Margaret Fountaine (1862–1940) was a lepidopterist during a period of transition and professionalization in natural history. Over her lifespan she collected more than 22 000 butterflies, published extensively and wrote a diary of more than a million words. Wealthy and independent, Fountaine toured Europe in her early twenties and then, over the next 50 years, travelled the globe collecting butterflies. Fountaine straddles many of the boundaries that historians have constructed to aid understanding of natural history in this period, specifically those defining gender roles, the nature of scientific knowledge and the divide between amateur and professional. Fountaine reminds us that these categories are never a clear or perfect division and that the reality of natural history research and exchange was much more complex than these boundaries often allow for. Fountaine herself is under-researched and this article contains a useful account of her entomological career.

**Keywords:** Margaret Fountaine; entomology; travel; women; gender; collecting

In 1912, at a meeting of the International Congress of Entomology in Oxford, Margaret Fountaine was invited to join the Linnean Society by its President, Edward Poulton. This was only 15 years after Beatrix Potter had been unable to attend a reading of her paper at the Society because of her sex. In the intervening period, the botanist Marian Sarah Farquharson had campaigned for women’s fellowship of learned societies. Although the Linnean Society initially refused to accept the petition, a sustained campaign led by several council members resulted in the issue being put to a vote in 1903, after which the Linnean Society sought a supplementary charter explicitly allowing female fellows. A ballot of 15 women for fellowship finally took place in 1904.¹ These pioneering efforts occurred at the peak of Fountaine’s entomological career. Despite her prestigious invitation to become a Linnean fellow, Fountaine is remembered by historians purely as an avid collector rather than as an entomologist. This distortion of her place in natural history is perhaps due to historiographical categories: it will be argued here that lines drawn to assist historical understanding of Edwardian and inter-war natural history serve to limit our interpretation of Fountaine’s entomological career. Fountaine is positioned on the boundary between amateur and professional, between what is and is not a contribution to scientific knowledge, and between gender roles for men and women. Institutions and

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individual scientific identities were transformed in this period of nascent professionalization and, although it is useful to create boundaries to understand such a complex moment, a close examination of Fountaine’s career provides a valuable reminder that these can sometimes obscure the complexity of natural history in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Existing work on Fountaine divides easily into categories; in addition to biographical accounts, Fountaine has been discussed by historians of gender, women’s writing and travel. Within each category, different versions of Fountaine are illuminated: the intrepid adventuress, the oppressed entomologist, the wilful feminist. This schism becomes more interesting when Fountaine’s diaries are consulted, because they hold a different version again. It must be conceded that Fountaine does indeed work as an interesting example of a female diarist, or at least—at 12 volumes and more than a million words—a keen one. Additionally, it is true that she was particularly well travelled, venturing to almost every corner of the British Empire. Yet above travel and writing, Fountaine was a passionate lepidopterist—a feature marginalized in existing work on her. This account of her entomological career will redress the balance and focus on scientific biography rather than travel, writing and romance. It will be demonstrated that Fountaine was a conventional female lepidopterist of her era and that, free from the constraints of imposed historical boundaries, she serves as a window into the changing complexities of the natural history community of the Edwardian to inter-war period.

THE LIFE OF A LEPIDOPTERIST

Above all, Margaret Fountaine was a dedicated lepidopterist. Born in 1862 near Norwich, she started a diary in 1878 which she maintained until her death in 1940. Written up annually in leather-bound journals (figure 1), her diary provides detailed insight into her life and society.

As a young girl Fountaine spent time sketching cathedrals, pressing flowers and visiting the botanical gardens and butterfly collection of a family friend, Mr Elwes. In her youth, her uncle died and left her an inheritance that made her independently wealthy. Fountaine’s first annual share of her new fortune was used to tour France and Switzerland with her sister Rachel. Following *Cook’s Tourist Handbook*, it was in Switzerland that Fountaine rediscovered her childhood love of butterfly collecting:

> I filled my pocket box with butterflies, some I had only seen in pictures as a child and yet recognized the moment I caught sight of them on the wing. I little thought years ago, when I used to look with covetous eyes at the plates representing the Scarce Swallowtail or the Camberwell Beauty that I should see both these in a valley in Switzerland and know the delight of securing specimens. I was a born naturalist, though all these years for want of anything to excite it, it had lain dormant within me.²

After a brief return to England, Fountaine travelled to Milan in 1893 to study singing, but when her musical ambitions failed she retreated to the Corsican hills to collect new specimens. Butterfly collecting was a popular pastime, and Fountaine found that ‘to have come here for the purpose of collecting butterflies was at once to find myself completely in the fashion.’³ The scene was dominated by men, yet she reports being easily accepted into their company and sharing evening meals. Fountaine’s entomological interest bloomed as she started using Linnean rather than common names in her diary.

