

## **A Cosmopolitan Victorian in the Midlands: regional collecting and the work of Sophie Anderson (1823-1903)**

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*Collections: Birmingham Museums Trust, The New Art Gallery Walsall, New Walk Museum and Art Gallery Leicester, Wolverhampton Art Gallery*

**The Victorian artist Sophie Anderson lived and worked between France, America, England, and Italy. In 1871 she became one of the first living female artists to have art works purchased by a British public museum, but today her work is barely known. Five of the eight paintings by Anderson in public ownership in Britain are in the Midlands. This article provides the first sustained analysis of her work, and the histories of its collection and display in the region.**

Key words: women artists, Orientalism, classicism, children, collecting

This article explores the work of one Victorian artist who happened to be a woman, and whose paintings have, since the 1880s, been housed predominantly in the Midlands. Sophie Anderson was a successful and well-known artist in the nineteenth century, but is barely known today; this is the first published article to substantially engage with more than one of her paintings. The five Anderson paintings in the Midlands span an eclectic range of subjects, and can be understood as one woman's contributions to contemporary understandings of femininity, childhood, the classical past, an exoticised 'Orient', and the Southern Mediterranean. Anderson's work both fits into and complicates the nineteenth-century limitations placed on her by her gender, and by the twentieth and twenty-first century conceptions of Victorian art and regionality.

The appearance of Anderson's work in Midlands collections from the 1880s onwards offers a concrete example of the ways in which women actively contributed to public culture in Victorian Britain – and far beyond London. It testifies to a public endorsement and an acceptance of Anderson as a professional artist. This public presence, and professional status is important. As Pamela Gerrish Nunn emphasises, the very notion of women as creative artists ran counter to Western European understandings of sexual difference and the expectations of male and female behaviour and capabilities: 'to study Victorian women artists is not to discover female Landseers or Turners, but to confront a moment when it seemed as if the world itself might be transformed.'<sup>1</sup>

### **Introducing Sophie Anderson**

A three-page entry in Ellen Clayton's 1876 publication *English Female Artists* has been the basis for the handful of subsequent discussions of Sophie Anderson's life and work. Most of Clayton's short biographies follow a similar pattern – a naturally gifted young girl overcomes adversity to establish herself as an artist.<sup>2</sup> The same pattern emerges in her narrative of Anderson's life, which – despite its limitations – continues to underpin most accounts of her work, in part because – to my knowledge – there is no substantial archive related to Anderson. Clayton informs us that Anderson was born in Paris to an English mother and French architect father, and grew up in rural France, where 'From earliest childhood she had a great passion for drawing and painting, and persevered in practising in spite of every disadvantage.'<sup>3</sup> In 1843, aged twenty, she began her one year of artistic training in Paris with the German-born artist Charles de Steuben, who soon, however, abandoned his pupil to return to his adopted home of Russia. Her family fled France after the 1848 revolution, and settled in America, initially in Cincinnati, Ohio, and subsequently Manchester, Pennsylvania. The twenty-five-year-old Sophie continued to develop her skills as a portrait painter; the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* informs us that she contributed five illustrations to Henry Howe's *Historical Collections of the Great West* (1852). She married the English artist Walter Anderson in 1849, and the couple moved to London in 1854, where she began exhibiting paintings at a wide variety of institutions in the capital and across Britain and Ireland. Little is known about the couple's financial and social status, although in most accounts Walter is regarded as a vastly inferior artist, and it is possible that Sophie's work enhanced Walter's reputation and brought in more money.<sup>4</sup> In 1871 they purchased the Villa di Castello on the island of Capri, and relocated, with Anderson annually sending work to France, England, Ireland and Scotland for exhibition and sale. British, German, French and American artists (including Frederic Leighton and John Singer Sargent) all visited or resided on the island, providing Anderson with access to a significant network of artistic colleagues.<sup>5</sup> She and Walter returned to England in 1894 and settled in Falmouth, where she died in 1903.<sup>6</sup>

Clayton's biography rather inadvertently undermines the 'Englishness' of this 'English' female artist; Anderson (born Gengembre) was a cosmopolitan Victorian, moving and working between artistic communities in continental Europe, north America and Britain. Feminist art historians have recently begun to examine the mobility of nineteenth-century female artists, and their involvement in local, global and imperial artistic networks. Anderson might be re-evaluated as another mobile female artist, and contribute a further case study to this project. However, in the context of imperialism in particular, and drawing on post-colonial feminist theorist Gayatri Spivak, Janice Helland and Deborah Cherry have emphasised the limitations of fixating on individual biographies. They describe 'a mesmerising fascination with Western individualism and in particular the white feminist heroine', which, however well-intentioned, can nonetheless serve to further marginalise – for example – both male and female artists of colour, or to gloss over the other power

dynamics at play (e.g. race, class, religion, dis/ability) that enabled some Western European women to become successful artists.<sup>7</sup> Mindful of this, my intention here is not to earmark Anderson a heroic individual, but to analyse the ways in which Anderson's work can be understood as contributing towards a self-fashioned European feminine professionalism, to consider why Anderson was able to achieve a moderate degree of success in her own times, and to explore the role that she played in local and civic identity formation in the Midlands.

### **Why you might not have heard of Sophie Anderson**

'If ever there existed an art of "uplift", an art that moderated unruly passions, and art that scourged vice and inculcated virtue; that was the art of Mrs Anderson. Her whole artistic output was nothing but a hymn to Propriety in Clothing.'<sup>8</sup>

This caricature of both Anderson and her work as prudish and moralising appears in Edwin Cerio's 1924 short story set around Anderson's villa on Capri. It sets up a binary between the 'modern' sexual liberation that Capri facilitated for some northern Europeans and north Americans, and Anderson's provincial 'English' garden-parties for art viewing on Capri, attended (apparently) with 'puritanical animation' by 'the Protestant pastor, the seasoned spinsters, the daughters of half-pay officers, the undertakers' widows.'<sup>9</sup> It begins to explain why you might not have heard of Sophie Anderson, despite her commercially successful career. The repressed, and repressing figure of Anderson in this early twentieth-century story perfectly encapsulates the double bind which has kept nineteenth-century women artists from the conventional narratives of art history: they are not just female, but they are Victorian. Further, as I explore here, this has led to many of their works being held in – and associated with – municipal collections outside of London.

This is emphatically *not* to suggest that all artists who share one marginalised characteristic (e.g. being female in a male dominated [art] world) will have a single perspective (that there is necessarily a distinct, readily identifiable category of 'women's art'), or that female artists are inferior to male artists.<sup>10</sup> Rather, it is to point out that different social conditions for male and female artists (intersecting with other factors such as class, ethnicity, sexuality and religion) created different possibilities for the production and reception of their art works.

Women artists faced specific challenges as a group in the nineteenth century. They had limited opportunities for artistic training, and their presence in the life class was a matter of considerable debate; Anderson was lucky to have been able to access a year's training in Paris.<sup>11</sup> They were prevented from being members of the Royal Academy, the preeminent British professional body for artists, with an annual exhibition that lay at the heart of the London art world. They could still exhibit at the Royal Academy, but received none of the benefits of membership, including reputation-building access to the most prestigious spaces

on the walls in the annual exhibition, and, pre-eminently, status and recognition as professionals. Women were consequently excluded from London professional networks, purchasing committees, exhibition organisation – and were less likely to secure themselves an art dealer, an increasingly important means of commercial success in the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> Even the few art societies that did permit women to be members (such as both the Old and New Watercolour Societies) were managed exclusively by men, and classified ‘lady’ members as a distinct category. In art writing, ‘Women’s art’ was generally discussed as a separate artistic, and often amateur category – and women’s exhibiting societies, although providing a space for women to show their art, also maintained their work as a separate and often inferior category.<sup>13</sup> Today, despite over forty years of feminist scholarship painstakingly reclaiming and theorising the work of a diverse and extensive range of female artists working in the nineteenth century, women artists remain under represented in art historical writing, teaching and in public collections.<sup>14</sup> Later nineteenth-century artists like Anderson have also perhaps been less appealing subjects for contemporary discussion. She was not (to my knowledge), an active feminist, involved like many of her peers in campaigns for women’s suffrage, and her work might initially appear somewhat conservative, reinforcing rather than challenging gender norms.

Cerio’s caricature of Anderson with which I started is characteristic of an early-twentieth century reformulation and rejection of the Victorians as prudish and repressive. This functions to set ‘us’ post-Victorians as somehow superior and liberated in contrast to our nineteenth-century counterparts.<sup>15</sup> Such a rejection of the Victorian is compounded in the art world, where the notion of art progressing inexorably towards abstraction and twentieth-century modernism continues to exert influence. If the ‘goal’ of art is abstraction and twentieth-century modernism, much Victorian art can only ever figure as an unfortunate detour or aberration.<sup>16</sup>

It’s only really in the past forty years that work by Victorian male artists has begun to be taken seriously in academia (and even so it continues to evoke violent rejections amongst art critics and some art historians).<sup>17</sup> In this context it is perhaps less surprising that art by Victorian women artists sit awkwardly in the dominant narratives of art history. Interestingly, one of the very few published texts exploring Anderson’s work uses her [No Walk Today](#) (undated) to demonstrate the significance of Victorian paintings that might today be readily dismissed as mere ‘sentimentalism’. Caroline Arscott concludes her brilliant reading of this painting by noting that ‘Modernist detractors of Victorian painting see only sentimentality where contemporary critics saw a complex orchestration of emotional response.’<sup>18</sup> Arguing that the feelings that the supposedly sentimental might arouse can also be artistic engagements with ideas about the limits of representation, Arscott shows the importance of taking such images seriously as art historical and cultural artefacts. Anderson’s work might well be sentimental, and as such not valued in some art historical

traditions – but a designation as sentimental need not be the final, dismissive word on her images.

