

Marianne North (1830-1890): Amateur Women Botanists
Imagining Aesthetics of Domesticity in the Tropics

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how women's participation in scientific work is shaped by gendered ideologies about public and private spaces as they were produced and reproduced in Victorian scientific communities. My central focus is the work of Marianne North (1830-1890), a popular travel writer, painter and amateur botanist who planned, curated and in 1882 eventually opened the Marianne North Art Gallery in Botanic Gardens, Kew (London). The Gallery which combines elements of natural history museums, art gallery and domestic private spaces remains the only solo permanent exhibition of a female artist's work in Britain. I begin by analyzing North's participation in scientific circles, both within London and outside it. I argue that the insufficient professionalization of Victorian science meant that male scientists had to rely on amateurs like North to help to sustain an informal network of friends and acquaintances which created and disseminated scientific knowledge. Secondly, I look more closely on North's painting style and the content of her visual art. North defined her painting style while visiting Jamaica in 1871-72 and I will try to find out why this happened and why the transformations in Jamaica's landscape that were enacted through colonial botany had such a big impact on her work. In my third and final chapter I bring the focus back on the Marianne North Art Gallery as I try to untangle both how women could have access to scientific spaces in Victorian London and the multiple, sometimes conflicting uses and meanings the Gallery had within Kew Gardens.

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Introduction

The central concern of my thesis is how women's participation in scientific work is shaped by gendered ideologies about public and private spaces as they were produced and reproduced in Victorian scientific communities. In order to explore this issue I will focus on the work of Marianne North (1830-1890), especially her art gallery at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew. North was a popular travel writer, adventurer in the service of empire and respected visual artist, as such she repeatedly placed herself outside the domestic / private sphere, either in order to explore far flung places or to interact with the public. Her wealthy and politically connected family (including her father Frederick North who was the Liberal MP for Hasting) allowed her to get the letters of introduction and money necessary not only to travel the world and get to know some of the most important botanists and natural historians of her day, but also to build herself a lasting legacy through the Marianne North Art Gallery.

North had several successful temporary exhibitions in the 1870s before deciding to ask Joseph Hooker, the Director of Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, if she could donate her paintings as well as funds to build a gallery to the Gardens. Hooker swiftly accepted her offer and the Marianne North Art Gallery opened in June 1882 with an exhibition called "Plants and their homes" containing more than 700 of North's paintings. The Gallery was integrated in the rest of the Kew complex and served different purposes for different visitors. The Gallery was a quiet place where tired visitors could rest while admiring North's art (North initially wanted to serve refreshments to wearied garden explorers) and a kind of botanical museum where visitors could learn about worldwide flora through illustrations that were much more vivid than the dried up plant specimens and grainy photographs of the Museum of Economic Botany. It was also the place where North and other botanical artists could work since the building included a studio. And over 130 years later the painting displays at North Gallery have remained almost unchanged offering a unique opportunity

to think about women and public scientific spaces in the Victorian period.

I only arrived at Marianne North's work as the focus of my project after I was initially interested in the discourses of domesticity that male botanists produced in their work on plant sexuality and how they were impacted by male scientists' need to seek legitimization for their profession. In the 1870s and 1880s, life sciences, including botany, had only begun to be professionalized and most botanists lacked institutional support even though their work was hugely important to imperial projects. Thus, male scientists seeking state support emphasized that their work is masculine and belongs to the public realm although their work relied on the work of women amateurs who collected materials for them or edited their texts. I wanted to explore the tensions that the need for professionalization created but afterward I realized I wanted to explore them through the perspective of women amateurs who were also experiencing these tensions and whose work took up space outside rather than within the restrictive public / private dichotomy. I wanted to explore how North specifically dealt with these issues both because her work was so popular and public during her lifetime and because she confounded easy conclusions about women's work as either feminine or masculine. North could, on the one hand, ridicule marriage, a “terrible experiment”, according to her, in which women often find themselves to be “only a sort of upper servant” in their households¹, and, on the other, praise wives who do their duty to their husbands and their country by keeping an orderly house while living in the colonies. She painted in a genre that was highly feminine, yet created her own style which borrowed elements from scientific methods of drawing plants while remaining too crude and bold to be mere botanical illustrations. Moreover, her memoirs, despite their length and repetitiveness, have their sparks of sarcastic humor. For example, when she describes “Mr. G”, a Fellow of the Geographical Society she stayed with while in Western Australia, North makes sure to mention that Mr. G remembers Darwin's visit on the Beagle because Darwin being the “ugliest young man he ever met” (*Recollections* 2, 120).

But trying to understand the role that gendered expectations of public and private spaces

¹North, *Letter to Burnell 18 January 1878*

played in North's work brings up questions about the other themes and tensions her work, especially with regards to colonialism. Because of the need to address broader issues about colonial science, women's labor and colonial economics I have made domesticity the connecting thread between my chapters rather than private / public or femininity / masculinity. Domesticity has been defined as a discourse which emerged among 19th century European middle classes as the new modes of production ushered in by industrialization made a new sexual division of labor necessary². But a closer look at Victorian discourses of domesticity show that Victorians struggled to find definitions of “families and houses”³ and by the end of the 1850s became engulfed in an obsession with the aesthetics of domesticity, “the wild efflorescence in the public signs, traces, slogans, and figures of domesticity” rather than the thing itself⁴. Domesticity, much more so than private or public spaces or femininity and masculinity, is also a tangibly communal construction, a discourse created through communal intimate experiences and informal network's participation in knowledge production is one of the other themes of my thesis.

Although I began work on my project by focusing on the Marianne North Art Gallery, in this text I work backwards, building towards the Gallery. In my first chapter I analyze North's participation in scientific circles, both within London and outside it. I argue that North like many other women amateurs helped to sustain an informal network of friends and acquaintances which helped to create and disseminate scientific knowledge. My second chapter will focus more closely on North's painting style and the content of her visual art and because North's visit to Jamaica had a foundational effect on her style I try to analyze her writing and paintings from her trip there. My third and last chapter will bring us back to the Marianne North Art Gallery as I try to untangle both how women could have access to scientific spaces in Victorian London and the role that the Gallery played in the Kew Gardens complex.

²Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 114

³Chase and Levenson, *The Spectacle of Intimacy*, p. 5

⁴Ibid., p. 215

Chapter 1. A “Most Perfect Home”: Women Amateurs and Informal Networks Creating Victorian Science

Introduction

On a sunny summer day in 1881, Marianne North packed some of her Australian paintings and left London for a day trip in the countryside to see the scientist she considered “the greatest man of his age” (*Recollections 2*, 87). Freshly returned from her one year painting trip to Australia and New Zealand, she was eager to start work on arranging her paintings in the Marianne North Gallery whose construction had been completed under the supervision of its architect, James Fergusson (1808-1886), while she had been away. But before framing and preparing her paintings for display, North wanted them to be seen by the man who had sent her Australia to paint in the first place: Charles Darwin. The previous summer (in 1880), Darwin had written to North to ask her to visit him at home. At the time of the visit, North had already begun planning her gallery at Kew but Darwin convinced her to postpone opening it because her representation of “the vegetation of the world” would not be complete without paintings of Australian vegetation “which was unlike that of any other country” (*Recollections 2*, 87). North took his recommendation as a “royal command” and quickly made plans to sail for Australia via Borneo (*Recollections 2*, 87). Still it would take her over a year to complete the work and return to England to show it off to the “great man” who had urged her to carry it out.

Their meeting in 1881 is an important piece of evidence that, despite her sister's assertion that she “was no botanist in the technical sense of the term” (*Recollections 1*, vi), Marianne North participated in the scientific circles of her time and made important contributions to the development of Victorian botany. Because of this, a large number of critical accounts of North's

work mention it⁵. Yet, the way *Recollections* describes their encounter on her return is a little disappointing:

He sat on the grass under a shady tree, and talked deliciously on every subject to us all for hours together, or turned over and over again the collection of Australian paintings I brought down for him to see, showing in a few words how much more he knew about the subject than anyone else, myself included, though I had seen them and he had not. (*Recollections* 2, 214)

The paintings seem to become another opportunity for the memoir to show that North's scientific knowledge is inferior to that of male scientists, despite the fact that she was intimately familiar with how many plants look. The memoir's editor (North's sister, Janet Catherine Symonds) also includes a note Darwin sent North just after he visit after the description of North's visit. In the letter Darwin praises her for the “vividness” of her imagination, but gives little indication that the paintings had any kind of scientific value for him.

I have spend such a long time trying to sketch out the encounters between North and Darwin because they can provide a way to understand both the terms on which Marianne North participated in scientific circles and how spaces where sciences was “done” were gendered in the Victorian period. Darwin's invitations to North, the fact that he encouraged her work, offered her advice on her Gallery and discussed botany with her prove that North was welcomed into the closed inner circle of Victorian science more than most of her female contemporaries. At the same time, his dismissive attitude towards her work show that we should not overestimate how well North's work was regarded by male scientists. Despite the fact that North discovered a handful of new species and that her paintings were generally considered botanically accurate, she was clearly regarded as an amateur incapable of producing original, reliable scientific work. But how did she manage to exhibit her work within a scientific institution with very little resistance from its male leadership? How come her memoirs are full of references to her friendship with the most well known scientists of her day (Darwin, Galton, Hooker, Agassiz, Asa Gray etc)?

⁵Ponsonby, “Introduction” to *Abundant Beauty*, p. 13; Le-May Sheffield, *Revealing New Worlds*, p. 89; Kerrigan “Marianne North: Painting a Darwinian Vision”.

Feminist science historians have long argued that 19th century European women were excluded from scientific circles because “feminine” qualities like empathy and irrationality (which made women good wives and daughters) were considered incompatible with objective science⁶ and because women were the “representatives of private life” while science took place in the public sphere⁷. Yet the idea that there was a total exclusion of femininity and private life from the pursuit of science does not fully explain how the North Gallery functioned as a semi-scientific institution or how North attracted the support of so many major scientists for her work. It also does not explain why North comfortably describe Darwin not only as a great man of science, but as a man with a “most perfect home” full of family who “loved his work as he did, and shared it with him” (*Recollections* 2, 215). Breaking ties with family is seen as giving women greater freedom and ability to carry out intellectual work and, indeed, many accounts of British women traveling abroad in this period emphasize “the freedom which they found within the colonial context” far away from their families back in Britain⁸. For male scientists like Darwin, however, his ability to carry out his work seems to hinge partly on his family's willingness to “share it with him”.

