

'Adelaide Kemble: And the Lyrical Drama in 1841'; Mrs S. C. [Anna Maria] Hall, 'Memories of Miss Jane Porter' – but where the symbol "*" is used to footnote, this signifies an original note.

Introduction: Art and Economics for the Middle-Class Woman

[W]e may go on to the very obvious question – *what* is a woman to do? A question more easily asked than answered; and the numerous replies to which, now current in book, pamphlet, newspaper, and review, suggesting everything possible and impossible, from compulsory wifehood in Australia to voluntary watchmaking at home, do at present rather confuse the matter than otherwise. No doubt, out of these 'many words', which 'darken speech', some plain word or two will one day take shape in action, so as to evolve a practical good. In the meantime, it does no harm to have the muddy pond stirred up a little; any disturbance is better than stagnation.

— DINAH MULOCK CRAIK 41–2

In 1858, Dinah Mulock Craik complained that 'the chief canker at the root of women's lives is the want of something to do' (3). Yet when Craik subsequently asked – '*what* is a woman to do?' – she immediately went on to note that it was a question more easily asked than answered. Its very imponderability provoked a profusion of debate over middle-class women's potential employment that this book aims to examine through its focus on female artistic labour. The scale of the issue for Victorian society had been starkly demonstrated by the 1851 census, which revealed that there were 2.5 million redundant women – that is, one third of the labour force – who had no option but to support themselves. The desire and the call for work went far beyond those who needed to earn money though – it also encompassed middle-class women's desire for purposeful and fulfilling work.

Revealingly, Craik distinguished between the female professions and handicrafts, which for her represented a different class of working women. For Craik, the professions included 'the instruction of youth; painting or art; literature; and the vocation of public entertainment – including

actresses, singers, musicians, and the like' (42), whereas the handicrafts were comprised of traditionally working-class female labour such as needlework, teaching, and domestic service. But, female professions and handicrafts were shifting categories whose meanings changed in relation to one another in the course of the period. A key element that facilitated middle-class women's gradual entrance into the labour market as professionals rather than as amateurs were the opportunities provided by the growth of the art-industries. The art-industries was a term that was used to describe the manufacture of artistically designed merchandise, which included a wide and eclectic array of creative work, from the design of domestic ornaments such as silks, fire grates, chandeliers, and footstools, to artisanal production such as etching, engraving, pottery painting, and photograph tinting. In exploring the connections and contiguities between a number of different occupations, such as literature, painting, craft, and acting, this anthology aims to map out a series of pathways through which students and researchers can contextualise and historicise the relationship between women, work, and art.

What Is a Woman to Do? aims to contribute to a scholarly understanding of the aesthetics and economics of female artistic labour in the Victorian period. Arguing that 'women's art and feminism were inextricably intertwined' in the second half of the nineteenth century, Deborah Cherry has shown the way in which these two discourses came to define each other. In talking about women and art, she argues, 'Women claimed representation: in the world of work, in the profession of art, in civil society' (*Beyond the Frame* 9). Yet, as Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling stated in 1886, the Woman Question was also inevitably one 'of economics, the result of our capitalistic system' (215). This anthology draws together the sometimes cooperative and sometimes competing discourses of women's art, feminism, and economics. Through a comparative approach to different types of female artistry, it maps out the evolution of the Woman Question in the nineteenth century in a number of areas, such as the key discursive shifts in debates over the status and suitability of artistic professions for women, the creation of new forms of artistic labour, and women's changing relationship to the public sphere.

In an 1877 cartoon on light reading, *Punch* satirises the 'lady reader' who cannot find her 'place' within the one-volume edition of the novel she was reading as compared to the three-decker (30). While the cartoon mocks the light-headedness of female readers, it tells a broader story about women's quest for markers within newly emerging spaces that extend beyond the page and the closeted space of the circulating library to that of the marketplace itself. The wealth of material this anthology gathers together – from autobiographies, conduct manuals, diaries, prefaces, travelogues, and periodical articles from both the mainstream and the women's press – is itself a demonstration of the way in which women looked for markers of identity outside the familiar space of the home as they worked to represent themselves against existing stereotypes of femininity.

