HAWLEY, CELIA LEGBAND. M.A. Complicated Submissions: Sati and Subversion in Three Women's Novels of the Raj. (2022)
Directed by Dr. Anne Wallace. 37 pp.

What can literary studies tell us about the Hindu custom of *sati*? The nineteenth century fiction of Flora Annie Steel, Maud Diver, and Krupabai Sattianadhan, written contemporaneously with the gendered norms it portrays, provides a representation of the patriarchal dynamic between Hindu men and women that might be implicated in the extreme act of widow self-immolation. This study examines a novel by each woman author, Steel's *On the Face of the Waters*, Diver's *Lilimani,* and Satthianadhan's *Kamala* to uncover extant cultural expectations and behaviors that contributed to the acceptance of the practice of *sati* and to its mediated resistance and subversion.

HAWLEY, CELIA LEGBAND. M.A. Appledore in Bloom: Thaxter, Hassam, and a Flowering of Art (2022)
Directed by Dr. Karen Kilcup. 52 pp.

The North Atlantic island of Appledore in the Isles of Shoals inspired American artists Celia Thaxter and Childe Hassam to prolific creation before and after the turn of the twentieth century. This paper argues that the island acted as their muse and is an archive of their experience. Celia Laighton Thaxter and Childe Hassam, author/gardener and Impressionist painter, respectively, spent many summers on the small island over the course of decades, Thaxter hosting an arts salon and Hassam joining her and a cadre of America's creative elite in exclusive community. Thaxter produced poetry, prose, journalism, and children's stories as she annually cultivated an ornamental flower garden; Hassam painted Thaxter's garden and the contours of the island's coastline in oil, watercolor, and pastel. The pair collaborated on Thaxter's literary production, and Hassam went on to document the topography and geology of the island for years after Thaxter's death, creating a collection of Impressionist works that showcase Appledore's rocky natural beauty. Together, in words and images, they created a record of Appledore that made it an archival place. A replica of Thaxter's original garden is maintained today and can be visited courtesy The University of New Hampshire's Shoals Marine Laboratory and its collaboration with Cornell University.

COMPLICATED SUBMISSIONS: SATI AND SUBVERSION IN THREE WOMEN'S NOVELS OF THE RAJ

AND

APPLEDORE IN BLOOM: THAXTER, HASSAM, AND A FLOWERING OF ART

by

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Approved by

Dr. Anne Wallace
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DEDICATION

To Grant, who gave me the unexpected gift of motherhood, I dedicate all the academic work of my later years on this, his 38th birthday.

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis written by Celia Legband Hawley has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

My interest in the literature and history of the nineteenth century has led me to explore two very different projects, one set in British India and one in America. Both investigations have at their centers the authorial work of women. In India's Raj, British and indigenous woman writers provide through fiction a window onto the Hindu practice of *sati,* a widow's sacrificial act of self-immolation on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband; in America, poet and gardener Celia Thaxter emerges as a prominent contributor to and patron of the arts. Thaxter's island home of Appledore, Maine, becomes her muse, as it does for many of the cultural elites she introduces to the Isles of Shoals, most notably Impressionist painter Childe Hassam.

In the literature I selected from the British Raj, women writers capture gendered societal and interpersonal norms in relationship narratives. The practice of *sati* is easily (mis)understood by outsiders as an example of the exotic and opaque society of the East, and as such invites the deeper and more reflective examination of these contemporaneous writers. I argue that close readings of their novels provide evidence of nineteenth century women's growing discomfort with and resistance to the ritual of the tradition-bound act of *sati.*

American poet, prose stylist, and flower gardener Celia Thaxter was influenced by and involved in many of the artistic trends of the second half of the nineteenth century, including the Progressive Era and its gardening ethos, Aestheticism and its ideal of beauty, and the nature writing of the Transcendentalist Movement. As hostess of a summer arts salon in her island cottage home, Thaxter's path intersected those of numerous famed writers and thinkers. At Thaxter's invitation Childe Hassam traveled to Appledore early in his career, setting his course for painting the island over the next three decades. In that time Hassam would produce dozens of

oils, watercolors, and pastels of the Shoals, creating Appledore in paint as Thaxter did in words. Together they created such a particular portrait of the rocky outcrop that it is still visited today, and is, I argue, a living archive of their artistic work.

CHAPTER II: COMPLICATED SUBMISSIONS: SATI AND SUBVERSION IN THREE WOMEN'S NOVEL'S OF THE RAJ

The handprints on the walled gates across the northern state of Rajasthan in India have become iconic. Left behind by female hands of countless generations, the stains of henna or vermilion powder and turmeric are the ritual gesture of *sati vrat* (vow to become a *sati*) (Belli 230). Most of the individual women who made their personal stamps before passing through village gates to the funeral pyre within remain anonymous; if an occasional epigraph appears, it contains the name of the *sati's* husband, along with the dates of his life, and perhaps the *sati's* natal home (230). *Sati*, or widow burning, can be called suttee in Anglo-Indian usage (Kapila 232) and refers to both a person and a practice. Alternatively, either term, *sati* or suttee, can designate a good wife or good widow, meaning one devoted to her spouse, and in the case of the widow, one whose purity derives from her chasteness (Olivelle and Olivelle 32). It is unsurprising that the custom attracts attention, resolute feelings, and controversy, even within the Hindu community where it has lingered into the twenty-first century. This study of fiction by three nineteenth century women authors, two Anglo-Indian and one Indian, examines representations of the contemporary patriarchal dynamic between Hindu men and women that might be implicated in such an extreme act. Flora Annie Steel's *On the Face of the Waters* (*OFW*), Maud Diver's *Lilimani: A Study in Possibilities,* and Krupabai Satthianadhan's *Kamala: The Story of a Hindu Child-Wife* illuminate gendered norms for religious Hindu women extant in nineteenth century British India, depicting the cultural veneration of male over female that is the foundation of *sati.*

Sati is represented in eye-witness accounts, travel literature, news stories, the records of history, and, of course, fiction. The significance of this study extends into the present, with *The Times* of London headline of May 23rd, 2006, proclaiming: "Relatives are Held After Widow Dies on Funeral Pyre" (Dhillon). That all-too modern echo of a practice alluded to in Virgil's *Aeneid*[1] and incised in stone memorials thousands of years earlier refers to family repercussions for coercing the sacrifice of widow Vidyawati Singh. A more typical account comes from a slightly earlier report, a Reuters wire story originating in Deorala, India, that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* on 16 September 1987: "Thousands Watch Indian Bride Die on Husband's Funeral Pyre." In defiance of a government ban, hundreds of thousands of Indians turned out "to honor" an 18-year-old bride who burned to death along with the corpse of her recently deceased husband: "Roop Kanwar, a bride of eight months dressed in her brocaded wedding sari, sat on the blazing pyre to commit *sati*, the self-immolation seen as the ultimate act of fidelity in ancient India but outlawed for centuries." The bride's death in the western state of Rajasthan quickly followed that of her husband. Presiding Hindu priests under perfumed and flowered canopy were joined by multitudes of spectators. In the words of Rajinder Singh, a twenty-year-old student willing to admit he witnessed the act and quoted in the article: "She had an aura about her. She was calm as the flames enveloped her. When I arrived, half her body had burned. She sat on the funeral pyre with folded hands. There was no sign of panic on her face. She was chanting mantras" (*Los Angeles Times*).

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[1] In book IV of *The Aeneid*, Virgil writes of a passionate Dido: "She climbed the pyre and bared the Dardan sword … 'I die unavenged,' she said, 'but let me die. This way, this way, a blessed relief to go Into the undergloom. Let the cold Trojan, Far at sea, drink in this conflagration And take with him the omen of my death'" (Fitzgerald 119-120).

Understanding the cultural logic that has carried this tradition into our current day requires an exploration beyond its spectacle. *Sati* cannot be weighed without knowledge of the harsh realities of its only alternative, Indian widowhood. If a woman did not give up her life along with the remains of her husband, an expectation more prevalent among the wealthier high castes, she was consigned to what has been called the 'death in life' that was the widow's lot.

As *sati* has survived into our time, so too has the austerity meted out to the nineteenth century widow. Another late twentieth century newspaper article, this one from the 1999 *Boston Globe*, depicts the contemporary state of poverty for millions of Indian women, cast out of their homes after the death of their husbands. The article was precipitated by another case of *sati,* in Vrindavan, India, and carries the byline of Marion Lloyd for an interview of Kamala Ghosh, a woman who at that time ran a shelter for abandoned widows in her town south of New Delhi. Ghosh explains that in her culture women are widely expected to do penance for their husbands' deaths and are often thrown out of their homes by sons who do not want another mouth to feed. Those same sons can be relied upon to support fathers who are widowers, just as widowers are free to remarry while widows are discouraged from ever taking another husband. Ghosh goes on the characterize the overall condition of widows: "either someone will put something in your mouth or you die" (Lloyd 8:3). They must choose between begging or devoting themselves to the gods in one of a handful of so-called widows' villages, where thousands of widows spend their days squatting on the temple floors and chanting in exchange for handfuls of rice and lentils. "On the other hand, with sati, you burn yourself once and for all" (Lloyd). High caste widows may live in better circumstances, but the state of social death is the same; they are expected to be maintained by their in-laws, and live life as dependents, without the status and protection afforded by a husband (Sangari and Vaid 1286). Dorothy Stein recorded the inescapable

everyday reality in 1978, beginning with the sentence: “It is not hard to see why death might be preferred to widowhood.” She continues:

> Prescriptions for the proper conduct of a widow included instructions that she should not eat more than one very plain meal a day, that she should perform the most menial tasks, never sleep in bed, leave home only to go to the temple, keep out of sight at festivals (since she was inauspicious to everyone but her own children), wear nothing but the drabbest clothes and … no jewelry. Perhaps most humiliating for a high-born lady was having her head shaved monthly by an untouchable male barber. All this was held to be necessary for the sake of her husband’s soul and to keep herself from being reborn as a female animal. (Stein 255)

The umbrella of tradition may give shelter to cultural and historical practices in all societies, facilitating acceptance and perhaps even shielding them from scrutiny. In the case of the ancient ritual of *sati,* a rite exclusive to Hindu wives, a widow’s fate was shaped in the shadow of the culture’s long-established patriarchy. The dictates of caste, family and peer expectations, religion and other venerated belief systems worked in concert to curtail the widow’s agency. Ironically, the women authors of nineteenth century India who engaged the practice in their writing did so under the constraints imposed by the male-dominant culture of the Raj. The varying perspectives of these writers reveal aspects of the day-to-day gendered realities that contributed to the normalization and longevity of *sati*. Their words speak of the general position of women in Indian society, and to the specific question of what it meant in that time and place to be a good wife. Steel was an Englishwoman of passion and imagination, a relative outsider in her adopted society, but an informed and sharp observer; Diver, culturally closer to India, was native-born and lived in India after marrying in England; and finally, Satthianadhan brought the cultural and ethnic intimacy of being India-born and reared, though the years of her short life were few.

The terminology associated with the ancient practice of *sati* is itself revealing of

complexity and requires clarification. A Hindu widow becomes s*ati* if she immolates herself on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband's body; the practice of immolation of a Hindu widow in this way is also named *sati* (*OED*). Although the words *sati* and suttee are often used interchangeably, I will use '*sati'* for the immolated widow and the act, and 'suttee' for the living woman, both good wife during her husband's lifetime and surviving good widow. These usages appear in the fiction of all three authors under my consideration, where they carry the additional signification of word origins and religious/cultural understandings. '*Sati*' from Sanskrit means faithful or virtuous wife, the feminine of *sat*, good, wise, honest (*OED*). It connotes a chaste woman. What would likely have been known to a contemporaneous Hindu reader, though less probably to an English one or an audience outside of India, are the stages that constitute a woman's transformation into a *sati*. Each of these confers a degree of understanding that can remain unseen in a singular focus on the act of self-immolation. All three writers, Maud Diver and Krupabai Satthianadhan in particular, inform their fiction with this more nuanced awareness.

Lindsay Harlan explains the process of transformation in *Religion and Rajput Women: The Ethic of Protection in Contemporary Narratives*. *Pativrata* refers to a wife who has made a vow, or *vrat,* of obedience to a husband or *pati.* While the devotion implied by the vow of a wife is commonplace in the wider world, the protection it promises is not. A devoted Hindu wife is seen as server and protector of her husband, and her capacity to shield him is increased by the constancy of her performance of wifely duties to him and to his parents. Consequently, a husband's death can be blamed on his wife as evidence of the inadequacy of her reverence for him. She escapes culpability at the cost of accompanying his remains on his cremation pyre. Her *vrat* to burn alongside his body transforms her from a pativrata into *a sativrata*: a good woman (*sati*) who formulates an intention to die and so enters the second stage of the transformation

process, that of *satimata.* She is entitled to that honorific when she perishes on her husband's pyre, and some believe her death endows her with supernatural powers, where she joins other family *satimatas* in protecting the welfare of the family she has left behind. The practice of *sati,* then, originates in the idea of an afterlife and the power of a dead woman's devotion to safeguard both her husband and her family (Harlan 119). The visible sense of peace and calm that is often cited as enveloping the *sati*, as illustrated in the *L.A. Times* article above, shares its name with that of the highest state of meditation in yoga, *samadhi*. It derives from the Sanskrit 'a placing together,' in which the distinctions between subject and object disappear and unity with creation is attained (*OED)*.

As illustrated by the two modern news stories cited earlier, the rite can be voluntarily undertaken or coerced from a surviving female spouse (Roye 281). To prevent widows from changing their minds and trying to escape from the fire, exits from the pyre were sometimes blocked, and roofs of wood were designed to collapse on the widow's head (Lester and Stack 306). Eyewitnesses in the nineteenth-century reported that child widows aged eight and ten were sometimes forced onto the funeral pile and bound hand and foot if they tried to escape (306). Conversely, we also know that some widows asked to be bound and thrown onto the pyre to prevent them fleeing and escaping their duty (307). There are credible reports as far back as the seventeenth century that link priests with the administration of "a certain beverage to stupefy and disorder the senses, which takes from [the widow] all apprehension of her preparations for death" (Sharma 27). Some widows were drugged with opium (Lester and Stack 306). Indian author Cornelia Sorabji's 1901 short story "A Living Sacrifice," for example, delivers a reversal of the anticipated plotline as pertains to the use of opium in an immolation. Set in the 1828 Ganges Valley, the text's 'rightful' *sati* is newly widowed Tara, twin sister to Dwarki. But

opium, Dwarki, notes "… is useful on occasions" (80). Dwarki will trick her twin, who is wholly fearful of death by fire, into taking the opium to relieve Tara of the pressure to sacrifice herself and will then take her sister's place on the funeral pyre while "… the real widow lay opium-drugged in the safely remote storeroom of the little establishment" (81).

Originating as a high caste practice within the northern Rajput clan, where it remained most prevalent, *sati* spread to lower castes who wanted to co-opt its status. The custom quite naturally attracted the attention of women writers living and working in India during the second half of the nineteenth century, the era of the British Empire, or Raj. Historian Margaret MacMillan notes that writing was an occupation that attracted numerous ambitious women in India, given that it was cheap and portable (206). And as Jenny Sharpe reminds us, the documentary record is subject to its own confines: "History, forming the conditions of existence to the literary imagination, places limits and restrictions on what can be represented at any one moment. Fiction is granted the license to imagine events as they might have happened or in a way that history has failed to record" (Sharpe 21). The personal and interpersonal, the idiosyncratic, and the interiority of its subjects – all these are the province of the storyteller. In the more succinct formulation of critic Pierre Macherey, it is the absent text of history that can be seen in the margins of literature (Macherey 85).

That said, our understanding of later nineteenth century India must include its changed role and status vis a vis the British, who originally came as East India Company traders,[2]

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[2] Or, as Steel writes in the opening of her novel, "…the feeling in the early fifties, when the commercial instincts of the West met the uncommercial ones of the East in open market for the first time, sharpened the antagonism of race immensely; that inevitable antagonism when the creed of one people is that Time Is Money, of the other that Time is Naught" (*OFW* 2).

but who imposed direct rule beginning in 1858. Following the well-known 1857 Mutiny, when Indian soldiers in the Bengal army revolted and killed their British commanding officers, the administration of India was taken over by the British Government. On 1 November 1858 the Raj was born (de Courcy 10), and its government consisted wholly of British officials. Installing an Indian Civil Service which would become the backbone of the Raj, English administrators replaced commercial traders, and Queen Victoria was later proclaimed Empress of India. As the rule of the Crown took over, Parliament's involvement in Indian affairs increased: a total of 196 Acts concerning the continent was passed between 1858 and 1947 (United Kingdom: Parliament). Of the many changes that came with the Raj, one that would have affected the Anglo-British authors was the much-diminished amount of social contact between British women and Indians (MacMillan 60). During this time of governance by the British, social and political barriers between themselves and the Indians came to seem insurmountable, and thus the fiction was characterized by an acute awareness of race (Winks 53). The resulting separation of the races compounded the strict behavioral rules of division already in place in Hindu society. *Purdah* secluded Hindu women in the name of modesty and chastity, and included separate living quarters, or *zenana* (MacMillan 59), as well as the clothed sequester of head to foot veiling. The colonial system thus worked in tandem with the distinctions of the hereditary classes into which society in India had been partitioned from time immemorial, castes (*OED*) which allowed no social intercourse among them.

In the time of the fictional settings of the three novels considered here, the intermixing of East and West out of commercial self-interest had transformed into a hegemonic Western mission of civilizing aloofness and perceived racial superiority. The Raj itself formed what Sharpe might have considered a 'system of knowledge' (21) against which these novels

need be read. In recognizing the racial hierarchy of colonialism, Sharpe's understanding is that "…The middleclass English woman, oscillating between a dominant position of race and a subordinate one of gender, [had] a restricted access to colonial authority" (12). Indian women authors, of course, worked from a position of even less influence. From within the complexities of their own positions, all these novelists engaged with the prevailing white male structures of power. In so doing they began to reveal the conditions of Hindu wives, whom Antonio Gramsci would term 'subalterns,' meaning those of 'inferior rank,' subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes (Ashcroft et al. 244). Gayatri Spivak has more recently looked at the condition of gendered subjects and of Indian women in particular, for "both as an object of colonialist historiography and as a subject of resistance, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant" (247). In the gendered rungs of the caste system, then, Hindu women and widows of all classes are treated as inferior to their male counterparts. Second-class too are the white British women of the male-dominant Raj. We may suppose that the latter's compassion for the position of the former may well have been the result of this relationship of parallel subservience.