Fountaine returned to her family for the winter of 1895, began setting her Italian butterflies and visited Colesbourne, the estate of Mr Elwes, to view his butterfly collection. Henry John...
Elwes (figure 2) was a scientific traveller and natural history collector; at various times he had served as vice-president of the Royal Horticultural Society, president of a series of smaller natural philosophical societies and, from 1897, a Fellow of the Royal Society. Fountaine was engrossed by the largest private collection of Lepidoptera in the country, and her competitive nature was revealed as she realized the pitiful state of her own collection:

I was happy till I and Rachel were asked to spend three days at Colesborne, to see Mr Elwes’ butterflies, a thing I had much desire to do. . . . Mr Elwes’ wonderful collection making one thoroughly unsettled and discontented, I was dissatisfied with my own collection in a way that was almost childish. ‘Now you see the possibilities of a collection,’ Mr Elwes had said one day in the museum, to which I had replied, that on the contrary I only saw the impossibilities of a collection!

Inspired by Mr Elwes’s museum, in 1896 Fountaine made an entomological expedition to Sicily, declaring that to demonstrate her ambition of becoming a serious lepidopterist she would be the first British collector to brave the brigands that ran that island. Upon arrival she contacted Signor Enrico Ragusa, Sicily’s leading lepidopterist, and travelled through the mountains staying at tourist hotels, again mixing freely with male entomologists. An
account of her collecting was published in *The Entomologist* for 1897. The article contained original knowledge of habitats and variation in Sicilian specimens, and the paper was discussed animatedly in subsequent issues. In the same year several of Fountaine’s specimens were admitted to the British Museum’s collection. This was something of an honour as, with so many collectors providing specimens, only those of extraordinary quality were accepted. Fountaine quickly became a reputable collector and formed relationships with lepidopterists in the Natural History Department that continued to influence her throughout her lifetime.

In 1898 Fountaine travelled through Trieste and Budapest, meeting entomologists in Austria, Germany and Hungary and attending the meetings of several societies. Discoveries of various species variations and a rare example of bilateral gynandromorphy motivated Fountaine to write her second article for *The Entomologist*. She spent the butterfly season of 1899 in the French Alps, where she was excited to meet Mr Henry Lang, because it was his reference book on European butterflies that she used. Fountaine now collected caterpillars to breed her own perfect specimens; her diary and articles document the work she did to discover the food plants and conditions that would produce the healthiest specimens. On her return home, Fountaine received a visit from Mr Lang, who ‘almost made me conceited by his lavish praise of my collection, and all that I had done since I became an entomologist. Just now I was “booming” in the Entomological World.’ Mr Lang convinced her to lend him some of her specimens for his next publication, and she lent out more to Mr Elwes for the same purpose.

And so I sent the cream of my collection to Colesbourne, and I felt very sorrowful about it, I wondered whether the pleasure of removing their acquaintance would equal the pangs of parting with them, yet I know that if I did not turn my long days of toil to some scientific account when I got the chance, for what else have I toiled?

Fountaine went collecting in Greece with Mr Elwes in the summer of 1900, and she wrote up their work for *The Entomologist’s Record and Journal of Variation* and *The Entomologist*. Additionally, *Transactions of the Entomological Society* announced...
Mr Elwes’s exhibition of Grecian Lepidoptera ‘taken this season in conjunction with Miss Fountaine.’ Fountaine spent that autumn in London and attended meetings of the Royal Entomological Society. She had been elected in 1898 and attended meetings whenever she was in England.

