

OUR LADY OF THE GASTEROMYCETES:
 THE MUSHROOMS OF
Violetta White Delafield

The dead, so people say, are forgotten, or they should rather say, that life has for the most part little significance to any of us.

– Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being*

Violetta White Delafield (1875–1949) was an American botanist and one of the early female taxonomists in the field of mycology. She has been most well-known for her horticultural pursuits at Montgomery Place, the ancestral estate of the Delafield and Livingston families of the Hudson River Valley. An independent scholar who developed a passionate interest in puffballs, earthstars, stalked puffballs, and bird’s nest fungi, she became an authority on the Gasteromycetes. She was also broadly knowledgeable about agaric mushrooms

through a systematic study of mycology and field work that was largely self-directed. As an artist, her stippled drawings of Gasteromycetes are models of punctilious design, and her watercolor illustrations of agaric mushrooms reveal an appreciation of living form and color that come from plentiful field study. In her rapport with the mycologists who became her informal mentors, she made contributions of specimens to the herbaria of the New York Botanical Garden and New York State Museum that retain significant scientific value to this day. Yet with all this, her work

and reputation have suffered from long neglect to become suffused with enigma. Though her career was fractured by personal loss and bereavement, her devotion to mycology was as unquestionable as her accomplishments are enduring and worthy of close study.

It is not inappropriate to refer to Mrs. Delafield throughout as *Violetta* though that was not her given name. She was born in Florence, Italy on May 10, 1875 and christened Susan Elizabeth White. In other circumstances she might have been “Sue White,” a bland name to be sure, but she was tended by a



Violetta Susan White, c. 1895. (Courtesy Bard College Visual Resource Center.)

nursemaid in Florence who admired her deep blue eyes and called her Violetta. Perhaps Verdi's *La Traviata* lurks in the background to this re-naming; his famous opera of 1853 was originally to be titled *Violetta* for its main character. Susan White became Violetta from then on, accepted unanimously as such by the White family. In 1904, she changed her name legally to Violetta in advance of her marriage to John Ross Delafield, to become Violetta White Delafield. According to the patriarchal conventions of the age she would be styled "Mrs. John Ross Delafield," though privately she was called "Dolly" by her husband and "Letty" by her sisters. As "V. S. White" she authored three important studies of the fungi just after the turn of the century. Her full name was Violetta Susan Elizabeth White Delafield.

Violetta was born to wealth, the sort of wealth that was considered respectable poverty by the truly monumental old wealth of the New York aristocracy. Her father, John Jay White (1829–1902) made a fortune in hat manufacture in Danbury, Connecticut. Her family was a product of the Gilded Age, the last three decades of the 19th century characterized by Mark Twain for its rampant corruption, accumulation of

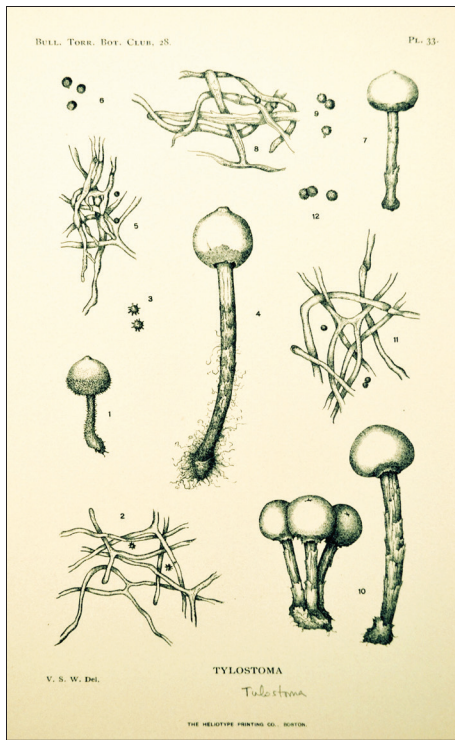
colossal wealth, and insatiable greed. The Whites, on an extended tour of Europe through the 1880s, saw the birth of Violetta in Florence and the birth of her brother Alain at Cannes-et-Clairan, France. When their ailing mother Louisa Lawrence Wetmore (1839–1890) died, the family returned to New York. Violetta then attended the Brearley School in Manhattan for two years from 1890 to 1892 but did not graduate. This was the full extent of her classroom education; otherwise she was tutored and self-educated. She returned to Paris to study piano, traveled through Italy, and then back to New York where she became fascinated with botany. It is likely that her close observation of nature began at the White family home in Litchfield, Connecticut. Her brother Alain was a chess composer and amateur botanist, co-author of *Succulents for the Amateur* (1946), who with their sister Margaret May Whitlock White founded the White Memorial Foundation in Litchfield in 1913. Violetta was fluent in French, Italian, and German though initially deficient in English. She was known to be timid and had very few friends. She was closest with the friends of her siblings.

