Chapter 19

"A MOST FASCINATING AND DANGEROUS PURSUIT"

THE BOOK COLLECTING OF ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER

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ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER is a difficult woman for the modern researcher to pin down.[1] She destroyed a lot of her correspondence towards the end of her life, although a substantial amount has survived in the collections of others and in the documents she kept for display in the museum.[2] She was also fond of saying "Don't spoil a good story by telling the truth."[3] As a result, it becomes necessary to separate fact from fiction and to dig deeper into the surviving sources. The basic facts of her life, however, are well-documented. Gardner was born in New York on April 14, 1840, to a wealthy family who had the means to privately educate her, and who later sent her to finishing school in Paris.[4] Having returned to America in 1858, she married John (known as Jack) Lowell Gardner, one of Boston's most eligible bachelors, two years later.[5] After the death of their only child in 1865, the Gardners went to Europe as a cure for Isabella's consequent depression. This journey would prove to be a pivotal moment, as she came back to Boston a changed woman, and soon became known for her colourful personality and outrageous antics.[6] Gardner began collecting works of art on her travels as well as at

1 I examine Gardner's collecting and scholarship in the context of female manuscript collecting in my PhD thesis, "Women's Contributions to the Medieval Manuscript Trade 1900–1945." This chapter draws heavily on that research.

2 Louise Hall Tharp, *Mrs. Jack: A Biography of Isabella Stewart Gardner* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965), 320.

3 Morris Carter, *Isabella Stewart Gardner and Fenway Court* (London: Heinemann, 1926), 34.

4 "Isabella Stewart Gardner: An Unconventional Life," *Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum*, www.gardnermuseum.org/about/isabella-stewart-gardner, accessed November 8, 2022.

5 Christina Nielsen, with Casey Riley and Nathaniel Silver, *Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum: A Guide* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 4; "Gardner: An Unconventional Life."

6 Tharp, *Mrs. Jack*, 36, 43.

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home in Boston, and, after Jack's death, plans were set in motion to build a magnificent museum to house her collection. She is primarily known today either for her eccentricities or for her art collection, both of which have been extensively written about.[7] However, her book collecting is often excluded from the critical conversation or condensed into a single sentence that highlights the fact that she collected books before she collected paintings.[8] Although the exact date of Gardner's first rare book or manuscript purchase is not known, we do know that her acquisitions were largely spurred on by the lectures and readings she attended by Charles Eliot Norton, the first of which was a series of readings of Dante in 1878.[9] We also know she was purchasing books from "the Boston-based dealer-auctioneer C. F. Libbie and the luxury goods store Shreve, Crump and Low" in the early 1880s, and that Norton became her library advisor in 1886, which marked a turning point towards rarer volumes.[10]

Indeed, it seems that by 1886 the book-buying bug had well and truly bitten, with Gardner writing to Norton, "Books I fear, are a most fascinating & dangerous pursuit, but one full of pleasure."[11] "Dangerous" is a rather odd way to describe book collecting; after all, it is not a pastime that regularly involves life-or-death situations. It is, however, a passion that can become dangerously addictive as one purchase leads into the next, and I suspect that Gardner was hinting at this. Books were also arguably the hook into her wider collecting, and as a result, wider spending, which might suggest danger of a financial kind. This underlines the point that the lack of interest paid to Gardner as *a collector of books* is a major critical oversight, as it is fundamental to understanding her as a collector. Gardner undoubtedly saw herself as a serious bibliophile, making her book collecting a substantial part of her acquisitive personality, and so it should be assessed with according seriousness. Using material from the Gardner Museum archives and analysing the museum space, I aim to highlight how Gardner engaged with her collection beyond the process of acquisition, as well as how she utilized artistic placement within the museum's design to express her bibliophilic self.

