

## **Fast and Fashionable: The Girls in *The Girl of the Period Miscellany***

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When the unsigned article “The Girl of the Period” appeared in *Saturday Review* in March 1868, it reinvigorated the debate about the role of women in British society. The 1860s saw improvements to girls’ education, the establishment of the first college for women, and increasing agitation for women’s suffrage and property rights. Alongside these movements to improve the position of women, the British government passed a series of Contagious Diseases Acts (in 1864, 1866, and 1869) that were designed to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases by forcing prostitutes to undergo mandatory medical treatment. Issues of women’s freedom, through their sexuality, education, and employment, lie at the heart of the discussions about women and girls during this decade.

The article polarised the discussion of women because it described the “girl of the period” as having little in common with the chaste, virtuous girl of the past who was the “ideal of womanhood” (Linton 356). Instead, the modern “girl of the period” was akin to a prostitute, concerned only with fashion and pleasure. Eliza Lynn Linton was soon identified as the author. In the early days of her career, Linton was outspoken in her support of women’s political, social, and sexual freedoms but her later work demonstrated her increasingly conservative outlook. Ironically, Linton supported herself throughout her career as a writer and journalist and lived separately from her husband for most of their marriage.<sup>1</sup> “The Girl of the Period” was one of many articles she contributed to *Saturday Review*, but it was this article for which Linton was perhaps best known.<sup>2</sup> The article generated widespread conversation, debate, satire, and sensation, which speculation about the author only heightened. The phenomenal response in the periodical press and elsewhere indicates the centrality of these concerns about the roles and responsibilities of girls and young women to the average Victorian (Helsing et al. 113). Cows, horses, and ships were named “The Girl of the Period,” demonstrating the ease with which the catchphrase and concept spread through the popular consciousness. She spawned parasols, comedies, waltzes, cartoons, and publications that ranged from volumes that reprinted Linton’s articles, Girl of the Period almanacs, and *The Girl of the Period Miscellany*. The *Miscellany* is particularly interesting in that it reworked the Girl of the Period from an object of disdain into a figure who might be humorous, but who was also engaging and sympathetic. There is a stark contrast between the homogenous Girl of the Period found in *Saturday Review*, *Punch*, *Tomahawk*, and elsewhere, and the multifaceted Girl of the Period depicted in the *Miscellany*.

Rather than being easily categorized and dismissed, the Girl of the Period found in the *Miscellany* has some characteristics that invite satire but she is also capable, entertaining, and attractive. Moreover, there is a significant difference between thinking about the article that spawned the phenomenon and the *Miscellany* itself. Appearing in the conservative *Saturday Review*, the article was provocative and seemingly intended to be so. In contrast, the *Miscellany* was designed to attract and retain a readership. This article will examine how and why the *Miscellany* is able to resist Linton’s simplistic construction of the Girl of the Period and instead depicts a

variety of different girls who, although their behaviour might be more “modern,” are nonetheless worthy of respect and attention as pure, virtuous, middle-class girls. In addition, the publication of the *Miscellany* demonstrates the challenges of attracting as readers a group of girls and young women whose self-conception was rapidly shifting at the end of the 1860s.

### THE GIRL OF THE PERIOD

In her article, Linton first describes a “fair young English girl...who could be trusted alone if need be, because of the innate purity and dignity of her nature” and “who was neither bold in bearing nor masculine in mind” (356). She is “generous, capable, and modest” as well as being “a tender mother, an industrious housekeeper, a judicious mistress” (356). In contrast to her, the Girl of the Period “dyes her hair and paints her face” and her only object in life is “plenty of fun and luxury” (356). Her dress is the focus “of such thought and intellect as she possesses,” suggesting that she is of limited intelligence. She is also known to sacrifice “decency” (356) and “cleanliness” (357) in her pursuit of fashion and thus she dresses and acts to please only herself, and cares little if she displeases others. In the end, however,

the girl of the period does not please men. She pleases them as little as she elevates them...All men whose opinion is worth having prefer the simple and genuine girl of the past, with her tender little ways and pretty bashful modesties, to this loud and rampant modernization, with her false red hair and painted skin, talking slang as glibly as a man, and by preference leading the conversation to doubtful subjects. (360)

The article is provocative for a number of reasons, but first of all for its lament that the innately pure and virtuous English girl no longer exists. Instead, she is merely a memory of times gone by and England must wait until “the national madness has passed” (360). Nationhood is intricately tied to its girls because of their future roles as wives of the next generation of leaders and as mothers of the next generation of children. How a girl conducts herself during her girlhood will have an impact on the future of the nation because her role as the spiritual and moral centre of the home will affect everyone around her. Linton waits hopefully for England’s women to “come back again to the old English ideal, once the most beautiful, the most modest, the most essentially womanly in the world” (360). The Girl of the Period is not a source of pride for England and has no admirable qualities. More importantly, her deviation from the ideal of the past is making her less feminine and less womanly.

Furthermore, these increasingly sexualised “modern” (356) girls are no longer content “to be what God and nature had made them” (356). The “natural” feminine ideal is being replaced by a girl who uses artificial beauty aids like cosmetics and hair dyes. She is a source of embarrassment and dismay because she is imitating the *demi-monde* world of prostitutes. As Linton explains, “it cannot be too plainly told to the modern English girl that the net result of her present manner of life is to assimilate her as nearly as possible to a class of women whom we must not call by their proper – or improper – name” (359). As Linton blurs the lines between the *demi-monde* and respectable middle-class society, she betrays her anxiety about the permeability of class boundaries and her desire to reinforce traditional class identifiers. For Linton, the most troubling aspect of the modern girl is that it is no longer possible to distinguish, by observing either her dress or her behaviour, between her and a

prostitute. (The success of the Contagious Disease Acts, for example, was predicated on the assumption that a prostitute was identifiable based on her appearance.) Thus the modern girl is in danger of becoming, or being perceived as becoming, a prostitute.

In her article, Linton articulates only two possible positions for the contemporary girl. She is the embodiment of either the virtuous womanly ideal of the past or the prostitute of the present. Linton does not address the many facets of the “woman question,” such as education, suffrage, and employment for women; instead she focuses on the changing representation of girls. Her dislike of this Girl of the Period suggests a deep anxiety about the control that girls are taking over their own lives. Rather than living according to a feminine ideal of domesticity and subordination to patriarchal structures, modern girls are choosing to exercise, at least to a limited extent, their own power in the highly gendered world of the 1860s. The changing styles of beauty, fashion, language, and behaviour that Linton notes reflect the changing expectations of feminine behaviour. Girls are making independent decisions about what to wear and how to conduct themselves, and Linton finds this deeply disturbing because these girls no longer reflect her nostalgic conception of the “fair young English girl.”

