



A Forgotten Daughter of Bohemia: Gertrude Christian Fosdick's *Out of Bohemia* and the Artists' Novel of the 1890s

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In October 1859, George William Curtis, editor of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, attempted to define for his readers the concept of Bohemia. Alluding to both the freedom that Bohemia embodied and anxiety about the threat it posed to bourgeois life, he pronounced that "Bohemia is the realm of vagabondage[,] . . . a fairy land upon the hard earth. . . . Hereabouts you may find it in painters' studios, and in the rooms of authors. . . . [I]ts denizens are clad loosely—seedily, in the vulgate—and they are shaggy as to the head, with abounding hair. Whatever is not 'respectable' they are" (705). This idea of Bohemia as an imagined site for artists mapped onto an actual urban terrain of lower-class neighborhoods began with Henri Murger's *La Vie de Bohème*, and by the end of the nineteenth century, the term "Bohemia" had wide currency as a signifier of unconventional living. For example, Christian Reid's *A Daughter of Bohemia* is set in the South but uses the term "Bohemia" as a kind of shorthand for its spirited heroine's irregular and travel-filled upbringing. Earlier works such as Thomas Janvier's *Color Studies* and Puccini's *La Bohème* popularized the idea of an artistic Bohemia, but it was George Du Maurier's *Trilby* that defined the term for the 1890s. Du Maurier's eponymous heroine, Trilby O'Farrell, is a free-spirited artists' model who enchants three English art students living in Paris. She is mesmerized into becoming a singing sensation through the hypnotic gaze of Svengali, whose name still evokes the figure of a male mentor exploiting a female artist. *Trilby* sold 300,000 copies in the first year, Richard Michael Kelly notes (87), and it captured the imagination in part because of its fetishized view of the female body under male power, a simultaneous representation of the body's innocent display and the gaze that controls it.¹

The gaze as a master trope is particularly significant in this period because,

for one of the first times in history, the particular power relations that it signified—male gaze and female model—had been significantly and officially disrupted. The establishment of the influential Académie Julian in Paris in 1868 challenged the traditions of the École des Beaux Arts, not only by admitting women students but also by allowing them to take classes with men, including life drawing from nude models.² Significantly, the Académie Julian also served as a training ground for such painters-turned-writers as Robert W. Chambers (*Outsiders: An Outline*), George Moore (*Mildred Lawson*), and Frank Norris (*Vandover and the Brute*), who studied there, according to biographers Joseph R. McElrath, Jr., and Jesse S. Crisler, from 1887–89 (94). Like the prostitution and working-girl narratives of the 1890s, the Bohemian artists' novel was a powerful draw for writers, in part because, as in narratives of prostitution, its objectification of the female figure provided an ideal mode for examining spectatorship and sexuality.³ Other Bohemian artists' novels written by men, such as Émile Zola's *The Masterpiece*, William Dean Howells's *The Coast of Bohemia*, Stephen Crane's *The Third Violet*, and W. Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage*, reveal anxiety about the permeability of class and gender boundaries, most clearly in their treatment of women's positions as artists as well as models. By contrast, earlier novels about women artists, such as Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *The Story of Avis*, examine the conflict between artistic aspirations and domestic life, with Phelps illustrating the obstacles to blending the two. But one novel of this later generation, Gertrude Christian Fosdick's *Out of Bohemia*, focuses on a different set of issues, exploring how nationalism and an imperial American innocence disrupt the power dynamic of male gaze and female subject. As a brief overview of Fosdick's life followed by an analysis of the novel demonstrates, *Out of Bohemia* is valuable both as a recovered text by an unknown woman author and as a work that moves the figure of the woman in the Bohemian artists' novel from object to autonomous subject, a transformation effected through the discourses of nationalism that Fosdick invokes on behalf of her protagonist.

