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Charles Kingsley's *Hypatia*, Visual Culture and Late-Victorian Gender Politics

Victoria Mills*

ABSTRACT

Charles Kingsley's *Hypatia or New Foes with an Old Face* was first published in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1852, but was reissued in numerous book editions in the late nineteenth century. Though often viewed as a novel depicting the religious controversies of the 1850s, Kingsley's portrayal of the life and brutal death of a strong female figure from late antiquity also sheds light on the way in which the Victorians remodelled ancient histories to explore shifting gender roles at the fin de siècle. As the book gained in popularity towards the end of the century, it was reimagined in many different cultural forms. This article demonstrates how Kingsley's *Hypatia* became a global, multi-media fiction of antiquity, how it was revisioned and consumed in different written, visual and material forms (book illustrations, a play, painting and sculpture) and how this reimagining functioned within the gender politics of the 1880s and 1890s. Kingsley's novel retained a strong hold on the late-Victorian imagination, I argue, because the perpetual restaging of Hypatia's story through different media facilitated the circulation of pressing fin-de-siècle debates about women's education, women's rights, and female consumerism.

KEYWORDS: Hypatia, Charles Kingsley, historical fiction, New Woman, classical reception, visual culture, intermediality, illustration, sculpture, Victorian nude, Charles Mitchell, Richard Belt

Positioned in an alcove in the north-west corner of the Drapers' Livery Hall, City of London, Richard Belt's statue of Hypatia (1882) is just one of a significant number of visual depictions of the fourth-century pagan philosopher and scholar produced during the second half of the nineteenth century (Figure 1). Like most representations, Belt's statue shows the moment immediately preceding Hypatia's brutal attack and subsequent murder by a gang of Christian monks. Many such artworks were directly inspired by Charles Kingsley's novel, *Hypatia, or New Foes with an Old Face*, first published in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1852 and republished many times in novel form later in the century. Set in Alexandria, the second city of the Roman Empire, Kingsley's text imagines the story of Hypatia and charts her fraught relationships with Cyril, the Christian Patriarch and Orestes, the Roman Prefect of Egypt. Hypatia was accused of causing unrest in the city and towards the end of the novel, Kingsley describes her callous murder in graphic detail, the tearing of her flesh with flints, shells and fragments of pottery, the burning of her limbs and the scattering of her bones. Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman and John Henry Newman critiqued Kingsley's portrayal of the ruthless machinations of the early church and a novel-off ensued in which Wiseman's *Fabiola* (1854) and Newman's *Callista* (1855) (both works of antique fiction featuring Christian martyrdom) were published to counter the anti-Catholic impetuses of Kingsley's narrative.

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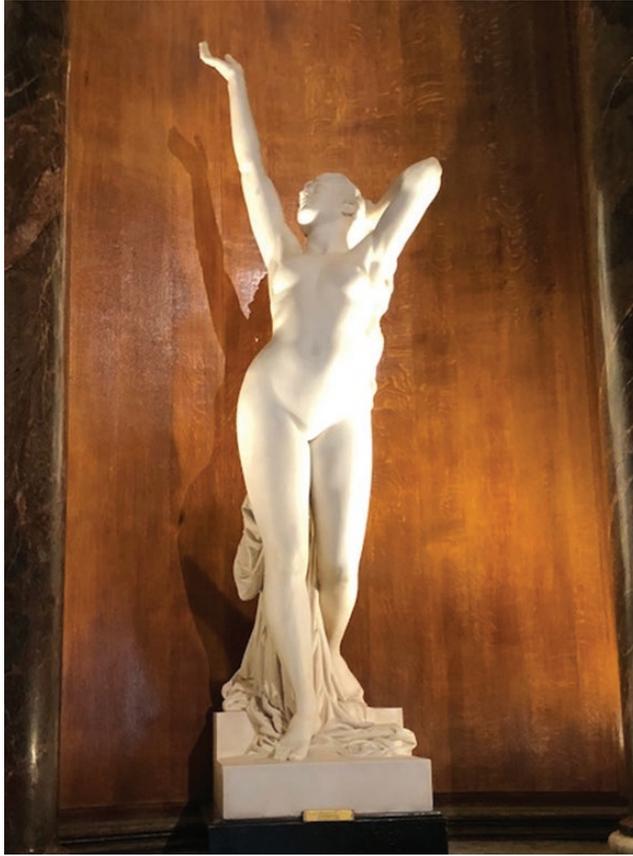


Figure 1. Richard Belt's *Hypatia*, Drapers' Livery Hall, City of London. Courtesy of The Drapers' Company.

The relatively scant existing criticism on *Hypatia* situates it in relation to the religious controversies of the 1850s. Norman Vance sees the novel as an exposition of Kingsleyan manliness through which Kingsley effects a critique of late-Roman Christianity. Simon Goldhill discusses race and breeding as significant themes in Kingsley's anti-Catholic polemic, while Sarah Ross has recently emphasized the importance of national and international politics for a reading of the novel, situating it in relation to the build up to the Crimean War and showing how both the war and the novel mediated the racial dimensions of complex religious issues.¹

In contrast to these readings, which take contemporary religious debates as their focus, this article uncovers *Hypatia*'s intervention in late-Victorian debates on gender. Kingsley's depiction of a strong female figure from late antiquity, I argue, sheds light on the way in which the Victorians remodelled ancient histories to explore shifting gender roles at the fin de siècle. As the book gained in popularity towards the end of the century, it was reimagined in many different cultural forms. Studies of classical reception are often restricted to one medium and

¹ Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 112; Simon Goldhill, *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity: Art, Opera, Fiction, and the Proclamation of Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011); Sarah Ross, 'Brave Hermeneutics, the Eastern Question, and Kingsley's *Hypatia*', *Victorian Studies*, 60 (2018), 412–33.

the relationships between different media can often be ignored.² Yet Kingsley himself described *Hypatia* as a ‘sketch’ drawing attention to the importance of visuality in the writing of historical fiction.³ Moreover, in the late-Victorian era new techniques of reproduction led to an unprecedented availability of different forms of writing and visual culture, which influenced the consumption of the cultural history of the antique, and stimulated the growth of a popular audience for fictions of antiquity. This article demonstrates how *Hypatia* became a global, multi-media fiction of antiquity, how it was revisioned and consumed in different written, visual and material forms (illustrations, a play, painting and sculpture) and how this reimagining functioned within the gender politics of the 1880s and 1890s. Kingsley’s novel retained a strong hold on the late-Victorian imagination, I argue, because the perpetual re-staging of Hypatia’s story through different media facilitated the circulation of pressing contemporary debates, particularly in the periodical press, about the evolving roles of women.

Recent scholarship has shown how the antique world had a profound impact on Victorian literature and culture, and that visions of antiquity were central to the Victorians’ conception of their own modernity.⁴ Goldhill, for example, suggests that four linked contexts (religion, history, national identity and politics) are crucial for an understanding of the role played by works of antique fiction in the Victorian cultural imagination.⁵ Nineteenth-century fictions of antiquity, however, remain under-researched and the importance of the numerous illustrated editions is rarely discussed. Depictions of martyrdom set in the ancient world were an especially popular subject for Victorian writers and artists. Novels featuring martyrs include Henryk Sienkiewicz’s *Quo Vadis* (1895), W. H. Withrow’s *Valeria, The Martyr of the Catacombs* (1883) and Edward Farrar’s *Darkness and Dawn* (1891), among many others. *Hypatia*, though not strictly a narrative of Christian martyrdom (Hypatia is not quite converted before her death), spawned the two response novels by Newman and Wiseman, both of which deal with female martyrdom.

Usually set in the declining years of the Roman Empire, such novels connect past and present, prompting debates about the role and purpose of Christianity in modern Victorian society. This renewed interest in martyrs generated a variety of literary and visual responses. As well as the novels mentioned above, early Christian martyrdom was depicted in many nineteenth-century paintings and the figure of Hypatia herself became a well-treated subject for artists. This output included a sculpture by Rachel Levison and a watercolour by Rebecca Solomon (both untraced), a photograph by Julia Margaret Cameron (1868) in which Marie Spartali posed as the philosopher and a painting by Arthur Hacker of the characters Pelagia and Philammon (1887). Charles Mitchell’s 1885 painting, *Hypatia*, (now at the Laing Gallery in Newcastle) inspired a sculpture by Francis John Williamson (1891). Other sculptures include Robert Cushing’s *Hypatia* displayed in the west gallery of the National Academy of Design in 1887, Belt’s sculpture mentioned above, Peter Rothermel’s painting *The Death of Hypatia* (1876) and Oduardo Tabacchi’s sculpture (1874), which was presented at the National Exhibition of Fine Arts in Naples in 1877 and sold at Sotheby’s in 2017.⁶

² For example, William St Clair and Annika Bautz usefully trace the production history of Bulwer-Lytton’s *Last Days of Pompeii* but devote little attention to readings of the visual culture it inspired. ‘Imperial Decadence: The Making of the Myths in Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *The Last Days of Pompeii*’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 40 (2012), 359–96.

³ Charles Kingsley, *Hypatia*, 2 vols (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1853), I, p. xx.

⁴ See for example Goldhill, *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity*; Norman Vance, *The Victorians and Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997).

⁵ Goldhill, *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity*, pp. 158–9.

⁶ I have not been able to trace the Cushing statue or Rothermel’s painting, though pencil sketches exist for the latter.