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7 For a biography of Gardner that highlights her eccentricity see Douglas Shand-Tucci, *The Art of Scandal: The Life and Times of Isabella Stewart Gardner* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998). Gardner is often written about in volumes centring on women art collectors and/or women philanthropists, which tend to ignore the book collecting, as in Diane Sachko Macleod, *Enchanted Lives, Enchanted Objects: American Women Collectors and the Making of Culture, 1800–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

8 For example, Aline Bernstein Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors: The Lives, Times, and Tastes of Some Adventurous American Art Collectors* (New York: Random House, 1958), 36.

9 Elizabeth Anne McCauley, "A Sentimental Traveler: Isabella Stewart Gardner in Venice," in *Gondola Days: Isabella Stewart Gardner and the Palazzo Barbaro Circle*, ed. Elizabeth Anne McCauley, et al. (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 2004), 3–52 at 5.

10 Anne-Marie Eze, "Une femme bibliophile: Isabella Stewart Gardner's Book of Hours by Jean Bourdichon and French Books," in *Bourdichon's Boston Hours*, ed. Anne-Marie Eze and Nicholas Herman (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 2021), 11–23 at 17.

11 Cambridge, MA, Harvard University, Houghton Library, Norton Papers, bMS Am 1088, 2494, letter from Isabella Stewart Gardner to Charles Eliot Norton, July 12, 1886.

Gardner's Scholarly Scrapbooking

As William P. Stoneman and Anne-Marie Eze have observed, Gardner, unlike most of her collecting contemporaries, wrote not one but two catalogues of her rare books and manuscripts, published in 1906 and 1922. Both catalogues were "issued in large print runs and distributed widely to fellow book lovers, art collectors, and libraries."[12] They were entitled *A Choice of Books from the Library of Isabella Stewart Gardner* and *A Choice of Manuscripts and Bookbindings from the Library of Isabella Stewart Gardner Fenway Court*, respectively, and the second catalogue was written with the help of Morris Carter, who would become the first director of the Gardner Museum.[13] These published catalogues, however, were not the first time that Gardner had attempted to list the major works in her collection. A handwritten book catalogue completed by Gardner in the museum's archives dates to 1900, thus predating the earlier catalogue by six years.[14] From the archival material that survives, including the handwritten catalogue and research files for the 1922 published catalogue, we can go beyond the initial statement of fact that she compiled her own collection catalogues to critically assess just what the work entailed. These materials provide an insight into how Gardner saw her collection of books, as well as showing which facets of the books and manuscripts preoccupied her.

Beginning with the research files, it is possible to gain insight into Gardner's thinking process in its earlier stages, before they had been honed into catalogue form. There are six folders of loose pages, comprised of clippings and notes relating to the books and manuscripts ahead of the 1922 catalogue. These files often include photograph reproductions of either the bindings or miniatures of importance, and sometimes both. A pattern emerges regarding the types of documents that are preserved. There are three main types: 1) an image of a binding with a cut out and pasted catalogue entry; 2) an image of a miniature with information about the artist as well as to which manuscript it relates; 3) an image of a binding with an important former owner noted above and information regarding the volume below, normally relating to its provenance. The use of and arguably, reliance on, reproduced images highlights the importance of the visual element in Gardner's book collecting. This is compounded by the fact that in the files in which a miniature is displayed, information is often also given about the miniatures in the rest of the manuscript.

Though it was common practice in catalogues to make a point of mentioning illustrations, Gardener's interest in visual art suggests that it was more than following convention for her. She had bought her first painting in 1873, a "mild enough affair" by Emile

12 William P. Stoneman and Anne-Marie Eze, "Illuminating the Charles: Collecting Manuscripts in Boston," in *Beyond Words: Illuminated Manuscripts in Boston Collections*, ed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger, et al. (Boston: McMullen Museum of Art, 2016), 15–19 at 18.

13 Stoneman and Eze, "Illuminating the Charles," 18.

14 This is known as Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum Archives, ARC.009130, the date of which we know thanks to how it has been catalogued. See "Book Catalog, 1900," www.gardnermuseum.org/experience/collection/24301#object-details, accessed November 8, 2022.

