



THE ART OF THE ILLUSTRATOR

LOUISE WRIGHT
AND HER WORK

BY
PERCY V. BRADSHAW

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*Yours sincerely
Louise Wright*

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AS long ago as 1785, the first Fashion drawing was published in the *Cabinet des Modes*—a Parisian journal. It attracted very great attention on both sides of the Channel, but its designer could have had little idea of the enormous future in store for the Fashion Plate.

And the Artist of to-day who refuses to consider such work as worthy of serious consideration, and reviles even the best modern Fashion drawings so vigorously, has equally little idea of the fascinating history of this branch of Illustration, or of the distinguished Artists who have been occupied in dress designing.

Many of the great figures in Modern Art—Burne Jones, Alma Tadema, Abbey and others—have designed dresses for stage productions, while a surprisingly large number of the earlier Painters and Illustrators started their careers as dress designers.

Meissonier drew his first Fashion figure when a lad of barely fifteen, and received two francs for it. Gustave Doré was another of the celebrated artists who, in their earlier days, added to a precariously uncertain income by drawing for Fashion Plate publishers, while “Phiz,” and John Leech of *Punch*, also produced many “dressmakers’ drawings.”

The reason why the admirable work done by many of the present-day Fashion artists is condemned so unfairly is due, primarily, to a lack of understanding on the part of the critics.

There are still a great number of people who persist in considering Fashion Plates from the academic draughtsman’s point of view, entirely ignoring the fact that the *first*—almost the *only*—object of the drawing is to display the dresses to advantage. A Fashion drawing, then, is a Dress *Diagram*—not a work of Art—though in many cases it happens to become both.

This study of Louise Wright and her technique is the Seventeenth of a series, to be completed in Twenty parts, dealing with the Art of the Illustrator

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It should be realised that a figure posed and drawn in a normal manner seldom shows enough of the costume or gives the required sweep of line, and though, from an anatomical point of view, the Fashion figure cannot be correct, the admirably sincere work one has seen for years by "Albert" of the *Ladies' Field*, Lilian Young of the *Gentlewoman*, and Louise Wright of the *Queen* and other journals, deserves serious consideration.

The American papers have introduced a new note into the work, and even the most rabid opponent of Fashion drawing would be silenced into admiration by the work of "Kleinschmidt" in the *Delineator*—though one must utter a passing protest as to his appalling name.

He works in pen and ink, chalk, pencil, wash and colour, with the looseness and freedom and ease of a sketch by Sargent, and no one comparing such work, and that of our own Artists just mentioned, with the Victorian Fashion drawings can doubt whether we have made progress.

Georges Pilotelle was the High Priest of Fashion about thirty years ago. In making a vigorous effort to raise Fashion drawing from a stodgy convention into an interesting and useful branch of Illustration, he acquired a habit of drawing women seven feet six inches high with ten-inch waists. But he designed so well that many of the leading women of London Society sought his services.

Pilotelle had his value in pointing out the necessity for accent in design, and when his vogue departed it was superseded by a much more natural, realistic method of treatment. Notwithstanding the countless experiments in Fashion Illustration which one notes everywhere to-day—decorative, grotesque, quaint, frankly humorous—there is little doubt that the sincere Wash drawing, with its realistic representation of textures and materials, will have the most lasting appeal.

There are some delicious little drawings and decorations—the quaintest and most original little conceits—in almost any number of *Vogue* and other high-class American

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journals, but it is difficult to see how such work can do a great deal more than decorate a page. The Editor and the dressmaker generally want something much more practical—an idealised picture of a certain costume, which is, at the same time, an attractive diagram showing how the garment can be made.

The influence of Bakst and other designers, has, during the last ten years or so, introduced a *macabre* and morbid, un-English note into some Fashion drawings, which has incurred the wrath of many well-known writers and students of Illustrated Journalism.