Most of these artworks date from the late nineteenth century, thirty to forty years after the publication of Kingsley's novel. At this time, the popularity of *Hypatia* the novel was growing rapidly in both the UK and the US. *The Literary World* of 1895, while hostile to what it describes as an 'overrated book', marvels at the enduring popularity of the novel, which appeared 'as old wine in new bottles' (that is in many different editions), 'a fact to which every critical opinion must bend'.⁷ Following the first edition in 1853, a second and third were published in 1856/8 and a fourth in 1863. Fifteen reprints occurred between 1869 and 1888, two sixpenny editions in 1889 and 1890 and a new edition in seven impressions between 1888 and 1894. An Eversley edition came out in two impressions in 1881 and 1890 and a pocket edition in 1895. Illustrated editions were published in 1894, two in 1897, one in 1899 and another in 1914. The 'Literary Week' column in the *Academy* of 1900 remarked that '*Hypatia* ... [is] constantly selling'.⁸

What follows is an exploration of Kingsley's *Hypatia* as it morphs through different contexts and cultural forms. I begin with an exploration of the ways in which visual and textual depictions of Hypatia converge with the figure of the 'Girton Girl', a prototype New Woman figure who was closely associated with the development of classics as a field of undergraduate study for women in the late nineteenth century. The second part of the article examines William Martin Johnson's illustrations for an edition of *Hypatia* published by Harper and Brothers in 1894. Targeted at female readers, this lavishly illustrated edition encouraged a form of engagement with the past rooted in the commercial concerns of the present. Lastly I examine depictions of the moment preceding Hypatia's murder by a book illustrator (Lee Woodward Zeigler), sculptor (Belt) and a painter (Mitchell). Focusing on both composition and modes of display, I consider how these works represent the naked female body prior to assault and in doing so, how they negotiated the controversial politics of the Victorian nude, much discussed in the mid 1880s in relation to the display of the nude female figure in a number of London art galleries. First, however, I consider some methodological questions raised by the subheading to Kingsley's novel.

1. NEW FOES WITH AN OLD FACE

Kingsley was explicit about the correlations between his fourth-century story and the nineteenth-century present: 'I have shown you New Foes under an Old Face – your own likenesses in toga and tunic, instead of coat and bonnet', he writes, exhorting his mid-nineteenth century readership to recognize themselves in his depictions of the historical figures of late antiquity (2:377). Kingsley had particular foes in mind, the leaders of the Oxford Movement, who threatened his own brand of liberal Anglicanism. But his statement has wider implications for thinking about the reception of antiquity. What does it mean for a nineteenth-century reader to recognize his or herself in the literary representation of a figure from the antique past? What are the gender implications? Do the 'foes' change across time in step with contemporary politics and the concerns of the day, or is this approach too 'crudely presentist'?⁹ And what model of reception pays attention to the intermedial relations between Kingsley's novel and other cultural forms such as painting, illustration and sculpture?

⁷ [Anon.], 'Old Wine in New Bottles', *The Literary World; A Monthly Review of Current Literature*, 21 September 1895, p. 300.

⁸ [Anon.], 'Literary Week', *The Academy, a Weekly Review of Literature and Life*, 22 April 1900, p. 325.

⁹ Charles Martindale, 'Thinking through Reception' in *Classics and the Uses of Reception*, ed. by C. Martindale and Richard F. Thomas (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), pp. 1–13, p. 13.

Examining later illustrated editions of *Hypatia* demands a broader perspective than the historical contingencies of an isolated publication moment allow, linking the publication of new volumes to new contexts, new politics and new aesthetics.¹⁰ These texts raise questions about the way in which history's materiality is mediated through writing and visual culture, processes of circulation and replication and the significance of aesthetic choices in the re-performance of history, all of which shape the relationship between past and present. Mieke Bal's notion of 'preposterous history', is useful in this context. Bal considers cultural forms which refuse to abide by chronology, describing this phenomenon as a 'reversal', which 'puts what came chronologically first ("pre-" as an after effect behind ("post") its later recycling'.¹¹ The texts and artworks under discussion here mediate between a classical past and two different Victorian presents (the 1850s and the 1890s). This temporal complexity is also inherent in Kingsley's statement in which the 'new foes' of the present are discernible in the newly represented and consumed, but nonetheless 'old face[s]' of the classical past.

Such multi-layered temporalities also have implications for questions of gender. In an article titled 'Heroines of Nineteenth-Century fiction' (1901), William Dean Howells describes Kingsley's *Hypatia* as a 'young lady of the early 1850s, of the time when young ladies of her type were crudely called strong minded'. Calling to mind Eliza Lynn Linton's controversial 1868 article for *The Saturday Review*, 'The Girl of the Period', Howells describes *Hypatia* as 'rather arrogant in mind, holding matrimony in high scorn and thinking but little better, if any, of maternity'.¹² For Howells, Kingsley's *Hypatia* is as much a 'girl' of the 1850s and 1860s as she is a woman of the fourth century CE. As well as being associated with Kingsley's opposition to Catholicism, then, the figure of *Hypatia* became a focal point for contemporary periodical debates on the woman question.

Kingsley himself often intervened in debates about the role of women. He contributed to Frederick Denison Maurice's 1855 collection *Lectures to Ladies on Practical Subjects* and in 1869 he produced an article for *Macmillan's Magazine*, 'Women in Politics', responding to John Stuart Mill's *Subjugation of Women*, published in the same year. In 1873, his *Sanitary and Social Lectures and Essays* (discussed below) again broached the question of proper female behaviour. In the context of fin-de-siècle debates on femininity, then, the *Hypatia* of Kingsley's novel, *Hypatia* the historical figure, and *Hypatia* as avatar of a particular Victorian female type were all in play. By the time illustrated editions of *Hypatia* were circulating in the 1880s and 90s, encountering Kingsley's 'New foes with an old face' involved the recognition of a tripartite relationship between the gender questions posed by the events of late antiquity, Kingsley's figuring of *Hypatia* in the context of mid-century debates over the woman question and the late-Victorian discourse on the New Woman.

2. HYPATIA, THE NEW WOMAN AND THE GIRTON GIRL

'A wise man would sooner see his daughter a Nausicaa than a Sappho, an Aspasia, a Cleopatra, or even an *Hypatia*' stated Kingsley in his 1873 lecture 'Nausicaa in London'. Later published

¹⁰ Julia Thomas writes about the importance of the 'cultural events and assumptions' that influence a work's 'creation and circulation', see *Pictorial Victorians: The Inscription of Values in Word and Image* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004), p. 15.

¹¹ Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press), p. 7.

¹² William Dean Howells, 'Heroines of Nineteenth-Century Fiction XX: Charles Kingsley's *Hypatia*', *Harper's Bazaar*, 34:2 (1901), pp. 79–83, p. 80.

in *Sanitary and Social Lectures and Essays* (1880), Kingsley's essay focuses on the education and development of women, arguing that the body should not be ignored in favour of the development of the mind. Thus, female models from classical antiquity known for their intellect, such as Sappho, Aspasia and Hypatia, are shunned in favour of Nausicaa – the nubile daughter of King Alcinous, admired by Odysseus and renowned for her beauty and enjoyment of physical activity. For Kingsley, the physical form of ancient Greek statues provided a model to which women should aspire in the cultivation of their figures; indeed the topic for the essay was inspired by a visit to the British Museum in which Kingsley viewed 'the forms of men and women whose every limb and attitude betokened perfect health, and grace, and power'. Towards the end of the essay, Kingsley bemoans modern efforts to 'assimilate the education of girls more and more to that of boys'. It being an unstoppable trend, however, he expresses the hope, very much in tune with his earlier advocacy of muscular Christianity, that future plans for the higher education of women will include 'training analogous to our public school games'. The essay ends with a footnote: 'Since this essay was written I have been sincerely delighted to find that my wishes have been anticipated at Girton college near Cambridge . . . and that the wise ladies who superintend that establishment propose also that most excellent institution – a swimming bath'. This, hopes Kingsley, will prevent women 'under the unwholesome stimulant of competitive examinations, and so forth, from "developing" into so many Chinese dwarfs – or idiots'.¹³

Kingsley's essay makes a direct link between a particular model of antique feminine virtue and the woman that later became known as the 'Girton Girl', though his fear of the impact of learning on the female body also leads him to deploy the racialized language of degeneration.¹⁴ Girton had opened its doors to women in 1869 at a time when the place of classics in the Cambridge curriculum was hotly debated.¹⁵ The figure of Hypatia was invoked in such debates about the higher education of women on both sides of the Atlantic: 'we compare our modern Mary Somerville, whose honoured life and happy memory inspire the young women of Girton college, with Hypatia' wrote Walter Le Conte Stevens for the *North American Review*.¹⁶ We can trace the development of this discourse via the publishing histories of Kingsley's novel, in which textual and visual renditions demonstrate the close correspondence, almost interchangeability, between Hypatia, the New Woman and the Girton Girl.

In 1893, Glencairn Stuart Ogilvie adapted Kingsley's *Hypatia* for the stage. Extremely popular, it ran for 103 nights, almost twice that of Oscar Wilde's *A Woman of No Importance*, which played the same year. Truly multi-medial, this production involved Lawrence Alma-Tadema on set and costume design, composer Hubert Parry on music as well as a play text derived from Kingsley's novel. The press commentary is full of references to Alma-Tadema's work, which influenced the way in which the appearance of characters and interiors became lodged in the popular imagination.¹⁷ In the press reviews, commentators shuttled between past and present, admiring the play for the way it transported audiences back to antiquity while, at the same time, using the review form as a vehicle through which to comment on

¹³ Charles Kingsley, 'Nausicaa in London, or the Lower Education of Women', *Sanitary and Social Lectures and Essays* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1880), pp. 107–130 (pp. 107; 124; 125; 126; 127).

¹⁴ A view also expressed in Eliza Lynn Linton's *The One Too Many* (1894).

¹⁵ Yopie Prins, *Ladies' Greek: Victorian Translations of Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), p. 13.

¹⁶ Walter Le Conte Stevens, 'University Education for Women', *The North American Review*, 136 (1883), 25–39 (p. 25).

¹⁷ See Michael Liversidge, "'Living Alma-Tadema Pictures': *Hypatia* at The Haymarket Theatre', in *Making Sense of Greek Art: Ancient Visual Culture and its Reception*, ed. by Viccy Coltman (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2012), pp. 156–78.

contemporary issues. The clinging, draped costumes, for example, were remarked upon by the advocates of dress reform and the secularist journal the *National Reformer* used the play to criticize religious groups of all persuasions for their opposition, among other things, to women's higher education and entry to universities. Illustrated editions of *Hypatia* functioned in a similar way; they could immerse the reader in the antique world while simultaneously speaking to current concerns, specifically those around the role of women.