In the rest of my chapter I will attempt to find explanations to these apparent paradoxes by examining the role played by amateurs in producing and spreading scientific knowledge in the Victorian period. I will argue that the need for scientists to collaborate with amateurs left the door open women to be involved in scientific work as amateur botanists or natural historians, for example. In the 1880s, when North opened her Gallery, natural history had still not achieved a level of professionalization which allowed scientists to rely on scientific institutions to support their work, disseminate it or facilitate exchanges of information within the wider scientific community. Because of this incomplete professionalization of scientific work, scientists had to rely on informal networks built out of family and friendship connections to create and share their work. Thus I will argue that although Marianne North seems to be a marginal figure, she contributed to maintaining

⁶Richards, “Darwinian Science and Women Intellectuals”, p. 130-1

⁷Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?*, p. 236

⁸Mills, *Gender and Colonial Space*, p.30

informal networks through which scientists shared their work in three important ways: firstly, by collecting and identifying new species for botanists still back home, secondly, by maintaining friendships which tied scientific circles together and, thirdly, by familiarizing the wider public with science through her work.

Science and technology studies already use network models to analyze how scientific knowledge is created and shared however these models often do not pay enough attention to gender. The most notable network approach is probably 'actor-network theory' (ANT) which was first developed by Michel Callon, Bruno Latour and John Law in the 1980s. ANT uses the metaphor of a "heterogeneous network" to argue that science/technology and society are not separate sphere which sometimes influence each other but rather are both "mutually constructive [...] networks linking human beings and non-human entities"⁹. However, although ANT aims to have an inclusive approach to who or what enables scientific discoveries and to this end makes sure to take into account how non-human entities, most agents within ANT frameworks are still male heroes and their big projects¹⁰. In this sense, ANT shares the bias "towards exciting, high status men" at the expense of "routine" science in which most women work that is more general in science studies¹¹. Because of this, although my approach is partly inspired by ANT, my aim is to focus on women amateurs whose work was not particularly "exciting" and on how networks are created specifically through friendships and family ties.

The professionalization of science

One major aspect of the gradual professionalization of science beginning with the early 18th century was the establishment of institutions whose chief goal was the pursuit of scientific knowledge. Up to the late 18th century, these quasi-scientific institutions like gardens, curiosity cabinets or specimen collections were the private property of specific individuals (even though those individuals sometimes happened to be part of the royal family) and only occasionally allowed

⁹Wajcman, „Reflections on Gender and Technology Studies”, p. 451

¹⁰Ibid., p. 453

¹¹Delamont, “Three Blind Spots?”, p. 166

visitors with the written invitation or permission of the owner. Although these early institutions seem like the direct antecedents of Victorian museums, they were distinguished from the latter both by their different intended audiences and different ways of organizing the collections. While collections in curiosity cabinets and similar institutions were characterized by their randomness and discontinuity, museums organized their collections in an orderly way to facilitate scientific research even when they inherited collections from curiosity cabinets¹². In curiosity cabinets objects are arranged as though they are “on holiday, randomly juxtaposed and displaced from any proper context”¹³. At the turn of the century national institutions began to appear and take over former private collections. The Louvre is perhaps the clearest embodiment of the new model of national museum. Already in 1778, Louis XVI established a commission to come up with plans for opening the Louvre as a public museum “dedicated to civic virtues” which would help encourage people to develop an attachment towards “the state and nation as entities that were conceived as partly separate from and superior to the king”¹⁴. The museum was only finished after the French Revolution and when it finally opened in 1793 on the anniversary of the revolution its purpose was to emphasize a new conception of the state which gained legitimacy through democracy. In the new public museums the citizen is allowed to admire and inspect the nationalized treasures of the former monarchy in a “democratic public setting” which emphasizes that the citizen too is represented by and in the museum’s treasures¹⁵. It took a longer time for national institutions to be established in Britain because for a long time science remained dominated by gentlemen of science who pursued scientific research as a hobby and did not want to transform it into a vulgar paid profession. By the second half of the 19th century, however, teaching natural history in universities became common even at the conservative Oxford and Cambridge and there was a lot of interest in the uses that botany especially could be put to in the service of the empire.

Thus even in Britain what had originated as a series of amateur practices and organizations

¹² Mullaney. *The Place of the Stage*, p. 60-1

¹³ Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage*, p. 62

¹⁴ Bennett. *The Birth of the Museum*, p.37

¹⁵ Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 38

was by the 1850s becoming an “institutionalized science” which was “explicitly imperial” despite represented itself as objective¹⁶. Kew Gardens, for example, began as the exotic gardens supported financially by Augusta, Dowager Princess and later her son George III¹⁷. They only became a research institution and a national botanical garden in 1841, after lobbying by the Royal Horticultural Society, especially Joseph Banks (1743-1820). Banks had been the de facto director of the Gardens while they were owned by George III as well as the president of the Royal Society for over 40 years and he had made his fame as a natural historian by cataloging the vegetation of Australia and New Zealand when he joined James Cook in his first trip there in 1768-1771¹⁸. After 1841 the Gardens were under the directorship of William Hooker (1784-1865) and then of his son, Joseph Hooker (1814-1879). Under their leadership Kew became an important center for imperial science. Over time the botanists at Kew created a network of colonial gardens whose gardeners and botanists had strong ties to Kew and sometimes were even directly appointed by Kew¹⁹. The role of these smaller gardens was to gather plants and information and to send them to Kew where interesting specimens could be examined. Simultaneously, these smaller gardens received information back from Kew and were often tasked with growing plants that could not grow in the harsh English climate. For example, Kew served as the “incubator” for cinchona seeds and young plants stolen by British explorers from South America because at the time cinchona was the best known source of quinine and an increasingly important commodity on the international market. After they were “nursed” at Kew, the trees were sent on to India, where the climate was favorable although professional botanical expertise was lacking²⁰. Especially after William Hooker opened the Museum of Economic Botany with the purpose of encouraging research into human uses of different plants, work carried out at Kew became intimately entwined with imperial agricultural projects²¹.

¹⁶ Philip, “Imperial Science Rescues a Tree”, p. 187

¹⁷ Drayton, *Nature & Government*, p.87-8

¹⁸ Dayton, *Nature & Government*, p. 94-106

¹⁹ Dayton, *Nature & Government*, p. 182-5

²⁰ Philip, “Imperial Science”, p 188

²¹ Philip, “Imperial Science”, p 185

Yet despite this large networks of institutions, Kew also continued to rely on amateurs to acquire many of its specimens. For example, Kew received huge numbers of plant specimens from New Zealand from William Colenso (whom Joseph Hooker met and befriended in 1841 when the British Antarctic Expedition stopped at the Bay of Islands in New Zealand)²². Hooker knew that these amateurs could threaten the status of botanical professionals like himself so he was careful to caution that only professionals possessed the detailed knowledge necessary to create good classification systems and name new plants²³. To Hooker's dismay, however, some amateurs did insist on classifying their discoveries. Although he never completed any formal studies in botany, throughout his long life Colenso named hundreds of new species and “resented” anyone who criticized his nominations²⁴.

The tensions between increasingly professionalized “official” science and amateurs hinged on the question of who could create legitimate scientific knowledge. Europeans collecting plant specimens abroad largely ignored local knowledge about indigenous plants even when they were only able to find rare and interesting plants because local people who already knew them told them about them. Europeans like North collected specimens as though they were entirely new discoveries no human beings had had contact with before and gave them new names with no regards to what the plants were called by locals. Under the guise of pursuing a new, objective and “universal” science, European natural historians stripped plants of their cultural meanings and uses and only counted as legitimate botanical knowledge European Greek or Latin derived names²⁵. Thus the superior status of certain kind of European nomination that Hooker uses to defend from attack by amateurs was from the beginning a way for a specific class of European scientists to assert the superiority of their scientific knowledge.

Botany and domesticity

²²Oliver, *Botanical Discovery in New Zealand*, p.4

²³Philip, “Imperial Science”, p 184

²⁴Oliver, *Botanical Discovery*, p. 11

²⁵ Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, p 208-9

The boundaries between the scientific and the non-scientific, just as those between the scientist and the amateur were not so clear cut. Labeled and cataloged botanical specimens were a popular parlor decoration “blurring the distinction between taxonomy and home décor” and showing again that science and domestic spaces were not seen as complete opposites²⁶. Although women were generally discouraged from taking an interest in science, beginning with the 18th century botany was considered a suitable hobby because it was thought to be a way to “shape women [...] for their lives as wives and mothers”²⁷. Women could observe flowers from their gardens and prepare specimens for their herbariums in their kitchens and the preparations of plants for drying was nowhere near as gruesome as that of animals²⁸. Moreover, botanical illustrations were seen as an acceptable form of scientific work for women. For middle and upper class women botanical illustrations could be a way to respond to popular Victorian impulses “toward nature study, dissemination of information, self-improvement, and cataloguing the natural world”²⁹. It was even fairly acceptable for women to make scientific illustration more than a hobby. Kew's official botanical illustrator in 1881 when North was arranging her gallery was a woman, Matilda Smith (1854-1926). Not coincidentally, she was Joseph Hooker's second cousin while Hooker's daughter, Harriet Ann also created many of the illustrations in the *Botanical Magazine*³⁰. In the 1880s there were growing concerns in Britain about the state of agricultural education in the country. When these concerns coupled with worries about single middle class women who could not find husbands who would support them financially, horticulture began to be encouraged as a valid profession for women. For example, Swanley Horticultural College was set up in 1889 as an all male agricultural college but started admitting women in 1891, but proved so popular with women students that it eventually became an all-women institution in 1901³¹. Many of the alumae of the college went on to work in botanical gardens both in Britain and abroad since the college offered classes specifically

²⁶ Morin, *Frontiers of Femininity*, p 92

²⁷ Shteir, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science*, p. 35

²⁸ Shteir, *Cultivating Women*, p. 36-7

²⁹ Morin, *Frontiers of Femininity*, p. 94

³⁰ Endersby, *Imperial Nature*, p. 120

³¹ Brassley, “Agricultural Science and Education”, p. 642

on work in the colonies³².

