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**Wings, Gender and Architecture:  
Remembering Bath, England**

**Cynthia Imogen Hammond**

**A Thesis**

**In**

**The Department**

**of**

**Humanities**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at  
Concordia University  
Montréal, Québec, Canada**

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## ABSTRACT

Wings, Gender and Architecture:  
Remembering Bath, England

Cynthia Imogen Hammond, Ph.D.  
Concordia University, 2002

This thesis is a cultural study of the city of Bath, England. Bath's tourist industry currently uses Neo-classical architectural heritage to foster an incomplete vision of the past, void of working-class women's history. As a feminist analysis of Bath's architecture, this study takes examples of medieval and Georgian building and Gothic revival in Bath to reveal the gendered underpinnings of architectural discourse at large. At the symbolic core of this discourse in Bath is a mythical figure, the winged male architect, which suggests that architectural achievement is a form of transcendence unavailable to women, both historically and, by extension, in the present. The "feminine" equivalents of the winged male architect – the angel in the house and the fallen woman – are subject to critique here for the ways in which their construction denies historical women the capacity for both creativity and agency. This study therefore presents and analyses archival evidence of women's history in Bath in relation to Bath's architectural history. Based on the assumption that feminist scholarship is a heuristic activity, this doctoral project also documents performance art projects and collective, public art strategies involving the author and other women artists, in Bath and Montréal, Canada. These artistic interventions into the "public" sphere of the city are an attempt to bring the practice of feminist ethics to bear on history, architecture and public memory.

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Cynthia Hammond, April 2002.

To my mother,  
Rosalind Faith Souter Hammond

The house will always remember your creativity.  
And after the house is gone,  
I will remember.

If I am an artist, it is because you are one, too.

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...I saw a Lady stand at one corner and turn herself to the wall and whisper'd[. T]he voice came very cleer and plaine to the Company that stood at the crosse corner of the roome soe that it could not be carry'd by the side wall, it must be the arch overhead which was a great height. But to return to the Church...

- Celia Fiennes<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Illustrated Journeys of Celia Fiennes, 1685-c.1712*, ed. Christopher Morris (Great Britain: Macdonald & Co. Ltd., [1947] 1982) 191.

## Introduction

### *feathers and stone*

Bath is a small city elegantly poised on the slopes of seven hills<sup>1</sup> in Somerset county, in the south west of England. It is true that I dream about this city, and have hammered out its likeness in painting, sculpture and text for years. When people inquire about my profession, the name “Bath” repeats in my answers. Why (t)here? Bath’s history and appearance invites the obsessive determination of academic work; the place breathes contradiction. The unpredictability of speculative building markets, past and present, closely shadow the careful beauty of Bath. Bath’s most famous architectural monuments harbour the obsessions of regional architects. The smooth façades feature in equal parts the triumph of Georgian architecture and the instability of local stone. You would never know, as a tourist, that Bath is a city that is steadily eroding. Daily, street sweepers gather a fine layer of pale yellow dust along with the detritus of littering tourists and hurrying locals. Bath cleans up nice, but like a sealed envelope, its neatness conceals. Accompanying every golden crescent or terrace, charmingly free of telephone poles or billboards, is a sequence of decision-making that insists to twenty-first-century audiences that Bath is an eighteenth-century town.

Conservationists force feed silicon into the pollution-weakened, porous surfaces of preservation-worthy architecture, attempting to retain Bath’s youthful

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<sup>1</sup> These hills are Combe and Claverton Down, Beechen Cliff, Newbridge, Lansdown, Solsbury and Primrose.

appearance,<sup>2</sup> but no similar effort occurs on behalf of those hands which built and cleaned and slept against these stones when there was no other shelter. Rather, the unwritten histories of working-class men and women in Bath have been pushed back behind the stone, rubbed out of sight, pulled down, torn up and redirected. Milk, Corn and Avon Streets once demarcated Bath's largest working-class district. This area is now a parking lot, a mall and the Bath City Technical College. (Fig. 1, 2) But this loss and these absences are not immediately apparent. When I first saw Bath, I was filled with wonder at the city's beauty, and then sought to make a mark or leave something of myself with this lovely city. What could I reveal of Bath to itself, to others? After years of building homage to Bath in painting and sculpture (Fig. 3), and more years of studying the stories behind the architecture, I began to see that Bath's beauty is a carefully constructed commodity, and that my enthusiastic response was, in part at least, predictable. There is much to seduce the lover of architecture in Bath, so much so that recognition of the absence of working-class, women's history, may not be immediate.

My reaction to the gendered elisions in the stories of Bath's architectural rise and triumph has had several facets, all of which emerge in this thesis. I would like to introduce an important aspect of my working method at this juncture and be very clear that the process, or lens through which I have sought to produce a feminist reconsideration of the architecture of Bath is not only scholarly, but also artistic. This artistic process depends greatly on performance, anonymous "gifts" and collaborative projects in Bath and Montréal, which this thesis also documents through image and description. The combination of art historical research and studio practice as an approach to studying Bath's history and architecture, was

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<sup>2</sup> Jerry Sampson describes this as one conservation tactic proposed (and rejected) for the 1992 restoration of Bath Abbey. See *Bath Abbey, West Front: Report on the Early Restorations* (Wells, Somerset: Caroe and Partners, Architects, 1992) 43.

already in motion well before I began to work on Bath as a doctoral project, and it has been an integral part of the work that now stands before the reader.

The way that art making has come to inform my work is this: art, particularly performance, collaboration and “non-commissioned public art”,<sup>3</sup> functions for me in a way that is not available to an academic approach to history alone. The vision of Bath that is immediately visible to the tourist is one that is class and gender-biased. Thus a very partial “history” of Bath is in continual production, and each of the three million estimated tourists a year leave without knowing much, if anything, of local women’s history and even less of the ways in which women contributed to the architecture that is the focus of most visitors’ sojourn there. Bath’s history is, simply, very active in the present moment. It operates through a lively and lucrative tourist culture and thus is not a clearly defined moment from the “past” which allows the luxury (or detour) of arms’ length elucidation. Rather, Bath’s history is its current currency and for that reason, the gendered and class-based gaps in the tourist-ready version of its story are more than regrettable oversights from another era. If anything, it is the practices of history and heritage today that are at issue for a feminist scholar of Bath’s history. And what is required is not simply to increase the tally of public monuments dedicated to historical female figures. It is also to reconsider how, on a profoundly symbolic level, Bath, a city valued for its high-class architecture, does not publicly remember how working-class women contributed to the city. Making art in the ways that I do has allowed me direct intervention – in the present moment – with the “past”, and has allowed me to engage the very tourist culture with which I take issue.

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<sup>3</sup> Contemporary Canadian artist, Janet Morton uses this term to describe multiples (cast frogs, for example) which she places, without permission or commission, in public spaces such as beaches, and on public buildings. Morton is particularly known for her monumental knitted sculptures, which she uses to engage and reinterpret public monuments. See Sarah Quinton, *Janet Morton: Wool Work* (Toronto: Textile Museum of Canada, 2000).

Change is slow to come in a place such as Bath, a place that prides itself on its aesthetic conservatism and its stock roster of heroes. The feminist guidebook to Bath may be a long time coming. In the meanwhile, my work in and on Bath has included art works planned to disrupt, disarm and potentially destabilize the local circuit of male genius and “great” architecture.<sup>4</sup> For the sake of brevity and clarity, this thesis includes discussion of six projects, three of which took place in Bath, and three parallel projects I undertook in Montréal, Québec. The unifying, iconic and symbolic link between all of these projects was a handmade wing or wings. Usually I was the one to make the wing, but there were significant exceptions. Before I introduce these projects, however, it is necessary to go back to the fall of 1997, when I began to build a wing out of hand-cast paper feathers, found branches, wire and cotton thread. (Fig. 4) The wing was a gesture, an attempt to give a place to the overwhelming feelings of helplessness that were utterly (and unspeakably) bound up in the dying and death of my father. I was reading Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* at the time, particularly the story of the artist/architect/craftsman Daedalus, and how he and his son Icarus escaped (and failed to escape) from the island of Crete.<sup>5</sup> I felt my

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<sup>4</sup> It would be misrepresentative to suggest that all commentators have found Bath’s architecture to be “great”. There is a long history of damning Bath with faint praise, from an anonymous poet who compared the Royal Circus to a giant tea set [See R. S. Neale *Bath 1650-1850, A Social History; or a Valley of Pleasure Yet a Sink of Iniquity* (London, Boston and Henley; Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981) 204] to architectural historian Sir John Summerson, who, while readily admitting the influence of the Square, the Circus and the Crescent in subsequent urban building schemes in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth-centuries, appears to find distasteful the embarrassing (for architectural history) flights of fancy which seemed to inspire these, Bath’s most notable and long-lived architectural achievements. John Summerson, Chapter 23, “The House and The Street in the Eighteenth Century” in *Architecture in Britain, 1530-1830* (London: Penguin Books, 1983), particularly 388-395. (Summerson’s more derogatory comments about the town planning of Bath did not survive the editing process of the newer, 1983 edition of his book.)

<sup>5</sup> In Ovid’s version of the story, Daedalus builds wings out of wax and feathers for himself and his son, Icarus, to escape from their imprisonment. He warns Icarus to avoid the hot rays of the sun, but to no avail; Icarus flies too close to the beautiful sun and the wax holding the feathers of his wings together melts. Icarus falls to his death in the Icarian Sea. *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, trans. Mary M. Innes (Great Britain: Penguin, 1955) 184-186.



situation to be a reversal of the roles of Daedalus and Icarus, in this case, the child making the wing for the parent, but regardless, the wing did not save the one for whom it was made. My father died within the first three months of my having begun doctoral work.

But how does this story relate to Bath, and the particular issues of heritage and amnesia that are the concern of this thesis? I ask here for patience on the part of the reader, while we follow what Régine Robin calls *Nebbenwegge*, a wandering path.<sup>6</sup> I was reading Ovid because the story of Daedalus and his wings is remarkably similar to the story of Prince Bladud, a mythical Celtic character who survived great perils, had remarkable talents, was the pioneer architect of Bath and, reputedly, could fly.<sup>7</sup>

Bladud was a right cunning craftsman, and did teach [necromancy] throughout the realm of Britain, nor did he stint of his subtle sleights until he had fashioned him wings and tried to go upon the top of the air, when he fell upon the temple of Apollo in the city of London, and was dashed into many pieces.<sup>8</sup>

Bladud's similarity to Daedalus, and the fascination that Bladud held for Bath's key

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<sup>6</sup> “[O]ne ought to take *Nebbenwegge*, lateral or oblique paths, detours, to operate displacements, to produce the confusion of genres, of writings, and of disciplines, to...introduce a dialogical process within the heart of formalized monosemia.” Régine Robin, “Toward Fiction as Oblique Discourse,” *Rethinking History - Yale French Studies Review* 59 (1980): 234.

<sup>7</sup> Various accounts of Bladud's story exist, most based on Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, trans., Sebastian Evans, revised, Charles W. Dunn (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., [1138] 1958). The later the version, the more elaborated it tends to be, with John Wood the Elder's account being the most florid and imaginative. See *Choir Gaure, Vulgarly [sic] called Stonehenge, on Salisbury Plain, Described, Restored, and Explained, In a Letter To The Right Honourable Edward, Late Earl of Oxford, and Earl Mortimer* (Oxford: The Theatre, 1747). In addition to most general tourist information relating to Bath, the story of Bladud is also found in Howard C. Levis, *The British King Who Tried To Fly: Extracts from Old Chronicles and Histories Relating to Bladud, The Ninthe King of Britain, Together with Several Portraits* (London: Chiswick Press, 1919) and Michael J. Curley, *Geoffrey of Monmouth* (New York, Toronto: Twayne Publishers and Macmillan Canada, 1994). Archaeologist Barry Cunliffe also discusses the Bladud myth in the Introduction to *Roman Bath Discovered* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

<sup>8</sup> Dunn 35.

eighteenth-century architect, John Wood the Elder (1704-1754), demanded careful attention. With these parallel myths, however, it was that which went unsaid, the gaps and omissions, which warranted my reflection. The discursive link between human, male achievement and loss (the sacrifice of a loved one, or the protagonist himself) is, for example, nowhere explicit in these two myths. The message remains clear, however, that when humans reach towards heaven, either through the upward mobility of architecture or through the body, they trespass upon the realm of the gods, causing an impossible imbalance in the natural order that must be righted. The correction of the rupture is usually bad news for the human protagonist, but traces or memories of the transgression remain, be they in the form of architecture (the labyrinth, the city of Bath), or even more powerfully in the form of a narrative.

Indra Kagis McEwen's book, *Socrates' Ancestor: An Essay on Architectural Beginnings*, considers the implications of one aspect of Daedalus' work, his "moving statues", or *Xoana*.<sup>9</sup> The story goes that Daedalus, the "first" artist, was so successful with his lost wax method of casting bronze that his sculptures could move, and further, escape their owners. These statues were thus bound to keep them in place. Kagis McEwen writes, "the expedient of binding these primitive Daedalean statues...with cords or chains was a way of making the divine life in them manifest."<sup>10</sup> Daedalus is then a very complicated and important mythical figure, not simply for his role as an architect, but also for how he defines the artist for Western cultural history as the tragic one who gives a divine spark of life to that which would otherwise be inanimate. It is this quality that gives Daedalus his stamp as a human with near-divine powers. It is notable that such powers should be

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<sup>9</sup> See Indra Kagis McEwen, Chapters 3, "Daedalus and the Discovery of Order" (41-76) and 4, "Between Movement and Fixity: The Place for Order" (79-120) in *Socrates' Ancestor: An Essay on Architectural Beginnings* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, England: MIT Press, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> Kagis McEwen 5.

associated with art, architecture, flight and masculinity.

When my father died, the wing I was building was unfinished. I left it this way deliberately, as there was no further impetus to complete it. In the months that followed, the unfinished wing became a symbol for me of need for creative action as a means of making sense; that is, making bearable those aspects of living which threaten to collapse the whole landscape of living with their senselessness. In this way the wing completed itself, and I began to see it in terms of key moments in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, such as when Daedalus builds the wings and fits them to his son's body, and then again to the moment of Icarus' burial. Ritual, repetitive actions were the basis for the construction of my wing. The lengthy preparation of paper pulp and plaster molds, the slow casting and sewing of the long yellow feathers to their armature meant that the wing came into being painfully slowly, and was visually awkward in the early weeks of its creation. At one point, a very insightful woman had told me that I was not building a wing, but mending it.<sup>11</sup> After my decision to stop work, the large bare patch on the wing was also a potent reminder of how mending is not always possible, and that in fact, to leave something un-mended is to confront the ways in which it does not work.

The wing I built for my father was, as I said above, a futile yet (for me) necessary gesture in the face of his imminent death. I also began to think about Daedalus' and by parallel, Bladud's fallible wings as metaphors for western architecture, particularly monumental or sacred architecture: a near-divine accomplishment steeped in an inevitable mortality. Given the early association of western architecture (temples) with sacrifice (altars), the undercurrent of death

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<sup>11</sup> This woman was Vita Plume, an artist who co-taught a graduate seminar, in which I participated, as part of the MFA programme in Sculpture at Concordia University, Fall/Winter 1996.

which informs classical architecture is not a surprise.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, however, a notion of sublime human achievement also informs the discourse of “great” architecture. Mircea Eliade, historian of religion, writes,

To build a temple or a city is equivalent to reiterating the “construction” of the Universe...the repetition of the cosmogony and the symbolism [therein] are not exclusive to sacred architecture: the same rituals and symbols are present when it is a matter of building a dwelling which to our modern eyes is “profane.”<sup>13</sup>

And what are these symbols and rituals that inhabit all architecture? Eliade continues his discussion of sacred space and architecture with an anecdote, derived from Buddhist texts about the Arhat, for whom the ultimate mystical experience takes the form of an image of priests, who “by their own will break and pass through the roof of the house and disappear into the trees.”<sup>14</sup> The “perfect freedom” expressed in this linkage of architecture and human flight leads Eliade to conclude that,

In the majority of archaic ideologies, the image of “flight” signifies access to a mode of superhuman being (god, magician, “spirit”)...[he who] breaks through the roof of the house, and soars into the sky illustrates in an imaged manner that he has transcended the Cosmos and has acceded to a paradoxical, indeed unthinkable, mode of being...on the mythological level, the exemplary gesture of the transcension of the world by a violent act of rupture...<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> George Hersey has written extensively about the etymological evidence for an early culture of sacrifice and classicism in architecture in *The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture: Speculations on Ornament from Vitruvius to Venturi*. Cambridge, Mass., and London, England: MIT Press, 1988). For a feminist reconsideration of Hersey’s ideas, see Cynthia Hammond, *The Strength and Fragility of the Egg: Spring Hurlbut’s Interventions in the Classical Idiom* (Montréal: Concordia University, 1996). Joseph Rykwert also discusses “The Heroes’ Sacrifice” in Chapter 5 of *The Dancing Column: On Order in Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass., and London England: MIT Press, 1996) 145-146.

<sup>13</sup> Mircea Eliade, “Sacred Architecture and Symbolism” in *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts* (USA: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1985) 113.

<sup>14</sup> Eliade 122.

<sup>15</sup> Eliade 123.

Thus the myths of Daedalus and Bladud represent both a validation of those skills and practices (“cunning”) which are central to the practice of architecture, while at the same time producing a narrative where architecture is the fulcrum by which the human male catapults himself into the realm of the gods.

It is important to introduce here the idea that the myth of Daedalus, while not explicitly celebrating maleness, equates human defiance of gravity and all that this suggests, even when it fails, with masculinity. I am not even speaking of the most obvious inference here, the erection. I am describing, rather, the ideal map of masculinity that architecture, or the architect, offers in terms of how “he” leaves behind earthly matter (and matters). The ongoing currency of the Daedalus myth, and the ways in which it continues to register an ideal of masculinity is apparent in Peter H. Tatham’s book, *The Makings of Maleness: Men, Women, and the Flight of Daedalus*. Tatham writes defensively,

I find it inappropriate, when examining a mainly masculine set of archetypal imagery such as *daidalos*, to be presented with a demand for “more feminine please”...It is one of my intentions to examine the field as it is, which means accepting a relative absence of the female in what is therefore a predominantly male field. At the same time I hold on to the overall unity of the two (male and female), which is at all times implied.<sup>16</sup>

The absence in Tatham’s book of a critical analysis of gender distinctions is not surprising, as the author’s intention is to rewrite masculinity using Daedalus-the-craftsman/artist/architect as a basis.<sup>17</sup> Given that the attempt to delineate masculinity

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<sup>16</sup> Peter H. Tatham, *The Makings of Maleness: Men, Women, and the Flight of Daedalus* (New York: New York University Press, 1992) 59.

<sup>17</sup> Tatham: Preamble, n. pag.. Sarah P. Morris’ rigorous and fascinating study of Daedalus, *Daidalos and the Origins of Greek Art* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), offers a staggering list of achievements and inventions attributed to his name. Rather than consider Daedalus to be an archetypal male figure, Morris views the character of Daedalus to be a useful repository or emblem for the qualities of cunning, speed and inventiveness which attend his presence in ancient Greek narrative. His name is less a name, therefore, than it is an adjective. While Morris’ work promises and delivers much, there remains the predictable gendering of achievement that is somewhat inevitable through this myth, and its subsequent revitalization.

has tended to take femininity as a constitutive but insignificant Other, Tatham's work breaks little new ground.<sup>18</sup> What it does do, however, is reinstate Daedalus (and by extension, all that is attributed to this character, including art and architecture) as a figure of immense symbolic proportions, whose potential significance for a contemporary notion of masculinity is considerable. This significance, it would seem, is to place skill, creativity and the capacity to transcend securely within the domain of masculinity.

Always seeking the gaps, the dropped threads, I notice that despite all proselytizing in his favour, Daedalus' ability to give the divine spark of life to inanimate objects does not extend to reviving the dead Icarus. Similarly, Bladud's mysterious ability to fly was not enough to prevent him from crashing into a temple (the house of the sacrificial altar) to his death. The obvious limits of Bladud and Daedalus' talents do not detract from their roles as superhuman characters. On the contrary, the presence of death in each narrative locates and legitimizes both myths within the western tradition of epic narrative. As feminist theologian Grace Jantzen has observed, much of Western culture's notions of the sacred pivot around cults of death.<sup>19</sup> Jantzen, who seeks to redefine the concept of the divine through a feminist framework, uses what she calls the principle of "natality" as a tool to recuperate femininity. In *Becoming Divine*, Jantzen attempts to reconceive the relation between creativity and divinity. Primarily Jantzen seeks to investigate the notion that a "renewed political thoughtfulness" has great potential for the "becoming (divine) of

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<sup>18</sup> Moira Gatens discusses the structure and tradition of thought which categorically and hierarchically opposes male and female, in *Feminism and Philosophy: Perspectives on Difference and Equality* (England: Polity Press and Indiana University Press, 1991).

<sup>19</sup> See Chapter 6, "In order to begin: death and natality in the western imaginary" in Grace Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999) 128-155.

women subjects”.<sup>20</sup> In other words, “becoming divine” is for Jantzen the most pressing task of humanity, and one that she believes cannot occur without a thoughtful, feminist reconsideration of dominant cultural narratives. This, as I discuss further in Chapters 1 and 9, includes the concept of creation, and (women’s) creativity.

Opposing herself to those strains of thought which assume “the disembodied and unsituated [mind]”, Jantzen’s guiding concept of natality “affirms the concreteness and embodied nature of human lives and experience, the material and discursive conditions within which subjects are formed and out of which a religious symbolic must emerge.”<sup>21</sup> Jantzen’s work redefines the divine by recognizing creativity as a divine function of life on earth, and a politically necessary one at that (earthly matter, earthly matters). These ideas bring me back to the art that I have made in and about Bath, as attempts to effect what Jantzen calls a “shift in the imaginary”.<sup>22</sup> I have sought through my art projects to do three things. First, I have wanted to make an immediate, if temporary difference in the amnesia that permeates Bath today vis-à-vis its history of working-class women. Second, I endeavored to challenge the unspoken, but persistent assumption in Bath (as elsewhere), that the architect is a divine figure who is always, already male. Third, I wanted to intervene in the symbolic order of Bath’s memories of the past, wherein the male, winged architect occupies the seat of most importance, while its female counterparts – the angel in the house and the fallen women – garner no attention at all. While each notion is entirely a cultural construct, the masculine figure of the winged architect nonetheless accrues validity and importance, especially in relation

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<sup>20</sup> Jantzen 145.

<sup>21</sup> Jantzen 146.

<sup>22</sup> Jantzen 146.

to architectural history, while the female figure (whether “good” or “bad”) does not.

Wings, and winging women, have been crucial to each art project I discuss in the pages ahead. The three projects in Bath depended on either actual wings or overt references to the idea of the winged architect. In *pro fanus* (performance, September 1999), I stood in front of Bath’s largest church (Bath Abbey), which features a falling, winged female figure as part of its external decoration. Here, through the performance I used my voice and physical presence to comment on the absence of working-class women in Bath’s heritage programmes. (Fig. 5, 6, 7) *fallen/winged* (performance, July 2000) saw me scrubbing the façades of Bath Abbey and the Bath Female Home and Penitentiary during the course of one day. For this project I was again winged and wore white gloves, as a reference to the history of reform houses for “fallen women” in Bath, and their programme of reform through household work. (Fig. 8, 9, 10) *Winged* (bookworks and group exhibition of uncommissioned public art, July 2000) incorporated two limited edition bookworks (Fig. 11, 12, 13, 14, 15), dispersed around Bath’s historic centre and what had once been the working-class district, with artwork by other artists. Montréal artists Katja Macleod Kessin, Suzanne Leblanc, Lydia Sharman and Caroline Stevens all participated in this project. (Fig. 16, 17, 18) I invited these women to think about Bath as a canvas on which they could leave a mark of some sort, either in relation to women’s history, or to wings, or to architecture. These projects directly engaged the notions of architecture, gender and historical value, which characterize the current, nostalgic view of Bath’s past.

Of my work in Montréal, one project, *take back the night* (collaborative performance, March 1998), was an attempt to locate the links between the political and creative agency of women, and the relationship between the private safety of women and the public spaces of the city. In this work, over two hundred women



participating in a march for women's safety wore reflective, glow-in-the-dark wings that I had made for the event. (Fig. 19, 20) Another project, *breathe/animer* (collaborative performance, June 1999), also in Montréal, sought to invest and symbolically transform public sites with simple, ephemeral gestures and actions. (Fig. 21, 22, 23) Then in 1999, I worked with Katja Macleod Kessin, later a participant in *a woman was here*, and a group of seven survivors of domestic violence in Montréal. Macleod Kessin and I facilitated painting and sculpture workshops in which our collaborators adopted the theme of our programme, "flight", in various ways as a metaphor for their own experience of survival. (Fig. 24, 25) (See Chapter 9.)

These projects are, with this thesis, the representation of a shift in my thinking about what is possible, academically, when an explicitly creative and subjective process is grafted together with a "historical" topic such as Georgian architecture. The strongest indicator of this shift is the difference between the art reproduced in Figure 3 and 4, and the art documented in Figures 6 through 25. I can best describe the nature of this shift not in terms of style or materials, but rather in terms of engagement. Without denigrating my earlier work, this doctoral project has given me the opportunity to connect with conviction the keen interest I have in architectural history, the specific location of Bath, the desire to do creative work, and my feminism. The drive to work "on" a historical topic is entirely synchronous with the desire to improve the current political lot of women. Susan Stanford Friedman articulates a primary impetus behind feminist politics in the academy when she writes,

The narrative act of assigning meaning to the past potentially intervenes in the present and future construction of history...The heuristic and interventionist dimension of history writing [is in other words]

historiography as an act in the present on behalf of the future.<sup>23</sup>

Bath presents its prized Georgian architecture to the public with virtually no acknowledgement of the thousands of historical, working-class women who participated in its emergence. The history that accompanies a tourist experience of the city is a particular version of the long eighteenth century.<sup>24</sup> The present economy depends very much on that history. In this history, there are few women who figure.<sup>25</sup> And those who do are never connected with that which brings Bath its fame and its revenues: architecture. For the remainder of the introduction, I sketch an image of the women who did populate Bath during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and pose some parameters for the discussion of architecture's symbolic import.

The absent women with whom I am concerned came from a variety of backgrounds and arrived with myriad purposes. Many were maids, wives of labourers, landladies, and some were prostitutes and brothel keepers. There were young rural women who went into service in Bath, only to become pregnant by a man in the household and fall upon the charity of the city.<sup>26</sup> Some women in Bath were unwell visitors, who had come to Bath for its celebrated healing waters, and this is where local history begins to remember women, women who enjoyed a

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<sup>23</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman, *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998) 200.

<sup>24</sup> Neale's phrase, demarcating the time line of his social history of Bath.

<sup>25</sup> With the obvious major exception of Jane Austen and the recent exception of Amanda Foreman's popular biography of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire. See *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire* (England: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999). The striking resemblance between Georgiana in Foreman's portrait and the late Princess Diana would seem to suggest that the fascination with this historical woman is imbricated with her wealth, privilege and notoriety.

<sup>26</sup> Neale, discusses the case of Sarah Wheeler, and the situation of women in domestic service, in Chapter 3, "The Labouring Population" 49-94. See particularly page 73.

degree of privilege and social mobility. A great number of privileged and fashionable women came for Bath's famed society. Others were neither poor nor rich, but dependent upon the patronage of the wealthy for their good reputations, and came grudgingly, such as Jane Austen (1775-1817).<sup>27</sup> Of those born into wealth on a grand scale, like Selina, Countess of Huntingdon (1707-1791), some used their privilege to foster their own visions for the city. There were those who believed in the city's potential, like utopian novelist and philanthropist, Sarah Scott (1723-1795). Finally, there were those who came because they loved it, as in the case of author, Fanny Burney (1752-1840).

To a limited degree, these women have held the attention of Bath's historians, and their cultural production noted, and at times championed, as part of Bath's heritage.<sup>28</sup> Public plaques, museums, tourist guides and newspaper articles regularly acknowledge Austen and Burney.<sup>29</sup> But in the case of working-class women, there is no venue in Bath through which a tourist can access their history. Crucially, there is neither a physical nor a discursive location in Bath where the links between upper or working-class women's social history and architectural heritage publicly occur in Bath.<sup>30</sup> From the finely tooled architectural details to the

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<sup>27</sup> Maggie Lane, author of *A Charming Place: Bath in the Life and Novels of Jane Austen* (1988. Bath: Millstream 2000), writes, "[Austen's] own attitude to the city was sometimes hostile, frequently ambivalent..." (11).

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Paul Newman's tourist guidebook to Bath, *Bath* (England: Pevensey Heritage Guides, n.d.).

<sup>29</sup> Eighteenth-century author Jane Austen enjoys a great deal of attention in Bath with her own museum, numerous books and frequent newspaper articles dedicated to promoting and celebrating her connections with Bath. Even Austen's distaste for Bath's superficial society is an integral part of the remembering of privileged culture that pervades a tourist experience of the city today. See "The Jane Austen Years", a series of articles published in late June (the onset of the tourist season) by the *Bath Chronicle*, 3-4, 21-22, which trot out all the usual figures: Jane Austen, Ralph Allen, John Wood the Elder and Fanny Burney.

<sup>30</sup> There is, however, the "Building of Bath Museum" which houses tools, maps, illustrations, models and samples relevant to the building trades in Bath. While not explicitly concerned with the culture of male labourers in Georgian Bath, the museum implicitly values the methods and products

prevailing stories of men and their architectural visions, Bath thus becomes the sepulchre for these historical women who, through their labour, also participated in the construction of one of England's most celebrated cities.

When I first came to the city in 1992, the weather was uncharacteristically perfect, Bath Abbey stood under a sheath of scaffolding and fabric, and I was on the cusp of a new direction in my studio practice. I was twenty-two. At that time, my reaction to the city (and later, my memories of that trip) was commensurate with my predilection for Neo-classicism. It was as if Naples yellow, Vitruvian principles and an unmistakably human scale had found an inimitable meeting point in the streets of Bath. The strata of history that were visible through Georgian buildings included partially excavated ancient Roman and Celtic sites. I was intrigued by Bath's mysteries, the healing waters and heroes, and by the personalities that animate and clutter Bath's history with mythology. I loved Bath in the way that one loves something that is at once intimately familiar, yet completely new. I embraced the architectural language I had stumbled across, domestic Neo-classicism, but did not think then about how my position in society and culture had predisposed me to reach towards it.

The first hint that something was amiss struck me later, after returning to Canada. Thumbing through *Northanger Abbey*<sup>31</sup> I recalled that in Austen's novels the architecture was silted with artifice: each building was a trap of false flattery and transparent ambition. Morning calls, evening balls and tentative romance tarnished

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of male labour. The museum has recently opened a new wing (separate and distinct) in which interior decorating is the focus, however, here again it is male designers and firms, rather than the quotidian "home-making" and custodial practices of women, which hold the spotlight. The further irony that the building which contains the main museum – itself an homage to Georgian architecture – is one of the few eighteenth-century Gothic buildings in Bath, and furthermore the work of a woman (Selina Hastings), is dealt with in Chapter 1.

<sup>31</sup> Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (1818. England: Wordsworth Editions, 1993).

the city for Austen. Furthermore, Bath had given a setting to Austen's subtly chastising critique of the social norms and gender roles inherent to contemporary polite society. It was then I realized that, a feminist, I had forgotten women.

I am a white woman, the daughter of a male anglophile. My father, born and educated in New Zealand, made England the focus of his life and work. Growing up in Canada, my sisters and I knew there was no place like home, and "home" was England.<sup>32</sup> Bath offered me, like many others, an easily consumable version of the past – a past that screams cultural inheritance to "colonials" such as my father, and apparently, to me. My trip was an unplanned pilgrimage, but like a religious pilgrim in the Vatican, I recognized the sacred when I saw it and found a place to lodge the unspecified longings that had been my real inheritance. If my tastes had run to Pre-Raphaelite painting, perhaps I would have found "home" in the Victoria and Albert. If I had idolized the Beatles, I could have run aground happily in Liverpool. My studio practice at that time consisted of projects I thought of as built, or architectural landscapes. (See fig. 3) These were for me searching places where I looked for beauty (to me, at the time, an only intermittent quality of the steel-producing town where I was born). I had never seen anything like Bath. Not even London, so alarmingly vast and complicated, could compete with Bath, which seemed to be my size. Bath met my desire for a certain kind of aesthetic. I was

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<sup>32</sup> While I would not suggest that my parents' experience as white "colonials" coming to England in the early sixties was similar to the experience Stuart Hall discusses in his interview with Kuan-Hsing Chen, "The Formation of a Diasporic Intellectual", I am familiar with what Hall describes as his parents' identification with colonial power. (485). David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds., *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. (London, New York: Routledge, 1996) 484-503. I would go somewhat further than Hall by saying that such identification permitted an acceptance of power and dominance within our family that was structured on patriarchal lines, especially once my father felt rejected by the culture he considered superior to all others and worthy of both his intellectual focus and his nostalgic longing. I have to admit that there is an aspect, in this project, of wishing to debunk the myth of England's greatness, in part because the myth of England's greatness was synonymous with my father's position of dominance in a family of women. The childhood desire that my sisters and I felt for England helped to justify my father's priorities, passions and moods, which in turn constructed our desire, like his, to "go home".

determined to know it. So, with the only way I had of “knowing” – art making – as my tool, I began at what I thought was the beginning: architecture.

Bath was and still is a city of dwellings, shops, hospitals and utopian designs. Its population during its historical emergence was predominantly female.<sup>33</sup> Thousands of women made Bath their home from the period of 1680 to 1900. Their labour, struggles and creativity barely register on Bath’s historical façade. Given that Bath’s importance today is synonymous with its reputation as a Georgian city, the immediate defense of the absence of women would be that there were no women architects in Bath. Apart from the fact that this is debatable,<sup>34</sup> there is a larger issue. “Architecture” and “architect” remain categories which discursively exclude women, despite the growing evidence that women can, have done, and do practice architecture in many ways. As feminist architectural historian, Lynne Walker writes,

[T]he relationship of women to architecture remains highly problematic; at one end of the design continuum, the image of the architect remains firmly male, and at the other, the women who use buildings have little control over or understanding of their production. The art historical values of innovation and quality which...place women’s issues and achievements in a nether-world of ‘other’, while British cities are planned and designed with scant attention paid to the needs of women, especially those in communities where mobility and spending power are restricted.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Neale 72-76.

<sup>34</sup> As I discuss in Chapter 2, there is reason to believe that Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, was the architect of the Huntingdon Chapel in Bath, now the Building of Bath Museum.

<sup>35</sup> Lynne Walker has produced an important introductory survey of practicing women architects in England from the late seventeenth to the late twentieth centuries. See “Women and Architecture” in *Gender, Space, Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*, eds. Jane Rendell et al (London: Routledge, 2000) 244-257. In addition to this kind of inclusionary revisioning of architectural history, scholars such as Dolores Hayden have written about late nineteenth and early twentieth century feminist reconstructions of space in such a way as to give them architectural credence. See *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, England: 1981). Elizabeth Wilson’s work on nineteenth-century women and large urban centres has also contributed to the growing body of work on women’s constitutive, if not authorial role in histories of architecture and of cities. See

Why is this so? The answer, I believe, has to do with the ways in which architecture is covertly a discourse about transcendence, but first, a word about Neo-classicism. The most valuable of Bath's architectural resources is the Georgian period, which rose in national importance as local conservation efforts gained momentum in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. Looking at Figure 38, a standard guidebook shot, and keeping in mind that the means of access to the Roman Baths is through the eighteenth-century Pump Room, note how Georgian architecture frames, literally and figuratively, the Gothic and Roman elements in the image.<sup>36</sup> A highly successful example of architectural hegemony, Bath's Georgian architecture embraces that which is outside its historical and stylistic perimeters and incorporates it, much as Wood adapted Stonehenge, Pythagoras, ancient Rome and Celtic mythology to his purposes in Bath.<sup>37</sup> Ironically, Bath's architectural mythology, bolstered by the solid remnants of past architectural moments, rests equally upon the lightest of notions: the winged architect.

The winged architect is a motif that manifests at a key point in Bath's mythology; it arises during the eighteenth century in the fantastical (some may say fanatical) writings of John Wood the Elder, architect, antiquarian and eccentric.<sup>38</sup>

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"The Invisible *Flâneur*" in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, eds. Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Great Britain: Blackwell, 1995); *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (Great Britain: Virago Press, 1991).

<sup>36</sup> In Bath, thanks to various excavation efforts, architectural heritage is highly visible so that the city itself becomes a large, stratified, stationary exhibit.<sup>36</sup> The display is such that for a price the visitor may see the many layers of history and architecture that Bath claims as its heritage: Celtic, ancient Roman, medieval, Reformation, Palladian and Neo-classical. The standard publicity shot of Bath, for example, shows the ruins of the ancient Roman baths in the foreground (accessible only through the late Georgian Pump Room, a tea and water-drinking establishment redesigned by Thomas Baldwin in 1789-99, completed by John Palmer), topped by a Georgian balustrade, decorated with twentieth-century statuary (in imitation of the missing Roman originals), with the late Gothic west front of Bath Abbey rising in the background.

<sup>37</sup> See footnote 43.

<sup>38</sup> See Wood, 1747, and *Essay Towards a Description of Bath* (London: 1765).

The emergence of Georgian Bath between 1725 (the date usually given to the elder Wood's "Imperial" plan, largely unrealized, for Bath<sup>39</sup>) and the end of the eighteenth century is a phase that has come to define Bath's value since the onset of the battle between developers and conservationists in the 1960s, and then definitively from Bath's declaration as a world heritage site in 1988.<sup>40</sup> The subtext to Wood's grand schemes for Bath is his writing, most of which include reference to the winged architect Bladud, whom Wood credits with building an ancient version of pre-Roman Bath.<sup>41</sup> Wood contrived Bladud's renaissance at a time when the former was expending enormous amounts of creative and entrepreneurial energy on both building and elevating Bath.<sup>42</sup> Wood's well-documented obsessions with Bladud and human flight, which I discuss in Chapter 1, reveal something of the mythical measure of architecture: the meaning which cannot be explicitly located in the masses and spaces of a building, but is discernible in the ways that architecture signifies human (male) power and skill, and "mastery" over matter and gravity. This mastery, however, is always already a failure. In the mythical architectural story of Bath, the winged architect's flight is doomed. Likewise, architecture reaches upwards but its flight is only ever symbolic; the fact that architecture never truly

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<sup>39</sup> See Tim Mowl and Brian Earnshaw, *John Wood, Architect of Obsession* (Bath: Millstream Books, 1988) 9.

<sup>40</sup> Graham Davis and Penny Bonsall, *Bath: A New History* (England: Keele University Press, 1996) 174-179.

<sup>41</sup> Wood, 1747; *The Origin of Building: or the Plagiarism of the Ancients Detected* (Bath: 1741); *Essay Towards a Description of Bath* (London: 1765). In this thesis I refer to the revised edition of 1765, unless otherwise stated. In the bibliography, I have designated certain sources as "primary" and others as "secondary". *A Description of Bath* is a historical document, but like other texts I call "primary", it is an example of research that is also an example of self-portraiture, or self-disclosure. In this sense, all texts could be "primary", however, the ones so designated are particularly cogent examples of this phenomenon.

<sup>42</sup> Mowl and Earnshaw 9-26.



leaves the earth contradicts the ascent. Thus the soaring majesty of a Gothic cathedral, such as Bath Abbey (Fig. 27), is as much a lament *for* as it is an homage *to* what it can never be or attain: heaven.<sup>43</sup>

Bath offers an opportunity to explore architectural history in a way that enfolds feminist concerns with both the binary of male/female, and with the binary of human/divine. Women participated in the story of Christianity in Bath, through architecture, philanthropy and fiction. Selina Hastings, the Countess of Huntingdon was instrumental in launching Methodism in Bath through the Chapel she designed and built in 1765.<sup>44</sup> Sarah Scott, a novelist, woman of letters and philanthropist, wrote a utopian novel that sought to provide a woman-only model for an ideal community, self-sustaining and isolated from society, housing those Others (women and “monsters”) that Georgian society found so difficult to deal with. Scott based her novel, *Millenium* [sic] *Hall*, on her own philanthropic work in Bath.<sup>45</sup> That Bath does not today remember these two women (at least not beyond anecdotes of the

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<sup>43</sup> The lament, as Christine Ross has written, “makes manifest a temporal and autobiographical disjunction.” Ross’ consideration of a very different subject, the contemporary video art of Vern Hume, leads her to write, “The disjunction of the past and the present viewed, commented upon and lamented in this way is not repeated except insofar as it produces forgetting as memory, produces a gap between...the surface of reception and the surface of the preservation of events[.] Such a gap brings about the re-emergence of the unrepresented of representation, creating a kind of future anterior of history, of personal history.” While the object of focus differs, Ross here relates to my concern to make a personal history (and to make history personal) relevant within the disjunctions of past and present in contemporary Bath. From “The Lamented Moments/ Desired Objects of Video Art: Towards an Aesthetic of Discrepancy” in *Mirror Machine: Video and Identity*, ed. Janine Marchessault (Toronto: YYZ Books and CRCCII, 1995) 133, 139.

<sup>44</sup> See Bryan Little, *Selina, Countess of Huntingdon* (Bath: Huntingdon Centre: 1989); Boyd Stanley Schlenker, *Queen of the Methodists: The Countess of Huntingdon and the 18th Century Crisis of Faith and Society* (Durham: Durham Academic Press, 1997).

<sup>45</sup> *A Gentleman on His Travels* [Sarah Scott], *A Description of Millenium Hall and the Country Adjacent Together with the Characters of the Inhabitants and such Historical Anecdotes and Reflections as May Excite in the Reader Proper Sentiments of Humanity, and Lead the Mind to Virtue* (1762. New York: Penguin Books-Virago Press, 1986).

Countess' domineering personality) is indicative of the ways that religious and architectural discourses do not easily support the articulations of women. To introduce the literature on Bath dealing with architecture, and its omission of women's contributions, Chapter 2 presents the architectural and moral obsessions and solutions of Hastings against a backdrop of the dominant Georgian model of architectural success in Bath, the work of John Wood the Elder.

Wings on the female form in the nineteenth century indicated two states supposedly limited to femininity, a binary which had little to offer women who sought to express themselves, or even simply make a living, beyond the bounds of matrimony and the home. In short, they indicated the moral quality of a woman, and the potential in each woman to either fall *from virtue*, or ascend to an acceptable sexualization within marriage. Such constructions of femininity were rigid and polar, and completely circumvent the question of women as producers of culture in favour of the woman-as-representation, or as reproducer of the nation's population.<sup>46</sup> The image of the fallen woman takes my study out of the Georgian period and into the Victorian. In Chapters 3 through 5, I focus on the history of the Abbey, the falling female angel added in 1895, and the implications of such an addition at that point in Bath's history. Chapters 6 through 8 focus on the history of prostitution in Bath, with particular focus on a reform house for "fallen women" known periodically as Ladymead House. Using a combination of archival research and architectural detail, this chapter focuses on the way that gendered forms of labour were thought to reconstitute architectural space along appropriate gender lines, while refurbishing the tainted femininity of women who worked as

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<sup>46</sup> My ideas about this difference derive both from Spivak's work on the notion of reproduction as it pertains to women within a capitalist, industrial economy, and equally from Janice Helland and Catherine MacKenzie's session, "The Woman Producer, Not the Woman Reproduced", held under the auspices of the Universities' Art Association of Canada, McGill University, 1995. I published "The Industry of Motherhood: Spring Hurlbut's *L'ascension* and Julia Margaret Cameron's *Wings*," *RACAR (Revue d'art canadienne/Canadian Art Review)* XXV, 1-2, 1998 (issued in 2001): 48-57.

prostitutes. In addition, Chapter 8 addresses those acts of subversion and rebellion, which render the home for fallen women as a site where women of little power nonetheless enacted what power they had.

In Chapter 9 I discuss the art projects not otherwise dealt with in the thesis: *breathel/animier*, Montréal 1998; *Flight*, Montréal 1999 (in collaboration with ex-residents of the *Maison de la Culture*, NDG, and Katja Macleod Kessin) and *winged*, Bath 2000 (temporary, group “exhibition” with Macleod Kessin, Caroline Stevens, Lydia Sharman, Suzanne Leblanc and myself). In this chapter I address the question of the researcher’s ethical relationship with their subject, and the ways that feminism and my visual art practice have performed in this doctoral project as a provisional ethical system.

A critique of the popular history of architecture in Bath is necessarily a critique of the exclusion of working women and the notion of femininity from the discourse of architecture as a whole. It has been my intention in this thesis to write such a critique, as a potential model for further studies. Also, I have wanted to build a space within this thesis for women’s work as constitutive in terms of the architectural and social fabric of Bath. Ultimately, through the art projects introduced above, I have sought to build temporary “rhetorical spaces”, to use Lorraine Code’s term, in Bath, where the work, words and creativity of women may matter.<sup>47</sup>

In the pages ahead, I tell a story about architecture, wings and women, a story about creativity in the past and history in the present. Telling this story, I speak of historical women in a place that seems to remember history only through the words, acts and buildings of men. I also tell a story about a woman who, falling

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<sup>47</sup> Lorraine Code, *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Locations* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995).

in love with a city, comes to terms with her feminism and learns to remember a city differently.

## Chapter One

### Methodology and a further introduction to Bath

“But history, real solemn history, I cannot be interested in...I read it a little as a duty, but it tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me. The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men all good for nothing, and hardly any women at all – it is very tiresome and yet I often think it odd that it should be so dull, for a great deal of it must be invention...and invention is what delights me in other books.”

“Historians, you think,” said Miss Tilney, “are not happy in their flights of fancy. They display imagination without raising interest. I am very fond of history – and am very well contented to take the false with the true.”

- Catherine Morland and Miss Tilney, conversing in *Northanger Abbey*<sup>1</sup>

There are many ways to approach Bath. High above the Atlantic Ocean, a traveller could fly from the west into the Bristol Channel like a nineteenth-century windjammer, past the coastal town of Portishead. Leaving anchor in the shipbuilding city of Bristol, this traveller could then follow the River Avon against its current, to the east. Not long after leaving Bristol, the traveller would pass through a sudden airborne sweetness rising from chocolate factories situated between Bristol and Bath. The landscape changes rapidly during the journey, from broad flat stretches of farmland to the rounded viridian shoulders of Hercynian hills. Twenty kilometres east of Bristol, Bath appears quickly on the lowlands banking the Avon. On the ground, the city contrasts with the river’s swift and metallic twists under the sun. But from above, Bath appears like a city out of control, tumbling towards the Avon, itself gracefully plunging into the city from the

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<sup>1</sup> Austen *Northanger Abbey* 113.

west. (Fig. 28) The streets are narrow and shapely, curved into crescents and circuses. The fields and hills that cup the city also venture into it, pushing up underneath the pale yellow terraces, which skim Bath's dramatic topography like exposed vertebrae.

Or a traveller might come from the east, from London. Blue shadows mark the green lengths of marshy farmland in Wilts. Purple hills patrol the horizon like enormous, slow-moving beasts. At the western edges of Wiltshire, green stretches of earth heave and jostle one another beneath the traveller's journey. The train, if one chooses that method, speeds through the one flat plain in this terrain. It follows a bend around Bathampton Down, one of the seven hills that surround and abut Bath. Dramatically receding from the snaking black ladder of the railway tracks, Bathampton Down gives way to a cinematic first view of Bath. Time appears arrested here, as period Georgian architecture stretches away from the green fields and playing grounds, scaling the hills with not a shopping mall nor a Victorian church spire in sight. The train obligingly continues its curving approach to the city, and the pale ochre of the local stone begins to work its visual magic. The architecture is a contradiction: at once regular and moderate, yet abandoning its restraint against the rolling pastoral contours of the earth. Streets of compellingly disguised row houses climb hills at impossible angles.

A traveller might also seek Bath from the past, from the bird's eye view of history or the narrowed lens of nostalgia. Indeed, this is the preferred route implicitly offered to tourists, who are welcome to savour Bath's claims to the long eighteenth century and the attendant, nationally famed figures, such as Jane Austen, Mrs. Siddons, Fanny Burney, Thomas Gainsborough, General Wolfe, William Pitt, Sarah and Henry Fielding. In Bath, the list of personalities extends to local history: Bath's "master" architects, John Wood the Elder and his son, John Wood the Younger (1728-1781), Ralph Allen, the postmaster and entrepreneur who mined the

value of local stone, and Beau Nash, the self-proclaimed “King” of Bath under whose rule Bath society followed precise rules of deportment and civility. These male figures operate as Bath’s holy trinity in a secular story about the creation of an earthly, but transcendent, city.<sup>2</sup> Sir John Summerson, the established authority on historical British architecture, writes,

The great period of Bath’s expansion began in 1725. In that year, ‘Beau’ Nash as Master of Ceremonies was at the height of his influence, while the brains and capital of Ralph Allen were exploiting the capabilities of Bath stone. In that year also John Wood...drew the first plans of those parts of the city with which his name will always be associated.<sup>3</sup>

Those parts of the city were Queen’s Square, the King’s Circus (Fig. 29) and the Royal Crescent (Fig. 30), each a variation upon the theme of individual domestic dwellings sharing a continuous, monumental façade. These three planning innovations, particularly the Crescent, were to have great influence in the British Isles, Ireland, Europe and eventually abroad.<sup>4</sup> Bath even influenced its bigger sibling, London, as can be demonstrated in John Nash’s building schemes between 1813 and 1830, such as Regent Street, Regent’s Park, and Piccadilly Circus.<sup>5</sup>

Like the King’s Circus in Bath, heritage processes are at work in maintaining Piccadilly Circus. Architectural history offers a framework within which Piccadilly Circus’ preservation is guaranteed for future generations. As a commercial site, however, Piccadilly Circus’ involvement in capitalist machinery and present-day

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<sup>2</sup> In a topical parallel, Wood notes that “we may very safely fix its [“the rise of building”] commencement with the Beginning of the Third Generation of the World, when only three Male Persons were in it” (1741) 11-12. Wood cautions his readers against “drawing Conjectures...from the uncertain Accounts of Profane Writers.” (12)

<sup>3</sup> Summerson (1977) 388.

<sup>4</sup> Summerson 394, see also Dan Cruickshank, *A Guide to the Georgian Buildings of Britain and Ireland* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, The National Trust, The Irish Georgian Society; 1985).

<sup>5</sup> Mark Girouard, *The English Town* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990) 168.

materialism is impossible to ignore (signs and lights obscure the “original” architecture of Piccadilly Circus). The King’s Circus in Bath, however, is still wholly residential. Tourists walk freely through the historic city centre of Bath with relatively few stationary reminders that this is no longer the eighteenth century. Yet while the King’s Circus may not be covered in neon flashing signs, its façade is just as contemporary as that of Piccadilly Circus. After decades of unpopularity, neglect and the steady blackening of Bath stone, Bath City Council embarked upon a massive cleaning programme of the historic city centre in the 1950s and then again in the 1980s.<sup>6</sup> Most of Bath’s buildings are now clean. The method of cleaning is to either blast the stones with water or gently rub them with dampened toothbrushes, in order to remove the sooty modern coating of grimy pollution which began to accumulate during the Industrial era. With every cleaning, the soft oolitic limestone erodes a few millimetres; cleaning eases away surfaces tooled by eighteenth-century hands and techniques. In effect, the tourist does not see eighteenth-century Bath; the tourist is looking at a completely new city surface, if not a new city.<sup>7</sup>

In a troubled balance of architectural purism and economic motivation, there is an obsessive purchase of the “past” in Bath. Residents of buildings within the “conservation zone” of Bath and the skyline surrounding Bath must have the permission of the Heritage Council before replacing windows, painting front doors, or adding perceived anachronisms such as shutters, railings or flower boxes.<sup>8</sup> These

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<sup>6</sup> Department of Environmental Services Policy Conservation and Landscape Team, *Recovering Quality Urban Spaces in Bath*. (Bath: Bath City Council, 1996) 28.

<sup>7</sup> A fictional version of this conundrum may be found in Julian Barnes’ *England, England* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf: 1999), in which the Isle of Wight becomes a mini-England theme park that outstrips the “real” England in popularity and tourist revenues.

<sup>8</sup> Conversation with David McLaughlin, City Architect of Bath, September, 1999. See also the pamphlet *Listed Buildings and the Built Heritage Group* (Bath: Bath and North East Somerset, n.d.), which states, “Bath and North East Somerset has around 6,400 buildings or structures which satisfy the national standards (for listing as heritage buildings) and are included on the statutory list...Consent is required for alterations which change the character of a listed building...Consent



forms of control are key to the ongoing commodification of the past in Bath. The city has marketed itself with varying degrees of success since the early eighteenth century as a place of healing, as the playground of those with discerning taste, and as a place of exceptional architectural beauty and consistency.

In 1996, Bath City Council published the booklet *Recovering Quality Urban Spaces in Bath*, a study of the relationships between city planning, pedestrian and motorized circulation, and the “success of historic spaces.”<sup>9</sup> The booklet defends the implementation of a “regime” of “Quality Management” as a means of preserving and improving the historical “character” of Bath’s historic city core.<sup>10</sup> The booklet wishes to promote a “language of conservation,” and in other words, a civic outlook that would help to forward preservation efforts regarding the “inherent character of the City.”<sup>11</sup> The following points of consideration included within the regime indicate the degree of visual control such official bodies exert over the appearance and maintenance of the city:

[We seek to continue] the creation of a coherent streetscape by the successful linkage of historic areas using unifying areas [...]; the reduction of visual discord by removing clutter and distractions generated by superfluous signs and street furniture which can...inhibit flow.<sup>12</sup>

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must...include sufficient particulars to identify the location of the building and to indicate, in considerable detail, the building as existing and as affected by the proposed works...” (unpaginated)

<sup>9</sup> *Recovering Quality* 4.

<sup>10</sup> Pollution is one of the greatest threats to vulnerable Bath stone, which is porous enough to be cut by hand tools. Since the switch from coal to other forms of heating, car emissions, acid rain and the damaging vibrations from motorized vehicles (like large tour buses) are considered threats to the outward appearance and structural integrity of historic buildings. See Colin Buchanan, “Traffic in Towns Today”, *Built Environment*, 9, 2 (1983): 91-139.

<sup>11</sup> *Recovering Quality* 10.

<sup>12</sup> *Recovering Quality* 10.

As a visitor to Bath who has been duly impressed with the visual results of this type of planning, I am not suggesting these measures deserve ridicule. On the contrary, I present them as highly successful manoeuvres in a programme of sanctifying history through architectural and urban space, and the control of human movement through that space. As long as there has been economic incentive, Bath's civic space has been subject to enormous efforts to police and control its parameters and image. From John Wood the Elder's first and partially realized conception of Bath in 1743,<sup>13</sup> the city-as-representation has been a crucial motor at work within Bath's economy, even when that motor has failed to function well, or when control for the motor has been contested. There are, therefore, two civic identities that operate under the rubric of Bath: Bath as civil society and Bath as a representation of the past operating in the present.

How then to approach Bath methodologically? Bath is a heritage city, in other words, an imaginary city, its identity established in a notion of the past. That past, imagined to reside in physical objects such as buildings, is claimed for the present (tourist) moment, and for the future. As the *1968 Official Guide to the City of Bath* asserts,

You will probably fall in love with Bath. Most people do, for it is a gracious and beautiful city...the eighteenth century planning and building [of Bath is] unmatched for architectural grace and pleasurable living...Everybody came to Bath, and either stayed or wished they could stay – and so, now, must you...Few cities indeed can enjoy the reflected glory of so eventful a background, or look forward to more pleasant prospects.<sup>14</sup>

“Bath” is like historical fiction: certain liberties and omissions taken and made as part of artistic licence. The past is a constitutive factor here, but not so much so that

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<sup>13</sup> Wood (1765).

<sup>14</sup> Nunn, J.W. *1968 Official Guide Book to the City of Bath* (Bath, England: Spa Committee of Bath City Council, 1968) 1, 5.

it would contradict the pleasant, seamless narrative of tearooms, Roman ruins and Georgian order. Bath as a civil society, however, is a complex of social relations embodied, as Roger Simon has put it, “in a great variety of organizations [sic] and institutions including churches, political parties, trade unions, the mass media, cultural and voluntary associations.”<sup>15</sup> Bath, furthermore, I understand as a collection of individuals and institutions layered in one place, occupying the spaces of Bath, operating in conjunction (and contradiction) with the notion of Bath. Clearly, not all individuals and institutions local to Bath are directly involved with the preservation of the past, of “Bath.” The degree to which Bath depends culturally, financially and conceptually upon “Bath,” however, makes the radius of effect wide enough, I would argue, to include all inhabitants and visitors, if unpredictably.

It has been impossible, on my visits, to walk through the city and not constantly greet the operation or presence of the conjured Bath. Of course, this presence is what brought me and three million other people there in the first place. “Bath” is Bath’s most important and ubiquitous tenant and well-preserved historic architecture is Bath’s most crucial asset. For without the cleaned Georgian façades, the lack of neon would amount to nothing, fiscally speaking. A triumph of heritage work, “Bath” solidifies, convinces and seduces on the stage Georgian architecture provides. The performance demands my attention in a way that leaves little room for the consideration of the less attractive elements of its character. Bath’s facelift has eradicated the wrinkles in its history. The question, whether or not this was deliberate, is irrelevant, as the end result is the same either way: the history that emerges is free of any real class issue, or women’s issue, that might cast some doubt on the glory of Bath.

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<sup>15</sup> Roger Simon, *Gramsci’s Political Thought: An Introduction* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991) 27.

Writing about the recent explosion of the heritage industry, historian David Lowenthal argues in *Possessed by the Past* that,

the relics of time help us both to know the past and to bend it to our own uses. Such remains, on the ground and in the mind, are more and more extracted and enjoyed...Heritage aims to convert historical residues into witnesses that attest to our own ancestral virtues...At its best, heritage fabrication is both creative art and act of faith.<sup>16</sup>

It is hard to deny that Bath is a work of art. From its smallest chiselled ornaments to its city plan, and from the ongoing project of restoration to the deployment of the past, Bath is begging for some interpretation. To return to my opening statement, there are many ways to approach Bath, and within each approach the traveller (or academic) will inevitably encounter a confusion of previous interpretations. My fundamental argument about a methodology for the feminist study of Bath's architecture is, however, that "Bath" may only be approached in the present moment of the traveller – academic, historian, artist – in question, especially when the object of the journey is the past.

#### *Reading the past in the present tense*

Several terms are crucial for thinking through the particular circumstances at work in Bath: history, memory and heritage. In this thesis, I have conceived of each of these as historically constituted categories and practices whose inconsistencies and contradictions indicate that some potential exists for change, both metaphysically and at the level of the social. In other words, if the architectural history and heritage of Bath are not given entities but rather current constructions, how "might we demystify the naturalization of particular memories in order to

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<sup>16</sup> David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York, London, Toronto: The Free Press, 1996) xi-xii.

reveal the possibilities for making our own social memories?”<sup>17</sup>

Writing about *les lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory, historian Pierre Nora suggests that,

Our relation to the past is now formed in a subtle play between its intractability and its disappearance, a question of a representation – in the original sense of the word – radically different from the old ideal of resurrecting the past...amid these complexities, it is memory that dictates while history writes...<sup>18</sup>

Building from the work of French philosophers of history, Henri Bergson and Maurice Halbwachs, Nora seeks in his seven-volume study of memory to address the ways in which social contexts or frames help to constitute the personal memories of the individual. Nora’s massive project indicates the currency of memory in a world fascinated by history, where there is a strong assumption that there is a decisive difference between the past and the present. The history of memory is, in Nora’s view, a history that might shed light on what a society agrees to remember, and how the individual becomes a support in the collective memory of a nation, or a community.<sup>19</sup> What this can mean in turn is that collective memory is flexible; it can and does change according to shifts in circumstances and pressures. Nora’s work falls within the legacy of poststructuralist thought in that it is premised on the understanding that history writing is very much a construction, a non-objective and partial practice, imbricated with both personal and national memory. Thus, the moment of remembering has a subjective as well as a political force. As Nancy Wood writes, “With the decline of the nation-state as the main institution of

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<sup>17</sup> Bill Gale, “Staging the Practices of Heritage”, *Labour/Le Travail*, 37 (Spring 1996): 290.

<sup>18</sup> Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*”, *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 17-21. See also Nora, *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard (new ed.), 1997).

<sup>19</sup> Nancy Wood, “Memory’s Remains: *Les Lieux de mémoire*”, *History and Memory*, 6: 1 (Spring/Summer 1994): 124-125.

social cohesion and its replacement by a social consciousness of the nation, past and future are no longer interdependent...Memory thus comes into a new alliance with the present.”<sup>20</sup> We have, Wood continues, a “memorial culture” in which the “nation” is no longer the impetus behind history writing but is rather, a given. In this memorial culture those in the present are under continual pressure to remember, as the past takes on a new definitiveness in opposition to the present. The uncertainty of the future continually tempers this injunction to remember the past as Other to the present.<sup>21</sup>

The role of a critical architectural history in this new culture becomes clear in Jane Riches’ scathing review of architectural historian, Mark Girouard’s popular book, *Life in the English Country House*.<sup>22</sup> Riches writes,

Girouard’s [book] will amplify and elucidate many aspects of the trail around the houses of our heritage. It will also condition what is seen and what is not seen. It must be admitted...that his partial analysis of country house life ultimately reinforces the selectively conservative image of the past, which is currently being reconstructed as ‘national heritage’.<sup>23</sup>

In her review, Riches comments on the “unease” her class background had prompted in her for Girouard’s lush evocation of bucolic, eighteenth-century life. She acknowledges Girouard’s avowed intention to make architecture “accessible” to a broad audience, but maintains that “a tacit thesis emerges” in Girouard’s book. This thesis, what she and Walter Benjamin call “empathy with the victor”,<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Wood, “Memory’s Remains” 145.

<sup>21</sup> Wood, “Memory’s Remains” 145.

<sup>22</sup> Jane Riches, “The Historian and Heritage: Mark Girouard and *Life in the English Country House*,” *New Issues in the Theory and Practice of Architecture, Art and Design* vol 1, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 45–61. See also Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

<sup>23</sup> Riches 58.

<sup>24</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (USA: Schocken Books, [1968] 1988) 256.

obscures that dimension of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English history that is the “ruptured and separated families, the systematic degradation, the exploitation and abuse of women, the divisive internal differentiation imposed by the masters on the servant class.”<sup>25</sup> I comment on Riches not simply because her text and the subject of her critique are topical, but also because it is her “baggage” that compels Riches to address the “blinkered” nature of Girouard’s book, and by extension the “national heritage” it supports and sustains. The rigour, insight and personal motivation of her critique begins to suggest a way in which possibilities for other memories can enter into and challenge this slick persuasion that heritage is, at its worst.<sup>26</sup>

With the legacy of poststructuralism comes a new host of questions, worries and possibilities for those interested in producing work around a historical topic, and particularly around a category of identity, such as “woman”. Bill Gale’s suggestion that it is necessary to demystify the objects of heritage for the purpose of revealing possibilities for other memories,<sup>27</sup> is central to my project, but only goes half the necessary distance. Feminist theorist, Moira Gatens sketches the academic

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<sup>25</sup> Riches 50, 56.

<sup>26</sup> “Bath’s” heritage currently effaces women’s history, its colony-supported wealth and links to the slave trade. As Lowenthal writes, celebrating “heritage as uniquely splendid sanctions narrow-minded ignorance and breeds belligerent bigotry.” (2)

<sup>27</sup> The political potential of Gale’s remark becomes immediately apparent in Bath, where the memory of Georgian Bath and heritage work have excluded much during the past fifty years. In addition to working class, and specifically working-classwomen’s history, heritage in Bath has also denied the traces of the slave trade, which bolstered a lively, if unpredictable economy, and by extension, the building trades. Local social historian Trevor Fawcett has made an important introductory step towards a crucial topic in “Black People in Georgian Bath” *Avon Past* 16 (Spring 19 93) 3-9. Neale writes sporadically about the relations between slavery and Bath economics in Chapter 5, “Stockjobbers and Entrepreneurs”. For his discussion of the abolition movement in Bath, see pp. 345-349.

as an active producer of culture.<sup>28</sup> Writing about feminist historical work Gatens posits that “how [the past is] remembered is important for the present and the future. We need to understand and remember how we became what we are, not in order to live what we have become as our ‘truth’ but rather as our conditions of possibility for that which we may become.”<sup>29</sup> Imagining ourselves differently, imagining societies based upon political equality and freedom is the root of emancipatory movements, and depends greatly upon both one’s creative capacity in the present and on what one draws from the past. Gatens’ ideas are important, methodologically, because they have allowed me a different way of thinking about my own investment in my subject. This way of thinking insists upon the “positioning” of the author in such a way that does not cancel out what feminism recognizes as the political necessity of there being an author.

Similarly, literary theorists Nicole Ward Jouve and Susan Stanford Friedman also posit notions of academic work informed by feminist politics, which indicate a shift in the subject-object binary familiar to academic work. For Jouve, critical writing is a form of autobiography; the “elaborate third person” of many texts is a barely disguised production of the authorial self.<sup>30</sup> This is not to say that all texts are merely “inevitable accounts of self” or that criticism should become autobiography, but that in producing academic work, academics need to “make the observing

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<sup>28</sup> This concept of the academic is similar in spirit to Gramsci’s notion of the “organic intellectual”. For Gramsci, the activity of thinking does not belong to the intellectual alone. Rather, it is the organizing function of certain thinkers which gives them this title. Furthermore, not all intellectuals are alike. Because all people think, every group or class will produce its own intellectuals. Of these, the intellectuals who organize on behalf of the oppressed groups of which they are a part, Gramsci describes as “organic”. See Simon, Chapter 12, “The Intellectuals”, pp. 91-99.

<sup>29</sup> Moira Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) 77.

<sup>30</sup> Nicole Ward Jouve, *White Woman Speaks with Forked Tongue: Criticism as Autobiography* (London and New York: Routledge: 1991) 3.



subject part and parcel of what critical observation is about.”<sup>31</sup> More than a self-conscious positioning of the author within the text, Jouve’s integrated observing subject is “in the same business as the artists themselves.”<sup>32</sup> Like Susan Stanford Friedman, Jouve is not naïve about the body of thought that casts serious doubt upon the project of locating/writing the “self” (or woman, for that matter).<sup>33</sup> However, Friedman and Jouve find the political necessity of retaining a working sense of both self and woman to override, and in fact complicate, those calls for a complete deconstruction of those terms. As Friedman argues, it is not useful for feminism to “simply replicate the dismissive gesture that consigns everything but the act of poststructuralist problematizing to a bankrupt and naïve humanism...”<sup>34</sup> And further, that “[p]erpetual self-reflexivity – particularly with its continual focus on linguistic construction – contains within it the potential of dangerous inaction – or, to be more precise, action that in its constant inward turn inhibits an outer-directed energy for social change.”<sup>35</sup>

In short, what Jouve and Friedman propose is a feminist shift in the conception of the academic, and in the conception of the object of study. The

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<sup>31</sup> Jouve 5.

<sup>32</sup> Jouve 9.

<sup>33</sup> As Friedman writes, “there has been a palpable anxiety within the feminist movement about the possibility that our activities as feminists – including the productions of our own history – run the risk of repeating the same patterns of thought and action that excluded, distorted, muted or erased women from the master narratives of history in the first place.” (200) Friedman argues that to some degree, the deconstructive method which challenges the category “woman” in turn feeds this anxiety in the sense that there is never solid ground to stand upon. Without that (even temporary) ground, politicized action is also continually in question. Building upon feminist standpoint theory, Friedman proposes what she calls “locational feminism”, which she premises on “a recognition of how different times and places produce different and changing gender systems as these intersect with other different and changing societal stratifications and movements for social justice. Locational feminism thus encourages the study of difference in all its manifestations without being limited to it...” (5).

<sup>34</sup> Friedman 203.

<sup>35</sup> Friedman 212.

former becomes an observing subject who is implicated and integrated with the text produced. The latter becomes an aspect of the former's will for social change. Both are involved in the sense of history, which, as Mieke Bal writes, understands "the past as *part of* the present, as what we have around us, and without which no culture would be able to exist."<sup>36</sup> As editor of *The Practice of Cultural Analysis: Exposing Interdisciplinary Interpretation*, and longtime supporter of the notion that within academic work there is a mutual construction of the researcher and the researched,<sup>37</sup> Bal designates this critical reconfiguration of history, the past and the present as "cultural analysis". To apply Bal's words to a cultural analysis of Bath's architectural history and current heritage practices, the objects of the past and the subject who (re)writes the text, "share a contemporaneity. This is not an indifference to history but a foregrounding of the active presence of the object of text, in the same historical space as is inhabited by the subject, 'me.'"<sup>38</sup> In this way, my actions and the heritage operation of Bath share the stage of my thesis.

*"The House is Empty Yet"*<sup>39</sup>

I have spoken with my wife about the Window Curtains for the two Bedchambers, & she thinks the same Table Cloth Damask you line the Bed Curtains with will be properest for the windows, and desires you will buy either that or the Napkin such as best suit the width of the Windows.

John Wood the Elder<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Mieke Bal, "Introduction" to *The Practice of Cultural Analysis: Exposing Interdisciplinary Interpretation*, eds. Mieke Bal and Brian Gonzales (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) 1.

<sup>37</sup> See "Semiotics and Art History", with Norman Bryson. *Art Bulletin* 73, 2 (June 1991): 174-208.

<sup>38</sup> Bal (1999) 12.

<sup>39</sup> Wood the Elder, Letter to Mrs. Phillips, Landlady (Bath) from London, Sept. 13, 1727 (Manvers estate letters, British Library, Egerton CH 6102).

<sup>40</sup> Wood the Elder, Letter to Mrs. Phillips.

A feminist cultural analysis challenges the fundamental tools that have traditionally shaped historical practice: linearity, empiricism, chauvinism, and objectivity. As Gatens writes, “It is not surprising that feminist scholars have been concerned with history...contesting descriptions of what we have been and done is a crucial aspect of *taking an active role in the production of culture*...all history and all narrative is necessarily ‘invested.’”<sup>41</sup> Those investments must inevitably take shape around dominant ideological discourses. Whether in support of or in opposition to (or in some position in between), the constructions that go under the rubric of “history” are invested and determined. The next question then is how might one make the critical engagement of present and past transparent? How might critical, textual operations become more critically engaged with the past in such a way that the mutual construction of past and present is transparent, responsible, self-referential but not solipsistic? What I am suggesting is an approach that includes yet expands the now requisite “positioning” of the author. This would be an approach that remained conscious of the role that creativity plays in conceiving of the past: an approach that begins with the relation of author-to-subject as concomitant.

In certain academic circles the subject’s subjectivity is now well understood to be inseparable from the context and product of reading, and of course, inseparable from the product of such work.<sup>42</sup> The constitutive nature of the relationship between (historical) object-in-question and reader is, however, a troubling proposition, too unruly and unpredictable, perhaps even too obvious a problem to seem useful within scholarly boundaries. Indeed, the spectre of a biased reading

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<sup>41</sup> Gatens (1996) 76-77, my emphasis.

<sup>42</sup> Mieke Bal has written extensively on the mutually constitutive nature of academic work. In her essay “First Person, Second Person, Same Person” she writes, “subject and object positions in the process of knowledge construction are reversible.” See page 183 and Chapter Five, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 1996) 165-194.

continually looms over academic language, shaping the contours of scholarly writing around an invisible “I”. It is no exaggeration to suggest that the inclusion of the author, beyond certain sanctioned spaces (the prologue, for example) threatens the perceived validity of academic research. Indeed, the demonstration of an author/ity’s overinvested subjectivity is sufficient to topple, even ridicule their work. On the other hand, scholars seeking to further some goal in excess of (or in opposition to) disinterested analysis, such as feminist or postcolonial workers, risk the accusation that the political sentiments of the researcher “shape” or “determine” the results of the inquiry. I hope this will prove to be the case here.

As I attempt to show in the literature review/case study (Chapter 2), there is no shortage of information regarding Bath’s eighteenth-century coming of age. Nor is there any shortage of writing (although there is room for further critical assessment) on Bath’s cast of political, literary, mythical and eccentric characters. There is, however, a deficit of writing that adequately expresses how the relations between gender, architecture and myth have shaped the way that Bath (and architectural history, and monographs on key figures in the eighteenth-century) both remembers eighteenth-century “Bath”, and insists that there is nothing else to remember except eighteenth-century “Bath”. Expressing such relations means something other than charting a parallel or alternative “women’s history” of eighteenth-century Bath, because as it stands, the discipline of architectural history is still concerned with objects and authors, and a parallel women’s history would remain only parallel, not integrated into the whole question of architectural heritage. Instead, the project of remembering Bath differently requires what Moira Gatens has called “genealogy as critical history.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Gatens (1996) 76.

Similar to Bal's notion of cultural analysis, genealogy as critical history is, according to Gatens, an approach to the past that understands "history" as a sanctioned form of remembering which effaces as it reconstructs. Such genealogy would not assume that "women" and "woman" are fixed referents whose historical contribution may be – or should be – quantitatively assessed and rendered alongside a history of men. Rather, Gatens suggests that the categories used in feminist historical inquiry be subject to continual assessment: what were the conceptions of "woman" in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and how did those conceptions condition what actual women actually produced? How did that conception shape what is known of such production? How does a turn-of-the-millennium understanding of history, heritage and architecture work in tandem with that two-hundred-year-old construction of "woman" such that Bath does not remember women? Art historian, Linda Nochlin writes, "[i]t is important to keep in mind that one of the most important functions of ideology is to veil the overt power relations obtaining in society at a particular moment in history by making them appear to be part of the natural, eternal order of things."<sup>44</sup>

The reason that Bath does not remember women in its architectural creation story is not because women were barred from practicing architecture. Women of a certain class and inclination did practice architecture in eighteenth-century England.<sup>45</sup> Architectural history does not remember women because women's creativity in Bath and elsewhere has been linked to a biological notion of

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<sup>44</sup> Linda Nochlin, "Women, Art, and Power" in *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (England: Thames and Hudson, 1998) 2.

<sup>45</sup> Lynne Walker's text, "Women and Architecture" is the most relevant to this thesis, however, for discussions of historical women architects see also Annmarie Adams, *Architecture in the Family Way: Doctors, Houses, and Women, 1870-1900* (Montréal & Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996) and Susana Torre, *Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective* (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1977).

(re)productivity, not to a mode of artistic creation, because that mode's fundamental association is with maleness and a male, creative god.<sup>46</sup> Women's work was – and still is – connected with mundane chores, unmemorable, un(der)paid and painful labour, long hours scrubbing and polishing the buttresses of a culture that claims to understand and protect them from themselves. Bath is understood as a work of architectural genius, perhaps quirky, even embarrassing genius at times, but (divinely) inspired nonetheless. Women's work, creative and not, has been subject to a different kind of mythologizing than that of men's work and creativity. The supposedly natural tendencies of female subjectivity were shuttered to the domains of great art, architecture, religion and politics. The only exceptions were, in this view, exceptional women, and thus, not women at all, according to current standards.<sup>47</sup>

As I walk the streets of Bath, admire its beauty and enjoy my journey, a demand, however subtle, is being made of me. Bath's heritage asks me, obliquely yet persistently, to accept a view of "Woman" in relation to historical architecture, which as a feminist I cannot support. If this view of women, like the architecture, were historically specific, or at least transparent in the mechanisms of tourist "Bath", perhaps it would be easier to swallow. But the construction of woman that accounts for their absence in Bath's architectural history is still in working order today, as is evidenced by their absence in Bath's revival as a tourist destination. The logic that supports a hierarchical opposition of the sexes and the subjugation of

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<sup>46</sup> A good woman was one who transcended the inherently weak and capricious nature of her sex. Transcendence in other areas could hardly be a possibility when women were supposed to be struggling against their very biology. Men, as the stronger sex, the active principle, were naturally suited to the worlds of architecture and words. One consequence of this opposition in Bath is that women are not the subjects of commemorative practices there today.

<sup>47</sup> Griselda Pollock's *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988) is still an excellent study of this problem for art history. Also very useful is Lisa Tickner's "Feminism, Art History and Sexual Difference" *Genders* 3 (Fall 1988): 92-128.

women is based on speculative, reductive reasoning, drawn from patriarchal mythology, misogynist philosophy and Christianity, and from a highly suspect interpretation of biology. It is, above all, a “logic” that is ahistorical and blind to the actual achievements of actual women. It claims to be universal, timeless and the force with which it has been applied, in religion, law and family relations, reverberates today worldwide with brutal and heartbreaking results. This logic is no stranger to architectural discourse.

In 1688, on the cusp of the period of Bath’s modern nexus, this logic allowed the Marquis of Halifax, George Savile to write an open letter to women on the subject of their conduct. Savile writes,

That the supposition of yours being the weaker *Sex*, having without all doubt a good Foundation, maketh it reasonable to subject it to the *Masculine Dominion*...You are therefore to make the best of what is settled by Law and Custom, and not vainly imagine, that it will be *changed* for your sake.<sup>48</sup>

Savile’s gently chastising tone is not intended to cloak the authoritarianism of his statements. Savile’s message is that with tradition, legality and logic against women, even their powers of deduction and reason are simply symptoms of their inherent weakness. It is a mistake, and quintessentially female (hence the need for the letter in the first place), to imagine that the world will improve, that the injustices the Marquis plainly admits women suffer will cease. Furthermore, it is a vain hope, it is vanity. The word “vanity”, usually applied to women, when applied to men is that much more damning because of its association with women. It describes a state of being inordinately proud of one’s achievements, possessions, and beauty. It equally describes emptiness, hopelessness, and worthlessness. When the Marquis

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<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Vivien Jones, ed. *Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity* (England: Routledge, 1990) 19.

admonished “daughters” for their vain imaginings he did so within a language, a society and culture which saw white, middle-class women as being inordinately proud of worthless achievements and possessions. Worthless, that is, in comparison to the achievements and possessions of men. Nonetheless, the Marquis must have had some reason for writing in the first place. Perhaps the daughters to whom he writes were not as satisfied with their worthless achievements as a paternalistic society might like them to be.

The Marquis walks with me through the streets of Bath. When I look through his eyes, I disappear, as do Bath’s historical women. The streets become dead ends. But when I look at the Marquis, and at Bath, through the critical eyes of a feminist, the civic landscape shifts in emphasis – a shift that I would argue from a political and moral position to be necessary.

### *Architecture and lament*

In her essay, “Architecture, Lament and Power,” architectural theorist, Catherine Ingraham writes,

...architecture cannot in any direct sense embody any of the things that we have traditionally thought it could embody, such as nobility, the spirit of the age, social well-being, grandeur, harmony, the grotesque, or fascism... “[E]mbodiment” is fraught with problems, at least one of which is the idea that there is a uni-directional movement of meaning (a translation) from idea to object, whereas the signification of architecture seems...oblique, far more analogical and circuitous.<sup>49</sup>

Ingraham takes issue with the notion that the forms, spaces and visual vocabularies of various types of architecture are essential or reducible to a particular ideology.

Architecture is for Ingraham a lament for and commemoration of *what it is not*. In fact, architectural form is only the evidence of a failed intention: to manifest what

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<sup>49</sup> In Andrew Benjamin, ed., *Architecture, Space, Painting* / *Journal of Philosophy and the Visual Arts* (Great Britain: Academy Editions, 1992) 10-14.



the architect or client sought to celebrate or eulogize. In this way, architecture bears the trace of what it was meant to stand for, such as the hoped-for perfect coupling of reason and Christianity in the work of John Wood the Elder, but can never actually claim to incarnate reason or faith per se.<sup>50</sup> In other words, architecture does not have the capacity to transmit directly an ideology, abstraction, or mandate.

The dangers of maintaining this position become clear when there is a moral imperative to implicate all the symbols of a regime with the practices and outcomes of the regime. The compelling example from the previous century is the equation of Nazi architecture with Nazism. As anything less than unequivocal refutation of Nazism in all its aspects is morally suspect, and as the dynamics of recuperation are such that the aesthetic or formal study of architecture can easily lead to erasure of the inhumane politics which provided conditions of production for Nazi architecture, Ingraham's argument may not seem worth the trouble.<sup>51</sup> It is, I think, worthwhile to give this idea some more consideration. If applied to the question of Nazi architecture, the supposal is that Nazism is not naturally inherent to Neo-classicism. For Ingraham, architecture is a spatialization of ideology rather than a primary representation thereof.<sup>52</sup> In other words, despite every effort on the part of Albert Speer, Nazi architecture cannot actively incarnate Nazism, but it can make space in which Nazism may operate, a space in which Nazism is brought into action.

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<sup>50</sup> Wood is emphatic, if not succinct, about his project to connect classical achievement in philosophy and architecture with Christianity in his own writing (1741). For a discussion of Wood's intentions and what they produced in Bath see Mowl and Earnshaw, Chapters 5, 9 and 12, and Neale, Chapter 6 "Ideology and Utopia" (1981) 171-225.

