

Womanhood in Anglophone Literary Culture

Womanhood in Anglophone Literary Culture
Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Perspectives

Edited by

Robin Hammerman



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Womanhood in Anglophone Literary Culture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Perspectives, edited
by Robin Hammerman

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This collection is dedicated to the loving memory of Helen Hill,
daughter of Becky Wingard Lewis

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PREFACE

Womanhood in Anglophone Literary Culture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Perspectives is a study well placed among a growing number of books on womanhood in literary tropes and themes. The essays in this collection investigate the historical continuity of culturally vibrant and deeply rooted conceptions of womanhood for Anglophone women writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The contributors examine specific ways in which women authors participated in discourses about social conditions for women.

The essay topics were ignited by each contributor's personal and professional interest in the relationship between women's writing and the state or condition of being a woman. The scholars whose essays appear in this collection contribute to a great tradition of critical inquiry about intersections of literature and women's culture, not to mention the expanding canon of nineteenth and twentieth century books written by women. This collection will be of special use to graduate students and faculty who navigate these intersections in their objects of study. *Womanhood in Anglophone Literary Culture* is divided into three parts: the first establishes foundations or basic contexts for understanding ideas about womanhood in the nineteenth century; the second investigates modernism and womanhood in twentieth century literature written by women; and the third explores conceptions of womanhood among female authors of the post-modern movement and in culturally expansive, late twentieth century Anglophone narratives.

For part one, the first chapter by Zoe Trodd sets *cartes-de-viste* (CDV's) in the context of America's collecting culture. Trodd explains that contained within the world of parlor objects, and often imagined as collectible objects themselves, women seemed particularly easy to collect and categorize. Images of women as art objects reading novels were frequently featured in nineteenth century photographs, and Trodd reveals the tension in CDV's between nineteenth century objects and subjects. In Trodd's estimation, the images acknowledge women's capabilities for living story-like lives and the CDV's offered sites of resistance akin to those in nineteenth century fiction.

In chapter two, Susan Toth Lord discusses the five volumes of women's history that Lydia Maria Child compiled to educate and inspire American women about their potential as citizens of a nation that was

grappling with moral issues such as slavery. Child, whom Lord identifies as a non canonical author, speaks to readers interested in nineteenth century -women's education, activism, and the women's rights movement. Lord examines the ways in which Child simultaneously validated and challenged the Cult of True Womanhood and its prevailing limitations of women to the roles of homemaker and mother. In Lord's estimation, womanhood according to Child is ultimately characterized by self-sacrifice, intelligence, courage, and adaptability.

Christine Poulson in chapter three examines nineteenth century novels and fiction written specifically for children which feature stepfamilies. Poulson explains how new attitudes towards children and towards maternity in the first half of the nineteenth century contributed to a new sense of the family, in which the maternal bond and the nature of childhood experience were considered especially significant. According to Poulson, a corollary was that the step-family was often seen as potentially problematic, unnatural, and deviant rather than a normative part of the social order and family life. In Poulson's essay, the *Cinderella* story is heralded as the most famous of all step-family stories. Poulson examines how women writers, often writing initially for their own children, tended to rework and bowdlerize the story, omitting the stepmother and changing the step-sisters into sisters or half-sisters.

For chapter four, Susan Cruea examines the obstacles which nineteenth century women writers faced with particular attention to their publishers. Cruea explains how women writers during this time faced careful scrutiny of their works by a publishing culture which strongly censured and deviation from hegemonic ideal s of True Womanhood. In Cruea's estimation, women writers including Susan Warner, Maria Cummins, and E.D.E.N. Southworth, clearly endorse alternative ideal images of womanhood while appearing to perpetuate True Womanhood. Cruea traces the significance of their novels in the wake of Margaret Fuller's writing and the feminist movement.

In chapter five, Susan Soroka delineates the influx of poetry written by nineteenth century women who gained monetary support for their work and, at the same time, expanded some of the cultural roles assigned to them. Soroka explains how women poets reexamined the role of the poet and transformed contemporary understandings of poetic identity. In Soroka's estimation, nineteenth century women poets worked in collaboration with each other as well as established historical and literary female figures to reexamine how poetry itself can and should be written. Soroka highlights the figure of Sappho and the story *Long Ago*, written by Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper under the pseudonym Michael Field.

Becky Wingard Lewis in chapter six examines the art of collaboration in an inter-textual study. The essay emphasizes connections between *The Story of Avis* Elizabeth Stuart Phelps and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*. Lewis delineates the ways in which such literary women connected with each other across generations and oceans, defining and redefining their conceptions of True Womanhood in nineteenth century Anglophone society.

