

Beyond the Bowes Museum: The Social and Material Worlds of Alphonsine Bowes de Saint-Amand

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The Bowes Museum in Barnard Castle is a public art museum built from 1869 and inaugurated in 1892 to display in technical and didactic ways the collection formed by a couple who lived most of their adult lives in Paris. The so-called founders' collection combines items purchased with the museum in mind with an important collection of artworks and furnishings used in the couple's own homes on both sides of the Channel. Today the museum presents to visitors a selective biography of its founders, John and Joséphine Bowes. John Bowes (1811–1885), the illegitimate son of the 10th Earl of Strathmore, inherited his father's English estates, but not his title.¹ Educated at Eton and Cambridge, he displayed a keen interest in theatre, history, and France. By 1847 Bowes had taken up residence in Paris, marking an end to his career as a Whig MP for County Durham. An essential figure in exporting the British horseracing tradition into France and a wealthy bachelor from a landed family, Bowes joined the exclusive Cercle de l'Union in 1846 and was invited to join the Jockey Club.² By contrast, Benoîte Joséphine Coffin dite Chevalier was born in Paris on 26 April 1825, the daughter of a clockmaker, originally from Lyons, and Madeleine Antoinette Sergent (1787–1866).³ Joséphine followed Laurent-Joseph Morin's classes at the Conservatoire, and performed on the stage of the Théâtre Français.⁴ In September 1846 *La Tribune dramatique* reported that the young actress Mademoiselle Delorme (Joséphine's stage name) would commence a three-year contract at the Théâtre des Variétés, which was bought outright in cash by John Bowes in 1847.⁵ They signed a

¹ Charles Hardy, *John Bowes and the Bowes Museum* (Barnard Castle: Friends of the Bowes Museum, 1970), pp. 24–25. My thanks to Judith Phillips, Simon Spier, Tom Stammers, Emmanuela Wroth, and the anonymous reviewer for their generous feedback and suggestions during the writing of this article.

² Bowes disappears from the members' directory in 1851. See Alcée Gibert and Philippe de Massa, *Historique du Jockey-Club français depuis sa fondation jusqu'en 1871 inclusivement* (Paris: Jouaust, 1893).

³ Archives de Paris, état civil reconstitué, V3E/N 513.

⁴ 'Élèves', *Le Mercure des théâtres*, 29 January 1846, 24 December 1846, unpaginated.

⁵ 'Macédoine', *La Tribune dramatique*, 6 September 1846, pp. 430–32 (p. 432).

marriage contract in Paris in 1852, were married in church in London in 1854, and they eventually bought a townhouse at 7 rue de Berlin in Paris. In 1869 Joséphine laid the foundation stone of the Joséphine and John Bowes Museum in Barnard Castle.

Joséphine has enjoyed a remarkable resurgence of interest in recent years, emblemized by a 2017 exhibition for the 125th anniversary of the museum opening and new doctoral work, which builds on decades of behind-the-scenes research by curators. However, she is not the only woman in the Bowes story, although this has often been downplayed in the scholarship. Very little work has been done on the years after Joséphine's untimely death in 1874, which left John Bowes devastated. Yet little more than a year later, John had taken a new companion: Alphonsine de Saint-Amand, born in Paris on 1 May 1835, the daughter of Eulalie Soline Terme and Alphonse-Eugène Saint-Amand-Coysevox, a doctor.⁶ Her mother's second marriage to the writer Hippolyte Lucas propelled the family into the heart of literary society. In 1868 Alphonsine married the Swiss Comte Emmanuel de Courten (1833–1892) in Paris, the descendant of an old aristocratic family from the canton of Valais.⁷ Less than a year later, Alphonsine filed for a separation of domicile from her husband, as divorce was not legalized in France until 1884 and 1876 in Switzerland. Despite the complication of them both being considered foreigners in the French court, she nevertheless obtained a separation and custody of their son, Alphonse (1868–1874).⁸ The comtesse married John Bowes in 1877, once her divorce had been finalized in Switzerland, having already enjoyed his protection for several years. John initiated divorce proceedings against her in London in 1884, citing infidelity, but the case was settled out-of-court, and Alphonsine inherited the contents of 7 rue de Berlin when John died in 1885, under the terms of their marriage contract.

The second Mme Bowes is all but invisible within the museum narrative. Bowes's biographers have described this late second marriage as a disaster and cast aspersions on Alphonsine's moral character. Charles Hardy, in *John Bowes and the Bowes Museum*, reduces Alphonsine to the failed marriage, leaving the reader with the impression of her as a greedy, selfish woman without an inkling of cultural interest nor any conscience about preserving heritage.⁹ While more balanced than Hardy, in *John and Joséphine*, commissioned by the museum in 2010, Caroline Chapman none-

⁶ Archives de Paris, état civil reconstitué, V3E/N 706; certified copy of John and Alphonsine's entry in the Registry of Marriages, Kew, National Archives, J77/314/9376.

⁷ Lorédan Larchey, 'Les Suisses de France', *Le Monde illustré*, 23 January 1886, p. 58.

⁸ See 'Tribunal civil de la Seine (4^e chambre)', *Le Droit*, 3–4 May 1869, p. 442.

⁹ 'With [John's] sense of sad disappointment must have mingled the feeling of a poor return for the kindnesses he had long lavished on Alphonsine [...]. He thought he had chosen his second wife most prudently, but evidently his judgment was sadly at fault' (Hardy, p. 231).

theless alleges that Alphonsine had '[taken] advantage of his age, failing health and loneliness' and that John 'had paid a high price, both emotionally and financially, for his gullibility and faulty judgment'.¹⁰ Chapman does, however, hint towards Alphonsine's side of the story by mentioning her correspondence with the Strathmores during the legal proceedings, in which Alphonsine brought up John's popularity with women and the possibility of her husband having an affair with Amélie Basset.¹¹ Citing John's age, Chapman dismisses this idea as 'surely preposterous' (p. 137). Much of the writing about John and Joséphine has been moralistic, based on judgements around Joséphine's professional career, John's illegitimacy, or their physical frailties. In Alphonsine's case the controversy turns on the rancour caused by the attempted divorce case, and her residual control over the French estate, despite John's attempts to disown her under English law.¹² Two of John's trustees for the museum and English estate, his university friend William Alexander Kinglake and his London solicitor Edward Young Western, were already involved in the museum project as the trustees of Joséphine's will. Western & Sons represented John in the 1884 divorce case against Alphonsine. Her erasure from the museum narrative is tied to bitterness over the legal mechanics of women's property law in France. While stripped of her inheritance, the French marriage contract still applied. Furthermore, Alphonsine's counsel negotiated an expensive settlement after the divorce attempt, funds which would otherwise have been part of the endowment for the museum.¹³

Property law was therefore essential in shaping women's interaction with collections, although scholars have rarely explored these dynamics in depth. In the Bowes case these dynamics reflect the different conventions regarding property on entering into marriage. One further reason for the confusion around Alphonsine is her foreignness. Like other notable divorcees and widows of the time, she benefited from the different legal frameworks available to her as a French citizen and through her marriage to foreigners. She never lived in Britain and recovered her French identity at John's death; moreover, aside from a handful of letters and household bills, she did not leave archives behind, in contrast to Joséphine Bowes's papers kept in the Bowes Museum's archive. As with Julie Amélie Castelnau, the

¹⁰ Caroline Chapman, *John and Joséphine: The Creation of the Bowes Museum* (Barnard Castle: Bowes Museum, 2010), p. 138.

¹¹ Durham Country Record Office (DCRO), D/St/C1/18/5(1-7).

¹² Will of John Bowes, 4th codicil, 22 January 1874, copy in the Bowes Museum Archive (TBMA), TBM/2/1/2.

¹³ Marriage contract copied in 'Analyse des Papiers' from 'Inventaire après le Décès de M. John Bowes', 30 October 1885, Paris, Archives nationales (AN), MC/ET/XI/1405. Other than inventories in the DCRO, all the archival sources are in French. Unless otherwise stated, translations are my own.

