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A Blue and Gold Mystique: Reading the Material Text in Louisa May Alcott's "Pansies" and Ticknor & Field's *Blue and Gold Series*¹

Sarah A. Wadsworth

*These are the days when skies resume
The old-old sophistries of June—
A blue and gold mistake.*

—Emily Dickinson, c. 1859

In her last book, a collection of stories entitled *A Garland for Girls* (1888), Louisa May Alcott repeatedly emphasizes the importance of reading in the lives of her characters (Figure 1). In "May Flowers," six blue-blooded Boston girls meet regularly to discuss books read in common; the thoughtful protagonist of "Poppies and Wheat" reads for self-improvement during her grand tour of Europe; "Mountain-Laurel and Maidenhair" contrasts a jaded rich girl who has no true appreciation for poetry with an unsophisticated farmer's daughter who reads it avidly and learns to "put her poetry into her life²;" and in "Pansies" a refined and learned elderly woman advises three young ladies which books to read and which to avoid (Figure 2). In this latter story, Alice, the most serious of the girls and an admirer of George Eliot, is cautioned to "choose carefully" lest she become "greedy, and read too much," since "cramming and smattering is as bad as promiscuous novel-reading, or no reading at all,"³ while Eva, the youngest of the three, is gently steered away from the girlhood favorites Charlotte Yonge and Susan Warner to "fine biographies of real men and women."⁴ Carrie, however, poses the greatest challenge to the sage Mrs. Warburton, for she delights in "thrilling" novels and frivolous romances.⁵

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Libraries, and the Massachusetts Historical Society for permission to publish artwork and quotations; and the staff of the Houghton Library.

² Louisa May Alcott, *A Garland for Girls* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1888), 257.

³ *Garland*, 78-79.

⁴ *Garland*, 81.

⁵ Ironically, the kinds of tales Carrie enjoys are just the sort Alcott produced for the *Saturday Evening Gazette* and *The Flag of Our Union*.

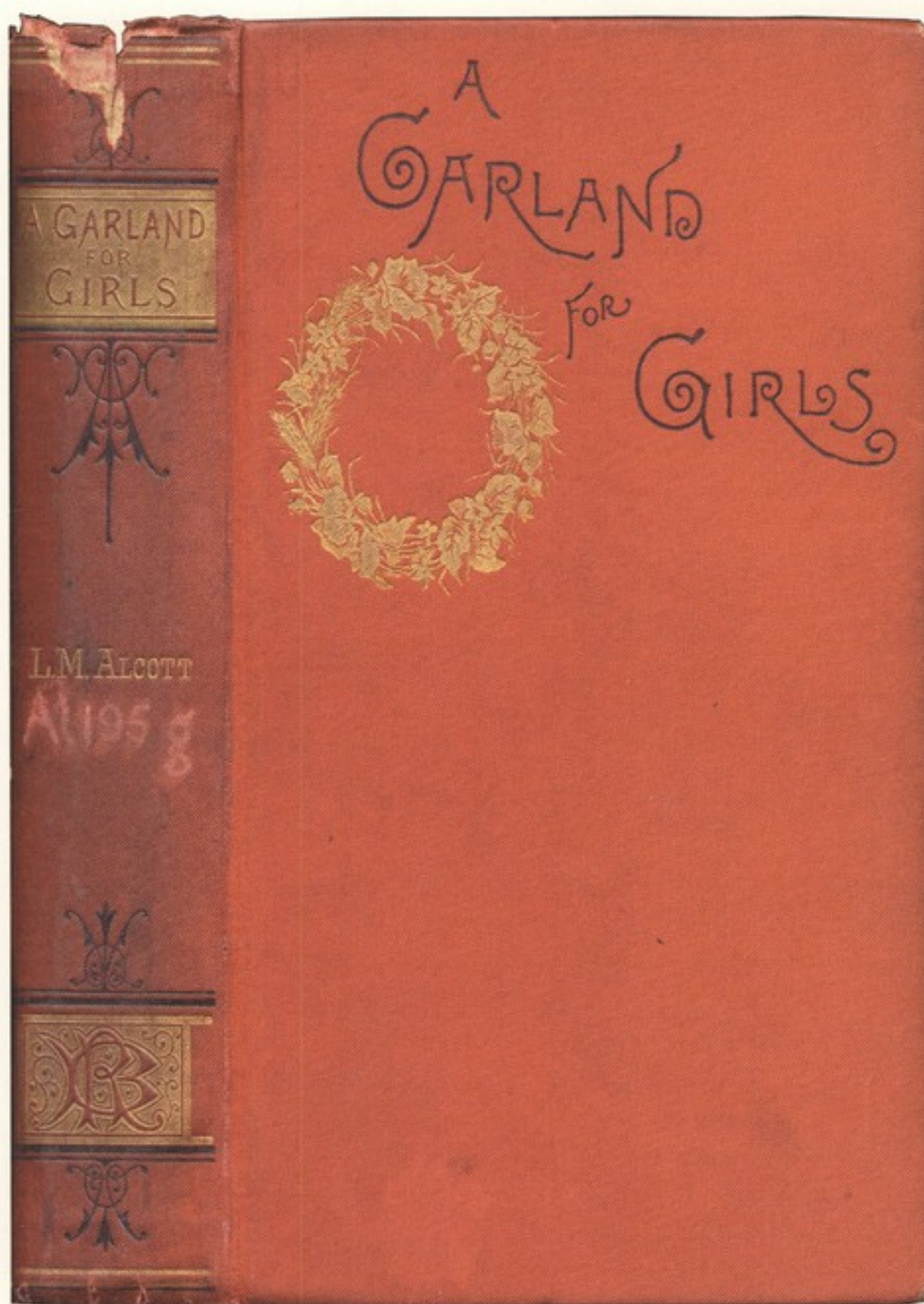


Figure 1. *A Garland for Girls* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1888), by Louisa May Alcott. *AC85 Al194 \$87g. Courtesy of the Houghton Library, Harvard College Library. Although this cover is unsigned and unattributed, the distinctive letterforms and simple decorative design strongly suggest the work of Sarah de St. Prix Wyman Whitman (1842-1904). Whitman, the principal book designer for Houghton Mifflin during the 1880s and 1890s, is known to have designed several covers for Roberts Brothers during this period. She was fond of horticultural illustration and embellished several of her known covers with floral wreaths. This one (shown in actual size) depicts plants named in the titles of stories in the collection, including poppies, wheat, button roses, ladies' slippers, and ivy.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Warburton succeeds so well in reforming the girl's taste in literature that Carrie forsakes the "crumpled leaves of the Seaside Library copy" of *Wanda*, an "interminable and impossible tale"⁶ by the popular novelist Ouida (Marie Louise de la Ramée),⁷ and resolves "to take her blue and gold volume of Tennyson on her next trip to Nahant."⁸

Alcott's allusion to the "blue and gold Tennyson" is not idiosyncratic. References to blue and gold volumes abound in the mid-nineteenth-century culture of books. In *A Mid-Century Child and Her Books* (1926), for example,

6 Alcott, "Pansies," 71.

7 Ouida (1840-1908) is best known today as the author of *A Dog of Flanders*. In a slightly revised earlier periodical version of "Pansies" (*St. Nicholas*, 15 [November 1887]: 12-19) the references to the *Seaside*

Library and *Wanda* are veiled, with Carrie "turning the crumpled leaves of a cheap copy of a sentimental and impossible and tale" (12). It is likely that Mary Mapes Dodge, the editor of *St. Nicholas*, is responsible for the omission of these details.



"Alice, with both elbows on the table, listened with wide-awake eyes." — PAGE 80.

Figure 2. A Garland for Girls, frontispiece illustration by Jessie McDermott.

Caroline M. Hewins recalls, "My grown-up library began with the first edition of Hawthorne's 'Marble Faun' and was soon increased by Longfellow's 'Golden Legend,' a blue and gold Tennyson and Jean Paul's 'Titan' in two thick vol-

8 Alcott, "Pansies," 94. Nahant, an island-like peninsula adjacent to Lynn, Massachusetts, was a popular seaside resort in the nineteenth century. Between 1850, when the Longfellow family spent the first of many summers there, and the early 1880s, it became a kind of "Harvard Summer Annex," hosting many New England luminaries, including Emerson, Hawthorne, Holmes, Lowell, and Whittier, in addition to Longfellow and Ticknor & Fields editor James T.

Fields. See Stanley C. Paterson and Carl G. Seaburg, *Nahant on the Rocks* (Nahant: Nahant Historical Society, 1991), 85. See also Fred A. Wilson, *Some Annals of Nahant, Massachusetts* (Boston: Old Corner Book Store, 1928) and Blanche Roosevelt Tucher-Macchetta, *The Home Life of Henry W. Longfellow: Reminiscences of Many Visits at Cambridge and Nahant During the Years 1880, 1881, and 1882* (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1882).

umes."⁹ Soon after Ticknor & Fields introduced the format in 1856, other publishers rushed to copy the design, and before long, "blue and gold" became a generic descriptor in book announcements and criticism. When Roberts Brothers brought out a new edition of Jean Ingelow's *Poems in blue and gold*, the publisher advertised the book as "the prettiest Blue and Gold volume ever issued,"¹⁰ and, when Edmund Clarence Stedman received a new "blue and gold" edition of Thomas Bailey Aldrich's poems published by Rudd & Carleton in New York, he complained, "I don't like Blue and Gold in so large a type; it looks too much like cheap gilt children's books."¹¹ Still, Ticknor & Fields retained the strongest association with the style it had successfully popularized, so that Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, upon receiving a barrel of cider from William D. Ticknor in January 1863, could quip, "If instead of this iron-bound cask you had sent me a copy of 'Cider, a Poem in two Books' by J. Philips, bound in Blue and Gold, I should not have been half so grateful."¹² Indeed, so closely was the design identified with Ticknor & Fields that the colors suggested their imprint even when they appeared beyond the covers of a book. Thus, in a parodic vignette published in *Vanity Fair* in 1860, a fictionalized Prince of Wales pays his respects to a "magnificent (i.e. for Boston) creature gotten up gorgeously in blue and gold, a la Ticknor & Fields."¹³

A remarkable feature of allusions such as these is that the phrase "blue and gold" appears without explanation. Whatever these colors signified is a given; it was cultural knowledge that evidently needed no contextualization for contemporary readers.¹⁴ In the context of Alcott's story, the "blue and gold Tennyson" ostensibly symbolizes Carrie's intellectual progress, which is signaled by her development from a reader of the much-maligned Anglo-French novelist Ouida to a reader of Tennyson, poet laureate of England and exemplar of literary refinement. But divorced from the individual author, and considered within the broad context of nineteenth-century American literature, the ubiquitous references to blue and gold editions raise a number of questions. Why are blue and gold volumes singled out and so often evoked? What role does the physical format of a book play in market segmentation and the targeting of readers?

9 Caroline M. Hewins, *A Mid-Century Child and Her Books* (New York: Macmillan, 1926), 36. Hewins also mentions reading several books by Anna Jameson, who, with nine volumes in Ticknor & Fields's *Blue and Gold Series*, had more titles "in Blue and Gold" than any other Ticknor & Fields author. See Hewins (20, 113-14).

10 Quoted in Raymond L. Kilgour, *Messrs. Roberts Brothers, Publishers* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952), 35. Roberts Brothers was Alcott's own publisher for most of her career.

11 Laura Stedman and George H. Gould, *Life and Letters of Edmund Clarence Stedman*, 2 vols. (New York: Moffat, Yard & Co., 1910), 1: 308.

12 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, ed. Andrew Hilen (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1972), 4: 311. Longfellow alludes to *Cyder, a Poem* (London, 1708) by John Philips (1676-1709).

13 "Stupendous Enterprise," *Vanity Fair*, 20 (1860): 180. These allusions take on additional significance in light

of the fact that a number of other publishers developed different color-coded series that did not receive such attention. James Miller published a series of *Green and Gold* editions, for example, and near the end of the century Harper published its *Black and White Series*. In addition, many publishers advertised "Red-Line Editions," in which the text is framed by a red border, and the firm of Thomas Y. Crowell became famous for their "Red-Line Poets." See Helmut Lehmann-Haupt, with Lawrence C. Wroth and Rollo G. Silver, *The Book in America: A History of the Making and Selling of Books in the United States* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1952), 228. In all of these series, the importance ascribed to the physical design is suggested by the fact that the series title reflects the binding, in contrast to designations such as "Standard Authors" (person-focused) or "Little Classics" (text-focused).

