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Joan Mark. *A Stranger in Her Native Land: Alice Fletcher and the American Indians.* (Women in the West.) xx + 428 pp., illus., bibls., index. Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 1988. $35 (cloth); $16.95 (paper).

This is an important, frustrating, ultimately annoying book. It is important because the attempted careers of women in male-dominated scientific contexts deserve close, sympathetic analysis, and because Alice Fletcher presents a particularly sad and instructive case. It is frustrating and annoying because Joan Mark, despite assiduous research, only dimly perceives and cannot articulate the significance of her subject. Rather than engage in either playful or serious analysis, she occasionally drops suggestive notes (see below), then plods along dutifully to the next biographical moment. She never returns; there is no reflection, and no summary chapter.

The key to understanding Fletcher probably does not lie in possible childhood sexual abuse (pp. 8–16) or in the female models of Maria Mitchell, Julia Ward Howe, and Mary Livermore. By the early 1880s, when she began her career in ethnography and Indian politics, Fletcher was in her forties, and she was a completely male-identified, Victorian woman. Although she lived and worked with other white women and Indian men (notably Francis LaFlesche, whom she legally adopted and safely loved), it was always and only white male approbation that she sought and valued. Whether in shaping the Dawes Act in order to turn Indians into civilized farmers or in writing Omaha ethnography, Fletcher never seriously or openly challenged the professionally established boundaries of thought of her male colleagues; she always worked (admittedly in tension) under the nominal tutelage of a protective male authority (especially F. W. Putnam); she treated Indians as children even as she mined their remnant cultures for her own career purposes; and she willingly accepted the largesse of wealthy female patrons, such as Mary Thaw and Phoebe Hearst. Multiply victimized, she was also a self-pitying, soft-footed predator.

The tragedy is that she had so little choice. The real power in Fletcher’s life was held virtually entirely by men. Hers was largely derivative, and she exercised it upon confused and defeated Indian peoples, at times mercilessly. However, the question is not, as Mark suggests (p. 202), whether they would have been better off without her misguided efforts. Rather, the problematic of Fletcher’s life revolves around the nature of power and power wielding in Victorian America: power of men over women, of women over women, of whites over Indians, of white men over Indians through white women, and so on. In a fascinating overture (p. 107), Mark does suggest that Fletcher saw land allotment among the Omahas as a birthing process (to civilization) and her own permanently crippling illness (acquired in the field) as an analogue to the pain of childbirth, suffered on their behalf. As an explanation of her anthropological matronizing, and as a view of her understanding of her own power wielding, this is a promising insight that deserves pursuit.

The author’s style is tedious, with an irksome tendency to repeat “Alice Fletcher” in seemingly every sentence (see, e.g., p. 305). Fletcher’s letters and journal are blindly paraphrased, especially in the last five chapters. More attention to thematics and less to chronology for its own sake would have greatly improved the volume. The editors at Nebraska need to sharpen their editorial quills.

Curtis M. Hinsley


No one would dispute that conceptions of nature and art changed radically between the eras of the French Revolution and World War I, or that science played a role in the transformation. This agreement does not mean, however, that historians have adequately accounted for the periods and movements in this long cultural upheaval. Happily, the two books reviewed here provide some valuable perspectives on nineteenth-century ideals and controversies, both before and after Darwin.

In *Nature Into Art* Carl Woodring offers