A review of the cheap pocket edition of Kingsley's works published by Macmillan points to the enduring appeal of Kingsley's novels 'despite (my italics) the New Woman, New Humour and the New Morality'.¹⁸ However, *Hypatia*'s popularity, as both book and play, was in fact closely linked to these debates. In the *Punch* review of Ogilvie's play, the author refers to the character of Hypatia as a 'classic Girton girl'.¹⁹ The 'Girton Girl', as Yopie Prins has shown, was 'a popular icon for the entry of women into Greek studies' and became part of the language circulating on the New Woman.²⁰ Satirized in the press as a bicycling, chain-smoking, trouser-wearing female who challenged gender stereotypes, the New Woman was, as Sally Ledger reminds us, 'variously, a feminist activist, a social reformer, a popular novelist, a suffragette playwright, a woman poet' as well as a fictional construct.²¹ Anne Heliman has emphasized the importance of the classical past to New Woman writers such as Mona Caird, who re-wrote classical myth in order to 'destablilse patriarchal discourse's all-too-close alliance with Classical mythology'.²² The title of Caird's *Daughters of Danaus* (1894) speaks to this theme through its reference to the mythological Danaïdes who, forced into marriage against their will, killed their husbands on their wedding night.

Indeed the name 'Hypatia', while clearly referencing an ancient heroine, was used to connote the modern, forward-looking tendencies of the New Woman type in much journalism and in fiction. In William Black's 1896 novel, *Briseis*, one of the central characters, Georgie Lestrangle, attends 'The Hypatia', a club for forward-thinking women. In contrast, Briseis herself, the Athens-born heroine, loses her fortune and undergoes a period of domestic slavery at the hands of English relatives, her name and situation clearly alluding to the Greek slave Briseis, of Homer's *Iliad*, source of the famous argument between Achilles and Agamemnon.²³ Another example can be found in L. T. Meade's short story of 1895, *A Very Up-To-Date Girl*, which traces the fortunes of Hypatia Wentworth, a girl who 'despised matrimony', but was 'a favourite at Girton . . . working very hard for her classical trips'.²⁴ Moreover in 1886 the novelist, Ouida, referenced Hypatia as a 'learned woman' in an article on female suffrage in the *North American Review* and again in an article on 'The New Woman' in 1894.²⁵

While Ogilvie's *Hypatia* was still running in the West End a poem titled 'A Girton Girl' by the painter Sir Noel Paton (who had illustrated Kingsley's *The Water Babies* in 1863) was

¹⁸ [Anon.], 'Literature', *The Country Gentleman, Sporting Gazette, Agricultural Journal and "The Man about Town"*, 4 July 1896, p. 855.

¹⁹ [Anon.], 'The Haymarket Hypatia', *Punch*, 21 January 1893, p. 28.

²⁰ Prins, *Ladies Greek*, p. 13.

²¹ Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 1.

²² Ann Heliman, *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 159.

²³ The Hypatia was a real women's club, founded in the US in 1886 by Mary Elizabeth Lease.

²⁴ L. T. Meade, 'A Very Up-To-Date Girl', *The Woman at Home*, 4:2 (1895), 44–55 (p. 44).

²⁵ Ouida, 'Female Suffrage', *The North American Review*, 143 (September 1886), 290–306 (p. 293); and 158 (May 1894), 610–19 (p. 614).

published in the London-based *Atalanta*. Named after the Greek mythological heroine, a prototype of female heroic strength, this feminist-leaning magazine, aimed at girls, was founded by writer and feminist activist, Meade. The poem, which was accompanied by an illustration by Gordon Browne, deals with the question of how to paint a Girton Girl. In the poem, classical and Christian models battle it out as the artist ponders the most suitable form of representation:

[...]
 'How shall I paint her? Radiant in the dance
 Fairest of many fair and radiant girls!

'Or, as with flashing eye and glowing face
 And long locks floating, Maenad-like behind
 Her raiment rippling on the salt sea wind,
 She leads along the beach the madcap race?²⁶

Other representational possibilities debated in the poem are also based on classical models – Pallas 'on the sheer cliff' and 'shadow-eyed' Mnemosyne. In the end, all these possibilities are rejected as Paton plumps for an image of the Girton Girl alone in her college room 'white-curtained, husht – alone among her books.' Pagan vitality ultimately gives way to a sedentary, cloistered, Christian existence. However, the choice of maenads as possible models for the Girton Girl roots this poem in debates over the sexual politics of Victorian Hellenism which were not confined to the Oxford circles of Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater, but also linked to the entrance of women into higher education and to the study of classics in particular.²⁷

Ogilvie's play was published in book form by William Heinemann in 1895 and the illustrated cover and frontispiece by John Dickson Batten suggest how networks of artistic collaboration link Paton's Christian-Pagan Girton Girl to the figure of Hypatia (Figure 2). Batten, a British painter, book illustrator and print maker, had collaborated in the late 1880s with Lancelot Speed who was one of two English illustrators of editions of the novel (the other was Byam Shaw). Speed was a well-regarded book illustrator. He had illustrated other fictions of antiquity including Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Last Days of Pompeii* and Eliza F. Pollard's *Avice: A story of Imperial Rome*, but his bread-and-butter work was adventure fiction, books of fairy tales by Andrew Lang and stories for children published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. Speed's edition of *Hypatia* was published in 1897 as part of the series by the publisher Service and Paton and it contains line drawings of figures, clearly inspired by Alma Tadema's costume designs.

Speed and Batten were undergraduates together at Cambridge. In 1888 they co-illustrated a book by Owen Seaman called *Oedipus the Wreck or 'To Trace the Knave'*, which is in part a satire on contemporary university life and in part a spoof of the play *Oedipus Tyrannus*. This had been the Cambridge Greek play of 1887, an edition of which was also illustrated by Speed and purports to be the first illustrated edition of any Greek play ever published. The yellow cover of *Oedipus the Wreck* prefigures the decadent 'yellow books' of the 1890s. It depicts an image titled 'The Three Graces of the Senate: Bacchantes of the arts on their way to a Women's

²⁶ Noel Paton, 'A Girton Girl', *Atalanta*, 6:67 (1 April 1893), 1–2.

²⁷ See Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

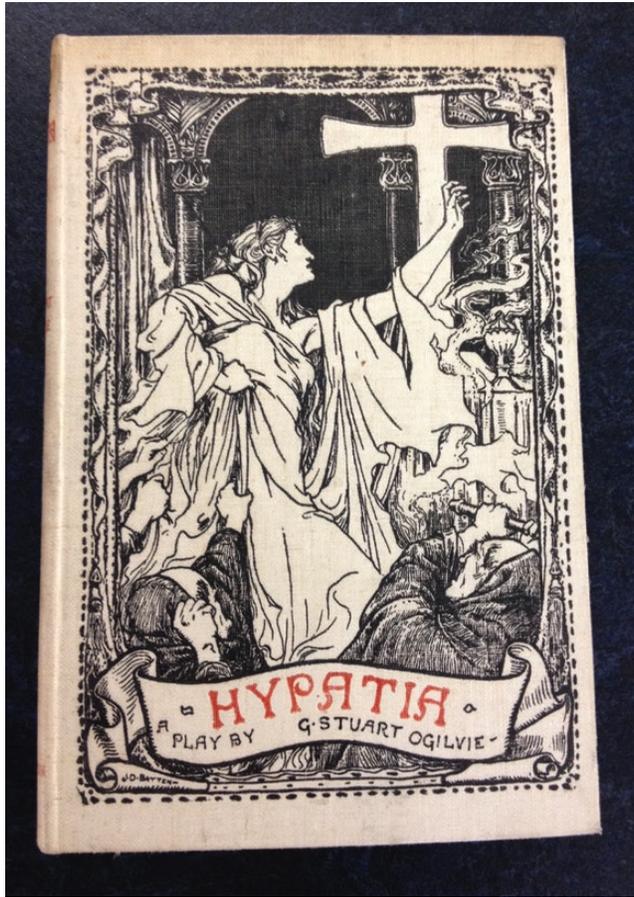


Figure 2. J. D. Batten's cover illustration of *Hypatia* for Stuart Ogilvie's play, 1893. Private collection.

rites [sic] meeting' (which appears again on p. 71) and lampoons the growing politicization of women over equal rights (Figure 3). A *Punch* author, Seaman's text satirizes the attempts of female undergraduates to debate the equal treatment of women in higher education (and it is worth noting that in 1894 he was to satirize George Egerton's collection of short stories depicting the New Woman, *Keynotes*, as 'She-Notes'). The illustration shows three female graduates dressed in flowing robes, wearing sandals and brandishing ivy sticks. Instead of ivy wreaths, they wear mortarboards. Conditions are stipulated on compliance with which women undergraduates might 'be allowed the degree of Bacchante of Arts, advancing in due course to Maenad of the same.'²⁸ There is visual evidence to suggest that this drawing is by Batten as it bears a strong resemblance to the depiction of Hypatia's assault reproduced on the cover of Ogilvie's play (Figure 3a). There is a similarity of pose, in both cases the left arm is raised and bent, the right arm crooked and the face is in profile and slightly raised. In place of the maenad's thyrsus, Hypatia's arm reaches up towards the cross.

This suggestive visual connection between Seaman's illustrated text and Batten's illustration for the play highlights the way in which images of the Girton Girl, Hypatia and the maenad were

²⁸ Owen Seaman, *Oedipus the Wreck* (London: Hamilton Adams and Co., 1888), pp. 71–2.