Anglo-Indian author Flora Annie Steel was the wife of a British officer in the Indian Civil Service and one of the most popular British novelists of the late nineteenth century Raj (MacMillan 14). A memsahib, or married European or upper-class woman (*OED*), Steel, unlike many of her fellow English wives in India, had in her twenty-two years on the subcontinent learned to speak, read, and write Punjabi and made a point of learning the language of local villages wherever she and her husband were posted (Crane and Johnston 73). Her facility with local vernaculars allowed her a deeper level of engagement with native life and society, and she invested her time in various civic projects, gaining entry into a world hidden to most Europeans

(73). As Steel explains in her autobiography, *The Garden of Fidelity* (*Garden*): "'At Kasur there was literally *no one* but the natives. … Therefore I had no choice. I had to observe – or die…'" (104). Though a supporter of British rule in India, she made a genuine attempt, in all her Indian writing, to interpret the country and its culture using Indocentric rather than Eurocentric measures (Crane and Johnston 74). This sympathetic representation of British and Indian perspectives, devoid of exoticism, is demonstrable in her most popular novel, *On the Face of the Waters: A Tale of the Mutiny,* published to great acclaim in 1896. Ralph Crane and Anna Johnston report that the success of the novel elevated Steel's popularity and celebrity status to equal that of Rudyard Kipling (76). *The New York Times* reported that its sales reached 500,000 copies (2); *The National Review* in Britain stated that "it requires no recommendation here. The public sprang at it without prompting" (148). Having left India for a new home in Scotland, Steel ventured back again to India to collect information for her Mutiny novel. After a winning negotiation over the standard American royalties then paid to British authors, Steel recorded in her autobiography that "The success of the book was immediate. The bookstalls [in America] were piled with it" (*Garden* 228). In *On the Face of the Waters* Steel memorably stages an uncustomary act of *sati* by involving a Westerner: Tara, a Rajput widow, will sacrifice her life, not over her own deceased husband, but out of her frustrated love for an Englishman.

Very unlike the approach taken by Steel is that of Maud Diver in *Lilamani*, published in 1911. Diver's is a more stereotypical work of imperial India, a romance, but one out of the nineteenth century Anglo-Indian literary mainstream in its portrayal of a happy interracial love story and marriage. Anglo-Indian romances, also called "Indian Romance" (Stieg qtd. in Kapila 218) or "Anglo-Indian domestic novels" (Sainsbury qtd in Kapila 218), were produced between 1880 and 1930 and were immensely popular with British women readers in India, England, and

in the British colonies (Kapila 218). An early study by Bhupal Singh recognizes the romances as a distinctive genre and classifies them by plot and theme (Singh qtd in Kapila 218). Within this genre, interracial romances (usually between an English man and an Indian woman) constitute another sub-genre and often end with the death of the Indian woman. Maud Diver is one of the few authors whose three interracial romances, *Lilamani* among them, have happy endings (Kapila 218). Placing the character of Lilamani in a setting outside of her native India, Diver will familiarize readers with the strict codes of behavior expected of an upper caste Hindu female and wife. Diver was the daughter of an officer in the British Indian Army, and like many British children born and brought up in India, was sent home to be educated in England. The author went on to publish numerous books about India, nonfiction as well as fiction, and saw *Lilamani* issued in America as *Awakening: A Study in Possibilities* in 1911[3] (Kemp et al).

Finally, Krupabai Satthianadhan, who was born in the Bombay Presidency in 1862, has the distinction with *Kamala* of being the first Indian woman to write a novel in English, and by so doing, introduced the Indian heroine into English fiction (*Kamala* xii). The Hindu character of Kamala educates the reader in the female life-experience within the indigenous male-dominated structures of nineteenth century India. (*Kamala* 3). A young girl when she began boarding with European missionary women, Satthianadhan was inspired and guided by an American woman doctor and entered Madras Medical College in 1878 (*Saguna* xiii). Forced to

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[3]The new title recalls that of Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening,* published in 1899. The themes of the two are, however, antithetical. Diver's tale of an Indian wife's total obeisance to her English husband, an interracial romance, was still probably more palatable to readers accustomed to pieties of late Victorian fiction than that of Chopin's open treatment of female marital infidelity. Chopin's novel was largely denounced on moral grounds by original reviewers (Corse and Westervelt 140).

withdraw due to depression, she began writing. Using the nom de plume, 'An Indian Lady,' Satthianadhan published articles in several Indian journals and magazines. After battling both mental and physical infirmity for most of her short life, she died in 1894 at age 32, the same year *Kamala* was published as a book after having first been serialized in the *Madras ChristianCollege Magazine* (*Saguna* xiv). The 'Note on the Text' that precedes the Introduction to *Kamala* tells readers of our own century that when published, the novel was extremely well received by both Indian and British readers, and that the original title, *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life* has been altered to *Kamala: The Story of a Hindu Child Wife* (*Saguna* ix).[4]

The writings of these colonial era authors allow readers to construct a more authentic understanding of indigenous practices that had been exoticized or even caricatured in the West. The entirety of the colonial project and Empire in particular had been romanticized for back-home consumption. Importantly, then, along with *sati* Steel portrays the fate of the Hindu widow who does not self-immolate, as does Satthianadhan, while Diver shows us the consequences of marriage to an ethnic outsider, which looks much the same as the renunciation and internal exile faced by widows. Steel opens her novel with Tara Devi, a Rajput widow, in the unusual circumstance of being a near-*sati*. Tara will choose her own spectacular death, claiming *sati*, at the novel's conclusion, but for its preceding length she is living the consequences of "a scandalous dishonor," that of having been pulled from her husband's funeral pyre, "when she was drugged, too, and quite happy" (19). Tara's own brother, a sepoy, or Indian soldier in the

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[4] We can only speculate that the change in subtitle might reflect the more modern perspective that the marriage of the "little girl" Kamala, the child wife of the original title and a descriptor used repeatedly throughout the text, might need now be recognized as other than a typical Hindu life.

British army, refers to the low position of Hindu widowhood as living "the life of a dog, which was all that was left to her among her own people." Though he admires his sister, "he would not for worlds have touched the hand which had lain in his from the beginning of all things. It was unclean now" (20). Having been saved from the flames by Englishman Jim Douglas, with whom she will later fall in love, the sixteen-year-old Tara is kept as his servant for years. Her worldview is made clear: Douglas' intervention has not only prevented the sainthood bestowed by *sati*, but it has also made of her a complete outcast. "None, not even other widows, will eat or drink with a woman rejected by the very gods on the threshold of Paradise" (19). Steel's next words speak directly to her non-Eastern readership: "Such a mental position is well-nigh incomprehensible to western minds. It was confusing even to Tara herself; and the mingling of conscious dignity and conscious degradation, gratitude, resentment, attraction, repulsion, made her a puzzle even to herself at times" (19). Tara asserts here, as she will throughout the novel, "…I would have been suttee (lit. virtuous). But for thee I should have found, ay! and given salvation" (19).

In Maud Diver's cross-cultural romance, titular character Lilamani fulfills the stereotype of the exotic-other female. She is a "child of an alien race," introduced to the reader as a high caste "vision" with an "alluring air of unreality" and a "purely Eastern stillness" …. "a bud half open awaiting the strong kiss of the sun" (3-4). This text offers the fullest portrait of what it means for the woman to be *suttee,* meaning living as a good wife, what Lilamani herself terms "my husband-worship," considered more fully in the next section of this study, and also recounts the steep price paid for a marriage made outside of Hinduism. Lilamani, the 17-year-old daughter of an unusually open-minded Rajput father, will marry one Nevil Sinclair, a white upper-class English gentleman whose avocation is painting. As the couple, who have met abroad in France,

contemplates the marriage, Sinclair discounts any possible objections to their union from the father to whom Lilamani is so close. "But… it is not him," she explains, "it is our law, our custom. If I, a Hindu, marry to a foreigner, I am cut off for always from family, from caste, from religion – from ever going back to my home. This he cannot change with all his wishing and his courage…" (124). Her father speaks to her of the tremendous risk she is taking, one for which she will lose so much for this one gain. "Think, my child, if the Gods in anger should take him from you, leaving you a widow – young, beautiful, cut off from home and country—" "Then, with a sudden dawn of inspiration in her face, she added low and fervently: 'Shall the flesh survive when the soul is gone? If the Gods smite me through him – I go also. I am *suttee*. There are other ways than the funeral pyre'" (140). Lilamani maintains she will marry Sinclair "excommunicate though she would be from the rites, feastings, and sacrifices that absorb more than half the Hindu woman's life" (171). Even before she becomes Sinclair's wife, it is clear to the reader from the recounting of her adherence to Hindu conventions of courtship that "She is pure Hindu woman in her capacity for sacrifice of self" (145).

Finally, Satthianadhan's treatment of widowhood, though brief, is part of the narrative of her story of Kamala, another devout only child in the care of a devoted father. As might be expected, the glimpse afforded by the indigenous Indian writer, perhaps due to its quotidian detail, presents as more intimate and knowing, coming as it does from inside the culture. We meet widows at a gathering where, ill-clad, they cover their shaven heads with *sarees* (*Kamala* 111). From an explanatory note provided by editor Chandani Lokuge for the novel's 1998 publication, the reader learns that "tonsure was compulsory for the Hindu widow and was symbolic of her withdrawal into celibacy and asceticism" (168). Married women with their bundles of newly washed clothes go back inside their homes through the front door; the widows,

presumably also doing laundry, enter via the backyard (129). When the plot calls for a girl to run away and disappear rather than stay and endure the miseries of a widow's lot, a further note gives an in-depth account of what that misery looks like:

> The nineteenth century widow's life was inflexibly constrained by institutionalized ideologies: prohibition of re-marriage, and obligatory withdrawal from the world in devotion to celibacy, asceticism and the worship of her gods. Widowhood was also considered a blight and carried serious social stigma: a widow was an outcast without personal rights, and was abused as a harbinger of ill-luck. Colonialist and missionary discourse … considered Hindu widowhood as tragic and degrading, and requiring redemption. In 1856, the remarriage of widows was legalized by the British Government. However, as with the introduction of other reforms,[5] it was strongly cried down by orthodox Hindus. (169)

The novel concludes with Kamala, having come unexpectedly into a great fortune, being immortalized and enshrined as a saint, for she has left her fortune for the sole benefit of widows and orphans (156). This final plot turn may raise questions about widows and women's property rights in early twentieth century India, and specifically their right to inherit, given the lack of personal and legal rights revealed in this paper. The conclusion in the historical record is that there was no single body of property rights that applied to all Indian women. Legal rights and remedies were determined depending on which religion and religious school she followed, if she was married or unmarried, which part of the country she came from, if she was tribal or non-tribal (Basu 9).

The state of widowhood in India was a concern that made its way into the periodical literature of the nineteenth century, with reporting on both missionary work in that country and

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[5]The 1829 outlawing of *sati* in British India by Lord William Bentinck 1829 included. "The number of recorded cases of sati increased after its legal abolition because the abolition was considered by orthodox Hindus to be 'a product of British colonial intrusion in Indian society'" (*Kamala* 170).

general interest stories. *The Women's Magazine* of July 1886, published in Brattleboro, Vermont, contains a strongly worded section in its Missionary Department entitled "Hindoo Widows." It opens with the sentence, "No pictures of the life of heathen women are sadder than Hindoo widows." The writer's understanding is that "for some sin committed in a former state of existence, [a woman] must bear 'perpetual widowhood' and be a 'perfect leper in society.' What wonder that a Hindoo woman, losing her son-in-law, prays God to kill her daughter" (*Woman's Magazine*). *The Sentinel*, a British publication, featured in its September 1890 issue a piece on "Infant Marriage and Enforced Widowhood in India." A good deal of space in this two-page article is devoted to abolishing infant marriage, a cause fiercely taken up by the British. As regards *sati,* the reportage mistakenly claims it to be a thing of the past. It repeats a speculation that the practice is founded on a misconception of the meaning of the Vedas, ancient sacred books of India, and that vast numbers of widows suffered a cruel death through a false rendering of the injunctions in the sacred texts. Turning to enforced widowhood, *The Sentinel* labels it "a senseless and miserable Indian custom" (102), condemning women to lifelong seclusion and contempt:

> She is not only disbarred from a second marriage; she is despised and ill-treated by her friends and relatives. "Judging," says a recent writer, "from the present rate of progress… it will be very long indeed before she ceases to be starved, to be shaven, to be scorned as the verist earthworm, as the thing whose touch, whose look, whose very shadow, is a pollution. (102)

At the heart of an investigation into the rite of *sati* is the question: what does it mean to be a good wife? Defined by world cultures in manifold ways, what is universal about the concept is the value and status placed on its achievement. For a religious Hindu woman in the nineteenth century, ending her life as a widow in an act of self-immolation could be considered the culmination of, and the final act to ensure, a life lived as a good wife. The fictional portrayals

used in this study serve to elucidate the lifeways that can be seen as preparatory to the act of ritualized suicide by widows.

Starting with the author most steeped in India as homeland, and therefore most imbued with Hindu practice and mindset, I will attend to Satthianadhan's *Kamala* first. The novel is primarily an evocation of the manners, mores, and social conduct of an orthodox Brahman family and community in later nineteenth century India. Its plot follows the domestic plight of a Hindu child-wife, and it is firmly grounded in India's Deccan, the southern plateau of caves and rivers and the hills that form the Western Ghats.

The daughter of an educated Brahman father,[6] only child Kamala lives the life of the traditional daughter, wife, mother, and widow. Hers are the plural roles and duties of the high-caste Hindu female, and the space we see her in is the home, with a strong depiction of her release into and enjoyment of nature. We meet her as a child, a "little girl… devotedly fond of her father" (23) and without a mother. Early in the novel Father tells Kamala his secret: "You are to be married… and I can't help it. It was arranged some time ago" (31). Her father's reference is to the prevailing custom of infant and child marriage, an institution which adds yet another inextricable layer to the practice *sati.* Considered a religious and social obligation among the higher castes, pre-arranged child marriages were the norm, with noncompliant parents facing ostracism. A girl was expected to marry before the onset of menstruation and was often betrothed

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[6]*Brahman,* also *Brahmin,* is the priestly or highest caste of Hindus, the spiritual governors and heads of society. According to the *Varna* (Hindu caste system), Hindus are born into one of four castes, each of which are multiply tiered. In descending order: *Brahmins*; the *Kshatriyas*, warriors (as are the Rajput), rulers and landowners; *Vaisyas*, usually businessmen, traders, artisans; and *Sudras*, usually the peasants, though not all peasants are *Sudras*. Casteless are the untouchables, literally societal outcasts (*Kamala* 157).

between five and twelve years of age (*Kamala* 159-160). Therefore, the husband a girl/woman lost, occasioning her self-sacrifice as either *sati* or widow, might well be one she had not chosen or for whom she did not care, and for whom she would be forced into a lifetime of solitude if she did not burn. (Regarded from the vantage point of one's teenage years, widowed misery may as well be infinite.) The article in the 1890 *Sentinel* that took issue with Indian widowhood, cited above, also addressed infant marriage with an entreaty called an *Appeal from the Daughters of India,* which presented "an appalling picture of the conditions to which young girls are exposed in our great Eastern dependency" (101)[7] The marriage of the "little girl" Kamala shortly comes to pass, and the remainder of the novel is a glimpse into the life lead by a young Hindu wife. A crucial moment during her wedding festivities marks the symbolic permanence of the *Brahmagath*, when the bridegroom's shawl is tied to the upper end of the bride's *sari* (*Kamala* 161), forming a silken knot. The knot is never to be undone, as it unites Kamala and groom Ganesh for life: "Living or dead she was henceforth the wife and the property of the man whoever he might be" (37). Barely through one portion of the evening's rituals, Kamala is upbraided when she misspeaks and mentions her husband's name aloud. "'She will be the most undutiful wife. She has taken her husband's name!" "Don't you know, you little stupid,' said an old woman shaking her, 'that a husband's name is to be heard, but never pronounced by a wife'" (38).

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[7]The report recounts: "Infant marriage leads to physical and moral deterioration of the race. The contract of marriage, entered into by others (generally by the parents), is …binding for life. The average age of marriage for girls has been ascertained to be about seven; thousands of the so-called marriages take place at an earlier age… Girls of twelve or thirteen have to bear the burdens of wifehood and motherhood. Not a few of these 'married martyrs' succumb to the shock of the first childbirth… The rate of infant mortality is terrible" (101).

Consigned by tradition to leave her natal home and live with her husband in the domicile of her in-laws, Kamala is welcomed by her father-in-law but inspires jealousy in Gungi, her husband's mother; this will be the most fraught relationship she endures. Her husband she scarcely knows, and her duty is to be at the beck and call of the household, functionally a servant. Long before daybreak:

> It was her duty to get the water vessels ready and fill them with water for the morning ablutions. Then came the cow-dunging of the kitchen and front yard, and the working out of various flower designs on the cow-dunged floor with white shell powder, which difficult feat every Hindu girl is an expert. Next came the buying of vegetables and other things from street vendors and the work in the kitchen, where she was expected to help in cooking. She was also required to prepare the baths, keep ointments and other things ready, and if anything was missing a shower of abuse was hurled on her. The food was served by Ramabai while Kamala stood looking on from behind a door. (57)

When Kamala makes female friends from neighboring houses as they all perform their chores, she is warned by the oldest: "'A time will come when not a day will pass without your getting a good beating from [your mother-in-law and sisters-in-law] or from your husband, and they will try to poison your very food for you.'" "'But we all have to go through it, and you must not be frightened. It is a woman's lot…'" (45). It is to this lot, days filled with regimentation and drudgery, with absolute control wielded by in-laws, that Kamala becomes resigned. In the succinct summation of Ellen Brinks, such a "lot" amounts to a version of institutionalized slavery (151).

Like the character of Lilamani that Maud Diver will create, Kamala's perseverance relies in part on having imbibed the teachings of a national poem of India written in Sanskrit, the *Ramayana* (*OED)*. A set of multiple stories that if linked would form a code of Hindu conduct and morals (Renou 156), the ancient epic paints an uncompromising picture of wifely devotion. Heroine Sita, having been kidnapped, must prove she remained faithful during her imprisonment

to her husband and prince, Rama, by undergoing a "fire-ordeal" (*Kamala* 164) and stepping into fire. The elemental message is that the "idea of wifehood incorporated by Sita is one of chastity, purity, tenderness and conjugal fidelity which cannot be destroyed or even disturbed by her husband's rejections, insults, or thoughtlessness" (164). From the fabled stories and legends of Kamala's youth she had learned one lesson: Good deeds were rewarded, and bad deeds were punished even in the next life. Chastity, honour, and respect for elders were looked upon as the virtues of a good life, and no matter her pleasure or pain, she must accept them meekly, for it was her *fate*[8] (58).

