legendary past, each coming from an ancient city rediscovered in 1748, over a century ago. Narcissus stands in the middle of a Hall under a “shining lake” above, that is, according to Haweis, symbolically representative of his origin myth. This shining lake is effectively the mirror within which Narcissus fell in love with himself. From this perspective of the original myth, Narcissus Hall in Leighton House could be interpreted as the underwater reflection beneath the surface of the lake, creating a “through the looking glass” effect of joyful disorientation. The ceiling is described as shining and reflective, reinforcing themes of narcissism and obsession. The lily pattern from 4.1 makes another appearance in this image, this time fully surrounding Narcissus, effectively throning him as the subject of the room. Similarly, the use of porcelain and china carries over into this image. Largely visible on the side tables, and in the far wall alcoves in the Arab Hall, Leighton’s interest in the artistic nature of china reiterates throughout this space. The Iznik tiles and Arabic script present in the Arab Hall can be seen in this view of Narcissus Hall, clearly reflecting a principal interior design theme and Leighton’s fascination with the “exoticism” of the Middle East.

293 Mary Eliza Joy Haweis, Beautiful Houses; Being a Description of Certain Well-Known Artistic Houses: By Mrs. Haweis. With a Preface., 4.
294 Hatt, “In Search of Lost Time,” 780.
295 Mary Eliza Joy Haweis, Beautiful Houses; Being a Description of Certain Well-Known Artistic Houses: By Mrs. Haweis. With a Preface., 4.
Figure 4.6. Narcissus Hall of Leighton House, Historic England Online Archive

Legend:

1- The red circle identifies the tiled lily pattern in the floor
2 – The orange rectangle identifies “exotic” Iznik tiles

Analysis:

Returning to the Hall of Narcissus, the same themes from earlier are identifiable. A return to a two-dimensional representation of the lily appears in the tiling on the floor, whereas tiles of an “exotic” nature are used as wall covering in the Arab Hall, visible in the right edge of this photo. Interestingly, some of the tiles used within these spaces were constructed by William de Morgan to fill in the blanks, as it were, effectively functioning as
European reproductions of traditional Middle Eastern design tenets. Gere notes that de Morgan’s reproduction process is similar to domestic English production of porcelain, where motifs and elements from a foreign culture were synthesized with English sensibilities. Taking a step back from the minutiae of the space, the colors and patterns seem to suggest the color scheme of a peacock, with the rich blues and green accents visible in some of the tiles. Both the Narcissus and Arab Halls are replete with identifiable symbols linked to a legacy of queerness unique to Aesthetic Movement discourse.

Figure 4.7. Narcissus Hall, Leighton House, Courtesy of Will Pryce, Leighton House Museum. The colors in the Narcissus Hall, including the flashes of green and gold throughout, seem to reference the elegance and drama of the peacock’s feather, symbolic of the Aesthetic Movement.

Figure 4.8. Arab Hall, Bedford Lemere, Historic England Online Archive

Legend:

1- The red circle/rectangle identifies the reflecting pool and fountain in the Arab Hall
2- The orange circle identifies the mashrabiya screen on the windows
3- The green rectangle identifies “exotic” Iznik tiles and elements in the Arab Hall
4 – The blue circle identifies china and porcelain integrated throughout the space
Analysis:

Leighton’s Arab Hall contains four examples of the objects or themes identified in this thesis as queer symbols. Firstly, the reflecting pool and water fountain reiterate themes present in the Narcissus Hall that connects to this space. Within the Arab Hall’s more intimate space, the use of reflection, water, and design features recalling a Turkish bathhouse, create a sense of exoticism and erotic desire.\(^{297}\) The mashrabiya screens are traditional window screening forms used in Arabic designs. Functionally, these screens provide visual privacy from the outside, while allowing for light to filter into a space, effectively encapsulating the screened intimacy concepts discussed in the semiotic analysis. The penchant for exoticism intentionally continues within the specifically designed Arab Hall, constructed in part to house the Middle Eastern collections of Lord Frederic Leighton.\(^{298}\) Another recurring theme is the use of china and porcelain as a decorative object in practically every space on this level of Leighton House. Within the Arab Hall, alcoves and inset shelving permeate the tiled walls and highlight various porcelain vessels, of what appears to be Middle Eastern or Asian origin.

Figure 4.9. Picture Room, Bedford Lemere, Historic England Online Archive

**Legend:**

1- The red circle identifies walls that were painted in a green color

**Analysis:**

The Picture Room within Leighton House was originally painted in a green hue, a preferred color that was symbolic of the tastes of the Aesthetic Movement (see Figure 3.7). Despite Haweis’s description of the “peacock-greeny” and “greeny-silver” of the Narcissus and Staircase Hall, the Picture room seems to be the only room in Leighton House with a purely green wall, outside of the Library, which is not included in the historic photographs.
studied here. As examined in the literature review, the color green was a contentious choice during the Aesthetic Movement as it carried connotations of high culture and also impropriety. The inclusion of this color in the Picture Room serves a backdrop for other pieces of art from Leighton’s art collection. Cupolas (not visible in this image) filtered and diffused light into the space, providing privacy and a sense of screening while illuminating the collections.

Figure 4.10. Artist’s Studio, Bedford Lemere, Historic England Online Archive

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299 This green wall is visible in the Leighton House virtual tour available at [http://www.panoramea.co.uk/leightonhousemuseum/](http://www.panoramea.co.uk/leightonhousemuseum/). This thesis assumes that this room was restored faithfully.
Legend:
1- The red circle identifies multiple pieces of porcelain
2- The orange rectangle/circle identifies a classically styled frieze
3- The green circle identifies lilies

Analysis:

Leighton’s Studio includes a menagerie of objects, symbols, and art pieces related to the thesis questions with principle signifiers present. Firstly, in the middle left of the photo, a set of porcelain vases and vessels can be identified. While certainly useful both practically and decoratively, as noted by Anne Anderson, china was often lambasted for its femininity and emasculating powers throughout the Aesthetic movement.\(^{300}\) Secondly, the large frieze stretching across the wall in the upper left hand corner seems to be of classical influence and reminiscent of the Parthenon’s interior frieze. The frieze figures depict a number of males riding horses, an animal Cirlot noted for their association with instinct and bodily sensation.\(^{301}\) Cirlot also ascribes “the natural, unconscious, [and] instinctive” to the horse.\(^{302}\) Cirlot’s verbiage mimics discussions of homosexual identity which are often couched in similar terms, defining homosexuality as a “natural” predisposition or part of the “unconscious” psyche. Leighton’s studio reflects the space where some, if not all of his homoerotic pieces of sculpture and art would have been produced. The purchase date of Leighton’s frieze is not known, but it is reasonable to assume some of his sculptures may have been molded under it. Finally, cut lilies seem to be placed in a vase near the sets of porcelain. Physically embodied in this space, in comparison to the Hall of Narcissus, the flower symbolizes purity, grace and the softer Aesthetic virtues.

