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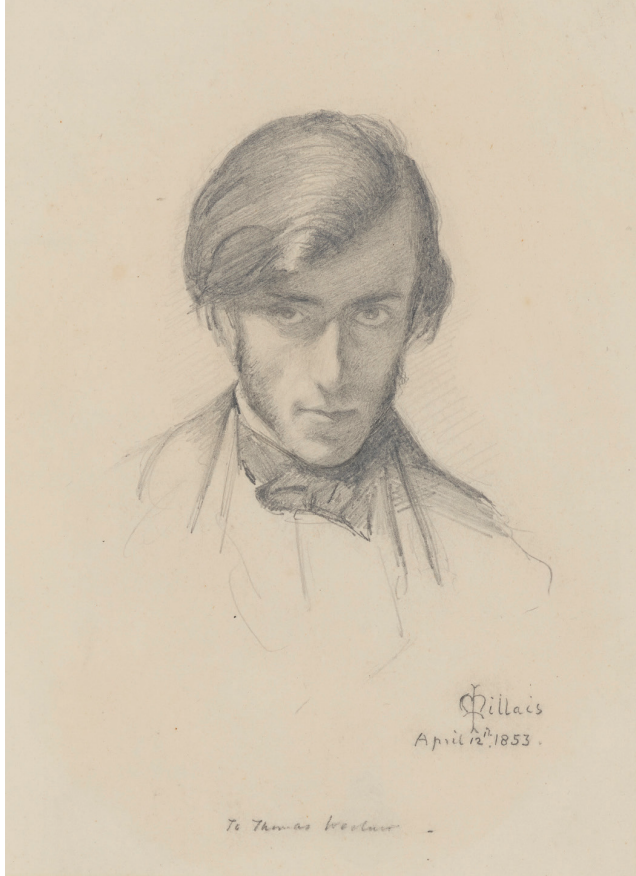
LOCAL TO NATIONAL: VICTORIAN INDUSTRIALIST ART COLLECTORS' GEOGRAPHIES

Approximately after 1850, Victorian middle and artisanal working classes sought cultural education identified by John Ruskin, among others, as a signifier of civilization and national greatness. Working Men's Colleges, three 1870 university Slade Professorships in art history, proliferating art publications, and emerging regional museums offered opportunities to become conversant with visual art then equated with social mobility and Englishness. There arose "a great talking about the Fine Arts", as John Eagles, *Blackwood's Magazine* art critic, noted in 1853, referring to the prolific newspapers and magazines and the rise of art critics and writers of books on art and art history.¹ Art writers like Anna Jameson (1794–1860) and Elizabeth Eastlake (1809–1893) were well-traveled autodidacts, erudite and knowledgeable about Continental art. Seen as cultural democratization, this spreading art knowledge was often polemical, as critics argued about different styles, foreign influences, art markets, institutions, and artists. Into this expanding art discourse, dealers' galleries and new modes of exhibitions (e.g., single-work shows, retrospective exhibitions) generated a rich, chaotic, varied, and bountiful artworld caught between defining English national culture and a growing international art market.²

Amid this cultural profusion, critic F. G. Stephens's 100+ *Athenaeum* series, "The Private Collections of England" (1873–1887), elevated collectors to national figures. Stephens (ill. 1) detailed these collections' expanded geography in England's industrial north. Collectors ranged from aristocrats to

¹ J. Eagles, "The Fine Arts and Public Taste in 1853", *Blackwood's Magazine* 1853, 74, p. 92.

² On Victorian art criticism and the press, see P. Fletcher and A. Helmreich, "The Periodical and the Art Market", *Victorian Periodicals Review* 2008, 41(4), pp. 323–501; G. Landow, "There Began to be a Great Talking about the Fine Arts", in: *The Mind and Art of Victorian England*, ed. J.P. Altholz, Minneapolis 1976, pp. 124–145, 188–192.



1. John Everett Millais. *Frederick George Stephens*, 1853, pencil, 8 1/2 in. x 6 in. (216 mm x 152 mm). NPG 2363©National Portrait Gallery, London

middle-class industrialists, merchants and bankers, the latter personally and socially networked with artists and with each other, often working in complementary industries of shipping, mining and chemical manufacturing, which were then booming. Stephens's series was in some ways a culmination of the move to support living artists begun by Samuel Hall, editor of *The Art Union* in 1839, later renamed *The Art Journal* in 1849, who from the 1840s urged Britons to collect and commission Victorian artists.³ After 1880, Britons experienced "the rediscovery of national identity and native traditions", both in-

³ Articles about these and other collectors also appeared in the art press, *The Magazine of Art* and the *Art Journal*, as well as in general periodicals.

terpreted in various ways over places and times and this experience between nation and region was a subtext of Stephens's series.⁴

In this essay, I will argue that Stephens's series reflects changing attitudes toward collectors in England and elsewhere, a culmination of the century-old development of cultural and scientific institutions of England's industrial north, and a growing concern about what defines a national culture and who represents that culture. I will also argue that Stephens's periodical press devices of ekphrasis and serialization serve to address these three topics, as does his geographical focus. Aided by English professor David Mather Masson, Stephens, a former co-founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, began work at the *Athenaeum* in February 1860 and wrote for forty years as the journal's art critic and later art editor, producing about 475 reviews on art, architecture, illustration, as well as religious works and children's books. The *Athenaeum's* editor Norman MacColl gathered outstanding contributors in the 1870s and the periodical reviewed art books and exhibitions under several headings: "Reviews", "Original Papers", "Exhibitions", "Obituaries" and "Gossip". The London-based *Athenaeum* appealed to well-educated, cultured, upper-middle/upper class Londoners, but was also read by cultured people in the country anxious to know what was topical in London, which they frequented. Alvar Ellegård suggested that the *Athenaeum* was equal to the *Times* in its coverage of cultural and scientific content for the literary, artistic and scientific middle-classes.⁵ A weekly miscellany, its price –3d – was neither expensive nor cheap.⁶

The *Athenaeum* had many articles on art books and exhibitions and often took a nationalistic position. In a review of Edmond About's book on French art, the *Athenaeum* writer took the French to task for thinking they were superior in all the fine arts.⁷ One author writing on American art declared that America needed art critics in order to develop good art and good patronage.⁸ In 1892 another author attacking Impressionism argued that innovations such as blue shadows already appeared in works by Turner, William Holman Hunt, Alfred Hunt, and others, and that Impressionists' only contribution to

⁴ D. Peters Corbett, Y. Holt, F. Russell, "Introduction", in: *The Geographies of Englishness*, eds. Peters Corbett, Holt and Russell, London 2002, pp. ix–x.