14 A modern analogue for this phenomenon is the *Modern Library*, another cheap, nicely bound publisher's series featuring classic (or would-be classic) writers.

Can the packaging of books tell us something about the texts themselves or the readers for whom they were intended? Can the design of a book be said to perform a kind of "cultural work" beyond, or different from, that performed by the text itself?

The physicality of the book does, indeed, convey messages. As Gérard Genette has argued, the "paratext"—the verbal and nonverbal productions that surround a text—is a "threshold of interpretation," a "conveyer of a commentary."¹⁵ With a similar emphasis on the physical book, Jerome McGann explains that "[e]very literary work that descends to us operates through the deployment of a double helix of perceptual codes: the linguistic codes (or "conceptual message"), on the one hand, and the bibliographical codes (or "physical medium") on the other."¹⁶ These physical attributes are particularly conspicuous in series of books such as Ticknor & Fields's Blue and Gold Series, for no particular title or author stands entirely apart from the series as a whole. In this essay, I read Alcott's short story "Pansies" in the context of the Blue and Gold editions as a means of unraveling the relationship between text and paratext, linguistic codes and bibliographical codes, both in the series and in the story. By recovering the contemporary meaning of Alcott's juxtaposition of the "blue and gold Tennyson" and the Seaside Library edition of Wanda, Countess von Szalras, I show that the "history of the book" (in the bibliographic as well as the disciplinary sense) illuminates the story even as the story illuminates the "history of the book." A fascinating commentary on the functions of books and reading in nineteenth-century America, "Pansies" thus offers a key to interpreting both the materiality of the text and the symbolic power of the book as it reveals the oft-evoked but seldom examined "blue and gold" mystique.

In the poem beginning "These are the days when Birds come back" (J. 130), Emily Dickinson describes the false Spring that precedes the onset of Fall. Deceptively displaying the outward appearance of June, the skies of an Indian summer are, in Dickinson's analysis, "a blue and gold mistake."¹⁷ As is so often the case in Dickinson's verse, the image is sensuous, evocative, pleasingly cryptic, and vaguely eccentric. Yet for all her characteristic originality, Dickinson joins a number of her contemporaries of the late 1850s in painting the month of June in shades of blue and gold.

The occasion that gave rise to this poetic association of month and hue was the appearance, in June 1856, of two volumes of Tennyson's poems in a pocket-sized (32mo) edition, bound in grained blue cloth and embellished on the front cover with an intricate blind-stamped floral cartouche framed by a triple-ruled border (Figure 3), an ornate frame of gold filigree on the spine, brilliant gilt-edged leaves, and an engraved portrait of the poet for the frontispiece (Figure 4). Initially, the volumes bore no official series designation. Thus, in November 1856, Ticknor & Fields advertised their new "Pocket Edition of Longfellow's Poems, (Uniform with Tennyson's,) Complete in Two Volumes," noting simply that this "miniature" edition will be "bound in 'blue and gold,' like

15 Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1-2.

16 Jerome McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton, N.

J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 77.

17 Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston: Little, Brown, 1951), 61.

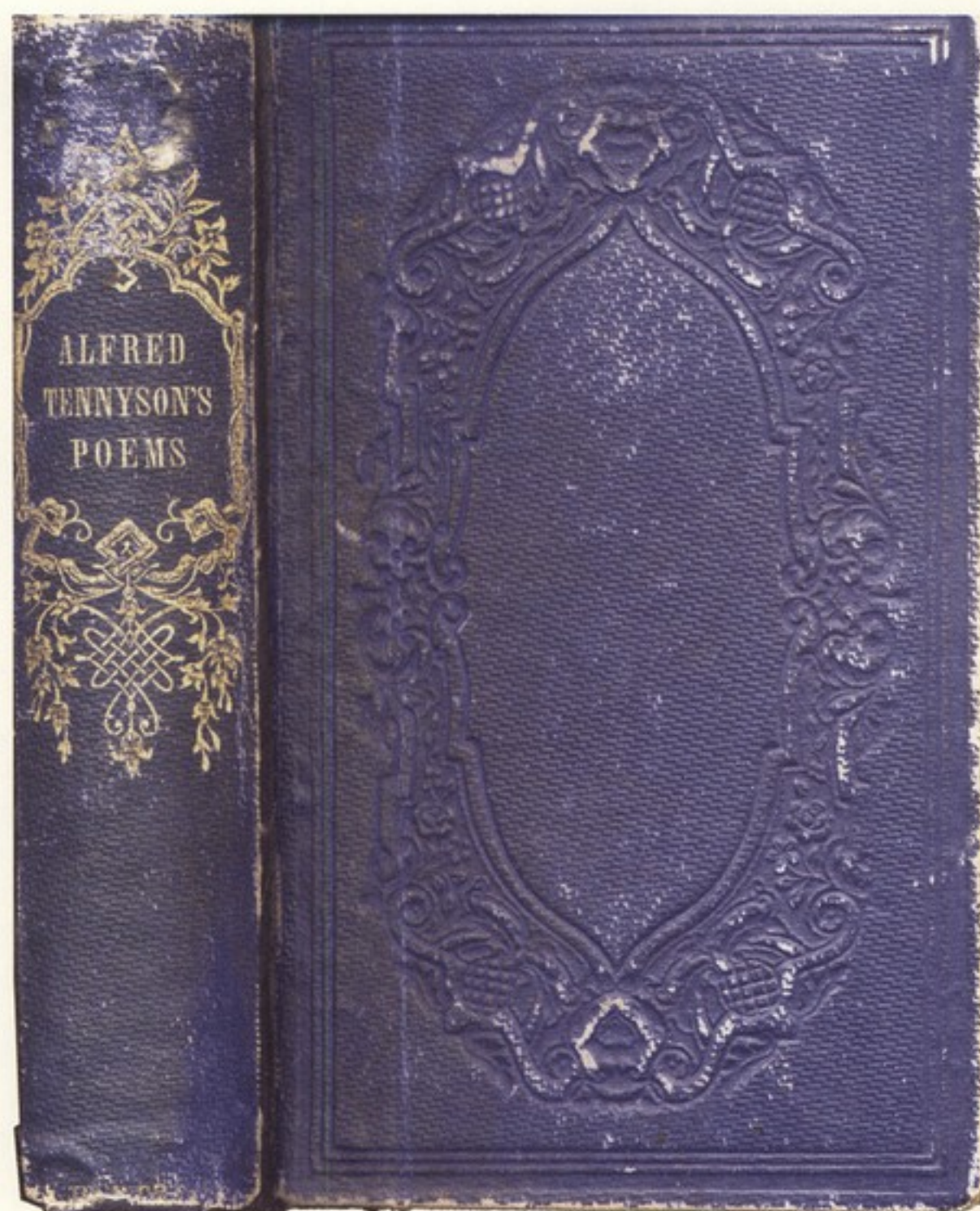


Figure 3. Ticknor & Fields's Blue and Gold Tennyson (cover, actual size). *AC85 J5554 Zz8571. Courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard College Library. This particular volume, housed in the Houghton Library, belonged to Sarah Orne Jewett and was a gift from her maternal grandfather.

Tennyson's."¹⁸ Readers and reviewers referred to the Tennyson as the "blue and gold edition," however, thereby effectively helping to "create" the series as such. Eventually, after Ticknor & Fields issued further titles in the same format, the publisher began to advertise them as "Books in Blue and Gold" and to herald them collectively as the Blue and Gold Series. The line was probably inspired by the 1853 pocket edition of Whittier's poems published by the London firm of Routledge.¹⁹ James T. Fields, who "wanted a small handy volume, printed in easy-to-read type on thin but good paper,"²⁰ designed the binding with his brother George, and Henry O. Houghton of the Riverside Press designed the interior typography and layout.²¹ Despite relatively high production costs, the large sales of the Blue and Gold Tennyson soon brought profits, and "the format

¹⁸ *American Publishers' Circular and Literary Gazette*, 2 (November 1856): 737.

¹⁹ According to Thomas Currier, "The similarity between Ticknor's Blue and Gold binding and that of Routledge's London edition of Whittier's poems, 1853, indicates whence the idea of the former may have originated." See *Bibliography of John Greenleaf Whittier* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937), 81. Jeffrey D. Groves elaborates: "In the early 1850s . . . Routledge published pocket editions of several

American poets, including Holmes, Longfellow, and Lowell. These books were bound in blue cloth with gold ornamentation and edges. They probably served as direct models for Ticknor and Fields's blue and gold design." See "Judging Books by Their Covers: House Styles, Ticknor and Fields, and Literary Promotion," in *Reading Books: Essays on the Material Text and Literature in America*, ed. Michele Moylan and Lane Stiles (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 98.

caught on like wildfire."²²

Before long, poets whose work appeared in the series, as well as those who aspired to the new format, sang its praises. Two years after Ticknor & Fields brought out Blue and Gold editions of his *Poems and Prose Works* (1857), Longfellow approvingly observed, "That little edition is having an extraordinary run." It was, he pronounced with more pragmatism than poetry, "A handsome little heifer, with a good deal of milk."²³ Thomas Bailey Aldrich, who had been trying to persuade Fields to bring out a small volume of his poems since September 1856 (a few months after the appearance of the *Blue and Gold* Tennyson), finally saw his poems ensconced in the *Blue and Gold Series*—"the one reserved for the most important writers of the day"²⁴—but only after Rudd & Carleton had brought them out in a knock-off blue and gold edition.²⁵ Whittier, too, expressly pursued publication in the *Blue and Gold Series*. After Fields sent him a copy of Longfellow's *Poems in Blue and Gold*, Whittier replied, "I like your new edition exceedingly, and wish some means can be devised to get my verses into a similar shape."²⁶ After the death of Whittier's original publisher (Benjamin B. Bussey), Fields managed to obtain the copyright on his early poems, and the *Blue and Gold* edition of *The Poetical Works of John Greenleaf*



Figure 4. Frontispiece, *The Poetical Works of Alfred Tennyson*, Ticknor & Fields (1856), Blue and Gold Series.

20 Warren S. Tryon, *Parnassus Corner: A Life of James T. Fields: Publisher to the Victorians* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), 229.

21 John William Pye, *James T. Fields: Literary Publisher* (Portland, ME: Baxter Society, 1987), 26. An article in *The Round Table* related, "It was in 1856 that Mr. James T. Fields, having in mind Leigh Hunt's pleasant praise of pocket volumes, went to the Riverside Press with a little English book, and said to the printer that he wished to get up a small handy volume, something like the one he held, to contain all of Tennyson, and with type sufficiently large to be easily read." See "Literary Notes," *Round Table: A Weekly Record of the Notable, the Useful and the Tasteful*, 1.9 (February 13, 1864): 140.

22 Tryon, *Parnassus Corner*, 229. Michael Winship explains: "The 'blue and gold' style was an immediate success. A total of 11,204 copies in five printings of Tennyson's *The Poetical Works* . . . were produced by the end of 1856. In December a second title was issued in the same 'blue and gold' binding: two printings of 5,000 copies each of Longfellow's *Poems* . . . in two volumes were produced that month." See *American Literary Publishing in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: The Business of Ticknor and Fields* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 124. Both Tryon and Winship number the series at 41 titles in 57 volumes (apparently basing their count on Ticknor & Fields's 1869 catalog). My count, based on the cost books and sheet stock

inventory of Ticknor and Fields, the holdings of the Pye Collection of Ticknor & Fields Imprints at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the holdings of the American Antiquarian Society is 57 titles. See Table.

23 Longfellow, *Letters*, 4:108.

24 Virginia L. Wolf, "Thomas Bailey Aldrich," *Dictionary of Literary Biography 42: American Writers for Children Before 1900*, ed. Glenn E. Estes, (Detroit: Gale Research—Brucoli Clark, 1985), 44.

25 Aldrich wrote to Fields in September 1856, "I should like to get a volume out by next Spring, but am willing to wait four summers." Quoted in Ferris Greenslet, *The Life of Thomas Bailey Aldrich* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1908), 34. Four years later, he again conveyed to Fields his desire to "bind himself" (note pun) with Ticknor & Fields: "Rudd & Carleton have brought out two volumes of mine . . . and are willing to try me again, but I would rather have your imprint if possible. It would be of such service to me. I write to you before binding myself with Rudd & Carleton. What cheer?" (quoted in Greenslet, 52). The Rudd & Carleton edition, a "compact little volume bound in blue and gold, in genial imitation of the Blue and Gold Series of immortals published by Ticknor & Fields" (Greenslet, 63), appeared in 1863, followed by the "authentic" Ticknor & Fields two years later.