\(^{300}\) Anderson, “‘Fearful Consequences . . . of Living up to One’s Teapot,’” 28.
\(^{301}\) Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, 152.
\(^{302}\) *ibid.*
4.2 The Residences of Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon

Figure 4.11. “Ricketts in his room at 164, Kennington Park Road, c. 1884”

Legend:

1- The red circle identifies flowers, a prominent theme throughout this section of images

2- The orange circle identifies objects that are likely porcelain

3- The green rectangle identifies photographs and images of famous works of art
Analysis:

This first image depicts a young Charles Ricketts sitting in his room, likely still a student as Calloway has theorized.\(^{303}\) Even in this small, seemingly cramped space, Rickett’s penchant for Aesthetic taste and enjoyment of art are quite visible. Additionally, as discussed in the Semiotic Analysis, Ricketts and Shannon utilized flowers throughout their interiors as a design element, the beginnings of which can be seen here, identified in the red circle.\(^{304}\) The exact variety is difficult to ascertain, but it takes a position of prominence as it is set on the mantel. Secondly, the orange circles identify what Calloway calls “a jumbled array of modest but ‘artistic’ purchases”, i.e. porcelain vessels and what could be a statuette of a bird, also on the decorated mantel.\(^{305}\) It is unclear what Ricketts is holding in this photograph, it may also be a porcelain statuette, or a miniature reproduction of a classical piece of sculpture, both of which were indicative of a queer identity. The green rectangle identifies images that Ricketts has pasted on his walls, images of art, sculpture and other objects. Almost like an inspiration or bulletin board, this papers the backdrop of his interior. Many of these images also appear to be nudes or seem to follow an ancient, or perhaps neoclassical, art tradition, favored by queer individuals for period interiors.

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\(^{305}\) Calloway, “‘Tout Pour l’art’: Charles Ricketts, Charles Shannon and the Arrangement of a Collection,” 20.
Figure 4.12. “Shannon in the studio at Edith Terrace, Chelsea, c. 1888”

Legend:
1- The red circle identifies a flower, visually similar to the sunflower
2- The orange circle identifies other floral themes
3- The green rectangle identifies porcelain products
4- The blue rectangle identifies “exotic” additions to the interior

Analysis:

Figure 4.12, depicts Charles Shannon sitting in the studio. The interior has a minimal amount of Aesthetic clutter or layering present, although it is considerably more ordered than typically represented in Aesthetic interiors. The red circle highlights what appears to be a flower similar to a sunflower. While it is not the “traditional” sunflower one pictures when
hearing the word, the flower is visually similar to the rudbeckia or black-eyed susan, a genus of plant within the sunflower family. Continuing along the floral theme, circle 2 identifies another example of floral elements within the Ricketts and Shannon set of interiors. Surrounding these two figures are sets of porcelain vessels, creating a sort of veritable tablescape of semiotic meaning and imagery. The rudbeckia/sunflower represents aesthetic longing while the porcelain is indicative of a feminine taste in delicate objects. This tablescape echoes later amalgamations of Ricketts and Shannon’s collections seen in the other images of their homes. Finally, in the background on the walls are a “dozen Japanese prints” as well as a hanging wall scroll, known as a kakemono, according to Calloway. The inclusion of these objects does, of course, speak to the Aesthetic fascination with Japanese culture, but integrated into a queer individual’s domestic space like this, it literally provides a backdrop of the “exotic unknown” so to speak, to the interior.

306 ibid.
Figure 4.13. “Parlour in The Vale, Chelsea, c. 1889”

Legend:

1 – The red circle identifies a mirror
2- The orange circle identifies china and porcelain products
3- The green circle identifies flowers
4- The blue rectangle identifies a wall, interiors in this home had “aesthetic” coloring

Analysis:

Figure 4.13 is an image of the Vale, one of the more well-known residences of Ricketts and Shannon. In the parlour, a mirror is placed on top of a cabinet near the windows. Mirrors, according to Potvin, were used by Ricketts and Shannon to activate the space and spark conversation. The placement of the mirror next to the window invites views to the
outside, as well as the more self-centered reflection to the interior. Both of the themes resonate with the concepts of mirroring and Narcissism in queer Aesthetic interiors as explored in the Semiotic Analysis. The orange call-outs mark the ever-growing china collection of the artistic couple, now prominently displayed in its own shelving unit near the focal point, the mantel, of the room. Floral themes continue as well, placed in a vase, off to the right side of the image. Finally, this is the home that Ricketts and Shannon acquired after Whistler had used it for a mistress, thus potentially inheriting some of the artistic interior color schemes such as yellow and green.307 As the parlour was one of the more public, central areas of the house (where, as Logan noted, exterior influences collided with the interior) it is likely that this room was painted in Aesthetic color schemes.308 This parlour in the Vale residence is replete with Aesthetic symbology, from color, to porcelain objects, flowers, and conceptual examples of self-reflection materialized in the form of a table mirror.

307 Please see pages 71,111 for more background on the inclusion of the color green as a symbol, and on the Vale Residence  
Figure 4.14. “Little drawing-room at Spring Terrace, Richmond, c. 1899”

Legend:

1 – The red circle/rectangle identifies a mirror
2- The orange circle identifies a classical, nude statuette

Analysis:

This interior sees further interior integration of the art collection belonging to Ricketts and Shannon. In this image, this is evidenced by the cabinet near the door, on the left hand side of the image. Although the pieces are small, it appears to be a smattering of Antiquities, vases, and perhaps china products. More apparent, is the large statuette sitting on the table.
next to this cabinet. Cook links Ricketts and Shannon’s preference for ancient art and antiquities to the homosexual culture at the time, where Greek philosophy was popularized among the educated. There are also two mirrors present within this image, a circular one over the mantel, as well as one along a wall a panel. As Potvin and Calloway both mentioned, Ricketts and Shannon used mirrors and flowers frequently, filling in and reflecting the interior back upon itself.