In the ebb and flow of Kamala's relationship with Ganesh, there is a time when Ganesh decides to develop his wife's mind so that she can be his more equal companion, and he undertakes her education. This norm-violating behavior earns Ganesh his own share of scorn from the women of his household, as his mother and sisters accuse him of forgetting his manhood and losing his self-respect. The wife, they remind him, is as the saying goes, 'the mat under the plate,' the slave of the family and of her lord (73). Other husbands have a similar reaction: "Whom would you like to have as a wife? A simple, innocent modest girl afraid to open her mouth, or a bold, clever woman wielding such dreadful power over others as this woman wields" (81)? Ganesh ultimately regrets that he has enabled his wife's learnedness, which he comes to view as interfering and bold. He tells her that she is a mean, low woman, no better than a grass-cutter, and that she needs shoe beating to bring her to her senses (133). As a woman she is less than a servant in his eyes, an "old rooted prejudice in the Hindu mind against women" (133). Ganesh now finds truth in his forefathers' saying: "Never trust a woman" (139), as Hindu

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[8]According to Buddhist and Hindu philosophy of *Karma* (fate), a person's actions determine her/his future states of existence.

superstition would have a woman seen in a dark night taken for a walking-demon, from whose clutches there is no hope of escape (146). Though Kamala vacillates emotionally in the gray area between frustrated repression of self and genuine devotion to others, ultimately a "soft, sweet glamour spread over her and she was happy in the great sacrifice of self she had contemplated" (141). When Ganesh dies suddenly after contracting cholera, Kamala reflects that she has lost the "greatest adornment of a woman" (152).

Subsequently losing both her father and her infant in quick succession, Kamala's understanding of the metaphysical world reflects the Hindu mindset: "The spirit world is a world of reality; the universe is inhabited by living spirits, good and bad, of departed human beings; these spirits are supposed to possess qualities which were theirs during their human existence together with other qualities peculiar to spirits" (150). Such a belief system makes it easier to understand how the good wife, or suttee, might choose to become *sat,* or the *satimata* who will provide protection in the afterlife to the family she has left behind. As the novel concludes, several years have gone by, and a life-long friend declares his love and implores Kamala to marry and accompany him away, leaving behind the "trammels of custom and tradition" (154). Kamala cannot bring herself to break free from the life of sacrifice that has always been her lot. She adheres instead to the widow's code and rejects his proposal, acting very much in accordance with *pativrata*, obedience to her now dead husband, including the recognition of her culpability for his death and the continuing nature of her widowhood:

> 'Ask me not that,' she said, with a shudder. 'It is too much for me to think of. Did we wives not die on the funeral pyre in days of old? Despise me and drive me away from thee. Look not on my face. I am the accursed among women. … I am but a broken vessel, fit only to be thrown aside and to be spat on.' (155)

It is in death that Kamala becomes a saint, with a shrine and monument bearing her name. Her fortune, dedicated to the care of widows and orphans, ultimately confers upon her a final reward not unlike that earned by a *satimata*, her "unseen hands relieving the poor" and safeguarding the unfortunate in the aftermath of her earthly passing (156). But for all her selflessness and sacrifice, for her default embrace of womanly self-flagellation, what Kamala conspicuously does not do is enter the literal fire.

Very unlike *Kamala* in tone, style, and theme, Maud Diver's *Lilamani* is set in the 1890's and finds accord with Satthianadhan's novel only in the time period of its action. Nor is Diver's text set in India; her love story takes place on the coasts of France and Italy, and in the heart of England, uncommon choices for this romantic genre of Indian and English interracial marriage. The book is divided into three sections, which themselves provide the contours of the story: The Seed, The Blossoming, and The Fruit. From its opening page, when English gentleman Nevil Sinclair spies "the vision," Indian Lilamani Singh, at the Cap d'Antibes Hotel on the French Riviera, a setting as exotic as the pairing it will foster, the question is how, not if, the relationship will develop. Lilamani is in France, accompanied by her father Sir Lakshman Singh and teacher Audrey Hammond, only because she has refused a prospective husband chosen by her family back home. She is "plucky enough to break through the hampering laws of purdah and caste" (Diver 11), Audrey tells her old friend Sinclair, to journey to France and study medicine. Her mother, orthodox to the bone, had fiercely rebelled against the Anglicizing of her daughter, but Lilamani was expected to return in due time to her homeland to share her Western-acquired knowledge and advance conditions for her Indian sisters. Instead, she is courted and won over by Sinclair, although he is hindered by the "disability of his race and age" (48-49), Lilamani being seventeen and he in his thirties. Over objections, warnings, and much introspection, the couple

agrees to obtain Sir Lakshman's permission to marry. Lilamani is her father's "Jewel of Delight;" her plea to him is in part:

> But ask your private heart only – is woman created for wisdom in book-lore, or in heart-lore? Is she, before all things, Life-healer, or Life-bringer? Audrey might think – the first. But I… never! And will it be great harm for England if I give to her a few children with best blood of India in their veins? (139)

In the voice of Lilamani's father, struggling with what he knows will be the consequences of his daughter's marriage outside her race and caste, Diver gives perspective on the complications of such a union. The author has established Sir Lakshman as refined and "broadminded," one who associates the traits of strength and courage with the British Raj, one of "we Indians, who believe in England's power - that the true England, yes, and the true India, may wake up and grasp hands together before it is too late" (107). Here he tries to explain much to Sinclair that the prospective groom cannot possibly understand about his impending marriage, even if there is some shared ground that might bode well for the alliance: his daughter is of old Rajput family, therefore of good birth and lineage, like Sinclair himself. But Lakshman identifies other obstacles, most significantly, Lilamani's religion:

> For the Indian woman religion is all; and marriage is a chief part of that religion. It is consecration for this life and all other lives. That is the inmost reason of *suttee.* The wife, being spiritually higher than her husband, has all power over the welfare of his soul in future incarnations; he, without her, having none. … But now consider – how shall there be marriage of consecration without unity of creed? See then, what loss for her, that she can have no power for the welfare of your soul. (147)

Sir Lakshman use of the term *suttee* echoes his daughter's usage in the earlier passage: "I am *suttee.*" She is already emotionally a good wife, proud of the devotion and fidelity to her husband that her wedding vow will pledge. Her first response to her betrothed after their promise ceremony is wholly unexpected by Sinclair: "Live for ever, my Lord and King" (181). It comes

at the end of Book One, The Seed, and sets the tone for the nature of Lilimani's orthodoxy as their relationship becomes formally established.

Because Diver's audience was largely English, being schooled in cultural mores and traditions through her pages, there is ample explication of both the Hindu wife's actions and thinking in the balance of the novel. The new bride has never spoken her husband's name and explains to Sinclair what was pointed out more harshly in Satthianadhan's *Kamala*: "'With us, it is not custom even when married to take the name of – beloved,'" she told him with averted eyes (184). As a bride of six weeks standing, we see Lilamani at work in their summer home: "Crouched upon the stool before a primitive brick oven, set up under her own supervision, she was absorbed in cooking her lord's dinner; a service so sacred to the Hindu wife that a special garment of silk fibre is reserved for that function and for prayer" (190). All domestic home duties in a Hindu household are carried out by sisters, daughters, daughters-in-law, under supervision of their ruler-in-chief – the mother (190):

> A woman stands, spiritually higher than man, because 'she alone is capable of conquest – for others.' To accept service and devotion of any is the highest honor you can pay her. That is the core of the Indian woman's credo; the lamp hidden in her heart; for a woman, service and worship are birthright and crown of glory. (190)

Lilamani will often reiterate this commitment to worship: worship of husband is worship of the Life-force. She will invoke Sita, the heroine of the epic *Ramayana* who also inspired child-bride Kamala. Sita is India's ideal of womanhood: gracious, unsullied, unafraid, and loyal to husband Rama no matter his actions toward her. In Diver's novel, Lilamani will in fact pose for her husband's painted canvases that tell the story of the *Ramayana*, she the model for Sita in Sinclair's pictorial rendering of the poem. When she mentions to her husband Sita's survival of

the ordeal by fire that is part of the poetic legend, she shares a bit of her past that shines a light on the early inculcation and preparation of Hindu girls:

> In old days, when *Suttee* was not outside law, girl-brides would fear sometimes were they strong enough, were they worthy? Then they would make test; holding smallest finger in fire till flesh burnt from bone; or stirring with bare hand rice when boiling. And I – I have done – that last; though never I told to anyone – till now. … Such a small thing! But now – I am glad; and perhaps a little more worthy for being Sita in your beautiful pictures, that I long to see. (202)

Close reading of Diver's text reveals that the author uses the word "*suttee*" on a continuum, demonstrating that she is aware of its meaning of "faithful wife" as well as its Anglo-English designation for the act of self-immolation. Lilamani is an eager and virtuous "*suttee*" to her living husband and is also prepared to be *"suttee*" as the culmination of her wifely goodness should she lose her husband. How else can we read her question about her actions in the event of her husband's death: "Shall the flesh survive when the soul is gone? If the Gods smite me through him – I go also. I am *suttee*. There are other ways than the funeral pyre" (140). It is my interpretation that Lilamani lives as a proud "*suttee*" with her husband. In the event of his death, she would become *sati* in order to join him in that state and continue to exert the same protection that she has during their marriage. In her use of the term, she expresses both her current state of wifely submission and loyalty, and her willingness, her intention, to die should Sinclair's death precede hers, even if she does not choose to die by fire.[9]

Interestingly, the heroine of the Ramayana, Sita, Lilamani's "chosen patron saint, upon whose character she must strive to model her own" (173), survives her trial of fire. So closely does Lilimani identify with the legendary paragon of womanly virtue that when her father calls her his little "Sita Devi" it is his daughter's "crowning reward for an act of self-suppression, or a day

[9]For an alternate reading of Diver's use of the term suttee, see Susmita Roye's *Suttee Sainthood Through Selflessness: Pain of Repression or Power of Devotion.*

well spent" (173). The conceit of the series of painted portraits of Sita, modeled by Lilamani and executed to perfection by her husband, allows the new wife to relate the story of the *Ramayana* within the pages of the novel. Lilamani describes the tale as a mixture of all things war and philosophy and family love (207). The qualities of Sita are those to be emulated. She is "dutiful beyond all women" (207), "true wife still, pure as snow newly fallen" (209), "peerless" (210). When she is kidnapped and receives no word from husband Rama, she begs, in a broken voice, "make ready funeral pyre. For loving woman, hurt beyond healing, what else was left" (211)? "And Sita, not shrinking, drew near those leaping flames, praying with uplifted hands to the God within":

> Universal witness, Fire
> Protect my body on the pyre!
> As Raghu's son has lightly laid
> This charge on Sita – hear, and aid! (211)

The flames close upon her in. Then Sita is saved by "the great Gods" (211), and the flames roll backwards. After the Gods intervene, she is fresh, not one flower of wreath scorched, nor hair of eyelash singed. She is given again to her lord of life, Rama. But there is another telling twist to the tale: Rama, for "honour of his kinghood" (212) finds he must send Sita and their unborn child away to a far hermitage; there she lives for twenty years before being summoned back to reign as Rama's queen. But the people are not satisfied, and murmur: "'Let her be tried by fire'" (212). Overcome by this additional cruelty, Sita cries: "If unstained in thought and action – Mother Earth, receive thy child" (212)!

> Then that great Earth-Mother, quick to answer, cleft the ground and came up, there, at her daughter's feet. Beautiful beyond telling her throne: wide her arms of welcome. Vain, all vain, outcry of Rama and his people. The earth was closing on mother and child. She is gone…that stainless one ---! (212-213)

A reference, perhaps, to an alternative practice of *sati,* one less known and written about, but acknowledged in the literature: the recourse of burying widows alive.

Though they are subject to many of the predictable vicissitudes of an interracial couple, especially as they choose to live in England among Sinclair's people, Lilamani and Nevil Sinclair emerge as a happy couple. The foundation of their relationship is Nevil's continuous delight at the nature of Lilamani's expression of feeling for him: "The measure of an Eastern woman's submission is the measure of her love" (123) and his wife's capacity to submit obediently seems without bounds. After six months of marriage Sinclair is aware he has changed, "though he scarcely realized yet how much was due to the girl-wife who swayed him by the very completeness of her submission, as only the true woman-spirit can" (309). The final words of the novel are an echo of those spoken by Lilamani at her promise ceremony: "Live for ever, my lord and my king ---" (424)!

Flora Annie Steel's contribution to our understanding of the male/female dynamics of British India is a product of her outsider's status combined with her openness to India. Like many such authors, Diver included, she wrote for an educative rather than an overtly political purpose – to educate the British about Indian culture (Crane and Johnston 75). After spending twenty years living in India, herself a memsahib, and returning for two years specifically to collect information for her planned novel of the sepoy rebellion, Steel undertook a tale of narrative complexity. That did not, however, preclude the influence on her thinking of Victorian certainties about the superiority of the British and a belief in the British Empire, particularly the Raj in India (77). But it did result in a novel that engaged multiple discourses of its day, and Steel's contribution to this study is to represent the colonial society of the Anglo-Indian community and its interactions with and observations about the colonized. Unlike the

Satthianadhan and Diver texts, Steel's is interwoven with subplots and intrigues, her focus broader than the relationships of a single female protagonist, and the portrait of her countrymen and the natives multi-layered. In Steel's telling, the reader is privy to the cultural norms not only of the Indians, but also to those of the Victorian English co-opting India.

The backdrop and central historical event of *On the Face of the Waters* is the 1857 uprising in Delhi (the Mutiny) of the Indian sepoys enlisted as part of the British military and administrative force governing India. Foregrounded are the Brits and Indians whose lives will be affected by that unfolding rebellion. 'Mem' Kate Erlton is unhappily "exiled" in India, and unhappy also in her marriage to an unfaithful husband, Major Herbert Erlton. The Major will not survive the battle, nor will his mistress, Alice Gissing, who will give her life trying to save an English child from a rebel. Kate will be rescued by the same Jim Douglas who early on rescued Rajput widow Tara Devi from becoming *sati* on her dead husband's funeral pyre; Tara has been "in his service" (27) these eight years since, and even attends the death of Jim's Persian mistress, Zora bibi. His previous action to prevent her immolation had brought Tara's family "scandalous dishonor," but Tara has nonetheless fallen in love with Douglas. Now involved in espionage for the Company, Douglas saves Kate Erlton during the outbreak of the mutiny, and they find themselves unable to escape the dangerous city. They begin to live in the guise of an Afghan Muslim couple, and with Tara's help they end up in residence on a secluded rooftop in the besieged metropolis. It is there that Kate spends most of her time, hidden from the eyes of the city, while Jim leaves daily to scout for the Raj in Delhi by posing as a trader.

The Kate Erlton introduced before the uprising kept herself at a remove within her new country: "She drew back…, as if to escape from what she did not understand, and therefore did not like. That, indeed, was her attitude toward all things native" (9). "The innate repulsion of the

alien overpowered her dim desire to be kind" (9). Steel writes that Kate's "cult of home was a religion with her," and that Kate thinks of her life as one of exile from her beloved native country (21). In Kate we meet a not unfamiliar 'mem' who is uncomfortable and bothered living among the "other." The great irony is that Kate, forced out of the insularity of the Indian home she has made into an English replica, successfully survives the chaos of the insurrection by engineering her own abduction by disguised Afghan trader Jim Douglas. She and Jim will eventually live with the son of a late friend, impersonating an Afghan family, with Tara looking on longingly from the periphery of their lives. With Tara's help, Kate eventually chooses to adopt Indian customs and learn Hindustani, thereby literally walking in the shoes of the surrounding Muslim community. Near the conclusion of the novel, she will take on yet another disguise to aid in Douglas' well-being by assuming the native identity of a Hindu widow. Again, it is Tara's tutelage that allows Kate to occupy the space of the Hindu woman, or suttee, including the wearing of the widow's shroud and willingness to shave her head. It is in this cross-cultural friendship that Steel demonstrates her familiarity with the racial/gender hierarchy in India. Tara is astonished at Kate's willingness to have her head shaved in service of the disguise, but Kate begins hacking at her hair and actually enjoys it, "for in truth, she was becoming interested in her own adventures, now that she had, as it were, the control over them" (364). The English woman still has agency over her own actions, and chooses to enter the space of suttee, while the Rajput woman, as a true Indian widow, must continue to perform the domestic role that has enslaved her for eight years. Tara is so unnerved by the prospect of the mem having a shaved head that she stops her and insists on achieving the same effect by braiding Kate's hair and shrouding her head. To serve her plot, we see that Steel will disguise a white woman as a native but has brown woman Tara stymy Kate's impulse to bodily alter her identity

as a memsahib to serve that same storyline. As Sharpe observed, the dominance and division of race persist even within gender.