In chapter seven, Nina Bennett compares the depictions of Cuban women in Louisa May Alcott's novel *Moods* and Elizabeth Stoddard's short story *Eros and Anteros*. Bennett explains how both writers configure a love triangle between an Anglo man and two women, one Anglo and one Cuban and how, in both texts, the Cuban woman is rejected as an unsuitable choice for the Anglo man. Bennett addresses the suggestion that Alcott's and Stoddard's decision to re-value the Anglo woman as the appropriate choice can be read as a rejection of the popular nineteenth century political doctrine of manifest destiny and, for Alcott, slavery in America. Bennett argues that both Alcott and Stoddard challenge notions of conquest abroad in a familiar domestic context. Cuban women are presented as more overtly sexual and dangerous than their Anglo counterparts, and they are expelled from the two stories because of these characteristics. Nevertheless, relationships between the Anglo couples falter. Both *Moods* and *Eros and Anteros* end with failure of the domestic relationships, suggesting in Bennett's estimation that Alcott and Stoddard are as critical of domestic subjects as they are of Anglo political domination.

For part two, chapter eight, Jennifer Shaddock argues that five literary chronicles published from 1930-33 provide a profound corrective to the idea that "war girls" on the front lines during World War I were empowered by the war. Shaddock explains that the writers of each narrative -- Mary Borden, Rebecca West, Evadne Price, Irene Rathbone, Vera Brittain -- employs the Victorian trope of the fallen woman to describe their protagonists' war experiences as Voluntary Aid Detachment nurses or ambulance drivers (VADs). The five writers transport the fallen woman iconography from a Victorian domestic landscape to the military terrain of the Great War. Shaddock reveals how the authors were thus able to express their inexpressible experience of disillusionment, debasement and alienation to a reading public otherwise unable to understand the full trauma of the VAD's wartime story. In Shaddock's estimation, the five narratives provide a more realistic account of the VAD's sacrifice and trauma than had earlier published World War I narratives. The writers, to the extent that they revised the fallen woman

metaphor, simultaneously revised the rigidly deterministic categories of this trope, which was still operational during the 1930s. Shaddock suggests that these women writers and war critics created a profound avenue of expression in modernism's language of psychological despair and social critique.

Julia Lisella in chapter nine examines the cultural expectations of women writers in both high modernist and leftist Anglo American circles. Lisella, drawing from poetry, manifestos, and historical documents of the 1930s, along with current ideas about maternity and modernism, argues for a holistic approach to the study of modernism and political poetry of the 1930s. In Lisella's estimation, a fluid interpretation of those two movements and their relationships force us to reconsider American modernism's lively debates, voices, and agendas. Lisella emphasizes the ways in which women's political poetry of the 1930s often strove to articulate rather than obfuscate the particularities of female experiences, including birth, marriage, and domestic labor. Lisella argues that examining and embracing such traditional roles for women was a radical act for women in modernist and leftist circles.

In chapter ten, Alayne Peterson examines three of the most influential twentieth century women writers of science fiction: Ursula K. LeGuin, Joanna Russ, and James Tiptree, Jr. (Alice Sheldon). Peterson focuses on the ways in which these three writers approach ideas about gender and power. The representative texts were all written within a seven year period (1969-1976) that witnessed what Peterson characterizes as much consternation across the United States about the women's liberation movement. The texts were written, Peterson argues, in part to challenge hegemonic assumptions about women and their social roles in contemporary society and in what Peterson identifies as the final frontier of late modern speculative fiction.

For part three, chapter eleven, Jennifer Dunn examines reincarnations of the muse in fiction by postmodern women writers and its problematizations of female creativity. Dunn explains how the representative texts challenge patriarchal constructions of womanhood as well as the progressive reconstructions of feminism in the twentieth century. The study contains three sections. In the first section, Dunn considers the ways in which the muse figure in Angela Carter's *Black Venus* functions to expose her disembodiment at the hands of the artist and to re-present her – black, foreign, diseased – as a return of the abjected body. In the second section, Dunn considers representations of the female artist and the male muse. The final section compares two novels featuring female artists haunted by female muses, Emma Tennant's *The Bad Sister*

and Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*. In Dunn's estimation, both novels present a final, grim vision of blankness and absence that problematizes the speaking muse and suggests the impossibility of a positive narrative about womanhood.

In chapter twelve, Diya Abdo examines Moroccan feminist and sociologist Fatima Mernissi's Anglophone autobiography *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*. Abdo emphasizes the ways in which the women of the narrative construct for themselves an Arabo-Islamic feminist consciousness and subjectivity within spaces that are restricted physically, emotionally, socially, and narratologically. Throughout Mernissi's narrative, Abdo observes a successful utilization and amalgamation of cultural or religious aspects that have been used to circumscribe women but might be used now to their advantage. Such a representation of Arab and Muslim women, especially for the target audience of this Anglophone autobiography, challenges representations of Arab and Muslim women as passive victims suffering from false consciousness; hence, the text in Abdo's estimation delineates the existence of an alternate, viable feminism for English language readers.