Despite the challenges faced by women artists, they were not entirely invisible in the nineteenth century. In 1871, Sophie Anderson's [\*Elaine\*](#) (1870) became the very first painting to be purchased with public funds for the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool.<sup>19</sup> Nineteenth-century British paintings dominate regional British collections, and a significant number of paintings by Victorian women artists reside in museums and art galleries outside of major national collections in London. In the nineteenth century, newly founded municipal art-exhibiting societies and later permanent galleries in wealthy industrial towns and cities were the pre-eminent exhibitors and purchasers of what was then contemporary art. These institutions did not just collect works, but actively created a new interest in and market for a particular variety of narrative-driven, often moralising contemporary art, which fitted with their founding principles that art had a moral purpose.<sup>20</sup>

The history of Victorian art (and especially Victorian art made by women) is fundamentally intertwined with that of regional art galleries. Yet with the widespread early twentieth-century turn away from Victorian art, post-industrial decline, swingeing local authority budget cuts and in an often London-focussed and dominated art world, these interconnections have become considerably less auspicious. These art works are not just unfashionable; they are perceived (by some) as provincial and thus marginal to dominant narratives. My examination of Anderson's work, and its Midlands context offers a rebuttal to the apparent 'triple bind' of gender, Victoriana, and regionality.

### **From Children's Stories to the Arabian Nights**

In the 1850s, critics identified a new strand of genre painting, dealing with the domestic. This coincided importantly with a wave of female artists exhibiting in London (including Anderson from 1855 onwards). As Cherry explores, the female artist and the domestic scene – especially images of children – soon came to be synonymous. But these images are no mere passive reflection of an external social order; works by female artists actively contributed towards the varied Victorian understandings and ideals of the home.<sup>21</sup> Family home life was regarded as a suitably respectable subject matter for women to paint, and to look at as art viewers. The home was also a ready source of models for female artists, whose children, adult female family members and servants regularly posed for them, obviating the need to pay those less respectable working-class women who worked as models.<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, Anderson never painted adult men. The world she creates in paint is exclusively composed of children and young women. And unlike many successful female professional artists, Anderson's success with painting generic scenes of childhood seems to have kept her sufficiently secure in terms of finances and reputation to avoid what one contemporary described as the 'bondage' of portrait painting.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the variety of her oeuvre, spanning classical, Orientalist and literary subjects, Anderson was renowned as a painter of children in her own time, even deemed superior to her male competitors.<sup>24</sup> This continues to be the mainstay of her reputation today. Her best known work is the image of bourgeois childhood in [\*No Walk Today\*](#), which has graced the cover of several exhibition catalogues and sold for over £1,000,000 in 2008, and her work is specifically directed at children at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, where it hangs in the museum's children's gallery.<sup>25</sup> The identification of Anderson exclusively with paintings of children is doubtless due to her status as a female artist. As Anne Higonnet has explored, images of childhood were 'feminised' during the later nineteenth century, becoming associated closely with both female artists and a mass female audience.<sup>26</sup> It is telling that far more complex artistic identities than simply 'painter of children' are ascribed to male artists like Anderson's celebrated contemporary John Everett Millais, or predecessors such as the first president of the Royal Academy Joshua Reynolds, who were both, nonetheless, renowned for their images of childhood in their own lifetimes.<sup>27</sup>

*The Children's Story Book* (fig.1) depicts six rosy-cheeked children and a baby in the bright sunny countryside, with a view out over a woodland, a distant church spire the only hint of human habitation. This rustic setting is entirely characteristic of what Higonnet refers to as 'Romantic' visions of childhood which emerged in the later eighteenth century. *The Children's Story Book* identifies childhood with nature, and, in a highly industrialised late-nineteenth-century British context, creates a nostalgic vision of the landscape, a seemingly timeless realm across which seemingly timeless children might roam. This nostalgia, a sense of longing for something unattainable from the past, intersects with a sense of loss inherent to Romantic images of childhood. Such images seek to define childhood by its innocence and physical difference from adulthood, yet 'Every sweetly sunny innocently cute Romantic child image stows away a dark side: a threat of loss, of change, and ultimately death.'<sup>28</sup>

In the centre of the painting, two girls sit at the foot of a tree, engrossed in the eponymous story book, its dog-eared corners suggesting a well-loved, well-used item. They are watched over by an older girl holding a baby, and attending to a toddler, while a girl around the same age looks on, resting on a basket. The only boy in the picture is rolling around on his back, waving his hands and feet in the air (perhaps entertaining the toddler, whose gaze he meets). His hat has fallen off his head, his boots lie discarded at the front of the painting, and he sports his socks as gloves, his fingers poking through sizeable holes. The painting is easily read as evoking the future maternal roles of the girls, and as reinforcing a binary of gendered behaviour – boys as active and playful, girls as quiet, passive and demure. It freezes boyhood as a playful episode in masculine development (it's not clear what future lies ahead of this scruffy boy), but seems to present sexual maturation and motherhood as rooted in childhood for his standing female counterpart. Yet at the same time, the children

are fully engrossed in their play and in each other; the adult spectator might feel as though they have stumbled upon a scene closed to the adult world. In her representation of autonomous children, Anderson's works differ significantly from her female contemporaries such as Emily Mary Osborn, whose work explicitly engages with adult-child relations (see, for example, *The Governess*, fig.2).

*Pet Canary* (fig.3) is likewise a self-contained image, perhaps even oppressively so, considering its depiction of domesticated, caged birdlife. The head, shoulders, and upper body of a girl fill the canvas, her pale pink and white dress brilliant against a heavy green embossed curtain which seems to push her to the front of the canvas. She tilts her head downwards to inspect a canary perched on her finger, its beady eye the only ocular contact that the painting offers its viewers. Anderson painted a number of similar images of girls with domesticated animals, including [Her Favourite Pets](#) (which features a girl with a caged canary and a cat). Children in this period were regularly depicted with pets, which served, in Higdonnet's analysis, to render the child 'less human, less conscious, more at one with nature.'<sup>29</sup> The fragility of the canary might direct viewers to consider the vulnerability of the girl, as well as reinforcing the connections between femininity and nurturing behaviour.

*Neapolitan Child* (fig.4) similarly represents an isolated figure who does not meet our gaze. We see the profile of a child leaning on a wall and looking out of the picture to the left. The child wears rustic Southern Italian costume, an unbuttoned chequered sleeveless item over a loose blouse, with unkempt shoulder-length hair and an earring. Unlike the girl in *Pet Canary*, this painting's protagonist is not enclosed by curtains. The background further sets the Southern Italian scene, with fishing boats and a view over the Bay of Naples, and Vesuvius in the distance. The child has been variously gendered over time; the painting was donated to Leicester as *A Neapolitan Boy*, but by the 1970s was described as 'a pretty little girl', in the 1980s reconsidered as a boy, and is today labelled as a gender neutral 'child.'<sup>30</sup> Having scoured lists and descriptions of Anderson's exhibited paintings from 1855-1899, the only likely contender for this image is *Ragazza Napoletana* (Neapolitan Girl, 1886), so it may well be that the child's gender had already changed from Anderson's initial title by the time it reached Leicester.<sup>31</sup> Anderson's English children are clearly gendered through hairstyles, clothing, and behaviour (as seen in *The Children's Story Book*). The confusion over the *Neapolitan Child*'s gender is testimony to the ambivalence that accompanied visions of Southern Italians in the later nineteenth century. The child in the painting does not readily fit into nineteenth-century northern European gender binaries, and is both product and reinforcement of a Northern European othering of the Mediterranean South, pitted as backward, poor and inferior – as well as exotic and beautiful; especially fitting for artistic representation.<sup>32</sup>