By the time the mutiny is squelched, Kate and savior Jim have fallen in love and are free to continue their lives in the open as a couple, but with this pairing-off the character of Tara is left as we have found her, but without even the patronage of Douglas, and therefore without prospects for a different future. Yet Tara's fate has been subverted from the outset of the novel, when she was rescued from her husband's pyre against her will. She then escaped "the life of a dog" (28) by leaving her community to go into service for Douglas. Recall the ambivalent sentiments that her survival of the pyre inspired in her: "The mingling of conscious dignity and conscious degradation, gratitude, resentment, attraction, repulsion, [that] made her a puzzle even to herself at times" (27). As Jenny Sharpe intuits, writing in *Allegories of Empire*, the above words

> locate the enigma that *sati* presents to Victorian women in the widow's own consciousness. However, they also refuse to reduce Tara's subjectivity to her decision to become a *sati.* The inconsistencies in her actions permit the reading of a more complicated subjectivity than that of female obedience and passivity. (Sharpe 105)

With that "complicated subjectivity" we are inhabiting a different space than that created by Satthianadhan and Diver, whose protagonists' continuous submission endorses the prevailing system just short of entrance into the fire. In *On the Face of the Waters* Steel has the widowed female character Tara remain critical to the plot, though her plight remains faithful to the proscriptions of Indian widowhood throughout: she does not remarry and lives largely without joy. After her subservience to the Englishman, she will swallow her own feelings for him to unite him with mem Kate. She will then become *sati* in a highly non-traditional way. Driven by simmering jealousy for Kate Erlton and of "unstable mind," Tara will finally achieve

the status denied her eight years earlier, sacrificing herself without either a husband or a funeral pyre, but out of unrequited love for Douglas. Here again Steel's understanding of Hindu widowhood has allowed her to depict the death-in-life that Tara has suffered as a Hindu widow in order to credibly portray her as a deferred *sati*. Tara climbs onto the roof of a burning building in a final spectacle:

> "My God!" came an English voice, as something showed suddenly upon the roof. "I thought you said it was empty – and that's a woman!"
> It was. A woman in a scarlet, tinsel-set dress, and all the poor ornaments she possessed upon her widespread arms. So, outlined against the first sun-ray she stood, her shrill changing voice rising above the roar and rush of the flames.
> "*Oh! Guardians eight of this world and the next. Sun, Moon, and Air, Earth, Ether, Water, and my own poor soul bear witness! Oh! Lord of death, bear witness that I come. Day, Night, and Twilight say I am suttee."* There was a loud roar, a sudden leaping of the flames, and the turret sank inwardly. But the changing voice could be heard for a second in the increasing silence which followed. [10] (424)

In *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, Bernard Cohn writes of the Raj as a cultural project of control (ix), with India being the largest and most important of Great Britain's colonies. In turn, the authors of the works examined in this paper write of India as a country that historically exerted rigid control over its women, depicting the exacting protocols and consequences to which Hindu women were subject. Ironically, within the narrow living space imposed by colonial society, these resident fiction writers also lived and worked as second-class citizens. Thus, the power of class and privilege during the Raj took both gendered and racial forms while being widely regarded by many English as 'civilizing.' India was a country they felt capable of changing through British beneficence (Cohn 121). This age-old altruistically framed

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[10]A number of scholars have commented on the similarity of Tara's death scene with that of Bertha Mason in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. Each character meets her end on a burning rooftop. See the work of Jenny Sharpe in *Allegories of Empire*.

rationale calls to mind Eugene Genovese's work on paternalism.[11] Genovese writes that all paternalisms grow "out of the necessity to discipline and morally justify a system of exploitation" (4). Addressing the system of American slavery in particular, the historian's insights apply equally well to the relationship of colonizer and colonized: in essence paternalism is a system of class rule that binds two peoples together in an ambivalent and complex relationship wherein each shapes the other (3). Viewing the fiction of Steel, Diver, and Satthianadhan through this lens of reciprocity brings a new, more nuanced understanding of its purpose and function. As gradually becomes clear, each of these authors endured the imperial project and accepted elements of its superiority, hoping the Raj would mean reform for the conditions of women in India. But each would also use her narrative action to plant the idea of resistance in her readers.

Questioning the extreme ritual of Hindu India, the practice of *sati* unique to its women, these authors use fictional space to plot the possibility of defiance by offering alternatives to self-annihilation. This compromise is at the heart of the negotiation that Ketu Katrak sees as often necessary for women within patriarchal structures, as opposed to the outright rejection of regressive traditions (Katrak 157). The use of concession in conjunction with resistance, in other words, may be the most effective way forward: go along, but not all the way. Negotiation in the form of fictional alternatives gives a place to writing itself as the most significant strategy for coping with customary constraints, allowing women to exercise agency in an indelible way.

Circulating at the time of these novels were the stirrings of a new idea that could

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[11] The online *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "paternalism" as the policy or practice of restricting freedoms and responsibilities of subordinates or dependents in what is considered or claimed to be their best interests.

influence each author's use of unconventional possibilities for her characters. The notion that women's traditional roles at the heart of the home were subject to change, that there could be a New Woman, was gaining currency in both Victorian England and the Indian colony. Would home and family, and thereby society suffer or benefit if women, the traditional homemakers, were allowed to gain political and legal privileges, education, and employment (Vaid WS-63)?

This was the crux of the Woman Question in England, and Maud Diver integrates it into her novel via character Audrey Hammond's comments to her former protege Lilamani. Hammond refers not only to the lack of dowries but the dearth of money-making options for single women in Britain, leaving them without opportunities for self-sufficiency:

> "If English fathers were bound to provide for their daughters, the Woman Question might be less acute than it is."
> [Lilamani:] "Woman Question? What is that?"
> "Happy little ignoramus! It's a disease of modern civilization. A riddle without an answer; and I'm a part of it. But don't trouble your pretty head about me, dear." (177)

Lilamani's understanding of the Question is that some womenfolk are "nowadays, eager for the way of the brain" (177). After educating her readers about the status quo for Hindu women, Diver defies the literary traditions of the romance genre of her time. Rather than see the demise or ultimate rejection of the female love interest characteristic of that genre, Diver gives her Indian protagonist, by virtue of her enlightened father (a figure present in the Satthianadhan text as well) the headway to find happiness outside of conventional norms. In fact, Diver uses the character of her living suttee as a foil to Western womanhood and the struggle for change. The revered femininity of the Eastern woman is held up as an example before unfeminine Western females like Audrey Hammond and Sinclair's sisters. Susmita Roye quotes Teo's observation that Diver is "obviously using Oriental femininity to contrast with, and to castigate, the development of the New Woman, of whom she strongly disapprove[s]" (Roye 294). In

Lilamani, Diver represents an alliance of East and West, of colonizer and colonized, through the device of a successful interracial marriage, thereby presenting a reconciliation of the two worldviews. During the novel, the character Lilamani repeatedly avers that she *is* India, so we know that Nevil Sinclair *is* England. He ultimately settles with his wife at his ancestral home in Britain, placing Lilamani, the female heart of the home, inside English domestic space. (A comparable positioning would be for Nevil to represent England in the heart of India, the exact charter of the British Raj.) Diver presents a negotiated settlement between Empire and an Indian female protagonist from the colony, one which replaces *sati* with happiness, albeit a happiness born of submission.

To like effect, Satthianadhan's editor Chandani Lokuge helps the author's contemporary audience recognize that the character of Kamala incorporates qualities of India's New Woman, who is committed to upper-caste Hindu women's reforms (*Kamala* 2). If, as Lokuge writes in her introduction to *Kamala,* women are a metaphor for nation, then reform must come from the "civilizing arm of the colonizers" (*Kamala* 3) lifting the country out of its degradation. Writing for a British readership as well as English-educated indigenous readers (*Kamala* 3), Satthianadhan made clear the unequal conditions between husband and wife, while elsewhere having the young Kamala stretch the bonds of orthodoxy that prevail in a culture of son preference. The education she receives at the hands of her father and husband ignite her inquisitive mind, and the course she walks after becoming a widow is a middle path. Kamala does not break from the dictates of *pativrata,* her vow of protection and devotion to her husband, nor does she violate the cultural expectation of enforced widowhood. But we do see her nursed back to health during her own illness at the time of her husband's death, and those who save her are not family, but women friends made during their shared experience of dismal marriages. In

this community of women who silently resist the "old way" of *sati* with their lifesaving care, tradition is replaced by the will of female solidarity in a younger generation. Importantly, Kamala is given a way to perform a saintly action and care for those she leaves behind that does not involve a bodily sacrifice of self, as would *satimata,* but a material one in the form of a bequeathed charity. We therefore see in Kamala a likeness to the heroines in the fiction of George Eliot, one of Satthianadhan's major literary influences (*Kamala* 2): an ambivalent heroine whose aspirations to surmount convention settle into negotiated submission.

For her part, Flora Annie Steel, too, tips her hat, by way of her pen, to the superiority of the British project over its Indian subjects, incorporating elements of the New Woman sensibility into her Mutiny novel. Steel's two widows, Kate and Tara, serve as vehicles to deliver the author's perspective on the contemporary state of women, and the condition looks decidedly mixed. In *On the Face of the Waters* Kate Erlton evolves from a stereotypically narrow-minded and helpless memsahib into a kind of New Woman who demonstrates independence and agency. Actively participating in her own salvation, Kate successfully escapes death at the hands of the mutinous Indian rebels and is allowed to live happily with a second husband. Her fate contrasts directly with Tara's, who is allowed no such choice or hopefulness, and who remains in a state of abjection and servitude. Her original savior, Englishman Jim Douglas, has since rescued mem Kate, spurning Tara in the same way her own kinsmen have. In the face of this dual rejection, Tara reverts to *sati*, in highly unusual form. In Kate's fate we can read Steel's judgment of the fairness and high-mindedness of her English culture; in Tara's, we see a culture portrayed as far less humane.

While the authors Diver, Satthianadhan, and Steel do not make their case with one voice, I argue that they each chose to incorporate a degree of resistance into their portrayal of the status

quo. In delineating plots that saw characters veer from the traditional roles ascribed to women – daughter, wife, mother, widow – they plotted courses that might anticipate nascent rebellion. They revealed the particulars of gendered expectations for Hindu women which simultaneously made clear the necessity for change. Each expressed an awareness of the Woman Question that had traveled halfway across the globe along with the British Raj, and the thinking and writing of each included enough deviation from Hindu custom to subvert the prevailing norms and ethos of colonial India. The ways of the oppressor, be he white colonizer or indigenous Indian male, are handled by all three novelists with some degree of resistance on the part of their female characters. As if enough small cuts might eventually afflict the body of the patriarchy. *Sati* today remains the vestige of an ancient culture of son preference,[12] and lives on in contemporary India, though to a much-reduced extent.

Lata Mani argues that because Indian women themselves are marginal to the debate about *sati,* their status in Indian society became an occasion for struggle between colonial officials and the indigenous male elite (79), or in the words of Gayatri Spivak, "white men saving brown women from brown men" (Riach 45). As in the 1829 attempt by the British to outlaw *sati*, rescuing women became part of their justification for the civilizing mission of the Raj itself. Such debates were not about women but about "the moral challenge of colonial rule," notes Mani. "In this process women came to represent 'tradition' for all participants: whether viewed as the weak, deluded creatures who must be reformed through legislation and education, or the

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[12]Elizabeth Croll sees the inverse of that term as a more accurate one, favoring "daughter discrimination" to "son preference" (10).

valiant keepers of tradition who must be protected" (Mani 79). The double subjugation of Indian women, Gramsci's subalterns in this context, comes at the hands of Indian men, who do indeed hold power over "brown women," and in the imperial assumption that "white men" can intercede on behalf of native women, whom they regard as passive objects with no subjectivity or voice of their own. The masculine authority of the Raj was mirrored and replicated in the masculine authority of the Indian patriarchy and its assumed right to impose death in the name of tradition on its own women and girls.

Finally, the larger context of the Raj provided the colonial stage on which these women writers mounted their productions, a context that added complexity to the existing intricacies of both India and the position of women in India. The point of George Orwell's nineteenth century parable "Shooting an Elephant" lies in the ambiguity about which of the title entities represents the Raj, and which India. The elephant, having been shot by a policeman, dies a slow, agonizing death, one which the shooter himself cannot bear to witness. In a like twentieth century metaphor featuring another colonial elephant and a tiger, Ho Chi Minh assigns the pachyderm an identity: it symbolizes the French occupiers of his country, Vietnam, engaged in battle with the tiger that is Indochina. Written fifty years apart, each allegory characterizes an Asian country struggling for independence from a Western colonial power. Ho Chi Minh's portrait, however, perhaps informed by India's history, is not only more definitive, but more prescient:

> If the tiger ever stands still, the elephant will crush him with his mighty tusks. But the tiger will not stand still. He will leap upon the back of the elephant, tearing huge chunks from his side, and then he will leap back into the dark jungle. And slowly the elephant will bleed to death. Such will be the war in Indochina. (*Vietminh Tactics*)

I posit that it is the elephantine Raj in Orwell's essay that finally falls due to a multitude of cuts, its lumbering presence dangerous but containing within its size the seeds of its own destruction. Flawed in intention and execution, the elephant, in both cases above, is bound - possibly even karmically fated - to fail.

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CHAPTER III: APPLEDORE IN BLOOM: THAXTER, HASSAM, AND A FLOWERING OF ART

> Swept by every wind that blows, and beaten by the bitter brine for unknown ages, well may the Isles of Shoals be barren, bleak, and bare. At first sighting nothing can be more rough and inhospitable than they appear. The incessant influences of wind and sun, rain, snow, frost and spray, have so bleached the tops of the rocks, that they look hoary as if with age… Yet so forbidding are their shores, it seems scarcely worth while to land upon them – mere heaps of tumbling granite in the wide and lonely sea… (Thaxter *Among the Isles of Shoals [AIS]* 10*)*

On a desolate rock in the cold North American ocean, Celia Laighton Thaxter (1835-1894) chose to plant herself and thrive. Surrounded by the relentless forces of sea and air and a host of like-minded companions, Thaxter became the center of a summer arts colony on the island of Appledore, Maine, one of nine islands co-owned with the state of New Hampshire that makes up the Isles of Shoals. Joining her there were other writers, artists, and musicians of varied stripe, and in her parlor and vine-shrouded piazza all were enveloped in the color and scent of the blooming flowers she so joyfully cultivated. Thaxter's entire adult life on Appledore can be said to be one of successful cultivation: of her garden, of her own artistic talent and that of others, and of family. Her own marriage remained the only significant endeavor that was apparently beyond her ability to nourish to her satisfaction. Nonetheless, Celia Thaxter flourished in a myriad of creative ways that were to position her beloved island home no less definitively than had nature, casting it beyond its inherent geographical and geological interest and shaping it into an archive of cultural history.

Of note is the body of written and visual work she produced collaboratively with American Impressionist painter Childe Hassam (1859-1935), the totality of which forms an homage to Appledore Island and the multiple contours of its beauty. Due to that fruitful pairing,

Appledore is pictured and remembered as a creative center, securely positioned at the crosscurrents of American art due to Thaxter's hospitable presence on her island home. Millions of years old, the island contains the strata of ages, and I contend that it is a living archive, a keeper of Thaxter's creative output, of her botanical caretaking, and of Hassam's assured and dedicated brush.

Because Thaxter had her hand in so many kinds of cultural production, tracing her life in art is a rich and satisfying journey. I will begin by introducing the most significant artistic pairing in her career, that with painter Childe Hassam, and go on to consider the biographical narratives of each artist. Once their paths cross, an ongoing and symbiotic relationship begins, though there is little in the research to document its specific nature. Thaxter and Hassam build on the foundations of their individual creative work in nature writing and gardening, and Impressionistic painting, respectively, to form a fertile pairing. The salon on Appledore that Thaxter establishes spurs production and camaraderie in both artists, and those results are manifested in varied and imaginative work. All the while Thaxter contends with the pull of her domestic responsibilities, negotiating compromises throughout her life to allow the pursuit of her art, which for all its inherent personal satisfaction also becomes a financial necessity. This constant struggle with the limited resources of time, energy, and money is a hallmark of Thaxter's life as a nineteenth century woman. I then give due consideration to Thaxter's summer island garden, honoring its meaning and importance to both artists personally and professionally; Thaxter and Hassam endowed it into perpetuity with book and brush. Finally, having situated Thaxter in the artistic movements of her era, I end with the creative legacy left by poet and painter, and Appledore's role as both catalyst and catalogue, underscoring my original argument.

Beginnings: The Siren Call

Celia Thaxter's place in American literary history is difficult to capsulize by both the variety of her production and its manifold influences. Thaxter wrote lyric poetry, journalism, children's poems and stories, correspondence, and autobiography; her hallmark and great subject was nature writing. The Shoals would act as her lifelong muse, and her writing in turn would create Appledore as an oceanic archive of romantic themes: freedom and captivity; adventure and experimentation; isolation and close community. In the broad spectrum of nature writing, Thaxter's contributions fall somewhere between natural history essay (*An Island Garden [AIG]*), travel and adventure journalism (*Among the Isles of Shoals[AIS]*), and poems that consider both nature and man's role in it (Lyon 278). She is characterized as the most widely published woman writing poetry in America during the last half of the nineteenth century, illustrated by an anecdote that has her publisher, Houghton, rejecting a submission by Emily Dickenson (1830-1886) because they already had a 'woman poet' (Mason x), namely Thaxter. Dickinson, Celia's contemporary, was less famous in their time than Thaxter, with fewer than ten poems published during her lifetime, and those mostly against her wishes (Roberts 734-735). Thaxter was influenced by the Transcendentalists, including Emerson, Longfellow, Whittier, and Lowell; by the works of Dickens; and by those of Elizabeth and Robert Browning, whom her husband Levi revered long before they were famously "The Brownings."

We remember Thaxter today as much for the garden she lovingly tended year after year outside her cottage doorway on Appledore, and for the dramatic circumstances of her life, as for her writing. All have enjoyed a recent resurgence of interest, due to the reestablishment and maintenance of a garden on Appledore plotted and planted with as much faithfulness to Thaxter's original vision as possible. Thanks to a collaboration between the University of New

Hampshire's Isles of Shoals Marine Laboratory and Cornell University, the Shoals is a site of marine biology research and undergraduate education, and visitors can today ride a ferry out to Appledore (and the other islands) and walk in Thaxter's footsteps and among her legacy flowers, still tended on their native site by mainland volunteers. Those who cannot make the trip are not without recourse to Thaxter's Atlantic home: The Shoals Marine Laboratory today maintains a camera-eye sweep of the island, accessible from any computer or connected device. Further, the archipelago is listed on the United States National Register of Historic Places. Already valued for its contribution to scientific research, Appledore, I contend, can also fruitfully be mined as an artistic research archive, a cultural legacy of the near-past.

A set of painted canvases from Thaxter's own time and shortly thereafter, created under her auspices, provides an evocation of the singular beauty of her nineteenth century island world. Created by fellow New Englander Childe Hassam, an artist whose work, like her own, is valued today both for its individual merit and as part of their joint effort, Hassam's oils and watercolors coalesce into a portrait of Appledore that has immortalized the island no less than Thaxter's own writings. *An Island Garden*, her best-known work, was published with illuminations of Hassam's Impressionist floral paintings inspired by Appledore.[1] The island, therefore, functioned as muse to both Thaxter and Hassam and was the linchpin of their production. Additionally, as the location of Thaxter's salon, it enabled a kind of cross-pollination among many prominent artists and intellectuals. I argue that its role today is that of artistic archive, seminal in its centrality to the development and understanding of its subjects and their creative work. Jacques Derrida posits

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[1]Its identifiable cover was designed by another female pioneer in the male-governed artworld, Sarah Wyman Whitman (DelMusArt). Wyman Whitman worked in-house for Houghton Mifflin and was also linked to Thaxter through mutual friend Sarah Orne Jewett (gardnermuseum).

the archive as a place of "uncovering" a lived experience and its remembered (or forgotten) image (Blouin and Rosenberg 1); this lens positions Appledore as both host and repository of history and a place to produce, or recover, new knowledge about that history.