Alison Perry in chapter thirteen examines the acquisition of verbal and spatial literacy in Sapphire's novel, *Push*. The novel chronicles the recovery from sexual and family violence of an illiterate, HIV positive, sixteen year old protagonist named Precious Jones who twice has become pregnant by her father. Perry explains how the body of the protagonist is characterized by her race, her class, her gender, and by the pregnancies that bear out her sexual abuse. The conception of womanhood in the novel, Perry argues, is young, black, and urban. The story, in Perry's estimation, gives voice to marginalized women like Precious who simultaneously acquire literacy in English and develop autonomy.

For the final chapter, Natalie Wilson explores how conceptions of womanhood from the 1980s became conflated with what she identifies as wombhood, or a woman's capacity to reproduce and mother. Wilson contends that reproductive technology and trends beg critical assessment in relation to classifications of contemporary womanhood in Anglophone culture. The essay examines six novels published between 1983 and 1999 by contemporary female authors from Britain and the United States. Wilson explains how the six novels mock, resist, and subvert notions of motherhood as defining and necessary components of womanhood. In this study's analysis of female subjectivity at the twentieth century's *fin de siècle*, Wilson also draws from contemporary cultural phenomenon including images of pregnant celebrities and the rise of what Wilson identifies as chick lit.

The collection suggests that womanhood in its multiple guises developed unevenly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries while it offers insight about the different ways in which women writers of the two centuries explore feminine identity. Books written by nineteenth century women, especially those who were once well-known and written about in periodicals, have become a vital part of literary studies in our time. Scholars, teachers, and researchers continue to resuscitate nineteenth century women's writing in nearly all academic disciplines. The contributors to parts two and three demonstrate some of the ways in which twentieth century literature by women contribute to contemporary discourses about literature and material culture. Twentieth century woman writers, such as the ones examined here, have had to navigate the worlds between writer and publisher as well as writer and reader in unprecedented ways. Together, the essays in this book suggest that the examination and critique of womanhood in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries remain as boundless as feminine identity itself.

PART ONE:
FOUNDATIONS IN THE NINETEENTH
CENTURY

CHAPTER ONE

CABINETS OF THE CURIOUS: WOMEN-READERS IN THE NINETEENTH- CENTURY AMERICAN ARCHIVE, AND THE SEARCH FOR A STORY-LIKE LIFE

ZOE TRODD

“[I]n the same cabinet, by the way, I had the pleasure of contemplating a picture of a different kind—that pretty American girl whom you pointed out to me last week”
—Henry James, 1878.

“[We can make] stories out of all these things; stories which will tell themselves to the untrained observer”
—Frank Hamilton Cushing, 1894

On a gray Christmas morning, Jo March woke to discover a crimson-covered book beneath her pillow. Her sisters rummaged and found books, too: Meg’s green, Beth’s dove-colored, and Amy’s blue. “I’m glad mine is blue,” said Amy. Jessie Willcox Smith’s illustrations for the 1915 edition of *Little Women* then showed Jo wearing crimson, Meg grey-green, Beth cream and Amy blue—connecting the girls’ clothes to their books’ covers, and by implication their interior lives to the books’ contents. The girls *are* their books and, sure enough, throughout Louisa May Alcott’s novel they come “to regard themselves as... capable of living story-like lives,” as Hayden White notes of whole classes in the nineteenth century.¹

The Christmas books are copies of *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Jo reads her crimson volume as a “story of the... life... lived” and, emphasizing the possibility that Jo might then find her *own* story-like life, Alcott adapted

¹ Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (1868, New York: Penguin, 1989), 13, 487; Hayden White, “Historical Pluralism,” *Critical Inquiry* 12.3, 1986, 487.

part of John Bunyan's work for her epigraph to *Little Women* (1868), so that Bunyan's line "Go then my little Book, and shew to all... What thou shalt keep close, shut up from the rest," now ends "shut up in thy breast." This anthropomorphizes the book, connecting its hidden contents to the interior lives of the sisters (the same connection made by Smith's illustrations), and suggests the possibility of narrating (*shewing*) one's hidden story to others. This possibility is realized when the four little chests in the March garret, which contain the histories and "hidden stores" of the sisters (as Jo's poem puts it toward the end of the novel) eventually open up to Jo's "loving eyes." The garret chests *shew*: telling stories, they make the archive speak—like the chest in William Merritt Chase's studio of the 1880s, which one visitor imagined "could tell strange tales" and had "heard many a page whisper soft speeches in the ears of pretty, black-eyed tire-women." Out of relics, trifles and records—what Alcott terms a "motley store"—Jo crafts the sisters' individual stories and summons Mr. Bhaer to her side. Then, in responding to her revelation of the archives' contents, he becomes her "knight": dead treasures of the garret come to life, and Jo's life becomes a story.²