⁵ Cited in P. De Montfort, "'Two to make a Brotherhood': F. G. Stephens, Art Criticism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood", *Review of the Pre-Raphaelite Society* 2008, 16(2), p. 4.

⁶ Many thanks to Laurel Brake for information on the *Athenaeum*.

⁷ The *Athenaeum*, No. 1465, Nov 24, 1855, pp. 1372–1374.

⁸ The *Athenaeum*, No. 2437, Jul 11, 1874, p. 51.

this discovery was “to coarsen their artistic representation”.⁹ The *Athenaeum*'s art criticism reflected national competitiveness that also characterized contemporary histories of modern art by the French critics Robert de la Sizeranne and Ernest Chesneau.¹⁰

The populist art periodicals, the *Art Journal* and *The Magazine of Art*, both published articles on collectors for decades but neither published these articles during the years in which Stephens's series appeared.¹¹ Covering two generations of collectors, especially from England's industrial North,¹² Stephens's series benefitted from new forces in Victorian visual culture: the press, art critics, philanthropic collectors, museums and their emerging public role, artists' celebrity culture, and the growing status of visual cultural capital. Preceded by the earlier, more academic study of largely aristocratic collections by Gustave Waagen (1854–57), for which Stephens's series was sometimes considered a supplement, Stephens's essays contributed greatly to nascent Victorian art history, the history of collecting, while expanding the public image of collectors.¹³ In 1873 alone, he wrote about the collections of the Duke of Northumberland at Alnwick; the engineer William Armstrong at Jesmond Dene; lead manufacturer and prominent Pre-Raphaelite patron James Leathart, living in both Bracken Dene south of London, and in Lynemouth north of Newcastle; the Earl of Derby at Knowsley; and Liverpool ship-owner Frederick Leyland, another Pre-Raphaelite patron.¹⁴ He charted the collections of those still relatively unknown even to art historians: Henry Bolckow, iron

⁹ The *Athenaeum*, No. 3394, Nov 12, 1892, p. 670. It is worth noting that Stephens described an American collection of French art in *The Magazine of Art* in 1895, so was aware of wider international collecting practices than he described in his series.

¹⁰ On art writings in Europe c. 1900, see J. Codell, “From Rebels to Representatives: Masculinity, Modernity and National Identity in Histories of Pre-Raphaelitism”, in: *Writing the Pre-Raphaelites*, eds. T. Barringer and M. Giebelhausen, Aldershot 2009, pp. 53–79, and J. Codell, “From English School to British School: Modernism, Revisionism and National Culture in the Writings of M. H. Spielmann”, *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 2015, Summer, available online: <www.19thc-artworldwide.org> [accessed: March 23, 2023].

¹¹ D.S. Macleod, “Mid-Victorian Patronage of the Arts: F. G. Stephens's ‘The Private Collections of England’”, *The Burlington Magazine* 1986, 128(1001), p. 598, fn 6. The *Art Journal* published these articles before Stephens's series and *The Magazine of Art* published theirs from 1881–1898.

¹² Macleod, *Mid-Victorian Patronage...*, pp. 597–607. There has not yet been a serious scholarly follow-up to this study.

¹³ See also D.S. Macleod, “F. G. Stephens, Pre-Raphaelite Critic and Art Historian”, *The Burlington Magazine* 1986, 128(199), pp. 398–403 and 405–406.

¹⁴ Montfort, ‘Two to make a Brotherhood’..., p. 7.

master from Middleborough, armaments manufacturer William Armstrong, and Isaac Lowthian Bell, who manufactured iron and steel.¹⁵ Stephens treated the classes differently. He described at length the histories of aristocrats' country houses and their inherited collections of Old Masters, as well as current family members' additions to these collections. He praised the thirty-one industrialist collectors for supporting contemporary Victorian artists, whose works made up the majority of their collections, and put them on a par with the aristocratic collectors. He believed that the "middle-class of England has been that which has done the most for English art".¹⁶

In her ground-breaking book Dianne Sachko Macleod's appendix of collectors' biographies and details of their collecting habits and collection dispersals, she lists about 140 names, only 30 of which overlap with Stephens's subject, leaving about 110 collectors in Macleod's appendix not in Stephens's essays. This number plus the aristocratic collectors Stephens includes offers a clear indication of how many collectors there were throughout England.¹⁷

GEOHISTORY OF BRITISH ART AND PROVINCIALISM

One underlying issue in this series is the nature of English art. Ruskin, for example, in his introduction to Ernest Chesneau's *The English School of Painting*, 1885, was already anxious about influences from Asia and the Continent.¹⁸ David Peters Corbett, Ysanne Holt and Fiona Russell comment on the rising concerns about the Englishness of English art in the 1880s, identified with landscapes and national history, when London was a central focus of the market and of artists' production, and when Englishness was in a contest with modernity and with an increasingly international artworld. These concerns focused on "geographical not temporal difference, an imagined space", not the imagined time that had earlier influenced the Pre-Raphaelites in their attempt to establish an historical legacy.¹⁹ In the 1880s, a national and geographic legacy took precedence.

Stephens was constructing a geographic cultural legacy while addressing Englishness, not just for art but to discern an English character for col-

¹⁵ Macleod, *Mid-Victorian Patronage...*, p. 597.

¹⁶ "English Painters of the Present Day. XXI. William Holman Hunt", *The Portfolio* 1871, 2, p. 38.

¹⁷ D.S. Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the Making of Cultural Identity*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 381–489.

¹⁸ *Preface* to Ernest Chesneau, *The English School of Painting*, London 1885, p. ix.

