



Eacles Imperialis 1909 Evening Gown

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Contextual Review and Concept

Submission context. One of the best-selling authors of the early 20th Century, Gene Stratton-Porter (1863-1924) was known for entwining nature studies into popular fiction. Stratton-Porter has been one of my favorite authors from my childhood, when I first encountered her 1909 novel *A Girl of the Limberlost* on my grandmother's bookshelf. In creating this design, I analyzed Stratton-Porter's novels using ecocriticism as a theoretical framework. Ecocriticism is a literary criticism theory that focuses on "place, nature, and the physical world, attesting to the interconnectedness of humans (their culture) and nature" (Bressler, 2011, p. 231). In many of her works, particularly *The Harvester*, *The Keeper of the Bees*, and *A Girl of the Limberlost*, Stratton-Porter advocated a sustainability-focused approach to interacting with nature, using natural resources while maintaining natural habitats, flora, and fauna. She followed this approach in her own life, preserving indigenous plants and flowers in her gardens when she realized that they were being destroyed by commercialization, and expending considerable effort to photograph and draw birds and moths for her books without killing them (Meehan, 1972; Plum, 1996; Richards, 1980). Even when not directly advocating sustainability and conservation, Stratton-Porter sought to engage public interest in and appreciation for nature through her writing (Pyle, 2005). Although Stratton-Porter seems not to have engaged in much design beyond landscaping and architecture, she described in her books numerous examples of design inspired by local plants and insects, including woodworking, landscaping, fashion, and even the culinary arts (Stratton-Porter, 1909, 1911, 1921).

Design concept. Perhaps the most striking of the designs mentioned in Stratton-Porter's books was a dress from *A Girl of the Limberlost* inspired by the *Eacles Imperialis* moth (Stratton-Porter, 1909, pp. 337-338). For this project, I chose to create my own interpretation of the *Eacles Imperialis* dress as described in the book. The dress is designed to suit the publication year of the book, 1909. As Stratton-Porter educated the public about natural history through her novels, this dress is intended to increase interest in moths and provide inspiration for the viewer to learn more about them.

Process, Technique, and Execution

In creating this garment, I adhered as closely as possible to Edwardian dressmaking techniques. The fabrics and trims for the project were chosen based on materials that would have been available and suitable for an evening dress in 1909. I examined numerous period fashion illustrations, photographs of museum garments, and two extant evening gowns of the period, also referencing a 1909-1910 bodice pattern and a 1901-1902 skirt pattern (Arnold, 2007) all of which I combined in designing the pattern for the piece. Period construction techniques were

informed by a 1911 dressmaking book (Butterick Publishing Company, 1911) as well as photos taken of the garments I had examined. Silk chiffon and charmeuse, used for the body of this gown, were commonly used in this period. The gown was underlined in white cotton sateen, the closest available equivalent to the white polished cotton used in a similar extant gown that was examined. The gown fastens with hooks and eyes, using metal eyes and hand-stitched thread loops as appropriate for the locations on the garment. Period gowns were constructed using multiple layers of different types of fabric and lace; to that end, I located two types of beaded lace fabric to use in the dress in addition to layering the chiffon and charmeuse. I embroidered a hand-beaded moth for the front of the gown using glass seed beads and rocaille beads, as glass beads were frequently used in gowns of this period.

To more effectively link the dress design to the inspiration, I departed from historic accuracy in using digital printing on silk chiffon for the wings and the train of the dress. A photograph of an *Imperialis* moth was printed onto silk chiffon to form the wings of the dress, and the image was also used to design an engineered print for skirt's train. Both the wings and the train are attached with hooks and hand-stitched loops, so that they can be removed for any instance in which strict historical accuracy may be required.

Aesthetic Properties, Visual Impact and Cohesion

The color scheme was determined by the coloration of the *Eacles Imperialis* moth: Yellow, orchid purple, dark purple, and lavender, with gold accents. The colors of the body of the dress are repeated in the digital print, and the visual texture of the digitally-printed textile design was created from the photograph of the moth. Period norms, as well as references to the shapes and patterns of the moth's body, were used to design the silhouette and structure of the dress. The dark purple accent at the bottom of the moth's wings was repeated in the girdle, the tassels, and the beadwork of the dress. The colors from lighter purple and yellow fabrics are repeated in the lace that forms the sleeves and the decorative accents on the front of the dress.

Design Contribution and Innovation

Very few examples of moths in apparel design have been found. Historic costumer Leimomi Oakes (2010) created an Edwardian gown inspired by a moth; however, Oakes cites Stratton-Porter as historic justification for creating a moth gown rather than as direct inspiration. More frequently, butterflies have been used as design inspiration. Chen (2015) created a transformable garment utilizing origami butterflies. Zhang and Holland (2017) used butterflies with digital printing to translate a drawing into wearable art. Whang (2017) also utilized butterflies in a dress, focusing on sustainability and slow fashion as the impetus for the design. Michael Cinco created a gown inspired by the metamorphosis of a butterfly (Gonzales, 2018). This dress is the first directly inspired by the nature writings of Gene Stratton-Porter and to employ literary ecocriticism in design work.

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