Figure 4.15. “Drawing-room at Spring Terrace, Richmond, c. 1901”

310 Potvin, Bachelors of a Different Sort, 110; Calloway, “‘Tout Pour l’art’: Charles Ricketts, Charles Shannon and the Arrangement of a Collection,” 19.
Legend:

1 – The red circles identify mirrors
2- The orange circle/rectangle identify Antiquities
3- The green rectangle identifies organic elements

Analysis:

Once again, mirrors are employed within the interior to reflect images and impressions of the ever-growing art collection back and forth across the space. Direct evidence of this effect can be seen in figure 4.17, as the photograph captures the reflections of other angles of the space. Antiquities and curiosities of both domestic and foreign origin are present here as well. Notably, the statue on the desk, but also the cabinet off to the left, filled with a diverse range of goods. Difficult to parse out visually, Calloway writes that “this cabinet and [the objects in the room], in particular pieces of old silver and Sheffield plate, begins to give the room a slight hint of 'boudoir taste' a feel not unlike that feminine and highly cultivated mix of pretty things.”\(^{311}\) Neither Sheffield plate nor old silver have been identified as necessarily queer objects, although Calloway apparently believes that a proliferation of these objects still imparts an effeminate, yet sophisticated feel to the space. The bowl is not one of The bowl is not one of the “famous bowls of water containing shells” that Calloway reports the couple were partial to.\(^{312}\) The particular objects within are not clear, although they appear somewhat organic in nature.

\(^{311}\) Calloway, “‘Tout Pour l’art’: Charles Ricketts, Charles Shannon and the Arrangement of a Collection,” 23.
\(^{312}\) ibid., 27.
Figure 4.16. “Drawing-room in Lansdowne House, Holland Park, c. 1902”

**Legend:**

1 – The red circles identify mirrors
2- The orange circle/rectangle identify floral elements
3- The green rectangle identifies sheer curtains

**Analysis:**

Although the date for this interior (1902) is slightly outside the period that this thesis is concerned with and the interiors is largely neoclassical versus aesthetic in ornamentation, the interior was a product of the acquisitions of their owners, much of which was, accumulated throughout the course of the Aesthetic Movement.
Veritably a Neoclassical museum at this junction, the interiors of Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon are practically laden with objects that continue to carry semiotics associated with the Aesthetic Movement. Although the date for this interior (1902) is slightly outside the period that this thesis is concerned with, many of the same symbols and objects are visible here. According to Cook, each interior is indicative of the men behind the curtain.313 The sheer quality of the drapes in the interior invites gazes both in and out, reflecting a different expression of queer identities at large. In contrast to the “dark side” of the late Aesthetic Movement, this airy, neoclassical interior is flooded with light.314 By inviting light in, the interior was exposed to scrutiny, a scrutiny which Ricketts and Shannon capitalized upon to display their collection of objects, solidifying their queer eccentricities as an acceptable form of “academic” collecting.315 Four mirrored surfaces are visible in this interior at Lansdowne House. The increase in mirrors is proportionally related to the growth of the collection as a whole. The mirrors could also be seen as another element enabling scrutiny of both interior and inhabitant. Such vigilance would require constant performance of gender norms, even within a “private” domicile. The lush floralscapes of Ricketts and Shannon continues here, spread across the room as accents, and reflect personal preferences.316

314 Lambourne, The Aesthetic Movement, 78.
4.3 Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower, Gower Lodge, Windsor

Figure 4.17. Saloon, published in Gower’s *Bric-À-Brac*

**Legend:**

1 – The red circle identifies floral elements
2– The orange circle identifies a folding screen
3– The green rectangle identifies sculptural elements
4– The blue circle identifies china pieces
Analysis:

Lord Gower’s Saloon, which he self-described as an “afterthought”, is filled with objects, or “bibelots” the French term that Gower preferred to use.\footnote{317} Despite the room being an “afterthought” to Gower, the Saloon still carries queer semiotic importance. A reiteration of the floral theme fills the space among and around the desk. A folding screen, highlighted by the orange circle, has either a mirror half-circle top, or a painted design. Folding screens functionally managed privacy, as it controls an individual’s visual access to areas of the interior. The panel of the screen to the left of the circle is decorated in a pattern. Common designs on Aesthetic Movement folding screens were “exotic” and largely Asian in origin, according to Lambourne.\footnote{318} Anderson notes that oriental influences in the domestic Aesthetic interior signified the “other”, or an identity different or separate from one’s own.\footnote{319} China is used to decorate multiple surfaces within Gower’s Saloon, including the mantel as well as other shelving. The fireplace, specially designed for Gower by Mr. A.Y. Nutt, “Her Majesty’s architect”, houses figures of neoclassical origin. As Cook suggested, this interest in classical figuration connects Gower to the homophilic class of Aesthetic Movement artisans, patrons, and literati, much like fellow aesthetes Ricketts and Shannon.\footnote{320}

\footnote{317} Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower, “Bric À Brac”; or, Some Photoprints Illustrating Art Objects at Gower Lodge, Windsor, 2.
\footnote{318} Lambourne, *The Aesthetic Movement*, 28–33.
\footnote{319} Anderson, “‘Fearful Consequences . . . of Living up to One’s Teapot,’” 237.
\footnote{320} Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower, “Bric À Brac”; or, Some Photoprints Illustrating Art Objects at Gower Lodge, Windsor, 2; Cook, “Domestic Passions: Unpacking the Homes of Charles Shannon and Charles Ricketts,” 628.
Figure 4.18. Sitting Room No. 1, published in Gower’s *Bric-A-Brac*

**Legend:**

1 – The red circle identifies floral elements

2 - The orange circle identifies an ornate mirror

3- The green rectangle identifies a set of “bibelots” that include porcelain

**Analysis:**

Including his “purple damask” Sitting Room, Lord Gower situated his personal art collection within his interiors, much like the house-museums of Ricketts and Shannon. The interior housed portraits, porcelain, and objects. Within Sitting Room No. 1 alone, three queer symbols are also visible. Firstly, the ornate, gilded mirror that hangs over the mantel is

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[321] Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower, “Bric À Brac”; or, Some Photoprints Illustrating Art Objects at Gower Lodge, Windsor, 4.
visually prominent. More ostentatious than those studied in the photographs of Leighton or Ricketts and Shannon, this mirror is a focal point within the room. Cirlot links the mirror to the subconscious, feminine, and even as a form of escapism.\textsuperscript{322} Mirrors also are reminiscent of reflection and Narcissism. Gower’s large mirror certainly reflected perspectives of the Sitting Room back into the space. Beneath the mirror, sitting on the cabinet are small objects including vessels, vases, and plates. This suggests a case of “Chinamania”, a medium that Gower was also partial to. Flowers fill in visual space in this interior. Relegated to a side table, the flowers are still providing visual weight to the corner they sit in.