Violetta's self-study of botany was deliberately comprehensive, and she was meticulous with her own sketches and illustrations. What stimulus provoked her to notice the mushrooms is hard to know. By the aristocratic norms of New York high society, too much education of young women was suspect, and college education was not fashionable; by these standards her turn toward mycology might have been considered positively freakish and would certainly not make her marriageable. The relatives of novelist Edith Wharton (1862–1937), for example, believed Edith's brilliant writing to be a family disgrace. However, Violetta's notebooks reveal a systematic study of the fungi from the kingdom level through to family, genus, and species. Her sketches of fungal anatomy populated her study notes. Microscopy became prevalent in mycology in the last decades of the 19th century, and Violetta adopted this immediately. She used a compound microscope manufactured by Carl Reichert of Vienna for her studies of spores, spore ornamentation, and microscopic structures.

She advanced rapidly with an intensive study at the New York Botanical Garden

(NYBG) beginning in 1900, focusing on the Gasteromycetes, fungi whose spores mature inside the fruiting body protected by an outer layer (peridium). Her three key publications were *The Tylostomataceae of North America* (1901), *Nidulariales of North America* (1902), and *Some Mount Desert Fungi* (1902). All three monographs were published in the *Bulletin of the Torrey Botanical Club* and as *Contributions to the New York Botanical Garden*. The Tylostomataceae include the stalked puffballs; the Nidulariales are known as the bird's nest fungi; and her survey of mushrooms on Mount Desert Island, a part of Acadia National Park in Maine, was a comprehensive list of her collections with interpolated descriptions of new species she discovered by Charles Peck. The first two monographs remained standards in the field for nearly half a century. The Mount Desert article was intended to serve as "preliminary supplement" to Edward Lothrop Rand's *Flora of Mount Desert Island, Maine* (1894) that had excluded the fungi.¹

Several prominent mycologists benefitted Violetta in her quest to know the Gasteromycetes. One of these was Charles Horton Peck (1833–1917), the first Botanist of New York State and a public authority on the fungi for nearly a half-century. His discoveries were widely known through the annual reports of the New York State Museum in Albany. In the absence of convenient mushroom guidebooks, hundreds of people requested these reports directly from Peck, and he attracted quite a following. Violetta corresponded with him in 1901/02, sending him many specimens, often accompanied by her watercolor illustrations. In return, he loaned her museum specimens and helped to guide her research of the Mount Desert fungi, naming *Cortinarius whiteae* in her honor. For this, she professed to be flattered. Their relationship was never close, but truly sincere, for he was always willing to help, and she was an ardent student. She wrote to Peck, "It is so hard to put into words what one feels, but I must say again how much I appreciate your kindness to me. The little work I can do in Botany and what it has brought into my life, means so much to me." Her passion for mycology seemed always tinged with regret: "The more I work on these plants, the more the fascination



Tylostoma spp., stippled drawing by V. S. White, 1901.

for [them] grows upon me; I only wish I could devote all my time to their study and collection.”²

As a resident of New York City, Violetta’s deepest immersion into mycology came from visits to the New York Botanical Garden. In 1901, “Miss V. S. White” became a certified researcher “with privileges to the Collections and Laboratories” at an institution that was bursting at the seams with activity and discovery. Nathaniel Lord Britton (1859–1934) was founder and Director-in-Chief. A humorless and driven scientist with long-standing ties to Columbia University and the Torrey Botanical Society, Britton devoted the Garden to nothing less than the complete botanical reconnaissance of the Americas and the Caribbean. He drew support from the Gilded Age titans of industry: Andrew Carnegie, J. P. Morgan, and Cornelius Vanderbilt, all board members of the Garden. Fiercely independent, Britton formulated a system of nomenclature that rigidly insisted on the priority of names for plants and fungi. Britton’s American Code of Botanical Nomenclature competed with European systems and was rejected or ignored by many American mycologists, some of whom believed it nothing more than a self-serving ploy to upset taxonomic logic and nomenclatural reasonableness.