The Entomology meeting was attended by Mr Elwes, who spoke at some length on our collecting in Greece, and when he had finished turned around and called upon me to continue in spite of my having strictly told him not to do so, when he suggested it. However there was nothing left for me to do, but to get up and make a few feeble remarks, which were of course loudly applauded in consequence, I well know, of my being the sole representative of my sex present, with the exception of one lady visitor. But I enjoyed the meeting immensely, and met several of the entomologists we had seen in Corsica, and who I had never seen since.12

And so her career continued. With the wealth left to her by her uncle, Fountaine travelled constantly to expand her collection, periodically returning to England to mount specimens and attend meetings. Any attempt to provide accurate dates for her extensive journeying is impossible as she travelled for most of her life without a passport and her diaries rarely mentioned dates of arrival or departure; however, we can still learn where she went and how good the ‘collecting’ was. There were several significant collecting trips between 1901 and her death in 1940; the first of these was to Syria and Palestine in 1901 with an account published a year later in The Entomologist.13 That article discussed the collection and breeding of several rare specimens and requested information from readers concerning life-cycles, demonstrating that Fountaine was keen to gain an understanding of her specimens beyond that required by a collector. On this expedition she hired a Syrian dragoman, Khalil Neimy, with whom she quickly formed a close personal bond and who became her constant travelling companion. Their first extensive trip was in 1903 to Asia Minor and they returned to Constantinople with just under 1000 butterflies. Her article for The Entomologist was again filled with questions and theorizing over seasonal and geographical influences on various species. It caused another stir, prompting notes and letters in subsequent issues.14

Fountaine spent the next two years in South Africa and Rhodesia and produced sketch books of previously undocumented eggs, caterpillars and chrysalises. Norman Riley, later the head of the Entomology Department at the British Museum, commented that ‘these sketches were most beautifully done and illustrated the metamorphosis of many species which had not been previously known to science.’15 Her research from South Africa, published in Transactions of the Entomological Society, gave descriptions of life cycles, food plants, seasonal timings, number of skins and colour changes. This article was the most technical that Fountaine wrote, and her reviewers praised her observational astuteness.16 Fountaine returned to London to set her African specimens, then crossed the Atlantic to visit her brother and collect in the USA, Central America and the Caribbean. Khalil joined her and is fondly called ‘Bersa’ in her articles for The Entomologist discussing the Alleghany Mountains and Costa Rica.17 In Jamaica she addressed the Kingston Naturalists’ Club, where her talk ‘The sagacity of caterpillars’ was met with huge applause. Fountaine and Khalil returned to England to attend the 1912 International Congress of Entomology in Oxford, where Fountaine was invited to join the Linnean Society.

In the years building up to war, Fountaine spent time in India, Ceylon, Nepal and Tibet, and this extensive trip produced watercolours rather than the usual reports for
In 1917 she travelled to America and published on her collecting in California while volunteering for the Red Cross. By the summer of 1918 Fountaine was almost penniless; unable to wire what was left of her inheritance because of the war, she began to take specimen orders from Ward’s Natural Science Establishment. After the war Fountaine set off on her last extensive entomological journey with Khalil, in the Philippines (figure 4). A full account was written up for *The Entomologist* and was referenced by conservation workers 50 years later. Fountaine, now in her mid-sixties, continued on to West and East Africa, Indo-China, Hong Kong, the Malay States, Brazil, the West Indies and finally Trinidad. Only putting the occasional note into *The Entomologist*, she focused on her watercolours and collecting. Khalil died in 1928 and Fountaine continued alone, surviving her lover and confiding in her diary that her only source of comfort was her caterpillars. To gain insight into her later lepidopterist activities we have only several references from her diary, a few short notices in *The Entomologist* and her correspondence with Norman Riley. This material shows that Fountaine was still on the hunt for rare specimens and kept up with publications despite spending nearly all her time abroad. At 77 years of age Fountaine suffered a heart attack and was found, butterfly net in hand, on the path back to her hostel in Trinidad.

This rich and detailed account of Fountaine’s life is taken from her journals and various articles. As a prolific diarist she left us a rich history, providing us with a real sense of the texture of her life. Her invitation to join the Linnean Society demonstrates the level of respect that her work evoked in fellow naturalists and entomologists. Despite her contemporary reputation, Fountaine is now remembered as something far removed from a serious and well-respected lepidopterist. Work on Fountaine can be clearly divided into three subcategories: biographical work, histories of women’s writing, and accounts of female travel.
After her death, Fountaine’s collection was bequeathed to the Castle Museum at Norwich, accompanied by a tin trunk to be opened on 15 April 1978. Shortly after that date Tony Irwin, Senior Curator of Natural History, announced the existence of the diaries found inside and became the first to promote Fountaine’s romantic life above her entomological work. Irwin described Fountaine’s Lepidoptera collection as ‘not outstanding’ and declared that Margaret Fountaine, the intrepid lady lepidopterist, who travelled more widely than any other entomologist before or since, was a girl in love. Her passions crippled by Victorian morals, she sought refuge in the pursuit of butterflies and to this she devoted her whole adult life.  