Whittier materialized in 1857. This volume, in turn, caught the attention of the British poet laureate, in company with yet another prominent American poet, Bayard Taylor. Caroline Ticknor records, "In 1867 a letter written by Bayard Taylor described an evening spent with the English poet [Tennyson], when he had listened to the reading of 'Guinevere,' at which time a volume of Whittier, in 'blue-and-gold,' lay on Tennyson's table. . . ." ²⁷ Upon receipt of his own *Poems in the Blue and Gold* format in 1864, Taylor had written to Fields:

The books are here, and they are charming. . . . I think I never had so much pleasure in looking at a book of mine as just this one. Each separate poem seems to read better than it ever did before. ²⁸

And the Scottish poet Gerald Massey, whose work was also represented in the series, informed Fields:

[O]f all pocket editions I think yours the choicest and am proud to find myself in its good company. The Blue and Gold are true colors also to sail under in crossing the Atlantic, and I desire to thank your firm for their fair and generous dealing with myself, and for their manner of getting up a bonny little book. ²⁹

Some poets even composed verses about the little volumes. Bayard Taylor inquired rhetorically of a *Blue and Gold* edition of his *Poems*:

Shall this an emblem be of that blue sky
Wherein are set the golden stars of song? ³⁰

Oliver Wendell Holmes prefaced his own *Poems in Blue and Gold* with an epigraph ("To My Readers"), which includes the following lines:

Go, little book, whose pages hold
Those garnered years in living trust;
How long before your blue and gold
Shall fade and whiten in the dust? ³¹

The best example of verse celebrating the elegant little volumes, however, is George S. Hillard's thirty-four-line poem, dated June 6, 1856, and inscribed to James T. Fields:

²⁶ Quoted in Samuel T. Pickard, *Life and Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, 2 vols. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1894), 1:392.

²⁷ Ticknor, *Glimpses of Authors* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1922), 322. Although the letter Ticknor cites is apparently unpublished, *The Selected Letters of Bayard Taylor* contains a contemporaneous letter (dated March 11, 1867) to Edmund C. Stedman in which Taylor describes his visit to Tennyson and Tennyson's reading of the idyll of *Guinevere*. Taylor makes no mention of Whittier's *Poetical Works*, focusing instead on the "magnum of wonderful sherry, thirty years old" and bottle of "Waterloo-1815" that the two bards imbibed. In the previous year, Taylor had written to Stedman (April 15, 1866) "in the jolliest mood,"

reporting that "Tennyson praises my blue-and-gold poems, and cordially invites me to revisit him in England" (*Life and Letters of Bayard Taylor*, ed. Marie Hansen-Taylor and Horace E. Scudder, 2 vols. [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1885], 2:456-57).

²⁸ Taylor, *Life and Letters*, 2:426.

²⁹ Quoted in Groves, 88. As Groves notes, Ticknor & Fields publicized Massey's remark by printing it at the front of the *Blue and Gold* edition of his *Poems*.

³⁰ Bayard Taylor, *The Poems of Bayard Taylor, Blue and Gold Series* (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1865).

³¹ Oliver Wendell Holmes, *The Poems of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Blue and Gold Series*, (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1862, rpt. 1863), iii.

When your new Tennyson I hold, dear friend,
 Where blue and gold, like sky and sunbeam, blend,—
 A fairy tome—of not too large a grasp
 For Queen Titania's dainty hand to clasp,—
 I feel fresh truth in the old saying wise,
 That greatest worth in smallest parcel lies.
 Will not the diamond, that fiery spark,
 Buy a whole quarry full of granite stark?
 Does not the flaunting hollyhock give place
 To that pale flower, with downward-drooping face,
 Which summer fashions of the moonbeams sheen
 And sets in tents of purest emerald green?
 Well suits your book with this sweet month of June,
 When earth and sky are in their perfect tune;
 For when I read its golden words, I think
 I hear the brown thrush and the bob-o-link;—
 I hear the summer brook, the summer breeze;
 I hear the whisper of the swaying trees;
 Between the lines red roses seem to grow,
 And lilies white around the margin blow;
 Cloud-showers swift across the meadows pass
 And fruit-trees drop their blossoms on the grass;
 The wild bee hums upon the clover's cheek,
 And the pert robin pipes with restless beak.

Thanks to the poet, who to dusty hearts
 The balm and bloom of summer fields imparts;
 Who gives the toil-worn mind a passage free
 To the brown mountain and the sparkling sea;
 Who lifts the thoughts from earth, and pours a ray
 Of fairy land around life's common way.

And thanks to you, who put this precious wine,
 Red from the poet's heart, in flask so fine,
 The hand may clasp it, and the pocket hold;—
 A casket small, but filled with perfect gold.

With its conventional evocations of nature and imagination and its subtle intimations of luxury and leisure, Hillard's poem was an ideal epigraph to the volume and to the series. Showing characteristic marketing savvy, Ticknor & Fields promptly appropriated the lines, which issued forth in subsequent printings of the *Blue and Gold* Tennyson.³²

Less blatant an encomium than Hillard's, Alcott's "Pansies" testifies to the degree to which the *Blue and Gold* format came to symbolize culture, taste, and gentility in nineteenth-century America. The story achieves more than a tribute

³² Conscious of the value placed on the series by the literati, Ticknor & Fields evidently lowered the royalty rate on the series from the standard ten percent. Bayard Taylor complained in a letter of 14 February 1865: "They [T&F] actually insist on reducing the copyright [royalty] on their blue-and-gold editions to 7 per cent. on the retail price. This I have not submitted to, altho' they assure me that Longfellow, Holmes and Whittier have accepted." See *The Selected Letters of Bayard Taylor*, ed. Paul C. Wermuth (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1997), 237. The large sales

of the series may, of course, have compensated for the small royalty. According to the *Round Table*, "the aggregate sales of the 'blue and gold' are now largely ahead of the same work in its less portable form. It is fair to say that the circulation of our popular poets in this shape is from three to five times larger than in the other styles, and in particular instances the difference is still greater" ("Literary Notes," 140). Winship lists the *Blue and Gold* Longfellow and the *Blue and Gold* Tennyson among the firm's most popular works from the period 1840-1859, giving numbers of copies pro-

to the skillful design and impeccable content of the new series, however. In the context of a story for and about girls, "Pansies" probes the complex negotiations among gender, culture, and consumption in the marriage market as well as the literary market. Through a frame narrative in which Mrs. Warburton regales her three young listeners with the story of her courtship and marriage, Alcott suggests that the materiality of the text impinges against readers (literally and figuratively) in unexpected and problematic ways.

Although Alcott does not specify the publisher of the "blue and gold Tennyson" by name, she clearly has in mind the same firm that Hillard eulogizes in "To J. T. F." Boston-based Ticknor & Fields was one of the most prestigious publishing houses in nineteenth-century America, and Alcott knew it well, personally as well as professionally.³³ Moreover, while several other publishers appropriated the "blue and gold" style, Ticknor & Fields had exclusive rights to American editions of Tennyson.³⁴

William D. Ticknor began his publishing business in the 1830s as a specialist in medical books. The firm became a leading literary publisher after 1843 when Fields, who had joined Ticknor's Old Corner Bookstore as a clerk in 1832, advanced to junior partner. The company published the most highly-respected American authors of the day, including Emerson (after the collapse of Phillips Sampson in 1859), Thoreau, Longfellow, Hawthorne, Whittier, Lowell, and Holmes. They also published Scott, DeQuincey, Tennyson, Dickens, Thackeray, Browning, and other highly regarded British authors. Their forte was poetry, a distinction that added further luster to their image.³⁵ Indeed, as a result of its literary distinction, Fields, who represented the firm for most of his career, earned a reputation as "an educator of the public," one who "never stooped to vitiate the popular taste."³⁶

It was not only in the brilliance of their list, however, that Ticknor & Fields

duced as 24,308 for the Tennyson and 19,417 for the Longfellow (55). In 1864, the *Round Table* reported that "Longfellow leads the rest [of the familiar poets of this series]. He circulates one-fourth to one-third more than Tennyson, who comes next, and about double the number of either Whittier, Holmes, Saxe, and Lowell, which four as a group occupy the third position of prominence. After these come at about the same grade, Adelaide Proctor, Owen Meredith, and Gerald Massey" ("Literary Notes," 140).

³³ Around 1862, Alcott brought Fields the manuscript of "Success" (later *Work*). After reviewing the manuscript, Fields reportedly replied, "Stick to your teaching; you can't write." See Louisa May Alcott, *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, ed. Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy (Boston: Little, Brown, 1989), 109. Fields later regretted his dismissal of Alcott's talent and engaged her to write several stories for the *Atlantic Monthly*, which he edited from 1861 to 1870.

³⁴ Warren S. Tryon, "Nationalism and International Copyright: Tennyson and Longfellow in America," *American Literature* 24 (March 1953): 304-05. According to Caroline Ticknor, Tennyson "recalled

the fact that the first check (wholly unsolicited) ever paid by an American firm to an English author was received by him in 1842 from the Boston house." See Ticknor, *Glimpses of Authors*, 76. As a result, Tennyson granted exclusive American rights to Ticknor & Fields, a wish that seems to have been well respected. See also John Olin Eidson, *Tennyson in America: His Reputation and Influence from 1827 to 1858* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1943).

³⁵ As Kilgour, *Messrs. Roberts Brothers*, notes, "When Ticknor and Fields acquired from Little, Brown and Co. a famous series of English poets, it was asserted that this addition of the older writers made Ticknor and Fields the greatest publishers of poetry in the English-speaking world" (22).

³⁶ *Boston Transcript*, quoted in "Fields, James T.," *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946-1958), 3:379. Fields, an amateur poet in his own right, was also dubbed "the Poet Publisher" in J. C. Derby, *Fifty Years Among Authors, Books and Publishers* (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1884), 619.

excelled. The firm also pioneered the nascent art of book promotion.³⁷ In addition to procuring favorable reviews for Ticknor & Fields's books and orchestrating advertising campaigns for new titles, Ticknor and Fields proved that the physical book could be used as a medium for advertising and marketing and effectively overcame the difficulty many contemporary publishers faced in establishing a recognizable "brand."³⁸ The uniform physical design they adopted for key titles—in particular, their standard brown volumes and their Blue and Gold editions—minimized, for the consumer, the element of variability in quality and "essence." Consequently, Ticknor & Fields's books became "status statements on a bookshelf";³⁹ or, as Raymond L. Kilgour put it, "Their imprint on a book was the vogue."⁴⁰

Although Ticknor & Fields distinguished itself with its well-crafted volumes of poetry and belles lettres, their books were neither uniformly "fancy" nor expensive. Ticknor & Fields understood from an early date the advantages of bringing out several editions of a single author, variously priced and in a range of formats, thus segmenting their market by price point and design. In 1863, for example, the firm published a standard edition of Jesse Benton Frémont's *The Story of the Guard: A Chronicle of the War*. Because the Civil War had created a demand for low-priced, portable editions, they quickly followed it up with a rival "Knapsack Edition" of the book in sixteens, priced at 50 cents in paper or 75 cents in cloth, which they advertised as follows:

CHEAP EDITION OF MRS. FRÉMONT'S 'STORY OF THE GUARD.'—Ticknor & Fields announce as nearly ready what they happily call the 'Knapsack Edition' of this popular book, already in its sixth edition. It will be well printed, and handsomely prepared every way for army reading. A great call for this work among our soldiers suggested this cheap 'Knapsack Edition.'⁴¹

In addition to the mainstream and military audience, Ticknor & Fields perceived yet another market for Frémont's text: the sizable audience of German-speakers in the United States. Acting on this observation, they came out in the same year with *Die Liebgarde: Eine Geschichte aus dem Kriege*.

With such varied target audiences, *The Story of the Guard* may have been an unusually versatile text. Nevertheless, the practice of bringing out parallel editions of its titles became a common strategy for Ticknor & Fields. Once a book (particularly a collection of poems) proved successful in their standard brown-cover format, they might issue it as a reprint in the *Blue and Gold Series*—

37 See William Charvat, "James T. Fields and the Beginnings of Book Promotion," in *The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968; rpt. 1992), 168-89.