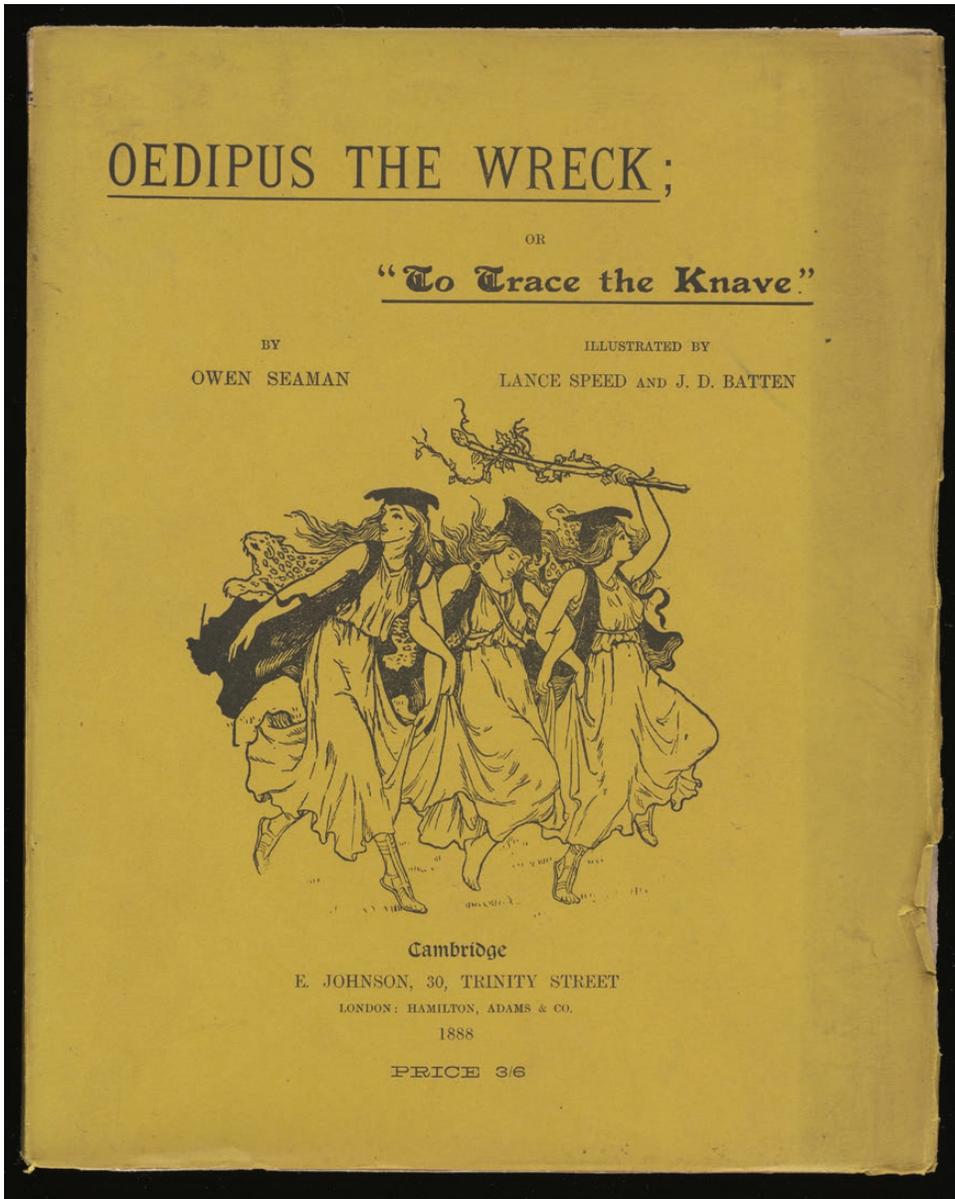


Figure 3. J. D Batten's illustration of Girton 'maenads' from *Oedipus the Wreck*, 1888. Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

reproduced, interchanged and circulated via a network of visual and literary production in which questions of gender were articulated and contested. Batten and Speed's illustrations caricature what Prins has described as the self-identification of female scholars with the Greek maenad. In this figure women found an imaginative alternative to common female stereotypes such as the spinster or 'properly married' Victorian woman.²⁹ In parodying this attempt, the illustrations

²⁹ Prins, *Ladies' Greek*, p. 46.



Figures 3. 3a. J. D Batten's illustration of Girton 'maenads' from *Oedipus the Wreck*, 1888. Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library (detail).

challenge a feminist counter-discourse on a subcategory of the New Woman, reframing both Hypatia and the Girton Girl as members of Eliza Lynn Linton's 'shrieking sisterhood'.

To follow the reception of Kingsley's *Hypatia*, then, is to trace a chain of intermedial interaction. From the page to the stage and back, depictions of the Hellenistic heroine circulated in a wide range of visual and literary culture and shaped contemporary periodical debates on gender. Drawing on the iconography of both Kingsley's and Ogilvie's *Hypatia*, *The Lady's Pictorial* review of the play states:

we do not mob, outrage, and assassinate our feminine philosophers nowadays, but we have methods of torture not much less brutal . . . In the case of our modern wise-women, their enemies rend them limb from limb in metaphor only, in the scurrilous columns of newspapers and strip them of every rag of noble quality – in the name of orthodoxy³⁰

The reviewer comments on the widespread satirizing of the New Woman and particularly, perhaps, the virulent lambasting this figure received at the hands of the Catholic Press. The *American Catholic Quarterly Review* argued aggressively that ‘the “New Woman” in her extreme type is an abomination to Catholic instincts.’³¹ As the figure of Hypatia became increasingly synonymous with the construct of the New Woman, Catholic periodicals continued to critique Kingsley’s negative depiction of Bishop Cyril and his role in Hypatia’s death.³²

Batten and Speed’s satire is not quite so brutal as the treatment to which the *Pictorial* alludes. However, Ogilvie’s play based on Kingsley’s novel, Batten’s illustration of the play script and Speed and Batten’s illustrations for Seaman’s book constitute a chain of intermedial interaction which elides representations of Hypatia, the Girton Girl and the New Woman. Through this, images of Hypatia were implicated in a wider project to challenge an emergent brand of empowering female Hellenism at a time when those redolent of Kingsley’s ‘new foes’ were vocalizing opposition to the changing nature of women’s roles as symbolized by the figure of the New Woman.

3. A FEMALE AUDIENCE FOR HISTORICAL FICTION: THE HARPERS’ EDITION OF *HYPATIA*

America had its own version of the ‘Girton Girl’ in the ‘Gibson Girl’, a popular icon of idealized female attractiveness based on the drawings of Charles Dana Gibson, which first appeared in the 1890s. The Gibson Girl was forward-thinking but less politically engaged than the New Woman; upper-middle class, physically active and always well dressed. An *Academy* article draws attention to the huge appetite for historical fiction in the US, arguing that a key audience for this kind of fiction is women – and particularly ‘Gibson Girls’ whose ‘especial organ’ is the *Ladies’ Home Journal*. Such a girl, ‘if ordinarily intelligent and fond of reading would be interested and benefited by reading . . . *Hypatia*’ wrote an *LHJ* correspondent in 1897, suggesting a clear link between the readership of the journal and potential readers of Kingsley’s novel.³³

The *Ladies’ Home Journal* was founded in 1883 and in the 1890s its circulation was approximately 800–900,000 copies a month. It stopped circulating as a monthly as recently as July 2014. The editor of the journal in the late 1890s was book illustrator William Martin Johnson who collaborated on a lavishly illustrated edition of Kingsley’s *Hypatia* for Harper and Brothers in 1894.³⁴ Johnson’s illustrations are remarkable for their detail, abundance and variety. There are full-page illustrations of scenes from the novel, each chapter has an illustrated heading and on nearly every page there are smaller vignettes (Figures 4a–e). Johnson’s 1891 edition of *Ben Hur* contains over 1000 illustrations – so many, in fact, that in 1893, a lengthy guide to his illustrations for the novel was published. In both this and *Hypatia* we find illustrations of a mixture of antique objects, (ancient buildings, statues, wall paintings,

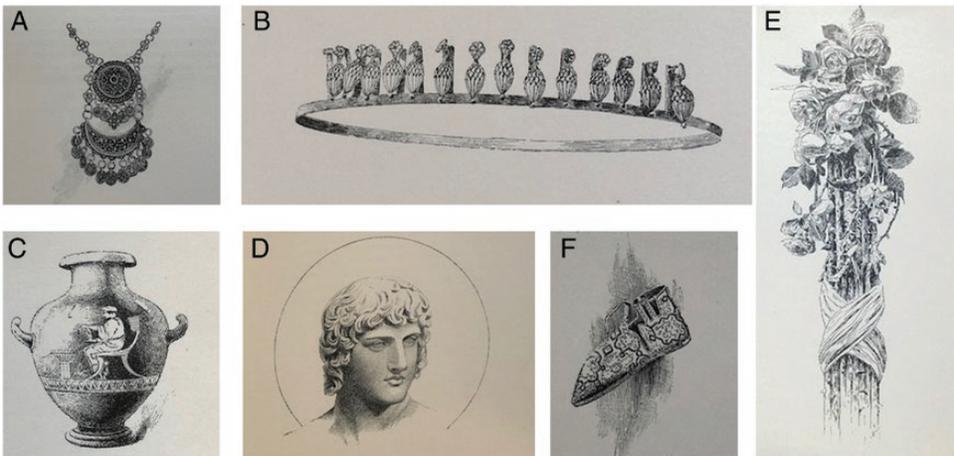
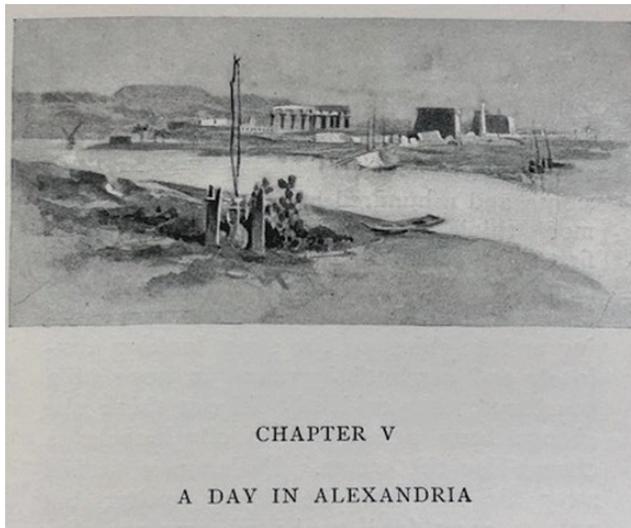
³⁰ [Anon.], *The Lady’s Pictorial*, 7 January 1893, p. 22 quoted in Joanna Paul, ‘Subverting sex and love in Alejandro Amenábar’s *Agora* (2009)’ in Cyrino, Monica, S., *Screening Love and Sex in the Ancient World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 227–242, p. 234.

