The conversation parties of the bluestockings, held to debate contemporary ideas in eighteenth-century Britain, were vital in encouraging female artistic achievement. The bluestockings promoted links between learning and virtue in the public imagination, inventing a new kind of informal sociability that combined the life of the senses with that of the mind. This collection of essays, by leading scholars in the fields of literature, history and art history, provides an interdisciplinary treatment of bluestocking culture in eighteenth-century Britain. It is the first academic volume to concentrate on the rich visual and material culture that surrounded and supported the bluestocking project, from formal portraits and sculptures to commercially reproduced prints. By the early twentieth century, the term ‘bluestocking’ came to signify a dull and dowdy intellectual woman, but the original bluestockings inhabited a world in which brilliance was valued at every level and women were encouraged to shine and even dazzle.

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