Dictyophora duplicata, by V. W. Delafield, 1909. (Courtesy Bard College Visual Resource Center.)

As for Violetta, she was registered as an “Investigator in Taxonomy” and a life member of the NYBG from 1901.

At the Garden, Violetta’s studies flourished under the tutelage of Lucien Marcus Underwood (1853–1907), who was Chairman of the Board of Scientific Directors, succeeding Britton as Professor of Botany at Columbia University. One of Britton’s key lieutenants, Underwood was an expert of ferns and hepatics. His *Moulds, Mildews, and Mushrooms* (1899) helped to popularize mycology just at the moment that Violetta entered the field. As editor of the *Bulletin of the Torrey Botanical Club* he was instrumental in publishing her scientific writing. He allowed her free access to his private collection of specimens and guided her through the herbarium collections of the NYBG, especially those of Job Bicknell Ellis and of Lewis David von Schweinitz at the Philadelphia Academy of Science. Their relationship was cordial and productive. In 1907, tragedy struck the Underwood family. Distraught after losing money in a business deal, Underwood attempted to murder his wife and ended up committing suicide at their home in Redding, Connecticut. Britton was aghast beyond measure at this loss, which not only deprived the Garden of a brilliant mind but interrupted the

publication of a key project, the *North American Flora*. Though his role as her mentor had diminished by this time, Violetta experienced Underwood’s sudden death as an irreparable tragedy.

However, she had found a long-lived friend in William Alphonso Murrill (1869–1957), who was staff mycologist at the NYBG from 1904 to 1924. Murrill had the reputation of a charming southern gentleman, a parlor-room pianist who styled himself “the Naturalist.” He identified hundreds of agarics, boletes, and polypores with names following Britton’s American Code. Murrill identified the fungal pathogen responsible for chestnut blight, founded the journal *Mycologia*, and established the Yama Farms Mycological Club at a Catskill watering hole for the rich and famous. Murrill believed in science education for the masses, and he wrote many popular nature guides (“nature and character books”) apart from his scientific publications. Violetta corresponded with him long before he joined the Garden, and though he guided her toward agaricology, he failed to deflect her interest from puffballs and their allies. For example, *Leptonia* and *Leptoniella* are typically not genera of mushrooms first studied by the beginner, but she identified and painted several exquisite watercolors of these diminutive

pink-spored mushrooms, formerly of the genus *Entoloma*. In her honor, Murrill remembered her with *Leptoniella whiteae*, along with several others: *Scutigera whiteae*, *Pluteus whiteae*, and *Entoloma whiteae*.

Violetta also corresponded with Curtis Gates Lloyd (1859–1926) though they never met personally. Lloyd was a “professional amateur” with the mojo and reputation of a mycological maverick. Heir to the Lloyd pharmaceutical fortune of Cincinnati, Ohio, he was more knowledgeable about Gasteromycetes than most anyone in the field at the time. A cranky perfectionist without affiliation, Lloyd published the journal *Mycological Notes* where he felt comfortable to fling his opinions and barbs about freely. With petulant arrogance he ridiculed the practice of adding an author’s name to a species name as a personal advertisement (though he created hundreds of new names himself), and he mercilessly heckled taxonomists as “name jugglers.” But he knew the fungi thoroughly, his discoveries were rampant thanks to *Mycological Notes*, and his scope of study was nearly global. Violetta shipped him puffball specimens for the Lloyd herbarium, and he acknowledged her contributions in his publications on the Gasteromycetes.