Known in the artworld for his prolific output, Hassam created depictions of Appledore and the Isles of Shoals, including paintings of Thaxter and her garden, which form a large and distinct portion of his oeuvre. His friendship with Thaxter in the early 1880's through the first half of the 1890's highlights their shared preoccupation with nature as one of art's great subjects. As of 2004, Metropolitan Museum of Art curator H. Barbara Weinberg considered Hassam one of the preeminent American Impressionist painters (*Patterns* n.p.), yet Hassam has a reputation in the world of art that has, like Thaxter's, waxed and waned over the past century. Though an appreciative biography by Adeline Adams was published in 1938, tastes in 1940s and 1950s, America began to favor modernism (*Patterns* n.p.), and Weinberg writes that cultural nationalism fed a taste for colonial portraiture and Hudson River school landscape painting. American Impressionism was too traditional for the modernists and too French to satisfy cultural nationalists (*Patterns* n.p.). As French Impressionist works became costly and scarce by the early 1970s, the commercial value of Hassam's work began to rise along with the attention it attracted. Weinberg gives the example of a single American flag painting, one of many Hassam did in his later career, selling at auction at Christie's in 1998 for more than $7.9 million (*Patterns* n.p.). The New York curator of American Art closes her article on Hassam with this assessment: "The resurgence of esteem for American Impressionism that began in the mid-1960s is now at its peak, as is Hassam's status as one of its leaders" (*Patterns* n.p.).

Twenty-four years later John. W. Coffey, retired Deputy Director for Art and Curator of American and Modern Art at the North Carolina Museum of Art, echoed Weinberg's evaluation.

The exhibition that Coffey undertook at the Raleigh Museum in 2016 in conjunction with the Peabody Essex Museum in Massachusetts was titled "American Impressionist Childe Hassam and the Isles of Shoals." Interviewed for this paper, Coffey restricted his show's focus to Hassam's depictions of the Shoals, and he spent much of his own time over years of summer travel walking the overgrown, scrubby paths on Appledore Island, documenting the numerous geographical locations that correspond to the vantage points of Hassam's work. Coffey considers Hassam a master of the painted sunset and atmospheric effects and is a particular fan of the Impressionist's watercolor canvases. Summing up Hassam's decades of paintings of the Shoals, the former curator told me Hassam viewed Thaxter's island as a "sculpture of nature," and that creating "A portrait of Appledore was his project" (Coffey interview). Hassam's painting, below, executed five years after Thaxter's death, might well have been created to illustrate the writer's painterly evocation of a moonrise in *An Island Garden.* Sharing the desire to recreate the poetic effects wrought by the unique atmosphere and environment of the Shoals, they each used the island light to limn the color that so captivated them in all its tints, tones, and shades:

> In the sweet silence before sunrise, standing in the garden I watch the large round shield of the full moon slowly fading in the west from copper to brass and then to whitest silver, throwing across a sea of glass its long, still reflection, while the deep, pure sky takes on a rosy warmth of color from the approaching sun. (*AIG* 112)

Figure 1. Moonrise, Isles of Shoals, 1899, oil on canvas

Because Hassam's narration of the Shoals was accomplished with his brush, we rely on the words of art critics and contemporaries who explicated his island "voice:"

> these works are done on Appledore, both gazing outward toward the sea and adjacent isles and inward across the island's own geologic formations. Hassam ranged beyond Thaxter's garden, adding to his repertoire brilliant, light-filled images of gorges, ledges, and coves. (Bailey and Coffey 109)

Biographies: Island Daughter and Suburban Son

In many important ways, the trajectory of Celia Thaxter's life was determined by a decision her father Thomas Laighton made in 1839. A man with a bent for opportunity as well as for history, Laighton had lost an election in March of that year for the office of Selectman of Portsmouth, home to his family and New Hampshire's only seaport (*Sandpiper* 6). Thomas and

his brother jointly bought Hog (which Laighton was to rename Appledore), Smuttynose, and Malaga Islands (*Sandpiper* 6), each part of the Shoals archipelago, to undertake a new business in shipping local fish and lumber. The Isles of Shoals, as it happens, is named not for its submerged sandbanks, as its name might suggest, but for the preponderance of "shoaling," or "schooling" fish - mackerel, herring, and cod - who swim the waters off the islands (Duncan and Ware 386.). When the government post of lighthouse keeper on White Island in the western Shoals became available, Laighton saw it as an opportunity to oversee the islands of his recent purchase and to inaugurate his business, all the while living with his family in a way no inland location could offer.

Though lighthouse keepers in those days virtually always left their families on shore (Vallier 27), Laighton in the autumn of 1839 moved his wife Eliza and two children, Celia and her newborn brother Oscar, to tiny, meagre White Island, no more than a handful of acres of rock and scrub. When brother Cedric arrived shortly thereafter, four-year-old Celia and her siblings were left to gain their footing on the slippery granite that would eventually become their chosen foundation. This isolated place, the Isles of Shoals, a set of sparsely populated rocky islands hopscotched only by boats, whose sheltered solitude had to be sought out and deemed worthy of the vagaries of nineteenth century travel, imparted its shape to the rest of Celia Thaxter's life. And Celia returned the favor. Contemporary archival theory, having evolved to emphasize diversity in its creation of history and memory, now includes the kinds of socially formed information and communication (Ridener112) made possible by Thaxter's presence on Appledore.

After the family's short stint on Smuttynose, the Laightons settled on Appledore and Thomas conceived of a new business opportunity: he would lure well-to-do northeasterners away

from the sweltering summer heat of their urban homes to a grand ocean retreat. At ninety-five acres[2] Appledore is the largest of the Shoals islands, and Appledore House was established as a luxury hotel in 1848 (Mandel 26). The first successful island resort in America (Mandel 2), this new venture would require the time and commitment of the entire Laighton family over the course of summers well into the future. The resort, which had a bathing pool, bowling alley and tennis courts, could host several hundred guests at a time (Sutherland n.p.).

Laighton's partner in the hotel enterprise, scholar and ornithologist Levi Thaxter, would become a private tutor to his children and then husband to Celia; ironically, the business partnership ended shortly after it began, and the subsequent marriage was realized much too soon for Laighton's taste. But until Levi took over the job of educating Celia and her brothers, the duty had belonged to their father, whose bookish instruction the children supplemented with their own exploration and discovery of the natural environment of the islands. In Oscar Laighton's words, Levi's "knowledge of the best in literature and art made him a rare teacher. Sister was enjoying her lessons and advancing rapidly" (*Ninety Years* 29). Thomas Laighton devised his daughter's only formal year of schooling, it turns out, as a maneuver, a pretext on which to send the young teenager away from Appledore and her physical proximity to the tutor who was eleven years her senior. She completed a year at Mount Washington Female Seminary in South Boston in 1849-50, only to return to the island and become Levi's wife in 1851 at the age of sixteen (Mandel 32). Her granddaughter Rosamond wrote in her biography of Celia that the bride gathered "armsful of scarlet huckleberry leaves, bright rosehaws, wild asters and beach goldenrod to fill the room" where she was married (*Sandpiper* 35). Her own carefully tended

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[2]Celia erroneously records its size as four hundred acres in *Among the Isles of Shoals.*

flowers would be gathered in like manner to cradle her at her death, decades later, when she was accompanied to the Laighton family burial ground on Appledore by those closest to her, including Annie Fields and Childe Hassam (Mandel 161).

Thaxter would bear three sons, keeping her firstborn, Karl, close to her throughout her life, even as the younger boys, John and Roland, often traveled with their father. Karl had suffered either an *in utero* or a birth injury, and after infancy all his days were marked by signs of both physical and emotional disability (Mandel 34-35). His mother was attentive and protective of her neediest child, often bidding her other two sons goodbye to accompany Levi as they split parental responsibilities. Still, the decades of the 1850's and 1860's were devoted to tending children and keeping house in the Boston suburb of Newtonville. Landlocked Boston was, however, a fortuitous location for intellectuals such as the Thaxters. It was during this time that Celia and Levi become close friends with *Atlantic Monthly* magazine's publisher James Fields and his wife, Annie (*ProQuest* n.p.), a cherished friendship that would prove both personally and professionally rewarding to Thaxter over many years. Through the well-connected couple, the Thaxters became acquainted with the area's leading writers, Longfellow, Emerson, and Whittier among them. These literary lights, along with visual artist Hassam and others, would people her summer salon on Appledore throughout the 1870s and 1880s up until her death in 1894.

Thaxter spent much of her adult life summering on Appledore, leaving the island in early fall with Karl and occasionally with Levi and one or two of their other sons, destined for various homes in Kittery, Maine; Massachusetts; and New Hampshire. After wintering over on dry land, in springtime she would fairly skim back over the water to her island home. Levi had nearly drowned in a boating accident in 1855, just four years into their marriage, and he had vowed to

quit the island, beginning what would continue to be for the young Thaxters a long series of separations (May n.p.) Year-round residents of Appledore, resort owners Eliza and Thomas Laighton would require their daughter's tending throughout the seasons as they aged, and Thaxter wrote of how she found the experience of her exposed Atlantic islands frightful in the harshness of winter, "doubly hard" (*AIS* 136.) "The situation is so bleak, while the winds of the north and west bite like demons, with all the bitter breath of the snowy continent condensed in their deadly chill" (*AIS* 85). But more often she set out for the island in April after wintering on the mainland. Cossetted on her transport across the water were the carefully cultivated winter seedlings destined for the small garden among the ledges of Appledore (*AIG* v) for which Thaxter would become well-known. It was a life pattern that would continue to excite her: gardening and cultivating, celebrating nature through her created works.

Thaxter's summer role was that of innkeeper of Appledore House, with the management and maintenance of the resort left in the hands of her brothers. There was never a shortage of work to be done. In addition to the logistics of scheduling guest reservations and requests, Thaxter's contributions included much behind-the-scenes, hands-on duty. She helped her mother with housekeeping and dining chores at hotel scale, from baking breakfast sweets to meal preparation (Mandel 58), all for a large and steady number of vacationing guests. Levi's distaste for the island kept him away during the 1860s and 1870s, with rare exceptions, leaving Celia and Karl in the company of the Laighton family, entwined in the resort enterprise. In his absence from Appledore after 1880 (Mandel 104) and having lost both parents and the responsibility for their care, Thaxter's island life could turn in the early 1880s more exactly to her own preferences: a colony of arts companions that help form the legacy of her time on Appledore.

Frederick Childe Hassam was born in what is now the suburb of Dorchester, formerly a part of the city of Boston, in 1859. He has been characterized as having an idyllic, upper-middle-class youth filled with the "boyish camaraderie" (dorchesteratheneum) of playing sports and swimming, the latter an activity that would remain a lifelong passion. Both his parents claimed descent from a line of patrician New Englanders, and several of his critics and biographers attribute a measure of the adult Hassam's patriotic leanings to his pride in that ancestry. In a 1922 volume on Childe Hassam, part of a collection on Distinguished American Artists, Ernest Haskell's Introduction includes sentences about the painter that are also characteristic of his time: "Bred into his art is this vigorous quality, this New England thoroughness. And how essentially American his work is!" (Pousette-Dart vii). Hassam recalled that he could not remember a time in his childhood when he did not have artists' materials: watercolors, colored crayons, pads of paper.

After his father's cutlery business was destroyed by fire in 1872, leaving his family in precarious financial straits, Hassam was sent to work in the shop of a wood engraver (dorchesteratheneum). Just as family circumstances had determined Thaxter's life course, so the Hassam family's need for income forced their artistically inclined son into the position of paid illustrator. Soon elevated to the position of draftsman, he produced designs and line drawings for Dorchester letterheads and newspapers, including a masthead for the Marblehead Messenger that is still reproduced weekly in an inside page of what is currently the Marblehead Reporter newspaper (legendinc). Along the way he, like Thaxter, found freelance work in the burgeoning magazine industry. He produced illustrations for *Harper's, The Century*, and *Scribner's* (Mandel 150). Hassam would go on to be lauded for his etching skill, showcased in subsequent

lithographs such as those that illustrate Thaxter's *An Island Garden*, but is most known and remembered for his oils, watercolors, and pastels of outdoor scenes.

By 1880, when his family moved to Hyde Park, a southern neighborhood of Boston, Hassam had begun to paint scenes from the urban life by which he was newly surrounded (dorchesteratheneum), and his first one-man exhibition of watercolors in 1882 earned critical praise (Weinberg *Patterns* n.p.). It would be the first of many for the industrious and productive painter, who proved himself over the course of his lifelong career to possess an entrepreneurial temperament, ever with an eye for selling his canvases. Married to Kathleen Maud Doane in 1884, the probable year of his first visit to Appledore (Faxon 114), he supported himself and his wife with the sale of his paintings for the rest of their lives (Mandel 150). John Coffey confirms that Hassam was the most prolific and financially successful of the American Impressionists, and that he managed his career well enough to "die rich" (Coffey email).

Foundations: Impressionistic Nature Writing and the Nature of Impressionism

When student Thaxter and instructor Hassam met at an early 1880's Boston art class for watercolor painting, Hassam must have recognized in his pupil a knack for self-marketing like his own. She invited him to Appledore in 1884 (Sutherland n.p.) and thus set the trajectory for his summer getaways over the next three decades. The Hassams would make summer visits to the island until 1916 (Curry 115). The following is Hassam's account of Celia's shrewd advice to his younger self regarding his own personal branding:

> When I was not much past twenty I met Celia Thaxter who liked as many others did…to paint with watercolors. She said to me one day "You should not, with an unusual name like yours, fail to take advantage of its unique character – There is a young Englishman who has just written some remarkably good stories of India. …His name is Joseph Rudyard Kipling – but he has the literary sense to drop the prefix. If your name is to become known, as …. I think it will, it would be better without the F." That was quite early in my career and so I become Childe Hassam and I spent some of my pleasantest summers in the Isles of Shoals and in her salon there. (Stern 111)

This interaction, at a critical moment in Hassam's career, establishes the nature of his on-going relationship with Thaxter: she is an experienced mentor who understands that there is more to success than just talent behind an easel, and sees in him enough potential to help him prosper. Her invocation of Kipling as an analog to Hassam shows her to be not only a consumer of contemporaneous literature but a student of the marketplace. That business sense has certainly contributed to our memory of the island: Thaxter's volume of productivity was partly due to the pressures of having to sell her writing and her porcelain pieces, leaving a larger body of public work through which Appledore is immortalized.

Tending the garden on Appledore was a seasonal pleasure that annually embellished Celia's summers. She also engaged in creative pursuits off-island, whether living in Maine or New Hampshire, and had success in selling her poems, a number of which she illuminated with images of flowers, and she found a clientele for her painted porcelain. As early as 1877, Thaxter studied china painting with John Appleton Brown and drawing with Ross Turner and Childe Hassam (Mandel 132), all of whom soon joined her on Appledore. When she encountered Hassam again in the early 1880's at his Boston watercolor class, it was the beginning of a life-long bond for Celia, whose enthusiasm for the sunlit beauty of her island Hassam would share and memorialize with his brush. Hassam's oeuvre numbered about four thousand paintings (Kilian n.p.), of which an estimated ten percent were images of Appledore Island. While Thaxter was alive, she and her garden predominate as his subjects; after her death in 1894, Hassam's painterly eye turned to the rocky coastline and "the heaps of tumbling granite" with which Thaxter was so taken. In an iconic vista of the island, Hassam's 1890 oil on canvas known as *Babb's Rock* showcases both the ledges that fall away into the ocean and the natural vegetation surrounding them. Thaxter captured the same scene in *An Island Garden*, demonstrating in her

prose an equally painterly eye: “How beautiful they are, these grassy, rocky slopes shelving gradually to the sea, with here and there a mass of tall blossoming grass softly swaying in the warm wind against the peaceful, pale blue water” (72).

Hassam’s visual work on the Isles of Shoals is an expression kindred to Thaxter’s lyrical one; Appledore itself inspired them both and remains a primary source for us. To experience their art firsthand is to engage their island; likewise, to engage their island is to experience their art. Twenty-five years Hassam’s senior, Thaxter must have relished having a young friend about whose health and approval she needn’t worry. So many of her close relationships with men could be characterized as having fatherly overtones that the reversal of seniority she enjoyed with Hassam must have been refreshing. Her deep concern and worry for her father, older husband Levi and elderly friends James Fields and John Greenleaf Whittier had preoccupied her; by the end of the year 1884, all but Whittier were gone. Levi’s obituary of that year refers to his wife as “the poetess Celia Thaxter, so closely identified with the Isles of Shoals” (Mandel 113), affirming that she had by then earned the status of established poet and presided over a fashionable salon on Appledore.

After the publication of “Land-locked” in 1861, Celia’s book of poetry titled simply *Poems* had appeared in 1872, followed by *Among the Isles of Shoals* the following year. In 1875 came an essay that is closest to straight journalism, *A Memorable Murder*, the narrative of the murders on Smuttynose that were to make that island infamous. More published poetry followed, with volumes *Drift-Weed* in 1879 *and Poems for Children* in 1883, about the time her path intersected Hassam’s. In 1886 *The Cruise of the Mystery* was published, and finally in 1894, *An Island Garden*. All pay tribute to her islands and are testament to her deep relationship, the actual identity-forming kinship, she feels in connection to this singular Atlantic group of isles.

Samples of Thaxter's nature writing included here only suggest her large and heterogeneous body of work in multiple genres. With few exceptions, however, her subject remains constant: nature is her enduring muse; specifically, the nature she engaged and observed on Appledore.

Thomas Lyon proposes three main dimensions that make up the literature of nature: "natural history information, personal responses to nature, and philosophical interpretation of nature" (276). *An Island Garden,* written on demand for admirers who wished to replicate Thaxter's gardening results, best fits Lyon's category of natural history essay: "When expository descriptions of nature… are fitted into a literary design, so that the facts then give rise to some meaning or interpretation… The main burden of the writing is to convey pointed instruction in the facts of nature" (277). *An Island Garden* meticulously catalogues Thaxter's method. Not the romantic musings of a casual stroller along the garden path, but an intricately detailed account of a serious and knowledgeable naturalist and botany student, it imparts information as does a botanist working in service of prospective gardeners.