Only a few pages before recounting her second meeting with Darwin, North mentions almost by accident while describing showing Asa Gray and his wife around the Veitch greenhouses that a traveler had once been sent “across the world” in search of one of the plants she discovered and painted, the “*Nepenthes Northiana*” (*Recollections* 2, 213). In fact, North's representation of the plant was considered so trustworthy that before specimens of it could be collected, her paintings were used by botanists to identify the new species. Both an 1881 article in *The Gardener's Chronicle* describing the discovery of the species and a later article in 1882 discussing different *Nepenthes* species cite North's painting of the plant as the authoritative visual representation of it³³. *N. Northiana* also ended up being one of the most popular tropical pitcher plants (hence why nurseries like the Veitch greenhouses had them) and it was quite widely discussed at the time in botanical circles, often with reference to North's painting of it. The plant was so important to North that the first edition of her memoir has gilt for a *N. Northiana* on the front cover. Thus although North's contribution to the project was quite modest (archival evidence suggests that North did send at least a small number of plant specimens back to Kew), she was one of the many amateurs who helped Kew Gardens carry out their mission to collect the world's flora. In less tangible ways, North made an important contribution to maintaining relationships between Kew and its network of colonial botanical gardens and amateurs. North visited and painted in so many botanical gardens not only because it was easier to have access to a wider range of plant species in these, but because Hooker who provided her with letters of introduction tasked her with meeting and socializing with gardens directors abroad.

For example, when North left to visit Australia and New Zealand, she met with Walter Hill, the curator of Brisbane City Gardens (*Recollections* 2, 109) and Ferdinand Von Mueller, the Director of the Melbourne Royal Botanic Gardens (*Recollections* 2, 142-3). She also visited the botanic gardens in Camden (New South Wales) and Wellington (New Zealand). Even outside of

³² Ibid.

³³“New Garden Plants”1, p 717; “Notes on the New *Nepenthes*”, p. 56

botanical gardens, wherever she went, North was welcomed into the homes of friends of her family and their acquaintances who tried their best to make her comfortable and entertain her. As the wealthy daughter of an MP this meant that she was even welcomed in the homes of royalty. While she traveled through Asia in 1875 she was hosted by the Brookes, the Rajah and Ranees of Sarawak who traveled with her again in 1880 when she set off for Australia. Although she resented having to sit through “long European dinners, full dress, with glaring lamps” (*Recollections* 2, 90) and preferred to wander around admiring nature on her own, it is undeniable that North’s journey was only possible to her social ties which were built through this kind of social gatherings as much as through her family’s position back in England. North recounts with some disgust that in Australia there is “an odd custom” to provide guests of the family with everything they need including combs and tooth-brushes (*Recollections* 2, 126), but beyond her dismay it is clear that her hosts provided her with almost everything, not only accommodation and warm meals but also access to interesting plant specimens as she was often taken on trips. Back in the metropolis, North built friendships within scientific circles which allowed her to contribute to scientific knowledge. Her friendship with Hooker and Darwin played a role in her being allowed to build a gallery on the grounds of Kew Gardens just as much as her father’s name. These friendships were not with individual scientists, but rather with their families and their wider circle of friends, when Darwin welcomes North into his home they spend the day not alone but with North’s father’s old friend (and former Bank of England director for over 50 years), George Wade Norman and with the Lushingtons, close friends of Darwin’s daughter, Henrietta who also had ties to Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the Arts and Crafts Movement. Both visual culture and science seems to be held together by friends spending delightful days together in the country side.

Not lastly, North’s work like that of many other popular journalists and travel writers who acted as “essential mediators between the scientific network and a larger European public” helped to bring into “the public sphere” scientific knowledge and discoveries³⁴. Although not considered

³⁴Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 29

educated enough for the important work of identifying and classifying plants in nature, women amateurs were often tasked with the important work of popularizing scientific work among middle and upper class audiences and translating research done in scientific centers like Kew into popular works, often guides to native flora. Women who like North created botanical and zoological illustrations and wrote about the wildlife of British colonies, for example, Louisa Meredith (1812-1895) or Georgia Molloy (1806-1843) helped produce “a vision of the colonized country as a storehouse of random flora and fauna waiting for the civilizing order of the narrator with her Western science” although as women their claim to authority over Western scientific knowledge was tenuous³⁵. North's paintings and her memoir were equally important for her work. North started working on her memoirs in 1880 but she did not have the chance to finish them before her death in 1890. The manuscript was initially considered too lengthy for publication so Janet Catherine Symonds edited it down to fit into two volumes and finally published it posthumously in 1892. *Recollections of a Happy Life: Being the Autobiography of Marianne North* proved popular enough for the publisher to agree to publish a third volume in 1894, *Further Recollections of A Happy Life*. Darwin's compliment on the vividness of North's paintings was not unusual, her work was appreciated for being able to reproduce plants in a life-like manner and stimulate the imagination. Her paintings were well received during her life time and her private exhibition popular enough to allow North to exhibit her paintings in the South Kensington Museum in 1877. Reviewers typically praised North's truthful representations and her ability to bring to life distant places. A few days after the Gallery opened in June 1882, the Birmingham Daily Post published an article that claimed that curious “crowds” flock to the Gallery “in their eager pursuit after the vegetation with which their sojourn or traveling in diverse countries where it grows has rendered it familiar”³⁶. Joseph Hooker (the Kew Gardens Director) wrote in the preface to North Gallery's first catalog that not only is the Gallery extraordinarily beautiful, but it is “impossible to overrate [North Gallery's] interest and instructiveness in connexion [sic] with the contents of the Gardens, Plant-houses and

³⁵Mills, “Knowledge, Gender, and Empire”, p. 41

³⁶ “London Gossip”, p. 5

Museums at Kew³⁷. The Gallery was considered especially useful at representing economically useful plants from around the British Empire and the Gallery guide offered visitors detailed information about the most important crops.

An understanding of Victorian science which assumes the exclusion of women and domesticity from all endeavors to make science cannot show the many ways in which the making of science is reliant on women's labor. While it is true that in the 19th century, for example, scientific societies in Britain such as the Royal Society were largely led by gentlemen amateurs and run like gentlemen's clubs³⁸, highly masculine spaces like societies were not the only places where science work was carried out and disseminated. Renowned scientists like Darwin worked in labs and studies attached to their “perfect homes” and relied on the women in their families to carry out both scientific and domestic work to aid their work.

³⁷Joseph Hooker, Preface to *The North Gallery Catalogue*

³⁸Morin, *Frontiers of Femininity*, p. 92

Chapter 2. North's Jamaica: Domestic Labor through Science

Introduction

Having shown in the previous chapter how Marianne North helped to sustain the informal networks through which scientific knowledge was created and disseminated, I will now focus more closely on the content of her work, the kinds of knowledge she passed on. I have already argued that North was one of the popular writers (many of which were women) who helped transmit scientific knowledge to the wider public so I am now interested in exploring the ways in which North's work represented the botanical world to its audience and in the question of what sets North's work apart from that of other Victorian women travelers and amateur botanists. Continuing my focus on domestic spaces, I will analyze North's writing and paintings from her trip to Jamaica in 1871-72 to try to understand how North engaged with the discourses and aesthetics of domesticity in colonial spaces. The basic assumption underlying my analysis is that British women's representations of empire, whether in travel books or visual art, carry multiple meanings and participate in multiple discourses about colonialism, race and gender. These multiplicities depend on how individual women are positioned vis a vis the colonial project in terms of the structural power they hold but also on women's personal experiences and beliefs. North is often discussed as one of the women travelers who chose to give up feminine concerns with domesticity and assume instead “masculine power, authority and autonomy”³⁹ through the “masculine virtues of strength, initiative and decisiveness”⁴⁰, but I want to argue that because women's works are engaged in multiple discourses we cannot analyze them through a simple feminine / masculine dichotomy. North positions herself differently in relation to different discourses of masculinity and femininity at different points in her work. It is hard to see North whom her brother described as “stout” and “satirical” and who was a

³⁹ Anderson, *Women and the Politics of Travel*, p. 24

⁴⁰ Foster, *Across New Worlds*, p. 11

self-described atheist⁴¹ as the image of Victorian femininity. But it is also difficult to dismiss the fact that North shows not only interest in but outright admiration for some of the feminine women she encounters. Throughout her travel writing, whether in Jamaica, Australia or India, North praises upper and middle class white women who work on the margins of empires to provide their families with domestic comforts while maintaining feminine decorum. Moreover, North's admiration for this type of colonial domesticity and her interest in natural history are linked because for North painting botanical specimens was work in the service of empire, more specifically of educating the wider public about colonial agricultural science and the “naturalness” of colonial rule.

Recollections of a Happy Life: Being the Autobiography of Marianne North and the Marianne North Gallery might seem like little more than the work of an eccentric spinster, of mild interest but too formulaic to provoke much interesting discussion. Indeed, North's paintings have been judged as not particularly original or “strong” in technique⁴² and the fact that recent reprints of *Recollections* are heavily abridged is a testament to the fact that North's readers generally found her too verbose and her narrative too repetitive. Yet analyzing how North's artistic and literary work is positioned within colonial discourses can reveal the multiplicity important ties between scientific knowledge and women's labor. Sara Suleri in her analysis of Anglo-Indian women's autobiographical and fictional writing asserts that women amateur artists and scientists traveling around British India in the 19th century did not record the landscape and peoples they encountered out of a simple desire for “aesthetic self-gratification” but because they were part of a long-established tradition that placed British women at the “peripheries of colonization” and tasked them with aestheticizing the “political realm” in which, as women, they could not participate⁴³. Suleri's approach can lead to productive readings of North, whose work was scrupulously apolitical. Even her memoirs mention very little about her father's work as an MP. Suleri also argues that while trying to answer the question of what was the extent to which British women participate in

⁴¹ Ponsonby, “Marianne North: An Introduction”, p. 14

⁴² Morin, *Frontiers of Femininity*, p. 98

⁴³ Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India*, p. 75-6

colonialism, it is important to see the ways in which these women's texts, and in North's case, visual art, were spaces which allowed women to both raise and repress these questions⁴⁴. North used a scientific realist painting style which tends to anonymize individual paintings by reproducing the same angles and poses again and again so that identifiable botanical features (such as leaves, flowers, buds, seeds) can be all portrayed in one image (so that the aspiring botanists needs to consult only one image when identifying a plant). This can make it difficult to analyze her work in detail, but by looking for broad trends and changes in her style, closer readings of her paintings are possible.