The hidden, motley stores, where Jo finds disparate objects and storied relics of the sisters' lives, are a model of unofficial history and an archive in the tradition of the old Cabinet of Curiosities. This was a tradition set apart from nineteenth-century America's museum movement, and the era's faith in the importance of classification and order within society and the archive. Throughout the nineteenth century, curiosity became knowledge and cabinets became museums, but the spirit of the *Wunderkammer* lived on: novels, cabinet cards and *cartes-de-visite* (CDVs) were shifting and dynamic archives, like the March family's garret chest, and within this tradition of unofficial history, CDVs that show women reading novels explored the storying of women. Like Alcott's novel, they acknowledged women's stored but also *story-like* interior lives.

These photographs offer the chance to read the archive from below, as instructed by Allan Sekula. Archives "maintain a hidden connection between knowledge and power," notes Sekula, and should be "read from below, from a position of solidarity with those displaced, deformed, silenced, or made invisible by the machineries of profit and progress." The photographs, "torn between narration and categorization, between chronology and inventory," as Sekula says of the archive more generally,

² Alcott, 12, 477-79; John Moran, "Studio-Life in New York," *Art Journal* 5, 1879, 345.

reveal a tension between nineteenth-century objects and subjects, archives and narratives. They show “hidden stores” becoming stories, and the “I” entering “stores” to make “stories.” Storied as subjects even as they were consumed as art objects, the collectible little women of CDVs narrated their individual “I.”³

Curious Cabinets and Classified Collections

The eclectic *Wunderkammer* of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe was described Thomas Platter in 1599 after he visited Walter Cope’s cabinet: “a Madonna made of feathers, a chain made of monkey teeth... an apartment stuffed with queer foreign objects in every corner.” This became the Cabinet of Curiosities of eighteenth-century America; still a melange of “Any thing that Is strang,” as a 1625 letter by Tradescant the Elder described the *Wunderkammer*. The aesthetic of the *Wunderkammer* then reappeared in nineteenth-century *trompe l’oeil* paintings of well-worn objects and storied remnants, and as the nineteenth-century art studio, like Chase’s studio with its storied chest, and other studios of which visitors wondered “how constituents so multifarious and seemingly incongruous can make up such a delightful ensemble.” In particular, photographers’ studios seemed a remarkable “dumping ground of the dealers in unsaleable idols, tattered tapestry, and indigent crocodiles,” as one visitor to a New York studio remarked.⁴

Popular photography was in fact a major site for the rehabilitation of a *Wunderkammer* aesthetic of extravagance and wonder. For example, the introduction to *Marvelous Scenes of the World* (1902) noted that the photographer has gathered “from the ‘World’s Storehouse’ the choicest treasures, transports us through his images to the Old Curiosity Shop immortalized by Dickens.” The CDV composite-card, sometimes featuring up to a thousand tiny faces on one card, was advertised as a “photographic curiosity” in of itself, and CDVs of people with unusual physical features were popular by 1860. In addition, CDVs were produced to be album collectibles, referred to as “album portraits,” and collected within albums that were individuals’ own personal cabinets of

³ Allan Sekula, “Reading an Archive,” in Brian Wallis (ed.), *Blasted Allegories* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987), 119, 127, 118.

⁴ Thomas Platter, *Thomas Platter's Travels in England 1599*, trans. Clare Williams (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), 171-73; Tradescant the Elder cited in Arthur MacGregor (ed.), *Tradescant's Rarities* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 15; S.G.W. Benjamin, *Our American Artists* (Boston: Houghton, 1886), 72; *Critic* 43, 1903, 34.

curiosities—with photographs of friends and relatives alongside images of Renaissance art-works, celebrities, and natural wonders.⁵

The CDV, which took the form of an individual bearer's personal photographic portrait mounted on sturdy cardboard stock, was the first cheap, mass-produced photograph, and as such was the everyman's portrait (often made in studios located on the premises of hairdressers, butchers and dentists). CDVs were so popular that in 1866 Edward L. Wilson observed in the *Philadelphia Photographer*: "Everyone is surfeited with [the CDV]... everybody has exchanged with everybody." And when collectors compiled annotated albums that reflected their own histories and interests, the CDV became a form of folk-history. This was also an ever-shifting biodegradable history. "How long are card pictures to be the rage?" asked one critic in 1862. "In a few months or years at the most, our good patrons will have their albums full of dirty and yellow and faded pictures. Will they replace them with new ones, or pass us by with contempt and disgust?" Even the albums were shifting narratives, with invitations pasted on their first page inviting each viewer to add their own image after viewing it—to replenish and continue the collection.⁶