Figure 4.19. Sitting Room No. 2 - published in Gower’s \textit{Bric-\`{A}-Brac}

\textsuperscript{322} Cirlot, \textit{A Dictionary of Symbols}, 211.
Legend:
1 – The red circle identifies classic sculptural elements
2- The orange circle identifies china pieces and vessels
3- The green circle identifies a feather fan

Analysis:

Lord Gower’s second sitting room serves largely as a space to house his collections. He notes in *Bric-Á-Brac* that this room is the least lived in, yet “there any many things to occupy the attention of any caller.” Examples of queer symbology are present among these objects. Bibelots are largely centered around the mantel, flanked on the corners by two classically styled bronzed figures. Both are nudes, considered acceptable by Victorian standards, yet also indicative of eroticism. Miniature china vases and vessels also adorn the mantelpiece. Although utilized more frequently by the middle classes, vessels could also be made of parian-ware, a faux marble material valued for its relation to whiteness and purity. A pair of fans sit in the shelving above the mantel, identified by the green circles. They are constructed out of feather-like material. Fans, were popularized during the Aesthetic movement, particularly the Japanese paper variants. These fans, upon closer inspection, seem to be similar to the ends of peacock feathers, namely the “eyes” and fringed feather tips. Satirical magazines and theatre pieces, notes the Victoria and Albert Museum, routinely criticized the use of fans in the Aesthetic Movement, as they were considered feminine and frivolous.

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323 Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower, “*Bric Â Brac*”; or, Some Photoprints Illustrating Art Objects at Gower Lodge, Windsor, 6.
324 Logan, *The Victorian Parlour*, 129.
325 ibid., 128-129
327 Victoria and Albert Museum, “An Introduction to the Aesthetic Movement.”
Lord Gower’s final sitting room, called the “Ground Floor Sitting Room”, was a “dull pale green, the color of a grouse’s egg”.\(^{328}\) This Aesthetic color choice sets the palette for the room, wherein Gower’s collection continues. Potted and cut flowers are present in this green

\(^{328}\) Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower, “Bric À Brac”; or, Some Photoprints Illustrating Art Objects at Gower Lodge, Windsor, 8.
sitting room as well. The set of flowers on the right, appear similar to lilies, reinforcing themes of purity and aesthetic grace. Above the mantel a large mirror reflects the interior and its collected objects, allowing differing angles of contemplation for guests. The mirror thematically relates to the subconscious and self-reflection. The statuette highlighted by the green circle is a nude of a small figure or child, further associating Lord Gower with a queer aesthetic milieu.

Figure 4.21. Marie Antoinette Relics, published in Gower’s *Bric-À-Brac*

**Legend:**

1 – The red rectangle identifies busts and cameos of neoclassical influence
Analysis:

Not an image of an interior, this particular collection of Gower’s physically materializes his infatuation with Marie Antoinette. These objects, however, inhabited an interior and are telling as to portions of Gower’s identity. The bust and cameos link to traditions of classical sculpture, yet more interestingly this collection indicates a certain level of narcissistic imagination. Potvin views Gower’s fascination with Marie Antoinette as a potential expression of queer self-preservation and self-identification, best clarified at length by Potvin himself:

Unproductive, enfeebled, degenerate, neither [queer nor queen], it was commonly held, could assist in the betterment and future of the nation. The homosexual, moreover, lacked the possibility to contribute to the heteronormative and capitalist system of narratological progression through to procreation. …. Luxury then becomes a locus for escape and pleasure and cannot be dismissed as mere frivolity but a political strategy of empowerment and the displacement of the center of power – distinctly away from bourgeois morality.329

Gower’s collection of Marie Antoinette objects provided a sense of identification and a sort of hypothetical lineage or community. Both individuals were similarly ostracized from their society, even though both were of royal or upper class status: The queen for her excess luxury and the queer for his sexual identity later exposed during the Cleveland Street Brothel scandal of 1889. These objects although small in stature, are carriers of important in semiotic meaning.

4.4 Limitations

After analyzing all of the images presented here, it is necessary to identify limitations of study, application, and interpretation within this thesis. The entirety of the photographs considered within this body of research were shot in black and white. This limitation means

329 Potvin, Bachelors of a Different Sort, 71.
that discussions of color and to some extent lighting are slightly hindered. When images are rendered in black and white, it is also difficult to definitively identify some patterning on objects as color is lacking. Additionally, the true quality of the photographs is difficult to ascertain. When possible, this thesis has utilized professional publications or archival services such as the Historic England Online Archive to gather photos. Due to the age, digitization process, and varying original conditions of these photographs, they are not uniform in quality or clarity. This, in turn, also makes object identification and analysis challenging.

These photographs are also likely staged, to some extent. By “staged” this does not mean that these interior images are necessarily falsely represented, rather that the interiors presented have presumably been cleaned, organized, and dressed to show the best possible version of themselves. This may remove individual touches or flairs not deemed photographable and presents a more sanitized vision of these spaces. The reasons for the photographs are also different between the sets, changing what is photographed or focused on. These biases of photographer and the gaze of intended audience should be recognized. However, the core elements and décor within the interiors remained regardless of these modulations, and it is these daily, integrated objects that this thesis is interested in.

This thesis also bases its research completely off of photographic evidence and other materials that can be studied from a distance. Due to distance, cost, and time restrictions, it was impossible to visit any of the surviving interiors studied within this body of research. Although many of the interiors considered have been altered, destroyed, or forgotten, studying these interiors in person would elucidate observations not available from afar. Additionally, this thesis has focused its investigations on the private interiors of three
demonstrably queer aesthetic individuals. Although not considered here, there are other queer individuals whose interiors are worthy of study such as Simeon Solomon, C.R. Ashbee, Algernon Swinburne, and of course, Oscar Wilde himself.

4.5 Analysis Summary

Across the images studied in this chapter, examples of each queer symbol or object were found across varying extents and physical expressions. It is important to note that these multiple symbols and objects were not simply placed or dropped haphazardly into an interior, rather, they were totally integrated into the overall design of these Aesthetic interiors. Aided by the Aesthetic preference for a multitude of objects, the integration of physical objects that were simultaneously laden with queer symbology was certainly attainable. This supports the existence of a meta-textual queer interior, or an interior that was understandable on different levels of meaning, including a queer-specific one. Logan and Stankiewicz both note the Aesthetic Movement’s reliance on symbology, myth, and allusion in the creation of thematic Aesthetic space.  

This created narrative-like interiors, where symbols could be co-opted or reinterpreted, a polysymbolic application noted by Cirlot.

Personal and aesthetic preference across queer interiors of the Movement certainly varied, although there were a number of similarities across the interiors of Leighton, Ricketts and Shannon, and Gower. Color, “feminine” objects such as porcelain, exoticism, and even the use of mirrors resonated across these different sets of interiors. Most of the spaces studied within this chapter are semi-public, or spaces where it would not be uncommon to invite strangers or guests into should they enter one’s home. This public nature of Victorian

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331 Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, xi–xii.
domestic interiors, spoken to by Logan, adds an element of social performativity to these spaces as well. The queer symbology present throughout these interiors then, was similarly semi-public and semiotically potent if interpreted by fellow queer aesthetes and individuals.