The evolution of North's style

Marianne North's trip to Jamaica in 1871-72 was one of the first painting trips she took abroad. After he father's death in October 1869, North first undertook a trip through the United States and Canada in 1871 because she had "long had the dream of going to some tropical country to paint its peculiar vegetation on the spot" (*Recollections* 1, 39). Although she was by no means a famous artist in 1871, her network of family and friends and her status as the daughter of an MP secured her meetings with several American celebrities. On her trip, North met Charlotte Cushman, perhaps the most famous actress and singer of her time (*Recollections* 1, 51) and Emily Blackwell, the third woman to gain a medical degree in the US (*Recollections* 1, 66). She also had dinner at the White House with president Ulysses S. Grant and his wife (*Recollections* 1, 73-5), probably because they confused her father with Fredrick North, who was the Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1770 to 1782 (*Recollections* 1, 76). More importantly, she spent a day with naturalists Louis Agassiz and Elizabeth Cabot Agassiz (his wife) talking about Brazil. The couple had been on a scientific expedition to Brazil together in 1866-67 and North was intending to travel there as well. Elizabeth Cabot Agassiz was a natural historian in her own right and it was she who showed North around the Museum's palms collection (*Recollections* 1, 50).

Although North describes painting Niagara Falls at length (*Recollections* 1, 55-7), she

⁴⁴ Suleri, *Rhetoric of British India*, p. 76

hardly mentions painting anywhere else in her account of this first trip. Most of the paintings of North American plants that she later included in the North Gallery were actually made during her subsequent trip to North America in 1875. It seems as though, despite her initial enthusiasm, North America turned out to be too similar to Britain to be the “tropical country” whose “peculiar vegetation” she dreamed of painting. For example, her paintings of autumn trees (“Autumn Tints in the White Mountains, New Hampshire, United States” #191 and “Autumn Tints, near Niagara, United States” #211 [Figure 1]) lack botanical detail and appear anonymous. In comparison, her paintings of redwood forests she made in 1875 on her second trip to North America (for example, “View in a Redwood Forest, California” #204 [Figure 2]) showcase specific plant species and focus more on botanically relevant details, such as the shape of tree trunks and roots, even at the expense of the beautiful landscape in the background. Still life and landscapes were not unusual subjects for women amateurs traveling abroad but North’s distinctive style can be seen by comparing her work with a contemporary female artist like Ellis Rowan (1848-1922). Although both North and Rowan painted botanically accurate “plant portraits”, Rowan’s paintings are very different in style. For example, “Cooktown orchid (*Dendrobium bigibbum*, *Dendrobium bifalce*)” (1891) [Figure 3] has softer colors than most of North’s paintings and a lot more intricate detail. Rowan’s plants also look benignly pretty, whereas North’s plants have been described by critics as “unpleasant”, “frightening” and “erotic”⁴⁶. One of the reason for these complaints is that North over-sizes and over-emphasizes key features of the plants she paints, especially flowers, to emphasize their botanical value because her paintings are always part of a dual discourse of decorative aesthetics and science (see, for example Figure 4). Rowan, whom North described as “a very pretty fairy-like little woman, always well-dressed, and afraid to go out of the house because people stared at her” (*Recollections* 2, 149), much better reflected expectations of picturesque femininity.

However, I do not want to insist too much on difference between North’s painting style and the picturesque. In fact, I argue that an important commonality between North’s cruder, more

⁴⁶ Morin, *Frontiers of Femininity*, p. 98

scientific style and the feminine picturesque of artists like Rowan is that both styles aestheticize labor. The picturesque transforms “physical labor (hoeing and shearing sheep) into its discrete material effects (wheat fields and pastures of sheep)” and by shifting the emphasis away from the agricultural producer, to the observer, it disguises labor as an aesthetic experience⁴⁷. In a similar manner, North's Jamaica paintings show colonial botany as a natural and permanent part of Jamaica landscape, thus disguising the labor that went into transforming the island's landscape through the creation of plantations using European botanical knowledge. While the picturesque ideal excludes landscapes bearing “visual traces of agricultural cultivation”⁴⁸, North's work is invested in the project of colonial botany. Because of this, she is necessarily interested in colonial agriculture, in addition to cultivate plants that have run wild. But in these paintings, as in the rest of her work, North almost never shows people tending to plants. The labor that went into transforming Jamaica into the botanical paradise North perceives it to be is disguised, in favor of focusing on her exhilaration at the wealth of botanical material around her. The bold colors and overemphasized flowers and leaves in her paintings suggest strong emotions and exhilaration.

In the early 19th century there already was an established tradition of representing Jamaica plantations as picturesque. Because abolitionists made extensive use of images to bring attention to their cause, plantation owners in Jamaica attempted to counteract those representations of the island as a place of violence and exploitation by hiring British artists to “create picturesque representations of their properties”⁴⁹. North is clearly working within this tradition of imperial picturesque, but she also deviates from it in her scientific/botanist approach to the landscape, which led to her creating paintings which prioritize showing botanical details of plants over harmonious landscapes. Compare, for example, James Hakewill's aquatint “Williamsfield Estate, St. Thomas' in the Vale” from his 1825 book *A Picturesque Tour of the Islands of Jamaica* (Figure 5) with North's painting of sugar cane harvesting in Brazil, #45 “Harvesting the Sugar-Cane in Minas Geraes, Brazil” (Figure

⁴⁷ Tobin, *Colonizing Nature*, p. 11-12

⁴⁸ Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, p. 35

⁴⁹ Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, p. 36-7

6). Although both paintings show sugar cane plantations, North's focuses on the cane plants themselves, even at the expense of not showing much of the landscape. Whereas in Hakewill's aquatint, the sugar canes are simply an indistinguishable mass of lines at the base of the imagepainting: little effort is put into representing them accurately as plants because the real focus of the painting is the estate behind them since Hakewill was paid to create positive images of the estates. North's aesthetic could be described as a kind of scientific picturesque which replaces the figure of the poet or artist with that of the scientist, who experiences the landscape not only as aesthetic pleasure but as a scientific one as well. North's exhilaration at the success of colonial botany on the island comes not from how well the different plants Europeans introduced look together, but from the wealth of botanical information they bring together in an enclosed space. North could not develop this style fully until she reached Jamaica because her experiences of North American landscapes were not amenable to this kind of scientific picturesque framing, especially since she did not visit the south of the US. While Europeans had significantly changed the wildlife of North America, North only witnessed a radical transformation of the landscape through the methods of lens of modern European science specifically when she got, to Jamaica where a large number of plants were introduced in a short period of time and in a small space...

Colonial botany: voyages of discovery and plantation economies

North's interest in Jamaica as a budding amateur botanist was not incidental; the island played an important part in the development of British botany. The rapid development of botany in the 19th century in Europe, including Great Britain, was due to earlier voyages of discovery outside of Europe. Much earlier, in the 15th and 16th centuries, the "discovery" of the American continents led to an increase in interest in botany, especially with a view to transplanting useful plants between the Old and the New Worlds. This process of exchange was multifaceted. As Spanish colonists struggled to acclimatize grape vines to South America⁵⁰, for example, crops like maize and the

⁵⁰ Cosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, p. 72

sweet potato started to be grown on the coasts of Africa, at first in order to obtain easily preserved food for slave trading ships' journeys⁵¹. However, in the 16th century transcontinental travel was still too difficult, time-consuming and unpredictable to allow for fully systematic studies of the world's fauna. Until the 1830s and the invention of the Wardian case, it was not even possible to ship live specimens back to Europe. Because of the difficulty of sharing both plant material and information, botanical knowledge in this period was "local and particular, derived from direct experience with plants in agriculture, gardening, or medicine, or knowledge based on that experience"⁵².

Starting with the 17th century, however, as transcontinental travel became increasingly frequent, large amounts of plant material began to flood into Europe forcing botanists to come up with new ways to classify plants on a global scale and reorient the study of plants away from studying plant uses to studying plant structures⁵³. While academic debates about proper plant taxonomy systems raged in Europe throughout the 18th century, European explorers "discovered" new territories in the Pacific, and European colonizers established plantations growing cash crops on a large scale using slave labor in the Americas. Economic and scientific interests thus became intertwined. The huge importance of imports of plant products into Europe meant that, while taxonomical studies claimed to have "pure" theoretical aims, there was still a great deal of interest in the economic uses of plants. Linnaeus, the creator of the taxonomic system which eventually became authoritative in Europe, was very interested in the economic implications of plant cultivation. For example, because he did not fully grasp the ties between plants and their environments, he was convinced that it should be possible to acclimatize tea plants to Northern Europe and thus stop the trade with China which was, according to him, the "gate through which all the silver of Europe disappears"⁵⁴. Throughout his life, alongside developing his taxonomic system, he devised many acclimatization experiments intended to render Sweden self-sufficient and

⁵¹ Cosby, *The Columbian Exchange*, p. 186

⁵² Schiebinger, "Private Life of Plants", p. 124

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Koerner, „Purposes of Linnaean travel”, p. 133

economically independent, but most of them were not very successful⁵⁵.

Despite more plant collections becoming available in Europe, many scientific careers were made by cataloging flora while on voyages abroad. 1735, the year when the first edition of Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae* was published was also the year when the first major European scientific expedition was launched⁵⁶. Yet long sea voyages outside of Europe remained dangerous. Linnaeus himself never traveled outside of Europe, thus proving that systems of “universal” knowledge could be created without extensive contact with data from outside of Europe, but he sent many of his 'apostles' on trips to collect materials for him. Not all of them made it back. Pehr Löfling (in 1756), Carl Fredrik Adler (in 1761), Pehr Forsskål (in 1763) and Andreas Berlin (in 1773) fell sick and died while collecting plant specimens for Linnaeus in Asia and Africa⁵⁷. Daniel Solander, another one of Linnaeus's 'apostles' joined Joseph Banks (the founder of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew) in the 1768-1771 HMS *Endeavour* scientific expedition in the southern Pacific Ocean. The expedition, during which (among other scientific achievements) the coastline of New Zealand was mapped almost entirely and Europeans set foot in Australia for the first time, made Banks famous as a scientist as well as a politician. After his return to England, Banks became not only the President of the Royal Society, but part of the Privy Council from 1797, thus able to directly influence the colonial policy of the British Empire⁵⁸.

Kew Gardens started to systematically collect plant specimens in the 1840s and received so many plant specimens, from amateurs and professionals alike, that in 1850 Hooker wrote to the Office of Work to say that in the future no expeditions should be initiated to collect plant material for Kew, since the gardens received so much material voluntarily already⁵⁹. As I have shown in the previous chapter, many of the plant specimens held at Kew Gardens came from amateur botanists who sent their discoveries back to England. However, especially after the establishment of the Museum of Economic Botany in 1847, Kew Gardens began to be involved in carrying out research

⁵⁵ Koerner, "Purposes of Linnaean travel", p. 130-2

⁵⁶ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 16

⁵⁷ Koerner, *Linnaeus: Nature and Nation*, p. 113-5

⁵⁸ Drayton, *Nature's Government*, p. 94-5

⁵⁹ Drayton, *Nature's Government*, p. 184

on economically useful plants (especially from South American). Kew Gardens were instrumental in establishing large scale cultivations of several popular plants in the colonies; by the 1880s it was called “the botanical centre of the world” which “carries on all the Economic and Scientific work of the Empire”⁶⁰.

