

*“Nineteenth-Century American Women”*

Teresa Trupiano Barry

My favorite book collection (I have several) features books by and about nineteenth-century American women. It began innocently enough six years ago as I started looking for books by Ann S. Stephens, a popular and prolific author, whose works are the subject of my dissertation. In the course of looking for Stephens' fiction, I came across works by other nineteenth-century American authors such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and E. D. E. N. Southworth (after all many bookstores organize their wares in semi- (chaotic) alphabetical order). Who could resist titles such as *Changed Brides* or *Tried for Her Life*?

Although I would like to collect as many first editions as possible, two major considerations prevent this: 1. money - I am a graduate student (need I say more?); and, 2. practicality - nineteenth-century American women are the subject of my research as well as my book collection. Rare books are not for underlining and marginalia, and no matter how famous I may become as a scholar of nineteenth-century American women's writing, I doubt that my marginalia would increase the price of a book in the way that, say, Coleridge's did. So, I try to get modern reprints of those works that are available. If I need to study works from my collection in careful detail, I make photocopies and use them for close study.

Whenever I go to major cities, I haunt the used bookstores to see if I can find goodies to add to my collection. I attend the local Antiquarian Book Sale whenever possible, and I have recently added to my collection via the Internet. Family and friends are aware of my passion and have generously contributed to my collection. Although my collection is still small, 42 volumes, it is growing. Any of Stephens' works tops my list of wants. I feel fortunate that I now own nine of her novels. I would love to own one of her dime novels, in any nineteenth-century format, but those are well beyond my price range. I was surprised to discover, in assembling this bibliography, that this collection contains 10 first editions. But my interests are eclectic - as long as a book is by or about nineteenth-century women, I am captivated.

One aspect of my dissertation is analyzing Stephens' rhetoric to examine how she attempted to identify with her readers, who were primarily women. Therefore, a familiarity with various forms of expression used by nineteenth-century women authors is an important aspect of my research, so both fiction and nonfiction contribute to my knowledge. The fiction allows me to make comparisons - in themes and tropes, as well as uses of rhetoric - between her works and those of others. The nonfiction works demonstrate issues that some women deemed significant and thus provide additional contextual information. I know that I will continue to build this collection for the rest of my life, if for no other reason than self-defense - my husband collects and restores antique tractors!