French wife of Sir Richard Wallace, it is too easy to make Alphonsine disappear behind her husband's heroic narrative.¹⁴

In her study of women's agency as patrons of the arts, Kate Hill shows that the example of the Bowes complicates the gendering of collecting because the museum was the product of a joint initiative.¹⁵ Heroic narratives of collecting often struggle to acknowledge the teamwork that drove the acquisition of art, and even Joséphine's own collecting has sometimes been rather dismissively framed as bourgeois shopping experiences.¹⁶ The language of female consumption and shopping devalues the collecting experience and denies the same cultural importance to women who collected art. In addition to devaluing women collectors, the middle-class connotations of such labelling are also fundamentally misleading. Bourgeois, too, is a misnomer, considering the Boweses' contacts with a wide array of people across the social, cultural, and political spectrum of nineteenth-century French society. Alphonsine complicates the couple's collecting format further. To date, nothing has been written on Alphonsine as a collector, nor any attempt made to consider her impact on the museum collections in anything but a destructive light.

Building on the trend to recover Joséphine's agency, this article seeks to insert Alphonsine into the narrative; for the first time, it moves beyond the traditional, Anglocentric sources to include archival and material sources in France. Despite the legal restrictions faced by women in France and Britain at the time, the evidence from correspondence, domestic inventories, and notarial records shows how the two Bowes marriages left enduring traces in the public museum and offers a broader picture of both women's influence on John's life and on the organization of the collection. Both Joséphine's and Alphonsine's positions in the social worlds of the theatre, arts, and literature, as well as their personal aesthetic tastes, shaped the museum's collections. It will be argued that Alphonsine's activities as collector, decorator, and donor have been obscured not only because of her gender, but also (and especially) because her contributions to the collection do not conform to the narrative arc of traditional collecting stories. Conveniently eclipsed by John's attempt to divorce her in 1884, a range of moralizing judgements, social connections, gendered decorative choices, and aggressive legal claims over the Bowes estate conspired to

¹⁴ See Suzanne Higgott's article in this issue of 19.

¹⁵ Kate Hill, *Women and Museums, 1850–1914: Modernity and the Gendering of Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), p. 141.

¹⁶ James Illingworth, 'Joséphine Bowes (1825–1874), Shopaholic or Patroness of the Arts?', in *Plaisirs de Femmes: Women, Pleasure and Transgression in French Literature and Culture*, ed. by Maggie Allison, Elliot Evans, and Carrie Tarr, *Modern French Identities*, 133 (Oxford: Lang, 2019), pp. 73–87; Sarah Kane, 'Turning Bibelots into Museum Pieces: Josephine Coffin-Chevallier and the Creation of the Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle', *Journal of Design History*, 9 (1996), 1–21.

erase her from the already complex double collecting history of the Bowes Museum. In the first section we will explore Alphonsine's participation in the rich theatrical, artistic, and literary milieu of mid-nineteenth-century France and connect her sociability to objects in the museum. In the second section we consider the domestic spaces in which her cultural agency was revealed, thanks to the acquisition and display of her possessions. The final section examines for the first time Alphonsine's philanthropy and engagement with public museums in France and encourages us to rethink the consequences of John Bowes's second marriage for the collections in Barnard Castle today.

Social circles

Tackling the complexities and eccentricities of nineteenth-century Parisian society, Anne Martin-Fugier explains that 'fashionable society is a constantly moving fog of salons, social circles, and cliques' governed by unspoken codes which enabled bankers, politicians, writers, and prominent artists to mix with members of the aristocracy.¹⁷ It has been argued that Bowes's struggle to be accepted in Victorian high society was one of the reasons for his move to Paris, where non-aristocratic elites were recognized on the same level as old families.¹⁸ Martin-Fugier identified four principles that characterized 'le monde': public displays of luxury and wealth, the importance assigned to leisure, celebrity (*notoriété*) or a person's potential to achieve it, and the promotion of cultural refinement. In principle 'la bonne société' was separate from 'le demi-monde et le Boulevard', yet theatres, salons, members' clubs, and out-of-town spas were social spaces that showed how the foundations of high society were becoming more flexible (Martin-Fugier, pp. 336, 339). Lola Gonzalez-Quijano has built on Martin-Fugier's studies to show the central role played by female actors and courtesans in the salons, where they rubbed shoulders with the affluent classes.¹⁹ These salons were the crucial mechanisms of sociability, where Joséphine — under the guise of Mademoiselle Delorme and later Mme Bowes — and Alphonsine each mingled with ease.

Joséphine Bowes considered herself an artist, latterly through her painting, but at first through her career on the stage, where she earned

¹⁷ Anne Martin-Fugier, *La Vie élégante; ou, La Formation du Tout-Paris, 1815–1848* (Paris: Fayard, 1990), p. 100.

¹⁸ Sarah Kane, 'When Paris Meets Teesdale: The Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle', in *Northumbria Panorama: Studies in the History and Culture of North East England*, ed. by T. E. Faulkner (London: Octavian Press, 1996), pp. 163–94 (p. 171).

¹⁹ Lola Gonzalez-Quijano, *Capitale de l'amour: filles et lieux de plaisir à Paris au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2015).

many reviews for her performances (*Fig. 1*).²⁰ Correspondence indicates that she was not only solicited by playwrights to take on roles or contacted to sponsor other cultural initiatives, but that the theatre world also understood her influence on the running of the Théâtre des Variétés under John's ownership.²¹ As well as obtaining a conferred title in 1868, Joséphine had friends in prestigious, if not 'mondain', circles. Letters from some of these friends and reports in newspapers describe social events, such as



Fig. 1: Mademoiselle Delorme, Le Daguerrotypage théâtral, 19 February 1851, Bibliothèque nationale de France. With thanks to James Illingworth for finding this visual depiction of Mlle Delorme.

²⁰ See also, portraits in the Bowes Museum, B.M.529 and B.M.297.

²¹ TBMA, JB/7/14/1-4.

balls, hosted by the Bowes and their friends.²² John and Joséphine regularly lent their box at the Opéra to Madame de Belleyme, whose obituaries capture her importance in cultural circles.²³ Joséphine's friends also supported her work as a painter and their letters about the Salon of 1870 reveal Joséphine's pride in being shown. She painted landscapes and featured in the Paris Salon in 1867, 1868, 1869, and 1870.²⁴ The art dealer Édouard Carpentier, who provided canvases for her, wrote lengthily to John Bowes in 1873, praising her progress, yet imploring him to prepare his wife for the possibility of a rejection due to 'space restrictions'.²⁵ Howard Coutts's catalogue *Joséphine Bowes and Painting in Nineteenth Century France* reproduces a bill for art supplies packed for a painting spree to Fontainebleau. In 1865 Joséphine had purchased a cottage at Cernay-la-Ville, an artists' retreat that was popular for painters of the Barbizon School.²⁶

To those familiar with the Boweses' story, much less is known of the second Mme Bowes. Contrary to the assumption that the comtesse depended on John Bowes to shine in fashionable society, Alphonsine de Saint-Amand was born into 'le monde' (Chapman, p. 135). As the great-granddaughter of the sculptor Antoine Coysevox, she was proud of her artistic heritage from the *Ancien Régime*, as her calling card shows (*Fig. 2*).²⁷ Her marriage to Comte Emmanuel de Courten in 1868 further anchored her within elite Parisian society. Reported in *Le Mémorial diplomatique*, the glistening wedding was the first event of the season mentioned in *Le Journal des marchandes de mode*, which lingered upon 'the young bride, beaming in all her beauty, sporting with the ease and simplicity characteristic of high society, a stunning frock of the finest taste'.²⁸ Despite the legal separation granted in Paris less than a year later, Alphonsine maintained some ties with the Courten family. Regardless of her marital status, she continued to socialize in high society, often with her mother and stepfather, frequenting spas and chic holiday spots in the summer. Her friends there were part of Paris society too. She was a regular at the salon of Marie-Letizia Bonaparte-Wyse, at that point Mme Rattazzi and later Mme de Rute; and, at the wedding of Amélie Jubinal and George Duruy, 'splendidly celebrated at the

²² TBMA, JB/8/1/20/8; 'Échos de Paris', *Le Figaro*, 3 April 1869, p. 1.

²³ Comtesse de Tamar, 'Deuils', *Gil Blas*, 5 December 1899, unpaginated.

²⁴ Howard Coutts, *The Road to Impressionism: Joséphine Bowes and Painting in Nineteenth Century France* (Barnard Castle: Bowes Museum, 2002), p. 10.

