NATURALISTS, CONNOISSUERS AND CLASSICISTS:
COLLECTING AND PATRONAGE AS FEMALE PRACTICE IN BRITAIN,
1715-1825

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Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
Master of Arts
in the Department of History,
Indiana University

May 2010
Accepted by the Faculty of Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Dedication

For my family
The completion of this thesis would have been unimaginable without the constant intellectual and emotional support given to me by my husband, Andrew Tate. He performed tirelessly as a draft reader, sounding board, and patient confidant for the past three years. I wish to thank my parents, Eileen and Barney Gaughan, for introducing me to the importance and relevance of history. I also wish to thank my sister, Mary, and my brother, Colin, as well as other family members and friends, who encouraged my scholastic endeavors with unwavering enthusiasm.

I owe a great deal of gratitude to my professors and those who advised me academically throughout my graduate career at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis, IUPUI. In particular, I want to acknowledge Dr. Jason Kelly for his expert guidance and encouragement in my historical studies. Dr. Kelly’s confidence in this project, from its brainstorming beginnings to final edits, has been invaluable. I also wish to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Melissa Bingmann and Dr. Erik Lindseth for their constructive counsel and willingness to serve as my thesis committee members. Lastly, I must thank the archival and information services staff of the Royal Collection’s Picture Library at St. James’s Palace, the National Archives of the United Kingdom, the British Library, and the British Museum who provided much assistance with this project.
ABSTRACT

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This thesis reevaluates the role that women played in the collection and patronage of natural history, fine arts and antiquities in the long eighteenth century. While most scholarship that addresses early modern collecting and patronage operates within an androcentric framework, this project fills a historiographical gap by focusing its analyses on the experiences, activities, contributions, and achievements of female figures.

Primary documentation provides evidence of a highly sophisticated, invested and functional network of enthusiastic and experienced female collectors and patrons who participated in activities that were at once parallel to that of their male peers and yet retained a distinctly feminine character. Influenced by prevailing intellectual movements and aesthetic trends, women throughout the period studied, accumulated, and commissioned items of scientific, artistic, and antiquarian value. Their meaningful engagement with naturalists, explorers, artists, statesmen, and colleagues is at the center of this study which situates female collectors and patrons within a wider socio-cultural context and confirms the broader historical significance of their work. In this way, this thesis may be understood as a restoration of women to their central place in the history of collecting and patronage and as a more complete historicization of the corresponding culture between the years 1715 and 1825.

Jason M. Kelly, Ph.D., Chair
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