“From the Editor's Standpoint”
Rodgers, Beth

Published in:
English Studies
DOI:
10.1080/0013838X.2023.2239132
Publication date:
2023
Citation for published version (APA):

Document License
CC BY

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Aberystwyth Research Portal (the Institutional Repository) are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

• Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Aberystwyth Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
• You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
• You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Aberystwyth Research Portal

Take down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

tel: +44 1970 62 2400
e-mail: is@aber.ac.uk
“From the Editor’s Standpoint”: L.T. Meade, Alice Corkran, and Lessons on Authorship, Collaboration, and Competition

Beth Rodgers

To cite this article: Beth Rodgers (2023) “From the Editor’s Standpoint”: L.T. Meade, Alice Corkran, and Lessons on Authorship, Collaboration, and Competition, English Studies, 104:6, 865-886, DOI: 10.1080/0013838X.2023.2239132

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/0013838X.2023.2239132

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Published online: 20 Nov 2023.

Submit your article to this journal

View related articles

View Crossmark data
“From the Editor’s Standpoint”: L.T. Meade, Alice Corkran, and Lessons on Authorship, Collaboration, and Competition

Beth Rodgers

Department of English and Creative Writing, Aberystwyth University, Aberystwyth, UK

ABSTRACT
The Irish writers L.T. Meade and Alice Corkran were both editors of leading London-based girls’ periodicals in the 1890s, Atalanta and the Girl’s Realm, respectively. Although both periodicals and both editors have been the focus of increased attention in recent years, the theme of this special issue affords the opportunity to consider in more detail the links that existed between Corkran and Meade and their respective publications. Prolific novelists as well as editors, both women were outspoken in their advocacy of the professionalisation of young women’s literary work, and both were highly involved in professional networks that drew a range of Irish women writers together in this period. In this article, I take as a case study an intriguing incident in which Corkran and Meade joined forces to offer Girl’s Realm readers the opportunity to hone their skills of authorship as part of a competition. I explore the extent to which Meade and Corkran model collaboration for their readers through this exchange and consider what it tells us about co-authorship and the lines between the amateur and the professional in this period.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 21 October 2022
Accepted 18 July 2023

KEYWORDS
Irish women writers; girls’ periodicals; collaborations; networks; Meade; Corkran; competitions

CONTACT

Beth Rodgers
bjr6@aber.ac.uk

L.T. Meade (1844–1914) and Alice Corkran (c.1847–1916) were both editors of leading London-based girls’ periodicals in the 1880s and 1890s, Atalanta (1887–98) and the Girl’s Realm (1898–1915), respectively.1 Moving from County Cork to London in the 1870s in pursuit of the pen, Meade was initially best known as a writer of girls’ books, although her immensely prolific output comprised many genres, and she played a prominent role in the development of detective fiction in the 1890s.2 In an interview with the journalist Helen C. Black, however, she referred to her time at the helm of Atalanta as “the greatest idea and achievement of her life”.3 Corkran was born in France to an Irish literary family who had connections to the Brownings and the Wildes. When her father, J. Frazer Corkran, lost his position as Paris correspondent for the Morning Herald, the family

1For detailed consideration of the history and content of these publications, see Moruzi, Constructing Girhood, chaps. 5 and 7, and Dawson, “Not for Girls Alone.” Examples of more recent studies of specific aspects of the magazines include Standlee, “The ‘Wire-Puller’” and Sunderland, “Politics for Girls.”
2For fuller biographical discussion of Meade, see O’Toole, The Irish New Woman, chap. 2.
3Black, Pen, Pencil, Baton, Mask, 226.
moved to London where Corkran established a varied literary career, which included children’s books, journalism, art criticism, biography, and editorial work.\textsuperscript{4} Like Meade, Corkran prized her time as editor of a successful girls’ magazine, viewing it as the “opportunity of her life”.\textsuperscript{5} In my previous work on Meade and Corkran, I have been interested in exploring their individual roles in the creation of the “modern girl”\textsuperscript{6} as well as the development of the professionalisation of authorship.\textsuperscript{7} The theme of this special issue, however, affords the opportunity to consider what an examination of the links between these two author-editors, both of whom were so closely associated with the younger generation of girl readers and writers, can tell us about women’s literary professionalism, the importance of collaboration and mentorship, and the creation of intergenerational networks both real and imagined at this period. In distinguishing between “real” and “imagined” networks, I do not suggest that the “imagined” community between a network of readers is not also real. Rather, the distinction is between groups that met and knew each other in person and those that existed primarily within the pages of the periodical, shaped by a sense of shared identity. In thinking about readerships in this way, I follow the example of other periodicals scholars in drawing upon Benedict Anderson’s notion of “imagined community” in the conceptualisation of how a periodical creates a network of “likeminded readers”.\textsuperscript{8}

In her influential study \textit{The New Girl} (1995), Sally Mitchell observes that in the period 1880–1915 “both working-class and middle-class girls increasingly occupied a separate culture”, which was “evident in books, magazines, clothing styles, clubs, sports, schools, and memoirs” of the period.\textsuperscript{9} As sixpenny monthlies, at the higher end of the magazine market, \textit{Atalanta} and the \textit{Girl’s Realm} both broadly targeted a readership of middle- and upper-middle-class young women in their teens and early twenties. The actual readership may have been more expansive, however: Mitchell notes that “Atalanta was carried in public libraries and was therefore available to working and lower-middle-class girls”,\textsuperscript{10} and in the \textit{Girl’s Realm} Corkran sometimes published letters from readers keen to dispute the assumption that all readers held such privileged class positions.\textsuperscript{11} Although neither Meade nor Corkran remained in the editorial chair for the duration of their respective title’s runs, both women were instrumental in establishing the tone, textual identity, and readerly communities of these publications, responding to and significantly helping to shape this burgeoning girls’ culture as they did so. Articles on topics such as girls’ schools and higher education, employment and careers, literary debates of the day, and the nature of modern girlhood consolidated these as some of the key themes associated with the “new girl”. Both titles were produced in central London, but evidence

\textsuperscript{4}Rodgers, “The Editor of the Period,” 165–70. For more on the wider Corkran family and their connections to the networks of literary Paris, see Jay, \textit{British Writers and Paris}.

\textsuperscript{5}Warre-Cornish, “Miss Alice Corkran,” 850.

\textsuperscript{6}Mitchell, \textit{The New Girl}, 3.

\textsuperscript{7}For example, Rodgers, “L.T. Meade, ‘Queen of the Girls’-Book Makers’”; “The Editor of the Period.”

\textsuperscript{8}See, for example, Moruzi, \textit{Constructing Girlhood}, 13.

\textsuperscript{9}Mitchell, \textit{The New Girl}, 3.

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid., 11.

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., 11.
from correspondence and reader contribution pages, which often printed addresses alongside names, indicates that they (and their textual communities) circulated well beyond that geographical location. Irish readers were frequently represented in lists of competition entrants, contribution sections, and exchange pages, but readers also sent in letters and work from countries such as France, Germany, the United States, Japan, and New Zealand, among others.