In some journals there has been an orgy of the wildest extravagance, in which decadence and a certain unhealthy, Beardsley-esque immorality is suggested by the lank, shapeless females with heavily-pencilled eyes, who squirm, wriggle and ogle insanely across usually respectable pages. One infuriated critic described this type of "femininity" as "Beaudelairean Bogeyism" and appealed to a modern Leech to cure Fashion of its malaria.

There is no "malaria" in the work of Louise Wright.

Miss Wright is one of a family of very English and healthy Artists. Her three brothers have all made reputations as Illustrators. George Wright is chiefly known for his jolly sporting prints—pictures of Georgian huntsmen, "Gentlemen of the Road" and other "horsey" types who are always certain of popularity on the walls of the R.A. and in print-shop windows all over the World.

Gilbert Wright also draws hunting subjects admirably, designs Fashions, and has produced a number of Book-Cover Illustrations in colour.

Philip Wright is another member of this always-busy family, who has, during recent years, concentrated on Fashion drawing after a good deal of experience as a general Illustrator. He is now with our Army in Italy.

Remarkable facts about the Wrights are that none of them ever had the slightest training in Art, that their ability developed rapidly on entirely professional lines, and

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that they were doing drawings for publication at an absurdly precocious age.

As children they all drew, and nothing interested them more than to sit round a table at home, sketch just the particular subjects which took their juvenile fancies—and fight for the India-rubber. They decided very early on their special enthusiasms. As a very little girl, Louise Wright spent most of her playtime designing dresses for her dolls, while George and Gilbert were living in an earlier century—soaked in the glamour of Highwaymen and other picturesque adventurers. At the age of twelve, Gilbert Wright had painted a big picture in oils, which was immediately bought by a leading publisher and reproduced as a print. Then he fell under the influence of S. E. Waller, and, at the mature age of thirteen, was painting handsome Georgian gallants eloping with their lady-loves. Many varieties of Elopement came from the brush of this juvenile sentimentalist during the next year or two, and soon a War picture, exhibited at the Royal Academy, was again purchased by a publisher and proved very successful. Since those early successes, he has hardly ever had to look for commissions.

While he was painting Elopements, his sister was painting portraits and continuing her study of Fashions, but, realising that there was no opening for her in Leeds—where the family lived—they came up to London.

Her first Fashion work submitted for sale was a series of Water-Colour designs for exhibition in the windows of Ladies' Tailors. This work soon attracted notice. She was given a staff appointment as designer for a Costumier, and soon after was offered commissions by Vivian Mansell & Co., for whom she did her first Fashion Catalogue. Soon she got so exceedingly busy that her brother—that versatile young prodigy Gilbert—shook off his Highwaymen companions and gallantly came to her assistance. In a little while, the whole family was bitten with enthusiasm for Fashion drawing. It is generally admitted that "The

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Wrights" started the vogue for the beautifully illustrated Fashion Catalogues which have been issued by drapers, costumiers, tailors, etc., in recent years.

They have been kept perpetually busy, and Miss Wright has been responsible for a great deal of the best Fashion work which has been produced in this country. For a year she was chief Staff Artist of the *Queen*; her work is known and appreciated by users of Fashion drawing everywhere, and the design she has produced for me will give you a good idea of the sincerity of her methods.

STAGE I—The figures are lightly touched in with pencil on Roberson's Fashion Board, B surface (extra smooth), the board measuring $14\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide by $21\frac{1}{2}$ inches high. The design of the costumes is original, and was suggested by certain characteristic details which were in fashion at the time when Miss Wright commenced the drawing. It is essential that pencil work for Fashions should be put in with sufficient delicacy so that the surface of the board is not spoiled for the wash, and you will appreciate the dexterous, graceful way in which these pencil outlines are introduced.

STAGE II—Here the brush work is commenced, Lamp Black and Sables of various sizes from No. 0 to No. 5 being used. Faint washes of tone are introduced into the face seen in profile, for instance around the eyes, nose and chin, while in the other face light washes can be seen across the forehead, down the nose, mouth and shadow side of the face, beneath the chin, and on the neck of the front view.