38 As Groves explains in "Judging Books by Their Covers," Ticknor & Fields achieved a recognizable imprint by marshalling a set of disparate texts into a series of "visually similar books" that allowed the buyer to "identify a Ticknor and Fields book at a

glance." The compelling appearance of these volumes enabled them to function as "visual signs crafted and repeated to encourage consumers to associate good literature with specific binding designs" (78, 92).

39 Groves, "Judging Books by Their Covers," 93.

40 Kilgour, *Messrs. Roberts Brothers*, 22.

41 *American Literary Gazette* (May 15, 1863): 154. James Redpath also brought out a 25-cent paper edition of Alcott's *Hospital Sketches* for a military readership.

provided it was sufficiently high-toned. Successful *Blue and Gold* titles that had been released in two-volume sets might later be repackaged as omnibus *Cabinet Editions*, as was the case with the poetical works of Tennyson, Longfellow, Whittier, and Holmes.⁴² The text might then make yet another appearance in the form of a *Diamond Edition*,⁴³ a *Red-Line Edition*, or a *Little Classics Edition*, and later, perhaps, as a *Merrimac Edition*, *Household Edition*, *Family Edition*, *Illustrated Library Edition*, or some other special edition. Finally, the most enduring of the "classic" titles might make an encore as elegant *Riverside Editions* from the press of Houghton Mifflin Company, the direct descendent of Ticknor & Fields.

In *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market*, Susan Strasser explains that in the modern American economy, pricing ceased to be "the outcome of a series of bargains and negotiations," becoming instead "part of the marketing process. Manufacturers would set prices, and the most sophisticated ones would do so with respect to targeted market segments, creating lines of competing but differently priced products . . ."⁴⁴ The publication agenda of Ticknor & Fields, whereby a single text was packaged in a variety of formats all priced for and marketed to specific segments of the reading public, exemplifies this sophisticated marketing strategy. Their handling of Tennyson's poems is a case in point. As William Tryon explains:

The publishers sought, by the creation of new formats, to arouse interest and, by establishing a price range from fifty cents for a pamphlet edition to ten dollars for a de luxe illustrated one, to stimulate sales. They succeeded. Between 1842 and 1870 no less than 130 separate issues of the collected poems totaling 206,044 copies (in 267,948 volumes) were published. Every taste and every pocketbook was reached, and by 1865 the publishers could count an annual sale of between 25,000 and 30,000 copies of their various Tennysons.⁴⁵

Ticknor & Fields's decision to put particular texts into their *Blue & Gold Series* reflects both their high estimation of those texts and their authors, and the high status potentially accruing to them.⁴⁶ Because all texts brought out in this series shared a common "look and feel" (in today's marketing jargon), each title took on some of the luster of the other titles in the series. In the *Blue and Gold Series*, each new book that appeared in the decorative blue and gold binding was supported, in terms of cultural status, by the series' distin-

42 The *Cabinet Editions*, which commenced as a series in 1864, used the same plates as the *Blue and Gold* edition but combined the two *Blue and Gold* volumes into a single volume printed on larger paper. Apparently, Fields felt that the *Blue and Gold* margins were too narrow. See Warren S. Tryon and William Charvat, eds., *The Cost Books of Ticknor and Fields and Their Predecessors, 1832-1858* (New York: Bibliographical Society of America, 1949), 363. A writer for *The Round Table* concurred that "the narrowness of the margins in this series has been an objection to some who wish to place them upon the shelf" ("Literary Notes," 140). Printing from the same plates on larger paper mitigated this defect. Roberts Brothers followed the same practice with their imitative "Blue and Gold Editions" and "Cabinet Editions," a category used by some British publishers as well.

43 The audience Ticknor & Fields hoped to address with its *Diamond Editions* is evident in a letter from Fields to

Whittier (dated September 27, 1866), in which Fields wrote: "The price pr vol. (each poet is to be in one) is to be cheap, cheap, cheap, so as to open a market far away among the unbuying crowd hidden away in the dust holes of our country" (quoted in Currier, 107).

44 Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 269.

45 "Nationalism and International Copyright," 304.

46 It is important to recognize that, although the *Blue and Gold* volumes were relatively inexpensive according to the book-buying standards of the day, they were not minimally priced. While Ticknor & Fields did sell pamphlets for as little as 25 cents between 1843 and 1860, they "published little in the way of cheap books" and "were famous throughout the nation for good taste, quality paper, printing, and binding" (Tryon, "Old Northwest," 594). Their *Blue and Gold* editions initially cost 75 cents for a single volume and \$1.50

guished backlist.⁴⁷ In the case of the *Blue and Gold* editions, the strategy worked exceptionally well. Readers and reviewers were quick to notice the series identity of the distinctive miniature volumes and readily recognized them as "characteristic of poetic issues of Messrs. Ticknor & Fields," a format symbolic of high literary value and subject to imitation.⁴⁸ Ticknor & Fields had become "the Moxons and Murrys of America," and "the 'Blue and Gold' pocket edition was considered a sort of crowning achievement."⁴⁹

Nineteenth-century readers often were discriminating consumers of books as objects. Book announcements and reviews routinely noted the physical appearance of the books (how they were "gotten up") and frequently provided minutely detailed descriptions of the volumes. Indeed, Melville devoted an entire review of a revised edition of Cooper's *The Red Rover* to a discussion of the book's design.⁵⁰ Given the fact that many nineteenth-century readers were quite knowledgeable about book design and construction, it is not surprising that Ticknor & Fields's attention to the physical quality of the books was perhaps the most highly praised feature of the series.⁵¹ Many readers focused on its "typo-

for a two-volume set, but by 1864 these prices had doubled, perhaps in part due to War-time inflation. (The average daily wage for a semi-skilled worker was about \$1.00.)

47 Commenting on Victorian book series, Leslie Howsam explains, "When publishers constructed systems like the *Comhill Library of Fiction*, the *Aldine Edition of the British Poets*, or *Redways Shilling Series* they were commissioning or resurrecting texts, then transmitting them in such a way that the sum of the collected books was greater than their individual parts." See "Sustained Literary Ventures: The Series in Victorian Book Publishing," *Publishing History*, 31 (1992), 5. Also writing of the British market, Margaret Ezell observes, "once an author, for whatever reason was included in a series, he was likely to remain there throughout the nineteenth century. This practice, of course, had the effect of solidifying his or her reputation as a classic writer because of the continuing presence of the texts in these series; these texts, by virtue of their slot in a series, acquired 'timelessness,' the hallmark of a 'classic.'" See "Making a Classic: The Advent of the Literary Series," *South Central Review*, 11 (1994): 14. With specific reference to Ticknor & Fields, Richard Brodhead has argued that Fields "gained monopolistic hold on the writings of Hawthorne, Emerson, Longfellow . . . [.] contrived the means to identify them as classics" and "then transferred this cachet to the new authors his publishing instruments brought to public life." See *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 153.

48 "The Editor's Repository," *Ladies' Repository: A Monthly Periodical, Devoted to Literature, Arts, and Religion*, 20 (1860): 758. The previous year, a reviewer for the *Ladies' Repository* declared of *The Poetical Works of James Gate Percival* (1859), "As to the style in which these two volumes are gotten up, it is enough to say that they appear in the 'blue and gold' series of Messrs. Ticknor & Fields. This is our favorite edition of the British and American poets." See "The Editor's

Repository," *Ladies' Repository: A Monthly Periodical, Devoted to Literature, Arts, and Religion*, 19 (July 1859): 442. A reviewer for the *Southern Literary Messenger* was among many who pointed to "the luxurious style of blue and gold first employed by Ticknor and Fields, and made by them so popular." See "Notices of New Works," *Southern Literary Messenger, Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*, 30 (April 1860): 320. Toward the end of the century, a book historian affirmed that "the 'blue-and-gold' editions of various poets were hailed rapturously as novelties of the most 'elegant and refined' character, and the fashion died hard." See *Commercial Bookbindings: An Historical Sketch, with Some Mention of an Exhibition of Drawings, Covers, and Books at the Grolier Club, April 5 to April 28, 1894* (New York: Grolier Club, 1894), 7. Imitators of Ticknor & Fields's *Blue and Gold Series* included Appleton; Little, Brown; Sanborn, Carter, Bazin; Otis Clapp; Francis; Rudd & Carleton; Roberts Brothers; Charles Scribner; Clark, Austin, Maynard; Whittemore, Niles, and Hall; W. J. Widdleton; Duffield Ashmead; E. H. Butler; and James Miller. *The Round Table* explained: "Several publishers in New York and Philadelphia have issued some very cheap imitations of this 'blue and gold' style, which has hardly, however, affected the character of the originals with buyers of any discrimination. They have rather damaged their own reputation by attempts to foist upon the unsuspecting the spurious for the genuine" ("Literary Notes," 140).

49 Eidson, *Tennyson in America*, 99.

50 Herman Melville, "A Thought on Book-Binding," rev. of Cooper's *The Red Rover*, revised ed. March 16, 1850, rpt. in *The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces, 1839-1860*, ed. Harrison Hayford et al. (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, 1987), 237-38.

51 Even those who faulted the poets praised the volumes. Commenting on the *Blue and Gold Whittier*, a reviewer for the *New Orleans Picayune* declared, "The name of the most charming poet of New England is the synonym of abolitionist, and disfiguring the pages

graphical beauty"⁵² and "luxurious style."⁵³ Upon receiving a *Blue and Gold* Tennyson, Sophia Hawthorne effused in a letter to Fields, "you have surpassed yourself in the beauty of its execution. [It is] miraculous how you could crowd all those poems into such a tiny compass & yet present them in such clear, large type."⁵⁴ (See Figure 5.) The *Christian Examiner* also admired the typography, remarking, "We should have said that Tennyson could not be compressed into so small a space without crowding, but we find everything, including that sweetest, saddest of modern poems, the In Memoriam."⁵⁵

Gerald Massey, whose poems issued forth in the *Blue and Gold* format in 1857, was one of many who declared the volumes "exquisite."⁵⁶ A reviewer for *The Knickerbocker* exclaimed, "how exquisite they are, in the 'first appeal, which is to the eye,'" while a reviewer for *Putnam's Magazine* concurred that the *Blue and Gold* Tennyson exemplified "the most exquisite taste, in every way." Juxtaposing the "classic" *Blue and Gold* and the tawdry popular novel, this reviewer also drew the comparison Alcott makes in "Pansies" and reckoned that in the "beautifully printed and bound" *Blue and Gold* Tennyson "the poems of one of the truest poets that ever illustrated our language may be had for the price of the last worthless novel."⁵⁸

Readers also lavishly praised the small size of the 32mo volumes (approximately 14.5 cm X 9.5 cm)⁵⁹. In "To J. T. F." (quoted in full earlier in this essay), Hillard emphasizes the feminine aspect of the small format, referring to the *Blue and Gold* Tennyson as "A fairy tome—of not too large a grasp / For Queen Titania's dainty hand to clasp." The *Home Journal* echoed Hillard's diction and imagery when it mused, "If books had been manufactured in those days when

of one of the most beautiful collections of poems in our language. . . . Even the author of 'Hiawatha' and 'Evangeline' has made his published works distasteful to a Southern library, by mingling with the pure gold the basest alloy" (quoted in Currier, 83).

⁵² "The Editor's Repository," *Ladies' Repository: A Monthly Periodical, Devoted to Literature, Arts, and Religion*, 25 (1865): 125.

⁵³ "Notices of New Works" (1860), 320.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Tryon, *Parnassus Corner*, 229.

⁵⁵ "Notices of Recent Publications," *Christian Examiner*, 61 (July 1856): 151. Many series in 32mo were not so easy on the eyes. As Richard Altick observes, "A magnifying glass may not always have been needed to read them . . . but it often would have helped." See "From Aldine to Everyman: Cheap Reprint Series of the English Classics 1830-1906," *Studies in Bibliography*, 11 (1958): 16n. Difficulty of reading was, in fact, a complaint lodged against Ticknor & Fields's *Diamond Editions*, set in the smaller diamond type.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Tryon, *Parnassus Corner*, 229.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Groves, "Judging Books by Their Covers," 85.