In this article, I focus on Meade and Corkran’s interactions with the figure of the aspiring girl writer as part of their broader engagement with modern girlhood. As the later of the two publications, the *Girl’s Realm* more confidently championed the figure of the modern girl, but as editors both Meade and Corkran acknowledged and catered to their readers’ keen interest in writing and the writing life. Both magazines featured articles about journalism, women journalists in particular, and biographies of women writers both current and historical, and essay competitions provided readers with opportunities to test their own skills. Writing competitions and calls for contribution from readers were not unusual in juvenile periodicals or juvenile sections of newspapers, but I argue here that Meade and Corkran utilised their editorial personas as busy, professional women writers in order to offer more specialised and distinct commentary on readers’ literary aspirations that reflected their shared interest in professionalisation and women’s literary networks. These practices can be understood as offering informal modes of literary mentorship to readers. Meade’s “Atalanta Scholarship and Reading Union” and “School of Fiction” sections, for example, gave readers the opportunity to write scholarly essays on a range of topics and learn from a series of accomplished writers. As Janis Dawson has noted, these features “set Atalanta apart from other girls’ magazines”, and “had pedagogical functions beyond the friendly instruction generally offered by family literary magazines; they supported and encouraged girls’ academic and literary ambitions and were an important part of Atalanta’s work to support women’s contribution to cultural discourse.” The “School of Fiction” series of papers on literary matters culminated in Meade’s final editorial column in 1893, entitled “From the Editor’s Standpoint”, in which she gathered together her most prescient insights from her experiences as both a successful author and editor. In the *Girl’s Realm*, Corkran also recognised readers’ desire to know more about the writing life, frequently acknowledging it in her editorial column, “Chat with the Girl of the Period”. In an early “Chat”, she prefaced the launch of the new “Literary Page”, which she also authored, with extracts from a letter from “Jean”, who explained that she did not wish to “lead a butterfly sort of life”, but instead

13As well as articles on schools and careers, the *Girl’s Realm* also included more material on sport and pastimes such as photography than was evident in *Atalanta* or the *Girl’s Own Paper*.

14See, for example, Pooley, “Children’s Writing” and Atkins, “Literary Olympic.”

15A full history of mentorship and women’s writing is beyond the scope of this article, but it is worth noting Joanne Shattock’s observation, in her work on an earlier generation of women writers, that women’s literary networks have had a history of being “less obvious and less public” than those of men, who were able to make connections via schools, universities, clubs, and public spaces such as coffee houses. Unable to access such spaces until much later in the century (or, indeed, beyond that for many), women had to make connections in less formal ways. Shattock, “Professional Networking,” 134.

16For example, in the first issue, Andrew Lang’s essay on Sir Walter Scott for the inaugural “Scholarship and Reading Union” is followed by an invitation to respond to two questions (on “Scott’s Ideal of a Prose Romance” and on the plot of *Guy Mannering*, that month’s selected novel). Readers are reminded that papers must not exceed 500 words, and that “Quality, not quantity, will be the test of excellence.” “Scholarship Competition Questions,” 52. In addition to offering advice, the later “School of Fiction” section also offered feedback on individual pieces in return for an additional fee. For more on both the “Scholarship and Reading Union” and the “School of Fiction,” see Dawson, “Not for Girls Alone.”

wanted to “write jolly, short stories, interviews, and articles—not about dress, though—and one day to be able to edit a paper”. According to Corkran, Jean’s letter was “but one of many letters expressing the ambition of some of my readers to write. I hope to help them to train for this object by means of my Literary Page”. In the first instalment of the new venture, Corkran assures her “dear girls” that this will be “a new kind of literary page”: “I want to help you in your reading, but to do it in my own way, and in the way that I think would be most useful to you.” Corkran’s “Literary Page” thus took on the qualities of her “Chat with the Girl of the Period” column, in which she characterised herself as the facilitator of a conversation between a network of readers. Her reference to “training” readers, however, emphasises that this is a conversation that is pedagogically inflected, which will, much like Meade’s column, position readers as potential apprentices.

In their recent study of the Irish author and journalist Hannah Lynch, Faith Binckes and Kathryn Laing stress the significance of the “sociable, semi-professional atmosphere so vital for women making their way as independent agents in a male-dominated world” and describe “networks of continuity and of interconnection stretch[ing] across nations and decades”. Noting Corkran’s publication of several Irish writers in the Girl’s Realm, Binckes and Laing comment:

> it is not entirely clear whether the Girl’s Realm’s inclusion of Irish women writers such as Lynch, [Katharine] Tynan and [Jane] Barlow arose from London networks of female authorship or from existing affiliations in the London Irish literary and political diaspora. It might be a mistake to try to distinguish between the two, given the way that such networks intersected.

Similarly, although it may not be possible to trace the exact origins of the connections between Meade and Corkran, I suggest that we can learn a great deal about the kinds of writers, editors, and mentors they were through a consideration of the links between them. I begin by considering in more detail the networks in which they operated and/or helped to facilitate, before taking as a case study an intriguing incident in which Corkran and Meade joined forces to offer Girl’s Realm readers the opportunity to hone their skills of authorship as part of a competition. Despite their years of experience in engaging with girl writers, however, this joint venture did not prove entirely successful. I then move on to explore what this collaboration between Meade and Corkran, despite its being something of a misfire, tells us about the formation of both professional and amateur networks in this period, as well as about modelling collaboration to a younger readership (even if, ultimately, their variant responses to readers’ work mean that they provide rather different models). In doing so, I suggest that the literary mentorship they offer to readers can be understood as constituting an extension of those “networks of continuity and interconnection” posited by Binckes and Laing, which Meade and Corkran benefited from and participated in in their own professional lives. The incomplete success of this particular project, however, also usefully reveals some of the complexities and challenges that can sometimes complicate the processes of collaboration and mentorship.

20Ibid., 70.
21Notably, debates about some of the challenges and limitations of mentorship in the development and support of women’s careers continue in our own day. See, for example, Agunsoye, “Career Mentoring.”
An “Animated Group”? Meade, Corkran, and their Network(s)

Their appearance in each other’s publications indicates that Meade and Corkran had a professional relationship at the very least, and likely moved in similar circles. Corkran wrote a long piece on a recent exhibition at London’s New Gallery for Atalanta in April 1891 and her pair of articles on “Journalistic London” were published in the 1892–3 volume. Meade’s “The Temptation of Olive Latimer” was serialised in the first volume of the Girl’s Realm, hot on the heels of her being voted favourite writer in a reader poll in the magazine. In the second volume, Meade’s short story “The Lover Prince” appears next to Corkran’s article on “Famous Horses”, and Meade supplies a jaunty account of her cat Fluffy for a later piece on cats, in which Corkran observes that “Mrs Meade’s cat will, I know, be a specially interesting one to my girls”. In 1901, Meade provides the first contribution to what becomes the Girl’s Realm’s regular “How I Began” feature (a piece that now stands as a key autobiographical source), and her name is often included prominently in lists of the magazine’s contributors in promotional notices.

That Meade’s name appears in the Girl’s Realm more frequently than Corkran’s does in Atalanta no doubt reflects the higher degree of fame and success enjoyed by Meade, who by 1898 had already published over 100 novels, many of which targeted the same readership as the Girl’s Realm. Corkran was therefore prudent to capitalise upon her connections—although Meade had stepped down from the editorial chair of Atalanta in 1893, she continued to publish fiction in it, and her name was bound up with both popular and periodical writing for girls. Her willingness to contribute such a wide range of material, both fictional and non-fictional, to Corkran’s magazine served as an endorsement of the new publication, which, with its stronger focus on the “modern girl”, appeared to take up the mantle of the just-folded Atalanta for a readership ready to enter the twentieth century. But Corkran’s magazine may also have represented an important publishing opportunity for Meade. In keeping with the “keen market sense” that Dawson suggests “serve[d her] so well throughout her career”, Meade may have welcomed the opportunity to maintain a connection with her girl audience while she was otherwise engaged with the crime fiction and mystery series she was writing (with great success) for publications such as the Strand and Cassell’s. Critics today often cite the Girl’s Realm reader poll that placed Meade at the top of her contemporaries as evidence of her popularity, but the result was of significance to Meade and Corkran at the time as well. The announcement was swiftly followed in the next number by Sarah Tooley’s article “Some Famous Authors as Girls”, which began by asserting “There is no greater favourite as a writer for girls than Mrs. L.T. Meade, as the recent competition in this magazine has fully proved”. It is perhaps by way of thanks for this bolstering of her status that Meade embarks upon the special collaborative competition discussed later in this article.