What made middle-class women's labour so prominent yet fraught is that it was this class that generated the terms of the debate through its control of the mechanisms of cultural discussion, principally the periodical press. In focusing on the role that these debates played in women's transformation into artistic labourers in the public arena, this book is heavily weighted in terms of how their challenging of and negotiating with social expectations of their roles was achieved through print media. However, at the same time, it also invites further scholarship in visual and material culture by providing a historical and conceptual framework within which researchers and students can explore the relationship between female artistic labour and the Woman Question.

This reader forms part of wider scholarly attempts to historicise the changing significance of work for women between the 1830s and 1890s; it focuses on this period not simply because it equates with the span of the Victorian era, but also because the 1830s and 1890s mark important moments of social, political, and legal change in the position of women. As Valerie Sanders has pointed out, the 1830s was 'in many ways a peculiar decade of the nineteenth century, marking the decline of Romanticism and only a gradual emergence of something not yet definable as "Victorianism"' ('Meteor Wreaths' 42). It was in this decade that Sarah Lewis and Sarah Stickney Ellis published their well-known conduct books, *Woman's Mission* (1839) and *The Women of England, Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* (1839). These would be highly influential in consolidating the domestic

ideal associated with the ideology of separate spheres. Sixty years later, while there remained a stress on women's role as guardians of the home, their educational, economic, and professional opportunities had been transformed.

In the period represented, middle-class women seeking artistic work benefited from the expansion of the literary market-place and the growth of the art and performance industries following the Great Exhibition of 1851; this growth was driven by the economic development of particular trades and industries and by broader demographic and political changes. It is well-known that this encompassed political agitation for the franchise and the campaign for women's rights, as well as widespread public debate about the need for women's education and work. By the 1890s, where our reader ends, the domestic ideal had been, if not supplanted, at least diluted by the New Woman and the increasing number of women entering public professions. There were '3700 female artists in England and Wales (27 per cent of the total), 6400 actresses (52 per cent), and 22,600 musicians (also 52 per cent)' (Gourvish and O'Day 23). While, as Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis have shown, there were certainly continuities between the New Woman and earlier expressions of femininity, the relation of this figure to the emerging modernist aesthetic places her beyond the scope of this study.

What Is a Woman to Do? complements a number of existing anthologies that approach the issue of women and work from a variety of perspectives: sociological, feminist, cultural studies, and, finally, book history; these include Patricia Hollis's *Women in Public* (1979), Harriet Devine Jump's *Women's Writing of the Victorian Period* (1998), Pamela Gerrish Nunn's *Canvassing: Recollections by Six Victorian Women Artists* (1986), Andrea Broomfield and Sally Mitchell's *Prose by Victorian Women. An Anthology* (1996), David J. Bradshaw and Suzanne Ozment's *The Voice of Toil: Nineteenth-Century British Writings about Work* (2000), and Solveig C. Robinson's *A Serious Occupation: Literary Criticism by Victorian Women Writers* (2003). Of these existing publications, Bradshaw and Ozment's excellent and wide-ranging anthology does cover different attitudes to male and female work, yet the specificity of debates about women's artistic labour is beyond the scope of its general remit. Conversely, Robinson and

Gerrish Nunn focus on single occupations, those of literary criticism and painting respectively, through the pioneering work of writers and artists such as Margaret Oliphant, Harriet Martineau, Mary Howitt, and Anna Jameson. Whereas Robinson explores questions of agency, aesthetics, and reputation, Gerrish Nunn takes into consideration the material and institutional constraints on women working in the fine arts as they struggled to achieve professional recognition.