In her research of stalked puffballs, Violetta identified eleven new species of *Tylostoma*; three were named by Underwood. She wrote: “The members of this family are puffball-like plants, which form underground in the shape of rounded masses, appearing at first on the mycelium as minute thickenings, and gradually reaching their full development.” She included her own ink-stippled drawings of fruiting bodies, hyphae, and spores in the publication. Her monograph on the Nidulariales was the first covering North American species. She acknowledged the assistance of Peck, George Francis Atkinson, William Gilson Farlow and “most especially ... Prof. L. M. Underwood, under whose direction the work was undertaken.”³ Her stippled drawings of this group of tiny fungi were exquisite; her work was admired by all. Of the Mount Desert collection of mushrooms, made during a summer vacation in Maine, Peck praised Violetta for the discovery of *Cortinarius whiteae*: “It gives me great pleasure to

dedicate it to its discoverer, a most enthusiastic mycologist from whose specimens, notes, and colored sketch of the fresh plant the description has been derived.” Not all was praise, however. On one occasion she received a testy letter from Professor Theodore D. A. Cockerell of the University of Arizona Agricultural Experiment Station. Cockerell praised her “excellent and lucid account” of the Nidulariaceae but begged leave to express his criticism, writing to her:

I deplore exceedingly that you do not give precise localities for your specimens cited. It would take up little more room and would be so much more satisfactory, especially to workers in local floras. I feel myself injured in a way by having my collections vaguely cited, as the reader may infer that I did not properly label them.⁴

Cockerell’s injury was not fatal, and if his carping discouraged her we do not know it. (Today we might be tempted to reply to him with two words of sarcasm: “Poor baby!”) Amidst all this Violetta revealed to Peck in March 1902 that she had commenced work on a revision of the genus *Geaster* under the tutelage of Lucien Underwood. As early as 1901, Underwood advised her “to get all our species separated as distinct things,” believing that the species determinations of foreign specialists were mostly unreliable. She got as far as a first draft of a long manuscript.⁵

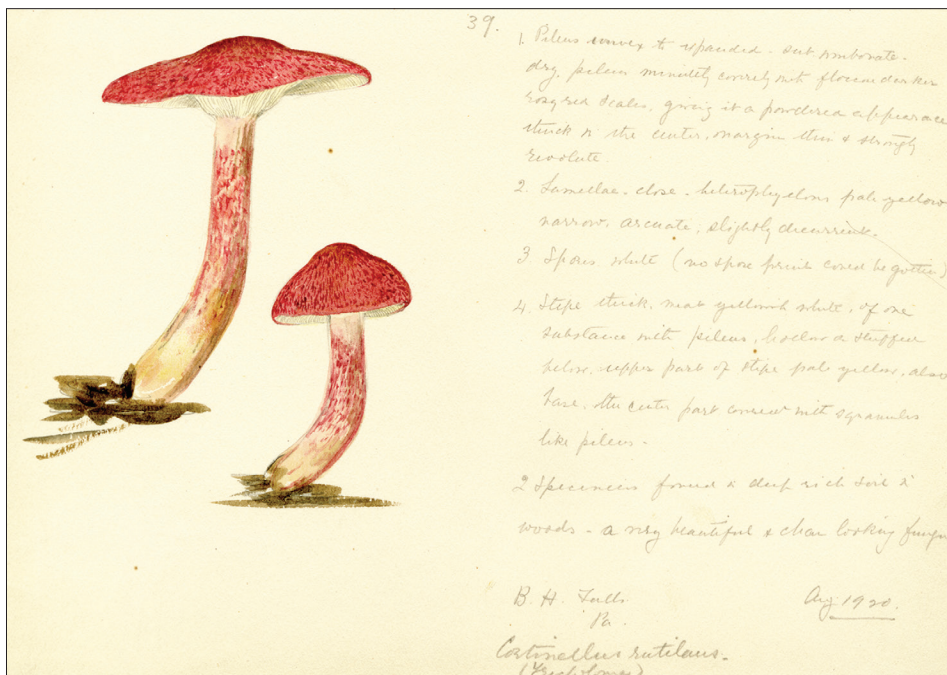
Violetta’s successes in mycology coincided with years of profound personal loss. Early in 1901, just as she was involved with her treatise on *Tylostoma*, her brother Arthur Eli White died. She retreated from her studies in heartbreak but resumed during the summer. Her father’s illness and death followed late in 1903. Underwood offered comfort and encouragement, writing to her, “I trust your splendid vitality will continue and that this summer will give rest to your overworked nervous system.” This sentiment conforms to the male stereotype of the neurasthenic female, but Violetta’s emotional insecurity and pain were based in the actuality