These moments of exchange and encounter within the pages of their publications reflect broader connections and processes between the two women and the larger

---

23Dawson, “’Write a Little Bit,’” 139.
24For example, Mitchell, The New Girl, 14.
networks of which they were a part. Both were highly engaged figures in the literary marketplace of their day. In their discussion of Hannah Lynch’s movements in literary London, for example, Binckes and Laing note that the Corkran family held regular salons on Thursday evenings, which were “intergenerational affairs at which women writers were welcome.”26 They cite the author Gertrude Atherton’s account of meeting figures there “whose careers stretched from mid-Victorian to the early modernist”, including Mary Elizabeth Braddon and May Sinclair.27 This emphasis on the intergenerational is fascinating in the context of Corkran’s editorship of the Girl’s Realm; in naming her editorial column “Chat with the Girl of the Period”, a play on Eliza Lynn Linton’s controversial article from 1868, Corkran signalled a desire to challenge the ways that previous generations had castigated younger women.28 The salon took place at the home in Mecklenburgh Square that Corkran shared with her sister Henriette Corkran, author of the memoir Celebrities and I (1902), and the novelist Richard Whiteing, who described himself as something of a mentee of his “old friend” J. Frazer Corkran, having benefited from the elder man’s “counsel” ahead of his own time as a Paris correspondent.29 Both Henriette Corkran and Whiteing occasionally appear in the Girl’s Realm, the former with short stories and the latter contributing a humorous account to the above-mentioned article “On Cats”. As the editor of the Bairn’s Annual in the 1880s, Corkran had made extensive use of the writers in the family and wider circle, including Lady Jane Wilde and Constance Wilde.30 The greater range of contributors included in the Girl’s Realm, however, attests not only to its larger size and scope but also to the way that women like Corkran were increasingly involved in clubs and societies that helped to professionalise women’s writing at this period, moving from the “female-centred salon culture” that took place in private homes to more formal organisations that “mov[ed] out into traditionally male territory beyond it”.31 As Binckes and Laing note, “[t]he overlap between these two spaces … gives an indication of the range of different positions available to women when negotiating their place in the professional sphere”.32

Corkran’s lifelong experience of salon culture—as a child, she had also been present at her mother’s fashionable salons in Paris—arguably complicates what in some senses appears to be a rather unequal relationship between Meade and Corkran; in terms of fame, publication record, and financial reward, Meade was certainly the more successful of the two, but Corkran’s membership of what the Athenæum called a “well-known literary family” no doubt granted her readier access to certain kinds of networks.34 Nevertheless, having moved to London without the family connections of Corkran, Meade

26Binckes and Laing, Hannah Lynch (1859–1904), 70.
27Ibid., 70.
28Linton’s article, “The Girl of the Period,” was published in the Saturday Review in 1868. See Moruzi, Constructing Girlhood, chap. 2. For more on the significance of the column’s title, see Rodgers, “The Editor of the Period,” 171.
29Whiteing, My Harvest, 135. In her memoir, Atherton describes the Whiteing-Corkran residence, which also included the Corkrans’ mother (until her death in 1892) and elderly uncle, as “a singular household, and I have often wondered it has not before this figured in some work of fiction.” Atherton, Adventures of a Novelist, 245.
30See Fitzsimons, Wilde’s Women, 156.
31Binckes and Laing, Hannah Lynch (1859–1904), 71.
32Ibid., 71.
33Henriette Corkran recalled meeting Charles Dickens among other famous writers of the day at these events. Celebrities and I, 52.
34“Literary Gossip,” 454.
enthusiastically embraced the opportunities presented by professional collectives, and her success demonstrates the shift between informal and formal organisations as described by Binckes and Laing. Indeed, Dawson suggests that “No aspiring woman writer was more determined to take advantage of London’s opportunities than Meade.”

Although I am yet to find evidence that Meade attended Corkran’s salon, they certainly encountered each other in “clubland”. Meade was on the managing committee of the feminist Pioneer Club, regularly participating in debates, and her name was included among the founding members of the Lyceum Club. In 1889, she and Corkran both attended the inaugural Literary Ladies’ Dinner (later renamed the Women Writers’ Dinner), an annual event that was a key constituent in the “emerging female club culture” of the period, and with which both women became heavily involved in subsequent years. In addition to Meade and Corkran, twenty other women attended the first dinner at the Criterion hotel in May 1889, including Katharine Tynan, Hannah Lynch, Alice Meynell, Mona Caird, and Amy Levy. Linda K. Hughes notes, however, that hostile, sometimes mocking press responses to the event served to dissuade many participants, including Tynan and Meynell, from returning the following year. Unlike previous women’s clubs that focused on “social comforts”, the launch of a dining event was different because it “represented a collective female incursion into public urban spaces”, a bringing together of “professional opportunity and domestic comfort” that had previously been the exclusive preserve of men in places such as the Savile Club. Meade herself was far from dissuaded, however, even agreeing to preside over the second dinner. Hughes suggests she was a “shrewd” choice as Chair given her strong publication record, degree of experience, and, in particular, her status as an editor who “could offer significant publishing opportunities to her colleagues”. Her connections as an editor worked in other ways as well: in 1891, she was part of the group’s organising committee, alongside Corkran and several others, and offered up the Atalanta office in Blackfriars for committee meetings.

That Meade and Corkran worked alongside each other towards an event that brought together the professional, social, and literary, and were undeterred from participating in it despite the negative press response in some quarters, says a great deal about their dedication to the professionalisation of women’s writing and their sense of the importance of networks within that. It is also suggestive of their understanding of their own place in the wider literary marketplace. In an account of the 1890 event titled “A Daring Dinner”, the Women’s Penny Paper reported:

35Dawson, “‘Write a Little Bit,’” 138.
37D’Espaigne, “The Lyceum Club,” 607. Notably, this announcement appears in the Lady’s Realm, of which the Girls’ Realm was originally an offshoot.
38Binckes and Laing, Hannah Lynch (1859–1904), 71.
39A striking number of the attendees were Irish; indeed, Binckes and Laing note that the number of women present who were also members of the “short-lived Irish feminist and political group” the London Ladies’ Land League is suggestive of the range of “point[s] of crossover between Irish political activity and literary London.”
40Hughes, “A Club of Their Own,” 242.
41Ibid., 234, 235.
42Ibid., 244.
43Ibid., 247.
Although but few women of the first rank in the world of letters were present, the diners who read periodical literature must have been fully aware that Mrs. L. T. Meade has no slight share of fame; [and] that Mrs. Pennell is a valued contributor to Harper’s Magazine … Scarcely less well known are names of Miss Billington [and] Miss Alice Corkran …

The world of periodical literature may be constructed here as the implied “second rank”, but it was bread and butter to Meade and Corkran, who were both professional women who supported their families with their writing and who understood the challenges that came with such work. In the early 1880s, the precarious nature of her irregular employment across a range of titles led Corkran to appeal to the Royal Literary Fund for financial assistance, as her journalist father had also done before her. For her part, Meade spoke openly about the need to “keep the pot boiling at whatever cost”, as she candidly told an interviewer she had initially met at a meeting of the Grosvenor Crescent Club. While some women writers worried that their reputations could be compromised by continuing to be involved in the organisation, Meade and Corkran may well have felt that the potential advantages of the networking opportunity far outweighed the disadvantages.

