through the slow process of bringing
the book to publication. In 1949
nineteen years after she had begun to
write of Topaz, the story’s central
figure, The Innocent Traveller was
published. It was preceded by Hetty
Dorval in 1947, the first of a total of
six books as well as many published
short stories. All of them are memo-
rable for her distinguished style, per-
fected by years of painstaking rewrit-
ing and revision. Collectively and
individually her works are unique in
their display of a keenly observant
eye for people and place and a com-
pelling combination of humour and
irony. Among her contemporary writ-
ers only Gabrielle Roy’s work has a
comparable grace and humanity.

Both Ethel Wilson and Constance
Lindsay Skinner are well served by
their biographers. In his Preface
David Stouck traces his interest in
Wilson, her life and work, to 1966
when he read her novels in prepara-
tion for joining the English Depart-
ment of Simon Fraser University.
When he first tried to see her she was
in seclusion and unapproachable
because of her intense mourning for
her husband, recently deceased. He
did not meet her until 1976 when
she was already in a nursing home
and plagued by the gradual decline
of her mental powers.

Meanwhile he had become well
known in academic circles as a sen-
tive critic of her work. He has given
us a wonderfully complete study of a
woman who became one of our finest
writers almost in spite of herself and
certainly in spite of the very real
traumas and repressions of her early
years and the crippling arthritis of
her maturity. Until she was com-
pletely disabled she continued to be,
as Stouck terms her, a “grandedame,”
although she avoided centre stage
and certainly in spite of her intense mourning
for her husband, recently deceased. He
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SHE WHO
CHANGES:
RE-IMAGING THE
DIVINE IN THE
WORLD

Carol P. Christ

REVIEWED BY JOHANNA
H. STUCKEY

Carol Christ has done it again! Her
recent book, She Who Changes, is yet
another exciting examination of our
understanding of the divine as female.
In it Christ explicates the works of
process philosophers, primarily
Charles Hartshorne, to produce “a
feminist philosophy of religion.” In
the introduction, she professes herself
surprised to be “waxing eloquent
about a male philosopher, white and
dead, old enough to have been [her]
grandfather.” So am I, since, for most
of her career, Christ has been firm in
rejecting male-dominated religions
and philosophies. However, this new
book, which Christ sees as “the fruit
of a love affair” with Hartshorne,
shows why the latter’s work so
entranced her.

According to Christ, process phi-
losophy regards life as “in process,
changing and developing, growing
and dying,” and, as feminists like
Carol Gilligan have tried to show
about the female self, it sees the self
”as relational, social, embodied, and
embedded in the world.” Not only
that but the divine is “the whole
world.” No wonder theologian Christ
finds this philosophy both satisfying
and implicitly feminist!

In Chapter One, Christ outlines
six “problems with God”: absolute
perfection and immutability, un sym-
pathetic goodness, omnipotence,
omniscience, immortality after
death, and infallible revelation—all
of which contribute to the creation
of the gods of patriarchal monotheisms. In the rest of the
chapters, she discusses process phi-
losophy’s solutions and demon-
In her final chapter, Christ tackles the issue of symbols, the lack of which constitutes, in Hartshorne’s words, a serious limitation in a “purely philosophical religion.” It is in the area of symbol making that Christ sees a feminist process paradigm as being of immense help. It can provide a framework for evaluating symbols for their “life-affirming imagery” and assist in defending usages. Christ then examines some actual symbols, such as goddesses Kwan Yin, Kali, and Sophia, and she explores ways of re-imagining deity symbols in prayers, hymns, and such. In her introductory chapter, Christ had decided to call the deity “God/dess/God,” a practice that she employs throughout the book. She explains: “I understand the divine power to be beyond gender or inclusive of all genders.” In this Christ seems to be opting for a kind of monotheism, called by process philosophy panentheism. It means that “the world is ‘in’ Goddess/God,” and, like monotheism, it has an “intuition of unity.”

In She Who Changes, Christ would have accomplished much if all she had done was to elucidate the arguments of process philosophy to make them accessible to feminist readers. However, she has made another major contribution to spiritual feminism in arguing that what both spiritual feminists and process philosophers need is “a new creative synthesis,” a “feminist process paradigm.”

Though process philosophy shares with feminist spirituality a sense that restoration of the body and “the world body” is necessary, it has often failed to realize how crucial this is for women. Christ suggests that adding feminist insight to process philosophy will move its understanding of the body, the world body, and the divine body from the metaphysical plane to the physical plane. Going back to the six problems with God of her first chapter, Christ states that they are all “based in denial of the changing body and the changing world” and are “rooted in a way of thinking that is inherently anti-female.” A feminist process paradigm helps with re-imagining the divine as in and of the world.

She Who Changes is an important addition to spiritual feminism and feminist theology from its foremost theologian and should be essential reading for anyone interested in the latest thinking in the area.

DOMESTIC DEVILS, BATTLEFIELD ANGELS; THE RADICALISM OF AMERICAN WOMANHOOD, 1830-1865

Barbara Cutter


REVIEWED BY SHERRILL CHEDA

Seldom is history as captivating and illuminating as it is in Barbara Cutter’s fresh look at antebellum women. Using original U.S. and Canadian sources newspapers, essays, poetry, lectures, sermons, books and illustrations—as well as extensive secondary sources, both African-American and white, from the antebellum era, Cutter analyzes the subtle shifts in gender and race relations in America during this crucial period.

Cutter’s catchy chapter headings—“Drunk with murderous longing; the problem of the respectable murderess” and “The ‘Fallen Woman’ in Antebellum America”—are full of novel insights and make for most interesting reading. Cutter explores fascinating cases of white and African-American women accused of murder and how the gender ideology of women as being more moral, religious and nurturing than men (i.e. redemptive), deter-mined their guilt or innocence. Her exploration of actual cases and references to so called “fallen women” discloses a counter principle. “Just as women’s duty as redeemer made them responsible for the nation’s virtue, women who were not properly redemptive actively destroyed the nation’s moral fibre.” Cutter’s brilliant research and feminist analysis of the complex prevailing gender ideology of the time turns many of our previous assumptions upside down. She finds underlying evidence that within this ideology, attitudes towards fallen women slowly changed until they were no longer seen as “evil” so much as women who needed protection. And then the question arose as to who would protect them and it was obvious that it had to be other women. How this gender ideology of redemptive womanhood impacted African-American women in the culture of racism is fully explored.

The ideal of redemptive womanhood was used in a number of ways by both races. Cutter’s analytical skills bring a fresh eye to gender relations in antebellum U.S. as she points out the interdependency between the images of white women and slave women. The notion of redemptive women slowly changed from the 1820s/1830s until the 1850s when it seemed possible for both white and African-American women to be active in the public sphere as well as the domestic. They were able to bring their redemptive skills out of the home and into the public and to advocate against slavery and for women’s rights, as these were moral issues within their domain. Those believing in Women’s rights and African-American’s rights often yoked them together under the “redemptive woman” rubric.

Studying various historians, Cutter