Anderson's images of childhood are more complex and revealing than might be anticipated of this artistic category traditionally (and often disparagingly) associated with female artists. But what of her other genres of work? *The Song* (1881, fig.5) depicts three female figures in classical drapery in a woodland grove. One stands alone playing the lyre, the other two are seated and listening. It is one of the largest known paintings by Anderson, measuring 145 x 200 cm, and an unusually large canvas for a nineteenth-century female artist. In both size and subject matter, *The Song* could be understood as a declaration of intent to enter the male-dominated, high profile sphere of large-scale historical painting. Charlotte Yeldham's survey of subject matter in art works made by women in nineteenth-century England and France suggests that a very small number of canvasses painted by women dealt with classical themes.<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, however, *The Song* was only one of a number of classically-themed paintings that Anderson exhibited in England in the 1880s; and according to Cerio, Anderson painted a wide range of classical nude figures which she exhibited at her Villa in Capri.<sup>34</sup> The exhibited works include a number of images featuring women in classical drapery in woodland settings (such as [Dreaming](#) and *Birdsong*).<sup>35</sup> But there is also considerable variety in her classical imagery (and both *Dreaming* and *Birdsong* are remarkable for their representations of the semi-nude female body).<sup>36</sup> *The Studio* (private collection), for example, features a Roman domestic setting with intricately rendered archaeological furnishings.<sup>37</sup> The title of an untraced work, *Evoe, Evoe, Bacche!* (exhibited at the Royal Academy and Birmingham, 1883) refers to the cries made by celebrants at festivals of the Greek/Roman god of wine Dionysus/Bacchus, perhaps indicating an engagement with Greek tragedy; while *Julia banished, Capri* (also untraced, the Royal Academy and Liverpool 1888, exhibited 1891 in Birmingham) seems to have been a Roman historical subject.<sup>38</sup>

Anderson's classical works seem to stand apart from the trends identified by Yeldham, who notes an increase in mythological themes in women's work in the 1870s, but concludes that from this date onwards 'The main theme to emerge ... was love, exemplified in myth, history, literature and the anonymous present.'<sup>39</sup> This theme also contrasts with the portentous classical literary references and detailed archaeological works produced by their more famous male 'Victorian Olympian' counterparts such as [Frederic Leighton](#) and [Lawrence Alma-Tadema](#). *The Song* does not seem to fit either. It is not concerned with specific classical textual references, archaeological detail, nor explicitly with love. Instead it presents an exclusively female world of cultural production and appreciation in a vaguely classical setting. The label that accompanies the painting at Wolverhampton today notes the late nineteenth-century rise in popularity of classical scenes, but concludes that 'In Victorian times, the harp represented a faithful woman, so the painting may have a deeper moral significance.'<sup>40</sup> I'd like to suggest a reading of the painting's possibilities that is not limited to the moral expectations of feminine respectability.



Musicians in classical garb were increasingly popular in later nineteenth-century painting. These, however, tended to be male musicians playing to a female audience, such as Alma-Tadema's [\*Sappho and Alcaeus\*](#) (which, like *The Song*, was also exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1881), or Albert Moore's *A Musician* (1867, fig.6). Such works have been analysed as key interventions in the later nineteenth-century 'aesthetic', or 'art for art's sake' movement. As Barringer puts it:

The painting should have the same sensuous effect on its viewers as the music does on its aurally intoxicated listeners — producing feelings without producing meaning. Music, refined and divested of all extraneous associations, seemed the perfect riposte to the vulgarity of the material world and for the excessive textuality of British art.<sup>41</sup>

Paintings associated with the aesthetic movement privileged sensation, experience and beauty over narrative – the absolute reverse of the main ways in which Anderson's genre paintings are usually understood. But it is worth considering whether Anderson's classicising, music-focused imagery might have been understood as part of this new turn in British painting, and have offered a different, female-oriented perspective. Anderson's women are not the languid, passive decorative baubles in Albert Moore's *A Musician*, flattened out accessories to male musicality. The women in *The Song* are carefully posed and poised, not lolling about in a bored manner, but actively listening and looking. The woman to the left pulls her knee towards her with her hands in a relaxed but active and engaged position. The second reclining woman is not slouched but propped up on her right elbow. Both women's gazes are fixed upon the standing woman with the harp; she does not meet our gaze or theirs, but looks out of the painting, perhaps lost in her own thought as she sings and plays.

The possibility of a female gaze, as an alternative to the dominant, objectifying male gaze, has been widely discussed within feminist art histories. In a foundational essay, Griselda Pollock argued that texts made by women can 'produce different positions within the sexual politics of looking.'<sup>42</sup> Pollock suggests that female artists are able to rework traditional orders of space, and to focalise their paintings through relationships between women: 'The women depicted function as subjects of their own looking or their activity, within highly specified locations of which the viewer becomes a part.' Unlike the work Pollock analyses, Anderson's painting is far from being a highly specified location of urban modernity. Yet there is something useful to be gleaned from considering the ways in which the three figures in Anderson's painting are 'subjects of their own looking or their activity', engrossed and immersed in their own world. Can these women allow other female spectators to become part of the male-dominated world of classicising painting, and of creative, artistic production? It is true that they are also presented as objects of aesthetic pleasure for the viewer, intimately connected to the natural world of the woodland grove rather than a 'man

made' urban cultural setting (ancient or modern). But there is arguably potential to resist if not entirely foreclose the objectifying gaze in the visual and aural connection between Anderson's women rendered in paint.

Anderson also tackles the theme of women's creative capacity emerging despite – or indeed because of and in response to – male power in *Scheherazade* (undated, fig.7).

Scheherazade, the narrator of the *Arabian Nights*, ensures her survival through her ability to tell stories. In this series of (perhaps) tenth-century CE narratives, King Shahriyar executes a series of women after spending one night with them; Scheherazade volunteers to spend the night with the King, but ensures that her one night never ends by telling a series of interconnected, cliffhanging stories which keep the King on tenterhooks. Her sister Dunyazade is a co-conspirator and significant audience for her stories, suggesting that, like *The Song*, *Scheherazade* might evoke a female creative community.<sup>43</sup> Yet unlike *The Song*, none of this female creative potential is visually present in the painting. The female figure in *Scheherazade* is not speaking or gesticulating; her lips are pursed, her hands at rest on a ledge or table. Our knowledge of the figure's command over narrative is based entirely on the painting's title.

In its close up focus on a single, lavishly dressed and accessorised figure, and its emphasis on exotic and spectacularly rendered fabrics and textures, *Scheherazade* recalls images of aestheticized women depicted most famously from the 1859 onwards by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (see, for example, [The Blue Bower](#), 1865). As Liz Pettejohn notes, works by Rossetti and his followers have 'ordinarily been presented as a male category, revelling in the sensuality of the new figure types or demonising women by presenting them as temptresses and *femmes fatales*.' However, Rossetti's 'aesthetic' woman was predated by a series of paintings made by women in the 1850s and early 1860s, which focused on single female figures, outside of a narrative context (fig.8). Pettejohn suggests that these works may have been conceived as a quasi-feminist project to depict powerful historical women. She argues that, rather than representing an objectified 'aesthetic' woman, these images might be read as 'expressing a feminine selfhood that is not obliged to make a full confession to the patriarchal public world.'<sup>44</sup> Anderson's *Schererazade* might thus be situated not as a feminine version of Rossetti's 'aesthetic' woman, but an engagement with earlier female artists' renderings of single historical and literary female figures.

There are other important power imbalances at play in *Scheherazade* – most obviously in its depiction of a putatively 'Arabian' woman. In his landmark 1978 publication *Orientalism*, Edward Said raised new questions about the ways in which nineteenth-century Western European colonial powers constructed an inferior, homogenized 'East' as its other, primarily through literary representations. In these 'Orientalist' texts, an undifferentiated East, stretching from Greece to India, and south from Italy to North Africa is set out as timeless,

lazy, effeminate place of mystery.<sup>45</sup> The exotic, luxuriant, shimmering spectacle of *Scheherazade* would have connoted a set of power dynamics quite distinct to the vision of classically draped female figures in *The Song*. Feminist literary scholars and art historians have nuanced Said's argument, exploring the role that gender played in the visual construction of an Oriental 'other', and the ways in which 'Oriental women' might resist and refute this 'othering'.<sup>46</sup> Does Anderson's gender contribute towards a more complex understanding of her representation of Scheherazade?

Reina Lewis's study of female Orientalist painters suggests that a female gaze on the Orient might destabilise the power relationships implicit in Western representations of the East. Western women who travelled to places such as modern-day Turkey were able to have a markedly different experience and privileged access to the life of Eastern women; they could enter spaces which were entirely closed to their male European counterparts – such as the female living areas of wealthy households (known as the harem). And as Lewis emphasises, contemporary critics *expected* female artists to represent the East differently to their male counterparts; they constructed a position for women Orientalists of possessing and portraying:

a knowledge that has some authority because it is experiential (but that is trivialized because it rests on womanly empathy rather than the clinical detachment of the authoritative scientific gaze) and that is emotional (but petty because its emotions are merely those of feminine sympathy and intuition rather than the grand passion of the Romantics).<sup>47</sup>

Viewers examining *Scheherazade*, aware of its female authorship, may well have brought with them similar ideas and expectations. They may have assumed that *Scheherazade* was based on privileged female access to Oriental life, and common female feeling across cultures (even if Anderson never did travel further East or South than Capri). But they likely also deemed Anderson unable to present the ethnographic, 'scientific' detached knowledge of Eastern custom associated with male Orientalist painters, such as [John Frederick Lewis](#). Anderson the successful creative artist might seek to align herself with the subject matter of the painting – an intelligent and ferociously gifted storyteller, perhaps disrupting the Western European superiority implicit in Orientalist painting. *Scheherazade* is not reduced to being only a sexualised object, as in so many nineteenth-century male representations of Oriental women (and indeed men); see, for example, French painter J. A. D. Ingres' [Turkish Bath](#) (1852-9). She appears as an adult woman, confidently meeting and directly returning our gaze – not the deferential figure with the air of an English school girl envisaged by Arthur Boyd Houghton for the frontispiece to the 1865 illustrated edition of the *Arabian Nights* (fig.9).

