

Caroline Winterer, *The Mirror of Antiquity: American Women and the Classical Tradition, 1750–1900* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2007), pp. xii + 242. ISBN 978 0801441639.

Antiquity served as a guiding ideal for patriots during the American Revolution. Classical knowledge comprised a great part of the identity of the American ruling class and provided them with role models in their struggle for independence. Ancient war heroes and politicians were also models for behaviour in the newly founded republic. But how could women be good patriots and participate in building this new republic in a society dominated by male actors? By making use of the same classical narrative, answers Caroline Winterer in her book *The Mirror of Antiquity*. She lays out in great detail how women of the generation of the founding fathers utilised their classical knowledge in order to gradually shift their role in society. Politics and public debate had been a strict male domain, but through clever arguing under the disguise of classicism, they would gain increasingly equal influence.

Thomas Jefferson and John Adams are often cited as the main figures eager to connect to British gentry and to legitimize their leading role in American politics by making use of classical learning. While Greek and Latin heroes like Cicero and Scipio served as role models for men, Greece and Rome also offered many forms to imagine and articulate new roles for women of the eighteenth to nineteenth century. For example, through the figures of Portia, Venus, or women of Sparta, they could connect to America's patriotic movement and thus make themselves heard in public and in turn shape their self identity within the revolution and early republic.

An example: the knowledge of antiquity made them part of the upper class society and hence desirable marriage partners. The Virginia planter William Byrd II fell in love with his future wife in part because she knew Greek. He later wrote: 'In beauty you surpassed Helen, in culture of mind and ready wit Sappho' (quoted p. 21). In her courtship letter, Abigail Adams called herself Diana and John Adams turned into Lysander, a figure praised as one of the brave Spartans by Charles Rollin, the author of the widely read *Ancient History*. In later years, she adopted the pseudonym of Portia, the wife of Brutus, fighting against tyranny, and under this disguise she could address political problems such as women's rights in the new republic. While men favoured the ideal of the Greco-Roman soldier, Winterer points out, women were able to participate in conversations about how to create a new republic by adopting at first the role of a 'Roman matron', that is, a dignified married mother. Moreover, classicism served equally as a framework of individual and social orientation during the transition from colony to republic. Then, women were allowed to make claims for political rights in public discourse including their engagement in the abolition movement.

Winterer adds an important facet to a more complete picture of how classicism shaped America. Her explanation of how women made use of it in order to participate on political topics is based on many examples. It is also a fresh source for new approaches towards the depiction of women in paintings during the Federal period. However, as women increasingly grasped for classicism as a means of emancipation, the importance of classical knowledge ceased to have a defining function on society as a whole. Already in the early nineteenth century, with the rise of Jacksonian democracy, classicism lost its cultural significance and other role models emerged. The scene

was dominated not by the past in Greece but by the future in America, not by ideals but by practical down-to-earth figures such as Andrew Jackson. If we look at the artists' struggle for recognition of classicist paintings at that time, we can observe that classical knowledge was limited to a narrowing circle of ruling elite and its importance declined quickly in the early nineteenth century in which the majority of the middle class increasingly gained political influence in part by opposition to the old ruling class and their cultural framework. Thus, women's emancipation on the back of classicism has been one possibility among others. Emancipation propelled by the larger wave of democratisation has had probably the greater impact, one that is still vivid today.

HARALD KLINKE

University of Göttingen, Germany

Deborah Cherry and Janice Helland (eds), *Local/Global: Women Artists in the Nineteenth Century* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), pp. xvi + 269. ISBN 978 0754631972.

Jordana Pomeroy (ed.), *Intrepid Women: Victorian Artists Travel* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), pp. xvi + 144. ISBN 978 0754650720.

Meaghan Clarke, *Critical Voices: Women and Art Criticism in Britain 1880–1905* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), pp. xii + 214. ISBN 978 0754608158.

We have recently been assured of the imminent demise of 'women's studies'. We are all post-feminists now, it seems, and the focus on women's history is therefore anachronistic and out-moded. The titles reviewed here, however, indicate how much still remains to be done in terms of redressing the patriarchal focus of art-historical studies, and filling the lacunae of women's history. It is clear from the detailed research underpinning these studies that, far from being excluded from the art world of their time, many women were participating at a national, and even global level – negotiating institutional prejudice and social restriction, admittedly, but nonetheless resisting these forces in order to make important contributions to visual culture. If art history has declared there were no women art critics of note in the nineteenth century, that women's art was primarily cloistered within the domestic realm, it is clearly because art historians have been over-restrictive in where they look for evidence and in the areas to which they give value. As more and more examples are offered of exceptional women travellers and writers, so these women begin to appear ever less exceptional, indicating a far more complex network of interaction between the sexes than the 'dominant male/marginalised female' model suggests.

The stultifying stereotype of the Victorian lady in her parlour, composing delicate watercolours for consumption by her private family circle, is powerfully contested by *Local/Global* and *Intrepid Women*, which focus on the artistic production of nineteenth-century women artists. While Gerrish Nunn and Deborah Cherry, among others, have previously documented a number of women exhibiting in Victorian Britain, these richly varied collections of essays place the nineteenth-century woman artist in a global framework of cultural and economic exchange, bringing to light hitherto neglected bodies of work and underlining the extraordinary heterogeneity of women's art in this period.¹