¹⁹ *The Geographies of Englishness*, pp. x–xi.

lectors whose homogeneous taste, whether by wealthy family business or by working their way up, and economic support for living artists promised an English legacy that would overcome the centuries-old dominance of foreign artists in England until the eighteenth century. Some of the national discourse on Englishness sought a return to a pre-industrial past, but Stephens instead embraced industrialists as exemplary of English taste and culture. In this, then, he also embraced modernity and saw it as pervading all of Britain, not just London. Stephens's articles underscored geography as an institutional space, both regional and national, and recognized that the press in its vast dissemination brought this geography into a unified space. Stephens's series was organized according to his own proposed "geographical arrangement": The *Athenaeum's* Table of Contents for the series listed collections' locations, not their names: "Alnwick Castle, 279, 313; Galleries near Newcastle, 342; Gosforth House, Tynemouth, 372; Tynemouth, Gateshead, 406; Durham, 469; Washington Hall, Durham, 500; Middlesborough-on-Tees, 664".²⁰ Titles of articles listed place, even when collectors' names were included: "Galleries In or Near Liverpool", or "Galleries in Newcastle".²¹ These are examples of "idiographic geography", Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann's phrase for specific sites where processes and factors are tied to the local in "the study of how cultures, involving traits, complexes, and systems, are spread over space".²² DaCosta Kaufmann emphasizes "regions, populations and values that have often been neglected by scholars as 'peripheral,' 'marginal' or 'minority,'" through the study of artworks' circulations.²³ Stephens created an internal geohistory between London's exhibitionary complex and provincial "peripheral" private collections to which artworks had circulated, crossing internal physical boundaries and turning Britain from a patchwork of geographically distinct sites into a series of transcultural/transgeographic spaces. Some collectors, like George Rae and Frederick Leyland, lived in London and in the provinces, so Stephens treated their collections separately by place, emphasizing the role of geography as both a separation and as potential for unity.

²⁰ *Athenaeum*, No. 2394, Sept 13, 1873, p. vii.

²¹ F.G. Stephens, "The Private Collections of England. No. LXXI – Galleries in and near Liverpool", *Athenaeum*, No. 2866, Sept 30, 1982, p. 438.

²² T. DaCosta Kaufmann, "Introduction", in: idem, *Toward a Geography of Art*, Chicago and London 2004, pp. 2–3.

²³ T. DaCosta Kaufmann, C. Dossin, and B. Joyeux-Prunel, "Introduction", in: *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, eds. DaCosta Kaufmann, C. Dossion, B. Joyeau-Prunel, New York 2017, p. 16.

Geohistory also has a temporal dimension. Victorians experienced dramatic time shifts; the train, the telegraph, and the press all condensed time so that through the press events in Scotland occurred simultaneously with events in London. For Stephens, life in a regional town was not temporally lagging but was as modern and as historically and nationally important as events in London. Stephens praised collectors for locating their collections in the north. Regarding the collection of Albert Wood in North Wales (Conwy, Caernarvonshire), Stephens listed several intrinsic merits of his collected paintings as "considerable and varied"; but above all, it was the only collection in North Wales and perhaps in "all of the Principality, where there is not, of course, a single public collection of works or art or letters of any kind ... collected by a Liverpool magnate" and also for revealing "the skill and peculiar feeling for nature of the Liverpool School of artists deceased", underscoring the importance of regional "schools" of art.²⁴

However, Stephens also raised tensions about the geography of collecting, emphasizing collectors' local places while presenting them as shaping a national space in their homogeneous taste and patronage, thus emphasizing geography while at the same time straddling and flattening differences between national and regional market forces when, ironically, England's art market was fast becoming international. Stephens tried to realign relations between the local/regional and the national, the local building a nation that was more than the sum of its regional parts.

In the context of recent scholarship on the "new geographical consciousness", which resists the priority of national cultural identity, Stephens's series works to erase internal borders, and claims a privilege for provincial locales as signs of nationhood, homogeneity, and a rising English culture that can define Englishness.²⁵ Stephens collapsed the center-periphery duality in ranging

²⁴ F.G. Stephens, "The Private Collections of England, No LXXXIII – Mr. Albert Wood's, Conwy", *Athenaeum*, No. 3026, Oct 24, 1885, p. 542. Provincial art societies and institutions began to appear between 1800–1830 in northern England, with attention given to local artists, including some of the places where Stephens's collectors clustered, e.g., Liverpool's Academy shows, 1810–14, and exhibition of Old Masters in 1823, Newcastle's exhibition of Norwich artists in 1823, and included provincial sites in Scotland as well, cited in T. Fawcett, *The Rise of English Provincial Art*, Oxford 1974, pp. 1–3. These municipalities shared and circulated their exhibitions, 204–213. Wales, however, is not listed by Fawcett among these early exhibition sites, so perhaps Stephens is correct in especially praising Wood's collection in Conwy.

²⁵ The phrase "new geographical consciousness" is from H. Bhabha, "Introduction: On Disciplines and Destinations", in: *Territories and Trajectories*, ed. D. Sorensen. Durham 2018, p. 1.

widely across the UK in search of art collectors, not to reach a global perspective but to mediate and meld regional and national perspectives as created, above all, by culture.

Recently, Ruth Livesey, studying the nineteenth-century notion of provincialism, described its potential for unity:

provincialism ... was also a means to expand access to print and material cultures to those previously excluded.nineteenth-century Britain was powered by industry, intellectual enquiry, and newspapers emanating from non-metropolitan towns and cities...Victorian Britain represented itself as an entity composed of distinctive constituent regions and imagined itself as an imperial power. to spark a sense of attachment and identity across geographically dispersed peoples....the local geographies of smaller towns enabled breakthroughs in arts and industries alike. ... Midlands provincial towns were sites of an integrative radical Enlightenment in which the rapid changes of industrialization, cheek-by-jowl with agrarian landscapes, instigated new ways of interpreting the world. ... alternative networks of knowledge and influence drawn from village and town lives were vital and formative.²⁶

By the end of the eighteenth century the provinces were becoming “centres of intellectual activity with learned societies, newspapers, and theatres, supported by the commercial, industrial, and professional middle class”, and there were early art collectors as well, such as Henry Blundell of Ince. In addition, many collectors such as Sir Thomas Barnard and Sir George Beaumont, Constable’s patron, who gathered paintings by contemporary English artists with a preference for landscapes.²⁷ Liverpool was becoming an art center by the time of the 1810 re-establishment of the Liverpool Academy, followed by Leeds and its rival Manchester, all economically thriving cities with Art Unions and steady art patronage for and exhibitions of provincial artists.²⁸ Stephens knew well that provincial collectors supported the Pre-Raphaelites from early in their careers, an appreciation underlying his partisanship in the belief that the Pre-Raphaelites created a national school, like the Venetian, French or Dutch schools, in an imaginary linear development from the Renaissance to Victorian Britain. This also explains his focus on Newcastle,

²⁶ R. Livesey, “Provincialism at Large: Reading Locality, Scale, and Circulation in Nineteenth-Century Britain”, *Journal of Victorian Culture* 2023, 20(10), p. 2.