Anderson painted at least five other Orientalising canvasses, from the late 1870s to early 1880s, all of which focus on close ups of female figures.<sup>48</sup> [\*Toklihili: The Young Indian Princess\*](#) depicts a three-quarter length single female figure. Like *Scheherazade*, it fixates on a single figure bedecked with gleaming luxurious fabrics and jewellery, set off against a plain, deep brown backdrop. Like the figures in *Scandal in the Harem* (1877, fig.10), these women are exotic studies in their own right. They do not require the obsessive architectural detail associated with Orientalist painting (Jean-Léon Gérôme's [\*Snake Charmer\*](#) of 1879 is perhaps the most famous example).

It is possible that the same woman posed for all of these paintings; the facial shape, distinctive long braided hairstyle and eyebrows are remarkably similar. But who was this woman? We only have records of Anderson living in Capri during the 1870s, and there are no mentions in any of the press reviews of her work of her having travelled in the middle east prior to the creation of these images.<sup>49</sup> McQueen suggests that *Toklihili* and *Scheherazade* may have been painted from the same model in London, while Anderson was resident there from 1863-71.<sup>50</sup> Yet the only securely dated Orientalist paintings by Anderson hail from her period of residency in Capri (*Scandal in the Harem*, 1877, and *Zelica*, 1881). Further, considering the entrenched nineteenth-century conceptualisation of Southern Italians as ethnically other, exotic and often Orientalised in contrast with northern Europeans, a Southern Italian model seems to me a much more likely candidate.<sup>51</sup>

Although putatively representing Middle Eastern and Indian women, the use of the same model for all would not be at all uncharacteristic of nineteenth-century artistic practice, which regularly employed the same person as a basis for a whole range of ethnic identities. The Jamaican-born, mixed race woman Fanny Eaton, for example, posed for people of Jewish, Arabic, Indian and African heritage, including the figure who may be Zenobia (an ancient Syrian Queen) in fig.8.<sup>52</sup> The 1850s-1880s was a period of intense fixation on, and attempts to establish specific visual signifiers of, racial difference through art works. Anderson's likely use of the same model to delineate a variety of ethnicities exposes the historical and cultural processes of racialisation, whereby art works are part of 'the processes by which groups or individuals come to be ascribed a racial identity.'<sup>53</sup> Anderson's works can be understood as making and reinforcing ideas of racial difference. They are fundamentally intertwined with racial and imperial power dynamics.

Like Henriette Browne, the French artist at the heart of Lewis's study, Orientalist imagery was part of Anderson's broader artistic practise, and bears close relation to her images of childhood, or classical scenes (indeed, she may even have used the same models for her classical paintings – *The Song*, for example, was, according to an inscription in Anderson's hand on the reverse of the canvas, painted on Capri). The uncategorizable gender of the *Neapolitan Child* (fig.4) arises from its exotic and unkempt appearance, and demonstrates

precisely these intersections in her work. Once seen in this context, images of rosy-cheeked English children might also appear more specifically racialised. Anderson's Orientalist works can draw attention to the imperial contexts of her work, and the complex ways in which racialised dynamics played out across images of childhood and the classical past as much as images specifically engaging with colonised spaces. Anderson might have been a cosmopolitan, at home in France, America, England and Italy. But her work is testimony to Peter van der Veer's argument that 'cosmopolitanism is a view from somewhere'; despite the vision of an enlightened, open-minded, curious cosmopolitan transcending chauvinistic national boundaries, cosmopolitanism is fundamentally bound up in European imperial endeavours.<sup>54</sup> But how did these works by a cosmopolitan Victorian find a place in the four Midlands collections under scrutiny here?

### **Anderson in the Midlands**

In 1886, Sophie Anderson's *The Song* (1881, fig.5) became the first painting by a woman to be purchased for Wolverhampton Art Gallery, and the first to enter a public collection in the Midlands. By 1930, there were five paintings by Anderson in the region's civic museums; only three others reside in public collections in the UK, in London, Bournemouth, and Liverpool.<sup>55</sup> Wolverhampton, however, was the only one of the four institutions under scrutiny here to actively purchase one of Anderson's works; the other paintings found their way into the remaining Midlands collections as bequests, to Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in 1892, New Walk Art Gallery and Museum in Leicester in 1894, and The New Art Gallery Walsall in 1931. The story of Anderson's works in the Midlands is thus a history of private as well as public collecting activities. In this section I explore further the intersections between art made by Victorian women and ideas about the importance of art for mass audiences in industrial towns and cities.

Throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century, public art galleries funded (at least in part) by local councils opened across Britain, and particularly in major industrial towns. In the Midlands, these included art galleries at Birmingham (1885), Wolverhampton (1884), Leicester (1885), as well as smaller purpose-built galleries at Dudley (1883) and Wednesbury (1891), while Walsall started holding art exhibitions in its civic library in 1892.<sup>56</sup> Unlike the historical, continental European holdings of the National Gallery in London (founded 1824), the mainstay of these regional collections was contemporary British art. The Sheepshanks collection (donated 1857) at the South Kensington Museum (Victoria and Albert Museum) housed a selection of nineteenth-century British art, but it was not until 1897 when the National Gallery of British Art (Tate) opened that there was a permanent home concentrating exclusively on recent British art in London. Amy Woodson-Boulton's research into the comparative histories of municipal art galleries in Birmingham, Liverpool (opened 1877) and Manchester (1883) demonstrates the distinct local contexts and ideologies from which each of these municipal institutions emerged. There was not one unifying

understanding of why art was important lying behind the foundation of these museums – they were sites of contestation. But she also teases out four main ideas about the potential of art museums in specifically industrial cities:

1. To provide healthy recreation for the working classes
2. To provide objects for study and so improve industrial design
3. To help workers lead more fulfilling lives by showing them the grace and beauty in the world
4. Most radically, to help audiences see the ugliness created by industrial capitalism and thus galvanise them to change both the modern urban environment and the system that created it.<sup>57</sup>

The Victorians and Edwardians who founded art galleries across Britain had a keen sense that art had a role to play in British culture, despite approaching it from varied perspectives. As Woodson-Boulton puts it succinctly: ‘Ultimately, cities built art museums because people invested art with unique powers.’<sup>58</sup> The acquisition of Anderson’s work must be seen in this context: it was not mere decoration, or another object to fill up space; the paintings selected for, and bequeathed to, public art galleries were understood to have a range of social, moral, as well as aesthetic purposes.

These newly founded institutions perpetuated a gender power imbalance; their committees were all male, and the bulk of their collections comprised of art by men. However, their contemporary art-focused acquisition policies offered *some* opportunities to women artists. Many of these new public institutions, such as the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, or more locally, The New Art Gallery Walsall and New Walk Museum and Art Gallery Leicester, began their lives with annual exhibitions selling works (and selling tickets for entry). These were keen to attract artists, often included watercolours (a medium favoured by and promoted to women), and as such provided new opportunities for women to show and sell their work and to participate in professional networks. At the Liverpool Autumn Exhibition of 1873, for example, works by women made up 7.9% of the oil paintings exhibited, and 20% of watercolours (compared with 7.6% of oil paintings at the Royal Academy that year).<sup>59</sup> Liverpool, not London was the first place to allow a woman to serve on a selection committee for an annual exhibition (Henrietta Rae in 1893).<sup>60</sup> In the twenty five years after purchasing Anderson’s *Elaine* in 1871, the Walker purchased a further nine works by women from its Autumn Exhibition (compared to seventy six paintings by men).<sup>61</sup> I am not claiming that any of these Victorian regional collections embodied some sort of feminist utopia; women’s work never made up much more than a tiny portion of their permanent collections (1% at the Walker by 1887, for example).<sup>62</sup> But it is remarkable that art made by women was actively acquired and exhibited by public-funded institutions, in a period when the very notion of a woman as an artist challenged what people thought about the capacities and

identities of men and women. It is even more noteworthy considering that these regional collections attributed an enormous social-reforming power to art works, and that their purchases were subject to considerable scrutiny since they were funded in part by the public purse.