This set the tone for much of the historical narrative that followed: a woman of unconventional spirit who hunted butterflies as an escape from Victorian society. W. F. Carter, an assistant editor of the Sunday Times, edited the diaries into two volumes for the popular market in 1980 and 1986, producing 340 pages of abridged diary entries condensed from Fountaine’s 12 volumes. In this process various aspects of Fountaine’s life were lost and her entomological career suffered in favour of her love life. ‘Miss
Fountaine, though the author of some papers for learned societies and respected among lepidopterists, is summed up now, not unkindly, as a useful collector, perhaps a great one, but not a great scientist. Carter’s employment of modern boundaries to define scientific knowledge production prevented him from seeing that Fountaine’s activities, rather than being ‘somewhat eccentric’, would have been well inside the remit of scientific activity in her own period. Carter’s editorial choices demonstrate his preference for tales of passion and travel, leading to the abridgement of Fountaine’s passages concerning collecting, breeding and mounting specimens.

A more recent biography by the travel writer Natascha Scott-Stokes results in a similar portrayal to that offered by Carter; Fountaine’s entomological career is condemned with the label ‘obscure lady amateur’. Yet Scott-Stokes is not as marginalizing of Fountaine’s work as Carter and demonstrates how Fountaine’s interest in butterflies gave her a ‘key to freedom’ and an excuse to take flight around the globe. ‘Studying them [butterflies] gave her a socially acceptable way to exempt herself from a traditional domestic role in England. Collecting them, far beyond the constraining eyes of her own society, gave her the liberty to experiment with men.’ For Scott-Stokes, Fountaine’s passion for collecting was second to her desire to travel and escape the repression of Victorian society; Fountaine was interested in butterflies for their passport-like qualities. Scott-Stokes’s portrayal of Fountaine as a woman escaping domesticity has ignored the voice of Fountaine’s contemporary Norman Riley, who wrote in 1940: ‘Her great passion, however, was collecting butterflies, an interest which she first developed about 1883, and which from then onwards led her every year further and further a-field in search of material for her collection.’ Like Carter, Scott-Stokes is writing for a popular audience and in both cases Fountaine’s entomological achievements are undermined by the need to entertain. Carter marginalizes Fountaine’s scientific work in favour of her romantic ventures; Scott-Stokes continues this neglect but instead favours her globetrotting lifestyle.

It is difficult to define anyone’s place in society without inserting them into categories: rich, poor, male, female, professional. Potential labels are endless, and applying them necessarily limits understanding by creating an expectation that an individual will conform to the category into which he or she has been placed. By researching Fountaine in a history of science context the labels of ‘eccentric’ or ‘intrepid’ are soon invalidated. When Fountaine became a lepidopterist, entomology was the height of fashion, and natural history societies were commonplace and well attended. In the mid-1800s several entomological journals were founded and guide and field books were published. The content of naturalist publications changed, too, as works were no longer produced only for the elite scholar. David E. Allen’s work on Victorian crazes demonstrates how ‘literature . . . now stepped down from its age-old loftiness even to the point of becoming chatty.’ One such ‘chatty’ publication was Emma Hutchinson’s 1879 work *Entomology and Botany as Pursuits for Ladies*, which encouraged young women to study the habits of butterflies rather than simply collecting them.

Hutchinson, who lived a generation before Fountaine, had a similar entomological career. Both women focused on butterfly lifecycles and cultivated the skill to rear butterflies from eggs. They both published their work and maintained a keen correspondence with other entomologists. Allen has argued that historians have tended to think of ‘Victorianism’ as a ‘unique set of attitudes and tastes which suddenly came into being in the 1830s’, when in fact an interest in collecting and natural history had existed long before and was particularly popular with women. Allen claims instead that ‘Victorianism’ was actually the enthusiastic ‘stamp’ put on the ‘habits and poses’ of their parents’ society by a new
Many female entomologists had gone before Fountaine; far from ‘eccentric’, her interest was the continuation of a tradition.