Although Linton may well have been writing to provoke a response, the immense “textual and commercial proliferation” of the Girl of the Period suggests that Victorian men and women both had “a need to codify and contain ‘representative’ woman” and it also “points to a general concern about England’s self-definition” (Boufis 98). The issue of self-definition is, I believe, at the core of this debate about the “Girl of the Period.” The surge of popularity in the Girl of the Period came about at least in part because of the middle-class girl’s desire to have “fun” (Anderson 118). This liberatory desire marks a different kind of emancipation than the movement towards higher education or women’s suffrage because its premise is based on overturning, at least to some degree, the prevalent model of femininity. These girls “gloried in self-display” (Anderson 118) and conspicuous consumption became a predominant occupation. The Girl of the Period thus becomes a lightning rod for anxieties about traditional roles for women as she actively makes her own decisions about how she conducts herself. Unable to control her appearance or her behaviour, the British press increasingly demonstrated its concern that the changing nature of girlhood was a sign of moral decline and degeneration.

### ***THE GIRL OF THE PERIOD MISCELLANY***

*The Girl of the Period Almanack* appeared at the end of 1868 to such success that *The Girl of the Period Miscellany* was launched in March 1869. Its run was short-lived though, lasting just nine months and culminating in another *Almanack* at the end of 1869. One of its contributors, novelist and painter Joseph Ashby-Sterry, described the *Miscellany* as “one of those ephemeral publications that are thrown away as soon as read” (Layard 143). The articles in the *Miscellany* are unsigned, but the majority of the contributors and illustrators are men, which highlights the unusual nature of this magazine. Most periodicals aimed at girls and women in the latter half of the nineteenth century, such as the *Monthly Packet*, the *Girl’s Own Paper*, *Atalanta*, and the *Girl’s Realm*, contained many contributions by women. Along with Ashby-Sterry (1836?-1917), contributors to the *Miscellany* include novelist, journalist and poet Mortimer Collins (1827-76), and Augustus Mayhew (1826-75), the author of comic

novels, plays and farces as well as being the assistant to his brother Henry in his investigations for *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851).<sup>3</sup> Illustrators included Miss Claxton, E. Barnes, William Brunton, and Civil War correspondent and illustrator for the *Illustrated London News* Frank Vizetelly (1830-83).

In her comments about the commercialisation of the *Girl of the Period*, Nina Rinehart notes, "It appears that the satirical thrust of the original article was ignored by the commercial exploiters since the products using Linton's title as a label were presumably aimed at the same fashionable young women Linton had attacked" (4). This is an important distinction between Linton's article and the *Miscellany* because it highlights a fundamental difference in the attitude towards the *Girl of the Period*. While Linton attacked and criticized her, the *Miscellany* was trying to attract her as a reader. It was intended to be read by the girls of the period and thus the comic journalism in its pages needed to walk a fine line between entertainment (even as it pointed to her foibles) and critique that might alienate its readers.

Whether or not the *Miscellany* was read, or intended to be read, by girls is a subject of some debate. Yet it seems clear from some of the contemporary responses to the magazine that girls were part of the understood readership. In the *Era*, a leading theatrical journal of the period, one reviewer notes,

This *Miscellany* is enjoying a very large share of popularity, and the present number (the fifth) is quite as readable and interesting as any of its predecessors. The *Miscellany* is designed for the edification of the "girl of period" in various stations of life, and there is nothing in the number before us which the most severe prude could object to. The work is profusely and tastefully illustrated, an engraving to every article being the role apparently laid down by the proprietors of the *Miscellany*. ("Literature" July 11, 1869 6)

This review suggests not only that the *Miscellany* is intended to be read by girls of varying classes, but also that its contents are entirely appropriate for that readership. The "prude" presumably refers to those guardians of girls' purity, who need to sign off on the propriety of any magazine which is geared towards a girl readership. In another *Era* review, the *Miscellany* is commended for its

very extensive circulation from the first, and the success is likely to continue while the contents are so attractive as they are at present. Articles written in a light and amusing tone are, of course, to be looked for in a magazine of this special class, but others of a more solid kind are wisely introduced from time to time. To commence with, in the August number is the third of a series of papers entitled *The Plain Gold Ring*, and in it are to be found some exceedingly sensible remarks on the superficial and altogether faulty education given to the young ladies of the present day. The changes are continually run on the "Girl of the Period," but monotony is cleverly avoided, and to conduct a magazine which has one principal theme to be kept constantly in view is no easy task. ("Literature" August 29, 1869 6)

The "special class" of the magazine presumably refers to its role as a comic journal. The recommendation of the more "solid" material incorporated within its pages emphasises that at least a portion of the *Miscellany's* readership was intended to be

girls. Otherwise, serious articles on girls' education and household responsibilities would be conspicuously misplaced.

In contrast to the *Era*'s positive reviews, the *Derby Mercury* is less enthused with the *Miscellany*. In a review of the first number, the writer notes that the "girl of the period" is "positively irrepressible, and we doubt whether the publication of this class of serials is the best means to reform them – if that is the object of their promoters" ("Literature" March 24, 1869 6). There is some uncertainty about the expected readers, and the writer wonders whether it will be effective in "reforming" these girls. It is, nonetheless, a publication in which "the idlers of society may find amusement" (6). By the time the seventh number appears, the *Mercury* reviewer is severely critical of the material, claiming that there are "several articles in this number that can serve no other purpose than to minister to a vitiated and prurient taste" ("Literature" Aug. 18, 1869 6). The final review in the *Mercury* condemns the content of the magazine as nothing more than "'fast' writing to suit 'fast' girls and silly men" ("Literature" Oct. 20, 1869 6). Despite the reviewer's obvious disdain for the contents of the *Miscellany*, his acknowledges that both girls and men will read it suggests the presence of multiple voices in the journal, a feature to which I return later.