³¹ Rev. G. Tyrell, ‘Old Faith and the New Woman’, *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, July 1897, p. 630.

³² For example, the *Catholic University Bulletin* (1902).

³³ [Anon.], ‘The Craze for Historical Fiction in America’, *The Academy*, 31 March 1900, pp. 275–6; ‘Literary Queries’, *Ladies’ Home Journal*, 14, February 1897, p. 30.

³⁴ Charles Kingsley, *Hypatia, or New Foes with an Old Face*, 2 vols (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1894).



Figures 4–4e. 4. William Martin Johnson's illustrations for the Harpers' *Hypatia*, 1894 – illustrated chapter heading. 4(a) A selection of objects depicted in the Harpers' edition – Pelagia's necklace. 4(b) Hypatia's 'lofty tiara of jewels'. 4(c) An antique vase. 4(d) Classical bust (of Antinous). 4(e) Floral embellishment of classical pillar. 4(f) The sumptuous shoe, described as an extravagance by Kingsley. Private collection.

Greek vases, weapons) but also a plethora of flowers, animals and jewels, which sometimes, but not always, refer directly to scenes or objects mentioned in the text. Johnson's editorship of the *LHJ* closely followed his work on the Harper's edition of *Hypatia* and across this work we can detect an interest in the collective capacity of writing and visual culture to evoke history and promote its popular consumption. In Johnson's illustrations we see a convergence of the metaphoric (drawings of the novel's events) and the metonymic (material objects) a collision highlighted in a review in the *Dial*, which describes his edition of *Hypatia* as an 'art work resulting from the union of ripe learning and forceful imagination'.³⁵ Johnson's approach to imagining history visually turns the text into a historical artefact and the Harpers' edition presents the reader with a collection of objects to delight the eye. In the process of engaging

³⁵ Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clio: A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); [Anon.], 'Holiday Publications', *The Dial*, 1 December 1894, pp. 335–8 (p. 336).

with them, readers of antique fiction, especially women, are turned into spectators and consumers of the classical past.

The Harpers' editions were aimed at a female audience, produced to satisfy an appetite for historical fiction among American women and to appeal to them as potential modern consumers of a particular version of the antique world. Harpers' *Hypatia* was advertised in high profile magazines aimed at women such as *Vogue*, which described it as one of the 'popular book[s] of the season'.³⁶ The *LHJ* had also contributed to the commodification of *Ben Hur* via the advertising of products aimed at female audience. In the 1890s, *Ben Hur* flour was popular and in particular, the *Ben Hur* bicycle, (perfect for the Gibson Girl/New Woman), aimed at the female consumer with the tag line 'your best cheek reddener and heart gladdener. Handsome, light, strong and slow to wear out'.³⁷ Even the covers of these books were made to appeal to women, one review suggesting a link between the Harpers' edition's binding and female dress, describing it as 'so fair a dress' in 'tawny Persian silk'.³⁸

Concurrent with his production of illustrations for *Hypatia*, Johnson wrote a number of articles for the *LHJ* on the decoration of houses, flower arranging and displaying paintings in the home, all aimed at a female audience. When the illustrated editions of *Hypatia* and *Ben Hur* appeared, women readers of antique fiction were being targeted as the potential consumers of a range of classically inflected goods and Johnson's illustrations played a role in this. While not wanting to close down the possibility that women readers were engaging with these texts with a critical, historical eye (and indeed this is remarked on by the *Academy* article), women also read these drawings with an eye for decorative detail, seeing in them inspiration for aspects of classical design to use in home decoration or for personal adornment. Many of Johnson's drawings appeal to female consumer aspiration (illustrations of jewellery for example) and in his articles on home decoration for the journal he recommends furniture decorated with motifs inspired by the ancient world. In the series 'In the way of chairs and tables' Johnson recommends 'a three seat divan, woodwork of oak or mahogany. Upholstery in Nile green velvet. The standard finished with Egyptian ornamentation in green and gold' (his own design). He also recommends the use of bas-reliefs in the library and suggests that the hall should contain 'one or two classical heads'.³⁹ These editions link the market for historical fiction to the market for interiors; historical imagining is shaped to fit a specific publishing context, gesturing to the past in order to influence consumer choice in the present.

The Harpers' Edition of *Hypatia* (also described as a Christmas edition) presents antiquity as a kind of storehouse in which female readers could browse. A review in the *Outlook* describes the way in which Johnson's illustrations present a range of goods on display: 'flowers, shrubs, branches, rocks, locks, boats, chains, jewels, bric-a-brac- statues, tripods, armour, pottery'.⁴⁰ Yet this emphasis on consumables jars with Kingsley's critique of mid-Victorian materialism. In chapter seven, for example, Johnson chooses to illustrate in some detail the embroidered shoe belonging to one of the richest Christian women in Alexandria. (Figure 4f). For Kingsley, the shoe is an example of the 'tasteless fashion of

³⁶ [Anon.], 'Popular Books of the Season', *Vogue*, 4, 15 November 1894, p. C2.

³⁷ [Anon.], 'A Swift Spin on a Ben Hur Bicycle', *Ladies' Home Journal*, 13:2 (1895), 35.

³⁸ Brander Matthews, 'About Certain Beautiful Books', *The Cosmopolitan*, 12:3 (1892), 380.

³⁹ William Martin Johnson, 'In the Way of Chairs and Tables', *Ladies' Home Journal*, 17:4 (1900), 21; 'The Hall and Staircase', *Ladies' Home Journal*, 16:2 (1899), 18.

⁴⁰ [Anon.], 'The Christmas Books: The Holiday Literature Reviewed and Described', *Outlook*, 1 December 1894, pp. 915–30 (p. 919).

an artificial and decaying civilisation' (1:157), and sits uncomfortably with any sense of genuine Christian piety, whereas for Johnson it is one of a number of decorative objects offered up for consumption to the reader-consumer. The gendering of the Harpers' *Hypatia* is further suggested by the sense that appearance, rather than scholarly endeavour, has been privileged. The *Outlook* reviewer expresses disappointment at the book's lack of scholarly apparatus (introductions and notes) which would have 'vastly heightened' the interest in the romance.⁴¹ While Johnson is clearly influenced by developing notions of archaeological authenticity, the illustrations appear more as decorative embellishments, designed to appeal to a particular consumer demographic.

The book's other paratextual elements also suggest a clear gender binary at play within the book's publication and marketing. The Harpers' edition is 'carefully gotten up' and 'silk bound'. But such silk-bound books, though attractive to the eye and 'pleasant to hold', 'do not seem so worthily clad as if they were bound in leather'. The mechanics of book binding are used to draw attention to a lack of masculine strength inherent in the Harper's edition. Leather bound 'male' books, it is suggested, are more worthy than silk bound 'female' volumes. Furthermore, the illustrations themselves lack 'strength' and are thus unable to do justice to the text. 'This romance needs more virile treatment' writes the reviewer, suggesting that the illustrated cornucopia of goods – jewels, bric-a-brac, flowers – feminize the text in a way that detracts from the essential virility of its muscular Christian message.⁴² By emphasizing the pleasures of material consumption over moral didacticism the illustrations compete with the tenor of Kingsley's text. It is perhaps unsurprising that in such an edition, *Hypatia*'s final scene is not illustrated, much to the relief of one reviewer who was 'grateful that the supreme tragedy of the fate of Hypatia is left unpictured'.⁴³

4. VIEWING HYPATIA

She shook herself free from her tormentors, and springing back, rose for one moment to her full height, naked, snow-white against the dusky mass around—shame and indignation in those wide clear eyes, but not a stain of fear. With one hand she clasped her golden locks around her; the other long white arm was stretched upward toward the great still Christ appealing—and who dare say in vain?—from man to God (2:329).

Tennyson objected to both the violence and nakedness in Kingsley's portrayal of Hypatia's assault. In a letter to Kingsley he wrote 'Hypatia's mistreatment by the Alexandrians I found almost too horrible. It is very powerful and tragic; but I objected to the word "naked" . . . I was really hurt at having Hypatia stript'.⁴⁴ Many book illustrators shared Tennyson's sensibility and chose not to depict this scene. Nonetheless it inspired a number of artworks, including Charles Mitchell's painting which was displayed at the Grosvenor gallery in 1885 along with the above extract from the novel describing Hypatia's last moments. Hypatia is shown fleeing her attackers, she turns, looks on them with a gaze that encompasses pity, despair and

⁴¹ 'The Christmas Books', p. 919.

⁴² 'The Christmas Books', p. 919.

⁴³ [Anon.], 'Hypatia', *Literary World*, 1 December 1894, p. 415.

⁴⁴ Letter to Kingsley in early May 1853 in *The Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson, 1851–1870*, ed. by Cecil Y. Lang and Edgar F. Shannon, Jr. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 63.

excessive fatigue, raises her left arm in silent appeal and with the other, covers her naked body with her long flowing hair (Figure 5).