Jacque, as one of her biographers called it.[15] Arguably, part of the reason for not branching out into the acquisition of European masterpieces sooner was money related. Anne Higonnet notes that "In 1891, immediately after she inherited a fortune from her father and three years before she began working with Berenson, she emerged as an astute collector," identifying Vermeer's "The Concert" as a masterpiece before Vermeer's works were fashionable, and buying it at a sale in Paris that year.[16] Notably, even contemporary art experts were impressed at her purchase (and the price she had negotiated for it), with one remarking that "it was probably worth five times what she had paid for it."[17] As such, it can be said that Gardner had a naturally keen eye for visual art. There is also cause to believe that she had a particular liking for manuscript illuminations. Bernard Berenson, ever the savvy salesman, once tried to sell her a painting by Raffaellino del Garbo by comparing it to one, writing to her in 1902 that "It is as lovely as the illuminated page of a medieval manuscript."[18] The only reason to make the comparison would be if manuscript illuminations appealed to her; it would hardly have made for a very useful sales tactic otherwise.

Gardner's other primary concern appears to have been provenance. From her correspondence with Berenson it is clear that the importance of provenance was no momentary preoccupation, nor was it limited to books. In a letter from 1900, she asks him: "Please send me when you possibly can a complete list of the provenance of the pictures I have had through you. I mean from whom I bought them, and where they came from."[19] This preoccupation is reflected in both the research files and the handwritten catalogue of 1900. For example, instead of the more common practice of using the title of the work or the type of book as the heading, many of her files have who the volume formerly belonged to written at the top of the page, with examples including Anne of Austria and King Henry VIII of England, both of whom had the royal associations that Gardner particularly liked. In some of the files in which a dealer catalogue entry has been pasted in, provenance data regarding famous, and particularly royal, former owners have been underlined in red—perhaps as a reminder to include such information when compiling her own catalogues.

The making of the handwritten catalogue of 1900 is further evidence that Gardner had a personal interest in provenance. In a letter to Berenson in 1900, Gardner mentioned a catalogue that she had been preparing, writing that "I have begun to make a lit-

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15 Tharp, *Mrs Jack*, 46–47. There is a slight caveat: this is the earliest painting to have made it into the final collection at Fenway Court.

16 Anne Higonnet, *A Museum of One's Own: Private Collecting, Public Gift* (New York: Periscope, 2009), 48.

17 Rachel Cohen, *Bernard Berenson: A Life in the Picture Trade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 118.

18 Rollin van N. Hadley, ed., *The Letters of Bernard Berenson and Isabella Stewart Gardner 1887–1924* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), 309.

19 Isabella Stewart Gardner to Bernard Berenson, January 19, 1900, *Letters of Bernard Berenson*, ed. Hadley, 201. Further instances of Gardner asking for information about provenance appear on 220, 248, 269.

tle catalogue for my own amusement. I post the photographs of my originals into a book and write the provenance etc. etc."[20] Whilst this may be in reference to the "photograph album known as *Catalogue MCM: The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in the Fenway*," it could equally be talking about the handwritten book catalogue.[21] What the letter and the catalogues show is that Gardner enjoyed investigating the provenance of her collection and embarked on these projects purely for her own satisfaction. This is compounded by the fact that the 1900 book catalogue was custom bound, making it unlikely that it was ever intended for publication.

If it is assumed that the catalogue was written for Gardner's personal use, this potentially explains some of its idiosyncrasies. The roughly alphabetical categorization that she used in the 1906 published catalogue has a predecessor, for the handwritten catalogue was also ordered in that way.[22] Given that in the 1922 catalogue (the only one in which she had the additional assistance of Carter) the alphabetical categorization had been abandoned, it is safe to assume that this was her preferred means of organization.[23] Moreover, the alphabetization is a little idiosyncratic, as sometimes the books were organized by type, such as "Bibles," by author, such as "Dante" or modern scholars like "Bernard Berenson," or even by press if it was of note, like the "Aldine Press." Even when the type of book is the same, as in the case of Books of Hours, these are variously listed under "Hours," "Horae," and "Heures," depending on the volume's origins. This habit of changing languages may in fact be related to Gardner's own interest in languages, as she had learnt French growing up and Italian in later life.[24]