The *Miscellany*'s role as a comedic journal complicates the reading of the Girl of the Period. The *Miscellany* certainly emerged from the tradition of comic journalism that arose from the early nineteenth-century literary magazine and the journal of political satire and that was instantiated with the arrival of *Punch* in 1841. However, as Alvin Sullivan notes in his discussion of Victorian comic journals, "rival comic weeklies" tended to resemble *Punch* "more closely than comic monthlies, which are generally less political and less satirical" (501). Donald Gray similarly observes the characteristically weekly nature of the British comic periodical, also noting that it generally sold "for a penny or two, rarely more than three" (2). A 6d. monthly magazine aimed specifically, at least in part, at girls, *The Girl of the Period* *Miscellany* is involved in an alternative project. Rather than engaging with Whig and Tory politics, the *Miscellany* addresses the contentious issue of gender and femininity in its pages. As Gray notes, "Increasingly, in the course of the century, what can be called social topics began to be given more space" (2) in comic journals.

The humour sometimes functions as a distancing device. As readers, we can enjoy her and sympathise with her, but we do not have to treat her too seriously. Furthermore, the irony in its pages allows its readers, especially its girl readers, the opportunity for self-reflection. A girl can choose where to position herself and is free to create a "girl of the period" that meets her own needs and desires. This freedom is particularly apparent in a declaration written by the fictional editor Miss Echo, whose name raises questions about whose voice and which ideas are being echoed. Miss Echo declares that the Girl of the Period is merely "the irony of the situation" (34). She is neither becoming more masculine nor more sexual but is merely "the delicately-masculinized giggle of the hour" (34), and thus readers everywhere can "cherish a sneaking kindness for her" (34) because it is "barely possible to unwomanize a woman" (34). This declaration invites the reader, whomever he or she might be, to join in on the joke, appreciate the foibles and idiosyncrasies of the Girl of the Period, and celebrate her "elastic" (34) womanliness. Thus the *Miscellany* is articulating and defining the Girl of the Period and, in so doing, revising her image from being predominantly negative into something much more positive. Even more importantly, the *Miscellany*

presents the idea that there are multiple girls of the period, rather than the single defining image articulated by Linton.

### **WHO IS THE GIRL OF THE PERIOD?**

The pages of the *Miscellany* are devoted to, amongst others, French, Irish, Scottish, and American Girls of the Period. There are London Girls of the Period, Evangelical Girls of the Period, and Tourist Girls of the Period. A cursory review of the *Miscellany* demonstrates the difficulty of identifying many common characteristics amongst these girls beyond their gender. Likewise, both the form and the title of the magazine highlight the different types of girls collected within its pages. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “miscellany” as “a book, volume, or literary production containing miscellaneous pieces on various subjects.” Indeed, the *Miscellany* “resists the singularity of the concept” (Fraser et al 22) of a “girl” of the period because it presents a variety of “girls” instead. The girls within the *Miscellany* are “a mixture, medley, or assortment” (*OED*). There is not just one Girl of the Period here, but many, and these girls look different, both from each other and from the “girl of the past,” and have a range of interests.

More troubling to critics like Linton than the actual differences between these girls is the meaning behind them. The many girls of the period are asserting their independence and making their own choices. Thus, the uncontrolled behaviour that Linton critiques in her article lies at the heart of the Girl of the Period in the *Miscellany*. A close inspection reveals her to be an enthusiastic supporter of the supposed newfound freedoms associated with girlhood in the late 1860s. Liberated from the confining domestic sphere, she enjoys being able to play croquet and flirt with captains and curates alike. In a poem appearing in the first issue, “Awfully Nice” (34), the narrator describes the life of a girl of the past as “shamefully slow” (l.2) because it placed limitations on her behaviour. A girl’s life nowadays is “better by far” (l.12) because girls have “freedom to roam; / We have not to sit always moping at home” (l.15-6).

The narrator in “Awfully Nice” is eager to leave the gendered space of the home behind. Instead of worrying “about stockings, or buttons, or needles and thread” (l.18), she invokes John Stuart Mill and his famous treatise on women’s rights. Dismissing concerns that this freedom might cause a young girl to become “a bad wife” (l.30), the narrator jokingly argues that her life is full of “hard, lady-like work” because “we crochet, we tatt, and till eyeballs are sore, / O’er horrible crimes in new novels pore” (l.36-8). The Girl of the Period is occupied with useless activities and reading sensation novels, and she loves it. The poem concludes with a reference to finding a husband while playing croquet, thus mixing “bus’ness with pleasure” (l.53). Even for a fun-loving Girl of the Period, there is a constant awareness that her “job” is to find a husband and although she might enjoy herself, she must present herself as an attractive and marriageable girl.

Thus, although the Girl of the Period is still concerned with marriage, she challenges the feminine ideal that Linton constructs and redefines it for the purposes of a modern young woman. In contrast to other magazines such as *The Monthly Packet*, where the responsibilities to family and church remain the most important part of a girl’s life, the narrator here is not troubled about her training to become a wife, nor is she concerned with her responsibility to the family. The emergence of girls into the public

sphere is the cause of much concern because it suggests that the social expectations governing the behaviour of middle-class girls are changing and these girls are no longer willing to confine themselves to spaces that had long been considered their proper domain. As Linton fears, the Girl of the Period “has done away with such moral muffishness as consideration for others, or regard for counsel and rebuke” (357). Instead, she eagerly chooses to have fun and be active. She embraces her sense of being a Girl of the Period and encourages the readers to do so as well.

The same sense of freedom associated with the Girl of the Period can also be found in an illustrated page entitled “Girls Who Play” (figure 1). At the bottom of the page is subtitle, “Un-Posted Valentines” and the page is divided into quarters, with each quarter occupied with a different girl: The Croquet Girl, The Nautical Girl, The Hunting Girl, and The Archery Girl. Along with an illustration of each girl is a poem and together they celebrate girls active outside the home. Although these girls are engaged in activities that could be considered somewhat masculine, it is nonetheless conceivable that girls would be active in such venues. Croquet was certainly seen as a feminine activity, and the Nautical Girl is engaged in nothing more threatening than gazing out to sea. What is significant to me is their depiction outdoors, not contained within the domestic interior. Furthermore, these girls are all elegantly dressed for their activities and maintain a sense of feminine decorum in their outward appearance, with the possible exception of the shorter skirts of all the girls and the cigarette being smoked by the Hunting Girl.