Among the Isles of Shoals is composed for a different purpose, and in its time, 1873, functioned as a travel advertisement for the Laighton family resort. According to Lyon, it is the "exhilaration of release from civilization, the sense of self-contained and self-reliant movement, and … the thrill of the new" (280) that are the attractions of the travel genre. In her book *The Language of Landscape*, Anne Whiston Spirn writes that making these landscapes successfully appeal to emotion and reason depends on understanding rhetoric: "To know landscape poetics is to see, smell, taste, hear, and feel landscape as a symphony of complex harmonies…In landscape symphonies, all dwellers are composers and players" (22). It is this symphony that Thaxter so often plays. Imagining a stranger's first experience landing on one of the Shoals islands, she recreates a characteristic sunrise in *Among the Isles of Shoals*:

> For the world is like a new-blown rose, and in the heart of it he stands, with only the caressing music of the water to break the utter silence, unless, perhaps, a song-sparrow pours out its blissful warble like an unembodied joy. The sea is rosy, and the sky; the line of land is radiant; the scattered sails glow with the delicious color that touches so tenderly the bare, bleak rocks. These are lovelier than sky or sea or distant sails, or graceful gulls' wings reddened with the dawn; nothing takes color so beautifully as the bleached granite; the shadows are delicate, and the fine, hard outlines are gloried and softened beneath the fresh first blush of sunrise. (11)

As the sunrise transforms the elements of land and sea and sky, Thaxter transforms prose into poetry. The advent of a new day colors rocks, water, sky, and sparrow by awakening the senses of sight and sound, and in so doing, delivers "the release from civilization" and "the thrill of the new." In her nature writing, as in her other artistic endeavors, Thaxter consistently demonstrates an eye for beauty and answers the siren call of the Shoals. Importantly, her publications also gave Thaxter a perch of relative ease and success from which to relish being mentor and friend to Hassam. We can begin to anticipate the nature and quality of the work they will produce together, with Appledore the repository of their creation.

By the mid-1880s, Hassam was also established in his chosen field, having painted one of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts' most popular paintings, the softly realist *At Dusk* (*Boston Common at Twilight*) as well as the equally assured *Rainy Day, Columbus Avenue, Boston*, a sort of Back Bay answer to street scenes emerging from the French art market of the time (Smee n.p.). Both these painted scenes would be recognized by today's audiences, as they circulate in American popular culture, ornamenting notecards and calendars, for example, in a way that the name of the artist does not.

Hassam and wife Maud would set off for a tour of Europe the year Thaxter's *Poems for Children* was published, but it would not be until 1886 that they would settle on the outskirts of Paris in the avant-garde neighborhood of Montmartre. There Hassam spent three years

investigating the phenomenon of French Impressionism, eventually taking his studio easel outdoors, *en plein air*, onto the streets of Paris. From France came his looser brushwork and lighter palette, presentiments of his later reputation as a master of sunlight and shadow (Stewart n.p.). Ironically, he would eventually become annoyed by the moniker pinned on him by American art critics and commentators: "the American Monet." But no matter how tiresome he may have found that label, the Shoals pictures "bear eloquent witness to Monet's fertilization of Hassam's painting style. The most memorable Appledore images, like Monet's finest works, and perhaps like the islands themselves, combine great delicacy with resonant strength" (Curry 94). A seasonal painted record of Appledore over the years begins to accumulate in Hassam's art; it will eventually bear archival witness over a period of more than a quarter century.

Childe Hassam remained resistant to the label "Impressionist" throughout his career. Unwilling to be pigeonholed but equally unable to resist the influence of a style taking hold in the larger art world, Hassam was moved by the effects of light and the use of color the Impressionists had unleashed across the waters of the Atlantic. For the thirty years of his career that remained, he was characterized as having a hybrid style, a blend of realism with French Impressionism. What would remain constant was his choice of subjects: gardens, flowers, the play of light and atmosphere out-of-doors or on women in front of windows, and the movement and motion in urban streetscapes.

A portrait of his wife Maud done in Paris in 1888 prefigures much of the work Hassam would choose to do with Thaxter on Appledore in the following half dozen years. Entitled simply *Reading*, it is an oil on panel of Maud tucked onto a chair with a book, embraced by the curve of a rosy-toned half-wall. At her feet curls the figure of a sleeping dog. A series of flowerpots sit on the low horizontal cap of the wall, filling in the space which the wall would consume if painted

at full height. Decorative crocks of blooming red and pink geraniums are the eye's first resting place as it travels from left to right, over the two figures, and into the neutral foreground. The tranquil, lovely scene, with its geometric organization and bright palette (Hill 11) would be characteristic of many of Hassam's paintings of Thaxter's garden.

Celia's Salon: All Embracing Hospitality

At her invitation many New England cultural elites would find in Thaxter's welcoming sea cottage a veritable salon of receptive like minds. Friends like James and Annie Fields, William Dean Howells, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Sarah Orne Jewett, Lucy Larcom, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Horace Greeley, Thomas Higginson, John Greenleaf Whittier, William Morris Hunt, musician Ole Bull, and father and son music composers Lowell and William Mason visited over the years, many regularly. Childe Hassam and Ross Turner both eventually had painting studios on Appledore near Celia's cottage. Her evenings were free for entertainment in her parlor and piazza, spaces that she had made uniquely her own. Filled with carefully arranged vases of flowers from her cutting garden and walls papered with pictures and paintings done by her guests, the air was reliably resonant with music from the piano at the center of her front room.

Most notable salon-goers of Thaxter's time had first met her on the mainland. Accepting the poet's invitation to join her elite set on Appledore offered them a rarified opportunity and demonstrated Thaxter's unusual talent for drawing together and entwining people in friendship and patronage. Thaxter shared this characteristic with her collaborator Sarah Wyman Whitman, who also welcomed visitors to enjoy her "all-embracing hospitality" (Harvard Magazine). By the early 1880's Thaxter had become one of America's most popular poets (Mason x), a celebrity well-read, well-rounded, and well-connected, and therefore sought out by her artistic peers. To

her island home came a parade of American cultural elites, and together they created a moment of historical and philosophical chemistry that was Appledore's to record.

In addition to the visual artists and authors who gathered during convivial summer evenings at her cottage, just a short walk from the hotel, Thaxter's guests included musicians, for she loved the arts in general, music among them. Music could often be heard coming from her parlor piano. "During the 1860s, Lowell Mason, the American hymn composer and musical educator, introduced his children to Appledore where his son William became a regular at the piano. On several occasions, John Knowles Paine, America's first symphonic composer, and William Mason would play the piano…" (Mason xi), popularly, Beethoven duets. In the years to come William would introduce American audiences to many of Schumann's works, and he became one of Thaxter's favorite composers (Mason n.p.). Thaxter's 1881 poem *Schumann's Sonata in A Minor* conveys the scene:

> Outbreaks at once the golden melody,
> "With passionate expression!" Ah, from whence
> Comes the enchantment of this potent spell,
> This charm that takes us captive, soul and sense?
> The sacred power of music, who shall tell,
> Who find the secret of its mastery? (Mason n.p.)

Characteristically, Thaxter opens the stanza by inverting her subject and verb for emphasis, indicative in this instance of how the sweep of music disrupts the routine conventions of speech. She goes on to include the score's instruction for the piece's emotional pitch, and manifests that "passionate expression" in reverent language inspired by the music: "potent spell," "soul and sense," "sacred" and "secret … mastery." Thaxter's granddaughter recounts that many of her poems had been set to music, and "a universal favorite among them was 'Goodbye Sweet Day.' On Appledore, then, as on Star Island now, assembled friends and guests would join in

singing this beautiful song as the sun disappeared behind the New Hampshire hills" (*Sandpiper* 195). If the island as storehouse and archival site has a soundtrack, it is classical.

Though within a scant ten miles of the coast of Maine and New Hampshire, the world the Shoals represented to Celia was consciously chosen and completely other. Appledore offered the kind of prosody engendered by artistic fulfillment; wintering off-island was made prosaic with traditional female duties. On display in Thaxter's cottage salon were the accoutrements of her various creative projects, and she sometimes worked during her afternoons and evenings among her invited friends. The light from a parlor window fell on her all-important writing desk, but also on a table surface covered with materials for china and watercolor painting, her other artistic money-making endeavors.

Porcelain painting was a popular pursuit for women at the turn of the late nineteenth century, a respectable hobby and occupation for the middle and upper classes (Kansas Historical Society). Thaxter's need to support herself through her work led not only to writing and selling flower bouquets but also to crafting her illuminated manuscripts and painted china. We know that in addition to ordering from high-end European companies, Thaxter worked with Cooley's in Boston, a prestigious firm that not only provided firing services for hand-painted china but also carried an extensive line of china blanks and supplies (Stephen 134). Blanks, or undecorated porcelain forms, provided an avenue for another visual expression for Thaxter, and she was able to transform the china into useful but handsome everyday objects. She produced plates, bowls, cufflinks, teacups and saucers, pitchers, jars, tiles, and buttons. Always true to her great subject, Thaxter was a naturalist painter of botanical precision. The set of painted cufflinks, below, may have been inspired by a butterfly in Thaxter's garden, testament to her powers of observation and

the exactitude of her brush. She would record that "the whole blossoming space is alive with many-colored butterflies floating like flowers" (*AIG* 114.)

Figure 2. Courtesy of the Celia Thaxter collection, Portland, Maine

A portrait of the aesthetically rich space her front room had become reveals Thaxter, finally, with a room of her own. It catalogs both the social and historical practices that have become part of the repository of the island. From Caleb Mason's *The Isles of Shoals Remembered: A Legacy from America's First Musician's and Artists' Colony* comes a slice-of-life portrayal of Celia's Appledore salon on a hot summer afternoon:

> her friends would stroll over from the nearby hotel, passing through Celia's magnificent garden before entering the parlor quietly, so as not to disturb her as she sat writing at her desk. Celia's dark green parlor was furnished with long sofas and easy chairs, comfortable furniture on which her friends could sit as she recited one of her poems, or as one of the gifted musical guests played Beethoven or Chopin sonatas on her grand piano. Every inch of wall space was covered with paintings by Childe Hassam, Ross Turner, John Appleton Brown, and other artists and friends. Artists hopeful of making a sale displayed their works on the many easels set up in the room. Beautifully coordinated flower arrangements from Celia's cottage garden added color and fragrance to the sun-splashed room. (A guest claimed to have counted 110 different flowers in the parlor one day.) Looking out across the ocean, the mainland would disappear from view in the

> midday haze, heightening the guests' sense of being lost within the security of island living. (Mason x – xi)

Mason depicts a privileged and nested seclusion; at a remove from the mainland, the island hides its treasures inside a shroud of veiling mist, with Thaxter's cottage drawing room its innermost sanctum, the salon's cultural offerings more desirable for its invitation-only accessibility.

Mason also off-handedly highlights a little-known feature of Thaxter's parlor. Susan G. Larkin, authoring an essay for Weinberg's *Childe Hassam American Impressionist,* names Thaxter's parlor "one of the most celebrated interiors in American cultural history" (124). The aura of exclusivity that Larkin identifies at Celia's salon was calculated to enhance its commercial success, as the art on display was available to only the chosen few. Even the flowers were for sale: "At first, the garden was started entirely for pleasure… but in after years it became quite a source for revenue, as hotel guests gladly availed themselves of the privilege to possess the lovely corsage bouquets arranged by her own hands" (125). In addition to the densely hung walls of Thaxter's cottage parlor, the hotel lobby itself, Larkin speculates, may have served as additional gallery space (126). In featuring the artwork of her peers, Thaxter designs an intellectually and aesthetically pleasing space while making clear her own choices and preferences as patron and benefactor. Her once private parlor, a most individualistic and cherished space, had enlarged into a sphere of public influence and taste. Ahead of her time once more, Thaxter's gatherings cannot help but recall the much-touted Parisian salons of art patron Gertrude Stein in the twentieth century's first quarter.

The Splendors of Creation: Appledore in Words and Pictures

Two years before Celia's death in 1894, Hassam painted what is his most famous work, *Celia Thaxter in Her Garden,* relying on the same left to right progression as did his painting *Reading*, with the same overall softness of effect. Thaxter's white hair and garb make her an

angelic focal point occupying the painting's full center. In this case, the reds and pinks of the garden poppies lead the eye inward, their contrast against her white gown bringing the eye to a rest on her contemplative figure. Hassam's use of the white in Thaxter's dress, or rather, the pastel lavenders, blues, and yellows that inflect his whites, had emerged to significant effect in his cityscape *Horticulture Building, World's Columbian Exposition*, an 1893 illustration commissioned for the World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago that same year (Hill 18). The translucent domed building, at once architecturally accurate and ethereal, is again centrally positioned behind and against color and greenery. It closes a composition made serene by a wide central boulevard enjoyed by strolling, parasoled women. The mood Hassam paints seems always to reflect that of his Appledore paintings: never the storm, always the sunshine.

All three paintings exemplify how commercially driven Hassam was. His were depictions of the social set that would buy his paintings, says Weinberg. "There's no hint that there was a heterogeneous, struggling population in his cities, whether Boston, Paris or New York. Instead, you see a genteel, optimistic view of urban life" (Weinberg qtd. in Stewart). The same can be said for his depiction of the Shoals, for like reason. Notably absent in his set of paintings depicting Appledore Island are figures of people, and certainly Hassam would have had ample opportunity to include the vacationing upper-crust guests at the hotel. His decision was to omit the public, and other than Thaxter, his canvases capture only the occasional female figure, set upon the craggy coastline of the island as part of a seascape. His island paintings thus depict the true attraction of Appledore: unpeopled, peaceful, and idyllic summer vistas that become dreamscapes for his potential clientele. Sharing the same motivation as Thaxter, the need to generate income, Hassam succeeds, as does she, through the volume of his production.

The first known depiction of the island Hassam painted is a watercolor from 1882-83 published as a magazine illustration and featuring the unusual rock formations on Appledore's northeast section (Burnside 107). He would begin returning to the same subjects repeatedly, a favorite gorge in particular named Neptune's Hall typical of the evolution of his painting technique as he tried on the lessons and experiments of Paris. His renderings of this rock formation gradually became bolder and more experimental, emphasizing color, light, and the movement of the water, as in *Isles of Shoals, Broad Cove*, 1911 (Burnside 109). Hassam's brush strokes become a more visible part of his compositions over time, clearly identifiable, for example, in *Lyman's Ledge, Appledore*, 1903. They culminate in his abstract evocations of the gorge in watercolors done in 1912, but during his time with Thaxter, his representation of the island in oils is assertively yet softly Impressionistic, as in his 1892 work *Moonlight*. In that study of teals and greens, the cloud surrounded orb of the moon paints its own path across the Atlantic waters, its light redirected by the sloped coastline into and out of quiet tidal pools. Hassam's brand of Impressionism, asserts Kathleen Burnside, prioritizes color and atmosphere, but also embraces naturalism and aesthetically pleasing composition (109). After Thaxter's death in 1894, Hassam took a five-year hiatus from the singular place of their attachment, only returning regularly to the island in 1899. Having expended much time and paint on Celia's garden during her lifetime, he now turned to the architectural domain of the rocks and variegated ledges, where wind and tide interacted with light. Now his subject exclusively became the island topography and seascapes, a documenting that would participate in transforming Appledore from island into historical cache.

As Susan Morgan writes in *Place Matters*, in the politics of culture, "where" can be as complex a category as "who" (Morgan 4). In Morgan's view, place does not carry an inherent,

definitive identity, but entails history and particular historical discourses, and is additionally always framed by the points of view of other places (10). Places, then, can themselves be archival. Just as Appledore brings its entire geological backstory (Bailly and Coffey 51) forward into Thaxter's moment, it brings to us Thaxter and Hassam's history, including their respective uses of the "language" of art, precisely the nature and function of an archive.

To the extent that regions specify place, write Fetterley and Pryse, Thaxter's region, and to a lesser degree Hassam's, is a group of islands (12), as much cultural as geographic, about which each artist takes up the question of the peculiar and the particular rather than the universal or even necessarily the American (33). Much like the islands when they are veiled by haze, the formations themselves are always there, but their outlines require attention and discrimination to discern. Both painter and writer bring to their subjects such tools of heightened observation and receptivity. Writing for the magazine *American Art* in 1999, Elizabeth Broun reminds the reader that Hassam's training as an illustrator instilled habits of industry and keen observation that stayed with him throughout his painting career (34). And Thaxter includes her own advice on the subject in *An Island Garden:*

> Unless the eyes are young and keen a microscope only will tell this; but it is one of the wisest things in the world to carry in one's pocket a little magnifying glass, for this opens so many unknown gates into the wonders and splendors of Creation. There is such a wealth of ornament, such marvelous subtile (sic) thought spent on the smallest blossom! The "sweet and cunning hand of Nature" is so lavish of its work, and it is all so happy, the joy is so inexhaustible, the refreshment to the human soul so heavenly! (120-121)

Thaxter displays at once a scientist's eye and an aesthete's sentimentality. She uses any tool at her disposal to read nature more closely, in this case a simple magnifying glass, but we know she has also used a microscope in the past. As she continually strives to observe and understand nature more fully, she records here as elsewhere the ecstatic reaction that it often elicits from her.

In *Among the Isles of Shoals*, Thaxter demonstrates an auditory sensitivity that typifies how finely attuned to her islands she became: "each island, every isolated rock, has its own peculiar rote, and ears made delicate by listening in great and frequent peril, can distinguish the bearings of each in a dense fog" (19). We can scarcely imagine Celia being Celia in any location other than her island home, or without the mainland that formed her identity in opposition to her islands. Flipping the equation and trying to envision Appledore Island without Thaxter, close friend and island visitor John Greenleaf Whittier wrote to his dependable correspondent: were it not for your presence, the island would be "a mere pile of rocks … dead as the moon's old volcanic mountains. Thee have given them an atmosphere" (Whittier qtd. in Curry, 13). Thaxter's time on Appledore, and all she engendered on the island, added a distinctive archival layer to the granite's ancient geology. Fittingly, nature, like land, the source of life, is historically considered feminine (Limpar 55).

Gendered Expectations: Which Call to Answer?

Geography and gender are instrumental axes in forming Thaxter's identity. Two main gendered narratives of Thaxter's life become apparent in reading her biography and creative work and reflect the two places that formed her: island and mainland, point and counterpoint. The former allows her a greater degree of freedom to practice an intellectual, creative, and cultural life; the latter is more confining, marked by the routine usualness of New England polite society, but does create advantage as Thaxter established future summer salons. With access to Boston, Newtonville enabled many cultural opportunities, many due to the Thaxters' relationship with the Fieldses. Annie Adams Fields was then and is now identified with her own salon as a site of literary production and performance, and the men and women who came together in the social space of her home did so united by their common religion of art (Loeffelholz 162-163).