The success of Kew Botanic Gardens was founded both on discoveries made by individuals, experts and amateurs alike, and on a network of colonial botanical gardens which worked together to find new useful plants and transplant them to British colonies where they could be grown on a large scale. Tea, rubber or cinchona are merely the most well known examples of the many efforts to transplant useful plants around the British Empire, which started in the late 18th century but especially took off after the invention of Wardian cases. The rationale behind this massive imperial project was the same as behind Linnaeus's acclimatization experiments, to make Britain “independent of other nations in her imperial pursuits” and create “a maritime empire self-sufficient on a global scale”⁶¹. Thus in the 18th and 19th centuries, botany combined scientific, economic and political interests. Whether engaged in the rush to claim new territories for their home countries or conducting acclimatization experiments of economically useful plants back home, botanists' work was never separate from the economic and political realities of colonial exploitation.

North's Jamaica: A Botanical Paradise

North reached Jamaica on Christmas Eve 1871 and the change in the tone of her narrative is obvious from that date. She still recounts anecdotes and adventures she has during her travels, but also spends a lot of time describing the flora of her surroundings and frequently mentions working for long hours, often in adverse conditions. After landing on the island, North hired a room on the site of the “long-deserted botanical gardens of the first settlers” (*Recollections* 1, 81). It is possible that the garden where North stayed was Hinton East's Spring Garden in Gordon Town which was

⁶⁰ Drayton, *Nature's Government*, p. 243

⁶¹ Frost, “The Antipodean Exchange”, p. 75-6

established in the 1770s as a private botanic garden. Although the garden was private, Hinton East imported and exported seeds and plants⁶². Later on in her trip, North visited Bath Garden, the oldest formally established botanical garden on the island, founded in 1779 but abandoned in the 1860s because the location was prone to flooding. Both Spring Garden and the Bath Garden exchanged plants with Kew, then under the leadership of Joseph Banks⁶³. North write that at Bath after the garden was abandoned “everything grew as it liked, and the ugly formal paths were almost undiscoverable” (*Recollections* 1, 101). North’s descriptions of the two abandoned botanical gardens are also very similar to how she describes the rest of the island. Everywhere cultivated introduced plants seem to run wild and take over the landscape, for example, “the scarlet geraniums and zinnias of former soldiers’ gardens had seeded themselves all about” (*Recollections* 1, 88). Although the geraniums and zinnias are decorative plants, she also describes the many edible introduced plants that spread wildly on the island.

From her verandah, for example, North saw a dizzying variety of fruit trees, most of them not indigenous to Jamaica: bananas, rose-apples, breadfruit, trumpet-trees, star-apples, mangoes, custard apples, dates and coconuts (*Recollections* 1, 83). Although North sometimes does enthusiastically describe native flora (especially the ferns, which enchanted her with their “fairy-tale like beauty”, seeming “too good to be real” (*Recollections* 1, 89)), central to her vision of Jamaica is the abundance of cultivated plants. The scientific ingenuity of the early colonists who knew how to transplant and acclimatize a wide range of plants to Jamaica, transformed the island into a beautiful paradise abounding in fruit. In fact, North’s narrative goes so far as to claim that there was so much food in Jamaica that much of it was wasted because people do not know how to prepare it. Seville oranges rotted on the ground because black Jamaicans were “too indolent to make anything in Jamaica” (*Recollections* 1, 84) while in white households thirty (expensive) coconuts were “used for drinking every day”, their “precious fibre and husk” simply thrown out afterwards (*Recollections* 1, 104). Although, occasionally, North highlights the wastefulness of wealthy

⁶² Hall, “Planters, Farmers and Gardeners in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica”, p. 100

⁶³ Hall, “Planters”, p. 102

Europeans on the island in this way which suggests that the island itself is too abundant, too fertile, she spends much more time pointing out the laziness of its black inhabitants. In comparison to the black Jamaicans, she portrays the indentured workers from India as “so graceful, frank, and intelligent-looking” (*Recollections* 1, 100). Thus North's portrayal of the island as a tropic paradise is full of undertones which dismiss the importance black people's labor and make invisible their huge contribution to how the island looks.

Moreover it is easy to see North's insistence on the “natural” success of European introduced plants as a metaphor of the success of European colonists. The indigenous people who lived in the Caribbean islands before the arrival of Spanish colonists had been almost completely wiped out by the beginning of the 17th century, creating the need to import slave labor to the islands. In contrast, European colonists had managed to survive and thrive on the island, just like the many plants they introduced in Jamaica. At least, this is the image of themselves that white colonists in Jamaica wanted to project. Mortality rates in the early period were very high, and the white population was not self-sustaining⁶⁴. The belief that destiny of “inferior” human races was to gradually disappear as the naturally more adaptable “civilized” races spread farther and farther around the globe was actually quite well spread among scientists. In *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (published a year before North's trip to Jamaica in 1871), Darwin argued that “at some future point, not distant as measured by centuries, the civilised races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace the savage races throughout the world”⁶⁵.

Thus, despite the image of North as a painter of rare plants, partly due to her discovery of a handful of new plant species, most of her Jamaica paintings are well known cultivated plants. North painted a wide variety of introduced plants. Among the more popular and well-known introduced plants she painted are: the sugar cane (135 “A Piece of Sugar Cane”), cotton (107 “Foliage, Flowers, and Seed-vessels of Cotton, and Fruit of Star Apple, Jamaica”, 176 “Great Cotton Tree,

⁶⁴ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, p. 325

⁶⁵ Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, p 156

Jamaica”, 129 “An Old Cotton Tree at the Ford, Morant's Bay, Jamaica”), passion fruit (112 “Foliage, Flowers, and Fruit of the Franadilla, Jamaica”) and bread fruit (113 “Road near Bath, Jamaica, with Cabbage Palms, Bread Fruit, Cocoa, and Coral Trees”, 116 “The Bog-walk, Jamaica with Bread Fruit, Banana, Cocoanut, and other trees”). North also painted lesser known introductions, among them fruit trees like the akee (136 “Foliage and Fruit of the Akee, Jamaica”) and the pitanga (114 “Foliage, Fowers and Fruit of the Pitanga, and Sulphur Butterflies, Jamaica”) and medicinal plants like *Leonotis nepetaefolia* (124 “*Leonotis nepetaefolia* and Doctor Humming Birds, Jamaica”) and *Alpinia nutans* (123 “Foliage and Flowers of *Alpinia nutans*, and a pair of Doctor Humming Birds, Jamaica”). Of course, the only North paintings we still have are those which were subsequently included in the North Gallery. North might have painted many more native plants when she was in Jamaica in 1871-72, but later, when creating the exhibition for her gallery, chose only to showcase those paintings featuring better known plants. While this is possible, the account North gives of the trip in *Recollections* shows that her interest was primarily in introduced plants and that to her they were what gave Jamaica its charm.

Colonial domesticity

To what extent did women participate in the European rush to explore and colonize non-European lands? Until the end of the 18th century, travel outside of Europe was too risky to allow many European women to undertake extensive travel abroad. Gradually, however, throughout the 19th century travel became safer and cheaper. At the same time, British women gained more independence, for instance through the 1870 Married Women's Property Act, which allowed women to retain legal ownership of her property after they marry. It became more acceptable for women to travel abroad alone. By the 1870s, when North set off on her first trips, foreign travel was fairly common and it was not entirely unusual for women to travel alone over long distances⁶⁶. However, the tendency of many women travelers writing in this period to describe the countries the visit as “empty, or populated by harmless, loving children” (emphasis in the original) also feeds into a

⁶⁶ Anderson, *Women and the Politics of Travel*, p. 13

narrative of total British control over the colony⁶⁷. The riskiness of early colonial exploits also meant that few women were sent to colonial outposts before the 18th century. For example, when the English first settled in Jamaica in the 17th century, most of the settlers were men: in 1661, 85% of the white inhabitants were men⁶⁸. Once the colonists settled on the island, though, within half a century the ratio between men and women approached 50/50 because, despite myths that women could not survive tropical climates, white women lived longer than white men in Jamaica⁶⁹.

White women played multiple roles in the colonies, both as symbols and as workers. For example, Suleri writes that Anglo-Indian women were the “symbolic representative” of the “joys” of English domesticity as well as of “all that the Englishman must protect”, while also acting as a symbolic “safeguard against the dangers posed by the Eastern woman”⁷⁰. But white women's roles as moral guardians of their husbands and children went beyond protection against the threat of non-European women's sexuality, as I will discuss in my last chapter. In some cases simply a woman's existence in a space transformed the space into a moral one⁷¹. And by the mid 19th century when increasing numbers of middle class women could not find a husband or employment, there were plenty of white women in Britain who wanted to try their luck in the colonies. In 1861, the Female Middle Class Emigration Society (FMCES) was launched with the purpose of finding paid work for (white) middle-class women in the colonies⁷². The FMCES wanted to find “respectable” positions for middle class women: nannies, governesses, shop managers - not lowly domestic servants. Thus although these middle class women had to learn “working class” skills like cooking and washing, they expected to have jobs which would allow them to preserve middle class feminine respectability. Partly out of a refusal to accept “undignified” paid work, the FMCES was not very successful and only managed to send 14 women abroad in its first year⁷³. These virtuous women

⁶⁷ Mills, *Discourses of Differences*, p. 22

⁶⁸ Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, p. 326

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India*, p. 76

⁷¹ For example, in 1847 Caroline Chisholm called virtuous white women “God's police” as a way to encourage more white women to move to Australia. See Lane, *Myths and Memories*, p. 34

⁷² Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, p. 181

⁷³ Ibid., p. 181-2

immigrants were precisely the women who attracted North's admiration. In her travel writing, North praises middle class women who are not afraid of doing domestic labor while maintaining feminine respectability. For example, Gertrude S. who North describes as “the person I liked best in Jamaica” was taken to Australia with her brothers as a child where she had “driven cattle with her brothers” and “helped her mother to cook, wash, make clothes, and salt down meat” (*Recollections* 1, p.90). Despite this upbringing, Gertrude “had a noble face and figure” and despite doing “the finer kinds of cooking” for her brother and seeing “her horse and cow fed regularly”, she still had time to teach herself “German, French and Italian” while living with her brother in Jamaica (*Recollections* 1, 91).