²⁷ C.P. Darcy, *The Encouragement of the Fine Arts in Lancashire, 1760–1860*, Manchester 1976, pp. 2–3, 15–19.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 33–41, 80–94. There were a number of works by Turner collected in Lancashire, *ibidem*, p. 163.

a place generally thought of then as without a strong art culture, but with the major Pre-Raphaelite collector Leathart, who, along with Rae and Coltart, numbered among Stephens's paradigmatic collectors for both their taste and their careful display of art in their homes.²⁹ His belief then endorsed the importance of provincial sites as places of increasing cultural and national leadership. His exploration of these collections participates in what Livesey describes as the "middle ground" of a flourishing Victorian culture in the Midlands and North of England, despite the lingering negative connotations of provincialism that remained and occasionally resurfaced.³⁰

SERIALIZATION

Stephens's combined geographical and temporal dimensions relied on two of the periodical press's devices: serialization and ekphrasis. Stephens's articles structured a series, a word he used. As Linda Hughes and Michael Lund point out, a series emphasizes temporality, as in serialized fiction when a character's life progresses from one point to another.³¹ For Victorians, the serial created meaning for readers eagerly waiting for the next installment and imagining what might happen next, encouraging readers' investment in the series and general belief in progress over time.³² Serialization promised more to come and suggested a world of plenitude.³³

Combining series' temporality with his emphasis on the geography of art collections, Stephens dramatically cross-referenced collectors' shared tastes for the same artists and subjects. He also interspersed exhibition histories into his ekphrases, offering cultural memories to mark the changing tastes of the Royal Academy and the public and to underscore the collector's role in salvaging culture: for example, he described Albert Wood's collected piece by William Davis as "his finest work, the well-known 'Harrowing'", though formerly rejected by the Royal Academy, then later exhibited in the 1862 International Exhibition.³⁴ This reversal of fortune for Davis's work reflected

²⁹ This is Macleod's well-argued speculation in *Mid-Victorian Patronage...*, p. 599.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

³¹ L.K. Hughes and M. Lund, *The Victorian Serial*, Charlottesville 1991, p. 1.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 4. Hughes and Lund point out the parallels between serialization and other Victorian temporal conceptions, such as uniformitarianism, gradualism, and historicism (pp. 6–7).

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

³⁴ F.G. Stephens, "The Private Collections of England, No LXXXIII – Mr. Albert Wood's, Conway", *Athenaeum*, No. 3026, Oct 24, 1885, p. 542.

the collector's insight, good taste, and cultural contribution in salvaging this painting.

Cross-references signaled consistency among collectors. On September 20, 1873, Stephens compared Jacob Burnett's collection in Tynemouth to Leathart's collection that he had described a week earlier, presuming his readers would recall earlier articles.³⁵ He referred to William Windus's *Burd Helen*, owned by Leyland in 1882, when discussing a study by Windus, *The Outlaw*, in Wood's North Wales collection, three years later in 1885.³⁶ Such references over these time spans implied that he thought his readers kept up with these articles and could remember in 1885 what he had written in 1882. Cross-references implied not only a homogeneous but also a British taste interwoven and shared among collectors and, presumably, with the public.

Most articles ended with a brief note on the next installment. Stephens engaged his readers in this way, building toward an accumulation of cultural wealth and a prolific visual culture spread generously around the country. Adriana Turpin notes that "Another way of understanding the importance of acquisition in the process of collecting is that the collection itself becomes a new work of art, whose nature transcends the individual nature of each object within the collection", as collectors give their objects new meanings through the very acts of collecting and displaying.³⁷ Stephens' serialization itself with its cross-references gave the collections a combined transcendence beyond each individual collection and put these works into a new set of national and cultural meanings. Susan Pearce describes collecting's development from exotic curiosities and esoteric resemblances to "the normal and regular ... recurrent and reliable patterns". Stephens regularized collectors' recurrent and reliable patterns, demonstrating how collecting emerged "into institutional recognition and so into acknowledged practice".³⁸

³⁵ F.G. Stephens, "The Private Collections of England: No. II Galleries Near Newcastle", *Athenaeum*, No. 2394, Sept 13, 1873, p. 342.

³⁶ F.G. Stephens, "The Private Collections of England, No LXXXIII – Mr. Albert Wood's", *Conway*, p. 542, and "The Private Collections of England, LXXXI – Galleries In and Near Liverpool", p. 438.

³⁷ A. Turpin, "The Value of a Collection", in: *Concepts of Value in European Material Culture, 1500–1900*, eds. B. De Munck, D. Lyna, London 2015, p. 259.

³⁸ S. Pearce, *On Collecting. An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition*, New York 1995, pp. 121, 142.

EKPHRASIS

Curiously, Stephens omitted illustrations, perhaps presuming the *Athenaeum's* cultured readers were familiar with artists' works, and also expressing his faith in Victorian visual culture's dissemination across England. Stephens expected readers to remember Rossetti's *Lady Lilith* from the 1882 Burlington Club exhibition and *The Borgia Family* from the Royal Academy 1883 exhibition of Rossetti's work, and noted that Albert Moore's *The Music Party* "is well known through photographs".³⁹

Ekphrasis was intimately tied to the Victorian press in its long critical essays and in reviews of Academy exhibitions. The educated public attended exhibitions, shopped in print shops and read art periodicals, where full-page reproductions were to be ripped out and hung on parlor walls. While the art press provided images of works discussed in its pages, the general press, like the *Athenaeum*, covered a wide range of social, political, historical and cultural topics and did not often provide images of art works amid long ekphrastic descriptions of the hundreds of paintings hung from floor to high ceiling at the annual Royal Academy exhibition. John Ruskin's long ekphrasis about Turner's *The Slave Ship* (1840), for example, evoked political, moral, affective, formal and textual resonances that suggested rich meanings of Turner's painting not readily evident on the painting's surface. Ekphrasis often attenuated the meaning and value of a work by dramatically expanding its ideological implications and historical significance, as in the case of Ruskin's "word painting" of Turner's *The Slave Ship*. Art critics even described in great detail the feelings and motives of characters in Victorian narrative paintings to explain their behavior depicted in paintings, as if paintings were novels.⁴⁰

Given that descriptions of artworks are invariably subjective with value-laden adjectives, ekphrasis infused the described work with affect, rhetorical aesthetic valuation, and historical relevance, all reinforcing the critic's authority.⁴¹ Ekphrasis is a form of translation, not only from verbal to visu-

³⁹ F.G. Stephens, "The Private Collections of England: No. LXXXI – Mr. W. Coltart's Woodleigh, Birkenhead", *Athenaeum*, No. 3022, Sept 26, 1885, pp. 407–408.