Our aim with this anthology is to make available primary sources which range across the fields of women, work, and art and indicate how the general issues related to the Woman Question – such as the accessibility to work and the choices behind their chosen careers – were influenced by the specific debates surrounding female artistic labour. Such comparisons open up the obstacles and opportunities posed by the artistic professions and female handicrafts that women attempted to undertake and provide important insights into different conceptions of femininity, creativity, cultural production, and industry. For instance, while 'handicraftsman' was a word coined in the seventeenth century, this term does not seem to have been used before 1846, and Dinah Mulock Craik was one of the few who seem to use it as a way to distinguish between the manual skills involved in artisanal occupations by women from the mental work involved in the female professions. Even though Craik shifted attention away from a masculine to a feminine work ethic, she did not anticipate how some of these handicrafts developed into professions through the art-industries later in the century.

Whereas there is extensive scholarship on Victorian women and work, and more particularly on what Craik called the female professions (literature, painting, theatre, music), it is only recently that the growth of the art-industries and their prominent role in the opening up of employment opportunities for women in the second half of the nineteenth century has received significant critical attention (see Elliott and Helland, Schaffer, Zakreski). Of all the areas covered by this anthology, female authorship in the Victorian period has probably received the greatest critical attention; there are numerous excellent studies which look into the way in which nineteenth-century women of letters negotiated with publishers to achieve profit and popularity (see Brake, Fraser et al., Onslow). Most

recently, Linda H. Peterson's excellent exploration of the 'multifaceted question of how Victorian women entered the profession of letters – how they articulated their role as authors, negotiated the material conditions of authorship, and constructed myths of the woman author, often against the material realities' has revealed how integral their 'literary innovations and public self-constructions' were to the history of their profession (5–6). The way in which Peterson uses the '*becoming*' of the woman of letters as 'the state of always being in a process, of always seeking yet never quite achieving secure professional status' is a model of a nuanced historical understanding that could be applied to the study of other female professions and handicrafts (9).

Too often though debates about female authors and the literary marketplace have been treated in isolation from comparable developments in other professions. The Victorians did not share our sense of disciplinary divisions between the different fields of artistic labour despite the hierarchical relationships established between them. As Regenia Gagnier has argued, 'Rather than police firm boundaries, we should claim this tolerance, flexibility, and critique as the cherished state of the arts' (405). Part of the originality of our book is its attempt to redefine and enhance our understanding of women's relationship to work by foregrounding the connections and distinctions between those artistic *miliieux* regarded as high culture (literature, painting, theatre, music) and those classed as 'art-industry' – such as pottery-painting, art needlework, or engraving. Combining for the first time nineteenth-century criticism on literature and the visual arts, performance, and craftsmanship, this book is divided into four themed sections through which it aims to show how each of these fields of labour were subject to the same anxieties, as well as how the development of new artistic media had an active role in shaping debates about the nature of women's work and their role in the public sphere. Thus, Section One demonstrates the different ideological positions in the debates on the domestic ideal surrounding the transition of women from idleness to serious occupation. Sections Two and Three explore the impact of artistic labour upon perceptions of feminine sensibility and aesthetics, and the conflicting views of women towards the pragmatics of their own creative labour as it was expressed through vocations, trades, and professions. Finally, Section

Four reviews the complex relationship between paid labour and female respectability, fame, and notoriety, which was the result of the growing prominence of the figure of the public woman.

The focus of this anthology on the nature of female artistic labour means that it is primarily concerned with the middle-class woman. In 'False Morality of Lady Novelists' (1859), W. R. Greg suggested that the 'educated lady' inevitably turned to novel writing rather than to millinery as a matter of class convention: 'There are vast numbers of lady novelists, for much the same reason that there are vast numbers of sempstresses. Thousands of women have nothing to do, and yet are under the necessity of doing something. Every woman can handle a needle *tant bien que mal*: every unemployed woman, therefore, takes to sewing' (53). For Greg, the phenomenon of the 'lady novelist' reflects genteel women's predilection for 'creative' labour suitable for their social and intellectual status, even though such suitability is a matter of presumption on her part given she lacks any professional training. That women's lack of access to the professions was often related to issues of training is also exemplified by a satirical article in *Punch* responding to suggestions that there should be professional schools of cookery for women. Rhetorically asking whether cookery should be considered as 'one of the High Arts' because it was 'generically' 'masculine' like 'poetry, painting, and music', *Punch* declares its belief that women's training best served to render her 'as a thorough Cook, indeed an "Angel in the House."' (103).