Although *Out of Bohemia* has autobiographical elements, little information is available about Fosdick herself. No biography has been written about her, the National Museum of Women in the Arts has no records on her, and she is not mentioned in many reference books, although Mantle Fielding's *Dictionary of American Painters, Sculptors & Engravers* and Chris Petteys's *Dictionary of Women Artists* provide basic information. Gertrude Christian was born on 19 April 1862 in Urbanna, Middlesex County, Virginia, and, according to the 1880 US Census, she was the fourth child of M. A. and Joseph Christian, a Judge of the Superior Court of Appeals (Fielding 291; DAR 375). In 1880, at age nineteen, she was living at home in Virginia with her two older sisters (a brother was away at school), her parents, and two servants. Later, she attended Barnard and

possibly studied at the Art Students' League before moving to Paris to train at the Académie Julian in the late 1880s.⁴ While there, she studied under the famous academicians William Bouguereau and Jules-Joseph Lefebvre (Falk, "Fosdick, Gertrude Christian" 1162), as did her American contemporary Frank Norris, who attended the academy at about the same time. On 22 October 1890, she married James William Fosdick ("Fosdick, James William" 511), a Bostonian four years her senior and a fellow student at the Académie Julian, and in April 1892 she published a poem, "The Smile of Peace," under the name "Gertrude Christian Fosdick" in the *New England Magazine*. After "The Smile of Peace," Gertrude's primary work was *Out of Bohemia*, but J. William Fosdick won increasing fame as an artist in burnt wood by creating panels such as his 1896 *The Adoration of St. Joan of Arc*, now in the Smithsonian. The 1900 US Census reveals that the couple was by then living in northern New Hampshire with their two-year-old daughter; they may already have been dividing their time between their summer home in Sugar Hill, New Hampshire, and their city home at 33 West 67th Street in New York, where they maintained a residence through 1933 (Fielding 291).

In 1896 Fosdick was listed as a "celebrated contributor" to the *Home Queen*, along with Ruth McEnery Stuart, Grace King, and Harriet Prescott Spofford ("The Home Queen" 3). Yet over the next few decades, Gertrude Christian Fosdick remained more active in the world of art than that of literature. She translated Honoré de Balzac's tale "Modest Mignon" for Philadelphia publisher G. Barrie's 1895 collected edition of *The Human Comedy* and several of Alfred de Musset's novellas for the same publisher in 1900. Her painting *Roses* was shown at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1913 (Falk and Bien 330), and other works were exhibited at the Society for Independent Artists and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1927. By the middle to late 1920s, the Fosdicks spent their summers in Gloucester, Massachusetts, which had a thriving artists' colony centered on the North Shore Art Association in East Gloucester. Permanent installations of Gertrude's art there include two memorial tablets commissioned in the 1930s. The most visible of these is the George O. Stacy Memorial, a signed bronze tablet placed on the Stacy Esplanade in 1930. The other memorial tablet honors the American impressionist painter John Henry Twachtman, who, like Gertrude Fosdick, studied under Lefebvre at the Académie Julian and spent time in Gloucester. J. William Fosdick died in Boston in 1937 ("James W. Fosdick"), but Gertrude Fosdick continued to exhibit her work in New York galleries and shows through 1947 (Jewell 21). Seven years before her death on 22 October 1961 ("Deaths"), she published her husband's memoir, *Happy Days at Julian's: How Two Young Americans Entered the Great French Academy*.⁵ It bears the printed inscription, "Now published for the first time by his wife, Gertrude C. Fosdick, painter, sculptress, and writer."

That Fosdick cared so to identify herself sixty years after publishing her only novel, and that her position as “writer” took equal place alongside her more visible occupations of sculptor and painter, speaks to the significance of *Out of Bohemia* for her.

Out of Bohemia focuses on possibilities for women living in the free spaces of Bohemia, the cultural differences that such women must negotiate, and the mediation and inscription of their nationality and their sexuality through the male gaze. It is the story of an American art student, Beryl Carrington, whose excursions into, and extrication from, sexual danger depend heavily on the ideology of American innocence and an undercurrent of American imperial power. The 13 May 1894 *New York Times* review of the novel summarizes the action as follows:

Beryl Carrington was an American girl from the South, and she wanted to paint and went to Paris. . . . At her boarding house Beryl meets two American students—Georges Latour, who is a very bad young man, and Clay Sargent, who is a very exemplary one. Beryl loves the bad Georges, and he sacrifices her to his mistress Gabrielle [the keeper of the boarding house where both live].