⁴⁰ Ruskin's ekphrasis on Turner's painting appears in J. Ruskin, *Complete Works*, ed. E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, 39 vols, London 1903–1912, 3: 569–571. See J. Codell, "Sentiment, the Highest Attribute of Art", *Dickens Studies Annual* 1992, 22, pp. 233–252.

⁴¹ Victorian art criticism boomed in the 19th century and Stephens was among those critics who promoted artists, especially Rossetti, who refused to exhibit after the 1850s, and so whose works the public never saw, but were heavily described by Stephens at every available opportunity. J. Codell, "The Art Press and Its Parodies: Unraveling Networks in Swinburne's 1868 Academy Notes", *Victorian Periodicals Review* 2011, 44(2), pp. 165–183.

al, but also a translation of meanings by collectors' and critics' biases, affect and rhetorical intentions. In his excessive ekphrastic descriptions, Stephens constructed the artworks' meanings, as he also levelled differences. Britain was and still is rich in regional accents and dialects, but Stephens's ekphrases applied his affective descriptive "translation" of art works to all the collected works, offering a single cultural language across collections' geographies to suggest an imaginary culture for an imaginary nation. This is what Homi Bhabha calls an "uncanny rendering" of the peripheral local and familiar, magnifying them, in Stephens's case, into national prominence that could rival London's cultural domination.⁴²

Jas' Elsner defines ekphrasis as "an extended argument ... the tendentious application of rhetorical description to the work of art... for the purpose of making an argument". Ekphrasis may "indicate social history or underlying cultural reflexes.... appropriated to numerous kinds of argument or rhetoric".⁴³ On George Rae's possession of Albert Moore's *Dancing Girl Reposing*, Stephens provides a very long ekphrasis (ill. 2).⁴⁴ This is a provocative work depicting a dancing girl in a diaphanous dress, "the ample folds of which are designed with admirable skill and rare feeling for the value of grace in lines", but which reveals the naked body beneath. She stands next to a completely naked girl, probably a slave, "a pretty figure, with a pleasing face and graceful air". Stephens here attempted to make the troubling nudity into an aesthetic feature for both figures. He described the scarlet and "rich yellow" of the dancer's outfit, and the colors of matting on which she stands. He claimed Moore's style "suggests a semi-Greek inspiration, with an Oriental tinge... piquant and charming". While praising the work, Stephens mentioned the heads are too small and that Moore depicted "colour of a peculiar kind, altogether a delightful work of fine art".⁴⁵ Just as his praise softened criticism of Moore's painting, Stephens's most compelling and common rhetoric was to claim, when reviewing individual works in each collection, that a painting collected was one of the artist's best works. William Coltart's work by Simeon Solomon, for example, was "one of the best instances of that artist's powers".⁴⁶ This praise was multi-pronged, praising the collector's good taste, the

⁴² Bhabha, *Introduction...*, p. 7.

⁴³ J. Elsner, "Art History as Ekphrasis", *Art History* 2010, 33, pp. 11–12.

⁴⁴ F.G. Stephens, "The Private Collections of England, No LXVII – Mr. Rae's, Birkenhead", *Athenaeum*, No. 2501, Oct 2, 1875, p. 481.

⁴⁵ *Athenaeum*, No. 2502, Oct 9, 1875, p. 481.

⁴⁶ F.G. Stephens, "The Private Collections of England, No. LXXXI – Mr. W. Coltart's Woodleigh, Birkenhead", p. 408.

Mr. A. Moore's small but beautiful 'Dancing Girl Reposing' is in Mr. Rae's possession. It comprises the figure of a tall and graceful girl resting, while she is standing with both hands on her hips, leaning against the wall of a chamber; her feet are on a leopard's skin. Her form is visible, but not distinct, through her thin robe of greyish white, the ample folds of which are designed with admirable skill and rare feeling for the value of grace in lines. This garment has excellent local colour, and combines well with the scarlet hood she wears, the rich yellow of the slabs of marble in the wall, and the red, blue, and yellow of the matting which hangs behind her head. The same colours are repeated in the mosaic of the pavement. By the dancer's side a naked girl lolls against the wall, seated on the pavement, with feet crossed, a pretty figure, with a pleasing face and graceful air. It is characteristic of Mr. Moore that both the heads are too small. The style of the picture suggests a semi-Greek inspiration, with an Oriental tinge, which is, so to say, at once piquant and charming. This is a beautiful example of colour of a peculiar kind, altogether a delightful work of fine art.

2. Ekphrasis example, on Holbrook Gaskell collection: F.G. Stephens, "The Private Collections of England: No. LXXIX - Allerton, Liverpool", in: *Athenaeum*, October 4, 1884, No. 2971, p. 438

artist's best work, the critic's aesthetic acumen and knowledge, and Britain's cultural achievement in producing collector, critic and artist.