The *Miscellany* highlights the tradition of comic valentines that began in the 1840s through its reference to “Un-Posted Valentines.” Unlike sentimental valentines, which were printed on high quality paper and sometimes hand-painted, satirical comic valentines were printed on cheap paper and often sent anonymously. The *Miscellany* differs from this tradition because of its sincerity; although humorous, the illustrations of “Girls Who Play” are not comic exaggerations. Instead, these girls are attractively feminine and are successful in their outdoor pursuits. However, the valentines may be un-posted for a variety of reasons. There may be no one to receive them, the world may not ready to make jokes about these girls, or possibly their “un-posting” performs a kind of modesty on behalf of these adventurous girls. Because the Girl of the Period is displayed so positively elsewhere in the magazine, I would argue that these valentines are intended to portray the Girl of the Period as an attractive, albeit humorous, figure. The readers of the *Miscellany* are the intended recipients, and possibly the senders as well, because they will get the joke and have a giggle at these representations of themselves.

Unlike the “Girls Who Play,” who are quite obviously middle-class girls engaged in middle-class entertainments, the “Girls Who Work” (figure 2) are less clearly – and hence more problematically – situated within the middle-class: indeed they are much closer to the emerging lower middle-class, a segment of the reading public that was to become the principal consumer of periodicals like the *Miscellany*. These girls are apparently employed outside the home as a “Ballet Girl,” a “Lady’s Maid,” a “Refreshment-Bar Girl,” and a “Sewing-Machine Girl.” While these occupations are all essentially feminine, their public nature makes them less traditional. The

16 (GIRLS WHO PLAY.)



**THE CROQUET GIRL.**

ONE wants old WATTEAU'S hand to trace,  
And colours that glowed on his palette—  
To limn the magic courtly grace,  
And picture the Maid of the Mallet!

No mortal man could e'er refuse  
This maid her meed of adoration—  
But humbly owns *La Belle Croqueuse*  
As good at croquet as flirtation!



**THE NAUTICAL GIRL.**

WITH such a skipper for my boat,  
I'd sail the whole world over;  
On broad Atlantic fearless float,  
As knock about off Dover!

I'd gladly glide o'er billows blue,  
'Midst angry waves keep rollin'—  
With this "the darling of our crew,"  
Though unlike "poor TOM DOWLING."



**THE HUNTING GIRL.**

THIS Girl, "who hunts and *always* jumps"  
In spite of "purlers," knocks, or bumps,  
Rides straight to hounds, and leads the rush  
Of Nimrods eager for the brush.

Her crop well plied; just out of breath,  
She's foremost "scarlet" at the death;  
And lo! the trophy in her hand,  
Proclaims her chief of Dian's band.



**THE ARCHERY GIRL.**

O rapture with such a MAID MARIAN,  
At night-time to wander alone!  
In Sherwood's deep glades, with staid MARIAN,  
To press her and call her my own!

Then archest of archers, tender toxophilite,  
Smoother your feelings with sighs,  
Or surely you'll rob murky Nox of a light  
When drooping the lids of your eyes.

**UN-POSTED VALENTINES.**

Figure 1 – Girls Who Play

(GIRLS WHO WORK.)



THE BALLET GIRL.

Joy when she carols or dances,  
Rapture, indeed, when she flirts;  
Laughing with bright merry glances,  
Darling in gossamer skirts.

Tripping so light and fantastic—  
Of daintiest dancers the pearl—  
Sternest of cynics monastic,  
Smile on my sunny-haired girl!



THE LADY'S MAID.

You're clever and cautious, *ma mignonne*,  
And know every touch of the toilet;  
You can build up the loftiest chignon;  
Can curl it, or dye it, or oil it.

Who is able to ply more demurely  
Her ladyship's ivory brushes?  
Or more fitted to keep most securely  
The secrets of pallor or blushes?



THE REFRESHMENT-BAR GIRL.

Of this charmer I'm intensely fond—  
Be she HARRIET or HENRY—  
If well trained by SPENS & POND,  
Little care I who may she be!

Sweet as spring-time, bright as a star,  
I'm sure you cannot help owning,  
Now gentle HENRY'S called to the bar,  
'Tis "good-bye to the bar and its moaning!"



THE SEWING-MACHINE GIRL.

You sing and stitch with a merry sound,  
And blithely carol as wheels go round;  
Even then some time may be found  
To prattle, smile, and flirt.

You warble a lay to the new machine,  
Happy and gay as a summer's queen,  
For changed is the sempstress's song, I ween,  
Since HOOD sang the "Song of the Shirt"!

UN-POSTED VALENTINES.

Figure 2 – Girls Who Work

*Miscellany* was uncertain about depicting working girls in its pages because employment was a difficult facet to incorporate within the feminine ideal of virtue and purity. The moral and spiritual centre of the home could be contaminated by a girl's exposure to the business world. The magazine portrays these girls as successfully and happily employed. "The Sewing-Machine Girl," for example, sings and sews "with a merry sound" (l.1) and can even find time "to prattle, smile, and flirt" (l.4). The working conditions for "The Sewing-Machine Girl" have changed substantially since Thomas Hood described the toil as nothing but "Work! work! work!" (l.9) in his poem "Song of the Shirt" (1843). In the *Miscellany*, the Sewing-Machine Girl is no longer a poverty-stricken working-class girl; the girl's clothing and the illustrated background suggest she is pursuing a hobby at home, rather than working for a living. The illustrations represent newfound opportunities in public spaces for these girls, despite the unlikelihood that the girl readers could, or would, avail themselves of such freedoms.

Although a Girl of the Period can and should enjoy her freedom, she must not forget her marital and maternal obligations. Moreover, a Girl of the Period will be able to marry, suggesting that her virtue is unquestioned. The modernity of the Girl of the Period does not extend to liberal sexual behaviour, and is thereby limited to play and work. Although her childbearing responsibilities are often implicitly tied to her marriage, they are never made explicit. For example, there is no "Mother of the Period" in the *Miscellany*. Thus, the Girl of the Period is sexualised through the focus placed on marriage, yet this sexuality manifests itself independently of the traditional maternal role. In the *Miscellany*, "The Fast Smoking Girl" (figure 3) stands holding a pool cue and smoking a cigarette. Elaborately coiffed and dressed, she describes her favourite activities, which include balls, concerts, and sensation novels as well as singing and dancing. In her art studies, she rejects the "tame subjects" of landscape, fruit, or flowers, and instead studies the "glorious masculine figure...all day" (l.31-2). The sensual, sexual pleasure she describes is unusual in the girls' magazines of the period. However, the concluding stanza reminds the reader that a girl's sexual desire must be contained through marriage. The Fast Smoking Girl tells her mother, "Shut up, and don't preach about marriage" (l.33) because she will "hook a rich stupid old husband, / And I'll promise – but *he* shall *obey!*" (l.47-8).