Their instincts proved correct—not only did Corkran secure at least one article from the first meeting, but the Women Writers’ Dinner increased in success throughout the 1890s. By 1904, two hundred women were attending the annual event. Press reports detail the continued presence of both Meade and Corkran. A piece on the 1895 dinner in Hearth and Home, for example, noted that they formed part of an “animated group” that also included Kathleen Mannington Caffyn (“Iota”), the Tipperary-born author of New Woman novel A Yellow Aster (1894), and Laura Smith, a writer and collector of sea shanties who later contributed to the Girl’s Realm. Indeed, a number of women who attended the dinners went on to appear in Atalanta and the Girl’s Realm, such as Honnor Morten (the founder of the group), Hannah Lynch, Amy Levy, John Strange Winter, and Sara Jeanette Duncan. Originally published as an offshoot of the Lady’s Realm, the Girl’s Realm had “inherited” some writers from its sister publication’s roster (Mrs Eric Pritchard writes columns on fashion in both titles, for example), but the wider lists of contributor names suggest that Corkran drew extensively from her own personal and professional networks as well.

Notably, Katharine Tynan features in both publications. She contributed material to Atalanta across the period of Meade’s editorship of the magazine: in her memoirs, she describes a visit to the Atalanta office in 1888–89, and she includes Atalanta among

---

44“A Daring Dinner,” 392.
45Rodgers, “The Editor of the Period,” 166–7.
46Stubbs, “Sidelights on Modern Writers,” 247. In the article, Meade specifically refers to the fact she supports her “invalid husband” and three children. Her candour as regards such “potboiling” made her an anathema in some quarters. See, for example, the disparaging review of her work and working practices in “The Queen of the Girls’-Book Makers,” Saturday Review 15 Dec 1906: 741–2.
47For example, Hughes suggests that Alice Meynell stepped back from the group after the reaction to the first dinner because she “carefully maintained a public image of rectitude and feminine propriety”. Hughes, “A Club of Their Own,” 242.
48On the topic of women gaining commissions via the dinner, Hughes notes: “Not coincidentally, another Literary Lady of 1890, children’s writer Alice Corkran … contributed to Art Weekly [edited by fellow attendee Graham R. Tomson] soon after attending the dinner on 30 May”. Ibid, 244.
49Ibid., 253.
51Tynan, Twenty-Five Years, 287.
the titles for which she was writing in 1893.\(^{52}\) Her poem “De Profundis” appears in the November 1889 issue, next to an account by Sara Jeanette Duncan of “How an American Girl Became a Journalist”, which opens by stirringly describing “this golden age for girls, full of new interests and opportunities”.\(^{53}\) In the 1892–93 volume, Tynan’s poems “The Dead-Tryst” and “Winter Sunset” are placed alongside serialised instalments of Robert Louis Stevenson’s “David Balfour”. The juxtaposition of Tynan’s poems next to an article about young women as writers on the one hand, a favoured topic of the magazine, and the “star” serial of this particular volume on the other, is suggestive of the stock Meade placed in Tynan’s work. Tynan later contributed a number of short stories to the Girl’s Realm, including “An Idler” in the first volume and “A Midnight Visitor” in the second. This shift from placing poetry in Atalanta to short fiction in the Girl’s Realm several years later perhaps reflects Whitney Standlee’s observation that Tynan changed focus from poetry to prose as the 1890s progressed, with a view to producing more commercial success.\(^{54}\) Her appearance across these two publications therefore charts not only her professional exchanges with other Irish women writers within her network but also how her negotiation with the demands of the literary marketplace played out in terms of her creative decisions.

As well as providing further evidence of their social and professional interactions, the Women Writers’ Dinner is an important context for understanding the broader “networks of continuity and interconnection” that Meade and Corkran presided over as editors of girls’ magazines. The dedication to the professionalisation of women’s writing and the creation and consolidation of networks of women writers that we see in their involvement with the Women Writers’ Dinner reappears in the pages of Atalanta and the Girl’s Realm, not only in their choice of contributors,\(^{55}\) but also in the ways they offer advice and opportunities to aspiring girl writers. As I now go on to explore in more detail, writing competitions and commentaries on the writing life enabled Meade and Corkran to extend the values of their real-life professional networks into imagined ones for their readers.

**Case Study: “The Mystery of Greystones”—The Girl’s Realm’s Prize Competition**

Atalanta and the Girl’s Realm were both periodicals that prized contribution from and interaction with readers. As editor, Meade invited readers to respond to a variety of (sometimes contentious) articles published in the regular “Brown Owl” column, which she oversaw, printing some of the responses in the “Atalanta Letter Bag”, and a range of essay competitions took place under the auspices of the “Atalanta Scholarship and Reading Union”.\(^{56}\) In addition, there were also competitions related to less academic

---

\(^{52}\) Tynan, The Middle Years, 73.


\(^{54}\) Standlee, “A World of Difference,” 75.

\(^{55}\) Noting that Meade “used her editorial position to promote women’s writing”, Dawson observes that “fully half of the contributors to Atalanta in its first year were women writers, and a significant number of the contributions were in the form of essays on famous women writers”. “Not for girls alone,” 481.

\(^{56}\) As Dawson points out, it is important to recognise the difference between these features and forms of reader contribution in competitor publications: “Meade’s invitation to readers should be distinguished from the Girl’s Own Paper’s practice of publishing testimonial letters like Jane Cooper’s ‘Letter from a Kitchen’ describing the usefulness of the magazine to her daily round as a domestic servant, or its popular ‘Answers to Correspondents’ pages where readers received curt responses to their unpublished letters.” “Not for girls alone,” 484.
work, such as embroidery and drawing. The Girl’s Realm offered an even greater variety of competitions: readers were variously asked to solve a range of “mixed puzzles”, respond to challenging issues to do with what was broadly termed “conduct” (often ethical dilemmas among schoolgirls), and write essays in response to the topic of the “Literary Page”. A regular “Readers’ Own Realm” section collated much of the reader contribution—artwork, essays, stories, comments—and featured photographs of prize-winners.

These competitions served a variety of purposes. The occasionally lavish prizes that accompanied the semi-regular “Grand Prize Competition”, including jewellery and pianos, were well advertised in promotional material and within the magazine itself, and were no doubt intended to help entice would-be buyers. However, the content of the competitions also indicate a desire to foster a sense of community between readers, helping to consolidate the broader values of the magazine in ways that enhanced its textual identity and encouraged readers to view themselves as “Girl’s Realm girls”. The poll in which Meade was voted favourite writer was one such “Grand Prize Competition” that arguably worked in both these ways. A lady’s Swift bicycle worth £20 was “offered for the best list sent in of the six most popular living writers of stories for girls, given in the order of their popularity”. The instructions explained that the prize would be “given to the competitor whose list most neatly corresponds with the general vote of all the competitors”.