Winter visits to the dining room and salon at 148 Charles Street, home of James and Annie, put the Thaxters in company with Dickens during his 1866 reading tour (Mandel 60), as well as with Sarah Whitman, Mathew Arnold, Willa Cather, Sarah Orne Jewett, Henry James, Longfellow, Emerson, Oliver Wendall Holmes, and John Appleton Brown.

James Fields had succeeded the *Atlantic*'*s* first editor, James Russell Lowell, and was in charge when a number of these authors were contributors to the magazine (Mandel 46). Many would sail to Appledore in the coming years to join Thaxter in her parlor and share in her summer gatherings, which would offer, like Annie's, a "social sphere not so much separated by gender as defined by its allegiance to an emergent late nineteenth-century aesthetic sphere of high culture" (Loeffelholz 162). While neither Boston nor the island allowed Thaxter to escape the domestic lot of a nineteenth century woman, one feels that she shouldered the expectations of her gender more lightly, or perhaps counterbalanced them more satisfactorily, at Appledore. Further, on-island she catalyzed and fed the artistic leanings of many luminaries who judged her to be nothing less than an equal. Biographer Mandel writes that for Thaxter, the bonds of connection she developed as hostess of her own salon were particularly important. Distanced from her husband, Thaxter enjoyed success as a poet and the feelings of self-esteem that went with it and sought empowerment rather than dependence in her relationships with fellow artists (67). Quoting feminist writer Carolyn Heilbrun, Mandel elaborates on the kind of power that the arts colony conferred: "Power is the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to the action and the right to have one's part matter" (67).

When aspiring writer Nathanial Hawthorne visited the island in 1852, early in the life of the resort, he carried a letter of introduction from Franklin Pierce, United States senator and future President, fellow Bowdoin graduate, and friend and former guest of Thomas Laighton on

Appledore (Mandel 21). In his *American Notebooks* he conferred on Thaxter a moniker that has been repeated in sundry accounts about her life since, due no doubt to the adroitness of his allusion and to his subsequent fame. Hawthorne records spending evenings on Appledore with Levi Thaxter, Celia's husband, and notes that "[Levi's] marriage with this pretty little Miranda is a true romance" (Hawthorne 537). In naming Thaxter as an echo of Miranda from Shakespeare's "The Tempest," Hawthorne alludes to a fictional daughter brought up on a deserted island exclusively in the company of her father, Prospero. The two make their own enchanted world from the middle of a storm at sea, the bard's Miranda also home-schooled by her learned father and his library of books. Both Thomas Laighton and Prospero would have outsized influence on their daughters; in Laighton's case, he imbued Celia with his own enterprising sensibility and desire for self-improvement. Marjorie Garber's meditation on the geography of Shakespeare's play could well double as insight into the role Appledore Island played in Thaxter's life:

> What is most magical about the isle, however, is that in being many places at once, geographically, culturally, and mythographically hybrid, it eludes location and becomes a space for poetry, and for dream. It is not found on any map. Prospero's enchanted island, while drawn from real explorations and published accounts, is ultimately a country of the mind. (856)

In Thaxter's world, however, the private, domestic obligations of her inland homes balance the more public, poetic, and easily romanticized isles of "Miranda."

Appledore's role in Thaxter's life highlights Garber's distinction, above, between location and place, and points to the island's archival function. More than coordinates on a map, the noun "place" includes a wider context of space, as in a dwelling or person's home (*OED*). The *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of "home" includes "a refuge, a sanctuary; a place or region to which one naturally belongs or where one feels at ease (*OED*). In Thaxter's case, her feeling of being at home on Appledore is centered on her relationship with the island and on her

deep connection with its natural environment. To understand that bond, and Thaxter herself, a firsthand experience of that archive is called for, just as we would visit the built homes or designated institutions housing the public records of any researched subject.

Thaxter would not be alone in chafing at the endless rounds of household chores that kept her from her writing and her painting. Living in Newtonville, Massachusetts at the age of twenty-one, keeping house for her husband and two young sons, Thaxter vented in a letter to a friend:

> I do my own washing now, and think of you all the time, and get tired to death and half dead … How it seems as if the weary load of things one makes out to do, with such expenditure of strength and nerves and patience, goes for naught, no manner of notice ever taken of all that is accomplished, but if anything is left undone, ah me, the hue and cry that is raised. (Mandel 40-41)

Caught in her moment's ambivalence, Thaxter frustrations illuminate the restrictions imposed by the nineteenth century's Cult of True Womanhood and anticipate Virginia Woolf's spiritual railings against the plight of the Angel in the House. Thaxter biographer Mandel characterizes the womanhood cult as the "belief that a woman should devote herself to the private sphere of the home, while her husband, working in the outside world, remained head of the family" (104). Popularized by Coventry Patmore's sequence of poems "The Angel in the House," the "angel" Woolf refers to and vows to kill in "Professions for Women" is an ideological construct meant to teach women to value their mindless domestic roles (Bizzell and Herzberg 1249).

Such ideas fueled the "The Woman Question" that loomed on both sides of the English-speaking Atlantic at the time: What is the proper role for a woman in society, and to what rights is she entitled? In 1929 Virginia Woolf famously elaborated on this theme, applying it specifically to women and fiction writing in "A Room of One's Own," a space, incidentally, that Celia always sorely needed and would go on to establish on Appledore. Woolf believed that

women novelists through the centuries had failed only because they were not financially independent or intellectually free, and therefore denied the fullest worldly experience (Bizzell and Herzberg 1260).

It was Thaxter's need to earn a living that would cause her to comply less with convention and rely more on her array of intellectual and artistic gifts for both financial and personal fulfillment. Because Levi never had a consistent means of earning a living, Thaxter was forced into a more public, working-artisan role designed to keep her household afloat. She would write and illustrate her own poetry, publish freelance journal articles on the issues of the day, and publish children's poems and stories in leading juvenile magazines such as *St. Nicholas, Youth's Companion*, and *Our Young Folks,* drawing on her childhood experiences of growing up on-island (Mandel 76-77). In *The Kittiwakes*, for example, a poem published for the young readers of *St. Nicholas* in 1874 (Kilcup and Sorby xiv), Thaxter foreshadows her later writing and activism on behalf of wildlife; the plight of birds is her particular and enduring cause, intervening an at early age is her chosen method:

> Nay, then boatman, spare them! Must they bear
> Pangs like these for human vanity?
> That their lovely plumage we may wear,
> Must these fair, pathetic creatures die?

A dozen years later, having become the secretary of the Audubon Society in Waltham, Massachusetts (Mandel 153), Thaxter would decry in an adult essay the practice of using birds, both feathers and corpses, in women's fashion. *Women's Heartlessness* was published in *Audubon Magazine* in its first issue in 1887 (Celia Thaxter collection), an early example of a humane environmental consciousness. In 1890 Thaxter began a correspondence with naturalist Bradford Torrey about avian life on the Isles of Shoals, establishing a legacy of environmental stewardship that continues today in the scientific research conducted by Shoals Marine

Laboratory (Hamilton and Jones 303). The preservation of the island as repository requires conservation of its natural state as generative archive and healthy ecosystem.

Though several sources record that it was Levi who was responsible for submitting her first published poem, "Land-locked," which appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1861 and was given its title by editor James Russell Lowell (Thaxter *Sandpiper* 61), a more recent biography of Thaxter asserts that this is unsettled (Mandel 45). Nonetheless, her lyrical lament about mainland living, away from the large rocks surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean, was the beginning of her paid writing career. The check for $10 that Celia received (Mandel 45) was a princely sum at the time, an amount that would have paid for a week's stay at the Appledore Hotel (docent, Appledore Island, 2022). The final stanza of six in "Land-locked" is representative of its overall sentiment. Thaxter longs for what she has called "the very sweet and suggestive" rote, the often-melancholy sound of the sea on the rocks; for her, one of the signature pleasures of being on island. Unlike Hassam, she captures the island's nuance in all its moods, not just those of bright sun and serenity, but in its deeper, more solemn registers as well. Hassam's vision is that of visitor; Thaxter's is a knowing recounting of home:

> O Earth! Thy summer song of joy may soar
> ringing to heaven in triumph. But I crave
> the sad, caressing murmur of the wave
> that breaks in tender music on the shore.

With these words we recognize that the only way we can stand in the shoes of Thaxter, and Hassam, is to inhabit their sensory experiences of the Shoals, from which their art grew.

Thaxter supplemented her earnings as an author by selling her decoratively painted porcelain pieces, many with images of the flowers she knew by heart, often executed from memory. We learn the fate of one batch from an account Thaxter left in a letter to her son John:

"I am sending a large covered basket of painted china to Mrs. Safford and I will send it from Portsmouth by the Stage. There is a plaque to hang up and a pitcher with daisies and a vase with seaweed and a little plate of poppies. I hope they get it, for there was as much as twenty-five dollars worth at least!" (*Sandpiper* 138).

Celia's Garden: The Desire for Profusion

Thaxter's vaunted garden is much smaller and free form than both the amount of pleasure she took in it and many of the historical antecedents whose images it conjures. Replicated today in its original plot, it still invites audiences and imitation as part of America's landscape history, a living catalog of botanical research. At 50 x 15 feet, it sat right outside her cottage doorway and ran the length of her piazza, so that she could step out her front door, through a vine-encased arch, and into her cutting garden. Still, it dwarfed the original "scrap of garden" she nurtured as a young girl on White Island, "not more than a yard square, wherein grew only African marigolds, rich in color as barbaric gold" (*AIS* 111). As an adult she would muse, "It seems strange to write a book about a little garden only fifty feet long by fifteen wide! But then, as a friend pleasantly remarked to me, 'it extends upward,' and what it lacks in area is more than compensated by the large joy that grows out of it and its uplifting and refreshment of 'the Spirit of Man'" (*AIG* 71).

Mara Miller undertakes the definitions of gardens and of art in her book *The Garden as an Art*: "A garden is any purposeful arrangement of natural objects … with exposure to the sky or open air, in which the form is not fully accounted for by purely practical considerations such as convenience" (15). Miller then elaborates on the last-mentioned feature, what amounts to an excess of form. More than can be accounted for by physical necessity, "this form provides a sort of satisfaction in itself, and some sort of meaning or significance – whether aesthetic, or sensual,

or spiritual or emotional" (15). In this excess lies Thaxter's joy. The desire for profusion she expresses in her garden parallels that in her literary art. As with her flowers, in poetry and prose she transforms the ordinary or utilitarian into literature, giving it "a texture and resonance beyond its abstractable meaning" (Eagleton 2). This "disproportion between the signifier and the signified" is a defining quality of literature that works equally well to describe Thaxter's gardening practice. More obviously recognizable in the fine art of painting, this drawing of attention and flaunting of material being (Eagleton 2) is a hallmark of the artwork of both poetry and ornamental gardens. For Mara Miller, this "excess of form," this flaunting, is the invariable marker, the distinguishing feature, of the work of art; anything which exhibits this excess, successfully or not, is art (15). Thaxter, accordingly, is both literary and botanical artist.

By the early 1880's, when Thaxter began gardening in earnest, her flower beds were unusual. She avoided Victorian formality, favoring a naturalistic amorphous explosion, an "excess of form," of softer tints and tones, planted in irregular drifts and masses that intertwined and overlapped (Curry 70). Quaint annuals and perennials were suited to her cottage garden, unpretentious and rambling. This is the image most captured by Hassam, compelling him to use his entire toolkit: pastels, watercolor and oil. *The Island Garden*, *Field of Poppies*, *Home of the Hummingbird*, *Hollyhocks in Late Summer*, *From the Doorway*, *Isles of Shoals*, *Flower Garden*, and *Celia Thaxter's Garden*, *Isles of Shoals*, is but a sampling. Each is welcoming, softly profuse, pleasing to the layman's eye, imparting comfort. In Thaxter's words, "They are mostly the old-fashioned flowers our grandmothers loved (*AIG* 44). As one of Thaxter's modern-day literary counterparts, Jamaica Kincaid, wrote in *Among Flowers*, her own memoir of gardening,

> The garden is an invention, the garden is an awareness, a self-consciousness, an artifice. We think and feel that we are making something natural when we make a garden, something that, if come upon unexpectedly, is a pleasure to behold; something that

> banishes the idea of order and hard work and disappointments and sadness, even as the garden is sometimes made up of nothing but all that. (188-189)

Certainly, Celia's garden was made up of "all that," a labor of love and a source of deep pleasure in its planning, execution, and realization. In examining its meaning to Thaxter, we can say that the garden "exists simultaneously as idea, place, and action" (Francis and Hester 3), and to that list I would add that the garden on the Isles of Shoals was also a symbol of the creative autonomy she found on Appledore. Gardens takes place patiently, over time, season to season, generation to generation, hand to hand. Thaxter's garden on the insulated island is analogous to the medieval garden planted safely inside monastery walls, with the Atlantic providing "walled off" security from the perilous and chaotic outside world (Rijksmuseum). Not a projection of power such as the formal gardens of Versailles, it is more akin to the untamed gardens at writer Virginia Woolf's Monk house in Sussex, England (reckless-gardener).

The island garden, especially once Hassam began painting it using techniques of the French Impressionists, was most comparable with artist Claude Monet's famous garden at Giverny, France. Ironically, one can today see Monet's *Poppy Field in a Hollow near Giverny,* an 1885 oil painting, on the home turf of both Thaxter and Hassam in Boston's Museum of Fine Arts. Hassam's work, like Monet's, is characterized by the garden as recurring theme, and bright pigment applied with a loaded brush (Curry 97). Like Thaxter's, Monet's garden was the product of his own labor, its rewards the more satisfying. As a social construct, Thaxter's garden was also a stand-in for her ability and self-confidence, a sanctioned expression of middle- and upper-class white female creativity that yielded highly visible and pleasing of results. (As I write this narrative, a play entitled *Native Gardens* by Karen Zacarias debuts locally, its flyer advertising a dispute over the lay of the land that "spirals into a war of taste, class, and entitlement") (Playmakers Repertory Company).

Thaxter's seeding and ordering of nature in the form of her chosen flowers was a very personal idea, one that brought the sometimes-beleaguered mother, wife, and daughter a measure of healing and solace, serving both a utilitarian and an aesthetic function, a colorful cutting garden of flowers waving in the island breeze against the cerulean canvas of the sky and sea.

Figure 3. Photograph of Celia's garden on Appledore, July 2022

Of her flowers Thaxter wrote, "In the garden they are planted especially to feast the souls that hunger for beauty, and within doors as well as without they 'delight the spirit of man'" (*AIG* 93.) Embroidered into her select and exclusive space were, among others, dahlias, lilies, an array of poppy varieties, lavender, columbine, phlox, hollyhock, nasturtium, peonies, marigolds, foxglove, and verbena (*AIG* 72.5) Thaxter's intuitive design was to order the height of her varieties in eye-pleasing tiers, and her actions as gardener, hands dirtied in the natural processes of digging, planting, watering, and cutting, connected and reconnected her to a patch of soil on a scrap of rock in the larger history and ecology of the world. Of this plot she was the sole steward. Pressed by her visitors to record the plan and method of her horticultural achievement, the writer penned *An Island Garden*, published in 1894 shortly before her death. The book incorporated both Sarah Whitman Wyman's art nouveau cover and Child Hassam's Impressionist interior illustrations, a collaborative effort that exemplified the aesthetic sensibility of its moment.

In *The Garden as an Art*, Mara Miller calls attention to an often-neglected visual aspect of gardens: the landscape surround in which they are situated. Miller identifies this extended environment as crucial to the sense of appreciation we bring to a plot of blooming flowers, as context is always additive. The outer environment, Miller reminds us, is what provides the terms of contrast and differentiation with the garden itself (Miller 143-144). In Thaxter's case, the craggy island garden setting of rocky coastline outlined by lapis sky and aqua ocean sharpens many of the values which Celia's garden expressed. Hassam expressly chose vantage points to juxtapose this relief of flower and stone. In *Poppies*, for example, an 1890 oil painting riddled with hues of red poppies in the foreground, neutral tones of rock and granite slope into the sea behind the softly textured and intensely colored blossoms of Thaxter's garden. Hassam manages to show respect for the form of the blooms - we know the smears are poppies - while veiling them with paint strokes, also identifiable. Providing glimpses not only of a way of life but of ways of making both garden and painted art, Hassam's set of depictions of Appledore invite a holistic, archival treatment of the Shoals as botanical and cultural space.

Thaxter's explication of her gardening includes the impossibly funny but deadly serious anecdote revealing how heavily on Celia's shoulders the responsibilities of maintaining a garden could weigh:

> Last night, after having given myself the pleasure of watering the garden, I could not sleep for anxiety about the slugs. I seldom water the flowers at night because the moisture calls them out, and they have an orgy of feasting on my most precious children all night long. Before going to bed I went all over the inclosure (sic) and, alas, I found them swarming over the Sweet Peas; baby slugs, tiny creatures covering the tender leaves and the dry pea-sticks even, thick as a grains of sand. I was in despair, and though I knew they did not mind ashes, I took the fine sifter and covered Peas, sticks, slugs, and all with a thick, smothering cloud of wood ashes. Then I left them with many misgivings and went to bed, but not to sleep, for thinking of them. At twelve o'clock I said to myself, You know the slugs don't care a rap for all the ashes in the world, but the friendly toads may be kept away by them, and who knows if such a smother of them may not kill the precious Peas themselves? I could not bear it any longer, rose up and donned my dressing

> gown, and out into the dark and dew I bore the hose, over my shoulders coiled, to the very farthest corners of the garden, and washed off every atom of ashes in the black midnight, and came back and slept in peace. (*AIG* 61-62)

Even Eden, after all, was not wholly Edenic; every garden requires human care (Miller 34.) Pressured by the need to be productive and generate income with her writing and porcelain painting, Thaxter the gardener enjoyed a different motivation, that of the caretaker. Her commitment was to the welfare of her living garden, to its nourishment and protection. As a creative exercise, the garden, tended and husbanded over time, requires something more of its artist than does writing or painting. In a simile fitting of Celia, Robert Pogue Harrison writes in *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition*, "like a story, a garden has its own developing plot, as it were, whose intrigues keep the caretaker under more or less constant pressure. The true gardener is always 'the constant gardener' (7). Such was Celia's horticultural lot.