Chanterelles, by V. W. Delafield, 1919. (Courtesy Bard College Visual Resource Center.)

of family illness. After her brother’s death, she wrote strictly on mourning stationery—letters edged in black, as this one to Lloyd in 1903: “Dear Sir: It gives me great regret that I have not had an opportunity to attend to the specimens you sent me, but owing to very serious illness in the family, it has been impossible for me to do so. However, now I hope to get at my microscope and will write you again shortly. My paper on the Tylostomataceae, being my first effort in this line of work is very faulty, and I hope that any work I might do now would be better deserving of consultation, still under present circumstances I have been obliged to finish all personal work of mine.” Her self-deprecating assessment of her own work intimates a sense of rejection by the male science establishment.⁶

On June 14, 1904, at age 29, Violetta married John Ross Delafield (1874–1964), whom she met through his sister Julia, a classmate at the Brearley School. Delafield was forthright, bold, ambitious, wealthy, and he loved outdoor life, natural history, and genealogy. A graduate of Princeton and Harvard, he became a formidable New York attorney who inherited the Montgomery Place estate in 1921. He was a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army, an anti-communist, and a vocal advocate for military preparedness. In 1917, during the World War I, he



Cortinellus (Tricholoma) rutilans, by V. W. Delafield, 1920. (Courtesy Bard College Visual Resource Center.)

organized and trained a corps of 1,400 men for the defense of New York City. Violetta inevitably addressed her letters to him “General John Ross Delafield.” At this juncture her life was entirely transformed. Her mycological work was cut short, and she herself recognized this as a permanent rupture in her scientific career. She became a wife, and then a mother, and her allegiance to her family was paramount. But there were difficulties to come: she experienced four pregnancies; three of her children predeceased her. In 1916, her infant daughter Sylvia died the day after birth. One bereavement followed another.

When the U.S. entered World War I in 1917, Violetta took Red Cross courses in first aid. Her study notes in this subject are as meticulous as her earlier study in mycology. Though pre-occupied with her family and Red Cross volunteerism, she made an attempt to come to terms with her unfinished manuscript on *Geaster*. In 1917, she wrote to Nathaniel Lord Britton requesting the return of her manuscript “read by dear Prof. Underwood at some botanical gathering, and I think it was returned to me, but I have never been able to find it since.”⁷ Britton replied that he had no idea of its whereabouts. She asked him, however, to return her drawings because she valued them so highly. She was not finished with mycology yet. In 1919, the Delafields changed the location of their

summer vacation to Buck Hill Falls, Pennsylvania. Violetta began to collect mushrooms, to paint, and to correspond with William Murrill. She spent three productive summers at Buck Hill Falls, 1919 to 1921. She exchanged specimens with Murrill and directed collections to William Chambers Coker (1872–1953) of the University of North Carolina. Coker was embroiled in research for a large compendium of Gasteromycetes co-authored with John Nathaniel Couch that was published as *The Gasteromycetes of the Eastern United States and Canada* in 1928. Coker cited many collections from Buck Hill Falls, but one wonders whether he understood that “Mrs. Delafield” and “Miss White” were one and the same person as he cited both names for the same species in a couple of descriptions.

During these years Violetta’s *Geaster* manuscript somehow turned up. In January 1920, sixteen years after retirement from her incomplete monograph, she wrote to Murrill for advice about preparing the manuscript for publication. His recommendations were onerous, on the level of advice to a doctoral candidate writing a thesis. He told her to ensure that all species names conformed to the rules of Britton’s taxonomy; to review the works of Lloyd and Saccardo and the *Mycologia* index; and to review the relevant NYBG herbarium specimens. Murrill

admitted “this will take time.” He also acknowledged her precarious health with some realistic encouragement:

If you are to do this and the large amount of work I have in mind for you, you want to get strong and well as soon as possible. If you begin right away, you can turn back the clock about 20 years before it is time to go to Buck Hill Falls for your summer’s work. I shall tell you about this when I see you again.⁸

However, Violetta did not follow through. She had been separated from the intensity of scholarship for sixteen years, and her manuscript “The Genus *Geaster* in North America” remains unpublished; today it is part of an unprocessed archival collection of her papers at the NYBG. Instead, she returned to the refuge of her private study of agarics through her watercolor paintings. In the years that the Delafield family summered in Buck Hill Falls, she produced hundreds of fine watercolors. Most of the originals are held in the archive of the Montgomery Place campus of Bard College; others in the herbaria in the Bronx and Albany.