Editions of The Entomologist and Transactions of the Entomological Society that contain Fountaine’s work all have articles from other women, with the exception of two (1917 and 1925). These articles provide evidence that women contributed to scientific entomological thought generally: Fountaine was not the lucky exception. Furthermore, the articles contributed by women are on similar topics and of a similar style to those submitted by men. In 1910 there were six women listed as members of the Entomological Society; this number may be small but it demonstrates that it was entirely acceptable for women to join the society and maintain an interest in entomology beyond just collection. Milbry Polk has suggested that there were two key events that allowed women to pursue a life devoted to the natural sciences. The first was the introduction of Linnaeus’s classification system, which resulted in women being encouraged to press, collect and study flowers. ‘Some women went beyond collecting flowers in presses and used this socially acceptable endeavour of collecting plants as an avenue to exploration.’ The second was the publication of Darwin’s theory of evolution; moving on from collecting, natural historians now had the task of understanding how the natural world fitted together and worked in harmony. This endeavour ‘opened up opportunities for women to participate in various scientific fields as artists and illustrators.’

The boundaries of scientific activity contemporary to Fountaine are obviously different from modern conceptions of scientific work; Carter’s and Scott-Stokes’s use of current categories blinds them to the fact that illustration and collection were essential aspects of scientific endeavour during Fountaine’s lifetime. With this understanding it becomes clear that Fountaine’s entomological activities should not be regarded as ‘eccentric’ or ‘intrepid’ but rather as the continuation of a female tradition of engagement in natural history knowledge production. Fountaine was exceptional because of her extreme dedication and the personal wealth that facilitated her collecting; the difference between her and other female entomologists was one of degree, rather than of kind.

There are many collective bibliographies of female explorers, books crammed with ‘intrepid’ women listing their exotic destinations. Jane Robinson includes Fountaine in two collective biographies of adventuring women in which she argues that a secure social reputation and travelling outside Western Europe were incompatible. Taking diary extracts from Carter, Robinson gives us a Fountaine compelled to travel, not by butterflies but by something else entirely:

I was interested to know whether her amorous quests were by-products of the Romance of travel. Perhaps there is a link between libido and locomotion, I wondered. In Margaret’s case, it seems not. Bath, where she stayed with her sister in 1896, was as meaty with promise as Babylon to her.28

In Robinson’s first collective bibliography, Fountaine, along with other scientific women, has her science marginalized. Robinson believes that women in Fountaine’s era were unable to partake in scientific discourse and research, because this would have made them ‘twofold eccentrics’ for seeking some fulfilment in life other than ‘the family and the fireside’ and for
‘scratching around in the dank corners of the world in the search’. Furthermore, a ‘globe-trotting lady scientist could not possibly hope to be taken seriously either as traveller, lady or scientist’.

Fountaine’s biography and contemporaries provide significant evidence for female membership of scientific circles and their important contributions to data collection and the depiction of species. Robinson’s focus on Fountaine as ‘highly sexed’ limits her ability to appreciate this: ‘She was a serious entomologist, a great authority on her subject, but it is the romance in her life that makes her diaries so rich.’ Following this theme, Dea Birkett, in *Spinster abroad*, argues that women such as Mary Kingsley, Isabella Bird and Margaret Fountaine were neither courageous intellectuals nor proto-feminists but instead were ‘dissatisfied with the cramped lives prescribed for them in Victorian society’ and seeking ‘new horizons abroad, discovering in these distant places a degree of freedom and respect unimaginable as spinsters at home.’ Fountaine is added to these biographical menageries to bolster arguments for women as pioneers of travel or overcoming oppression. But Fountaine was not as intrepid as these authors suggest: her life overseas was spent with assistants or friends, always carrying letters of introduction and her *Cook’s Travel Guide*. This is not to diminish Fountaine’s achievement—she remains the most widely travelled lepidopterist ever—but she was not a ground-breaking explorer who sought out new lands for the purpose of fresh horizons. She always had an entomological interest and never travelled anywhere that was not good for collecting. Fountaine has been given the label of ‘adventurer’ to serve a historical argument, at the expense of her achievements in entomology, which are marginalized.