Mitchell's painting caused quite a stir when it went on display at the Grosvenor, both in the London and provincial press. *The Athenaeum* described the painting as 'impressive and vigorous', the *Art Journal* correspondent commented on its 'bold and striking' conception while the ladies' columnist for a number of local papers reported that 'Everyone was looking

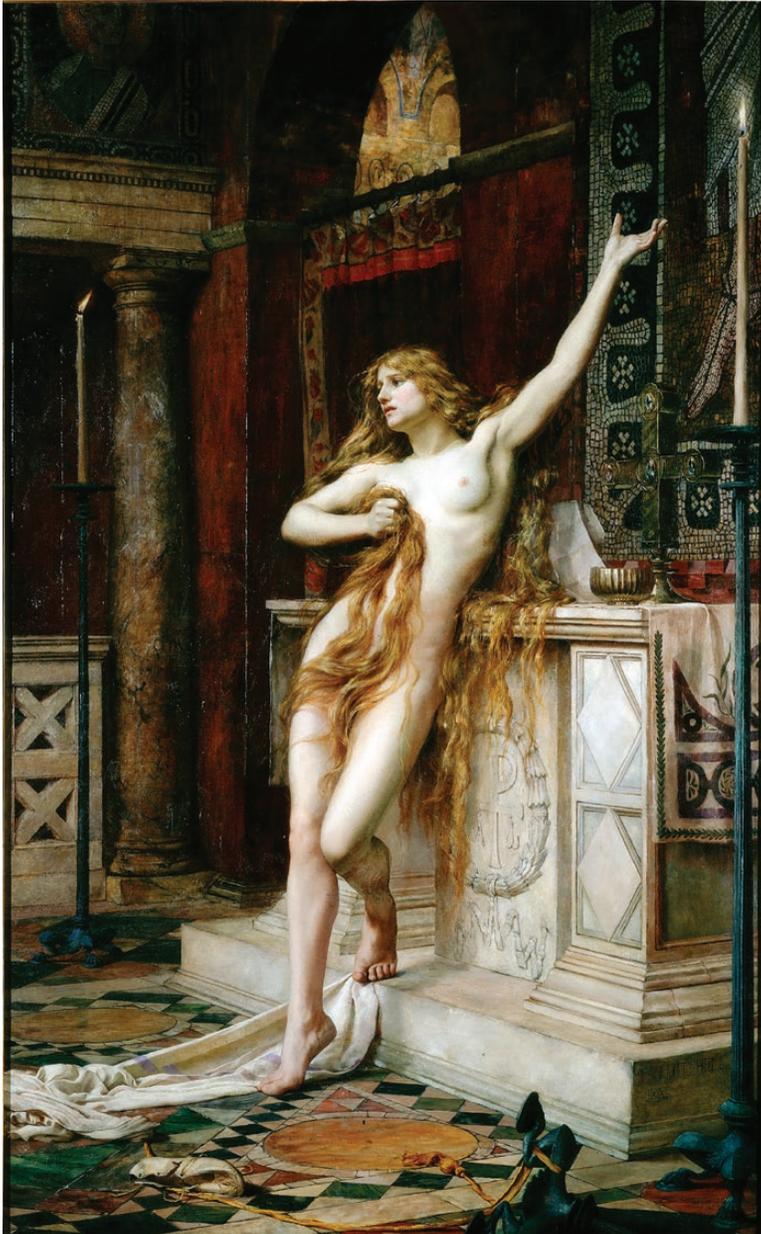


Figure 5. Charles Mitchell's *Hypatia*, 1885. Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK/© Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums/Bridgeman Images.

at it'.⁴⁵ A large painting (2.44m by 1.52m), it dominated the wall at the head of the West Gallery and was described by most reviewers as the stand out piece by an exciting young artist.⁴⁶ The display of the painting was not without controversy. It is likely that it was one of the works critiqued in *The Times* correspondence pages in May 1885 by the self-styled 'British Matron' whose attack on the nude has been well documented by critics.⁴⁷ The British Matron was in fact a man – John Callcott Horsley, treasurer of the Royal Academy. His letter titled 'A Woman's Plea' complained about the vast number of 'immoral' paintings featuring female nudes on display in British galleries during 1885. Through the adoption of a female persona, Horsley imagined the response of women to depictions of the nude, suggesting that exposure to such images would make them 'burn with shame'.⁴⁸ In the case of Mitchell's painting, then, the 'shame and indignation' felt by Kingsley's Hypatia and referenced in the accompanying extract was necessarily shared by the female viewer. Horsley's strategy encouraged an act of self-identification with the nude in its various forms on the part of female gallery visitors and was challenged by some female correspondents in *The Times* who questioned 'her' ability to speak for both sexes.⁴⁹ As the debate over the female nude gathered momentum, Horsley argued further that these paintings violated Christian principles. Yet as we have seen, a number of artists, including Mitchell, chose to paint images of martyrdom depicting the female nude as the central figure in a journey towards Christian faith.

Diverting somewhat from the novel, Mitchell chose not to portray the gang of Egyptian monks, though Hypatia's gaze clearly suggests their close proximity. Recent critics diverge as to whether Mitchell presents an image of a strong, noble New Woman figure or a female body subdued by masculine strength.⁵⁰ The painting can hold both readings but the former is complicated by the juxtaposition of the painting with Kingsley's text describing Hypatia's 'tormentors', which clarifies for the viewer exactly what is at stake, and what tends to get overlooked: that this is the body of a strong yet vulnerable woman prior to rape.⁵¹

Such a reading was available to Victorian viewers, albeit in mediated form. Tellingly, a review of Mitchell's painting in the *Glasgow Herald* describes how Hypatia looks 'like some flying nymph pursued by a lustful god'.⁵² The *Herald's* description alludes to Ovid's tale from *Metamorphoses* in which the nymph, Syrinx, flees from the lustful intents of the Greek God Pan and is transformed into reeds in order to facilitate her escape from rape. The *Herald's* comment reflects the pivotal place of classics, and of Ovid in particular, in the cultural hinterland of many gallery visitors. Such myths were used as a kind of cultural lexicon through which to voice ideas and suggestions prohibited by Victorian social convention. In its comparison of Mitchell's Hypatia to a fleeing nymph, the review prefigures a later painting of Syrinx by Arthur Hacker (1892), which was directly inspired by Ovid's tale. In her recent discussion of Hacker's *Syrinx* Kate Nichols draws a parallel between the silencing that both rape

⁴⁵ [Anon.], 'The Grosvenor', *The Athenaeum*, 25 April 1885, pp. 540–41 (p. 540); [Anon.], 'The Grosvenor Gallery', *Art Journal*, July 1885, p. 227; [Anon.], 'Our Ladies' Column', *Wrexham Weekly Advertiser*, 37, 9 May 1885, p. 2; *Bristol Mercury*, 9 May 1885, p. 6.

⁴⁶ [Anon.], 'The Grosvenor Gallery', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 27 April 1885, p. 8.

⁴⁷ For example, Alison Smith, *The Victorian Nude: Sexuality, Morality and Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

⁴⁸ A British Matron, 'A Woman's Plea', *The Times*, 20 May 1885, p. 10.

⁴⁹ 'A Woman's plea', *The Times*, 21 May 1885, p. 6.

⁵⁰ See Smith, *The Victorian Nude* and Maureen Moran, 'The Art of Looking Dangerously: Victorian Images of Martyrdom', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 32 (2004), 475–93.

⁵¹ Neither Moran nor Smith discuss this reading.

⁵² [Anon.], 'The Grosvenor Gallery', *Glasgow Herald*, 27 April 1885, p. 9.

and metamorphosis effect. Syrinx avoids rape through bodily transformation as she dissolves into the reeds and thus into silence.⁵³ In contrast, however, Hypatia's silencing occurs via the actual perpetration of an act of violence that culminates in her death. Indeed, depictions of the martyred body draw attention to a conflict between the eloquence of the martyr's sacrifice – emblemized through the dead body and its message of hope, sacrifice, faith – and the kind of silencing that violence, especially sexual violence, enacts. Both positions can be read in images of Hypatia as pagan/Christian martyr.

Mitchell's *Hypatia* suggests that redemption via bodily transformation is open to Hypatia through the blending of her pagan body with Christian stone. Classical and biblical imagery combine as, leaning on an altar, it appears that Hypatia is about to merge with the building, not just to escape her attackers, like Syrinx, but to become one with Christ. The painting's facture emphasizes the similarity between Hypatia's skin tone (warmer than the traditional classicized nude) and that of the stone. We are shown the beginnings of a symbolic conversion of a pagan body as it becomes part of the fabric of a Christian church, an image that gestures to the power of the martyr's body to articulate hope. But the suggestion of Hypatia's dissolution from form to matter in this painting also anticipates her ultimate trajectory – the flaying of her skin with shells, the rending of her limbs, the scattering and burning of her body parts and the silencing of a strong, highly educated female voice. Thus, simultaneous with the suggestion of Christian deliverance, the painting imposes an aesthetic experience on the viewer that cannot ignore the connotations of sexual violence. The ideals of the Victorian nude are troubled by the sense that we are viewing a body prior to violent attack, a body hovering on the boundary between life and death, living form and inert matter.⁵⁴

Lee Woodward Zeigler's illustration of Hypatia's attack for a special 'Westminster' edition of *Hypatia* (1897) is more blatant in its evocation of sexual violence (Figure 6). The illustration has a closer relationship with the Kingsley text, appearing opposite a full page in which Philammon's reaction is also narrated. 'What in the name of the God of mercy were they doing? Tearing her piecemeal? *Yes, and worse than that*' (my italics) (2:330). Kingsley's text strongly indicates that Hypatia is suffering a sexual assault, underlined in the Westminster edition by the close juxtaposition of written word and illustration.⁵⁵ Zeigler depicts the men about to perpetrate this act of violence in the foreground of his image. Their rigid clawed hands suggest a pack of brutish, baying animals, the hunger of their cause is evident in their pinched cheeks and their brutal shell weapons are clearly visible. The naked body of Hypatia is in full view, her hair covers only her left breast and her figure is turned fully on the audience. Her body is slight, girlish and very white – projected through the darkness it appears in almost sculptural relief against a dark background and foreground. This proto-cinematic image conforms to Laura Mulvey's formulation of 'woman as image, man as bearer of the look' as Hypatia's darkened 'audience' is all-male.⁵⁶ But it is also clearly racialized as the Egyptian monks comprise what Kingsley describes as a 'dusky mass', contrasted, in Zeigler's image, with the whiteness of Hypatia's body (2:329). The image underscores an uneasy correlation between forms of racialized scophophilia and the threat of sexual violence as the viewer is

⁵³ Kate Nichols, 'Arthur Hacker's *Syrinx* (1892): Paint, Classics and the Culture of Rape', *Feminist Theory*, 7 (2016), 107–26.