The most fascinating thing about the handwritten catalogue, however, is its work-in-progress, multimedia format. As well as inserting a few pasted pages that follow the same format as the research notes (reproduced images, notes underneath), Gardner added materials that related to her book and manuscript purchases. For example, there is an entry from a dealer's catalogue pasted in for the fourteenth-century Dante manuscript that Gardner bought through the London bookdealer Ellis at the Ashburnham sale, with "To be sold by Sotheby on June 10 1901," handwritten above it.[25] The slightly later date of 1901 suggests that Gardner was actively adding things into her catalogue over a period of time. In another example, there is an article from *The Athenæum* dated November 30, 1889, regarding a printed Book of Hours that once belonged to Catherine de' Medici and Mary Queen of Scots that Gardner inserted in the catalogue. Alongside the article she also included a more personal item, namely, a letter from Ellis dated Octo-

20 Hadley, ed., *Letters of Bernard Berenson*, 210.

21 Casey Riley, "Commerce and Connoisseurship: Isabella Stewart Gardner's *Catalogue MCM*," in *Photography and the Art Market around 1900*, ed. Constanza Caraffa and Julia Bärninghausen (Florence: Mitteilungen Des Kunsthistorischen Institutes, 2020), 93–108 at 97.

22 See Isabella Stewart Gardner, *A Choice of Books from the Library of Isabella Stewart Gardner* (Boston: no publisher, 1906).

23 See Morris Carter and Isabella Stewart Gardner, *A Choice of Manuscripts and Bookbindings From the Library of Isabella Stewart Gardner Fenway Court* (Boston: Merrymount Press, 1922).

24 McCauley, "Sentimental Traveller," 4, 7.

25 Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum Archives, ARC.009130.

ber 12, 1892, regarding the more recent provenance of the book.[26] This corresponds to an entry that Gardner has written on the opposite page:

> *Heures a l'usage de Rome toutes au long sans Req'rir…avec Calendrier et Almanach* (1514–30) Printed on vellum. 8vo Paris, Simon Vostre 1574. Belonged to CathV erine de Medicis, Francis II, Marie R. Queen of Scots, Cardinal de Lorraine with their autographs.[27]

The gathering of information from various sources both personal (like the letter) and industry-based (like the article) and juxtaposing them together is in essence scholarly scrapbooking, allowing her to build something of disparate yet related parts to make a whole. It shows that Gardner was utilizing different sources to research and produce the most complete histories of her books.

Eze has noted that Gardner had a particular interest in collecting volumes that had once been in royal collections or the collection of famous female bibliophiles, to the extent that she bought a copy of Ernest Quentin-Bauchart's two-volume, illustrated, *Les femmes bibliophiles de France* at auction in 1891.[28] In collecting works associated with such women, Gardner was putting herself forward as one of their number; namely, as a great bibliophile herself. However, by collecting and collating secondary material to ultimately produce a catalogue, she went one step further. The clippings and notes in their various iterations prove that she was engaged in a project of further reading, revision, and editing. In doing so, Gardner interacted with her collection in a more wide-ranging way, going beyond the books and manuscripts themselves and reading around them. They are idiosyncratic and at times haphazard records that retain that air of scrapbooking that was popular amongst many women in her social class at the time. Nonetheless, it can still be classified as scholarly work, and ought to be taken in the context of a woman who came to book collecting in middle-age and never received a formalized education in bibliography, during an era in which, as Donna M. Lucey reminds us, "women were discouraged—if not banned—from intellectual pursuits."[29] Even if it was as an art collector that she became famous, Gardner clearly saw herself as a book collector as well. And it is this self-conception of Gardner's as a bibliophile that I will now turn to, as well as how it is manifested within the make-up of the museum itself.