Because North was a very wealthy woman, as well as an amateur botanist and visual artist, it might be difficult to imagine her work on her paintings as similar to domestic labor. But take, for example, the short postscript Janet Symonds, attached to the last volume of *Recollections* in which she describes her sister as having lived “a charmed life”:

she could apparently sit all day painting in a mangrove-swamp, and not catch fever. She could live without food, without sleep, and still come home, after a year or two, a little thinner, with a more careworn look in the tired eyes, but ready to enjoy to the full the flattering reception which London is always ready to give to any one who has earned its respect by being interesting in any way. (*Some Further Recollections*, 316)

A life of (at least apparent) hard work, deprivations and constant danger of death was the kind of “charmed” North saw as admirable and sought to lead. Her self-representation depended very much on work, for example, her letters to friends frequently mention all the work she was trying to carry out, sometimes going so far as to include her schedule in them⁷⁴. North's interests, not only in venturing into the unknown and discovering new plants, but creating botanically accurate representations of already existing ones to educate people, show that she regarded herself as both an adventurer and a diligent worker. She sought labor that was feminine and respectable while still

⁷⁴ Le-May Sheffield, *Revealing New Worlds*, p. 98

being hard and dangerous, and she found it in her botanical art.

Chapter 3. Women at Kew: Victorian Scientific Institutions and their Female Visitors

Introduction

Victorian scientific institutions such as natural history museums are often represented as the realms of “gentlemanly science” which would make a museum which is curated by a woman appear inherently subversive. Certainly, when Marianne North wrote to Joseph Hooker in 1880 to ask if she could give her work to Kew Botanic Gardens and build a gallery for it, she was doing something highly unusual for a woman of her time. As I have already shown in Chapter 1 (“Amateurs and scientific knowledge networks”), it was not unusual for Victorian women to be interested in botany and collect botanical specimens although their collections rarely became large enough to rival those of natural history museums. It was also not especially unusual for women to work as botanical illustrators, in fact the official botanical illustrator of Kew Gardens in 1880 was a woman, Mathilda Smith. What was, and continues to be, unusual is for a single woman to create a large number of artistic works which have scientific as well as artistic value, fund and design her own gallery to house them and then successfully integrate her gallery within a larger scientific institution.

Initially, my work was focused on finding and analyzing conflicts or disagreements because Marianne North and the management of Kew Gardens (both the Director, Joseph Hooker, and the Board of Trustees). After all, Kew was a major scientific institution run by men, the idea of adding a woman's art gallery to it must have given rise to some conflicts? I was surprised to find very little evidence of conflicts in archival material related to the building of the Gallery. The only problem North encountered was the fact that the Gardens banned drinking and eating on the premises so she had to give up on her idea of serving refreshments in her Gallery. My research question then

became, why was it so easy for North to build her Gallery at Kew? This chapter is thus an attempt to understand how the North Gallery functioned both a scientific and an artistic institution within Botanic Gardens Kew, exploring along the way how the space of the Gallery was gendered.

When the Gallery successfully opened to the public in 1882, Marianne North intended it to serve three purposes: showcase and preserve her artistic work, educate the public by providing them scientifically accurate information about plants, animals and people from around the world (but especially British colonies) and offer Kew Gardens visitors a quiet place to rest while they walk around the Gardens. I am especially interested in the Gallery as a space for passing on scientific knowledge and I want to argue that the vision of the world that the North Gallery (re)presents to its visitors is more complex than a domestic, feminine alternative to the harsh, masculine science that was created through the research carried out just outside of her Gallery on the grounds of Kew Gardens. I intend to continue the analysis of the boundaries between masculine science and feminine domesticity I have already explored but this time focusing on how these borders were recreated (or not) through Victorian scientific institutions. The 19th century was the period when scientific institutions were starting to take the shape they have right now and the borders between different kinds of institutions were not as clear as they are now. This is why although the Marianne North Gallery is an art gallery, in many ways it resembles natural history museums more than modern art gallery.

In the rest of the chapter I will first give a brief overview of the history of Victorian museums, explaining why they are such an important space in Victorian culture and paying close attention to natural history museums specifically. Afterward, I will analyze what historical records regarding the kinds of visitors museums had in order to complicate some, too simplistic analyses of museum spaces which see visitors as purely passive. Finally, both to undermine the binary between passive visitor and active curator and to focus more closely on Marianne North's work, I will examine some of her paintings which represent scenes from colonial botanical gardens and try to see what vision of domesticity these show.

Museums in Victorian society

The importance of museums for the development of Victorian science can perhaps not be emphasized enough. Early Victorian science had been preoccupied with observation rather than experimentation as it sought to establish the “place, position, and hierarchy” of natural phenomena (including living organisms) rather than find their causes⁷⁵. For this reason, the museum with its vast collections of specimens gathered from around the world, rather than the laboratory, was the “central institution” of science⁷⁶. In the mid sixteenth century, a widespread cultural appetite for the strange and the unusual in Europe led to the appearance of curiosity cabinets which rapidly gained popularity as a way for private individuals to collect and display unusual objects ranging from historical artifacts, everyday objects made by non-European people, objects believed to belong to mythical creatures and strange animal remains⁷⁷. Although many museums started from cabinet collections, the two institutions are in many ways different. While collections in curiosity cabinets and similar institutions were characterized by their randomness and discontinuity, since what appealed to the visitor was their strangeness, museums organized their collections in an orderly way⁷⁸. The orderliness of museum was a response to increasingly large collections of objects. In the seventeenth century, new plant and animal specimens brought back from the colonies began to flood Europe gradually making random curiosity cabinets unmanageable⁷⁹. At the same time, among natural historians there was a new emphasis on breaking away from the norms set up by classical texts and creating a new, more legitimate knowledge of the world through individual observations⁸⁰. Together these two phenomena created a need for natural historians to come up with new systems of classification which they could use to order their

⁷⁵ Secord, “Introduction” in *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, p. xii

⁷⁶ Ibid. p. xii

⁷⁷ Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage*, p. 60

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 61

⁷⁹ Schiebinger, “The Private Life of Plants”, p. 124

⁸⁰ Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution*, p. 72

collections⁸¹.

At the same time, private collections were gradually replaced by national / state-supported institutions. In these new public museums the citizen is allowed to admire and inspect the nationalized treasures of the former monarchy in a “democratic public setting” which emphasizes that the citizen too is represented by and in the museum’s treasures⁸². Thus new museums create new relationships not only between objects (which now become ordered into narratives), but also between objects, visitors and the state. Several historians have developed Foucauldian analyses of power and space to explain these kinds of relationships. Timothy Mitchell claims that exhibitionary spaces (such as world exhibitions or art galleries) arrange their collections of “Oriental treasures” with the intention of making the objects tell the story of “History, or Empire, or Progress”. Thus, exhibitions taught their European visitors to organize the world into orderly images which reveal a larger pattern of meaning (usually this meaning was the racial, cultural and economic superiority of Europeans and European states)⁸³. Or Tony Bennett argues that modern museums were part of a wider shift in the structures of power which moved from a need for overt public displays of violence to persistent public surveillance. Victorian museums simultaneously ordered objects “for public inspections” and ordered “the public inspected”⁸⁴.

Museum visitors: class and gender

Bennett also argues that the new museums was intended as an institution in which “the working classes” could be “exposed to the improving influence of the middle class classes”⁸⁵, but what was the typical museum visitor actually like? Although Bennett’s argument that museums offered an opportunity for working class people to better themselves, we should be careful to generalize it. Smaller museums, like the Royal College of Surgeons Hunterian Museum (which

⁸¹ Schiebinger, *Ibid.*, p. 124

⁸² Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 38

⁸³ Mitchell, “Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order”, p. 304

⁸⁴ Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 3

⁸⁵ Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 30

opened in 1813) or Oxford University's Museum of Natural History, were “too exclusive for working-class people to attend”⁸⁶. Larger museums, especially in London, were able to attract a large number of diverse visitors. The museum could offer shelter both from bad weather and from the bustle and hustle of the city since it was “the antithesis of the city [...] well-ordered, beautiful, quiet”⁸⁷.

However, it is important to remember that the geography of London was drawn along class lines and museums in the upper and middle class parts of the city could not attract a very significant number of working class visitors. The South Kensington Museum, where Marianne North exhibited her paintings and to which she initially bequeathed them in 1877⁸⁸, attracted significant criticism because of this. Although it was intended to educate “the skilled laboring men of London” its location in the faux-aristocratic South Kensington was far away from where these men worked and lived⁸⁹. In response to this criticism, which sometimes came from working men themselves⁹⁰, the South Kensington Museum opened another branch in one of the poorest areas of East London, the Bethnal Green Branch⁹¹. This branch exhibited collections from the main museum as well as exhibitions on food production and hygiene created specifically for its working class visitors⁹². Rather than being the passive victims of many Foucauldian analyses, working people themselves campaigned for access to museums and asked for “evening openings, free days, and especially neighborhood collections” in “lecture halls, local newspapers and [...] public houses”⁹³. And although men participated most visibly in these debates and attempts at working class “improvement” were typically aimed most explicitly at men, museums were intended to be

⁸⁶ Yanni, *Nature's Museum*, p. 9

⁸⁷ Black, *On Exhibit*, p. 24

⁸⁸ Le-May Sheffield, *Revealing New World*, p. 86

⁸⁹ Kriegel, *Grand Designs*, p. 159

⁹⁰ In 1859 *Star* published a letter by “Pimlico”, an “industrious and sober mechanic” who asked for Sunday openings at museums. See Kriegel, *Grand Designs*, p. 170. Or in 1868, Thomas Conolly who is described as a “workingman” gave evidence to the House of Lords about the need to build more museums in London which would “educate the working classes”. See Black, *On Exhibit*, p. 33

⁹¹ Black, *On Exhibit*, p. 33

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 33-4

⁹³ Kriegel, *Grand Designs*, p. 163

attractions for the whole family, not single men⁹⁴. Moreover, museums could also become “a learning environment” in which working class women could learn important “bourgeois conceptions of femininity and domesticity”, through reconstructions of “the ideal home” in arts and crafts museums as well as through more practical public lectures⁹⁵.

Regardless of where they were located, many Victorian museums took their duty to educate the public very seriously. Many curators believed that museums should exhibit their whole collection to the public, which often led to extremely crowded museums⁹⁶. After the popular success of the Crystal Palace, it was widely believed that permanent museums should be set up which would “charm the eye, instruct visitors on the state of industry, and inspire manufactures and workers”⁹⁷. This was meant very literally, for example, the South Kensington Museum opened an exhibition called *False Principles* in 1853. This exhibition, rather than showing the public examples of beautiful artworks, “showcased tastelessness in design in order to admonish the potential producer and consumer alike”⁹⁸.