⁵⁴ On the significance of boundaries and borderlines in the aesthetics of the nude see Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1992), p. 33.

⁵⁵ The idea that Hypatia is sexually assaulted can be seen as part of Kingsley's critique of the Eastern church and the dangers inherent in its policy of extreme celibacy. See Goldhill, *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity*, p. 206.

⁵⁶ Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16:3 (1975), 6–18.

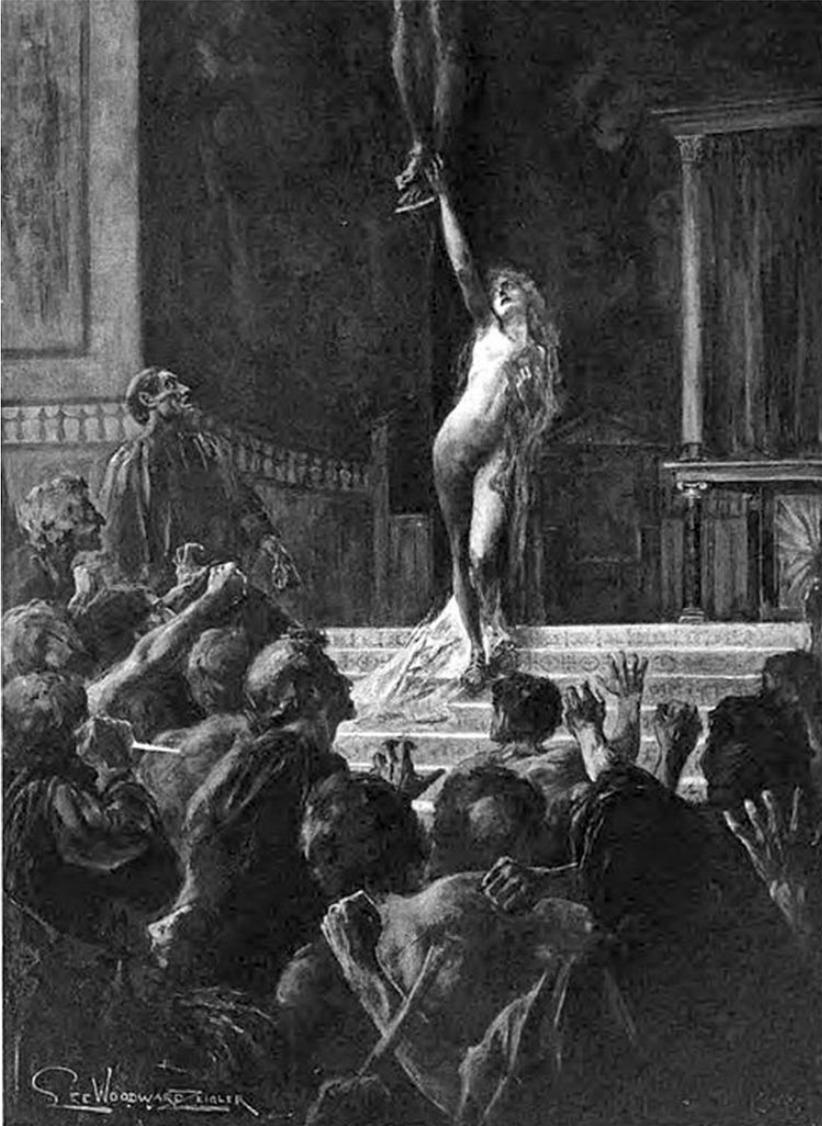


Figure 6. Illustration from Westminster edition of *Hypatia* illustrated by Lee Woodward Zeigler. Private collection.

made complicit with the perspective of the monks, situated within the dark mass of male figures and sharing their voyeuristic pleasure.⁵⁷

While Zeigler's image depicts a passive female body offered up to the male gaze, it also suggests a more active role for Hypatia, connoted through uplifting biblical imagery. The elevation of Hypatia's body in the top centre of the image recalls the iconography of the Transfiguration. While Raphael's *Transfiguration* was widely discussed in the Victorian period, it is Titian's

⁵⁷ For a discussion of the racial connotations of Kingsley's novel see Goldhill, *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity*, and Ross, 'Brave Hermeneutics.'

version in the Church of San Salvador, San Marco, Venice that is evoked here (Figure 7). In this painting, Christ's body is draped in white, brightly lit and surrounded by darker figures with their backs turned to the viewer, gesturing in amazement. The monk on the far left of the Zeigler illustration, whose profile is visible, has a similar reaction and his expression suggests that he is witnessing a divine event. The light shining on Hypatia's body appears to be directed from the figure of Christ above. Her hand touches the feet of Christ and their bodies merge, a blending of the Christian and the pagan, again consistent with Kingsley's view that a pagan might be received by Christ. In both painting and book illustration, the containment of the female body by the threat of sexual violence is countered by the idea that the body can be freed through forms of Christian transformation.

Richard Belt's earlier statue of Hypatia, possibly a source for Zeigler, similarly confronts the boundaries that policed the Victorian nude by juxtaposing, in uncomfortable proximity, the sensuous, the erotic, the vulnerable and the violent (Figure 1). Commissioned by Arthur Anderson, a stockbroker and art collector, it was auctioned by Christie's on his death and sold to the Drapers' Livery Company in June 1894. Positioned since then in an alcove in the Drapers' livery hall, Hypatia is shown fully naked, her robes falling in a pool at her feet. It is an incongruously sensuous sculpture. Hypatia holds her hair back from her body rather than drawing it across to disguise her nakedness and she seems to luxuriate in her pose, her head thrown back, in stark contrast to the more sedate attitude of John Gibson's *Tinted Venus*, a copy of which stands in the opposite alcove. Viewing the statue today, the visitor again participates in an eroticized economy of viewing in which a sightline is shared with a crowd of men. The sculpture of Hypatia is on permanent display in front of a host of paintings depicting British male monarchs in the dark robes of state, along with a soberly clad Queen Victoria.



Figure 7. Titian's *The Transfiguration of Christ* Image by dvdbramhall licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Hypatia appears trapped in her alcove, this time with her right arm raised in an appeal to God, perhaps, or to anyone who can liberate her from the ignominy of being viewed by wedding parties and corporate eventers who hire out the hall on a weekly basis.

Following its commission, Belt's statue played a significant role in an extraordinary episode in the history of Victorian sculpture, which highlights the role of eroticism in aesthetic response. In 1882, the *Belt v Lawes* libel case became one of the longest court cases in the nineteenth century, running from 21 June to December 1882 followed by two unsuccessful appeals over the course of another fifteen months. In an anonymous article in *Vanity Fair* of 20 August 1881, the sculptor Charles Lawes claimed that Belt did not produce his own statues and that they were 'ghosted' by other artists, specifically Thomas Brock and Pierre Verheyden. In later correspondence Brock confirmed that he had been responsible for the busts of Charles Kingsley, among others. Belt sued for libel and the case was heard in the high courts of justice with many well-known witnesses called including sculptor Hamo Thornycroft, Frederick Leighton, Alma Tadema and (interestingly) J. C. Horsley. The periodicals had a field day and detailed reports appeared in the *Times* but also the *Graphic*, *Morning Post*, *Daily News* and *Reynolds's Newspaper* as well as a host of regional papers.

As part of his defence, Belt arranged for examples of his work to be brought into the court room at the same time as a series of witnesses were called who had sat for various busts and full-sized sculptures. These pieces appeared gradually throughout the duration of the case and on 12 November 1882 it was reported that 'the 'Gallery of the Fine Arts' in the body of the courts was further enriched on Monday by a large life-size plaster cast of "Hypatia", one of Mr Belt's later works'.⁵⁸ This moment is captured in *The Graphic* (Figure 8), where we can see the statue of Hypatia from the rear, placed in the centre of the courtroom.⁵⁹ Her naked body is in full view of the judge and jury and many faces are turned in her direction. She dominates the scene, the visual dynamics of which again correspond to that of the moment described in Kingsley's novel and depicted by Mitchell and Zeigler. Here, the jury and clerks (in their dark suits) form the dark knot of men ready, in this case, to pass judgement on Hypatia as an authentic production of the sculptor. The court exchange recorded by *Reynolds's* on 12 November highlights the competing claims of the erotic and the aesthetic in the responses to the nude sculpture.

There was a large nude figure of Kingsley's Hypathia [sic] in court. Mr Charles Russell [the prosecutor] complained that the object stood between him and the witness and he found both difficulty in seeing and hearing. Perhaps too, it might distract his Lordship's attention. (Laughter.) His Lordship replied that there might be some difficulty in moving it at that moment; but it could be turned towards Mr Russell (Laughter).⁶⁰

The courtroom mirth recorded here has its roots in the open acknowledgement by those present that this statue inhabits the boundaries of acceptable viewing. A classicized Victorian nude, yes, but it still has the potential to titillate the judge, who, it is suggested, might find it a distraction. In a classic example of what Lynda Nead describes as 'coy play' on the relationship between eroticism and aesthetic experience, the judge jestingly offers a fuller view of the statue to the chief prosecutor.⁶¹

⁵⁸ [Anon.], 'The Belt Libel Action', *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper*, 12 November 1882, p. 7.

⁵⁹ [Anon.], 'Our Illustrations', *Graphic*, 18 November 1882, p. 531.

⁶⁰ [Anon.], 'The Belt Libel Action', *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 12 November 1882, p. 1.

⁶¹ Nead, *Female Nude*, p. 33.