Without illustrations, ekphrasis was the only entry into artworks, relying on the critic's authority, the presumed accuracy of his description and his aesthetic assessment, conferring valuation on works and artists.⁴⁷ But Stephens's ekphrasis, superficially appearing as descriptions of artworks in these collectors' homes, went beyond the objects themselves to point to the collector, shifting value from artworks and artists to collectors who gathered and salvaged art for the country. On George Rae's collection in Birkenhead, Stephens

⁴⁷ E.B. Loizeaux, "Ekphrasis and Textual Consciousness", *Word & Image* 1999, 15(1), p. 35.

pointed out that the works were “strongly marked by originality of *technique* as well as of conception... This distinctive character is, no doubt, due to the state of the owner, who has a strong love for art of a certain high class”,⁴⁸ interweaving aesthetics and character, a common transfer from artwork to artist in Victorian art criticism, but transferred here to the collector as well. Writing in 1885 on William Coltart’s Birkenhead collection, Stephens emphasized Coltart’s individuality as “an accomplished amateur... in sympathy with the best design and does not care for inferior work”.⁴⁹ Eustace Smith’s collection was “of high character and great merit”. Works in Burnett’s Tynemouth collection were mostly “of high merit, some are among the best modern specimens”, as in Leathart’s collection. Ship-owner George Holt’s choices “attest the independence of the owner’s judgment as well as his comprehensive tastes”.⁵⁰ Stephens transferred artworks’ qualities to collectors’ taste, character and national contribution to underscore their role in artworks’ valuation.⁵¹ Stephens always praised collectors’ tastes despite his occasional criticism of individual works. His reference to their independence may also allude to their independence from dealers, purchasing art from auctions, artist studios, sale rooms and exhibitions. Only thirteen of Stephens’s collectors appear in dealers’ books.⁵²

THE VALUE OF PROVENANCE: THE COLLECTOR’S CHRONOTOPE

Catalogues raisonnés and sale catalogues listed provenance as an attribute of artworks, given that a renowned provenance held potential for a work’s increased value.⁵³ The significance of provenance had been its aristocratic longevity and pedigree, but industrial collectors’ provenance was not a function of pedigree but of social intimacy with the artists themselves, reflected in their commissions, voluminous letters to artists and social life

⁴⁸ Stephens, “The Private Collections of England, No LXVII – Mr. Rae’s, Birkenhead”, p. 413.

⁴⁹ Stephens, “The Private Collections of England: No. LXXXI – Mr. W. Coltart’s Woodleigh, Birkenhead”, p. 407.

⁵⁰ F.G. Stephens, “The Private Collections of England, No LXIX – Galleries Near Liverpool”, *Athenaeum*, No. 2864, Sept 16, 1882, p. 376.

⁵¹ F.G. Stephens, “The Private Collections of England, No. III – Gosforth House – Tynemouth”, *Athenaeum*, No. 2395, Sept 20, 1873, pp. 372–373.

⁵² Macleod, *Mid-Victorian Patronage...*, p. 602.

⁵³ J. Gramlich, “Reflections on Provenance Research: Values – Politics – Art Markets”, *Journal for Art Market Studies* 2017, 2, p. 3.

shared with artists. These connections also permitted collectors to shape museums to which many of them donated their collections and to canonize living British artists. Thus, their ownership or provenance became embedded as a quality of an artwork, as was the case with aristocratic provenance, but, in addition, industrialists' provenance was also proof of a work's authenticity because the collector was the artist's patron and often friend as well. This provenance was further authenticated by institutions, museums, auction houses and dealers.

Gail Feigenbaum and Inge Reist suggest important roles for provenance, the "transformative power of ownership" affecting how a work would be perceived and understood by future generations.⁵⁴ Collectors co-produced works and contributed to their meanings, so that, as Johannes Gramlich writes, their ownership outlines "individual maneuvering space, motives and strategies... networks formed... the art market as a dynamic web of relationships", enabling us to trace information exchanges, analyze the calibration of power structures, and observe the establishment of aesthetic values.⁵⁵ Stephens's series created such a web of relationships through heightening the special category of collectors emerging at that time and through his cross-references knitting together collectors' shared tastes and practices.

THE RISING CATEGORY OF "COLLECTOR"

Stephens presented collectors' activity as history in the making. Their collections of living artists alongside their Old Masters promised a continuum of high art and national greatness from the Renaissance to Victorian Britain. Tom Stammers suggests that to understand the historicity of nineteenth-century collecting, we need to consider collecting's volatile historical conditions. That collections built diversely over time "emphasises their mutability and discontinuities, as well as the 'choreography of hands' that assembled and instrumentalised their contents at different moments. The temporal meaning of a collection was unstable and aleatory".⁵⁶ Stephens attempted to

⁵⁴ G. Feigenbaum and I. Reist, "Introduction", in: *Provenance: An Alternate History of Art*, eds. G. Feigenbaum and I. Reist, Los Angeles 2013, p. 1.

⁵⁵ Gramlich, "Reflections on Provenance Research", pp. 11–12. See also J. Codell, "Victorian Artists' Letters: Rhetoric, Networks, and Social Capital", *Arts* 2022, 10, available online: <<https://doi.org/10.3390/arts10040073>> [accessed: March 23, 2023].

⁵⁶ T. Stammers, *The Purchase of the Past: Collecting Culture in Post-Revolutionary Paris c. 1790–1890*, Cambridge 2020, p. 13.

make collections appear stable, continuous, intentional or planned, covering over the “mutability and discontinuities” by praising industrialist collectors as sole assemblers of their collections, and referring to the many hands of centuries-old aristocratic collections as carefully and intentionally built up, not haphazard, although they certainly were. Historicity in Victorian revivals (neo-Gothic, medievalism, neo-classical) gave the past a ‘presentness’, so vital to Victorians’ notions of their own progress worthy of a place in the world and in history. Unlike aristocratic heirs, however, middle-class collectors focusing on living artists did not gather the past as repositories of history, but made contemporaneity into a living history.

As Turpin explains, “collectors played an important role in the market for art just as much as dealers in a symbiotic process among kinds of values and motives. Among the motives of collectors, are those ascribed to them or inscribed on them by others, ...part of larger social, economic and national forces of identity and worth”.⁵⁷ Stephens inscribed collectors’ motives and their cultural and social value to Britain at a time when collectors were becoming distinct cultural figures in Europe and the US. Oscar E. Vázquez writes, “collectors and collections – in so far as they are dependent on discourses – are a creation of the modern era” with “increased attention to...the collector over the collected object”.⁵⁸ Dianne Sachko Macleod described British industrialist collectors’ motives as affirming “a middle class identity” distinct from a leisurely aristocratic one, and her research reveals that these collectors, almost all men, came from comfortably well-off families, were educated and traveled, and were not *arrivistes*.⁵⁹ Stephens, however, mixed these classes, even levelled or disguised class differences in his series by identifying them and lumping them all together as collectors contributing to public taste and national unity in one new cultural category.