²⁵ TBMA, JB/2/10/10/4.

²⁶ Stéphanie Constantin, 'The Barbizon Painters: A Guide to Their Suppliers', *Studies in Conservation*, 46 (2001), 49–67.

²⁷ See Comte Albert de Mauroy, 'Les descendants de Coysevox', *Revue de l'art français ancien et moderne*, 3rd ser., 2 (1886), 65–67.

²⁸ Vicomte Honoré de Chaville, 'Courrier des salons', *Le Mémorial diplomatique*, 23 January 1868, pp. 61–62 (p. 61); Eliane de Séricul, 'Modes', *Le Journal des marchandes de mode*, January 1868, pp. 1–3 (p. 2).

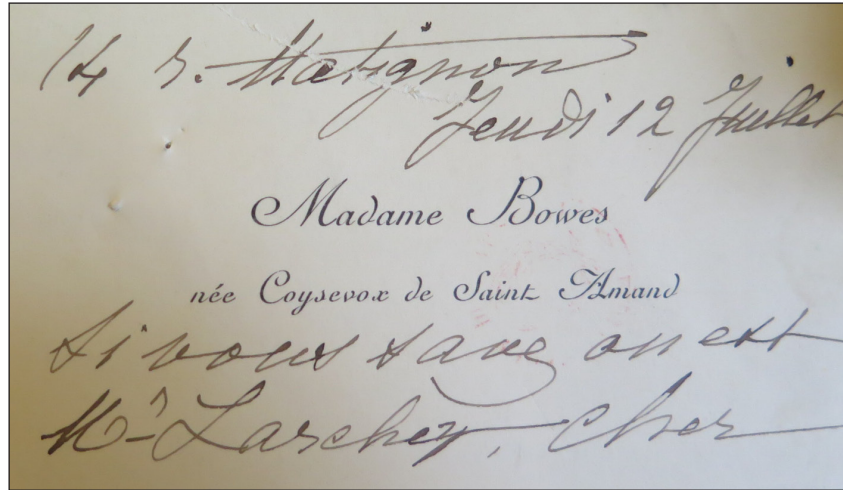


Fig. 2: Calling card of Alphonsine Bowes de Saint-Amand, c. 1900, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal, Papiers Lorédan Larchey, MS 9260.

Madeleine', Alphonsine was mentioned in *Le Figaro* alongside guests like Princess Mathilde and Henry Houssaye.²⁹

Just as important as her connection to (old) high society and the diplomatic world was her standing within literary circles, through her mother's second marriage. With the Lucases, Alphonsine visited the Hugo family in exile on Guernsey for several summers, before she was married.³⁰ Alphonsine's presence is recorded in at least two photographs at Hauteville House, a group shot and a portrait in Joséphine Nicolle's album, and in the diaries of various family members (Figs. 3, 4).³¹ Juliette Drouet's letters to Victor Hugo convey her jealousy of Eulalie Lucas and her daughter: she turned a blind eye to their arrival and snidely referred to their 'plaisirs débordés' (unbridled pleasures) a few weeks later.³² Her hostility crept into the correspondence again on their next visit, culminating in November

²⁹ Raoul de Lussac, 'Revue mondaine et artistique', *La Fantaisie parisienne*, 15 January 1873, pp. 8–10 (p. 9); 'Échos de Paris', *Le Figaro*, 13 July 1882, p. 1.

³⁰ See Jean-Marc Hovasse, *Victor Hugo*, 2 vols (Paris: Fayard, 2001–08), II: *Pendant l'exile I 1851–1864* (2008), pp. 447, 497, 600, 606, 638. References to the manuscript correspondence are cited from *Lettres de Juliette Drouet à Victor Hugo*, Publications numériques du CÉRÉDI (Université de Rouen-Normandie) (2012) <<http://juliettedrouet.org>> [accessed 26 October 2020].

³¹ For the Hugo albums, see Alexandrine Achille, 'La Photographie à l'œuvre: autour du fonds photographique de la maison de Victor Hugo', *Genesis*, 45 (2017), 124–36 <<https://doi.org/10.4000/genesis.2956>>.

³² Juliette Drouet to Victor Hugo, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), MSS NAF 16379, fols 269, 287–88 (transcriptions by Anne-Sophie Lancel and Florence Naugrette).



Fig. 3: The Hugo family and friends in the garden of Hauteville House, *c.* 1860, photograph. CCo Paris Musées/Maisons de Victor Hugo Paris-Guernesey.



Fig. 4: Alphonse de Saint-Amand, 1860, photograph. CCo Paris Musées/Maisons de Victor Hugo Paris-Guernesey.

1860, when she bemoaned ‘the Alphonsines [of the] past, present and future’ who consumed Hugo’s attention.³³

Hippolyte Lucas and Victor Hugo corresponded regularly.³⁴ Hugo attended John and Alphonsine’s civil wedding in Paris in 1877. In turn both Alphonsine (Mme Bowes) and Lucas’s son, Léo Lucas, would attend Juliette Drouet’s funeral.³⁵ The esteem Hippolyte Lucas enjoyed among his peers is palpable in the letters bound together and donated to his native city of Rennes by Léo. Lucas could shape someone’s career and the ‘Livre d’Or’, the thirteen albums of letters received by Hippolyte and his family, is rife with examples ranging from bestselling authors to budding actors.³⁶ Lucas translated the works of Pedro Calderón de la Barca and Shakespeare, and his interest in the latter led him to call upon Bowes, whom he had known since the Théâtre des Variétés days, about a possible collaboration.³⁷ At Lucas’s death, Alphonsine, her mother, and Léo received visits and letters from the doyens of the literary world.³⁸ His career was summarized in the eulogy delivered by Edmond About at his friend’s funeral, where the funeral party was led by Léo Lucas and John Bowes, and counted hundreds of Lucas’s peers.³⁹

After their marriage in 1877, John and Alphonsine mingled with high society, from taking the waters at Baden or Salies to attending balls in Paris during the season. For instance, Mme Bowes was cited as one of the most beautiful guests at a charitable ball held at the British Embassy in 1881.⁴⁰ At home the Boweses held dinner parties for Alphonsine’s family friends from the literary sphere alongside republican politicians. According to the *homme de lettres* Étienne Lorédan Larchey (1831–1902),

She used her influence to draw to the rue de Berlin the front- and backbenchers of literature. Mr and Mrs Renan, and especially Arsène Houssaye, Edmond Texier and his daughter. Richarme, Chirès, Récipon, Batbie, Martin-Feuillée, Waldeck R., and a few others represented the political and financial fields. I have seen Lesseps leaning against the chimney in the smoking room, chatting gayly about the Panama project.⁴¹

³³ BnF, MSS NAF 16381, fols 202, 246, 290 (transcriptions by Amandine Chambard and Florence Naugrette).

³⁴ Bibliothèque de Rennes Métropole (BRM), MS 1195, fols 17, 19, 21, 41.

³⁵ *Le Rappel*, 14 May 1883, p. 1.

³⁶ BRM, MS 1181–93.

³⁷ BRM, MS 1188, fol. 303.

³⁸ BRM, MS 1193.

³⁹ Published in Hippolyte Lucas, *Portraits et souvenirs littéraires* (Paris: Plon, 1890), pp. 235–37; ‘Échos de Paris’, *Le Figaro*, 17 November 1878, p. 1.

⁴⁰ ‘Les Échos’, *Le Voltaire*, 9 June 1881, p. 1.