Natural history museums, more specifically, also had to struggle to balance the needs of two groups of visitors: the general public and scientists. While the general public visited museums to be entertained and educated, scientists wanted access to museum collections so they could use their specimens for research. For example, when public debate ranged about establishing a separate museum for the natural history collection of the British Museum, two different philosophies about the purpose of museums surfaced, one which prioritized the general public and one which regarded scientists as the primary users of museums. Richard Owen (1804-1892) the Superintendent of Natural History at the British Museum believed that the new museum should put most of the British Museum's natural history collections on display. The museum thus exhibiting “thousands of objects” displayed would show “the wealth of the empire in the powerful form of natural

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 167

⁹⁵ Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 32

⁹⁶ Yanni, *Nature's Museum*, p. 92

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 93

⁹⁸ Black, *On Exhibit*, p. 32

knowledge”⁹⁹. Owen had already tried to (unsuccessfully) to transform the Hunterian Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons into a national comparative anatomy museum that would rival George Cuvier's Museum d'histoire naturelle¹⁰⁰. But Owen's motivation was not solely to create an internationally renowned institution, he also was a strong believer in the importance of educating the museum visiting public and insisted that public lectures in the Natural History Museum were “indispensable”¹⁰¹. On the other side of the debate was Thomas H. Huxley (1825-1895), whose nickname was “Darwin's bulldog” because after Charles Darwin published *The Origin of the Species* in 1859, Huxley frequently publicly defended his friend's work¹⁰². Huxley argued that only a small part of the natural history collection should be exhibited for the public, enough to educate but not overwhelm non-scientists, while the rest was kept in storage so scientists can have easy access to the specimens¹⁰³. The London Natural History Museum was only opened in 1881 and moving the whole natural history collection from the British Museum took until 1884, these kinds of public debates about the purpose of museum spaces were still taking place at the time when Marianne North was planning her gallery.

Typical visitors at Kew Gardens

How did this debate play out at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew more specifically? While the Gardens shared many characteristics with natural history museums, they were also a more complex institution than most museums. The Gardens had to fulfill three broad functions: public garden for the general public, the “pure” scientific work of cataloging the world's flora and, increasingly after the Museum of Economic Botany was created in 1847, laboratory for colonial agriculture. The three functions often overlapped each other, for example, the vast collections of plants from overseas obviously drew a lot of visitors to Kew Gardens, but they also sometimes led to competition over the Gardens' resources. The number of visitors Kew Gardens received grew

⁹⁹ Yanni, “Divine Displays or Secular Science”, p. 278

¹⁰⁰ Rupke, *Richard Owen*, p. 19-21

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 28

¹⁰² Yanni, “Divine Displays or Secular Science”, p. 276

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 277

continuously after it opened to the public as a national botanical garden in 1841. Initially, Kew was regarded primarily as a public garden and attracted people with the promise of entertainment out of doors rather than scientific knowledge¹⁰⁴. This was a successful strategy and in 1851 over 300,000 people visited the Gardens, many of them having come down to London also to visit the Great Exhibition¹⁰⁵. By the 1860s, more than half a million people visited each year¹⁰⁶. In 1895, the number of visitors was almost a million and a half¹⁰⁷. Despite the huge number of visitors, the Gardens were only opened in the afternoon so that scientific work could be carried out in the morning¹⁰⁸. The ever-increasing number of visitors had obvious advantages since visitors were charged “ninepence a head” and the fees from admissions helped fund the Gardens¹⁰⁹. Visitors, however, also created problems and disrupted the research work.

The 1851 *Popular Guide to the Royal Botanic Gardens of Kew* written by William Hooker warned visitors about the rules they had to comply with in order to gain admission at Kew. Only persons who were dressed “respectably” were admitted to the gardens¹¹⁰ and “smoking, or eating and drinking, or the carrying of provisions of any kind into the Gardens” were all prohibited¹¹¹. Although it is easy to assume that the problems were always created by the working classes visiting the Gardens, that might not always have been true. For example, in his 1854 description of the Gardens, William Chambers' claims that “the 'lower classes' are not the people who pick and pilfer here”, rather it is respectable middle class “amateurs” cannot help themselves and give in to the temptation to pick plants¹¹². Chambers also notes that although the primary reason why people visited the gardens was outdoors fun, the gardens were also popular with those interesting in “horticultural or botanical study” and in “drawing botanical subjects”, either for pleasure or to make

¹⁰⁴ Drayton, *Nature's Government*, p. 180

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 188

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 206

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 207

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 188

¹⁰⁹ Chambers, *Kew Gardens*, p. 29

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 31

“designs for manufactured goods” out of them¹¹³.

Purpose of Kew Gardens: research and entertainment

It is hard to estimate how many of Kew's visitor were women and harder still to try to estimate the number of working class women, but public gardens were popular attractions for women. Similarly to museum, the use of public gardens by working class people were promoted as a “civilizing” influence. For example, a select committee on public parks argued in 1834 that public parks are important for working class people not only because the fresh air is good for their health but because:

a man walking out with his family among his neighbours of different ranks, will naturally be desirous to be properly clothed, and that his Wife and Children should be so also; but this desire duly directed and controlled, is found by experience to be of the most powerful effect in promoting Civilization.¹¹⁴

Thus while men walking alone among their “betters” could lead to unhealthy types of jealousy, walking in nature with their families could instill in men a healthy sense of ambition. Indeed, although Victorians frowned upon women's participation in the public sphere, at the same time, in many ways, women's presence in certain kinds of public spaces was regarded in itself as a “civilizing” force. Women embodied “a gentleness of manners” which was transmitted to those around them¹¹⁵. Moreover, as I explained in chapter 1 (“Amateurs and scientific knowledge networks”), botany was considered to be an acceptable hobby for women and was fairly popular among middle class women. As a testament to this, Kew Gardens hired their first women gardeners in 1896. The 1896 Annual Report of the Kew Guild noted that although “the addition of two young

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 44

¹¹⁴ Cited in Davidoff & Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 423

¹¹⁵ Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 32

women” to their staff was a little controversial, the good work they did at Kew proved that “there does not appear to be any insuperable difficulty in the way of the adoption by women of gardening as a profession”¹¹⁶. However, Kew Gardens stopped hiring women in 1902 and until the 1950s did not regularly recruit women unless there was a severe labor shortage due to the two world war¹¹⁷. The women gardeners Kew Gardens hired were graduates of the Horticultural College at Swanley in Kent, England. Set up in 1889 as part of a national effort to improve formal agricultural education, Swanley Horticultural College started admitting women in 1891 and eventually became an all-women institution in 1901¹¹⁸. The college trained women who went on to work in other botanical gardens and later, between 1902 and 1915, offered classes specifically for women who intended to work in the colonies¹¹⁹.

For Marianne North too, Kew Gardens was a place with multiple meanings. When her gallery was being built and designed, she specifically asked to have a studio in the building where she could work quietly, “away from the sloppy greenhouses and traffic of visitors” (*Recollections* 2, 87). North seemed to be dealing with the same problems that Kew's botanists were, namely large groups of visitors preventing her from doing her work. Although North seems to have made several plant studies while Kew, she never painted landscapes of the Gardens and its visitors. In order to see how botanical garden spaces function for North and why she choose Kew to house her collection instead of donating it to the South Kensington Museum, for example, I want to analyze some of the paintings she painted in botanical gardens elsewhere. Although it might seem to contradict the image of Marianne North as a daring artist painting rare plants in dangerous, wild setting, North actually worked in botanical gardens often. Susan Morgan explains that this was because “part of her social obligations” while travelling was to “bring greetings from Kew to many of the director's colleagues”¹²⁰. Although, undoubtedly, North participated in strengthening ties

¹¹⁶ Kew Guild, *Kew Guild Journal* (1896), p. 9

¹¹⁷ Losse, “The history of working women at Kew”

¹¹⁸ Brassley, “Agricultural Science and Education”, p. 642

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Morgan, “Introduction”, in North, *Recollections* (1993), p. xxix

between Kew Gardens and colonial gardens in her travels which existed both as an official knowledge production network and as an informal network of acquaintances and friends, but working in botanical gardens was also simply more practical.

Marianne North's paintings of colonial botanic gardens

Like Kew, botanical gardens in the colonies played multiple roles. They facilitated the collection of native plant specimens as well as putting in practice new colonial agricultural projects devised in the metropole. They were also important in providing “the basis for the institutional emergence of environmentalist ideas”¹²¹. Similarly, Joseph Hooker claimed that North's paintings were an effort to save for “posterity” natural “scenes” which “can never be renewed by nature”¹²². For example, the Buitenzorg (now the city is called Bogor) Botanic Gardens where North worked “every day” while she was staying in Java in 1876 (*Recollections* 1, 256), were founded in 1814 during “a brief period of British control of Java” to aid research into valuable native plants¹²³. Later in the 1850s, the Gardens became an important site for the rush to grow Cinchona trees (from which quinine bark was extracted) in large scale plantations outside of South America¹²⁴. Or, an even clearer example of economic interests leading to the foundation of botanic gardens is the Brisbane Botanic Garden, where North worked in 1880 while visiting Australia. The Garden was first established in 1825 as a “government garden” in which convicts grew “vegetable and cereal crops” to feed the colony¹²⁵. A formal botanic garden was established in 1855 under the curator Walter Hill, who had worked at Kew Gardens, also to facilitate finding economically valuable native plants as well as acclimatizing cultivable plants from elsewhere¹²⁶.