The Wolverhampton art-viewing public would already have been familiar with Anderson's work. Another painting, *The Water Carrier* (untraced) had been exhibited at the 1884 Wolverhampton Fine Art and Industrial Exhibition, on loan from a local art collector, J. W. Webster.<sup>63</sup> The Fine Arts element of the 1884 exhibition was displayed to inaugurate the newly completed art gallery building, which had been paid for by an anonymous donor. At the opening of the exhibition, the benefactor was dramatically revealed to be Philip Horsman, a local building contractor (who also had a substantial art collection, later donated to the gallery). Both the exhibition, and the newly instituted gallery, sought to promote art for public social, moral, and aesthetic improvement. They were also presented as a matter of local industrial pride.<sup>64</sup> The Black Country was not just a place of industrial capital, but boasting cultural capital too. Its emergent art-consuming class was, the *Birmingham Post* suggested, tasteful but 'unpretending', and keen to serve its community by loaning art works to the exhibition. 'Few visitors to the Black Country', it opined:

can have any idea of the wealth of pictorial art which enriches the walls of many a homely and unpretending dwelling planted in the very thick of the smoke and clatter of its forges. It is not the least important of the uses of an exhibition such as this that it brings to light these hoarded treasures, and gladdens the eyes and hearts of thousands with valuable art gems ... which must otherwise sparkle unseen by mortal eye outside the family visiting circle.<sup>65</sup>

Writing in 1888 after the permanent opening of Wolverhampton Art Gallery, one London art critic's perspective underscores the *Birmingham Post*'s embattled sense of local pride – and also the perception that art was a means of social amelioration for places choked with industrial smoke: 'In few towns in England was an art-gallery so imperatively required as at Wolverhampton', noted Charles Whibley in the *Magazine of Art*,

for, speaking frankly – to a stranger at least – it is a dismal place ... the factory chimneys ... obtrude themselves on us everywhere, pouring forth volumes of smoke, veiling the sky and seeming to blacken the surrounding landscape. A picture gallery in the centre of such a town as this is an inexpressible relief, and cannot fail to exercise a beneficial influence on the inhabitants.<sup>66</sup>

The appearance of Anderson's work in the Midlands is emphatically part of the sense of local engagement with the wider art world that the *Birmingham Post* articulates. Indeed,

the newspaper gave her something of a promotion, listing her as one of the ‘living celebrities’ proudly on display in 1884 alongside President of the Royal Academy Frederic Leighton, and John Everett Millais, a founding member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood who had recently been awarded a Baronetcy for his services to art.<sup>67</sup> Displaying a painting by Anderson at the Wolverhampton Exhibition was a means of staking a local attachment not just to the London art world, of which she was demonstrably part (exhibiting regularly at both the Royal Academy and fashionable and controversial locations such as the Grosvenor Gallery), but also the wider network of exhibitions in Liverpool, Manchester, Dublin, and Glasgow to which she contributed almost annually. It forged a Black Country cultural connection to Anderson’s origins in continental Europe, her transatlantic early career, and to her contemporary situation as a resident of artistic, cultivated Capri. Further, the subject matter of her paintings – *The Water Carrier’s* exotic Orientalism, *The Song’s* edifying classicism – fitted well into the interests of municipal collections and local private collectors.<sup>68</sup> Wolverhampton was able to show off both the civic-mindedness of its industrialists, who loaned their art collections to the exhibition, and their cultivated taste. The connection to local industrialists (whether as building-funding benefactor, generous painting loaner, or bequest-giver) runs throughout the early history of public art galleries in the Midlands. Industry was not perceived as an embarrassing brush with filthy lucre, nor as operating in contradiction to an ethereal art world.

Prior to its purchase, *The Song* had been loaned to Wolverhampton Art Gallery for a temporary exhibition by a Leeds resident, Mr Dixon. In 1885 and early 1886, Dixon offered the gallery the painting for £350; the committee declined ‘after careful consideration’, stating that they ‘could not afford’ this price. Later in 1886 the painting – now in the possession of a Mr George Stannage of 77 London Road Leicester, was offered to Wolverhampton for £250; the committee minute book records that ‘as the price was so low for such a valuable work it should be secured for the Art Gallery.’<sup>69</sup> The cost of Anderson’s work was one prime motivating factor (even the register of its merit ‘a valuable work’ has financial overtones). But it would be wrong to assume that Wolverhampton acquired a work by a female artist only because it was offered at a low price; the committee evidently regarded Anderson as an artist whose work was aesthetically important. Anderson priced her paintings at higher sums than many of her male, let alone female contemporaries; £250 was a good price for a painting of this size – considerably less than the £840 for which it was listed when exhibited at the Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts in 1882; it had also been the third most expensive painting (out of 1435 exhibits) at the Liverpool Autumn Exhibition of 1881.<sup>70</sup> There was evidently a sense that this was a high quality artistic work which could contribute towards the aspirations of the gallery.

The significance of Wolverhampton’s purchase of *The Song* is compounded when one considers that Anderson’s painting was one of only five that Wolverhampton had purchased



by 1886; the remainder of its pre-1887 collection came entirely from donations.<sup>71</sup> Three of these acquisitions were landscapes, and only one a figurative image, Richard Redgrave's [\*Babes in the Wood\*](#) (1862). *The Song* shared this painting's sylvan setting, but differed in its lack of explicit narrative; of all five paintings purchased *The Song* was arguably the most innovative in its subject matter, and could even be understood as participating in contemporary debates around 'art for art's sake'. It was over thirty years before Anderson was joined by another female artist at Wolverhampton, with the 1917 donation of Elizabeth Stanhope Forbes' [\*The Edge of the Wood\*](#) (1894). But it was not until the mid-1940s, almost sixty years after the purchase of *The Song* that Wolverhampton actively purchased another oil painting by a female artist, acquiring Enid Marjorie Vale's [\*The Mountain Barrier\*](#) in 1945, and soon after in 1947, Laura Knight's [\*Sundown\*](#) (1940–7). These were significant purchases; Vale was a lauded local artist, while Knight had been elected a Royal Academician in 1936 – the first woman to hold such a post since the eighteenth century. They were also unusual; as Katy Deepwell has shown, women made up roughly a third of exhibiting artists in the interwar period – and less than 10% of museum purchases.<sup>72</sup>

Anderson's work was well known in the Midlands before entering any of these public collections. From 1855–99 she was a regular exhibitor at the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists' annual exhibition of oil paintings held in their city-centre New Street gallery, and her work was well reviewed and described in detail in the local press. These extensive descriptions have enabled me to provide – for the first time – a secure date for the first exhibition of *The Children's Story Book* (fig.1).<sup>73</sup> The painting was exhibited as *The Story* at the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists' and in Glasgow in 1872, and in 1881 at the Leicester Autumn Fine Art Exhibition.<sup>74</sup> By 1890 it was in the collection of William Millward of Edgbaston, Birmingham, to which I will return. Christies, Manson and Woods sold this collection on 8 March 1890, and the *Story Book* was purchased by a Mr Bailey for £162.15s.<sup>75</sup> By 1892, the painting had passed into the hands of a Mrs Turton. I have been unable to find out anything about Mrs Turton. Could she have been one of the women who participated in what Cherry refers to as 'the culture of matronage' (as opposed to patronage), women who actively supported other women artists by buying their works?<sup>76</sup> In 1892, Mrs Turton bequeathed the painting to Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, the first oil painting by a female artist to enter the collection.<sup>77</sup>

The painting in Leicester (fig.4) is possibly *Ragazza Napoletana* (Neapolitan Girl), exhibited in 1886 in the East Room of London's fashionable Grosvenor Gallery alongside avant-garde works by [\*George Clausen\*](#) and [\*Evelyn Pickering\*](#) (later de Morgan).<sup>78</sup> 17% of works exhibited at the Grosvenor were by women artists – still a tiny fraction, but considerably higher than the Royal Academy. Only a very small portion of the female artists selected were exhibited in the prestigious East and West galleries, but Anderson's work was consistently placed in these sought-after spaces, with six out of the eight paintings she exhibited at the Grosvenor

reaching these two key rooms, further testimony to the esteem with which she was held in the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>79</sup> *Ragazza Napoletana* was also displayed at the 1886 Liverpool Autumn Exhibition, where it was listed at £31.10s.<sup>80</sup> By 1894, the painting now in Leicester was in the collection of Henry Snow, a prosperous Leicester boot and shoe manufacturer.<sup>81</sup> Snow seems to have owned two other paintings by Anderson, *Meditation* and *Embarrassed with Riches*, which he had loaned to the 1882 Fine Art Exhibition at Leicester.<sup>82</sup> Snow's will permitted the Leicester Art Gallery Committee to choose paintings from his collection; they selected fig.4 along with two landscapes by [George Cole](#) and [Henry Dawson](#).<sup>83</sup> This bequest made Anderson's scene of Neapolitan childhood the second work by a female artist to enter Leicester's permanent collection, after Henrietta Ward's historical scene *Palissy the Potter* (1866), purchased in 1887.

Less is known about the dates and exhibition histories of the two paintings at The New Art Gallery Walsall. I have been unable to securely identify either of them with the paintings that Anderson exhibited in Britain and France between 1857–99. *Scheherazade* (fig.7) and *Pet Canary* (fig.3) were bequeathed (with these titles) in 1931 by Henry James Thrustans, a former resident of Walsall who was listed in the 1893 Walsall directory the *Red Book* as a timber merchant.<sup>84</sup> The two paintings by Anderson were among eight other works offered in Thrustans' will, and 'selected as suitable for exhibition' by the Principal of Walsall School of Art, and the Chair of the Free Library and Art Gallery Committee.<sup>85</sup> They became the second and third paintings by a female artist to enter The New Art Gallery Walsall's collection, after a Lady Holden donated local artist Edith M. Elliot's [Still Life: Flowers in a Bowl](#) (c.1890-1911) in 1913. Anderson's works are likely the earliest paintings made by a woman in The New Art Gallery Walsall's collections. *Scheherazade* and *Pet Canary* had previously hung on the walls of Thrustans' Devon home 'The Mount' in Ilfracombe. The remainder of Thrustans' collection comprised English domestic interiors, landscapes, and images of farm animals, all painted in the nineteenth century, and all by male artists.<sup>86</sup> Anderson's tender portraits of female subjects – and the dramatic, vibrant colour palette of her Orientalist *Scheherazade* in particular – stand out as quite distinct from these other works collected by Thrustans.