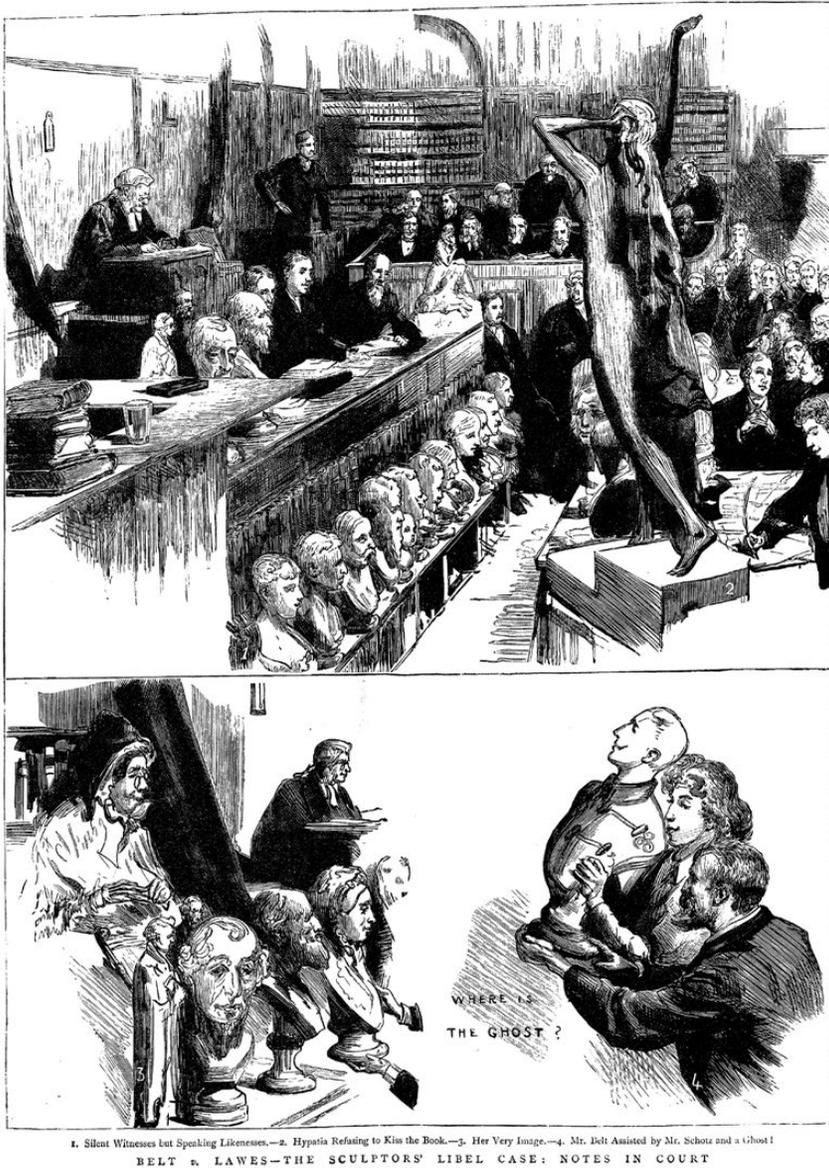


Figure 8. 'Belt v Lawes', *The Graphic*, 18 November 1882.

A similar dynamic is apparent in the evidence presented about female models who had sat for Belt's statue. Artists' models had long inhabited the borderlines of acceptable society, a fact reiterated three years later in Horsley's attack on the use of nude models in the South Kensington art schools. Assumptions about the morality of models lurk beneath the surface of much testimony in the *Belt v Lawes* case. In the questioning of one witness, Mr Hamilton, there are repeated references to the undressed state of Belt's models:

I have frequently seen Mr Belt working on the statue of Hypatia, with Miss Felden as his model.

His Lordship – Was she in the nude at the time?

Witness – She was in the nude.

Cross-examined by Mr Webster – I saw Miss Brookes sitting to Mr Belt for the statue of Hypatia. That was for the head.

His Lordship – was Miss Brookes in the nude?

Witness – she was not, my Lord

...

Witness – . . . Miss Giles sat as a model for the limbs

His Lordship – Of course, she was in the nude? [laughter]⁶²

Again, note the laughter at the (unnecessary) repeated question of whether the model was in the nude. Female body parts are enumerated and offered up to be enjoyed by the courtroom audience in a move that bears uneasy comparison to the dismembering of Hypatia's body.

Kingsley's directive to his readers to recognize themselves in the figures of late antiquity was given new literality as models came forward whose bodies had been used to create the sculpture. One such model, Elizabeth Brooks, is shown in an image from the *Illustrated London News*. The image is captioned 'Hypatia' and reiterates in the mind of the viewer/reader a sense of the interchangeability between inanimate sculpture, living female body and a dead body from the antique past (Figure 9).⁶³ The female models were questioned in front of an all-male judge and jury and asked to recount their nude sittings with Belt. Emma Felden was called to testify twice and each time she insisted that Belt had not worked from her, but that the majority had been done by a Mr Schotz, Belt only taking over when visitors called at his studio in order to keep up appearances.⁶⁴ Felden was asked repeatedly if she was in the nude during her time with Belt, highlighting the moral precariousness of her position as a model. The prosecutor attempted to discredit her evidence by drawing attention to her occupation as jobbing actress and model, describing her as a 'pitiful spectacle.'⁶⁵ Models, it seems, were put on trial for their life choices as much as their evidence. Yet despite this fact, the trial also gave these women a platform. Alison Smith notes that the voice of the female model was not once heard throughout the 1885 nude controversy but the court reports from *Belt v Lawes* give significant details about their lives.⁶⁶ These avatars of Hypatia are largely discredited as witnesses, but they are given a voice. Indeed the statue of Hypatia itself is anthropomorphized in both the *Graphic* image in which she refuses 'to kiss the book [bible]', an allusion, perhaps, to her pagan roots, and in one court correspondent's imagination of an usher's dream in which she comes to life in order to contribute to court proceedings asking 'Who made us? Who conceived us? Who invested us with whatever artistic merit we possess?'⁶⁷

5. CONCLUSION

Kingsley's *Hypatia*, its late-Victorian illustrated editions and the other cultural forms it inspired revised the classical past to explore the gender politics of the present through an

⁶² [Anon.], 'The Great Libel Case', *Morning Post*, 7 December 1882, p. 2.

⁶³ *Illustrated London News*, 81, 18 November 1882, p. 517.

⁶⁴ [Anon.], 'Alleged Libel on a Sculptor', *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 17 December 1882, p. 5.

⁶⁵ 'The Belt Libel Action', *Reynolds's Newspaper*, p. 1.

⁶⁶ Smith, *The Victorian Nude*, p. 235.

⁶⁷ [Anon.], 'The Close of the Belt Case', *Graphic*, 6 January 1883, p. 9.

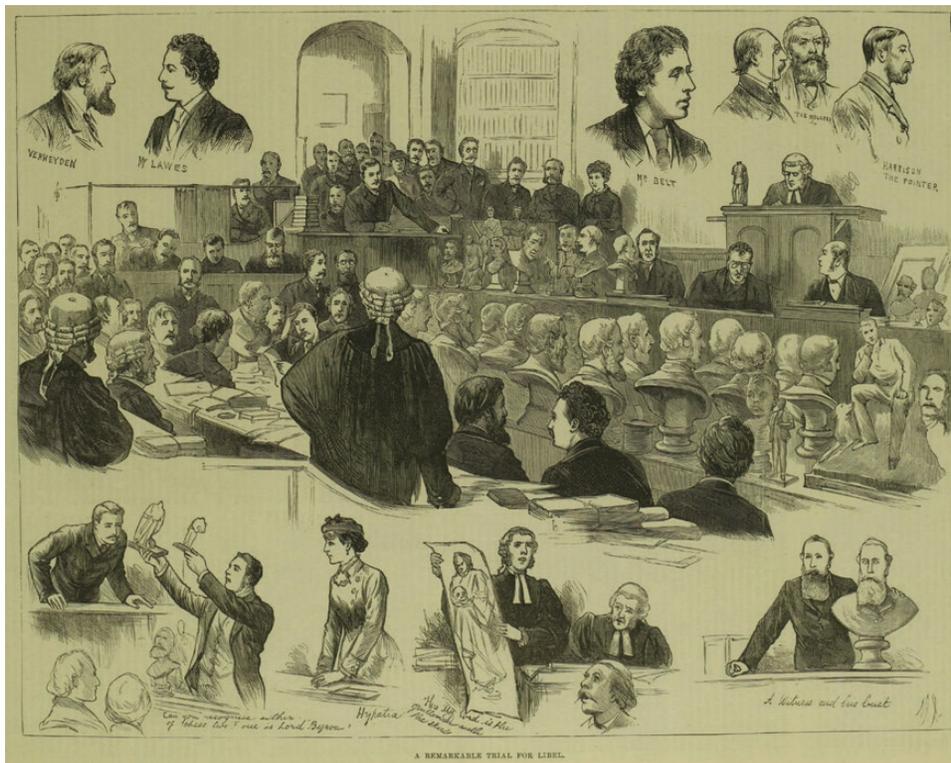


Figure 9. ‘A Remarkable Trial for Libel’, *Illustrated London News*, 18 November 1882.

evolving relationship between writing, performance and visual culture. Embraced by diverse new audiences at the fin de siècle, intermedial representations of Hypatia shed new light on the way in which the antique past was used to debate the higher education of women, women’s rights, female consumerism, and the politics of the female nude.

The transformation of Hypatia from a lived historical figure to a book character, to an image in book illustrations, to play character, painted figure and sculpture requires an approach to nineteenth-century classical reception that pays attention to the complex interactions of different media. While the popularity of images of Hypatia imply a somewhat disquieting interest in the repeated violation of the female body, the retellings of her story in different visual forms helped to shape late-nineteenth-century discourses on gender. Though silenced through appalling violence in the fourth century, Hypatia is liberated by this Victorian chain of intermedial interaction, ‘saved’ to speak in new ways, to new audiences and to new contexts – to deal, unceasingly, with ‘new foes’.

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