Then a very swell young man, Harold Bertram, intervenes. It is Clay who would probably have made Beryl the better husband. Georges kills himself, Bertram sails to America, and Beryl comes home. . . . As to Clay, he is left out in the cold. (“An American Girl in Paris” 27)

This retelling represents the bare facts of the story accurately, though its tone is less complimentary than that of the review in *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*. After noting that Fosdick's husband was a frequent contributor of illustrations and stories, the reviewer praises Gertrude's book as a picture of the lives of “students who *study*” rather than affecting Bohemian attitudes and calls it “a woman's story of art-student life in Paris, written in a very pretty, *naïve* style” in which “the author is true to fact as well as to her feminine delicacy” (“Literary Memoranda” 127). Oddly enough, neither review mentions the novel's more sensational elements, which range from Beryl's engagement to Georges, who later blackmails her by threatening to reveal their former relationship, to a night spent alone with Clay in his studio. That such episodes can exist in Bohemian spaces without apparent impropriety is borne out in two related autobiographical texts by J. William Fosdick. *The Honor of the Braxtons* (1902) features a similar triangle of a young woman, a dark, passionate, foreign-identified artist, and a faithful Anglo-Saxon friend; and *Happy Days at Julian's*, Fosdick's memoir, tells of a southern woman whom he calls “Virginia” (named for Gertrude's birthplace) forced to flee a French boarding house when her flirtatious ways attract an impetuous Russian artist, incidents that echo the

plot of Georges, Beryl, and Gabrielle Dubray, the boarding house keeper in *Out of Bohemia*.

But the autobiographical elements of the book are ultimately less compelling than the larger issues it raises: the policing of female sexuality in the unregulated transnational spaces of the modern city, female subjectivity and the new presence of women in the art studios, which disrupted the traditional dyad of male artist/female subject by questioning the nature and focus of the gaze and its mediation of power, and above all the uneasy coexistence of cosmopolitanism and nationalism evoked by Americans in Bohemian Paris. From the very beginning, the book's interweaving of female subjectivity and national identity positions Beryl as a national figure. Within the transnational space of a Bohemian art students' ball, where identities are disguised and exchanged, Beryl Carrington masquerades as a Spanish dancer, dressed in black with gold spangles and wearing her dark hair in a loose braid, in nineteenth-century fiction a sign of sexuality unbound. The narrator describes the "striking scene: the circle of eager faces, the dingy walls, the flickering gas-jets throwing their fitful rays on the bright, flushed face, and glittering on the gold spangles of the dancer's dress, as she throws her body, first this way, then that, in the graceful movements of that most abandon [sic] of all dances, the Spanish cachucha" (10). The form of the dance may express sexual abandon, but its performance does not, for, as the narrator comments, Beryl dances with "the natural grace of passion without its grossness[,] like "a child of the forest" (10–11). Both the male gaze and the national gaze are foregrounded in this scene of spectacle, for the "eager" observers' reactions vary according to their nationality. The true American and later friend of Beryl, Clay Sargent, sees it as "the dancing of a merry, innocent child" in an evocation of American innocence (11). But "foreigners" fail to understand her masquerade: Angelo, the Italian doorman, mistakenly calls Beryl "the *petite Espagnole*" (10), and Georges Latour, an American corrupted by long years in France, compares her to the Spanish dancer Carmencita (11) and addresses Beryl in French, calling her his "*petite Espagnole*" and pressing her dark braid to his lips (13, 12). The men read in Beryl's body nationality as well as sexuality, and her dark hair and "Spanish" ethnicity become conflated into a single signifier of sexual availability. Yet, although she has voluntarily assumed the racialized and sexualized persona of Carmencita, Beryl recoils at Georges's familiarities. She replies in English, "I am an American, whom you will do well to respect" (13), using American nationality as both a license to behave freely and a signifier of inviolable sexual innocence. Nationality here trumps the power of the male gaze despite Beryl's transnational disguise and performance.

