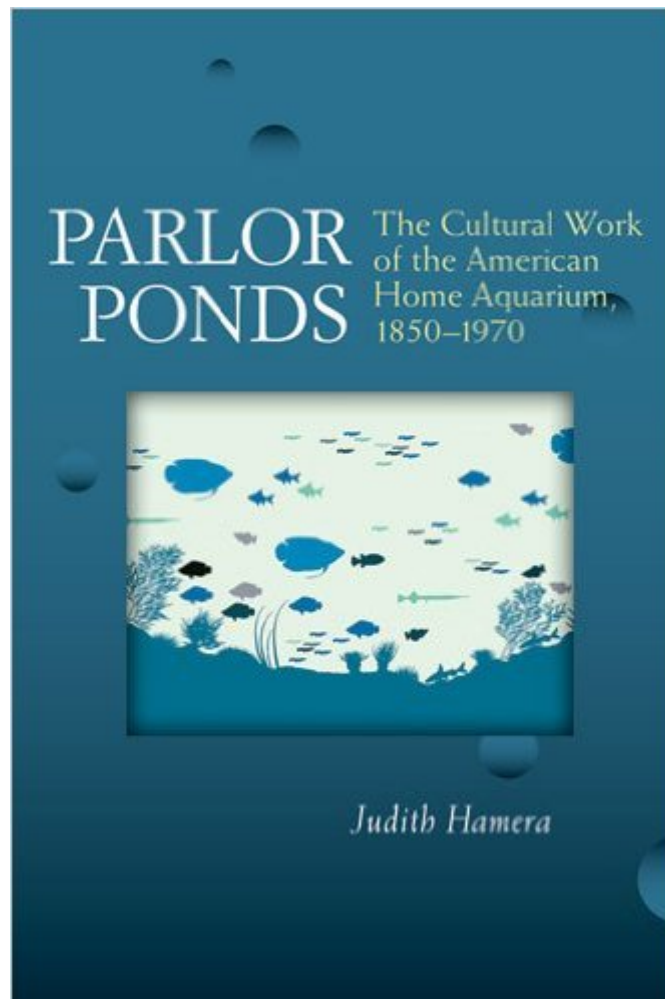


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Parlor Ponds: The Cultural Work Of The American Home Aquarium, 1850 - 1970



Synopsis

Parlor Ponds: The Cultural Work of the American Home Aquarium, 1850–1970 examines the myriad cultural meanings of the American home aquarium during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and argues that the home aquarium provided its enthusiasts with a potent tool for managing the challenges of historical change, from urbanization to globalization. The tank could be a window to an alien world, a theater for domestic melodrama, or a vehicle in a fantastical undersea journey. Its residents were seen as inscrutable and wholly disposable — as deeply loved and charismatic individuals, and as alter egos by aquarists themselves. *Parlor Ponds* fills a gap in the growing field of animal studies by showing that the tank is an emblematic product of modernity, one using elements of exploration, technology, science, and a commitment to rigorous observation to contain anxieties spawned by industrialization, urbanization, changing gender roles, and imperial entanglements. Judith Hamera engages advertisements, images, memoirs, public aquarium programs, and enthusiast publications to show how the history of the aquarium illuminates complex cultural attitudes toward nature and domestication, science and religion, gender and alterity, and national conquest and environmental stewardship with an emphasis on the ways it illuminates American public discourse on colonial and postcolonial expansion.

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Customer Reviews

The following is taken from the introduction to Hamera's book: "My interest in the home aquarium was spawned by deprivation. My parents would not let me have one, and the reason for this deprivation was excess. The aquarium was too much: too much mess, money, space and time."

It was too watery, too chemically, too much a potential replication of too many flushy good-byes to bleached and bloated goldfish found belly-up in countless bowls. It was too much like the microscope, the telescope, the chemistry set, the specimens for dissection bobbing in their formaldehyde-filled baggies - enthusiastically enjoyed until they weren't any longer, demanding storage space, posing disposal problems. And my parents were right. Dr. Hamera, a professor of Performance Studies (read art and music), presents nothing in this book that shows that she has ever owned so much as a goldfish. Hamera uses book endnotes for her sources and explanations. However, to read these book endnotes one has to know the Chapter number since that is how they are arranged at the end of the book. However, the real problem with book endnotes is that they more often than not replace a true bibliography and this is the case with this book. There is no bibliography. The main job of an author is to make sure the readers understand what is being said. Unfortunately Hamera's writing is rife with so much socio-babble that upon comparison, Beowulf is much easier reading. Examples: "These affinities inserted the tank, its residents, and its viewers into preexisting logics of perception and consumption, along with their embedded narrative logics, organizing what and how to see, as well as why."

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