By contextualising a number of texts writing specifically about middle-class artistic labour, this anthology aims to give insight into the ways in which working women negotiated not only a gendered but also a class-based subjectivity. At one level, the profusion of debates about their quest for purposeful work and concomitant discourses about status and respectability is a reflection of the middle-class domination of the social and cultural landscape. As Bradshaw and Ozment have justly noted, whereas there was no shortage of debate about what under-employed middle-class women were to do, 'a much greater number of women born into much worse circumstances received much less attention' (630). *What Is a Woman to Do?* complements the extensive scholarship on representations of working-class women's labour (the figure of the seamstress being the obvious example),

as well as that on the way working-class women expressed their experience of work and the need for trade unions and factory reform (see Alexander, Boos, Harris, Zlotnick). However, one reason that this valuable work falls outside the scope of this study is that it often concerns itself with alienated labour and the over-determining effect of economic need. As Gerry Holloway has shown, up through 1914, laundry work, domestic service, and manufacturing were still the main employments of working-class women, in spite of the new opportunities in shop and clerical work (96). By contrast, the narrative of women's engagement with the professions is, in general, a middle-class woman's story.

The focus on middle-class artistic labour, however, does allow us to foreground more complex relationships within particular female professions and industries which go unnoticed when obvious hierarchies, such as those between the highbrow and popular arts, are the sole focus of study. In some professions, notably theatre as opposed to the fine arts, the involvement of women across classes has been well-established. Yet, even here, there is a risk that while much attention has been given to the achievements of a few notable actresses and the growing respectability of the stage, this elides the distinctions within the industry. As Tracy C. Davis has noted, the archival record demonstrates that 'the advantages of middle-class respectability attributed to the late-Victorian stage were actually enjoyed by very few performers – and even fewer women. The reality for most was a low working wage, social ostracism, and the constant threat of unemployment' (xiii). The anthology invites comparison not only between different types of female artistry, but also highlights the gradations within them.

It was not always the case that social distinctions mapped onto divisions between professions. Joyce Pedersen has interestingly argued that liberal feminist arguments concerning work attempted to move beyond socio-economic markers of class; her work traces the way in which 'they spoke in terms of differences of "education" or "intelligence" rather than differences of wealth or market position' (36). In this context, we can similarly begin to see other emerging referents of class in relation to female artistic labour. One of the issues that repeatedly emerges from the selections in this anthology is that status distinctions between different professions were often made on the basis of the perceived degree of creativity involved. Practices

seeming mechanical – such as typewriting, telegraphing, and shorthand reporting – were seen as being of lower status than 'the many branches of high-class trade manufacture' requiring application of design or training (e.g. wood-engraving, chromo-lithography) that would enable a 'capable artist' to earn £12 to £18 from a completed drawing (Graves 472).

The selected material in this anthology allows for a more in-depth exploration of how the evolution of female professions and the art and performance industries influenced broader liberal conceptions of art and labour, which were most commonly considered in relation to the male worker (see Danahay, Kestner, Tosh). Recently, Tim Barringer has effectively demonstrated how the image of the masculine labouring body in the nineteenth century came to signify an idealised form of aesthetic subjectivity for the male artist. As Barringer shows, the gendering of work as masculine was accompanied by a similar iconography which associated the woman with the domestic interior and 'invisible domestic labour' (32). This visual binary, he argues, allowed the male artist to negotiate between different categories of 'bodily' and 'mental' work. Whereas bodily work was associated with the labour theory of value and the notion of social productivity, mental or 'intellectual' labour, such as art and literature, was feminised through its lack of physicality (15–16). Drawing on the example of Ford Madox Brown and his famous painting *Work* (1852–1863), Barringer traces the way in which Brown constructed an artistic identity that identified his own manual labour as a painter with the physical ideal represented by the central figure of the painting in order to 'circumvent the critique of intellectual labour as unmasculine' (80). Gendered notions of work, therefore, become iconographic categories through which the Victorian male artist defines and performs his own masculine subjectivity.