<sup>51</sup> In no way do I mean to suggest that Neo-classicism was anything other than an informed and deliberate choice. See Volker Losemann, "The Nazi Concept of Rome" in *Roman Presences: Receptions of Rome in European Culture, 1789-1845*, ed. Catharine Edwards (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 221-235; Alexander Scobie, *Hitler's State Architecture: The Impact of Classical Antiquity* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1990).

<sup>52</sup> Ingraham 12-13.

Nazism in operation is Nazism incarnate, and so the thinness of the line between an architecture of lament and an architecture of embodiment becomes apparent.

Why insist on the line at all? Nazi architecture now begets grief, horror and anger. This is proof, to my mind, that Nazi architecture must continue to stand as a place where such emotions and memories may have full expression. If architecture did embody ideology, then there would be no choice but to destroy every surviving architectural trace of the Third Reich building programme. If, on the other hand, the architecture laments the rise of the Third Reich, then those same traces, those buildings have the potential to act as charged locations, repositories for the horror that they so deserve. And as repositories, they may serve crucial pedagogical and symbolic purposes.

To take a very different example, in 1954 the architectural firm of Leinweber, Yamasaki & Hellmuth completed thirty-three high-rise, high-density units under the United States Housing Act of 1949. The firm designed the project to re-house and contain the growing slum population thought to threaten the business core of St. Louis. The project, situated on a fifty-seven acre site that had previously been the “black ghetto”, was intended to house fifteen thousand black and white tenants. As Katharine G. Bristol writes, “Anyone remotely familiar with the recent history of American architecture automatically associates Pruitt-Igoe with the failure of High Modernism, and with the inadequacy of efforts to provide livable environments for the poor.”<sup>53</sup> Due to various contextual and social factors, exacerbated by the design of Pruitt-Igoe, the project suffered greatly from budget cuts and low maintenance provisions throughout its brief history, with resulting high levels of violent crime and vandalism. By 1958, Bristol writes, “conditions had

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<sup>53</sup> Kathleen Bristol, “The Pruitt-Igoe Myth” in *The Journal of Architectural Education* 44. 3 (May 1991): 163.

begun to deteriorate”, by 1965 the architectural profession had begun to condemn the project’s design, and by 1972 the City of St. Louis had completely leveled three of the buildings.<sup>54</sup>

In her article, “The Pruitt-Igoe Myth,” Kathleen Bristol contests the customary argument that problems inherent to the design of Pruitt-Igoe were alone responsible for its massive failure. As Bristol points out, this view of Pruitt-Igoe assumes that it is architecture – not deeply embedded social and economic structures – that determines the success or failure of public housing. To say that Pruitt-Igoe is a failure of modernist thinking implies that success (in this case, success being the end of vandalism and violent crime in state-owned property) would be inevitable if the practice of architecture were perfected. This is hardly a critique of architecture; on the contrary, it is a celebration of the monumental power of architecture and the architect to draft the textures and contours of ideal society. As Bristol writes, “the myth [of Pruitt-Igoe’s design flaws] is more than simply the result of debate within architectural culture: It serves at a much more profound level the interests of the architecture profession as a whole.”<sup>55</sup> This notion is another facet of the position to which Ingraham objects. As with the example of Nazi architecture, viewing architecture as capable of embodying ideals, political positions, autocratic power is equivalent to perceiving architects as omnipotent but blundering gods.

What Ingraham and Bristol together are beginning to suggest is that so long as the myth of the architect as a near-divine individual persists, the social and political contexts of architectural production are invisible. Where I would like to take this further is with relation to women’s history and feminism. This issue – how to begin

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<sup>54</sup> Bristol 165.

<sup>55</sup> Bristol 170.

to understand the signification of architecture – has particular relevance for feminism, or perhaps it is more accurate to say that feminism has great relevance for reconceptualizing the ways in which architecture is understood to have meaning. The “feminine” has been designated only a very marginal place in traditional architectural history and practice. Discursively, the “feminine” is synonymous with specific architectural forms (curves, interiors) and particularly with ornament (an indulgence, unnecessary, even frivolous).<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the disassociation of architecture as a discipline with women practitioners is logical within, for example, the structures of sexist, dualistic thinking Camille Paglia depends upon in *Sexual Personae*.<sup>57</sup> Paglia’s neo-conservative thesis is that men, not women, are the (architectural) agents of the human race. Paglia writes, “If civilization had been left in female hands, we would still be living in grass huts.”<sup>58</sup> Given architecture’s cultural capital<sup>59</sup> worldwide as expositor of national pride, religious belief, political supremacy – as well as symbolizing reserves of skilled labour and economic resources – it is not surprising that Paglia should defend it as “male” territory by virtue of her assumption that it embodies “masculinity”.<sup>60</sup> Paglia’s project is to denounce those periods of Western culture which celebrate ornament, opulence and

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<sup>56</sup> Architectural historian Joseph Rykwert reiterates the symmetry between the “feminine” and ornament in *The Dancing Column*; while Deborah Faush et al, eds., make an extensive critical review of this association in *Architecture: In Fashion* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>57</sup> Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickenson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

<sup>58</sup> Paglia 38.

<sup>59</sup> This is Pierre Bourdieu’s term, which he uses to differentiate certain practices, objects and relations from economic capital. Both are forms of power, and while differentiated as their names suggest, are not distinct in terms of operation. Bath is a good example, as its economic capital is dependent upon its cultural capital. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (USA: Stanford, 1998) 6-7.

<sup>60</sup> Or, as Paglia calls it, the “Apollonian” aspect.

excess as “Dionysian”; that is, irrational or feminine. These are, for Paglia, periods of cultural decline and backwardness. In other words, “good” architecture is implicitly and inevitably “masculine”, while bad architecture is implicitly and inevitably feminine, reversing culture’s forward-seeking thrust.

I use Paglia here because she is a highly visible figure whose loud rejection of feminism has excited popular media for some time. Her ideas are problematic for many reasons, but two problems in particular are relevant to this thesis. First, Paglia accepts without hesitation the idea that architecture has the ability to actively embody abstractions – masculinity, femininity, democracy, absolute power, national identity – in effect accepting reductive, deterministic and essentialist thinking (no stranger to architectural theory, as Ingraham is at pains to challenge). Second, the emphasis on the “masculinity” or “femininity” of either broad periods or specific instances of cultural production ignores the question of the gender of the producer of architecture. Paglia would like to convince her readers that an artist working in a “Dionysian” cultural period will produce work that is gendered female, work that must in turn be rejected by the clear “Apollonian” directive which will unquestionably (in her view) follow.

Such insistence upon the eternal return of broad cultural initiatives structured upon a vague notion of gender supremacy disregards entirely the ways in which architecture operates within the same social, economic and symbolic systems that produce sexism and racism in educational institutions and working situations. Consequently, Paglia embraces this sexism, which is fundamental to the discussion surrounding architectural ornament and the historical exclusion of women from architectural practice.<sup>61</sup> The way that architecture receives and houses the

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<sup>61</sup> One might take Paglia’s celebration of America’s monumental bridges on page 37 as emblems of what men have given to culture as an example of what her sweeping approach to culture fails to register. There is no room in her book for the ways in which women have themselves produced great feats of architecture and engineering, whether those feats are authored or not. John Stuart

mythologies and truth claims of its makers, admirers, users and maintenance workers is a complex process which finds no voice in Paglia's theory, which hinges, like Peter Tatham's version of Daedalus (above) on an unquestioned gender essentialism.

The myth of the winged (male) architect is a clue to the gendered dimensions of architecture. I aim to deconstruct this figure in order to expose the fundamentally exclusive nature of architectural discourse as it appears in heritage practices in Bath today. My purpose has also been to "speak" as a feminist artist across the surfaces of this city, in order to challenge the resident architectural mythology and supplement, if not supplant the lingering figure of the winged (male) architect with a winged woman, whose relation to the city emerges through the proxy of my own body and the work I have done with my own hands. In short, as the remainder of the thesis bears out, I press against the limits of the term "architecture" in order to make space for these kinds of work, including my own, that would not be remembered as architectural, but that have contributed to Bath nonetheless.<sup>62</sup>

My methodology, then, lies at the junction of two concerns. First, I challenge the notion that charting an unequivocal "past" from an unequivocal and

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published an article in the 1994-1995 issue of *Architecture/Research/Criticism* titled "Silent Partner", in which he details the participation of Emily Roebling in the design, construction and completion of the Brooklyn Bridge while her husband, Washington Roebling, was bedridden and blind. That a woman would have had such control over the successful bridge was a suppressed fact, for no one would use a bridge a woman had built. Stuart quotes Roebling as saying, "but for me the Brooklyn Bridge would never have the name Roebling in any way connected with it." (6) The Bridge is attributed to John A. Roebling and Washington Roebling. See Stuart 6-13.

<sup>62</sup> In *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, Mass., London, England: MIT Press, 1996), urbanist and professor of architecture, Dolores Hayden establishes architectural heritage within a social continuum, marking women's and working-class histories as starting places for heritage projects. Hayden's purpose is not to produce architectural history but rather to "rebuild public memory" (xv) around the notion of "place" as something that is bound up equally in the realm of the social as it is in the built environment. Please see Chapter One for more discussion of Hayden's method and results.

disinterested “present” is possible. Within this problematic, I have a feminist agenda: to revisit the traces or marks historical women have left upon Bath and “Bath” – traces which may no longer even be visible. These concerns are potentially in opposition to one another, as in order to fulfill the latter aim, I must utilize notions of “female”, “past”, and “present” as though they were indeed fixed entities. My strategy for avoiding a methodological roadblock is to conspicuously assume the role of a producer rather than a recorder of culture, and this strategy has several strong supporters, including feminists such as Nicole Ward Jouve, Susan Stanton Friedman and Moira Gatens. The investigating subject (myself) and the investigated subject (in this case, “Bath”) would be at risk of operating as a false binary if I were to maintain traditional academic modes and goals. While the *product* of reading the past is customarily the “point” of academic inquiry, I wish to emphasize the *activity* of reading: making a relation with the past whereby my subjectivity does not simply inform the reading, but likewise the reading [in]forms my subjectivity. With this approach, selfhood unfolds alongside the “past” within the “present.” As Jouve writes, “Only by daring to make the observing subject part and parcel of what critical observation is about, can criticism sail towards a three-dimensional land.”<sup>63</sup>

To reiterate, my argument is this: During the course of historical investigation conducted for the purpose of creation in the reader’s present moment, the reading self and object of study are in fact mutually constitutive. When the objective of historical investigation is a product of some sort (a book, an essay, a commemorative sculpture, a historical film) the relationship between “history” and “historian” is anything but objective.<sup>64</sup> An individual, looking into the past

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<sup>63</sup> Jouve 5.

<sup>64</sup> In the field of art history, Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson first charted this notion in their important article, “Semiotics and Art History”, where they discuss the need in academia to

delineates an objective for those acts of looking, and in so doing circumscribes the past. The reader has shaped the past to fit her or his concerns, and consequently, to fit her or him: the reader. This is not willful solipsism, (indeed, I suspect it is widely unconscious, to use the term in its lay sense), nor is it irresponsible. It is, to my mind, an inevitable fact of an engaged reading. To quote Jouve again, "...any writing constructs and betrays a subject. It is not a question of choice. One might as well make something of the process."<sup>65</sup>

My goal is that this thesis be an example of writing that is historically based, critically engaged and understands subjectivity and creativity – mine – not as a whimsical or solipsistic embellishment, but rather as a fundamental element, an embedded quality, of rigorous academic work. As an artist, a feminist and a student of cultural history, my means of engaging the past has been creative. Through performance, video, installation, anonymous group interventions and small gestures I have presented the creative gesture as an index of agency. I employ the word "agency" in the sense of the ability of a person to act. Not necessarily in the sense to act freely, for this would be to limit the resonance of action taken within conditions of restraint. There are actions, constituting agency, that take place in conditions of constraint. There may be freedom within action in situations where there are limits

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acknowledge and be accountable for the historical specificities of both the art object (performance, text, etc.) and the art historian. Art history, they argue, is created at the meeting points (the "lines of convergence") between these two elements in the relation of art history, and that in fact the discursive treatment of the art object (art history) is inseparable from the cultural and historical position of the art historian.(op cit) For further discussion of this argument in terms of its relation to art history and feminism, see Chapter One. One important precedent to Bal and Bryson's argument is Walter Benjamin's essay, "Theses on the Philosophy of History": "As flowers turn towards the sun, by dint of a secret heliotropism the past strives to turn toward that sun which is rising in the sky of history. A historical materialist must be aware of this most inconspicuous of all transformations." *Illuminations* 255.

<sup>65</sup> Jouve 10.



on freedom.<sup>66</sup> In fact, it is those actions that occur in conditions of constraint which interest me most. Historian Linda Mahood argues for a methodology based on the concept that women made choices within limited avenues of action. This concept registers both women's agency and their historical circumstances of oppression.<sup>67</sup>

The ideological conditions of eighteenth-century Bath were such that conditions of class and gender channeled women's creative production. However, it is the ideological conditions of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century that constitute the lack of remembering that equally concerns me. It is my present-day experience of Bath that suggests to me the need for remembering differently. Women were creative in Bath, and even when there is no trace of their creativity or even of their lives beyond a name in a church register, their labour as domestic servants, prostitutes, daughters and mothers, the fact remains that they contributed to the social and built fabric of Bath.<sup>68</sup> The fragmentary evidence of these contributions and my interpretation of their value for Bath as a whole are my focus in the pages ahead. But my essay into the past is more than that. I do not want to speak for these women. However, through my creative practice in the "present" I

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<sup>66</sup> For example, in an unpublished paper titled "Where They Work and Feel: Hearts and Palms in the Brazilian Rainforest" I describe what I see as the agency of a group of indigenous people in Brazil, coerced into working in an artisanal "collective" which was set up to produce puppets for sale. These puppets were, to be blunt, grotesque, and their unpleasant appearance seemed to me to be an index of the community's rejection of the paternalistic and racist attitudes towards them. I presented this paper at the 1998 Universities' Art Association of Canada annual conference on Donald Preziosi's panel.

<sup>67</sup> Mahood writes, "This approach...has...the advantage that it avoids the dilemma in certain areas of feminist historiography of portraying women either as the agents or victims of their time." *The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century* (London, New York: Routledge, 1990); see also Maria Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (England: Cambridge University Press, 1995), particularly where she discusses the choices women made regarding prostitution (6-7, 102-103).

<sup>68</sup> For a broader picture of women and the arts in the eighteenth century, see John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (USA: Harper Collins, 1997) and Ellen Messer-Davidow, "'For Softness She': Gender Ideology and Aesthetics in Eighteenth-Century England" in *Eighteenth-Century Women and The Arts* eds. Frederick M. Keener and Susan E. Lorsch (New York; Westport, Connecticut; London, England: Greenwood Press, 1988) 45-55.

am attempting to do something in the place of speaking for them. I am drawing a link between my art and the forgotten, invisible, or partial actions of historical women, to use my creativity as an informed remembering of the women of Bath through the very object which ignores them: heritage architecture. This architecture, I believe, can operate as a critical, pedagogical tool. Through brief, ephemeral “interventions”, Bath’s architectural capital can be made to “speak” differently, and to register its silences in such a way that women’s history does not fall through the cracks between the stones.

*And again the wing*

...[T]he miracle of winged works of art is transferred to the creation itself, as if this line contributed to the tradition that Daidalos, shadowy *Dopplegänger* to the epic craftsman-god, made wings himself...[in Greek myth] wings characterize divine and majestic qualities, and eventually the means of flight itself becomes the object of a legend of manufacture.<sup>69</sup>

The connections between Bladud, the flying architect of Bath and Daedalus, flying artist/architect and troublemaker of Ancient Greece, are immediately apparent, and very present in the writings of John Wood the Elder, who is worth quoting at some length.

...a Prophet rose up in the Island [England]...he had a Name, implying an Eagle, given to him, no doubt from his transforming himself into the Shape of a Bird...and his other Name of Bladud...might have arisen from his early knowledge of the Motion of the Stars...and from his appearing as a meer Dudman while he was decked with Feathers to enable him to fly in the Air, as it is reported of *Daedalus*, and his Son *Icarus*; from whose last Flight the Icarian Sea received its Name: For the Young Man’s Wings failing him...*Icarus*...fell down in to that Sea, and perished...<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Morris *Daidalos* 16.

<sup>70</sup> Wood (1765) 30.

In Bath, Bladud's wings are conspicuous by their absence. But Bladud as progenitor of Bath, as demi-god creating *ex nihilo* and flying high to a tragic end, was almost a carbon copy of Daedalus, with the exception that rather than losing his son, Bladud lost his own life.<sup>71</sup>

In questioning the figure of the flying architect, I have studied a wide range of representations of winged human figures.<sup>72</sup> In my reading on relevant subjects, particularly on angels, the overwhelmingly striking elision was the issue of gender. Repeatedly, the sources, whether popular, theological or academic, made assumptions about the gender of these supposedly non-human beings based upon the codes of human gender specific to the moment of writing. Essays on the angelic, in other words, were essays upon the human. The current, highly consumerist obsession with angels and fairies<sup>73</sup> would warrant a doctoral dissertation of its own;

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<sup>71</sup> According to Howard C. Levis, in the 1517 edition of *Historia Britannica*, Bladud tried to "fly through the upper air". In Elizabethan cosmology, this was the angelic realm. "*Bladud recyteth howe he practizinge by curious arts to flye, fell and brake his necke. The Yeare before Christe, 844.. The British King Who Tried To Fly* 42. See also Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948).

<sup>72</sup> These have included angels and fairies, for the story of Bladud contains suggestions of both the angelic (and its corollary, the daemonic) and fairy realms. While not an analytic study of Bladud's progress in early modern literature, Howard C. Levis' book, *The British King Who Tried To Fly*, does show the changes in symbolic meaning the character Bladud enjoyed from his appearance in Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* to today.

<sup>73</sup> To name a few from the plethora of popular sources on angels and fairies: Sophy Burnham, *A Book of Angels: Reflections on Angels Past and Present and True Stories of How They Touch Our Lives* (USA: Ballantine, 1990); Gena Chmielewski, *Angel Visions and Miracles: Seven Sacred Steps To Creating Miracles in Your Life* (USA: Angel Visions International, Inc., 1996); David Connolly, *In Search of Angels: A Celestial Sourcebook for Beginning Your Journey* (New York: Perigee, 1994); Eileen Elias Freeman, *Touched by Angels: True Cases of Close Encounters of the Celestial Kind* (Audiocassette, USA: Time Warner Audio Books, 1993); and Geoffrey James, *Angel Magic: The Ancient Art of Summoning and Communicating with Angelic Beings* (St. Paul, Minnesota, USA: Llewellyn Publications, 1995). For a somewhat more analytical account of the current popularity of angels, among other fantastical beings, see Joseph M. Felser, "Old Age' Religion meets the New Age in Middle Age: On Angels, Authorities, Aliens and Artists" in *The Quest* (Winter 1995): 56-79, where he writes, "the increasing fascination with which the idea and image of the angel is held by many self-described new agers is symptomatic of a much deeper failure of the movement to live up to its own revolutionary ideals." (61)

however, here it is the association of wings with architecture that concerns me, given that both play such a role in the cultural inheritance of the city.

To be brief, the result of my research on angels yielded results that were pertinent to the study of architecture of Bath. “Angels”, supposedly (and indeed, canonically) sexless, gender-free and decidedly non-human, gain a human form and gender in the process of visual representation. The gained gender would be therefore prosthetic, and like any prosthesis, would serve its function self-consciously. Winged human figures are a persistently popular emblem and have had a long and varied history.<sup>74</sup> Within the shifting pattern of religious freedom and revival in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England emerged a greater freedom for artists to appropriate religious themes and images and shape them at will.<sup>75</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, the religious revival that discursively supported

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<sup>74</sup> For a scholarly study of fairies with many insights despite the apparently dissociative topic, see Joyce Underwood Munro, “The Invisible World Made Visible: The Fairy Changeling as an Articulation of Failure to Thrive in Infants and Children” in *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays*, ed. Peter Narváez (USA: University Press of Kentucky, 1991) 251-283. In the same volume, Susan Schoon Eberly’s “Fairies and the Folklore of Disability: Changelings, Hybrids, and the Solitary Fairy”: 227-250, is another useful cultural analysis of the fairy. Stuart Schneiderman, *An Angel Passes: How the Sexes Became Undivided* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1988); Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Angels: Messengers of the Gods* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1994); Gunnar Berefelt, *A Study on the Winged Angel: The Origin of a Motif* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1968) all demonstrate the absence of gender analysis which the subject seems to so clearly require. Constance Classen’s *The Colour of Angels: Cosmology, Gender and the Aesthetic Imagination* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) is one attempt to complicate the notion of “angel” with the consideration of gender. The problem of human gender for angelology is not new. See, for example, Thomas Aquinas’ *Treatise on Separate Substances* (West Hartford, Connecticut: Saint Joseph College, 1959).

<sup>75</sup> For example, until the nineteenth century, fairies were dangerous entities (however much Protestant and Catholic churches denied their existence) to be mollified and reckoned with at all times. The Age of Reason and subsequent religious revival led to the demobilization of fairies as a force for mischief, and they became tiny, capricious fictional characters; the stuff of children’s books and lugubrious paintings. See Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); Sir Walter Scott, “Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft” in *The Complete Works: With A Biography, and his Last Additions and Illustrations* (vol 1, New York: Conner and Cook, 1833) and still the definitive work on fairies, Katharine Mary Briggs’ *The Anatomy of Puck: An Examination of Fairy Beliefs Among Shakespeare’s Contemporaries and Successors* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959).

the idea that women served society and God best in the home, had at best levelled out, and was perhaps even on the decline. Historian Barbara Caine writes,

[D]espite the rhetoric of female domesticity, women's public and political activity markedly increased at this time as women began to appear and to be noted as patriots as well as in the guises of reformers or radicals. The new emphasis on private and public and on the gendering of space served at least as much to make women's activities visible as to restrict their scope.<sup>76</sup>

Certainly, the object of the most vocal religious reform movements – the poor – were not responding to those efforts as obediently as middle-class philanthropists might have liked.<sup>77</sup> The prevalence of winged female figures in the nineteenth century was due to their purpose as emblems of morality. In these emblems, there is a superficial invective to be like angels.<sup>78</sup> There is, however, a further invective to obey and not, as the Marquis of Halifax had admonished a century earlier, expect the world to “change for your sake.”

But for a woman to be like an angel at a time of increased moral concern, such as in the nineteenth century, does not equate with actual women being symbolically identified with a glorious emissary of an all-powerful deity. That male

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<sup>76</sup> Barbara Caine, *English Feminism 1780-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>77</sup> Catherine Hall writes, “...the bourgeois ideal of the family became a part of the dominant culture and, by the 1830s and 1840s, was being promoted through propaganda as the only proper way to live. In the government reports of that period, working wives and mothers are presented as something unnatural and immoral. Working-class women were castigated for being poor housewives and inadequate mothers.” *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 91. Little wonder that the results of philanthropic efforts were uneven. See also F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). For a more in-depth study of philanthropic work in Bath related to prostitution, see Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

<sup>78</sup> The most (in)famous example of the desired symmetry between the domesticated woman and the notion of the angel is Coventry Patmore's lengthy and sentimental poem, *The Angel in the House*, was a tribute to his dead wife. *The Angel in the House* became a popular gift for young, middle-class women anticipating marriage. *The Angel in the House, Together with the Victories of Love* (Introduction, Alice Meynell, London: George Routledge & Sons; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., [1855] 1905).

writers consistently insist upon the implicit masculinity of angels (see footnote 73) does not contradict the plethora of simpering, and just as often, chauvinistic Victorian representations of winged women.<sup>79</sup> This insistence acts to conserve whatever remnants of divine power the “real” angels might have, and thus that a male god would exercise. Wings attached to human form are indeed a reference to that which is more than human, or to that which humans might aspire. The kind of human body attached to a pair of wings, however, is no accident.

The most glaringly obvious example of how power and the winged human form operate in the discourse on gender is the façade of Bath Abbey. (Fig. 26, 31) The façade of Bath Abbey (begun 1499) is notable as a very-last minute Catholic exhortation to its soon-to-be Protestant congregation to consider the Church as the only true path to God. Based upon a dream by the presiding Bishop, the façade is marked by two columns of angels on either side of the main portal. The angels illustrate the dream of Bishop Oliver King, who saw in his sleep angels climbing and descending a huge ladder to heaven.<sup>80</sup> King had his vision cast in stone accordingly. The original number of angels is unknown; however, twelve are affixed to the

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<sup>79</sup> Winged women emblemized motherhood, nation, victory, peace, wisdom, and so forth. They also, in the form of fairies, could represent an Other woman, one whose non-human status could lend itself more easily than the Victorian notion of “woman” to voyeurism and sexualization in the form of pin-up like images. Marina Warner discusses the allegorization of women in image and sculpture in *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (New York: Atheneum, 1985). Victorian examples of artists who represented female-gendered figures either as angels, fairies or winged allegories include Julia Margaret Cameron, Richard Dadd, Ferdinand Hodler, Sir John Gilbert, Sir Joseph Noel Paton, Edward Dulac, John Atkinson Grimshaw, Fred Stead, John Simmons and of course, Arthur Rackham. I have written about Cameron’s photographic representations of winged children and women in “The Industry of Motherhood: Spring Hurlbut’s *L’ascension* and Julia Margaret Cameron’s Wings,” *RACAR* 25, 1-2 (1998): 48-57.

<sup>80</sup> While Jacob’s Ladder would seem to be the obvious conceptual precedent for the West Front of Bath Abbey, most sources consider the dream of Oliver King to be the basis for the schema. See, for example, Paul Newman’s guidebook, *Bath* 10-12. Whatever the real source of the cosmogram on Bath Abbey, the image of the ladder, in conjunction with a church, still has currency today. P. J. Bonthron’s short piece for the *Daily Telegraph* (20 July, 2000, p. 7) describes a “pink neon-illuminated ladder to heaven” installed against St. Peter’s Church, Canterbury. The artist is Ron Hasleden.

façade today. Over the centuries, the angels have been replaced and updated, so that the turn-of-the-millennium visitor can see a variety of styles of carving. In an 1883 photograph, just prior to the 1895-1900 restoration conducted by Sir Thomas Jackson, it is clear that the angels have largely eroded. This erosion is due to the sensitive nature of Bath stone. (See fig. 31) In this photo, taken at the end of Jackson's restoration, two new angels may be seen. Both are facing towards the earth, in an attempt to better render King's dream of the angels climbing down. This decision, rather than clarifying King's vision, actually suggests that these two angels are falling rather than climbing. They are the only two angels so represented. And of the twelve angels on the Abbey's famous façade, the only recognizably female angel is one of these falling angels.

While this may be read as somehow emancipatory (that a woman's body was deemed appropriate for containing the exalted being of an angel), I see it rather as supporting evidence for my assertions above on the ascription of gender distinctions to non-human, divine beings. In other words, the use of a woman's body is a symbolic reminder to actual women that they are subordinate to actual and symbolic male figures. At times of unquestioned hegemony, the need to remind women of their subordinate position is not as necessary. At the time of the restoration of Bath Abbey under Jackson, there was an expansion of political franchise for women. As Lisa Tickner notes in *The Spectacle of Women*, by the end of the nineteenth-century the suffrage movement had begun to accelerate in organizations such as The Women's Council of the Primrose League (1885), the Women's Liberal Association (1886) and the Women's Liberal Unionist Association (1888). By 1879, women who owned property had the right to vote for school and poor law boards. By 1888, that right had extended to votes on county, parish and district councils.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) 5.

Interestingly, or predictably, enough, during Jackson's restoration of Bath Abbey the decision to replace two of the angel figures included the decision to shape one of those figures along highly popular, Pre-Raphaelite stylization of the female body. The anxiety and hostility which surrounded the suffrage movement may or may not be reflected in the decision to make a falling angel female, particularly as the other falling angel is identifiably "male" within the same representative tradition. The degree to which the current climate of opinion around the role of women as "angel in the home" and whore in the street affected this decision is, however, not speculative at all. As Tickner elucidates in her book on the imagery and counter-imagery of the suffrage campaign, representations of the female form are a battleground upon which dominant and emerging notions of femininity struggle either for articulation or continued acceptance. The winged female figure on the Abbey is a response to the fashions of the time, undoubtedly, and as such, is a powerful indicator of the forces of change at work in the arena of women's rights, and of the efforts to curtail those efforts. That this figure exists on the façade of one of Bath's largest and most celebrated buildings is no accident, either. As the conservative corollary to the suffragists "agitation by symbol",<sup>82</sup> the use of a pious yet falling female angel on public, well-funded sculpture at the turn of the nineteenth-century England was a prescription through symbol.

The wing, when attached to human form, is a complex symbol. It refers frequently, if not consistently, to power when attached to male form. And it refers frequently, if not consistently, to the directive of moral law, and consequently, a lack of power, when attached to the female form – in male-authored representation. And wings, when attached to an architect, fuse several discourses – masculinity,

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<sup>82</sup> Tickner, *Spectacle...* 10.



creativity and divinity – around the highly revered and quasi-mystical notion of architecture. As I have previously stated, the mythology of “Bath” entwines human flight and architecture, and is a history of men, male mythical personalities and the creativity (the architectural production) of men. In this thesis, part of my goal is to demonstrate the relation of architecture and the notion of human flight, using Bath as a specific example of how a city’s cultural capital *can* rise, literally, from its mythology, if its metaphors are potent enough. Given the potency of (male) human flight, my imperative is to emphasize the role that women have played in the construction of Bath/“Bath,” through reconsidering architecture, wings and the work that women did which aided in the formation of a city “from below” and necessarily, from above, from the women who are remembered because of their social privilege.

Privileging this work as a shaping force in Bath’s history implies that the ways architecture tends to be re-membered is insufficient. The history of architecture within feminist terms demands a reconsideration of factual evidence – actual women who commissioned or built architecture, women who were involved in the domestic labour necessary to maintain a city with a high visual prestige, and the women whose sale and lack of freedom were indispensable to the economy of Bath’s wealthy inhabitants. All this is perhaps straightforward enough. The leap that I ask of the reader is poetic. The metaphor of the winged architect is not accidental, nor is the reasoning behind their inevitable fall from grace. The wings of the mythical architect are a symbolic shorthand for how men are able to transcend their human status, to trespass up/on the divine. The creation of space is fundamentally overlaid in western cultural history with overtones of the sacred. The next chapter teases out some of the macro and microcosmic issues at work in a feminist study of the architectural history of Bath.

## Chapter Two

### Literature review Architecture, Flight and Women in Bath

Me may Angels guard from Ill  
When I am to do thy Will  
So shall I with steady pace  
Reach the dearest City, Grace

Who can hurt me in this Place  
Fenc'd and fortify'd by Grace?  
Dearest City, I am thine,  
And thy Happiness is mine.

Anonymous<sup>1</sup>

This quote comes from one of the hundreds of hymns that Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, compiled in 1770 and published in Bath. While the hymn has no named author, it introduces the themes of this chapter: the divine city and the “silent” historical woman. The notion of the divine city is a concept with a long history. From Augustine’s *City of God* to Ledoux’s eighteenth-century salt works, architecture, utopia and spiritual vision have combined in varied ways on this theme, the most topical for this thesis being John Wood the Elder’s early eighteenth-century vision of Bath.<sup>2</sup> Less known is the utopian architectural vision of Selina Hastings, the Countess of Huntingdon, who built a Methodist Chapel at Bath in 1756. (Fig. 32) This Chapel, while being one of the few remaining traces of

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<sup>1</sup>Hymn 59 from *The Collection of Hymns, Sung in the Countess of Huntingdon’s Chapel*, compiled by Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon (Bath: T. Mills 1770) 73-74.

<sup>2</sup> Wood (1765).

Hastings' vision, was full of "silent" historical women, as women were literally not allowed to speak inside its walls.<sup>3</sup> They were, however, welcome to sing, and singing was an important aspect of early Methodism's spiritual practice.<sup>4</sup> Katherine Plymley of Shropshire made six visits to Bath between 1794-1807. On Sunday, October 12, 1794, she notes in her diary that "We went to Lady Huntingdons [sic] chapel, they sang very often, almost between every prayer & there was a good Organ."<sup>5</sup> Plymley came to Bath several times as the "guest" of her brother, and spent a great deal of her time helping to care for his twelve children.<sup>6</sup> Intelligent, unmarried, a keen observer and politically minded,<sup>7</sup> Plymley's economic and social circumstances were typical of those people drawn to Methodism at the end of the eighteenth century. Catherine Hall describes how Methodism, and its less radical sibling, Evangelicalism, began to forge new visions of English morals, of the English home and family life between 1780 and 1820. She writes, "This view was to become a dominant one in the 1830s and 1840s. The Evangelical emphasis on the

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<sup>3</sup> "If [Hastings] did not appear as the public advocate of the cause, it was because a woman is forbidden to speak in the Church..." Aaron Crossley Hobart Seymour, *The Life and Times of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon* (London: William Edward Painter, 1811) xviii.

<sup>4</sup> "They have boys and girls with charming voices, that sing hymns, in parts, to Scotch ballad tunes; but indeed so long that one would think they were already in eternity, and knew how much time they had before them." Horace Walpole, letter to John Chute, Esq., Bath, October 19, 1766. Quoted in J. Aitken, *English Letters of the Eighteenth Century* (England: Pelican Books, 1946) 109-110.

<sup>5</sup> Ellen Wilson, "A Shropshire Lady in Bath, 1794-1807" *Bath History* 4 (1992): 97.

<sup>6</sup> Wilson "A Shropshire Lady" 102.

<sup>7</sup> Wilson notes that Plymley was familiar with the writing of Hannah More and William Wilberforce, both very active in the anti-slavery campaign. ("A Shropshire Lady" 95, 122)

creation of a new life-style, a new ethic, provided the framework for the emergence of the Victorian bourgeoisie.”<sup>8</sup>

Highly controversial and frequently disliked, Methodism and Hastings became synonymous at Bath.<sup>9</sup> The Chapel drew as many criticisms as visitors, inspiring one irate local to write to the *Bath Chronicle* about Hastings’ refusal to have collections made at the Chapel for “the Hospital.” Bob Short huffed, “And quite right too! Collections at the Chapel should go towards a hospital for lunatics as the *damnable* Doctrine delivered there will soon turn half the congregation’s brains.”<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, Audrey Thomas describes how “Bath Society began to appreciate the new preachers. The chapel was crowded. The congregations even overflowed and the doors were left open so that the services could be enjoyed by those who were standing outside...”<sup>11</sup> While some, such as the Duchess of Buckingham, found Methodism repugnant for its claim that sin knows no class barriers,<sup>12</sup> historian R. S. Neale has identified the Countess of Huntingdon’s “Persuasion” (as it was called) as an institution that “sought to place [the people]

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<sup>8</sup> Hall, Chapter 3, “The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology” 75.

<sup>9</sup> The disloyalty to the High Church of England inherent to Methodism may not have been the only factor in the rejection of Methodism. “[F]ear of Methodism as a socially disruptive handmaid to a plot to overturn the Hanoverian monarchy may have had more substance than is generally supposed.” Schlenther 27.

<sup>10</sup> *Bath Chronicle* March 20, 1766.

<sup>11</sup> Audrey Thomas, “The Countess of Huntingdon’s Chapel” *The Lady* (July 26, 1984): 139.

<sup>12</sup> “It is monstrous to be told that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth.” Duchess of Buckingham, quoted in Neale (1981) 316.

more firmly under the control of a doctrinaire church...[Methodism] taught people to bear with things as much as to protest against them.”<sup>13</sup>

With the opening of the Chapel at Bath in 1765, Hastings expanded her broad-ranging Persuasion or “Connexion”, an association of chapels, colonial investments, missionary work, a school, and personal favorites. While remaining cognizant of Hastings’ patent disinterest in the labouring classes, Neale observes that the Methodism Hastings helped to foster in Bath was one of the early manifestations of organized dissent in that city. Neale’s stated purpose in his chapter, “The Consciousness of the People 1680-1815”, is to trace the rise as he sees it of social consciousness and organized political activity, until the early nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> He observes that concern over the self-indulgence of the upper classes motivated Hastings to act. Neale places the creative and utopian work of another woman, Sarah Scott, author of *Millenium Hall*, alongside Hastings’ Chapel. In 1762, novelist and philanthropist, Sarah Scott, sister of Elizabeth Montague, wrote about a utopian female community, based on her charity work in Bath, where she lived and collaborated with Lady Barbara Montagu. Neale notes the historical proximity of these creative, political and ideological acts in his social history of Bath, but he finds the importance of Scott’s novel and Hastings’ Chapel to lie in

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<sup>13</sup> Neale (1981) 316.

<sup>14</sup> Neale (1981) 302-328. Bath’s other major social historians, Penny Bonsall and Graham Davies, sketch out the various shades of opinion on the subject of Bath’s nineteenth century, working-class political character on page 116 of *Bath: A New History*.

their being “forcing grounds” for a new social consciousness in Bath.<sup>15</sup> He writes, “Had any of [the poor people in the neighbourhood of Bath] read [*Millenium Hall*] it might have conveyed to them a vision of a Utopia different from Wood’s and from the world in which they lived.”<sup>16</sup>

It is true that readers of Scott’s novel, and likewise visitors to Hastings’ chapel, would find a different vision of utopia, architecture and community than those of John Wood the Elder (although it is somewhat utopian to hope that working-class individuals would have had the necessary funds or education to be among Scott’s readers, or the necessary patronage and welcome to be among the chapel’s visitors). Neale’s juxtaposition of Scott and Hastings’ work is nonetheless tantalizing in that it presents these two women’s disparate and unrelated creative acts – writing and architecture – as constitutive aspects of Bath’s cultural history. His juxtaposition does not, however, explain the discussion, local to Bath, of vision, utopia, architecture and creative genius, which has so far claimed only John Wood the Elder with any enthusiasm. Wood is, in this view, both an architectural prodigy and a local and national treasure. Furthermore, Neale’s juxtaposition of Hastings and Scott does not address the ways in which architecture specifically played a role in each woman’s vision.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, I pick up the discussion Hastings on these two

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<sup>15</sup> Neale (1981) 314-323.

<sup>16</sup> Neale (1981) 317.

<sup>17</sup> Scott has been the subject of several analyses, such as Jane L. Donawerth and Carol A. Kolmerten’s *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women: Worlds of Difference*, ed. Susan Gubar (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1994); Christine Rees, *Utopian Imagination and Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (London: New York: Longman, 1996); and most pertinent to this study,

points, where I believe Neale's account leaves off, as a way of providing the literature review for this thesis.

One of the difficulties of an interdisciplinary project is drawing the parameters for the study at hand. My bibliography attests to the range of subjects under consideration for the purpose of this thesis. Given the utter lack of feminist-positioned writing on the subject of Bath's architectural history, my research has taken me from literature by women, such as Scott and Austen, to arcane sources on angels, from social history to very traditional architectural history. It is, therefore, impossible to survey "the literature" on the question of women, architecture, the notion of flight, and Bath. However, it is possible to show the problems inherent to a feminist cultural analysis of the architectural heritage of Bath (and by extension, the need for interdisciplinary work in this attempt) with the very telling case study of Countess of Huntingdon's Chapel at Bath. The sources necessitated by the specific example of Hastings' Chapel are representative of the "field" of Georgian architecture in Bath. At the same time, the example of Hastings also indicates where the gaps in feminist (architectural) history lie, and how I have followed feminist cultural analysis and feminist ethics to deal with those gaps.

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Dorice Williams Elliott, "Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* and Female Philanthropy", *Studies in English Literature* 35, 3 (Summer 1995), 13pp. 22 June, 2001  
 <[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/studies\\_in\\_english\\_literature/toc/selv039.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/studies_in_english_literature/toc/selv039.html)>. Elliott's text, drawn from her doctoral dissertation, takes issue with the emphasis in critical literature on same-sex relationships. This emphasis, Elliott claims, ignores what she sees as a central aspect of Scott's book: its emphasis on philanthropy. Scott's novel, Elliott argues, finds a place for Other women – women who are neither fallen, nor married – within a self-contained economy. Elliott presents the novel as a place of synthesis between the cult of sensibility and the rise of philanthropy, as well as being a feminist utopian revisioning of domesticity.

Selina Hastings was a powerful woman whose Nonconformist vision for England and beyond was rooted in a class privilege that allowed her diverse and at times deeply disturbing venues for augmenting that power. Hastings' clergy, for example, had to remind her of the moral inconsistency of insisting on the freedom to express a personal, spiritual mission and owning slaves in the American colonies.<sup>18</sup> Immediately then, Hastings is a complicated and contradictory figure. The strength of her determination is what emerges from any study of her biography, particularly from the efforts of her chroniclers to render her in terms that would be palatable to Victorian audiences.<sup>19</sup> The concern of utmost urgency to Hastings after 1746 was the expansion of the Connexion, and the related work of installing preachers in her growing number of chapels.

In 1741 she wrote a letter to John Wesley of her desire to seek and facilitate the "entire purification of the soul."<sup>20</sup> Later, in a letter to Charles Wesley, she wrote of her dreams for a utopian community structured around such purification:

I'm sure it must be a town of our own building, [secure] in property to us alone [,] that the few souls who are...now scattered may become a household to the Lord...I have by [me] a plan for this purpose.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Seymour (1811) vol 11: 265-266. Seymour prints an extract from a letter from Hastings in which she writes, "I must, therefore, request that a woman-slave may be purchased with [trust money from George Whitefield], and that she may be called Selina, after me..." (vol 11: 266)

<sup>19</sup> Seymour writes, "...and while considerations of sex, of the disposition and [unsympathetic] views of her beloved lord, of the rank she held, and which she was so well qualified to support, would have restrained an ordinary mind of common piety from public interference – these...to her appeared to be talents of great worth, and she was excited to employ them to the greatest advantage." (vol 1: xix)

<sup>20</sup> October 24, 1741, quoted in Schlenther 22.

<sup>21</sup> Schlenther 22. (Written between 1742-46.)



Embedded in this phrase are multiple concerns, including what Boyd Stanley Schlenther has called “early Methodism’s casting about for a theological anchor.”<sup>22</sup> Here, Hastings articulates her faith in building, or in the material presence of a town, as a means of anchoring the “few souls” of her particular brand of Nonconformism to a physical place. The brevity and illegibility of her numerous personal letters to the Wesley brothers, her friends, followers, foes, and to the large circle of aristocratic converts her chapels inspired, should not detract from the intensity of her conviction that the word of god and salvation alike required the sanction of space.<sup>23</sup> The Wesley brothers were famous for their open-air evangelizing. The Countess of Huntingdon was famous for the chapels in which she contained their sermons, and the sermons of the many clergy who trained in her Methodist training school at Trevecca, in Wales.

In addition to this college, by the time of her death in 1791 Hastings had built sixty-four chapels in England, including the one at Bath.<sup>24</sup> This Chapel is an architectural anomaly for several reasons. The first is simply because by “the autumn of 1765 the Huntingdon Chapel was Bath’s only important Georgian Gothic building.”<sup>25</sup> It is also one of the few eighteenth-century Gothic – or Gothick –

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<sup>22</sup> Schlenther: 26.

<sup>23</sup> Schlenther writes, “She wanted to establish a utopian community.” (22)

<sup>24</sup> Research files of Samantha Baker, curator of the Lady Huntingdon Museum, a subset of the Building of Bath Museum, Bath. Ms. Baker generously shared her unpublished research with me during my visit to Bath in October, 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Little 14.

buildings to survive from the Georgian period,<sup>26</sup> and to this day the little Gothic chapel and adjoining minister's lodging are distinct architectural features in a sea of Georgian architecture.<sup>27</sup> In addition to being a denominational and aesthetic exception, the Chapel is significant in Bath's history because it is also the only Bath building constructed in the Georgian period that may reasonably be said to have been designed by a woman. (Hastings was Nonconformist in more ways than one.)

The Huntingdon Chapel at Bath is a small, rectangular building, terminating in a semi-circular apse in the middle of the east wall, which originally held the communion table and the organ loft above. It measures 59' 8" by 39' 9" on the inside, the ceiling being 26' 2" high. The plan is symmetrical, with Gothic windows on every elevation (four in the west wall and five on each of the side walls). The east wall adjoins the minister's lodging (see fig. 32), which is the elevation visible from the street. The most "Gothick" aspect of the entire design, this two-story residence has distinctive bay frontage design, elaborated with ogee-arched windows<sup>28</sup> and a battlemented parapet.<sup>29</sup> As Bryan Little notes, the double stairway

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<sup>26</sup> Walter Ison includes the Chapel in his *Georgian Buildings of Bath* (1948. Bath: Kingsmead, 1980) 56-58.

<sup>27</sup> The "Vineyards" is the name still used to describe the location of the Chapel and adjoining areas. When the Countess chose this plot of land in early 1765, she and her ministers would have enjoyed sweeping views of the Avon and green hills beyond from the east front windows. The City of Bath Corporation approved the construction of the Paragon, a serpentine, continuous terrace of Georgian housing, less than two years after the Chapel opened. This broad crescent effectively walled in the Chapel with twenty-one Neo-classical houses. See also Little 13.

<sup>28</sup> "Ogee" refers to a curving form, sometimes in an "S" shape, used as a decorative motif, and is evident on the external window treatment of the Huntingdon Chapel at Bath.

<sup>29</sup> Sources for descriptions of the design include Ison 56-58; Little 14.

to the road, and “the ogee pattern of the iron lampholders above the gate piers” heightens the overall visual effect of the Chapel.<sup>30</sup> Horace Walpole, himself a proponent of Gothic style, admired Hastings’ Chapel in 1766:

The chapel is very neat, with true Gothic windows (yet I am not converted); but I was glad to see that luxury is creeping in upon them before persecution: they have very neat mahogany stands for branches, and brackets of the same in taste. At the upper end is a broad *hautpas* of four steps, advancing in the middle: at each end of the broadest part are two of *my* eagles, with red cushions for the parson and clerk...a third eagle for pulpit [above]. Scarlet armed chairs to all three. On either hand, a balcony for elect ladies. The rest of the congregation sit on forms.<sup>31</sup>

Walpole here refers to “his” eagles. This is a nod to the three carved eagles used as lecterns in the Huntingdon Chapel, as elsewhere. A popular symbol for evangelist sects, the eagle typically signified St. John the Evangelist, however, Hastings had a particular fondness for them. At Bath, two of the eagles have her initials carved into the base, although she dedicated one to her late husband’s monogram.<sup>32</sup> This simple gesture, of signing the eagles in her Chapel, is more representative of Hastings than is immediately apparent. She felt her role as a spiritual enabler, if not leader, keenly, and set about creating an evangelical empire, of which the Chapel at Bath was one outpost. The breadth of her control is remarkable. She built the college in which she

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<sup>30</sup> Little 14.

<sup>31</sup> Walpole, quoted in Aitken 109-110.

<sup>32</sup> A. W. Knight notes this detail in “Lady Huntingdon’s Circle in Bath” *Somerset Year Book* (1928): 51.

had “her” ministers trained to her taste.<sup>33</sup> When the Church of England would not ordain her ministers, she ordained them herself.<sup>34</sup> When she fought with Charles Wesley and her overseer at her college over Calvinism, she sacked the overseer and “superintended the affairs of the college herself.”<sup>35</sup> She built the chapels in which these same ministers would preach. She bought the land in other countries where her emissaries would attempt to convert the locals.<sup>36</sup> She was the patron of the most powerful and popular speakers within the Methodist sect,<sup>37</sup> and, according to one of those, she perceived this spiritual empire as her own. Charles Wesley, frustrated with Hastings by the 1770s, said that she continually referred to “*my college, my masters, my students: ‘I mixes with everything.*”<sup>38</sup>

Whether a strong sense of entitlement or a strong sense of self, this claiming of Methodism as Hastings’ own extended to architecture. As most sources on the Chapel attest, Hastings was already very familiar with Gothic revival by the time she set about building a chapel in Bath. Samantha Baker, curator of the Huntingdon

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<sup>33</sup> Orchard writes that the preachers-in-training at Trevecca were “subject to the personal vetting of the Countess.” (6)

<sup>34</sup> The peerage had the right to ordain a limited number of ministers a year for their personal convenience. Hastings, as a result of controversy surrounding her “Connexion”, registered her chapels under the Toleration Act of 1779, in effect establishing her own denomination. See Orchard 6-7.

<sup>35</sup> Orchard 6.

<sup>36</sup> The “Countess of Huntingdon Connexion” is, for example, still active in Sierra Leone today. See Orchard: introduction.

<sup>37</sup> Hastings financially assisted George Whitefield, John and Charles Wesley. Little 8-9.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in David Gadd, *Georgian Summer: Bath in the Eighteenth Century* (Great Britain: Adams and Dart, 1971) 159.

Museum in Bath, writes, “The Countess’s acquaintance with Horace Walpole...might also have influenced her choice [sic] of Gothic. From 1748 Walpole had “Gothicised” and publicised his country villa, Strawberry Hill, at Twickenham on the banks of the Thames.”<sup>39</sup> Moreover, “the Countess had been brought up at Staunton Harold where the chapel was ‘survivalist’ Gothic which could have been imprinted on her mind, and whose windows had some kinship with the ‘true Gothic’ which Horace Walpole admired in the chapel at Bath.”<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, as Little notes, Hastings built other Chapels with the distinctive feature of the ogee heads on windows and doors, the two tiers of Gothic windows, and the signature eagles. Even where Hastings refurbished an extant building as a Chapel in the Connexion, she added Gothic details.<sup>41</sup> An intelligent, educated, well-travelled, well-informed, determined and ambitious woman, the Countess of Huntingdon would not have made the decision regarding the look of her Chapel thoughtlessly, least of all in Bath, where the mid-century building boom was in full sway.<sup>42</sup> Given the prevalence of Neo-classicism in Bath and elsewhere, and given Hastings’ disdain for the society and mores which inhabited that Neo-classicism, Gothic was not a surprising choice

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<sup>39</sup> Baker, exhibition notes.

<sup>40</sup> Little 15. Baker confirms this: “Other attractions of the Gothic style for the Countess might have been her own knowledge of the 17<sup>th</sup> century ‘Gothic Survival’ family chapel at Staunton Harold...” Baker: exhibition notes.

<sup>41</sup> In Bristol she inserted two Gothic windows into a building that had started life as a theatre. Little 15-16.

<sup>42</sup> The Seven-Years’ War had ended in 1763 (two years’ before Hastings’ purchase of land in Bath), enabling the building trades to put the hiatus behind them. Giles Worsley, *Classical Architecture in Britain: The Heroic Age* (New Haven & London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, Yale University Press, 1995) 226.

for a Nonconformist sect attempting (as Methodism was in its nascent years) to differentiate itself from the Church of England.

Nor is it as mysterious as, for example, biographer Bryan Little makes it seem. Visitors to the Chapel today may purchase a twenty-page pamphlet by Little on the Countess of Huntingdon, her history of evangelical work and the history of her Chapel at Bath. The author describes the origins of the Chapel in this way:

In March 1767, an indenture between the Countess, a Bath builder named George Clarke, and William Clark who is mentioned as a yeoman, refers to the chapel as “lately built”, perhaps by Clarke...the chapel was opened...on October 6<sup>th</sup> of [1765]...the new building[’s] designer and cost are unknown. What is still unexplained is the choice of its Gothic style which was, in the 1760s, most unusual in Bath.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the evidence that Hastings “chose” the Gothic style as part of her own design of the building, authorship eludes her.<sup>44</sup> While consistently acknowledged as having “founded” or even “built” the Chapel, Hastings is never described as the “architect”.<sup>45</sup> Her “unexplained” aesthetic choice seems, as I have shown, much

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<sup>43</sup> Little 12-13.

<sup>44</sup> Little muses that Hastings’ “papers at Westminster College, Cambridge throw no light on the problem [of the identity of the architect], and are mostly later than 1764 or 1765 [the dates of the purchase of land in Bath, and the opening of the Chapel, respectively]. The Chapels in Bristol, built by Wesley and Whitefield could have provided no model...” (15) If mistaken about Hastings’ role in the Bath Chapel, Little is accurate in his claim that Wesley provided no precedents. Wesley had very specific ideas about the ideal Methodist chapel, two of these being that the chapels should be octagonal and have no pews. In these, as in other, respects, Hastings’ chapel at Bath is no copy. See George W. Dolbey, *The Architectural Expression of Methodism: The First Hundred Years* (London: Epworth, 1964) 66-67.

<sup>45</sup> Neither the biographical sources on Hastings, nor architectural histories of Bath (or the eighteenth Century), nor histories of Methodism in England acknowledge Hastings as the “architect.” Newman writes that Chapel “was built by the zealous Selina...” (72); Ison says “The famous Chapel...was built and originally maintained by Selina...” (56); Seymour writes “In the year

more logical if one considers the possibility that Hastings herself designed the building.

Hastings falls in the company of self-trained, wealthy, eighteenth-century architects – male and female – whose interest in architecture was part of their class privilege. In her essay “Women and Architecture”, Lynne Walker describes two kinds of women architects who would have practiced architecture prior to the official admission of women to the Royal Institute of British Architects.<sup>46</sup> She writes,

Before the nineteenth century there were two routes to becoming an architect: through the building trades or through an amateur interest in architecture. From the seventeenth century until the end of the nineteenth century, women worked mainly in the amateur tradition, which until the nineteenth century was associated with the aristocracy and upper classes, without having its later pejorative, feminine connotations.<sup>47</sup>

Walker gives the example of Lady Elizabeth Wilbraham, who designed Weston Park, Staffordshire, in 1671 following Palladio’s *First Book of Architecture*.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the evidence of Wilbraham’s interest in architecture and her work on Weston Park, architectural historian, Nikolaus Pevsner can only grudgingly bring

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1765 her Ladyship bought a piece of ground...and erected there a house and the beautiful chapel which has proved so great a blessing” (466); Baker writes cautiously that “no ‘architect’ as such for the Chapel is known”: exhibition notes. Dolbey only comments on Hastings as an “example” of wealthy peers involving themselves in Methodism’s early manifestations. He does not comment on the Chapel, its authorship or its style. (33).

<sup>46</sup> Walker notes that during the sixty years between the designation of architecture as a “profession” (in 1834) and the official acceptance of women to the Institute in 1898, women worked as architects nonetheless, “without RIBA membership of approval.” (251-252) The first woman to gain entry to the Institute was Ethel Mary Charles. Her sister, Bessie Ada Charles, followed as the second woman member, in 1900. See Walker 52-253.

<sup>47</sup> Walker 245-246.

<sup>48</sup> Walker 246. Wilbraham’s copy of Palladio, complete with her notes, annotations and budget in the margins, is still in the library at Weston Park. See Stephen Ponder, “Weston Park” *Traditional Interior Decoration* 2, 4 (March/February 1988): 35-36.

himself to say that “It was built by Sir Thomas and Lady Wilbraham in 1671, Lady Wilbraham being credited with the design.”<sup>49</sup> Similarly, he describes the church Wilbraham built in 1701 as “an enterprise of Lady Wilbraham.”<sup>50</sup> No other work of architecture in his book has these awkward designations. In the vast majority of cases in Pevsner’s encyclopedic survey of English architecture, a building is “by” the architect, with no other qualifications (“by Butterfield,” “by Scott,” etc.). A small point perhaps, but Pevsner’s bombastic phrasing creates a complication in the text where no complication need arise. In creating this dissonance, this rupture in the language of the text, Pevsner subtly erodes Wilbraham’s authorship. Similarly, the almost wilful confusion over the identity of the architect of Hastings’ Chapel seems misplaced when set beside the details of her obsessive control of her Connexion, her consistent choice of Gothic, her Nonconformism (in both the religious and secular senses of the word) and the absence of any definitive alternative.

Little and Baker note that Hastings hired builder Gregory Attwood, a Bath plasterer and tiler, in 1764.<sup>51</sup> Other candidates for the title of the Chapel’s “real” architect are George and William Clark, yeomen, who appear on an indenture with Hastings in 1767 (two years after the Chapel was built, I must add).<sup>52</sup> Baker, more willing to speculate than Little, still feels that Hastings’ authorship cannot be

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<sup>49</sup> Nicholas Pevsner, *The Buildings Of England (Staffordshire)*, eds. Nikolaus Pevsner and Judy Nairn (England: Penguin, 1974) 305.

<sup>50</sup> Pevsner (1974) 306.

<sup>51</sup> Little 12; Baker, unpaginated exhibition notes.



definitively proven. She does, however, acknowledge that the architect could have been untrained, and might well have used the widely-available pattern book, *Gothic Architecture, Improved by Rules and Proportions*, by Batty Langley.<sup>53</sup> At this point, the careful hedging about authorship becomes a little ridiculous. I imagine Attwood and Hastings, sitting in her parlour in Edgar's Buildings,<sup>54</sup> considering Langley's pattern book together. I see Hastings regally pointing out the same window pattern she consistently chose for the Chapels whose details are still known. Attwood nods, then carries out her orders. Is this so speculative? Who is the architect in this scenario? And why deny Hastings that title, unless there is another issue at hand?

There is, of course, another issue at hand. The title "architect" is a precious symbolic commodity, not to be given lightly. But who gives it, and why? In tandem with arguing for Hastings as the author of the Chapel at Bath, I want to include her in the discussion of architectural "vision". Hastings was a utopian thinker in the sense that her beliefs and obsessions fueled her drive to transform Bath via the built environment. For John Wood the Elder, the desired transformation was local and material, but this materiality was bolstered by what were for him crucial symbolic conjunctions (mostly conjectures) with a mythical Celtic past and an extraordinary Christian heritage. Hastings' vision was neither limited by the civic boundaries of Bath, nor the economic considerations of the fluctuating speculative building market

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<sup>52</sup> See Little 12.

<sup>53</sup> Batty Langley, *Gothic Architecture, Improved by Rules and Proportions* (London: Printed for John Millan, 1747).

<sup>54</sup> Little 11.

which continually troubled Wood. Her wealth and independence, after her husband's death in 1746, allowed her a freedom and architectural autonomy which meant that she did not have to please the market. On the contrary, Hastings' Chapel is decidedly a manifestation of her desire to avoid conformity, to be the moral and aesthetic exception in Bath.

Hastings' personal vision of a series of chapels dedicated to the expansion of Methodism began after 1739, when she joined the first Methodist society in Fetter Lane, London.<sup>55</sup> Two women were central to Hastings' own process of conversion, Lady Elizabeth Hastings and Lady Margaret Hastings, both related to the Countess by marriage. The former was instrumental in pioneering a project for a hospital for the poor in Bath, now known as the Royal Mineral Water Hospital on Milsom Street. Elizabeth Hastings never married and dedicated her life to charitable work and the church. Margaret Hastings took care of the Countess during an unspecified illness, becoming her confidant and religious model.<sup>56</sup> In the summer of 1739, Selina Hastings and her husband, the Earl of Huntingdon, visited Bath to seek a cure for the unwell Earl. There, according to an early biographer, Seymour, she "enjoyed many opportunities of advancing the interests of pure religion, which she uniformly embraced with all the ardour of a newly-awakened convert."<sup>57</sup> Seymour's

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<sup>55</sup> *The Countess of Huntingdon's Work and The Huntingdon Centre*, pamphlet produced by The Huntingdon Centre, Bath, n.d., n. pag..

<sup>56</sup> See Little 5.

<sup>57</sup> Seymour (1811) vol 11: 444.

account of a wide-eyed, innocent, recently-converted Hastings, struggling to defend her faith from “the bigoted and intolerant”<sup>58</sup> does not match up to the picture of determination and single-mindedness which emerges in this and Schelnthar’s text. Seymour does note, however, that Hastings from the start deployed architecture to further her vision of a spiritually enlightened England. “The means on which she chiefly relied in this good work was the erecting of numerous chapels, where the glad tidings of a free and full salvation, suited to the wants and necessities of the ruined...have been... faithfully proclaimed.” [Seymour: 444.]

Stanley Boyd Schlenther in his 1997 biography of Hastings notes in the first few pages the “gynaecological complications” which often had her seek the assistance of Bath’s medical community.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, her “frequent breeding”, he says, “often produced colic.”<sup>60</sup> The deaths of her husband and five of her six children and her gender-specific health problems are central narrative elements in Schlenther’s, Seymour’s and Little’s biographies of Hastings. Thwarted or difficult motherhood become the backdrop, even the explanation of her spiritual fervour in these texts. Schlenther splices Hastings’ religious zeal with an emphasis on maternity and wifehood which seem at odds with the enormity of her project, the extent of her influence, the force of her determination and even simply with her enormous

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<sup>58</sup> Seymour (1811) vol 11: 444.

<sup>59</sup> Schlenther 6.

<sup>60</sup> Schlenther 6.

privilege. As Seymour wrote a little nervously in 1811, the “powers of Lady Huntingdon were anything but feeble.”<sup>61</sup>

This is not to suggest that the role of motherhood or family priorities are anything but tremendously important, all-encompassing, and for many women, very spiritual. But I am very suspicious of the early warning signs in these texts of an overemphasis on maternity in Hastings’ life. While I do not wish to romanticize who she was (indeed, who can really “know” who she was), I also do not want to simply leave her spirituality, and by extension her massive works, as “explained” by her motherhood. To do so would be to sail too close to a familiar and damning wind for women: the notion that women are essentially maternal beings, and that this essential femininity is ahistorical, it knows no class or culture differences. Within this mode of thinking, too, Woman becomes the lesser term in the series of dualistic couplets which oppose masculinity to femininity, culture to nature, “active” to “passive”.<sup>62</sup> A naturally passive being, Woman is thus only ever the empty space, the vessel from which life flows, never the maker of spaces within which life may take place.<sup>63</sup> In other words, it is no surprise, given that Hastings’ biographers emphasize her personal tragedies, her gynaecological difficulties and her “breeding”, that she is never named as an architect. These tragedies are a way of organizing the Countess of Huntingdon’s life and actions in such a way that her own creative

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<sup>61</sup> Seymour (1811) vol 1: xviii.

<sup>62</sup> See Gatens, “The Feminist Critique of Philosophy” (1991) 85-99.

<sup>63</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, “Women, *Chora*, Dwelling” in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, eds. Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Oxford, England and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1995).

choices are not relevant, let alone the issue of how her spiritual vision translated to built, material reality. As they stand in her biographies, her sixty-four Chapels are quirky accessories in a life dedicated to grief and spiritual seeking. Fascinating questions, such as how did her choices as an architect help her withstand life's blows, or how, like many artists, did she use her personal experiences in her art? Do not arise. It does not need to be asked, on the other hand, whether or not the authorship of the Chapel at Bath would be in such question if it had been the Count who had shown an interest in architecture.

I turn here to another, far better known example of architecture, vision and authorship in Georgian Bath. Despite having died in 1754, John Wood the Elder, Bath's architect *célèbre*, still haunts the origins of the Royal Crescent, a project his son realized by 1775. (See fig. 30) The Crescent has garnered both rapturous and derisive commentary, the former because of its undeniable aesthetic and dramatic appeal, and the latter because, I believe, of a complicated allegiance to the elder Wood. This allegiance to John Wood the Elder is based, as I suggest in the Introduction, on the intersection of two deeply cherished beliefs: the notion of a lone and transcendent creative genius, and the notion that the plan and look of Bath is the product of such genius. This notion of a hierarchy of architectural achievement, topped with one throne, structurally cannot support shared laurels. In short, as long as Bath's tourist and heritage machinery claims John Wood the Elder

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as their architectural hero, their Daedalus, then his son will surely fall, his work will be a failure.

According to Neale, by 1768, John Wood the Younger was in debt for £92 000.<sup>64</sup> Wood acquired this sum for the purpose of building the Royal Crescent, what Walter Ison has termed “the finest building in Bath and the greatest single achievement in the whole field of our urban architecture.”<sup>65</sup> The Royal Crescent was also one of the largest speculative building projects in Bath to date, and represents what Neale calls the “social organization of space” in that century.<sup>66</sup> This concept of the social organization of Bath’s urban spaces is useful in that it strikes a more sober note within the reams of celebratory tourist material written around architectural genius and heritage. Primarily, this concept helps to establish that, despite Bath’s apparent architectural uniformity, and regardless of John Wood the Elder’s much-touted plan for the city of 1727, Bath’s architectural unfolding occurred in relation to a highly speculative and competitive building market, which played havoc with the elder Wood, and all practicing architects’ schemes. Neale writes that Bath “seems planned in appearance [but is in fact an] urban Utopia resulting from creative responses antagonistic to the disorder and anomie of the developing market society in which it was built.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Neale (1981) 161.

<sup>65</sup> Ison 34.

<sup>66</sup> Neale (1981) 209.

<sup>67</sup> Neale (1981) 209.

The Royal Crescent is a good example of an inspired response to restriction and contingency in the building market. John Wood the Younger's "masterpiece"<sup>68</sup> lies to the west of King's Circus, the Elder Wood's final project, still unfinished at his death. The Circus and Crescent connect via Brock Street, a narrow arm of lovely Georgian houses which extend the Circus' "superbly ordered claustrophobia"<sup>69</sup> to the west, just long enough so that what follows has the force of an impact. Emerging from Brock Street's western terminus on my first visit to Bath, I stepped from the pleasant, understated Georgian terrace of Brock Street into the majestic sweep of the Royal Crescent, looking like a palace, acting like a monument, and receiving visitors like the queen. The Royal Crescent incorporates thirty self-contained residences within its semi-elliptical, unified, Ionic façade. Neale writes that the Crescent was "a sort of collective palace for an itinerant and socially mobile agrarian capitalist elite."<sup>70</sup> Fraught in the early years of its development with rising land values, an uncertain water source, delays and complicated leaseholding agreements,<sup>71</sup> the Crescent was fully occupied by 1778.

Like the city of Bath in general, the Royal Crescent's popularity has waxed and waned, but in the late eighteenth-century, as now, it was a highly desirable address. Wealthy visitors to Bath were drawn to the dramatic climax of the

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<sup>68</sup> Ison 7.

<sup>69</sup> Mowl and Earnshaw 181.

<sup>70</sup> Neale (1981) 207.

<sup>71</sup> See Mowl and Earnshaw 182; Ison 231-2.

Crescent, still in the 1770s the western limit of Bath, and the broad vistas of rolling hills and picturesque scenery offered through its large, sash windows. As Mowl and Earnshaw have noted, the architectural progression that may be followed (from Queen's Square, up Gay Street, into the Circus, out via Brock Street) provides an architectural apex within the city, whose smaller size in the eighteenth century could only have added to the Crescent's power. While not employing the same language as Neale in his discussion of the social organization of Bath's urban space, Mowl and Earnshaw observe that the building programme of the Woods did redirect Bath's development as a whole, northwards. In the decades following the completion of the Crescent, new building projects such as Camden and Lansdown Crescents (begun 1788 and 1789 respectively) staked very steep grounds, privileging views and inaccessibility rather than the wayward nostalgia of the elder Wood's Queen's Square, Bath's Georgian (but not populist) agora. Increasingly, visitors made their seasonal homes up the steep hills that gave reason to many to hire a Bath sedan chair for the ride home.

Whether one agrees with Ison's fairly unusual assertion that "the work of the younger Wood represents the highest point of the Palladian achievement in Bath"<sup>72</sup>, clearly the Crescent is, and was, a centrepiece of Bath's architectural history, pivotal and unique in design. A consultation of John Wood the Elder's biography, *John Wood: Architect of Obsession*, shows that authors Tim Mowl and Brian Earnshaw

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<sup>72</sup> Ison 7.



are, however, oddly reticent in their praise. In fact, they appear to view the Royal Crescent as “almost spoilt” by what they perceive to be the younger Wood’s caution, modesty, moderation and economy. The biographers go as far as saying that Wood the Younger, being “desperately solemn” and “[enthusiastic] for plain spare housing for those in want”,<sup>73</sup> “almost spoilt the great Crescent by touches of moderation and economy.”<sup>74</sup> The picture emerges that the Younger Wood was a bit of a cheapskate, and when faced with the monumental task of finishing his father’s project, without “his father’s detailed drawings to guide him”,<sup>75</sup> a bit incompetent. Just in case there was any lingering doubt that John Wood the Younger might have been making an architectural statement of his own, the elder Wood’s biographers state, “What the younger Wood built was a wild Palladian conceit modified by timid neo-Classical [sic] treatment.

This condemnation of the son is actually an affirmation of the father, although it is a legitimisation almost as quixotic as John Wood the Elder’s conclusion that Bladud was the one who made the stones of Stonehenge “fly” to their current resting places on the Salisbury plain.<sup>76</sup> To understand why Mowl and Earnshaw

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<sup>73</sup> The authors are referring here to John Wood the Younger’s interest in building for the poor. His book, *A Series of Plans for Cottages or habitations of the labourer, either in husbandry, or the mechanic arts: adapted as well to towns as to the country....* (London: Printed for J. Taylor, 1806, new edition, first edition: Thomas Bensley, 1788), is a sympathetic and detailed study and proposed modification of eighteenth-century workers’ housing.

<sup>74</sup> Mowl and Earnshaw 204–205.

<sup>75</sup> Mowl and Earnshaw 205.

<sup>76</sup> “My Lord, suppose a Druid array’d in his Sacred Robes; his Egg about his Neck; his Staff or Want in his hand; and by a touch therewith setting a Stock or Stone of twenty Tun weight in motion...” Wood (1747) 109.

would take such issue with the Crescent, but simultaneously manage to claim it (and especially its unrealized brilliance) for John Wood the Elder, it is necessary to remember that John Wood the Elder's plan for the rebuilding of Bath along the lines of a vividly, if not accurately imagined ancient Roman and Celtic inheritance,<sup>77</sup> has given him prize of first place in Bath's architectural genesis story.<sup>78</sup> As Hastings' personal and physical suffering has denied her a place in Bath's architectural history, John Wood the Younger's "enthusiasm for plain spare housing" wins him no fans in the camp that wants the identity of their architectural hero clear and unwavering. I wonder if the palpable distaste in these comments about the younger Wood has so much to do with his aesthetic choices – perhaps it has more to do with the association with philanthropy which invades the monumental schemes of the father when the son takes over? A small but disquieting indication that architecture, even the most "romantic projects",<sup>79</sup> have a social impact, a social responsibility?

I am not interested in denying the elder Wood's architectural achievements (indeed, if I did not find them compelling, I would probably never have begun this, my own romantic project). I am, however, equally compelled by Hastings' utopian fantasies, which are also deliberate in terms of choices in architectural vocabulary,

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<sup>77</sup> "Wood's greatest building schemes would never have been conceived if he had not been a bad antiquary..." Mowl and Earnshaw 207.

<sup>78</sup> Newman writes, "Under the leadership of Wood and successive architects who imitated and developed his style – beginning with his son, John Wood the Younger – a new town emerged, though his plan was never fully realized." (20)

<sup>79</sup> Mowl and Earnshaw: 207.

situation, and purpose. Hastings' Chapel at Bath an artifact of her creative, personal vision. Much as the Woods' for-profit domestic schemes in Bath are deeply contradictory for their emphasis on exterior – the façade and the schema were the first concern, the interior plan secondary<sup>80</sup> – Hastings' Chapel is also a site of contradiction in that a powerful woman designed, funded, oversaw and controlled a space and a religion which refused women's voices.

The Countess of Huntingdon and her work in Bath is, in addition to being an example of the mechanism which suppresses the creativity and production of women in architectural discourse, is also an example of the difficulties inherent to a feminist cultural analysis of architecture. Apart from the considerable issue of Hastings' racism, the question remains of how to approach the contradiction of her creative and religious "voice" and the silence her religion imposed upon women. Feminist historian of nineteenth-century women's history, Linda Mahood, suggests that a feminist approach to history can take several forms, which in turn will shape the conclusions reached. She describes "the double-standard model, the oppression model, and the problematization model" as the current strategies for writing

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<sup>80</sup> Mowl and Earnshaw quote James Brydges, the Duke of Chandos and early employer of Wood as a builder, as writing in 1730 that the "outside work is very well performed but as for the inside it is generally agreed...that no work can be worse done..." (37) Mowl and Earnshaw note that Wood "appears less interested in the technical skills of his trade and the functional utility of a building than in the outward show of an elevation." (38) The holdings at the Bath Reference Library of Wood's sketches and working drawings do bear these criticisms up – the vast majority of the collection are Wood's conceptions of the main elevations. (See John Wood the Elder, "Architectural Drawings in Somersetshire", held at the Bath Reference Library, loose pictures file W54.) The plans of Queen's Square, the Circus and various other interiors of Wood's design in Ison's *Georgian Buildings of Bath* were supplied by the author.

women's history.<sup>81</sup> The first assumes a basis in Freudian dissociation theory, in which biological and psychological factors outweigh any question of sexuality being a social and historical construct (much like memory). To study Hastings' chapel with this approach as a foundation would mean ignoring (as her biographers do) the social and class inscriptions of her "femininity", and to cloak her religious intensity and her construction of chapels as a natural outcome of her maternal misfortunes.

The oppression model conceives of women as "passive victims of male oppression", with no capacity to make "their own history."<sup>82</sup> In this view, Hastings' Chapel at Bath, and particularly her participation in a religion that eschewed women's voices is an index of her thwarted subjectivity, and her inscription in a patriarchal discourses of religion and architecture. The categories of "male" and "female" are, perhaps inadvertently, maintained as essential and as givens in this model. The problematization model, which Mahood supports, takes observational categories such as "woman" as invalid starting places for critical, historical assessment.<sup>83</sup> Working from Foucault and Joan Scott, Mahood argues that the observational categories which emerged in the nineteenth century (particularly the Victorian notion of the prostitute, but also the homosexual) must be challenged and reconsidered for their symbolic portent within hierachical discourses, rather than be

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<sup>81</sup> Mahood: 4. Mahood is discussing specifically the question of an historical investigation of sexuality, here, prostitution, however I find her points valid for the study of women's history in general.

<sup>82</sup> Mahood: 4.

<sup>83</sup> Mahood: 4.

maintained in current research as sound classifications. Within this approach, a critical dissection of Hastings' gender and class position would be primary. Equally, within the problematization model, the researcher must continually problematize her own production, as gendered, classed, etc. The difficulty of such a model, as Susan Stanford Friedman and Catherine Hall have noted, is that the emphasis on "problematizing" can become its own product, to the extent that it can displace the actual histories and creative acts under consideration. Friedman writes, "The political problem with endless problematization of the ground on which we stand is the elimination of any position or standpoint from which to speak, organize for social change, or build coalitions based on common objectives. This applies to history writing as a form of feminist activism."<sup>84</sup>

I return to this key point below, but first I would like to note how Mahood complicates her own version of the problematization model with Gramsci's notion of hegemony, understanding that in any issue concerning power, various factions are always struggling for dominance.<sup>85</sup> In other words, no oppression is ever seamless and complete, just as no struggle for power is without contradiction. In her work on nineteenth century prostitution, Mahood chooses to emphasize women's capacity for agency, "focusing on indicators of women's 'choice'".<sup>86</sup> By doing this, she argues, she avoids the problem in feminist history of presenting women as either

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<sup>84</sup> Friedman: 212-213.

<sup>85</sup> Mahood: 11.

<sup>86</sup> Mahood: 13.

the “agents or victims of their time”.<sup>87</sup> To portray women as having the capacity for agency is to leave room for both the evidence of that agency, where it exists, and to acknowledge how oppressive systems limit the ways in which women have historically exercised that capacity.

In this thesis, I am very concerned with emphasizing the “indicators of women’s choice” as emblems of that capacity. To follow through on the example this chapter provides, Hastings’ Chapel at Bath is, like the choice of Gothic and the choice of Methodism, a text of her personal agency. To say so is not to ignore how the specifics of her class position and contemporary codes of gender marked that text with contradictions. Similarly, I take my study of the Bath Female Home and Penitentiary as a location for further evidence of women’s capacity for agency, specifically in relation to architecture. The women who resided in the Penitentiary left traces of their choice to enter the institution, and their choice to leave it. While not “architects” in the sense that Hastings was an architect, the residents of the Penitentiary nonetheless contributed in a material (and a symbolic) way to the functioning and appearance of the building which housed the Penitentiary, and to the larger social milieu of nineteenth-century Bath. The current scholarship on nineteenth-century women’s history thus gives me a means by which I may study

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<sup>87</sup> Mahood: 13. She qualifies the historiographical dilemma for feminists well, writing that “the problem with [perceiving women as victims] involves the question of agency: it fails to recognize women as full participants in the historical process capable of making their own history. The problem with the second approach [perceiving women as agents] is that by emphasizing women’s culture and power it risks losing sight of the social inequities which have marked women and which have been the basis of patriarchal and class relations.” (13-14)

these women, their contributions and their historical agency, without either emphasizing their subjugation or romanticizing their lot.

It may be clear at this point how I am seeking to insert women into “the social organization of [Bath’s] space”.<sup>88</sup> But Neale’s phrase, however useful a link between nineteenth-century women’s history and Bath’s social history, does not yet bridge the gap between these fields of study and the discourse of architectural history.<sup>89</sup> This is where I need to return to Susan Stanford Friedman’s point about history writing as a form of feminist activism. Lynne Walker, who has done more than any other scholar of English women architects to shift the perception of the role of women in this field, identifies the persistence of sexism in current architectural practice. She writes,

Today, when women have become professional architects, a similar pattern of discrimination, implemented through the mechanism of sexual division of labour, remains, according to a recent RIBA survey, which showed that women architects can expect to hold fewer positions of power and influence in architectural practices and that they are more likely to earn less than men throughout their careers.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Neale (1981) 209.

<sup>89</sup> While attentive to women’s history, Neale still places the emphasis of his discussion on architecture on the Woods and the speculative building market. Similarly, Davis and Bonsall pay more attention to men’s working-class history than to women’s. Another social historian of eighteenth-century England, Roy Porter, makes the reasons for this emphasis clear: “...I have become acutely aware how easily it is for a male historian to write as if only adult males existed – or at least as if only they made history...[but] Circumlocutions and neologisms such as ‘he/she’, ‘s/he’ or ‘his or her’ help little, and phrases such as ‘Englishmen’ and ‘the common man’ are too rich a part of the language’s heritage to be lightly jettisoned.” *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. J. H. Plumb (London, England: Penguin Books, 1982) 20. It would seem that feminist critiques of the sexist and exclusionary nature of most history writing are too “light” a reason for change.

<sup>90</sup> Walker: 250.

It is my thesis that women continue to face obstacles in the architectural profession because architectural practice is synonymous with a symbolic transcendence that is discursively unavailable to women. Thus the project of rewriting architectural history along feminist lines must also take as its object those subjects which are not immediately identifiable as “architectural”. Furthermore, it must engage in the attempt to shift the symbolic underpinnings, to stretch and reconfigure the notion of architecture and the architect, such that the discursive limits of the category expand. What this means for me as an artist is that my projects have an interventionist programme; they are a form of feminist activism.

In her essay, “Making History: Reflections on Feminism, Narrative, and Desire”,<sup>91</sup> Friedman suggests that “the feminist desire to ‘make history’ entangles the desire to effect significant and lasting change with the desire to be the historian of change.”<sup>92</sup> Friedman describes history writing as “heuristic activity”: activity that helps others to learn, and guides them in discovery. In this view, she continues, history writing is a “narrative act of assigning meaning to the past [which] potentially intervenes in the present and future construction of history.”<sup>93</sup> Premised on the idea that academia is a place where change should be possible, and should furthermore emanate outwards, for Friedman feminist historiography is “as an act in

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<sup>91</sup> Friedman, Chapter 8: 198-227.

<sup>92</sup> Friedman: 200.

<sup>93</sup> Friedman: 200.



the present on behalf of the future.”<sup>94</sup> Similarly, Elizabeth Grosz argues that history’s “privileged objects of reflection...retain some traces, some residue, in the present and the future[. This raises] serious ontological and epistemic, and thus political and ethical, questions, methodological questions that the disciple [sic] has not even tried to address.”<sup>95</sup>

This disciple would like to address them here, and use the springboard of artistic production to highlight the heuristic potential of feminist, academic interventions. In the July 1985 edition of the *Architectural Journal*, author Penny Wright describes how the Bath Preservation Trust purchased the Huntingdon Chapel, “as part of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in 1984.”<sup>96</sup> The Trust, she continues, “appointed architects Aaron Evans Associates to restore and convert it into a heritage centre for schools, residents and visitors, as well as an architectural centre for students, designers and construction professionals. The property, by an unknown architect, is an early example of the Gothic revival in Bath...”<sup>97</sup> According to its pamphlet, the Building of Bath Museum is devoted to teaching visitors to Bath “what the classical style is composed of, and how an architect and builder would have used it in Bath.”<sup>98</sup> “The Museum”, the pamphlet continues, “is housed in a

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<sup>94</sup> Friedman: 200.

<sup>95</sup> “Becoming...An Introduction” in *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory, and Futures*, ed. Elizabeth Grosz (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999) 22.

<sup>96</sup> Penny Wright, “Blessing in Disguise” *Architectural Journal* 10 (July 1985): 24.

<sup>97</sup> Wright 24.