Entrants (who had to be aged seventeen or under) could send in as many lists as they wanted as long as each one was accompanied by the coupon supplied in the magazine’s advertisements section. In this way, competitions helped to secure purchases, but they also encouraged readers to think of themselves as part of a broader community of girlhood—here, for example, success is based on being in accord with fellow readers; elsewhere, competitions challenged readers to gather other girls’ signatures, thereby advertising the magazine’s existence to them.

From the outset, however, the competition under discussion in this case study was pitched as being of especial appeal to readers. In a coda to her December 1899 “Chat” column, Corkran announces the following:

I must tell you too, that in the next number you will find quite a new sort of competition, and one that, I hope, you will all greatly enjoy trying for. The Girl’s Realm for January will contain a very thrilling and sensational story by Mrs. Meade, that breaks off at its most exciting crisis. Handsome prizes will be offered for the best solution of the mystery. The prizes will be of money, but what I think my girls will value more, will be two volumes given by Mrs. Meade. These two delightful books, one for the elder girls, one for the younger, contain her autograph, and a charming inscription in her own hand; and will be sent to the winners in this competition.

There are a few interesting points to note in these initial details. As well as emphasising the idea of the competition’s novelty, Corkran’s comments make clear the great honour of this opportunity to enjoy a brush with celebrity: the prize is not just a book, but a

57Moruzi, “Children’s Periodicals,” 305.
58Given that these prizes were often clearly branded, one assumes that they were sponsored by the company in question, in a quid pro quo arrangement. For example, in a competition announced in November 1901, readers were encouraged to view the prize bicycle in the Swift depot. See Rodgers, “Competing Girlhoods,” 283.
59“Grand Prizes,” 89.
60For example, “Our Voting Competition,” Girl’s Realm 4 (1902), 446–9.
signed, inscribed book by an author confirmed as “favourite” by the very readers now being offered this exciting opportunity. That the “handsome prize” for the competitors’ literary labour involves not just a book but also a financial reward is striking. Competitions in both *Atalanta* and the *Girl’s Realm* often involved cash prizes, but the presence of money in a collaborative venture concocted by two avowedly professional women writers inescapably acquires some symbolic power. Although Corkran is careful to position it as the secondary consideration in comparison to the inscribed book, the suggestion to readers that their amateur efforts, their work as girl writers and as readers of this magazine, is worth remuneration is a powerful message to those readers aspiring to, like Meade and Corkran themselves, “live by the pen”.

Meade’s story, “The Mystery of Greystones”, appears in the next issue—a tale of siblings, a crumbling mansion, secretive parents, a mysterious old man, and the sudden appearance in the house of a young girl called Angelica, who hides in cupboards and does not wish to be discovered. Notably, the story includes the following note: *Told by Vera Newcombe, aged sixteen, in the year of grace, 1863.* It is tempting to speculate that Meade is helping competitors out here by putting the narrative in the voice of someone close in age to the competitors themselves, who can be expected to speak and act in ways that might be familiar to them. The reference to the specific year of 1863 also firmly places the story in the realm of sensation fiction, again giving an indication of the mode in which she expects girls to write. The story breaks off with the tantalising words, “Oh! it was a mad and dangerous thing, and when I consider what came of it—” After this point, we get some more details about the competition. Competitors aged sixteen to twenty-one will win one guinea and a copy of Meade’s latest novel, “bearing an inscription in her own writing on the fly leaf”. Under sixteen will win ten shillings and sixpence, “and a copy of Mrs. Meade’s ‘Light o’ the Morning,’ also containing her autograph and a greeting.” Again, we see that fetishisation of Meade’s own writing and the suggestion of the exhilaration of a personal encounter with Meade’s celebrity. The choice of *Light O’ the Morning* (1899) for this age group is interesting: although it makes sense to select a recently published book that readers would be unlikely to own as yet, this particular title also stands as one of Meade’s “Wild Irish Girl” books. It therefore speaks to the Irish connection between Meade and Corkran, and also recalls the role played by the *Girl’s Realm* more broadly in Meade’s self-representation of her Irishness, a topic Tooley discusses in the “Some Famous Writers” article and Meade expands upon in “How I Began”, describing how her writing (and later she herself) travelled “[f]rom a lonely rectory in the south of Ireland to the heart of that great city [London].”

Alongside providing these prize details, Corkran also informs readers of the exciting news that:

Mrs. Meade will herself act as a judge in this competition, and will award the prize to the two solutions in most accord with her own. The prize solutions and that of Mrs. Meade will be published together in the April number. I want my elder girls to endeavour to work out their explanation of the mystery as if they were taking up Mrs. Meade’s narrative, and to conclude it in her own manner as far as may be. My younger girls may tell their version of the clearing

---

63 Ibid., 354.
64 Ibid.
up of the mystery in their own way, giving, however, their reasons for the part they assign to each character in their solution. The solution in both cases must not exceed 800 words in length, must be written on one side of the paper only, and the name, address, and age of the competitor clearly stated on the first page.66

This second set of instructions inflects the competition yet further. The challenge for older girls is not just to solve the mystery, but “to conclude it in Meade’s own manner as far as may be”. Their success will therefore be based on their knowledge of Meade’s work—almost an early call for fan fiction—and their ability to inhabit the professional woman writer’s mind. They are therefore encouraged to think of themselves not as lone, amateur writers, but rather as quasi-collaborators with Meade—as apprentices, or rather as one of a network of apprentices all working on the same project under the auspices of Corkran’s editorial guidance. All competitions require rules and parameters, but it is particularly striking that in this competition that may well have special appeal to those aspiring to a writing career, it is made clear to readers that they have a duty as an author, and to Meade as a “co-author” of sorts, to obey the rules of a genre, and that this is part of the challenge of collaboration that is to be taken seriously.

Writing competitions of different kinds, such as essays, translations, and stories, are not new in the Girl’s Realm, but this encouragement to be self-conscious about and reflect on the choices they make as writers is unusual, and arguably in line with Meade’s wider advocacy of literary professionalisation. The different instructions for the younger age group perhaps reflects an assumption that they would be less familiar with the crime fiction/mysteries part of Meade’s oeuvre, but it is notable that what they are asked to produce is reminiscent of what creative writing pedagogical practices of our own day would term a “critical commentary”—a self-reflective piece that “foreground[s] the student’s own report, or point of view, on the pedagogic process in which they have participated”.67 Meade was arguably ahead of her time in her belief in the value of teaching the skills of creative writing. In 1897, she had published an article in the New Century Review entitled “A School of Fiction”, in which she argued that if we have schools of art, music, and cookery, why not of fiction? Her concern was not “the Jane Austens and Thackerays of our time”, but the “novelist who supplies the bookstall and the periodical”,68 a distinction that recalls the division into “ranks” as suggested by the report on the Women Writers’ Dinner cited above, as well as Meade’s own unashamed recognition of her place within that taxonomy. Meade’s proposal, in which she drew upon her experiences as both an author and an “editor of a well-known magazine”,69 was ridiculed in several corners of the press, but it is pertinent to recall that Meade also ran a column of this name in Atalanta, alongside her “Atalanta Scholarship and Reading Union”. She had also led a debate on the topic “That a School of Fiction Would Help Our Younger Novelists” at the Pioneer Club in September in 1896.70 I would suggest, therefore, that these are no throwaway instructions to younger readers, but rather an invitation to engage thoughtfully with their work that is very much in accord with Meade’s long-standing professional principles. For their part, readers

67Wandor, The Author is Not Dead, 146.
68Meade, “A School of Fiction,” 220.
69Ibid., 224.
70“Pioneer Records,” 35.
responded with gusto, with results even being delayed due to the level of enthusiasm. A note in the April number stated that “Owing to the enormous amount of contributions received for this competition, it has been found impossible to announce the result in this issue.”