⁴¹ Pétrus Richarme, Émile Récipon, Anselme Batbie, Félix Martin-Feuillée, and Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau were republican politicians, many connected to Britta-

Juliette Drouet and Victor Hugo regularly hosted the Boweses in their nearby home at 21 rue de Clichy, often accompanied by the Lucases and other notable figures.⁴² Drouet complained of the frequency of dinners with Alphonsine, which must have conjured awkward memories of Guernsey, with the ‘delight and delirium around, on top and below the table’.⁴³ She added, ‘I hope that your foot, well trained in these secret games of footsie, will not miss its target and mix up mother and daughter.’ Although Alphonsine was now accompanied by ‘son bonhomme de mari’, the jealous Drouet conceded that ‘doesn’t a sultan need some sultanas (*sultanes*) [...]?’⁴⁴ Whether return invitations were extended is not known, but the Boweses frequently hosted Lucas’s colleagues from the Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, Paul Lacroix and Lorédan Larchey.⁴⁵

Reconstructing the lives and voices of women who left few written sources is difficult, as their archival presence has been shaped by men and through the male gaze. The short biographical scraps penned by Étienne Lorédan Larchey on significant men and women who crossed his path are one such example. It is telling that some of the judgements and gendered assumptions made by scholars in recent times already appeared in Larchey’s musings. Four single-sided sheets titled ‘Bowes’ provide a snapshot of ‘this Englishman turned Parisian while remaining stubbornly English’ and shows that his wives were a key part of his reputation in France.⁴⁶ His condescending statements about Joséphine — not named throughout — and overall impression of John as an upstart exemplify the way the Boweses were discussed at the time. The mention of Alphonsine, who is cited as the reason Larchey ever met Bowes, comes with the list, quoted above, of influential people she introduced into John’s life, and Larchey adds that ‘her originality, her spirit had rejuvenated and attracted M. Bowes’. A tribute column for ‘Bibliophile Jacob’ (Paul Lacroix) posited Alphonsine’s as the only salon capable of luring him from his home.⁴⁷ Similarly to Lacroix’s limited social habits at the end of his life, Larchey wrote that ‘I am living as far away as possible from what we call “le monde”’, but he accepted an invitation from Bowes ‘with great pleasure’, while Lacroix declined.⁴⁸

Thanks to Alphonsine’s family connections, Bowes could benefit from the expertise of these researchers and historians. Larchey remarked

ny. The diplomat Ferdinand Marie, Vicomte de Lesseps presided over the Panama Canal Company (BnF, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal (BnF Arsenal), MS 9247).

⁴² BnF, MSS NAF, 16399, fols 19 and 38.

⁴³ BnF, MSS NAF, 16399, fol. 73.

⁴⁴ BnF, MSS NAF 16400, fol. 43 (transcription by Chantal Brière). With thanks to Simon Spier for alerting me to this letter. See also fols 40 and 44.

⁴⁵ TBMA, JB/2/10/13/57.

⁴⁶ BnF Arsenal, MS 9247.

⁴⁷ *Le Soir*, 18 October 1884, p. 2.

⁴⁸ TBMA, JB/6/7/2/10.

that Bowes ‘was methodical with everything and wished to know the precise value of the objects he purchased from multiple hands’. Although Larchey recognized the influence of ‘le père Basset’, the picture dealer and restorer, and his daughter Amélie Basset, who would become the collection’s curator, he viewed the collection as John’s solo endeavour. According to Larchey, Bowes spent his money ‘à l’aveuglette’ (blindly) and required ‘information on the value of his purchases’ because, ‘like many amateurs, he neither liked nor understood the artistic value of the things he took pleasure in assembling’.⁴⁹ John sought out Larchey’s historical expertise on at least two occasions: Larchey’s notes concerning the history of Ostend and his interpretation of Bowes’s painting of the Treaty of Hubertusburg.⁵⁰ Both records are undated, but cannot predate the beginning of John’s relationship with Alphonsine, and the Ostend notes are given on his Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal card.⁵¹ Paul Lacroix also shared bibliographical information on Spanish paintings.⁵² Indeed, Alphonsine’s legacy in the museum runs deeper than has ever been acknowledged. Larchey’s friendship with the couple persisted, separately, after the divorce attempt. He explains that the gift of his portrait by Faustin Besson to John’s museum had been his way of pouring oil on troubled waters in the aftermath of the inconclusive divorce case (*Fig. 5*).⁵³

Examining Bowes’s wives’ social worlds — one artistic and theatrical, the other more literary and linked to the old elites — illuminates the different cultural contexts in which the Boweses’ collection was formed. Acknowledging the influence of these heterogeneous networks on Bowes’s professional and private life leads to new avenues of research where Alphonsine, as well as Joséphine, was instrumental. The so-called founders’ collection at the Bowes Museum was profoundly but subtly shaped by Alphonsine’s friendships and familial ties with figures such as Hippolyte Lucas and Lorédan Larchey. It is one sign that traces of the two couples’ private lives can still be found in the galleries of a public museum: evidence that is confirmed when we look at the Boweses’ homes and interiors in France.

⁴⁹ BnF Arsenal, MS 9247.

⁵⁰ TBMA, JB/6/5, with thanks to John Findlay for alerting me to these notes. Bowes sent Larchey a print of H. Faber’s *The Treaty of Hubertusburg 15 February 1763* (B.M.623).

⁵¹ Henry Martin, *Histoire de la Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal* (Paris: Plon, 1900), pp. 595–96.

⁵² TBMA, JB/6/7/4.

⁵³ ‘Je m’entremis pour aboutir à un accommodement qui finit par se conclure. [...] Dans l’intérêt de la cause j’avais même offert au musée de M. Bowes mon portrait peint par Faustin Besson’ (BnF Arsenal, MS 9247). See also, TBMA, JB/6/6/1.



Fig. 5: Faustin Besson, *Lorédan Larchey* (1831–1902), c. 1860, oil on canvas, 55.5 × 46.4 cm, Bowes Museum, B.M.377. Courtesy of the Bowes Museum.

At home

Feminist historians, social historians, cultural and art historians, and historians of collecting have shown the importance of the domestic interior in nineteenth-century France, and the light it can shed on women's public identities.⁵⁴ Lady Blessington's visit to the actress Mademoiselle Mars's home in 1841 confirmed that 'a just notion of the character of a person can always be formed by the style of his or her dwelling'.⁵⁵ The home was an extension of the woman's beauty, intelligence, elegance, and refinement, and Lady Blessington was invited to see two semi-private rooms Mademoiselle Mars had curated for visitors: the boudoir and the library that also acted as a picture gallery and recorded her theatrical career. Women who received guests in their homes took care to display themselves through their things. In this section, we interrogate the records and evidence of the material possessions

⁵⁴ See Anca I. Lasc, *Interior Decorating in Nineteenth-Century France: The Visual Culture of a New Profession* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), pp. 6–7.

⁵⁵ The Countess of Blessington, *The Idler in France* (Paris: Baudry's European Library, 1841), p. 82.

collected by Joséphine and Alphonsine, bearing in mind the context of property and inheritance law on both sides of the Channel: firstly, and briefly, John and Joséphine's country houses, the Château de Louveciennes (1852–62) and Streatlam Castle (1861–74); and then Alphonsine, at 44 rue de Clichy (1875–76) and 7 rue de Berlin (1876–85). The historian Véronique Long has explained the pitfalls of using inventories to examine the homes of art collectors. While these records do give a sense of the hierarchy of rooms and their contents, they reduce objects to their basic appearance and monetary value, often grouped together for the convenience of classification. When analysed with care, though, inventories are vital documents for understanding women who left so few alternative documents.⁵⁶

Bills, receipts, and inventories regarding the Boweses' homes on both sides of the Channel reveal the tenuous legal status of women and their relationship to property in each country. On 5 June 1852 Joséphine became the named owner of the Château de Louveciennes, and the Paris firm Monbro fils aîné was employed to decorate the house, making it suitable for hosting large-scale social gatherings. Anne-Sophie Brisset's analysis of Monbro's records shows that the expense on each room was in line with its public, semi-public, or private function: they spent the most on the Grand Salon (5868 francs), and 3943 francs on the Petit Salon.⁵⁷ When John and Joséphine sold Louveciennes in 1862, their married life centred on the house at 7 rue de Berlin in Paris, as well as Streatlam Castle, Bowes's country seat in the north-east of England, where Joséphine's rooms were furnished with part of her collection sent from France. Because Joséphine's possessions at Streatlam were not part of the Bowes estate, they are not listed in the 1870 'Catalogue of Furniture, Pictures etc. belonging to Streatlam'.⁵⁸ John's lengthy instructions for emptying and arranging the rooms that were to become Joséphine's are the only record we have of their contents. Indeed, when John and Joséphine signed their 'contrat de mariage' in Paris in 1852, they had chosen the legal regime of separate property ('séparation de biens'), an option favoured by wealthy people that protected a woman's personal property and revenues in marriage.⁵⁹ Article 3 of their contract designated the contents of the couple's French properties as Joséphine's personal assets. Article 4 stated that all 'furniture and furnishings' in the marital homes would belong exclusively to Joséphine. It is only after her death, when these were inherited by John, her universal legatee,

⁵⁶ Véronique Long, 'Collections et intérieurs à Paris de 1850 à 1914', *Hypothèses*, 7 (2004), 23–32.