To reinforce the link between national identity and Beryl's actions as a woman artist, *Out of Bohemia* not only employs the rhetoric of nationalism

but also invites comparison with two other novels about independent young women making their way in Europe: Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* and Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*. In *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne explores issues of art, performance, and representation through the interactions of four characters: Kenyon, a sculptor; Miriam, a darkly beautiful painter; Hilda, a New Englander whose forte is copying others' work; and Donatello, a faunlike figure of innocence. Early in *The Marble Faun*, the narrator comments on how even the innocent Hilda may freely inhabit the Bohemian spaces of the art student, as Beryl does: "The customs of artist-life bestow such liberty upon the sex . . . and it is perhaps an indication that, whenever we admit woman to a wider scope of pursuits and professions, we must also remove the shackles of our present conventional rules" (Hawthorne 897). In referring to *The Marble Faun* throughout her novel, Fosdick equates Beryl with Miriam, an original artist whose guilty secret no one can discern, rather than with the virginal and imitative Hilda, a choice that has sexual overtones as well. As Deborah Barker notes, the female copyist's work was a natural extension of her other womanly functions and brought culture to the nation by reproducing men's art (32–33), whereas the "original woman artist" posed a threat because of her unregulated sexuality in "us[ing] her passion for original artistic creation rather than 'proper' procreation" (37, 35).

Fosdick most directly evokes *The Marble Faun* at the midpoint of *Out of Bohemia* when Beryl visits Harold's studio at his invitation. At this point, Beryl has resolved not to let Georges and his threats about exposing their relationship drive her from Paris, yet she fears meeting Harold. In a scene that foreshadows Beryl's redemption through her return to the national fold, Fosdick carefully renders Harold's studio as an American place and not a Bohemian or transnational space. As Beryl enters, Harold "[leads] her to a seat over which the stars and stripes drooped from the wall" (109), as if the spot were a throne signifying her rightful place as an American woman. Determined to find an American subject, he tells Beryl that he has decided to "illustrate the work of a great American author" and reads to her a passage from *The Marble Faun* in which Donatello and Miriam gaze at the body of a monk whom Donatello has "flung . . . over [a] precipice" because Miriam believes that the monk had been stalking her (111, 113). Harold plans to paint Georges as Donatello and Beryl as Miriam. However, in a piece of intertextual foreshadowing, the figure of the monk's corpse also forecasts Georges's fate, for he soon dies a suicide, "lying in a pool of blood with a bullet through his head and a pistol lying near" (152). As Miriam bears moral, though not legal, responsibility for the glance at Donatello that gives him permission to throw the monk over the precipice, so, too, is Beryl charged with responsibility for Georges's suicide when Gabrielle Dubray, Georges's former mistress, accuses her of being "as good as his mur-

deress" (177–78). Unlike Miriam, Beryl denies responsibility, and the haunted scenes of guilt and expiation that comprise many chapters in *The Marble Faun* are, in Fosdick's text, rejected in favor of a return to America and the restorative properties of American innocence.