Despite the Fast Smoking Girl's declarations to the contrary, the radical possibilities embodied in the figure of the Girl of the Period can, and perhaps should, be limited through marriage. One of the final contributions to the magazine is a poem, "Lines to 'A Girl of the Period'" (303). The poet, who is in love with this girl, disregards the gossip that she has smoked, talked slang, gamed, and diced, and concludes, "'Girl of the Period!' be it so, but matrimony / With one you love will make you amply steady" (l.19-20). Marriage thus becomes a reclamation of the feminine ideal and also suggests some of the ways in which marriage is assumed to function for men. This Girl of the Period will become more "steady" through marriage, and mere love is insufficient. At the same time, the poet asserts that he only wants her to change her

**THE FAST SMOKING GIRL.** 137



The weekly accounts may be filed :  
 How can I have time for one glance,  
 When dear Monsieur Chassez is coming  
 To teach me that jolly new dance?  
 He says : "Mees, you must *lever votre jupe*  
*Vos très-petits pieds* to deesplay."  
 When he twirls me about in the *trois temps*  
 From earth we seem floating away !

Oh, bother the children ! You know  
 At South Kensington, Ma, I am due,  
 That exquisite cast of Apollo  
 To draw with my master till two.  
 "Draw landscape, fruit, flowers." No, thank you ;  
 Such tame subjects are not in my way :  
 The glorious masculine figure  
 Is the model I study all day.

Shut up, and don't preach about marriage ;  
 Of spoons you well know I've a host ;  
 When I come to your old fogey age  
 I sha'n't have to mourn over time lost.  
 The neighbours may gossip, and welcome ;  
 I don't mind two pins what they say ;  
 I'll hook a rich stupid old husband,  
 And I'll promise—but *he shall obey !*

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MODERN IRISH MELODIES.—No. II.

*Air*—"I saw from the Beach."—TOMMY MOORE.

I SAW from my window, when Morning was smiling,  
 A "Girl of the Period" come tripping along,  
 When, sudden, the wild blast like fury came howling—  
 The girl was still there—but her "chignon" was gone !

Ah ! such is the fate of the wigs we put on us !  
 So fleeting the false hair of which we're so proud :  
 Our darling excrescence the rough wind blows from us,  
 And leaves us exposed to the jeers of the crowd.

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MODERN IRISH MELODIES.—No. III.

*Air*—"The harp that once in Tara's halls."—TOMMY MOORE.

The girl that oft in lighted halls  
 Enchantment round her shed,  
 Now sits neglected by the walls  
 Her bloom and temper fled.

So fades the belle of garrisons  
 Till she becomes a bore,  
 And hearts that once beat high for her  
 Now feel that pulse no more.

AN OLD BACHELOR.

**THE FAST SMOKING GIRL OF THE PERIOD.**

DESCRIBED BY HERSELF.

I'm a filly just rising eighteen,  
 Lots of life I'm determined to see ;  
 Stow "Markham and Mental Improvement"—  
 No more of such rubbish for me.  
 Balls, concerts, 'drums, sensation-novels,  
 Are the cheese for us girls of to-day :  
 And I'll do a mild weed on the quiet,  
 For that is the new-fashioned way.

Slow Sophia may sew herself blind ;  
 With Herr Trompette I'll try the duet  
 We have practised so many times over,  
 But never sang perfectly yet ;  
 "Come, let us be happy together,  
 For where there's a will there's a way,"  
 In the Lost One or La Traviata  
 He'll make me quite perfect some day.

Figure 3 – The Fast Smoking Girl of the Period

name, and not her nature. Ostensibly then, he accepts her as a Girl of the Period. At the same time, she is not exactly perfect; she needs steadying, and marriage will provide that.

Nonetheless, opportunities to meet and flirt with men are to be taken advantage of whenever they should occur. In “The Flirt of the Period,” the flirt is yet another type of Girl of the Period who is to be celebrated. “We are,” the author claims, neither “much worse or better than our grandmothers or great-mothers... We love, marry, ogle, enjoy a sly kiss or so, now and then, and a little hand-squeezing, maybe, just the same as they did” (287). The author is refuting Linton’s somewhat nostalgic assertion that the girls of the past were more pure and more modest than the girls of the present by claiming that their grandmothers and great-grandmothers were just as likely to flirt. Moreover, the girls of the past were sometimes even more sensational because they openly violated “the rules of propriety in the shocking way” (287) which girls of the present would never do.

If the Flirt of the Period uses her wits and intelligence to compete with “those unacknowledged rivals” of the *demi-monde*, “whom she nominally ignores” (208), by “taking hints from them as to fashions in dress,” who can blame her? “To a real flirt, dress is a very important item in her accoutrements of war” (288). Once again, the argument against the Girl of the Period focuses on fashion. As the author notes, borrowing fashions from “the excommunicated sisterhood” is one of the points that “her adversaries urge most strongly against her” (288). Like Braddon in “Whose Fault Is It?”, however, this author argues that “men bring all this on themselves” (288) because “they obtrude these people on her notice everywhere” (288). This is apparent elsewhere in the *Miscellany* as well, including an article entitled “A Lady’s Remonstrance,” where “a lady” holds men responsible for their role in the creation of the Girls of the Period because, she argues, “women are what men make them” (179). What is particularly revealing in this discussion of women’s dress, and the comparison being made with a girl’s “unacknowledged rivals,” is the unquestioning acceptance of the feminine ideal and the ability to read that ideal based on the appearance of the body. It is tacitly understood by these writers that they are contravening the contemporary sense of fashionable decorum by taking dressing tips from a prostitute, and although they persist in defending themselves, they do not modify their behaviour or their dress.