⁵⁷ Anne-Sophie Brisset, 'Les Monbro, de marchands de curiosité à décorateurs, illustration des mutations de la profession dans la seconde moitié du XIX^e siècle' (unpublished master's thesis, École du Louvre, 2013).

⁵⁸ DCRO, D/St/E1/3/33.

⁵⁹ Karen Offen, *The Woman Question in France, 1400–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 52.

that we catch a glimpse of Joséphine's belongings at Streatlam, in the 1876 'Inventory of Furniture at Streatlam Castle'. Her bedroom became 'Mr Bowes' Study and Closet' where John memorialized his late wife through her possessions, including '15 Oval Portraits' and '48 Paintings of different Sizes and Subjects', by then part of the estate.⁶⁰

In the same way that Streatlam Castle had undergone large-scale reshuffling to accommodate Joséphine's possessions, after 1874 space was made at 7 rue de Berlin for the new mistress of the house. The two properties occupied by Alphonsine, overseen by John, first at 44 rue de Clichy and then at 7 rue de Berlin, were platforms for her to show her personal collection and aesthetic tastes. Here again, Alphonsine's domestic environments have never been examined. In the summer of 1875, while on holiday with Alphonsine, Bowes called upon his housekeeper Marie Paigis and the upholsterer-decorator Edmond Gaucherot to oversee a new apartment for his friend upon their return. Gaucherot, who had previously worked for the Monbros' firm, wrote to Bowes on 5 September 1875 about 'the apartment of Madame de Courtin [*sic*]' and the renovation work being undertaken there by masons, joiners, and painters. 'As soon as it is ready,' wrote Gaucherot, 'I will move the furniture from the rue d'Alger and will await orders to put in place carpets and curtains.'⁶¹ Her new apartment in the rue de Clichy, leased by John, would be decorated with a combination of her own furniture and hangings, and tapestries from John's ample collection stored in the house on rue de Berlin, selected by Alphonsine on Gaucherot's advice.⁶²

John and Alphonsine's marriage contract, also following the regime of separate property, stated in Article 3 that everything in the marital homes belonged to John unless proven otherwise, excluding the 'effets personnels de l'épouse'. Were Alphonsine to survive John, he left her the house at 7 rue de Berlin for her personal use, although after the failed divorce proceedings, John revoked her exemption from the mortgage payment in the 4th codicil of his will. It is not clear whether Alphonsine chose to live at 7 rue de Berlin after 1885; she sold the property in 1887.⁶³ The marriage contract specified that Alphonsine had full ownership of the furniture housed in the apartment including the pictures, *objets d'art*, domestic items for personal use, jewellery, diamonds, and silverware. When reassessing Alphonsine's supposed dependence on Bowes's financial support, let us not lose sight of the bride's assets, valued at 840,000 francs, thanks to shares and investments in railway companies. In addition to this, the possessions she brought to the marital home were worth 29,721 francs and 40 centimes in the inventory of 7

⁶⁰ DCRO, D/St/E1/3/35.

⁶¹ TBMA, JB/2/10/12/13 (translation by TBMA volunteers).

⁶² TBMA, JB/2/10/12/138.

⁶³ Alphonsine sold the house in May 1887 to Alfred Pierre Laclaverie (Archives de Paris, DQ18/1372).

rue de Berlin taken after John's death, excluding her paintings, which were inventoried separately. A bill from Gaucherot from 28 August 1877 indicates the beginning of a redecorating spree at 7 rue de Berlin, where Alphonsine seems to have settled that November.⁶⁴ On 19 October Gaucherot sought Alphonsine's final decision between a selection of fabric samples for the landing, already approved by the architect Pellechet.⁶⁵

Contemporary accounts draw attention to the most striking aspects of Alphonsine and John's interiors. Larchey's manuscript notes on Bowes read, 'His reception rooms were hung with eighteenth-century tapestries purchased from some sale or other of the Garde Meuble, as several were strewn with *fleur de lys*.' Unconventionally, 'they even covered the ceilings, making for an overall unhappy display where everything seemed darkened and shrunken.'⁶⁶ Véronique Long singles out tapestries as an example of the expensive objects found in the public rooms of collectors' homes. Tapestries performed the double function of being prized artworks that were also highly decorative and shaped the character of the room (Long, p. 26). When Arsène Houssaye chronicled 'La semaine d'un paresseux' in 1884, he too was struck by the Boweses' 'Salon des Tapisseries', and his account focuses on the luxury of the interiors, the quality of the company, and the talent of the performers.⁶⁷ Houssaye's account reveals the network of intellectuals, critics, and playwrights who dined with the Boweses, brought together in search of conversation and entertainment, against the splendid backdrop of their home.

Aside from these contemporary accounts, the richest record of how the couple lived is provided by notarial accounts, such as the inventory taken at 7 rue de Berlin after Bowes's death in 1885 by Adolphe Dubourg and Edme Édouard Cailleux, both auctioneers from the department of the Seine.⁶⁸ The inventory is dry and, unlike a catalogue of artworks, it skims over provenance, manufacturer, or creator, without giving dimensions. As per the terms of John and Alphonsine's marriage contract under the regime of separate property, the inventory distinguishes Alphonsine's purchases made with her own money ('de ses propres deniers') from objects already belonging to her, and 'objets divers' not already indicated as reserved for the museum in the contract. Alphonsine's belongings populated all the house's formal, public rooms such as the dining room, ballroom, and grand salon. She owned many items that worked well with Bowes's existing collection. In the grand salon, Alphonsine contributed two massive *cloisonné* enamel fishbowls on wooden stands (worth 1500 francs), dramatic

⁶⁴ TBMA, JB/3/3/25/156.

⁶⁵ TBMA, JB/3/3/25/153.

⁶⁶ BnF Arsenal, MS 9247.

⁶⁷ *Le Gaulois*, 22 February 1884, p. 1.

⁶⁸ 'Inventaire après le décès de M. John Bowes', 30 October 1885, AN, MC/ET/XI/1405.

showpieces suited to the Louis XVI style of the room featuring Beauvais tapestries. The Salon Rouge, and adjoining Petit Salon Rouge, were semi-public spaces where a rosewood Érard piano with gilt-bronze porcelain plaques matched the rest of the furniture. The Petit Salon Rouge was one of the rooms that boasted tapestries on the ceiling which so intrigued guests. Aside from ostentatiously converting artworks for the purpose of decoration, this unconventional mode of display created a darker, intimate setting, while also providing a historically harmonious backdrop for Alphonsine's European porcelain.⁶⁹ The advice of Gaucherot and Pellechet as 'taste-professionals', as well as her familiarity with fashionable salons, would have ensured that no decorating faux pas were made and that each room reflected the refined taste of the hostess.⁷⁰

Care was taken in Alphonsine's personal reception rooms to display a wealth of colourful textiles enhanced by warm lighting. In these less-formal rooms, curtains and door covers need not match the other textiles, and she used screens to display embroidered silks and canvases, tapestries, and 'Algerian' fabrics. The 'petit salon de Mme Bowes' presented lustrous textures, from porcelains and Bohemian glass to Japanese bronze statuettes and mounted shells, all of which glistened under the glimmer of gilt-bronze mounted crystal lights, 'ten various Venetian glass candle sticks', and the wall lights on a pair of Venetian engraved mirrors. Comparison with the fashionable interiors of Princess Mathilde reveals that the apartments where hostesses held court needed to provide visitors with things to divert them, spur conversation, or inspire artists and writers: the furniture therefore should be arranged to provide scope for spontaneity.⁷¹ In Alphonsine's rooms this meant breaking away from matching suites of seat-furniture in favour of smaller groups of armchairs combined with carved oak chairs featuring old tapestries, and upholstered poufs and low stools, some of which were listed as 'Chinese', 'blackamoor', or 'Moroccan'.