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332 Logan, The Victorian Parlour, 24, 66.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

This findings of this thesis elucidate how decorative objects were used to manifest varying expressions of queer identity during the Aesthetic Movement. While there was not one particular way to experience queerness or live a queer lifestyle during late Victorian England, there were similarities of objects, symbols, and their thematic applications across domestic interiors of Lord Frederic Leighton, Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon, and Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower each of whom is linked through literature to a queer orientation. The following nine different objects and symbols were identified through the literature review and image analysis to be associated with the communication of queer identity: Peacock, Lily, Sunflower, Other Floral Themes, Mirrors and the Narcissus Motif, Porcelain + China Products, “Exoti” and “Ancient” influences, Privacy Controls (such as windows, screens, and curtains), as well as the color Green. Seventeen images across three sets of interiors provide evidence of these nine themes and their repetition. In each set, seven of the nine objects or symbolic themes are present. The prevalence of these objects supports the thesis’s first research question, and provides physical evidence of the visible manifestation of queerness in Aesthetic Movement interiors.

While scholars may legitimately argue that the prevalence of these objects and themes was part and parcel for the Aesthetic Movement and not necessarily indicative of a queer language, the thesis explicates that the period’s cultural circumstances led to a need for the queer community to create multi-layered semiotics with deeper hidden meanings through specific objects. The analysis first considered the origin of the Aesthetic Movement and the

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333 These nine objects and symbols identified in the Analysis section are referred to as “themes”, in the sense that they are repeatedly identifiable across various interiors. Theme here is defined as a specific and distinctive quality, per Merriam Webster Dictionary.
particular tastes, expressions, and desires of those who popularized (and were satirized for) the spread of Aesthetic values and theoretical virtues. As shown throughout the literature review (see Figs. 1.1, 1.20-1.21) male aesthetic figures were publically harpooned for their proximity to behaviors and objects traditionally associated with the female and critiqued for the effeminate tastes and actions, contrary to that of the supposed “real man” of late Victorian England. Oscar Wilde, in all his flamboyance, was often a victim of such parody, and it is important to understand that this type of historical homophobia divided society and required queer desires and relationships to be invisible or veiled. Thus queer tastemakers, artists, and designers of the Aesthetic Movement devised ways to hide or conceal their identity. As proper presentation and concealment of a queer identity could be a matter of life, and if not death, at least public derision and trial, it is reasonable that friends of Leighton disavowed any claims of untoward desires within the artist’s character, that Gower employed narcissistic self-preservation tactics, and that Ricketts and Shannon upheld public performance of normative period values of decency and décor.\(^{334}\)

This thesis also addressed particular design techniques that could lead to a characteristic of queer interpretations of domestic spaces. Beyond the use of physical objects as material signifiers of sexual preferences, individuals created interiors that intimated feelings of queerness or that were expressive of queer identity. While the analysis certainly found common objects, the direct application to a domestic space seems to be as diverse and malleable as the label queer itself. Thus, each of the Aesthetes studied within this body of research approached their own identity and expression thereof quite differently through their domestic interiors. This is consistent with prior research cited in the literature review that

noted one of the strongest facets of the word “queer” is that it precludes labels, and resists a “static, stable, and easily identifiable” definition.\textsuperscript{335}

Lord Frederic Leighton’s particular expression seemed to focus more on the creation of a \textit{gesamtkunstwerk} or immersive stage-like interior that relied on objects to both decorate and subtly titillate the senses of the inhabitant and guests. This “Russian-doll” effect was certainly noted in the synaesthetic writings of Haweis and other guests who experienced the immersive vision of Leighton and his architect Aitchison.\textsuperscript{336} Notably, the drama, scale, and grandeur of Leighton’s interiors were afforded by his social status and position. However, his respected and public academic role as President of the Royal Academy was something worthy of protection, and would have likely been threatened or made tenuous by queer identity association or exposure, much as Oscar Wilde’s trial plummeted the poet’s reputation. Through his interiors, Leighton interiors strove for the zenith of Aesthetic expression to prove the purity and all encompassing fervor of the artist’s intentions. The reliance on the lily as a theme, particularly in the Narcissus Hall, reads as an exultation of aesthetic purity and indicates the artist’s self-interest in (or love for) the Aesthetic ideals. Yet, even these artistic ideals were besmirched and challenged. Leighton’s \textit{gesamtkunstwerk} extended into reconstructing structures and styles foreign to his Kensington Park address, allowing him to physically inhabit other worlds and locales, where English norms, expressions, and identities were theoretically foreign. In particular, the Arab Hall existed as a sort of self-serving architectural escapism, where Leighton could house his collections

\begin{footnotes}
\item[335] Gorman-Murray and Cook, \textit{Queering the Interior}, 2.
\end{footnotes}
garnered over his travels, live “exotically”, and perhaps even engage in sensation forbidden to him in late Victorian England.\textsuperscript{337}

The queer expression of Ricketts and Shannon was also quite immersive, yet the scale and intent differed strongly than that of Leighton. Ricketts and Shannon were primarily working artists and collectors. They moved residences frequently, but lived together for over forty years as primary partners, certainly as artists, and arguably as significant others since they shared the same bedroom. The interiors of Ricketts and Shannon clearly revolved around their proliferation of collected objects, which grew more apparent as the couple progressed in age, wealth, and status. A simple glance at Figs. 1.8-1.13 shows this progression verbatim.\textsuperscript{338} The scale of Ricketts and Shannon’s \textit{gesamtkunstwerk} was rather at the miniscule, focusing its attention almost exclusively on the creation of space \textit{for} objects, rather than objects integrated within a space. Ricketts’ and Shannon’s queerness exhibited itself with a technique that allows the proliferation of objects to take over their interiors, sacrificing some functionality for intended effect. The couple’s use of mirrors, reflection, and floral elements served as important backdrops to this scene, creating a lush environment whose immersive nature doubles when considering the scintillating reflections from the mirrors as well as the flashes of both scent and emotion partial to the language of flowers, popular during the Victorian period at large.\textsuperscript{339} Ricketts and Shannon utilized their collection, specifically, to legitimize their relationship in the eyes of the public, thereby granting them acceptance in late Victorian society, as the two were “collectors” or perhaps “business

\textsuperscript{338} Cook, “Domestic Passions: Unpacking the Homes of Charles Shannon and Charles Ricketts,” 632.
partners” who chose to inhabit the same domicile to the practically indivisible combined collection.340

Finally, Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower’s interiors presented a rather different expression. Although similarly possessed by a zeal for collecting, and victim to the stereotypical Aesthetic “clutter”, Gower’s interiors read differently than those of Leighton or Ricketts and Shannon. In Gower’s interiors, there was a larger predilection for objects that hearkened to a personal history and legacy, perhaps real or imagined. Gower himself opens the preface to his self-published book on the treasures of his artistic collection by discussing “primogeniture” or the rights and inheritance of the firstborn.341 Even the act of cataloguing and disseminating one’s own collection seems to hint at a desire to “live on” or “procreate” in some sense, as this catalogue clearly lasted longer than Gower himself. The objects in his interior, particularly those relating to Marie Antoinette, point at a desire for remembrance or an act of legacy-building. Potvin discusses Gower’s obsession as a form of “diva-worship”, and even within this, there are kernels of self-preservation and identification, where Gower seems to self-legitimize his identity through his relation to his gathered objects.342 Gower then, relies on the implied legacy and history of his decorative and precious objects to create an identity of queerness that is tied to narratives and individuals that stretch both before and beyond him, establishing the continuation of a theoretically queer “family tree”, much as the first-born son is seen to traditionally carry on the familial line.