The themes of the male gaze and sexuality are more deeply intertwined with nationalism in *Out of Bohemia* than in *The Marble Faun*, however. In *The Marble Faun*, the sculptor Kenyon denies that Hilda has posed for his marble sculpture of her hands: "[A]nxious to vindicate his mistress's maidenly reserve," he confesses to Miriam, "I stole it [his artist's vision of her hands] from her" by glancing at her hands in secret (953). The language of seduction and lost virginity ("I stole it from her") is unmistakable, with the voyeuristic male gaze and its product, the sculpture, as a concrete representation of the artist's mastery in all senses over his subject. In *Out of Bohemia*, the secretive voyeurism is more overt and more sexualized than that employed by Kenyon in *The Marble Faun*. Although she visits Harold's studio freely, Beryl has previously refused to pose as Hawthorne's Miriam; an artist herself, she recognizes the power differential between artists and models and the complicated set of sexual ethics that govern the relationship. Women artists might pose for one another, as was apparently acceptable practice at the Académie Julian, but not for male artists. For a female artist to pose for a male artist threatened a loss of status and sexual reputation, since the woman would thereby transform herself from an artist in control of the gaze into the model receiving it, a position already gendered as feminine and, hence, submissive. Beryl finally agrees to pose for Harold because she fears seeing Georges at Harold's studio, but as she looks at the painting of her own image as Miriam beside Georges's as Donatello, she realizes, "If [Georges] sees it he will trace me." Deciding to act, Beryl "[s]eized a great sponge that lay in front of the canvas . . . [and] dragged it across the beautiful face. . . . She looked at the wreck she had wrought with a wild kind of glee" (121). Like the wayward Americans in *The Marble Faun*, while Beryl remains in Europe she cannot fully rid herself of her past, yet she can, and this time does, control her own representation: Destroying, rather than copying, male art gives her power. The violent gesture temporarily frees her from both Georges and Harold and restores to her a sense of control that she retains for the rest of the novel.⁶

In addition to *The Marble Faun*, *Out of Bohemia* also echoes and revises Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*. Like Isabel Archer, Beryl Carrington is an American girl with a strong desire for independence and the wish to do something with her life.⁷ Like Isabel, who rejects Ralph Touchett in favor of Gilbert Osmond, Beryl ignores the honest attentions of Clay Sargent in favor of a Europeanized American. Georges's appeal is both sensual and sinister like Gilbert Osmond's; his grasping, discarded mistress, Gabrielle, is a more

vulgar version of Madame Merle. Fosdick's solution, unlike James's, is to rescue the American girl from the corruption of Europe. *Out of Bohemia* concludes with Beryl's return both to America and to Harold Bertram, a Caspar Goodwood figure who, unlike Goodwood, has spent some time in European culture and learned to temper his Puritan rigidity. Like *The Portrait of a Lady*, *Out of Bohemia* proposes that aspirations of cosmopolitanism are ultimately illusory because national culture exists not simply as a picturesque backdrop on the periphery of the heroine's actions, but, where gender is concerned, at its very center. Beryl's dual citizenship in Bohemian and American cultures allows her access to both worlds, but, like Isabel, she can fearlessly assert her independence and unconventionality only within American spaces.

Three events illustrate the elastic boundaries of freedom in American spaces. The first is Beryl's visit to her friend, Clay Sargent, after Georges's suicide, during which Clay, recognizing her fatigue, drugs her drink so that she will sleep, and she stays all night in his studio. Later, she allows Clay to paint her picture and exhibit it at the salon, an action from which, given the sexual connotations of a female artist posing for a male artist, Harold infers that Clay has replaced him in Beryl's affections. Finally, she allows Clay to accompany her—unchaperoned—on a journey that will ultimately take her back to America and to Harold. During this journey, Beryl again falls asleep in Clay's presence in a display of "the old Bohemian naturalness" (231), much as Isabel can be wholly natural and emotionally available only to Ralph: "We need n't speak to understand each other," Isabel tells Ralph as he is dying (James 578). Beryl's unchaperoned encounters with Clay evoke standard features of a seduction plot, a plot that his drugging her drink would seem to confirm, as she puts herself entirely in his power. But because Clay is an American, his concern for her, like Ralph Touchett's for Isabel, is, if not entirely pure, shot through with a strain of admiration for the freedom of the American girl that causes him to keep silent about his still unspoken love for her. As the *New York Times* reviewer suggested, Clay seems the logical romantic choice for Beryl ("An American Girl in Paris" 27); yet he, like Ralph, suffers from a fatal defect: He has lived too long in the unhealthy atmosphere of Europe. Chronicling one of Bohemia's periodic cycles of decline at the turn of the century, Daniel H. Borus points out that "in the 1890s[, r]acial strife, economic depression, and the suffrage movement led to a reinvigoration of the warrior ideal in order to eliminate any taint of male weakness. . . . Such cultural custodians as Theodore Roosevelt and Brander Matthews insisted on the need for strong male bodies that resisted degeneracy" (380)—strong male bodies of a type not found in Bohemia. To restore her position as an American woman, then, Beryl must return to America and the "dear, loving arms" of Harold, the newly cultured but still vigorous American man (236). The novel's endorsement of all things American makes it in some

ways the anti-Jamesian alternative, since the Osmond/Georges character, not the Isabel/Beryl character, sacrifices his life. In *Out of Bohemia*, the American scene in effect triumphs over the international theme.