Aesthetics: Beauty for Beauty's Sake

Thaxter as gardener, as in so many of her other pursuits, was representative of a community emerging during America's Progressive era (Marley 2). In *An Island Garden* she wrote with reverence of her garden as a creation of beauty for beauty's sake. A lifelong aesthete, Thaxter was a believer in beauty and art long before the principle animated the Aesthetic Movement. Now, in middleclass neighborhoods and suburbs, formal and intensely pruned and shaped gardens were losing favor. Instead, the amateur gardener had begun filling personal plots, known as "commuter gardens," (Marley 2) with native plants and wildflowers. American artists – painters, sculptors, book designers, artisans – contributed to the garden movement by transplanting it from confining beds of soil into works of garden art on paper, canvas, glass (3) and porcelain. Thaxter's yearly garden compositions inspired the botanical motifs of her porcelain painting just as they acted as muse for Hassam's innumerable flower paintings and the

designs of Wyman's book covers. "The two arts of painting and garden design are closely related, except that the landscape gardener paints with actual color, line, and perspective to make a composition, as the maker of stained glass does, while the painter has but a flat surface on which to create his illusion… (Beatrix Farrand qtd in Marley 1).

Fortunately for Thaxter, notes Stephen, the American Aesthetic movement began to flourish with the expansion of trade and travel after mid-century, and under the formidable influences of designer William Morris and critic and aesthete John Ruskin (130). Thaxter needed no trend to appreciate art and beauty for their own sake; that ethic was part of her essential makeup. The quality and craftsmanship that hallmarked the Aesthetic Movement were second nature. What the larger trend did was to provide her opportunity and outlet to sell her professional-looking but useful pieces. The 1888 vase below resides in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum in New York City. Celia Laighton Thaxter is listed as "decorator" of the piece, manufactured at Boston's China Decorating Works. Finished in Appledore, Maine, its medium is listed as glazed and painted earthenware. The museum's description reads: "Celia Laighton Thaxter's vase of 1888 depicting naturalistic olive branches and a Greek inscription from Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus illustrates her interest in classical motifs informed by travels in Italy, and her penchant for inscribing her vessels with lines of poetry" (Metropolitan Museum).

Figure 4. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City

Appledore, then, is a fruitful site of production, a place that not only inspired artmaking but which Thaxter designed as a stage for the presentation, display, and sale of art. In the tight community of the island's salon gatherings, ideas were propagated and circulated among like-minded peers. While it is impossible to preserve the social milieu of an historical time, we can surely be stewards of the original site and maintain its physical environment, as well as its art and artifacts, for posterity.

After Hassam's return from Paris, he became in the late 1880s a regular visitor to Appledore, and would repeatedly paint Thaxter's seasonal garden, altering vantage point, varieties, and media. His garden images, whether created in pastel, watercolor, or oil, furnish an obvious point of comparison to his now-famous French counterpart. The flower cultivated and written about most by Celia, the one Sarah Whitman Wyman chooses for her cover illustration of *An Island Garden*, is the flower painted most by both Monet and Hassam. The "art" of the poppy seems not inherent in the flower itself, but a function of its relationship with its human observer.

The poppy, in all its complicated simplicity and in Thaxter's multiple varieties, provides an unlikely connection between not only the nineteenth century painters and the writer/gardener, but also with the work of English art critic John Ruskin, whose work Thaxter had read and incorporated into her writing. Discussions of Ruskin would feature in the salon conversations at Appledore, but the critic also singled out the poppy to illustrate his thinking about aesthetic ideals. Emphasizing the primacy of pure color, Ruskin recorded that accurate form and the "perfectly infused colour of the petals" made up the poppy's essence (Ruskin qtd. in Curry 91-92). Hassam himself was primarily a colorist, often asking of his fellows on Appledore "What colors do you see?" (Richardson 53). Thaxter's exhortations in *An Island Garden* about the Oriental variety in particular do justice to the focus of both Ruskin and Hassam:

> the great scarlet flags of the flower unfold. …There is a kind of angry brilliance about it, a sombre and startling magnificence. Its large petals are splashed near the base with broad, irregular spots of black-purple, as if they had been struck with a brush full of color…It is simply superb, and when the great bush is ablaze with these flowers it is indeed a conflagration of color. (85-86)

The poppy as Thaxter describes it above is a flower that inflames her passions. It is mood-altering in a different way: the poppy has an "angry brilliance, a sombre and startling magnificence," as if aggressively "struck" with a brush full of color, a bush "ablaze" as a

"conflagration." It may – almost - rise to the level of Edmund Burke's definition of the Sublime as "an outrage on the imagination" (Lucie-Smith in Grande xi). In yet another connection to Thaxter's historical moment, the poppy, along with the sunflower, is one of the identifiable motifs of the late nineteenth century's Aesthetic Movement, devoted to the nature and meaning of beauty (Lambourne 10).

In *An Island Garden* Thaxter writes several extended passages about her methods for planting and displaying her favorite flower. Her account of keeping the poppies fresh and well-presented for exhibition in her parlor is an exemplar of both her artistic eye and her systematic precision. Below she details her gardening strategy for the flowers to whom she spoke in friendship, and to whom she felt beholden:

> I am always planting Shirley Poppies somewhere! One never can have enough of them, and by putting them into the ground at intervals of a week, later and later, one can secure a succession of bloom and keep them for a much longer time, - keep, indeed their heavenly beauty to enjoy the livelong summer, - whereas, if they are all planted at once you would see them for a blissful moment, a week or ten days at most, and then they are gone. (*AIG* 50)

Within the seasonality of Thaxter's yearly garden composition are further temporal elements to be regulated, such as the rotation described above to ensure maximum enjoyment of the blooms not only for herself but for any incidental audience. As caretaker, Thaxter concerns herself with the spatial harmony and order of the garden only to the degree that they produce eye-pleasing color in profusion and excess.

Childe Hassam ultimately salvaged the organic poppy's ephemeral nature, indelibly rendering the flowers and making them emblematic of Thaxter's island. Using all the media at his disposal, he created at least a dozen paintings of the poppies of Appledore, painting them from differing viewpoints. One critic wrote that seeing the garden paintings was "like taking off a pair of black spectacles that one has been compelled to wear out of doors, and letting the full

glory of nature's sunlight color pour in upon the retina" (Stewart n.p.). A 1915 exhibit of paintings featuring Hassam's Isles of Shoals work gave New York Tribune art critic Royal Cortissoz opportunity to identify Impressionism's visual signature: "the loose, free strokes are woven into a fabric that permits the ground to show as part of the design;" and he lauded Hassam's "ability to suggest form with it and yet refrain from a fixed outline" (Bailly and Coffey 112). One hundred years later, art historian Ross King characterizes how Impressionistic techniques changed painting as it had existed before the advent of that most controversial and now-beloved art movement: the Impressionists as modernists declared the surfaces on which they were painting. They were not trying to hide or dissemble their medium, but to paint by showing the process of painting itself, by making the strokes themselves visible (King). Those same brushstrokes identify both Monet's and Hassam's poppies as well as the rock formations that Hassam painted on Appledore.

When Hassam returned to Appledore after Thaxter's death, her garden was no longer her garden. (Near the time of the painter's last visits, in 1914 her cottage and garden, along with most structures on the island, were destroyed by fire.) He had already done it credit, and now literally and figuratively felt comfortable turning his back on that time and place to face other vistas. As evidenced by his years of return, he continued to hear Appledore's call. The rock and sea paintings that mark his homecoming take on raw, natural harmonies, a vocabulary, a language in Spirn's sense, that he had acquired over time. These paintings complement his floral landscapes, and they, too, participate in Hassam's propensity to render a subject repeatedly. As a series of nature scenes, they convey the island features in a sculptural, monumental solidity. Often the brush stroke is short and determined in the manner we now recognize as characteristic

of post-Impressionist van Gogh (Zimmer n.p.), as Hassam fashioned stone with the care he once imparted to wood.

Sylph's Rock, Appledore, from 1907 is the most vividly expressive of these paintings and harkens back to his 1899 work *White Island Light, Isles of Shoals at Sundown*, where despite its title, the most prominent feature is a jut into the ocean of rounded rock that dominates the foreground. The painting's perspective, from above the rocky headland, adds to its weight and bulk relative to the barely discernable lighthouse in the distance. These geological depictions form an eloquent and arresting portrait that Thaxter never saw, but one that would have thrilled her, both for their own sake and for their immortalization of her home on Appledore.

As Hassam worked year to year on the island around the turn of the twentieth century and beyond, his technique became more "painterly," with unblended brushstrokes and pigment made visible in his depictions of ocean and craggy coastline, sunlight, and shade. Below is *Sylph's Rock, Appledore;* the original hangs in the Worcester Art Museum in Worcester, Massachusetts. Housed in the "Highlights of American Art" section, its museum label reads in part: "With horizontal brushstrokes of broken colors, *Sylph's Rock* depicts reflective light dazzling the massive granite boulder protruding into the ocean, as well as the turbulent waves dashing against its algae-covered ledges. Deeply aware of the transience of nature, Hassam captured Appledore Island at different vantage points and circumstances to explore the idea that no location was ever the same place twice" (Worcester Museum).

Figure 5. Sylph's Rock, Appledore, 1907, oil on canvas

The evolution of Hassam's technique is evident in his discernible brushstrokes; we see his process. Earlier blending of color has given way to short, individual strokes that mimic rock, ocean, and cloud strata in sunlight. Algae may ring the craggy granite base, or it may, in Thaxter's words, be the seaweed that "girdles each island, and gives a sullen aspect to the whole group" (*AIS* 15). The work reveals the painter's interest in intentional abstraction.

In service of his self-appointed task of capturing the ephemeral, everyday show that is nature's constant habit, these post-Celia paintings continue the Thaxter/Hassam tradition of paying homage to the specific and the particular, of fidelity to the character of the Shoals. Though Hassam rotated his vantage points on the island, it was to the singularity of the islands that the painter remained faithful. Susan Fetterley's essay, *Theorizing Regionalism*, takes pains

to emphasize Thaxter's focus on the singular and individualistic in her art. When in *Among the Isles of Shoals* Thaxter writes about the excavated skull from an ancient Appledore grave that she has rescued, Fetterley points to it as an example of "the specific gift of [Thaxter's] specific island" (47). Dramatizing the connection between person, place, and writing, Thaxter muses about the relic: "I was never weary of studying it. Sitting by the driftwood blaze late into the still autumn nights alone at my desk, it kept me company – a vase of brilliant flowers on one side, the skull on the other, and the shaded lamp between, equally lighting both" (*AIS* 146). I cannot imagine a more perfectly balanced expression of the author's fealty to both beauty and science. In a connection that is beyond Thaxter's to make, her own physical remains would eventually become part of her beloved place, as she and her siblings and parents are buried in a modest graveyard on the island.[3] The unique outcropping that nourished and fostered her lifelong creative spirit would finally incorporate her material remains, serving as last repository and as such, quintessential archive.

"Here were the end, had anything an end"[4]

During Thaxter's adult years on Appledore, she supported and enjoyed an array of literary, musical, and visual arts, all the while producing work of her own in those same arenas. Her eye for the beautiful seemed never to fail her and led her to commemorate the everyday as well as to savor the exceptional. Thaxter's aesthetic appreciation reached its zenith in her relationship with nature: she noticed, recognized, learned from, and relished its gifts, nurturing them wherever she could, and in so doing ensured that her life would never be bereft of pleasure.

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[3]Levi's remains, and those of their three children, rest in Kittery, Maine. At Celia's request, Robert Browning composed Levi's epitaph, and it is engraved on his headstone in the Kittery churchyard.

[4] *The Ring and the Book,* Book XII, by Robert Browning,

Thaxter'relationship with Hassam never stopped reverberating in the painter's life. One of his great and most enduring subjects, nature's artistry on the island of Appledore, is sought after today as a signature of American Impressionism, a school of painting underrepresented in art history even with the inclusion of Hassam and his contributions of archival Appledore. Henry David Thoreau, one of the literary notables who spent time on Appledore, anticipated Thaxter when he wrote in *Walden*, "With a little more deliberation in the choice of their pursuits, all men would perhaps become essentially students and observers, for certainly their nature and destiny are interesting to all alike" (96). No matter the circumstances or complaints of her fifty-nine years, she would always be enchanted by the glorious multitudes to be found in the natural world.

Childe Hassam continued to paint and enjoy commercial success from his work throughout his life. Settling in New York City after his return to the United States from France in 1889, Hassam documented the city's turn-of-the-century life. He created numerous weather-saturated cityscapes and a famous series of American flags prominently displayed on those city streets. He and wife Maud finally settled in New Hampton, New York where he died of undisclosed causes in 1934 (Stewart n.p.) at the age of seventy-five, having survived Thaxter by forty years. But the sunlit features of Appledore remained in regular conversation year after year in the decades he painted the Shoals, nearly up until the time the United States entered the first world war. Of the names that the label "American Impressionist" summon in the popular imagination today, Childe Hassam's can feel as lost as that of his peers John Singer Sargent and Mary Cassatt. And sadly, as neglected as that of his friend and mentor, Celia Thaxter. Nonetheless, in the words of a critic for the New York Times in 1919, he knew how to drench his paintings "with light and give them air to breathe" (Stewart n.p.).

Of the varied perspectives on archives and their meanings, Dietmar Schenk's is the most applicable to interpreting Appledore as archive. He writes, "it is useful to reserve the term 'archive' for physical objects which are remains of the past and may be discovered as traces of previous events or circumstances. Archival records are in any case authentic relics" (Bausi, Brockman and Freidrich 6). In the same essay Schenk continues, "public archives are accessible to everyone; they serve as 'institutions of memory' for civil society" (7-8). Broader than understanding an archive as simply a repository of documents or records identified for preservation (Blouin and Rosenberg 1), scholarly attention to methodology has begun to shift away from the history of archives as institutions to the history of archiving as a social practice, with archival holdings generally related to matters concerning the place where they are kept (Bausi, Brockman and Freidrich 3). If archiving is a practice meant to support and create memory (436), then "the historian, the user, the social rememberer give the archive's 'stuff' its meaning" (Blouin and Rosenberg 1).

I would wager that every researcher working today is, like me, grateful for the access and convenience that the digitized archive provides. A modicum of time yields an amount of data unrivaled by the amount of footwork previously necessary and feasible. Yet I cannot help but be aware that of all the scholarly thinking that has been available to me during this project, it has been my own literal footsteps that have taken me to the heart of my investigation of Celia and Childe. Because the opportunity is available to visit Appledore in the presence of island docents and guides, I could follow the poet and the painter onto their island and experience the twenty-first century instance of the primary source generative to them both. As I hiked over the rocky outcrops of the coastline, headed to the higher elevation of the remaining buildings and the garden at Appledore's literal and metaphorical center, I was conscious of not only of the two

principals that came before me, but of how astonished they would be at the stream of visitors that would continue *because* they had been there. The granite itself, at least positionally, remained the same, as did the salt air, the light, the situation of Thaxter's garden, the vistas; I could and did assume the vantage points that had inspired them both.

Before stepping onto the island, I had reviewed Hassam's paintings and their close-looking skills, so like John Coffey I experienced Appledore as a site of ongoing scientific and cultural production. I could see for myself how the artists' enduring focus on the island's geological and marine features served to collapse the distance between the site's past and its present. For my research purposes, then, the island was not confined to the role of repository of knowledge but would prove to be a source of production of my new knowledge. Not just a reflection of images and events, the island as archive shaped events and phenomena (Blouin and Rosenberg 2), which I would attempt to reconstruct through both my physical journey and my intellectual one. The tactile, embodied nature of being present on the island meant that for the briefest of moments I inhabited my subjects' primary source. The muse of Thaxter and Hassam was my own as well, serving my "uncovering." The physical experience of place is indelible. And rare in archival work is the feeling of such immediacy with its subjects. To some degree, this island *was* Celia Thaxter; to some degree, it still *is*.

Thaxter does not fit neatly into any category of art or philosophy of nineteenth century America but reflects features of several. Her life is informed by many of her culture's prevailing trends and is all the while more varied and capacious than any single doctrine or movement. Her love of nature's beauty and its conservation, for example, aligns with the country's mid-century Transcendental Movement. Many noted proponents of Transcendentalism were writers and thinkers whose paths crossed hers on Appledore, including Thoreau, Whittier, Hawthorne, and

Emerson, whose work and lectures she attended on the mainland. Her appreciation of beauty for its own sake as well as her production of eye-pleasing household items are part and parcel of the end-of-century Aesthetic Movement in America. Her childhood and youth, especially the influence and tutelage of a father who valued education and self-sufficiency for his daughter as well as his sons, so shaped her that she was bound to be independent – ironically, however, not from the demands of her family. Her lifelong practice of skimming back and forth from island to mainland, that is, from isolation and its freedoms to civic society and its expectations – shaped her too. One is tempted to see the time she spent on Appledore as more personally fulfilling; in her later years, it allowed a liberating agency rare for women of her time. Thaxter was daughter, mother, sister, and wife; she was also a writer of poetry and prose, muse, painter of paper and porcelain, amateur botanical and geological scientist, animal conservationist, gardener, music lover, patron, and benefactor. The island of Appledore may be just the right size for her archive.

Both Thaxter and Hassam were intent on recording their own time, Thaxter primarily by lexical means, with pen and paper, Hassam with a set of paintbrushes. Hassam shared a philosophical outlook with the French Impressionists, whose mantra was to leave off historical and religious subjects and dedicate themselves to depicting modern life. Hassam conveyed how he blended the old style with the new when he said, "A true historical painter, it seems to me, is one who paints the life he sees about him, and so makes a record of his own epoch" (Stewart n.p.). We can say the same of the journalistic record left by Celia Thaxter. For each artist, Appledore was sanctuary and classroom, familiar but exotic, both subject and muse. We cannot know the island without knowing Thaxter and Hassam's relationship to it, just as we cannot understand either without the historiography of their time on Appledore. The historical record, the archive of experience for writer and painter, is a particular promontory of granite, with seams

of quartz and felspar and gneiss and micaslate, interspersed with dikes of trap running in all directions (*AIS* 13). There is not another one exactly like it. The last words should be Thaxter's:

> I hid my face from glory – it was too much to bear. Ever I longed to *speak* these things that made life so sweet, to speak the wind, the cloud, the bird's flight, the sea's murmur. A vain longing! … but ever the wish grew… in storm or calm, by day or night, the manifold aspects of Nature held me and swayed all my thoughts until it was impossible to be silent any longer, and I was fain to mingle my voice with her myriad voices, only aspiring to be in accord with the Infinite harmony, however feeble and broken the notes might be. (*AIS* 118)

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