Part of a tradition of those "bards and story-tellers and minstrels, of soothsayers and priests" described by Carl Becker, the CDV invoked the opposite of "historians of the [nineteenth] century who found some special magic in the word 'scientific.'" But, as Walter Benjamin explains, there was "in the life of a collector a dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order." Though the fluid miscellany of the original *Wunderkammer* persisted in some strains of the American archival imagination, a Cartesian world-view had spawned taxonomy, typology, and the archivist-curator who sought to classify and rationalize. Collecting seemed a way to systematize the self and the world, and so another nineteenth-century development of the Cabinet was the more specialized public collections of art, natural history, geology, and ethnography, where scientific inquiry and analysis replaced curiosity and wonder, and selection replaced the infinite. A visual syntax of evolution took hold of museums, and World Fairs exhibited cultures and curios with a metonymic logic of progress. The archive that was once a "bric-a-brac shop" now had "everything... in its place... [in] a savant harmony," commented Thérèse Bentzon in 1893. CDV albums represented a kind of

⁵ Anon., *Marvelous Scenes of the World* (Chicago: C.W. Slauson, 1902), 2.

⁶ Edward L. Wilson, cited in George Gilbert, *Photography: The Early Years* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 96; *Humphrey's Journal*, 13, 1861-62, 292.

biodegradable history, but the nineteenth-century archival imagination sought a permanent totality.⁷

Commentators eventually looked back on earlier collections as what N. H. Witchell referred to in 1891 as “mere miscellaneous lots of objects brought together with no purpose.” Collectors like George Brown Goode believed their late Victorian museums to be “no longer a chance assemblage of curiosities, but rather a series of objects selected with reference to their value to investigators, or their possibilities for public enlightenment.” Material seemed worthless unless “properly classified and scientifically described,” said William Wilson, founder of the Philadelphia Commercial Museum, in 1894, and “classification, good labelling, isolation of each object from its neighbours” were “absolute requisites,” added Sir William Henry Flower in 1898. Michel Foucault explains this shift from “spectacle,” legend and fable to “rectangle... stripped of all commentary,” as the shift from an age of theatre to an age of catalogue.⁸

Extending this aesthetic into the home in the 1880s, advertisements for a series of real cabinets promised that the owner would realize “at once that he is ‘master of the situation.’” This advertisement in the *Catalogue of the Wooten Patent Cabinet Office Secretaries and Rotary Desks* added that “the man of method may here realize that pleasure and comfort which are only to be attained in the verification of the maxim, ‘a place for everything and everything in its place.’” And the Victorian interior was as compartmentalized as its method-making cabinets, the parlor a place “for company use”—a “sort of quarantine in which to put each plague of a visitor that calls,” as Calvert Vaux complained—and a site where women were “preserved, like a bottled fruit in syrup... in a plate-glass case,” as James puts it in one of his stories.⁹

⁷ Carl L. Becker, *Everyman His Own Historian* (New York: F.S. Crofts, 1935), 247, 249; Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library,” *Illuminations* (New York: Harcourt, 1968), 60; Thérèse Bentzon, *Les Américaines chez elles* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1893), 113.

⁸ N. H. Witchell, “Museums and Their Purposes,” *Science* 18 (July 24, 1891), 43; George Brown Goode, “Museum-History and Museums of History,” in *Annual Report of the United States National Museum* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian, 1897), 80; William Wilson cited in Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 121; Sir William Henry Flower, *Essays on Museums and Other Subjects connected with Natural History*, (London: MacMillan, 1898), 250; Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. (London: Tavistock, 1970), 131.

⁹ *Catalogue of the Wooten Patent Cabinet Office Secretaries and Rotary Desks* (1883) cited in Katherine Martinez and Kenneth L. Ames (eds.), *The Material Culture of Gender, the Gender of Material Culture* (Hanover: University Press of