⁵⁸ "Editorial Notes," *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, 8 (July 1856): 98. Reviews of Ticknor & Fields's *Blue and Gold* editions frequently emphasized taste. This is nowhere

more evident than in reviews of *Blue and Gold* editions of Mrs. Jameson's books, which epitomized, for nineteenth-century readers, exquisite taste both in content and in form. A reviewer for the *Southern Literary Messenger* announced, for example, that "Mrs. Jameson's 'Sketches of Art' is another one of those aurea-cerulean duodecimos which these tasteful publishers were the first to issue and which has become so popular. Mrs. Jameson is a genial and sympathetic writer and her art-criticisms are worthy of being read by all who would form correct opinions upon the aesthetic" See "Notices of New Works," *Southern Literary Messenger, Devoted to Every Department of Literature and the Fine Arts*, 26 (February 1858): 160.

⁵⁹ As Winship notes, "The cost books record the firm's attempts to achieve the desired volume size. On 29 April the firm ordered twenty reams measuring 22 in. x 29 in. from Tileston & Hollingsworth, but this paper was not used. It was replaced on 6 and 7 May with a slightly larger paper of 22 in. x 29 in., which was used in the first and second printings of Tennyson's *The Poetical Works*, the first volume in the series. For the third printing in July an even larger sheet measuring 22 in. x 29 in. was ordered, and this became the standard size of paper for volumes in what was soon to be one of the firm's most successful series" (101).

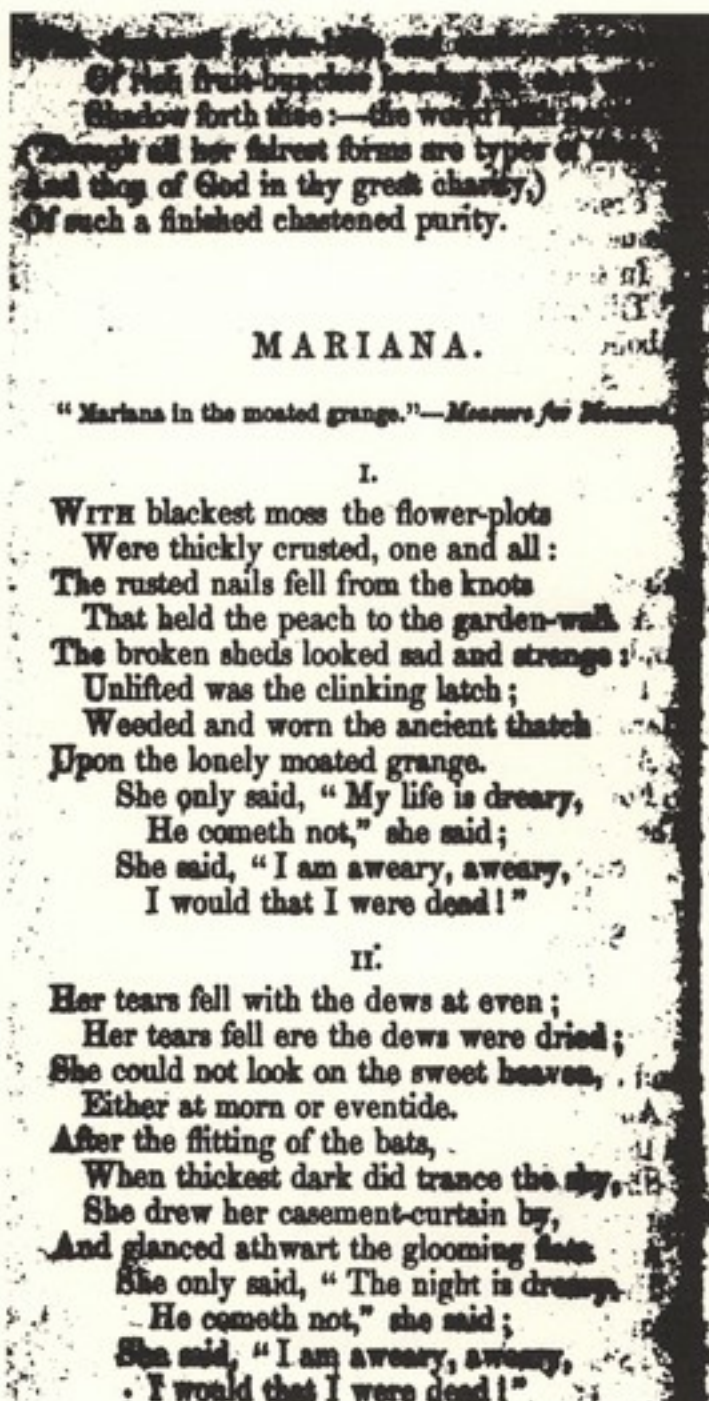


Figure 5. The Poetical Works of Alfred Tennyson, Ticknor & Fields's Blue and Gold Series.

Oberon and Titania were mighty powers in the woodland, when every asphodel and every king's cup was the chateau of a fairy,' those books would have been just such beautiful little 'claspable tomes' as 'Ticknor's miniature Tennyson.'"⁶⁰ The portability of the volumes, another function of its miniature size, also received high praise. Hillard marvels of Tennyson's *Poetical Works*, "The hand may clasp them, and the pocket hold;— / A casket small, but filled with perfect gold," and a reviewer for the *New York Daily Tribune*, for whom "Immortality in miniature was never more excellently presented," remarked that the volume was small enough to "be taken without inconvenience on a journey or on a walk."⁶¹ *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* declared that the "small, convenient pocket volume . . . is the most perfect of summer books" (a pronouncement which accords well with the fact that it was released in time for the summer holiday trade),⁶² while the *Christian Examiner* raved:

A real pocket edition of Tennyson, printed with good, plain type upon fair paper, and in very tasteful binding, must be admitted to be the very *vade mecum* of all others for our summer rambles, and our sojournings on the hill-sides and by the way of the sea. The publisher as well as the poet will be gratefully remembered under many a green tree and great rock, whilst Sirius has most things his own mad way.⁶³

Alcott, too, points to the aptness of the small volumes for travel not only when she writes of Carrie's intention to take her *Blue and Gold* Tennyson to Nahant, but also in "Mountain-Laurel and Maidenhair," the last story in *A Garland for Girls*, in which Emily, on a visit to the country, removes from her trunk "a pile of blue and gold volumes," their spines emblazoned with the names of Whittier, Tennyson, and Emerson.⁶⁴

Aside from its convenience for the space-conscious traveler, another significant feature of the pocket format was that it was well adapted to poetry. The volumes of the *Blue and Gold Series* were too small to accommodate long novels, and it would have been uneconomical to publish these in more than two volumes. Indeed, very little fiction and relatively few nonfiction prose titles exist in the series (See Table).⁶⁵ Conversely, the typical dimensions of novels were too large for most collections of verse, while the pocket-sized *Blue and Gold* provided a more appropriate trim size.

Sometimes the little volumes served as gifts and as prizes for the literarily inclined. A well-worn *Blue and Gold* Tennyson in the Harvard College Library is inscribed to Sarah Orne Jewett by her "Grandpa Perry," and a volume of *The Poetical Works of James Russell Lowell* in the Library of Congress carries an inscrip-

⁶⁰ Quoted in Eidson, *Tennyson in America*, 99.

⁶¹ Quoted in Groves, "Judging Books by Their Covers,"

84. In a similar vein, *The Round Table* pronounced it "convenient for the pocket and easy to the hand under circumstances when a more cumbersome volume would be unhandy," and the *Ladies' Repository* described the *Blue and Gold* edition of *The Poetical Works of William Motherwell* as "one of the most convenient and beautiful editions extant" ("Literary Notices," *Ladies' Repository: A Monthly Periodical, Devoted to Literature, Arts, and Religion*, 19 (June 1859): 377). Note the contrast between these portable volumes (implicitly suited to the pleasure journey or the leisurely ramble) and the

Seaside Library (also portable, but associated, in spite of its name, with railway stations and street corners).

⁶² "Editorial Notes," 98.

⁶³ "Notices of Recent Publications," 151.

⁶⁴ Alcott, *Garland*, 225.

⁶⁵ Irving's *Sketch-Book* (co-published by G. P. Putnam), Hawthorne's *Twice-told Tales*, and several British titles imported by Ticknor & Fields in 1866 are notable exceptions to the pattern. Most of the nonfiction prose titles are serious prose (philosophical essays, art criticism, etc.) rather than light prose, such as travel narratives, memoirs, and sketches—again, excepting Irving, Hawthorne, and several of the imported texts.

tion from the Public Latin School of Boston, recording that the book was "Awarded to George Santayana for a Poetical Translation from Horace."⁶⁶ The *Blue and Gold* was evidently the poet's series of choice, and poetry lovers were not far behind in their admiration. In a letter of March 19, 1863, a correspondent of Lowell's importuned, "Now I shall ask you, what I have wanted long ago to ask, to send me your poems in the little 'Blue & Gold' and write with love of J. R. L. just as you used to. . . ."⁶⁷

In *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Gérard Genette emphasizes yet another important aspect of the pocket-sized format. With reference to the French *livre de poche*, Genette asserts that "the 'pocket edition' (that is, simply the republication at a low price of old or recent works that have first undergone the commercial test of the trade edition) has indeed become an instrument of 'culture,' an instrument, in other words, for constituting and, naturally, disseminating a relatively permanent collection of works ipso facto sanctioned as 'classics.'"⁶⁸ Genette elaborates:

Today, therefore, "pocket size" is basically no longer a format but a vast set or nebula of series—for "pocket" still means "series"—from the most popular to the most "distinguished," indeed, the most pretentious; and the series emblem, much more than size, conveys two basic meanings. One is purely economic: the assurance (variable, and sometimes illusory) of a better price. The other is indeed "cultural" and, to speak of what interests us, paratextual: the assurance of a selection based on revivals, that is, reissues. Occasionally someone speculates about the possibility of reversing the flow—publishing works first in pocket size, then producing in more expensive editions those titles that have triumphantly passed the first test—but this seems contrary to all the technical, media, and commercial givens, even if in particular situations certain books have taken this paradoxical journey and even if certain pocket series welcome, as experiments, some previously unpublished works that are thus immediately canonized. For undoubtedly the pocket edition will long be synonymous with canonization.⁶⁹

It is precisely in this capacity of "instruments of 'culture'"—a means of "constituting" and "disseminating" a set of texts "sanctioned as 'classics'"—that the *Blue and Gold Series* makes its appearance in Alcott's "Pansies."⁷⁰ Indeed, the *Blue and Gold Tennyson* serves as an agent of Carrie's apparent acculturation into the system of values endorsed by Mrs. Warburton. Early in the story, Alcott characterizes Carrie as "one of the ambitious yet commonplace girls who wish to shine, without knowing the difference between the glitter of a candle which attracts

66 *National Union Catalog, Pre-1956 Imprints* (London: Mansell, 1968-1980), 43:388.

67 Sarah Blake Shaw, Letter to James Russell, March 18, 1863, James Russell Lowell Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. Quoted with permission of the MHS. Lowell's correspondent hints at another attribute of pocket editions: their suitability as collectibles. The uniform design of the volumes lent a further attraction to those inclined to collect them. The reader, "whose reason for purchasing more than one title in a series was often, presumably, the hope that the first could guarantee the quality of the others"

(Howsam, 23), may also have been enticed by the prospect of a row of matching volumes attractively displayed in the parlor. I am indebted to Emily B. Todd for the reference to this letter.