<sup>98</sup> *The Building of Bath Museum* (Bath: Bath Preservation Trust, pamphlet, n.d.).

beautiful 18<sup>th</sup> century gothic [sic] chapel, commissioned in 1765 by Selina, Countess of Huntingdon. It became one of over 100 chapels she had acquired in her Connexion before her death in 1791. A display in the museum explores her extraordinary life and achievements.”<sup>99</sup>

The current use of the Chapel at Bath not only continues the effacement of Hastings’ architectural production, it also appropriates the stylistic nonconformism of her choice of Gothic idiom. The Building of Bath Museum literally puts Hastings’ Gothic to the service of Bath’s famous Neo-classicism. Thus the Chapel becomes the vessel for a celebration of Bath’s male architects, their histories, their buildings and their myths. The most logical location in which the question of women’s relationship to architecture might be explored in Bath is therefore coopted very effectively, for the maintenance of a vision of an uninterrupted, masculine, Georgian Bath.

But not completely. To conclude with the same example with which I began: in July 2000 I participated in a group exhibition of my organizing, titled *winged*, for which my contribution had two phases, or “bookworks”. I produced these bookworks in limited editions and they both addressed aspects of the connection between women’s history and local architectural history. As Figure 13 shows, I installed one of these bookworks on the exterior sill of one of the east front Gothic windows of Huntingdon’s Chapel at Bath. Similarly, I installed (surreptitiously) the second bookwork inside the Chapel, adding it to one of the displays on Georgian

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<sup>99</sup> *The Building of Bath Museum.*

Neo-classicism.<sup>100</sup> Someone, upon finding this bookwork, would see that it was a self-enveloped packet, with an image of a winged woman standing aside a narrow, uncertain-looking Georgian townhouse. (See fig. 14) Upon opening the packet, which I had sealed with a small white feather, the finder would discover a small text, another feather, and a tiny stone. The stone (Bath stone) and the feather (very light and downy) would not obstruct the finder's view of the text, which was a synopsis of Celia Fiennes' description of her trip to Gloucester Cathedral, and the whispering wall there:

*A woman was here*

*I saw a Lady stand at one corner  
Turn herself to the wall and whisper  
Her voice came very clear and plain  
To the other side of the room  
It must have been the arch overhead that carried her voice.<sup>101</sup>*

A whispering wall is a wall which, because of the acoustics of the room, will “carry” a whisper a great distance. In this project I was thinking about the untapped ability of Bath architecture to carry the “whispers” of historical women across distances of time, for those who listen closely. My gesture of leaving the bookworks in places where those interested in architecture would find them, was a means of inserting my feminist concerns into both the specific context of the Chapel, the specific history of

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<sup>100</sup> There were twenty-five of each edition, placed mostly in exterior sites.

<sup>101</sup> Celia Fiennes, paraphrased, from *The Illustrated Journeys of Celia Fiennes, 1685-c.1712*, ed. Christopher Morris (Great Britain: Macdonald & Co. Ltd., [1947] 1982) 191.

Bath architecture, and the larger discourses of architectural genius and history. Catherine Ingraham writes that “women invent a way into architecture by inventing different kinds of practice: small practices, hybrid practices, practices in theory. The one architectural practice that resists, or proves difficult for, this type of intervention is building buildings...the very form of a (so-called) invented practice has a puzzling and problematic relationship to buildings...”<sup>102</sup> Through my own invented practice, I am seeking to puzzle and to problematize the notion of architecture, and in so doing, struggle against that same notion. I see this as a complicated and fraught project, but given that I am a feminist interested in architecture, I am compelled to struggle.

To struggle not to win so much as to make a mark, to mark a time and place as particular, is to imbue time (and space) with a hope that is beyond the hope of actual outcomes, to give it a nobility that marks [11] it out of its time, and in the time of a future where its hopelessness has had an effect, has produced more than was ever foreseeable.<sup>103</sup>

(“All the wayes to Bath are difficult.”)

- Celia Fiennes

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<sup>102</sup> Ingraham, “Missing Objects,” *The Sex of Architecture*, eds. Diana Agrest et al. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996) 34.

<sup>103</sup> Grosz (1999) 27.

## Chapter Three

### Bath Abbey and the Falling, Winged Woman: A History in Details

The first time I visited Bath, I came and left quite unaware of the falling angels. (See fig. 27, 31, 33) Of the two that appear to fall, both late-nineteenth-century additions, one has physical features, which distinguishes it – “her” – as female. This figure, third from the top on the right side as the viewer faces east, has two thick plaits of hair coiled over her ears, reminiscent of Pre-Raphaelite, painted women, still and sad. Her face is turned towards me, standing on the ground below, and I recognize her as the only demonstrably “female” presence out of the sixty or so carved bodies on Bath Abbey’s west front.<sup>1</sup> Her presence is both mysterious and troubling. Given that the moment of her production was during the west front’s late-nineteenth-century restoration, her “fall” has more force than that of her male counterpart on the other ladder. As Linda Nochlin has succinctly argued,

The sexual asymmetry peculiar to the notion of falling is worth considering, especially in the nineteenth century, when both aspects were taken more seriously than they are today. In art, fallen in the masculine tended to inspire rather boring sculptural monuments and sarcophagi. Fallen in the feminine, however – understood as any sort of sexual activity on the part of women out of wedlock...exerted a peculiar fascination on the imagination of

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Tindall, sculptor and stonemason, and Jerry Sampson, architectural historian, have noted that one of the figures appears to have been the Virgin Mary. See Nimbus Conservation Group, *Bath Abbey, West Front: Apostles, Iconography and Composition* (Bristol: Nimbus, 1991), and Jean Manco, *Bath Abbey Church: The Indian Summer of Bath Priory* (Bristol: Jean Manco, 1997) 12. This figure is almost entirely eroded beyond recognition and is in a position at the top of the west front that makes her difficult to see from below, let alone photograph.

nineteenth-century artists...that perhaps received its characteristic formulation in the circle of the Pre-Raphaelites and their friends.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter explores the contradictory couplets of “Woman”/ women, “angel”/human and the two senses of the word “fallen”, all of which operate in the representation of the twelve angels on the façade of Bath Abbey. The lone “female” angel, the scant comments that accompany her presence on the Abbey’s facade and my response to this conglomerate of factors constitute what Lorraine Code has called a “rhetorical space.” According to Code, a rhetorical space is one in which “knowledge and subjectivity are reciprocally constitutive, yet where cognitive resources and positions of authority and expertise are unevenly distributed.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, what I make of this angel develops as much from my position as a feminist student of architectural history as it does from the facts of the Abbey’s construction and maintenance, and the history of Christianity in post-Dissolution England.

Christian architecture is a category which, however much the subject of deconstruction, continues to wield considerable power. The west front of Bath Abbey is the physical and historical manifestation of a moral authority that has traditionally placed women in a subordinate position to men.<sup>4</sup> When I take account

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<sup>2</sup> Nochlin 57.

<sup>3</sup> Code: ix.

<sup>4</sup> Still a compelling argument on this topic, Mary Daly’s *The Church and the Second Sex, With a New Feminist Postchristian Introduction by the Author* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1975), has since its publication and revision found itself in the company of feminist theologians and feminist historians of the philosophy of religion who have sought in different ways to recuperate

of my position on my cognitive map of Bath, it is not enough to mine the Abbey's past for its muffled history of women. Nor is it enough to criticize the role of the church for how it aided in the production of an epistemology that silenced women socially and politically in Bath. In all good conscience (itself the product of moral authority?), the exposition of a disinterested argument is not my aim in this chapter. I respond to the angel not "in spite of" what I as a subject might say or think but because I occupy a female subject position. How are the limits of factual "knowledge", sanctioned authority and expertise useful for me as a woman speaking/writing about orthodox religion and its cultural products when, as a woman, my speech acts are historically associated with limited utterances?<sup>5</sup> This chapter introduces the concerns of Folio Two via a cultural analysis of details that argue for the presence of women in the story of Bath Abbey. I derive these details from historical sources on the Abbey's construction and reconstruction, from the period 1499-1865. Because of the lack of endorsement for rhetorical spaces in which their relevance to architecture could manifest, the histories of women in Bath remain partial. By the conclusion of this chapter, however, the "female" angel becomes, through no intention of its makers, a means by which women's history in Bath begins to surface.

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faith and even aspects of Christianity. Grace Jantzen's *Becoming Divine* and Margaret Miles' *The Fullness of Life: Historical Foundations for a New Asceticism* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981) are examples of the former, while Caroline Walker Bynum's *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) would be an example of the latter.

<sup>5</sup> "[Tacit] territorial imperatives structure and limit the kinds of utterances that can be voiced" in rhetorical spaces, as Code defines them (ix).

The monks of Bath were not the first Christian community to settle in this place. In 676, Osric, king of a Mercian sub-kingdom, endowed a house of nuns under an Abbess Bertana. The convent was short-lived in the face, it is suggested, of Danish Viking raids. Even at this stage...women are seen to play an important role in largely male-dominated societies, as queens, great landowners, or as the revered mothers of distinguished lords of the realm, or of the Church...

Didactic panel, Heritage Vaults, Bath Abbey

Made of stone and light, the Abbey was known in the past as the “Lantern of the West” due to its beautiful, plentiful windows, making up approximately eighty percent of the wall surface.<sup>6</sup> On my visits to Bath I would approach the Abbey each morning from the west. Seen from this angle, the sun seems to fill the building and burst through its enormous windows, spilling over nearby structures which would otherwise be in the shadow of the towers and nave. During its five-hundred-year history, the fabric of the Abbey has been the physical site of dispute, desire and neglect. The intersecting factors of the social, the aesthetic and the religious determine its role in Bath at any point in time.

From its emergence during the last strains of Catholicism in the early sixteenth century, to its early ruin and then repeated reconstitution over the last three centuries, the Abbey is not the *fait accompli* it appears to be. Like Bath itself, no element of this architectural structure is fixed. As Douglas Bernhardt writes, “By its first centenary, the Church had been [...] built, confiscated, devastated, changed denomination, and restored once again. No stranger therefore to the processes of

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restoration.”<sup>7</sup> To view this instability another way, the Abbey is not complete; maintenance and conservation efforts make the structure an ongoing work-in-progress. Apparently the brainchild of Bishop Oliver King, once secretary to Henry VII, the Abbey was begun in 1499, just a few decades before the Dissolution of the monasteries.<sup>8</sup> Jerry Sampson summarizes the history of Bath Abbey’s cycle of support and decay in the four centuries that followed:

The church was completed and probably partly restored during the first two decades of the seventeenth century, this work representing the first of the recorded restoration and repair interventions. Further work on the facade is known to have taken place in 1833-4 under the city architect G. P. Manners, in the 1860s and 70s under Sir George Gilbert Scott, in 1899-1900 under Sir T. G. Jackson, and in 1960 under Oswald Brakspear. It is clear from engravings dating from around 1800 that other (probably relatively minor) repair and restoration work must have taken place at regular intervals in this relatively wealthy city of fashion.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ken Hills, *Bath Abbey: A Guide to the Abbey and Heritage Vaults* (England: Unichrome Ltd., 1997) 31; see also Thomas Graham Jackson, *Gothic Architecture in France, England and Italy*, (2 volumes, England: Cambridge University Press, 1915) 1: 254.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas Bernhardt, *George Phillips Manners, Architect, 1789-1866: A Nineteenth-Century Practitioner* (Bath: Douglas Bernhardt, n.d.) 55.

<sup>8</sup> It might be asked why the Bishop began to build if the slow grumblings of secularization had likely begun to sound in his lifetime. As George William Woodward has argued, the move to secularization was political and economic, rather than religious, and the Bishop had had close relations with Henry VII. George William Woodward, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries* (London: Blandford Press, 1966) 164. J. Thomas Kelly has written, “A major cause of the Dissolution was Tudor regnal insecurity and fear of political and social upheaval...Within the religious community, monasteries offered the most resistance to changes made by Henry VIII.” *Thorns on the Tudor Rose: Monks, Rogues, Vagabonds, and Sturdy Beggars* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977) 3.

<sup>9</sup> Jerry Sampson, *Wells Cathedral West Front: Construction, Sculpture and Conservation* (England: Sutton Publishing, 1998) 9.

Most distinctive, and most perplexing of the Abbey's array of fluctuating features, are the sculpted angels that appear to fall down and climb up long, stone ladders on the western façade. Because only a portion of the original angels have been replaced, and the replacements themselves represent a span of two hundred years, the angels indicate the breadth of time and values inscribed by various generations and restorations, in evidence on the Abbey. One may thus view the metamorphic nature of the building, the vulnerability of its stone and the persistence of gender roles within the practice of Christianity during the Abbey's five-hundred-year history.

The angels are famous, "parochial" features of the Abbey, which is one of the last examples of Perpendicular Gothic in England. In art history, that which comes last tends not to garner acclaim and the Abbey is no exception. If the Abbey has received scant attention in surveys of English and European Gothic architecture, then the angels have barely struck a note of acknowledgement in these same texts;<sup>10</sup> an odd fact, given that the Abbey and its angels, trumpeted in most contemporary

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<sup>10</sup> From general, published surveys of Gothic architecture in England to the two scholarly monographs on Bath Abbey, analytical observations of the west front since the restoration of the 1890's do not extend beyond Francis Bond's categorization of it as "parochial" (see *Gothic Architecture in England: an Analysis of the Origin and Development of English Church Architecture* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1905) 91, and Jerry Sampson's more recent observation that unlike other medieval, ecclesiastical west front statuary, Bath Abbey was not polychromed. See Sampson (1998) 132. Jerry Sampson's extensive, unpublished 1992 report on the west front of Bath Abbey for Nimbus Conservation Group does deal with the presence of the angels, but only anecdotally or in terms of conservation issues. *Bath Abbey, West Front* (1992).

tourist-oriented publications, make one of the most obvious points of reference for a visitor's wanderings.<sup>11</sup>

Because of the Abbey's proximity to the ancient Roman baths, the Abbey grounds, now the Abbey courtyard, became valuable real estate in the Georgian period. Eighteenth-century speculative builders worked as closely as they could to its walls, building south, west and north of the Abbey courtyard, and even using the Abbey's walls as part of their structures.<sup>12</sup> As a result, the popular, late eighteenth-century Pump Room by Thomas Baldwin adds today to the vigorous pedestrian traffic in this area. Newcomers to Bath most likely book their stay at the accommodation office just a few steps from the Abbey's portals along a neatly swept, flagstone courtyard. (Fig. 2) The tour bus companies all use the Abbey's shaded north side as a starting point for their circumlocutions. Even though the Abbey's bells no longer ring for "important" visitors,<sup>13</sup> they do ring to signal the persistence of ritual within the High Church of England. Services are conducted daily, and except for those services, when the public spaces of the building ebb into their official purpose, the Abbey is almost always open for non-denominational looking, sitting and listening.

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Hills, *Bath Abbey: A Guide...* The Abbey's museum, the Heritage Vaults, also dedicate several displays and recorded quotes to the angels.

<sup>12</sup> J. Carter disparages ("miserable habitations") but does not illustrate, this building activity in *Some Account of the Abbey Church of Bath: Illustrative of the Plans, Elevations, and Sections of that Building* (London: Society of Antiquaries, April 23, 1798) 5. Jean Manco writes that in 1647 Bath Corporation "forbade Richard Abbot to go on building his house against the Abbey Church" but in vain, and "by the end of the century the church was so hemmed in that people took to using the aisles as a shortcut through from Abbey Churchyard to the Grove." (18)

On my return to Bath in 1998 I found the Abbey free of its plastic sheath and almost white under the spring sunshine. Motionless, winged forms dotted the ladders which reach upwards on either side of the main portal. (See fig. 27) This portal serves as entrance and exit for ecumenical services, as proscenium for the variety of street performers who entertain Bath's summer crowd and for the variety of tourists who pose there for a photograph. One and a half years later I would place myself on the rostrum which the ladders and the main portal offered and through a performance piece, enter the lexicon of contradiction which the angels flanking the portal create: movement and stillness, implied directionality, winged yet flightless. The only contradiction I would not be able to enter would be that "angels" are in theory unsexed, but in practice (representation) gendered. As a woman, I am gendered/I gender myself in theory and in practice, every day.

At the beginning of my critical relationship with these angels, however, I looked at these awkward stone forms, pinned to their limestone ladders, and considered their perplexing claim to fame for the Abbey. This representation implies that while some of the angels are climbing to heaven, others appear to fall. Importantly, these angels do not fly; they perform a human corporeal response to gravity. In climbing to heaven, the winged figures are a metaphor for the struggle, commitment and embodiment of Christian life. In falling, the figures indicate the presence of evil, or the effect of maliciously deployed free will. The "falling angel"

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<sup>13</sup> Bernard Stace, *Bath Abbey Monuments* (Somerset: Bath Abbey, Millstream Books, 1993) 3.

is a motif that has featured forcefully in western art as a synonym for the descent of pure good into pure evil. Highly esteemed artists such as Peter Bruegel the Elder and William Blake, for example, made this motif a vehicle for varying artistic purposes, each within disparate conditions of production. While the order of being represented in the motif of the falling angel is nominally superhuman, the moral implications for a (Christian) viewer are, however, decidedly corporeal. Sins of the flesh will result in the literal fall/fail of that flesh into hell.

Despite my fancy for Neo-classicism, the late Gothic Abbey itself interested me for the first time. I went inside.

A dark, woody vestibule is the visitor's musty introduction to the Abbey's interior. Then through a heavy door, whose thick bevelled glass greens the light that pours through the Abbey's fifty-two windows, and the visitor steps into the body of the church. Once in the central space, this light is clear and high, for the most part, unmediated by stains of colour, effecting with the verticality of the vaulting a sense of airy upwardness. Visitors' eyes inevitably lift towards the mathematical majesty of the fan vaulted ceiling, which spreads like pale geometrical plumage above. I feel here, as always in churches, as though on familiar but worrying ground: I am therefore on edge, a little awed and slightly rebellious. I stick to the back and side aisles, passing by monuments to and plaques for various personages. I pause at a large marble memorial to an American senator, William Bingham, whose memory is upheld by two (too?) smooth Flaxman angels, their bowed heads and erect nipples in perfect symmetry. (Fig. 34) I pause at these angels, at the further, unexpected

symmetry of female angels within and without the Abbey. Their cold, Neo-classical beauty, their blank eyes and useless wings seem to me a farce that I cannot participate in, as though these figures were simply dressing up for the carnival. I turn from the polished dyad and push through the nearest heavy door.

Blinking in the daylight, I find myself back outside too soon, on the south side of the Abbey and unable to reenter by the door behind me. Just ahead there is a sign and some stone steps heading downwards. Feeling a bit like Alice, I follow the implicit directions. The descent leads to the Abbey Heritage Vaults. The Heritage Vaults house the museum of the history of Bath Abbey. Built over the medieval monks' cloister,<sup>14</sup> the vaults actually belong to the eighteenth-century buildings that pressed against the Abbey's north and south walls. I pay my pound to enter and wait while the apologetic attendant prints up a disproportionately large receipt. The wait is disproportionately long; the attendant remarks upon my accent; we chat. He tells me that he is often asked to defend his belief in Christianity, by virtue of the fact that he works for the Abbey. I ask him how he manages with that task in the time it takes to print a receipt. He tells me a parable about the difference between supposition and faith. Supposition, he says, is having an excellent parachute at your disposal, along with superlative equipment and a plane flying high above the earth on a fine day. Faith, he says, is to then jump. We smile, and he hands me my receipt.

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<sup>14</sup> A Norman monastery founded in 1090 by John of Tours preceded the Abbey. See Peter Davenport, "Bath Abbey" *Bath History*, vol 2 (1988): 8.

The first items on display in the Heritage Vaults are the bodily remains of a woman. Set a coffin's depth into the floor at my feet are her skeletal remains. (Fig. 35) The pamphlet offered with my receipt says nothing of this woman. I can see through the glass roof of her display that her hip bones, indicating her sex, are scalloped and a soft, stained white, the same dusty colour as the stones which surround her. Another attendant, a woman, notices me hovering at length over the skeletal Snow White set in the floor of the Abbey's heritage museum. This attendant tells me that the identity of the woman is unknown. Originally she was found just at the entrance to the vaults, during their construction, and was moved to her current spot. She was buried on the same site as male skeletons. She was between forty and fifty years old when she died, according to her teeth. Her only infirmity seems to have been slight arthritis in those delicate hips. The stonework of her grave and condition of her bones suggests that she died in the twelfth century, according to the attendant, who now stands next to me and with me looks at the skeleton at our feet. Her stone grave, good teeth, lack of illness, relative old age at death and proximity of burial to the Norman monastery all indicate that this was a woman of great stature in her community, wealthy and respected, perhaps a benefactress of the monastery of some sort.

"And they have no idea who she is?" I asked.

"They have no idea who she was," the woman replied.

The skeleton in the floor of the Heritage Vaults is not the only historical woman directly implicated in the history and architecture of Bath Abbey. According to most formal and informal sources on the Abbey, prior to the Norman cathedral and the Saxon monastery, the land was occupied by a group of religious women. The earliest document in the Abbey's possession is a charter, dated 675, granted by King Osric of the Hwicce, a sub-grouping of the Kingdom of Mercia. This charter conveyed lands in or around Bath

to a convent of holy virgins, presided over by an abbess, Berta...From her name it is clear that Berta was a Frankish woman...By 681, when we next (and last) hear of the convent at Bath, the Abbess is, by name, now an Englishwoman, Bernguida (latinised Beornwyth), but her prioress, Folcburg, is still a foreigner.<sup>15</sup>

As a result of this evidence, historian Peter Davenport argues that while “the Abbey was, from at least the mid 8th century, a male establishment, the convent of the first two charters is clearly a female foundation.”<sup>16</sup> If the convent did survive until Cynewulf, a west Saxon king, granted land at Bath to Benedictine monks, there is no mention of the nuns' eviction. Nor is there any documentation of the buildings in which the nuns would have lived and worked; the names of two abbesses appear to be almost all that remains of this recondite pocket of Bath Abbey's history.

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<sup>15</sup> Davenport 1-2.

<sup>16</sup> Davenport 2.



Almost, but not quite. Davenport also records that a fragment of a lead plaque was found in a cemetery south of the Abbey, recounting the burial of a woman named Eadgyvu, one of the sisters of the community.<sup>17</sup> While the year is missing from the plaque's inscription, and the style of lettering is not in keeping with styles of the seventh century, Davenport accedes that "it is possible that the body was reinterred during some late Saxon building operations."<sup>18</sup> The location of the lead scrap, and the last known burial site of the skeleton now in the heritage vaults, were both immediately south of the Abbey. This coincidence alone should be enough to suggest that the body and the name "Eadgyvu" had some connection. It cannot be proven beyond a doubt that Eadgyvu and the skeletal remains were one and the same. The speculative nature of the connection is, however, less the issue than the fact that the Abbey's Heritage Vaults could easily incorporate this sort of information into their didactic panels and pamphlets, as opposed to leaving the history virtually bereft of women, and yet they do not.

The lack of information accompanying the display of this woman's body combined with what appears to be a hesitation on the part of the Abbey to provisionally name this woman's remains, create a rhetorical emptiness, an elision in the history of Bath Abbey. This rhetorical emptiness functions abstractly and conversely as a rhetorical *emphasis*, insisting implicitly if not explicitly that while women played "an important role...as revered mothers" etc., they did not

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<sup>17</sup> Davenport 6.

<sup>18</sup> Davenport 6.

contribute to the architectural history of Bath Abbey. The visitor to the Vaults is informed of women's importance, but is given no concrete vehicle through which that suggestion might take hold. The bodily remains of the unknown woman remain a "mystery" while the achievements of named men from the medieval monastery, and later, the Protestant appropriation of the Abbey, abound.

Such elision frequently marks the approach of architectural history to the issue of gender with, again, rhetorical silence.<sup>19</sup> There is a world of difference between stating "this woman's identity is unknown" as opposed to asking, "who was this woman?" Importantly, Davenport feels that the discovery of the lead fragment describing the burial of the nun just south of the Abbey is "strong *prima facie* evidence for the equation of the 675 foundation with the later medieval monastery."<sup>20</sup> The import of this assertion comes from the fact that most scholars agree that the foundation of the Norman cathedral was the basis for the present structure. Given the certainty that John of Tours built upon the site of the medieval monastery, the argument that the nuns built the foundation of *that* monastery then creates a lineage between those women and the Abbey of today. In other words, if Davenport is correct and the original convent was the basis for John of Tours' building (the basis for the present building), then the nuns themselves could be said

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<sup>19</sup> Catherine Ingraham writes with regard to architecture as a discourse, "It seems, then, that women are on the surface of things; certainly they are nothing to do with the discipline of architecture. But it also seems as if women invent something by being nothing, not because of some hidden or gender-specific power, but because of this strange condition of architecture as also being on the surface." (1996) 38.

<sup>20</sup> Davenport 6.

to have been instrumental in setting the parameters of the structure that stands today: Bath Abbey. There is no reason for this lineage, or even this line of supposition to be suppressed, however, all the most recent official guide to the Abbey has to say about the convent, apart from acknowledging the charter, is “just where [the convent] was and what happened to it is unknown.”<sup>21</sup>

I introduced this section with a quotation from a didactic panel, located a slight distance from the skeleton in the floor of the Heritage Vaults. This panel, while nodding politely towards women’s historical “importance” in roles unrelated to architecture, has already undermined the possibility that women might have played the role of protagonists in the history of this site, by simply describing the convent as “short-lived”.<sup>22</sup> The pamphlet printed by the Heritage Vaults does not mention the nuns or the convent at all. The remains of a woman possibly named Eadgyvu lie for all to see in the bowels of the Abbey. The Vaults present her bones as a novelty, claimed as a part of the Abbey’s impact on lost communities of the past. The Heritage Vaults certainly do not represent her as a woman whose impact was important, perhaps to the very layout, maintenance or patronage of a lost but pivotal structure. The skeleton, surrounded by stone, is separated from the past and ahistoricized by the decision to portray her as anonymous. In the architectural mythology of Bath, anonymous women provide bodies and labour for the pleasure and renown of others; their anonymity and the undervalued nature of their work

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<sup>21</sup> Linda Jones (addendum to Hills’ *Bath Abbey*) 20.

are intimated for the most part to be decorative embellishments rather than reason for inquiry. Lying on her back in the Abbey's "heritage" space, she is the walled-in bride<sup>23</sup> of the church, an aspect of that logic which insists that stories of women do not sidetrack the rise and rhythm of architecture's vaulting ambition. Such a woman is not a hero/ine – she is a hecatomb, her identity obscured in such a way that rhetorically reinvests the gendered narrative of architectural glory in Bath.

That narrative finds an echo in one of the winged bodies which cling rigidly to the stone ladders on Bath Abbey's west front, and significantly, finds reinforcement in another section of the Vaults, where a plaster cast of the "female" angel is on display. (Fig. 36) About twenty feet from the glass and stone coffin spectacle, a slightly grubby plaster cast from the late-nineteenth-century female angel sits in a cavernous space beside a contemporary version of Henry VII. While the King stands upright, named and holding the offices of power, the angel's back is to us, her head nearly touching the ground on which the King's feet stand. The juxtaposition of fallen, anonymous femininity with noble, powerful, historically concrete masculinity is nowhere so explicitly stated as in this particular display. Again, the contrast between the ahistoricity of "Woman" and the history-making of Man find expression through architecture and representation, solidifying the notion, without the critical comment that could do so much to complicate and

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<sup>22</sup> Didactic panel, Heritage Vaults, Bath Abbey.

<sup>23</sup> I am paraphrasing Manuela Antoniu's term, which she uses in her brilliant essay on women, myth, architecture and sacrifice. See "The Walled-Up Bride: An Architecture of Eternal Return" in *Architecture and Feminism*, eds. Debra Coleman et al, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996) 109-129.

enrich the historical view being presented of Bath Abbey, of history as man-made, and transcending earthly limitations.

I will here allow T. J. Diffey's essay, "Art and the Transcendent" to act as a segway towards a discussion of the links between notions of architecture, angels, transcendence and art.<sup>24</sup> Diffey argues ultimately for a notion of art that allows its ability in some fashion to constitute transcendent experience. In other words, art may be the basis for spiritual experience. Diffey suggests,

a work of art may in some manner offer a religious experience rather than report something which independently of the work obtains elsewhere; that is, a work of art might be both cause and object of a religious experience and not a report of how things are in a transcendent realm.<sup>25</sup>

He compares apples and angels in one phase of his essay, protecting his argument against the reasonable charge that representation is a category of articulation which constitutes any object it represents, through the constitutive power of representation, and independently of the question of transcendence: "the experience of anything in a work of art, apples as well as angels...is not what an experience of those things as such or 'in reality' [would be] unmediated by art."<sup>26</sup> Regardless, Diffey takes the now unpopular (and to some, doubtless courageous) stance,

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<sup>24</sup> T. J. Diffey, "Art and the Transcendent" *British Journal of Aesthetics* 34, 4 (October 1994): 326-336.

<sup>25</sup> Diffey 332.

<sup>26</sup> Diffey 329.

following Kant, that certain works of art bespeak a transcendent or spiritual quality which the secular age denies, in every facet of life. Initially drawn to his argument, I am tripped up by the example he uses to humorously discount the notion that art in some way mirrors or depicts the visual reality of a transcendent realm:

Why, everyone can see that an angel in a painting is not more than a woman with a dress, wings and a golden shield above her head...To think...that angels have real existence in heaven which paintings then give us a mirror glimpse of, would...be an illusion...The issue which this gingerly evades is the question: if there were no paintings of angels, could there be any [“}angels[“].<sup>27</sup>

The author then points out that paintings of phenomenologically present, non-transcendent objects, – such as apples – do not propose the same philosophical problems. I am troubled, not so much by his overall thesis, as by the particulars of his exposition. Once a representation has occurred, in visual art, literature, history or poetry, a material object *has* been created. That material object exists both in relation to the historical moment of production, and in relation to the reader, viewer, visitor, etc. Artists such as Oziás Leduc, painted apples lovingly as part of a larger, spiritual – one might say theological – project in turn-of-the-century Québec, Canada.<sup>28</sup> While Diffey acknowledges that the event of a transcendent or spiritual experience, through art, is dependent very much upon the predilections of the

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<sup>27</sup> Diffey 332.

<sup>28</sup> See Laurier Lacroix, *Oziás Leduc: An Art of Love and Reverie* (Québec: Musée du Québec, 1996), and Jean-René Ostiguy, *Oziás Leduc: peinture symboliste et religieuse* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1974).

recipient, he fails to register how works of art, in their discursive and historical specificity, might beg other, more pressing questions.

To search for or to defend a transcendent capacity of the arts is, in some ways, a project with which I sympathize but cannot take up. The exigencies of western culture demand at this moment a more thorough examination of precisely what Kant and Kantian aesthetics denies: recourse to the material. A key question that Diffey does not address in his essay is the near unbroken assumption, since Kant, that the distinction between transcendent and non-transcendent folds neatly into the distinction between material and non-material. The source for Diffey's own assumptions along this score is that the familiar definition of transcendence claims a category of existence that is beyond perception. While it would be naïve on many levels to disagree with this point *tout court*, I would argue that, as a direct result of our social, cultural, gender and class positioning, many of us are quite unable to perceive that which is no less than brute fact for others.<sup>29</sup> Thus that which is beyond perception is not necessarily transcendent. As a corollary to this point I would like to make a further claim. That which is not necessarily transcendent is not necessarily bereft of the ability to obtain some kind of meaning that offers a shift in perception, revealing something hitherto unrealized.

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<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of the ways in which Kantian aesthetics leave the question of lived existence hanging unsatisfactorily, see Lorraine Code, "Who Cares? The Poverty of Objectivism for a Moral Epistemology" in *Rhetorical Spaces*: 103-119. See also David Summers, "Form and Gender" in *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994) 384-412. Summers takes issue with the latent gender bias in the language and practice of objectivism and the pursuit of ideal form.

Returning to Diffey's example of the angel: to describe a representation of an angel as "no more than" a woman in a dress wearing wings is to obscure an entire (secular) history in which women were judged against a most "transcendental" view of the angelic. Transcendence, in Victorian England, was no longer the question of either materially disinterested aesthetics or a world-renouncing spirituality. In contrast, from John Ruskin's rural Gothic churches to William Morris' happy, well-furnished ideal worker, transcendence occurs in the earthy, and in human achievement. The mandate of the Bath Home and Penitentiary for Fallen Women's is in this way very similar to Coventry Patmore's ideal, domesticated woman in that transcendence was thought to occur via the material.<sup>30</sup> The structural flaw in Diffey's presentation of the transcendent is not so much that it revisits well-trodden ground but that it fails, as Kantian aesthetics tends to do, to address lived existence, and the ways in which the dream for the transcendent has a material history of its own.<sup>31</sup>

The female angel, her plaster likeness and the female skeleton in the guts of the church are slips of a tongue that speaks in a loud monologue. The skeleton (Eadgyvu?) reminds me of Snow White, looking like death but merely asleep in her glass coffin, unable to speak of her experience because of a lump of poisoned apple

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<sup>30</sup> In order: *The Lamp of Beauty: Writings on Art by John Ruskin* ed. Joan Evans (Bath: Pitman Press, 1980); William Morris, *News From Nowhere and Selected Writings and Designs*, ed. Asa Briggs (Great Britain: Penguin, [1962] 1980); Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House*, op cit. I discuss the Bath Home and Penitentiary at length in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

<sup>31</sup> For a feminist discussion of Kant, see Christine Battersby, Chapter 8, "The Passionate Dilemma" in *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (London: The Woman's Press, 1989) 71-80.



in her throat. The woman in the Heritage Vaults may be officially unknown, officially silent, but her presence has the potential to articulate another version of the Abbey's history. What is necessary is a stumble or an error, perhaps a fall to dislodge the apple in her throat, the machinery by which these indications of female voices in Bath might speak within and against the discursive logic at work. What would wake this voice from slumber?

*Wings and ladders*

The Abbey began with a dream, but not Jacob's. Rather, it was the somnolent inspiration of Oliver King, who was made Bishop of Bath in 1496.<sup>32</sup> The 1997 official guide book to Bath Abbey states,

In [King's] dream he saw the Heavenly Host on high with angels ascending and descending by ladder near the foot of which was a fair olive tree. A voice spoke saying, "Let an Olive establish the Crown and let a King restore the Church".<sup>33</sup>

King understood his dream as a mission from the heavens, directing him to follow through on his allegiance to the recently-victorious Henry VII ("Let an Olive establish the Crown") by constructing a High Gothic, Perpendicular style Abbey on the site of Bath's four-hundred-year-old, ruined Norman monastery ("let a King restore the Church").<sup>34</sup> The sculptural frieze on the west façade of Bath Abbey is,

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<sup>32</sup> Davenport 20.

<sup>33</sup> Hills 2.

<sup>34</sup> Hills 2-4.

accordingly, dressed in Catholic imagery. It is a cosmogram for Catholics, a road map to salvation. The basic message of its layout is that only via the Church will a human enter the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>35</sup>

A traveller visiting Bath, looking immediately above the deeply molded main portal of the Abbey will see a nineteenth-century version of King Henry (reproduced in the Heritage Vaults) centrally enthroned.<sup>36</sup> On either side of these heavy, dark wood double doors, roughly twenty feet apart, two ladders rise up the octagonal turrets which spring from the base of the Abbey, the lowest rung approximately fourteen feet above ground level. Too high, symbolically and figuratively, for a human to reach. On these ladders, carved angels climb and descend. At the top of the ladders, the patron saints of the church, St Peter and St Paul, sit waiting for devotees. In the spandrels over the impressive, seven-light central fenestration, as many as thirty angelic figures would have been clearly visible before erosion set in, denoting the heavens and signifying choirs of angels singing praises to God.

Situated on either side of the two ladders, and at the top of each ladder are the blurred remains of fourteen sacred personae, long assumed to be the twelve

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<sup>35</sup> I am indebted to Lawrence Tindall, a Bath mason who worked on the west front restoration of 1991 for first suggesting this interpretation of the sculptural frieze to me.

<sup>36</sup> Hills 4.

apostles.<sup>37</sup> The figure of God is at the apex of this visual opera. As R. J. Stewart writes,

At the top is God, and his power is seen descending through the mediation of his ministering angels, who clamber up and down ladders like medieval building workers. This power lights upon the King, who appoints the Bishops, who overlook the doorway through which the ordinary people enter.<sup>38</sup>

The composition of the west front statuary, and surviving sculpture are thought to be the work of local masons.<sup>39</sup> Bishop King oversaw the construction of the Abbey until his death in 1503.<sup>40</sup> Prior William Birde continued work on the Abbey until his death in 1525, when Prior Holway took over all aspects of the Abbey's management, until relinquishing the property to the throne in 1539. Hills suggests that Birde died, impoverished by his contributions to the Abbey,<sup>41</sup> however,

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas Perkins, *The Abbey Chambers of Bath and Malmesbury: and the Church of Saint Laurence, Bradford-on-Avon* (London: G. Bell, 1901) 11; see also Jerry Sampson, et al., *Bath Abbey; West Front*.

<sup>38</sup> Robert J. Stewart, *The Waters of the Gap: Magic, Mythology and the Celtic Heritage* (1981, Bath: Ashgrove Press, 1989) 58.

<sup>39</sup> While the exquisite fan vaulting of the nave is attributed to brothers William and Robert Vertue, sources tend not to directly attribute the west front carving to this partnership. The Vertue Brothers were the masons to King Henry VII, and had carried out designs at Westminster Abbey and at Cambridge. Oliver King, an Etonian, was secretary to King Henry VII for a time and would have been familiar with both the Vertue's work and the Perpendicular style King's College Cathedral, which seems to have informed fundamental choices regarding interior layout and style at Bath. See Davenport 20; Hills, *Bath Abbey* 5; and Jackson, *Gothic Architecture*, vol 2, p. 110. Additional information comes from an interview with Eric Lanning, Steward, Bath Abbey, 8 Sept. 1999.

<sup>40</sup> Perkins 8.

<sup>41</sup> Hall 15.

Youngs presents evidence that Prior Holway was making a profit on the Abbey and its lands right up until the Dissolution.<sup>42</sup>

In 1535, commissioners under King Henry VIII began their assessments of Church property, and in 1539 the then Prior of Bath Abbey, Prior Holway surrendered the building and adjoining lands to the King.<sup>43</sup> With the fall of Catholicism in England, the message chiseled into the “strange sculptural composition”<sup>44</sup> on the west front of the Abbey also surrendered to a new doctrine regarding the relation between human and divine. Unlike the dissolution of land, this latter surrender was not immediate. As Joyce Youngs has suggested, historians widely agree that the role of early Tudor monasteries in England and Wales was no longer indispensable in terms of what Youngs calls “the spiritual life of the country”; that in fact, the Dissolution was not the result of a movement for religious reform, but was rather “the result of a great distribution of rights of property.”<sup>45</sup> Youngs goes so far as to suggest that the Dissolution was not necessarily integral to the religious amendments that would occur through the influx of continental Protestantism in the latter part of the sixteenth century. While Thomas Cromwell and his associates were indeed working to augment Crown resources, in effect the

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<sup>42</sup> Joyce Youngs, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.; New York: Barnes and Noble Inc., 1971) 58.

<sup>43</sup> Davenport 20.

<sup>44</sup> Davenport 20.

<sup>45</sup> Youngs 14-15. See also Woodward 165.

Dissolution, through sale and seizure of monastic property, occasioned massive land reform in the 1530s.

There are traces of four figures at the bases of the ladders carved into the west front. In 1798, when the forms were more distinct than now, antiquarian and architect J. Carter suggested that these might have “some distant resemblance of shepherds” standing upon “a kind of undulating line, expressive of the surface of the ground; here the angels begin their ascension.”<sup>46</sup> As mentioned, the ladders begin fourteen feet above ground, which is too high for an unassisted human to reach. Yet the undulating line, and the “shepherds” would seem to contradict the message of ecclesiastical intervention which the façade otherwise suggests. If these are indeed representations of humanity, and “earth”, then perhaps human worshippers were included in this limestone cosmogram after all?

Oliver King had the vision that inspired the building of Bath Abbey. Bath was, at the time of his transfer to Bath, “festering” in decline, according to one source.<sup>47</sup> Bath’s economy for most of its post-Roman history was based on the production of wool, although the waters were still used locally for therapeutic purposes.<sup>48</sup> King’s attempts to realize his dream of the Abbey would have generated employment, travel and custom, invigorating local trade. If the ambiguous forms at the bases of the ladders were indeed shepherds, this representational decision, if it

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<sup>46</sup> Carter 7.

<sup>47</sup> Davenport 19.

<sup>48</sup> Cunliffe, Introduction, *Roman Bath Discovered*.

came from King at all, could have been a symbolic integration of that economy within a spiritual composition of Church and region. The priors of the pre-Dissolution Abbey were King, Birde and Holway.<sup>49</sup> Any of these could have found a fortunate metaphor for spiritual rebirth in the reawakening of a sleepy economy through the resurrection of ecclesiasticism in Bath. Understanding the figures as “shepherds” makes sense in this light. There are, however, fewer traces of the shepherds than there are of the angels and therefore speculation must reign.

While there is no visual evidence to justify the interpretation of these figures as shepherds, there is little doubt that the rocky ledge upon which the ladders seem to rest is earth. That edge of earth, a now-broken undulating line and the decapitated figures above it, pronounce the ruins of a variety of faith, and of the land-based power of pre-Dissolution, pre-Reformation Catholicism in England.

The complicated vertical machinery of the Catholic church, incrementally spanning mortal and divine realms much like the rungs of a ladder, was no longer the sanctioned means to salvation by the time Bath Abbey was complete.<sup>50</sup> Prayers and self-imposed piety were the new stepping stones to God. Looking at the west front from the Abbey courtyard, the crumbling, armless “shepherds” and their “landscape” completely devoid of sheep speak of lack. Like the voluptuous pagan gods whose marble sexes were the point of all Reformation attacks on impious,

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<sup>49</sup> Manco 14.

<sup>50</sup> See Gerald R. Cragg, *The Church and the Age of Reason, 1648-1789* (Church Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960).

falsely idolatrous sculpture, the “shepherds” have, through time, decay and neglect, lost their ability to carry out their representational function. Without a penis, Bacchus cannot fulfil his mythological role. Likewise, without arms, the uncertain figures on Bath Abbey’s west front cannot climb the ladders they flank. Their armless-ness, their lack, speaks more accurately of Catholic Christianity’s support of angelic intercessors in the worshipper’s search for redemption.

But before supposing a strict distinction between Catholicism and Protestantism, it is worth considering the ways in which the relationship between angels, humanity and god was hotly debated throughout the Middle Ages, within Catholicism. It is also worth asking how those debates contributed to the construction of the sculptural frieze on Bath Abbey’s west front, and why, if angels are no longer the necessary cogs in the spiritual wheel they once were, the angels on Bath’s largest church have been the object of preservation efforts over the last 150 years.

According to David Keck, author of *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages*,<sup>51</sup> there was not so much a clear, qualitative binary between human and angels in the medieval period as there was a relationship that was indicative of the particular qualities of each term in the relationship. Angels were seen to be omnipresent, hierarchical, and quite possibly instrumental in both the creation and

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<sup>51</sup> David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

management of the universe. Within this vast and complicated field of study, there are two intriguing aspects of angelology that are of particular concern to the question of Bath Abbey's west front. In the Middle Ages, the angelic realm was perceived as both a spatial and a temporal realm that was distinct from the eternal nature of divine time, and the limited nature of earthly time. Theologians contested the precise nature of angelic abilities and duties, however, to many medieval thinkers, the fall alone indicated that angels could exercise a rejection of god.<sup>52</sup> In so doing, they asserted (to use anachronistic language) individuality, one might say, their agency within the larger divine narrative. Thus the angelic story was seen as a far more important, macrocosmic version of the daily choices that humans made in their attempts towards religious piety.<sup>53</sup>

The hinge upon which many of the theologians' debates about the nature of angels swung was the distinction between materiality and immateriality. Because angels were seen primarily as divine intercessors, they were understood to have qualities of both the eternal reality that was god, and the flawed, temporal and sensate realm that was human. Furthermore, the wings served "as a way of discussing how all creatures of this sensible world lead the soul of the wide beholder

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<sup>52</sup> Allison Coudert, "Angels" *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (vol 1, New York, London: MacMillan Publishers, 1987) 282-286. Gustave Davidson writes, "it is also Church doctrine...that angels, like human beings, were created with free will, but that they surrendered their free will the moment they were formed. At that moment...they were given (and had to make) the choice between turning toward or turning away from God..." Davidson is drawing from Isaiah 45:7. *A Dictionary of Angels, Including the Fallen Ones* (1967. Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada: 1994) xvii.

<sup>53</sup> Keck 21, 23, 26.



toward the eternal God.”<sup>54</sup> Thus wings attached to human form in the representation of angels were a highly complex symbol, bespeaking an unknowable divinity, and at the same time, indicating the miracle of Christianity, that heaven exists on earth and is obtained through that very important protagonist, the human sinner. I make this point in order to introduce the idea that representations of angels actually bracket a longstanding theological contradiction in which the divine is present in the human, yet the human is opposed to and can never be, the divine.

The increasing use, throughout the Middle Ages, of angels in church decoration is an index of the fascination people felt for these beings that were neither god, nor human, but were of some nature yet betwixt. It is worth remembering that the space of the Church was itself consecrated in a way that is difficult to imagine today, a space privileged and distinct from secular space. Thus it is not such a contradiction that representations of angels might have begun to play a greater role in the cathedrals and churches that marked the most elaborate building programs of the medieval period. Keck writes,

The angelic worshippers [of god were brought] into the physical space of the Church itself...[angel decorations] testify to the omnipresence of the angels in the Christian liturgy. If angels joined humans on earth, so could humans aspire to be elevated to their heights...<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Keck 59.

<sup>55</sup> Keck 43.

Important demonstrations of the divine hierarchy, angels attested to the hierarchy of heaven and the divine order thought to be in effect on earth. Angels were increasingly seen, by the thirteenth century, to be improved versions of humanity, ministering, guiding and setting an example for men and women alike.<sup>56</sup> The heavenly hierarchy was a mirror of the best possible conditions on earth, while the angels appearing in the roof vaults, spandrels, stained-glass windows and statuary of churches “made the work of the invisible angels quite visible to all”.<sup>57</sup>

The exact appearance of the original angels on the west front of Bath Abbey is unknown. J. Carter, who I have mentioned above in relation to the “shepherds”, published the earliest, detailed visual depiction of the west front in 1798. Carter writes little about the angels, beyond that they are “much damaged”. From his syntax, however, it is clear that the angels depicted do not fall. “[T]he ladders take their rise from a kind of undulating line, expressive of the surface of the ground; here the angels begin their ascension...”<sup>58</sup> Carter, like his contemporaries and those who followed, find little to note in the figures of the angels themselves, apart from their relative idiosyncrasy and the usual apocryphal story about Oliver King’s dream. It is significant, however, that the angels ascend the ladders, rung by rung, and that “at the tops of the ladders are the busts of two saints, each holding a

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<sup>56</sup> Keck 36.

<sup>57</sup> Keck 43.

<sup>58</sup> Carter 7.

book.”<sup>59</sup> The shepherds, then, if indeed that is what the earth-bound figures were intended to represent, stand at the bottom of a ladder that leads to god and paradise. The way in which humanity was expected to reach paradise is explicitly laid out in the bodies of the climbing angels, who have both supernatural and divine qualities, but, like humans, have the ability to err. Unlike humans, angels, when they fall, will not be forgiven. Keck writes that “angels symbolize the impossibility of man’s [sic] unaided return to his state of innocence”,<sup>60</sup> however, they also represent, for Augustine, the role that humanity ultimately was intended to play in the divine hierarchy. Augustine believed that God created humanity specifically to fill those seats, to restore the angelic hierarchy to its original glory.

Thus angels were not only the intercessors between the eternal nature of divinity and the temporal and material nature of humanity; they were a powerful, ubiquitous immateriality through which humanity could understand and relieve itself of its own, burdensome and sinful materiality, without giving up the appearance of that materiality. The angel, ironically, saved the material world, by taking on its appearance in human form, and crucially, it did this through art. Or to put it another way, artists, artisans and masons saved the material world, through work whose object was a transcendence that could not be perceived but was, paradoxically, best understood through the substance of art.

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<sup>59</sup> Carter 7.

<sup>60</sup> Keck 28.

Keck writes, “[t]he illiterate person’s image of how an angel might appear would have been molded less by the words of Scripture directly than by the art and architecture of medieval Europe.”<sup>61</sup> The Council of Nicea of 787 had declared the depiction of angels in human form to be acceptable, because according to the Bible, angels appeared in the guise of humanity when they manifested in human dreams and visions. From the ethereal, sexless and immaterial being of the early Middle Ages, the angel becomes a more complicated construct of incorporeality within a *discussion* of materiality. This awkward notion is evident in the debates of late-thirteenth-century theology, between, for example, Aquinas (and the Dominican order), who argued for the pure spirituality of angels, and Bonaventure (and the Franciscan order), who claimed that “angels are made of both form and matter (albeit a spiritual matter).”<sup>62</sup>

This point brings me back to Diffey’s argument about angels and apples. If the immateriality of angels allowed for the discussion of materiality which brought the medieval world into focus, if not into clarity, then the point of the debates on angelic nature was not only to determine the nature of immateriality; it was also to categorize and organize the material world. As I wrote above, the desire for transcendence has a material history of its own. This desire is chiseled into the fabric of Bath Abbey’s west front, manifest in the angels, not flying, but climbing to heaven. The angels represent the human soul going home to god. Whether or not

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<sup>61</sup> Keck 30.

<sup>62</sup> Keck 32.

one feels the human soul going home to god is a matter of personal experience, determined in part by many potential factors of social and cultural positioning. But to make what might seem a rather simplistic argument, what if the “transcendence” experienced is not a result of the way that the work of art accesses or constitutes a divine realm, but rather that the work of art makes divine the moment of experience? Diffey’s essay is written within the loss of meaning, the moral vacuum thought to accompany secularization and the privileging of a scientific rationale and model of the universe. While I also question the hegemony of the scientific paradigm, I do not assume that secularization and scientific explanation are the end of a discussion of transcendence. But again, I question the implicit associations of the word itself, which denies the very material history that has allowed for its contemplation in the history of western thought.

Bath Abbey, with its long and tangled chronicle, offers some clues as to how the desire for transcendence – the desire for immateriality, or immortality – is ultimately a longing that finds expression in the matter of the world, and specifically, the matter of art. I differ from Diffey in the fundamental sense that I do not believe that “transcendence” has a universally transhistorical potential.<sup>63</sup> Rather, I assert two things: one, that the feeling of transcendence that might attach to an experience of a work of art, or be hoped to be found in a work of art, has been in

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<sup>63</sup> Diffey considers the question of the meaning of the word, but does not address the way that its meanings have shifted through time as well through subjectivity. Diffey is careful to note, through his personal examples, that while his experience of transcendence in art is not one that would be guaranteed in another, he never defines how transcendence might be historically specific in nature.

part determined by the historical, social and cultural circumstances of the observer. Two, that an experience of “transcendence” is not so much an experience of theophany, but rather, an expression of the way in which the earthly *is* divine.

The Abbey’s ruin in general is detectable only in traces, thanks to various rebuilding and restoration efforts. The attributes of the figures on the west front; wings and swords, nimbi, dogs, sinistral legs, lambs and crowns, began to soften into ambiguity as the Abbey turned the crest of its sixteenth-century construction and made a swift descent into ruin. When Cromwell’s associates offered the Abbey to Bath’s inhabitants in 1539 for five hundred marks, the people refused, perhaps not wishing to anger the King with apparent loyalty to the Church.<sup>64</sup> The church was sold for scrap and eventually the “skeleton” was dumped on the City of Bath Corporation in 1569. The only major effort made in the seventeenth century to maintain the Abbey was to roof the nave in plaster.<sup>65</sup> By the time of the first major restoration of the Abbey, in the late eighteenth century, the saints and angels on the façade of the Abbey were well-established relics of another era and of another system of belief. The north and south walls had become supporting walls for houses

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<sup>64</sup> Carter 4; Davenport 22.

<sup>65</sup> Perkins relates the popular tale of the event that precipitated the roofing. Caught in a downpour, the Bishop of Bath and Sir John Harrington, godson to the Queen, try to take shelter in the Abbey. “We do not get much shelter here,” said the bishop, to which Sir John replied, “If the church do not keep us safe from the water above, how shall it save others from the fire below.” Perkins 8.

and shops, and half of the angels on the ladders were barely recognizable.<sup>66</sup> Two had completely worn away.

In 1798, architect J. Carter published *Some Account of the Abbey Church of Bath: Illustrative of the Plans, Elevations, and Sections of that Building*. This large, folio-styled book is a meticulous study of the Abbey, with interior and exterior elevations, and floor plans. Carter's distaste for the buildings that abutted the Abbey's walls was forceful enough to have him omit them from his drawings. He writes, "Elevation of the north front of the Abbey Church of Bath [...] is here seen without the miserable habitations that disfigure it."<sup>67</sup> The removal of the houses, some thirty-six years later, left marks which Davenport calls "blemishes",<sup>68</sup> no longer visible, on the surface of the Abbey. Carter's comments and subsequent removal of the houses indicate a shift in opinion from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century about the importance of the Abbey in Bath's architectural capital. What is apparent in Carter's text is an echo of the nascent desire to establish value-based boundaries between types of architecture. This desire would increase in expression throughout the nineteenth century, and culminate in the vigorous debates around the adaptation of Gothic elements to the Abbey.

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<sup>66</sup> J. M. W. Turner's 1796 watercolour of Bath Abbey, while an unreliable source with regard to the statuary, shows English Baroque style structures adjoining the north and south walls. (Collection: Victoria Art Gallery, Bath) Perkins 9 and Davenport 26, confirm the presence of other structures clinging to the walls of the Abbey.

<sup>67</sup> Carter 5.

<sup>68</sup> Davenport 26.

In the images accompanying his text, Carter carefully specifies the angels, or their remains. These engravings are the earliest available, detailed studies of the angels, to my knowledge, prior to the first major restoration. At the time of Carter's study, their globular forms are reminiscent of stones or bones, their definition softened by time and water. It should be noted that despite his careful record, Carter was not particularly interested in the angels. Although his book is a clear indication that the Abbey and architectural cultural capital in general were on the upswing in terms of civic and antiquarian interest, the angels themselves were not quite the crucial symbolic apparatus one might suppose, given the continuing emphasis in every text related to the Abbey on Oliver King's dream, and the clambering angels.<sup>69</sup>

In 1824 the City Architect of Bath, G. P. Manners, was engaged to make cosmetic alterations to the Abbey's exterior, adding battlements, pinnacles and repairing damage caused by the removal of the houses that had been built against its north and south walls.<sup>70</sup> Public debate about the addition of battlements and pinnacles reflects the degree to which civic pride in the Abbey and the sense of architecture as shared cultural inheritance had expanded since its failure to sell to

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<sup>69</sup> A very recent example of this emphasis may be found in the Saturday, June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2000 edition of the *Bath Chronicle*, which published a 1906 photograph of the Abbey, as part of a series of historical images of this building. The text accompanying this image briefs the reader with the usual details of the Abbey, the Saxon and Norman building on the site, the dream of Oliver King, the angels and the ladder, and suggests that the west front is still worthy of "marvel" today. "Down Memory Lane" 20.

<sup>70</sup> Davenport 26; see also Charles Robertson, *Bath: An Architectural Guide*, Introduction, Jan Morris (London: Faber and Faber, 1975) 47; Neil Jackson, *Nineteenth Century Bath: Architects and Architecture*, Foreword, Sir Hugh Casson (Bath: Ashgrove Press, 1991) 174.



the inhabitants of Bath three hundred years ago. In passionate epistles to the local press, frequently anonymous authors would use whatever metaphors and aphorisms packed the greatest rhetorical punch in order to move their opponents and the Bath Corporation, which had final say over the proposed changes.<sup>71</sup>

The debate also demonstrates the growing tide of enthusiasm for and recognition of the Gothic as a meritorious architectural form in Bath. In 1834, local architect H. E. Goodridge, whose work in Bath was primarily Neo-classical in nature, entered into the argument over the addition of pinnacles to Bath Abbey.<sup>72</sup> His strategy was to personify the Abbey as an unclothed woman in need of vestments suitable to her age and purpose:

The dignified matron [Bath Abbey] is but half-attired: she is in a partial state of nudity – would [opponents to the proposed pinnacles] be so unfeeling as to expose her in such a plight? The removal of the houses [in the Abbey courtyard] having caused her nakedness to become manifest.”<sup>73</sup>

This writer is not criticizing the removal of the houses, but is rather using their absence to stress the fact that the job of restoring the Abbey is incomplete. Given the ecclesiastical purpose of the structure, the failure to adorn “her” in raiment deemed appropriate by Goodridge borders on a crime of a moral order, rather than being simply an aesthetic mistake. Goodridge’s choice of discursive device deliberately

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<sup>71</sup> Bernhardt, *George Phillips Manners*: 55.

<sup>72</sup> Goodridge’s Cleveland Bridge toll houses, two austere classical, pedimented structures with four-column porticoes (1827) are small acts of homage to Sir John Soane’s Neo-classicism.

<sup>73</sup> Letter to the Editor of *Bath Chronicle* by H.E. Goodridge, January 25, 1834.

evokes more than the question of architectural right and wrong. In an era when female nudity and its counterpart, female immorality were beginning to play an increasingly important role in the words of moralists and decisions of politicians, Goodridge's letter would have a very different effect than the mannered and quaint ring that it has today.

The explicit equivalence suggested here between a woman's naked body on public view and the "plight" of the Abbey makes it clear to the *Chronicle's* readers and the Abbey's managers that in leaving the building alone they are consenting to a morally compromised state of undress. To a society that corseted and stayed female bodies under masses of fabric and the threat of social impropriety, Goodridge's letter spoke of the need to contain the overwhelmingly sexual nature of women concealed, appropriately dressed in feminine ornament.<sup>74</sup>

What this suggests to me is the way that femininity is used as a signifier that is both empty and replete. This signifier is one that adapts to multiple analogies, but because of its long history of usage, its power to signify simultaneously fails to address actual women (who may have also been avidly following the pinnacle debate). As Lisa Tickner writes,

Women have been absent or marginal as producers of signs (in public discourse at least) but everywhere present *as* signs [...this enables] us to see how representations of femininity contribute to the production of feminine

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<sup>74</sup> It is impossible to say how instrumental this particular letter was in resolving the debate over Manner's work between 1824 and Sir Gilbert Scott's between 1864-74, as under both architects' restorations, pinnacles, battlements and parapets were added or modified according to what the architects felt the "original" designers would have wanted. See Robertson 47-48.

subjects while having no necessary relation to the referent ‘woman’ or the daily experience of women’s lives...”<sup>75</sup>

Whether the reaction to Goodridge’s comments was sympathetic outrage, a small smirk or simple disagreement, femininity had been called upon yet again to elucidate an argument about something other than women, yet had still managed to reiterate the notion that a woman of good standing requires male protection, implicitly, from the sexualized gaze of other men. What this means, discursively, is that the standard issue of rhetorical femininity detracts from and ultimately obscures the opinions, feelings and ways in which actual women may have lived in relation to such a climate.

Thus far I have attempted to show, from analyzing various details and passing – but considered – remarks, how “women” have had a place in the history of Bath Abbey. That place may at first glance appear to be minimal, but I hope to have demonstrated how, given attention, these details and remarks can be mined as slips in the rhetorical emphasis on male producers of this building’s history and purpose. It is significant that, at each major phase in Bath’s development, a woman, be she an actual, historical woman, or a representation of a woman, can be found. While such an approach to architectural history does not in and of itself yield the kind of feminist revisioning that Bath’s Abbey, nor yet its larger story, need, I feel that this sort of exploration can have larger implications for the study of cultural history, to shift focus from creators, to discourses. The overlapping layers of

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<sup>75</sup> Tickner, “Feminism, Art History and Sexual Difference” 97.

cultural history, buildings, social history and writing around these spheres is a more likely place to find and through which to articulate a place for women in the history of architecture.

As my first visit to the Abbey and the Heritage Vaults ends, the image of the falling female angel on the façade of the Abbey stays with me. I think about the attendant's comments on the difference between supposition and faith: the necessary leap. The angel has no parachute and no plane. She falls. Her wings must require greater faith of her than any equipment, for while being a more logical mode of flight than a medley of wires and ropes, wings have historically been a less likely means of survival for human fuselage. The benefit that wings might bring to a fallen female angel, other than mark the heavenly place which she refused, are a debatable point, as fallen angels seem not to have found much use in their wings. What would faith secure for her, if indeed "she" were a *she*, a living, breathing woman, if indeed she took the leap of faith rather than falling. Forgiveness for acts described in phallogocentric discourse as "sins" would not be more than scant reward for faith, at least in Victorian times, when a combination of social Darwinism, class structure and a profoundly misogynist moral ideal placed hundreds of late-nineteenth-century Bath women firmly in the category of "sinner" and left most of those "fallen" with no socially acceptable recourse.

The virtual absence of official acknowledgement of the social, physical, emotional and economic strictures experienced by women, combined with the

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expectation that a “good” woman’s life should be lived narrowly, in servitude and gratitude to male “protectors”, finds an accurate if inadvertent parallel in the stony ladders chiseled into the west front of Bath Abbey. The late-nineteenth-century, middle or working-class Christian woman in Bath (as elsewhere in England) was, like the biblical Eve, programmed to fail, to fall, and so must forever be reminded of the inevitable downward path should she succumb to her base nature. In this view, men were either her saviours or the catalyst for her descent. How appropriate, then, that the falling female angel on the façade of Bath Abbey is alone among male figures. As a twenty-first-century, feminist visitor to this sculptural story, I wonder, in what could such a woman place her faith? Perhaps in other women.

The divine, then, will not be a ‘God out there’, beyond the realm of human love and action, but rather the divine as the horizon and constitution of our selves and our world...<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Jantzen 153.

## Chapter Four

### The Winged Woman in her Moment

The Abbey appealed to all good citizens; it stood in their midst preaching to them. It was, therefore, their duty to preserve it as a memorial to...the many who had fallen in the South African war...as an incentive to the men of today and for the future of the human race.

Anonymous, 1901.<sup>1</sup>

Excavations...are going on at a great depth near the Abbey, and some care ought to be taken lest they approach too near the foundations of the Church, which in all probability are not nearly so deep...I think, at all events, you ought to be accurately informed of the position of any underground exploration that is going on.

Sir Thomas Jackson, 1899<sup>2</sup>

By the 1860s, the Abbey was in serious disrepair and its amenities completely out of date. Sir George Gilbert Scott's efforts to restore the Abbey were therefore focussed upon immediate practical concerns such as the roof, the floor, the heating and lighting systems. The main reason for this restoration, Rector Charles Kemble's initiative, was not to beautify the Abbey. Rather Kemble intended to address the swelling population of Bath, to make the ecclesiastical space of the Abbey acceptable to the users of the building, rich and poor. Despite an extensive restoration/ fundraising programme and strong public interest in Scott's much-debated amendments to the Abbey, the project floundered due to lack of funds. Two decades after Scott's work had ground to a halt, the Canon of York, J.N. Quirk, was appointed to the rectory of Bath Abbey in 1895. His immediate concern was to

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<sup>1</sup> Pamphlet, *Bath Abbey: Repair and Restoration* (Bath: May, 1901) n. pag..

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Graham Jackson, *Bath Abbey: Report on Exterior Masonry and Sculpture* (London, 1899) 7.

secure the west front's completion as a commemorative gesture for the fourth centenary of the building. He engaged Sir Thomas Jackson, R.A. to conduct the restoration, and Jackson in turn hired, in his words, "a really good sculptor", Sir George Frampton, A.R.A., for the carving of figurative elements.<sup>3</sup>

At the time of Jackson's appointment as architect and restorer of Bath Abbey in 1895, Bath was a city of empty, elegant houses and women living in both genteel and not-so genteel poverty.<sup>4</sup> Commenting upon a daytime social gathering for middle-class women based on tea-drinking, Adrian Ball notes that "the kettledrum" flourished in Bath not only because of the comparative inexpense of tea by this point in history, but also because "the city had such a preponderance of unattached women, single or widowed, in those days" for whom tea provided a suitable alternative to alcohol.<sup>5</sup> In 1870, the magazine *London Society* described Bath and Cheltenham nearby as "two beautiful sisters who still bear traces of elegance and fashion but, having passed the heyday of prosperity and youth, frankly accept their position and resolve to make the most of it."<sup>6</sup> Neat analogies aside, social conditions for women in Bath at the end of the nineteenth century appear to have been stretched across a spectrum of respectability. In the face of Bath's declining cache as a resort, the ongoing struggle to maintain that respectability was a manifold problem

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<sup>3</sup> Jackson (1899) 6.

<sup>4</sup> Adrian Ball, *Yesterday in Bath: A Camera Record 1849-1949* (Bath: Pitman Publishing, 1972) 7.

<sup>5</sup> Ball 8.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Ball 8.

for women of all classes. This struggle can, in part, be attributed to the extreme restrictions on what polite English society considered “decent “ in terms of women’s behaviour, dress, deportment, companions and means of financial support. As Anthea Callen has demonstrated in her book, *Angel in the Studio: Women in the Arts and Crafts Movement*,<sup>7</sup> rigid gender lines circumscribed the ways in which middle and upper class women could provide an income for themselves without losing propriety. She writes, “In the Victorian era the woman’s place was in the home; marriage was her sole sanctified vocation, her only means to social recognition, status and security. Home became a secular temple amidst pagan turmoil[. She was] “the Angel in the House.”“ Beneath that ideal lay contradictions, “for marriage, although advocated as the only honourable profession for Victorian gentlewomen, was becoming increasingly less feasible.” Callen describes how, by 1851 there were over half a million unmarried middle-class women in England and that “the problem of untrained ladies with no means of support was becoming acute.”<sup>8</sup>

Anxiety over working-class morality was similarly acute, broadly speaking, with a battle raging in England between workers, factory owners and reformers over the length of the working day and what we would today call maternity leave. The discourse around middle-class morality largely effaced the needs and concerns of working-class women during the peak of industrialism. An idealized view of

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<sup>7</sup> Anthea Callen, *Angel in the Studio: Women in the Arts and Crafts Movement 1870-1914* (London: Astragal Books, 1979).



(middle-class) motherhood and domesticity, combined with the suppressed reality of class distinctions, doubly oppressed working-class women in late Victorian England. For the first time in the Victorian era, middle-class women began to experience some of the same contradictions between social expectations and financial need that working-class women had known for the better part of the century. As Callen notes, the large numbers of unmarried, untrained, middle-class women with no means of financial support were not simply a social concern.<sup>9</sup> Underlying this concern was the fear of what a woman might turn to if her situation were truly desperate. In Bath, as I extrapolate below, the average citizen was female and working class. The official citizen was, as the quotes above suggest, female and middle class. The real and imagined Bath at the turn of the twentieth century, at the moment when the restored west front was revealed, was thus predominantly feminine, in all senses – problematic and inherited – of the word. Bath is thus a locus for tensions between the sexes, and while I would not argue that the city is emblematic of late Victorian England in all respects, the question of female morality has particular emphasis in this city.

Linda Nochlin, as noted in the introduction to the previous chapter, has argued that in the nineteenth-century, relentless misogynist moralizing forced a syntactic symmetry between the notion of unpredictable female virtue and “the

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<sup>8</sup> Callen 20, 22.

<sup>9</sup> “In a society where the status of middle- and upper-class women was defined by marriage, failure to [marry] left a stigma signalled by her lack of status: the existence of an unmarried woman was not acknowledged by Victorian Society – she had no position in the social hierarchy. Failure to do her duty in marriage was seen as a crime on her part.” Callen 20.

fall.”<sup>10</sup> Consequently, by the time of the addition of a female angel on the façade of Bath Abbey, at least a hundred years of fierce sermonizing had mapped female virtue onto a vertical axis, with chaste goodness (close to godliness) perched perilously at the top and sinful sexuality at the bottom. In stark contrast, the question of male virtue was irrelevant, given that men and the (male) state were both custodians of the socially disruptive forces of female sexuality, and ironically, subject to a natural impulse believed not to have any parallel in all but the most depraved women. Male virtue rested on a horizontal axis; like a horizon, male sexual appetites were constant, a given.<sup>11</sup>

The invisible player in mid- to late-nineteenth-century discussions of prostitution was the male customer. Men, approached by fallen women, could not help themselves, and perhaps even had a right to their exploits. The degree to which male impunity and privilege were upheld or explicit depended entirely upon the class, gender and moral positioning of the exhortation. Nonetheless, as Judith Walkowitz’s study of government, medical, police and news records demonstrates, women, not men, were the object of official reform and reprimand. In her book, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State*, she writes, “[i]n

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<sup>10</sup> Nochlin 57-85.

<sup>11</sup> To take a highly secular, recent example of this type of directional, ethical logic, in the film *New Waterford Girl* (Allan Moyle, 2000), pugnacious teenager, Lou (Tara Spencer-Nairn) says in defence of her left hook and in condemnation of her male victims, “If they’re guilty, they fall.” This example, while reversing the typical gender attribution of “fallenness” to women, is only a superficial reversal, as the sole desire of Mooney (Liane Balaban), the protagonist of the film, is to leave her small community for the bright lights of New York. She does so by faking her pregnancy, therefore her success is her “fall” in the standard sexual sense of female virginity “lost” out of wedlock.

their analyses, the [male, Victorian] investigators treated prostitutes as irrevocably 'fallen' women whose style of life permanently impaired their intellectual and moral faculties."<sup>12</sup> That sensibility is explicit in the Royal Commission of 1871's study on the "great evil" of prostitution; in defending their practice of targeting women rather than men in reform and surveillance activities, the Commission wrote, "there is no comparison to be made between prostitutes and the men who consort with them. With the one sex the offence is committed as a matter of gain; with the other it is an irregular indulgence of a natural impulse."<sup>13</sup> Implicitly then, male sexuality was beyond control and beyond repute.

Therefore, it was the fallen, opportunistic woman who was to blame for the sin of prostitution, not extreme poverty, nor social conditions which, through legal, familial and religious structures, demanded that women be dependent upon and subservient to men. Walkowitz rigorously explores a salient example of this logic in *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, where she details the rise, repeal effort and fall of the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866 and 1869. The acts legalized a complicated, sexist and profoundly ineffective system of surveillance, forced examination, treatment and control of women who were – or were suspected of being – prostitutes in late Victorian England. While ostensibly motivated by a desire

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<sup>12</sup> Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (USA: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 39.

<sup>13</sup> "Report of the Royal Commission on the Administration and Operation of the Contagious Diseases Acts 1866-69 (1871)," *Parliamentary Papers*, 1871 (C. 408), XIX, quoted in Walkowitz 71.

to control the spread of sexually-transmitted diseases in garrison towns and large cities, the acts did not make any provision to examine and treat the male clients who kept the women in business. Walkowitz writes,

Regulationists reinforced a double standard of sexual morality, which justified male sexual access to a class of “fallen” women and penalized women for engaging in the same vice as men. Indeed, an earlier attempt to institute periodic examination among soldiers had failed because enlisted men violently objected...It was contended that such objections could not apply to prostitutes, who were presumably bereft of “self respect” and more powerless to protest this intrusion.<sup>14</sup>

Womanly virtue was as revered in the nineteenth century as female vice was abhorred. In theory, these extremes were within the reach of every woman, indeed, were inherent to her nature. The moralizing debates which characterize nineteenth-century discourse on gender had, however, a particular effect on middle-class women, who did not have the variation of freedom enjoyed and endured by their upper- and working-class counterparts.<sup>15</sup> The notion of exemplary middle-class, feminine morality was idealized in the phrase (popularized by the poem by Coventry Patmore) “the angel in the home.” By the end of the nineteenth century, the fallen-ness of a woman had, given her angelic idealization in popular prose, painting and parlance, angelic dimensions. The strength with which this conflation

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<sup>14</sup> Walkowitz 3.

<sup>15</sup> Griselda Pollock, “Feminism/Foucault – Surveillance/Sexuality” in *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*, eds. Norman Bryson et al (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994) 24-25.

of the feminine and the angelic was voiced would suggest the corollary: a fallen angel was a fallen woman.

I do not propose that this configuration of femininity and the angelic was a kind of conscious reasoning which led to the placement of a descending, feminine angelic form on the surface of Bath Abbey. Rather, I suggest that this form demonstrates the convergence of several interpretative avenues. The first axis traces the conjunction of such a form with Bath's largest house of religion, at a point when Bath was home simultaneously to a brisk local trade in prostitution, and to an intense bourgeois concern over the moral conduct of all women. My argument here is that the facade of Bath Abbey demonstrates the syllogism in which feminine morality is bound up in the two extremes, the two directions of the angelic femininity: bound for heaven, and bound for hell. As Nochlin writes, "behind every crouched figure of a fallen woman there stands the eminently upright one of the angel in the house."<sup>16</sup> The second axis of interpretation connects Frampton's commission at Bath with what Nochlin calls the "peculiar fascination" that the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood had with the notion of a woman who was sexually active outside the bounds of marriage. Frampton, like other sculptors trained to make architectural sculpture, enjoyed the benefits of religious revival and a prosperous nation willing to support English artists, with appointments for both public and private work. Frampton's non-commissioned work demonstrates that peculiar fascination with two polar constructions of archetypal femininity.

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<sup>16</sup> Nochlin 61.

Whether or not it was intended to construct a local ideal of femininity within the boundaries already articulated by nineteenth-century moralists, the falling female angel can be linked to what were seen as appropriate roles for women in the nineteenth-century (if a woman was not virtuous, then a condemned, fallen state was appropriate for her – there was no middle ground). This appropriate role, subservient to the judgements and sanctions of men, found an echo in the relation of human action to divine judgement, and in the relation of architectural detail to architecture itself.<sup>17</sup> Part of my aim in this chapter is to demonstrate Spivak's observation that no etymology is innocent, even – especially? – a visual etymology such as the falling female angel.<sup>18</sup>

I am deliberately creating an overemphasis here on semantics because I am drawn to a detail<sup>19</sup> which, as the literature on Bath Abbey proves, appears to hold

<sup>17</sup> These are overlapping issues which all betray the same philosophical binary thought structure. See Moira Gatens' discussion of the gendered and binary logic of much western philosophy in *Feminism and Philosophy*. Naomi Schor's *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987) has been an influence on my thinking about details and their relation to women's history, and the discourse of the feminine, particularly in relation to architecture. She writes, "Neo-classical aesthetics is imbued with the residues of the rhetorical imaginary, a sexist imaginary where the ornamental is inevitably bound up with the feminine, when it is not the pathological..." (45)

<sup>18</sup> See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Politics of Interpretation" in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988) 133. Spivak is here taking issue with Kristeva's Lacanian emphasis on possession of the "Phallus" (language, law, etc.) as a figurative expression, and therefore not gender-exclusive in practice, and similarly, the term "abject", with its application, in continental feminism, to women only.

<sup>19</sup> Schor writes, "By reversing the terms of the oppositions and the values of the hierarchies, we remain, of course, prisoners of the paradigms, only just barely able to dream a universe where the categories of *general* and *particular*, *mass* and *detail*, and *masculine* and *feminine* would no longer order our thinking and seeing." (5).

no interest for architectural or sculptural history.<sup>20</sup> While local newspapers and pamphlets reflected a fairly healthy local interest in the restoration and addition of new angels to the west front, I have not found one reference to the gender of the angels in either academic or popular sources over the past one hundred years.<sup>21</sup> The root of this disinterest goes beyond whether or not the Abbey's architecture merits academic speculation. I suggest that the presence of a falling, female angel operates comfortably within the boundaries of a "common sense"<sup>22</sup> whose ancestry was (and may yet be) bound up in persistent nineteenth-century notions of gender, sin and femininity. The invisibility of this figure, its subsumption in the literature on Bath Abbey may on one hand be an example of the inconsequence of gender in traditional architectural analysis. To reach into the considered details of the angel's dress and hair, not to mention her orientation, beg further questions of the time period in which she was produced, and the ways in which she may have been

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<sup>20</sup> For notes on the sources pertinent to Bath Abbey in the context of scholarship on Gothic architecture, see Chapter 3, footnote 8. In terms of sculpture, the following sources devote space to Frampton's achievements, but none remark upon his work at Bath. See Benedict Read, *Victorian Sculpture* (New Haven and London, Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art: Yale University Press, 1982); Lavinia Handley-Read, *British Sculpture, 1850-1914* (London: The Fine Art Society, 1968); Joanna Barnes and Benedict Read, *Pre-Raphaelite Sculpture: Nature and Imagination in British Sculpture 1848-1914* (London: Henry Moore Foundation, 1991).

<sup>21</sup> While there was no reference to the gender of the angels in newspaper articles at the time of the Abbey's restoration under Jackson, there was a small debate over the proposed "upside-down" angels. The following is quoted from *Bath Abbey: Repair and Restoration*, a pamphlet published in 1901. "Those who did not approve of the angels, and felt inclined to give no more, might earmark their subscriptions for the buttresses. (Laughter.)...The Rev. H. H. Winwood seconded with pleasure...He confessed to being one of the critics who objected to the 'upside down' angels."

<sup>22</sup> Gramsci's analysis of the production of general consensus explains "common sense" as the complex product of a manufactured consent. "Common sense is the site on which the dominant ideology is constructed, but it is also the site for the resistance to that ideology." Simon 27. Subjects make decisions, vote, etc. in such a way that maintains hegemonic power structures even though the consequences of the decision may be deleterious to the subject.

operating discursively, if not consciously, as a moral message to the women inhabitants of and visitors to Bath.<sup>23</sup>

If I take this figure in tandem with local social realities, I may read this figure as an unintended memorial to the suppressed history of “fallen” women in Bath. It was with this latter idea in mind that I set out in the fall of 1999 to effect a piece of street theatre/performance art, which would present this angel as an agent of alternative history, as an unintentional monument to an aspect of the history of women which remains largely unconsidered, despite all the commemorative activity in Bath today. This chapter has three concerns: the first examines the sculptural work of Sir George Frampton as part of the Jackson restoration, and considers how the sculpture itself is aesthetically and discursively indebted both to the Pre-Raphaelite “sympathy” for the fallen woman, and to the then-current debates and fears surrounding women’s sexuality and morality. Second, through the work of Judith Walkowitz, Linda Mahood, Barbara Caine, Maria Luddy and Catherine Hall, historians of nineteenth-century women’s social and moral roles, I sketch a broader picture of prostitution in late Victorian England in order to contextualize the particulars of prostitution in Bath at the turn of the twentieth century. The ardent efforts of one Bath reformer, the Reverend J. Bolton, who worked tirelessly and vocally in an adjoining parish to the Abbey to rid Bath of “the great evil”, comprise the focus of the third section. This first section serves as a means to locate my claim

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<sup>23</sup> To do this is, I hope, to continue the spirit of what Schor calls “[shaking] the hegemony of the sublime – that is, the last vestige of classicism...to desublimize what was sublimated...” (147).



that the detail of the falling, female angel on Bath Abbey was a local and logical extension of the axiomatic moral logic that attended discussions of middle-and working-class morality of the time. I discuss my further contention that this angel can be read as an index of the contradictions that texture and ultimately disable that logic in Chapter 5.

*The mid- and late-nineteenth-century restorations of Bath Abbey*

To this day, the interest of [the] fairest cities depends, not on the isolated richness of palaces, but on the cherished and exquisite decoration of even the smallest elements of their proud periods.

John Ruskin<sup>24</sup>

A *Bath Chronicle* article of November 28, 1863, records a meeting between the newly-hired architect and the Abbey vestry, detailing the architect's plans. These plans were to finish the ceiling of the nave, which had simply been filled in with Jacobean timber and plaster since the early seventeenth century, replacing the floor with wood and concrete, and adding a stone screen to the west front.<sup>25</sup> A pamphlet of 1865, published by the local newspaper office, shows a shift in emphasis from the 1863 article, appealing for assistance for the maintenance of Bath Abbey: "The parish in which this Church stands contains a population of 2,339, chiefly of the Trading and Labouring Classes. There are but very small, and wholly inadequate,

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<sup>24</sup> *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) "The Lamp of Memory" 204.

Funds available for keeping the Fabric in repair.”<sup>26</sup> The anonymous author of the quoted pamphlet is calling for increased seating for the parishioners, and for donations of building materials. Scott’s revised prospectus for the restoration, published in this same pamphlet, includes reseating for 1 600, and raises the original expense of the restoration from £12 000 to £20 000.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the presence of a mid-Victorian interest in the moral health of the poor emerging in the planning and expenditure of the mid-nineteenth-century restoration, and despite Scott’s national reputation, his decisions were not always popular and have been the target of much criticism, in his day and subsequently. While his vaulted stone ceiling for the nave, matching the style of the chancel, was greatly admired and is a spectacular work of stonemasonry,<sup>28</sup> the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) denounced his removal of the galleries and repositioning of the stone choir screen.<sup>29</sup>

It does seem from the surviving evidence of his transactions at Bath Abbey that Scott’s intentions for the building’s restoration were somewhat dramatic. The

<sup>25</sup> “Restoration of the Bath Abbey”, no author, *Bath Chronicle*, 26 Nov. 1863.

<sup>26</sup> See *The Restoration of Bath Abbey Church*, one page pamphlet, printed at *The Chronicle* office, Bath, 1865.

<sup>27</sup> *The Restoration of Bath Abbey Church*.