Additionally, there is much evidence in Fountaine’s diaries that demonstrates her respect for contemporary social values; they were not something she ran away from. For instance, the shock that Fountaine expressed at the advances of foreign men and her account of the relief she felt with Khalil’s acceptance into London’s entomological circles serve as evidence of her respect for contemporary social values. Furthermore, Fountaine’s diaries betray her aspirations to fame in entomological circles: butterflies were not a way to flee society but were instead a route to social status. Fountaine’s entomological motive for travel has been neglected because it does not support arguments that female travel in this period was motivated by the search for liberty. Fountaine chased butterflies, not freedom, and her diaries and publications show us that her standing in entomological and family circles was important to her. This is not to claim that Fountaine did not enjoy the freedom of travel, but it was clearly not the dominant reason that she undertook such extensive journeying.

In any discussion of Fountaine as a traveller it must be remembered that she was not alone. Mary Russell describes the ‘new class of traveller’ that arose during Fountaine’s life, which included men and women just rich enough to tour the British Empire and Europe. Russell’s point is supported by the abundance of cheap hotels that appeared to cater for such a market as well as by an increase in assistants for hire and shops aimed at tourists. Fountaine is an example of this ‘new class of traveller’, particularly in her earlier journeys during which she stayed in accommodation designed for foreign travellers where she could mix with other entomologists. Fountaine’s travelling and choice of destination were not eccentric or intrepid, they were merely extensive. Fountaine was financially able to venture where she desired, and it was this liberty that made her exceptional, not her choice to travel, her destinations or her butterfly collecting. Far from being intrepid, Fountaine remained on the beaten entomological path, with Khalil disguised as her brother or servant—and if there was a handy *Cook’s Guide* available, so much the better.
The suppression of female scientific contribution has been discussed extensively by scholars, and Fountaine has been included in debates connected to the changing gender prescriptions of her period. Fountaine lived at a time of major social upheaval when Victorian, Edwardian and inter-war ideas of femininity were recognized, respected, negotiated, disregarded and triumphed over by individuals.\textsuperscript{34} Harriett Blodgett focuses on Fountaine as a diarist in her discussion of the differences between journal keeping and autobiographical writing. Fountaine is compared with the diarists Virginia Woolf and Beatrix Potter, women both plagued by self-doubt and, in Woolf’s case, severe depression. Blodgett situates Fountaine alongside these women and portrays her as a victim of her own ‘sense of insignificance’. However, she allows that, unlike Woolf and Potter, Fountaine had the good fortune to be born later and become one of the ‘new women’ of the 1880s and 1890s—a liberated, middle-class female who could live away from home, even if unmarried, and pursue a career.\textsuperscript{35} Blodgett uses the support that Fountaine expressed for the suffrage movement to depict her as a feminist. When addressing the success of Fountaine’s career, Blodgett applies the dichotomy of amateur versus professional, attempting to demonstrate the marginalization of female scientific contribution. Fountaine ‘established some reputation, if not as a scientist, then as a collector’.\textsuperscript{36} With this portrayal, Fountaine becomes an example of a woman repressed and made insecure by Victorian society, like Woolf and Potter, to suit Blodgett’s category of diary-writing ‘new women’.

Julie English Early argues that Fountaine attempted to ‘construct a life’ by collapsing the realms of private and professional together, demonstrated by the seamless mix of professional and private in her diaries. For Early, gender played a significant part in this interaction.\textsuperscript{37} She claims that Fountaine’s ‘relish for the attentions of men’ prompted her to seek ways of escaping the conventions of late-Victorian society. Here we find a similar argument to Birkett’s, with Fountaine trying to liberate herself from social constraints. But unlike Birkett, Early does not feel that the answer lay in travel. ‘Geography solved nothing: the export of Englishness throughout the empire only re-inscribed the social hierarchies and behaviours with which she had been raised.’ According to Early, Fountaine worked to ‘distinguish the natural from the artificial to confront directly the impulses so mystifyingly buried beneath social ritual.’ In her study of nature, Fountaine saw society’s laws for what they were, contrived and oppressive of females, and in that sense she liberated herself from them.\textsuperscript{38} With reference to the work of Evelyn Fox Keller, Early discusses how ‘man’s science’ resisted female contributions. Furthermore, with the mixing of the professional and the private in Fountaine’s writing, Early claims that to her contemporaries ‘Fountaine’s voice is an unprofessional disturbance.’ However, an analysis of Fountaine’s contributions to The Entomologist reminds us that her work was typical of the style of writing and article submitted by both genders. Whether Fountaine’s scientific style was ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ is open to debate; but it must be noted that she was simply following convention, writing in a way that was a product of her era rather than her gender.

