

*The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* by Talia Schaffer. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 2000. x, 298 pp. ISBN 0-8139-1936-3. \$55.00 (cloth). ISBN 0-8139-1937-1. \$19.50 (paper).

*Women and British Aestheticism* edited by Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1999. viii, 304 pp. ISBN 0-8139-1891-X. \$68.50 (cloth). ISBN 0-8139-1892-8. \$19.50 (paper).

What was the relationship between women and aestheticism at the end of the nineteenth century in England? Lisa K. Hamilton in an essay on "New Women and 'Old' Men" quotes Oscar Wilde as saying that women were "charmingly artificial" but had "no sense of art" (*Women and British Aestheticism* 67). These books are out to prove Wilde wrong. They focus on the changing ideas about gender current at the fin de siècle, as well as our contemporary ideas about this time. Our own fin de siècle has proven to be a productive time to examine the last one.

Talia Schaffer's *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes* brings to the fore the importance of women such as Graham R. Tomson (Rosamund Marriott Watson), Ouida (Marie Louise de la Ramée), Alice Meynell, and Lucas Malet (Mary St. Leger Kingsley Harrison) who were a vital, but hitherto unrecognized, part of British aestheticism. The essays in *Women and British Aestheticism*, edited by Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades, stress the importance of women at the time in prose, fiction, and poetry, but also go beyond these fields to include, for example, Gertrude Jekyll's garden writing and Vernon Lee's and Kit Anstruther-Thomson's psychological aesthetics. These complementary books greatly expand our perception of the aesthete from male and poetic to female and novelistic, and even into other areas completely. They bridge the time between the Victorians and the moderns, leading to recoveries and reassessments, and, it would be hoped, further work in the field. Indeed, Vernon Lee's name appears so frequently in these pages that she seems an excellent candidate for further research and publication.

The most riveting sections of the introductions to both volumes attempt to explain how these women came to be forgotten. Several factors converged to exclude women from the remembered rolls of aesthetes. Women tended to work in unappreciated fields of aestheticism. The original writers on aestheticism were writing about their friends--it was an insular world in which the men who published in journals and brought out histories or collections focused on one another's works. Although many women writers were popular in their day, that popularity did not continue past their own era. Schaffer believes that female novelists are particularly ill-remembered, and notes that feminist scholars have not typically celebrated the aesthetes. Indeed, she suggests that a division has come to be established between the New Women writers and the female aesthetes, although there was some overlap between them. Many critics working on the New Women do not consider the female aesthetes, or they focus on the more overtly feminist among them. New Women novels show women's freedom in making sexual choices while the aesthetes display