Mary Douglas considered collecting things as a means to citizenship, an engagement in long-term interactions with others, using goods to promote valued social patterns. Collecting was a rhetorical act, according to Arjun Appadurai.⁶⁰ In focusing on collectors, Stephens expanded this activity from citizenship to national contribution by placing collectors in the public sphere of

⁵⁷ Turpin, *The Value of a Collection*, p. 256.

⁵⁸ O.E. Vázquez, *Inventing the Art Collection: Patrons, Markets and the State in Nineteenth-Century Spain*, Philadelphia 2001, pp. 5, 3.

⁵⁹ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class*, pp. 1 and 4–6.

⁶⁰ M. Douglas, *Risk and Blame: Essays in Cultural Theory*, London 1992, pp. 150–151. A. Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*, Cambridge 1986, p. 38.

a widely disseminated press, prioritizing collecting over class and promoting their social and national roles. Vázquez, like Pierre Bourdieu, understands art as a tool of legitimation because collections do social and cultural work for their owners, making collectors inseparable from new legal instruments, bureaucratic documents and institutional spaces, so that the individualism of the collector was generated by structural factors.⁶¹ Stammers maps collectors' private activity as equated with individualism and a scholarly focus on biography and case studies.⁶²

However, while repeatedly praising collectors' individualism, Stephens avoided biography and asserted rather a common identity within the category of collectors, their individualism aligned with their shared taste in art and patronage of living artists. As scholars have noted, collectors who are contemporaries of one another often collect the same things and this was true for Stephens's subjects, who competed for celebrity artists' works and knew each other's collecting inclinations. They not only commissioned the same artists but also commissioned replicas and versions of the same paintings that now span the globe.⁶³ Stephens treated this taste as shared by readers as well, presuming that *Athenaeum* readers already knew the artists and many of the works he described. On Rae's collection, Stephens described Rossetti's *Francesca da Rimini*, a version of which he had described in his article on Leathart two years earlier in 1873.⁶⁴ Stephens's insistence on collectors' individualism was an attempt to tie them to a vital Victorian ideological value that was touted as an English character trait across the professions, from manufacturing to the arts to engineering.

In these efforts, Stephens recalibrated collecting as a public activity, a public good that represented the collective nation. Public good is a microeconomic term meaning a good that is both non-excludable and non-rivalrous, from which individuals cannot be excluded from use or benefit and where one indi-

⁶¹ Vázquez, *Inventing the Art Collection...*, pp. 1–29. As Stammers points out, “the societal significance of individual collections is thrown into relief by reconstructing the political, moral and aesthetic environment in which they were embedded”. Stammers, *The Purchase of the Past...*, p. 9.

⁶² Stammers, *The Purchase of the Past...*, pp. 7–8.

⁶³ Rossetti worked almost exclusively for replica commissions, but other artists did many of them as well. For a full study of the many replicas produced by Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, Ford Madox Brown, John Frederick Lewis, William Powell Frith, Frank Holl and others, see J. Codell ed., *Victorian Artists' Autograph Replicas*, New York 2020.

⁶⁴ F.G. Stephens, “The Private Collections of England, No LXVII – Mr. Rae's, Birkenhead”, *Athenaeum*, No. 2502, Oct 9, 1875, p. 481.

vidual's use does not reduce availability to others. While museum collections are often considered a form of public good, private collections are generally not. Stephens presented private collections as a public good for nation building, cultural unity, hegemony and European superiority. For Stephens, British collecting was not simply eccentric, but was communal and national, not just an extension of personhood, but of nationhood, a view shared by many emerging Victorian historians of British art at this time.⁶⁵ Stephens echoed the nationalism prominent in late nineteenth-century writings on national "schools".⁶⁶

Stammers argues that the French Revolution opened an era in which collecting was reimagined, problematized, mobilized and contested until the end of the nineteenth century, redefined by museums' attention to social and economic valuation of art and the role of nationalism in culture.⁶⁷ Stephens turned the individual collection into an institution through his series, and, like other institutionalizations, this one blurred the divide between private and public, allowing readers to virtually enter collectors' private homes and turning collectors, described as independent, individualist, and eclectic, into tastemakers, public servants and cultural exempla. Through collecting, objects moved from commodities to sacred relics sanctified in collectors' homes (ill. 3), as in Leyland's parlor with three Rossetti works grouped like a triptych, a sanctification later validated when objects were relocated to museums. Stephens's praise of collectors endorsed their sanctifying power.

⁶⁵ J. Codell, "Righting the Victorian Artist: The Redgraves' *A Century of Painters of the English School* and the Serialization of Art History", *Oxford Art Journal* 2000, 23, pp. 93–118.

⁶⁶ See Codell, *From Rebels to Representatives...*, and Codell, *From English School to British School...* Nina Lübbren discusses the "touristification" of the provinces between 1880 and 1900, helped by the national railway and nostalgic myths of rural life (N. Lübbren, "'Toilers of the Sea': Fisherfolk and the Geographies of Tourism in England, 1880–1900", in: *The Geographies of Englishness*, pp. 29–63). As early as the eighteenth century, William Gilpin in *An Essay on Prints* (1768), through his guidebooks, encouraged Britons to take grand tours of their own countryside. In the eighteenth century, the picturesque became associated nostalgically with an idealized countryside. Artists had long taken sketching tours all over Britain in and visited country houses to see the Old Masters, e.g., Turner was allowed complete access to the Earl of Egremont's collection at Petworth, although public access to country house collections was uneven and sometimes the public were charged a fee.

⁶⁷ Stammers, p. 9.