It turned out, however, that Meade was a difficult judge/“co-author” to please. Competitors rushing to bookstalls to pick up the May issue may have been a little disappointed by what they found there. In her report on the results, which follows the publication of Meade’s own ending to the story, Corkran announces that “Mrs. Meade has adjudged the first prize of One Guinea and an autograph copy of her book, ‘All Sorts,’ to Dorothy Cory (aged 17), Yoxall Rectory, Burton-on-Trent”. Thus, the daughter of one rectory acknowledged the literary aspirations of another, but it was not good news for Dorothy’s co-competitors. As Corkran goes on to explain:

[Mrs. Meade] does not think, however, that any of the solutions are satisfactory. The chief fault – made by all the competitors – is that of evading the crisis. Even of the successful report Mrs. Meade says: “This solution begins well, but reaches no climax, and therefore fails to hold the attention at the critical moment. At the same time it is brightly written, and the idea of the solution is good.” The next in merit is by “Philippa.” Mrs. Meade thinks it ingenious to make the old man turn out to have been Angelica in disguise. This idea has been adopted by a few other competitors.

Reassuring as Corkran’s final words here are, it is impossible to ignore the fact that the only direct quote from Meade herself is rather critical. Meade has invited this group of girl readers into the fold of the professional writing life and has been left distinctly unimpressed, and this seems to have resulted in her collaborator Corkran acquiring extra work as facilitator-editor—managing the interaction between celebrity author and loyal readers, and also turning unexpected judge. Because, if Meade is critical of the older girls, the situation is worse for the younger:

Mrs. Meade has not mentioned the name of any prize-winner in the Second Class. Alice Windsor (aged 14 [Glasnevin, Dublin]) has, I think, sent in the best continuation of the story by juniors, and, accordingly, to her is sent the autograph copy of “Light o’ the Morning” offered by Mrs. Meade to the Second Class. The prize of 10s. 6d., however, is withheld.

No remuneration for this young Irish writer, in the end, and also no further mention of that personal inscription.

Meade’s silence is frustrating, particularly as Corkran’s report goes on to give the strong impression that in their solutions readers demonstrated that they were indeed well-versed in mysteries, sensation fiction, and detective fiction—secret societies, criminal intrigue, disguise, and political rebellion in a range of locales all feature in the entries Corkran selects for discussion. As she explains, most competitors tried some kind of “conspiracy motive” or a variation Corkran dubs “the jewel motive”, a “solution, [she] imagine[s], has been inspired by a study of Wilkie Collin’s ‘Moonstone.’”

Gathering together different examples and including a selection of readers’ names, Corkran’s

---

71 “Results of Competitions,” 640.
74 Ibid., 716.
report reads as an extension of the facilitating role she adopts in her “Chat with the Girl of the Period” columns, in which she moderates conversations between readers and offers new avenues for future discussion. She singles out several girls’ efforts: Vera Blackstone’s solution boasts the “best plot” but “the treatment, however, is very crude”. Evelyn Simms’s work, “centring round a revolutionary rising in Italy”, and sent all the way from New Orleans, is praised despite “reach[ing] the office in such a torn and tattered condition that it was difficult to decipher it”. Corkran’s report is followed by Dorothy Cory’s winning entry, which like Meade’s own conclusion features a secret room behind a van Dyck painting, but we hear nothing further from Meade.

**Collaboration: Process or Product?**

Meade’s silence is all the more notable because, despite Corkran’s emphasis on the novelty of this competition in the *Girl’s Realm*, it was not totally new to Meade. She was at the helm of a similar competition a year before this one, but in the pages of a different kind of periodical with a different kind of readership—*Cassell’s Magazine*, home to the “John Bell: Ghost Exposer” mystery stories Meade wrote in collaboration with Robert Eustace. In December 1898, readers were asked to provide the solution to an “exceedingly clever story” entitled “The Secret of Emu Plain” and the best ones, in “Mrs Meade’s opinion”, would win one guinea each. Again, the competition was hugely popular. Of the 386 entries, it was reported that four entrants guessed “correctly”, and ten prizes were awarded, so this was on a grander scale than Corkran’s offering, but it was also more straightforward in many ways. Although there were no withheld funds in this instance, neither was there the additional fanfare, the call for self-reflection, or the personalised prizes of Corkran’s version.

The differences in approach and result in these two iterations of the same kind of competition reflect what this whole incident tells us more broadly about Corkran, Meade, collaboration, and networks both professional and amateur, real and imagined. There is arguably a tension here between appearing to welcome girl writers into a wider professional network on the one hand and what looks like discouragement on the other. One also wonders if there were tensions behind the scenes between Corkran and Meade as collaborators on a project one of them deemed a failure. The fact that Meade continued to play an important role in the magazine after this incident, however, suggests that it did not cause a significant breakdown in their professional relationship. Several months later, for example, a note in the “Chronicle of the Schools” column once again emphasises the close connection between Meade and the *Girl’s Realm* in its report of the distribution of prizes at “the well-known girls’ school at Hendon Hall” by “Mrs. L.T. Meade, author of ‘The Temptation of Olive Latimer’, ‘The Lover Prince,’ and ‘The Mystery of Greystones’”—works that were all first published in the *Girl’s Realm*. Furthermore, the School Editor observes that

> Mrs. Meade, not only by her charm of writing but by her great personal kindness, has endeared herself to girl readers of this magazine, and I am sure they will all congratulate the students of Hendon Hall on securing such a President for their annual gathering."}

---

75 Ibid.
77 “The School Editor,” “Chronicle of the Schools,” 1013.
Although the School Editor was not Corkran herself, such fulsome praise suggests Meade was not at this point estranged from editorial favour, and indeed in the volume’s final “Chat”, Corkran’s preview for the year ahead includes Meade among those from whose pens she has “been fortunate in securing short stories”. Perhaps it was the case that Meade’s reasons for not fulfilling her role as judge were entirely pedestrian—as an immensely busy and prolific author, it could be that the delay in making the announcement precipitated by the volume of entries meant she could no longer fit it into her schedule, and that as the less successful novelist, Corkran was in no position to make further demands on Meade’s time. Nevertheless, it remains the case that Corkran was left with more work to do than she may have anticipated, and that there is a tension in the report between Meade’s dissatisfaction and Corkran’s attempt to facilitate the textual encounter between readers and beloved author promised in her initial announcement of the competition.

These variant responses arguably point towards differences in what this competition represented to Corkran and Meade, and how each conceptualised their role as mentor. For Meade, in addition to its inherent self-marketing potential, the competition was an opportunity for literary apprenticeship and publication, a moment where amateur and professional networks could intersect, and Corkran’s girls have not, to her mind, risen to the occasion. Her refusal to award the full prizes could therefore be interpreted as a form of admonishment, a lesson to competitors about the consequences of submitting lacklustre work in the professional world. The apparent harshness of this position can be better understood, however, if we look more closely at the ways she mentored aspirant writers in her own editorial work. In “From the Editor’s Standpoint”, her final “School of Fiction” column in *Atalanta*, for example, Meade advised would-be authors to always be “as terse and business-like as possible”. Acknowledging that “There is no better opening for a young writer than to become a contributor to a good magazine”, Meade offers insights from her six years at the helm of one such “good magazine”. Her advice is candid and frequently severe—she has little time for “writers who do not trouble themselves to know anything of the nature of the magazine to which they offer contribution” or “the utterly silly person who thinks that it would be great fun to have something in print, and imagines that this desirable result can be attained with no labour or previous study”. Her discussion of the art of the short story, which she advises aspiring professional authors to attempt over serial fiction, pre-empts her comments on the limitations of the “Mystery of Greystones” entries, and their general “fail[ure] to hold the attention at the critical moment”.