Finally, Fountaine is mentioned in Barbara T. Gates’s account of the rise of the professional scientist in the late Victorian period. Gates claims that control over the standard of writing in biology was maintained by a ‘coterie of men who worked for major museums or institutions of higher learning … which were largely state-supported and staffed by full time researchers.’ The metropolitan centres were Kew, the Natural History Museum and the Linnean Society, where these professionals would meet, read papers and discuss contemporary research.
endeavours. Gates argues that women were excluded from this elite intellectual activity, citing the experiences of Beatrix Potter, who was prohibited from attending the reading of her paper at the Linnean in 1897. For Gates this represents a clear distinction between the male professionals and the predominantly female amateurs who emerged as science professionalized. Moreover, she argues that entomology’s ‘official sight’ was hegemonic as men had ‘appropriated what was proper to see and therefore to know.’ Gates sees the misogynistic aspects of Victorian culture taint the viewing of nature, ensuring that alternative, perhaps feminine, ways of viewing nature were disregarded as scientifically irrelevant. ‘Self-taught field naturalists were simply less and less valuable to the scientific enterprise—and, for the most part, women landed in the camp of the self-taught and unofficial.’ Gates allows that Fountaine was more successful in crossing this boundary than Potter but still insists that ‘she, like Potter, received little acknowledgement from her contemporary associates.’

The marginalization of Potter’s efforts is of course plausible because her scientific contribution was limited by the chauvinistic attitude of the Linnean Society, yet the example of Fountaine is not as useful for Gates’s theory of exclusion. There is much evidence for her acceptance into natural history circles: membership of the Entomological Society of London since 1898, numerous publications and attendance at international entomological conferences, in addition to countless London meetings of the Entomological Society. Furthermore, Fountaine’s correspondence with Riley demonstrates that he respected her contributions and was keen to use her illustrations in a publication on African Lepidoptera because he thought they ‘would greatly increase the value of the volume.’ Gates’s claim that Fountaine’s exclusion, like Potter’s, demonstrates that a gender boundary was created during the professionalization of natural history, is undermined by an examination of Fountaine’s full interactions with Riley and other contemporary entomologists and entomological institutions. Fountaine, unlike Potter, established a successful career, perhaps not centrally, but very much inside the parameters of institutional natural history.

Fountaine was, even if peripherally, a member of her scientific community; this blurs the gender boundary that has been constructed to demonstrate that women were excluded from professional science. Fountaine engaged in activities that historians have previously judged to be outside her normal gender role, yet she was not ostracized by her scientific or social contemporaries. The gender boundaries employed by Blodgett, Early and Gates shape our understanding of Victorian society and science and limit our ability to see female achievement in Fountaine’s era. Fountaine contradicts Gates’s marginalized scientist, Blodgett’s insecure diarist and Early’s oppressed woman. She belongs in none of these categories but negotiated a place for herself in scientific natural history while remaining an example of female propriety. This demonstrates the need for a more dynamic gender boundary that allows Fountaine to be within her gender norm when she was attending meetings of the Entomological Society along with the six other female members contemporary to her.

THE DANGER OF HEROINES

When Fountaine’s science is given due consideration and context, her significance and importance to our understanding of Victorian and Edwardian natural history becomes clear. Fountaine challenges preconceptions of the period and forces an examination of current historiographical boundaries. Fountaine remains relatively obscure in academic texts, perhaps because she does not conform to current frameworks in the history of
science and is therefore of little use to scholars attempting to argue for interpretations provided by and supporting these frameworks. Those who have attempted to include Fountaine have only been able to include facets of her life and work; cherry-picking for the benefit of their own historical ambitions.