68 Genette, *Paratexts*, 20.

69 Genette, *Paratexts*, 21.

70 All the books in the *Blue and Gold Series* consisted of reprinted material. The series included classic authors such as Shakespeare and Horace, a few of the Romantics (Coleridge, Hunt, and Southey), several writers of the American Renaissance (Emerson, Hawthorne, Longfellow), and a good selection of British and

moths, and the serene light of a star, or the cheery glow of a fire round which all love to gather."⁷¹ In striking agreement with Alcott, Yale president Noah Porter commented on just such a character defect in *Books and Reading; Or, What Books Shall I Read and How Shall I Read Them* (1870), an advice manual that went through several reprintings during the period between the discontinuance of the *Blue and Gold Series* and the publication of *A Garland for Girls*. Porter cautions:

Fashionable people, and people who aspire to give tone to society, may delight in low and vulgar novels. Even persons who are morally pure and right-hearted may want the capacity to discriminate between what is high and low toned in fiction. . . . [T]here are people whose aristocracy is unquestioned, and whose manners have the unmistakable confidence that bespeaks a well-established social position, who by the novels which they habitually read, betray the essential vulgarity of their intellectual tastes, and the low grade of the aesthetic culture. Few things are more properly offensive to the traveler than to see a second or third rate novel in the hands of a well-dressed and well-mannered lady. . . .⁷²

Carrie, who describes herself as "poor,"⁷³ frequently feels "vulgar, ignorant, and mortified" in the society of Mrs. Warburton's friends, who "dressed simply, enjoyed conversation, kept up their accomplishments even when old" and are "genuine," well bred, "busy, lovable, and charming." Alcott announces that the aims of Carrie's mother "were not high": Carrie and her sister "knew that she desired good matches for them, educated them for that end, and expected them to do their parts when the time came."⁷⁴ As a result, Carrie, like the "well-mannered lady" of Porter's diatribe, evinces an education woefully inadequate to the proper development of "aesthetic culture," or good taste.

Carrie's lack of discrimination—her inability to differentiate among candle, star, and fire—is precisely why she needs a series like Ticknor & Fields's *Blue and Gold* editions to guide her reading and shape her intellectual and moral development. A deficiency of George Munro's *Seaside Library* (the moth-tormented candle of Alcott's metaphor) was the utter lack of literary discrimination on the part of its publisher in selecting titles to include in it: any book sufficiently popular and sufficiently inexpensive to publish qualified for inclusion, with the result that Tennyson and Goldsmith (both *Blue and Gold* authors) rubbed shoulders with Ouida and "The Duchess" (another author Carrie admits to reading).⁷⁵ (See Figures 6-8.) The series comprised classics and potboilers alike, and many believed the *Seaside's* readers lacked the taste and education to discern the difference. In contrast, the imprint of Ticknor & Fields (and, especially, their *Blue and Gold Series*) provided a guarantee of literary quality and the assurance of cultural approval. Indeed, as literary publishers deeply invested in the notion of cultural hierarchy, Ticknor & Fields

American poets of the mid- to late nineteenth century (Tennyson, Bulwer-Lytton, Clough, Holmes, Lowell, Whittier, Aldrich, Taylor). The series seems to have extended to prose only gradually. Early on, Longfellow's tales and Mrs. Jameson's works (the most popular being *Characteristics of Women* and *Loves of the Poets*) were the only volumes of prose. Later, Ticknor & Fields added Hawthorne's *Twice-told Tales*, Emerson's *Essays*, Holmes's *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*, and, finally, several nonfiction volumes by British authors. (See Table.) Currier notes, "It seems to have been the plan, not destined to be fulfilled, to include Whittier's prose writings in the series

of *Blue and Gold* editions, for the *Atlantic Monthly* for June and July, 1864, advertises such a volume as "in preparation" (81).

⁷¹ Alcott, *Garland*, 76.

⁷² Noah Porter, *Books and Reading; Or, What Books Shall I Read and How Shall I Read Them*, 1870 (New York: Charles Scribner, 1882), 222-23.

⁷³ Alcott, *Garland*, 72.

⁷⁴ Alcott, *Garland*, 76-77.

⁷⁵ "The Duchess" was the nom de plume of Mrs. Margaret Wolfe Hungerford, after her novel *The Duchess*.

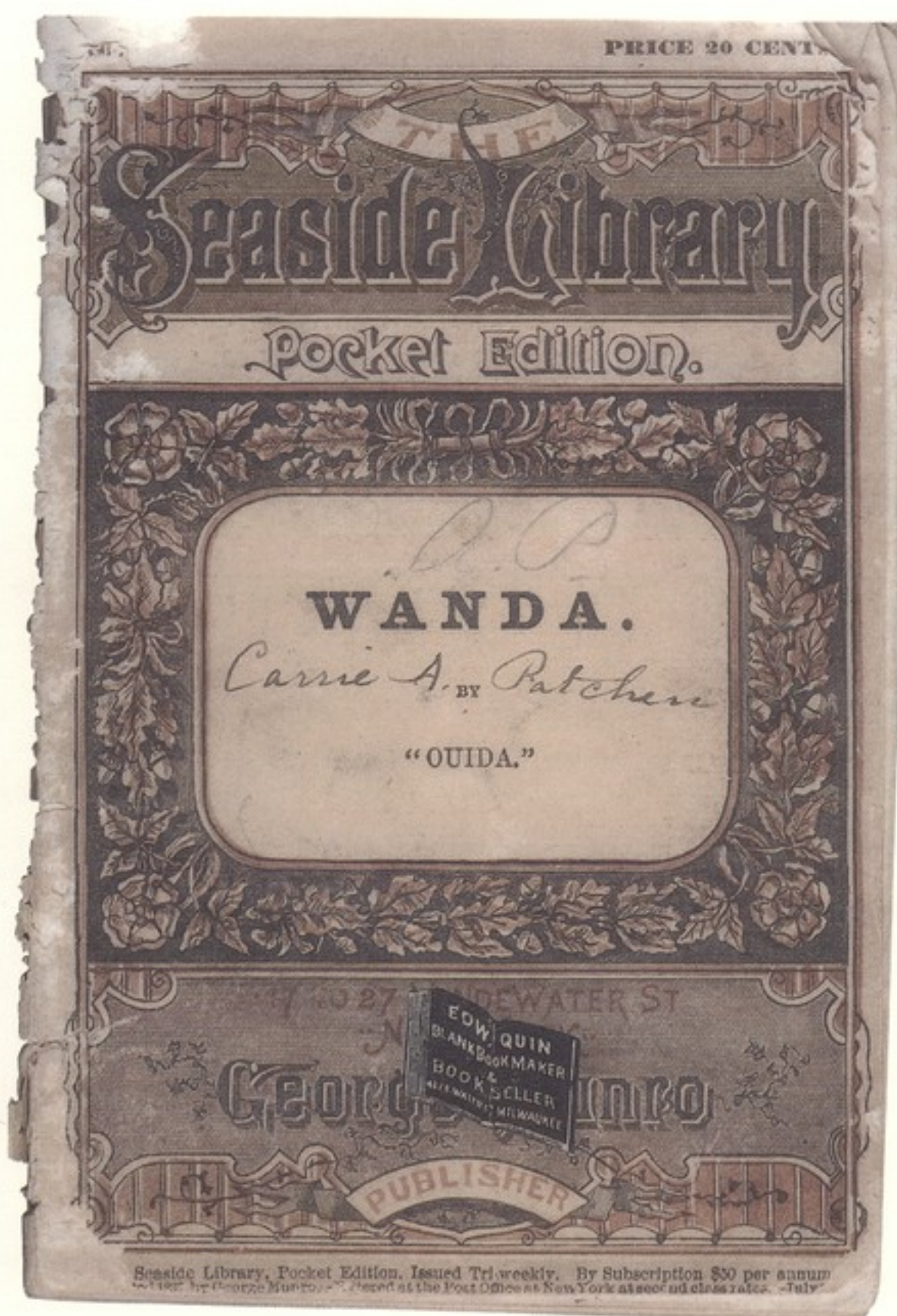



Figure 6. Wanda, Seaside Library, Pocket Edition, c. 1886 (front wrapper, actual size). Courtesy, Rare Books & Special Collections Department, Northern Illinois University Libraries.



DR. PEIRO has devoted 20 years to the special treatment of **Croup, Whooping Cough, Sore Throat, and all the diseases of the Throat and Lungs**, and has found that the most successful remedy is the use of **OXYGEN** in the treatment of these diseases.

OXYGEN TREATMENT

For the relief of Croup, Whooping Cough, Sore Throat, and all the diseases of the Throat and Lungs, the use of **OXYGEN** is the most successful remedy. It is a simple and safe treatment, and can be used by anyone. It is the only remedy that cures these diseases without the use of medicine.

THE NEW YORK FIRESIDE COMPANION.

A PAPER FOR THE HOME CIRCLE.

Pure, Bright and Interesting.

THE FIRESIDE COMPANION NUMBERS AMONG ITS CONTRIBUTORS THE BEST OF LIVING FICTION WRITERS.

DETECTIVE STORIES

ARE THE MOST INTERESTING AND EXCITING, AND ITS REVELATIONS ARE FEARED BY VILLAINS TO THIS DAY.

A FASHIONABLE ARTICLE.

CONTAINING THE LATEST FASHIONS, AND A NOTED MODIST, IN THE ART OF DRESSING.

CONCEIVABLE SUBJECTS.

will be sent for one year, if the name is forwarded with this advertisement. For more than one year, the price is \$1.00. Specimen copies are sent free.

Publishing House,
27 Vandewater Street, N. Y.

WANDA,

COUNTESS VON SZALRAS.

BY "OUIDA."

NEW YORK:
GEORGE MUNRO, PUBLISHER,
17 TO 27 VANDERWATER STREET.

Figure 7. Wanda, Seaside Library, Pocket Edition, c. 1886 (title page). Courtesy, Rare Books & Special Collections Department, Northern Illinois University Libraries. Original 9.25" x 7".

engaged in a kind of editorial selection, exclusion, and classification (a process quite alien to the publisher of the *Seaside Library*) that ultimately resulted in the identification of their books as "literary."⁷⁶ As The Knickerbocker observed, "Messrs. Ticknor and Fields, the popular publishers of Boston . . . have established . . . [a] high . . . reputation for the excellence of their selections, and the external beauty of their publications."⁷⁷

In "Pansies," Alcott, as author, takes on the publisher's task of selecting, eliminating, and constructing a hierarchy of texts for the benefit of her readers. Through her characters, she classifies the productions of Ouida and "The Duchess" as "false and foolish" tales;⁷⁸ she characterizes the novels of Susan Warner and Charlotte Yonge as "dear homely books;"⁷⁹ she elevates the novels of Scott and Edgeworth to an established tradition of standard novels; and she dismisses Howells and James, whose "everlasting stories, full of people who talk a great deal and amount to nothing" exemplify "the modern realistic writers, with their elevators, and paint-pots, and every-day people."⁸⁰ As for poetry, she designates Wordsworth "one of our truest poets"⁸¹ and sets Tennyson at the pinnacle of the contemporary high culture to which Carrie, after her abashed

76 As Brodhead explains: "The designation 'literature' . . . involves a prior act of hierarchization and elimination. This term is produced through a stratification in which most writing, including virtually all popular writing, gets marked as nonliterary and unworthy of attention . . . while some other writing gets identified as rare or select: in short, as 'literature'" (157). Brodhead draws a distinction between the *Atlantic* and the popular story-papers (78-79) that is analogous to the distinction Alcott makes between the *Blue and Gold Series* and the *Seaside Library*.

77 "Editor's Table," *The Knickerbocker, or New-York Monthly Magazine*, 48 (September 1856): 307.

78 Alcott, *Garland*, 80. In 1934, Malcolm Elwin characterized Ouida as "an apostle of insidious immorality" to the Victorians, explaining that "She was smutty and 'not nice'; therefore everybody read her." See *Victorian Wallflowers* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934).