<sup>28</sup> Robertson 47.

<sup>29</sup> The SPAB did not admire his restoration of Tewksbury Cathedral, either. See Neil Jackson: 173. Ruskin’s words could apply here, not so much to Scott’s work, but as a summary of the reception to Scott’s work: “I have never yet seen any restoration or cleaned portion of a building whose effect was not inferior to the weathered parts, even to those of which the design had in some parts almost disappeared.” *Modern Painters*, (1846) vol 1, Part II, Sec. 1, Chapter vii, 26. (179)

author of an extensive report on the condition of the masonry and fabric of the west front, Jerry Sampson, wrote in 1992 that Scott's

replacement of the upper four figural elements on the ladders with carving blocks also prompts the conclusion that he intended to replace the majority of the angels...His complete renewal of the tracery of the great west window, and his clear intention to renew the high parapet above it is further evidence of the intention to undertake a full-scale restoration. We can be grateful that the funds...failed to materialize lest the greater part of the surviving medieval sculpture should have disappeared.<sup>30</sup>

On the part of Victorian onlookers in Bath, there seemed to have been a mixture of relief that the funds for the continuation of the lengthy restoration were not forthcoming, and frustration that the Abbey was still in such a state of "dilapidation". Writing in 1887 of the Scott restoration, architectural historian, R. E. M. Peach crossly notes misunderstandings and "great delays", with the result simply being "the erection and loan of a costly and unnecessary scaffolding, which remained up for several years, and very little work was actually accomplished..."<sup>31</sup> Peach's publication, *The History and Antiquities of Bath Abbey Church* in 1887 seems to have set the scene for a renewed interest in the Abbey. Peach, for his part, encouraged such interest:

[I]t is clear that the responsibility of completing the West Front rests upon the present generation. Why should not the present Rector follow the example of his predecessors and appeal to the public to complete the external

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<sup>30</sup> Sampson (1992) 23-24.

<sup>31</sup> *The History and Antiquities of Bath Abbey Church* by John Britton, continued by R. E. M. Peach (Bath: Charles Hallett, The Bladud Library, 1887) 58.

work as he did the internal. We cannot believe, that the public spirit of the city was then exhausted, or that the city of Bath will be content to let this portion of the noble work remain in its present ignominious state...<sup>32</sup>

Twenty years after Scott's project sputtered to a halt, a new Rector appeared and the city of Bath was ready to tackle the Abbey once again. While it was clear that the Committee for the restoration of the Abbey did not want a repeat of Scott's lingering and controversial engagement, they did hire a student of Scott for the job, the well-known architect, Thomas Graham Jackson. Nonetheless, like Manners and Scott before him, Jackson found his commission at Bath Abbey at the turn of the twentieth century to be one filled with contention. Jackson had a twenty-five year relationship with Bath Abbey that did not, apparently, warrant any mention in his memoirs.<sup>33</sup> His opinion on the Gothic Revival is, however, worth noting in reference to Bath Abbey. He writes,

To walk, as I had been trained to do, along the narrow path of medieval orthodoxy, keeping one's attention rigidly on the way and shutting one's eyes to all other attractions right and left as if they were sinful things, now seemed to me irrational and unworthy of those who were "heirs of all the ages [...This was] no better than nursing a delusion and would never advance art a step onward."<sup>34</sup>

Jackson's view of himself and presumably his contemporaries as the "heirs of all the ages" led him to make radical and unapologetic additions and changes to the

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<sup>32</sup> Peach 58.

<sup>33</sup> *Recollections of Thomas Graham Jackson*, ed. Basil H. Jackson (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1950).

<sup>34</sup> T. G. Jackson *Recollections* 100.

fabric and decoration of the Abbey. Jackson, like Scott, shied away from what had come to be understood as amateur, uninformed attempts at recreating medieval architecture in the eighteenth century. These amateur efforts garnered the name “Gothick” (as opposed to the “real” Gothic), mimicking the term used by eighteenth-century predecessors, including the Countess of Huntingdon. This more whimsical style of medieval architectural reference had few fans in an era that, thanks to writers such as Ruskin and Morris, found in Gothic architecture equal parts the expression of moral and national pride. By the late nineteenth-century, however, an architect of Jackson’s stature could reject even Neo-Gothic building and reconstruction on the grounds of either stylistic error or slavish deference to the past. Jackson confidently took exception to the “medieval orthodoxy” on which he built his career, and at Bath Abbey, he proposed multiple additions and revisions.<sup>35</sup>

Apart from roof repairs, his decisions included replacing four of the figures above the ladders on the west front, including the body of a figure whose head was the only severely damaged part, and adding two new flying buttresses for the west end of the nave.<sup>36</sup> After the official dedication ceremony of the refurbished Abbey in

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<sup>35</sup> Jackson’s complete list of alterations runs as follows: “Restoration of the parapet of the west gable, and slight repair of the central niche and canopy/New head to the figure in central niche, and securing of the trunk by copper dowels where split/New top canopies on angle turrets and partial repair of some others/ Substitution of copper ties to some of the statues of the Apostles for iron/ Further pinning together of others/One new figure for [Apostle] No. 4. /Four new figures on the ladders at the top. /Repair of label of great west window. / New bracket over great window to carry the statue, with new shields and supporters below. /Dressing the sculpture of spandrils [sic] with preservative solution, and taking casts of three angels. /Completion of the three niches of lower part of front, and a statue in the central one. /New supporters to the royal arms.” Jackson (1899) 5.

<sup>36</sup> Neil Jackson (1991) 178.

1901, Jackson returned to Bath in 1906 to add eight new pinnacles. In 1912 he replaced the organ and organ loft, while in 1923 he installed the War Memorial Cloister to the south aisle.<sup>37</sup> My particular interest in the late-nineteenth century changes to the Abbey lies with the angels that appeared on the west front. As the above quote indicates, under the direction of Jackson, several plaster casts were taken from the west front statuary. During Scott's restoration, one Mr. Ezart cast several of the Apostle figures, further indicating that Scott had hoped to make his restoration quite extensive. Following upon this lead, Jackson ordered several plaster casts of the decaying stone figures on the west front, and, with an eye to posterity, casts of the new sculptures he had commissioned from George Frampton, his official sculptor for this project.

One cast was taken from the maquette for the new carving of Henry VII; several were made of three decaying angels, and one was made from the clay study of a replacement angel – the falling, female angel. These plaster casts, taken originally for the purpose of having a record for future restorations, are now in two places. The majority of the plaster casts are moldering in the Abbey Vaults, a derelict space currently subject to proposed refurbishing, some distance from the Abbey, near St. John's Hospital and the Cross Baths. (Fig. 2) As stated in the previous chapter, the casts of Henry and the saints are on display with the female angel in the Heritage Vaults beside the Abbey.

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<sup>37</sup> Neil Jackson (1991) 178.

Of the two sculptural additions that Jackson recommended, the architect has nothing to say other than “[t]here is no reason...why the four rough blocks inserted at the head of the ladders [by Scott] should not be carved into figures...or...replaced by sound stone and carved.”<sup>38</sup> To attempt to determine something of the reason for the appearance and choice of a gendered rendering of the angelic, we must turn to Frampton’s work and career, and the broader artistic and social context in which he produced his sculpture.

*The falling angel and the fallen woman*

Ruskin’s writing, William Morris’ reconception of craft and industrial production, Pre-Raphaelite painting and poetry together formed the basis of a new spirit in the arts in England after 1850. This spirit, the trend called “The New Sculpture” and the European influence of Symbolism, were the formative influences in the artistic background of George Frampton, who was a well-known and successful sculptor at the turn of the twentieth century. Born in 1860, Frampton had started his professional life in an architect’s office, and then took an apprenticeship with a firm specializing in stone carving for architectural commissions.<sup>39</sup> After training at the Lambeth School of Art and subsequently under Antonin Mercié in Paris, Frampton had developed an approach which French critic,

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<sup>38</sup> Jackson (1899) 3.

<sup>39</sup> Barnes and Read 99.

Roger Marx described in 1894 as reacting “against materialism towards the Ideal which is going on beyond our frontiers.”<sup>40</sup> For Marx and other observers, Frampton was somewhat unique in England for integrating some of the concerns of Symbolism, then a significant movement in Europe, into his sculpture and relief work.<sup>41</sup>

By the time Frampton installed the falling female angel on Bath Abbey, he jointly held the position of head of the Central School of Arts and Crafts with W.R. Lethaby, had taught at the Slade School and had been exhibiting with the Royal Academy for over a decade. His more famous commissions include full-length portraits of Queen Victoria for Calcutta, Leeds and Winnipeg.<sup>42</sup> His sculpture was, like that of his contemporaries, Alexander Munro, Thomas Woolner and Alfred Gilbert, steeped in Neo-classical formalism, while also indebted to the Renaissance portrait bust. His work frequently made narrative references to medieval and Arthurian literary characters, and was, much like others of his class and stature, motivated artistically by a then-current, English fascination with a nostalgic, highly romanticized femininity. His most famous quarter-length figure (which I discuss further below), *Lamia* (Fig. 37) was completed in 1899,<sup>43</sup> just prior to or concurrently with the execution of the falling female angel at Bath. (See fig. 33) I

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<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Lavinia Handley-Read 13.

<sup>41</sup> Handley-Read 13.

<sup>42</sup> Barnes and Read 99.

<sup>43</sup> Barnes and Read 100.



would argue that Frampton's reputation was thus well established and his influence arguably at its greatest at this moment of his career.

By 1906, Frampton was responsible for several church monuments, had firmly established his reputation as a sculptor in the round, and as an expert in bronze and multi-media relief panels.<sup>44</sup> The religious revival in the mid-nineteenth-century had been good for sculptors, resulting in what Benedict Read has described as "virtually an industry"<sup>45</sup> in mid-Victorian England. Not all sculptors gained either the knighthood or the prestige of Frampton, but various surveys of the period, such as Edmund Gosse's series of articles for the *Art Journal* in 1894<sup>46</sup> and Marion H. Spielmann's writing<sup>47</sup> posit a firmly-established movement that had drawn from both the influence of Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites, and the new, Continental influence of Impressionism, represented by a span of French artists (François Rude to August Rodin).<sup>48</sup> Gosse describes Frampton in terms which make him an artist for his times: "Great persistence and unwearied energy appear to be personal

<sup>44</sup> Read, *Victorian Sculpture* 327.

<sup>45</sup> Read, *Victorian Sculpture* 67.

<sup>46</sup> Edmund Gosse, "The New Sculpture 1879-1894" (4-part essay) *The Art Journal (New Series)* (London: J. S. Virtue and Co. Ltd., 1894): 138-142, 199-203, 278-282.

<sup>47</sup> Marion H. Spielmann, *British Sculpture and Sculptors of To-day* (London: Cassell and Co., 1901), and "Sculpture at the Paris Salons" *The Magazine of Art* (London, Paris and Melbourne: Cassell and Company, Ltd., November 1896 to April 1897): 81-85.

<sup>48</sup> Gosse: 139. This attribution is not without nationalistic slurs. Italian sculpture is for Gosse, "puerile and feeble", whereas French sculpture, when not inflaming English sculptors, is an "infiltrator" threatening to "penetrate" English art, while German artists must always fight against their "German proclivities" (139, 201, 200 respectively).

characteristics of Mr. Frampton, who has risen to the top of his profession – not at a single bound...not with a succession of brilliant short leaps...but at a slow, earnest, pedestrian pace.”<sup>49</sup> Such measured praise should not detract from the fact that Gosse also saw Frampton as one of those who pulled English sculpture out of “the lowest depths of desuetude.”<sup>50</sup> Tides were to turn swiftly, however, and the absence of a monograph on Frampton indicates the unfavourable shift in opinion regarding the heavy, ornate statuary of Frampton and his contemporaries, by the onset of World War I.<sup>51</sup>

Writers on the subject of Victorian sculpture acknowledge that many of the bronze editions, which found their way into Victorian homes, were derivative, overly sentimental or embarrassingly decorative.<sup>52</sup> The suggestion, however, that art is ruined by sentimentality and decoration is problematic, further reflecting a structural bias in the history of art towards masculinity as the privileged term. These are, as Naomi Schor and others have contended, highly gendered terms, which at certain points in history have negated or diminished specific creative practices (and

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<sup>49</sup> Gosse 306.

<sup>50</sup> Gosse 138.

<sup>51</sup> Several studies of Victorian sculpture suggest that the tide may yet turn again. The most detailed and recent of these is Susan Beattie’s *The New Sculpture* (New Haven and London: Published by the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 1983).

<sup>52</sup> Roger Fry wrote scathingly about Frampton’s *Lamia*, scoffing at sculptors who “make up for the absence of idea in their designs by playing tricks with their materials; putting crystal globes into the hands, or, worse still, the bronze bases, or covering their busts with opals...” (Quoted in Handley-Read 15).

indeed, the study of those practices) through veiled gender binaries.<sup>53</sup> Schor's

analysis here is most cogent:

...as any historian of ideas knows, the detail has until very recently been viewed in the West with suspicion if not downright hostility... To focus on the detail and more particularly on the *detail as negativity* is to become aware, as I discovered, of its participation in a larger semantic network, bounded on one side by the *ornamental*, with its traditional connotations of effeminacy and decadence, and on the other, by the *everyday*, whose "prosiness" is rooted in the domestic sphere of social life presided over by women.<sup>54</sup>

Further than this, Schor argues, to reconsider the detail in this way reveals how Academic, "normative" aesthetics since the eighteenth century have had a sexual bias, "carrying into the field of representation the sexual hierarchies of the phallogocentric cultural order. The detail does not occupy a conceptual space beyond the laws of sexual difference: the detail is gendered and doubly gendered as feminine."<sup>55</sup>

I would also contend that the pejorative use of such gendered terms ("decorative", "ornamental") renders a historical moment as "feminine", in order to emphasize the next, "masculine" thrust of creative energy.<sup>56</sup> Thus, charges of

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<sup>53</sup> See Svetlana Alpers, "Art History and Its Exclusions: The Example of Dutch Painting" in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978) 183-200; Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: Women's Press, 1984); Mieke Bal, *Reading Rembrandt: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press: 1991).

<sup>54</sup> Schor 4.

<sup>55</sup> Schor 4.

<sup>56</sup> To argue this is *not* to suggest that Camille Paglia's sweeping cultural analysis based on gender essentialism is correct, but on the contrary, to emphasize how the constructed nature of the discourse on gender has a domino-like and dehistoricizing effect on those objects and historical moments which have been gender-designated. The virility of Victorian sculpture was never doubted

Victorian sentimentality and ornamental excess should be regarded with some caution, not so much because the work they criticize needs to be defended, but because they uphold a gender-biased view of creativity. This view, superficially in favour of a highly modernist aesthetic, discursively favours the masculine.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, a formalist bias against Victorian aesthetics manages to circumvent the ways that cultural critics were taking Victorian mores and gender roles to task. I am creating here a rhetorical space in which the fallen female angel may be read not as a text of female sinfulness but as a rhetorical synthesis of the mores and gender roles of the period and climate in which it was produced.

In 1843, Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, architect of the Parliament Buildings in London and defender of Gothic architecture, wrote, “[a] great mistake of modern times is the supposition that Christian architecture will not afford sufficient scope for the art of sculpture...every portion of a Christian church may and should be covered with sculpture of the most varied kind...”<sup>58</sup> By the time of Frampton’s commission at Bath, the role of the professional sculptor and the role of the skilled stonemason could overlap. At Bath Abbey, they did not. Jackson

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by its practitioners or apologists. Gosse’s isolationism (“The New Sculpture 1879-1894”) is a case in point. For Gosse, the work of Frampton and others clearly indicated, much as Abstract Expressionism was to do for America, sixty years later, that the force of the nation was active on all levels: political, colonial, cultural, and some might even say, spiritual.

<sup>57</sup> See Lisa Tickner, “Feminism, Art History and Sexual Difference”; Pam Meecham and Julie Sheldon, “The Female Nude as the Site of Modernity” in *Modern Art: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000) 84-108.

<sup>58</sup> Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin. *An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England*. (London: 1843) 42.

explicitly sought a sculptor of high professional standing.<sup>59</sup> The class implications of this shift must be pointed to but cannot here be elaborated beyond the following: Frampton's gesture of two falling angels could be mined for its meaning for a strong local community of masons and stone carvers, including the Freemasons of Somerset. Frampton supplanted these masons' traditional and, until the dissipation of Scott's restoration programme, long-upheld role as experts in the fabric and decoration of Bath Abbey. As an outsider and a member of the upper class, the appointment of Frampton may have been an insult to the local masons who had done a great deal of the necessary labour for free by 1867.<sup>60</sup>

Present-day Bath mason and sculptor, Lawrence Tindall, suggested that the original angels may not have only been illustrative of Bishop King's dream; they may also have been portraits of the masons who worked on the building.<sup>61</sup> This statement provides a sense of the spirit that led to the revival of church decoration in mid-Victorian England. This revival, in tandem with the increase of public monument building and the crossover between religious and secular idioms, led to the flourishing of professional sculpture in the second half of the nineteenth century. Queen Victoria commissioned the most elaborate of these, in terms of numbers of artists involved, the Albert Memorial, in 1863. . Lavinia Handley-Read writes "[n]early all the established English sculptors were concerned with the Albert

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<sup>59</sup> Read 272.

<sup>60</sup> Jackson 170.

<sup>61</sup> Conversation with the artist, Sept. 1999. If this proposition were true, the addition of falling angels would have had a variety of meanings for local workers as well as for local women.

Memorial..”<sup>62</sup>The memorial’s purpose was to commemorate the life of Victoria’s husband, Prince Albert, and emphasized the role of sculpture almost from the beginning of its conception.<sup>63</sup> The architect and overseer of the project, Sir George Gilbert Scott, responded in his design to “Her Majesty’s first choice of a monolith greater than any that the world had seen surrounded by magnificent groups of sculpture in due proportion to its colossal magnitude...”<sup>64</sup> The architecture of Scott’s overall design was highly ornate, towering Neo-Gothic. The estimated cost of this memorial was £85 508 in 1864, and eleven professional sculptors carried out the work under Scott.<sup>65</sup> Scott’s earlier/later restoration and his much-maligned, unrealized plans to further decorate the various surfaces of Bath Abbey can thus be seen in terms of a larger, and popular trend. Scott’s design for the Albert Memorial uses Gothic in a relatively new way. Sepulchres and mausolea, rare structures in England due to the concern to bury on consecrated ground, were customarily built in some version of Neo-classicism. The Albert Memorial, while not the Prince’s burial place, embeds the notion of a mausoleum within its structure, with its large effigy of the Prince and a hero’s roster of achievements inscribed on and through every surface.

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<sup>62</sup> Handley-Read 8.

<sup>63</sup> Read 97.

<sup>64</sup> Scott, quoted in Read 97.

<sup>65</sup> Read 99. Women who were residents of the Bath Female Home and Penitentiary in 1854 collectively “earned” £329 for the charity through laundry work. The enormity of the Albert Memorial budget should come clear in comparison.

What I wish to note in particular is that this very large commission made liberal use of the female form, as was customary and even expected, to render in three dimensions the various accomplishments of the Prince, and the wide sphere of his influence. Africa, like Temperance, Prudence and Humility, all take the familiar form of allegorical yet undeniably voluptuous Woman. In the Albert Memorial, as in countless other sculptural works throughout western art history, the female form is a malleable signifier, helpfully standing in for ideals, concepts, geographical sites and discursive practices, yet never standing as herself, because she is no “she”. As Marina Warner has amply demonstrated in *Monuments and Maidens*, she is “Woman”, not *a* woman.<sup>66</sup> The configuration “Africa”, for example, serves to speak to the goals and desires of the dominant, imperial and racist discourse that produced “her.”<sup>67</sup>

“Africa” fits neatly into Scott’s ornately Gothic frame, a glorious appendage to the figure of the Prince himself, a valuable demonstration of the extent to which natural selection had guaranteed Victorian supremacy. Likewise, the fallen female angel on Bath Abbey is an extension of the particular logic, which attempted to catalogue and circumscribe female subjectivity through a moral lens. The enfolding of church and home, the Ruskin-inspired embrace of Gothic as a “naturally” English architectural syntax, and the elevated yet confined role of the ideal woman in

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<sup>66</sup> Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*.

<sup>67</sup> See Roxanne Lynn Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

nineteenth-century England are the parameters in which Frampton carried out his scheme for exterior decoration at Bath Abbey.

It is worth comparing the Abbey's angel with *Lamia*, previously mentioned, and a subsequent bust from 1907, titled *Enid the Fair*. (Fig. 38) Drawing from Tennyson's "Idylls for the King" for *Enid* and from Keats' poem of the same name for *Lamia*, Frampton discloses his interest in heroines and anti-heroines from literature. *Lamia* is a three-quarter-length bust of a beautiful young woman. (See fig. 37) Her hair is coiled at her ears in a highly decorative fashion, while her clothing emphasizes her breasts. Her gaze is downward; this and her general appearance strangely contradicts her mythical role as a fearsome, half-serpent, half-human woman. Given the Pre-Raphaelite obsession with the fallen woman, as Nead and Nochlin document, a character who was half-serpent (the half not depicted) could stand emblematically for the original Fall, the moment when Eve and the serpent became one in the act of sin. That we are given her mythical character, but not visual evidence of her serpent half, leaves the work open for imaginative interpretation on the part of the viewer. The serpent, an obvious phallic symbol, and *Lamia*'s absent lower body, already eroticized by her prominent breasts, are fetishistically linked. Her downward gaze may well be a gaze directed at her own, fearsome and sinful corporeality.

In contrast, *Enid* is a heroine of literature and of the British past. Her hair is a more elaborate version of *Lamia*'s coils. She may be younger; her gaze also casts downwards. Her bust, however, has no bust. The emphasis on *Enid*'s face and hair rhetorically emphasizes the non-maternal and virtuous aspects of femininity. The



sculptures of Enid, Lamia and the fallen female angel are strikingly similar in terms of the face, the downward gaze and hair of each. They are, despite the differences in type of sculpture, location and material, essentially the same woman. They are, in short, Woman. Enid and Lamia represent two ends of a moral spectrum that, for many Victorians, existed in every woman: the potential for great goodness and the potential for dissolute sinfulness. The angel on Bath Abbey makes this moral spectrum explicit.

She is the second figure from the top of the chiseled stone ladder, carved onto the north half of the west front. (See fig. 33) Unlike almost all of the other twelve angels, she is “upside down”, her head where the other angels’ feet are. Her hands are clutched into balls, possibly intended to be grasping at the rungs of the ladder. Her body position is reminiscent of a fetal pose, somewhat elongated by her right arm, which is thrust forward and downward. Her face is turned so that the viewer/visitor can clearly see her features: her hair, coiled into large, symmetrical buns on either side of her face, her eyes look down, not at the ground but at the ladder which does not hold her up. Her stone wings look heavy and motionless, useless. She does not appear distressed, but remote, placid, generic, and perhaps sad. In terms of Frampton’s production, both prior and subsequent to his commission at Bath Abbey, the female figure operates within a binary moral code, her appearance barely differing from “good” to “bad”. The Victorians understood feminine morality to be in operation in every woman, but only at one end of the

spectrum or the other.<sup>68</sup> The falling female angel on Bath Abbey demonstrates how “Woman” nonetheless encompassed the potential for either extreme at all times.

It is reasonable to ask who would, in Jackson and Frampton’s time, see Bath Abbey on a daily basis, or might, in their visit to Bath, be brought to the west front and asked to admire its surfaces. According to social historians Graham Davis and Penny Bonsall, Bath’s character had changed during the course of the nineteenth century such that its middle-class residents were no longer rubbing elbows with “the quality.”<sup>69</sup> As part of a larger climate of moral reform and religious revivalism, Bath’s official persona as a stylish place of healing and high society shifted towards a carefully cultivated place of quiet entertainment. Tellingly, between 1906 and 1910, the Society of Architects held their annual conferences in Bath. Likewise, the British Medical Association and the Institute of Mechanical Engineers met in Bath annually during those same years. Bonsall and Davis note that in “January 1913 the city entertained 400 doctors from London, who were taken on a motor tour of the area before being received by the mayor and the chairman of the Baths’ Committee for tea at the Pump Room.”<sup>70</sup> The Pump Room was situated immediately south and west of the Abbey. Visitors leaving the Pump Room and Roman ruins would find

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<sup>68</sup> Linda Mahood supports this claim, describing how “prostitute” was a label that would be applied to women simply for appearing without a male figure in a public place. She writes, “...the ‘prostitute’ was a label or censure, encompassing a constellation of women’s behaviour which moral reformers found objectionable or threatening...the debates [69] over who was and who was not a ‘prostitute’ were not just technical, but deeply political... by the nineteenth century the bourgeoisie could not easily ignore the presence of large numbers of women in the streets, whose dress, physical appearance, occupation, or behaviour led to their being labelled as ‘prostitutes’.” (68)

<sup>69</sup> See Davis and Bonsall, Chapter 4, “The City of Genteel Residence, 1820-1914” 63-86.

<sup>70</sup> Davis and Bonsall 79.

(then and now) the west front Abbey the primary visual focus point of the courtyard. While a newly restored façade would be of interest to members of an architectural conference, it is a point of speculation what the sight of a falling, female angel would rouse in the medical men who toured the city. Might she inspire a sense of the object of scrutiny, pity and scorn – the prostitute – that was the subject of the vigorous, sometimes even violent, Contagious Diseases Acts and their repeal movement?

And what might this sculpture inspire in the average citizen of Bath at that time? The average citizen of Bath at the turn of the twentieth century was, according to Bonsall and Davis, “neither a destitute beggar nor an upper class pensioner. The typical resident was female, in that women outnumbered men, and she was more likely to be a domestic servant or a dressmaker than either a street hawker, a prostitute, or a woman (whether widowed or single) of independent means.”<sup>71</sup> Further, “from at least the mid-nineteenth century, Bath was a predominantly working-class, small-scale industrial city.”<sup>72</sup> While domestic service was still an important source of paid work for labouring women, there were increased numbers of washer- and char-women during the period 1880-1910, a period in which domestic employment was, as elsewhere in England, beginning to diminish.<sup>73</sup> As

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<sup>71</sup> Davis and Bonsall 98-99.

<sup>72</sup> Davis and Bonsall 99.

<sup>73</sup> As Prochaska notes, the numbers of domestic servants in England had risen significantly in the 1850s, 60s and 70s, partly in response to the efforts of philanthropic women to retrain criminals and paupers into reliable domestic help. *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England*

social historians of Bath such as Neale, Bonsall and Davis have aptly indicated, the “working class” was itself very striated, and even an area designated as a “slum” might within it house a variety of income levels. Bonsall and Davis argue that from the mid- to end-point of the nineteenth century, there was an overall improvement in the average Bath resident’s standard of living. This estimate, however, should not ignore that “it is probable that in Bath, as elsewhere at the turn of the century, about 30 percent of the population lived in poverty.”<sup>74</sup>

This estimate is in strong contrast with the vision of itself that Bath promoted at the turn of the twentieth century to prospective residents and visitors. Bath’s many charitable organizations, the under-acknowledged industrial base of the city, the mixed economy and small scale of production seemed on one level to render Bath a place of social harmony, or at least, of lesser class tensions. The nature of the typical resident, working-class and female, and, by the end of the nineteenth century the increasingly straightened circumstances of Bath’s middle classes (also predominantly women) suggest a more complicated picture. As the anonymous 1901 pamphlet quoted at the very beginning of this chapter suggests, supporters of the Abbey and its sculptural programme intended to appeal, through

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(New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) 152, 148. This situation did change with more humane legislation and bourgeois horror at working conditions in factories and mines. See Margaret Hewitt, *Wives and Mothers in Victorian Industry* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1975).

<sup>74</sup> Davis and Bonsall 114. Writing about women in the penal system in nineteenth-century Ireland, historian Maria Luddy says, “From the evidence available in official sources about the occupations of imprisoned women it is clear that the majority of female criminals lived economically marginal lives. In 1870, for example, of the total of 14, 698 women imprisoned in the larger prisons...54 percent gave their occupation as prostitute...” (151).

architecture, “to all good citizens...as an incentive to the men of today and for the future of the human race.”<sup>75</sup> Sexist language aside, the main recipient of the message of the falling female angel would have been Bath’s overwhelmingly female population. This would particularly have included, the working-class women who, if not living in domestic service, would have lived in close proximity to the Abbey courtyard, in the St. James parish immediately south and west of the Abbey, just beyond the Baths and the Lower Borough Walls. As the anonymous, one-page pamphlet published in response to Scott’s proposed renovations indicated in 1865, “[t]he parish in which this Church stands contains a population of 2,339, chiefly of the Trading and Labouring Classes.”<sup>76</sup>

These trading and labouring classes lived primarily in boarding and rooming houses, brothels, and by the start of World War I, in some desperately needed experiments in council housing.<sup>77</sup> The compression of working-class people into small, distinct parts of the city was an effect of the class system that to a degree,

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<sup>75</sup> I am reminded of how, in a second-year painting course at my undergraduate university, our male painting teacher, caught up in a storm of passionate rhetoric, told the predominantly female class that “you have to have *balls* to paint.”

<sup>76</sup> See *The Restoration of Bath Abbey Church*.

<sup>77</sup> Municipal housing schemes in Dolemeads, James Street, Avon Street and Milk Street had provided by 1914 approximately ninety-eight new houses and instigated improvements in many others. Bonsall and Davis 113. Housing reform was a troubled issue in Bath. In the early years of the twentieth century, there was still adherence to the view that if the working classes could overcome an “innate” uncleanliness (and implicitly, adopt the personal and domestic hygiene standards of the middle classes), they would not be in such dire need of new housing. The Medical Officer of Health for England reported his opinion on working-class housing in Bath, stating that “the Housing Problem can only partially be solved by attending to the neglect of the house owners; the poorer classes of this country primarily need educating to the value of cleanliness, neatness and general house pride, to enable the advantages of the English system of housing to be enjoyed to the full”. *Medical Officer of Health Annual Reports* (1910), quoted in Bonsall and Davis 113.

suited both working- and upper class city dwellers. Working-class culture, perceived by the upper classes as an absence of culture,<sup>78</sup> could find freer expression in those parts of Bath designated as “undesirable.” The middle classes could, for their part, feel more secure in knowing that the working classes were a safe distance from their doors. Nonetheless, great exceptions to this division of the classes along urban boundaries existed in the form of prostitution, philanthropy, religious and moral reform movements, police activity and political agitation, all of which cut across (while still maintaining) class barriers.

For the second half of this chapter, I consider how in Bath, at the time of the falling female angel’s appearance on Bath Abbey, Bath’s vision of itself as a politically stable city was in fact belied by a cultural fear of/fascination with women, and the local fear of/fascination with prostitution. That fear and the issue of prostitution in late-Victorian England cannot be separated from either a middle-class fear of the poor, or from a middle- and upper class fear of women abandoning their “traditional” roles as moral backbones for the nation. Two deeply ingrained anxieties are at stake here: the supposedly depraved lengths to which poor would go to survive (specifically the lengths to which poor women would go) and the growing evidence that women in general were no longer satisfied with their lot in the family, in the nation, and in life. Thinking through prostitution in the

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<sup>78</sup> Walkowitz writes, “[f]or these middle class writers, working-class culture represented a total negation of culture” (38). See also Raymond Williams, “Culture is Ordinary” in *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (England: Verso, 1989), where he writes, “to say that working people are excluded from English culture is nonsense; they have their own growing institutions...There is a distinct working-class way of life, which I for one value...” (7-8).

nineteenth century is an activity which sheds light on the proscribed roles of Victorian women. Such a consideration is therefore useful in terms of understanding the lives of prostitutes and non-prostitutes alike. While I cannot deal in depth with all that such a study summons up, it is important to note that the enterprises and institutions which usurped and upheld the boundaries between rich and poor – philanthropy, reform, police action and political agitation – are all related to late-nineteenth-century debates in England around prostitution and moral degeneracy. Thus an examination of these larger patterns of influence and interference in the Victorian era comes first, and a discussion of Bath in particular follows.

*Class, gender roles and prostitution in Victorian England*

As Judith Walkowitz and Maria Luddy have noted, the rise of the cult of domesticity in the Victorian era accompanied a denial of non-procreative sexuality in women, in direct opposition to the supposed nature of male sexuality.<sup>79</sup> This difference was instituted, perhaps even insisted upon, at the parliamentary level, with the implementation of the Contagious Diseases Acts, which attempted to categorize “decent” women in opposition to “public” women, or “common prostitutes”, whose choice to exchange sex for money was seen as evidence of a deranged or unnatural sexuality.<sup>80</sup> Lynda Nead has argued that

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<sup>79</sup> Walkowitz, *Prostitution*; Luddy 152.

<sup>80</sup> Walkowitz, “Dangerous Sexualities” in Genevieve Fraisse and Michelle Perrot, eds, *A History of Women in the West, vol. 4: Emerging Feminism from Revolution to World War* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, England: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1993) 370.

Respectable female sexuality was defined in relation to the reproductive function; generally denied active sexual desire, woman's sexual pleasure, indeed her entire identity, was organized [by the medical establishment] in relation to the uterus – ovulation, menstruation, maternity and menopause. Medicine also assumed responsibility for deviant femininity and within medical practice prostitution became a special object of inquiry and expertise.<sup>81</sup>

This contemporary rhetoric on prostitution reinforced this ideal, which insisted that poor women, who constituted the largest category of prostitute, were either unnaturally sexual or remorselessly avaricious, willing to capitalize on the natural male sexual impulse. In her essay, "The Prostitute as Social Victim", Lynda Nead traces the professionalization of medical practice in the nineteenth century, noting how controversial topics such as prostitution helped to legitimize medical discourse as both scientifically sound and morally necessary.<sup>82</sup> Situated thus, neatly within the bounds of middle-class values, doctors were able to agitate middle-class fears of deviant femininity and (social) disease while establishing a role of importance for themselves in medical, political and moral controversies.

Given the widespread, *discursive* emphasis on the separation of public and private life, strictly delineated along gender lines, the purpose of prostitution was of secondary concern, in terms of parliamentary action, to the threat that prostitutes

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<sup>81</sup> Nead 141. Nead notes that the objection to feminine desire and sexual pleasure was far from monolithic. She cites Dr. R. J. Culverwell, a member of the Royal College of Surgeons, who wrote sympathetically of the role of the clitoris in female pleasure. Much later in the century, feminists such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and other women in support of birth control, could be said to be implicitly, if not explicitly defending the natural place of female pleasure in sexual relations.

<sup>82</sup> Nead 142.



posed as that which could infiltrate, disease and disable the middle classes. In other words, the prostitute had the power to muddy, and thus destabilize, a clear class boundary. Alain Corbin writes that the prostitute carried the “heavy scents of the masses” and was a reminder of the “lower-class woman at the heart of the bourgeois household who manages the bodily needs”, at the “beck and call of the bourgeois body.”<sup>83</sup> While this version of prostitution has validity, to consider the flip side of the coin is to see that this managing of middle-class bodily “needs” was also a merging of bodies. In this merging the possibility of infection occurred, and it was the fear of infection (on many levels) that indicates the threat that prostitution posed to a nervous middle class.

The degree of alarm that attended political debate, medical investigation and legislation on the subject of prostitution may be detected even in the adjectives deployed to describe prostitutes; she was the “common” or “public” woman. Both of these words – which are quite neutral compared to other descriptors – imply that the notoriety and impropriety of prostitution was intimately linked with the public performance of sexual acts, or public nature of the invitation to perform sexual acts. These actions, carried out “in public” or on “common” ground, were deeply threatening to the bourgeois standard of femininity, in which women were to experience their sexuality only within the economy of the family, and only in relation to one man, their husband. But what I want to emphasize here is that the

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<sup>83</sup> Alain Corbin, “Commercial Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century France: A System of Images and Regulations,” trans. Katherine Streip, *Representations* 14 (Spring 1986): 212-213.

conflation of the “public” with (a deviant) sexuality is significant in terms of a discussion of architecture, particularly architecture with an explicitly moral and public dimension, such as the Abbey. Given that the trade of prostitution took place predominantly in a neighbourhood literally five minutes’ walk from the centre of town, the Abbey’s west front was a site to be policed, to be protected from the most-feared aspects of Victorian society: the angry, deviant and diseased female poor.

Nineteenth-century investigators, such as the evangelical physician, William Tait and Malthusians George and Charles Drysdale recognized aspects of the class-based nature of prostitution in England, finding that the majority of prostitutes and their clients were transient and impoverished. While there was some effort in the early nineteenth century to understand how social circumstance could contribute to a woman’s decision to enter prostitution, this effort was undermined by the investigators’ insistence on the fallen/virtuous binary of female sexuality, in which a woman fallen would never rise. Tait wrote in 1840 that “a woman who forsakes the path of virtue, and prostitutes her body for the love of gain...[will] sink into the lowest state of degradation into which it is possible for a human being to fall...[this is] the general law by which the fate of prostitutes is regulated.”<sup>84</sup>

Judith Walkowitz has shown how such a rigid view of their moral state was not shared by the women who worked as prostitutes, who demonstrated a degree of

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<sup>84</sup> *Magdalenism: An Inquiry into the Extent, Causes and Consequences of Prostitution* (Edinburgh, 1840) 170-1. Quoted in Nead 146.

fluidity in their self-conception and work choices that was not recognized by a largely judgemental, voyeuristic and punitive regulatory movement. Furthermore, the social and economic reality of the nineteenth century female prostitute was such that in certain cases, prostitution may have been a reasonable alternative to the hard labour and long hours of factory work and domestic service.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, Maria Luddy finds that

when women found work in factories it normally proved to be a tedious, harsh and badly paid means of earning a livelihood. The largest opening for women would, of course, have been domestic service. This was not a very attractive choice for many women since the lives of domestic servants were extremely confining and they too were badly paid. Prostitution, then, may have been seen as a legitimate means of earning a relatively large amount of money without excess toil. It also allowed the women a certain degree of independence.<sup>86</sup>

Explanations for prostitution ranged from condemnation of the slippery nature of female morality, economic want and greed to seduction, wantonness, and so forth. Rarely was the “blame” placed on men’s sexual desires or their sense of entitlement to sexual gratification, although on occasion men were chastised, not for their appetites but for the way they satisfied their desires.<sup>87</sup> Nead writes, “[i]n terms of broad Christian ethics, adultery had to be seen to be equally iniquitous in both the husband and the wife, but for economic and cultural reasons concerning

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<sup>85</sup> As Walkowitz writes, “[t]he stereotyped sequence of girls seduced, pregnant, and abandoned to the streets fitted only a small minority of women who ultimately moved into prostitution... Poverty seems to have been a principal cause for women’s move into prostitution, but most women were not driven to prostitution from ‘sheer want,’ at the point of actual starvation.” Walkowitz (1982) 18-19.

<sup>86</sup> Luddy 132.

<sup>87</sup> Luddy 113-114.

inheritance, property and class reproduction, chastity in middle-class women was of greater significance.”<sup>88</sup> For the purpose of upholding those emblems of middle-class privilege and the respectable family home, censure of “deviant” behaviour, such as prostitution, incest, cross-dressing and homosexuality needed to be heavy and punitive. The institutional and political sanction of such censure is an index of the power of the dominant ideology to operate – or be forced upon individuals – at different levels of society. Linda Mahood writes,

...working-class sexuality was increasingly the object of middle-class scrutiny and attempts at colonization...on closer examination we find that [specific, objectionable’ characters] were mobilized in class- and gender-specific ways. It is significant that it was, by and large, working-class women whose behaviours were scrutinized and stigmatized.<sup>89</sup>

It should, however, also be seen as an indication of how threatened the Victorians were by the prospect of infection, both physical, moral and social, and how fragile the sense of moral stability and familial respectability was.<sup>90</sup>

As stated earlier, prostitution was a trade and a state of being which cut across while upholding class barriers, and was synonymous with a fear of disease that was so strong that “infection” itself became a metaphor for the social havoc that could ensue from its unchecked practice. It was also the vehicle through which many middle-class women found their political voice for the first time. Taking issue with the way the Contagious Diseases Acts were an implicit sanction of prostitution,

<sup>88</sup> Nead 53.

<sup>89</sup> Mahood 3.

<sup>90</sup> See also Walkowitz (1993) 369-398.

the way they impinged upon the bodily privacy of the prostitutes and the personal reputations of women who may or may not have been prostitutes at all, middle-class women were, with their male counterparts, a powerful and successful lobbying force in the 1870s and 80s.<sup>91</sup> One of the reasons why middle-class women overcame (or allowed themselves to appear to overcome) the distaste they should “properly” feel for fallen women may have been that the prostitute was perceived by some to be the saviour of the middle-class home. According to Nead, one strain of thought was that “the prostitute [...] kept middle-class women pure by satisfying the excessive sexual needs of men.”<sup>92</sup> One strand of medical opinion held that “pure” women, as stated above, did not have sexual desires. Men could, through imposing their sexual needs upon their wives, trigger an unhealthy and unnatural sexual desire in women, which, it was feared, would lead to “impurity” – infidelity – on the part of the wife. In this way, the middle-class woman and the prostitute are mutually engaged as necessary players in the cultural fiction that “good” women naturally do not have sexual desire, while “bad” women are willing to accommodate more than one man’s sexual needs.

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<sup>91</sup> Josephine Butler was the most famous of these women, and a leader to many in the Repeal activities. See Josephine Butler, *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* (Wesport: Connecticut: Hyperion Press, 1911). As Barbara Caine notes, such work was upsetting to many Victorians, not because the subject of the debate was prostitution (which had been a matter of debate for decades) but rather because once “women’s private activities [became] a source of public debate and discussion...the impossibility of these absolute distinctions between the public and the private [were realized] in the very act of setting them up.” (17)

<sup>92</sup> Nead 50.

Middle-class women fought the battle against what they saw as the tacit toleration of prostitution via the Contagious Diseases Acts, and, as well as fighting for repeal, worked on fundraising and support committees for reform houses in London and elsewhere. The participation of middle-class women in the debates on prostitution and the rescue and reform of prostitutes was distasteful and shocking to many middle and upper class male doctors, ministers and politicians. These people were horrified that the “pure” woman, the angel in the home, would taint herself with such matters.<sup>93</sup> There was also fear that the sexual depravity of the fallen woman would spread, like an illness, to the vulnerable, pure woman. This fear, it seems clear today, was a smokescreen for the more likely scenario that the cultural myth of the good woman’s asexuality would collapse under the pressure of contact between intelligent women of disparate circumstances and experiences.

Female repeal and rescue workers formed a small but powerful political force, and were for certain politicians, a foreboding emblem of the chaos that would ensue if women insisted on political participation.<sup>94</sup> When considering any local discourse on prostitution, central to the analysis is the large body of evidence for the way that middle-class revulsion, voyeurism and fascination with “deviant” sexuality was class-based, much like the zealous attempts to control and regulate working-

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<sup>93</sup> Nead writes, “feminine purity [could] only be guaranteed within the confines of the home. Better, then, for the bourgeois woman to stay within her domestic sphere and donate money to charity, than to leave her sanctuary and come into contact with sin.” (202)

<sup>94</sup> “Any deviation by women from imposed moral and social expectations, was a matter of concern for philanthropists generally. In the traditional ideology women were the stabilising forces in the family and thus contributed to the stability of civilisation itself. Any deviancy on the part of women could therefore have a detrimental effect on society at large.” Luddy 152.

class prostitutes. This evidence must, I think, be seen in terms of a macrocosmic social ethos, in which the application of a censure and regulation of working-class prostitution is equally an attempt to control *middle-class* women's sexuality. Likewise, the refusal of working-class women to submit to the regulations of the Contagious Diseases Acts was, like the refusal of middle-class women to mutely accept the judgements of male doctors and politicians, a refutation of the dominant order.

*The Reverend Bolton's pressing appeal*

It seems strange that a parish like St. James, under the wing of the Abbey, should have so long suffered from this toleration of vice.

Reverend William Jay Bolton  
*St. James's Court: A Narrative of Events* (1884)<sup>95</sup>

The fallen female angel on the façade of Bath Abbey is not simply a marker of the implications of sin, it is also a highly political warning to middle-class women who defied hegemonic attempts to control female bodies and subjectivities. Ultimately, however, the importance of undisputed family lineage and the

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<sup>95</sup> Reverend William Jay Bolton, *St. James's Court: A Narrative of Events* (Bath: pamphlet, 1884).

maintenance of middle-class, male privilege were the true concerns of local and national reform efforts in Victorian England. In 1888 the Chairman of the Bath chapter of the National Vigilance Committee, Reverend E.A. Eardley-Wilmot, declared to a “large audience” that

Christian people, though conscious of the cancer which was eating out the heart and sapping the manhood of the nation, had...spoken [of prostitution] with bated breath...But the cancer meanwhile had spread, and now it had reached a stage at which it could not any longer be bid (applause)...What then was needed? First, as individuals, as Christians, as citizens, in face of a gigantic evil, to recognize its existence and to give every effort to combat it, to get the young men to rise up against it, and to brand as unworthy...those of their own sex who indulged the grosser passions of nature (applause).<sup>96</sup>

The concern in Bath at the end of the nineteenth century ranged from bland disinterest to fervent and organized reform activity. The tendency to “tolerate” prostitution as a “necessary evil” had, however, diminished significantly over the course of the century, with the institution of the Bath Female Home, Penitentiary and (for a short time) Lock Hospital on Walcot Street, and the Asylum for Teaching Young Women Household Work on Gay’s Hill. The former, in the literature accompanying its annual reports, took a clear stand on the cause of prostitution: seduction, or less sensationally, poverty. These reports and the building that housed the institution, are the subjects of Chapter 5. For the remainder of this chapter, however, I examine in depth two pamphlets produced by the Reverend William Jay Bolton, appointed to the parish of St. James in 1881. The subject of these pamphlets is the region of Bath immediately adjacent; a notorious pub, Bell’s Inn, was then

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<sup>96</sup> *Bath Chronicle*, 26 Jan. 1888.



separated from St. James by a common space referred to in the pamphlets as a “court”. (See fig. 1)

In the decades following the Religious Census of 1851, the new locus for missionary work was seen to be the working classes,<sup>97</sup> whose observed antipathy towards church-going helped to sponsor a spate of church-building and provisions for the poor in extant buildings. As stated earlier in this chapter, the inclusion of more seating for the poor was one of the aims of Scott’s restoration of Bath Abbey during the 1860s and 70s. Nationwide, the growing middle-class interest in the moral health of the working classes led to the rise of popular evangelical speakers such as Henry Manning and A. C. Tait.<sup>98</sup> The Salvation Army was founded in 1873 to help protect and preserve the bodily and spiritual integrity of the working classes. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, Christianity was still a largely middle-class phenomenon. As historian Trevor May writes, the “stereotyped view of nineteenth-century Britain dominated by religion falls down when it comes to the working class, the mass of whom remained alienated from both church and chapel.”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Mahood 10. Catherine Hall states that propaganda about the middle class nuclear family in the 1830s and 1840s laid the groundwork for this philanthropic zeal. Working-class women were already the Other of the bourgeois ideal. Hall writes, “In the government reports of that period, working wives and mothers are presented as something unnatural and immoral. Working-class women were castigated for being poor housewives and inadequate mothers.” (91)

<sup>98</sup> Trevor May, *An Economic and Social History of Britain: 1760-1990* (England: Longman, 1991) 145.

<sup>99</sup> May 145.

Bruce Crofts, an amateur Bath historian, compares the census results of church attendance in Bath in 1851 and 1881. He finds that of 42 886 total attendance to all churches in Bath, 5114 attended the afternoon service, earmarked for servants. The total population of Bath at that time was 52 240, only about 400 more than in 1882. In 1882, the total attendance to all churches in Bath was 38 852, and of that number only 3867 went to the afternoon service. Crofts argues that the attendance numbers for 1881 actually only represent about fifty eight percent of the total population, given the likelihood that fifty percent of the evening attendance were repeat visits. This argument, coupled with the low percentage of attendance for servant services, seem to suggest that the missing forty-two percent were largely working-class individuals.<sup>100</sup>

Bolton's lack of interest in the economic compulsions that may have led in part to the small sex trade in his parish can be deduced from his texts overall.<sup>101</sup> He does not once comment upon the often desperate circumstances of residents in St. James' Parish, particularly those of working-class women. In the words of historian R. S. Neale, "there can be little doubt that working-class women, whether in work, widowed, married or as the mothers of illegitimate children, were in a worse

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<sup>100</sup> See Bruce Crofts, *Forgotten Year: News from Bath in 1882* (Bath: Bath City Council, 1982) 56.

<sup>101</sup> Bolton republishes Queen Victoria's Proclamation of 1860 in full, in which she calls for the suppression of all "lewd and other disorderly Houses" and writes, "The evidence usually produced is to the effect that men and women are seen frequently entering the house together, the same women repeatedly entering with different men." Bolton, quoting the page four of the manual of English Law. Bolton, *St. James* 5.

position than any other group of workers.”<sup>102</sup> Bolton’s misplaced, middle-class emphasis on purity rather than poverty leads to his recommendation in 1884 that “a strong Committee... should be formed – the object being to unite *men* in actively opposing the corruption of national and social life that springs from neglecting the principle of purity.”<sup>103</sup> Neglecting the question of impoverishment, Bolton is consistently astonished by the vehemence of the neighbourhood reaction, from police to prostitutes, to his efforts. In his earlier pamphlet, he almost salaciously records an incident, which he presents as having an almost Biblical portent:

...a dreadful scene occurred in Trim Street. A woman who had kept a house of this kind was remonstrated with by the then clergyman of the Parish, the Rev. John East, but in vain. On being threatened with prosecution, she declared her determination to exhibit her books with the names of the gentlemen who visited her house. God, however, took the matter in hand. Whilst on a visit to a relative who lived near, the premises took fire, and she was burned to death; and that in an extraordinary way, for her body fell across a beam where it could not be reached, and the wretched creature was literally consumed in sight of thousands of the inhabitants of the city. Thus Bath has had its warnings.<sup>104</sup>

This scene, while deployed by Bolton as a near-religious parable for the ill effects of sin, simultaneously demonstrates that the working-class players in Bolton’s war were worthy opponents. This woman, unnamed, would have unleashed great scandal and ruin had she released the names of the “gentlemen” callers. However, Bolton’s class prejudice is apparent in the narrative emphasis of his nasty little tale.

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<sup>102</sup> Neale (1981) 281.

<sup>103</sup> My emphasis, Bolton, *St. James* 19.

<sup>104</sup> *A Pressing Appeal on a Serious Matter* (Bath, 1884) 1.

God did not step in to help the woman out of her poverty. Nor did he step in to alleviate the distresses of any of the women who worked for the brothel owner. Nor yet was his assistance felt when the men in question ventured into the “house of this kind”. God only felt it necessary to intercede when the privacy of “gentlemen” was at stake. Ultimately, it is class privilege that is maintained in the horrific scene Bolton describes, in which this woman was essentially burned at the stake.

Inadvertently admitting to the financial ruin his efforts caused, Bolton quotes a letter from the landlord of Bell’s Inn, in which he claims he lost “£400 in takings since you [Bolton] commenced proceedings”. The surveillance and legal costs of “the extinction of a brothel”, according to Bolton, amounted in contrast to about £60. Gleefully noting the number of closings and women driven away from St. James’ Parish, Bolton uses one and a half of his twenty-two-page pamphlet to refer to the circumstances of those displaced in the course of his reform efforts. A list of thirty-four women, identified as numbers, a cursory description of their fortunes after leaving the parish, and several breathlessly remorseful letters (suspiciously well written) comprise the whole of his survey of their supposedly improved fortunes. Bolton’s battles with the “lowest stratum of society”, the “bottomless pit” of St. James, nonetheless manage to be more two-sided than his description intends.<sup>105</sup> As the author of the letter complaining about the loss of wages suggests, those individuals involved in the sex trade were, if not proud of their work, ready to see it

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<sup>105</sup> *St. James’s Court* 10.

as work.<sup>106</sup> *St. James's Court: A Narrative of Events* includes the following story. Bolton describes his door-to-door campaign to rid his parish of prostitution. "I warned them [the brothel-keepers] that if their houses were still occupied for these [illegal] purposes, we should feel it our duty to indict them. One of them sent me a lawyer's letter, demanding an apology!"<sup>107</sup>

Bolton's indignation and bafflement notwithstanding, these small asides speak volumes about the degree to which certain members of the parish felt entitled to a lifestyle and source of income which, according to Walkowitz, to some working women was "the best of a series of unattractive alternatives."<sup>108</sup> Beyond this question, which Walkowitz is hesitant to leave open to a posthumous romanticization on the part of hopeful feminist scholars,<sup>109</sup> there is the question: to what degree did the women who practiced prostitution themselves feel implicated or guilty? Were the lines between good and evil as clearly demarcated for working-class women as for men? Among working-class women? These are difficult

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<sup>106</sup> Sarah Robinson, *The Soldier's Friend: A Pioneer's Record* (London, 1913) 49, quoted in Walkowitz (1982) 28.

<sup>107</sup> Bolton, *St. James' Court* 7. Judith Walkowitz records a conversation between a temperance worker, Sarah Robinson and brothel keepers, who wished to attend temperance meetings, but were not welcome. The women in question argued, "You see, Mrs. Robinson, you get your living in one way and I in another. I pay my tradesman's bills the same as yourself, and I do not see why I should be excluded." (1982) 28.

<sup>108</sup> Walkowitz (1982) 31.

<sup>109</sup> Linda Mahood is particularly useful in terms of feminist historiography, and the issue of casting women as either victims or agents. She writes, "The problem with the first approach involves the question of agency: it fails to recognize women as full participants in the historical process capable of making their own history. The problem with the second approach is that by emphasizing women's culture and power it risks losing sight of the social inequities which have marked women and which have been the basis of patriarchal and class relations." (13)

questions to answer, given the lack of first-hand accounts by working-class people. A suggestion of the unwillingness of the court itself to hand down the heavy judgements that Bolton so eagerly sought indicates, however, that moral issues may have been stretched across the slightly different lines of sympathy in the hands of legislators. A *Bath Chronicle* article of July 17, 1884 briefly outlines the case of “a common, ill-governed and disorderly house in St. James’s Court”. The St. James’s Court Prosecution was unable to decide whether or not Jane Cleeves was “responsible or not for the house being so used. The result was that the jury disagreed.” The verdict was confused; Jane Cleeves was found “not guilty”, but her connection with such a house made her worthy of the “serious punishment” of trial and accusation.

The language of reform in Bolton’s text continually abuts the language of architecture and space. Bolton records the Chaplain of the Royal United Hospital nearby as describing St. James as a “vile hole”. Bolton continues, “Upon enquiry I found there were upwards of 20 houses, inhabited by some 60 prostitutes in St. James’s Court and immediate neighbourhood.” His concern is conveyed in literal terms of the civic environs, rather than in terms of the women and men in the area. Perhaps betraying that his interest was not in the spiritual redemption of these residents at all, but rather in keeping up appearances, Bolton writes, “The effect on the surrounding streets may be imagined.”<sup>110</sup> He continually refers to property,<sup>111</sup> to

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<sup>110</sup> *St. James’s Court* 6-7.

<sup>111</sup> *A Pressing Appeal* 2.

the “city that is so dear to us”<sup>112</sup> and quotes the Recorder of Bath as stating that “It is not necessary...in order to constitute the offence of keeping a disorderly house, that there should be anything seen from the exterior of the house to indicate that the iniquity that is going on within. Not at all.”<sup>113</sup> In the language used to describe keeping a brothel, Bolton uses phrases such as keeping a “bad house”.

Bolton’s original desire was to destroy the area in question. He wrote, “The only way, we are persuaded, or riding [sic] Bath and St. James’s of this filthy stigma is by purchasing all, and destroying some, of these houses.”<sup>114</sup> Later, Bolton’s plan becomes more insistent: “until all the houses are bought and demolished, the veil will not cease”.<sup>115</sup> Bolton goes on to suggest several alternatives to the current situation, most ironically that “National Schools might be built upon the site”, as they were to be, in the next century.<sup>116</sup> (See fig. 2) While the Corporation of the City of Bath rejected this and the plan to purchase the architecture in the area, Bolton’s vision to “remedy the whole thing” in a “business way” was clearly ahead of its time.<sup>117</sup> Currently, a large Marks and Spencers sits where the Church of St. James stood, before being bombed out during World War II. The east side of

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<sup>112</sup> *A Pressing Appeal* 3.

<sup>113</sup> *A Pressing Appeal* 5-6.

<sup>114</sup> *A Pressing Appeal* 2.

<sup>115</sup> *St. James’s Court* 18.

<sup>116</sup> *St. James’s Court* 2.

<sup>117</sup> *St. James’s Court* 7.

Southgate Street, with which Reverend Bolton was particularly concerned, is now a covered shopping mall, while the west side of the street has been renovated or rebuilt to accommodate various chains of clothing and food stores. By the time the local conservation effort Bath had begun in the late 1960s, a visitor looking for the working-class districts of Corn, Milk and Avon Streets, just west of Southgate Street, would find the Bath City College.

Why Bolton's zeal failed to generate action on a political level is a complex question. It may be that Bolton's views were the dying gasp – perhaps something like the fallen, female angel on Bath Abbey – of a viewpoint that was too polemic for an increasingly sophisticated urban population. Alternatively, there is the notion that the religious revival of the mid-century had begun to peter out, and that the fire and brimstone which mark Bolton's rhetoric could no longer satisfy the questions that people had regarding the consequences of displacing an entire neighbourhood. It could also be that, after a decade of heavy repeal activism, people were disinclined to enter into a cause set out by moral righteousness when similar causes, such as the regulation of prostitutes, had met with such opposition and criticism. Finally, it cannot be ignored that prostitution served multiple purposes in a city like Bath. Beyond providing a sexual service, localized prostitution enabled other regions of the city to claim (relative) "purity", and gave police, clergy and newspapers alike fodder for a righteous indignation which justified their numbers and presence. Bolton, attempting to explain the persistence of prostitution and vice in the St. James area, himself acknowledges that "politics have entered into the question" and that "the general and most plausible excuse is a desire to concentrate the evil as a



hunting-ground for the police.”<sup>118</sup> This was particularly galling for Bolton because his church, standing at the northeast point of the “iniquitous” zone, barely cast a shadow over the activities he found so revolting and compelling. St. James could not even claim to be a moral barrier between the “vile hole” and the more respectable streets of central (now “historic”) Bath.

### *Conclusion*

The prostitute has become the subject of ‘art’ and ‘art’ does not provide a space for woman as physically deviant or unpleasurable.

Lynda Nead<sup>119</sup>

The early twentieth century, in England and western Europe, saw a shift in opinion away from the idealistic, elaborate and figurative work of artists like George Frampton, towards an art whose references were all (supposedly) contained within the frame - “freed from the binding necessities of our actual existence”.<sup>120</sup> This new art, “modernism”, took issue not simply with Victorian aesthetics, but also with the bourgeois, repressed culture which spawned such aesthetics. In short, within a few years of the installation of the falling female angel on the west front of Bath Abbey, the role of (avant-garde) art was no longer to instruct and inform

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<sup>118</sup> *St. James’s Court* 6.

<sup>119</sup> Nead 132.

<sup>120</sup> Roger Fry, “An Essay in Aesthetics” (1909) in *Art in Theory: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford, England and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1994) 79.

society towards its moral obligations, but rather to be “an expression and a stimulus of [the] imaginative life, which is separated from actual life by the absence of responsive action...”<sup>121</sup>

Writing in 1909, Roger Fry argues for an art that is neither about beauty nor morality, saying, “[i]n art we have no such moral responsibility”. In fact, he continues, any claims for a moral purpose for art is “self-deception.”<sup>122</sup> On one level, the strength and persistence of the critique of Victorian art demonstrates, somewhat obliquely, the extent to which such “New”, “Modern” or “Pre-Raphaelite” sculpture had become mainstream.<sup>123</sup> Crucially, however, the aesthetic or formalist critique, which Fry indicates here, sidesteps the rising tide of dissatisfaction – exemplified most topically by feminism – that encouraged the oppositional spirit from which Fry’s writing obtains its own energy. But why would thinkers like Fry embrace an art which eschewed the “real” when the “real world” was at that moment full of a dissent that would rock the value system of Victorian England to its core?

Six years before Fry penned his rejection of “the copy of actual life”,<sup>124</sup> the Suffragette movement, headed by Mrs. Pankhurst, had sprung spectacularly into action, and this after years of successful and – to some – alarming participation of

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<sup>121</sup> Fry 79.

<sup>122</sup> Fry 79.

<sup>123</sup> Handley-Read 13, 15.

<sup>124</sup> Fry 79.

mostly middle-class women in the political debates around prostitution. The vision of Woman was forcibly being turned away from a suppressed yet elevated, subservient yet angelic, non-person, and English society grudgingly had to make room for an undeniably vocal, critical, and ultimately powerful group which demanded personhood on the most fundamental political level: the franchise.

Historian Barbara Caine writes,

despite the rhetoric of female domesticity, women's public and political activity markedly increased at this time as women began to appear and to be noted as patriots as well as in the guises of reformers or radicals. The new emphasis on private and public and on the gendering of space served at least as much to make women's activities visible as to restrict their scope.<sup>125</sup>

It is significant that, just as the conditions of "actual life" were irrevocably changing for women, the role of art also changed irrevocably. From being a tool of idealistic and didactic representation through which male (and to a lesser extent, female) artists could instruct, warn and chastise women, art became a tool that would not, in the highly formalist vein at least, concern itself with anything other than the creative genius and selective, superior vision of the (male) artist. It is tempting to speculate that, once the English bourgeois project to contain women as a separate and inferior group failed, artists turned to modes of art-making partly as a way of avoiding and undermining this new and troubling reality. I would argue that the focus of the moral imperative in England shifted at the turn of the twentieth century away from protecting the rights and privileges of middle and upper-class men, and towards

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<sup>125</sup> Caine 17.

highlighting the rights and oppression of women. Why would (male) artists – or critics – continue to expend their energies on a project that was no longer concerned with them?

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## Chapter Five

*pro fanus*

Why, everyone can see that an angel in a painting is no more than a woman with a dress, wings and a golden shield above her head.

T. J. Diffey<sup>1</sup>

Since that first visit to the Abbey's Heritage Vaults, I felt compelled to respond to the sculptural postulate on the surface of Bath's largest ecclesiastical building. From my research, it seems clear that there is a link between this sculptural detail, the history of prostitution in Bath, and a judgemental, class-blind and gender-biased Victorian sensibility. This sensibility, finding expression in the likes of Reverend Bolton and in the equally problematic Men's Committee, which oversaw the workings of the Bath Female Home and Penitentiary (see Chapter 4), was instrumental in the rendering of the falling angel and her placement on the Abbey. The angel's discursive function as a *fallen* angel, and by association, as an emblem for tarnished womanhood, arguably continues to operate today. Even if the representational strength of the icon has diminished in the hundred years since its affixation to the Abbey, the angel in question has a potential to "speak" about gender roles and inequities of a past time. That potential is as yet untapped, not surprisingly, given the dominant imperative in Bath to present the past in a narrow beam of celebratory light. Part of the process of appropriating this sculptural angel

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<sup>1</sup> Diffey 332.

for feminist art/historical purposes has been to borrow the elements of the discourse in question, particularly the elements that appeared the most benign: the wings.

To wing oneself, as I have found in past performance art projects, is to embark upon a complicated act of (self-)representation. The association of wings with the angelic is, for many viewers/participants, a positive and even entrancing connection. This connection is fraught for me with a certain historical tension, given the nineteenth-century symmetry between “good”/”fallen” angels and a concurrent, polarized notion of female morality. In Bath it was necessary to imbue my performance with historical detail in order to make manifest the mores that, in my opinion, made the addition of a fallen female angel on the façade of Bath’s largest church possible, desirable, perhaps inevitable. These details could, if presented through a critical challenge to the structure of middle class, heterosexual and patriarchal virtue, recast the fallen female angel as a falling winged woman – a different order of being entirely.

Integral to the attachment of wings to human form is a slip between worlds, between the possible and the thought-not-to-be-possible. This slip, while uncertain, untenable, irrational, is often lit with a charge of hope or fancy which appears to have outlived the sometimes inconsequential, sometimes alarming roles which angels have performed in Christian faith.<sup>2</sup> I do not mean to add to the bulk of

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the angel Mastema “works for God” as the “prince of evil, injustice, and condemnation.” God’s official tempter and executioner, Mastema appears in Exodus 4: 24ff, trying to murder Moses. Davidson 185.

writing that is available in enormous and saccharine volumes about angels.<sup>3</sup> Given that there is a substantial interest, fondness and fascination with angels (however market-proscribed), I decided to use the attention that this fascination generates for winged humans, to facilitate my amendments to the text of the west front of Bath Abbey.

In Halifax during the summer of 1998, and then in Montréal until the following fall of 1999, I worked on various projects involving wings, including a performance piece that had four collaborators in wings, climbing folding ladders on busy street corners at rush hour. I also made glow-in-the-dark wings for two hundred participants to wear during the Montréal chapter of the international feminist protest walk, Take Back the Night. At the Concordia University MFA studios, during an open house in 1997, I held the “fairy for a day” project in which I winged men and women who came through, and asked them to agree to be “fairies” in their newly winged guise. Most importantly, I worked with Katja Macleod Kessin, a fellow-student, to provide painting and sculpture workshops to a group of ex-residents of a Montréal woman’s shelter. The workshops and subsequent exhibition at the *Maison de la Culture, Notre Dame de Grace (Flight, November-December, 1999)* used the theme of “flight” as a polyvalent metaphor for the women’s experiences of survival. The wings we made, in various materials, became emblems for each woman’s personal and then, during the course of the collaboration, their creative agency.

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 1, footnote 73.

In each of these studio projects, I was exploring the viability and effect of appropriating the icon of the winged human, with all its angelic intonations, for feminist, performative, and at times, playful purposes. By far the most pivotal pieces dealing with the addition of wings to human form were *breathe/animer* and *Flight*. I discuss both projects in other chapters, and so here will simply say that the importance of these projects lay in the transformation that participants enacted, either through their corporeal selves or through the application of their creativity. In both cases, whether performing with wings or performing creativity through wings, the projects took on, for me, both an ethical and a political sheen that I discuss further in Chapter 9.

With these projects under my belt, and confident about the symbolic impact of wings on an audience, I made my way back to Bath in September 1999 to carry out a performance in front of Bath Abbey. The title of the work was *pro fanus*. I wished to draw from both the English-language inference of “profane”, or secular, and “profanity”, or blasphemy, irreverence. By separating the word into its Latin form, I also wanted to summon the classical intention of the term, which supposes a physical relationship with sacred space; “in front of the temple” is the literal translation of *pro fanus*. A search for the sacred architecture of Bath will quickly yield domestic as well as ecclesiastical buildings, given that the prominent Bath Abbey shares its status as a “temple” with the Circus, the Royal Crescent and Queen’s Square.

Historical women have not been included in the discussion of domestic space in Bath. Such space is unusual in Bath. Thanks to John Wood the Elder’s obsessive,



entrepreneurial activity, the notion of artistic vision frames domestic space, rendering it, in tourist, historical and architectural literature alike, as an architectural achievement of exceptional masculinity.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, historical women have not participated in the discussion of ecclesiastical space in Bath because such space is framed in Christian terms as the proper place of a morally superior masculinity, as made evident, locally, by the fallen female angel. I discuss this problem in detail in Chapter 3. Additionally, women do not figure into the story of Bath Abbey because of the persistence of the idea that women, historically, have not made or contributed to architecture of importance in a way that needs to be remembered. The discourse surrounding both types of architecture, sacred and profane, thus excludes women.

At the same time, however, as with domestic architecture, women in Bath obviously did contribute to the cultural and architectural fabric of the city. The Countess of Huntingdon built her non-conformist chapel at the height of the mid-eighteenth century building boom, while women engaged in the prostitution trade accounted, indirectly perhaps, for a key detail of the late-nineteenth-century restoration of Bath Abbey. The art work that I discuss in the pages ahead combines recognition of the contradictory nature of representations of women, a discursive flipping of the view of “Woman” depicted on the Abbey’s façade, and an attempt to

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<sup>4</sup> His obsession, however, where it coincides with attention to ornament or detail (such as in the decorative and narrative metopes on the Royal Circus) make him vulnerable to disdain. Sir John Summerson damns Wood with faint praise, and cautiously critical adjectives such as “curious”, “fundamentally unlearned”, “amateur” and “bizarre”. Summerson (1983) 390, 393.

practice – through performance – an art historical intervention. “Art historical intervention” might seem to be a contradiction in terms. I see my performance and art work as an extrapolation of the overriding concerns and methods of feminist art history, which addresses both marginal histories and analyses the mechanisms which rule out those histories. Feminists such as Lorraine Code, Susan Stanford Friedman and Catherine Hall see feminist historical work itself as an intervention in the exclusionary nature of the canon.<sup>5</sup>

The performance, *pro fanus*, would insist upon women’s participation in architecture, and engage directly with the lexicon of falling/sinful femininity that Sir Thomas Jackson’s masons had carved into the Abbey almost one hundred years earlier. I performed the work, which lasted twenty minutes, at dusk, two nights in a row. The piece consisted of my publicly speaking a text that I had inscribed into five, handmade books.<sup>6</sup> This text drew from tourist material, archival research into prostitution, and John Wood the Elder’s books and reputation. As I read this text, my movements revolved around, up, and down a five-foot high, collapsible, aluminum ladder. My movements also revolved around the books themselves, as once I had read the text aloud from each book, I placed the books on the ground in a circle between the ladder and the audience. (See fig. 5, 6, 7) Flashlights were an important symbolic element to the piece, as I used small flashlights to light my books. The flashlights helped me make literal “illuminating” gestures, to self-

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<sup>5</sup> Code (1995); Friedman (1998); Hall (1992).

<sup>6</sup> I have incorporated sections of this text into this chapter, in italics.

consciously draw attention to the fact that I wished to “shed light” on some standard texts, or narratives about Bath. Then, as the sky darkened, the torches became necessary tools for reading in the half-light. As I laid each book on the ground, I placed a torch into its open pages, so that it would shine towards the centre of what became a circle. As the circle and the performance continued, the beams of the torches created a small, floodlit effect on that circumscribed area on the ground. These gestures effectively established the circle as a space distinct from the Abbey courtyard, and like a fairy ring, implied that this was a space in which action – or magic – would take place.

Larger flashlights sat one on each shoulder in a muslin harness I had made which wrapped tightly around my chest. This harness emulated the kind of corset that was carved onto the fourth century, winged sculptural figures which are the focus of art historian, Gunnar Berrefelt’s troubled book, *A Study on the Winged Angel: The Origin of a Motif*. According to Berrefelt’s questionable logic, angels, as sexless beings, would have been articulated in the work of early Christian sculptors with no breasts. Berrefelt argues obsessively that the masculine gender would have been the only appropriate representational guise for an angel. He assumes that fourth century sculptors shared his views, and used a stylized corset to differentiate between female, pagan sculptures and male, “sexless” angels. I need not belabor the problematic aspects of Berrefelt’s argument, but I will point out that such arguments are part of a long trajectory of thought that posits femininity as the antithesis to spirituality and divine transcendence. The angel on the façade of Bath Abbey contradicts this trajectory. However, “she” may only be seen – enabled – to do so

after a discursive manoeuvre has been set in place to acknowledge and challenge the moral precepts that put her there. At that point, it is necessary to ask if inclusion in a vision of spiritual transcendence, such transcendence being always already inscribed within the phallogocentric discourse of “spirit”, would be either affirmative for, or desirable to, women at all.<sup>7</sup>

I intended the performance as a means of troubling my audience with such a question. In addition to inferring the broader implications of the falling female angel, I wanted specifically to challenge the particular supposition on Bath Abbey’s sculptural façade in terms of the local history of prostitution. For this work, I wanted to visually identify myself with the fallen female angel, as a way of making my position clear, and as a way of associating my corporeality, my physical, speaking and thinking self with the politics of representation in evidence on the Abbey. Hence the corset, and the decision to wear off-white, a colour not dissimilar from the shade of ochre of the Abbey’s masonry. (All elements, including my clothing, the books, the side bags I used to carry my materials, were either Off-white or unbleached cotton muslin.)

I fashioned my corset/shoulder harness, as a private dig at Berefelt, to emphasize my chest area, not flatten it. The large torches cast beams out from my shoulders, alluding to wings rather than being themselves actual wings. A thread ran through my performance of taking issue with and making a claim on the territory of

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<sup>7</sup> I am thinking here of Luce Irigaray’s notion of participating in an “economy of the same”. See Irigaray (1985) 157.

the angelic, and re-mapping that territory. By identifying myself with the angel and criticizing the structure of morality that defined a woman's worth by her sexual habits, I wished to recast the angel in a more complicated light. I wanted to show that the terms, "good/bad", would not suffice, given the historical contingencies of prostitution in Bath in the nineteenth century. I wanted the audience to feel some confusion as to what angels "ought" to be, and what the link made through the sculpture on the Abbey was actually saying about women and the angelic. The initial illogic of linking the sculptural angel with women's social history and the jewels in Bath's architectural crown would, I hoped, prompt questions about my motives that would shift that disjunction into larger musings about Bath's history and what a visitor or resident "knows" of this city. I wished to ask my audience, did the debate that raged over women's virtue obstruct other discussions, about women's constitutive role in Bath's history, its literature, philanthropy, art and architecture?

On another level, I wanted the performance to suggest a parallel between the accountability of the heritage industry in Bath and the accountability of the individual, suggesting to my audience that their "looking" or "visiting" could be an active, informed process that recognizes architecture as a product in the dynamics of cultural capital.<sup>8</sup> *Pro fanus* explicitly equated an accountable or responsible

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<sup>8</sup> The confidence I have in the audience as potential participants in their own cultural experience means that I share some common ground with Lucy Lippard, Suzanne Lacy and Mary Jane Jacob, who have all written about, curated, organized or produced art that attempts to expand the categories of "artist" and "art". These women premise this expansion on the idea that, as Jacob says, "Contemporary art can matter", that is, "it can move the beholder, relate to and be a useful and necessary part of many people's lives". Mary Jane Jacob, *Conversations at the Castle: Changing Audiences and Contemporary Art*, eds. Mary Jane Jacob and Michael Brenson (Cambridge, Mass., &

humanity with a “divine” humanity, suggesting that the category of “angel”, if used as a romantic or moral measure by which women are judged, might be missing the larger point of social inequity which I feel to be deeply imbricated in the fabric of Bath Abbey. “Angel” could, however, be fruitfully seen as a categorical shorthand for the role that humans – women and men – sometimes take on when they attempt to address inequity, right here on earth, right now, in human – humane – terms.

The performance was advertised, however, the Abbey courtyard is generally a fairly populated place, with open-air restaurants, a concert room, evening events at the Abbey, the Roman Baths and the Pump Room all within a thirty-foot radius. Audience members for *pro fanus* included those who had seen the advertising and those who had not. Tours, which regularly begin and conclude in the courtyard, added to the numbers in the audience in an unpredictable pattern. Thus some observers would hear sections of the performance during which I spoke about eighteenth-century architecture, while others would hear me describe nineteenth-century, working-class Bath; others still would hear my synopsis of Grace Jantzen’s arguments in *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion*. The courtyard is also a popular site for street performers and buskers; thus, my presence as a “performer” was not unusual, if my dialogue was.

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London, England: MIT Press, 1998) 17. See also by the same author, “An Unfashionable Audience” in *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, ed. Suzanne Lacy (USA: Bay Press, 1995) 50-59; Suzanne Lacy, “Seeing Mud Houses” in *Accidental Audience: Urban Interventions by Artists*, ed. Kim Pruesse (Canada: Ontario Arts Council, 1999) 68-74; Lucy Lippard, “Looking Around: Where We Are, Where We Could Be” in *Mapping the Terrain* 114-130.

As I spoke, I continually cross-referenced the fallen “female” angel with the way in which women’s history is not easily accessible in Bath, and the way in which the architectural narrative of Bath privileges and promotes a view of Bath that, by revisiting familiar sites of male achievement, ignores or erases women’s and working-class history. My movements paralleled the narration, as I climbed the ladder when speaking about the architectural credentials of the city, and descended it when acknowledging marginal histories, or asking questions which attempted to engage the implications of the representation of a female body on the west front of the Abbey.

*Words are crucial to architecture. A king will say “build” and so a church rises from the rubble of a lost civilization. Back in the fifteenth century, Bishop Oliver King had a dream in which angels climbed up and down a ladder to heaven...Every guide book to Bath will mention these famous angels. But they don’t answer the obvious question: why would angels need a ladder? Isn’t it the human who needs help to reach “heaven”?*

*[Run up ladder.]*

As the performance progressed, and it became clearer that my aim was not to further eulogize Bath’s Georgian architecture; I planned these ascents and descents to subvert the axiomatic synonymy of up with “good” and down with “bad”.

Each time I opened a book, a generous handful of white feathers tucked inside the first page of text fluttered out into the performance area. As the feathers lifted in the wind and scattered at the audience’s feet, they acted as an uncontrollable agent in the process of the piece. In contrast to the books and flashlights, carefully laid in a circle, and my obviously choreographed movements,

the feathers wafted and settled on the whim of the wind. As they caught in the air currents, twisted and always fell, these feathers were a gentle rebuke of John Wood the Elder's impossible, if poetic, desire for "flight". In a lyrical and light-handed way, they further added a material quality to the information I gave regarding the high Victorian moral sensibility that led, as I believe, to the placement of the fallen female angel on the west front.

In the performance, I attempted to draw attention, through the ephemerality of the torchlight, and the uncontrollable yet fragile nature of the unleashed feathers, to fugitive elements which do not find themselves at home in architectural history. For example, I drew attention to the sulphurous smell of the Roman Baths, just steps away from the performance.

*Perhaps you detect a touch of sulphur from the Baths. If we were in the eighteenth century, we might be able to smell the Avon from here, too. Not the river, but the street. Avon Street was profoundly unfashionable by the late eighteenth century for its unmistakable stench of poverty.*

*[sink to knees]*

From this point in the narration, I discuss Corn Street, Milk Street and Avon Streets, which, as I told my audience,

*composed a dense and vilified region of Bath, where prostitutes, criminals and the very poor lived and worked...The widows of the tanners were the most reviled members of society, even more than the scores of rural women who came to Bath in search of work and became prostitutes in order to survive. The vast numbers of women in the sex trade became one of Georgian Bath's greatest attractions.*

*[touch ground]*



*The question arises: are these stones monuments to the Georgian era, or are they the unofficial monuments to a long century of backbreaking labour? What does it take to become divine?...Stone, and a grave. Gravity. But in Bath it also took legions of low-paid stonecutters, cheap domestic labour and cheaper sex. Without these foundations, Bath would never have looked so good.*

Through the insertion of statistics into my performance regarding the high numbers of pregnant, unmarried women who sought Poor Relief in the eighteenth century<sup>9</sup> I was able to include an aspect of women's history which should, in my opinion, complicate the vision Bath currently sells to its visitors. Having discussed both prostitution and the moral climate of the historical moment in which Thomas Jackson installed the fallen female angel on the West front, my audience reacted noticeably when I told them that in 1851, almost 2500 women's means of survival was unaccounted for. But, as I added, they did survive.<sup>10</sup>

Part of my project was to inflect the façade of architecture in Bath with a sense that there is more to the story than what we as tourists receive. Having done that – and it was not difficult – I also wanted to speak of prostitution in a way that did not relegate its reception to either a sucked in, shocked breath, nor a voyeuristic

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<sup>9</sup> According to Neale, of the total number of applicants for Poor Relief in Bath between 1763 and 1774, “women constituted two-thirds, while pregnant, single or abandoned women constitute over half of that number” (1981) 72.

<sup>10</sup> According to the 1851 census, there were 32 517 women living in Bath (as opposed to 21 737 men). There were 12 266 women registered as having employment, and 14 747 unmarried and widowed women. Even if all married women had the full economic support of their husbands (which they did not), this still leaves a figure of 2481 unspecified in terms of subsistence. This is not to say that married women were never prostitutes, or that single women with no obvious means of support can be assumed to be prostitutes, but rather to indicate the size of the margin of the unknown with regard to this question. See Neale (1981) 276-277.

leer towards the past, into what might for some visitors have been a more interesting time in Bath. Rather, I wanted to summon a vision of what might have driven women to prostitution – necessity and choice – and how that need to survive may have transformed into an ability to survive, independently of a male “guardian”. This ability was, I imagine, something that not all women were willing to forgo, once experienced. I give more space to the complexities that surround prostitution as an empowering and oppressive practice in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. For now, as in the moment of the performance, I am borrowing some of the respect normally reserved for the holy male trinity of Bath’s founding, Nash, Wood and Allen, and offer it to the women who also contributed to Bath’s history, and more importantly, survived within it.