The boundaries challenged by a deeper analysis of Fountaine’s entomological career are many; this paper has focused on the boundary separating gender roles, the boundary that encircles standards of scientific contribution and the connected boundary that separates amateurs from professionals. From the latter perspective, as both a field collector and a contributor of original research as a member of the Entomological Society, Fountaine cannot be summarized as an amateur or an institutionally based professional. Furthermore, it must be remembered that the men based in central institutions who guarded the perimeter of scientific natural history depended, for their theoretical interpretations, on the local knowledge and private collections of field naturalists, both male and female. Yet this is not to claim that the boundary did not exist at all; indeed, debates concerning the difference between collector and entomologist were contemporary to Fountaine, as demonstrated by exchanges in *The Entomologist* concluded by the Reverend W. Claxton after much feisty letter writing:

Collectors themselves many be divided into two classes. In the first class would be placed those who, while not trying to obtain scientific rank, yet do through their collecting and gain some knowledge of second principles. In the second class would come those, probably not many, who regard their collection as an aggregation of specimens, and have not intention beyond the desire of making it as complete as possible... and so I submit that the positions may be exhibited in tabular forms as this:—

(1) Entomologists—Studies scientifically from the start
(2) Sub-Entomologist—Collection his first object, but gains some scientific knowledge in the process
(3) Collector—Has no object beyond amassing specimens.

Now I maintain that these classes are interdependent and form part of one great whole, and that no one of them has the right to express or feel contempt for the others, but that all may and should work harmoniously together.42

The distinction between amateur and scientist—or between tourist and scholar—registered in Britain well before Margaret Fountaine’s career started, but it is important to remember that traces of an older homogeneous thinking and attitude persisted for many decades into the twentieth century.43 By reclaiming Fountaine’s entomological work from her diaries, prioritizing it over her romantic interests and regarding it as the motive for her extensive travel, a much more interesting research question emerges. To what extent was Fountaine usual in the context of the increasing professionalization that historians have deduced was partly responsible for the exclusion of women from natural history research? Fontaine seems, to a degree at least, to have overcome this process of exclusion produced by professionalization—was this boundary more flexible, perhaps even negotiable, in this period? Mostly probably not: what separates Fountaine from other contemporary female entomologists was her wealth and decision to travel so extensively for her collection. Such dedication secured specimens not normally available to even the most privileged or well-institutionalized researchers, and it was this that secured her a space within institutional entomology.
Fountaine as solely a heroine of female travel or proto-feminism is a dangerous and deceptive notion. It is in attempts to contextualize Fountaine into the history of natural history that true insight can be made. Work documenting women’s achievements has a long and proud history—and role models are important for encouraging young women and girls—but the damage that narratives of ‘heroes’ have had on the history of science must be acknowledged. The bright lights of Newton, Darwin and Einstein can obscure the activities and contributions of their contemporaries—those less celebrated men and women of science, for example technicians, artisans, instrument makers, engravers, laboratory assistants and others, including wives and daughters, who worked invisibly in the scientific project. Heroines have the potential to be equally distorting. Discussions of Margaret Fountaine must encompass her as a whole: at her core she was a collector and lepidopterist, but she certainly did not work alone, sustained as she was by the Entomological Society, various correspondents and fellow collectors, and of course by Khalil Neimy. Fountaine’s extensive butterfly collection is held as ‘The Fountaine—Neimy Collection’, named, at Fountaine’s request, in honour of her collaborator. Neimy’s significant role in the amassing of Fountaine’s specimens could easily be sidelined as a result of his ethnicity and status as a servant or assistant, and so it was, for the many years between Fountaine’s bequest to the museum and the discovery of her journals.

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NOTES

2 Fountaine, Diaries, vol. 4, p. 947.
3 Ibid., p. 1060.
5 Fountaine, Diaries, vol. 5, p. 1209.
Margaret Fountaine

9 Fountaine, Diaries, vol. 6, p. 1453.
10 Ibid., p. 1454.
12 Fountaine, Diaries, vol. 6, p. 1508.
24 Riley, op. cit. (note 15).
30 Ibid., p. 132.
32 It must be noted that ‘Victorian social values’ are not a static set of rules, but for the sake of brevity this interesting variable will not be deeply explored. The changing nature of the ideal social norms for the sexes shifted dramatically within Fountaine’s life, but for this work it will be presumed that when ‘social values’ are mentioned it does not imply that they are unchanged but simply refers to the current state of negotiations between the sexes. For discussion on the changing nature of feminine ideals in this period see M. Poovey, The proper lady and the woman writer (Chicago University Press, 1984).
36 Ibid., p. 162.

38 Ibid., p. 187.


40 Ibid., p. 87.

41 Riley to Fountaine, 28 July 1932, NHM entomology Library Collection, MSS FOU B 1:1.