298. See also Thomas Sergeant Perry, "Ouida's Novels," *Lippincott's Magazine*, 20 (1877): 732-37.

79 Alcott, *Garland*, 81.

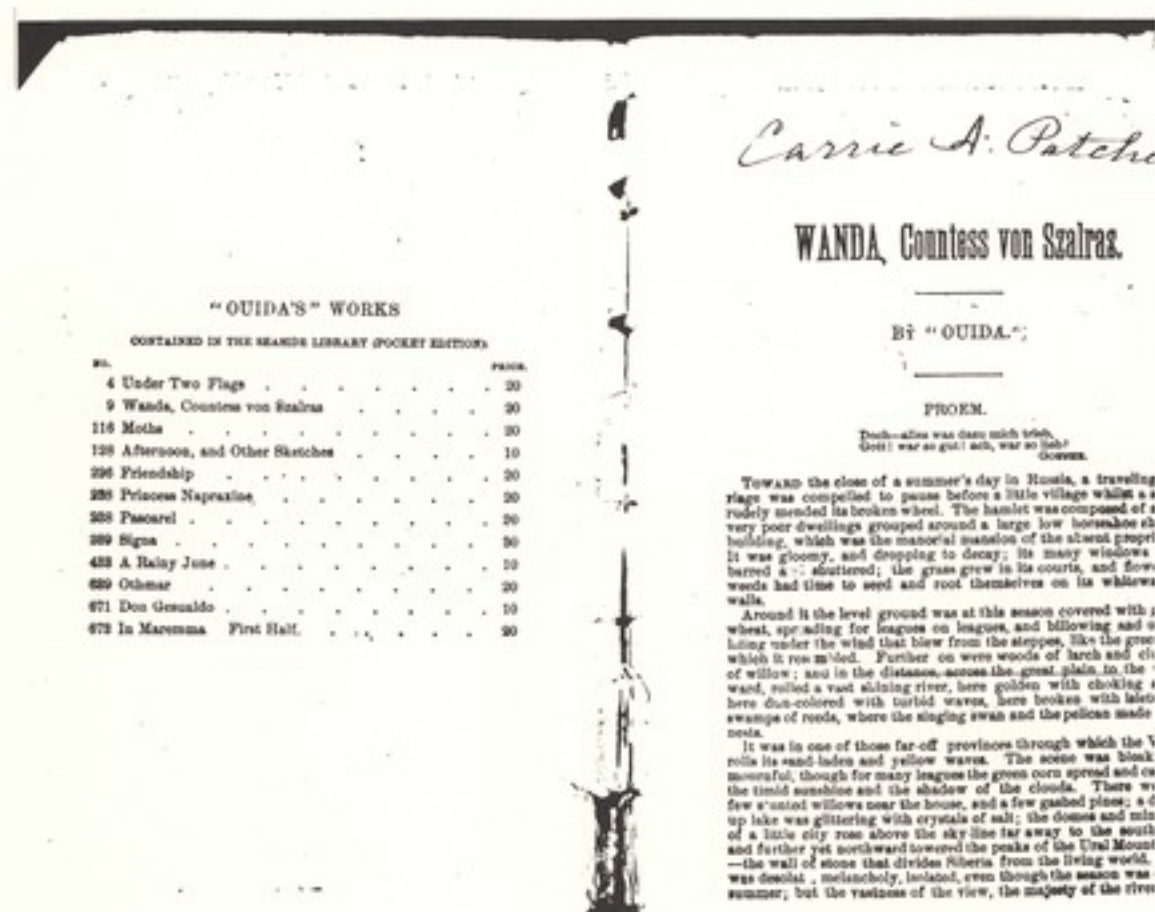


Figure 8. Wanda, Seaside Library, Pocket Edition, c. 1886 (first page). Courtesy, Rare Books & Special Collections Department, Northern Illinois University Libraries. Original 9.25" x 7".

rejection of *Wanda*, aspires.⁸²

The young ladies of Alcott's story have a shrewd literary advisor in the elderly Mrs. Warburton, whose motto is "Ask advice, and so cultivate a true and refined taste."⁸³ Nineteenth-century readers who lacked such a mentor could rely upon pre-assembled sets of classics, such as Ticknor & Fields's *Blue and Gold Series*, to separate the literary gold from the dross.⁸⁴ Indeed, although not exclusively marketed as a series for women, the *Blue and Gold* editions boasted a list of titles ideally suited to the moral and intellectual culture of the feminine mind.⁸⁵ In contrast, the *Seaside Library* carried precisely the kinds of novels that nineteenth-century critics held up as examples of books that were detrimental to female readers. In "What Girls Read" (1886), for example, Edward G. Salmon explained:

Girls' literature performs one very useful function. It enables girls to read some-

80 Alcott, *Garland*, 82-83. Alcott's dig at James may be in retaliation for his early reviews of her novels. He pronounced *Moods* "unnatural," and complained of *Eight Cousins*: "There is no glow and no fairies; it is all prose and to our sense rather vulgar prose." He also found Alcott's "smart satirical" tone disagreeable in a children's book. See Adeline R. Tintner, "A Literary Youth and a Little Woman: Henry James Reviews Louisa Alcott," in *Critical Essays on Louisa May Alcott*, ed. Madeleine B. Stern (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1984), 266 and Janet S. Zehr, "The Response of Nineteenth-Century Audiences to Louisa May Alcott's Fiction," *ATQ (The American Transcendental Quarterly)* NS 1 (1987): 338.

81 Alcott, *Garland*, 90.

82 In equating Tennyson with high culture, Alcott echoed the *American Booksellers' Guide*, which attested, "There is no mistake in the disposition of the laurel crown which graces the brow of Alfred Tennyson. He

is pre-eminently the poetic voice of the refined and cultivated Englishmen of this generation; and if of Englishmen, it is still more true of Americans" (2 [January 1870]: 9).

83 Alcott, *Garland*, 79.

84 Regarding nineteenth-century series, Peter Dzwonkoski notes, "It is clear from the evidence . . . that the American reading public had a strong appetite for sets of books. The popularity of ready-made libraries, which offered knowledge and culture neatly packaged, takes on added significance when one considers that only about one percent of the eligible population attended high school at the time [1873]. Education, or what there was of it, took place at home, and the American publisher provided the texts." See Peter Dzwonkoski, ed. *Dictionary of Literary Biography 49: American Literary Publishing Houses, 1638-1899*, 2 vols. (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1986), 2:590.

thing above mere baby tales, and yet keeps them from the influence of novels of a sort which should be read only by persons capable of forming a discreet judgment. It is a long jump from Aesop to "Ouida," and to place Miss Sarah Doudney or Miss Anne Beale between Aesop and "Ouida" may at least prevent a disastrous moral fall.⁸⁶

Similarly, in "Cheap Books and Good Books" (1887), Brander Matthews, a literature professor at Columbia, argued:

inferior foreign fiction . . . not only usurps the place of better literature, but spoils the appetite for it. . . . The cheap books to be bought in the United States are only too often the trivial trash of the ladies who call themselves "Ouida" and "The Duchess." How much these may nerve a man or a woman for the realities of existence, how much the wisdom to be got from them may arm us for the stern battle of life, I cannot say.⁸⁷

For Mrs. Warburton, too, the problem with reading the wrong kinds of books is not merely an aesthetic one, but a moral one. She confesses, "I always judge people's characters a good deal by the books they like, as well as by the company they keep."⁸⁸ She cautions her young friends:

Many young girls ignorantly or curiously take up books quite worthless, and really harmful, because under the fine writing and brilliant color lurks immorality or the false sentiment which gives wrong ideas of life and things which should be sacred. They think, perhaps, that no one knows this taste of theirs; but they are mistaken, for it shows itself in many ways, and betrays them. Attitudes, looks, careless words, and a morbid or foolishly romantic view of certain things, show plainly that the maidenly instincts are blunted, and harm done that perhaps can never be repaired.⁸⁹

Once again, Alcott's view (or at least Mrs. Warburton's) is closely allied to that of Noah Porter, who wrote:

the man or the woman who systematically dawdles away his or her time over a succession of third or fourth rate novels, weak in imagination and doubtful in morality, deserves a very low place in the estimate of people whose good opinion is worth regarding. There is no description of filth that is so filthy or so tenacious as that which comes from handling an equivocal or obscene novel. A white-gloved hand is for ever soiled by a smutch that cannot be drawn off with a glove, if seen to hold a low-lived and trashy tale, such as many a fashionable miss and pretentious coxcomb are known to handle.⁹⁰

Conversely, Mrs. Warburton and Porter would agree that "They are never alone that are accompanied with noble thoughts"⁹¹ and that the right kind of books allow us to "fortify ourselves with 'noble thoughts.'"⁹² For better or worse, then, as Alcott and Porter severally imply, books actually created one's character, inculcating or undermining culture and virtue in accordance with the moral

85 It is significant that more *Blue and Gold* titles may be attributed to Mrs. Jameson than to any other single author. Mrs. Jameson, whose books crowd the *Blue and Gold* list, was unquestionably a "ladies' author." As Clara Thomas explains, Mrs. Jameson "was one of many who began to write for a growing reading public of women whose predilections increasingly dominated popular letters as their influence dominated popular taste." See "Anna Jameson and Nineteenth-Century Taste," *Humanities Association Review*, 17 (1966): 53.

86 Edward G. Salmon "What Girls Read," *Nineteenth*

Century, 20 (October 1886): 522.

87 Brander Matthews, "Cheap Books and Good Books," 1887, rpt. in Dzwonkoski, *Dictionary*, 2:584.

88 Alcott, *Garland*, 79.

89 Alcott, *Garland*, 79. Mrs. Warburton's point is consistent with Pierre Bourdieu's observation in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984) that "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (6).

90 Porter, *Books and Reading*, 226.

value of the text.

Although Carrie, initially a resistant reader, asseverates, "I don't *wish* to improve my mind, thank you: I read for amusement in vacation time,"⁹³ she relents after Mrs. Warburton relates the story of her own courtship and betrothal. In this framed narrative, a young Mrs. Warburton (then Miss Harper) carelessly lets slip a small volume of Wordsworth that she had been reading on the upper balcony of a steamer while touring in Canada. The book strikes the head of Mr. Warburton, a distinguished man of science, who happens to be standing on the lower deck, thereby knocking his hat into the St. Lawrence River. The misadventure precipitates a meeting, with the result that Miss Harper and Mr. Warburton become acquainted through their mutual esteem for the great English poet, fall in love, and by and by become husband and wife, united by common cultural and intellectual pursuits. In narrating her story, Mrs. Warburton paints a picture of a literary elite formed through selective reading, remarking that "cultivated persons have a free-masonry of their own, and are recognized at once."⁹⁴ At the outset of "Pansies," Alcott encourages her readers to judge Carrie according to her penchant for "trashy" romances in sleazy bindings. At the end of the story, a change in Carrie's literary preferences signals her ostensible transformation, and, again, Alcott indicates that her choice of books reflects, and on some level, determines her character.

Reviewing the revised edition of Cooper's *The Red Rover*, Melville suggested that books form the society of their (male) readers:

Books, gentlemen, are a species of men, and introduced to them you circulate in the "very best society" that this world can furnish, without the intolerable infliction of "dressing" to go into it. In your shabbiest coat and cosiest slippers you may socially chat even with the fastidious Earl of Chesterfield, and lounging under a tree enjoy the divinest intimacy with my late lord of Verulam.⁹⁵

Alcott's story establishes a similar relationship between books and female readers. Her personification of the *Seaside Library* edition of *Wanda*, for example, equates the novel with the heroine: "Carrie tucked *Wanda* under the sofa pillow, as if a trifle ashamed of her society."⁹⁶ "We were only talking about books," began Carrie, deeply grateful that *Wanda* was safely out of sight.⁹⁷

Having established that people keep company with books, Melville took the argument a step further by advocating a kind of decorum between the outward appearance of books and their interior content. In his view, the appearance of a book should aid readers in ascertaining the nature of the text. Melville explained, "Men, then, that they are—books should be appropriately apparelled. Their bindings should indicate and distinguish their various characters."⁹⁸ Alcott's story complicates Melville's observation by effacing the boundaries between reader and text. In "Pansies," the bindings of books reflect and distinguish the characters of the readers who possess them as well as the nature of the texts which

91 Alcott, *Garland*, 71. This quotation from Sir Philip Sidney appears as an epigraph to "Pansies."

92 Alcott, *Garland*, 95.

93 Alcott, *Garland*, 71.

94 Alcott, *Garland*, 86. Alcott's observation resembles one that Brodhead makes in *Culture of Letters*: "the choices people make between now-separated writing worlds come to tell what 'kind' of people they are" (103).

("People" here refers to writers, but it applies equally to readers.) Brodhead's comment occurs in the context of a discussion of Alcott and *Little Women*.

95 Melville, "A Thought on Book-Binding," 238.

96 Alcott, *Garland*, 74.

97 Alcott, *Garland*, 78. The *St. Nicholas* version of the story lacks this personification, since *Wanda* is not named.

inhabit them.