The moment of offering came when I shifted my language about the figure in question on the Abbey. No longer describing her as a “fallen, female angel”, I began to describe her as a “falling, winged woman”, further emphasizing the difference in signification that her details of hair, body and position summon:

*My real question is, who built Bath? ...A winged woman falls to earth while angels climb. She is a symbol of the silences and sacrifices that architecture requires to be solid. If the stones began to speak of the pain they have witnessed, if homes began to talk of the suffering they have housed, could “architecture” still rise?*

About two months before finalizing my performance plans, I had had a discussion with Dr. Rosemary Hale, my advisor in the field of the History and Philosophy of Religion. In speaking with her about the sculpture on the façade of Bath Abbey, I

outlined a provisional sketch of my plans for the performance. At that time, I had been intending to conclude the performance with myself perched at the top of the ladder, to symbolically reverse the direction of the angel's fall through my own body. During our conversation, I told Dr. Hale that my real desire was to conclude the performance by flying away, and that by not flying away, was I not letting the angel on the Abbey "down"? Her suggestion to me was to reformulate the performance in such a way that, through the intervention offered by the piece, the angel would no longer fall but rather, the woman would *decide* to come down.

*Does the winged woman fall? Or does she choose to come to earth? There is such a lot to be done down here. Architecture can no longer indulge in sacrifice for the sake of immortality. We cannot afford a view of the divine which allows suffering as "God's will." If we were divine, what would we do? We would create – art, architecture, cities, societies, children – and we would be responsible for what we make...The winged woman on the Abbey cannot afford to fall. She must come down to earth of her own volition.*

Dr. Hale helped me to further my reconstruction of this sculptural figure, from a representation of failed femininity into an emblem for the many women of Bath who made difficult, devastating, and empowering choices. In reconceptualizing the "female angel" as a "winged woman", *pro fanus* began to register the historical agency of women that is the object of this entire doctoral project. To attempt to [up]right the wrongs of history is, to paraphrase Marguerite Duras, to waste a great deal of time<sup>11</sup> and perhaps ultimately, to miss the point.

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<sup>11</sup> "I think that the women who can get beyond the feeling of having to correct history will save a lot of time." Quoted in Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 146.

*Just as being outside the church allows you [all] to see its façade most clearly, what we should never forget about being on the earth is that it is one of the best places from which to see the sky. And only on earth can one imagine what it is – and could be – to be human.*

Even if I were able to physically reach up the north ladder on the West front of Bath Abbey, and take that falling, winged woman in my arms, turn her “right” side up, and re-affix her to her place – or perhaps even higher – on the ladder, what good would it do? It might make her look like a “good” angel, a “good” woman to the Victorian audience for whom she was intended. But this is no longer Victoria’s England, and visitors come from all over the world to Bath, with little or no sense of the cultural baggage this sculpture carries as she falls, perpetually, down the sandstone façade of the Abbey.

Attempting to right the wrongs of history is a project I am often drawn to, but fails to grasp the opportunity offered by the wrongs of history to comment upon the structures and beliefs which perpetuate similar wrongs today. The temptation to “fix” history is there, of course, with emblems as rich and frustrating as the falling, winged woman on Bath Abbey. However, it is important to recognize that such emblems are contradictory, and in their contradiction, are intricate exceptions to the supposed hegemony of middle class, patriarchal values and the parallel subjugation of middle- and working-class women. As Mary Poovey writes,

Representations of gender constituted one of the sites on which ideological systems were simultaneously constructed and contested; as

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such...representations of gender...were themselves contested images, the sites at which struggles for authority occurred, as well as the locus of assumptions used to underwrite the very authority that authorized these struggles.<sup>12</sup>

Thus the representation of “woman” on the West front may be re-read as a simultaneous construction and contestation of “femininity”. Furthermore, this figure is not simply a document of these contradictions. Re-read in this way, she is transformed into an unintentionally commemorative sculpture. “She” remembers the particular circumstances of women who chose to become prostitutes in nineteenth-century Bath, to whose Victorian commentators prostitution was a widespread and abhorrent trade. The angel/woman could and should be better deployed today as a pedagogical tool, one that would express something of the complexity of women’s material existence and daily choices in late-nineteenth-century Bath, and furthermore, inscribe these elements of women’s history into the ever-privileged spaces of art and architectural history. David Summers writes,

It is possible to reconsider the history of art so that it becomes a much more collective history of the making and building of human culture, as well as a record of the preservation of the whole panoply of human possibilities, a history and record in which the contributions of women may be much more visible...we think of the past as a prelude to the future...<sup>13</sup>

In my performance, I sought to draw links between a little-known and certainly uncelebrated part of Bath’s social history, prostitution, and the ways in

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<sup>12</sup> Poovey, Mary. *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (London: Virago, 1989) 3.

<sup>13</sup> Summers 408.

which the 1895 restoration of Bath Abbey's west front interred the necessary contradictions, for many women of the middle and working classes, between financial need, the desire for propriety, and the complicated pleasures of independence. Furthermore, *pro fanus* attempted discursively to shift the Victorian association of femininity with the angelic, towards an understanding of femininity as something that is historically and discursively constructed here on earth. I concluded my performance, as I conclude this chapter, emphasizing that wings attached to human form may be less an invocation to "be like angels" but more to be divinely human. If, as I believe, the difference between the two is again the decision to engage with the irreducible realities of earthly existence, then the falling, winged woman is further a metaphor for the feminist histories that still need to be written here and now.

## Chapter Six

### The Bath Female Home and Penitentiary

The urban space is thus one huge map that requires special decoding and interpreting skills; in the hands of...artists the city also becomes text, a signifying artifact.

Rosi Braidotti <sup>1</sup>

The River Avon is perhaps sixty feet away from where I sit, writing part of this chapter in Bath. When here, I stay in a low-lying neighborhood of Bath, once called Bathwick Estate. Now simply “Bathwick,” this neighbourhood adjoins the older part of Bath by two bridges which cross the Avon: Pulteney Bridge of 1774 (Robert Adam) and Cleveland Bridge of 1827 (Henry Edmund Goodridge). Between these bridges, on the steep western bank of the Avon is Walcot Parish, which takes its name from Walcot Street, still a major artery in Bath today. This is a long, uphill road, stretching from the Hilton Hotel downtown, northwards to a junction with Roman Road. From my window, I cannot see Walcot Street itself, but I can see the lovely Walcot Gate Chapel, a diminutive and sweetly Gothic funerary chapel which now houses temporary exhibits by local artists. (Fig. 39) Above its brief turret reaches the spire of St. Swithin’s, the only Neo-classical church built in the century known for its Georgian architecture. Local builder and carpenter,

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<sup>1</sup> Braidotti 20.

Thomas Jelly, who worked with his partner, architect John Palmer, on major commissions such as St. Swithin's, Bladud's Buildings, and St. James, built St. Swithin's.<sup>2</sup>

In 1757, at the age of sixteen, one Sarah Wheeler became an apprenticed servant in a Bathford household. From there, at the age of twenty-three, Wheeler moved to Bath to work for £4 a year for Thomas Jelly.<sup>3</sup> Just over a year later, Wheeler applied for Poor Relief, having conceived a pregnancy with Thomas Collett, one of Jelly's apprentices.<sup>4</sup> It is no exaggeration to suggest that Wheeler's life, hard as it must have been as a servant in the eighteenth century, became much harder once she became pregnant out of wedlock. The few means of survival available to women who "fell" from a state of sexual purity and thus fell from a state of social acceptability were Poor Relief, personal charity and prostitution. In Walcot Parish, at the time of Wheeler's application for relief, 65% of the applicants for assistance were women, and of that number, almost half were single mothers, or married and abandoned.<sup>5</sup> While I do not know what happened to Sarah Wheeler, hers is one of the names that can forge a link between the architectural history of Bath, and the history of the forgotten women of Bath.

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<sup>2</sup> Reverend J. Bolton became rector of St. James, now demolished, at the end of the nineteenth century. See Chapter 4.

<sup>3</sup> Neale (1981) 73.

<sup>4</sup> "Examinations before Justices of the Peace," Guildhall Archives, Bath.

<sup>5</sup> Neale (1981) 72.



It is men who articulate the history of prostitution in Bath, via institutions in which they held women's chastity to be the most important aspect of their selfhood.<sup>6</sup> Either ignored as an inevitable if regrettable aspect of urban life, or unapologetically endorsed by the men who enjoyed this particular attraction of Bath, prostitution did not raise as many eyebrows at the time of Sarah Wheeler's pregnancy as it was to do in the century to come. Prostitution acquired a different form in the local consciousness as the Victorian era wore on and Bath's official character was less a haven for pleasure-seekers and more a retirement town for older, middle-class citizens. It was inevitable, given Bath's sharp population increase over the eighteenth century, that prostitution rose as a practice during the Georgian era in Bath. Whether or not that practice continued to grow during the nineteenth century is difficult to surmise, particularly as the population increase leveled out at mid century. There is no doubt, however, that as early as 1805, prostitution and the diseases associated with it had become a moral problem in the minds of the more affluent members of society. By the end of the nineteenth century, prostitution was a scourge that threatened the very fabric of society for a middle-class who hoped to live in a prosperous and proper city, the shadows of its prized architectural vernacular free of corruption.

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<sup>6</sup> See John Parish's reports for the Bath Female Home and Penitentiary from the years 1816-1826. Each year the governing Committee was all male, and despite the practical, organizational sense in which women actually did most of the work of running the Penitentiary, decisions had to have this all-male Committee's stamp of approval. The *Asylum for Penitent Prostitutes: Minutes of the Committee, October 6, 1805 - December 6, 1811* document the organizing structure for the Bath Penitentiary, which was completely standard for its time. See Prochaska 143-44.

As architectural, social and local amateur history have suggested, Bath began in the nineteenth century to care for its public image in terms of middle-class respectability.<sup>7</sup> Seeking to attract home buyers in the wake of Bath's popularity as a spa, reform workers, horrified citizens and local businesses began to put increasing if uneven pressure upon the bureaucratic and ecclesiastical powers of Bath to rid the streets of disruption, petty crime and vice.<sup>8</sup> The Bath Chreche was a charitable organization set up in the early nineteenth century to help feed babies of "respectable" mothers. Paradoxically, the clients had to be able to afford the two shillings fee to benefit from this charity. Not surprisingly, the Bath Chreche took in fewer than twenty babies per day – a low number given Bath's population in 1881 of 51 814.<sup>9</sup> This low number of users of the charity can further be explained by the mission statement addendum, that "only the children of respectable mothers were [to be] received, on the recommendation of Bible women."<sup>10</sup> Respectable meant, obviously, married.

So where might someone like Sarah Wheeler go? Social custom demanded that unmarried women servants who became pregnant while "in service" be "let go"; society deemed that the punishments of poverty and degradation were

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<sup>7</sup> See Jackson (1991); Crofts (1982); Neale (1974, 1981); Davis (1990) and Davis and Bonsall (1996).

<sup>8</sup> See Jackson, Crofts, Davis and Neale, as above. These efforts had precedents. Bath's healing waters and sick poor led Lady Elizabeth Hastings in 1716 to urge "leading figures" of Bath to establish a hospital that would care for those who could not afford personal physicians. See Adrian Ball, *Yesterday in Bath: A Camera Record 1849-1949* (Bath: Pitman Publishing, 1972) 18.

<sup>9</sup> Crofts 53.

<sup>10</sup> Crofts 38.

appropriate for the crime committed. No such punishment would befall the man who impregnated the woman. The impropriety of a servant becoming pregnant out of wedlock was compounded by the decrease in her ability to perform her duties. As local historian, Marta Inskip commented, there was no economic motivation for a householder to keep a woman in service once she became pregnant.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, pregnancy out of wedlock was the irreducible evidence that the woman in question was not to be depended upon to uphold the delicate system of propriety which insisted upon discretion if not chastity in matters of sex. Not all middle and upper-class individuals were bound by these views, however. The end of the tumultuous eighteenth century, marked by economic extremes, brought a number of citizens of Bath to look beyond their fear of shame by association to found philanthropic societies. Those hoping for increased social prestige could, through monetary support, keep their involvement to a minimum and still appear benevolent. The period between 1790 and 1811 saw the birth of fourteen philanthropic associations in Bath, and marked a shift in the way that Bath attended to its poor and disadvantaged populace.<sup>12</sup>

The heyday of Bath as the pleasure-ground of the *ton*, as most architectural and social historians agree, was over by 1805, when Bath founded what Graham Davis and Penny Bonsall have called its “most important charity”, originally titled,

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<sup>11</sup> Conversation with Marta Inskip, 13 July 2000, Bath.

<sup>12</sup> Davis, “Beyond the Georgian Façade” 148-151; see also Davis and Bonsall, page 50 regarding philanthropy in Bath and Chapter 4 in “The City of Genteel Residence, 1820-1914” 63-86.

“The Society for the Suppression of Common Vagrants and Imposters, the relief of Occasional Distress, and the Encouragement of the Industrious Poor.”<sup>13</sup> In that same year, John Parish founded another charity, the Bath Female Home and Penitentiary, at 112 Walcot Street in a building now known as “Ladymead House.” (Fig. 40) This charity grew steadily over the nineteenth century and is a reflection of the gendered strata of mores and society, which made the woman who used the charity “the most degraded of her sex”.<sup>14</sup> Condemnation and compassion cleave together in the texts and annual reports produced by the Committee, finding an echo in the architectural amendments made over the years to the exterior of the Penitentiary, which like many institutions, occupied the identity of both a home and a prison.

As Davis puts it, in Bath in the early nineteenth century, “[c]ontemporary commentators, despite bursts of humanitarian feeling and genuine concern, operated within an unshakeable moral framework.”<sup>15</sup> That moral framework, and philanthropic attempts to address the issue of prostitution within that framework, are primary concerns in this chapter. My interest in the history of Ladymead House in Bath takes three forms in this thesis. A performance work I undertook in July 2000 was an attempt to commemorate the lives and work of the women who were residents of the Bath Female Home, Penitentiary and Lock Hospital. This institution was a home for “fallen women,” operational between the 1805 and 1914. In this

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<sup>13</sup> Davis and Bonsall 50.

<sup>14</sup> John Parish, “To the Public” in *Bath Penitentiary and Lock Hospital* (Bath: Richard Cruttwell, 1816) 9.

<sup>15</sup> Davis, “Beyond the Georgian Façade” 144.

work, *fallen/winged*, I suggested that these women should be remembered without moral judgement, through their work, both within the Penitentiary and without, as evidence of choices made within oppressive systems, rather than simply the evidence of oppression. The description of the piece, woven together with relevant experiences I had while undertaking research on this subject, comprises this chapter. Following this, in Chapter 7 I am concerned with how nineteenth-century moral structures, which defined appropriate roles for women and expressions of female sexuality played out in the history of the Bath Female Home and Penitentiary. I also address the architecture of the house, from its earliest known form through various changes that marked its transformation into an institution, a role that the building has only recently discontinued. This chapter serves as background material to Chapter 8, in which I present the fragmentary evidence of a history of work at the Penitentiary. In doing so, I demonstrate the ways in which those women characterized either as the victims or perpetrators of prostitution undermined those obdurate extremes. This history of work suggests how prostitution was neither simply a matter of innate evil in men or women, but rather the choice of women with very little choice.

Across the Cleveland Bridge and roughly a quarter of a mile south and down river from where I stay when in Bath, there is a large, yellow building situated close to the roadside of Walcot Street. (See fig. 40, 41) I first encountered this building in

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1992 on my initial visit to Bath, during a walking tour of the city with my sister. We were told that this building had a long history, reaching back before Bath's popularity as a spa, and was now a highly coveted residence for senior citizens. The fieldstone courtyard, refurbished Neo-classical additions and long green lawns reaching gracefully down to the River Avon seemed to exude great peace and calm. (Fig. 41) A resident would, from the east windows, see the first of the morning sun, and look on the downward slope of a quiet, green and relatively large property towards the river. The west front of the building remains connected to Walcot Street, a winding, busy concourse packed with pubs, shops, residences and churches. In the summer of 2000, in search of Bath's two reform homes for prostitutes, I came across this old-age residence again, now called "Ladymead House" after its earliest known name.

A small plaque on the wall that separates the courtyard from Walcot Street informs the visitor that this is a retirement home. The century-long history of the building as an institution in which prostitutes would "reform" through work and religious instruction is nowhere visible on ground level. The narrowness of Walcot Street at Ladymead House means that only a visitor in search of a hint to the building's past would find the words "Bath Penitentiary" ineffectually chiseled into the cornice of the west front of the building. Likewise, the other reform home for women in Bath, the Asylum for Teaching Young Women Household Work, at Gay's Hill and Belgrave Crescent, is identifiable through an inscription on the building's west front, but this is a side that is only visible from the next street to the west, between houses. (Fig. 42) Letters large or not, the two buildings in Bath which have

an undeniable connection to women's history are now, through their conversion into/reversion to residential spaces, relieved of a burden of history that might cause embarrassment, or demand further questions of a society and a city that continue to ignore the cultural contributions of women in favour of their value as sexual commodities. However, like a suppressed voice that rises to the surface, troublingly and unexpectedly, Bath's history of prostitution leaks into the simple experience of visiting the local art gallery.

The Victoria Art Gallery of Bath, where Robert Adam's Pulteney Bridge meets Bridge Street, is a fifteen minute walk from Ladymead House. The ground floor is devoted to local, travelling and contemporary exhibits, while the upper gallery spaces are customarily devoted to paintings and objects of local interest. On my way up, I stop on the solemn wide stairwell, at the landing. I look in astonishment at the two massive paintings. These paintings mark the visitor's transition from a space that demarcates transient, current culture to the space intended to reflect Bath's local, historical culture. On the left hangs *Death of Cleopatra* (Gennari, 1730, Fig. 43), a heavily-framed, four by five foot painting in dark oils, dark except for Cleopatra's white and naked body, turned to the viewer for delectation as she holds the phallic snake close to her breasts, and turns her face upwards in an ecstatic agony. The label tells me this image, painted by Benedetto Gennari, circa 1730, was a donation accepted in 1903. To Cleopatra's immediate right hangs *The Sinner* (John Collier, 1904, Fig. 44). A Gallery purchase of 1906, this large, shadowy oil painting also uses the bulk of its pictorial space for the body of a woman. Like Cleopatra, darkness surrounds this woman engulfed in distress, a

woman whose physical form suggests only abandonment (in all senses). Unlike Cleopatra, this woman has clothes, dressed in the fashion of a middle-class Edwardian woman. Unlike Cleopatra, she has no name; she is only “The Sinner”. By her despairing expression – interestingly similar to Cleopatra’s expression of ecstasy – and the desperate thrust of her corseted bosom against the confessional box at her side, it is clear that this woman has made the worst error a woman can, by the standards of her time. While the pagan Cleopatra ends her life as a result of passion gone wrong, the nameless woman clinging to the confessional has fallen beyond the point of recuperation. In a social and spiritual sense, she too is already dead.

The *Death of Cleopatra* represents the woman within *The Sinner* at the unrecorded moment of the latter’s moral crime, stricken by love and/or lust for a man, willing to forgo her entire life for the moment of passion. The woman in each painting is an essay in the ways that women were supposed to resist desires of their flesh, to live through their “higher” (non-corporeal) instincts. Both paintings make heavy-handed statements about female sexuality, virtue and passion, female lack of control and reason, etc. More interestingly, these paintings also describe, indexically, the role of men in relation to the female potential to fall. I cannot ignore the rough historical parentheses these paintings strike around the period of Ladymead House’s tenure as a “home” for “fallen women”, nor the ways in which both paintings proclaim and savour the “problem” of female sexuality. For me, what these paintings describe is the fascination men had for the notion of a woman completely out of control, a woman adrift in the realm of desire. Given that the



object of this desire was expected to be men, this visual thesis was an understandably popular theme for men to paint and for male art enthusiasts to purchase.<sup>16</sup>

It is notable that the Victoria Art Gallery acquired both paintings within a year, and that *The Sinner* was a purchase and not a gift. It is regrettable that the Gallery has elected a century later to hang them side by side with no interpretative comment on the context of the images' production as they relate to either local or general women's history. Without even moving them, the paintings could be critically recoded, to provide a counter thesis to the myth of uncontrollable, destructive sexuality in women, as the images' underpinnings lie not in any tongue-clicking truth about female passions but in a widely accepted, heterosexual male obsession with the figure of the prostitute.<sup>17</sup> This fascination, while having a national and even international character, also has particular ramifications for the researcher who looks for the history of prostitution in Bath. Misogynist Victorian ideals of feminine sexuality are, sadly, not quite dead. I think that if they were, interest in subjects such as prostitution would be more readily and critically expressed.<sup>18</sup> The paintings in the stairwell of the Victoria Art Gallery in Bath could be utilized as richly problematic images, well-entrenched in their historical moment

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Nochlin 57-85.

<sup>17</sup> See Walkowitz (1993).

<sup>18</sup> In R. J. Morris' essay, "Voluntary Societies and British Urban Elites", for example, the author fails to even mention prostitution as a site of philanthropic interest, despite the heated concern for the subject during the time frame of the study. See Peter Borsay, ed., *The Eighteenth-Century Town: A Reader in English Urban History, 1688-1820* (London and New York, Longman: 1990) 338-366.

of production. The lack of an analytical perspective accompanying the images of *The Death of Cleopatra* and *The Sinner*, however, contributes to the generalized, mutually constitutive and persistent tropes of ideal female purity, innate fallibility and “Woman’s” (desired) potential for wantonness.

Not far away from the two offending paintings, but inside the formal space of the second-level gallery, an oil painting of 1730 hangs between works by Paul Nash and Thomas Gainsborough. A creamy white, four-story house and large formal garden occupy the main compositional space of a wild and romantic landscape, painted in what might be called a naïve style. (Fig. 45) In the same year Gennari painted *The Death of Cleopatra*, an unknown artist painted this image of a building that was to become a home for “fallen” women: women who had committed just the sort of sin that brought Collier’s female subject to the confessional. Like the smoke that wavers upwards from the house’s three chimneys, at the foreground of the painting – the bottom of the canvas – the slight figures of boaters, sailors and people fishing add hints of daily life to an otherwise dreamlike image. The sunlight which rakes sharply from the upper left of the canvas, across the trees and hills behind the house, adds a pale yellow luminosity to the clouds, but does not cause the house to cast shadows, nor does it find any effect in the cypress, orange and lemon trees in the garden.<sup>19</sup> The little figures hemming the river and perched lightly in boats gliding by suggest that these forms, like the trees and sky,

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<sup>19</sup> David McLaughlin identifies these plants in “Saving Bath” in *Guidelines 50* (October 1994): 19.

are subject to the vitality of nature, light and wind. The utter stillness of house and garden, however, indicate that human control and order have quieted the natural forces otherwise at work in the painting. As Stewart Harding and David Lambert write, “[t]he only plants which were allowed to grow naturally [at Ladymead House] appear to have been the climbers on the walls of the house.”<sup>20</sup> Even the smoke trailing from the sturdy chimneys has only the slightest drift to the left, unlike the sail and tippet of the boat directly below, which are fully swollen with air.

This painting is dated circa 1730, and attributed to “a British artist” in the didactic panel accompanying its display. In his text for the Mayor’s Guides’ journal for October, 1994, the City of Bath’s conservation architect, David McLaughlin, records his discovery of the painting in a corridor during an inspection of Ladymead House.<sup>21</sup> McLaughlin secured the gift of the painting to the Victoria Art Gallery in the late 1970s, when it was cleaned, restored and exhibited at the Rijks Museum in Paleis Het Loo (1988), and in the exhibition “The Anglo-Dutch Garden in the Age of William and Mary”, at Christie’s in London (1989).<sup>22</sup> Despite all the care and attention recently given to this lovely painting, there has been no successful attempt

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<sup>20</sup> Stewart Harding and David Lambert, eds., *Parks and Gardens of Avon* (Bristol: Avon Gardens Trust, 1994) 28.

<sup>21</sup> Apparently, the painting had, prior to the 1970s, been in the attic. Acquisition notes from the file on *Ladymead House*, Victoria Art Gallery, Bath.

<sup>22</sup> McLaughlin (1994) 19.

at attribution thus far.<sup>23</sup> Through the conservation process, however, the date 1730 is now attached to the painting, as is the conviction that the house in the image is actually the same 1680s house whose plan can be traced in the much-altered Ladymead of today. McLaughlin writes that his “survey revealed the survival of the original plan form of the 1680s house at the lower ground floor level of the present building as well as several other architectural features...”<sup>24</sup>

The opinion that the house in the image is the precursor to the building on Walcot Street is not unanimously held. For example, local historian Marta Inskip feels that McLaughlin’s promotion of the painting as an important artifact for architectural history in Bath glosses certain inconsistencies between the structures described in the image and information available from leases in the Bath City Archives.<sup>25</sup> She further pointed out that McLaughlin’s claim in his short essay about Ladymead House that she, Inskip, “found archive leases dating back on this site to the 1400s” is untrue.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Through my consultation of the painting’s file and with the assistant curator, Kirsty Hartsiosis, at the Victoria Art Gallery (July 13, 2000), it appears that interest in the painting is limited to its status as one of the few images of pre-Georgian Bath.

<sup>24</sup> McLaughlin, *Ladymead House, Walcot Street*. Exhibition catalogue, Department of Architecture and Planning of Bath City Council. Bath: Bath City Council, 1977.

<sup>25</sup> Conversation with Marta Inskip, July 13, 2000, Bath.

<sup>26</sup> McLaughlin: 18; conversation with Marta Inskip, July 13, 2000. Inskip’s extensive research, which she generously shared with me in July 2000, has led to the cataloguing of leases dating no earlier than 1625, when the site was only a pasture. In my comparison of the lease plan from 1753 (Fig. 46) with the painting, I found a substantial number of matching features of both house and grounds which I discuss in Chapter 7. To my mind, the question of whether the painting may reasonably be claimed as part of the history of Ladymead House is less important than the nature of its discovery and McLaughlin’s ardent pursuit of its donation to the Victoria Art Gallery.

While I agree with McLaughlin that “the building and its history deserve detailed examination”, his overt emphasis on Ladymead House being a building that “may well embrace fragments of one the [sic] earliest surviving buildings in Bath” is, to my mind, missing the building’s history entirely.<sup>27</sup> McLaughlin’s personal interest in Ladymead House has led him to publish two articles on this subject. In 1977, the Department of Architecture and Planning of Bath City Council published a catalogue accompanying an exhibition in which McLaughlin featured his new discovery along with reconstruction drawings of the various stages of the building’s development.<sup>28</sup> Then in 1994, for the more informal *Guidelines*, McLaughlin wrote again about Ladymead.<sup>29</sup> In the earlier article, McLaughlin devotes most of his text to the philanthropy that marked the lion’s share of Ladymead’s history. In the later publication, however, he makes no mention of Ladymead’s history as a home for “fallen” women and instead emphasizes his role in rescuing the painting, and the painting’s subsequent progress. While this may be attributed to the more personal tone of the piece overall, I believe there is a further significance to this writerly emphasis. In the 1994 article, McLaughlin writes with excitement about the discovery, rescue, cleaning and presentation of the painting to the Victoria Art Gallery. He also elaborates on the travelling exhibition in which it featured in 1989,

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<sup>27</sup> According to Ms. Inskip’s unpublished research, the first mention of a house on the Ladymead site can be found in 1661, in the lease for the portion of the property belonging to the City Corporation of Bath. McLaughlin estimates that the house dates to the 1680s. See McLaughlin (1977) 1.

<sup>28</sup> McLaughlin (1977).

at Christie's in London and at the Rijks Museum, Paleis Het Loo, the year before.

McLaughlin describes his visit to the exhibition.

It was thrilling to go to Christie's to see the Ladymead painting. But when I arrived at the exhibition, I searched and searched the walls of the exhibition for the painting without success, until joy of joys, I saw a central octagon of panels with the eight prize pictures of the whole exhibition displayed, in amongst them the Ladymead painting. I was in tears of joy to see my beloved painting cleaned and conserved for the first time.<sup>30</sup>

This passage demonstrates the extent to which the author's discovery of and subsequent feelings of entitlement to the painting colour his emphasis in later years ("my beloved painting"). The text for *Guidelines*, written for the knowledgeable and committed volunteer guides who lead tours two to three times a day, summer and winter, could have enabled Ladymead House's "other" story to come forth, as part of the rich texture of women's history in Bath. More than an understandable degree of attachment, however, the effusive tone betrays a further investment in this building. Among McLaughlin's breathless descriptions of Bath's architectural attractions, the rendering of Ladymead in *Guidelines* is striking for its total ellipsis of the century-long history of prostitute-reform within Ladymead's walls. Clearly McLaughlin was aware of this history, as his earlier text is accurate in the details of the charity. Why this omission? McLaughlin's representation of the lovely, discarded painting, comes complete with an anecdote of how he found it in a

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<sup>29</sup> *Guidelines* is the Mayor's Guides' weekly newsletter, local history and architectural digest, published in Bath.

<sup>30</sup> McLaughlin (1994) 19.

compromised position, damaged by a thoughtless installation over a radiator, whose heat has splayed the very boards of the support.<sup>31</sup> Undoubtedly, McLaughlin's interest in the building is both professional and reasonable, as is his conviction that the "full significance of the painting was only appreciated during the...building survey of Ladymead House", which he undertook when acting in his role as Assistant Listed Buildings Architect.<sup>32</sup> However, his substitution of Ladymead's history of prostitution with the story of how he discovered a painting, an underestimated, anonymous and vulnerable painting, rings with the com/passionate fire which marks the proselytizing of concerned male citizens a century earlier, attempting to win their audience to the cause of the Penitentiary.

The sense of possession is strong both in McLaughlin's writing, and in his conversations with peers. When I first encountered McLaughlin and his research on the painting, I was not aware that the house in the image had an association with the building that had been the Bath Penitentiary. He took another colleague and myself to the Victoria Art Gallery to visit "his painting". During this discussion, as in his text for *Guidelines*, he focussed on his discovery and rescue. While the parallel for some readers may be tenuous, the link between McLaughlin's relationship with the *Ladymead House* image and reformers' relationships with "fallen" women pivots on mutual key words and concepts: discovery, cleaning, rescue, danger, the recognition of worth where others do not perceive it. All this

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<sup>31</sup> "I noticed an oil painting on a timber background screwed to the wall, (which was ironically right over a radiator which had caused the timber background to split." McLaughlin (1994) 18.

would be perfectly acceptable and understandable if not for the omission, in his more recent and visible work, of the history of prostitution, and hence, the history of sexism in Bath. Simply put, McLaughlin is a professional and an architect who had a unique opportunity, in the *Guidelines* format, to provide Bath's most popular guides with information that could have promoted knowledge and understanding of women's history and patriarchal conditions in this city. He did not take this opportunity, and consequently, the silence about women in Bath persists.

Sexist assumptions about women run deeper than the exclusion of women from senior positions in architectural firms, and have a broader impact than the virtual absence of the representation of women's needs in urban planning schemes.<sup>33</sup> The impact of sexism in the production of architectural and urban history often means that when there is a logical occasion in which to include women in the discussion, the chance is ignored, missed and passed by. Walking around the northern façade of Ladymead House, I pass the aged yellow, uncomfortably-proportioned Neo-classical exterior and walk down a path that likely covers the stream that runs through both lower terraces of the gardens in the Ladymead painting. A large, fieldstone building of four stories descends approximately sixty feet towards the river before a twentieth-century extension takes over the structure.

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<sup>32</sup> McLaughlin (1977) 1.

<sup>33</sup> Leslie Kanes Weisman, "Diversity by Design: Feminist Reflections on the Future of Architectural Education and Practice" in *The Sex of Architecture* eds. Diana Agrest et al. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996) 273-286.



Coming through the northern garden, what was once the upper right section of the formal garden, I can see the traces of the original Ladymead House reflected in the slight variations in window height along the eastern façade. The square windows of the top story, now unhooded from their four gables and tucked into a uniform cornice, bespeak a memory of another house, centuries ago. These are by far the clearest indication that this is the same place that “A British artist” documents in the Ladymead painting is the garden itself. To this day, the basic rectilinear layout of the three terraces, while reduced now to only a third of the original garden, remains clearly visible in the two lower garden sections, the path and steps which divide them, and the slight raise between the second and third terrace away from the river. The women who lived and worked in the Penitentiary would lay their washing out on these broad green lawns to dry in the intermittent British sunshine.

I walk down to the river where the small painted figures conversed and fished in what was once a clean river. On one level, I can understand the McLaughlin’s passion for the painting of Ladymead House. I too feel as though this house and its history is “mine” in the sense that I have come to care deeply for the women who lived here, and the circumstances which brought them here. Looking up at the gardens, which still bear traces of the landscaping visible in the 1730s painting, every precious detail of the scant archival research available and every ounce of my biased attention fuse in a need to “do something” for these women. My own interest and compulsion to work on this subject is therefore hardly baggage-free. My white, middle-class, twentieth-century experiences – both the ones I can speak of, and the ones I can not – do not make a legitimate parallel with the

historical silence of the residents of the Penitentiary, their unheralded work and struggles. The inability to speak of something, aporia, is not the same as the silencing function of history. Nonetheless, my own muteness brings me to this work, to these historical women, with more determination than I could summon for the work of any male architect in Bath. This is necessarily so; the links I make here between nineteenth century constructions of sexuality and space, gender and privilege are still active in the decisions historians make today.

To admit my own investedness in Ladymead House and the women who lived there between 1805-1914 is to lay myself open to the same critique I make of McLaughlin's texts. Such a charge would, perhaps, find fuel in the fact that I have in performance twice adopted guises and enacted narratives that deliberately refer to the concept "fallen". What right has a middle-class woman to imagine any parallel, whether in writing or in artwork, between her twenty-first-century self and women whose conditions of living are barely conceivable to her? To help articulate and defend my position here, I turn to Rosi Braidotti's formulation of the practice of "as if". As part of her discussion of nomadic subjectivity, the resemblance between experiences, or the evocation of one sort of experience from another, is a "quality of interconnectedness" which Braidotti wishes to support. She writes,

Drawing a flow of connections need not be an act of appropriation. On the contrary, it marks transitions between communicating states or experiences...the practice of "as if" is a technique of strategic re-location in order to rescue what we need of the past in order to trace paths of transformation of our lives here and now.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Braidotti 5-6.

What this provides for me is a way of describing the performance projects I have undertaken in Bath.

I see these performances as spaces in which I attempt to recognize where and how my own subjectivity verges on the lives of women I cannot “know”, not in a personal, historical nor (false) empirical sense. An alternative (and one that I feel underpins at least some social history, and certainly much of my own work) is, if not knowing, then recognizing and addressing elements of a historical person’s existence through empathy. But the danger of this empathic knowing is that it runs precariously close to the Victorian philanthropic model of middle-class concern. But, as Nicole Ward Jouve has argued, “There is an appropriate honesty, however, in working on, writing out of, the here and now.”<sup>35</sup> While our living conditions, our struggles and decisions are profoundly, irreducibly different, I do relate to these women on the grounds that I believe their subjectivities amounted to more than the sum of the interest that men paid to them, whether that interest was as clients, pimps, philanthropists, members of family or clergy. Their work, whether as prostitutes, washerwomen, seamstresses, or servants was, while not necessarily separate from their sexuality, as important. I believe that it is crucial now to produce feminist historical studies which attend both to gender issues and to women’s labour.

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<sup>35</sup> Jouve: viii.

The premise of the Penitentiary was to correct moral failings through labour; the idea being that these women, by cleaning, scrubbing, washing and mending would be able to purge themselves of their sins of the flesh, and return to a more exalted state. Those who organized and maintained the charity simultaneously worked within and ignored the economic reality in which the women turned to prostitution, and in which they hoped to survive, after leaving prostitution behind.<sup>36</sup> The philanthropists were willfully oblivious to what the women's labour meant in excess, or prior to, its debatable use as a moralizing agent, in other words, how women's labour was an integral part of Industrial-era England. My project, *fallen/winged*, was a performance intended for video. (See fig. 8, 9, 10) In this project, I referred to the work that women who lived in the Penitentiary undertook as part of their "reform", and as part of the class-based economies of both the Penitentiary and the city.

*Fallen/winged* included elements which either referred directly to the history of the Penitentiary, or to a looser narrative linking and questioning the themes of fallen-ness, the angel in the home, architecture, chastity, purity, cleanliness and work. For example, I wore white gloves as a reference to the fact that residents were taught to sew gloves for ladies as one of the early profit-gathering schemes for the penitents to carry out. The video shows close-ups of hands, gloved and dirty from "cleaning" the surfaces of Bath's morally pristine buildings: the Abbey and the

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<sup>36</sup> Not that all who lived in the Penitentiary left prostitution as a means of survival. Every year the Annual Reports document women who fell back into "sin". See Parish (1826), in which the annual reports for ten years are bound together.

Penitentiary. My character scrubs futilely, it seems, the exterior walls of these buildings. (See fig. 9) But when she/I pull those hands away, the gloves are indeed filthy. (See fig. 10)

An extract from my work journal, written while planning the *Fallen/Winged* project reads as follows:

I found Ladymead House yesterday. It's on Walcot Street...when I walked up to the building, one I'd passed a hundred times, I felt very happy. Seven o'clock in the evening is a quiet time in Bath. All the gates I needed were open, the names of the architects [G. P. Manners, J. E. Gill] responsible for the [mid-Victorian] revisions carved right into the wall...I walked around [the property], noted where the old building, built of fieldstone, ended and the additions began. I walked down to the lower lawn and river at the bottom of the garden. It was a beautiful moment. I felt completely connected to the past – all those women – and the present. My experience with David McLaughlin took on different shades.

I felt that *this* was where my thesis existed, really, in here, this quiet enclosure with such a history...I'd like to do a piece in this garden. I'd like to start, lying face down with my wings out, like a fallen angel, splat, and then get up and walk to the house. To show that fallen angels and fallen women both can get up and walk away...There needs to be a companion piece in front of the Abbey...I know I have to clean the buildings winged...rubbing the stones...rubbing the architecture. Challenging the proposition that dirt equals sin and that work cures both. The Abbey will prove to be as dirty as any other place that women have scrubbed throughout the centuries. The final shot should show me, after having worked, then taking off my dirty gloves and my clean wings, and walking away, simply as a woman, neither fallen nor angelic. Simply a woman who had worked. [Friday, June 6, 2000.]

This is an accurate synopsis of the project as it unfolded. My character, who might either be a fallen angel or a “fallen woman” with wings, is first seen face-down on the flagstone courtyard of Bath Abbey, arms akimbo, wings spread. (See

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fig. 8) She slowly rises, and walks towards the Abbey, where, with gloved hands, she scrubs at the stone's ostensibly clean and solid surface. (See fig. 9) When she pulls her hands away, however, there is a dark yellow stain of dirt on the palms of the white gloves. (See fig. 10) The character disappears around the edge of the Abbey, out of sight. She then walks past the "Asylum for Teaching Young Females Household Work" at the corner of Gay's Hill and Belgrave Crescent. The shots clearly indicate the panel on which the title of the institution on the west façade of the house is carved. The video then shows me/her entering the garden of Ladymead House, on the east side of the property, from the same side (if not the same bird's eye viewpoint) depicted in the anonymous painting of 1730. She approaches the northwest corner of the building, and again scrubs at the stones. Her efforts yield the same results as at the Abbey: greyish-yellow stains on now-ragged white gloves. Then, where the residents of the Penitentiary once spread their clean laundry, the woman is seen sitting on the lower lawn. She takes off her tattered gloves, and then unpins the wings, which have fluttered behind her throughout the video. She lays these appendages aside, rises, and walks out of the frame. (Fig. 55)

Even though I was obliged to seek permission to use the grounds and tour the interior of the former Penitentiary, I had a strong desire to do this project covertly, given the long history of women having to ask permission to enter and work within Ladymead's spaces. I wanted to work near the walls which the early minutes of the governing Committee briefly note for being failed points of containment, places of escape. I wanted to move secretly and subversively on this property, surprising and perhaps delighting those current residents who might look

out the windows. I also felt a great deal of discomfort with the notion of seeking official sanction for this project in any way, as I knew that personal experience was also at the root of my reasons for working in this manner, and I was not prepared to attempt to explain or divulge this aspect of my determination. My stated reasons for doing the project, an interest in women's history in Bath, were closely questioned by various employees of the current old-age residence and were grudgingly accepted with obvious trepidation. These same employees closely monitored me throughout the filming of the project. I was pleasantly surprised, however, to find that the current steward, Margaret Bartlett, relinquished her initial suspicions of me once she saw me in my guise. "You're the ghost of Ladymead!" She exclaimed triumphantly. I explained the connection for me between the prostitutes, being "fallen" and the idea of the angel in the home, but for her the project was already clear as she had, for at a party for residents in a previous year, dressed up as a ghost herself. It was said, she confided, that Ladymead House had ghosts. "Lots of those girls died, you know," she said to me, *sotto voce*.

(Buzz, buzz, Mrs. Bartlett.) This moment, perhaps anecdotal, became an important aspect of the *Fallen/Winged* project. Initially protective of the institution and defensive about the apparently unrelated history of the Penitentiary, Mrs. Bartlett became completely supportive in her curiosity once she felt she understood, through her own experiences and beliefs, what my project was about.<sup>37</sup> What had been a fraught and emotionally difficult project became lighter, almost joyful once

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<sup>37</sup> A copy of the completed video is promised to Ladymead House, as well as parts of this chapter.

there was the opportunity for exchange with Mrs. Bartlett, whose personal and professional connections with the house and its history were, as a contextual relation I myself could not provide, key to the completion of my piece.

I cannot say that there was a teleological purpose to this performance. I did not, as with *pro fanus*, intend the work to act as revisionist public history. Bath Abbey's status and location as a public building demanded, in my mind, a performance of that nature. With Ladymead House being a private residence, I did not seek to intrigue or annoy a passing tourist audience with a temporary performance. Rather, I wished to create a portable, visual document that would complicate the binary of the fallen and angelic woman with work, work that has a gender and class-specific history. On another level, problems I encountered during its implementation had the force of a blow on me, I was more deeply involved in this performance than any other to date. This involvement made me, in turn, deeply vulnerable to the project's reception on-site. My anxiety about the project, possible obstacles and successfully completing the performance were out of proportion to its narrative and technical simplicity. My prior relationship with the history of the Penitentiary led to this heightened state of apprehension, of caring about what happened, which in turn rendered my relationship to Ladymead House more acute than I could have anticipated. In the end, I had achieved for myself what in many ways this thesis sets out to do, to make the links between the architecture and the gendered self, palpable and undeniable.

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### *Conclusion*

In addition to the desire to remember the women of Ladymead House through something other than the patriarchal lens that Bath's history provides, I also have the desire to negotiate, and the will to fight for the complexity of female subjectivity, past and present. Vision is at the core of the issue; my battle for the remembering of Bath is to make women's stories "visible", while still reviewing, critically, the discourses which attempted to construct an architectural history that excluded or subsumed women. My work on Ladymead House, or the Bath Penitentiary, was for me very bound up in my anger towards those men, named in the Court Sessions of 1890 to 1904, who were charged with indecent assault, towards those men who were charged with "wounding" or "frightening" women, and those men who were charged with having carnal knowledge of women under sixteen years of age. The knowledge that the women who entered the Bath Penitentiary were for the most part, very young women, and often orphaned, further compounded my anger.

This anger marks my map of the rhetorical space of Ladymead House. While such anger alone could form a discouraging blockade between myself and the subject at hand, it does not become the sum of my work on the women who passed through Ladymead House. What my map, so marked, enables me to see as a researcher and artist is the necessity and pitfall of such a feminist project. The pitfall here is that the heterosexual, male gaze continues to sexualize women, in virtually

any situation, in ways that diminish, objectify and demean all women. Thus a critique of Victorian prostitution is, sadly but not surprisingly, as necessary in 2001 as it was in 1805 at the inaugural meeting of the Bath Penitentiary Committee.<sup>38</sup> Such a critique, however, privileges patriarchy as the prime mover, thus inevitably inscribing the tenor of that critique within the primacy of sexist and hierarchical power. However, as Lorraine Code writes, “[s]exism and inequality are obvious examples of realities that cannot be wished away; feminists have to engage with them.”<sup>39</sup> It is this re-inscription of patriarchy that I wish to, if not avoid, at least complicate. In the following chapter I therefore write *around* the dominant discourses of feminine morality, male desire, public and private space, which inform the extant research materials awaiting the investigator of Ladymead House. Potent details of labour, production, disruption and insubordination form a counter-thesis to these dominant discourses, providing an alternative lens through which to view the women of Bath who chose – and chose to leave – prostitution. Through this lens, the classification “prostitute” begs a broader and more nuanced appreciation of the choices women had and made within poverty. That these choices impinged upon issues of class, sexuality, gender, labour and architecture suggests again, a revisioning of historical female subjectivity. The choice I made, in returning to Ladymead House, in July of 2000, and again now, as I write in 2001, is to

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<sup>38</sup> Maria Luddy writes, “Any examination of prostitution reveals a multiplicity of attitudes not alone towards the practice of sexuality in any society but also towards how women are perceived in that society...” (98).

<sup>39</sup> Code 109.

withstand the diminishing quality of the (male) gaze, and to ask my readers to look at Ladymead, through the lenses of my choice.

A woman's admission to the Penitentiary was bound up in class and gender attitudes, which made the struggle to remain "pure" in middle-class eyes extremely difficult and thankless. There is nothing that someone like me can do "for" the nineteenth-century residents of the Bath Female Home and Penitentiary, such as Sarah Wheeler. I can't help them. I want to, but I can't. And I want to help myself, to make gestures, to live my life in a way that says that I am not simply the suppressed term within patriarchy. I am more than that, just as these women who entered, died within, were released and escaped from the Bath Penitentiary were more than the "degraded in body but not yet in mind" wretches that their patrons described them to be.<sup>40</sup> I want my gestures towards these women to meet their work, through remembering the products of their hands and their time, their particular genius. In my life, it is the creative (and I include academic work here) acts which put any distance between myself and the diminishing experiences I have had as a woman living in a patriarchal culture. By insisting on "working" in this way, I choose to remake the world, to remake myself, and to remember differently.

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<sup>40</sup> "Here we can see that the poor and outcast must not always be viewed as victims but could exercise some control over their own lives." Luddy 6.

## Chapter Seven

### Jumping Over the Wall: Architecture and Escape

Where, in truth, can be found any exercise of the holy virtue of Charity, which embraces a larger proportion of its sacred duties, than that which raises the diseased frame and desolate heart from its sepulchre of misery and despair; recalls it to life, and light, and being; connects it again with the charities of human nature, from which it had been an outcast; shelters it from scorn and reproach; provides for its necessities in this world, and does not forsake it till it has removed the cloud which obscured the prospect of a better.

John Parish, Chairman of the Bath Penitentiary, 1817<sup>1</sup>

The relationship of historical women and architecture in Bath has several important manifestations. One of the most crucial modes in which architecture and women “connect” in Bath is through what was seen as the moral crisis, the plague of prostitution.<sup>2</sup> In the previous chapter, I presented the connections between an ecclesiastical building and an image of fallen or sinful, winged femininity. In this chapter, I discuss the history of Ladymead House, which for over a century was home to one of Bath’s institutions for the moral reform and medical treatment of prostitutes, as a site where “fallen” women performed their agency within the confines of debilitating but yet permeable nineteenth-century moral codes. The

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<sup>1</sup> *Bath Penitentiary and Lock Hospital: Annual Report, 1816* (St. James Street, Bath: Richard Cruttwell, 1817) 13.

<sup>2</sup> Dingley writes, “consider how our own capital streets, for many years past, have been thronged, and every corner of our *metropolis* infested by these miserable wretches.” (vi)

foregoing details of the physical changes of the building parallel and even reflect the intensification of debates surrounding prostitution and Victorian society, but they do not necessarily “embody” those impossible standards for women. In this chapter I focus on the practices that female volunteers and residents of the Penitentiary undertook in terms of management, labour and rebellion, as a way of amending the foregoing view of the Penitentiary as a place that “controlled” women’s bodies and actions.

In 1758, a Mr. Dingley addressed the citizens of Bath in a lecture which the Reverend W. Dodd published three years later, alongside the latter’s sermon to the recipients of Bath’s Magdalen Charity. The difference in tone between the two writers is marked. Pleading the cause of a group of women who were society’s outcasts as well an unquestioned aspect of a party town’s pleasure, Mr. Dingley had to rouse his audience’s Christian feelings as well as delicately direct their attention to a matter which many felt was not their concern. In contrast, the Reverend Dodd clearly felt his role as a moral instructor keenly, admonishing the recipients of the charity for their waywardness, and impressing upon them the need for their penitence. These two speeches reveal the divide in opinion about prostitution in the eighteenth century, from supposed indifference to an actively moral attitude.<sup>3</sup> These men’s words, and the list of subscribers at the end of the document, indicate that “fallen” women and the moral fibre of the country were about to become the blocks

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<sup>3</sup> See Robert B. Shoemaker, “The London ‘Mob’ in the Early Eighteenth Century” in *The Eighteenth-Century Town: A Reader in English Urban History 1688-1820*, ed. Peter Borsay (London and New York: Longman, 1990) 217-18.

on which many Victorian writers and philanthropists sharpened their sense of religious, civic and personal duty.<sup>4</sup>

Revealing the general diversion of opinion towards prostitution in mid-eighteenth-century Bath, Mr. Dingley wrote, “In an age when Vice is, in some respects, become [sic] fashionable, and that of lewdness especially treated with smiles...it cannot seem strange that an attempt like the present, should meet with some ridicule...from the thinking as the thoughtless.”<sup>5</sup> To counter that ridicule, Dingley encourages the more generous sentiments of his contemporaries, insisting upon the innocence of the women in question and the predatory nature of the men who “ruined” them. “Surrounded by snares, the most artfully and industrially laid; snares laid by those endowed with superior faculties, and all the advantages of education and fortune; what virtue can be proof against such formidable seducers...”<sup>6</sup> This view of female and male sexuality was completely in keeping with the notion that women were not naturally sexual beings; sexual appetites in women were thought to be inspired by sexual contact with men. Furthermore, common opinion was that these appetites should not be encouraged in respectable women at

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<sup>4</sup> The politician Gladstone was one. See Peter John Jagger, *Gladstone: The Making of a Christian Politician: The Personal Religious Life and Development of William Ewart Gladstone* (Alison Park, Pennsylvania: Pickwick Publishers, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Mr. Dingley’s foreword to Mr. Dodd, *An Account of the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Magdalen Charity* (Bath: Mr. Leake, 1761) B3i.

<sup>6</sup> Dingley and Dodd iii.

all.<sup>7</sup> By the end of the period during which Bath actively fought prostitution (1805-1914), male seducers were no longer, discursively, the main perpetrators of this great “social evil.” In the Annual Report of the Bath Penitentiary of 1886, the only indication that men were involved at all in the issue of prostitution, beyond being the philanthropic engines through which the problem would be solved, occurs in the following lines:

It must be remembered that the women within these walls...have been deeply sinned against. The Committee would respectfully remind the Subscribers, that they can scarcely be engaged in a more Christ-like work than in supporting, both by their prayers and their alms, an Institution where our fallen sisters may be led to repentance, and eventually restored to a purer life.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast, the Dingleys and Dodds of eighteenth-century Bath saw privileged male seducers as the culpable figures in the rise of prostitution. In texts such as *An Account of the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Magdalen Charity*, the authors present impressionable young women as almost unwitting participants in this rise. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, this view had changed substantially, partly as a result of the concretization of the religious revival of the mid-Victorian period,<sup>9</sup> partly because of the vigorous discursive construction of public and private

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<sup>7</sup> See Nead 103.

<sup>8</sup> *Annual Report of the Bath Female Home and Penitentiary for 1886* (Bath: W. & F. Dawson Printers, 1887) 5.

<sup>9</sup> Catherine Hall sees Evangelicalism (along with Methodism) as two roots of the impact of the religious revival on women in nineteenth century England. Hall describes women as both agents and as disempowered within the revival. She writes, “Evangelicalism provided one crucial influence on this definition [re. the angel in the house] of home and family. Between 1780 and 1820, in the Evangelical struggle over anti-slavery and over the reform of manners and morals, a new view of the nation, of political power and of family life was forged. This view was to become a dominant one in

spheres, and partly because of the increased threat that women of various classes posed to the political clarity of a class-based, patriarchal system. The romantic and voyeuristic view of the tragic, seduced female could not, furthermore, withstand the polarized scrutiny that feminism and legislation alike directed to the body of the fallen woman. The faint allusion made in the above quotation to the broad spectrum of suffering and struggle which poor women faced in nineteenth-century England is so vague that its object - male desire - could easily be missed and would certainly not insult male readers of the text. While the emphasis on male perpetrators lessened dramatically from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century,<sup>10</sup> the emphasis on controlling women's bodies and actions, as solution to the problem of prostitution, did not.

Much like current strategies to protect women from rape focus on women's behaviour, dress and freedom of movement, Magdalen House of Bath did not seek to change the actions of men, but rather, to encourage in its residents a more acute sense of the moral and physical danger that would be found in a life of prostitution. The passage I cite above simultaneously critiques and upholds the system of privilege enjoyed by men of the landed and the new entrepreneurial classes in eighteenth-century England. In Dingley's presentation of the problem, beautiful, young women are no match for the sexual traps set by educated and powerful men because, as he admits regretfully, women have no similar access to the "advantages

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the 1830s and 1840s. The Evangelical emphasis on the creation of a new life-style, a new ethic, provided the framework for the emergence of the Victorian bourgeoisie." (75)



of education and fortune” which might prepare them for such advances. So, the targets of the rake’s progress must likewise find a male rescuer who, entitled to the same advantages as the rake, has one further card to play: a superior sense of justice, compassion and duty. In short, despite being the cause of the problem, men are still the only ones equipped to play the role of saviour. Introducing Dingley’s talk, the Reverend W. Dodd writes,

And as the exquisite distresses of deluded young women *have not, could not* escape observation; many benevolent wishes have been vented both from the lips and from the pens of different persons that some method might be thought of...for the relief of their pitiable sufferers [sic]...<sup>11</sup>

Dingley and Dodd tread a precarious line in their arguments. In *An Account of the Rise, Progress and Present State of the Magdalen Charity*, the precursor to the Bath Penitentiary and Lock Hospital, the authors address a social wrong that they admit to be a wrong to women specifically, because of extant gender inequities. Nonetheless, their solutions, their view of the consequences of inaction, and most importantly, their speeches to the “poor, young, thoughtless females”<sup>12</sup> in question, all demonstrate that their interest in fighting the evil of prostitution is always second to their faith in class privilege and moral superiority. While Dingley does not chastise the women directly, he still perceives women’s bodies as the locus and

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<sup>10</sup> Luddy 103-114.

<sup>11</sup> Dingley and Dodd: ii, emphasis in original. In this strangely lascivious passage Dodd refers to the enlightened male authors of articles in *Gentlemen’s Magazine* and *The Rambler* on the same subject. See Dingley and Dodd i.

origin of uncontrollable disease.<sup>13</sup> The issue of the economic need of a woman who turns to prostitution is subsumed immediately, in Dingley's speech, within the concerns of a more wealthy class: "[t]he same necessity obliging [the woman turned prostitute] to prey on the unwary [male], diffuses the contagion, propagating [sic] profligacy, and spreading ruin, disease, and death, almost through the whole human species."<sup>14</sup> Reverend Dodd, less concerned with earthy necessity, provides "Advice to the Magdalen":

[You wish] to leave the pernicious paths of vice, to redeem [your] good name, to recover [your] bodies from shame and foul Disease, to regain the fatherly protection of God and save [your] immortal Souls... Consider then, YOUNG WOMAN, of how great value to you this House of refuge is; as being the only one, to which you could fly; the only place where you could have any probability of attaining present or future Bliss.<sup>15</sup>

The patrician tone, the references to disease and to a heavenly father (represented in the stern figure of Father Dodd) are all what one might expect from such a sermon at this intersection of history and culture. Roughly fifty years later, Mr. John Parish, a Bath philanthropist and individual of considerable energy, set up a "Committee of well-disposed Persons, being Fathers and Heads of Families... Men who are influenced by the same common motives of active kindness, and zeal in the

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<sup>13</sup> Dingley and Dodd admonish the women to repent their "...fearful destruction of body and soul..." (ix, 59).

<sup>14</sup> Dingley and Dodd iii.

<sup>15</sup> Dingley and Dodd 59, emphasis in original.

undertaking”<sup>16</sup> of a reform home for prostitutes. Certainly zealous, active and perhaps even kind, Dodd, Dingley and Parish each produced rhetoric and remonstrations as part of the empirical and positivist epistemologies which, as Lorraine Code has suggested, reproduce women as “complements” of “propertied and privileged white men”.<sup>17</sup> Code writes,

...men in policy-making positions...read *their own* social position as the standard-setter which less-privileged people must surely want to emulate – and against which they can be judged deficient or morally weak if they do not measure up...Such preconceptions have produced politics of care that only minimally take the experiences, positions, and self-perceptions of either beneficiaries or providers into account.<sup>18</sup>

While Code is theorizing contemporary politics of caring, her observations are highly applicable to the history of late Georgian and Victorian efforts to reform women who worked as prostitutes to a more respectable way of life, and particularly, to the way that architecture figured in to those efforts. What I want to point out, by way of introduction to the concerns of this chapter is Dodd’s insistence that “this House of refuge is...the only one to which [the women] could fly.” Elsewhere in the text, Dingley anticipates Dodd’s imagery, stating “The doors of the house [Magdalen House] were no sooner opened than [the objection that prostitutes would not want to submit to reform] was powerfully removed indeed, by

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<sup>16</sup> *Asylum for Penitent Prostitutes: Minutes of the Committee, October 6, 1805 - December 6, 1811* [Unpublished notebook} November 19, 1805: 9.

<sup>17</sup> Code 108.

<sup>18</sup> Code 109.

the *number* of pitiable sufferers, who flew joyfully to the first harbour where they could be admitted...”<sup>19</sup> This image of the safe house (and the winged woman) persists into the nineteenth century in Bath, with the inauguration and maintenance of the Bath Penitentiary. As John Parish, Chairman of the Bath Female Home and Penitentiary wrote in 1817,

“[I]t may be doubted [if there] are any who present so strong a claim [to refuge] as the unfortunate Girl, who, seduced, but not depraved – her health destroyed, but her mind not yet vitiated – finds herself, by the same offence, dismissed from her service, and for ever disabled from finding another...she sees herself at once deprived of her home, her character, her health, and her subsistence; no shelter is afforded her, but the haunts of the most degraded of her sex...”<sup>20</sup>

As the nineteenth century progressed, the architecture of the building used to house, train and contain Bath prostitutes underwent alterations to adapt to the ideological concerns of this particular institution.

The Committee for the Asylum for Penitent Prostitutes met on November 19, 1805, to discuss letting a building known as “Corn-well House” (Ladymead) for 60 guineas per annum, on a fourteen-year lease.<sup>21</sup> A month later, the lease was signed, and a large, Jacobin building with traces of a formal Tudor garden became the official residence of the Bath Female Home and Penitentiary. (See fig. 45) A lease from 1753 shows that the building was L-shaped, and had a large courtyard, measuring 45’ 6” by 24’ 3”, facing Walcot Street. (Fig. 46) As previously stated, the

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<sup>19</sup> Dingley and Dodd B3ii, emphasis in original.

<sup>20</sup> Parish (1817) 9.

<sup>21</sup> *Minutes of the Committee*, Dec. 11, 1805: 17.

property was divided along the course of a stream from Walcot to the River Avon. This distance, "From the Highroad to the River Avon [was on the south side] two hundred and twenty four foot and four inches" and slightly longer on the north side of the property, 233' 4".<sup>22</sup> The L-shaped building was just over 1800 square feet, and had, if the painting is accurate in its details, three and a half stories, with dormer windows rising from each of the four main bays on the east front. David McLaughlin proposes that, after the John Parish bought the building in 1816 for the Penitentiary, that "[t]he two wings of the 1680s house were demolished and a chapel built in 1845 to the designs of G. P. Manners and J.E. Gill."<sup>23</sup> While it is possible that subsequent leaseholders had indeed built another wing on the original, L-shaped building, only one is in evidence in the plan of 1753, therefore McLaughlin's notion that they were both part of the original building is not possible. The twenty sixth annual report for 1842 shows the Penitentiary as a solidly massed, two-story building, maintaining the Ladymead layout with central courtyard and north wing extending to the street, but there is also a shorter wing to the south in a late Georgian style. (Fig. 47) The latter was built at some point between the 1753 lease and the 1848 report. (Fig. 48)

The refurbishment of the Penitentiary in 1845 by Manners and Gill was much more extensive, and is well-documented in J. F. Bevan Jones' survey of the property, November, 1945, now in the Bath Archives. (Fig. 49) This survey, clearly

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<sup>22</sup> Lease for Ladymead House, alternatively known as Corn-well House, 1753. (Bath Archives)

indicating the property break between parishes, registers the large chapel, 56 x 24', or over two-thirds the size of the original building. Reminiscent of a one-sided basilica, the flat planes and simple yet imposing ornament of the chapel have definitely transformed the effect of the Penitentiary's façade. This chapel confronted the passerby, visitor or the woman who sought admission to the charity; in other words, this was the part of the Penitentiary that met the street, which met the gaze. The chapel consisted of six bays with monumental, mullioned windows attached to a string course and adjoining a cornice through contained balustrades. The cornice, roughly ten feet above ground level, tops a raised pedestal, which is actually the height of a ground floor. Surmounting this imposing structure was a Neo-classical entablature, the crowning cornice of which bore the name of the institution.<sup>24</sup> A simple door, with no apparent detailing marked the entrance to the Chapel. (Even the door to the laundry facilities was more ornate. See fig. 49) Once inside, a visitor attending a Sunday service would encounter first a small lobby, and then turn right into the severe rectilinear form of the Chapel, with its strikingly high ceiling. The rigidity of the exterior would have been offset by graceful curves at the north end with the large, semi-circular altar and the beautiful circular skylights above, which survive today. Pews, installed on each side of the chapel, ran parallel with the street.

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<sup>23</sup> McLaughlin (1977) 2.

<sup>24</sup> Porthole windows have subsequently been added to the pedestal, or ground level of the building, since the Chapel was divided vertically into two levels. This space is no longer used as a chapel, but what is now the second floor still serves group functions in Ladymead's new purpose as a retirement home.

A survey of 1924 of the portion of the property belonging to St. John's Hospital,<sup>25</sup> prepared in advance of the sale of this portion to the Bath Corporation, shows Manners and Gill's work on that fraction of the institution. (Fig. 50) While this is only a fragmentary view of the floor plan, it nonetheless provides some useful information regarding the 1845 renovation. Adjacent to the chapel, on the side of the residences was a large sewing room, sandwiching the two preferred channels of reform – work and religion – in the actual physical structure of the house. Coming from the centre of town, a woman hoping to gain admission to the Penitentiary would have walked past the door to the Chapel, and entered the courtyard, sheltered by the high barriers of the street wall and the building itself. This hypothetical woman would then have had to walk around the curved bay window added by Manners and Gill to be able to approach the entrance. This window looked out onto the courtyard from the Board Room. A lovely aesthetic feature, this bay window also permitted scrutiny of the courtyard, street entrance and institutional entrance, and anyone in these spaces. (Fig. 51) On the east side of the entrance door was another window; this one would have given light to a waiting room, presumably for applicants, visitors or residents waiting for the outcome of their release petitions or bad behaviour. The courtyard, Board and waiting rooms form an almost perfect square in which the reception activities of the institution would have been contained with the least possible disruption of the parts of the

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<sup>25</sup> "House of Help for Women and Girls, Walcot Street, Bath, Plan Shewing Property Proposed to be Sold to the Bath Corporation", J. Hinte, February 1924. (Bath Archives)

building dedicated to labour. The panoptic aspect of the reception area echoes the admission procedures. After a woman applied, if deemed suitable she was admitted under probation for two months, during which time her behaviour was monitored and her capacity for reform assessed. Thus the deferral of full admission, instituted since 1806 in an administrative sense,<sup>26</sup> was built into the architecture of the charity itself after 1845.

The northeast wing of the Penitentiary was dedicated to sleeping and living quarters: half to the Matron's compartments and half to cubicles for residents. The Matron had a sitting room with a small bay window, and a bedroom with a double window. After a stairwell, four cubicles and a larger room, simply identified as for "Matron", fill out the wing. The residents' cubicles were 5x9'. Two cubicles would share one window, so that the dividing wall between cubicles would run into the window, thus complicating escape.<sup>27</sup>

Sir John Soane's influential recasting of Neo-classicism is evident in the additions and revisions to Ladymead House.<sup>28</sup> This use of Neo-classicism is no longer reminiscent of the cosy, almost diminutive revivalism of John Wood, the

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<sup>26</sup> *Minutes of the Committee*, June 6, 1806: 35.

<sup>27</sup> It should be noted that while the floor space of these compartments may seem small by contemporary, western standards, the size of a bedroom for an independent, middle class woman in London's York Street Ladies' Chambers, built in 1892 by Balfour and Turner, was 10x15'. See Adams 154-157.

<sup>28</sup> For a definitive monograph on Soane, see Pierre de la Ruffinière Du Prey, *John Soane: The Making of an Architect* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982). Soane's institutional Neo-classicism, such as the dramatic proportions and window treatments at the Bank of England (London, 1788-1808) echoes in the 1840s version of Ladymead.



elegance of John Palmer or the graceful pragmatics of Thomas Baldwin.<sup>29</sup> Rather, the architectural changes of the 1840s at the Bath Penitentiary sever whatever lingering ties the structure may have had with its domestic past, and draw the building firmly into the realm of institutional architecture. The Penitentiary entrance, which formerly was clearly visible with signs and located at the centre of the property's Walcot prospect with a gate marking the way in, gave way to the large, impassive façade of the Chapel. Also, as noted, the name of the institution was not itself particularly easy to locate. The large, high Chapel windows belie the fact that, as of this renovation, no residence windows face the street, thus making escape and even visual access to the outside world more difficult. To the right of the building, if viewed facing east, a small shop front facilitated the taking in of laundry and needlework orders. To the left, a high wall permits access to the Penitentiary entrance, but this entrance is almost entirely – one would say carefully – shielded from public view.

In many ways, the Bath Penitentiary (also known as the “Bath Penitentiary and Lock Hospital”, the “Bath Preventative Mission”, and the “House of Help”) was a “good” charity. It only admitted women on their application (women were not forced to enter the house) and in theory the staff would not keep a woman against her will. The all-male governing Committee and Ladies’ Committees aimed to instruct “inmates” in tasks, such as needle and handwork, reading and religion, which would serve the women well when it came time for them to find a “place”.

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<sup>29</sup> See Ison for a survey of each of these architects’ work in Bath.

According to the annual reports, careful provisions were made for clothing, food and, later in the century, separate sleeping compartments for each resident. The annual reports are full of grateful letters, parts of which must be genuine at least. Nonetheless, the trustees' and committee members' limited vision of the prostitute as a woman who had been "seduced from virtue", and their stated desire to only admit those who were most "likely to be saved...to be reclaimed to virtue"<sup>30</sup> was bound to abut the economic and social differences between the charity's administration, its staff and its residents, with difficulty.

These Ladies of the Subcommittee were six women who acted in concert with the Matron, "a grave, discreet, and serious Woman" who was hired to "act on all things under the Directions of the [male] Committee..."<sup>31</sup> The Subcommittee had less day-to-day power than the Matron, less administrative power than the Committee and no fiscal powers at all. Their voluntary services were to be retained, as the Committee noted on its first formal meeting, "*so far as may be found useful...for inspecting certain parts of the Domestic Economy...*"<sup>32</sup> Despite this remarkably banal and vague approximation of what the Ladies' Committee might be good for, the women who took these positions did actually exercise considerable decision-making power. They helped to determine the acceptance or rejection of

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<sup>30</sup> *Bath Herald*, 15 June 1816.

<sup>31</sup> *Minutes of the Committee*, 19 Nov 1805: 9.

<sup>32</sup> *Minutes of the Committee*, Nov. 19, 1805: 9, emphasis in original.

applicants, the residents' duties and movements (or lack thereof) within the institution, and what the women ate and wore.

Given its role as a shelter for ill, frightened, abused, desperate, strategic, angry and “repentant” women, Ladymead House was also a site where class and gender tensions inevitably played out. The traces of these tensions are minimal, as the records from the Matrons' admission interviews appear to have been destroyed for the sake of privacy, with the result that statements from the residents and the specific details of their circumstances are very few. One important source has, however, survived in addition to the printed annual reports of the charity, the handwritten Minutes of the Committee to set up an “Asylum for Penitent Prostitutes”, taken between October 6, 1805 to December 6, 1811. The findings of the annual reports, while adding to the discussion of prostitution in Bath, serve as a record of the tension that philanthropy produced in Bath when making sexual practices – or their suppression – their target. The handwritten Minutes, however, offer much greater insight into the ways that women – the Matron, the “Ladies Committee” and the inmates themselves – produced the space in which they worked, lived, and from which some escaped. The notion of escape is crucial to this chapter, as the Penitentiary at Ladymead House presented itself as an escape from the world of vice, disease and sin. The number of women who demanded release, and the number who are recorded as having “escaped”, cast the original “flight” to safety in a different light, and in turn, complicate the polarized Victorian emblem of feminine morality, the “angel in the house”.

The 1730 painting of Ladymead House (see fig. 45) depicts a space that is both sanctuary and walled enclosure, meticulously controlled for the purposes of cultivation. As described above, the small trees at the edge of the riverfront, and the slim poplars display no effect of the nature that blows and gleams around them. They are the product of pre-meditated governance, and demonstrate the antithesis of sloth and disorder. Like the plants which Celia Fiennes observed to be “nail’d neate” in the seventeenth-century, walled town gardens which she saw on her travels,<sup>33</sup> the “inmates” of the Bath Penitentiary and Lock Hospital were intended from the charity’s inception to be under strict moral and bodily control.<sup>34</sup>

It will exalt the character of the Penitentiary in the public eye – it will shew [sic] them that we are not *idle* – it will convince them that we are cultivating in the objects of our compassion the *spirit of industry* – and that while we are gently leading them back into the paths of virtue, which conduct to a better world, we are not omitting to form in them those habits of praiseworthy exertion, which will render them useful as long as they continue in the present one.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Harding and Lambert 29.

<sup>34</sup> See (no author) *The Bath Penitentiary and The Bath Preventative Mission for the Care of Friendless Girls*, leaflet: 2. This pamphlet, printed between 1907 and 1941, describes the amalgamation of the Penitentiary and the House of Help, a charity dedicated to preventing wayward girls from entering a life of moral depravity. The amalgamated charity was called the Bath Preventative Mission (1907). In detailing the history of the Penitentiary, the pamphlet isolates those measures taken in the early years of the Penitentiary’s operation to keep inmates away from windows, and indoors for their probationary period. In an attached, unpaginated application form from the year 1941, an anonymous worker or volunteer has noted the reasons for a fifteen-year-old girl’s admission to the Mission. Margaret Taylor is described as being “in moral danger” and “too fond of boys...plays out all night.”

<sup>35</sup> John Parish, *The Collective Reports of the Bath Penitentiary and Lock Hospital, from 1816 to 1826* (Bath: Mr. Griffiths, Booksellers, 1826) 73, emphasis in original.

The “cultivated objects” in question are the “penitent prostitutes” whose profession and its health consequences, including syphilis, were “of a nature too disgusting to admit of public detail” in press notices of the time.<sup>36</sup> The house and grounds at 112 Walcot Street, while not the first choice of the committee,<sup>37</sup> were able to satisfy the demand of the charity for “a roomy and moderately rented House...the most private and suitable which could be found [...with the] plainest Furniture...”<sup>38</sup> The walled garden which kept nature at bay in the anonymous painting of 1730 found new expression in the overt mission of the charity, as a “house of solemn penitence”<sup>39</sup> “with the advantages of seclusion”.<sup>40</sup>

The Penitentiary’s Committees took the advantages of seclusion seriously. Item nine of the “Rules for Internal Management” for the charity, published in book form in 1816, states that

No woman, after she is received, shall be allowed to go out of the premises, until discharged, but on very urgent and extraordinary occasions; and then, not without leave of two of the Ladies of the Committee, to be preceded by a request, in writing, signed by the Matron. And even when such leave shall have been obtained, no woman shall be allowed to go out, unless accompanied by a trust-worthy female.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Mr. Elwin, quoted in “Bath Penitentiary and Lock Hospital” *Bath Herald*, June 15, 1816.

<sup>37</sup> Originally the Committee had attempted to secure a house in Walcot Place, an arrangement which fell through for undocumented reasons. The Committee leased “Corn-well House” on the 18th of December 1806 for 60 guineas per annum. See *Minutes of the Committee*: 10-18.

<sup>38</sup> *Minutes of the Committee*, 19 Nov. 1805: 10-11.

<sup>39</sup> Mr. Elwin, *Bath Herald*, 15 June 1816.

<sup>40</sup> Parish (1816) 5.

<sup>41</sup> Parish (1816) 25.

The charity had, at its inception, six women in its care, the misfits of a large and impoverished population to which the stirrings of philanthropic and humanitarian effort in Bath directed their efforts.

Between the time of the inaugural meeting on October 6, 1805, and the reception of the first voluntary resident of the Penitentiary on April 8, 1806, the Committee's work was focussed upon acquiring a suitable house, organizing fundraising, raising awareness through printed leaflets, collecting subscriptions to the charity and preparing the house for the twenty to thirty residents they hoped to shelter annually. It is important to remember that apart from the clergyman that the charity had such trouble securing, the residents of the Penitentiary had no contact with men at all. Therefore it is necessary to review the "successful" reformations, the rebellious behaviour, the escapes and the decisions to adapt the house as time went on as struggles *among women* whose relative power to act was conditioned as much by class and gender roles within patriarchy as by a desire to change, or be changed. This is not to say that the women who resided in the Penitentiary, nor the women of the Subcommittee had no power; they did. But that power and those actions must be read within the terms of a highly hierarchical and exclusive economic and gender system.

The Ladies' Committee made key decisions with regard to certain physical characteristics of the buildings and the kinds of work that the residents undertook.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Minutes of the Committee*. See 1-30.

The Minutes show evidence of the Subcommittee having access to tradesman accounts,<sup>43</sup> and deciding to teach the residents to read and write.<sup>44</sup> In May of 1806 they determined that the inmates would make straw hats, as it “seemed to promise a profitable return”.<sup>45</sup> Four months later, the all-male committee deferred related decisions regarding the purchase of necessary materials and tools to the Subcommittee, it seems likely, because the former would have no relevant knowledge of hat-making to bring to such decisions.<sup>46</sup> In contrast to the specific demands of the Subcommittee for the hat-making enterprise, the all-male committee vaguely suggested that the “penitents” do “plain embroidery”, but made little comment on how this should come about. The following February, this suggestion was amended to set up dress-making and plain needle work in the Penitentiary for the “benefit of the Institution.”<sup>47</sup> The Subcommittee had the residents start making gloves in the fall of 1807 and suggested that the all-male committee advertise “a few Young Women in the Penitentiary whom the Committee can recommend as

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<sup>43</sup> *Minutes of the Committee*, 2 May 1806: 32.

<sup>44</sup> *Minutes of the Committee*, 1 Aug. 1806: 38.

<sup>45</sup> *Minutes of the Committee*, 2 May 1806: 33.

<sup>46</sup> *Minutes of the Committee*, 5 Sept. 1806.

<sup>47</sup> *Minutes of the Committee*, February 6, 1807: 53. Writing about similar ventures in nineteenth-century penitentiaries in Ireland, Luddy writes, “In Clonmel, women prisoners, under a matron and a ladies’ committee, were employed in spinning, knitting, sewing and plain work.” (155-156)

Servants” to respectable households in the country, far from the temptations of the city.<sup>48</sup>

When Jane Matthews of Bath, a 17-year-old orphan and prostitute, entered the Bath Penitentiary on April 8, 1806, she would have seen the fruit of the labour of the six-member, all women Subcommittee, who had made several changes and alterations to the interior and exterior of (then) Corn-well House. Over the winter, the Subcommittee had “ordered an enclosure of the upper part of the garden, with an Ashlar wall” and “ordered a necessary to be built...they have let the garden, coach-house and stable, at 25 guineas per ann...” The Subcommittee also “directed a person to whitewash the house, and [gave] orders for four bedsteads with half tester and brown holland hangings, and have laid in a cart load of coal.”<sup>49</sup> Later that year, “It was agreed that the sash windows in the parlour shall be made to open, at least partially, in the most simple manner, for the admission of more air.”<sup>50</sup>

Windows of penitentiaries were customarily sealed shut, and residents warned to keep away from them. Their visible presence was either thought to make them vulnerable or to encourage immoral behaviour with persons on the street.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Minutes of the Committee*, September 4-October 2, 1807: 70-72.

<sup>49</sup> *Minutes of the Committee*, January 17, 1806: 24.

<sup>50</sup> *Minutes of the Committee*, June 6, 1806: 35.

<sup>51</sup> Mahood finds similar circumstances at the Edinburgh magdalen asylum, located like the Bath Penitentiary in a central location. “In 1799 the windows on the west side were nailed shut and painted white to keep out prying eyes...In 1821, the directors built a Porter’s Lodge by the gate to serve as a gatehouse, to prevent the girls from escaping late at night. In 1835, ‘for greater seclusion’, half the windows in the house were boarded up and the fence had to be raised to prevent ‘improper persons’ from speaking to the inmates.” (81-82)



These decisions were important because they contributed to the efficient functioning of a new type of charity, which allowed women to opt out of one kind of work while providing another. Further, these decisions are significant for feminist social history, as they demonstrate how sanctioned forms of women's work would play out in the expanding field of approved public activities for women, occasioned by philanthropy. Historian Maria Luddy's observations on reform houses in nineteenth-century Ireland find an equivalent in the situation at Bath. She writes,

Without doubt women's involvement in philanthropy provided them with personal and group authority and power. Above all philanthropy was a business undertaking which required judicious use of resources, whether material or monetary, the keeping of accounts, in some instances the payment of individuals, and in many cases the maintenance of buildings. These practical functions and the power women wielded is often obscured in the trivial sentimentality of the annual reports which in some sense deny the very difficult and often arduous tasks that faced philanthropic women. Women's activities in the charitable sphere also added considerably to the welfare infrastructure of the country.<sup>52</sup>

Seen in this light, the Ladies' Subcommittee's decisions are central to the history of the Penitentiary in particular and to the overall economy of Bath.

With this claim in mind, I wish to make something of the Subcommittee's decision to enclose the upper part of the garden with an ashlar wall. This decision is significant in multiple ways. First, it indicates that it is the Subcommittee, not the all-male Committee, who were the first to recognize (or simply observe) that not all women would want to stay. For there is not one reference in the entire history of

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<sup>52</sup> Luddy 3.

the Penitentiary of someone breaking in. The walls were intended to keep the residents from breaking out. In as much as this construction of the wall around the upper part of the garden is an institutional decision, it is also an architectural one. Simply because they were a Subcommittee did not mean that they did not have fundamentally the same objective as the male architectural firms who followed in their footsteps. The architectural revisions of Manners and Gill in 1845 have the precise same goal/goal in mind: to keep women inside. Finally, the enclosure of the garden is an index of class-based power struggle within an all-female establishment. While the women of privilege had the power to erect the wall, the women of lesser privilege still had the power to escape over it.

On February 6, 1807, an Ann Wheeler was admitted to the Bath Penitentiary. No details survive of the circumstances that brought her to seek admission to the institution, however, at the time of her successful application, the “penitents” are recorded in the Minutes as behaving well.<sup>53</sup> This was frequently not the case, and punishment tended to be swift when insurrection occurred. The most frequent punishment was “imprisonment”, sometimes within the Penitentiary, and sometimes within other incarceration facilities in Bath, such as the gaol or the poorhouse.<sup>54</sup>

It is rare that the Minutes detail the exact events or actions which constituted improper behavior, however, references to bad language are frequent. Ann Wheeler,

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<sup>53</sup> *Minutes of the Committee*, 6 Feb. 1807: 52.

for example, is noted on April 3, 1807 of being “guilty of swearing.”<sup>55</sup> A few months earlier, on October 3, 1806, “The Matron was interrogated respecting the behaviour of the Penitents, and she reported that many of them behave in a very unruly and improper manner.” The committee, taking their prerogative as the governing body, admonish the Subcommittee “that before they admitt [sic] any applicant into the house, to endeavour to obtain from every possible source, the best information respecting her general character and temper, and proofs of the sincerity of her repentance. (One can only wonder what and where such proofs and information would be available to the middle-class women of the Subcommittee.) The reasons for improper behaviour are rarely commented upon, but the Minutes do acknowledge, however cursorily, the way in which a woman left the institution. She might be released, “dismissed” or might escape.

If a woman asked for release, as was supposedly her right, the committee was not necessarily supportive, despite the published mandate to let women go at their will. Ann Wheeler asked for release from the institution on March 4, 1808, roughly thirteen months after her admission. While the Committee agreed to her release after “examining” her, they refused the release of Patience Dash and Susan Pearce, who on May 5, 1809 “were desirous of leaving the house...for no satisfactory reason.”<sup>56</sup> There is no further mention of Wheeler until early June. During the year

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<sup>54</sup> April 8, 1806: the committee notes that “J\_\_\_ Hill...behaved improperly” and was “imprisoned for seven days” before being “passed to her parish.” (31)

<sup>55</sup> *Minutes of the Committee*, 3 Apr. 1807: 58.