This resistance to conventional expectations is what makes the *Miscellany* such a fascinating contribution to discussions of mid-Victorian girlhood. These girls are fully aware that they are opening themselves to attack when they adapt their external appearance or their behaviour based on examples from the *demi-monde*, but they continue to do so. They reject the moralising implicit in Linton’s argument just as they reject the idea that the changing nature of girlhood, of which they are the embodiment, is a sign of moral decline. Contravening accepted norms is both exciting and daring, and a key component to becoming a proper Girl of the Period.

### **CONTRADICTIONS IN FEMININE ROLES**

Margaret Beetham reminds us in her theorizing about the periodical press that there are, in each issue, many different contributors and thus a single issue of a periodical, much less its entire run, does not necessarily present a unified or coherent view on a given topic.<sup>4</sup> This is particularly evident in the discussion of the feminine role within

the pages of the *Miscellany*. In an occasional series entitled “The Plain Gold Ring,” the author<sup>5</sup> states clearly that

a woman *is* positively and distinctly created in order that she may become a wife and mother. If she misses this destiny, there is something wrong somewhere – it may be in herself, it may be out of herself. But a woman is a most complicated piece of mechanism, as clearly intended for wifehood and motherhood as the eye is intended to see. You may make an old maid, or a nun, or nurse all her life of her; but if you do, she is *qua* woman, a failure, whatever great and noble things she may do, or whatever she may accomplish to raise the standard of human effort and kindle the lamp of human hope. (277)

This article is surprising first of all for its tone. Gone are the jokingly familiar references to the Girl of the Period, and in their place is a much more severe tone, unaccepting of either feminine imperfections (such as a lack of inventiveness in household management) or spinsterhood. The message is also surprisingly direct after the many indirect references to marriage as well as the frequent recognition that marriage is not a foregone conclusion. If there was any lack of clarity about the importance of marriage and domestic skills, it has been removed here. Furthermore, the author makes it explicit that a woman’s roles as wife and mother are part of her feminine function, just as the eye is intended to see. A woman is a “mechanism” intended for marriage and motherhood. The female body is a symbol for both Linton and this author of her feminine functions, which are natural and, as Linton describes, “essentially womanly” (360). The subversive and/or comical possibilities of the female body have been removed and in their place the sexual and maternal functions are highlighted.

There are still other explorations of women’s roles within the pages of the *Miscellany*. In the first issue, one author wonders, “What shall we do with our surplus women?” (“What is the Girl of the Period For?” 6), an echo of W.R. Greg’s controversial article in 1862.<sup>6</sup> The author argues that only emigration to the Colonies “meets the case so far as the ideal of a woman’s career – wifehood and motherhood – is concerned” (6). This vocal support for traditional female roles is curious in the first issue of the *Miscellany*, which was intended to celebrate modern girls. Yet even emigration is an unsatisfactory solution because “it hurts one’s feelings as a man to think of exporting women; having them examined like government stores, and carried off in batches like Sheffield or Manchester goods” (6).<sup>7</sup> If women are not to be exported like certain manufactured goods, then it must be recognised that “marriage is not the sole or even the chief end of women” (6). This acknowledgement that marriage may be unlikely is problematic for the author because he feels the long disuse of the “feminine functions” will cause a woman’s hair to be “short and straight, her bust flat, her shoulders broad, and the whole of the existing pyriform aspect of her form [will] disappear” (6). Her voice will become deeper and she may become “a powerful man of business” (6). A woman’s reproductive role is linked to her ongoing femininity and the lack of a husband and children will cause her to become increasingly masculine, so much so that she will “be no more fit for a wife or a mother” (6) than Mr. Mill

himself. In connecting a woman's physical appearance with her social and reproductive roles as wife and mother, the feminine ideal on which these roles are based is reinforced.

Elsewhere in the *Miscellany*, the female body is intended to be seen as a spectacle and sometimes a joke. Femininity and fashion are both subject to comment and critique, as well as humour, in its pages. On a page of illustrations about hairstyles, for example, the ridiculousness of certain styles (figure 4) is highlighted. In "Prize Chignons from 'The Horticultural,'" the exaggerated hairstyles point to the extremes of fashion to which the Girls of the Period will subject themselves, including the use of false hairpieces. At the same time, these comic styles cause the girls to become spectacles, and the object of the male gaze, which helps them in their quest to find suitable marriage partners. Thus, although the magazine is pointing to the folly of the "Pineapple" hairstyle, and pokes fun at styles gone too far, it does not explicitly endorse a more prim and proper figure. As readers, we are invited to love and laugh with the Girl of the Period. Some other contemporary periodicals, like *The Monthly Packet* or *Victoria Magazine*, offered depictions of girls as models of appropriate behaviour. Unlike them, the *Miscellany* is more interested in humour than the corrective positioning of girls. Although humour can also be used correctively, I think the reader here is supposed to be amused. The poem accompanying the illustrations, "My Chignon" (185), celebrates the chignon for its ability to protect the wearer after a fall down six flights of stairs, and to create a bird's nest with stray twigs. Even more importantly, the chignon provides an opportunity for the wearer to meet young men when they accidentally run into the chignon and must be disentangled from it.

### HEALTHY AND ACTIVE GIRLS

As fashion is intended to be humorous, so too are physically active girls. Although a girl's femininity can be enhanced by her active lifestyle, it may also cause her to become less feminine. One of the first examples of this is in a supposed letter to the editor entitled "A Muscular Maiden" (79), in which a man describes an incident where two boys try to rob a young governess on her way to work. The young woman gives one boy a black eye, and punches the other in the stomach, for which pugilistic ability the narrator has much admiration. The accompanying illustration (figure 5) depicts the young woman responding to the narrator's offer of assistance, to which she thanks him and replies "quietly," "I think I have arranged the matter" (78). The two boys no longer present a threat, and the young woman appears unruffled and remains neatly dressed. Both her quiet response and her neat dress emphasise her femininity, while the boys at her feet suggest her masculine capability. The fact that the illustration does not depict her in the act of punching the boys is significant. The narrator is impressed with her abilities, but to physically display her punching a boy might be a bit too confrontational for the readers of the *Miscellany*. Instead, illustrating the scene after the woman has solved her trouble emphasises her ability to look after herself, as well as how little this ability undermines her femininity. The narrator is so impressed with her that he inquires of Miss Echo whether there is "no one among your staff like this fair Amazon to whom you can introduce me? I do not know the muscular one's address, and besides, she probably has a lover, and I want to have the field all to myself. But I want a muscular wife" (79). He explicitly sexualises, and feminises, her muscular capabilities by explaining how, as husband and wife, they can "playfully practise pugilistic feats upon each other, and amicably settle all conjugal differences by putting on the gloves" (79). She is implicitly