A sub-question this thesis attempted to answer was whether or not there was a particular symbolic representation or understanding of queer domiciles, i.e. whether

341 Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower, “Bric À Brac”; or, Some Photoprints Illustrating Art Objects at Gower Lodge, Windsor, viii–xii.
342 Potvin, Bachelors of a Different Sort, 71.
particular queer interior “techniques” used by these aesthetes created a shared dialogue revolving around symbolic expression. With an understanding of the symbolic interpretations of objects that were just explored, the diverse physical effects of “queering” a space become easier to manifest. Gower’s queer legacy building, Leighton’s showmanship, and the collection of Ricketts and Shannon, each serve as a unique form of interpretation of the techniques and symbols employed in Aesthetic queer interiors. Nevertheless it is difficult to posit that there is one “particular” conclusive symbolic representation of a space as symbols are multilayered and their implementation can be done with varying levels of nuance or intention. As Cirlot observed, “Symbolism adds a new value to an object or an act, without thereby violating its immediate or “historical” validity.” Such a dichotomy has been discussed throughout this thesis, but for the sake of clarity and brevity it shall be re-stated here. The simple inclusion of these symbols, objects, and even colors does not necessarily make a space “queer”. However, by relying on the historical record of the owner or domestic inhabitant to provide a sort of spatial litmus test or interpretational direction based on their acts, impressions, and personal particularities, it is easier to draw similarities and confluences between symbol, act, and identity.

In particular, considering that the three aesthetes analyzed within this research, studied art historical analysis and its symbolism, it is highly conceivable that this knowledge enabled a shared and coded discussion of queerness across individual interiors of queer individuals within the Aesthetic group. Lord Frederic Leighton, perhaps one of the most well-respected artists of the Aesthetic Period, was a member of the Royal Academy of Arts beginning in 1864 as an Associate member before transitioning to a full member in 1868.

343 Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, xiv.
finally being elected as Academy President in 1878, a position Leighton held until his death in 1896.\textsuperscript{344} Although both born in the 1860s, approximately thirty years after Leighton, both Ricketts and Shannon became elected members of the Academy near the end of their lives in 1922 and 1911 respectively.\textsuperscript{345} Leighton had died by the time the couple joined the Academy, however the couple met as students in 1882 at a “City and Guilds Technical Art School in Kennington, London,” during Leighton’s term as president.\textsuperscript{346} The Royal Academy was surely an organization the two were aware of both academically and artistically. Significantly, the Victoria and Albert Museum notes that Leighton was “sufficiently impressed” by Rickett’s illustrations in the artistic couple’s “occasional magazine” \textit{The Dial}, commissioning work from Ricketts to “encourage the young artists.”\textsuperscript{347} What, exactly, about Ricketts work impressed Leighton remains unclear and is worthy of further study, yet there did and does exist an identifiable, artistic, link between Leighton and this proto-queer couple. Commissioned work from the President of the Royal Academy was certainly of influence and very notable for the young, queer artists. Ricketts and Shannon also shared \textit{The Dial} with Oscar Wilde, who visited their homes to “praise their work”, a relationship that remained strong as the couple visited Wilde in jail and supported him financially after.\textsuperscript{348} This confluence of queer figures around Ricketts and Shannon speaks to a recognizable semblance of community, certainly united by art, yet in retrospect, also points to indicators of shared identity.

\textsuperscript{346}“Poster | Ricketts, Charles | V&A Search the Collections,” V and A Collections, July 17, 2019, http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O585402.
\textsuperscript{347}\textit{ibid.}
\textsuperscript{348}ibid.
Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower presents a slightly different story. A member of the Leveson-Gower family, Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower was no stranger to the art world as the family has a history of art patronage. Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower’s father, George Granville Sutherland-Leveson-Gower, Second Duke of Sutherland, was the president of the British Institution—a private organization devoted to values and an understanding of “connoisseurship” in the Arts—largely admitting the nobility rather than practicing artists into its fold.349 The First Duke of Sutherland, Lord Ronald’s grandfather, also served as Vice President (1810-20) and President (1820-5) of the British Institution.350 The British Institution held two exhibitions per year, focusing on contemporary art and art of the Old Masters: After the Institution’s dissolution in 1870, the Royal Academy adopted ownership of the Old Master Exhibitions.351 The Gower family clearly had intergenerational interest and investment in British Art, a passion that Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower also shared, noted by his work in sculpture, drawing, and his personal art collection. While never becoming a member, Lord Ronald did exhibit at the Royal Academy and was a “trustee of the National Portrait Gallery for forty-two years.”352 Studying at both Eton College and Trinity College, Gower was educated and also well acquainted with Oscar Wilde, who noted that Gower was the “original of Lord Henry in Dorian Gray”, a hedonistic, queer-coded character largely


351 “British Institution | Organisations | RA Collection | Royal Academy of Arts.”

responsibility for Dorian’s sashay into destructive decadence. Gower’s familial lineage, proximity to art, and educated, artistic ability centered him within the queer community of Aesthetic Movement Britain, thereby entwining him with key aesthetic figures, with whom he shared a similar language of art and expression.

The complete lack of some symbols within the identified interiors does not invalidate the queerness of the proprietor, nor does it invalidate the valuation of these objects or symbols as “queer” unto themselves. That being said, once these similarities across objects or between individuals have been identified, some basic interpretations can be made, such as Cook linking homophilic tendencies to a preference for Greek philosophy and art or Anderson identifying the effeminate aspects of china. The lily and the sunflower, for example, certainly were symbols of the Aesthetic Movement, and were parodied often, but as explored in the Semiotic Analysis, both of these flowers can take on particular poignant meanings when viewed through a deeper lens of queerness, namely aesthetic longing and a quest for purity. These linkages between queerness and object are malleable, in fact, they have to be in order for a covert queerness to survive. Spatially, an interior can be parsed apart to the object-meaning level, as this thesis itself has done, but it is important to evaluate these objects and symbols contextually, housed within a larger context of permeable space that individuals (and the public) fluctuated into and out of on a regular, routine basis. This layered understanding of a space allows for symbolic integration and interior interpretation.