<sup>56</sup> *Minutes of the Committee*: 113.

in which Wheeler successfully – it seems – petitioned for her release, tensions in the Penitentiary were particularly high. In early March there is much talk of “correcting irregularities” of behaviour in the residents. References to women going insane pepper the Minutes, as do indications of struggles among the residents themselves.<sup>57</sup> “An unfavorable account has been given of some of the Young Women respecting disagreements among themselves...Jane Lynch has been sent to the Walcot Poorhouse...Vines has absconded...”<sup>58</sup> In July, Sarah Angel was “confined in the Bath Prison” while another resident called Palmer “expressed much dissatisfaction and exhibited many complaints against the Matron and several Young Women in the house, which after minute investigation were all deemed groundless, frivolous, and vexatious...”<sup>59</sup> The Committee dismissed Palmer during this same meeting. In August, Susan Pearce, who had asked to be released three months earlier, is noted for her “insubordination”, and the Subcommittee is told to “dispose of her as they may think proper.”<sup>60</sup> Most striking is the case of Ann Wheeler, who appeared back in March to have been granted an early release. As noted above, she next appears in the Minutes for June 2, 1809, not for being released but for having escaped. The Minutes muse briefly that “she was supposed to have climbed over the wall.”<sup>61</sup> This

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<sup>57</sup> See *Minutes*: 82, 87, 92, 93, 109, 113, and 117.

<sup>58</sup> *Minutes of the Committee*: 87, 92.

<sup>59</sup> *Minutes of the Committee*: 117.

<sup>60</sup> *Minutes of the Committee*: 120.

<sup>61</sup> *Minutes of the Committee*: 115.

was the same wall that the female Subcommittee had ordered erected eighteen months before to enclose the garden and prevent such escapes at all.

Wheeler's story raises several questions. Why was a woman who had secured her own release still in the Penitentiary after three months? What were the conditions of her containment – or sense of containment – such that she had to escape in order to leave? And why did an institution which was committed in print to not keeping women against their will, deny Wheeler and her co-residents release? The Committee Minutes from 1805 to 1811 are a record of what Lorraine Code calls “surrogate knowledge”.<sup>62</sup> In Code's language, the Committee members were “surrogate knowers” of the residents, producing class-biased “knowledge” of those who had markedly different socio-economic and cultural realities. Empirical attempts at “knowing” the Other only occur through economic privilege, thus the underpinning assumptions and the overriding goals of the knower are local to the knowers' privilege only. A surrogate knower is someone who believes they can take on another's subjectivity and determine for that Other their best interests. Code continues,

[Surrogate knowers] commonly [presume] that everyone they “know” will be – or will want to be – just like them. Hence they extrapolate their *own* class-, race-, and gender-specific goals and values to construct norms for other people whose structural possibilities are then shaped by those norms, no matter how starkly their circumstances differ from those in the policy-making positions.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Code 107.

<sup>63</sup> Code 107-108.

At the Bath Penitentiary, the all-male committee's surrogate knowledge of their "complements",<sup>64</sup> the residents they sought to refashion into mute and chaste cogs in the early nineteenth-century economic and class system, produced a prison for certain unruly residents. While they were most definitely "active", their "kindness" was only altruistic to the extent that religious literacy, diligence, chastity and obedience were qualities they sought in women they would marry of their own class, and in the women they would employ as servants. In other words, saved women were *submissive* women. It was in the middle-class, male committee's best fiscal and political interests, therefore, to reform and save fallen women.

Given the persistence of accounts of insubordination, however, the term "penitent" seems to reflect the male committee's hopes of the inmates, rather than reflect the variety of positions and unruly behaviours the women residents of Ladymead House actually occupied and displayed. Further, the fragmentary evidence of rebellion, rudeness and escape are registers of how the philanthropic desire to mend other people's ways while "helping" them, was also a desire to control, discipline and punish any resistance to such "help".<sup>65</sup> Just as a sense of competition is more acute for the loser, a building will only become a prison to a prisoner. And "good" women, that is, women who wished to enter and then remain

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<sup>64</sup> Code 108.

<sup>65</sup> Mahood finds Foucault useful (but not definitive) for the study of prostitution in nineteenth-century England. She writes that reform institutions based "their regime on training in deference and subordination, qualities the inmates need as suitable servants or labourers. The organizational structure of magdalene homes was based on a paternalist model, which recast elements of the factory system in the image of the patriarchal family, thereby reproducing the patriarchal and class order of society." (87-88)

as long as possible, would have been less likely to feel incarcerated within the Penitentiary. Ann Wheeler, on the other hand, had been chastised for bad language during her thirteen months in the Bath Penitentiary, to the point that she had been named in the Minutes as a difficult case. It seems reasonable to assume that because of this, the Committee did not make good on its promise to release her. And in that decision, not even recorded in the Minutes, the Committee became wardens, not philanthropists: the Penitentiary transformed into a prison, and ceased to be a “home”.

Ann Wheeler’s escape became the motif of a public art project I undertook in Bath in July 2000, in the form of a bookwork. (Fig. 12, 13) This project consisted of twenty-five “books” encased in translucent plastic pockets to protect them from inclement weather, and placed in sites of importance to women’s history throughout downtown Bath. The project linked my performance in front of Bath Abbey, *pro fanus* with my work on Ladymead House and nineteenth-century prostitution. Also titled *fallen/winged*, the book work was comprised of a 500-word text: a 5x7” black and white photograph of the performance *pro fanus*; a drawing of the falling winged woman on the west front of Bath Abbey overlapping a small rendition of Ladymead House, based on the 1730s painting. (Fig. 52) Also included in the pockets were feathers, tucked in the folded text, a pencil, paper and small brown envelope. The larger plastic envelope and most of the materials it contained were in

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shades of black and white. The text made connections between these disparate – on first glance – materials.

My aim was, as I stated in the text, to have the project be a “gesture towards the ‘fallen’ women of Bath, small commemoration of their labour, spirit and largely forgotten presence in Bath.” Without trying to make a hero of Ann Wheeler, I would nonetheless argue for the importance of her action, climbing over the wall that the Subcommittee built. The women on the Subcommittee, acting collectively, did more than order an enclosure of Ladymead’s garden with hewn stone blocks. With this decision, they contributed architecturally and ideologically to Ladymead House’s new purpose as an institution, a purpose that for certain women meant their stay was as inmates, not as residents. As is evident from the Minutes of the Committee from 1805 to 1811, the nascent charity, was determined to overcome feelings of “delicacy” and “disgust” in order to “encounter the scenes which every where surround the wretched abodes, into which infamy and disease, poverty and prostitution have thrust their victims.”<sup>66</sup> The Penitentiary nonetheless replicated the very economic and social hierarchies which a certain current view (held by Mr. Parish, the chairman) blamed for the prostitutes’ downfall. This replication was not seamless. As Ann Wheeler’s and others’ insubordination clearly shows, the residents frequently deployed the space which the Penitentiary unwittingly provided for revolt against those social and economic iniquities. The fact that their institution, which claimed to keep no woman against her will, had a significant number of

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<sup>66</sup> Parish (1817) 10.



escapes each year, is the most immediate evidence that the Penitentiary was not as forgiving of transgression within its walls as it was of sins taking place without. More importantly, however, the escapes also prove that women in Ann Wheeler's position would act on their desire to leave, whether that desire had sanction or not, and are thus a measure of the agency that the inmates would exercise.

### *Conclusion*

In 1826, twenty-one years after the initiation of the charity, a Mr. Dumbleton made a report to those assembled at the Annual General Meeting on the outcome of the fifty-one residents taken in since its inception. Of this number, five had died, seven were expelled for "reprobate conduct", but were healthy on expulsion, two had "escaped", four were "discharged at their own request", another four were, after cure, "dismissed...not being considered proper subjects for the Penitentiary".<sup>67</sup> The total number of women who left the Penitentiary unpenitent was twenty-two: almost half the number taken in. Some of the reasons for this failure of the institution to sway the "ruined, despised, and forsaken female, from the deepest gulph [sic] of disease, misery, and vice"<sup>68</sup> have been discussed here as being related to the structural designs of an empirical and positivist philanthropy, steeped in the larger goals of a class-based system of privilege and burgeoning

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<sup>67</sup> Mr. Dumbleton's report, quoted in Parish's *Annual Report* (1826) 75.

industrial capitalism. I have also addressed the overtly subordinate role of the “Subcommittee” in terms of the actual powers these women exercised, and the supposedly subservient and penitent character of the residents in terms of how their admission was not necessarily followed by submission. I would like to conclude by exploring the larger implications of reading the actions of these two groups of women in this way.

Dependent upon the Ladies’ Committee and Matron reports for guidance, the all-male executive committee’s decisions are both an index of patriarchal control on one level, but a reflection of the Ladies’ Committee’s observations, work and demands on another. In this way, the Ladies’ Committee reflects what historian Amanda Vickery has called the expansion of roles for women in the early nineteenth-century. The women who formed the Ladies’ Committee were middle-class, usually but not always married, and often wealthy enough to subscribe personally to the charity. Of the six women comprising the Ladies’ Committee of 1816, for example, three gave financial support to the Penitentiary.<sup>69</sup> The gap in reference material related to the Penitentiary, between January 1812 and December 1815, accentuates the changes in official attitude towards the Ladies’ Committee, which can be detected by 1816. Other than thanks and the odd word of praise, the Minutes of the male Committee from 1805-1812 find very little to say about the Ladies, who were not permitted to attend the weekly, and later, monthly meetings.

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<sup>68</sup> Parish (1826) 72.

The Matron's "diary" and her reports of the residents' behaviour win the men's attention far more frequently. By 1816 however, the administration of the Penitentiary had altered distinctly to accommodate the voices of the Ladies' Committee. In the publication, *Bath Penitentiary and Lock Hospital*, encompassing the years 1816 and 1817, the "Rules for Internal Management" state clearly that

The Select Committee of Ladies and Gentlemen shall meet weekly, or oftener, if occasion shall require, and receive the reports of the weekly visitors; and determine on the adoption or rejection of applications for relief, and on all business connected with the internal management of the House...The Ladies of the Committee will superintend the employment, diet, and dress of the women; they shall also examine their work, and endeavour to lead them to habits of industry and virtue.<sup>70</sup>

In other words, the Ladies of the Committee had far surpassed the expectations of the original Committee, who did not include their names in public documents until December 1806 – more than a year after the Penitentiary's inaugural meeting – despite the sanction that their names could have provided to the project. By 1816, however, they were working closely with male supporters of the charity in the "Select Committee", noted above.

The irony of this situation is that the institution, formed to revise the ways of women who had eschewed "proper" femininity, itself gave an opportunity to middle-class women to be visibly active in an arena – the address of female sexuality beyond the bounds of marriage – that would supposedly taint any woman who came

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<sup>69</sup> See *Annual Report of the Bath Penitentiary and Lock Hospital*, 1816, "Donations and Annual Subscriptions" 17-29; and Appendix 1-4.

into contact with it.<sup>71</sup> In their “active benevolence”, to use F. K. Prochaska’s term, these middle-class women rather than women who worked as prostitutes seem to be the actual inspiration for the ever-louder insistence upon separate spheres in the later Victorian era.<sup>72</sup> Suggesting that the notion of “separate spheres” has been incorrectly exaggerated in histories of the nineteenth century, Vickery writes,

Indeed, one might go further and argue that the stress on the proper female sphere in Victorian discourse signalled a growing concern that more women were seen to be active *outside* the home rather than proof that that they were so confined. In short, the broadcasting of the language of separate spheres looks like a conservative response to an unprecedented *expansion* in the opportunities, ambitions and experience of late Georgian and Victorian women.<sup>73</sup>

While operating under the auspices of uncontested class and gender privilege, the Bath Female Home and Penitentiary nonetheless provided its Subcommittee with opportunities to make management and budgetary decisions, to provide and conduct the education of other women, to oversee and reward the labour of those

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<sup>70</sup> Parish (1817) 23-26.

<sup>71</sup> Luddy writes, “Any examination of prostitution reveals a multiplicity of attitudes not alone towards the practice of sexuality in any society but also towards how women are perceived in that society...In the case histories of prostitutes, often published in the annual reports of rescue agencies, they were portrayed as women whose lives were destroyed by sexual experience.” (98, 102-3) This destruction was thought to be contagious, as evidenced by the fact that “[p]enitents were forbidden to use their own names or to speak of their past” for fear that it might inspire a longing for life in the streets. (114) See also page 3.

<sup>72</sup> Prochaska 6. Prochaska notes that this benevolence hinged very much on class values and priorities. He writes, “The insatiable demand for reliable servants was an important factor behind the benevolence of late eighteenth and nineteenth century women, and it played a particularly significant part in their institutional work.” (148)

<sup>73</sup> Amanda Vickery, “Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women’s History,” *Historical Journal* 36, 3 (1993): 400.

same women. In short, the Subcommittee did there what they were expected to do as part of their class and gender roles, but they did not do it in *their homes*. They undertook this work at the Penitentiary, a place both public and private, equally a home and an institution. Their work on behalf of the charity falls neither into the category of “domestic” labour, and yet they did not do this work for pay. While this situation certainly replicated the larger structure of late Georgian, early Victorian society, this is not to say that the women of the Subcommittee were simply the dupes of a patriarchal machine. On the contrary, by working in a voluntary capacity on the behalf of other women who were thought to be a world apart in terms of class, education and morality, the ladies of the Subcommittee expanded the definition of what a woman could do in the public sphere in the early nineteenth century.<sup>74</sup>

It is important to remember, however, that such an expansion was still the privilege of an already privileged group.<sup>75</sup> Philanthropy, as Michael Ignatieff argues, was a political act in that it was authority in action, fostering dependency of the

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<sup>74</sup> Prochaska confirms this view. He writes, “In the Guardian Society, for example, founded in 1812 to provide a refuge and employment for former prostitutes, the ladies’ committee eventually took up the following duties: to direct ‘all’ the domestic arrangements in the institution; to examine in detail the conduct of all its inmates, ‘and advise, encourage, or discharge, as may appear proper or necessary’; to oversee the workshop and to ensure that the matrons carried out their different functions; and last, and perhaps most important, to approve or reject applicants for admission. In short, the ladies’ committee, in touch with the day-to-day management effectively took charge. The gentlemen’s committee, happy to lighten its load by delegating authority to what it believed to be expert opinion, accepted the decisions of the ladies. Hundreds of philanthropic societies followed this pattern.” (144)

<sup>75</sup> To be fair, however, Prochaska notes, “In their enthusiasm to turn paupers and criminals into domestics the charitable women may be accused of self-interest, but this accusation must be tempered with the realization that they were powerless to offer them very much else.” (154)

working classes upon those with more power.<sup>76</sup> I do not suggest that working-class women never engaged in acts of charity – working-class individuals probably knew how to be “charitable” better than any other group. But in terms of what would have been seen, even through the backhanded compliment of male alarm, as an expanded role for women through philanthropy, working-class women would not have been part of the debate. Nonetheless, it is interesting to consider that concern over prostitution increased at the same time that, as Vickery suggests, this new arena of female involvement in the public sphere was blossoming. The term “public woman” speaks volumes about the discomfiture that a woman walking and working in that notorious “public” sphere could produce.<sup>77</sup>

When I imagine Ann Wheeler scaling the ashlar wall, I superimpose my memories of the wall between the courtyard on the north east side of Ladymead, and Walcot Street, with the image of Ladymead House that the painting of 1730 gives me. It is dark, and Walcot Street is finally quiet. Wheeler is wearing the standard issue of the Penitentiary, the coarse and plain “suitable garments” that were given to her on her admission. She no longer has her old clothes – the Subcommittee and the Matron ensure that those thin coverings are inaccessible to

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<sup>76</sup> M. Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain* (London: Macmillan, 1978) 213.

<sup>77</sup> Caine writes, “The different and gendered meanings of the term ‘public’ whereby a ‘public’ man was one understood to be concerned with political and community affairs while a ‘public’ woman was a prostitute shows how absolute the exclusion of women from the public sphere was – while at the same time pointing to the fact that any public involvement of women was seen as potentially or actually immoral.” (7) Mahood supports this view: “Controversy over the presence of working women in the ‘public’ arena, therefore, became an integral part of the public discourse on the prostitution problem.” (73)

the inmates after arrival. These new clothes, while warmer, will be her giveaway back outside on the street, so she must make her escape at night for that reason, too. The places she knows, Avon, Milk and Corn Streets, are not far, although many roads are treacherous at night, not so much for the men but for all the construction which tears up streets into treacherous terrain. Bath grows daily, and she will not rest in this house another hour. She was promised release months ago, and still, no freedom. Some like it well enough here, but for Ann Wheeler, confinement does not suit. The women are not even permitted to look out the front windows any longer, for fear that they will be tempted to leave – or that they will tempt the outside world in?<sup>78</sup>

The wall is high, at least ten feet high, and Wheeler needs help to hoist herself over the coarse stones. She is not alone. There are other women outside, breaking the bedtime rule, lifting her. She grasps at the jagged edges of ashlar, which send fine particles of stone dust onto the hair and clothes of the women supporting her. They whisper; they try to stifle laughter, Wheeler is excited, afraid, determined. She hauls herself up onto the narrow ledge that the top of the wall provides. There is only air now between the other women's hands and her body, only air now between herself and freedom. All are silent. Wheeler looks back once at the women below, and at the Penitentiary that looms in the darkness beside her. She looks ahead to the fall, to the leap she is about to make. She jumps.

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<sup>78</sup> *Minutes of the Committee*, 1 May 1807: 61.

In making her escape, Ann Wheeler made it clear what the Penitentiary was to her: a prison. But the making of an escape is also the making of freedom. One might say that in that moment of jumping over the wall, Wheeler rebuilt both the Penitentiary and her relationship to it. One might even say that in that moment, she became an architect herself.



## Chapter Eight

### The Bath Penitentiary: A History of Work

To study women and work is to face sadness, is to confront a belief shared by every culture in every society in every country on this planet: the assumption that men, the things men do and all things masculine are more valuable than women, the things women do and all things feminine...[W]e must learn to love our own work. If the historical...belief that men's work is not to be perpetuated another generation, we must judge our own work to be worthy. And we must value it so highly that we value the men who chose to emulate us...[T]he status of women's work...is a measure of the value we place on women.

Nina Lee Colwill<sup>1</sup>

In Bath in 1851, the total stationary population was 54 254, not including an additional itinerant population. Graham Davis estimates that in the 1840s, the unofficial visitors to Bath could total up to 20 000 a year.<sup>2</sup> Of the official population, 32 517 were women, and of these, the 1851 census counted 12 266 as working for their living. The area of concentration in women's labour was domestic service, with domestic servants constituting over 63% of the female working population. As R. S. Neale observes, the figure 12 666 represents 14% of the total population, and almost 25% of the total number of women in Bath. Neale estimates that the average wage of a domestic servant in Bath would have been at the mid-

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<sup>1</sup> "The Worth of Women's Work" in *Dropped Threads: What We Aren't Told*, eds. Carol Shields and Marjorie Anderson (Canada: Vintage, 2001) 339-340.

<sup>2</sup> Davis (1990) 153.

point of the nineteenth century, £11 per annum, or four to five shillings a week.<sup>3</sup> This amount is, according to the *Bath Journal* of 1831, not even half of what would be the bare minimum to keep a family of four from starving or freezing to death. This calculation does not account for dramatic fluctuations in the cost of coal and bread, which added to the misery of the poor in Victorian Bath. A domestic servant's wages must be therefore regarded as an uncertain minimum during a time of want.<sup>4</sup>

As historian Joan Scott has noted, wages for women were maintained at a lower rate than men's wages throughout the nineteenth century. This situation was an effect of the confluence between the fiscal logic of industrial capitalism and the notion that the mainstay of a family's income was supposed to come from the male head of the house. As historians and sympathetic contemporary observers note, this confluence did nothing to acknowledge, much less assuage the struggles of single mothers, or families whose male figure had abandoned ship.<sup>5</sup> The insistence upon separate spheres, Scott argues, obscures the fact that many women had to work their whole lives, married or single, mothers or not, and did so for less wages than men. Arguing that women's labour was not a nineteenth-century phenomenon, but rather part of a cultural and economic continuity, Scott writes,

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<sup>3</sup> Neale acknowledges that this amount could vary significantly from servant to servant, depending upon the position of the worker within the internal hierarchy of the household.

<sup>4</sup> See Neale (1981), Chapter 8, "Social Structure and Economic Welfare" 264-300.

<sup>5</sup> Neale's observations on Poor Relief applicants have been noted already, Chapter 6, footnote 5.

[w]here women worked and what they did was not the fruit of some inexorable industrial process, but the result, at least in part, of calculations about labor costs. Whether in textiles, bootmaking, tailoring, or printing, whether associated with mechanization, the dispersion of production, or the rationalization of the labor processes, the introduction of women meant that employers had decided to save on labor costs.”<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, the predominance of women in trades and services such as textiles, clothing, food and domestic labour, was also fiscally motivated. To employ a male servant was a mark of prestige, and would cost a household considerably more than a female servant in the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

While women found employment in domestic service more readily than any other form of work in Bath, they also earned livings as independent laundresses, shoe-tanners, seamstresses, staymakers, tailors, shop girls and milliners. If engaged in factory labour, women workers in Bath tended to be found in clothing manufacture, particularly corset-making. Women with access to education became nurses, teachers, midwives, and, into the twentieth century, typists or clerks.<sup>8</sup> As Joan Scott has written, “For the bulk of the female wage-earning population, then, the movement was not from work at home to work away from home, but from one kind of workplace to another.”<sup>9</sup> The discomfort with, and even outrage over women working “outside” the home was, Scott argues, the product of an anxious

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<sup>6</sup> Joan Scott, “The Woman Worker” in *A History of Women in the West: IV. Emerging Feminism from Revolution to World War*, eds. Genevieve Fraisse and Michelle Perrot (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1993) 408.

<sup>7</sup> Davies and Bonsall 93.

<sup>8</sup> Neale (1981) 276, and Davies and Bonsall 92-94.

<sup>9</sup> Scott 405.

middle class attempting, on one level, to differentiate themselves from the working masses on the basis of a supposed moral and cultural superiority. While the ideology of separate spheres made no difference to poor women's need to work, the discursive emphasis on the gendered nature of space and labour did generate conditions for and to working women's experience in the industrial era in Bath. As Scott argues, the employers of women in specific industries, trades and services sought to defend their hire of women in the "public" sphere through gender tropes, specifically through the association of women with detail-oriented, repetitive, and low-paid work that was related in some way to either the home or to nurturing.<sup>10</sup>

Scott suggests that the gender classification of certain kinds of work as feminine and others as masculine, as well as the segregation of the sexes in work environments which required both types of labour, enabled a kind of discursive override of the "problem" of finding women in the public sphere (a problem which, as Scott carefully elucidates, was a middle-class obsession inapplicable to poor women's experience, historically). In other words, certain kinds of low-paid, persnickety work could "feminize" a working space with an otherwise "masculine" identification. Equally, as I hope to demonstrate in this chapter, "feminine" work was thought to be able to reinvest a compromised femininity with propriety, as the

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<sup>10</sup> See Scott, Callen and Vickery, works cited. Anthea Callen has noted, similarly, that women working in the Arts and Crafts industries tended to (in theory if not in practice) work at tasks which were considered "suitable" on the basis of gender. Art, according to Callen, "was an area of employment for women that could be seen as an extension of the traditional feminine accomplishments of the period, which would enhance rather than erode the role designated as 'nature' for Victorian womanhood." (25)

bourgeois ideal of femininity was synonymous with passive virtue. Thus Victorian conceptions of the public and the private, while initially appearing to a twenty-first century observer to be clearly demarcated along the gendered lines of public and private spheres, emerge as a far more complicated intersection of sexuality, ideology and space, particularly with regard to the question of work.

Just as a twenty-first-century insistence upon the ideology of separate spheres is ultimately misleading and disabling for feminism, so too the notion that women started to “work” in the nineteenth century is a red herring for the study of working-class women’s history. Amanda Vickery has compellingly suggested that “where historians have researched the activities of particular individuals and groups, rather than the contemporary social theories which allegedly hobbled them, Victorian women emerge as no less spirited, capable, and, most importantly, diverse a crew as in any other century.”<sup>11</sup> Vickery here warns that over-emphasis on discursive signs of women’s oppression obscures material evidence for women’s participation as varied and capable agents in Victorian culture. Likewise, the persistent anxiety over women workers in the nineteenth century comes, argues Scott, not from an increased number of women in the workforce, but rather from “contemporaries’ preoccupation with gender as a sexual division of labour.”<sup>12</sup> Concern about working women, and the relentless insistence of certain groups upon a separate sphere for women has, however, a particular relevance for the material

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<sup>11</sup> Vickery 391.

<sup>12</sup> Scott 425.

history of the Bath Penitentiary. The philanthropic impulse underwriting (literally) the institution echoed a familiar and favorite concept: the symmetry between domesticity, female virtue, and gender-specific work. Given that the women residents were physically present in the institution because of their previous reliance on a different – but no less gendered – kind of work, prostitution, the question of what work they would do, once inside the Penitentiary, was crucial.

As a “home” for repentant prostitutes, the Penitentiary operated along the interstice of two overtly incompatible, yet mutually constitutive Victorian precepts: that of the bad or “fallen” woman, and that of the good, private architecture of domesticity. Given the widespread certainty that the former could topple the latter, the notion that a “good” home could help mend the corrupt ways of prostitutes had its skeptics. On a more symbolic level, the asylums and penitentiaries that sprung up across England, Scotland and Ireland in the nineteenth century were in contradiction with the ideological underpinnings of domestic architecture in the nineteenth century. How was the safe haven, the stronghold to be defended? As Scott’s research on women’s labour demonstrates, certain kinds of work, with their overt gender connotations, had the power to mark a space as feminine. Thus work had the purpose in the Penitentiary to cleanse – both the “penitents” and the architectural spaces of the institution – of the association with vice. “Feminine” work was associated with the supposedly essential feminine qualities of nurturing, submissiveness and obedience. The laundry, hat and glove making, needle and handwork that occupied the residents had, therefore, a twofold purpose. The fiscal need to add to the operating budget and supplement the annual donations and

weekly collections was enfolded in a larger ideological project. As Linda Mahood writes,

The strategy the directors developed to resolve this contradiction was to attach a moral significance to certain kinds of work. The challenge then, was not simply a matter of re-socializing women for service or factory work, but a moral mission. The directors assigned a moral meaning to certain forms of female labour, thus through their programme of moral reform they not only created women fit for work, but work fit for women.<sup>13</sup>

The governing bodies and philanthropists who ran the Penitentiary sought to refashion the objects of their charity into women who were industrious, productive, and godly. In essence, women who could make these same committee members excellent servants would be women who were no longer capable of destroying the home.

In this chapter I document the complex nature of the work of the inmates of Ladymead House. The Select Committee, the Ladies Committee and the Matron chose for the inmates kinds of work that would instill in them a respect for “honest” labour, and a renewed sense of female decency. For onlookers of the time, a woman’s choice to enter or leave the institution was a measure of her willingness to return to “goodness”. What I seek to do here is, however, reconsider that choice to enter or to leave along the lines of choices about labour. As I stated in the previous chapter, the architecture of Ladymead House alone, in its successive renovations, demonstrates a metamorphosis from home to prison. If, however, women’s choices are the yardstick along which the architecture of the building is measured, then a

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<sup>13</sup> Mahood 93. She also writes that “the goal of the majority of directors was to create an industrial labour force...Financial motives and the need to make profit out of the inmates’ labour, therefore, lay behind the two-year residence requirement [common to many reform institutions]...” (92)

materialist feminist reading of Ladymead House may also understand the building in terms of one of its original intentions – to be a refuge. Furthermore, if Ladymead House is recognized as a place where a certain type of work was guaranteed and likewise, the streets were a place where another type of work could be found, the choices to stay, leave or escape, renders the architecture of Ladymead House not as a minor building in the history of Bath’s architecture, but as a key element in the Victorian working-class history of Bath.

In 1816, eleven years after the inaugural meeting of philanthropists and concerned citizens, the Bath Penitentiary’s annual report proudly acknowledges that, through a combination of industry, donation and frugality, the Penitentiary could claim a stock capital of £1850.<sup>14</sup> In this same year, the governing committee was able to purchase Ladymead House, the building, which they had previously been leasing. This purchase, obtained through the help of Chairman John Parish, amounted to £918/12/0.<sup>15</sup> Regular management expenses and further expenditures such as the expansion of the facilities with a new ward totaled approximately £2330.<sup>16</sup> The charity had six residents in July of that year and had, by the end of the year, admitted another twenty.<sup>17</sup> For reasons discussed in Chapter 6, only seventeen of these women were still in residence by year’s end. In 1816, the net profit of work

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<sup>14</sup> Parish (1816) 71.

<sup>15</sup> Parish (1816) 70.

<sup>16</sup> Parish (1816) 70.

<sup>17</sup> Parish (1816) 75.



undertaken by the inmates totaled approximately £115.<sup>18</sup> The annual reports of the Bath Penitentiary do not consistently isolate the monetary contributions the inmates made to the overall gross of the house, frequently grouping this supplement with general subscriptions and donations. An analysis of specific figures, however, yields some insight into the workings of the Penitentiary, and the relative importance of the residents' work for the maintenance of the institution.

The average number of new residents per year of operation, taken from admission numbers from 1818-1825, 1852-1854 and 1881, is twenty. This number multiplied by a conservative estimate of the number of years the institution operated at a thirty-bed capacity, eighty-five, results in the cautious figure, 1700, for the total number of residents of the Bath Penitentiary. I propose that the number of women who successfully applied for admission was roughly equivalent to the number who applied but did not gain entry. The figure 3400 is based on the average number of women who applied for admission, between the years 1816-1820 and 1852-1854: forty-one, then multiplied by eighty-five. Not every report notes the number of applicants (as opposed to residents), and the number of women who either remained longer, or for less time than the average length of two years. Other factors, not obscured by these figures, are the numbers of women who escaped or died, women who were only residents of the Lock Hospital during its operation, and women who participated in the Penitentiary's programmes but did not have a bed there at night. While there were rarely facilities for more than thirty full-time

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<sup>18</sup> Parish (1816) 70.

residents, the institution did take in as many as forty women a year. Women could remain anywhere from a few days to three years in the home. Fluctuations in the numbers of admissions can be attributed to lack of funds, renovations, or to the fact that, after 1816, the number of beds was generally limited to thirty, so a high number of successful applicants one year would likely mean a year or two of low admissions to follow. Committees also frequently based their refusal on the more nebulous reason that the woman in question was an “inappropriate object” for the charity.<sup>19</sup> I estimate that the 1700 women who lived and worked at the Bath Penitentiary from 1805 to 1914 produced a gross sum of £30 000 from their washing, needle and handwork.<sup>20</sup>

During the fiscal year 1821-22, the Penitentiary received twenty-three applications for admission, accepted eight, and was already housing twenty-four women. The total number of women in the house for all or part of that year was then thirty-two. These thirty-two women collectively, under the auspices of the charity, garnered £398 for their “work and washing”.<sup>21</sup> The women who lived in the house did not receive payment for their work beyond food, shelter, clothing and employment training. However, the chairman notes in the written section of the report for 1821-22 that “3 women have received the premium of one guinea each,

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<sup>19</sup> Luddy finds similar methods of granting entry in Irish asylums. See pp. 135-136.

<sup>20</sup> I obtained this figure by multiplying an average net profit (quite consistent throughout the century of operation) of £350 for washing and needlework by the number of years indicated.

<sup>21</sup> *Parish Annual Report for 1822* (1826) 8-9.

for remaining one year in place; and 2 have received two guineas each for remaining two years.”<sup>22</sup> The difference in the profits raised through inmates’ labour between the years 1816 and 1822 can be attributed to the increased numbers of residents and the likelihood of increasingly industrial methods for the execution of their work. By December 1821, the chairman, Parish, noted that the Penitentiary owned stock to the value of almost £2000.

In the following year, the house housed twenty-one women, and the total for washing and needlework was £266/15/10. Thirty-one inmates added the sum of £344/7/7 to the 1825 receipts, again, for washing and needlework.<sup>23</sup> The following year, the expenses for household upkeep, including food, clothing, bedding, furniture, repairs, medicine, coal, prayer books and salaries, came to a total of £845/16/3.<sup>24</sup> The inmates had, therefore, produced approximately 40% of the living and operating costs for the institution. In addition to breaking perfectly even on expenses for the 1824-25 fiscal year,<sup>25</sup> there was a £800 increase in the charity’s savings, from £2916/1/0 to £3716, etc. While this increase was largely due to the

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<sup>22</sup> Parish, *Annual Report for 1822* (1826) 5. This reward system, common to reform institutions, was obviously set up as an incentive to former residents to maintain a moral lifestyle in their new or resumed role as servant.

<sup>23</sup> Parish, *Annual Report for 1825* (1826) 9, 12-13.

<sup>24</sup> Parish (1826) unpaginated insert. The cost of clothing 38 women during 1881 was £71/3/8, meaning that it cost the Penitentiary just under £2 to clothe each woman. Likewise, the cost of provisions for thirty-eight women (and the undisclosed number of staff) came to approximately £8 per head. It appears that the women were being fed and clothed well, comparatively. To keep these figures in perspective, it should be noted that the stipend for the chaplain was £50 per annum. *The Bath Female Home and Penitentiary: Annual Report with an Alphabetical List of Subscriptions and Donations for the Year 1881* (Bath: W. & F. Dawson, 1882) 11.

<sup>25</sup> Parish *Annual Report for 1825* (1826) 12-13.

chairman's own frequent and generous donations, the large contribution that the residents' work made to the operational budget allowed Parish's gifts to remain as investments, as opposed to liquid capital for immediate expenses. One year later, Mr. Parish triumphantly writes,

By the judicious management of the Committee of Ladies...a regular income has been secured to the Establishment, by the profit of work done by the inmates...to the amount [last year] of £115: 9s.: 1d. the produce of about six months' labour...Gentlemen, this mode of occupying the Penitents will do more for us than increase our finances in a direct way. It will exalt the character of the Penitentiary in the public eye – it will shew them that we are not *idle* – it will convince them that we are cultivating in the objects of our compassion the *spirit of industry*...<sup>26</sup>

In 1855, the report delivered to the “Annual Meeting of the Subscribers and Friends of the Bath Female Penitentiary” stated that the number of applications for admission to the Penitentiary had risen sharply over the past three years, “causing the total number of females in the Institution, which in 1852 was 41, to rise to 67 at the close of 1854.”<sup>27</sup> Bishop Carr, delivering the report, noted that the price of “necessaries of life” had risen in parallel with this increase in application, such that the cost of board had increased by 58%.<sup>28</sup> The report for this year states that the price for inmates' work is “necessarily fixed and cannot be raised”, therefore the Bishop is calling for increased generosity on the part of subscribers and friends to

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<sup>26</sup> Parish (1926) 72-73.

<sup>27</sup> Bishop Carr's report for 1854, *Bath Female Penitentiary, Thirty-Ninth Report...During the Year 1854* (Bath: Wood Brothers, Bath and Cheltenham Gazette Office, 1855) 7.

<sup>28</sup> Carr 7.

the charity. The by-now-familiar strains of philanthropic rhetoric surrounding prostitution ring out on cue:

Such a state of things, if allowed to remain, would compel the Committee to the most *painful necessity of refusing to admit many a female*, earnestly imploring admission as a means of escaping from the horrors of continued transgression...to reject an appeal on behalf of the Bath Female Penitentiary, may be to turn a trembling penitent from the door, and drive her upon that destruction from which she is anxious to escape.<sup>29</sup>

The Bishop continues his request in a slightly different vein, however, asking for assistance so that the “noble Institution, so active for good...[could be] still more efficient and more extensively useful...”<sup>30</sup> At the end of his address printed in 1855 is a short addendum. This addendum notes that the simplest and most effective way of assisting charity would be to take servants directly from the Home; “great difficulty being experienced in procuring suitable places for Inmates.” The addendum further advertises “Washing and Needlework” services obtainable through the Penitentiary, with prices available at the end of the report. That year, over seventy women had found shelter and work in the Penitentiary. As the Bishop indicated, receipts from the inmates’ laundry and needlework amounted to roughly £350, a figure not much higher than resident work profits from 1825.

In order to address the growing financial problems of the institution – in a fashion perhaps intended to appeal to the burgeoning scientific ethos of the period –

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<sup>29</sup> Carr 8, emphasis in original.

<sup>30</sup> Carr 8.

the appendix to the report contains a table documenting the relative ages and parentage of the inmates from 1848 to 1854.<sup>31</sup> The majority of women who obtained admission each year were between the ages of seventeen and twenty, eighteen years being the age of the greatest number of applicants.<sup>32</sup> Also significantly high was the number of successful applicants aged between twenty-five and thirty-five years old.<sup>33</sup> On average and in keeping with the national norm, the Penitentiary took in more orphans than women with one or both parents.<sup>34</sup> Of 427 total applicants from the years 1848 to 1854, the number of women who had lost one or both parents was 318, or almost 75%. Thus it would seem, at the mid-century at least, that partial or full orphaned status was a contributing factor in a woman's path towards prostitution. Rather than blame the breakdown of some idealized, unified or stable family environment for a woman's "fall", however, I would like to consider how full or partial orphanage made a difference to a woman's employability. In other words, I would like to propose that the need to work, while occurring at a young age in working-class families anyway, came sooner and more

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<sup>31</sup> Carr 22.

<sup>32</sup> According to these tables, the age span was from "under 15" to "25 to 35". (22)

<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, to my knowledge no records survive which might indicate how many of these older women died in the Penitentiary's hospital, in comparison to younger women, nor whether younger or older residents tended to be more amenable to reform.

<sup>34</sup> Carr 22. Walkowitz has noted the significant number of orphans within mid-nineteenth-century female prostitution. She observes that the reduced economic circumstances of orphans, and even a desire to assist the remaining family members, could contribute to the decision to enter prostitution. She is, however, rightly hesitant to make a causal link between orphaned status and prostitution. Of the fifty-five applicants to the Penitentiary in 1853, for example, sixteen had both parents still living, while only eleven were orphaned. See Carr's report for 1854, p. 22.

insistently for full or partial orphans.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, given the kinds of work available to working-class families, and the extent to which skilled trades could be handed down, such that children worked within a family trade, the loss of one or both parents meant also the loss of a set of valuable skills and employment connections, in addition to household income. With this situation as the context in which many women turned to prostitution for their income in mid-century in Bath, the moral, sentimental or voyeuristic frameworks for viewing Victorian prostitution become less relevant.<sup>36</sup>

The 1881 annual report of The Bath Female Home and Penitentiary is a particularly useful document for its inclusion of a detailed list of prices of work, for needlework and washing. These lists, in addition to providing a fascinating overview of Victorian fashion and domestic fittings, indicate the vast variety of tasks which employable women were expected to be able to execute with expertise. In addition to being able to sew over thirty different items – as diverse as clergyman’s bands, nightcaps and bolsters – the residents could also cut out these articles for

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<sup>35</sup> As Margaret Hewitt has noted, death rates for both women and children were higher in working-class families than in middle- and upper-class families, due to the irreconcilable differences between the idealized vision of mothers staying at home, and the economic need of the majority of women to work. Hewitt’s detailed and insightful study demonstrates how the lack of sympathy (or simple recognition) of the realities of a working woman’s life led to parallel lack in terms of legislature concerning lying-in periods, and long, physically gruelling work days. The virtual absence of the former, and prevalence of the latter meant that many women lost their children and seriously compromised their health within the first few weeks after giving birth. And, as Hewitt states, they had no choice. See Hewitt, *Wives and Mothers*.

<sup>36</sup> In their studies, historians such as Walkowitz, Corbin, Mahood have described nineteenth-century prostitution in England and France as a form of work. See Walkowitz, *op cit*, and *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990) and Mahood, *op cit*.

extra charge. The most expensive low-end item was a man's shirt, at two shillings. The most expensive high-end item was a baby's robe, at six shillings and sixpence. The terms for washing depended upon whether the articles were from a "family" or from the family's servants. Different prices were given for forty-three items that the residents of the Penitentiary would wash for pay. These included pieces that would require special care, such as doilies, frills, habit shirts, petticoats, toilet covers and bed furniture.<sup>37</sup> (Fig. 53) The cost to wash a lady's dress was between 9 pence to 3 shillings per dress. All shirts cost tuppence per wash. Few items cost more than several pennies per launder.<sup>38</sup>

While laundry and, to a lesser extent, needlework were the mainstays of the residents' contribution to the Penitentiary's maintenance, they were taught to administer other tasks in preparation for "a future life of honest industry and usefulness".<sup>39</sup> In 1855 Bishop Carr notes that the women were "instructed in the several duties of Cooking, House work, Needlework, and Laundry work, passing stated periods in each department, unless a distinct and marked predilection for a

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<sup>37</sup> Carr 21.

<sup>38</sup> These sums and figures compare with Bridget Elliot and Janice Helland's findings regarding the sweated industries in England, in which, for example, a sweater in 1888 would make a shirt with fourteen buttonholes for two shillings that would sell for almost eight. "The Performative Art of Court Dress" in *Decorative Excess and Women Artists in the Early Modernist Period 1885-1935* (London: Ashgate, forthcoming 2002). Given that the Penitentiary charged at most three shillings to wash a lady's dress, and that the women doing the work would at most see two or three shillings upon their departure, the fiscal logic of the Penitentiary becomes clear.

<sup>39</sup> Carr, unpaginated insert.



special branch of training is shewn.”<sup>40</sup> The breakdown of labour thus meant that in 1854, approximately half the women worked in the most directly lucrative form of employment within the Penitentiary: “the average number of Women in the Laundry is 14, and their industry produces [earnings.]”<sup>41</sup> The attention to labour apparent in the more detailed accounts of the later reports is also evident earlier in the century, in the rules and regulations of the Penitentiary. The Rules for Internal Management of 1816 include the following points:

13. A Book shall be kept of the *kind and quantity of Work*, of the time employed thereon by each woman, and *of the profits arising therefrom*; which book shall be examined by the Ladies [Committee] every week.

14. The Ladies’ Committee shall endeavour to procure for the women, or suggest, *such work as shall best qualify them for service*; and exert themselves to procure proper situations for them, when discharged.

15. The Women in rotation, and according to the discretion of the Matron, shall have the care of the Kitchen; and each, in rotation, shall, in like manner, have the care of the public rooms, wards, Matron’s rooms, and stairs...<sup>42</sup>

Thus, throughout its operation, the management of the Bath Penitentiary was consistent in its purpose to utilize industry as a tactic of reform, a “reformed” woman being one who would be qualified “for service.” To put it another way, reform meant, as is evident here, that a woman would either be trained in a specific

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<sup>40</sup> Carr, unpaginated insert.

<sup>41</sup> Carr, unpaginated insert.

<sup>42</sup> “Rules for Internal Management”, Parish (1816) 26, my emphasis.

capacity if she indicated particular talents, or in a variety of general tasks which could prepare her for domestic labour.<sup>43</sup>

Retrained in the specifics of domestic servitude, the successful “penitents” were to experience a sharp reversal of their status as women within Victorian ideology. The fallen woman was, to some minds, the antithesis of domestic stability, and by extension, civic and national order. To train prostitutes to be kitchen servants, washerwomen and maids was thus not simply a logical strategy based on realistic economic expectations; it was an attempt to neutralize and reorganize the disruptive, unruly power of feminine sexuality deployed outside the bounds of domestic economy. Hegemony, in Gramsci’s conception of the term, depends upon the winning over of subaltern groups to their own, subordinate position within a given social organization.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, nineteenth-century Bath philanthropists provided, in the form of the Penitentiary, a place where supposed exceptions to female virtue could find redemption, thus acknowledging the women’s difference, or liminality. At the same time, the Penitentiary operated within well-known mechanisms of consent and subordination, providing an option toward re-assimilation. In many obvious ways, the reform home, in its emphasis on chastity, unpaid labour, piety, restricted social movement and deference to masculine and

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<sup>43</sup> In a Scottish parallel, Mahood writes, ““In order to prevent women from resorting to prostitution the majority of [Scottish] reformers recommended moral education and training in domestic service and other forms of work that were subject to direct patriarchal supervision or parental discipline.” (73)

<sup>44</sup> Simon 38-42.

class authority was a microcosm of the most coercive and oppressive elements of the ideal Victorian home.<sup>45</sup>

Beyond being simply a working mirror of Victorian ethics, family structure and industrial capitalism, however, the Penitentiary was also a materialization of the injustice encapsulated within each of these aspects of Victorian society. While recognizing gender and class inequity as constitutive elements in a woman's "fall", the Penitentiary nonetheless punished and imprisoned women for transgressing the then-necessary fiction of "Woman" being the unsexed, submissive property of "Man". But the residents' participation in the system proposed by the Penitentiary, and thus the Victorian social and economic system as a whole, was neither seamless nor lacking in contradiction. In this view, the foul language, fighting, escapes and unruly behaviour of certain inmates are not so much in contrast to ex-residents' gently grateful letters of thanks as they bespeak a variety of positionalities within the identity of "penitent". As stated, the historical traces of residents' work are traces of the choice to enter a house of reform. This choice was a conscious and informed decision to move towards a different form of work.

The residents were also taught how to read and write, as indicated by the "parcel of miscellaneous books for the Inmates' perusal" and special thanks given in

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<sup>45</sup> For a more involved discussion of "the necessarily fragmentary contradictory" ways that people are recuperated as "subordinate subjects" through hegemonic processes, see Stuart Hall, "Gramsci and Us," *Marxism Today* 31. 6 (June 1987): 16-21. Hall is careful, as I am attempting to be, to maintain space within his writing for the agency of those groups he discusses, no matter what their position within an oppressive system.

the 1881 report to the “Lady Teachers”.<sup>46</sup> Further instruction, in religion, was available to the residents in the form of Bible classes and weekly or bi-weekly sermons. There is evidence to suggest that women outside the institution would have known of these forms of education, or training. The 1881 report states that “two now in the Institution were persuaded to enter by a former Inmate.”<sup>47</sup> The weekly service held in the Penitentiary’s chapel, “held...on Sunday afternoons at 3.30 o’Clock” was “open to the public...Many persons have attended besides the Inmates, and it is hoped with good results.”<sup>48</sup> Likewise, the annual report of 1854 provides anecdotes in which two residents successfully entreat two other women to “leave off [their] evil course, and come into the Penitentiary.”<sup>49</sup> By the time of the 1855 publication of the report, and again by 1881, the work of the charity would have been equally well known in Bath, to upper- and middle-class supporters and to women engaged in prostitution alike. What this means in material terms for the women working as prostitutes is that beyond the notion of the Home as a place where their souls might be saved, the Penitentiary would also have been known, to Bath’s prostitutes, as a place where medical attention, food and shelter were available. I want to emphasize that prostitutes would also recognize the Penitentiary as a place in which they could “retrain”. While the inflection of reformatory

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<sup>46</sup> *Annual Report* (1881) 6.

<sup>47</sup> *Annual Report* (1881) 5.

<sup>48</sup> *Annual Report* (1881) 10.

<sup>49</sup> Carr 11.

“success” for a resident was arguably different than for a middle-class supporter of the charity, it seems reasonable to say that for both, success was inevitably bound up in the shift from one kind of work to another. This shift was a moral “success” for the subscribers and friends to the charity, and may also have been so for the residents. For the residents, however, the training and education that came with admission would have meant a life with more employment options, as well as a means of re-entry into acceptable society. In other words, the “penitent” act of applying for admission to the Home was equally – if not more so – a gesture inextricably bound up in material necessity, as opposed to moral imperative.

### *Conclusion*

According to rescue workers and others, a wild impulsive nature, a restlessness, and a desire for independence frequently characterized the young women who moved into prostitution. Moreover, seasoned prostitutes were capable of independent and assertive behaviour rarely found among women of their own social class.<sup>50</sup>

Out of deference to the women’s privacy (and perhaps to protect their future employers from embarrassment), the records of each applicant’s reasons for admission, the results of her examination and her name, were kept private and now appear to have been destroyed.<sup>51</sup> Faced with this lack of information, the approximately 3400 women who applied for admission over the century of

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<sup>50</sup> Walkowitz (1982) 20.

operation, the 1700 women who were admitted, and the projected gross of these women's work over an eighty-five year period of just under £30 000, could simply remain mute indices of reform work in Victorian-era Bath. There are, therefore, serious implications for insisting that the decision to enter the Penitentiary was synonymous with the pursuit of a different kind of *work*. In this view, that decision represents choice, demonstrates agency and thus, is a form of articulation. In this view, a woman who entered, lived and worked at the Bath Penitentiary was someone who made choices towards her own survival, even though the context for that survival was decisively shaped by a middle-class, moralistic and frequently punitive system.

Bishop Carr's report for the year 1854 includes letters from ex-residents of the Penitentiary. These letters cannot be taken as simple presentations of "truth", as selection and editing processes remain unknown. However, by way of conclusion I would like to briefly consider topical extracts from the letters. These letters represent one of the few instances where, however edited and selective, the residents' voices are present. Given the likelihood that there was a process of selecting and editing the letters *for* their representative power, the insistence in each letter on industry, loneliness and efforts to remain virtuous suggest more than just the "success" of the Penitentiary's programme of reform. They suggest further the degree to which work was implicated in both the social and gender structures in which these working-class women found themselves, and in the alternative,

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<sup>51</sup> Neither the current occupants of Ladymead House, the Bath Reference Library or the Bath

however mediated and contrived, of community the Penitentiary provided. A twist on the utopian notion of collective work that Sarah Scott never anticipated in *Millenium Hall*, the letters demonstrate a longing and loneliness that is, because this voice is rare, particularly poignant when found in working-class history. On February 24, 1854, an ex-resident known only as “No. 6” wrote to the Matron,

...will you please give my love to [my sister] I am pleased to here [sic] she is improved. I trust she may have a situation out of Bath. I have been trying for one here but I do not know many and beside the Welch [sic] people require so much of a servant in general. I suppose [my sister's] time is nearly up now...<sup>52</sup>

This woman, who moved away from Bath to protect her reputation from her past, may well be one of the women Judith Walkowitz describes as not having the physical strength for domestic labour. Another letter writer, “No. 233”, apologizes for not having had time to write before, and indicates an even stronger sense of yearning for the community of the Penitentiary.

[...O]ne thing I have not that is any one to give me good Advice but I can loock [sic] back at the time when I had line uppon [sic] line [at the Penitentiary...] I would give anything if I had any one [here] that I could open my heart to but as none that knows what has befallen me I could not find that I could say a word...<sup>53</sup>

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Archives have these records.

<sup>52</sup> Carr 12.

<sup>53</sup> Carr 13-14.

“No. 252” echoes these lonely feelings, writing “how often do I wish as the time returns week after week and I know [the women] are all assembled to hear the instructions of [the Chaplain] that I was among them...”<sup>54</sup>

Qualifications aside, these letters clearly show the authors’ desire to be in the company of women who shared similar experiences. “No. 233” writes, “I know when I was there I gave trubel [sic] and caused greate [sic] anxiety but please to excuse me...please remember me to the young wimen [sic] and tell them to make the best of there [sic] time while they are with you...”<sup>55</sup> While these letters hardly seem to provide the glowing evidence of successful reform that Bishop Carr seems to find<sup>56</sup> (ex-resident “No. 282” writes that she has “a great deal to do”, has been “very low” and is “surrounded with temptations”), they do represent the perhaps unintended fruit of the Penitentiary’s work. Ironically, this fruit is not recognized as significant in any of the annual reports or minutes. To explain: the Penitentiary offered its residents the freedom to share experiences in common. However much its middle-class authorities ignored the fact that the Penitentiary provided former prostitutes with a place in which they could “be themselves”, once admitted to the charity women did not have to hide their pasts in order to discontinue their former means of survival. Thus the institution was a rare space in which, however imperfectly, women who had exceeded the bound of acceptable femininity could be

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<sup>54</sup> Carr 13.

<sup>55</sup> Carr 13.

<sup>56</sup> Carr 12.



together while discontinuing the practices which brought them there. Given the fact that most working-class women who worked as prostitutes lived together in brothels, the Penitentiary would have in some respects echoed the structure of community which was for some women a positive aspect of this kind of work. Second, regardless of the moral reform that was the official first priority of the philanthropists, the Penitentiary offered women valuable training, educating them to read and gain employable skills that would help ensure their survival once out of the institution. In essence, in addition to the various forms of coercion the Penitentiary offered what for some appears to have been the positive experience of having worked and learned together.

Re-reading the Penitentiary's minutes, accounts and annual reports for the residents' participation, rather than their oppression, is one means of recounting Bath's history as a feminist. To conclude this chapter, I wish to elaborate on the implications of this reading for the kind of architectural history that I am proposing in this thesis. If I consider Ladymead House as an architectural object that, during the nineteenth century, underwent changes in order to better serve its purpose as an institution of reform, then it may only be read as a prison. If Ladymead House is understood solely as a prison, then only those who escaped, not those who asked to stay longer, nor those who were successfully reformed, nor yet those who were "rushed into eternity"<sup>57</sup> were agents. As a feminist art historian, I have a vested interest in recognizing these women as agents. As a researcher, I have an obligation

to point out that for many of the residents, the Bath Penitentiary *was* their best choice, and perhaps even saved their lives, not because of its platform of moral reform, but because of the advantages it offered, unevenly, in spite of that platform. Therefore, my own inclination to condemn the prison-like qualities of an institution intended to chastise, control and remodel “aberrant” female sexuality along essentially middle-class lines, is historically incorrect. Returning to one of my major claims, it is the use of a space that should in part help to determine this building’s architectural “value”. Ladymead House, with its long and complicated history of housing women, being a space in which women worked, and being a space which women controlled, could not simply be a prison. Rather, Ladymead House’s architectural “value” depends upon its importance as a building which women chose to enter in order to change their way of earning a living, and thus, it is part of the many-textured history of how working-class Victorian women in Bath were active agents in their own lives.

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<sup>57</sup> This was the phrase used by an ex-resident, in a letter to the Matron to describe those women in the Penitentiary who died. No date, but likely written between 1852-54. Printed in Bishop Carr’s annual report of 1854, pp. 14-15. The author of the letter is only known by her number, 282.

## Chapter Nine

### Winged Architectures: Creativity, Ethics and Feminism

#### (Conclusion)

The art projects I describe in this chapter all relate to my fascination and frustration with the history and architecture of Bath, England. When investigating and producing art in relation to the cultural capital of Bath – its architecture – I have been committed to tangents, specifically, two profoundly contingent icons: the winged architect and the fallen woman. The search for women’s history in Bath will inevitably yield the figure of the damned, sinful prostitute, either unrepentantly dodging churchmen and police, or piteously begging admittance to one of Bath’s reform homes for prostitutes, such as the Bath Female Home and Penitentiary. Likewise, the search for Bath’s architectural history will bring forward Bladud, a mythical Celtic prince, renowned for his affinity for pigs, his founding of pre-Roman Bath and his ability to fly.<sup>1</sup> This search will also immediately produce John Wood the Elder, Bath’s most lauded architect. The enthusiasm with which Bath continues to trumpet Wood’s achievements within “Georgian Bath” becomes suspect when considering that this discursive emphasis upon the eighteenth century effectively obliterates nineteenth-century history from the public, tourist-friendly

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<sup>1</sup> Most popular guides to Bath reiterate the story of Bladud’s bought with leprosy, his founding of Bath, and his famed flight, which ended, as the mythical flights of humans tend to do, in a crash. Bladud died when his flight path collided with the Temple of Apollo in the settlement now known as London. See Levis, also Geoffrey of Monmouth.

surfaces of the city. Architectural historian, Neil Jackson, observes that “What we see in the King’s Circus and the Royal Crescent, and along Gay Street and Brock Street is in reality, a nineteenth-century interpretation. Certainly the architecture is the Woods’, but the effect of the architecture within the space is much as the nineteenth century left it.”<sup>2</sup>

While I agree with Jackson’s point, I wish to take this observation further, to suggest that the social history, and specifically, working women’s history of the nineteenth century deserve a greater presence in the city’s heritage machinery. The reason for the lack of interest in such history is, on one level, that Bath reaps great fiscal rewards from its reputation as a Georgian city. The Bath and North East Somerset Council has produced a pamphlet which states,

the urban and rural built heritage forms an essential feature of the economic viability of Bath...an investment in the built heritage is an investment in the future...The built heritage is a valuable non-renewable resource and must be cared for as a record of the history and identity of Bath and North East Somerset.<sup>3</sup>

Bath’s architecture and “identity” is in this view, the product of “a coherent vision inspired by commitment to a particular architectural style”, “a city of grace and wit”,<sup>4</sup> and not, as R. S. Neale has suggested, a chaotic assemblage of building projects and competing interests. Neale argues that “absolute property and absolute

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<sup>2</sup> Jackson is referring to both the effects of pollution and the Victorian fondness for green spaces and public parks. The large trees in the centre of the Circus, for example, were never part of John Wood the Elder’s plan. (10)

<sup>3</sup> Bath and North East Somerset Council, *The Built Heritage* (Bath: pamphlet, April 1997), n. pag..

self-interest and the conjuncture of elements in the capitalist dynamic, which had made it possible to build Bath as an attraction to men of property and wealth, worked also to destroy that attraction and undermined its prospects as a planned organization of space...<sup>5</sup> Fanny Burney, writing as early as 1788, confirms this impression.

Bath seems, now, rather a collection of small towns, or of magnificent villas, than one city. They are now building as if the world was just beginning... nothing is secure from their architectural rage...their plans seem all to be formed without the least reference to what adjoins or surrounds them...you would suppose them built first, and then dropt, to find their own foundation.<sup>6</sup>

Burney's lighthearted criticism has a further relevance. When considering the fruits of Bath's conservation and heritage campaigns, it is reasonable to inquire whether these highly visible projects (such as the restoration of Bath Abbey in 1992) could do more to refer to "what adjoins or surrounds them", in other words, the gendered margins of history.

For me, the politics of location are manifold, as I have chosen in the past five years to dedicate my concern with architecture, feminism, and the winged human figure in the specific site of Bath. I am not a local; I speak from outside, but not from the margins. I have sought through several performance art projects to supplement a tourist experience of this city, and to clarify the links between a

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<sup>4</sup> Newman 6, 2. Newman, author of the current tourist guide to the city, gives only two of his ninety-seven pages over to local industrial history. See specific paragraphs on pages 22, 23, 27.

<sup>5</sup> Neale (1981) 263.

<sup>6</sup> Letter to sister Hetty, quoted in Maggie Lane, *A City of Palaces: Bath Through the Eyes of Fanny Burney* (Bath: Millstream Books, 1999) 47-48.

celebrated architecture and excluded women's history.<sup>7</sup> One such project, *pro fanus*, was a performance I undertook in September 1999 in Bath's historic city centre. (See fig. 5, 6, 7) In *pro fanus* my purpose was to raise questions about the absence of historical women in Bath's memories of the past, to use my words and my winged body as a link between the present moment and the "fallen" women of Bath's nineteenth century.

To argue in favour of a mandate for artistic practice and cultural studies (or those indefinite areas where one folds into the other) premised upon feminist ethics, is akin to navigating a narrow (and persistently unpopular) edge. From this edge, one risks falling into either prescriptive artistic strategies, or rubbing up against the modernist axiom that art is not art when it attempts to address the messiness of the material and the problems of the social.<sup>8</sup> I see a connection between the artist's dilemma (to work under the assumption that one's work will not matter, that is, not make a difference to others, or to work as if everything – not just art – has the potential to make a difference to others) and Pascal's wager.<sup>9</sup> For philosopher Agnes Heller, there is more than the existential wager. There is, in addition to the wager,

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<sup>7</sup> *Pro fanus* (1999), *fallen/winged* (2000), *A Woman Was Here* (2000 - uncommissioned public art project, including the work of Katja Macleod Kessin, Caroline Stevens, Lydia Sharman and Suzanne Leblanc).

<sup>8</sup> Suzi Gablik addresses this aspect of modernism in *Has Modernism Failed?* (New York and London: Thames & Hudson, 1984), and provides an alternative ethical framework for art making in *The Reenchantment of Art* (Great Britain: Thames & Hudson, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> Pascal's wager is premised on the idea that one must stake one's entire life, happiness and freedom on either the existence of god (and thus, cosmic contingency) or on the non-existence of god (and thus, historical contingency). See Agnes Heller, chapter 1 "Contingency" in *A Philosophy of History in Fragments* (Oxford, England and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1993) 1-35.

existential choice, which means that one is not limited in one's perception of the world and one's actions within it, to either relativist apathy or blind faith. There is a third way: to choose oneself, and in so choosing, understand one's contingency as the product of a specific historical moment,<sup>10</sup> as a precondition for being able to choose at all. Having chosen oneself, therefore, one's position in society is a factor to which one is accountable. To choose oneself is, in other words, to be consciously and perhaps conspicuously an agent.<sup>11</sup>

Heller's argument treads upon the ethical in the sense that a primary aspect of choosing oneself is deciding whether or not one chooses to live as a decent, or to use an unpopular word, "good" person. It is here that the esoteric aspects of this thinking begin thumping loudly on the door of the political. The bivalent nature of "responsibility" has yet to be recognized fully. Cultural workers hoping, perhaps covertly, to "make a difference", recognize increasingly and dutifully the colonial underpinnings of such a hope, the reproduction of privilege that occurs when a person writes about or researches an Other. And yet, the need to address inequity persists for the simple reason that if the act of contesting inequity is not practiced, the ability to contest inequity is lost altogether. Equally, the particular (creative) challenge for each cultural worker is to incorporate his or her own existential

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<sup>10</sup> Heller allows this moment to be called either modern or postmodern. (30)

<sup>11</sup> "The choice of oneself is the gesture that triggers the internal teleology of one's life. Choosing oneself is tantamount to addressing one's own envelope. The hitherto blank envelope will now bear the name of the person (the letter) as that of the being that becomes what he or she is. The letter contains the description of the accidental aggregate of unconnected throws of dice that the naked person is... To address one's own letter to oneself is the fundamental choice that limits the possibilities, as much as it pre-destines the probabilities, of all consecutive choices." Heller 25.

choice, of her- or himself, into the form of the contestation. As an artist, a feminist and a student of architectural history, I have taken this to mean that I am accountable, and responsible for, the ways in which my positions as a white, middle-class, “first”-world, educated woman are constitutive, how they are formative in terms of the decisions I make regarding what to study, how to work and what to produce. But equally, what I study, how I work and that which I produce, constitute me, the academic, the artist, the feminist. This means that art making, and in this case, performance, are the material, corporeal (if temporal) dimension in which my political choices become temporarily tangible. When political choices become tangible, ethics have entered the scene, and everyone becomes very uncomfortable. The intellectual practice of feminism is founded in an ethical premise: that the spoken and unspoken rules that govern human relations and privileges are fundamentally skewed. Thus feminist theory is always shadowed by its latent postulate, that a necessary social metamorphosis has yet to occur. This metamorphosis is necessary on numerous fronts (to put it mildly). The front I am concerned with in this thesis is the issue of public culture, particularly architectural heritage. As I suggest above, however, the front in question (if I have problematized it) will also be myself.

While it is expected that academics today will self-consciously position themselves in relation to their subject, the position I take as an artist falls perilously close to an impossible anachronism, which might be seen to threaten the “validity”

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of my historical research. It is my contention, however, that Bath's cultural history requires the intervention of a politicized and subjective self, that is, a self that is admittedly particular. While it is permissible, if not expected, for an artist to be subjective in their work, there remains a bias against the biased scholar, the biased historian. Biased history provokes condemnation for the simple reason that it is unethical. So, it is time to speak to ethics and partiality.

If one, or something, is pennated, then one, or something, has wings, feathers, or wing-like structures as a defining characteristic. I am a pennated artist. I work with wings, at times building them, sometimes wearing them, and when permitted, giving them to others. Wings are an apt metaphor for the ways I work, hinged to several discourses and practices simultaneously: performance art, architectural history, and feminism. These tributaries connect to one another by virtue of my commitment to each. If I conceive of my doctoral project as architecture, I think of these commitments as constituting the central block or body of the building. The organizing principle informing this architecture is the belief that women's history and creativity have been undervalued, and are important in crucial ways that still require a variety of means of articulation.

Underpinning this entire project, however, is a fundamental assumption about the nature of academic work. This assumption is that all academic production is both inherently creative and biographical. In other words, the products of scholarly research are not simply collections of facts informed by the writer's political, cultural and intellectual position(s), but are furthermore profoundly expressive of the way that a given individual grapples with the chaos of history, and

in so doing, grapples with the chaos of the present moment. This grappling, this engagement undeniably reproduces, even in those texts which most desire “objectivity”, the object of investigation in some new order. This ordering of a small piece of the world, chosen within the freedoms and restraints of subjectivity, inevitably represents the decision-making processes and selfhood of the chooser. Taken in this way, academic work becomes not a transparent mirror of the writer’s historical moment, their bias, and motivation, but a rich endorsement of the self in the politics of representing the past. From such understanding I have come to see my own art production as a literal , performative enactment, or acknowledgement of this rubric. To admit both the partiality and the creativity involved in academic endeavours is to admit the unruly nature of that work. It is to concur that one’s bias, whether one wishes it or not, becomes a constitutive feature of any and all work produced. But once the line between academic and creative work begins to blur, academic endeavours themselves may in turn be seen to play a constitutive, or formative role in shaping or affecting the producing subject: the academic. I propose that something be deliberately wrought from this mutually productive relationship.

To see one’s academic work as an index of one’s creativity makes the institutional boundaries between, for example, art and art history, less relevant. The connections between such work and ethics, or politics, on the other hand, become far stronger. Once the myth of the researcher’s “objectivity” becomes untenable, once creativity is perceived as a fundamental element of academic work, then it is the nature of the relationship between academic and the object of academic inquiry

that matters as much as what that relationship produces. In other words, to recognize one's indebtedness to one's own creativity in the process of producing historical work is to recognize one's subjective investment in the issue at hand. It seems to me that the inscription of this recognition into one's own work would be an important step toward defusing the myth of depoliticization that accompanies the myth of objectivity. I propose that working consciously with one's creative, and thus subjective, stake in research would be a more ethical means of furthering the project to move scholarship away from empirical and aesthetic models towards an art history (in this case) that is relevant to a variety of constituents. For the remainder of this chapter, I attempt two things, but not in a causal order. The first is to describe the projects *breathe/animer*, *flight* and *winged*, against the backdrop of the reasons, introduced above and developed below, for undertaking such projects. These reasons, while in this thesis are local to Bath, have larger implications for explicitly political approaches to cultural and public history. Second, this is a proposal for a framework in which ethically motivated actions— creative and public actions – are both legitimate and necessary responses to iniquity, providing non-prescriptive prompts for social change.

In my view, the making of “art”, be that performance, material objects, temporary or permanent installations, must avoid deterministic or reductive approaches, that is, avoid the misconception that “problems” may be “solved” through art. However, what art can do is be a form of engaged practice, involving the risk of taking a stand, and thus be an intersection between the concern of the

actor (the artist) and the site of engagement.<sup>12</sup> In my work on and in Bath, where the material presence of architecture and the popular history of all-male architectural progenitors have centre stage, taking a stand as a feminist has for me meant placing myself beside, against and literally, in front of the temple (*pro fanus*) of Bath's architecture, asking that it be accountable to the women who also participated within Bath's past. When I set up and participate in group exhibitions, performances and collaborative projects in Bath and Montréal along the theme of the winged, or pennated woman, I make a claim on the symbolic capital of the image of the winged human being, and thus claim the capacity of that image specifically for public, feminist work.

In spring 1999, after reading a text on the etymological connections between the notions of spirit/soul, wind and breathing,<sup>13</sup> I became very interested in the idea of a breath as something akin to a little wind. Geddes MacGregor writes that

The English words *soul* and *spirit* are attempts to represent the two sets of ideas found in the Bible: *soul* is continuous with the Hebrew *nefesh* and the Greek *psuche*, while *spirit* is continuous with the Hebrew *ruah* and the Greek *pneuma*...when we think of the ideas of wind, breath, or spirit, we would probably attach any one of them to *pneuma* rather than to *psuche*; nevertheless, we should bear in mind that the word *psuche* has an etymological connection with the verb *psuchein* ("to breathe"), as does the Latin *animus* with *anemos*, the Greek word meaning "wind."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This is not to suggest that academic work fails to take such a stand. On the contrary, I have found great inspiration in the writing of thinkers such as Agnes Heller, Antonio Gramsci, Grace Jantzen and Rosi Braidotti.

<sup>13</sup> Geddes MacGregor, "Christian Concepts of the Soul" in *Death, Afterlife and the Soul* (Ed. Lawrence E. Sullivan for *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York, London: Collier MacMillan, 1989) 214-222.

<sup>14</sup> MacGregor 215.

Living then in a large city, I felt increasingly aware during that polluted season that to take a deep, conscious breath was to consciously attest to one's right to air, to state one's aliveness, and one's desire to live. My idea was to make something of these links, as I saw them, between wind, breath and spirit. Four friends collaborated with me to transform, temporarily, two street corners in downtown Montréal during the early morning rush hour.<sup>15</sup>

The title of the project was *breathelanimer*. (See fig. 21, 22, 23) "Breathe" is a suggestion, never more than a gentle order, but often a plea to someone loved, a request to the living to continue living. "Animer" in French is to give life or to animate, and derives, as MacGregor notes, from the same Latin root as "animus" and "anima", or soul.<sup>16</sup> Each performer were dressed in light colours and loose clothing. Four of us wore t-shirts and "wings" of my making. These wings were long, transparent white sleeves which caught the wind and evoked wings, sails and veils. These same four performers were also equipped with a short stepladder. The fifth performer, Raya, carried a violin. The four of us with wings and ladders each represented a different, ancient word, printed on our clothes, with a brief description of how that word encapsulated wind, breath and spirit. The four words were *pneuma*, *psuche*, *nefesh*, and *ruah*.

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<sup>15</sup> These friends were Caroline Stevens, Raya Fridman, Karen Huska and Jeff Golf. Another friend, photographer Grayson Cooke, was responsible for the images reproduced here. Sarah Bachinski edited the final cut of the video version, intended for exhibition in "The Miner's Canary" in Winnipeg 2003, curator Marie Bouchard.

<sup>16</sup> MacGregor 215.

I printed loose translations of the words in English and French on the shirts, so that we were all wearing our words on the trunks, or cores of our bodies. I chose the words for their meaning, but also for the ways in which I felt they related to each of my collaborators.<sup>17</sup> (See fig. 22, 23) At my signal, the four of us with ladders each took a position at the intersection, one on each corner, facing the performer diagonally across. (See fig. 21) Once in place, we opened our stepladders and climbed them. Raya, whose shirt simply read “*breathe/animer*”, began to walk slowly from corner to corner, always with the lights (we were not attempting to physically stop traffic). She played a slow, wistful melody of her own composition, and as she passed each of us, we raised our faces, and raised our arms so that the light white fabric of our sleeves would billow in the wind. Once Raya had made one circle of the intersection, she stopped playing. We then lowered our arms, dismounted from our ladders, folded them, picked them up and paused. The entire performance took no more than five minutes, and we presented it in two locations.<sup>18</sup>

Responses to the piece ranged from motorists slowing, to pedestrians stopping to watch, security men gathering (not to stop us, simply to observe), and my favorite, a group of construction workers who stopped their drilling of the road

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<sup>17</sup> For example, one collaborator, Jeffrey Golf, was Jewish, and I gave him the word he instantly recognized and felt affinity for, *nefesh*, a Hebrew word.

<sup>18</sup> I chose two busy intersections, Rue President Kennedy and University Avenue, and Sherbrooke and Bishop streets. The former is in view of McGill University, but in one of Montréal’s business sections. Two churches, the Montréal Museum of Fine Art, and an office tower mark the latter intersection. I wanted to perform the piece in sites with a great deal of motorized and foot traffic, but also in places where people would be able to watch from windows.

while we performed. (They clapped when we finished.) One woman told us it was the loveliest thing the Museum of Fine Arts had ever organized. (We corrected her.) People who stopped to talk with us afterwards made frequent references to angels. When asked about the project, I offered a text which explained the more esoteric aspects of my ideas, but I simply said that I wanted to do something to remind people to breathe, as breathing is at the very core of living. The frenzy of rush hour was all the evidence necessary that taking a deep, calm breath is often the last thing one has time for.<sup>19</sup>

There are two reasons why this project was important. First, I conceived of the performance as a means of “transforming the moment” in which it took place, and by extension, transforming the urban location in which it took place. What this meant for me was that, regardless of whether a passerby would stop, ponder, perhaps even take a breath, the project had the potential to shift the parameters of what was “normal” on those intersections, at those times. In placing our selves in a public site, with no immediately accessible code through which an audience could identify and classify what we were doing,<sup>20</sup> we had, I began to think, the power to temporarily alter the street where we stood. Second, the performance demonstrated to myself as much as to the audience how winged figures are visually compelling,

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<sup>19</sup> I chose the intersections for their high visibility, but also because they had broad sidewalks with plenty of room for pedestrians and us who did not wish to stop. As a final note, my collaborators all expressed feelings of serenity and joy after the completion of the work. In fact, they didn't want to stop. While preparation had been fraught with some technical difficulties, the actual performance was indeed a very uplifting experience, and had the quality of both giving and receiving a gift.

<sup>20</sup> I am thinking here of the proscenium, for example, which helps to designate a space as a space of “theatre”. Similarly, galleries or museums provide an interpretive code – such as the Montréal Museum of Fine Arts did for one passer-by, who recognized our project as “art”.

symbolically uplifting. Although the reference to angels was minimal (we were wearing sleeves, not wings), it was spectacle enough, and perhaps more importantly, lovely enough to give people cause to pause.

The power of the winged figure and the power of an individual to transform moments in space and time: these were tools that I brought with me for two other major projects. Between the summer of 1998 and the fall of 1999, I became involved with a community-based art project, which another Humanities student, Katja Macleod Kessin, had instigated. Through our discussions and ideas, she and I came to facilitate and participate in painting and sculpture workshops which we offered to a small group of ex-residents of a shelter for battered women in Montréal, Québec. From the outset, these workshops were planned to result in a public exhibition, to be a means of raising awareness over the issue of domestic violence, and to be a way for the participants to build self-esteem and skills of self-therapy.<sup>21</sup> Our workshops took place over the spring and summer of 1999, and the subsequent exhibition, *flight*, was on view in the upper gallery of the *Maison de la culture* in Nôtre-Dame-de-Grace, Montréal from October 28 to December 5, 1999.<sup>22</sup> (See fig. 24)

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<sup>21</sup> “Self-therapy” is a term that Katja Macleod Kessin developed over time, to describe the one aspect of the benefits, as she sees them, of her ongoing art workshops with residents of the Auberge de Transition.

<sup>22</sup> Monique Polak, “Abused women spread wings” *The Montréal Gazette*, Monday, 1 Nov. 1999: E6. Macleod Kessin, the ex-residents and I also found publicity and a “venue” in the form of “But Now I Have To Speak: Public Art as Social Intervention”, a conference dedicated to the issues of women, public art and activism. I gave a paper at this conference titled “A Metaphor for Agency: Wings, Women and Creativity”. Macleod Kessin spoke about the process of the collaboration and



The word “flight” signifies both a mode of movement/freedom that is not technically possible for humans, yet is fully synonymous in human terms with escape and fleeing. The idea of using wings as an expression of individual creativity and as a reference to the experience of surviving domestic violence, was immediate. Intending the workshops to result in an exhibition, we sought a theme or motif that would offer a range of expression to the participants in the workshops and allow our voices as artist-facilitators to be consistent with our respective artistic practices. That theme would act both as a visual and a conceptual framework for the unique experiences of our participants. We anticipated that a public exhibition could be overwhelming for first-time exhibitors, and that we needed to give a clear suggestion for how to approach the work ahead. Over a period of about six months, discussing several possibilities, Macleod Kessin and I agreed to present “flight” to our group as a potential organizing metaphor for the workshops and exhibition.

The word flight carries several senses we wished to engage for our workshops and the exhibition. It was important to remember the enormous challenges and dangers women face when breaking free of an abusive situation; the flight from danger was one of our intended meanings. We also sought a fluid metaphor for the varieties of personal courage and perseverance each of our participants has demonstrated in her life. Our experience as artists suggested to Macleod Kessin and myself that the works produced could function as representations of the women’s own individuality, and that the wings would have

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her previous work with L’Auberge de Transition. Two ex-residents, Gemma and Greta, spoke about

the quality of a prosthesis, both in relation to the central canvas but also as a symbolic extension of the women themselves.<sup>23</sup> In our first official meeting with the group, the time we had set aside for discussing other possibilities was immediately absorbed by the women's enthusiasm for the idea of "flight". They quickly related to the notion that they would each create works of art reflecting their resilience and individuality in the broader context of being survivors. We suggested that each painting could operate as a triptych, with a central canvas and awing on either side that could be folded over the surface of the painting, effectively creating multiple surfaces for expression, and a sculptural, kinetic element to the final pieces.

Within minutes of our explaining how the wings could function, two of our participants had inspirations for their final pieces that had not occurred to either Macleod Kessin or myself in our preliminary discussions. Our collaborator Beverley's immediate impulse was to use some of her long platinum hair to make a tiny pair of what she called "angel wings." (See fig. 25) The way that Beverley immediately related her physical body and her work of art was an impulse that would shape her project from its inception to its final form. Beverley's intuitive sense of colour and pattern resulted in richly-painted borders on the edges of her canvas, emphasized by the addition of an early study, painted in a similar fashion, collaged to the centre. Her delicate small platinum wings rested on a small, wall-mounted plaster pedestal beneath her canvas. A theatrical quality imbued the work

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their own art. The conference was held at Concordia University, Montréal, November 5-7, 1999.

<sup>23</sup> Macleod Kessin has herself worked with wings as a symbol in painting, and as an element in performance for a decade.

as it progressed, emphasized by the strong visual contrast between the white of the plaster and unpainted portions of the canvas, and the tactile contrast of her two sets of wings, one of pale soft hair, the other of wood, painted white. The borders, resolving at the top of the canvas in a mask-like motif, acted as a proscenium for a mirror. Beverley used the four surfaces of the wooden wings, hinged to her canvas's frame, to inscribe the verses of a poem that her mother had given to her in childhood. This poem has come to have a shaping significance in her life. When closed, these wings and words introduced Beverley and her sources of resilience. When open, they echoed the tiny wings below and framed the mirror that reflected the viewer's gaze. Thus in her piece, titled *Face to Face*, Beverley simultaneously balanced a self-portrait with a portrait of the viewer, asking for a recognition of shared fragility, rather than a simple identification of Beverley-as-victim.

In a very different way from *breathe/animer*, *flight* also demonstrated to me the transformative potential of collaborative work and the meaningful symbolism of wings. It was clear to me, however, that this "meaning" is, while culturally inscribed with thousands of years of iconographic inheritance, also personal and immediate. Beyond the fact that each collaborator in *flight* (including myself and Macleod Kessin) produced markedly different work despite shared parameters, the treatment of the wings in each project took on a highly individualistic cast. It was at this point that I began to think about involving contemporary women artists in my work on Bath, to further explore the issues of public history, architectural heritage, and the

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winged woman. In summer 2000, during the month of July, I organized an outdoor “exhibition” of art by women, in various locations in historic centre of Bath.<sup>24</sup>

Having become acquainted with the narrative of the falling, winged woman on Bath Abbey, and the history of prostitution in Bath, my collaborators in *Winged* each took the opportunity of the exhibition to provide a project that addressed the notion of the fallen woman.

Macleod Kessin’s piece took the notion of a winged woman literally. She provided me, by mail, with ten colour images of her newly-tattooed back. The image is cropped so that skin fills the frame, with small blue and black wings visible on the left and the right of the picture. (See fig. 16) The wings are evocative of quotation marks, surrounding the blank space of the skin between the shoulder blades. This image is a complex comment on corporeality, pain, and being a witness to and in silence. Macleod Kessin instructed me to install the images in the King’s Circus, one of John Wood the Elder’s most famous projects. Figure 16 shows one of the images at the far west edge of the circular green which dominates the central space of the Circus. This small park, with its enormous trees, is a popular meeting spot for tourists, who shelter from the sun and admire Wood’s work. I placed the images on the outer perimeter of the park, and (gently) on the trunks of the trees, at roughly shoulder height.

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<sup>24</sup> As noted, the collaborators were Suzanne Leblanc, Katja Macleod Kessin, Lydia Sharman, Caroline Stevens and myself. I regret that I have no documentation of Suzanne Leblanc’s mail-art project suitable for inclusion in this thesis.