The connection that Barringer traces between art and masculinity invites an exploration of the challenges faced by women workers who sought to define their own selfhood within existing aesthetic traditions. Kristina Huneault has argued that the persistence of the gendered iconography of work made the woman worker, when represented, a more difficult figure to assimilate:

In the face of such cultural associations, female labourers embodied a double bind: to the extent that they conformed to this vision of labour, working women must needs sacrifice their femininity; to the extent that they conformed to the demands of gender, they were outside mainstream conceptions of labour. Such contradictory associations signal one key way in which working women were a wrench in the works of Victorian subject positioning. They slipped the gears of smoothly functioning social expectations. At the same time, however, it was impossible simply to ignore them, for their importance to the prosperity and comfort of Victorian society was inescapable. Thus, the ideologically contradictory existence of the Victorian working woman was, in itself, a challenge to the restrictive modes of categorical thinking upon which so much modern conceptualization of identity has depended. (8)

Though Huneault is writing specifically about visual representations of working-class women at the *fin de siècle*, the challenge the image of the working woman posed to social formulations of identity had been significant much earlier and across class distinctions. A number of critical studies have investigated how women working in the fine arts throughout the nineteenth century represented themselves (Nunn, Cherry, Orr). While these studies have provided valuable insights into the ways in which fine artists constructed a professional identity, enlarging the frame to include the interaction of their work with the increasingly commodity-driven industrial arts helps to situate these questions of agency and feminine aesthetics more firmly within broader nineteenth-century narratives of economic development, progress, and nation-building.

As the selections in this anthology make clear, art and the production of aesthetically pleasing commodities was one of the areas of Victorian society in which women's importance to the prosperity and comfort of the nation was most visible. What emerges out of sustained attention to this work is the possibility for understanding a historicised conception of a feminine aesthetic of labour. While mid-Victorian discourses on self-reliance placed weight on work as a mode of disciplining body and mind (e.g. Samuel Smiles), as Barringer notes, the feminised notion of mental work was also tied to an ethical theory of labour through the connection of labour and pleasure. This ethic, most famously espoused by John Ruskin in 'On the Nature of Gothic' (1853), was succinctly encapsulated by William Morris's statement that 'Art is the expression of man's pleasure

in labour' (i). Carolyn Lesjak has recently argued for the 'inseparability' of labour and pleasure when considering the novelistic representation of work. Arguing for their historical contingency, Lesjak criticises the way in which labour and pleasure are often divided in contemporary studies of the Victorian novel through the distinction between industrial and domestic fiction. As new forms of labour appeared, she claims, so did new types and understandings of pleasure. Admitting to their linkage can also help to point towards the interdependence of a number of gendered concepts of artistic labour – such as, paid/unpaid, productive/unproductive, amateur/professional, necessary/vocational – all of which are explored through the four sections of this anthology.

Women's interest in creative occupations, whether in the art-industries, performance or the literary market-place, can be explained in terms of a double rejection: a reaction against the frustration of the domestic ideal, but also a rejection of the alienating forces of industrial capitalism. On the surface, the ideological divide between art and industry seems difficult to reconcile. Industrial work signifies mass production, the division of labour, and the alienated worker; in contrast, creative work bespeaks individual endeavour and personal discrimination. The division of labour and the social specializations industrialization involved created questions of what held people together in a commercial society organized around market relations. In opposition to the Marxist narrative of struggle, the feminine aesthetic of labour imagines an ideal of cooperation within competition, creativity applied to industrial reproduction, and pastimes that become professions: a creative labour in which labour is pleasure.

In 'The Great Unrepresented' (1866), Margaret Oliphant has succinctly claimed that women did not have 'the slightest desire' to 'copy' men's 'occupations'. 'We have our own', she said, 'which are at least as important, and more in our way' (379). As part of an attempt to account for the particularities of this modern feminine aesthetic as a product and a response to industrial capitalism, this anthology asks, in part, the following questions: What is the relationship between artistic labour and femininity? How is women's aesthetic sensibility shaped through the debates on the nature of artistic labour? How do women reconfigure the meanings of work through their artistic practice? What kind of values do they attach to their artistic

production? What are the myths they institute around their professions and themselves as artistic labourers?