The final question explored in this thesis concerns the social and cultural drivers that allowed for aesthetes within the Aesthetic Movement to create a theoretical queer interior. To

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354 Cook, “Domestic Passions: Unpacking the Homes of Charles Shannon and Charles Ricketts,” 628; Anderson, “‘Fearful Consequences . . . of Living up to One’s Teapot,’” 247.
address the question such drivers were tabulated through literature review as opposed to the process of image analysis. Specifically applicable are Bourdieu’s theories of power struggle and class competition that revolve around the accumulation of social capital to either maintain one’s class standing or to rise to the next highest class-stratum. Relatedly, this thesis found that the most necessary drivers for an individual to have the ability to queer a space was a combination of their wealth and/or one’s position as an artist. Unsurprisingly, money and status were able to provide a net of social security that was hard to break, barring an individual being subjected to the utmost and damming public scandal. Logan and Lambourne, respectively, discuss the social nature of the Aesthetic Movement, with Lambourne highlighting its importance as a “largely middle-class” movement, and Logan noting the importance of social norm and value performance within interior spaces (and objects) that integrated with the public, such as the parlour. Potvin however, focuses on some of the affordances granted to queer aesthetes who were able to perform “normatively” and fly under the radar of late Victorian society, due to their perceived upholding of traditional values, despite their status as artists with bohemian tendencies. Underlying both of these, is the assumption of performance, or that someone can either “pass” in society, either due to their presentation of accepted interior design standards or their public personality. Public perception then, is another major driver for the queering of a space. If the public does not perceive a space at all, or at least not as problematically queer or different, the space can then serve as a safe haven for its requisite queer inhabitants. However, the position of artist and extant social standing also provide safety. While the peerage titles granted to Lords Leighton and Sutherland are not always indicative of wealth, they are strong factors pointing towards

it, or towards a position of respect. The grandeur and impressive size of Leighton House itself is also testament to Leighton’s position. Lord Gower was a member of the Leveson-Gower line, a respected, titled, and influential family. Ricketts and Shannon had to earn their status, and a direct upward progression can be seen largely through the images of their interiors alone as their collection and interiors grow in size.

While the choice of aesthetes and availability of materials for queer individuals of lower socio-economic status are limited for this particular time period, wealth, status, and public perception seem to simultaneously be both deterrents and drivers for queer expression. These drivers exist somewhat duplicitously as deterrents because one’s queer identity would be directly endangered the more publically queerness was expressed, and the risks to personal wealth, status, and public perception would be greater should queerness be exposed. At the same time however, these very same drivers allowed for these individuals to begin formulating queer interiors in the first place. Thus, this driver cycle requires a level of secrecy and covert expression, the hiding of identity in plain sight; in order to maintain and further protect one’s carefully constructed reality.

What happens when one’s interior reality or surrounding environment shifts? The Aesthetic Movement did not last forever, and neither did its queer influenced symbology. However, while there is not a direct transference of each and every symbol to the design movements following Aestheticism, there are examples or recurrences of those that do. Most immediately apparent would be the Art Nouveau era. György M. Vajda notes that the “erotic torrent of Art Nouveau visual arts” was largely due to the group of “aesthetes and dandies
that became the hotbed…in England’s late-Victorian atmosphere.” In particular, Vajda cites the “swan and the peacock” as iconic birds representative of Art Nouveau virtues of “decorative splendor” and “stylized elegance” (See Figure 5.1), additionally noting that the lily was also prized for its “intoxicating fragrance” coupled with a “lithe, and slender” body. The naturalistic and erotic overtones of Art Nouveau symbology that Vajda cites are directly influenced from the same core of Aesthetic figures that were central to the Aesthetic Movement.

Criticism and wariness of the latent sexuality and degeneracy hidden within these symbols also continued, particularly within Britain. Kara Olsen Theiding cites a backdrop of economic, imperial, and military strife within Britain in the early 1900s, where aesthetic debates raged around the “degeneracy” of fin de siècle art. Theiding suggests that this criticism largely stemmed from journalist Max Nordau’s critique Entartung [Degeneration], published in 1895, wherein he lambasted and criticized popular Aesthetic Movement motifs such as Morris fabrics and natural, floral elements as motifs of a degenerate and hysterical mind. These critiques are almost identical to those leveled at intensely “temperamental” or “effeminate” Aesthetes of the Aesthetic Movement.

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358 ibid., 74.
361 Le Gallienne, Richard, Prose Fancies (Second Series).
Semiotic and symbolic transference of queer symbology can also be seen within the interiors of the later Bloomsbury Group in England. Although this group of writers and artists were not necessarily at the forefront of an interior design movement, similar imagery or coloration continues into these interiors as well. Artist Roger Fry and his Omega Workshop, as noted by Potvin, created domestic objects and interiors with a strong penchant for floral themes, pulling inspiration from the Arts and Crafts Movement, as well as the French avant-garde.\textsuperscript{362} Floral themes were also strong within the Aesthetic Movement. Wyndham Lewis, critic, and a member of the Vorticist art circle, disliked the “greenery-yallery” of the Bloomsbury group, a critique that Potvin cites as a direct reference to stereotypical Aesthetic Movement coloration of greens and yellows, as well as a comment on

\textsuperscript{362} Potvin, \textit{Bachelors of a Different Sort}, 175, 177.
the personal queerness present within the artistic group (Figures 5.2, 5.3). The Bloomsbury circle (which included queer figures such as Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey, and Duncan Grant) lived somewhat communally and were recognized for their “liberal” (read: non-normative) sexual ideas involving both partnership and practice.

Figure 5.2. Charleston Farmhouse interior, View of Studio, 1916, Image Date: 1996. Courtesy of Artstor https://library-artstor.org.proxy.lib.iastate.edu/asset/SS7732236_7732236_12894790.