For her contribution to *Winged*, Lydia Sharman collected flowers and herbs which either had an internal geometry which could be related to the traditional sacred geometry of church architecture, or healing and olfactory properties. Figure 17 shows how *to catch her fall* used the central geometry of a cast silver medallion (from a prior project by Sharman) to structure the outward span of flowers, leaves and herbs. The resulting pattern, approximately 2'x6" wide, completes the north west ladder on the façade of Bath Abbey, at the base. Highly visible and fragrant, the angel-catcher provided the falling winged woman with a safe place to land, thus overriding the issue of morality and sin with an aesthetics of care and welcome.<sup>25</sup>

Caroline Stevens also worked directly with the notion of the falling winged woman, but took as her starting place the stone ladders on Bath Abbey. These ladders provide assistance for the angels who deemed worthy of ascendance but does nothing for those who fall. Like Macleod Kessin, Stevens mailed her project to me, asking me to temporarily locate it in different sites, and photograph it there. Figure 18 shows the installation of *escape ladder* on a blank grave in the churchyard of St. John the Baptist in Bathwick. (For location, see fig. 2) Steven's rope ladder is so thin and light that it would escape the eye of any but the most keen observer. So tiny, this ladder suggests a metaphorical escape, a portable escape that, like a secret, can be carried anywhere. As with Macleod Kessin's project, *escape ladder* alludes both to the cosmogram of Bath Abbey's west front, and to the larger

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<sup>25</sup> I owe the term, "aesthetics of care" to Suzi Gablik, who questions the insistence in contemporary art and art history alike on formal values. She argues that formal values should be reexamined for how well they are attuned to social considerations, environmental issues, and "caring" for others. *Reenchantment*, Chapter 11, 167-183.

issue of women's history. Cast across the grave of an unknown (woman?), the ladder is a symbol of transcendence, and of how little there often is in terms of aid in reaching that transcendence. The ladder also, however, as it played in the wind and reconfigured itself, challenged the idea that the only way for a falling angel (or a fallen woman) to find redemption would be to right herself, make herself upright. Redemption could just as easily mean stepping onto the earth as it might mean stepping into the heavens.

The notion of transcendence itself underwent a transformation for me in the duration of this project. I agree with Moira Gatens' observation that "[w]omen most often emerge from [the 'philosophical account of complementarity between male and female human being'] as less than human, as bound to their bodies and the exigencies of reproduction, as incapable of a certain kind of transcendence or reason that marks the *truly* human individual."<sup>26</sup> I also agree that transcendence is itself a concept which may be of little use to women seeking to engage with the here and now, with the exigencies of living in a society and an environment that so desperately need creative vision if they are to survive, if they are to improve.<sup>27</sup> Bath was, in July 2000, peppered with the small, ephemeral, yet insistent creative gestures of women. (For once, I was happy.) The nexus between myself, the

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<sup>26</sup> Gatens, *Feminism* 92.

<sup>27</sup> Jantzen writes, "I suggest that a feminist philosophy of religion must have as one of its highest priorities the root-and-branch eradication of...valorization of infinity, and its replacement with an acceptance of limits, for ourselves, for the earth, for the divine...Rather than squander our energy in a futile struggle against finitude, we can rejoice in the (limited) life we have as natals and act for love of the world." (155)

historical women that Bath neglects, and the creativity of women acting in the present served to temporarily reorganize Bath's mythology – in short, reorganize Bath itself – into a new text about transcendence. In this text, women transcended the roles, the assumptions and the historical inadequacy that the bulwark of history has assigned to them. And they did it by turning their attention downwards, giving those who also looked down on the green grass of the park in the centre of the Circus a creative gesture. They did it by softening the cold stone flags in front of the Abbey just in case the angel who always falls might one day land. And they did it by providing the women of Bath's history, weighed down by the accomplishments of male architects, the lightest means of flight.

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The occupation of space is inherently political.<sup>28</sup> In my performances and projects, I have drawn links between a little known and certainly uncelebrated part of Bath's social history: women's history. I have demonstrated some of the ways in which architectural monuments and lesser-known buildings alike interred the necessary contradictions for many women of the middle and working classes between financial need, the desire for propriety, and the complicated pleasures of independence. My aim has been to discursively shift the Victorian association of femininity with the angelic towards an understanding of femininity as something that is historically and discursively constructed here on earth. The suggestion that

women should “be like angels” is useless, has proven to be historically dangerous, and furthermore misses the point entirely. The relevance of the image of the winged human, male or female is not to “be like angels” but to be more divinely human.<sup>29</sup> The difference between the two is the difference between perpetually gazing heavenward, and deciding to engage with the irreducible realities, iniquities and contingencies of earthly existence. I claim the image of the falling, winged woman as a symbol for the material history of women, for the work that feminist artists and historians do today, and for the histories that still need, will need to be written – and performed – in the future. The winged woman who turns her attention earthwards is the best kind of angel there is. Without her, all Bath’s temples remain apterous.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Affrica Taylor, “Lesbian Space: More Than One Imagined Territory” in *New Frontiers of Space, Bodies and Gender*, ed. Rosa Ainley (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) 129-141.

<sup>29</sup> Margaret Miles comments on Tertullian’s invocation to medieval nuns and monks, “They will be like angels” in her book, *Fullness of Life* 26. She is here discussing how Tertullian emphasizes the nuns and monks’ humanity, in that they should be “like” angels, and not be angels. This is “to conserve their humanity”. Like Tertullian (and Miles), I do not want to deprive humans, male or female, of their substance.

<sup>30</sup> “Wingless”.



## EPILOGUE

VICTORY. More life into a time without boundaries.

On the morning that I walked away from the house I knew that it was crumbling...The house shrank up...shrank to its proper size. There would be a beginning not consumed by it. A beginning outside of hurt. A beginning outside of fear. I had not been destroyed by gravity...

For a moment, in the indifferent train, fear crept up beside her again. She looked across at the woman whose hair had the sun in it. She heard her laugh that had the sea in it. She recognized her.

VICTORY.

Jeannette Winterson<sup>1</sup>

There is another, well known and equally allegorical winged female figure, familiar in western culture, whose practice is neither to fall, nor to continually revert to the heavens. Her name is Victory. In Jeannette Winterson's 1994 novel, *Art and Lies*, the author appropriates major names from western cultural history, such as Picasso, Sappho and Hamlet for her narrative. The characters retain elements of their famous namesakes: Picasso is an artist, but she is female; Sappho remembers her Classical past, but she lives on in the present; Hamlet, the castrated male doctor with a bisexual past, is also a priest, locked within a lonely love of music. In this novel, Victory is a figure who emerges through both the female

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protagonists, and through other, unidentified women. She manifests to Sappho in the figure of Picasso, when Picasso sits, and leaps from the ridgepole of her family home. The fall does not kill her (“I had not been destroyed by gravity...”). Victory sits on a commuter train, encouraging Picasso to flee her abusive family. And when Sappho leaps to what she knows might be her death, she becomes Victory and does not die, either. Just as there is more to a winged woman than angelic perfection there is more to a woman who has fallen than simplistic moralizing might suggest. As Winterson’s novel makes beautifully clear (and beautifully confused), a woman who will let herself love is a woman who has fallen. Fallen, but in love. Such a fall does not guarantee a life free of pain, nor less the understanding and compassion of others. But it does guarantee that she who fell, decided first to leap. Once on the sands at the bottom of the cliff, Sappho considers her options. She could either settle for what is certain, visible, well-known; she could let “the future...be just as yesterday, she could tame the future by ignoring it, by letting it become the past.” But Sappho knows there is more for her than this: she is an artist and it is her work to find that which, in her words, is hidden. The work of the artist and the historian are not so different, after all. Neither can ignore the past, whether that past is firmly lodged in personal memory, or in her subject/object of study. And what if women, feminists, who look into the past for something other than themselves, find themselves there after all? The answer is to leap, and to know that somewhere in mid-air, I will find a new common ground between myself and what I study,

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<sup>1</sup> Jeannette Winterson, *Art and Lies* (Canada: Vintage, 1995) 164.

between what I remember and what I learn. This new place is not free of me; I offer it to my readers knowing full well that there is more of me here than academia would normally allow. This new place is no less heartfelt, no less sure a structure. Where my story and the stories of the women I present here meet is the basis of a new architecture. Looking down from its cornice, I have no fear of falling, because I have already leapt. And landed. (Fig. 54)

Saphho began to run. She ran out of the day that coiled around her with temperate good sense. She ran to where the sun was just beginning the sky. A thin rung of sun within reach. She leapt and grabbed the yellow bar with both hands and swung herself up into the warm yellow light.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Winterson 76.

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BA	Bath Archives
BL	British Library

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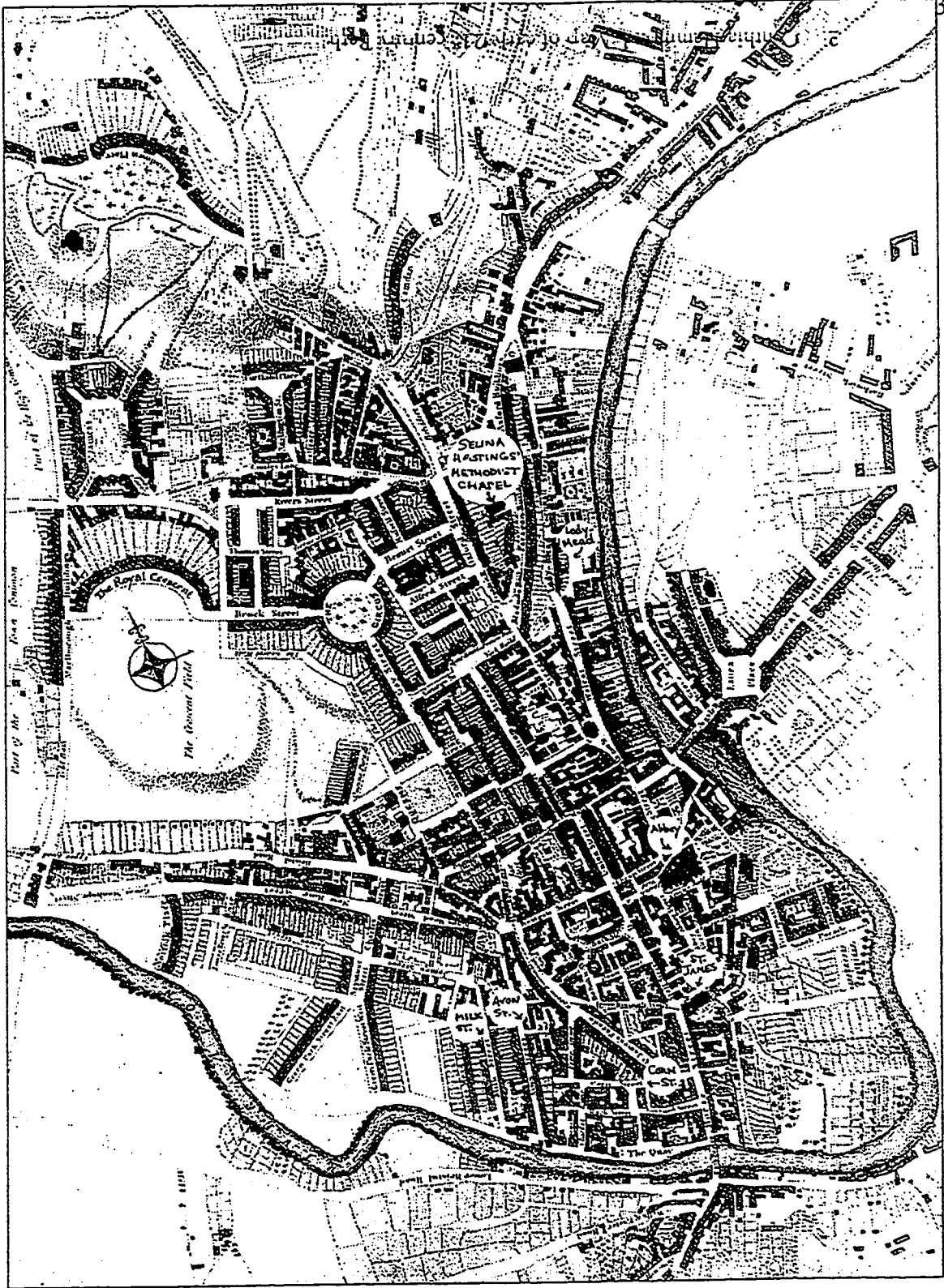
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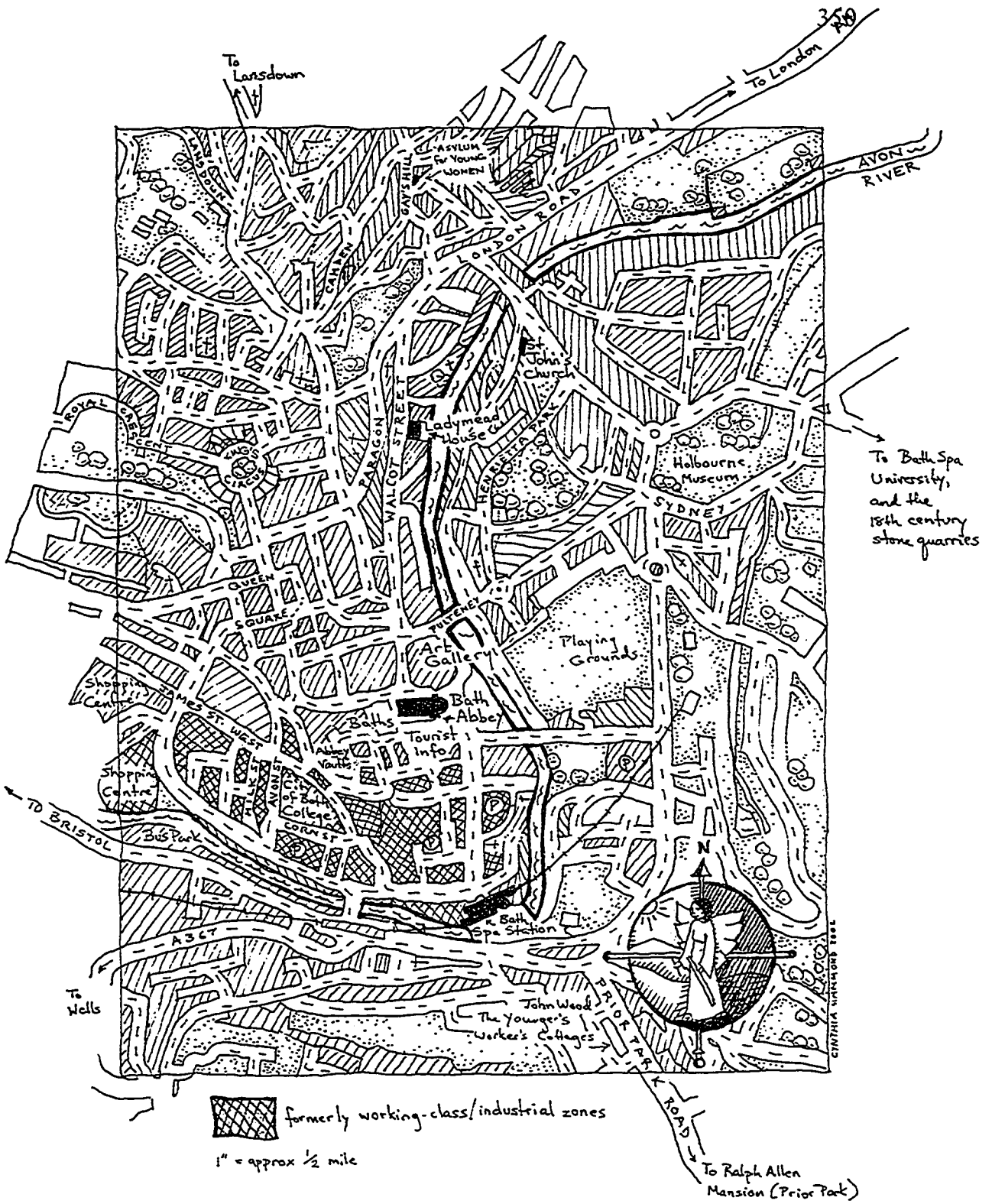
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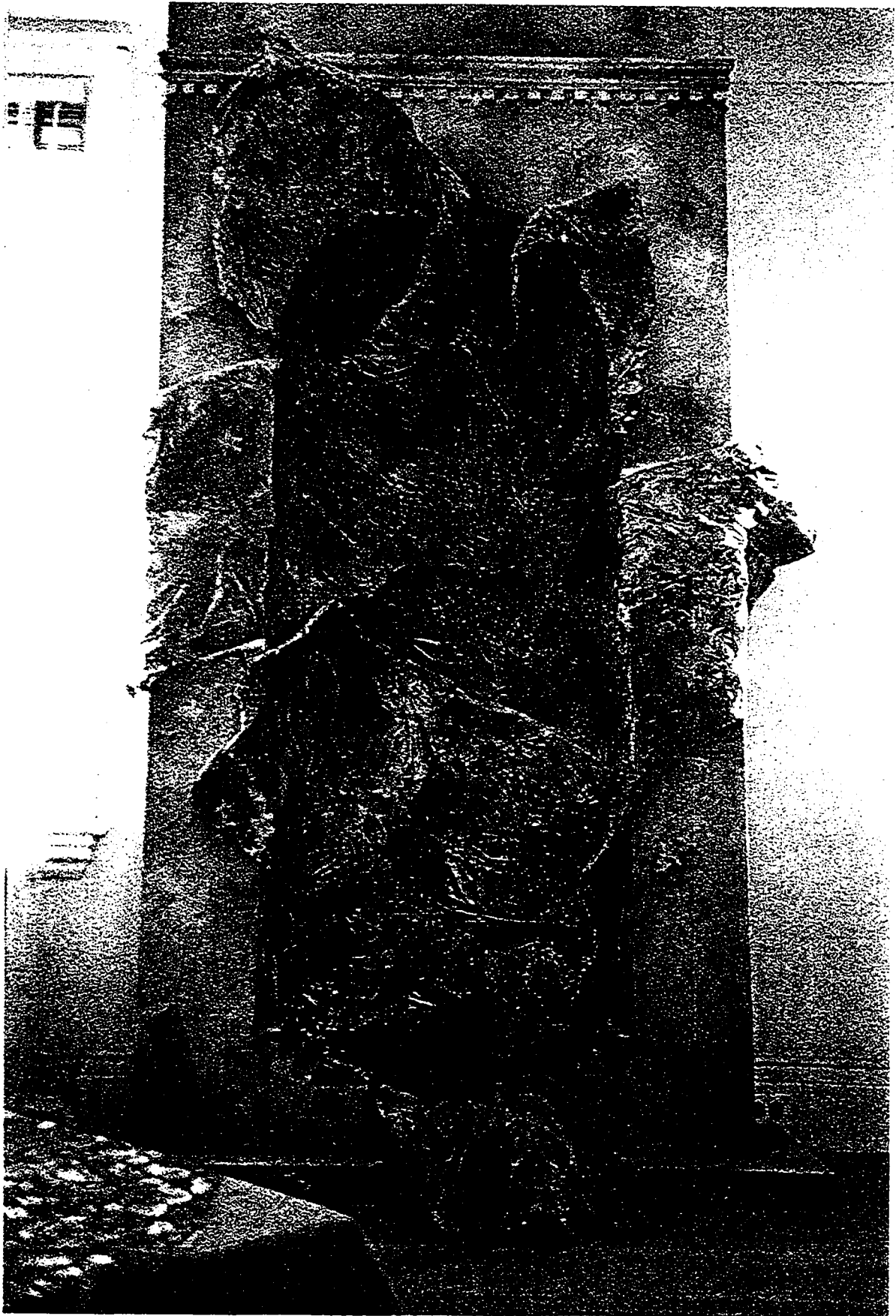




1. Map of Bath c. 1820, from Graham Davis and Penny Bonsall, *Bath: A New History* (England: Keele University Press, 1996) 47.



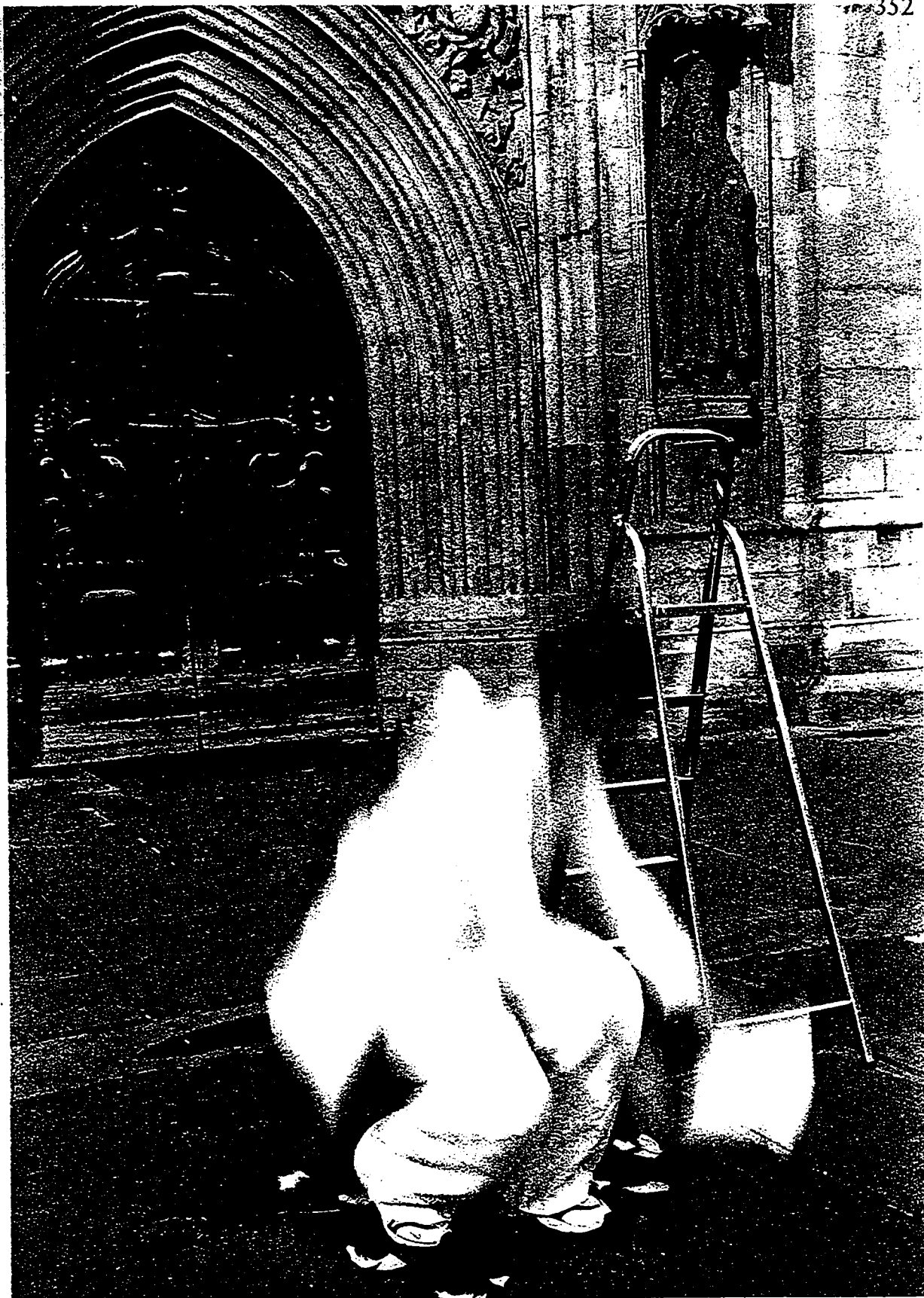
2. Cynthia Hammond, Map of early 21<sup>st</sup> century Bath.



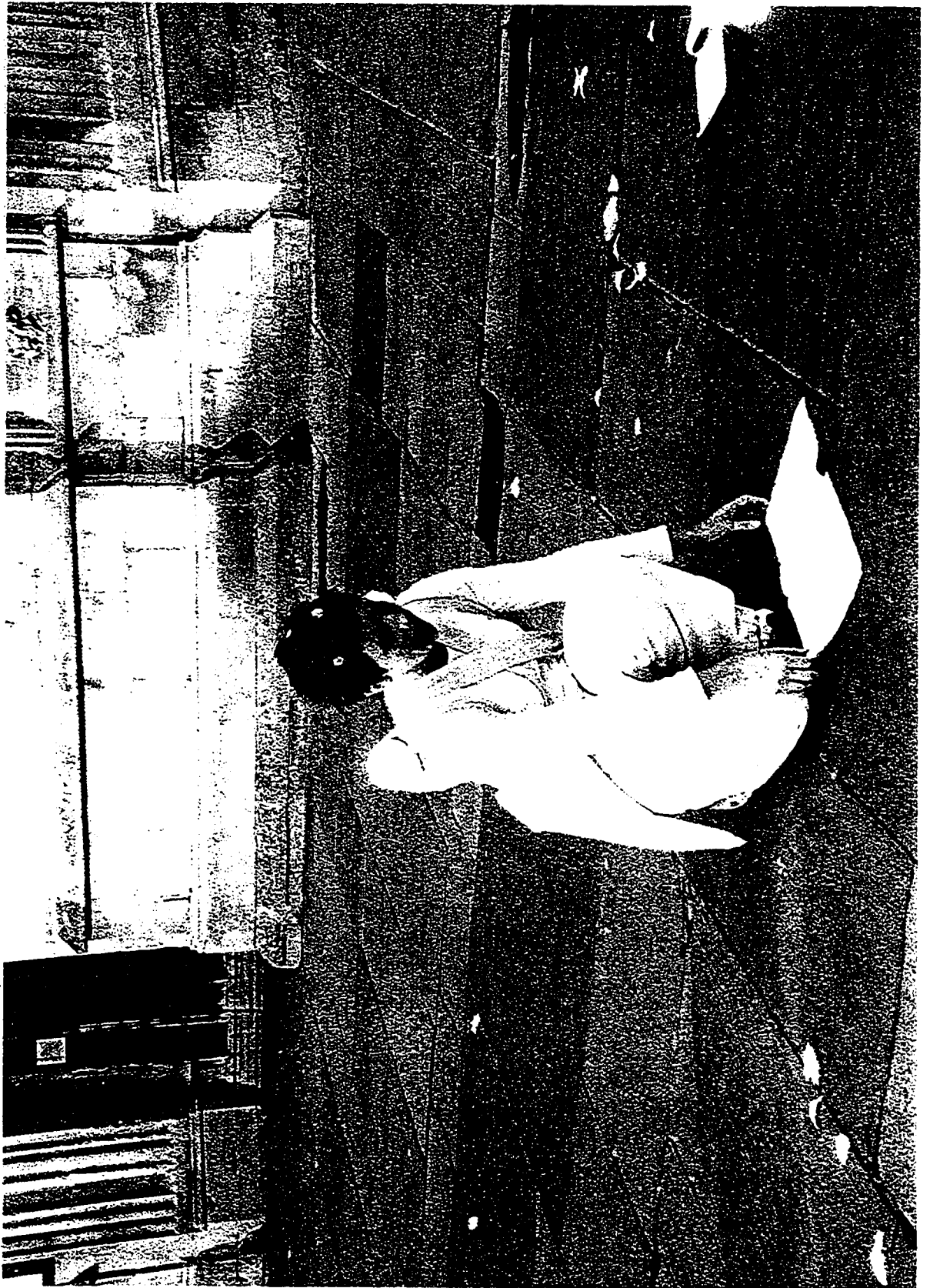
3. Cynthia Hammond. *Firmament*. 1993. (wood, wire, textile, acrylic) 4'5" x 8'5" x 1'5"



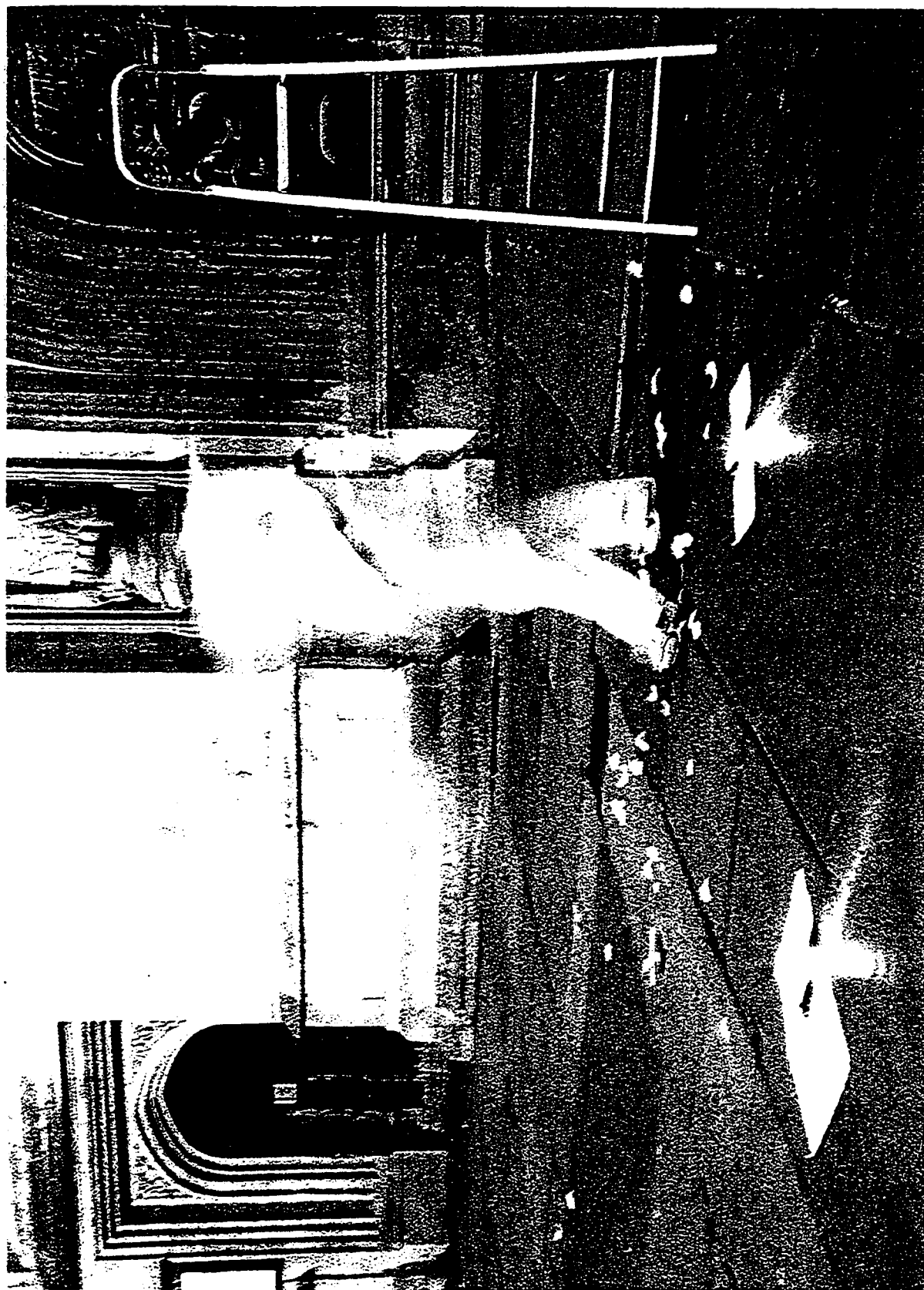
4. Cynthia Hammond. *Mending Icarus' Wing*. 1997. (found branches, wire, handmade cast paper, cotton) 5' x 6' (Private collection, Montréal)



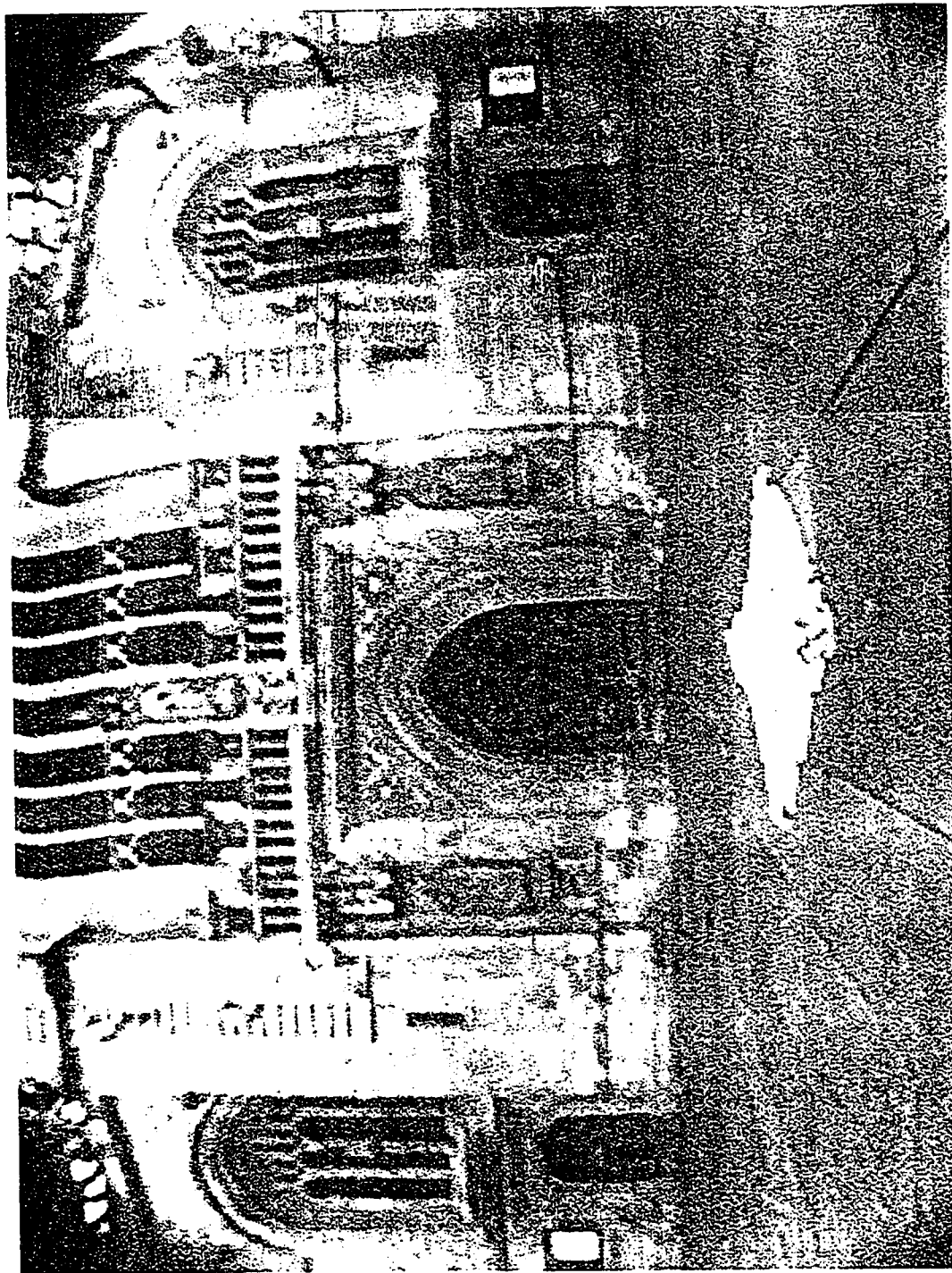
5. *pro fanus*. By Cynthia Hammond. Bath, England. Sept. 1999. Photography: Eugenie Schinkle



6. *pro fanus*. By Cynthia Hammond. Bath, England. Sept. 1999. Photography: Eugenie Schinkle.

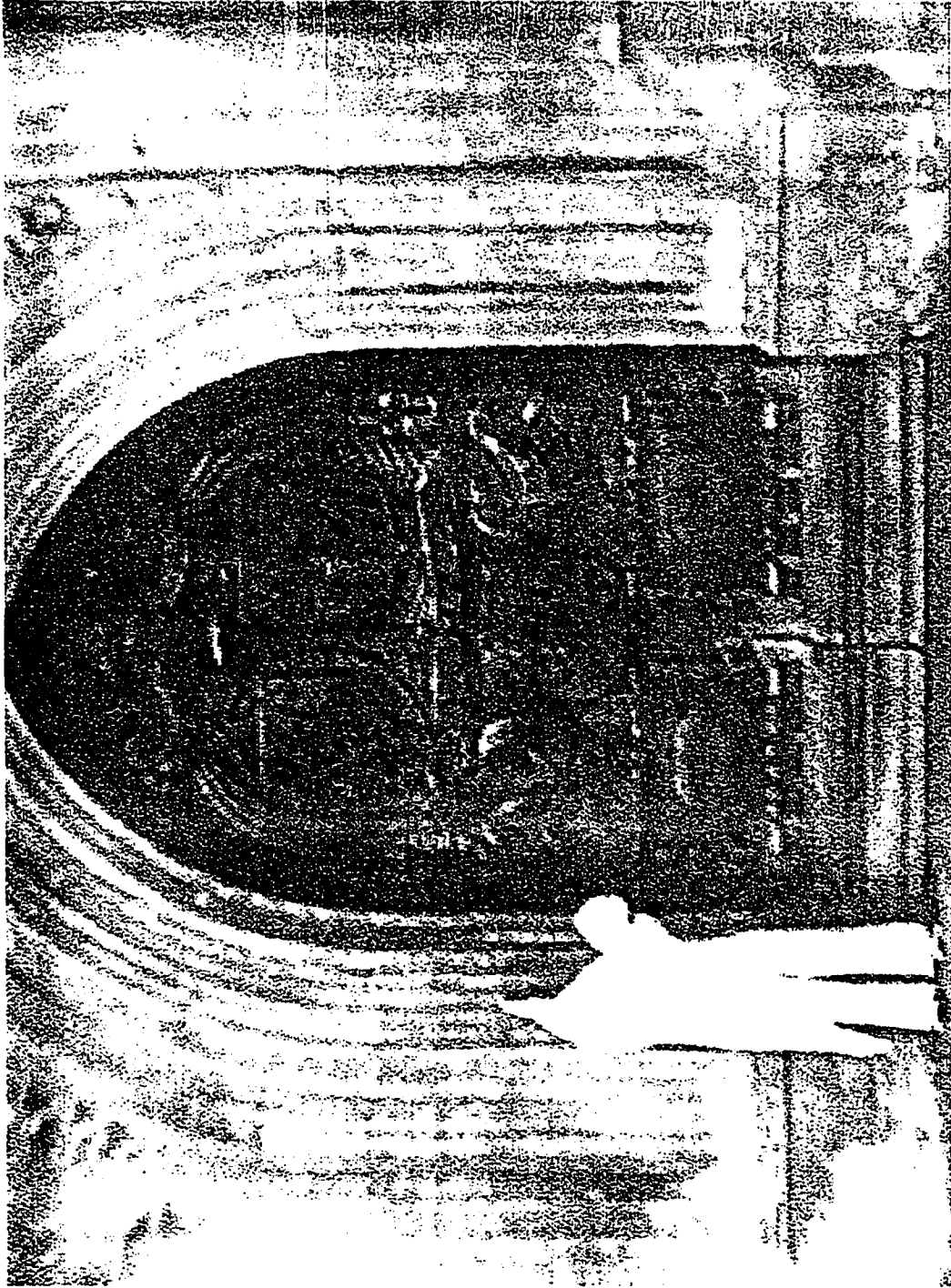


7. *pro fanus*. By Cynthia Hammond. Bath, England. Sept. 1999. Photography: Eugenie Schinkle.



8. *fallen/winged*. By Cynthia Hammond. Performance. Bath, England. July 2000. Video: C. McMahon, stills: Cynthia Hammond.

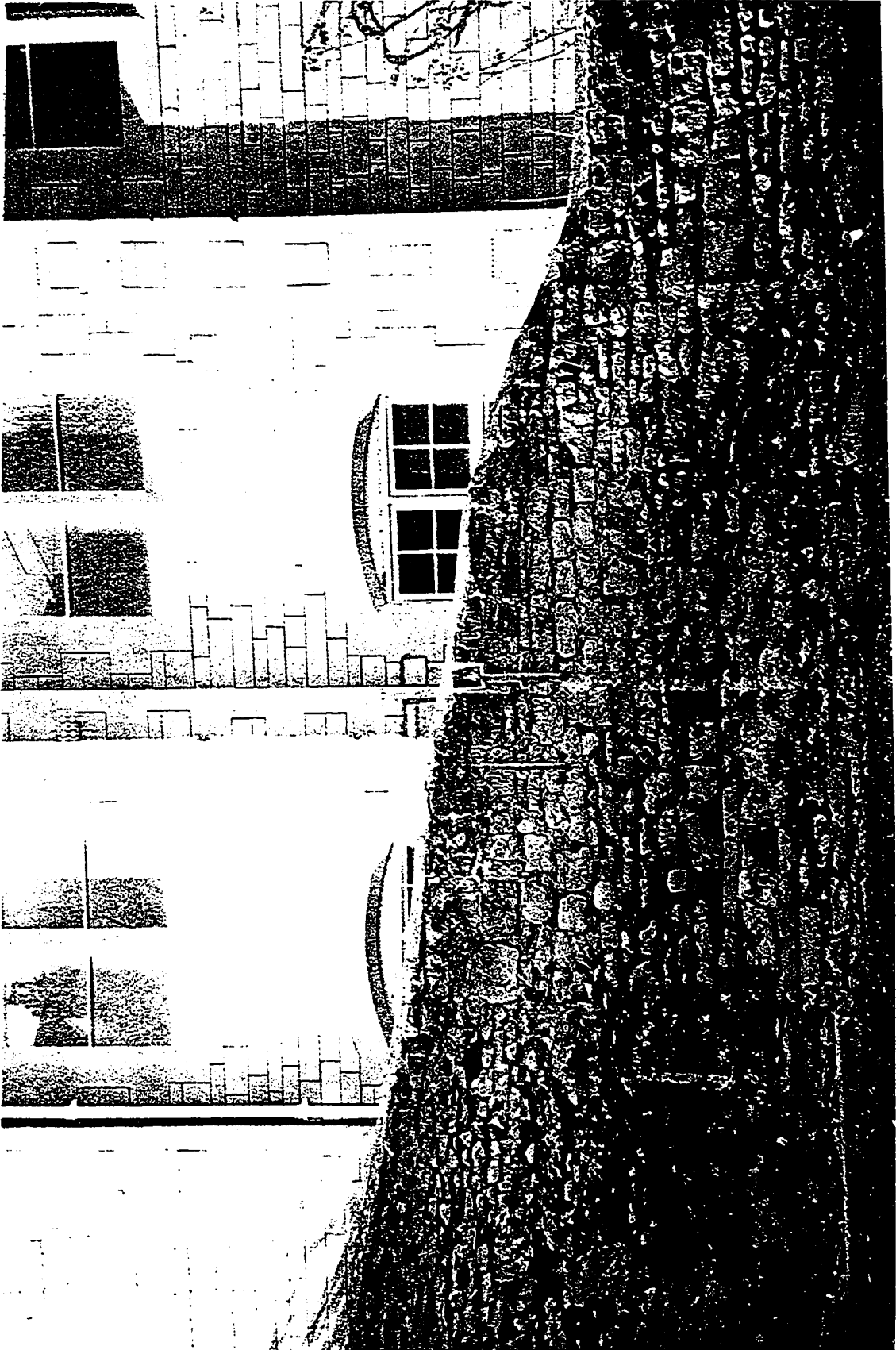




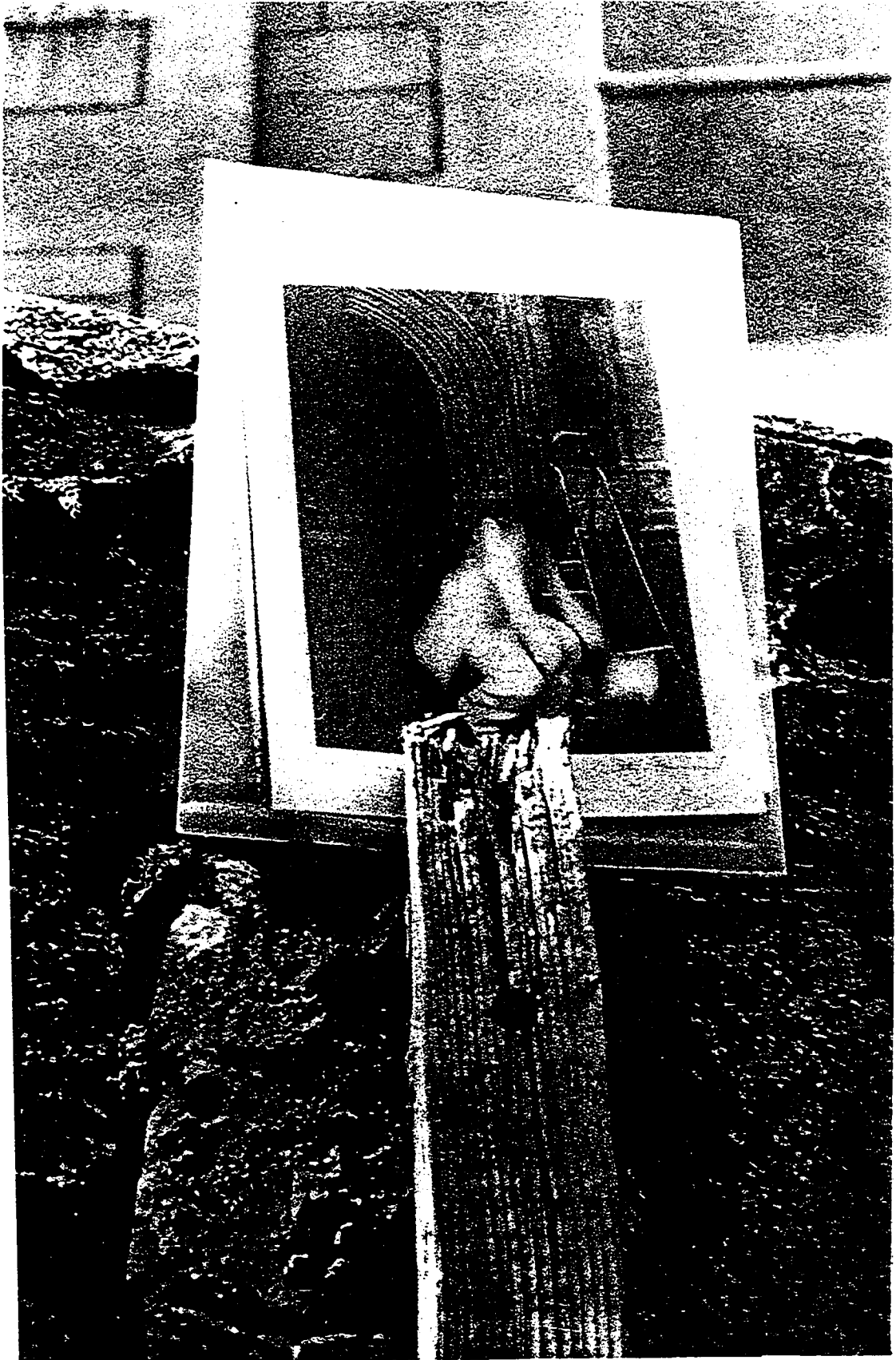
9. *fallen/winged*. By Cynthia Hammond. Performance. Bath, England. July 2000. Video: C. McMahon, stills: Cynthia Hammond.



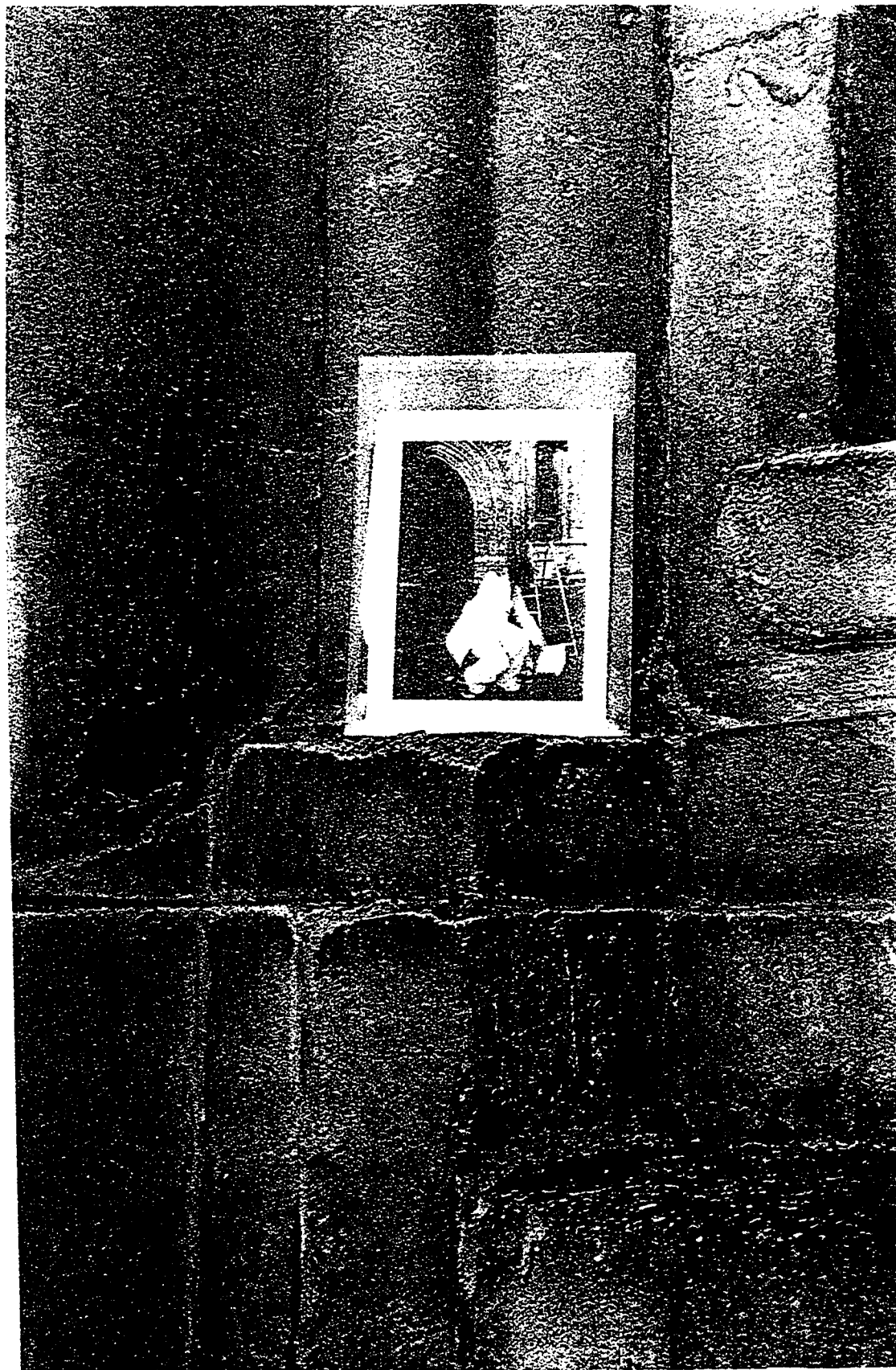
10. *fallen/winged*. By Cynthia Hammond. Performance. Bath, England. July 2000. Video: C. McMahon, stills: Cynthia Hammond.



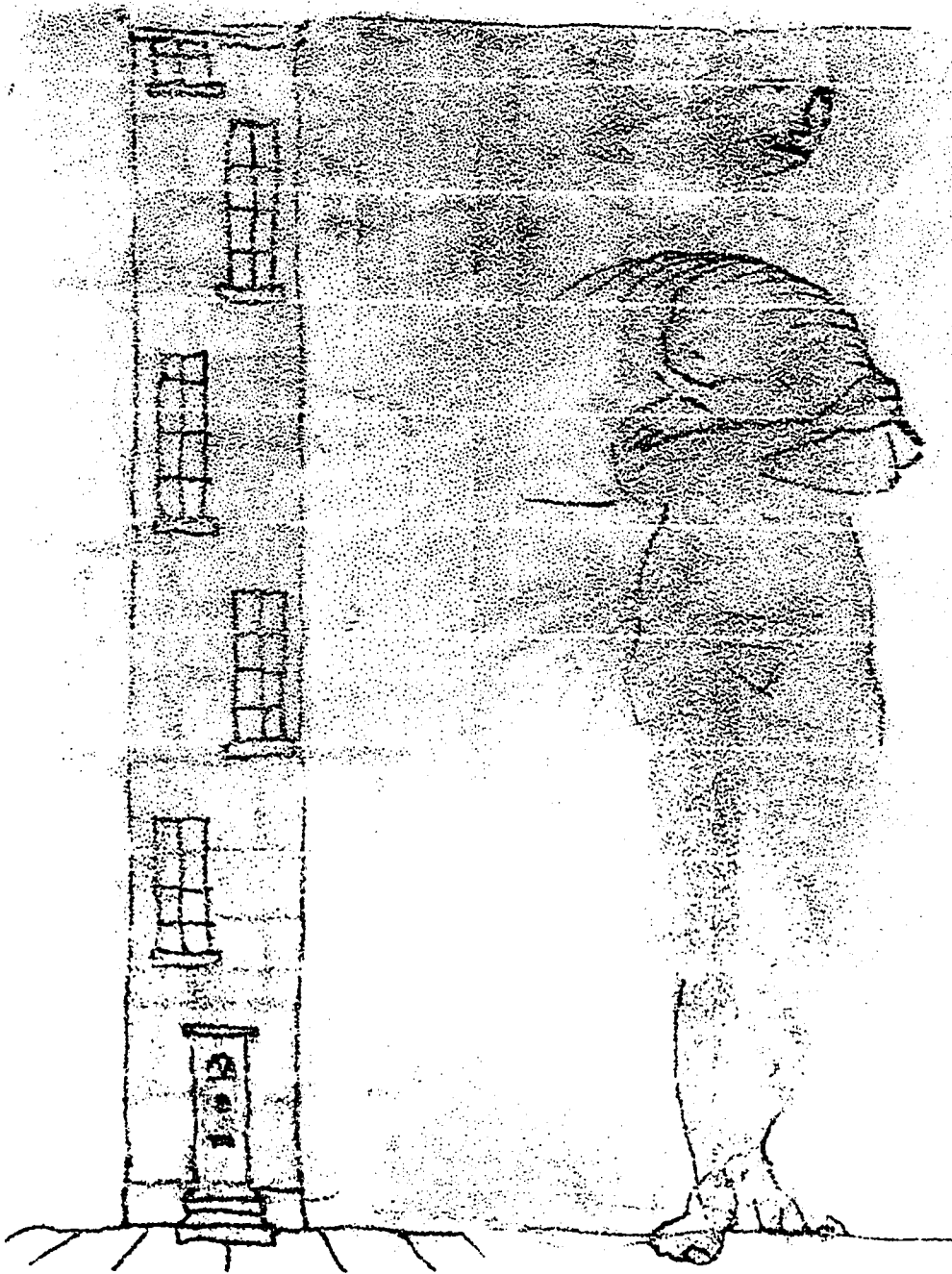
11. Cynthia Hammond. *fallen/winged* bookwork, edition of 25, 5x7" envelopes. In situ, working-class district of historic Bath (destroyed), July 2000. Part of the group exhibition, "Winged". July 2000, Bath.



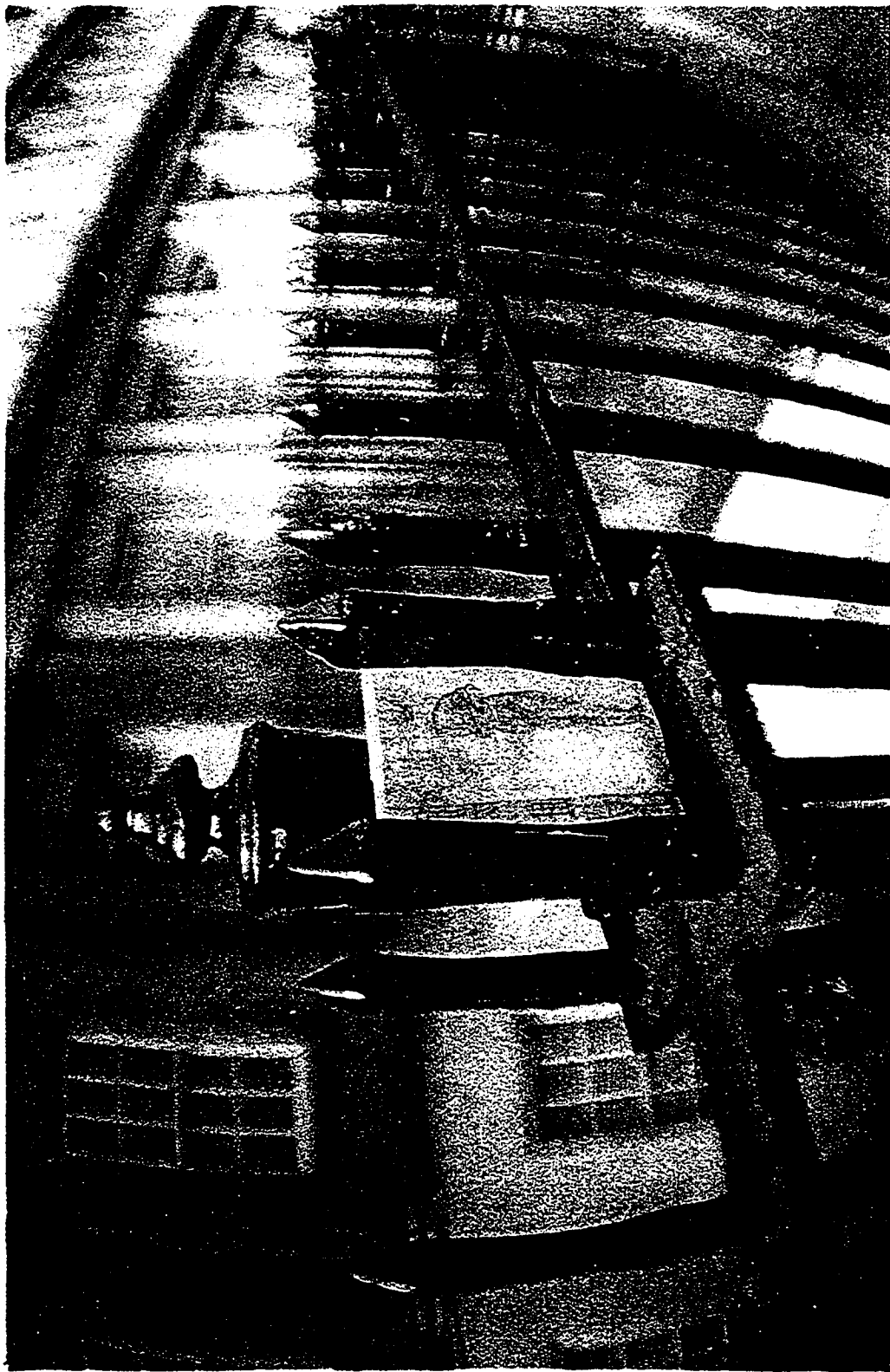
12. *fallen/winged* bookwork. (detail of fig. 11)



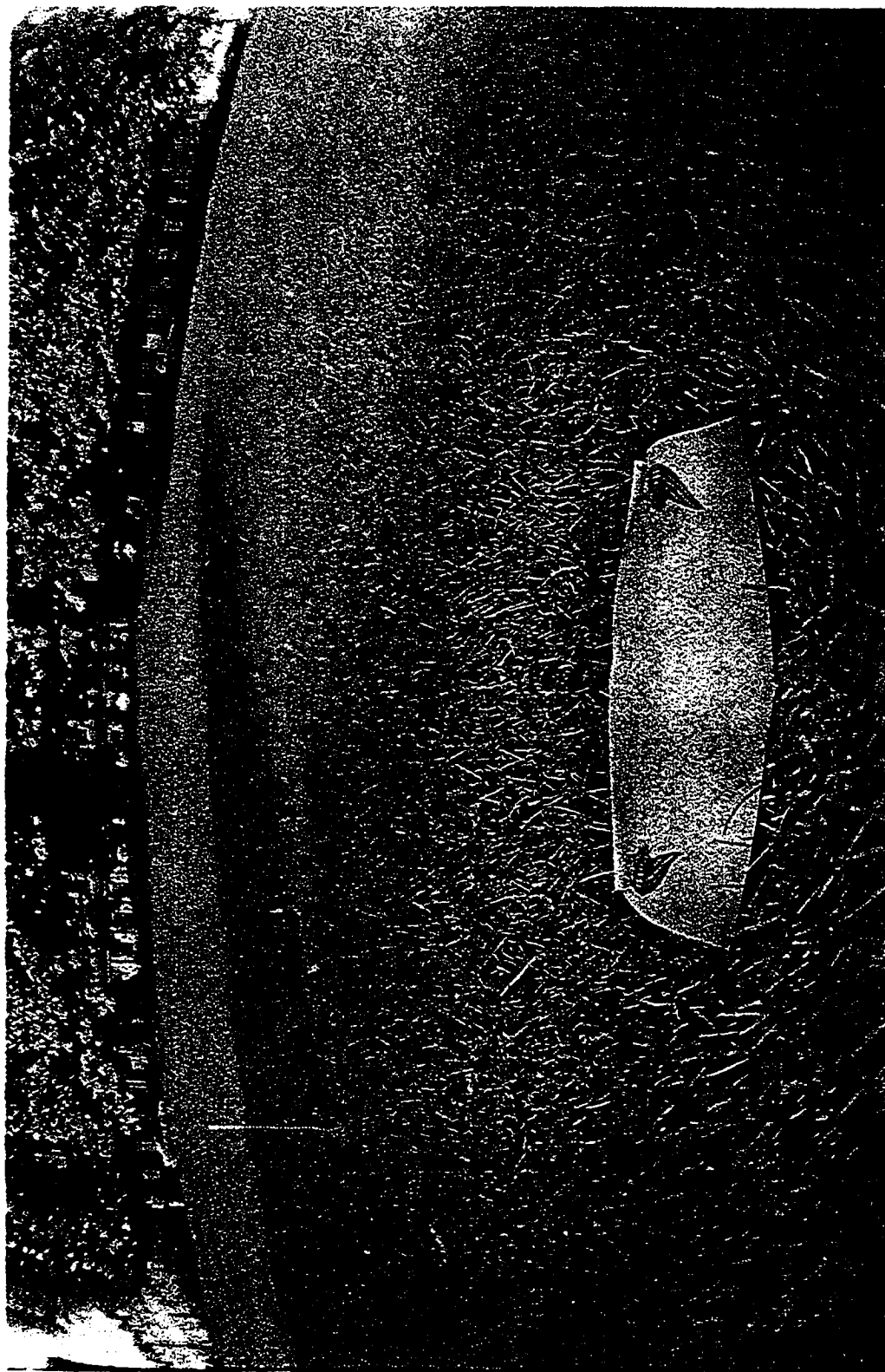
13. *fallen/winged* bookwork. In situ, Huntingdon Chapel, Bath.



14. Cynthia Hammond. Cover, *a woman was here*. Bookwork, edition of 25, 3x4" envelopes. Part of the group exhibition, "Winged". July 2000, Bath.

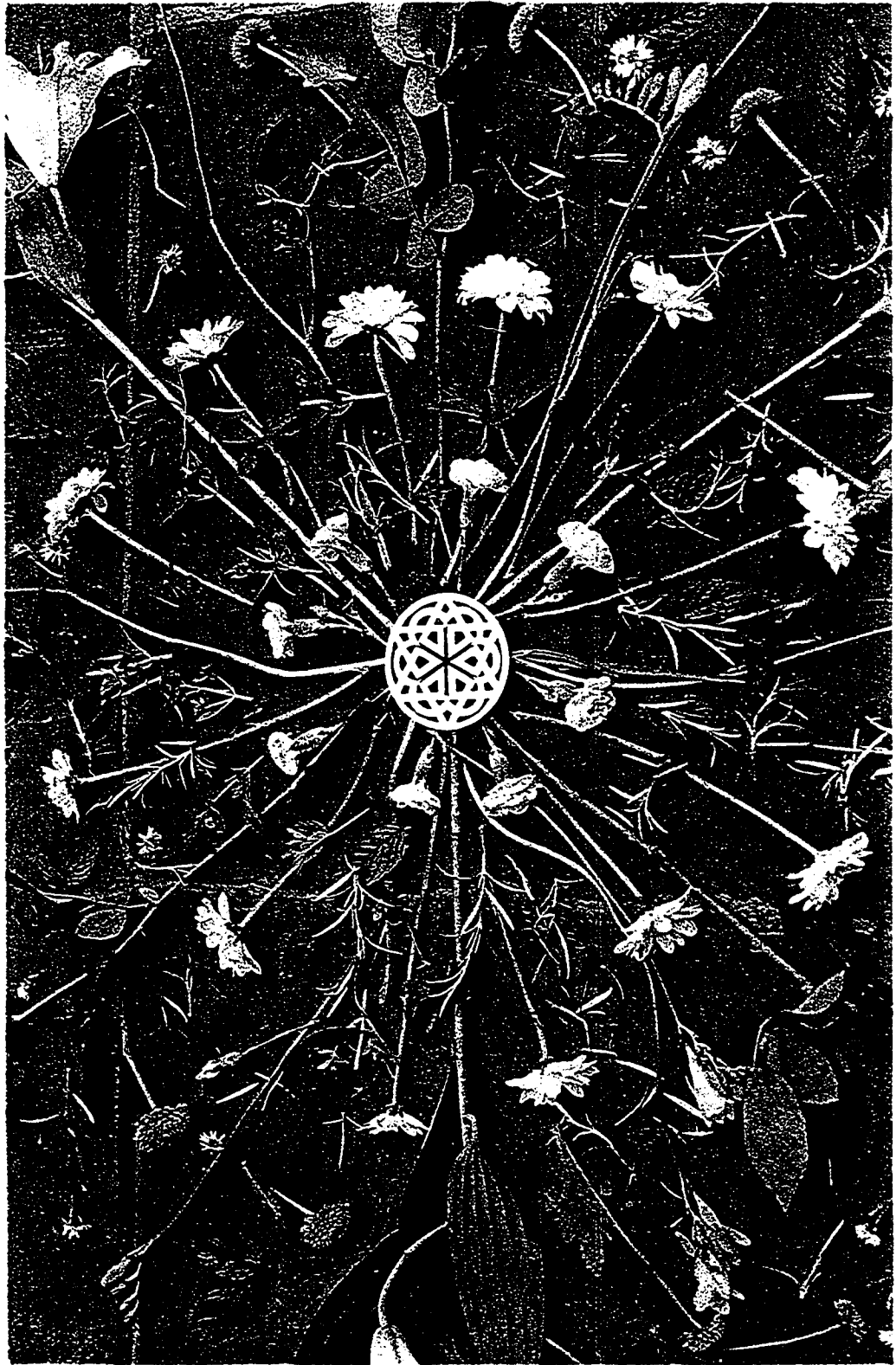


15. *a woman was here.* Bookwork, in situ, King's Circus, Bath 2000.

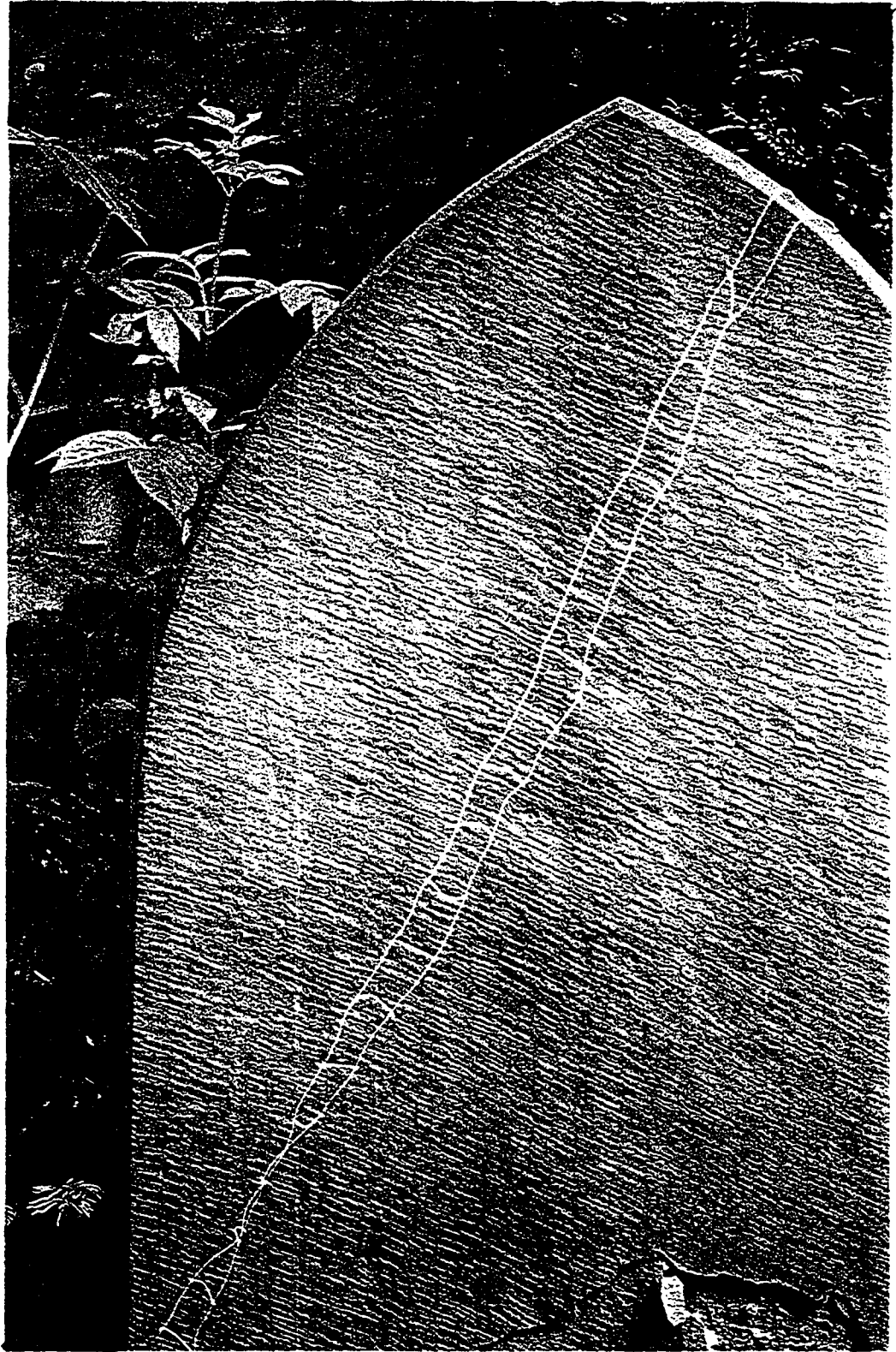


16. Katja Macleod Kessin *winged*. Photographs, in situ, King's Circus. Part of the group exhibition, "Winged". July 2000, Bath.





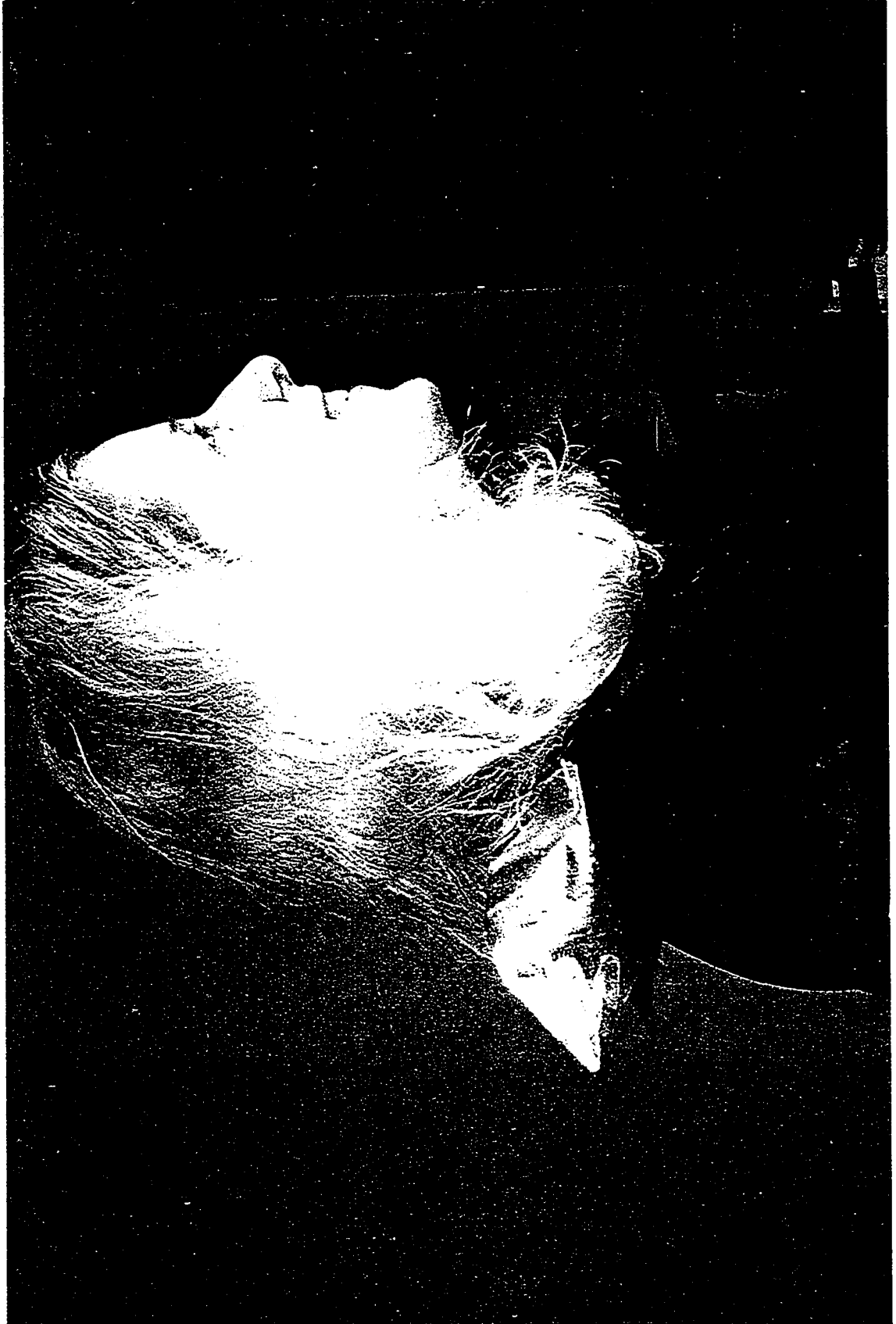
17. Lydia Sharman. *to catch her fall*. Temporary installation of flowers based on sacred geometry of central medallion, 3' diameter approx. Part of the group exhibition, "Winged". July 2000, Bath Abbey, Bath.



18. Caroline Stevens. *escape ladder*. Temporary installation. Thread, 28 x 1". Part of the group exhibition, "Winged". July 2000, Bath.



19. Cynthia Hammond. *take back the night*. Public art project: 200 pairs of wings given to participants in women's march. Reflective fabric, thread, phosphorescent paint, pins. September 1998, Montréal. (detail of wings)



20. *take back the night* (detail of wings on model, Penelope Hammond)



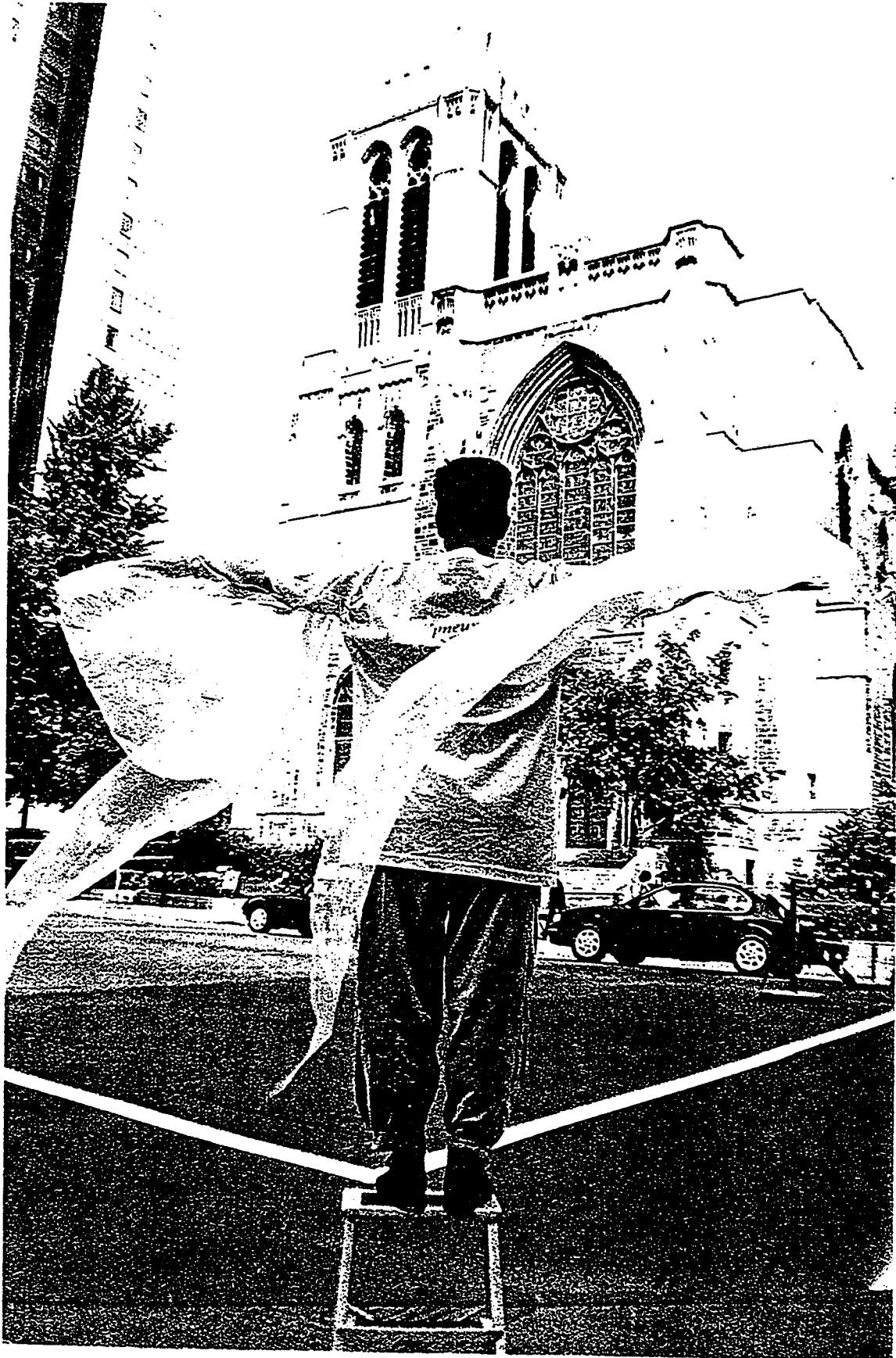
21. *breathelanimer*. By Cynthia Hammond. Public performance, with Raya Fridman, Jeffrey Golf, Karen Huska, Caroline Stevens. June 1999, Montréal. Photography: Grayson Cooke.



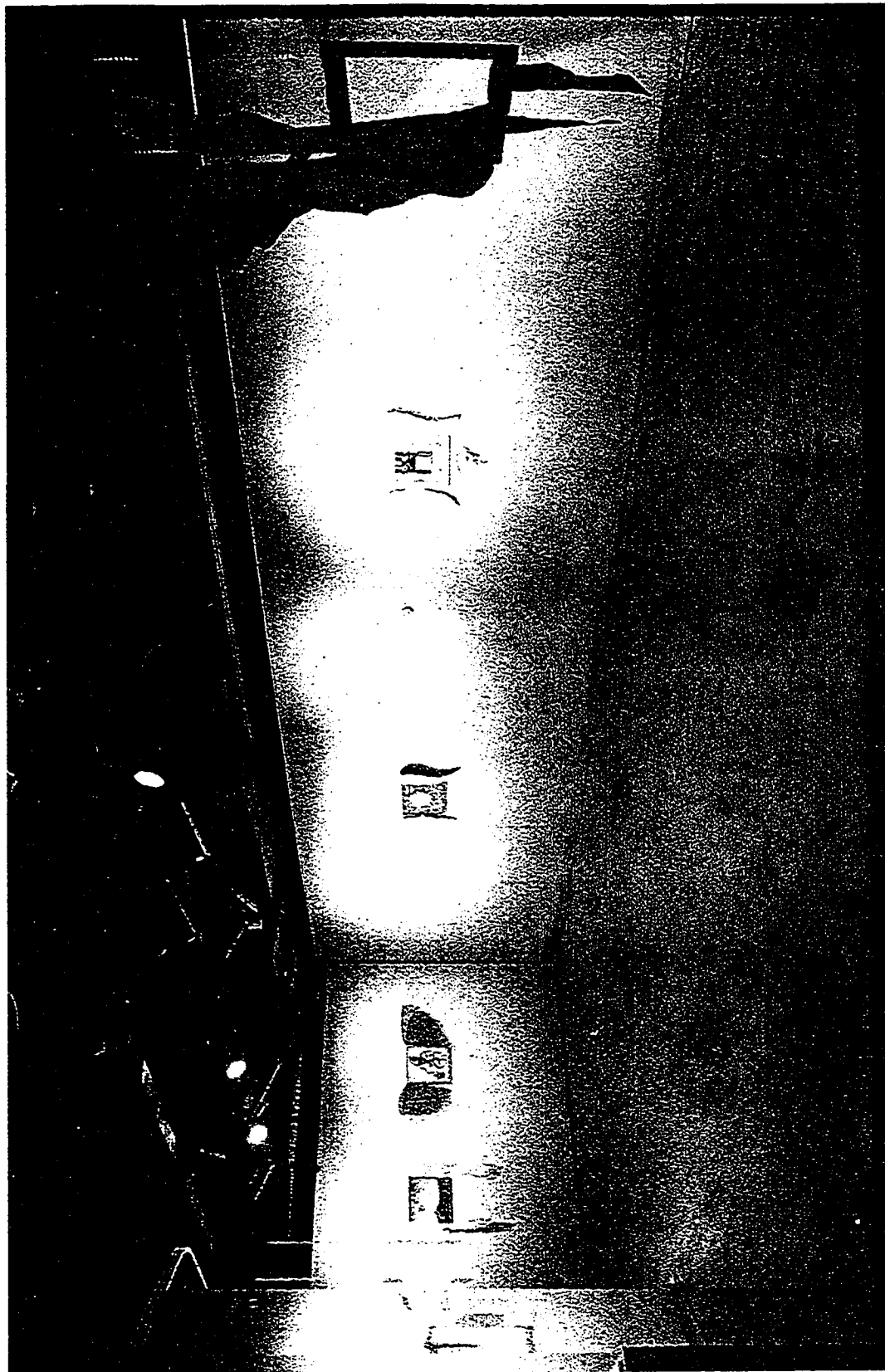
*refesh*

1. soul

2. the vital life source  
which can slip out during  
sleep and be caught, like a  
butterfly, in cloth.