The two different models of the Cabinet appear explicitly in Harry Leon Wilson's *The Spenders* (1902), where a "what-not" contrasts the "Empire Cabinet." The what-not shelters "the smaller household gods for which no other resting place could be found," and contains "hair of the dead... two dried pine cones brightly varnished; an old daguerreotype in an ornamental case of hard rubber... three sea-shells; and the cup and saucer that belonged to grandma." The new cabinet has "the mother-of-pearl fan... the tiny cup and saucer of Sevres... the Japanese wrestlers carved in ivory; the ballet-dancer in bisque." The what-not is "obsolete," and the Empire cabinet is "regnant," adds Wilson; and they are "hostile and irreconcilable." One offers an official narrative, the other a personal history: in the cabinet are the expected items, prefixed by "the," and in the what-not are individual objects, prefixed by "an." The what-not reveals what Benjamin explains as the collector's attachment "not only to his object but also to its entire past"—an attachment wherein the commodity fetish for unstoried objects without paper-trails is instead a memory-collection through souvenirs and storied relics; an ephemeral collage that is stored and storied.¹⁰

The new kind of Cabinet was part of America's search for a usable past and a visibly-ordered history amid the newly anonymous industrial marketplace—what Miles Orvell calls the nineteenth-century attempt to "enclose reality in manageable forms." Communities had fragmented, and America was recollecting itself. Object-collecting offered America an immediate, accessible history, and Victorian rooms were increasingly full of objects. The desire to find a visible past and present, and to read and recognize strangers, also played out in physiognomy and phrenology, botany and zoology, anthropology and statistics. Josiah Nott and George Gliddon's *Types of Mankind* was influential after 1854, and in 1874 Joseph Simms' *Nature's Revelation of Character* theorized dispositions through an observation of form and countenance. For in a way, the middle-class cult of collecting reflected the interests of a generation of physiognomist-collectors: as Benjamin notes, the true collector orders objects "according to a surprising... connection," and late nineteenth-century America exhibited instead what Benjamin terms "'disinterested'

New England, 1997), 91-2; Calvert Vaux, *Villas and Cottages* (New York: Harpers, 1864), 95, 97; Henry James, "The Beldonald Holbein" (1901), in *The Better Sort* (New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1903), 25, 26.

¹⁰ Harry Leon Wilson, *The Spenders* (Boston: Lothrop, 1902), 34-8; Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 207.

contemplation... which we would do best to compare to the gaze of the great physiognomist.”¹¹

Animate Art and Gilded-Edged Paper

Contained within the world of parlor objects, women seemed particularly easy to collect and index—their characters like a “legible door-plate of... identity,” as Henry James put it in “The Liar” (1888). In 1868 Sara Hale insisted that “character is seen through small openings, and certainly is as clearly displayed in the arrangements and adornments of a house as in any other way,” and in 1875 Harriet Beecher Stowe noted that a woman’s home was “the new impersonation of herself.” Far from being deeply storied and associated with the turning pages of a book, like Alcott’s characters, nineteenth-century women often seemed frozen as objects and associated with decorative collectibles and works of art. The Goncourt brothers equated “woman” and “thing,” calling women “art objects,” and Bentzon described the American house with its art objects as an “exquisite frame for a charming woman.” Or, perhaps most famously, a sketch by George Du Maurier for the October 30, 1880 issue of *Punch* showed a woman framed by art objects and a rectangular screen, her profile set against canvas. In a caption she expresses a desire to “live up to” the teapot that she holds, and as she looks at the object, her husband looks at her. She is collected as an art object within the middle-class cult of what Edmond de Goncourt called *bricabracomania*.¹²

Henry James praised Du Maurier’s satirical drawings, noting that they introduced America to the “mysterious body of people, devotees of the lovely and the precious, living in goodly houses and walking in gracious garments,” surrounded by “‘sincere’ sideboards and fragments of crockery.” He filled his own fiction with compulsive collectors and their cluttered rooms. For example, Miss Cutter’s house in the story “Mrs. Medwin” (1903) is “adorned indeed almost exclusively with objects that nobody buys... and would have been luxurious if luxury consisted mainly

¹¹ Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 35; Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 207.

¹² James, “The Liar” (1888), in *Henry James: Complete Stories, 1884-1891* (New York: Library of America, 1999), 321; Sara Josepha Hale, *Manners; or Happy Home and Good Society* (Boston: JE Tilton, 1868), 81; Harriet Beecher Stowe, *We and Our Neighbors* (New York: JB Ford, 1875), 152; E and J de Goncourt, *Journal*, vol. 1, September 12, 1868 (Paris: Flammarion, 1935), 177; Bentzon, 113.

in photographic portraits slashed over with signatures.” Or Olive Chancellor’s room in *The Bostonians* (1886), has “many objects that spoke of habits and tastes,” books on “little shelves like brackets (as if a book were a statuette),” and photographs and water-colors covering the walls. A few other of James’ sinister or laughable collector-figures include Mr. Leavenworth with his memorials in *Roderick Hudson* (1876), Madame Merle with her teacups and damask, Osmond with his medallions, and Ned Rosier with his bibelots in *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), Maria Gostrey with her brocades in *The Ambassadors* (1903) and Adam Verver with his tiles, enamels and museum in *The Golden Bowl* (1904).¹³

