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0521661560 - Literature and Material Culture from Balzac to Proust: The Collection and Consumption of Curiosities

Janell Watson

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This book addresses the issues of collecting, consuming, classifying, and describing the curiosities, antiques, and *objets d'art* that proliferated in French literary texts during the last decades of the nineteenth century. After Balzac made such issues significant in canonical literature, the Goncourt brothers, Huysmans, Mallarmé and Maupassant celebrated their golden age. Flaubert and Zola scorned them. Rachilde and Lorrain perverted them. Proust commemorated their last moments of glory. Focusing on the *bibelot* (the modern French term for knick-knack, curiosity, or other collectible), Janell Watson shows how the sudden prominence given to curiosities and collecting in nineteenth-century literature signals a massive change in attitudes to the world of goods, which in turn restructured the literary text according to the practical logic of daily life, calling into question established scholarly notions of order. Her study makes a new and important contribution to the literary history of material culture.

Janell Watson is visiting Assistant Professor at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech). She has published articles on nineteenth-century French literature and culture, and this is her first full-length book.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Contents*

| | |
|--|-----|
| <i>Acknowledgments</i> | x |
| Introduction | 1 |
| 1 The bibelot A nineteenth-century object | 5 |
| 2 The logic(s) of material culture Imitation, accumulation, and mobility | 27 |
| 3 The fashionable artistic interior Social (re)encoding in the domestic sphere | 57 |
| 4 Flaubert's " <i>musées reçus</i> " Bouvard and Pécuchet's consumerist epistemology | 83 |
| 5 Narrate, describe, or catalogue? The novel and the inventory form in Balzac, the Goncourts, and Huysmans | 109 |
| 6 The parlour of critical theory Reading dwelling space across disciplines | 143 |
| 7 Rearranging the Oedipus Fantastic and decadent floor-plans in Gautier, Maupassant, Lorrain, and Rachilde | 170 |
| <i>Notes</i> | 195 |
| <i>Bibliography</i> | 210 |
| <i>Index</i> | 225 |

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[More information](#)

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