Particularly note that the other portion of the faces in which the high lights are left remain dead white—the bridge of the nose, and the cheeks, and the light on either side of the neck of the front view are represented by the

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white of the card. Lightness and freshness of touch are essential in this stage, and a large proportion of the face should always be left the dead white of the card, the shadows only being lightly and transparently indicated.

The further touches of Wash in this stage are very obvious. In the profile head a faint wash is introduced on the hair, and the hair slightly modelled up afterwards with the point of the brush used as a pencil. In the waist-band of the profile figure, and that of the front view, a few broad blobs of tone are introduced, and left with their crisp, hard edges—in the profile figure to suggest the sheen of satin, and in the other to emphasise the folds of cloth.

Simple, broad washes are also placed on the shadow side of the skirt, the major portion of both figures being left absolutely dead white. A touch of dark colour is introduced beneath the hat-brim in the one figure to add emphasis, and afterwards the background tone is introduced with broad, fresh washes. The reproduction does not convey the cleanness and contrast of the original, as the screen through which the drawing is photographed necessarily appears in the block, causing a faint tinge over the whole subject. You can see this dotted screen clearly through a magnifying-glass.



STAGE III—The modelling of the faces is carried considerably further, by stippling up the light tones previously introduced. Dead white is still left over the major portion of the heads, but the strengthening of tone which would be noted in the reproduction is accomplished by a delicate cross-hatching with the point of the brush used comparatively dry. This cross-hatching needs very dexterous manipulation, and wherever it is possible to obtain the effect by fresh washes it is preferable.

The features of both the faces are emphasised by touches of almost dead black in the nostrils, by the darkening of the pencilled eyebrows, the emphasis of the

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lower outline of the upper lips and the corners of the mouths, and, in the front view of the face, by the more definite drawing of the corners of the eyes, the upper lids and the pupils. In the profile figure the hands are shaded by stippling, the right hand being only very faintly washed in. The more delicate modelling is left to a later stage.

The modelling of the dress remains untouched, but the costume on the right is taken a stage further by a broad light wash all over the dress, and by the introduction of an infinitely darker tone to the skirt. This stage is built up by one tone placed over another after the previous one is dry. In the skirt the brush work is increased in tone almost to dead black, the high lights on the folds being emphasised with Chinese White.

The dead black of the muff is then introduced. In its present stage it is absolutely solid, with no suggestion of modelling, the only indication of texture being furnished by the edges of the fur, definitely drawn by small lines with the brush, continued from the black mass. The collar, faintly outlined in pencil in the second stage, is now more definitely emphasised with a wash of body colour.



STAGE IV—I have had the figures reproduced much larger in this stage to give you a better opportunity of examining the technique. The artist has been chiefly concerned here with the strengthening of tone all over the outdoor costume, while the Evening dress is taken a stage further by the introduction of some fresh, simple washes. It was noticed, in working upon the outdoor costume, that the drawing of the left hip created a somewhat ugly line, and the outline has consequently been reduced or flattened here by the introduction of a little Chinese White. A flat light wash has been taken all over the cloth portion of the dress, the folds at the left arm and the outline of the bust have been more definitely shaded, and the sash in the centre very considerably increased in colour.

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The sash of the Evening frock has also been strengthened, and the lower part of the skirt considerably increased in tone. The hands, faces and feet remain in their previous condition, and in the last two stages you will see how the work is completed.





STAGE V—First of all, let us consider the indoor figure. The previous pencil drawing around the neck has been converted into a Chiffon collar, a light grey wash being taken across the collar, ending at the beads on the shoulder, the high lights then being roughly put in thickly with a solid white (Blanc d'Argent). The drapery of the sleeve has also been emphasised by outlining each of the shadows with this opaque white, a wash has been carried over the edge of the sleeve to form a frill, and further broad touches of white added to give transparency to the material. A bunch of flowers has been broadly indicated, chiefly with a wash of tone, the petals of the white rose being indicated with the opaque white, the dark flower with a wash of half tone, the shadows being filled in with black. The high lights on the waist-band have also been emphasised with the Blanc d'Argent and the outline of the band defined in the same way.