This theme encompassed James’ sub-theme of the collection of women as art objects and curiosities. He compared women to art on several occasions: upon seeing John Singer Sargent’s 1882 painting of four girls with vases, he remarked that “the splendid porcelain and the aprons of the children shine together,” so that girls echo vases. He admired another painting with “charming old objects... among which I include the human face and figure in dresses unfolded from the lavender of the past.” And within his fiction this theme is pervasive. For example, in “The Liar,” one woman has the appearance of “fresh varnish... so that one felt she ought to sit in a gilt frame,” and the character David Ashmore maintains that women might be painted many times and “hung up all over the place,” making “a pretty wall-pattern.” In his early story “A Landscape Painter” (1866), Miss Leary’s lover is “fond of comparing her to the Venus of Milo,” and the narrator explains: “if you can imagine the mutilated goddess with her full complement of limbs, dressed out by Madame de Crinoline and engaged in small-talk beneath the drawing-room chandelier, you may obtain a vague notion of Miss Josephine Leary.” Or in *The American* (1877), Newman wants “a beautiful woman perched on the pile, like a statue on a monument,” and observes: “I want to possess, in a word, the best article in the market.” The following year, in *Daisy Miller* (1878), Winterborne’s friend discusses “Innocent X by Valázquez, which hangs in one of the cabinets of the palace,” and then adds: “in the same cabinet, by the way, I had the pleasure of contemplating a picture of a different kind—that pretty American girl whom you pointed out to me last week.”¹⁴

¹³ James, *Partial Portraits* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1888), 368; James, “Mrs. Medwin” (1903), in *The Better Sort*, 116-117; James, *The Bostonians* (1886, New York: Penguin, 1983), 15.

¹⁴ James, *Picture and Text* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1893), 105, 12; James, “The Liar,” 323, 324; James, “A Landscape Painter” (1866), in *A Landscape Painter and Other Tales* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 64; James, *The*

The theme continues throughout James' entire body of work. In *The Bostonians*, Basil and Olive are like rival bidders at an auction of Verena, Verena seems a "moving statue" to Basil, and Mr. Burrage likes her for the same reason that he likes enamel and embroideries. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, Isabel's inheritance makes her an object in the marketplace, a *bibelot* with value at auction. Osmond wants her "to figure in his collection of choice objects," and compares her to a silver plate, just as Rosier thinks of Pansy as a "Dresden-china shepherdess" with "a hint of rococo." In *The Golden Bowl*, Verver sees Maggie as "slim draped 'antique' of Vatican or Capitoline halls" and the Prince sees Charlotte as "a cluster of possessions of his own... items in a full list, items recognized, each of them, as if, for the long interval, they had been 'stored'—wrapped up, numbered, put away in a cabinet." In *The High Bid* (1909), Prodmore regards his daughter Cora as his "largest property," puts her "on view," and tries to exchange her for a house, and in *The Outcry* (1911), Lady Sandgate is pursued by a collector as though she is an expensive work of art, and Lord John explains that "every handsome woman" is "a work of art." James was dramatizing the situation described by John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* (1972): "Men look at women," and "[w]omen watch themselves being looked at" and turn themselves "into an object... a sight."¹⁵

In James' fiction this situation allows women to be inserted into the narratives of others. After being collected and archived, women are also read and written upon: Verena, Isabel, Pansy, Daisy, Catherine, and Milly are all plotted by other characters, and some are described as blank or uncut pages. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, Pansy is "a sheet of blank paper—the ideal *jeune fille* of foreign fiction," and Isabel hopes that "so fair and smooth a page would be covered with an edifying text." Isabel herself is plotted by Ralph, who acknowledges that most women "waited, in attitudes more or less gracefully passive, for a man to come that way and furnish them with a destiny," and that "Isabel's originality was that she gave one an impression of having intentions of her own." Eventually he has to confess to Isabel: "I had treated myself to a charming vision of your

American (1877, New York: Norton, 1978), 44; James, *Daisy Miller* (1878, New York: Penguin, 1983), 75.