Despite its obscurity, then, *Out of Bohemia* responds to and revises portrayals of the independent woman—and especially the independent woman artist—by Hawthorne, James, and male writers of the Bohemian artists' novel. Fosdick articulates how Bohemian spaces and American citizenship intersect to offer a vision of female subjectivity at the turn of the century. As befits its place as a burgeoning imperial power, America is no longer the victim of Europe, but the victor; like Beryl, its citizens no longer must suffer a loss of reputation and remain in Europe to expiate their sins. Yet like Henry James, Fosdick also recognizes American weaknesses. Beryl is an attractive character, but the recklessness with which she conducts herself and her blindness to Clay's love for her suggest a heedlessness and selfishness that can go hand in hand with America's vaunted innocence—the same combination of innocence, heedlessness, and selfishness that impugned the nation's imperial venture and made James's "Daisy Miller" and "Daisy Millerism" a catch phrase in the 1880s.⁸ Like Henry James's Daisy Miller, Beryl expects the manners of all countries to be governed by American standards, a willfully naïve position especially given her boundary crossing between the freedom of Bohemia and the safety of an American identity. "[I]n adopting Bohemia as her home and allowing herself a free enjoyment of its privileges," warns the narrator, "she had not calculated as to how those privileges might be misinterpreted by others" (47). If it is as much cautionary tale as narrative of resistance, *Out of Bohemia* nonetheless presents a turn-of-the-century woman who pursues the course of freedom and, despite her mistakes, is neither condemned to death nor punished by a lifetime of self-sacrifice. The *New York Times* reviewer concludes that "Bohemia to an ordinary American girl is not a good country" ("An American Girl in Paris" 27), but what Fosdick suggests is that despite its perils, it is an important country to visit on the way to achieving a fully realized American woman's life.

NOTES

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1. *Trilby* appeared in English from January through August 1894 in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. For more on Trilby-mania, see Purcell and Jenkins. Gertrude Christian Fosdick's *Out of Bohemia* was mentioned in the "Books Received" column of the *New York Times* on 30 April 1894 ("An American Girl in Paris" 27), which suggests that

her book was in the publication pipeline well before Trilby-mania gripped the country and was not an attempt to take advantage of *Trilby*'s success.

2. Jo Ann Wein dates this practice at the Académie Julian from 1873 (42).

3. For an examination of these intersections of sexuality and spectacle, see Nicholas Daly, who links the sexualized and mesmerized figure of Trilby O'Farrell to two paintings, James A. McNeill Whistler's *The Woman in White* and Gustav Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde*, a graphic representation of "the torso of a woman reclining with her legs apart . . . her exposed genitals, shown in close-up" (20).

4. Falk lists the Barnard Club as among Gertrude Christian Fosdick's affiliations ("Fosdick, Gertrude Christian" 1162).

5. The WorldCat entry for *Happy Times at Julian's* lists Bates College Library as the sole repository for this book. It is part of the Falmouth Publishing House collection.

6. The idea of a woman defacing or threatening to deface a male artist's painting as an act of self-preservation appears most notably in María Cristina Mena's story "The Vine-Leaf," in which a woman smears the face on her nude self-portrait and presumably kills the artist, as well.

7. As Henry James writes in his preface to the New York Edition of *The Portrait of a Lady*, his central question for the novel was, "Well, what will she *do*?" (12). What Isabel wishes to "do" with her life is a central concern of the characters in the novel.

8. See, for example, the hack newspaper reporter Bartley Hubbard's disparaging reference to "the national reproach of Daisy Millerism" in Howells's *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (21).

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