



# **Raising the Dust: The Literary Housekeeping Of Mary Ward, Sarah Grand, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman**

*Beth Sutton-Ramspeck*

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*Raising the Dust* identifies a heretofore-overlooked literary phenomenon that author Beth Sutton-Ramspeck calls “literary housekeeping.” The three writers she examines rejected turn-of-the-century aestheticism and modernism in favor of a literature that is practical, even ostensibly mundane, designed to “set the human household in order.”

To Mary Augusta Ward, Sarah Grand, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, housekeeping represented public responsibilities: making the food supply safe, reforming politics, and improving the human race itself. *Raising the Dust* places their writing in the context of the late-Victorian era, in particular the eugenics movement, the proliferation of household conveniences, the home economics movement, and decreased reliance on servants. These changes affected relationships between the domestic sphere and the public sphere, and hence shaped the portrayal of domesticity in the era's fiction and nonfiction.

Moreover, Ward, Grand, and Gilman articulated a domestic aesthetic that swept away boundaries. Sutton-Ramspeck uncovers a new paradigm here: literature as engaging the public realm through the devices and perspectives of the domestic. Her innovative and ambitious book also connects fixations on cleaning with the discovery of germs (the first bacterium discovered was anthrax, and knowledge of its properties increased fears of dust); analyzes advertising cards for soap; and links the mental illness in Gilman's “The Yellow Wall-Paper” to fears during the period of arsenic poisoning from wallpaper.

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