The same is true of the earlier collection, auctioned in 1890, of William Millward of Edgbaston, which had contained *The Story Book*, as well as two other works by Anderson, *Buttercups* and *The Reverie* (untraced). The remainder of this collection of 118 paintings comprised landscapes and seascapes, depictions of towns and buildings, farm animals, and a smattering of portraits of plaintive women.<sup>87</sup> The Millward collection contained no other Orientalising works, no classical subject matter, nor any works connected to the aesthetic movement – that is, nothing that situates either the Millward or Thrustans collections in the fashionable metropolitan Grosvenor Gallery art world to which Anderson herself regularly contributed. Most of the works date from the 1850s onwards, and Anderson was the only

female artist present. Anderson's images seem to have been fitted more generally into a more traditional taste for nineteenth-century landscapes.

The fact that Millward, Thrustans and Snow owned more than one painting by Anderson is noteworthy. In her survey of patronage of women artists, Gerrish Nunn suggests that works by women tended to be purchased as one-off, individual pieces.<sup>88</sup> These three Midlands collectors, however, evidently sought out works specifically by Anderson. In Thrustans' case, *Scheherazade* and *Pet Canary* are markedly different works, in terms of subject matter, colour and technique; this might suggest a broader interest in Anderson as an artist, rather than a personal engagement with a specific work. Nonetheless, Anderson's works were isolated exceptions in collections composed otherwise exclusively of works by contemporary male artists. Millward, Thrustans and Snow were members of a new class of prosperous middle-class business men and industrialists, a group of new nineteenth-century art collectors who were important for the commercial survival of Victorian women artists, buying and in some instances commissioning works. Other collectors of Anderson's work were also members of this class; her first sale in Britain (*An American Market Basket*, exhibited at the Society of British Artists in 1855) was to a Mr Fallowes of Manchester for the princely sum of £315, and her work also featured in the collection of Pre-Raphaelite patron and Leeds stockbroker Thomas Plint.<sup>89</sup> Diane Macleod's study of art patronage among middle-class industrialists demonstrates the importance of contemporary Victorian art in middle-class identity formation, showing their distinction from the aristocracy.<sup>90</sup> Anderson's fashionable works had no small role to play in male, as well as female self-fashioning.

Millward's large collection included paintings by Royal Academicians, and Associates of the Royal Academy, including E. W. Cooke, J. C. Horsley, and Henri Le Jeune. Despite this well-regarded coterie of artists, however, only ten other works (seven of which were by the landscape painter Henry Dawson) sold for a higher price than Anderson's *Children's Story Book*; her work was evidently considered financially valuable, and far out-priced work by the Royal Academicians and Associates of the Royal Academy in Millward's collection. This is extremely unusual; work by female artists usually sold at a much lower price than their male counterparts. Her status as a professional, commercial artist is evident.

## Conclusion

Anderson's paintings were either the first, or among the first, works by women to enter these four Midlands civic institutions. The presence of women's work in newly founded public municipal galleries complicates historical discussions of the gendered division of public and private space in the nineteenth-century urban environment. As Davidoff and Hall put it:

public coincided with the productive world of work, of politics and of men; the private with the world of home, of women, children, and servants. Men had access to both spheres and moved constantly between them. Women, on the other hand, were supposed to occupy only the private sphere.<sup>91</sup>

Davidoff and Hall are quite clear that this was only ever a partial division, but emphasise how influential this ideal separation was on middle-class life and identity.<sup>92</sup> During the nineteenth century, middle-class families moved out of the city into newly built suburbs, removing respectable middle-class women (like Anderson) from urban centres, and embedding them more firmly in the domestic setting. Yet Anderson's artistic endeavours, and their visions of creative feminine agency were newly installed at the heart of the urban environment, her status as a professional female artist a challenge to the gendered public/private divide.<sup>93</sup>

However, as Woodson-Boulton has demonstrated, an underlying premise of the nineteenth-century municipal museum was that it reinstated the morally upright domestic environment in the heart of the city.<sup>94</sup> Women, children and servants – the world of the domestic – proliferate Anderson's images; their presence in the urban public space of the museum arguably contributes to its further domestication. Yet the outdoor and often Southern Italian settings of Anderson's child paintings do not always fit comfortably into the more conventional images of the Victorian home. And the public, permanent display of her classicising and Orientalising images might operate as a challenge to any perceived domestic submissiveness – especially considering their subject matter of adult women taking control of narrative, the paintings' formal engagement with new artistic developments, and the fact that the women who modelled for these images, and to some extent were embodied in them, were likely Southern Italian servants, subverting class as well as gendered expectations. In Anderson's paintings, a female artist put working-class women on public display not as sexualised objects, but as creative agents. The presence of her work in Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Leicester and later Walsall might have quietly upended the purported middle-class domesticated respectability of the public museum.

Further, the presence of work by a commercially successful female artist like Anderson in civic galleries across the region offered a precedent for a new generation of Art School educated female artists and designers. By the end of the nineteenth century, women in Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Walsall and Leicester could train in art and design at local Art Schools. From the 1880s onwards, Birmingham School of Art admitted female students, and also employed women as teachers (although their careers were still severely limited by the notion of the 'female amateur', as John Swift has shown).<sup>95</sup> Celebrated graduates include Kate and Myra Bunce, Georgie Gaskin, and Florence Camm, several of whom exhibited at

local exhibitions; a number of works by the Bunce sisters were displayed, for example, at the 1896 Walsall Art Exhibition.<sup>96</sup>

My analysis of Anderson's work has sought not to graft another woman onto a male dominated artistic canon, but to show the ways in which her work might be understood to offer a different perspective on art making, and art collecting in a specific region. Anderson's status as a Victorian woman artist, whose works were popular among middle-class Midlands industrialists has undoubtedly served to marginalise her from the art historical record, which has been overwhelmingly condescending towards both women and regional histories. But these aspects of her work and identity are arguably what makes her work so significant; it sheds new light on gender and public culture in the late nineteenth-century Midlands.

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Acknowledgments: Thanks to Julie Brown (The New Art Gallery Walsall), Tess Radcliffe and Carol Thompson (Wolverhampton Art Gallery), Zelina Garland and Victoria Osborne (Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery) and Simon Lake (New Walk Museum and Art Gallery Leicester) for sharing their knowledge about the collections they curate, and for providing access to object files for these works. Archivists at Walsall and Wolverhampton Local Studies Centres were extremely helpful, and thanks are particularly due to Mimi Buchanan for visiting Wolverhampton Archives on my behalf during her Undergraduate Research Scholarship in the College of Arts and Law, University of Birmingham. Zoë Thomas read a draft and offered detailed, helpful and enthusiastic feedback. Thanks also to Michael Ledger-Lomas, Katherine Harloe, and Rhiannon Nichols for their research assistance.

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<sup>1</sup> P.G. Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists* (London, 1987), p.2.

<sup>2</sup> For further exploration of Clayton's work, see P.G. Nunn, 'Reviews and Re-views, *English Female Artists*, by Ellen Creathorne Clayton', *Woman's Art Journal*, 3.2 (1982), pp.57–60.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen C. Clayton, *English Female Artists* (London, 1876), p.7.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, W. Mercer, 'Sophie Anderson', *Notes and Queries* (12 September 1914), p.214.

<sup>5</sup> L. Villari, 'Capri', *English Illustrated Magazine* (November 1887), pp.88–9.

<sup>6</sup> Charlotte Yeldham, 'Anderson, Sophia (1823-1903)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), online edition, January 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Deborah Cherry and Janice Helland, 'Local places/global space: new narratives of women's art in the nineteenth century', in D. Cherry and J. Helland (eds), *Local/Global. Women Artists in the Nineteenth Century* (Aldershot, 2006), p.11. See also J. Pomeroy (ed), *Intrepid Women. Victorian Artists Travel* (Aldershot, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Edwin Cerio, 'The Reformers', *London Mercury*, 11 (1924), p.242.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, pp.244–5.

<sup>10</sup> For further discussion see Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London, 1993), pp.12–13.

<sup>11</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, pp.53–64; Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists*, pp.44–53; Alison Smith, *The Victorian Nude. Sexuality, morality and art* (Manchester, 1996), pp.37–44.

<sup>12</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, p.98. On London's art market, see P. Fletcher and A. Helmreich (eds), *The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London, 1850–1939* (Manchester, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, pp.65–77.

<sup>14</sup> For a recent discussion and extensive bibliography, see Patricia de Montfort and Robyne Erica Calvert (co-ordinators), 'Still Invisible?', *British Art Studies*, 2 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-02/still-invisible>, accessed 14 December 2017.