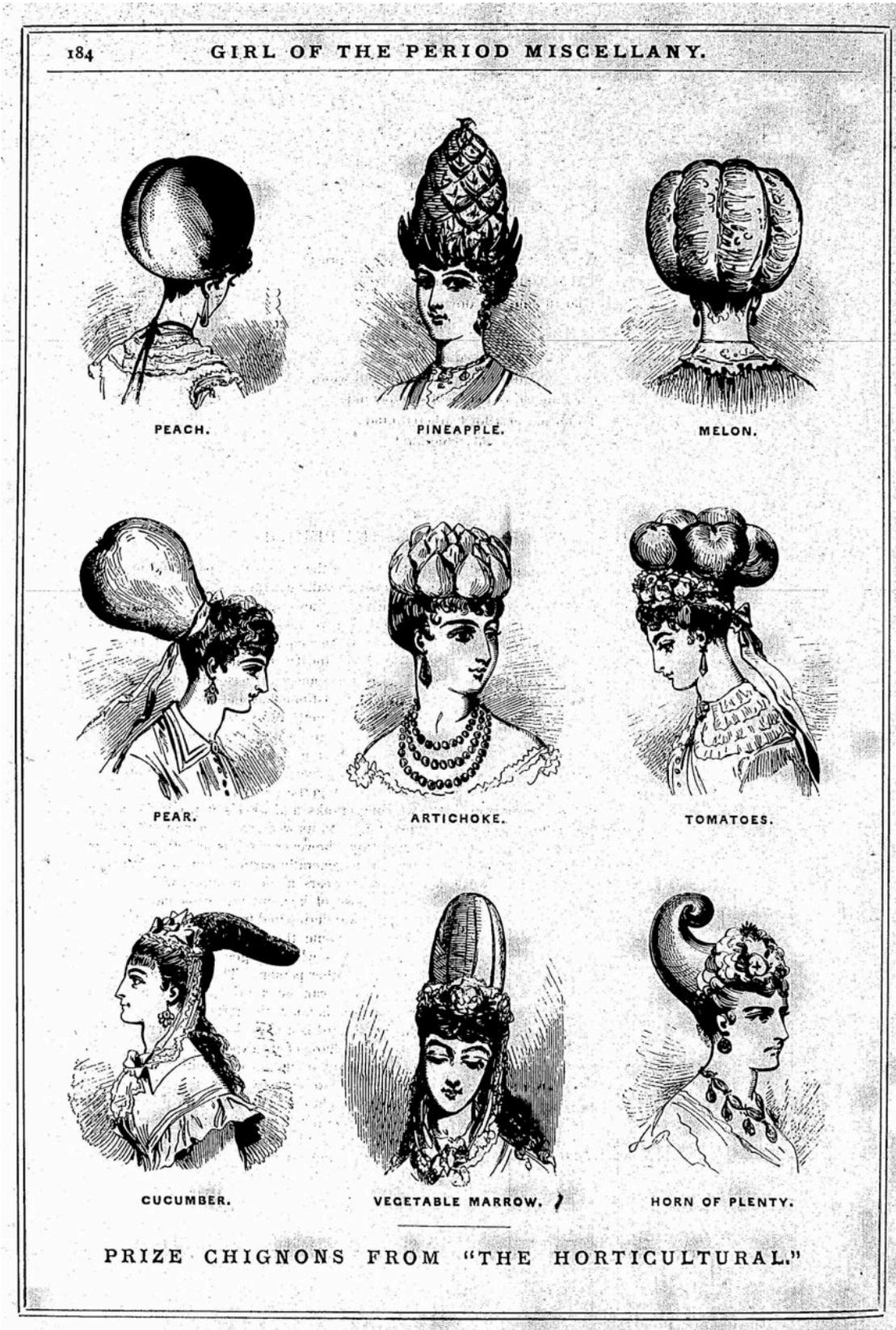
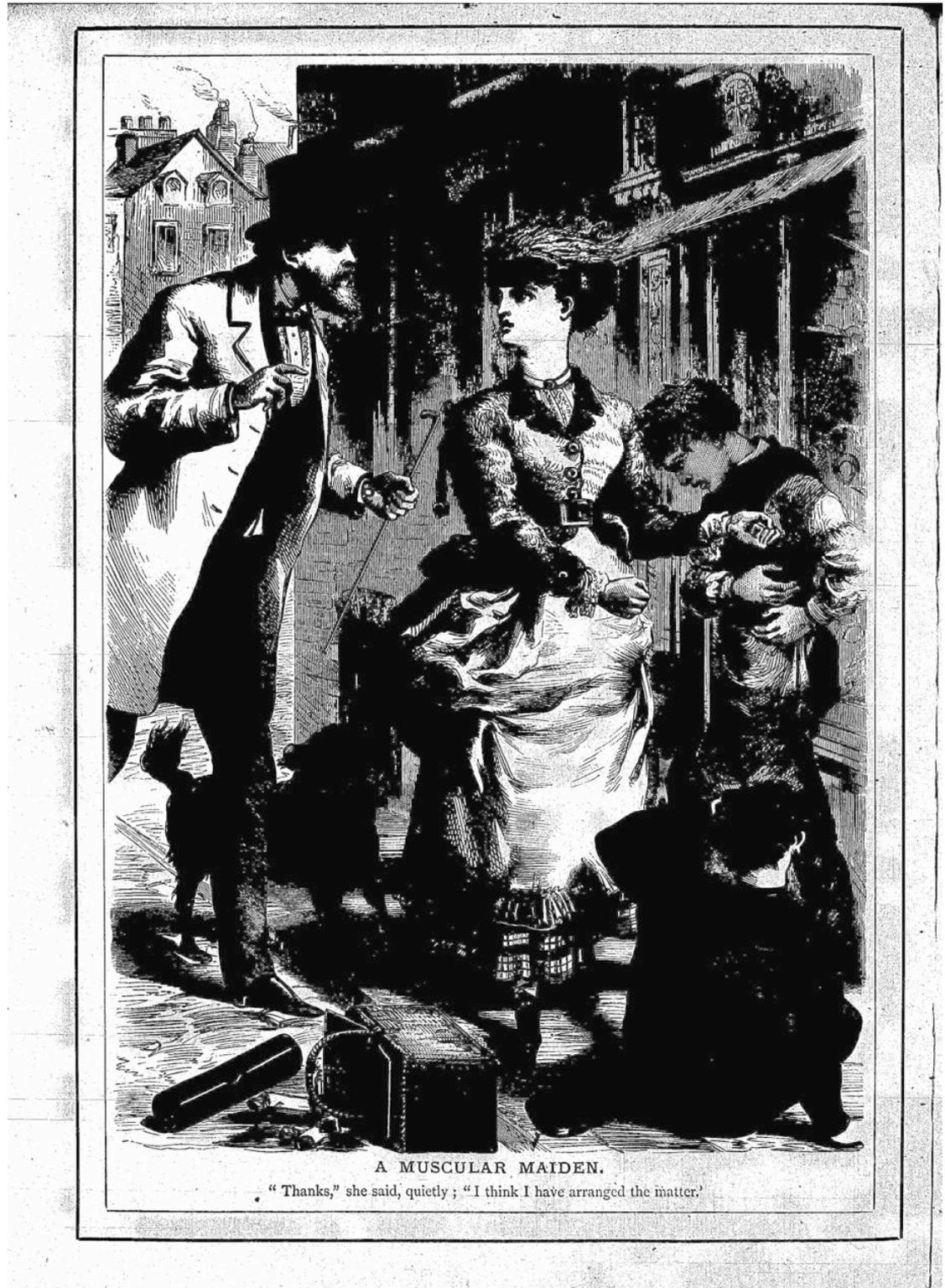