3. Bedford Lemere, *Interior view in the drawing room at 49 Princes Gate, showing six Rossetti paintings on the walls.* May 1892. Photograph. Source: Historic England Archive. Re-use not permitted. BL11528

THE RHETORIC OF NATIONAL CULTURE AND THE COLLECTOR

Stephens presented an imaginary and emerging British art history refuting the powerful influence of foreign artists – e.g., Anthony Van Dyck, Hans Holbein – who dominated British art until the eighteenth century. Stephens helped consolidate collectors' growing cultural authority, establish new national grounds for the significance of provenance, and assert his own cultural authority. He argued that local collections were historically important for British national identity because their collections crossed urban/provincial borders from London to the Northern industrial cities, even to Wales, and, in the case of aristocratic collectors, embraced centuries of time. Such moral and national purposes were prescribed by none other than John Ruskin, who argued that displaying art in the home was more important than in a museum, since the home was a site of moral and spiritual renewal and as such it

resisted commodification. He advised that living artists' works be collected privately while public museums should collect works by dead artists.⁶⁸

Stephens's articles realigned private collecting as a public activity in several ways: he (1) revealed collectors' support for living British artists in a shared, homogenous taste, (2) opened collections to the public, (3) emphasized collections' widespread geography as a force for unifying the country, (4) presumed that readers were already familiar with most artists and artworks, underscoring his belief in a national, homogeneous taste, (5) cross-referenced artists who appeared in multiple collections, and (6) created textual networks between collectors and the public through these articles. Stephens could build on readers' common body of knowledge from Ruskin's *Academy Notes* and his books, annual Royal Academy reviews, a burgeoning industry of artists' biographies, voluminous reproductions in books and periodicals, exhibitions in London, new provincial museums and millions of prints disseminated everywhere. Stephens promoted cheap prints; in an 1859 article in *Macmillan's* he argued that "the essentials of good art may be produced at a very minute cost", and derided the British for falling behind Continental print makers.⁶⁹

Stephens articulated a new national identity for art collecting that was on the cusp of a new discipline. He envisioned himself as an "art-historian", writing "a new literature" in a "new branch of knowledge".⁷⁰ Art history became a university discipline in 1870 in Oxford, Cambridge, and University College London, thanks to Felix Slade's generosity, but was not yet a degree-granting discipline. Stephens's collectors were mostly from a generation earlier and had absorbed art knowledge from popular art history writers (Anna Jameson, Lord Lindsay, among others), travels, a robust art press – the *Art Journal* and *The Magazine of Art* – and the general press. These collectors' art authority was as self-made as were their fortunes, and they were as entrepreneurial in collecting as in life. Their moves from manufacturing, banking, ship-owning

⁶⁸ Ruskin admonished the government for the way it "encourage(s) the private possession of the works of living masters ... to keep down the prices of them" (Ruskin, *Collected Works*, 16:81–82). He insisted that original work is the cheapest and best to have. Consumers determined the artist's character through "the kind of subjects which you, the public, ask them for, and therefore the kind of thoughts with which you require them to be habitually familiar" (Ruskin, *Collected Works*, 16:35). See J. Codell, "From Culture to Cultural Capital", in: *The Political Economy of Art*, ed. J. Codell, Madison 2008, pp. 27–39.

⁶⁹ "Cheap Art", *Macmillan's* I [November 1859], p. 48. Cited also in Macleod, *F.G. Stephens, Pre-Raphaelite Critic and Art Historian*, p. 401.

⁷⁰ *Flemish and French Pictures with Notes Concerning the Painters and Their Works*, London 1875, pp. v–vi. Cited also in Macleod, *F.G. Stephens, Pre-Raphaelite Critic and Art Historian*, p. 401.

to Parliament exemplified their increasing power that complemented their cultural authority to canonize British artists and shape public taste. The collector, after all, inscribes new meanings to artworks and thus co-produces these works, acquiring a vital role in art production as well as in its reception.

As the British artworld was becoming international and England was experiencing more population infusions from the colonies, from France after 1870, or from Eastern Europe, it is clear that this circulation and mobility was outside Stephens's intentions to fold the public and collectors into a cultural unity, ignoring influxes of foreign art then becoming widespread: foreign artists showing in galleries and exhibitions throughout Britain, Continental and colonial art filling London galleries and pages of the art press, and artists going abroad for training in France and Germany. Stephens was not using geography to celebrate diversity, but to prove homogeneity. At the same time, he was neither regressive in his attitude toward industrialists nor nostalgic about the provinces as idyllic or rural. Rather he suggested that provincial cities and even smaller towns were becoming modern cultural centers that, if not rivaling London, were certainly offering a decentralized network of cultural venues that were not vernacular, but were national, homogenized, fixed, stable, and sharing a single cultural language.⁷¹

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⁷¹ For discussions of the mobility and decentering processes, see D. Sorensen, "Editor's Introduction", in: *Territories and Trajectories*, ed. D. Sorensen, pp. 13–35.

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LOCAL TO NATIONAL: VICTORIAN INDUSTRIALIST ART COLLECTORS' GEOGRAPHIES

Summary

After 1850, the middle and working classes sought cultural education, which John Ruskin, among others, identified as a signifier of civilization and national greatness. Working Men's Colleges, three 1870 university Slade Professorships in art history, proliferating art publications, and emerging regional museums offered opportunities to become conversant with visual art were then equated with social mobility and Englishness. Amid this cultural nationalism, critic F. G. Stephens's 100+ *Athenaeum* series, "The Private Collections of England" (1873–1887), transformed collectors into national heroes. Scholars have noted the rising profile of collectors in 19th-century Europe and the US, in which Stephens's series participated. Stephens detailed these collections' expanded geography in England's industrial north, turning local art collecting into a national, unifying force, a transformation made possible by his periodical serialization itself. These collectors, industrialists, merchants and bankers exemplified a new middle-class social, cultural and political authority. Most of them intended to bequeath their collections philanthropically to museums, thus shaping public tastes and the canon. They were personally and socially networked with artists and with each other, often working in complementary industries. Stephens interspersed his detailed descriptions of artworks with exhibition histories across translocal and transnational spaces, using the power of the press to weave a network between collectors and the public and a shared cultural history that endorsed collectors' new public identity. However, Stephens also raised tensions about the geography of collecting, emphasizing collectors' local places while presenting them as shaping a national space in their homogeneous taste and support of the same living artists and even the same pictorial subjects. In this way, Stephens straddled and flattened differences between national and regional market forces when, ironically, England's art market was be-

coming increasingly international. This geographical layering is explored here in the context of the rise of provincial art institutions, the period's notion of national schools and in anticipating the features of the current geohistory of art. I will explore two devices associated with the periodical press: ekphrasis and serialization, both of which Stephens deploys. Stephens wrote long ekphrases on works in these collection and omitted illustrations, noting in several comments that the *Athenaeum's* middle-class readers were already familiar with artists' works. This presumption and his use of 19th-century serialization, used by novelists whose chapters appeared across multiple issues of periodicals, coming to create a powerful force binding readers to his elevation of collectors' social, national and cultural roles.

Keywords:

E.G. Stephens, ekphrasis, serialization, Victorian collectors, nationalism, the *Athenaeum*