Gardner the Bibliophile in the Museum

The Gardner Museum is largely preserved as Gardner designed it, due to the stipulation in her will that nothing could be added to the collection, and that the placement of objects could not be altered. This, as Corrine Zimmermann, Brooke DiGiovanni Evans, and Cynthia Robinson point out, means that visitors "encounter the founder's vision as

26 Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum Archives, ARC.009130.

27 Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum Archives, ARC.009130.

28 Eze, "Une femme bibliophile," 23.

29 Donna M. Lucey, *Sargent's Women: Four Lives Behind the Canvas* (New York: Norton, 2017), 178

imagined in her own time."[30] For researchers, the layout and positioning of the collection also functions as an analytical source, as they give an insight into Gardner's thought processes. Within the spatial context of the museum, the books may at first seem overshadowed by other items. For as fascinating as books were to Gardner, they would not remain her sole acquisitive passion, with her collection eventually encompassing paintings, sculptures, architectural pieces, antique furnishings, and art objects. It would be hard to make the case that books were the focus of her institution, which is very much unlike her contemporary Enriqueta Rylands, who also made rare book and manuscript purchases at the upper end of the market and exhibited an extraordinary amount of control over the institution that she built to house her collection. Both women kept notes about their book purchases, and both had a very specific idea of what they wanted and how they wanted it done.[31] You could argue that Gardner was more hands-on than Rylands, given stories such as the one in which "impatient with her painters' work on the walls of her courtyard," she "seized the sponges and pots of paint, hitched up her skirts, climbed a ladder, and demonstrated exactly what she wanted."[32] However, Rylands's rare book and manuscript purchases far outstripped Gardner's: Rylands's three major, *en bloc* collection purchases alone consisted of the Spencer collection (forty-three thousand printed books, four thousand being incunables); the Crawford collection (six thousand manuscripts in various languages); and the Passerini collection (six thousand volumes of Dante literature, including incunables and manuscripts).[33] This compares with three thousand rare books (forty-two of them being illuminated manuscripts and eleven being incunables) that currently reside in the Gardner Museum.[34] Furthermore, Rylands did not collect other forms of art like paintings and sculpture in any significant number. Arguably this is because it was her intention to build a standalone, memorial library, whereas Gardner had no such goal. Gardner's institution would be first a home and, ultimately, a museum, a kind of institution far more open to personal interpretation, giving her full artistic and intellectual freedom to create something that would reflect its founder: diverse of taste, complex of character, and not easy to categorize.

Thus Gardner's institution is an all-encompassing feast for the senses that brings together a multitude of art forms. As Linda J. Docherty writes, Gardner's Fenway Court "dissolved the line between architecture and objects," functioning not as a container

30 Corrine Zimmermann, Brooke DiGiovanni Evans, and Cynthia Robinson, "Living with the Founder: Constraints and Creativity," *Journal of Museum Education* 45.2 (2020): 109–114 at 110.

31 The chief evidence of Enriqueta Rylands's notes come in the form of a copy book held in the archives at the John Rylands Library in Manchester. In it she lists manuscripts according to language, listing the prices paid for them, as well as handwritten copies of correspondence related to the Crawford sale. See Manchester, John Rylands Library Archives JRL/6/1/6/1/6.

32 Higonnet, *Museum of One's Own*, 95.

33 "Our history," *University of Manchester Library*, www.library.manchester.ac.uk/rylands/about/our-history/, accessed November 21, 2022; Moses Tyson, *The First Forty Years of the John Rylands Library* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1941), 12.

34 "Collection," *Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum*, www.gardnermuseum.org/experience/collection, accessed November 21, 2022; Stoneman and Eze, "Illuminating the Charles," 17.