Gauging Alphonsine's taste solely from an itemized list is problematic because the inventory is orientated towards mere quantity. In some cases the clerks resorted to listing a 'Chinese lacquer and porcelain shelf containing fifteen bibelots' or 'fifty-five *bibelots d'étagère* items in ivory, porcelain, Meissen, china, filigree, silver, bronze, such as crucifixes, statuettes, trinkets etc.'. Even though the spaces were no doubt densely packed, by omitting the human context that made every object unique for its owner, inventories perpetuate a sense of accumulation, reducing prized

⁶⁹ Baronne Salomon de Rothschild also displayed her European porcelain collection in a Salon Rouge (Long, p. 28).

⁷⁰ Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 190–224.

⁷¹ Carole Blumenfeld with others, *Un Soir chez la princesse Mathilde: une Bonaparte et les arts* (Ajaccio: Palais Fesch-Musée des Beaux-Arts, 2019), pp. 274–75 (cat. no. 161); Martin-Fugier, pp. 168–69.

treasures to mere clutter. As mentioned above, in the Petit Salon Rouge she positioned a mahogany vitrine, which showcased a set of biscuit figures, Meissen animals, and twenty-nine ‘large Meissen figurines’ valued at 350 francs. Nevertheless, within these lists we detect her engagement with ceramics and textiles, both of which were considered to be specifically feminine interests and are strongly linked to Joséphine Bowes. She was also interested in modern ceramics and kept ‘Nancy porcelain cats’, one each in her water closet and Petit Salon; meanwhile, faience pieces from Lorraine, Rouen, Nevers, and Moustiers came together in her *cabinet de toilette*.

Manuel Charpy has noted that the desire to collect items from rural France was characteristic of bourgeois consumers bringing ‘authentic’ national history into their homes, and Alphonsine sent home cases of furniture and porcelain purchased with John in Arles and St Malo in 1877 and 1878.⁷² Family heirlooms took pride of place in the decor at 7 rue de Berlin, with the portrait of her great-grandfather, the seventeenth-century sculptor Coysevox, in the Grand Escalier Blanc, and a group of bronzes representing the artist’s *Chevaux de Marly* were displayed on Louis XIV console tables in her Petit Salon. A view of St Malo in her bathroom, along with a painting of a Cancalais interior and a bust of Hippolyte Lucas in John’s study, recorded her familial connection to Brittany, while various ‘objets-souvenirs’ or ‘objets du sentiment’ — keepsakes of the self — decorated her private rooms. Among these, photographs and a Victor Hugo watercolour reminded her of friendships, and a facsimile of the Column of Constantine evoked her travels with John to Italy.⁷³ In October 1875 Alphonsine had purchased enough to fill four shipping crates from the Florentine antique dealer Tito Gagliardi and, in December 1877, John also footed the bill to send fourteen pieces of furniture from Venice to Paris.⁷⁴ Their travels together are recorded in twelve albums, now in the Bowes Museum Archive.⁷⁵ Portraits of the hostess were dotted around the house. A portrait bust was placed in the dark, intimate setting of the Petit Salon Rouge, on top of a golden pedestal in the shape of an elephant’s head.⁷⁶

Historian Anca Lasc’s unpicking of interiors that appear eclectic to us today explains the presence of ‘oriental’ objects across John and Alphonsine’s home. These items, which were inventoried as ‘Moroccan’, ‘Algerian’, ‘Indian’, ‘Chinese’, or ‘Japanese’, were seen by contemporaries to be ahistorical and could easily be fused with a European period style,

⁷² Manuel Charpy, ‘L’ordre des choses: sur quelques traits de la culture matérielle bourgeoise parisienne, 1830–1914’, *Revue d’histoire du XIX^e siècle*, 34 (2007), 105–28 <<https://doi.org/10.4000/rh19.1342>>; TBMA, JB/5/14/1(vi); JB/3/3/26/27.

⁷³ In French, ‘une aquarelle de Victor Hugo’.

⁷⁴ TBMA, JB/5/14/3–6(iii); JB/3/3/25/178.

⁷⁵ TBMA, JB/1/9/2/1–12.

⁷⁶ The elephant stand alone was valued at 100 francs. The portrait bust would have been listed in the wedding contract’s appendix.

as was the case in Alphonsine's medieval-inspired bedroom, worthy of the Musée de Cluny.⁷⁷ The combination of elements from different cultures and eras in fact created harmonious ensembles. The inventory alludes to chinoiseries and japonaiseries in the shape of Japanese dolls, mother-of-pearl encrusted furniture, lacquerware, embroidered silks, fans, decorated ceramics, and small sculptured items which were typical of women's spaces. Elizabeth Emery has pointed out that, although associated with female sensuality and home decoration, chinoiseries and japonaiseries could contribute to a cosmopolitan and intellectually sophisticated ensemble.⁷⁸ Alongside paintings on porcelain after European old masters in her Petit Salon, objects that stand out include a pair of umbrella stands made from elephant tusks, a four-leaf Chinese bamboo screen, another made from peacock feathers, and a tapestry depicting Judith. The marriage of East and West in Alphonsine's private spaces and in highly performative representations of the self — the elephant portrait bust for instance — signals to Alphonsine's definite engagement with the East beyond chinoiseries and japonaiseries.

Elements of Alphonsine's social networks shed further light on her attraction to exotic subjects. Judith Gautier's short novel *Isoline* (1882), a tale of female emancipation, was dedicated to Alphonsine. Set in the Breton landscape, it was imbued with chivalric romance. Isoline's dreams of faraway times, which she read about, are matched by the young sailor's descriptions of his travels to India, Cochinchina, the West Indies, and Senegal.⁷⁹ As a teenager Gautier had learned Mandarin from her tutor Ding Dungling, introduced to the family household by the orientalist Simon Clermont-Ganneau. Gautier dedicated *Le Livre de jade* (1867), an anthology based on her translations of Chinese poems, to the former, and *Le Vieux de la montagne* (1893), a historical novel set in the Middle East during the Crusades, to the latter.⁸⁰ As well as bearing an association with Judith Gautier, Alphonsine wrote to Larchey around 1900 about meeting Jean Sawas Pacha, whose company she enjoyed, describing him as a 'relic'

⁷⁷ Anca I. Lasc, 'Interior Decorating in the Age of Historicism: Popular Advice Manuals and the Pattern Books of Édouard Bajor', *Journal of Design History*, 26 (2012), 1–24.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Emery, 'The Musée d'Ennery and the Shifting Reception of Nineteenth-Century French Chinoiseries', in *Beyond Chinoiserie: Artistic Exchange between China and the West during the Late Qing Dynasty (1796–1911)*, ed. by Petra ten-Doesschate Chu and Jennifer Milam, *East and West: Culture, Diplomacy, and Interactions*, 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 204–34.

⁷⁹ See Gautier's fascination with the past in *Le Collier des jours: souvenirs de ma vie* (Paris: Juven, 1904), pp. 170–71.

⁸⁰ Pauline Yu, "Your Alabaster in This Porcelain": Judith Gautier's *Le Livre de jade*, *PMLA*, 122 (2007), 464–82; Bettina L. Knapp, *Judith Gautier: Writer, Orientalist, Musicologist, Feminist: A Literary Biography* (Dallas: Hamilton Books, 2004), p. 223.

of the Ottoman Empire. A planning mishap meant that her dinner party for him became ‘a small “Harem” in her home.’⁸¹

Inventories and notarial records can be used to evoke the spaces in which Joséphine and Alphonsine lived and are especially useful when objects cannot be traced or have been lost. Home decorating was a way for both women to make curatorial decisions, combining their own belongings with John’s collection. For Alphonsine, home decorating was a way of bringing the Far East into her home, thus advertising her cultural sophistication and glamorous connections. Her interiors fit the model examined by Elizabeth Macknight, with personal apartments promoting autonomy and independence, and spaces for the hostess to reveal her personal tastes alongside prized family heirlooms.⁸² When examining the homes of French noblewomen, Macknight reminds us that collecting was a hobby for men and women alike, and the many vitrines, shelves, and cabinets in Alphonsine’s rooms show that she took pride in sharing her possessions with others. Looking at the process of decorating shows how difficult it is to disentangle the label of collector from that of consumer, despite the very different prestige accorded to these two terms.⁸³

Legacies

Reinserting the second Mme Bowes into John’s biography and into the history of the museum in Barnard Castle offers new perspectives on what is considered to be the founders’ collection. Anne Higonnet, in *A Museum of One’s Own*, examines the measures collectors took in their lifetime to determine the fate of their collections and ensure the conditions they set were met. ‘Any private collection turned into a museum’, writes Higonnet, ‘was bound to be a contradiction or at least a compromise.’⁸⁴ Joséphine’s untimely death left the museum project in John’s hands. The inventory of the contents of the house at John’s death differentiates between objects he had specifically set aside for the museum, leaving the rest as part of the house’s furnishings. His will stipulated that his trustees could claim any

⁸¹ BnF Arsenal, MS 9260.