In Alcott's formulation, Carrie, the naïve reader (or consumer of texts) whose admiration for the novels of Ouida arises from their lavish descriptions of extravagant clothing,⁹⁹ is ironically destined to become a product in the marriage market. Meanwhile, her book, the *Blue and Gold* Tennyson, serves as the packaging that is to mark her as a cultured, well-bred young lady: an advertisement set out to attract a certain kind of buyer (i.e., an "eligible learned or literary man").¹⁰⁰ Just as the book becomes person-like through the trope of personification, the (female) person becomes book-like—a text to be decoded—through her objectification in the ritual of courtship. Displayed against the body of Alcott's female reader, the book operates as an outward sign of the woman's inward qualities. Like Mrs. Warburton's jewel-encrusted, pansy-shaped pin—a symbol of thought ("pansy" derives from *pensée*) as well as a memento of her beloved blue-stockinged sister—it is doubly symbolic.¹⁰¹ As a lady's accessory, the physical book thus embodies two "texts": that of the writer and that of the reader.¹⁰²

In *Paratexts*, Genette explains that extratextual bibliographic productions such as the cover of a book, the table of contents, typography, and correspondence "surround it [the text] and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to make present, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its 'reception' and consumption in the form . . . of a book."¹⁰³ In Alcott's story, the physical book becomes a kind of paratext for the reader: the book "presents" her to the world and gives her a presence in the world. No less conspicuously than the spectacular gown of *Vanity Fair*'s "magnificent . . . creature gotten up gorgeously in blue and gold, a la Ticknor & Fields," the material text surrounds the reader, ensuring *her* presence, influencing *her* reception, and ultimately affecting (if not effecting) *her* consumption in society.¹⁰⁴

Near the end of "Pansies," Carrie, whose mother desired that she should make a good match and "educated [her] . . . for that end,"¹⁰⁵ seems to have learned more from her mother than from Mrs. Warburton as she reflects that "a good marriage [is] the end of life."¹⁰⁶ Perhaps Alcott intended no irony in this juve-

98 Melville, "A Thought on Book-Binding," 238. In his pertinent article "The Material Melville: Shaping Readers' Horizons" (in *Reading Books: Essays on the Material Text and Literature in America*, 52-74), Michael Kearns usefully adopts Hans Robert Jauss's notion of a "horizon of expectations" to explain how the physical features of the book influence the reception of the text.

99 Carrie gushes, "Wanda's [clothes] were simply gorgeous; white velvet and a rope of pearls is one costume; gray velvet and a silver girdle another; and Idalia was all a 'shower of perfumed laces,' and scarlet and gold satin mask dresses, or primrose silk with violets, so lovely! I do revel in 'em!" (72). A comparison with Ouida's text indicates that Alcott took pains to describe Wanda's wardrobe accurately.

100 Writing of current trends in wearable brand advertising, Strasser remarks, "Now displayed even on our bodies, the brand has become a statement about consumers themselves" (286).

101 The sweetheart of Mrs. Warburton's sister, upon presenting this brooch, says, "This *pensée* is a happy, faithful thought of me. Wear it, dearest girl, and don't pine while we are separated. Read and study, write much to me, and remember, 'They never are alone that are accompanied with noble thoughts'" (84). The St. Nicholas version of the story substitutes "pansy" for "*pensée*" and omits the italics in "thought" (16). It is likely that Dodge thought that the bilingual pun was too sophisticated for the magazine's readers.

102 Ezell, who points to the "growing connection between mass literary production and reading as a fashionable leisure activity" (13) in Britain, remarks that the "ornamental presentation [of the 'classic' text] signalled the status of the text and of its owner simultaneously," reinforcing "the perception of the purchase and display of books as a type of socially accrediting activity" (14).

103 Genette, *Paratexts*, 1.

nile narrative, although, in light of her reluctance to marry off her "little women . . . in a very stupid style,"¹⁰⁷ it is tempting to consider the possibility.¹⁰⁸ Regardless, the double entendre in the phrase "end of life" underscores the problematic nature of the story's denouement. When the future Mrs. Warburton drops her book and startles her future husband with "a smart blow" on the head,¹⁰⁹ the purely physical reception of the book becomes a device that ultimately "resolves" the conventional marriage plot. As Alcott suggests, however, in marriage Mrs. Warburton was subordinated to her husband, becoming "a helpmeet at home and a gentle prop for his declining years," as well as "a comrade in intellectual pursuits."¹¹⁰ Thus, the moral of the marriage plot (how to find a husband) undermines the moral of the advice narrative (how to cultivate one's intellectual gifts). Carrie, whose love of fine clothing is reflected in her admiration of Wanda's opulent gowns, develops from a reader metaphorically garbed in a tawdry *Seaside Library* romance to one figuratively arrayed, like the breathtaking belle of *Vanity Fair*, in the brilliant blue and gold trappings of the most distinguished literary publishers in the country. Nevertheless, the transformation, like Mr. Warburton's reception of the volume of Wordsworth, occurs on a purely physical level. It is fitting, therefore, that Alcott concludes her story by destroying the materiality of the cheap and disposable text while reinforcing the physical worth of the literary text as a means of announcing one's cultural credentials with a view to procuring a refined and intelligent mate:

Carrie sent Wanda and her finery up the chimney in a lively blaze, and, as she watched the book burn, decided to take her blue and gold volume of Tennyson with her on her next trip to Nahant, in case any eligible learned or literary man's head should offer itself as a shining mark. Since a good marriage was the end of life, why not . . . make a really excellent one?¹¹¹

Reflecting on his "early time" as a writer, Henry James reminisced in 1915 that "Publishers' names had a color and character beyond even those of authors, even

¹⁰⁴In light of this interpretation, it is important to consider what the materiality of Alcott's attractively bound *A Garland for Girls* signified to her own audience (young girls who, like the young ladies in "Pansies," presumably liked to read). With its spare ornamentation, consisting of a simple wreath depicting the flowers named in the story titles (Figure 1), this elegant cover is in sharp counterpoint to what Sue Allen characterizes as the "crowded 'bulletin-board' layouts" that were "bursting the bounds" of book covers in the 1880s. See "American Book Covers, 1830-1900: A Pictorial Guide" (Washington: Library of Congress-Binding & Collections Care Division, 1998). Charles Gullans observes of Sarah Whitman, who likely designed *A Garland for Girls*: "Her covers are often feminine, sweet, and charming," adding, "After all, the audience for books was certainly feminine by a wide margin, and was attracted by the sweet and charming, and on occasion not averse to the bold." See Sue Allen and Charles Gullans, *Decorated Cloth in America: Publishers' Bindings, 1840-1910* (Los Angeles: UCLA Center for 17th and 18th-Century Studies-William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1994), 64.

¹⁰⁵Alcott, *Garland*, 76.

¹⁰⁶Alcott, *Garland*, 94.

¹⁰⁷Louisa May Alcott, *The Selected Letters of Louisa May*

Alcott, ed. Joel Myerson, Daniel Shealy, and Madeleine B. Stern (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 121-22. In a journal entry of November 1, 1868, Alcott had expressed impatience that "Girls write to ask who the little women marry, as if that was the only end and aim of a woman's life" (*Journals*, 167).

¹⁰⁸Indeed, when one considers Alcott's own contributions to the sensation literature of her day, it is tempting to read the entire story as ironic. Nevertheless, Alcott seems to have had a remarkable ability to compartmentalize her literary productions into distinct and separate categories aimed at discrete segments of the literary marketplace. See Brodhead's *Cultures of Letters* for a discussion of her ability to "write across generic boundaries" and "be an author of all kinds, at once 'blood and thunder' writer and high-literary aspirant and 'the Thackeray, the Trollope, of the nursery and the school-room;' and so . . . write toward the whole audience that was divided up in her time" (106). The sentence containing the phrase "a good marriage is the end of life" does not appear in the *St. Nicholas* version of the "Pansies," suggesting the possibility that Dodge, like Henry James, detected an inappropriately "satirical tone" and deleted it.

¹⁰⁹Alcott, *Garland*, 89.

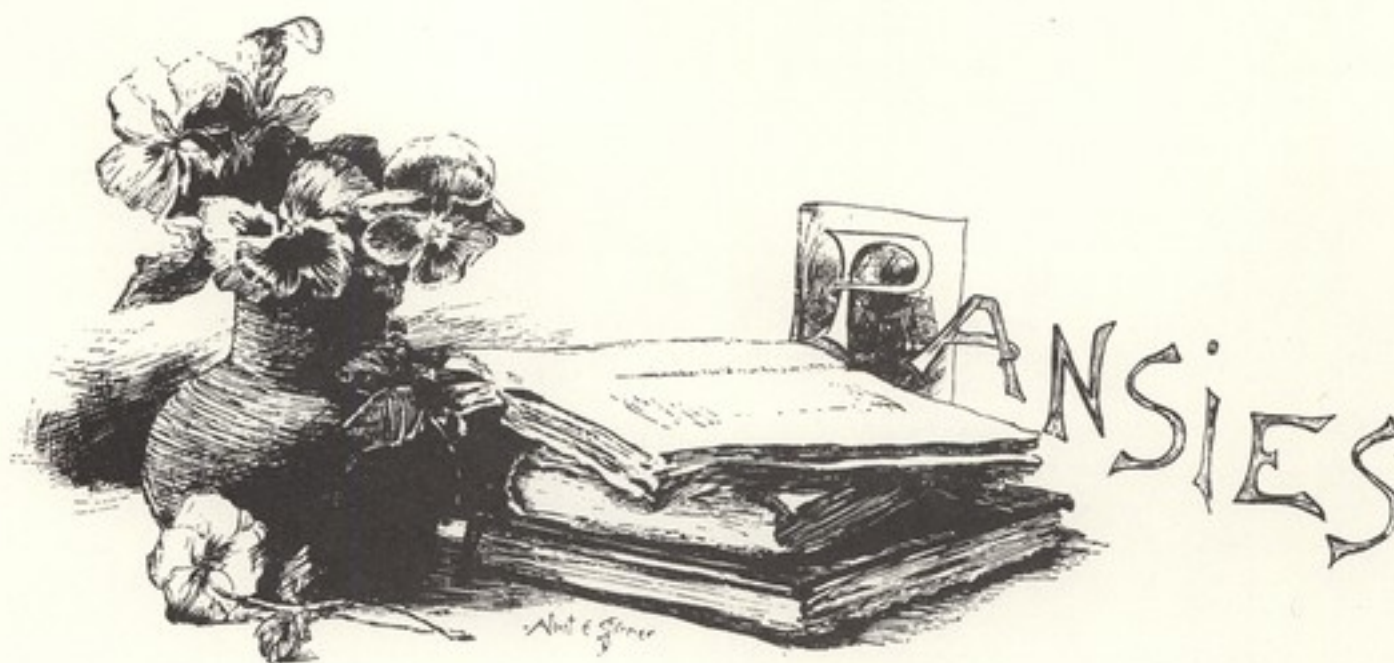
¹¹⁰Alcott, *Garland*, 93.

those of books themselves."¹¹² For nineteenth-century readers, the *Blue and Gold Series*, with all its celebrated Brahmin mystique, became a widely recognized emblem of the "color and character" of Ticknor & Fields, the quintessential literary publishers of New England. Consequently, when the firm moved into its new Tremont Street quarters in 1865 at the height of the series' popularity, the partners were eager to provide a physical setting that would fittingly showcase their flagship design. Tryon describes the new facility as follows:

The main showroom . . . was eighty feet long and thirty feet wide. The walls, the supporting columns, the counters, and all the woodwork were of highly polished, oiled western fir and exuded a grave and impressive air. Around the walls were shelves to exhibit the firm's regular offerings; at the end of the room was an elaborate arch, within which were glass cases to exhibit the colorful Blue and Gold series and other fine bindings. . . . Everywhere were rich carvings, ornate chandeliers for gaslights, and heavy moldings.¹¹³

Recognizing the essential relationship between product and packaging, presentation and display, exploited with such elegance in Ticknor & Fields's Tremont Street offices, Jeffrey D. Groves has argued that distinctive designs such as the *Blue and Gold* format "demonstrate how literary books could in fact be judged by their covers."¹¹⁴ As this essay has shown, readers could likewise be judged by their covers. Thus, in "Pansies," a story that identifies the embodiment of the text with the body of the female reader and conflates the personification of books with the objectification of women, Alcott effectively illustrates the tacit claim of so many publishers' ads, past and present: You are what you read.

Figure 9. Title Illustration by Albert E. Sterner from "Pansies," *St. Nicholas* 15 (November 1887). Courtesy, Hess Collection, Andersen Library, University of Minnesota.



¹¹¹ Alcott, *Garland*, 94.

¹¹² Quoted in Pye, 3.

¹¹³ Tryon, *Parnassus Corner*, 281.

¹¹⁴ Groves, "Judging Books by Their Covers," 77.