<sup>15</sup> See M. Taylor and M. Wolff, *The Victorians Since 1901: Histories, Representations, and Revisions* (Manchester, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> For an overview, see D. Peters Corbett and L. Perry, 'Introduction', in D. Peters Corbett and L. Perry (eds), *English Art 1860–1914. Modern Artists and Identity* (New Brunswick NJ, 2001), pp.1–12.

<sup>17</sup> For a recent art critical example, see Jonathan Jones, 'Reflections: Van Eyck and the Pre-Raphaelites review – not worth a look', *Guardian* (28 September 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/sep/28/reflections-van-eyck-and-the-pre-raphaelites-review-not-worth-a-look>, accessed 14 December 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Caroline Arscott, 'Sentimentality in Victorian Paintings', in G. Waterfield (ed), *Art for the People. Culture in the Slums of Late Victorian Britain* (London, 1994), p.72.

<sup>19</sup> See J. Sellars, *Women's Works* (Liverpool, National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside: 1988), p.1.

<sup>20</sup> Amy Woodson-Boulton, *Transformative Beauty. Art Museums in Industrial Britain* (Stanford CA, 2012), pp.82–107.

<sup>21</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, pp.120–1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, pp.126–7.

<sup>23</sup> Cited in Maria Quirk, 'Portraiture and Patronage: Women, Reputation, and the Business of Selling Art, 1880–1914', *Visual Culture in Britain*, 17.2 (2016), p.189. I am grateful to Zoë Thomas for this reference.

<sup>24</sup> 'Birmingham Royal Society of Artists', *Birmingham Daily Post* (29 August 1872), p.5;

'Birmingham Royal Society of Artists', *Birmingham Daily Post* (13 December 1871), p.6.

<sup>25</sup> Sotheby's London, 'Lot 96', *A Great British Collection: The pictures collected by Sir David and Lady Scott*, auction catalogue (19 November 2008).

<sup>26</sup> Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence. The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (London, 1998), pp.51–71.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, pp.23–8; Robert M. Polhemus, 'John Millais's Children: Faith, Erotics, and *The Woodsman's Daughter*', *Victorian Studies*, 7.3 (1994), pp.433–50.

<sup>28</sup> Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence*, pp.28–9.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p.33.

<sup>30</sup> 'Leicester Corporation Permanent Art Gallery', *Leicester Chronicle* (1 December 1894), p.12; Ronald Moore, 'Artist due for a revival', *Leicester Mercury* (July 1972); Letter from R. M. Paisey to P. Gerrish Nunn (21 September 1982), New Walk Museum and Art Gallery, Leicester, object file for Sophie Anderson, *Neapolitan Child*.

<sup>31</sup> Exhibition dates based on a list compiled from contemporary catalogues of exhibitions in London, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool by Pamela Gerrish Nunn, object file for Sophie Anderson, *Neapolitan Child*, New Walk Museum and Art Gallery (hereafter Nunn, *List*).

<sup>32</sup> See Gabriella Gribaudi 'Images of the south - the "Mezzogiorno" as seen by insiders and outsiders' in R. Lumley and J. Morris (eds), *New History of the Italian South. The Mezzogiorno Revisited* (Exeter, 1997).

<sup>33</sup> Charlotte Yeldham, *Women Artists in Nineteenth-Century France and England*, 1 (New York and London, 1984), p.116.

<sup>34</sup> Cerio, 'The Reformers', pp.243–4.

<sup>35</sup> Sotheby's London, 'Lot 57', *British and Continental Paintings*, auction catalogue (3 October 2007).

<sup>36</sup> As Smith points out, however, when some later-Victorian female artists painted nude figures, they were never regarded as serious intellectual endeavours like those of their male counterparts. Smith, *Victorian Nude*, pp.192–6.

<sup>37</sup> An image of this work is available on Bridgeman Images (BAL11024).

<sup>38</sup> Nunn, *List*.

<sup>39</sup> Yeldham, *Women Artists*, I, p.173.

<sup>40</sup> Wolverhampton Art Gallery, object file for Sophie Anderson, *The Song*.

<sup>41</sup> Tim Barringer, 'Art, Music, and the Emotions in the Aesthetic Movement', 19: *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 23 (2016) DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.784>, accessed 18 December 2017.

<sup>42</sup> Griselda Pollock, 'Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity', in *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and Histories of Art* (London and New York, 1988), p.87.

<sup>43</sup> For a general introduction, see Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (London, 2003). On the scandalous sexualised vision of *The Arabian Nights* in the 1880s see Dane Kennedy, "'Captain Burton's Oriental Muck Heap": The Book of the Thousand Nights and the Uses of Orientalism', *Journal of British Studies*, 39.3 (2000), pp.317–39. On *The Arabian Nights*, childhood and domesticity, Melissa Dickson, 'Jane Eyre's "Arabian Tales": Reading and Remembering the Arabian Nights', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 18.2 (2013), pp.198–212.

<sup>44</sup> E. Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (London, 2000), p.84.

<sup>45</sup> E. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978).

<sup>46</sup> See Linda Nochlin, 'The Imaginary Orient', in L. Nochlin, *The Politics of Vision. Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (Boulder CO, 1989), pp.33–59; Mary Roberts, 'Contested Terrains: Women Orientalists and the Colonial Harem', in Mary Roberts and Jill Beaulieu (eds), *Orientalism's interlocutors: painting, architecture, photography* (Durham NC, 2002), pp.179–203.

<sup>47</sup> Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism. Race, Femininity and Representation* (London, 1996), p.179.

<sup>48</sup> These include: *Scandal in the Harem* (untraced, but engraved in fig.10), exhibited 1877 at the Pall Mall Gallery London, the Paris Salon, and the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists'; *Zelica* (untraced), exhibited 1881 at the Royal Academy and 1882 at Glasgow. *Zelica* is a tragic female character in Thomas Moore's 1817 Orientalist poem *Lalla Rookh*. Exhibition dates based on Nunn, *List* and Roger Billcliffe (ed), *The Royal Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts*.

*A Dictionary of Exhibitors*, 1 (Glasgow, 1990), p.60. Undated Orientalist works *In the Harem, Tunis*, oil on canvas, 75.5 x 63 cm, which appears on the front cover of Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism* and as plate 27, and *Toklihili: The Young Indian Princess*, oil on canvas, 103 x 66 cm (Art Gallery of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada). On which see Alison McQueen, *Nineteenth-Century Art: Highlights from the Tanenbaum Collection at the Art Gallery of Hamilton* (London, 2015), p.43. Little is known about this painting or its subject; I suspect it might be *Tchlikely (the dangerous)*, a study for which was exhibited at Liverpool (priced £63) in 1876 (Nunn, *List*), and at Glasgow in 1877 (priced £42; Billcliffe, *Royal Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts*, p.60); a version simply listed as *Tchlikely (the dangerous)* is priced at £178.10 at the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists' in the same year (presumably the finished version, to merit such a significant price difference) (Nunn, *List*). This is described as 'An Eastern figure: a girl, wonderful in its intense realism' in 'Royal Birmingham Society of Artists', *Birmingham Daily Post* (21 August 1876), p.5. *The Water Carrier* (before 1884) was another orientalist subject, exhibited at Wolverhampton in 1884. See note 67 below.

<sup>49</sup> Clayton, *English Female Artists* (1876) makes no mention of Anderson travelling, nor do any references to Anderson having travelled further than Capri appear in the press. Given the contemporary fascination with women artists who travelled outside of Europe, it seems unlikely that these sources would have omitted a reference to any Eastern expeditions undertaken by Anderson – and the ill health that motivated her relocation to Capri would very presumably have limited the possibilities of any such excursions.

<sup>50</sup> McQueen, *Nineteenth-Century Art*, p.43.

<sup>51</sup> Nelson Moe, *View From Vesuvius : Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley, 2002).

<sup>52</sup> See Jan Marsh (ed) *Black Victorians. Black People in British Art 1800-1900* (Manchester, 2005), cat.nos. 71, 72, 83, 99.

<sup>53</sup> Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism*, p.2.

<sup>54</sup> P. van der Veer, 'Colonial Cosmopolitanism', in S. Vertovec and R. Cohen (eds), *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism. Theory, Context, and Practice* (Oxford, 2002), pp.165–179.

<sup>55</sup> These are: *Foundling Girls in the Chapel* (undated), oil on canvas, 68 x 54.8 cm, Foundling Museum, London; *Capri Girl with Flowers* (undated), oil on canvas, 42 x 52 cm, Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum, Bournemouth; *Elaine* (1870), oil on canvas, 158.4 x 240.7 cm, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

<sup>56</sup> S. J. Viccars, 'The Leicester Corporation Art Gallery', *Magazine of Art* (January 1893), p.12.

<sup>57</sup> A. Woodson-Boulton, '"Industry without Art is Brutality": Aesthetic Ideology and Social Practice in Victorian Art Museums', *Journal of British Studies*, 46.1 (2007), p.52.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, p.49.