The connection between women's artistic labour and the economic sphere that this collection traces also raises questions about women's place in the public domain. The educationalist Emily Davies was typical of the way in which Victorian women mercilessly undercut the supposed boundaries between the private and the public:

Let us look at this bugbear – this *bête-noire* called 'public life' – fairly in the face. What is it we mean by it? Is there any woman living who does not go more or less into public; and what is it that makes the difference between justifiable and unjustifiable publicity? (Davies 681)

Davies's negotiation of woman's sphere was predicated on the mutuality of the domestic and the public, which was motivated by her desire to reinvent them as transitional and interspatial territories. Victorian women's troubled relationship with what has generally been regarded as a masculine, bourgeois, public sphere has been similarly contested by recent critical studies, which explore women's quest for a third locus operating outside the apparent binary between domestic and public. While critics such as Anne Friedberg, Krista Lysack, Erika Diane Rappaport, and Deborah Parsons have examined ways in which activities like shopping provided the impetus and excuse for Victorian women to venture out into the public, other scholars like Lawrence Klein, Simon Morgan and Amanda Vickery have identified 'alternative counter-public spheres' – such as the salon or the pleasure garden – whose modes of sociability enabled female artists to operate more freely and with more influence.

Conversely though, it has been argued that by viewing woman's influence as occurring only within feminised activities or counter-public spheres relegates femininity to spaces that remain alternative to mainstream culture (see Batchelor and Kaplan, Eger et al.). Anna Mary Howitt's mingling of home with social life in her utopian construction of a Sisterhood of Art in *An Art Student in Munich* (1853), or Anne Thackeray Ritchie's idealisation of the female school of design on 31 Sloane Street as a familial community of artistic labourers in 'Arachne in Sloane Street' (1874) are

among the examples of the way in which women's participation in public work was legitimated by drawing on religious and domestic discourses. Nina Auerbach has argued that female communities are 'emblems of self-sufficiency which create their own corporate reality, evoking both wishes and fears' (5). The ways in which female rivalry is silenced in these pieces offer different models for imagining how women challenged dominant constructions of the public sphere through their travelling to Europe or the creation of anti-societies.

While women's exclusion from trades and professions identified as masculine is stressed in nineteenth-century accounts of female employment – as for example, Josephine Butler's discussion of the maulsticks which female china painters were deprived of by male colleagues jealous of their skills (13) – feminine culture as it relates to the economic sphere has been associated with the consumption of commodities rather than with their production, with discourses of sisterhood rather than rivalry, and with traditional notions of self-sacrifice rather than the individualised rhetoric of professional goals. It is important to stress how the public sphere was shaped both ideologically and materially through the conflicting discourses around work and gender. The supposed absence of women's influence in the shaping and defining of dominant bourgeois notions in the economic sphere was not, in fact, produced by their absence from the workplace. Rather, it was the product of a masculinised representation of artistry and industry which tended to render women invisible.

The project in which *What Is a Woman to Do?* participates is one of historiography in that it seeks to make women's influence on the public sphere more visible through its focus on the complexities of female artistic labour and its history as it was written by women imagining, describing, and encountering their work. It is possible to identify a graduated process of change within mainstream bourgeois discourse in writings that discuss women's industries and their workplaces, and that offer practical advice on subjects such as how to earn money. The way in which women negotiated their public identities as artistic labourers contributed to broader changes in the community of the workplace and the market for the educated female worker. By the end of the century the New Woman certainly did not submit to the 'conclusion to which even Tennyson's Princess was driven, that

woman's sphere is to be provided for, and not to provide' ('Queen Bees or Working Bees' 670). It is women's work as producers – producers of commodities, of culture, of discourses of labour, and of changing conceptions of the public sphere – that this anthology represents.

SECTION ONE:**Negotiating the Domestic Ideal**