Figure 4 – Prize Chignons from ‘The Horticultural’



**Figure 5 – A Muscular Maiden**

sexually attractive, for he believes her to already have a lover. At the same time, her masculine pugilistic abilities make her an ideal feminine sexual partner.

Similarly, one contributor fiercely admires the “Climbing Girl of the Period” for her ability to climb mountains without losing her femininity. He goes to some length to reassure the reader that this girl is not just a tomboy grown up, but is instead, “a new adaptation of femininity. For basis you must take an active, courageous English girl. Let her have plenty of health. Let her have a hearty hatred of all kind of humbug. Let her have a wholesome love of change, movement, and adventure” (197). The idea that this Climbing Girl of the Period is a “new adaptation of femininity” is fascinating because it suggests a different kind of feminine ideal than the commonly accepted prototype that Linton identifies. Linton’s concern with the outward appearance of the Girl of the Period is gone, replaced by a girl who welcomes movement and activity, and dresses appropriately for this activity.

Although the text supports this new femininity, the accompanying illustrations are less reflective of these adaptations. In figure 6, for example, the only concessions to climbing mountains are the shorter dress and the accompanying walking stick, and while her hat may be fashionable, it certainly would not provide any protection from the elements. Her shoes are petite and seem less suited to climbing mountains than to attending a ball. This picture reflects a feminine standard in keeping with the other fashion-conscious girls of the period, both in the *Miscellany* and elsewhere. Furthermore, this traditional feminine ideal is reinforced through the concluding paragraph of the article, when the author writes that the “Final Cause” (197) of the Climbing Girl of the Period is to marry the Climbing Young Man of the Period. If there was a worry that the Climbing Girl might just keep climbing forever, the author hastens to reassure his readers that marriage is the proper conclusion, even for this new feminine adaptation. However, despite this traditional, and unsurprising, rhetoric regarding marriage, it is important to remember that this Climbing Girl is rather a unique figure. As she climbs high mountains, unaided by anything but a walking stick, she is the embodiment of free and independent living. She does not depend on men for her climbing and yet she is able to retain her feminine figure. Thus her femininity is not compromised by new activities and, like the Muscular Maiden, her traditional role is enhanced by new abilities. Moreover, the irony in both the description and the illustration of the Climbing Girl once again open up a space of subjective freedom for the Girl of the Period. She is free to dress and behave as she wishes.

### **PURITY PREVAILS**

*The Girl of the Period Miscellany* never veers from its appreciation of her foibles and her many attributes. She is multifaceted and various. She can ride a bike, climb mountains, flirt with the best of them, disarm a threat, get married, talk slang, and make her own choices. A point of humour and a site for sober discussion, she represents many different things to many different people, and she sparks a debate at the end of the 1860s that is virtually unprecedented. Inspired by the discussion about the roles of women in British society, she leads the way for a broader conception of



**Figure 6 – The Climbing Girl**

girls and girlhood in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Her popularity demonstrates the extent to which she captivates the imaginations of the public. Importantly, however, even as the *Miscellany* redefines Linton's homogenous Girl of the Period into a series of figures who are appreciated for their wit, daring, and adventure, the magazine is careful to ensure that it keeps the core of the mid-Victorian feminine ideal intact. The many Girls of the Period figured in the magazine could cross most of the boundaries established for them, but their sexual and moral purity is sacrosanct.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Although Linton made some money from her novels, and received a small allowance from her father, she supplemented this income by becoming the first woman journalist in England to draw a fixed salary for her work at the newspaper *The Morning Chronicle*.

<sup>2</sup> In *Saturday Review*, Linton also criticised the “Shrieking Sisterhood” who sought women's right to vote as well as the “Modern Mother” who neglected her maternal responsibilities in her quest to become ladylike. Linton's *Saturday Review* essays

were collected and published in a two-volume edition, *'The Girl of the Period' and other Social Essays*, in 1883.

<sup>3</sup> The editor, "Miss Echo," is never explicitly identified in the magazine, and the secondary material is contradictory. In *British Literary Magazines: The Victorian and Edwardian Age, 1837-1913*, Alvin Sullivan claims the role was filled by Augustus Mayhew. In John North's *Waterloo Directory*, James Vizetelly is identified as editor.

<sup>4</sup> See Beetham's "Open and Closed: The Periodical as a Publishing Genre" in *Victorian Periodicals Review* for her discussion of the complexities associated with analyzing the periodical.

<sup>5</sup> The anonymity of the contributors makes it difficult to ascertain whether the entire series was written by the same person.

<sup>6</sup> In "Why are women redundant?", Greg proposes that the problem of surplus women be resolved through emigration.

<sup>7</sup> This is one of the few articles where the author's gender is explicitly identified.

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