⁸² Elizabeth C. Macknight, ‘A Touch of Distinction: Furnishing French Aristocratic Homes in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries’, in *Material Women, 1750–1950: Consuming Desires and Collecting Practices*, ed. by Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 75–91.

⁸³ Leora Auslander, ‘The Gendering of Consumer Practices in Nineteenth-Century France’, in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, ed. by Victoria de Grazia with Ellen Furlough (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 79–112.

⁸⁴ Anne Higonnet, *A Museum of One’s Own: Private Collecting, Public Gift* (Pittsburgh: Periscope Publishing, 2009), p. 169.

item they thought to be suited for the museum from Alphonsine's inheritance. This was prescient because, as we will see, Alphonsine contested the inventory on several occasions, reclaiming items that she considered belonged to her. Quibbles such as those between Bowes's trustees and his legatee can illuminate the complex negotiations by which a 'public' collection not formed by a single married couple was constituted.

The 1885 will suggests that the majority of the contents of 7 rue de Berlin which was yet to be shipped to England had been set aside in the atelier, or studio, and in rooms bearing 'reserved for the Museum' labels. John had planned for several lots of furniture and decorative items, moved from the Petit Boudoir into the studio, to be shipped to the museum even though they had been purchased by Alphonsine. She naturally claimed these items back ('accordé à Madame'). As per the terms of her wedding contract, Alphonsine was similarly within her right to claim any jewellery bearing her initials.⁸⁵ Various sets of tapestries were claimed by both parties, as some had been bought by Alphonsine while others belonged to John, and compromises were unavoidable. As for the rest of the house, the trustees picked out certain domestic items from John's private rooms, perhaps as a way of memorializing him in the museum through his personal belongings. They thus claimed suites of furniture from his bedroom and study, along with a panel painting depicting card players, but the bust of Hippolyte Lucas and the Breton paintings were left to Alphonsine.⁸⁶

The library at 7 rue de Berlin is another area of the collection where Alphonsine's involvement, through her network, needs to be reconsidered. James Illingworth's 2017 survey of the so-called founders' library revealed that the books carry many layers of significance, including offering a glimpse into John and Joséphine's social lives.⁸⁷ The contents of three bookcases in John's study were claimed by the trustees for the museum. These combined books for reading, such as two hundred paperback novels in French, and others for collecting, such as two volumes of autographs and sixty luxuriously bound volumes. As mentioned above, evidence that John benefited from Alphonsine's literary network for research purposes rests in the Bowes Museum Archive, leading us to recontextualize the portrait of Larchey, for instance. Despite the breakdown of their marriage, it is striking that Alphonsine worked to preserve records of John's cultural activities. With Larchey's help, Alphonsine donated a set of records from her

⁸⁵ For instance, 'a gold and enamel snuff box with *fleurs de lys*, A. B. initials and inscription [...] 800 francs'.

⁸⁶ 'Une peinture sur bois prisee soixante francs (joueurs de cartes)'. This could be TBMA, B.M.610 or B.M.421.

⁸⁷ James Illingworth, 'The French Library of John and Joséphine Bowes', *French Studies Library Group Annual Review*, 13 (2016–17), 37–45 <<https://frenchstudieslibrarygroup.files.wordpress.com/2018/06/annual-review-issue-thirteen.pdf>> [accessed 26 October 2020].

husband's papers regarding the Théâtre des Variétés to Charles Nutter, the archivist at the Opéra de Paris in August 1891. The scope of these records offers new insights into John's varied activities at the theatre.⁸⁸

Achille Jubinal (1810–1875) and Paul Lucas (1810–1880) represent two further examples of collectors in Alphonsine's social circles who were involved in the foundation of local museums. The local politician Jubinal helped found museums in Tarbes and Bagnères-de-Bigorre in 1852 and made substantial bequests of artworks to both institutions, drawing on his connections with influential figures of the Second Empire and the reserves of the Louvre. The Jubinals were family friends of the Lucases, and Alphonsine regularly vacationed in the fashionable spa town of Bagnères. Although passionate about medieval art, and despite his wife's family collection of important eighteenth-century artworks, Jubinal gathered a collection of modern 'orientalist' paintings to attract 'a specific kind of Parisian clientele' – wealthy, chic, cosmopolitan – to his constituency.⁸⁹ Closer to home, in 1894 Hippolyte Lucas's cousin, Paul Lucas, bequeathed a collection of early Italian paintings to his native city of Rennes, to form the nucleus of a Musée des Beaux-Arts. The context for the formation of his collection is not known.⁹⁰ During the Franco-Prussian War, Alphonsine, her son, and mother stayed at his home in Rennes.⁹¹ Jubinal's and Paul Lucas's involvement in local, public museums was typical of the philanthropy of a local elite in the second half of the nineteenth century that served the dual purpose of enriching regions while also securing the individual's legacy.⁹² Alphonsine and Léo Lucas were at the forefront of the annual commemoration of festivities for Hippolyte Lucas. These gatherings were an opportunity for writers, actors, and literary figures to come together in celebration, in Rennes and Paris.⁹³ Highlighting Alphonsine's connection with prominent local figures such as Jubinal and Paul Lucas, as well as her role in securing Hippolyte's legacy, may have encouraged her own desire to create an enduring cultural legacy.

When Alphonsine died in 1908 *La Chronique des arts et de la curiosité* was one of the newspapers to announce a series of donations to museums made by 'the great-granddaughter of the sculptor Coysevox'. Starting with

⁸⁸ AN, AJ/13/1044.

⁸⁹ Arnaud Bertinet, 'Les fondations de musées sous le Second Empire: l'exemple M. Jubinal', in *Histo.Art: travaux de l'école doctorale d'histoire de l'art*, 4 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de la Sorbonne, 2012), pp. 195–210.

⁹⁰ Mylène Allano, *La Collection des peintures italiennes du musée des beaux-arts de Rennes* (Paris: Somogy Éditions d'Art, 2004), p. 16.

⁹¹ Paris, Musée Carnavalet, AUT228 and AUT227–226.

⁹² Dominique Poulot, 'L'Invention de la bonne volonté culturelle: l'image du musée au XIX^e siècle', *Le Mouvement social*, 131 (1985), 35–64.

⁹³ Julien Duchesne, 'Association artistique et littéraire de Bretagne', *Le Glaneur breton*, 7–8 (1891), 276–84 (pp. 277–78); 'Échos', *Le Pays*, 24 August 1893, p. 1.

the museum of the city of Rennes, her bequest of ancestral portraits previously displayed at 7 rue de Berlin highlighted her descent from Coysevox and Coustou while at the same time enhancing the historical collections of a provincial museum. The portrait of Antoine Coysevox by Alain-Marie Michel-Villeblanche was a copy made in 1882 after Hyacinthe Rigaud, described on the canvas as ‘painted from authentic documents’ (*Fig. 6*). The portraits of Nicolas Coustou (1658–1733) and Guillaume Coustou (1716–1777) were also copies by the same artist after existing portraits.⁹⁴ As part



Fig. 6: Alain-Marie Michel-Villeblanche (after Hyacinthe Rigaud), Portrait of the sculptor Antoine Coysevox, 1882, oil on canvas, 120 × 84.5 cm, Rennes, Musée des Beaux-Arts, INV o8.43.1.