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363 ibid.
The results indicate that queer expression within the Aesthetic Movement was possible, tangible, socially interpretable, object-centered, and afforded by a surplus of wealth, status, or accepted public perception. This research adds a level of particularity to the interpretation of presumed “queer interiors” as it focuses simultaneously on decorative objects and symbols and how, contextually housed within the domestic interior, they can be interpreted or discussed as indicative of a queer identity in an era where queerness was not truly publically expressible. Queer objects and symbols vary across interiors, due to personal preference or experience, and some may not be present at all. The findings presented here are also limited by gender, social class and position, as the interiors studied focused on middle to upper class majority single male individuals within the Aesthetic Movement, leaving out female queer identities and those of a separate economic status. Additionally, these objects
and symbols cannot be unilaterally applied to other time periods, and are particular to the Aesthetic Movement, as their interpretations rely largely on period commentary that called out these symbols as either indicative of Aesthetic values, or criticized them as effeminate or queer. Therefore, while the process of this semiotic analysis is viable, the direct symbols cannot be directly carried over, although overlap and recurrence do appear within the historical record. Semiotic analysis is also interpretive. The efficacy of semiotic analysis is not foolproof and easily applicable to numerous situations. At times, this flexibility of semiotics is its strength, but its breadth of use conversely allows for a lack of depth, which this thesis has attempted to mitigate by lengthy literature review and symbolic discussion. Queerness, however, mimics this breadth and diverse nature of expression, and is a multilayered and highly personal experience. Recognizing this, semiotic analysis was fitting and appropriate to begin a dialogue on the use of period interiors as expressive of queer identity.
CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

The language of queer Aesthetism focuses around “objects of virtue”, or objects that are laden with meanings, evoke an intended emotional or psychological response, and reference an entwined, yet hidden concept of queer identity. In this way, single queer male Aesthetes of the late Victorian period were able to establish a domesticity outside the traditional norm of separate spheres, (where the male role corresponds to public and the female to domestic) affording their queer identities a form of tolerance, if not acceptance or recognition. These objects were couched in semiotic imagery, artistic concepts, and mythology, that when mixed with the art of collecting could take on an almost academic air. Through them, male queer aesthetes created what appear to be literal live-in museums, or gesamtkunstwerken of queer interiors where symbology, identity, and daily life were braided together. The interiors of Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon typify this sort of queer identity expression that is masked as a public, academic, and accessible/acceptable collection. Within Leighton House, a narrative of eroticism flows throughout the spaces, providing an escapist fantasy within the urban landscape of Holland Park, London. Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower’s lodge at Windsor and his published catalogue encapsulate his amalgamation of legacy-defining objects, situating himself within the legitimacy of art historical collection. These rich tapestries of expressive identities were made possible by an individual’s existing social position, wealth, or vocation as artist. Lord Frederic Leighton, as President of the Royal Academy, held a position of artistic importance where he could integrate with fellow queer artists, such as Ricketts and Shannon, while helping to propagate queer art and other thematic elements.
Importantly, this body of research identifies nine objects and symbols that appear in male queer interiors at differing levels of frequency and effect, with some appearing a multitude of times, whereas others are completely lacking in an interior. It finds that this reflects the diversity of individual identities and experiences as much as it represents their particular tastes, flavors, or preferences in interiors.

This research has expanded upon prior historical and queer research into Aesthetic objects and symbology and codifies these diverse reports of queer symbolical applications into one localized and condensed catalogue of Aesthetic motifs relating to queer identity. This catalogue can be used as an investigative tool to parse apart Aesthetic interiors in order to identify potential links to queer identities. This catalogue exists as a framework from which further queer work into symbology of the Aesthetic Movement can take place, as well as an example for similarly researched investigations into the symbology of design movements both prior or post Aestheticism.

Although queer male individuals certainly did have a coded semiotic system of expression and identity during the Aesthetic Movement, it is very difficult to corroborate the physical evidence identified in this research with written or archival verification. The deeper meaning of the objects and symbols from a queer perspective needed to be kept secretive due to the very real and physical threats that endangered individuals who publically expressed queer orientations during this time period. Due to this necessary secrecy and public perception of homosexuality, academic narratives of the period are also lacking. Yet, as noted in the Discussion Chapter some queer symbols and their associated period-specific meanings have survived. These include the peacock, the color green, and the green carnation, as noted in the literature review, continue on as modern symbolic iterations of queer identity.
Overall, this body of research provides helpful insight into the daily lived realities of queer male aesthetes during the Aesthetic Movement and of the interiors that they simultaneously called home, sanctuary, and stage. The objects chosen and integrated throughout these settings allowed for particularities of identity and expression to be explored, while still upholding a set of restrictive gender norms of the late Victorian era, that were quietly, semiotically subverted. This thesis also indicates the importance of queer identities and queer narratives to both history and the legacy of interior design at large. The interior is constructed largely out of social norms and the home is often construed as the site of “family values”, yet when the identities and expressions of the interior’s inhabitants are as diverse and as queer as possible, then the term “family” and what is considered to be of “value” needs to be reconstructed from the ground up.\textsuperscript{365} Importantly this research shows that within the Aesthetic Movement, this traditional familial structure was already being reconstructed by the single, queer male bachelor who chose to live alone and build a personal domicile, outside the realm of family, thereby subverting the doctrine of separate spheres.\textsuperscript{366} This queer bachelor simultaneously embraced the “feminine” domestic as well as the publically “male”, performative aspect of late-Victorian life.

This interior design research presents a more inclusive perspective of interior design history that integrates the homosexual experience into the traditionally heteronormative narrative of designers, influencers, and styles, while illuminating the rich confluence of queerness that likely significantly contributed to other major design movements. While the historical time constraints and the specificities of the period symbols researched preclude the findings of this thesis to be retroactively applied to another time period, the semiotic analysis

\textsuperscript{365} Logan, \textit{The Victorian Parlour}, 23–24.
\textsuperscript{366} Potvin, \textit{Bachelors of a Different Sort}, 12–15.
process is a viable method to allow a similar study to explore the nature of queerness and interiors in another era.

This research is important to the field of Interior Design, in both research and in application. Queerness embraces a large diversity of expression and identity under its umbrella, excluding none and inviting all. Making these identities and experiences visible is the necessary first step to re-orient interior design practice to be as inclusive of identities within a practice that is 89.7% percent female, largely Generation X, and majority white as of 2016.\(^{367}\)

The reconstructive work regarding queer identity, interior design, and gender is far from finished. Great progress has been made in the past few decades with contributions across academia, including feminist and queer studies. Intersections of queerness and design have altered approaches across research, and theories posited by Potvin, Betsky, Logan, and Cook have been paramount in the formulation of this research. More research is needed into the experiences of queer women, trans and non binary people, people of color, and those of lower socio-economic status. The white male as a subject of queer identity is certainly important, but due to his inherent privilege, has received a disproportionate level of focus. Further research into the experience of queer women during the Aesthetic Movement, would be of significant comparative value to this body of research. Additionally, an investigation into the influence of the Aesthetic Movement within America would elucidate interesting differences and similarities between the two sister branches. Queer interiors are not only limited to the Aesthetic Movement however, and have existed long before. These other historic queer interiors deserve their own separate study in order to flesh out a queer

historical narrative. Queer symbology and object-identity forming relationships also mandate an in-depth research study of their own.
REFERENCES