Violetta’s later portfolio of mushroom illustrations might be seen as her personal allegory of her interrupted career in mycology. This body of artwork is a survey of elegant and statuesque agaric mushrooms, a rendition of the picturesque from an aesthetic ideal that strives to remain true to a scientific purpose. She painted primarily the agarics: gilled mushrooms. She showed no evident interest in polypores other than a single painting of *Fistulina hepatica*. There are also some Gasteromycetes. Violetta not only painted what she saw, she wrote what she saw: a written catalogue of fungal anatomy parallels every painted image. After 1921, there were a mere handful of paintings through 1926. This falling off coincided with the death of her eight-year-old daughter Janet in 1922 whose ear infection caused a fatal systemic infection. This was the age before life-saving antibiotics. Like Beatrix Potter, another famous mushroom illustrator, none of Violetta’s paintings were ever publicly exhibited during her lifetime.⁹

The story of Violetta’s mushrooms does not end in 1926 with her last watercolor and subsequent turn toward horticulture. Her herbarium specimens continue to have fundamental value. In



Geastrum sp. (Courtesy B. Bunyard.)

the 1980s, Rodham Tulloss, authority on the genus *Amanita*, received collections of a large *Amanita* from Maine that fit no existing description. Rod traced and matched these collections to a mushroom that Violetta had collected in Bar Harbor, Maine in 1901, identified as *Amanitopsis vaginata*. Charles Peck described it from her watercolor as a varietal, naming it *Amanitopsis vaginata* var. *crassivolvata* in the paper that Violetta had written on the Mount Desert fungi. Rod recognized that this large mushroom differed significantly from any known species in the unconserved genus *Amanitopsis*, and he re-named it *Amanita violettae* in her honor, publishing the new name with his findings in *Mycotaxon*. There have been nine mushroom species named to honor Violetta, but four are no longer current, reduced to synonymy with other names. Most of these names use the species epithet *whiteae*; added to these, the name "*Amanita violettae* Tulloss" also remains current and valid.¹⁰

As a Livingston family descendent John Ross Delafield inherited Montgomery Place in 1921, and the Delafields relocated there permanently in 1925. The famed architect Alexander Jackson Davis contributed his re-design of the mansion in 1844, and Andrew Jackson Downing helped to develop the landscape. Violetta became strongly involved in horticulture and garden design of the property for the balance

of her life. The Delafields managed the estate together, and they appreciated its many associations with healthy living, horses, and horticulture. Soon after their arrival Violetta conducted an inventory of its flora and fauna. She took the lead in developing its gardens, introducing a colonial herb garden, rock garden, alpine garden (the wild garden), and rose garden. Sundials were placed strategically as emblems of the passage of time. She became fond of letting the force of time change her gardens; she allowed them to evolve naturally through the seasons. She joined the Millbrook Garden Club in 1931 and began to design floral arrangements for exhibit.¹¹

Violetta's flower arrangements are suffused with a subdued Orientalism, and many won her public acclaim. A prominent member of the Millbrook Garden Club, she won first prize in the International Flower Show of 1934 and many winning entries thereafter. Her floral arrangements appeared in the World's Fair in 1940. In concert with this, she grew interested during the Great Depression in improving the appearance of farm stands as part of a broader movement to beautify roadsides. In 1935, she and a colleague designed a wooden fruit and vegetable stand with bay windows and shelves for farm products to be entered by the Millbrook Garden Club at an annual flower show at the Dutchess County Fair. The entry won first prize. The farm stand was

then displayed at the 1936 New York Flower Show to win the bronze medal in the Garden Club of America section and then on to the New York exhibit of Rural Arts during the 1937 Agricultural Exhibition in Washington. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt saw it and found it praiseworthy. Today, the Montgomery Place Orchards Farm Stand is a local legend, open for the sale of fresh vegetables and fruits during warm weather on Route 9G in Red Hook, NY. On occasion, one might find there fresh wild *Laetiporus sulphureus* for sale.