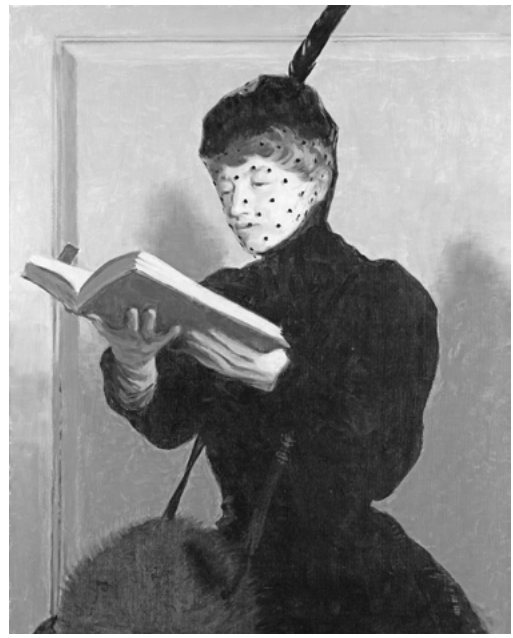

Figure 19.1. Martin Mower, *Isabella Stewart Gardner*, 1917. Oil, 83 × 66 cm. Courtesy of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

for works of art, but rather a curated symphony of colour, texture, and type.[35] With so much going on, it is unsurprising that when visiting the museum your eyes are drawn to more obviously spectacular items: the famous courtyard, the large-scale paintings like Titian's "Rape of Europa," and the rich, antique furnishings. Yet, if you look more closely, books are present nearly everywhere. After all, three thousand volumes are not a small collection. Books are hidden in alcoves in between doorways above eye level, shelved in cabinets big and small, sometimes with an indication as to their contents with a note about their author or theme, and sometimes not. Once you start looking for books, it becomes apparent that Gardner had amassed a large collection. For our purposes however, the main volumes of interest are the premodern ones, and for this we venture upstairs to the third floor of the museum, to the Long Gallery. This, incidentally, was where some of the papers discussed in the earlier section used to be kept, these having been removed and placed into the archives in 2004.[36]

There are several reasons why the placement of the Long Gallery within the scheme of the museum is important when considering Gardner's book collecting. Firstly, the third floor, comprising the Long Gallery, Titian Room, Veronese Room, Gothic Room, and Chapel, houses some of the showstoppers of Gardner's collection, and the rooms are created to reflect the brilliance of the objects. The yellows and pale greens that permeate the first and second floors give way to rich blues and reds, as well as deep wooden panelling. The colours are richer, reflecting the increasing richness of the objects housed there. Due to the higher ceilings and bigger windows, it is also the floor in which the most natural light floods through, which enhances the grandeur of its contents.

Secondly, although the Gardner Museum in its present form seemingly runs in a loop, with visitors invited to roam freely through the rooms, upwards and downwards, this has not always been the case. There was originally a terminus to a visit to the museum, in the Long Gallery, in which the rarest of Gardner's books and manuscripts,

35 Linda J. Docherty, "Collection as Creation: Isabella Stewart Gardner's Fenway Court," in *Memory & Oblivion*, ed. Wessel Reinink and Jeroen Stumpel (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999), 217–21 at 219.

36 See note on the front of "Folder 1: ISG Notes for 'A Choice of Manuscripts and Bindings,'" Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum Archives. It states that the documents in the folder were "Removed from underneath English Authors case, Long Gallery, 2004."

including her Dante collection, continue to be housed.[37] Docherty has drawn parallels between Dante's *The Divine Comedy* and the layout of the museum, suggesting that it is a visual translation of the literary work.[38] She argues that the Long Gallery more specifically references *Paradiso*, as the room is filled with Marian iconography and is only reached after making the journey around and upwards, which mirrors "Dante's ascent to the Empyrean" and the final "vision of Mary, who grants him the beatific vision."[39] This is a compelling argument, especially when considered in conjunction with the fact that Dante's works also reside in this room. However, regardless of whether this was Gardner's intent, it is telling that she initially decided to end visits to her museum in this room. Gardner was never one to shy away from a final flourish, and the combination of the grandeur and placement of the room demonstrate that it was engineered to have a lasting effect on the visitor and highlight the value of the items held within it.