<sup>59</sup> Sellars, *Women's Works*, p.2. When the Tate opened in 1897, 1.9% of its paintings were by women. See Alicia Foster, *Tate Women Artists* (London, 2004), p.7. The RA figures are compiled from the 1873 catalogue, *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, 1873* (London, 1873). Of 1112 oil paintings, eighty five were by women. There were no watercolours exhibited at the RA, but miniatures proved a comparable area for women artists, who made up 30% of the fifty two miniatures exhibited.

<sup>60</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, p.66.

<sup>61</sup> Sellars, *Women's Works*, p.1.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, p.15.



<sup>63</sup> J. W. Webster, letter to Mr Councillor Jones, Chairman of the Fine Art Gallery, 29 March 1886, Art Committee Minutes, Wolverhampton Archives and Local Studies, WOL-C-ART/1.

<sup>64</sup> For a broader examination of the role of nineteenth-century museums in fostering a local sense of industrial identity, see Kate Hill, 'Manufactures, archaeology and by-gones: making a sense of place in civic museums, 1850–1914', *International Journal of Regional and Local History*, 8.1 (2013), pp.54–74.

<sup>65</sup> 'Wolverhampton Exhibition. The Pictures (first notice)', *Birmingham Daily Post* (9 June 1884), p.5.

<sup>66</sup> Charles Whibley, 'Wolverhampton Municipal Art Gallery', *Magazine of Art* (January 1888), pp.65–6.

<sup>67</sup> 'Wolverhampton Exhibition. The Pictures (first notice)', *Birmingham Daily Post* (9 June 1884), p.5.

<sup>68</sup> *The Water-Carrier* is described as 'a characteristic specimen of Oriental beauty in a blue kerchief, with large crescent-shaped earrings, and a water-jar in her hand.' See 'Wolverhampton Exhibition. The Pictures (second article)', *Birmingham Daily Post* (20 June 1884), p.7.

<sup>69</sup> Art Committee Minutes, Wolverhampton Archives and Local Studies, WOL-C-ART/1, p.184; p.198.

<sup>70</sup> Billcliffe, *Royal Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts*, p.60; *Liverpool Autumn Exhibition of Modern Pictures* (Liverpool, 1881), p.38.

<sup>71</sup> This data is limited to oil paintings as I have compiled it from a search through acquisition dates for Wolverhampton Art Gallery on [www.artuk.org](http://www.artuk.org). The others were James Webb, [After the Wreck: On the French Coast](#) (1870; purchased 1886); Charles Edward Johnson, [Mountain and Flood, Sgurr nan Gillean, Skye](#) (1876, purchased 1885); Henry Hadfield Cubley, [On the Derwent, Derbyshire](#) (1886; purchased 1886); Richard Redgrave, [Babes in the Wood](#) (1862, purchased 1886).

<sup>72</sup> K. Deepwell, *Women Artists between the Wars: 'A Fair Field and no Favour'* (Manchester, 2010). I am grateful to Zoë Thomas for this reference.

<sup>73</sup> 'Autumn Fine Art Exhibition', *Leicester Chronicle* (1 October 1881), p.3.

<sup>74</sup> Nunn, *List*; Billcliffe, *Royal Glasgow Institute of Fine Arts*, p.60.

<sup>75</sup> 'Sale of Pictures', *Birmingham Daily Post* (10 March 1890), p.5.

<sup>76</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, pp.102–4.

<sup>77</sup> Two watercolours by Helen Allingham, [Valewood Farm](#), and [Old Cottages at Pinner](#) were acquired from the Art Gallery Purchase Fund in 1891. See Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery database, [www.bmagic.org.uk](http://www.bmagic.org.uk), accessed 18 December 2017.

<sup>78</sup> For a contemporary review of the 1886 East Room, see 'The Grosvenor Gallery', *Illustrated London News* (22 May 1886), p.555.

<sup>79</sup> Christopher Newall, *The Grosvenor Gallery Exhibitions. Change and continuity in the Victorian Art World* (Cambridge, 1995), p.24; p.48.

<sup>80</sup> Nunn, *List*.

<sup>81</sup> 'Births, Deaths, Marriages and Obituaries', *Leicester Chronicle* (10 January 1894), p.4.

<sup>82</sup> 'The Fine Art Exhibition at the Museum Buildings', *Leicester Chronicle* (23 September 1882), p.5.

<sup>83</sup> The other paintings selected from Snow's collection were H. T. Dawson, *The Thames* (1874) (now labelled as *The River Tamar*); George Cole, *Fittleworth Old Mill* (1881).

'Leicester Corporation Permanent Art Gallery', *Leicester Chronicle* (1 December 1894), p.12.

<sup>84</sup> *The Walsall Annual Red Book for 1893* (Walsall, 1892), p.105.

<sup>85</sup> Free Library and Art Gallery Committee minute book, Walsall Local History Centre, 150/1, pp.280–283.

<sup>86</sup> These are: George Cole, [\*Horses with Timber Wagon\*](#) (1880); Charles Waller Shayer, [\*Brown Cow Standing\*](#) (1826-1914); W. S. P. Henderson, [\*Fair Day\*](#) (1856); W. S. P. Henderson, [\*Welsh Interior\*](#) (1836-74); Charles Jones, *Sheep* (1875); James Clarke Waite, [\*Penny Whistle\*](#) (1863-1885); J. O. Banks, [\*At the Fountain\*](#); William Shayer, [\*White Cow Standing\*](#) (1810-79).

<sup>87</sup> For a full list see 'Sale of Pictures', *Birmingham Daily Post* (10 March 1890), p.5.

<sup>88</sup> P. G. Nunn, 'The Mid-Victorian Woman Artist, 1850-79', unpublished PhD thesis, University College London (1982), pp.247–250. See also Quirk, 'Portraiture and Patronage'.

<sup>89</sup> See Yeldham, 'Sophia Anderson'.

<sup>90</sup> D. Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class. Money and the Making of Cultural Identity* (Cambridge, 1996).

<sup>91</sup> L. Davidoff and C. Hall, 'The Architecture of Public and Private Life. English Middle-Class Society in a Provincial Town 1780-1850', in D. Fraser and A. Sutcliffe (eds), *The Pursuit of Urban History* (London, 1983), p.326.

<sup>92</sup> Cherry and Helland (eds) *Local/Global* provides a recent feminist art historical re-evaluation of this debate.

<sup>93</sup> On the perceived social transgressions of the professional woman artist, see P. De Montfort, 'Louise Jopling: A Gendered Reading of Late Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Woman's Art Journal*, 34.2 (2013), pp.29–38.

<sup>94</sup> Woodson-Boulton, *Transformative Beauty*, pp.4–5; 54–68.

<sup>95</sup> John Swift, 'Women and Art Education at Birmingham's Art Schools, 1880-1920: Social Class, Opportunity and Aspiration', *Journal of Art and Design Education*, 18.3 (1999), pp.317–27.

<sup>96</sup> *Official Catalogue of the Fifth Exhibition of Pictures at the Art Gallery, Goodall Street, Walsall* (Walsall, 1896), cat.nos.102, 111, 141.

## Images

Fig.1 Sophie Anderson, *The Children's Story Book* (c.1872), oil on canvas, 100.3 x 125.7 cm © Birmingham Museums Trust.

Fig.2 Emily Mary Osborn, *The Governess* (1860), oil on canvas, 34.9 x 29.2 cm, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund. Used under the YCBA's Terms of Use: <https://britishart.yale.edu/using-images-works-public-domain>.

Fig.3 Sophie Anderson, *Pet Canary* (undated), oil on canvas, 29 x 24 cm ©New Art Gallery Walsall. The painting was partially conserved, hence the brighter colours in the bottom left hand corner.

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- Fig.4 Sophie Anderson, *Neapolitan Child* (undated, possibly 1886), oil on canvas, 31.8 x 37.7 cm ©New Walk Museum and Art Gallery Leicester.
- Fig.5 Sophie Anderson, *The Song* (1881), oil on canvas, 145 x 200.5 cm ©Wolverhampton Art Gallery.
- Fig.6 Albert Joseph Moore, *A Musician* (c. 1867), oil on canvas, 28.6 x 38.7 cm, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund. Used under the YCBA's Terms of Use: <https://britishart.yale.edu/using-images-works-public-domain>.
- Fig.7 Sophie Anderson, *Scheherazade* (undated), oil on canvas, 50 x 41 cm ©New Art Gallery Walsall.
- Fig.8 Joanna Boyce Wells, *Fanny Eaton* (1861), oil on paper laid to linen, 17.1 x 13.7 cm, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund. Used under the YCBA's Terms of Use: <https://britishart.yale.edu/using-images-works-public-domain>.
- Fig.9 Arthur Boyd Houghton, *The Sultan Pardons Scheherazade* (1865), wood engraving, 20 x 14 cm. Frontispiece to *Dalziel's Arabian Nights' Entertainments* (London, 1865). Image scanned by George Landow for Victorian Web, used under their terms and conditions. <http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/houghton/1.html>.
- Fig.10 Unknown engraver, 'Scandal in the Harem, from the painting by Mrs Anderson in the French Gallery, Pall Mall', *Graphic* (13 January 1877), p.1. Author's collection.