You will notice that the high lights on the skirt are now a good deal more definite; this again has been effected by the Blanc d'Argent introduced solidly; and the lower part of this skirt has been remodelled slightly, and the lower tones by mixing a body of the white with Lamp Black. With regard to the hair, you will see that this has been considerably darkened in tone, and the high lights suggested in a rather more definite way with Chinese White lines, while the decorative comb gives character to the back of the neck.

The outdoor costume has also been strengthened considerably. The lace at the neck has been defined by drawing the pattern in pencil, and inserting the details

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delicately with Blanc d'Argent on the toned surface which is already waiting. The sharp points of the lace just around the neck, and any other darks that are necessary here, are shown in pencil. The girl's left arm has been made considerably darker in tone, and where any alteration of the modelling has been considered necessary, it has been done with Body Colour. The high light on the sash has been lowered by Body Colour, and where, on the right sleeve, you see more emphasis given to the edges of the folds, this also has been accomplished by lines put in with Blanc d'Argent. The lower part of the skirt has been taken down in tone, and its outline drawn a little more definitely and crisply with the Blanc d'Argent, which effectively suggests the actual thickness of the material. The high light which suggests so excellently the quality of the fur is simply shading with a very small pencil brush—a light grey Body Colour of white and black being put on in a succession of lines running in the same direction as the fur itself. To complete the drawing, the feet, hands and faces will require a little further treatment.