Thus although botanical gardens nowadays emphasize their conservationist mission so they might seem to us like places where Eden-like visions of wild nature are recreated, historically they have actually been places where a lot of work is done, both in the service of “pure” science and in

¹²¹ Grove, *Green Imperialism*, p 475

¹²² Hooker, “Preface” in Botting Hemsley, *The Gallery of Marianne North's Paintings* (1886), p. iii

¹²³ Drayton, *Nature's Government*, p. 121

¹²⁴ Drayton, *Nature's Government*, p. 208-10

¹²⁵ Sim & Seto, *Inventory of historic cultural landscapes in Queensland*, p. 15

¹²⁶ Sim & Seto, *Inventory*, p. 16

that of colonial economics. This is illustrated in the kinds of paintings North created in the colonial botanical gardens she visited which often include human dwellings and show native people working and / or Europeans promenading. Two of the paintings she made at the Buitenzorg Botanic Gardens show houses: painting number 610 (“A Tailor's Shop in the Botanic Garden, Buitenzorg, shaded by Sago Palms and Bananas” [Figure 7]) and painting number 693 (“Gardener's Cottage, Buitenzorg Botanic Garden, Java” [Figure 8]). The latter shows a building that looks more European (since it has a tiled roof), but otherwise the buildings are similar and North painted them in a similar position on the canvas and in similar tones. Both buildings are surrounded by groups of native people. At least in the first painting, the native people are working – there is a figure in the lower right corner who appears to be washing something in a creek. Perhaps it is the pith of sago palms (*Sagus lavis*) which are shown in the background, the North Galley guide claims that the palm pith, if properly prepared “by much washing”, can “supply a man with a whole year's food”¹²⁷. Or perhaps it is simply more clothes like the ones already hanging on a line in front of the house. It is more difficult to say what people are doing in painting 693, but at least there seems to be a group of native people talking in front of the building, notably at least two of the painting's character seem to be women walking with children. Painting 693 also seems to be representing the fence surrounding the Botanical Gardens, if not one of its entrances. In the background, outside of the Gardens, North paints shorter and more European looking trees, while the mountains can be seen in the distance. Meanwhile, the tailor's shop is in a distinctly more “tropical” and “exotic” setting, which better matches European expectations of the colonies although the banana trees which sound it are not native to Indonesia. Like in her paintings of plantation crops in Jamaica discussed in Chapter 2, North smooths over the violence of colonialism by showing signs of colonial exploitation as fitting seamlessly and “naturally” with the landscape. A more conflicted relationship between botanical gardens and the native landscape can be seen in the paintings North made while in Brisbane Botanic

¹²⁷ Botting Hemsley, *The Gallery of Marianne North's Paintings* (1886), p. 94

Garden.

North complained in her memoirs that the Brisbane Botanic Garden was “dried up and unattractive”¹²⁸, yet she painted at least three vivid landscapes there: paintings 732 (“Palms and Ferns, a scene in the Botanic Garden, Queensland”), 738 (“View in the Brisbane Botanic Garden”) and 783 (“View in the Botanic Garden, Brisbane, Queensland”). The second, “View in the Brisbane Botanic Garden” (738) (Figure 9) shows a beautiful banana passionfruit (*Passiflora tarminiana*) full of vividly colorful flowers in the foreground with flower beds, several trees and the Brisbane river in the background. Although it is difficult to make out what plants are in the flower beds, but the most visible tree in the painting is a Queensland pine (*Araucaria Cunninghamii*). Placed in opposite corners of the painting, the two plants seem to be competing for space with the passionfruit vine clearly winning. This painting is interesting because although several plants in the passiflora family are native to Australia and North could have chosen to paint one of them, but the banana passionfruit is not one of them and was introduced in Australia because of its colorful flowers and edible fruits. Nowadays it is considered an environmental weed in Australia, meaning that it is seen as posing a serious danger to native vegetation¹²⁹. Meanwhile, the Queensland pine although not an endangered species was over-exploited during the 19th century which led to the need to set up plantations in Queensland and New South Wales because the tree no longer grows naturally¹³⁰.

How do these two views of colonial botanical gardens reflect back on Kew Gardens? Their presence in the North Gallery next to several other paintings which show different scenes from botanical gardens around the world¹³¹ comes together to represent a vision of the whole world seen through a network of colonial botanic gardens which are under the influence of Kew. This world is perpetually green and fertile, even when North's own memoirs describe it as “dried up” (similarly,

¹²⁸ North, *Recollections* 2, p.109

¹²⁹ “Invasive Plant Glossary”, web

¹³⁰ Thomas, *Araucaria cunninghamii*, web

¹³¹ The examples are too numerous to analyze at length, but interesting scenes from botanical gardens are also represented in: painting 120 (“Bananas and Orange Trees, a Palm and a Bush of Noche Buena in a Garden at Morro Velho, Brazil”), painting 271 (“A View in the Royal Botanic Garden, Peradeniya, Ceylon”), painting 284 (“Talipot Palm, near the Botanic Garden, Peradeniya, Ceylon”) and painting 626 (“Palms in the Botanic Garden at Rio Janeiro”).

North's paintings from India painted around the same time as the Southern Indian Famine of 1876-8 show only green fields and beautiful flowers). It is also a world which is domestic and feminine, something reinforced both by images of native people carrying out domestic chores in the midst of botanical gardens set up to facilitate the exploitation of their and their land's resources, and by the building itself.

Conclusion

Although Victorian natural history museums did not have a single style, they usually were built in a classical / historicist (European) styles¹³². The North Gallery, on the other hand, is built to resemble a bungalow, significantly less grand and more domestic. In fact, although it might seem like an unusual choice for a museum or an art gallery, this style of building to help the gallery blend in with other buildings on Kew Gardens' premises to give the impression that as the visitor is walking around they gardens, they are seeing scenes from different places around the world. Other structures of the grounds of the Kew Gardens include a ruined arch, a 50 m high pagoda, the Temple of Aeolus (a small Greek temple) and an 18th century English cottage. Many of the feminist scholars who have analyzed North's work have struggled to understand what kind of space her Gallery is given that it appears so domestic and feminine. The question has especially been whether its apparent domesticity somehow subverts or challenges the starch masculinity of Victorian mainstream science. The question I have been trying to ask has been slightly different. I have been interesting in understanding what were the conditions which allowed North to create a domestic space within a scientific institutions, why is it that Kew Gardens showcases and remembers her work and not the world of other women botanical artists and / or naturalists. Part of the answer that I have come to is that North repeatedly portrays domesticity as something which helps to disguise colonial violence. And this is something that is visible both in her paintings of people in colonial

¹³² Yanni, *Nature's Museums*, p. 6

botanical gardens and in her paintings of colonial landscapes which show invasive species introduced by Europeans at home in landscapes of colonial exploitation (literally, since the title of her exhibition is “plants and their homes”).

Illustrations



*Figure 1 Autumn Tints, near
Niagara, United States”*



Figure 2 View in a Redwood Forest, California

Figure 3 Cooktown orchid (Dendrobium bigibbum, Dendrobium bifalce)



Figure 4 A new Pitcher Plant from the limestone mountains of Sarawak, Borneo



Figure 5 "Williamsfield Estate, St. Thomas' in the Vale

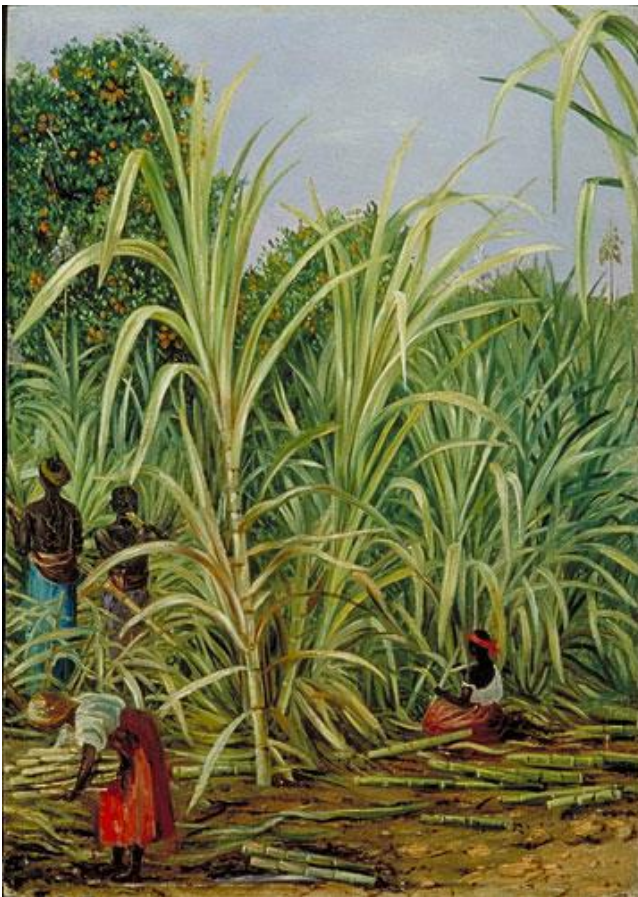


Figure 6 Harvesting the Sugar-Cane in Minas Geraes, Brazil

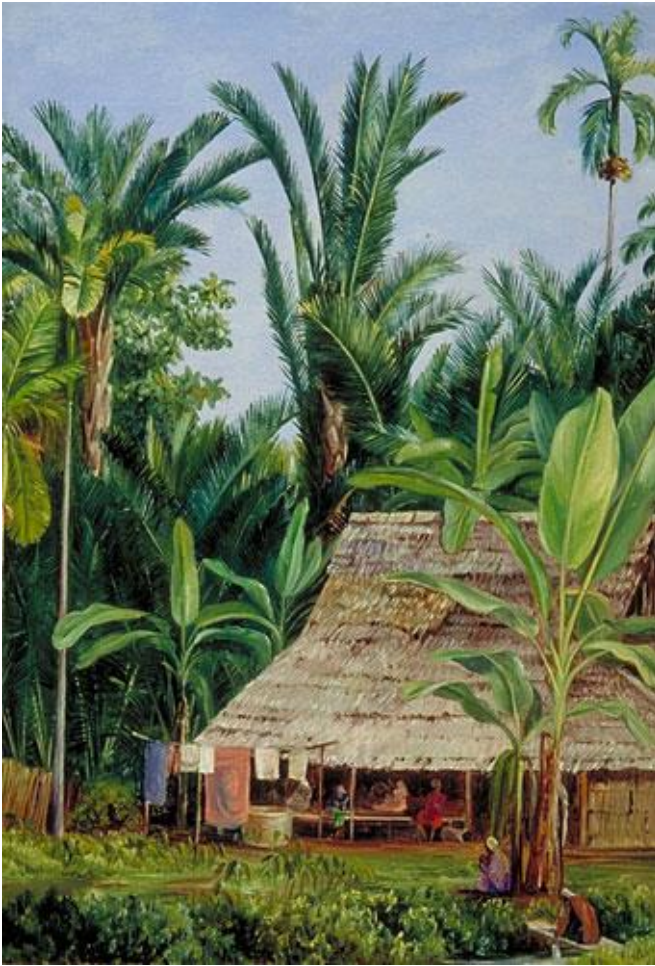


Figure 7A Tailor's Shop in the Botanic Garden, Buitenzorg, shaded by Sago Palms and Bananas



Figure 8 Gardener's Cottage, Buitenzorg Botanic Garden, Java



Figure 9 View in the Brisbane Botanic Garden

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