23. *breath/animer* (Karen Huska/pnuema)

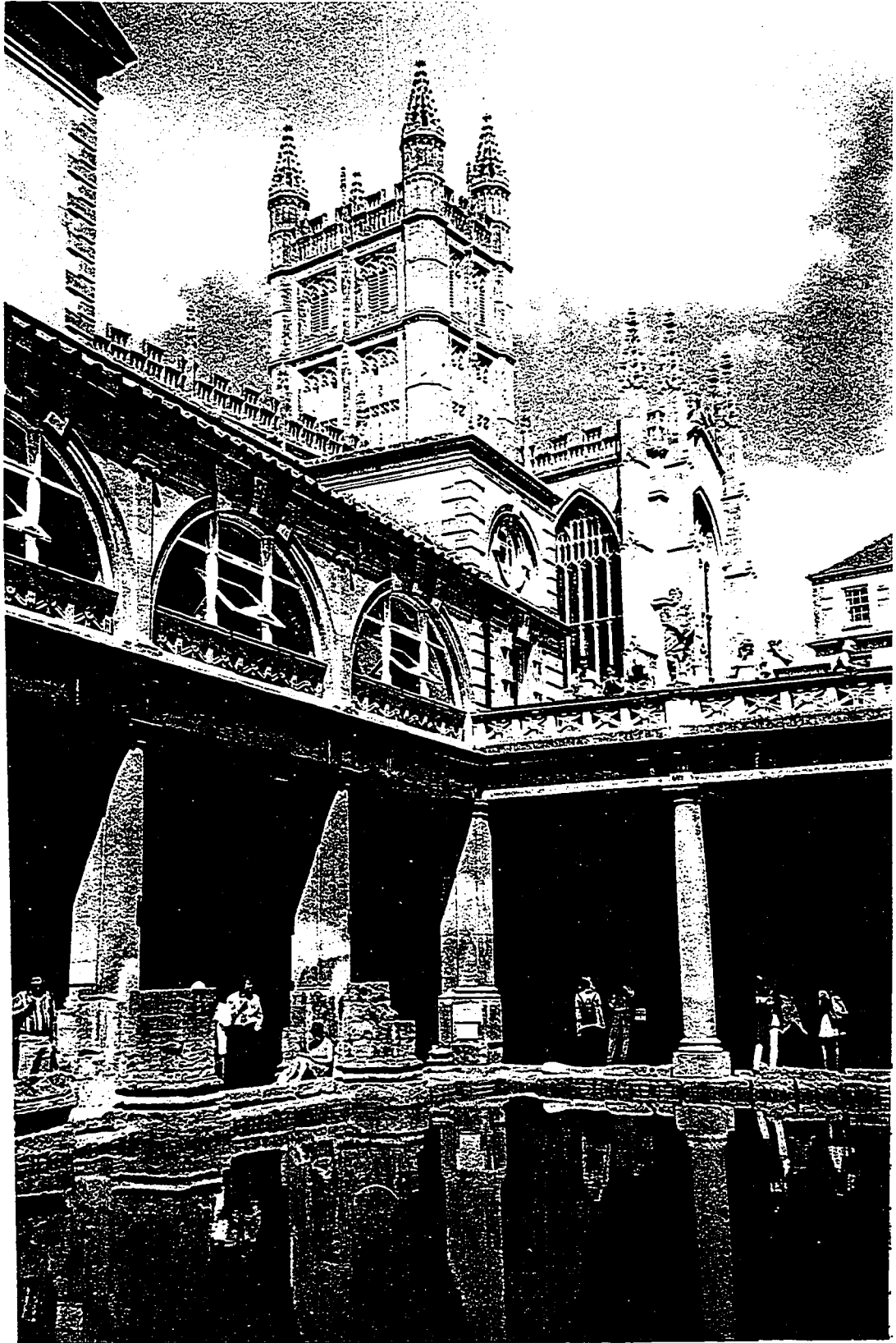


24. Cynthia Hammond, Katja Macleod Kessin, 7 ex-residents of L'Auberge de Transition, Montréal. *Flight*. Collaborative art project. Maison de la culture, November-December, Montréal 1999. (installation shot)

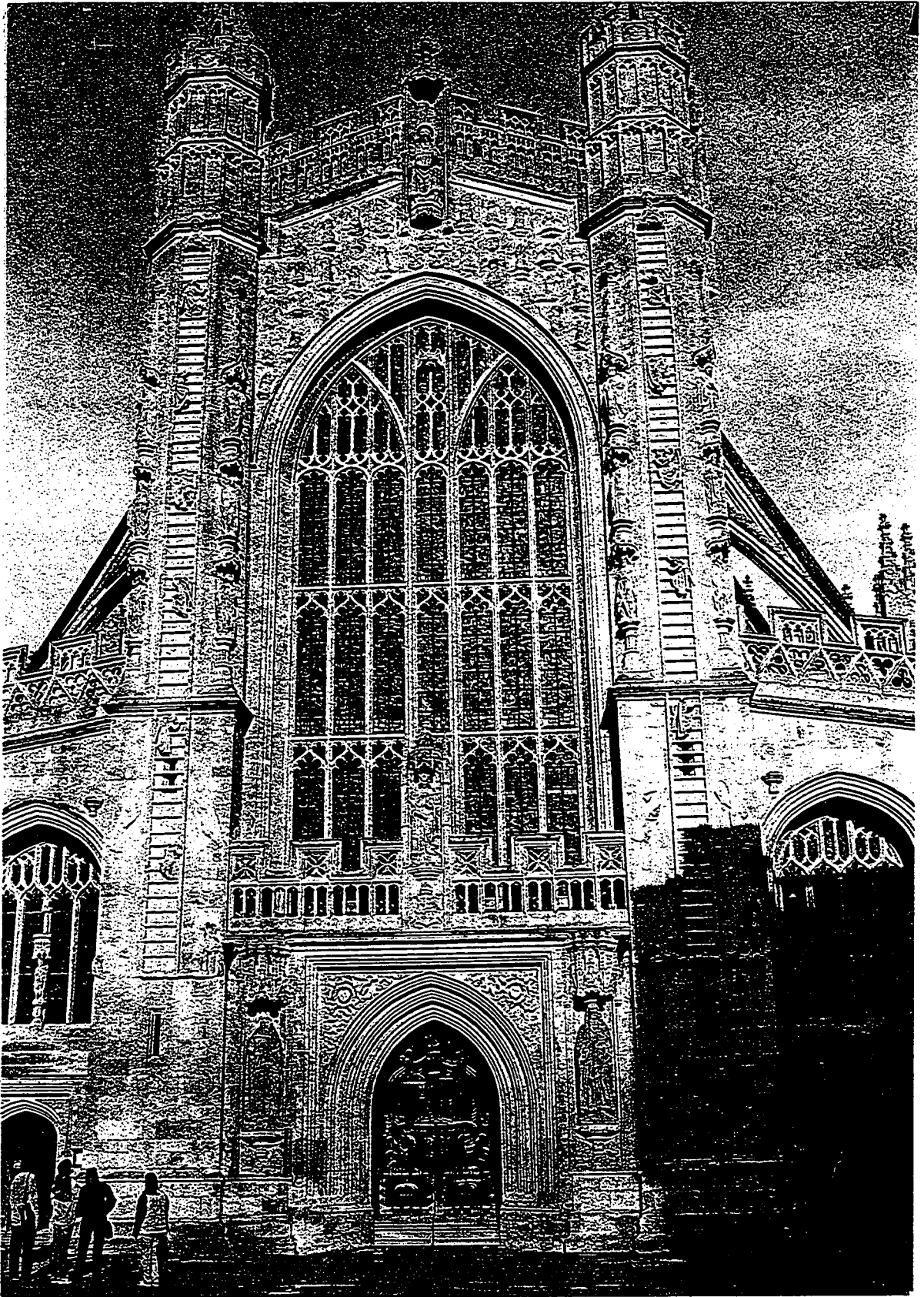




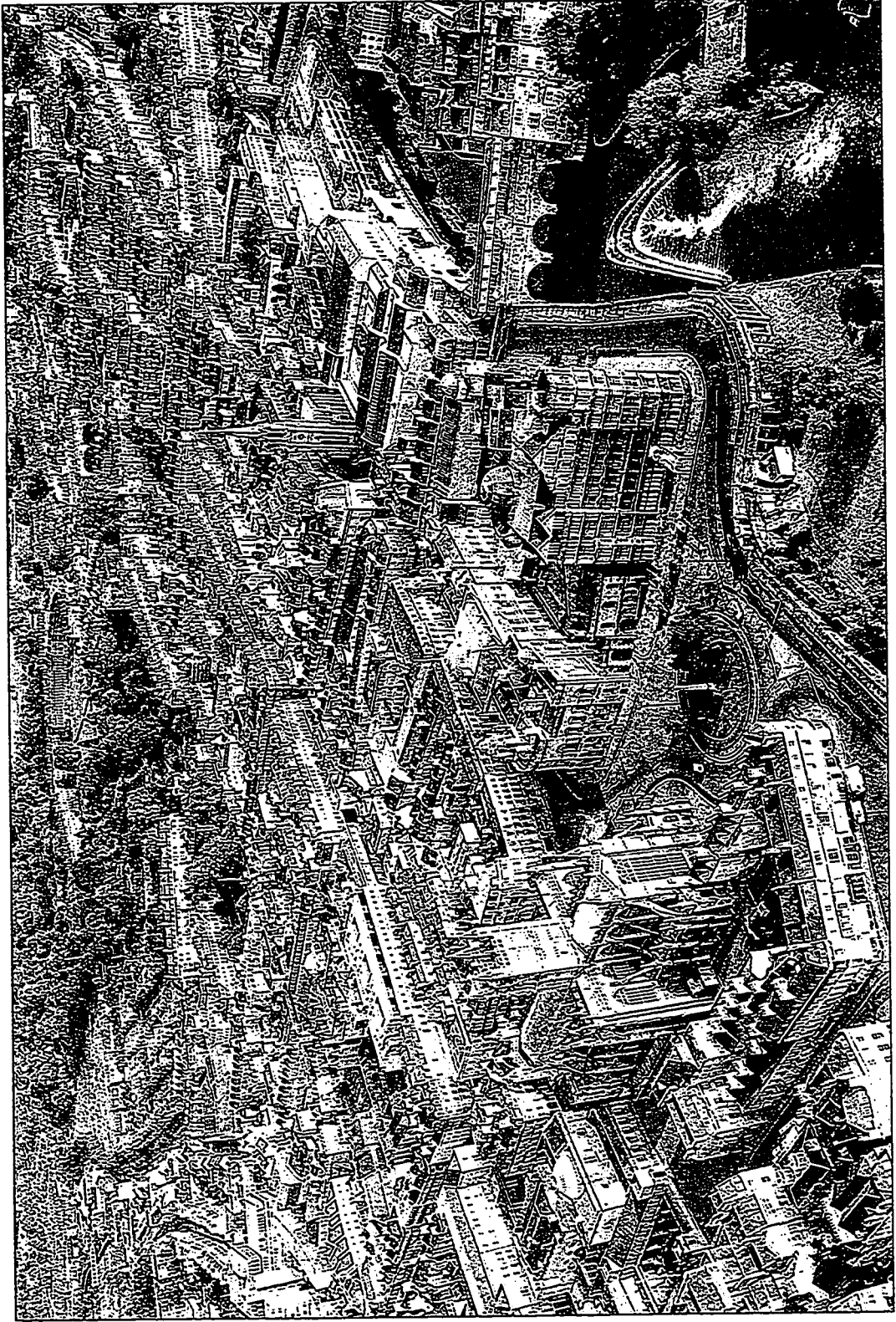
25. *Flight* (detail of *Face-to-Face*, work-in-progress by Beverly)



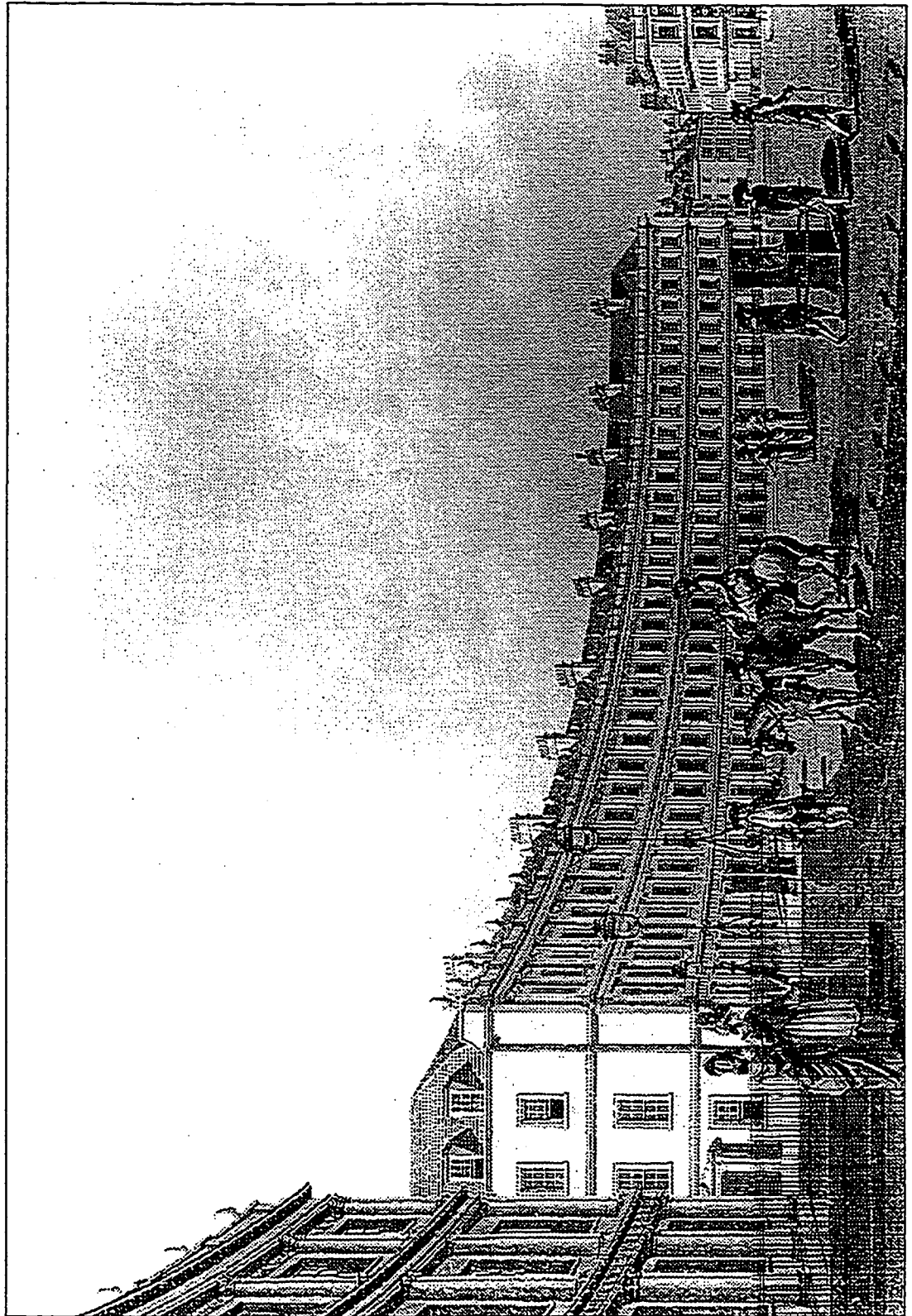
26. Bath Abbey from the Roman Baths, Bath. Begun 1499. (photo: C. McMahon)



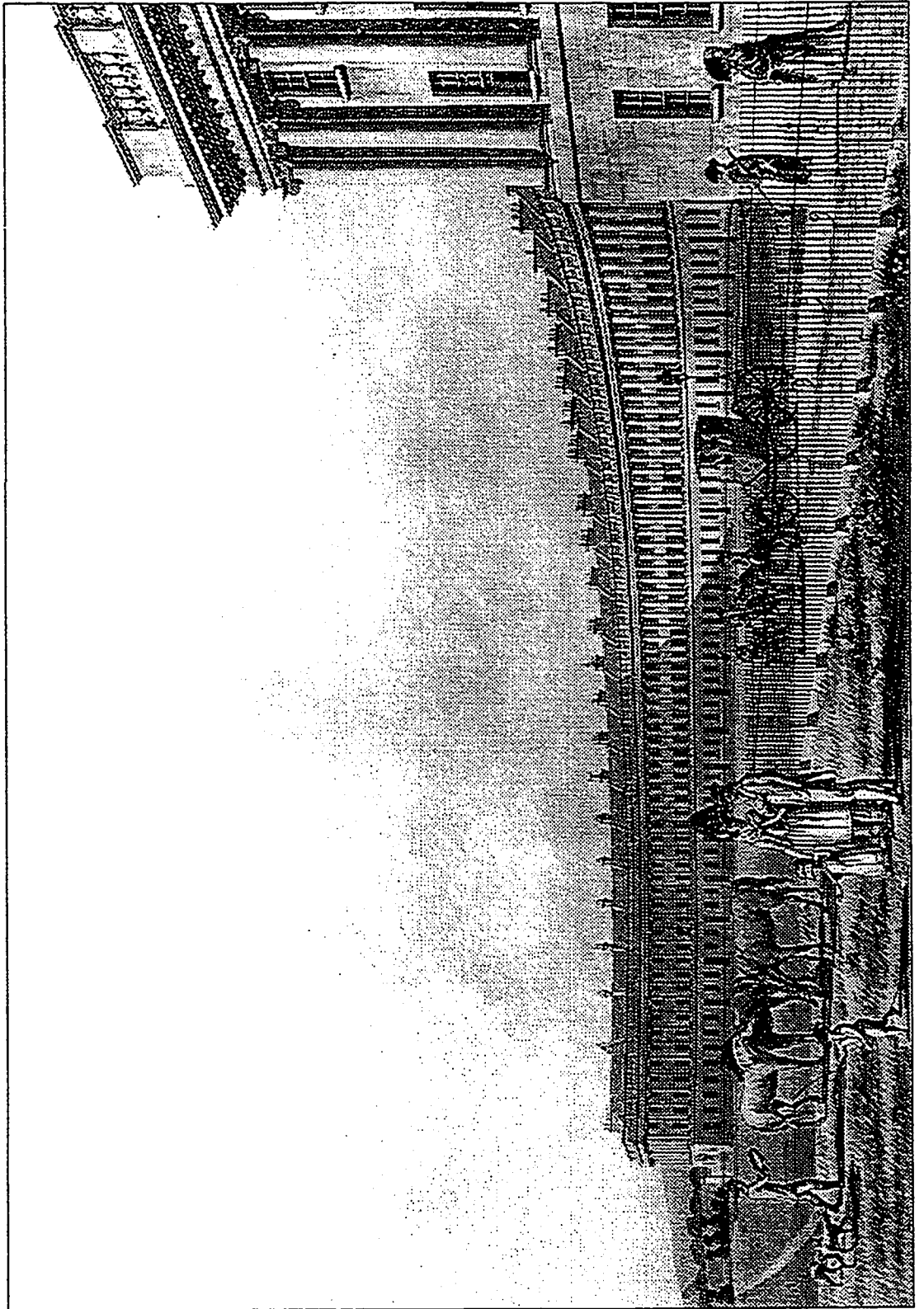
27. Overview of west front, Bath Abbey.



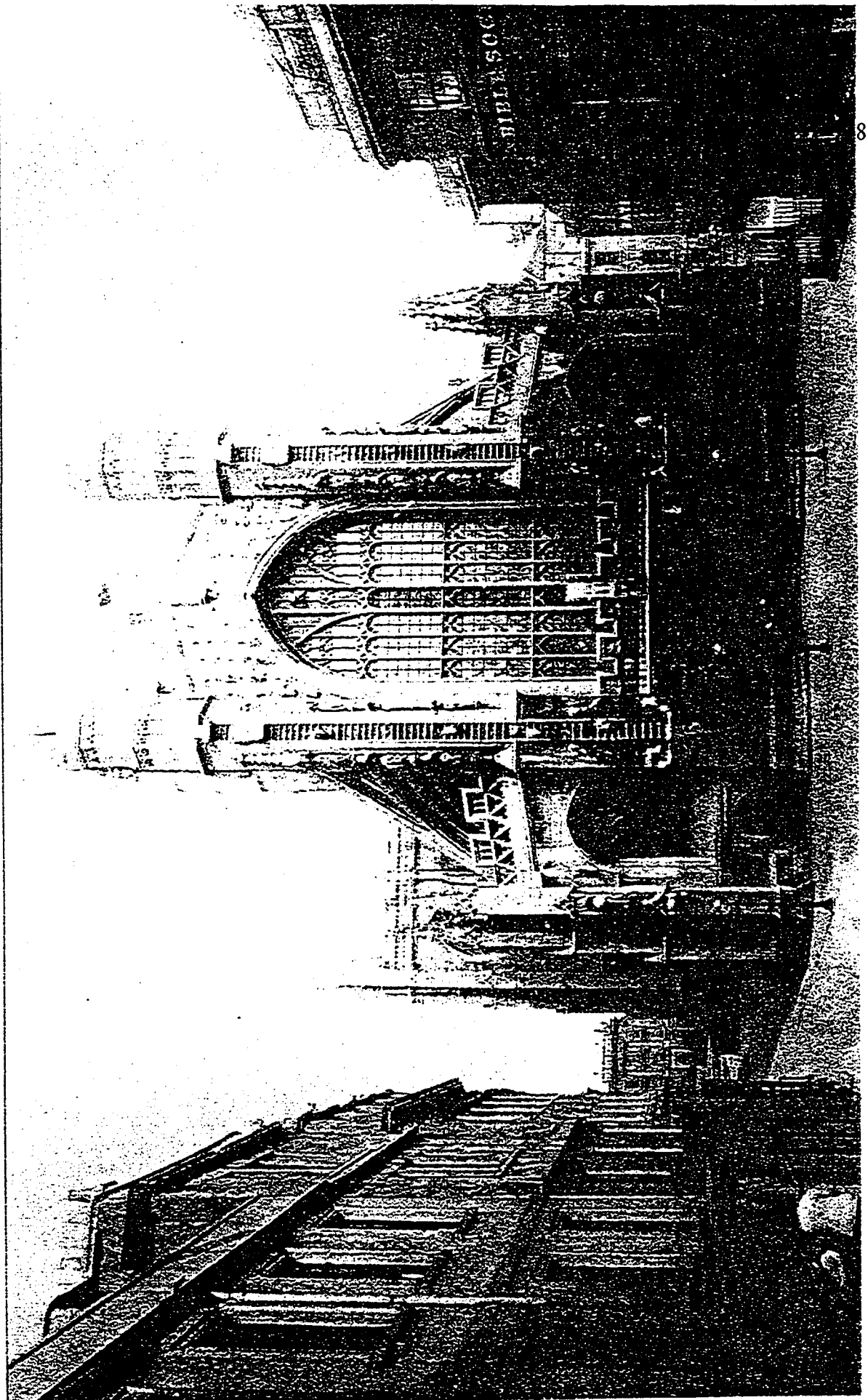
28. Aerial view of Bath (Photo: Philip Pierce)



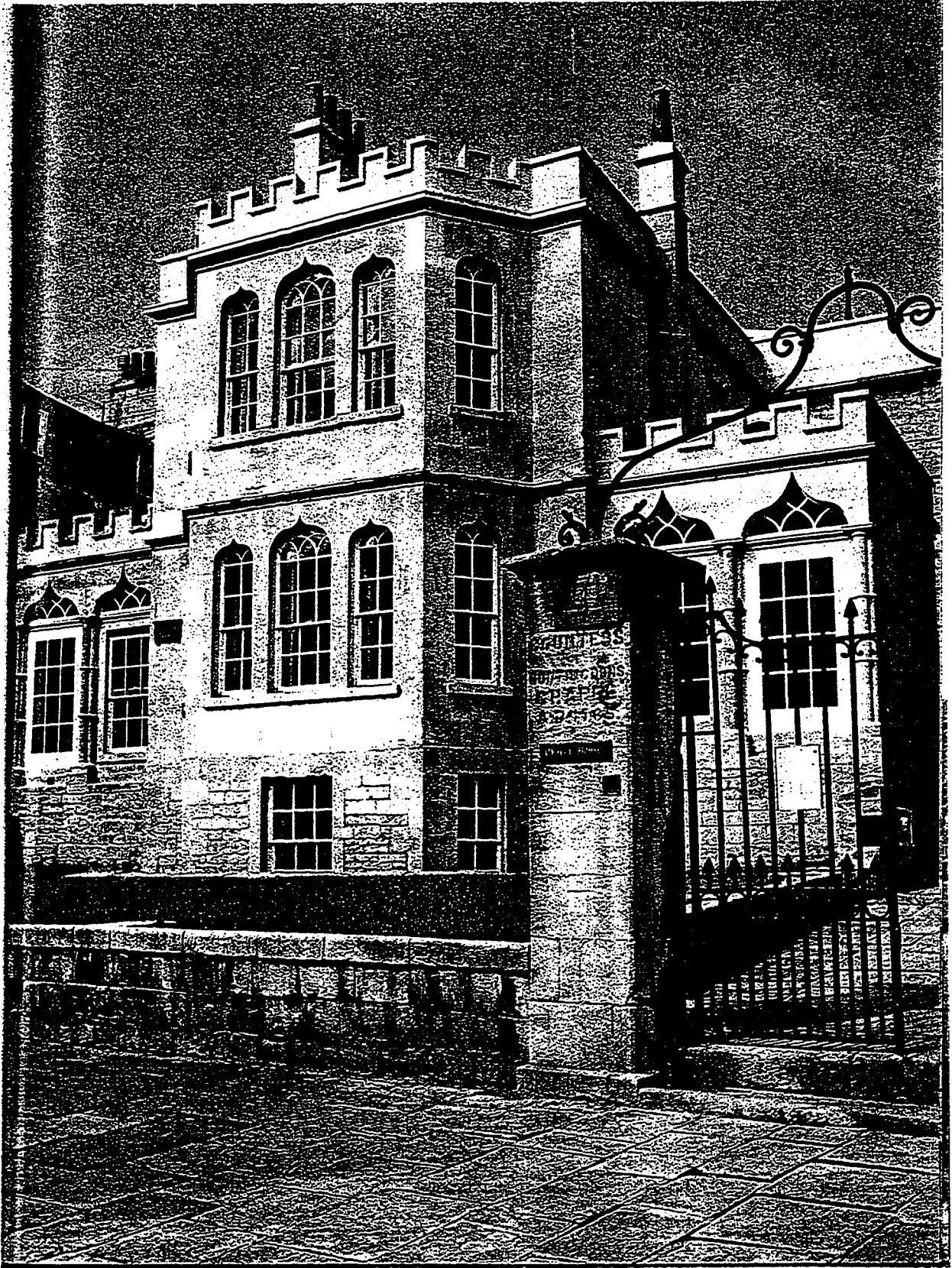
29. John Wood the Elder, The King's Circus, Bath. Begun 1754. Thomas Malton, 1784. (Victoria Art Gallery, Bath)



30. John Wood the Elder and Younger, The Royal Crescent. Begun 1767. Thomas Malton, 1777. (Victoria Art Gallery, Bath)



31. Bath Abbey in 1883. Bath Archives. *Bath: The Second Selection*. By Paul De'Ath. England: Chalford Publishing, 1998. 10.



32. Selina Hastings, The Countess of Huntingdon's Chapel, Vineyards, Bath, 1765. From Paul Newman, *Bath* (England: Pevensey Heritage Guides, n.d.) 77.

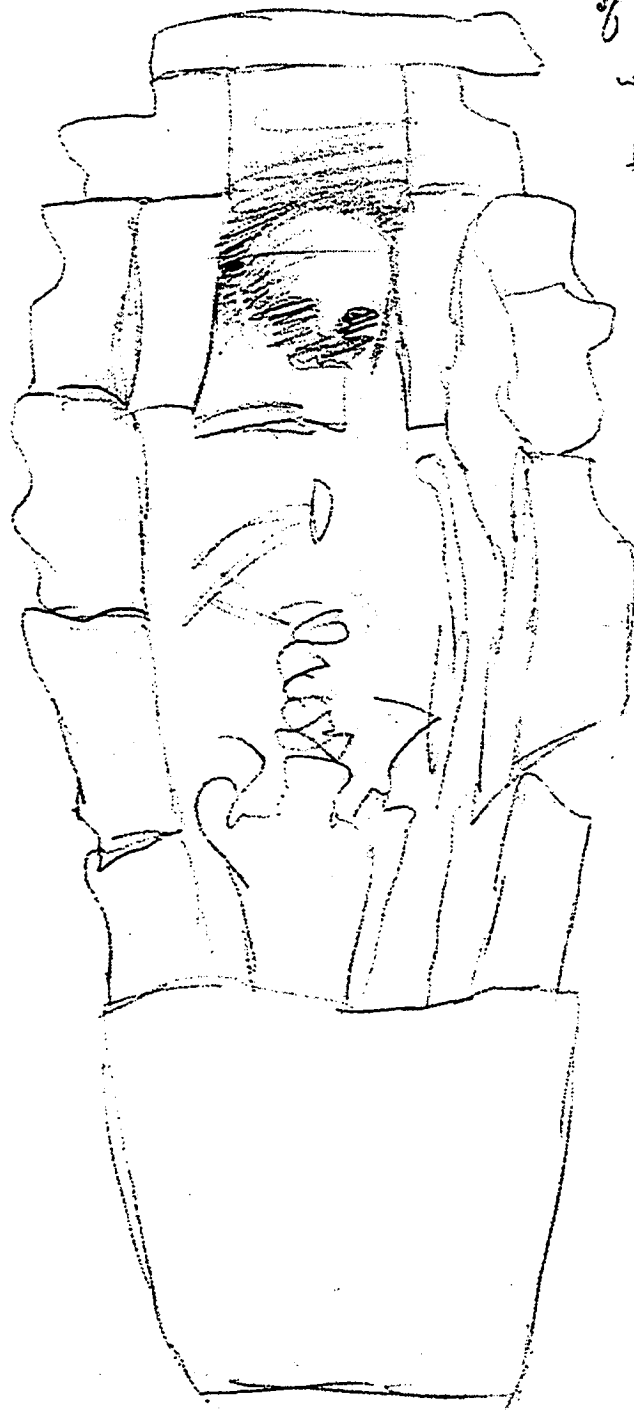




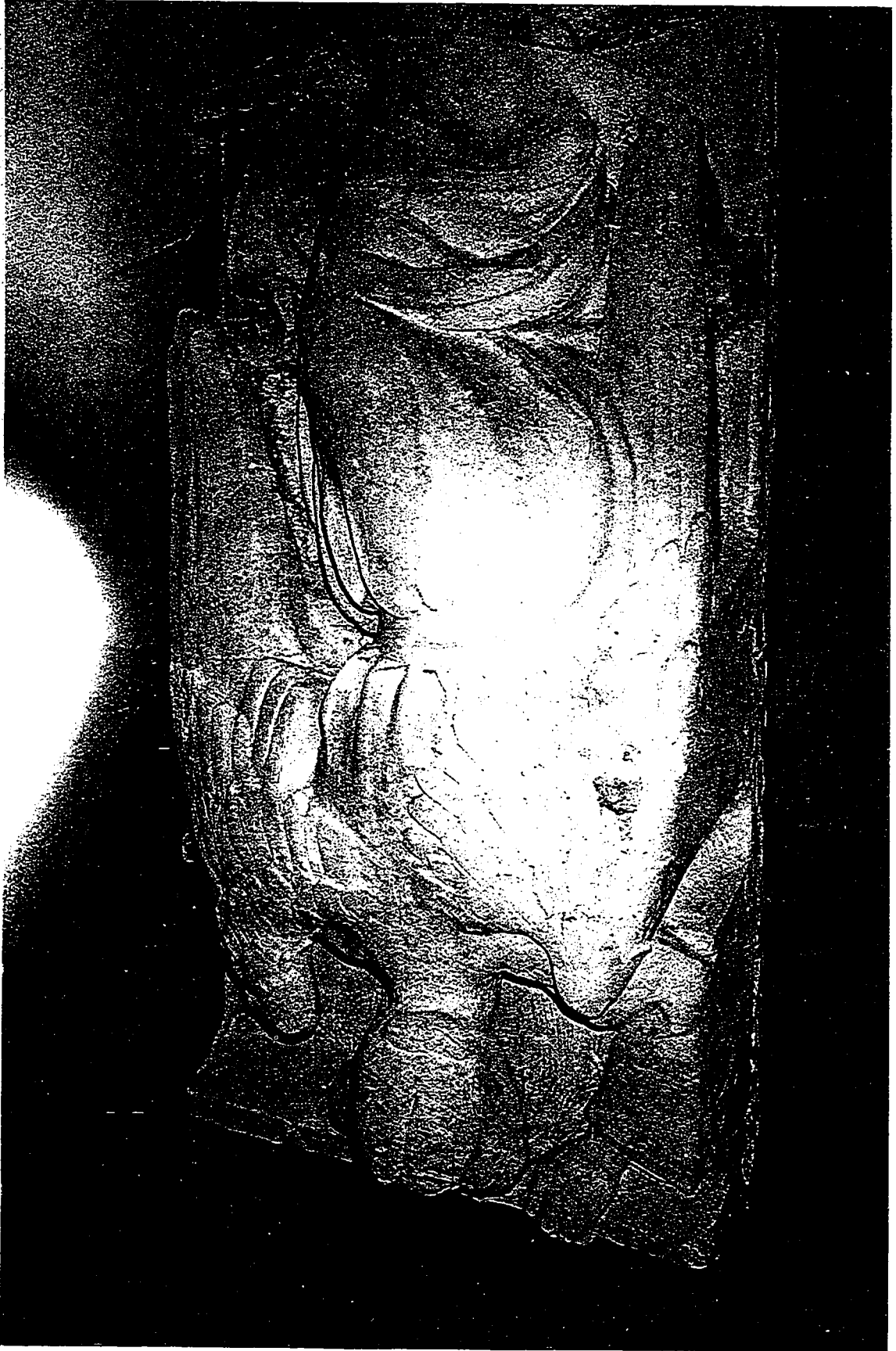
33. Sir George Frampton, *Falling Angel*. Bath Abbey, c. 1899.



34. John Flaxman. *Bingham Monument*. Bath Abbey, 1804. (detail)



35. Cynthia Hammond. *Sketch, skeletal remains in the Bath Abbey Heritage Vaults, Bath.* Pencil, 1998.



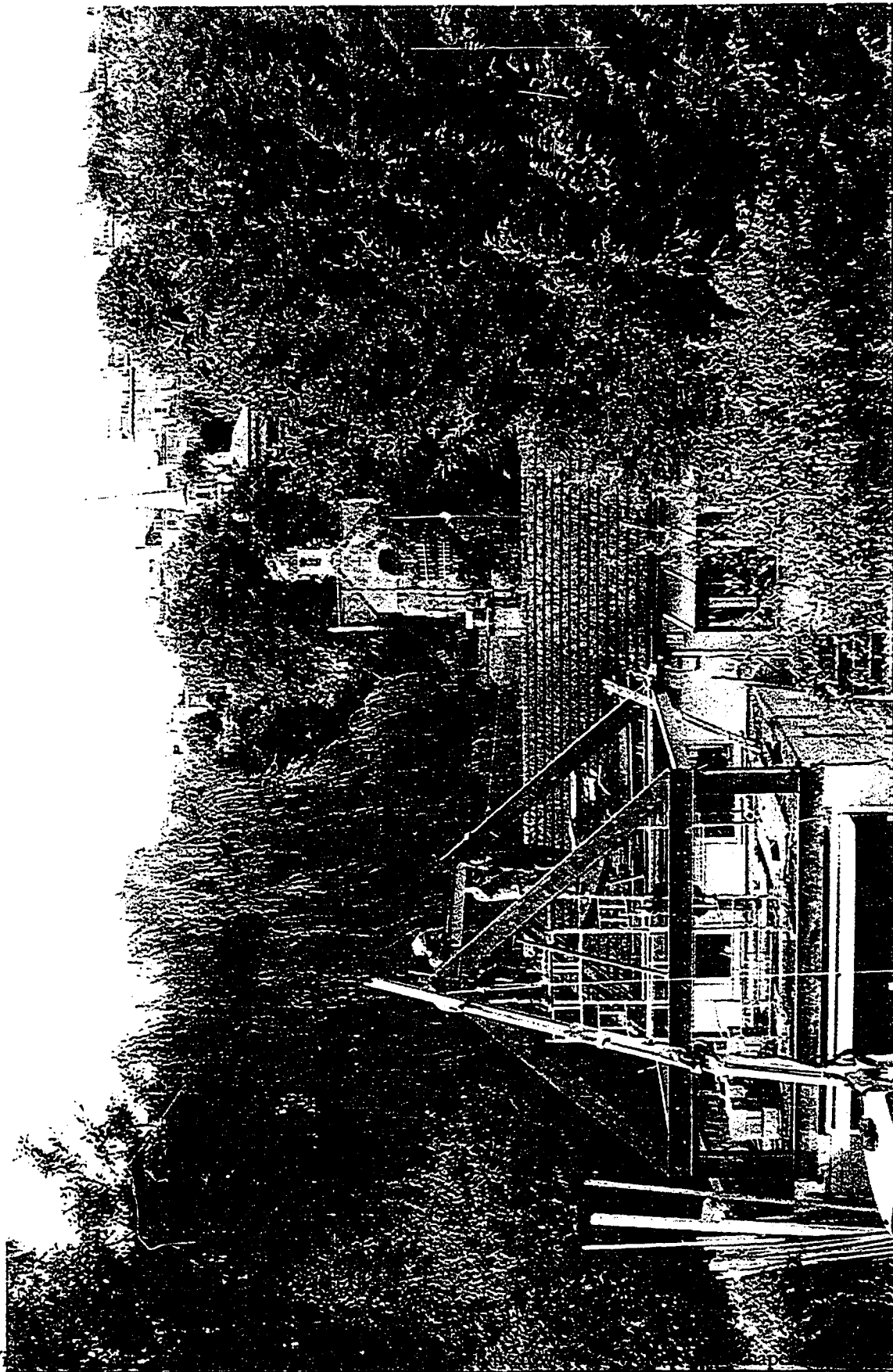
36. Plaster cast of falling angel. Bath Abbey Heritage Vaults, c. 1899.



37. Sir George Frampton, *Lamia*. Bronze, 1899



38. Sir George Frampton, *Enid the Fair*. Bronze, 1907.

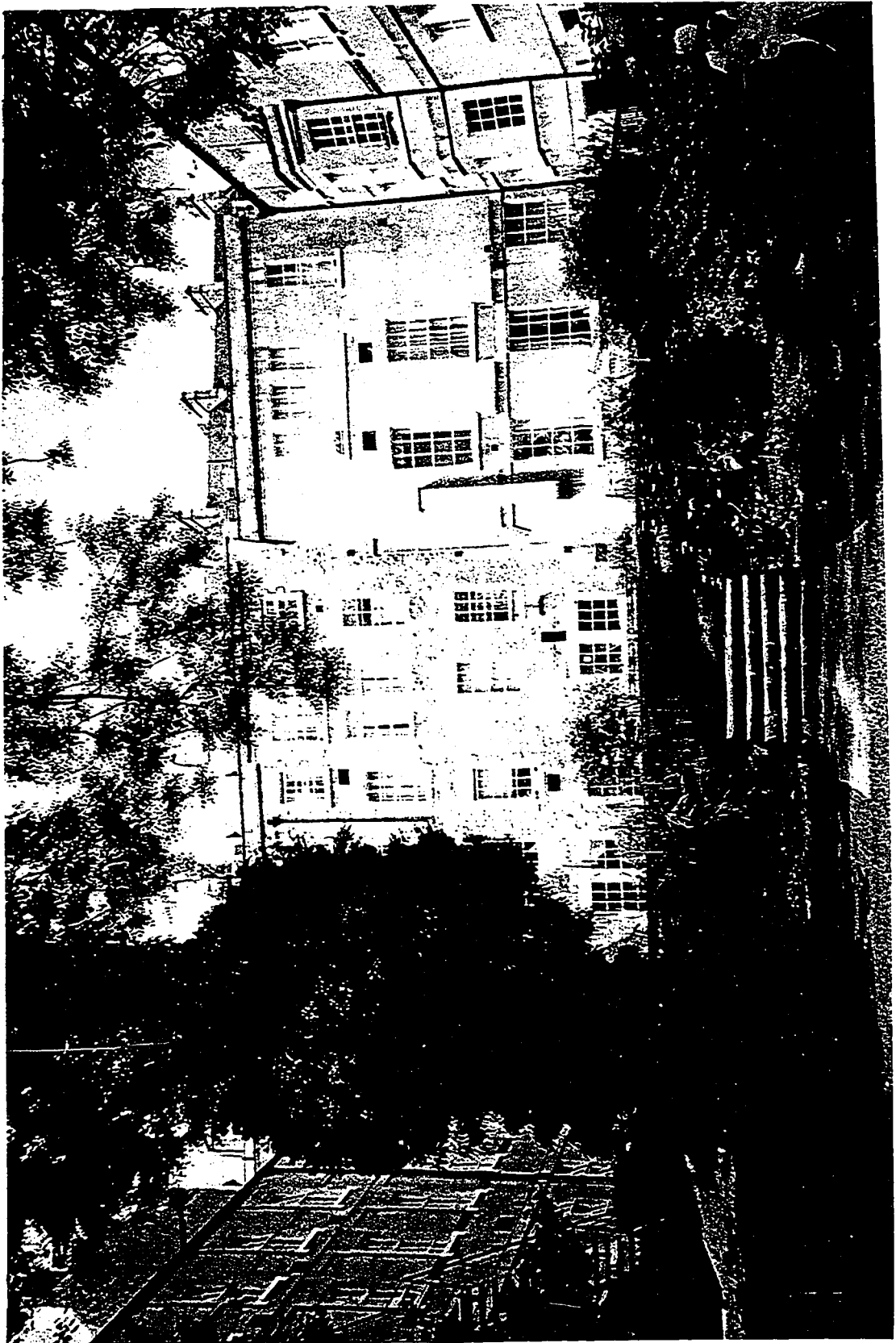


39. View  
1999.

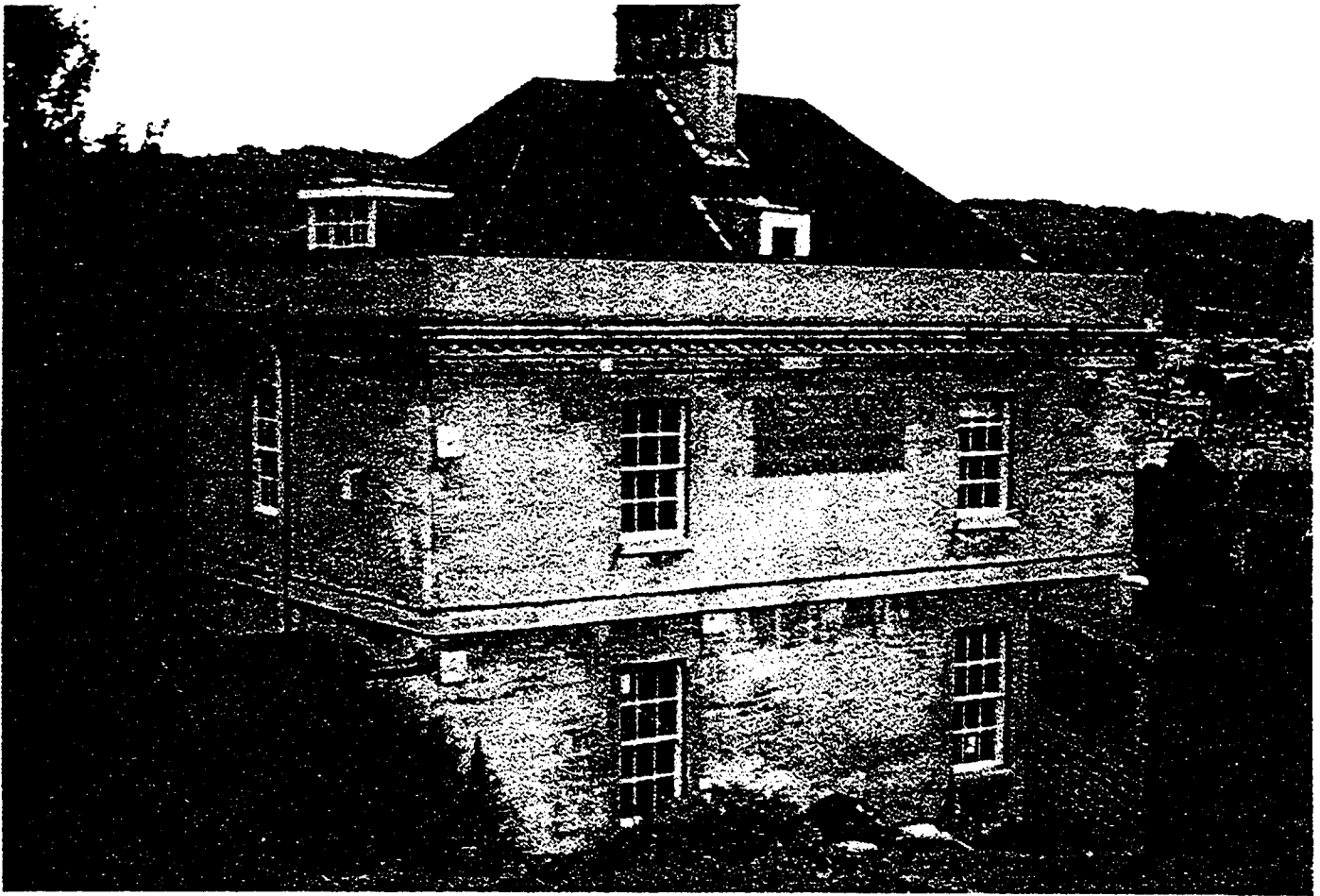


40. West front, Ladymead House. Bath. (photo: Tara Breen)

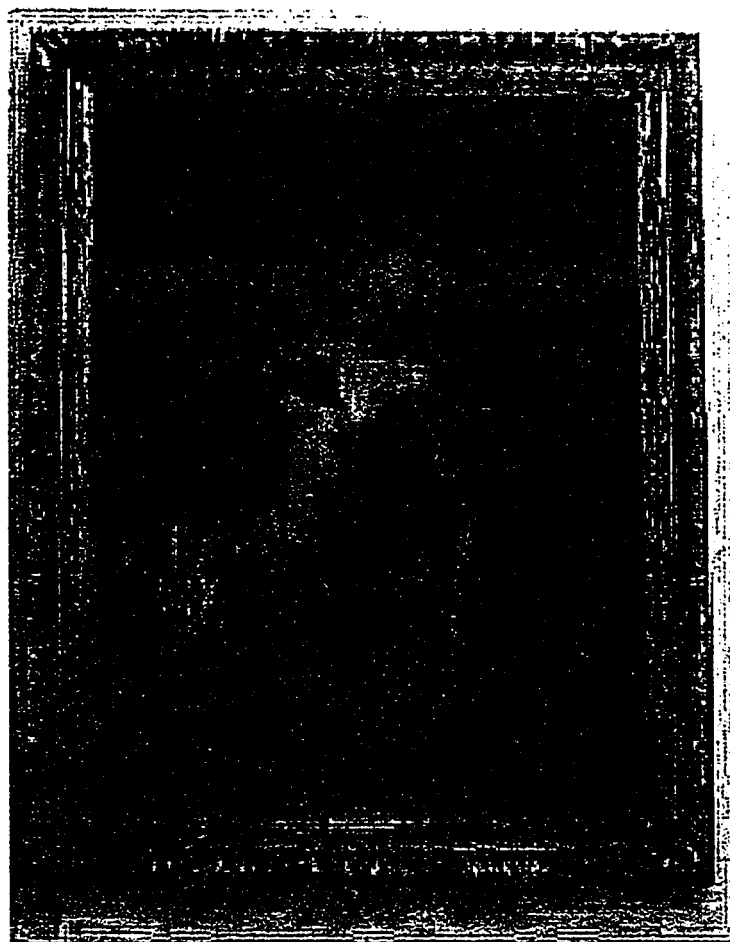




41. East front, Ladymead House. Bath. (photo: C. McMahon)



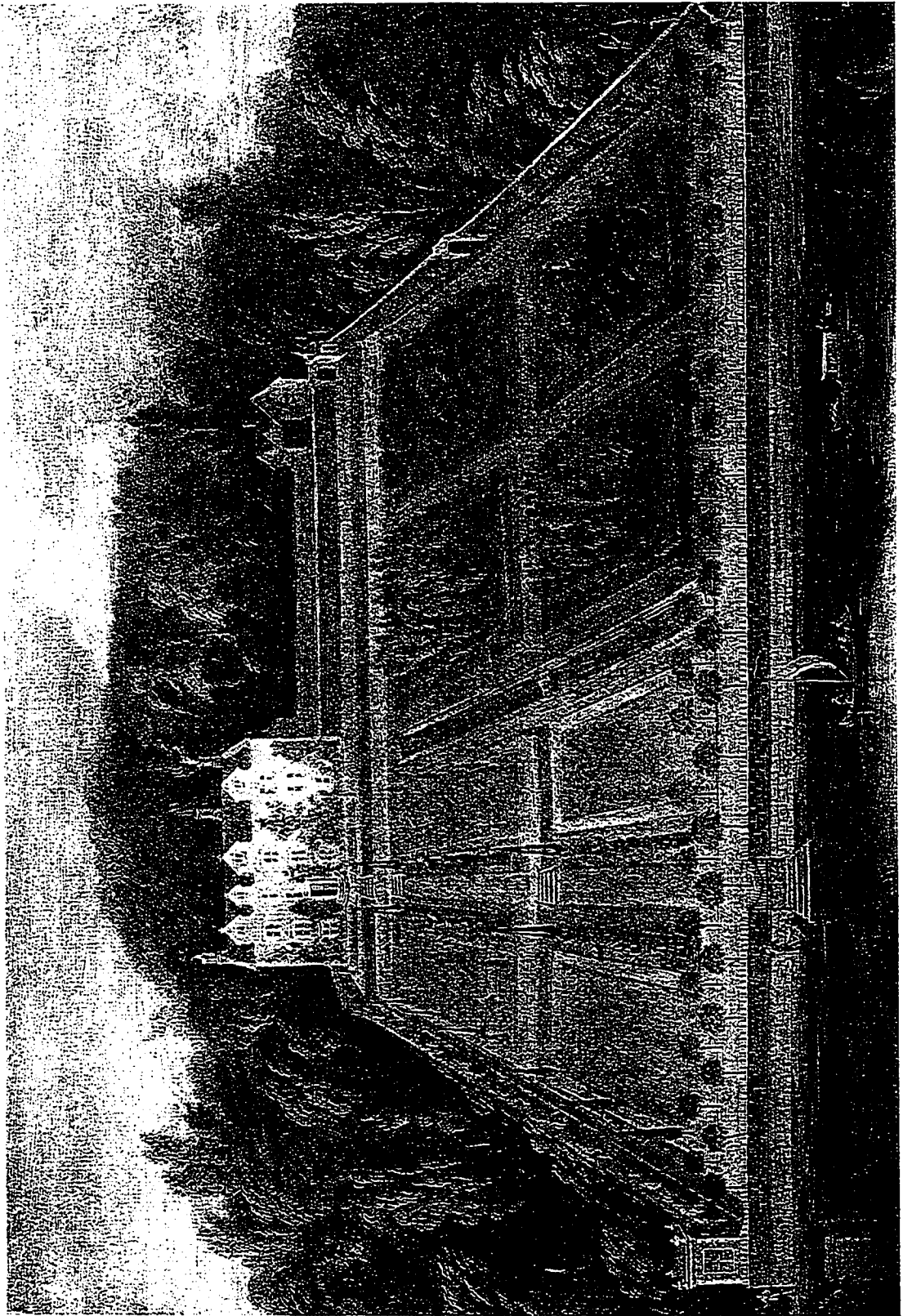
42. Asylum for Teaching Young Females Household Work, Bath.



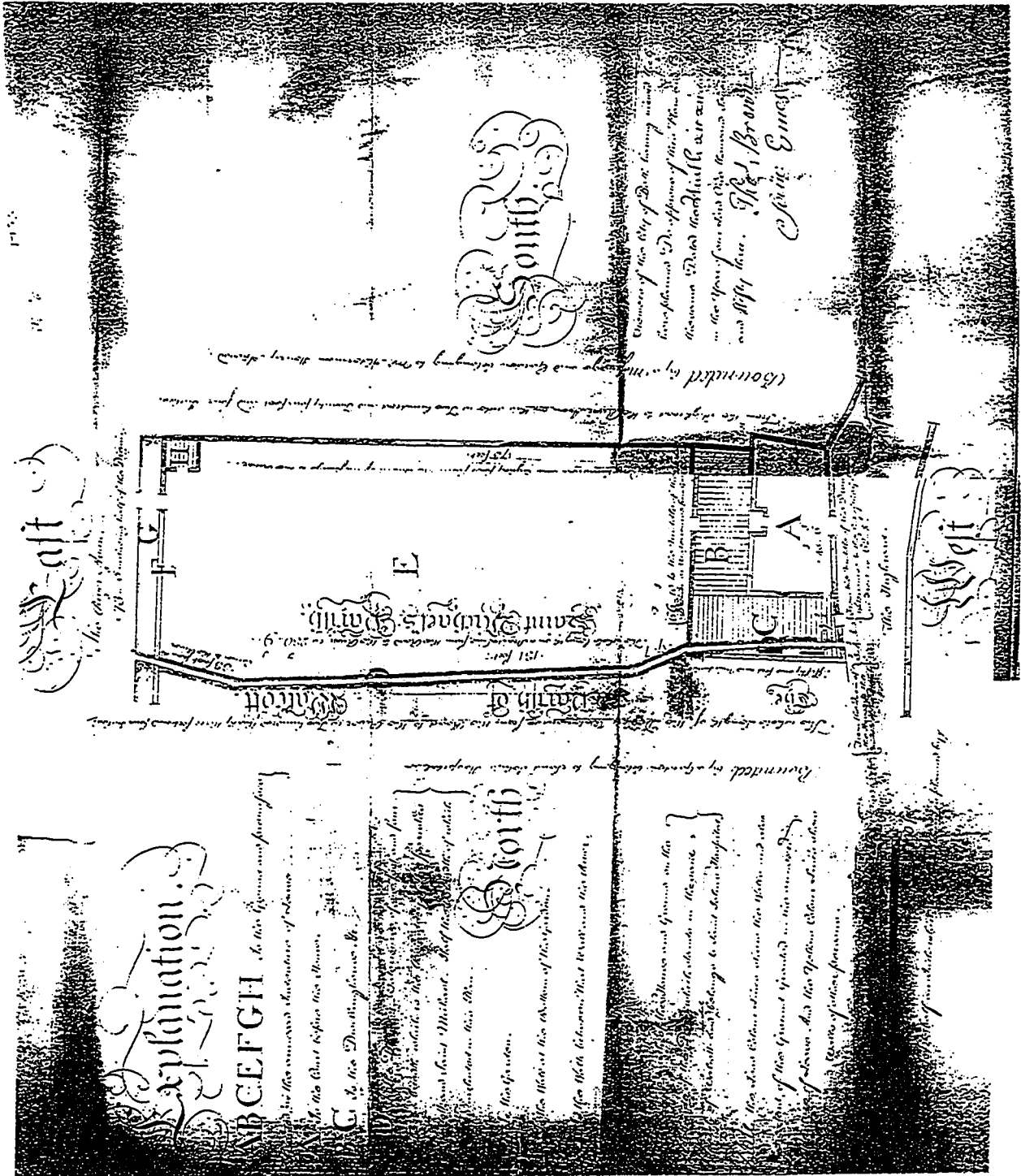
43. Benedetto Gennari. *Death of Cleopatra*. Oil, 1730. (Victoria Art Gallery, Bath)



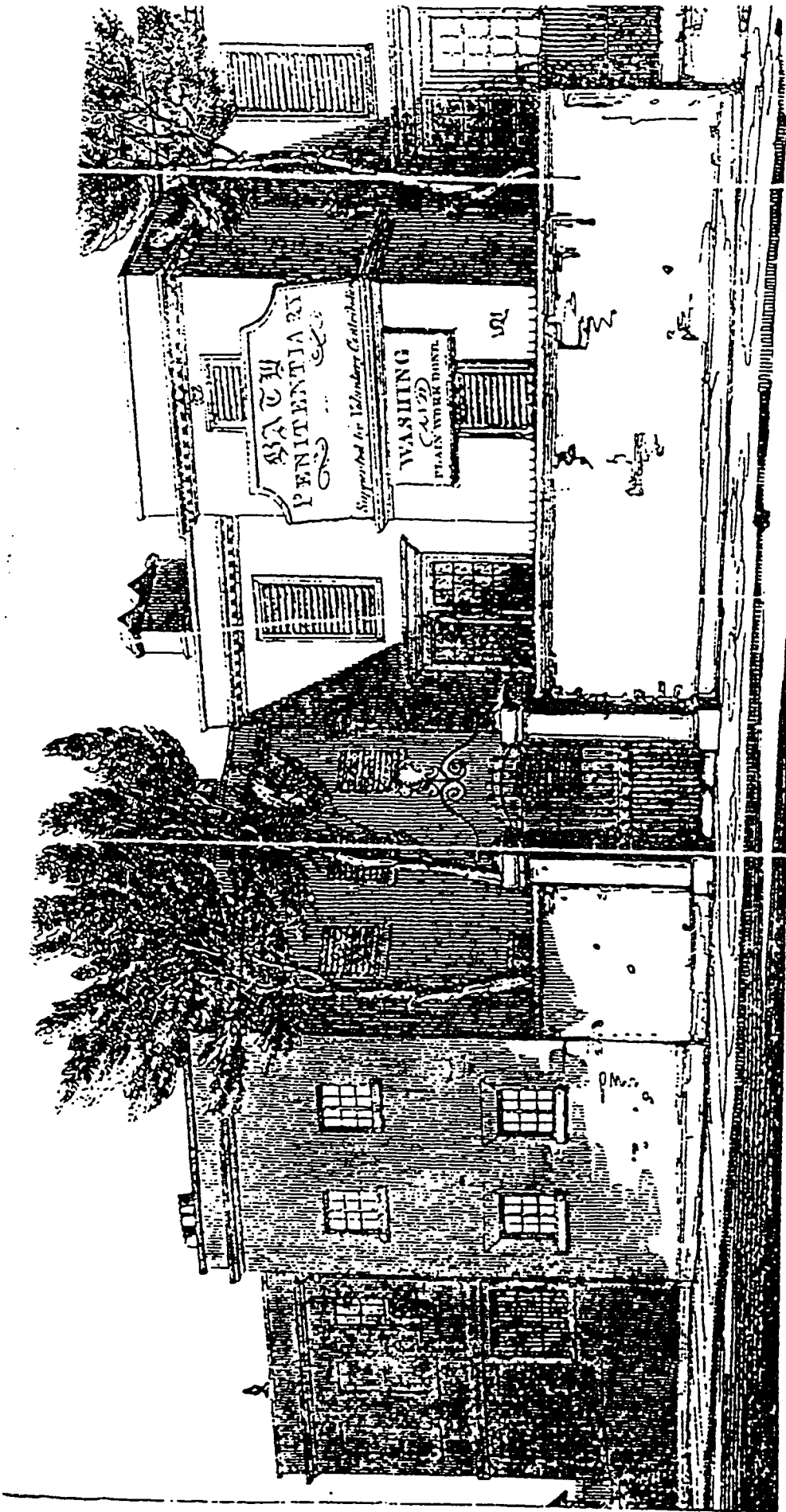
44. John Collier. *A Sinner*. Oil, 1904. (Victoria Art Gallery, Bath)



45. Anonymous. *Ladymead House*. Oil on panel, 1730. (Victoria Art Gallery, Bath)

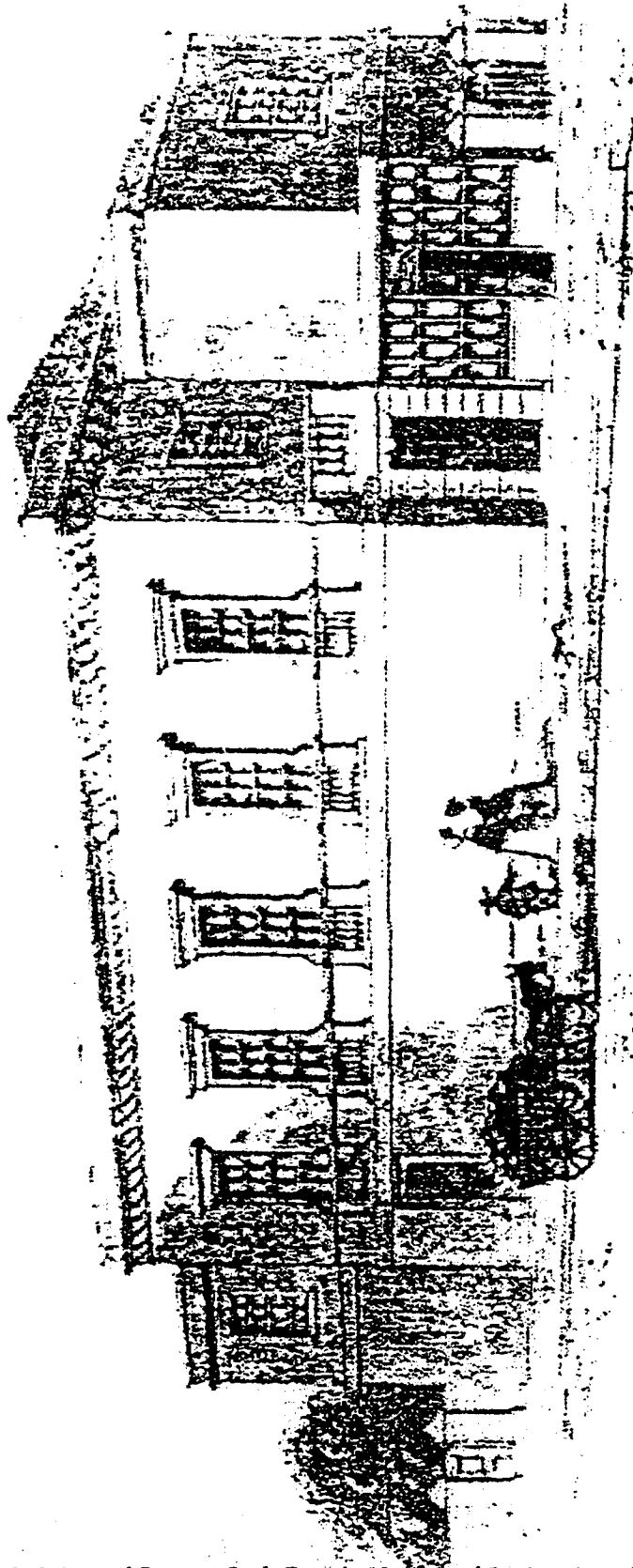


46. Lease of 1753, Ladymead House. Bath Record Office, Bath Archives.



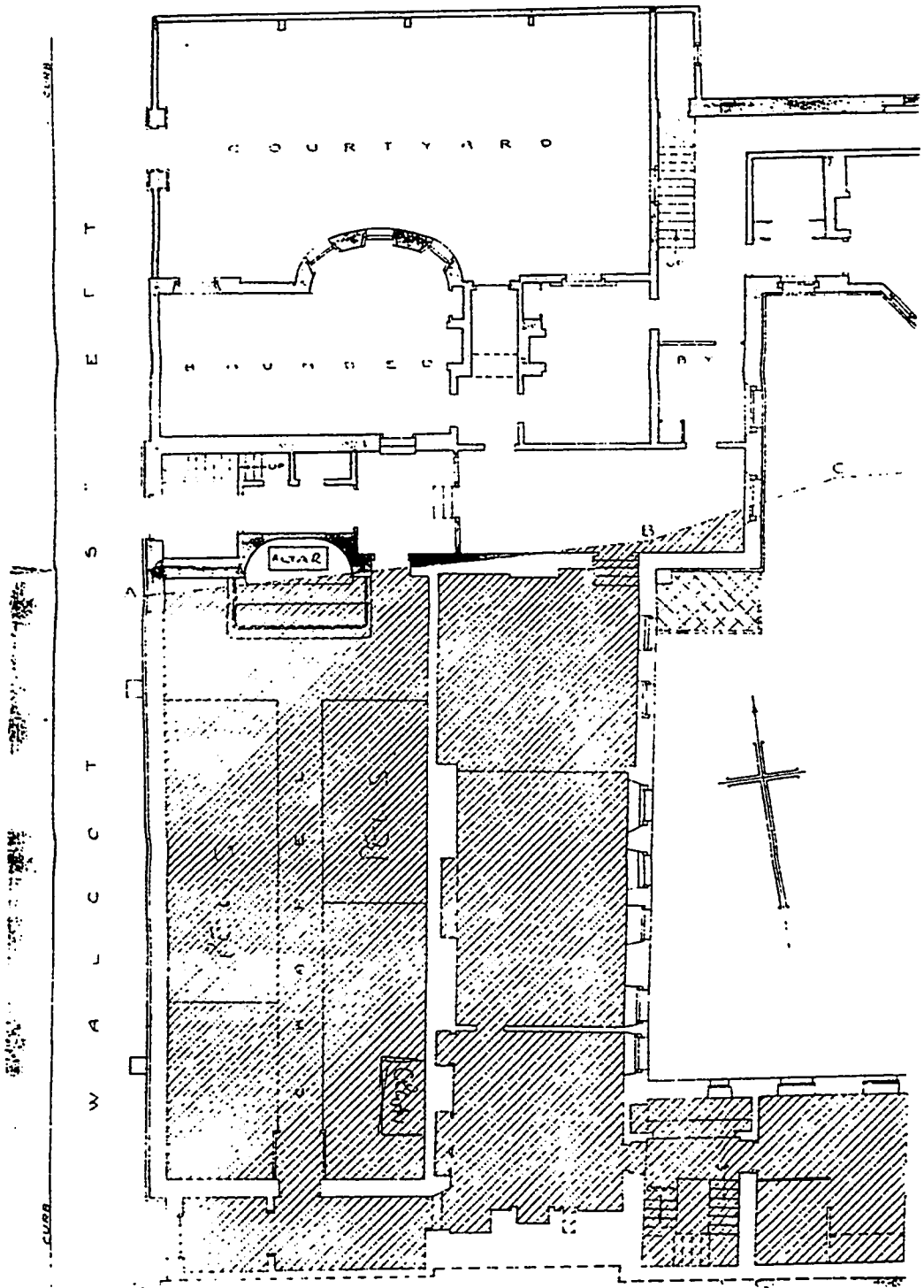
TWENTY-SIXTH ANNUAL REPORT. 1842.

47. Cover, 1842 Annual Report, Bath Female Home and Penitentiary. Bath Archives.

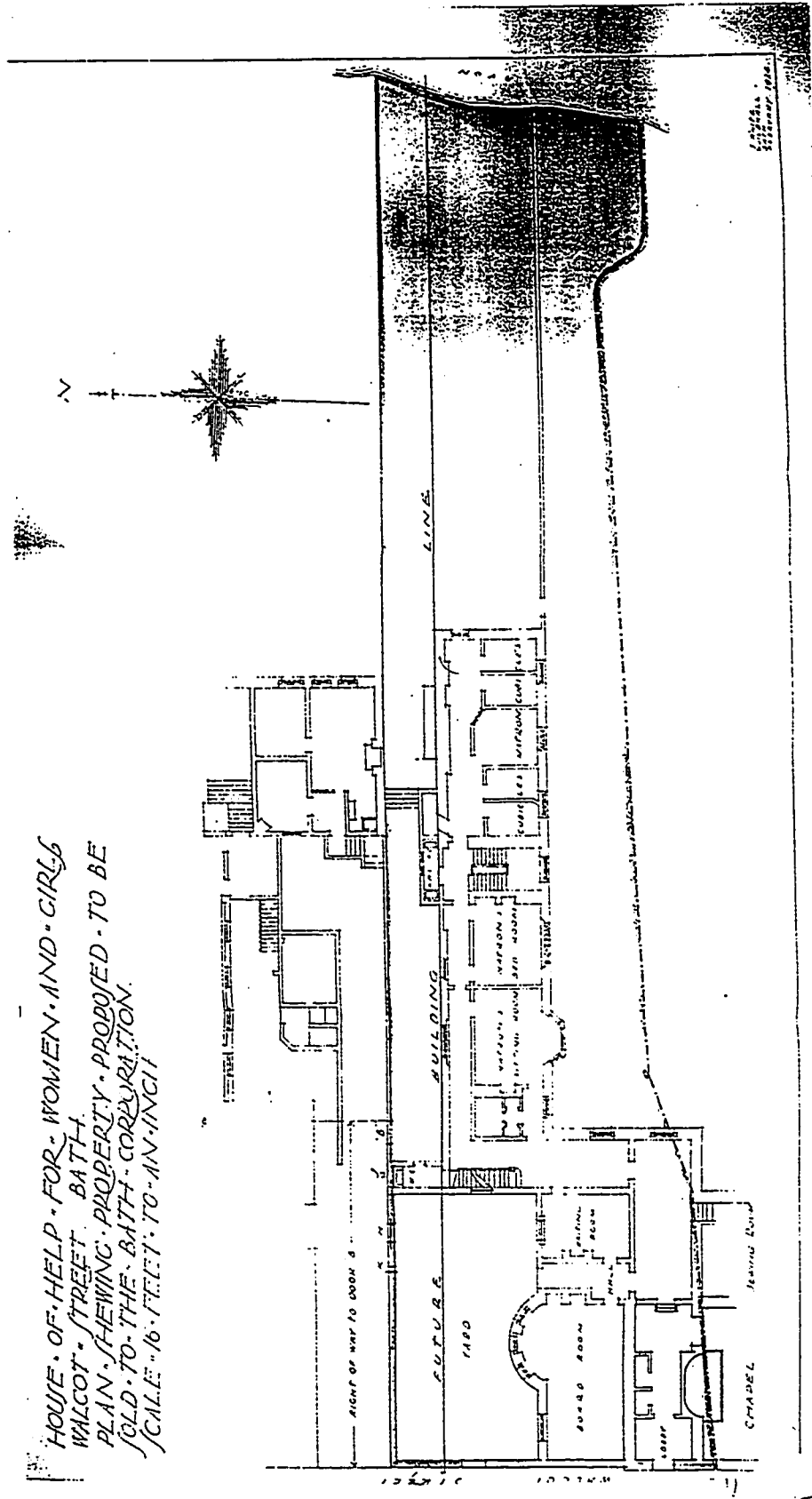


48. Cover, 1848 Annual Report, Bath Female Home and Penitentiary. Bath Archives.



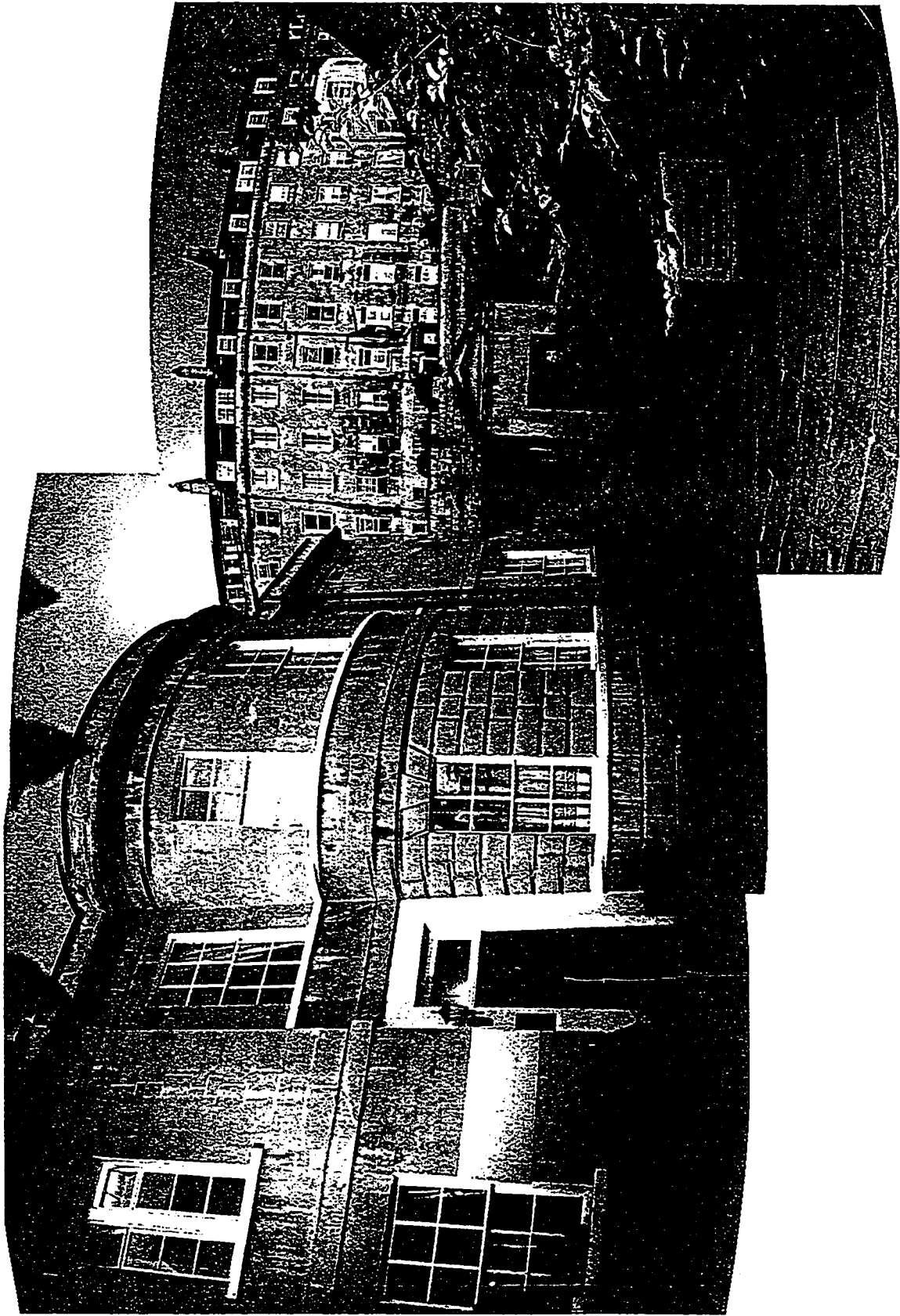


49. J. F. Bevan Jones. *Surveyor's plan for Ladymead House*. 1945, Bath Record Office, Bath Archives.



HOUSE OF HELP FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS  
 WALCOT STREET BATH  
 PLAN SHOWING PROPERTY PROPOSED TO BE  
 SOLD TO THE BATH CORPORATION.  
 SCALE 1/8" FEET TO AN INCH

50. j. Hinte, *Survey of House of Help (Ladymead House) for Bath Corporation*. 1924. (fragment) Bath Record Office, Bath Archives.



51. Ladymead House, north elevation, 19<sup>th</sup> century amendments by the firm Manners and Gill. (Photo: Tara Breen)



52. Cynthia Hammond. *Sketch of falling female angel, Bath Abbey and Ladymead House*. Pen and pencil, 1999.

## BATH PENITENTIARY.—PRICES OF WORK.

## NEEDLEWORK.

	s.	d.	s.	d.		s.	d.	s.	d.
Shirts .. from	2	0	3	0	Table Cloths .. from	0	1½	0	6
Flannel ditto ..	1	6	2	0	Sheets, per pair..	0	3	0	4
Night Shirts ..	1	0	1	9	Pillow Cases ..	0	3	0	6
Chemises ..	1	0	3	6	Bolster ditto ..	0	4	0	4
Night Gowns ..	1	6	5	6	Towels, per dozen	0	8	1	0
Calico Drawers ..	1	0	2	0	Knife Cloths and Dusters	0	4	0	6
Flannel ditto ..	0	10	1	6	Infant's Robes ..	2	6	6	6
Ditto Petticoats ..	1	0	2	6	Day Gowns ..	1	6	2	6
Ditto Vests ..	1	0	2	0	Slip ..	0	6	1	6
Nightcaps ..	0	6	1	6	Baby's Shirt ..	0	3	0	6
Dressing Gowns..	1	6	5	0	Baby's Bed Gown ..	0	6	1	6
Short ditto ..	1	0	2	6	Hemming, per yard	0	1	0	1
Wristbands, per pair	0	2	0	4	Tucks, per yard..	0	1	0	1½
Clergyman's Bands	0	5	1	0	Marking, per doz. letters	0	3	0	6
Collars, each ..	0	3	0	6	Table Napkins ..	0	1	0	1½
Handkerchiefs ..	0	1	0	2	Pinafores ..	0	6	1	6

*Cutting-out can be done in the Institution, but at an extra charge.*

## WASHING.

*PLAIN FAMILY WASHING taken at 1s. per Dozen; excepting Shirts, Skirts, Dresses, House and Bed Furniture, but limited to families who send the Kitchen Cloths, Dusters, &c., &c. Weekly payments are required.*

*Terms for Servants' Washing can be known on application at the Institution.*

THE PRICE PER PIECE IS AS FOLLOWS:

	s.	d.	s.	d.		s.	d.	s.	d.	
Aprons .. from	0	1	0	3	Petticoats .. from	0	3	to	1	0
Bed Furniture ..	2	6	5	0	Round Towels ..	0	1			
Blankets, each ..	0	6	1	6	Sheets (each) large	0	2			
Counterpanes ..	0	6	2	0	Ditto, small	0	1½			
Chamber Towels, per doz.	0	9	1	0	Shirts (day) ..	0	3	0	6	
Collars ..	0	1	0	2	Stockings per pair	0	1			
Chemises ..	0	1½	0	3	Socks ..	0	1			
Dollies, per dozen	0	6			Stays ..	0	3	0	6	
Drawers ..	0	1½	0	2	Toilet Covers ..	0	1	0	2	
Dresses (Ladies') ..	0	9	3	0	Ditto Muslins..	0	3	0	6	
Dressing Gowns..	0	6	1	0	Table Cloths ..	0	2	0	4	
Flannel Petticoats ..	0	2	0	3	Ditto Napkins	0	1			
Flannel Vests ..	0	1	0	2	Waistcoats ..	0	3	0	6	
Flannel Shirts ..	0	2								
Frills ..	0	1	0	2	CHILDREN'S LINEN.					
Habit Shirts ..	0	1	0	2	Chemises ..	0	1			
Kitchen Cloths and Dusters per dozen..	0	9			Drawers, per pair	0	1			
Night Shirts ..	0	1½	0	2	Frocks, each ..	0	3	1	0	
Night Gowns ..	0	2	0	3	Frills ..	0	1			
Night Caps ..	0	1	0	2	Night Gowns ..	0	1	0	2	
Pillow Cases ..	0	1	0	3	Shirts ..	0	1	0	2	
Pocket Handkerchiefs	0	0½	0	1	Petticoats ..	0	1	0	3	
					Pinafores ..	0	1	0	2	

Linen will be called for on Mondays, and cannot be received at the Institution later in the week than 10 o'Clock a.m. on Wednesdays.

*N.B.—The Committee cannot be responsible for any articles of clothing or linen not duly marked. Should any ground of complaint arise about the Washing, parties are requested to communicate the same to the HEAD MATRON only, either personally or in writing. All ingredients injurious to the linen are strictly forbidden by the Committee to be used.*

*Families having their Linen washed at the Institution are particularly asked to give Immediate Notice should any Infectious Disorder break out in their household.*



54. *fallen/winged* (final frame)