¹⁵ James, *The Bostonians*, 63; James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881, New York: Penguin, 1986), 354, 409; *The Golden Bowl* (1904, New York: Scribner's, 1909), 187, 46; James, *The High Bid*, unpublished typescript [1909], Houghton Rare Books Library, Harvard, Act 1, 23, 37; James, *The Outcry* (New York: New York Review Books, 2002, 1911), 14; John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990, 1972), 46-47.

future... I had amused myself with planning out a high destiny for you.” Or, in *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), Densher sees Kate as “a whole library of the unknown, the uncut,” and experiences “the thrill of turning the page,” and in *The High Bid*, Cora is a “large smooth sheet of blank, though gilded-edged paper.”¹⁶

James’ dynamic, whereby women are made into animate art and gilded-edged paper, played out across nineteenth-century photography as well. In spite of the presence of CDV albums as folk-histories and eclectic cabinets of curiosities, photography also helped to further catalogue and summarize culture. America sought national characteristics and the ideal type: Professor Plumbe’s National Daguerrian Gallery had 1000 portraits of public figures by 1845, Mathew Brady’s Daguerrian Miniature Gallery and semi-monthly *Gallery of Illustrious Americans* offered lithographic portraits and biography from 1847 onward, and *Photographic Portraits of Living Celebrities* (1856-1859) and *Portraits of Men of Eminence* (1863-67) gave accompanying mini-biographies each month.

Central to typology, photography was also used in criminology and surveillance—most famously in Thomas Byrnes’ *Professional Criminals of America* (1886). Photography could index the nation’s faces, as *Littel’s Living Age* realized as early as June 1846, when a journalist claimed that photography offered “indices of human character,” and “exponential signs of disposition, desire, character,” with “as many subdivisions as the famous classification of plants.” Photography was the “grand climacteric of the science [of physiognomy],” concluded the writer. In 1869 another article confirmed photography was central to “the delineation of anatomical specimens and of all natural historical objects,” and added that it had “long been used for the purpose of identifying criminals.” The photographer seemed the physiognomist’s best hand-maiden, as one photographer acknowledged: “the face is an index to both the intellectual and moral character,” wrote Marcus Aurelius Root, adding that “we are all physiognomists in practice, if not in theory.”¹⁷

The use of photography in physiognomy and typology meant it seemed prone to making its subjects into objects—and to turning women, in particular, into collectible and consumable art-works. From P.T. Barnum’s *American Gallery of Female Beauty* (1854) to numerous post-bellum CDVs of women leaning elbows on empty pedestals where vases or

¹⁶ James, *The Portrait of A Lady*, 328, 116, 395; James, *The Wings of the Dove* (1902, New York: Norton, 2003), 309; James, *The High Bid*, 35.

¹⁷ *Littel’s Living Age* 9, June 1846, 552; “The Legal Relations of Photographs,” *The American Law Register*, January, 1869, 3; Marcus Aurelius Root, *The Camera and the Pencil* (Philadelphia: M.A. Root, 1864), 89.

statues should be, women often featured in nineteenth-century photography as art objects. In CDVs where objects appear, these women are often associated with the objects, their costumes merging with painted backdrops of two-dimensional urns, their poses echoing the shapes of nearby sculptures. “[T]hey might as well be stone idols from Egypt,” complained one critic; “The entire number of positions... do not exceed four or five... No one could suppose that the artist thought they had souls, feelings, sentiments, dispositions.”¹⁸

As well, the design of CDV albums did tend to place the female subjects of CDVs deep within the culture of custom and typology. Partaking of the popular interest in botanical classification, many albums included printed surrounds of flowers and birds. And, positioned amid these specimens of natural history, the women in photographs sometimes wield botanic props that make them specimens of womanhood, as an article for the *Journal of Photography* made clear in August 1863: “In the portrait of a lady a variety of resources... may be found: she may be examining a bouquet, arranging a vase of flowers,” whereas in “the portraits of gentlemen, the same occupations would be less suitable.”¹⁹

While flowers were acceptable props for women, books were *not*. One photographer advised that while a woman might “hold a book or some other object, if the sitter so choose... a pretty hand is much the prettiest when empty.” Or, again advising against books as props, one early article in the June 1846 issue of *Littel’s Living Age* scorned the “literary weakness” that prompts “a young woman whose leisure hours are exclusively devoted to the restoration of dilapidated male habiliments” to be photographed as “intensely absorbed in the perusal of a large octavo.” It seemed that women could be open books themselves, their characters readable, collectible and contained, but never *readers* within the CDV.²⁰

Even when women do hold books in CDVs, the images often suggest merely the “desultory reading” that Abba Goold Woolson described in 1873 as being “without definite object or hope of temporal gain.” For example, in one 1880s image, two women have a toddler between them and hold on their laps open books at which they don’t look [fig.1]. White pages blend into their white aprons, for their stories *are* their domestic lives. The books balance precariously, and they hold them with one hand each while also supporting the child between them. They are connected visually by a fence-rail behind them—a rail with the same containing

¹⁸ “Expressing Character in Photographic Pictures,” *The American Journal of Photography*, November 1858, 180.

¹⁹ *The American Journal of Photography*, August 1863, 220.

²⁰ Root, 106; *Littel’s Living Age*, June 1846, 552.