⁹⁴ Rennes, Musée des Beaux-Arts (MBAR), INV o8.43.3 and INV o8.43.2 (both now destroyed).

of a prominent Rennais family, she sought to leave traces of more recent generations and bequeathed a portrait of Adélaïde Terme de Courbesac, her maternal grandmother, *Dame en pelisse blanche*, and her own portrait, *Petite fille au manteau bleu*, both by Henry Scheffer (Figs. 7, 8). Léo Lucas would secure the memorialization of the family further upon his death, when he donated his portrait as a young boy and portraits of his parents by Henry Scheffer, no doubt those intended by Alphonsine for the Musée du Luxembourg.⁹⁵ The local newspaper *L'Ouest-Éclair* regularly reported women's donations of this type, and a few years earlier the donor of a pastel portrait by Émile Lévy had been praised for '[enriching] the collection with something entirely new'.⁹⁶ Alphonsine had prominently displayed her own



Fig. 7: Henry Scheffer, *Dame en pelisse blanche*, undated, oil on canvas, 61 × 50 cm, Rennes, Musée des Beaux-Arts, INV 08.42.2.

⁹⁵ Louise Martinet, *Portrait of Hippolyte Lucas*, c. 1840, MBAR, INV 891.35.1; Henry Scheffer, *Portrait of Hippolyte Lucas*, MBAR, INV 25.47.1; G. Lipouilly(?), *Portrait of Léo Lucas as a Child*, c. 1846, MBAR, INV 25.13.42; and *Portrait of Madame Hippolyte Lucas*, MBAR, INV 25.13.41 (missing).

⁹⁶ 'Chronique locale', *L'Ouest-Eclair*, 17 February 1900, p. 2.



Fig. 8: Henry Scheffer, *Petite fille au manteau bleu*, 1844, oil on canvas, 49 × 43.5 cm, Rennes, Musée des Beaux-Arts, INV 08.42.1.

pastel portrait by society portrait painter Lévy in the Salon Rouge at 7 rue de Berlin, and she intended it, and another ‘petit portrait, tête d’enfant’ by Ary Scheffer, for the Musée du Luxembourg in Paris. The latter had been shown to Charles Moreau-Vauthier for his publication *Les Portraits de l’enfant* (1901), which described ‘the pretty portrait of Mme Bowes de Saint-Amand, aged 2’ as a fine work by Scheffer, ‘where juvenile grace is expressed with gentleness and emotion’.⁹⁷ Alphonsine’s ambition to leave her likenesses by two prominent portraitists of her time to the museum that acted as a temporary resting place for works before entering the Louvre indicates that she understood the cultural value of Lévy’s and Scheffer’s work, but also that she wished to see herself represented within national collections.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Charles Moreau-Vauthier, *Les Portraits de l’enfant* (Paris: Hachette, 1901), p. 353.

⁹⁸ See Catherine Granger, *L’Empereur et les arts: la liste civile de Napoléon III*, Mémoires et documents de l’école des Chartes, 79 (Paris: École des Chartes, 2005), pp. 337–48.

Newspapers detailed the large sums of money Alphonsine left to charitable causes (upwards of 200,000 francs) in support of children and the poor.⁹⁹ As a founding member of the Société centrale de sauvetage, a charity supporting lifeguards, she made regular donations and memorialized both her deceased son, Alphonse de Courten, and John Bowes.¹⁰⁰ So far, Alphonsine's donations to public museums and charitable institutions are typical of a woman of her class and wealth. The final donation worth highlighting was intended for the Musée Victor Hugo:

I bequeath to the Musée Victor Hugo, Place Royale, in Paris, a watercolour of Victor Hugo made by me, in Guernsey, with a dedication (1860) and a photograph of Victor Hugo with signed at the bottom by Victor Hugo 'I obey you' etc, both framed in red velvet.¹⁰¹

These personal items were testimonies to Alphonsine's involvement with Hugo and their donation was a way of writing herself into the biography of the poet and, by extension, into the nation's cultural heritage. This was no doubt the 'aquarelle de Victor Hugo' that Alphonsine displayed in her bathroom in the Boweses' home, and her description of it as drawn by her hand elucidates the ambiguity over authorship given in the inventory. As for her vast collection of decorative art and furnishings, by that point in her home on the rue Matignon, her estate sale took place at Hôtel Drouot over the course of three days for the jewellery, and one day for furniture and *objets d'art*.¹⁰² The sale, which raised 355,441 francs, was widely publicized in the local and national press, and praised for the quality of the tapestries, Limoges enamels, European porcelains, and Moustiers faience.¹⁰³ In the eyes of the public she ensured her own and her family's legacy on local and national scales, in art museums, and literary history. A watercolour by Victor Hugo thought to have been given to Alphonsine, representing a landscape and Hauteville House, in pen, ink, and brown wash heightened with white, and recently sold at auction, shows that Alphonsine may have left other legacies.¹⁰⁴

Alphonsine, a well-connected society figure in France both locally and nationally, has been omitted — and vilified — in John's biography

⁹⁹ 'Échos', *La Justice*, 26 May 1908, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, 'Nos nouveaux canots', *Annales du sauvetage maritime*, October–December 1911, pp. 545–53 (pp. 548, 549).

¹⁰¹ *Recueil des actes administratifs de la préfecture du département de la Seine*, May 1908, p. 433.

¹⁰² *Catalogue des importants bijoux, [...] objets d'art et d'ameublement [...] dépendant de la succession de madame Bowes de Saint-Amand*, Paris, Hôtel Drouot, 17–20 June 1908.

¹⁰³ 'Les Grandes Ventes', *Le Figaro*, 21 June 1908, p. 5; 'Art et curiosité', *Le Journal*, 25 June 1908, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ Lot 191, Victor Hugo, 'Paysage de Guernesey', Sale number 4015, Christie's, Paris, 25 March 2015.

and in the history of the Bowes Museum. Yet the collection carries traces of the founders' private lives, even after Joséphine's death. Recovering the private lives of Joséphine, John, and Alphonsine in France helps to understand some of the ambivalence within the museum. The legal situation of women and the laws of matrimony and succession impacted and often overshadowed the legacies of female collectors. The erasure of Alphonsine is characteristic of many other women in collecting histories who have been underestimated because of their education, profession, or personal life. For Alphonsine, the laws of marriage and divorce worked to her advantage in some ways, but that was not always the case. In 1879 the Belgian-born Valentine de Riquet de Caraman-Chimay (1839–1914) was forced to sell the Château de Menars and the ancestral collection inherited through her mother. Legally separated from her first husband, the French Prince de Bauffremont in 1874, Valentine swiftly became naturalized in the Duchy of Saxe-Altenburg, where it was legal for her to take the Romanian prince Georges Bibesco as a second husband. Under French law, however, Valentine was still married to Bauffremont, who retaliated by having the naturalization and the second marriage made void in the French court and her property confiscated, also appealing for the confiscation of her possessions in Belgium. The affair was widely publicized in the French press as part of the uphill battle to legalize divorce.

In Alphonsine's immediate circle several examples of collections inherited by women or handed down through maternal lineage reveal the importance of considering property law and women's role as legatees of collections. The Thoré-Bürger collection, inherited by Apolline Biffe (Mme Paul Lacroix) from her lover, was displayed in her husband's apartments at the Arsenal, where it was incorporated into his collection, so that her role was henceforth forgotten.¹⁰⁵ Achille Jubinal's wife inherited her father's collection of eighteenth-century artworks and both she and her daughter Amélie added to it. Although parts of this collection were inherited through the maternal lines, and enriched by women in the family, the Saint-Albin-Jubinal-George Duruy collection was ultimately remembered by their husbands' and fathers' names.¹⁰⁶ Understanding and acknowledging women's role as collectors and legatees of collections helps to recover the agency of women hidden behind the names of their husbands. While foundational narratives for museums have tended to privilege the achievements of a single male connoisseur, or occasionally a single collecting couple, the example of Alphonsine highlights the value of recovering the role of other women whose role in building collections has been hidden by legal strictures, marital scandal, or moral censure.

¹⁰⁵ Magali Charreire, 'Vermeer à l'Arsenal: la bibliothèque-musée de Paul Lacroix', *Littératures*, 75 (2016), 45–56 <<https://doi.org/10.4000/litteratures.668>>.

¹⁰⁶ Carle Dreyfus, 'La Collection Saint-Albin-Jubinal-George Duruy', *Les Arts: Revue mensuelle des musées, collections, expositions*, September 1905, pp. 2–21.