Violetta was guided by a philanthropic impulse her entire life with donations of fungi to herbaria, of rare books to botanical libraries, and, during World War II, of thousands of books to American servicemen overseas. In 1943, she became a member of the Citizens Committee for the Army and Navy and chair of its Book Committee. During 1944/46 she mailed out over 3,000 books per month to military personnel overseas, many of which she bought and contributed herself. The war years were overloaded with disasters for humanity, and so too for Violetta. Her sister Lucy died in 1943 in Great Britain, and her second son Richard died of pneumonia in the Pacific Theater in 1945. After the war she wrote a final horticultural article, "Plants that survived the war years" in 1946. A long-time smoker, she succumbed to emphysema in 1949 after a long illness.¹²

Mere weeks after Violetta's death, her husband wrote to NYBG Director William J. Robbins for a list of her accomplishments, professing interest in writing her biography. Robbins replied that her activities were "especially noteworthy because they demonstrate how an amateur with the interest and ability can pursue research in science and make substantial contributions." He claimed her two Gasteromycete monographs "were the first general treatments of these groups for America and are still standard works."¹³ Yet this summing up was damning her with faint praise, consigning her to second-class status as an amateur. Delafield accepted this assessment, the biography was never written, and her life receded into the past. But like Edith Wharton, Violetta's life "was a revolution against the idea that a lady should be in everything a mere amateur."¹⁴ The sinologist Simon Leys has written,

“The superiority of the amateur over the professional is an important and provocative notion—all the more provocative because it is not commonly held in Western culture.”¹⁵ Men of science, respected as specialists for their specialized “professional” knowledge, have tended to de-value female workers as “amateurs” when what this subject demands is a revolution in thinking: amateurs are often universalists, and women are the true universalists. Here is our case in point: Violetta White Delafield, who was during the course of her lifetime a mycologist, botanist, artist, horticulturalist, gardener, pianist, botanical historian, floral arranger, landscape designer, domestic manager, mother, wife, grandmother, and friend. She was wealthy, but she lived a life of sacrifice, nurturing her family through all the pains of living and dying, yet cultivating her intellectual and artistic talents all the while. Knowing this, we might grow closer to overthrowing the comfortable prejudice that implicitly devalues amateurs in science.

Violetta White Delafield’s intellectual and artistic endeavors after her early association with the NYBG are marked by nostalgia for the mycological. The Russian film-maker Andrei Tarkovsky once reflected, “Nostalgia is not the same as a longing for the past. Nostalgia is a longing for the space of time that has passed in vain.” It would be presumptuous to impose on Violetta a wish to reverse time as the single interpretation available for her truncated mycological career, for nostalgia can also be a stimulus to the imagination. Tarkovsky insisted that “The preparatory discipline that art demands is not a scientific education but a particular spiritual lesson. Art is born and takes hold wherever there is a timeless and insatiable longing for the spiritual, for the ideal: that longing which draws people to art.”¹⁶ In all her precision of method and intellectual rigor in her study of mushrooms, Violetta was driven by an unspoken spiritual quest in her fascination to know the fungi and advance the science of mycology. She will remain Our Lady of the Gasteromycetes.

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Endnotes

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- V. S. White to Curtis Gates Lloyd, November 24, 1903; Lloyd Library and Museum.
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Mycophile Messages

*fairy ring—as if
by magic, family
around the table*

jelly ears sprout
from a decaying tree

logging into
the mycelium network
—wood wide web

neighborhood gossip
oyster mushrooms
along the telephone pole

let’s keep this troop of morels
just between you and me

psychedelic mushroom
I shed the illusion
of separateness

*Autumn Noelle Hall
& Maureen Virchau*

[A little bit about renga, in case you’re not familiar with it—The two-poet collaborative Asian short form was invented by Garry Gay in August of 1992 and is celebrated in an annual contest by the Haiku Society of America. It consists of an alternating interlinked series of haiku and two-line verses which intentionally convey at least one and usually two themes. The title can be a clue as to what those themes might be. Our themes were mushrooms—of course—and communication.]