Although noting that “Editors have hearts, and sometimes these hearts are made to ache pretty considerably”, Meade reminds readers that “first and foremost, an Editor, if he is a good one, must be business-like”. This tussle between editorial head and heart is occasionally glimpsed in the “Brown Owl” column in *Atalanta*. Printing a humorous poem by “Busy-Body” that riffs on the words “Quite full for two years”,

---

79 Meade, “From the Editor’s Standpoint,” 841. Emphasis in original.
80 Ibid., 839.
81 Ibid., 840.
82 Corkran, “Results of ‘Mystery of Greystones,’” 715.
83 Meade, “From the Editor’s Standpoint,” 841.
Meade notes: “Rejected contributors might take heart from the following lines. They were received by the Editors, who, fulfilling one of the painful duties of their office, had been obliged to deliver the unwelcome verdict referred to.” Elsewhere, she laments: “Turquoise has sent a spirited reply in rhyme, which I am sorry I have not space to print”. That such submissions caught her eye is suggestive of the good humour and appreciation of effort that also characterises the final words of the “From the Editor’s Standpoint” article, in which she assures readers that “If to ability is added courage, and to courage perseverance, you will succeed; and I hope to shake hands with you in spirit over the good work you have accomplished”. Some of Meade’s readers did indeed accomplish “good work”, perhaps most notably the author and suffrage campaigner Evelyn Sharp, who appeared in the Scholarship honour roll on a number of occasions before going on to become a contributor, later publishing in the Girl’s Realm as well. Sharp’s status as a success story is not forgotten in the pages of Atalanta, even after Meade’s departure as editor. Noting the publication of Sharp’s book Wymps in 1897, the author of the “Brown Owl” column notes that “it will be an encouragement to present members to know that she was once a member of the Reading Union”. Sharp’s success demonstrates the possibilities of the training that Meade hoped publications such as Atalanta could provide to young aspiring writers, and which she may have hoped to emulate, albeit on a smaller scale, in her collaboration with Corkran in the Girl’s Realm.

For Corkran, however, the value of the competition was perhaps less about the final product and more about the process of collaboration and competition (not to mention the prestige brought to the magazine by Meade’s celebrity). That is not to say that she was not in agreement with aspects of Meade’s judgements. In the “Literary Page” in the same number, Corkran departs from her usual practice of focusing on a particular writer or text, instead offering a broader discussion under the heading “On the Short Story” that makes direct reference to the general misunderstandings of the structural requirements of the short story demonstrated by the competition entries. Nevertheless, her responsibilities as editor meant that, for Corkran, the ultimate value of the competition must be seen in terms of the broader project and textual identity of the magazine, in which reader contribution and the formation of a lively, interactive network of readers was key. As she noted in one “Chat”: “I am always pleased when I see the names that have grown familiar to me attached to essays and answers to the Literary Page, or to letters”. Those mentioned in the “Mystery of Greystones” competition become part of those “familiar” names: she may not have received the prize money for her continuation of Meade’s tale, for example, but elsewhere in the same volume, Alice Windsor receives honourable mention for an essay on Dickens, and later the top prize for the “best worked out” essay on Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland.

---

85 Ibid., 606.
86 Meade, “From the Editor’s Standpoint,” 842.
87 See Dawson, “‘Not for Girls Alone’”; Standlee, “The ‘Wire-Puller’” for further discussion of Sharp’s relationship with Atalanta. Sharp contributed several stories to the Girl’s Realm, including “Ralph Singleton’s Daughter” (vol. 1) “The Hog and Uncle Mostyn” (vol. 2), but is not to be confused with the Evelyn Sharpe/Evelyn Margaret Sharpe (aged sixteen) who appears several times in the “Chat” column and lists of prize-winners.
In these terms, the act of entering this competition and of “collaborating” with a figure so important to the magazine is to be celebrated in its own right, in much the same way as Corkran encourages girls to join her “Girl’s Realm Guild of Service and Good Fellowship”, a new venture that was conceived of and launched in the months that readers were developing their “Mystery of Greystones” entries. The comparison is pertinent, because as much as Corkran valued the opportunity to offer literary guidance, the Guild—a different kind of network that called upon girls to sponsor a cot in a children’s hospital, raise funds, and start local branches—increasingly became the central focus in Corkran’s interactions with her readers.

Developed in direct response to a reader’s enquiry about the possibility of the creation of a “Friendly Society” among readers, Corkran outlined her plans for the Guild across eight illustrated pages in the April 1900 number that culminate in a new “Grand Prize Announcement” dedicated to recruiting new members for the Guild. With the tagline “Girls helping girls to make this world a happier and a sweeter place”, Corkran’s Guild again emphasises the importance of community and collaboration among readers. “Collingwood”, the original reader whose letter inspired the venture, is referenced repeatedly throughout the manifesto, thus demonstrating to readers the potential impact they can have on the magazine, each other, and wider society. When girls become members or associates (as dictated by their ages), they receive a bespoke card bearing their enrolment number, “designed for framing”, and Corkran explains that any correspondent who is also a Guild member “from that time forward … will be expected to quote her number and initials, M.G.R.G. (Member Girl’s Realm Guild) or A.G.R.G. (Associate Girl’s Realm Guild) after her name when addressing letters to the Editor which have reference to the Guild”. In the monthly reports that follow, Corkran provides an additional “Editor’s Chat with her Guild” letter, lists the names of new members and associates, prints readers’ letters, and reports on the Guild’s progress and activities. Dorothy Cory, who won “The Mystery of Greystones”, is listed as member number 426, one of several new members “whose names will be familiar to many”. More concerned with charitable than literary aspirations, it could be argued that Corkran’s Guild served to train girls in more traditional conceptions of middle-class femininity as opposed to the pursuits of the “modern girl”, shifting them from apprentices in literary labour to affective labour. However, it is notable that Corkran’s conception of the Guild makes use of the skills of networking and collaboration practised in her wider life as a figure hard at work in the London literary marketplace and that she encourages her readers to adopt these skills themselves. Indeed, through the Guild, Corkran’s imagined community becomes a literal one. In the April 1900 “Chat”, she expands upon the Guild’s foundation, noting that she had invited “some of my girls who were within easy distance of the Strand to come and see me”. These readers helped her to

---

91 *Atalanta* also sponsored a cot in a children’s hospital, but at times Meade had to remind readers to do their bit: “What about the esprit de corps of the readers of *Atalanta*?” she asked in her “Brown Owl” column in November 1890. “I hear from the Children’s Hospital at Rhyl, that the *Atalanta* Cot has to be empty for six months in the year owing to lack of funds.” *Meade, “The Brown Owl,”* 126. In launching sponsored cots, both magazines emulated an earlier juvenile periodical, *Aunt Judy’s Magazine*. See Moruzi, “Children’s Periodicals,” 304–5.