Staying on the religious theme, although Gardner incorporated religious imagery and artefacts throughout the museum, at the very end of the Long Gallery is the Chapel. Regularly used as a working religious space in which Mass was held during Gardner's lifetime, it is still the place of her yearly memorial service.[40] Furthermore, it was also the place where Gardner wished to lie before her funeral, as she dictated to Carter before her death.[41] In that sense then, it was and still is a sacred space. Juxtaposing the chapel with her most priceless books and manuscripts not only draws parallels with some of the volumes themselves, as some of them are religious texts, but by means of association, elevates them to a similarly sacred state.

As a final piece of evidence for Gardner's bibliophilia as expressed within the fabric of the museum, I want to turn to one of the four portraits of Gardner in the museum. The Martin Mower portrait was painted in 1917, using a photograph thought to have been taken at the home of fellow bibliophile Henry Yates Thompson a decade earlier as its basis, and it now hangs in the Short Gallery.[42] Whilst the inclusion of a portrait that depicts Gardner engrossed in reading already speaks to her bibliophilia, its setting in the Short Gallery provides a comment on how she saw herself. Gardner was a master of artistic placement and set everything in her museum in its place for a particular reason. It is not the focal point of the room in which it hangs, unlike the famous John Singer Sargent portrait in the Gothic Room. Instead, the Mower portrait is one of many paintings displayed in the Short Gallery, a more "informal" and "personal" room that also includes

37 Linda Docherty, "Translating Dante: Isabella Stewart Gardner's Museum as *Paradiso*," *Religion and the Arts* 22 (2018): 194–217 at 213.

38 Docherty, "Translating Dante," 206.

39 Docherty, "Translating Dante," 213.

40 Adrienne Chaparro, "Remembering Isabella: Her Yearly Memorial Service," *Gardner Museum Blog* (April 12, 2022), www.gardnermuseum.org/blog/remembering-isabella-her-yearly-memorial-service, accessed September 14, 2022.

41 Morris Carter and Isabella Stewart Gardner, Note about Funeral Dictated to Morris Carter, 1924, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum Archives, ARC.008642.

42 Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum P33w35, photograph by Otto Rosenheim.

several family portraits.[43] It is hung up high above two other paintings and is fairly small. If you do not know what to look for, you might not notice it or recognize that it depicts the museum's founder. Its setting directly contrasts with that of the Sargent portrait, which is displayed in a much more showy and public fashion. They differ too in the presentation of Gardner: unlike the confident woman looking out of the Sargent painting, Mower's Gardner is introverted, obscured from the viewer by the veil, and focused on her book. The contrast therefore suggests that the Mower portrait is emblematic of the private Gardner. It provides an indication of how she wanted to be seen at her most personal, and it is telling that it is with a book in hand.

Conclusion

Tharp writes that when it came to Gardner's book collecting, it was far more of a private affair than her painting collection, with the fact that she collected rare books only being known to friends prior to the publication of the catalogues that brought her collection to the notice of the wider public.[44] There is a sense that Gardner had two personalities: the one more glamourous and eccentric lived out in public, and the other more intellectual and bookish confined to private settings. Both sides of her character undoubtedly existed, and yet in critical and popular discourse, it is the idea of the maverick with a penchant for pretty things that has won out.

However, if we consider both evidence from behind the scenes in the archives and what is "hidden" in plain sight in the museum layout itself, it soon becomes clear that a reassessment of Gardner's book collecting is due, for it is not the passing interest of a dilettante that the relative lack of critical interest would suggest. The plethora of clippings and notes, as well as the primacy given to her most valuable books and manuscripts indicate otherwise. Morris Carter, in the first published biography of Gardner, noted of the museum, that "every detail of it is personal."[45] It was made to reflect the founder as much as it was to act as a cultural institution. And that founder's passion for book collecting was such that she wove it into the fabric of the building that would both outlive her and bear her name.

43 Nielsen, Riley, and Silver, *Gardner Museum*, 105–106.

44 Tharp, *Mrs. Jack*, 317.

45 Carter, *Gardner*, 191.