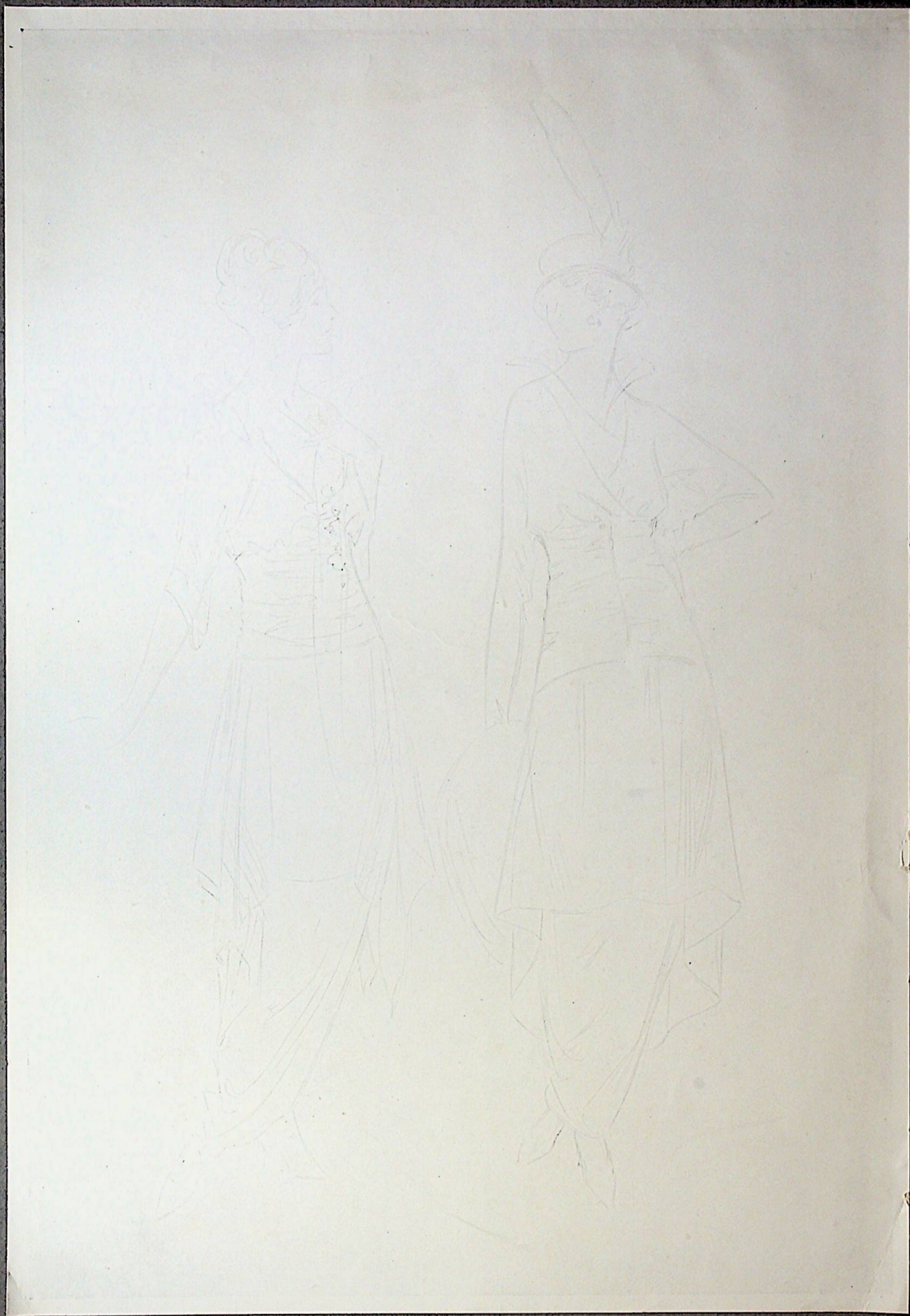
STAGE VI—There has been very little done to the Evening dress, but the right arm has been more sharply defined, and the hands rather more definitely indicated, especially by insistence on the shadow side of the outlines. The hair has been slightly strengthened in colour, the outline of the face altered by introducing a slightly fuller chin, and rather more prominence and fullness in the lips, which formerly suggested a rather simpering mouth. These alterations have been made with Chinese White. The eye and eyebrow have been introduced more heavily, the lips strengthened in colour, the line at the back of the neck more definitely drawn. The chiffon ruche has also been taken up a little further; you will especially notice this by a suggestion of the edges between the fingers; then, with the introduction of the shoes the drawing has been completed.

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The outdoor figure is noticeably fuller in colour, especially in the face; darker tone has been introduced into the eyelids and lashes, the lips are made somewhat heavier and fuller, all of which alterations give the face a rather more effective appearance. The modelling of the neck on the shadow side of the face is made just a shade more definite, but the high lights are still left absolutely dead white. The hat feather is very dexterously introduced by a broad wash of colour, the darks towards the tip and on the lower portion of the feature being introduced by floating dead black into the grey tone and allowing it to run. The high lights here and there on the lower portion are touched in with Chinese White. There is somewhat heavier shadow under the hat-brim, the previous clumsiness of the model's right shoulder has been obliterated by the rounding of the rather sharp corner with Chinese White, and the right side of the bust, which formerly had a distinctly flat appearance, has been altered by washing down the dark shadow near the armpit, and introducing a high light in the centre towards the waist-band. The rest of the dress remains practically untouched, except that there are one or two flecks of Body Colour introduced to emphasise the quality of one of the folds, and the drawing is completed by two particularly well-drawn feet.

This may be taken as a thoroughly typical drawing by a first-class Fashion artist, and the methods adopted are those usually in vogue.

Percy V. Bradshaw.



"FASHION
DRAWING"
by
Louise Wright
STAGE I.



"FASHION
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by
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STAGE II.



"FASHION
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STAGE III.



"FASHION
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STAGE IV.



"FASHION
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Louise Wright
STAGE V.



"FASHION
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STAGE VI.