93 Ibid., 628.

94 Ibid., 633.

design a badge to be distributed to Guild members and competition winners. “I greatly enjoyed meeting some of my girls”, she writes, “and I hope that our little tea-party will prove the modest inauguration of many future meetings on a large scale, when I hope to make the personal acquaintance of many of you”.96 As Meade did for the Women Writers’ Dinner committee meetings, Corkran here uses her office as a gathering space for this growing network, later proposing to make this a “Quarterly Conversazione”.97 By describing the meeting as her “little tea-party”, she domesticates something that is in fact built much more along the lines of the public, professional realm. In doing so, Corkran inaugurates a miniature intergenerational version of the clubs and societies in which she participated in her own professional life, one that literalises the intimacy of the editor/reader relationship. While not all attendees may have aspired to the professional literary life, Corkran’s office gathering nonetheless places them squarely within it, reimagining and repurposing the salon culture she had known in her own girlhood in Paris and continued to foster at her home in Mecklenburgh Square.

**Conclusion**

In her recent group biography, *Square Haunting* (2020), Francesca Wade discusses the interconnections between five women living and working in Mecklenburgh Square in London between the wars.98 She suggests that Mecklenburgh Square was a “radical address” in the interwar period.99 Living in the square at different times, Wade’s subjects were not part of a discernible group as such, but were nonetheless “connected through shared interests [and] friends”: “In Mecklenburgh Square, each dedicated herself to establishing a way of life that would let her fulfil her potential, to finding relationships that would support her work and a domestic set-up that would enable it”.100 Though Corkran had lived and hosted her literary salon in Mecklenburgh Square in a slightly earlier era, Wade’s comments on the different ways we might conceptualise networks and connections between women writers are suggestive in the context of Meade and Corkran, and the various modes in which they facilitated communities via their work as editors. Not least, the fact that Virginia Woolf brought her copies of *Atalanta* with her when she moved to 37 Mecklenburgh Square in August 1939 takes on additional resonance: as well as indicating the importance of *Atalanta* to Woolf herself,101 it also brings Meade and Corkran together in a different way across time, demonstrating as it does how narratives and networks of girlhood can retain their importance to women throughout their lives.

Through her “Literary Page”, “Chat with the Girl of the Period” columns, and commissions related to writers and writing, Corkran engaged with the literary aspirations of her readers, but she did so within the context of her magazine’s broader commitment to themes of community and networks both real and imagined. The “Girl’s Realm Guild of Service and Good Fellowship” is arguably to Corkran and the *Girl’s Realm* what the

---

97 Ibid., 643.
98 The five women are H.D., Dorothy L. Sayers, Jane Ellen Harrison, Eileen Power, and Virginia Woolf.
100 Ibid., 8.
101 Standlee, “The ‘Wire-Puller’,” 40.
“Atalanta Scholarship and Reading Union” was to Meade and Atalanta—the keynote feature that brought together the things that were most important to both editor and periodical. “The Mystery of Greystones” competition, in offering readers the chance to participate in a competition alongside other “Girl’s Realm girls” and collaborate with a professional writer who had a proven track record in mentoring other writers, represents a bringing together of both aspects of Corkran’s expertise and experience—the busy literary worker, and the effective facilitator of a community of readers. For Corkran, the competition was about the value of the process of collaboration and participation within a network of readers and writers, but it may have been something different for Meade. Read in the context of her dedication to the professionalisation of authorship, Meade’s stern withholding of that exciting cash prize for younger readers was perhaps part of what she saw as her important role as a candid and pragmatic mentor to a generation of girl readers. Moreover, Standlee has recently argued that “Meade’s editorship of Atalanta marks a significant milestone in the evolution of experimental short fiction”, thanks both to her editorial advice and the kind of material she selected for inclusion in the magazine.102 Her collaborative competition with Corkran is arguably part of this history. She may have inadvertently given Corkran more editorial work to do in the process, but Girl’s Realm favourite or not, for Meade, this was an important lesson in the vagaries of the literary world.

That neither Meade nor Corkran remained at the helm of the publications to which they gave such commitment and distinction, and that both were succeeded by male editors, arguably reflects such vagaries. Although Meade reported that she had been “obliged to resign” due to the demands of her other writing commitments as well as family life now that her three children were “out of babyhood”,103 both Dawson and Standlee speculate that behind-the-scenes issues may have contributed to that decision, including the amalgamation of Atalanta with the Victorian Magazine and, potentially, tensions surrounding her more controversial fiction choices (not to mention her own increased focus on her popular detective fiction).104 Dawson observes that in the years after Meade’s departure, “Atalanta continued to attract notable writers … though not in the numbers represented under Meade’s editorship”.105 Corkran stepped down as editor in 1903, but continued to write her monthly “Literary Page” and “Chat” until her final departure in 1911, likely precipitated by ongoing poor health and grief following the unexpected deaths of both Henriette and their other sister, Mary.106 Moruzi asserts that the Girl’s Realm noticeably changed when she moved from editor to contributor, the general tone of the fiction in particular representing a “remarkable shift from the agency and responsibility promoted by Corkran”.107 These changes in tone, content, and emphasis demonstrate not only the significance of the editorial voice within a periodical, but also the importance of the professional networks in which those editors moved—in losing Meade and Corkran as editors, Atalanta and the Girl’s Realm also lost the network of contributors to which they had access.

102Ibid., 25.
103Black, Pen, Pencil, Baton, Mask, 226.
106Warre-Cornish, “Miss Alice Corkran,” 850.
107Moruzi, Constructing Girlhood, 188.
As for the readers and aspiring writers who comprised these amateur networks, we know that both Evelyn Sharp and Angela Brazil made the transition from *Atalanta* competition winner to professional writer, but it is interesting to speculate how many readers may have continued to write beyond their years as part of the imagined communities of *Atalanta* and the *Girl’s Realm*, or gone on to professionalise in different ways the amateur efforts that were nurtured by the guidance and competitions offered by these publications. Dorothy Cory, Meade’s winner from among the many entries to “The Mystery of Greystones” competition, did not become a professional writer, but neither did she adopt what might be viewed as a conventional life. Family records indicate that she became an Anglican nun, and “taught at Rusape, Southern Rhodesia [now Zimbabwe]”. Her sister, Mary, who was two years younger and likely also a reader of the magazine, did not marry either, but was among the first generation of women to go to university. She achieved a Bachelor of Science degree and a teaching qualification, and spent her working life as a teacher of mathematics and science. Noting the staggering increase in the numbers of girls in education in England across the decades when Meade was “turning out [her girls’ books] by the dozen”, Mitchell suggests that Meade was writing for “the first generation in a new world”. Meade and Corkran’s mentorship and modelling of collaboration and networks of different kinds can be seen in a similar way: they extended, reinterpreted, and opened up aspects of their professional networks for a readership who were themselves able to join a greater number of organisations than ever before—be they schools, sports clubs, universities, workplaces, professional societies, or Guilds of Service and Good Fellowship. The knowledge that Mary Cory lived until 1972 makes the world of Meade, Corkran, and the networks of readers they created feel strikingly close.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

**ORCID**

Beth Rodgers [http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9962-3560](http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9962-3560)

**References**


109 “*The Isle of Wight Corys.*”
110 “*Teachers’ Registration Forms.*” 11. The Cory sisters were distant cousins of the New Woman writers Victoria Cross and Laurence Hope, although they may not have been aware of the connection. Personal correspondence with Margaret Goffin, archivist of Cory family, Feb 2022.
“Results of Competitions.” *Girl’s Realm* 2 (1900): 640.
—. “From the Editor’s Standpoint.” *Atalanta* 6 (1892–3): 839–42.


