

cant critical quarter to the ambivalent position women occupied as they moved into the arenas of theatre and politics and how, under their pen, generic conventions were disrupted.

Both books are well worth the read. Taken together, they represent a significant contribution to the field of British romantic literature.

MODES OF DISCIPLINE: WOMEN, CONSERVATISM AND THE NOVEL AFTER THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Lisa Wood
Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2003

REVIEWED BY GISELA ARGYLE

Lisa Wood's study adds substantially to current scholarship on the intersections of gender and genre. Aiming at a revisionary, inclusive literary history, she discusses seven British women novelists who belonged to Mary Wollstonecraft's generation but unlike her to the anti-revolutionary camp in the "war of ideas." The authors are Hannah More, Jane West, Mary Hays, Laetitia Mathilda Hawkins, Mary Brunton, and Jane Porter. Unlike their radical colleagues, they readily found publishers, a sympathetic public, and approving critics for their didactic fiction. However, the appeal of their reactionary didaxis became obsolete even in their life-time when after the final defeat of Napoleon Britain seemed safe from the spread of revolutionary ideas. Moreover, literary taste and critical theorizing were changing in favour of "objective" narrative without overt didaxis, such as Jane Austen's fiction. Wood's thesis contradicts the

common evaluation and dismissal of these conservative authors by finding agency even in their complicity with patriarchal power structures. She presents her approach as that of cultural studies rather than literary scholarship. This permits her to disclaim any attempt, otherwise frequent in revisionary histories of "underread" fiction, to recover their once popular novels from readerly neglect and to engage in the question of canonicity.

The study contributes to three major critical enquiries. First, female voice and authority: Wood explores the paradox constituted by the condition of conservative women who fulfilled their prescribed feminine nurturing role as writers of "medicinal" didactic fiction, which requires an authoritarian, that is, "masculine" authorial voice. Secondly, the problem of periodization, in this case of Romanticism: these authors are best described as "Anti-Romantics" as they rejected and campaigned against the Romantic values of 'individualism, solitude, passion, imagination, nonconformity' in favour of "political, social, religious, and literary conformity." Wood rejects any extension of the term "Romanticism" to include her authors, for instance, in a "feminine Romanticism" proposed by Anne Mellor, since that would diminish her authors' explicit opposition to what they saw as "romantic" values. Thirdly, British critical debates on the genre of the novel: the didactic novel and critical concern with the moral message in fiction enjoyed a short dominance to give way to a general rejection didacticism and to critical emphasis on aesthetic rather than moral criteria. In her discussions of individual authors Wood renders these generalizations more complex.

For methodologies, she turns to Foucault's theory of discipline, in *Discipline and Punish*. The title of her book alludes to this debt as well as to the subtitle of a novel by one of her authors. Foucault's third "technology of power," "coercion," which

institutes self-discipline, is "most in evidence in didactic fiction, which takes as its focus the reform of both characters and readers." However, Wood's subsequent conclusions tend towards a conception of her authors as agents as much as subjects of the ideologies of their time, in accordance with Foucault's positive meaning of power, in *Power/Knowledge*. More distinctively, she makes expert and thorough use of Gérard Genette's narratological methodology for close analysis of aspects of the novels in order to produce a nuanced and persuasive account of her authors' diverse and complex negotiations of the political and social power structures. For considerations of the moral effect on the reader, in the absence of such scholarship on publishers, readership, and the market as is so richly available for the Victorian period, she focuses on the "narrate" (Genette) or the "implied reader," in Wolfgang Iser's reception aesthetics, rather than on the historical reader. However, she complements this method with references to periodical reviews. The first chapter introduces the authors and their political and intellectual environment, the changing critical fashions with respect to didactic fiction, and the methodologies and terminology for the study. The subsequent chapters explore the authors' experiments with the novel form until their ultimate abandonment of it in favour of nonfictional moral and religious writings, which most had previously pursued together with fiction, as well as conduct literature and philanthropic activities.

In the introductory chapter, Wood suggests that her study of the anti-revolutionary women authors may extend to a critical understanding of the rhetorical gambits of current neo-conservative women, such as the Canadian Real Women. For this purpose and generally for the non-specialist reader, wider reference to better-known women authors and their practices would be helpful for the sake of comparison. For a longer view, the debate about women and

didactic fiction was resumed in the late nineteenth century with the “new didacticism” of the radical New Woman authors. While scrupulously situating her study in relation to other scholars’ work, Wood mostly relegates her disagreements to the notes, which makes for attractive reading, as do the clarity of her arguments, the economic use of her evidentiary material, and her judicious conclusions.

DIVINE FEMININE: THEOSOPHY AND FEMINISM IN ENGLAND

Joy Dixon
Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University
Press, 2001

REVIEWED BY SAMUEL
WAGAR

Although there is an academic and left political bias in favour of the secular which has shaped historical analysis of the feminist movement of late Victorian England, Joy Dixon argues eloquently and effectively that this movement was seen by many of its participants as primarily a spiritual crusade expressed through political means. It was not, however, a Christian spiritual crusade and, give the bias of Western Euro-American cultures to equate Christianity with religion, the spiritual base of large parts of the feminist movement—in the occultist new religion of Theosophy—has been rendered effectively invisible to historians.

Dixon has opened up a great new avenue of investigation in her excellent book by challenging the secularist bias of analysis of the feminist movement. In addition to the benefit of broadening our understanding of the influences which persist from these predecessors to the mod-

ern feminist movement, Dixon effectively demonstrates that Theosophy was a key link in establishing the feminists as anti-Imperialists (though bringing the ideas of Hinduism into Euro-American culture as honoured and valued sources of insight), that it was highly involved in the key debates of the time around sexuality, defining femininity and masculinity, and that Theosophy was a vital aspect of the third strand of socialist thought—ethical socialism, which was largely eclipsed by social-democracy and Marxism in the 1920s.

She traces the various stages through which the Theosophical Society developed, pointing to the contradictory aspects of notions of the ‘essentially feminine’, ‘Great Mother’ and the type of immanentist spirituality and ‘Orientalist’ Hinduism brought forward by the TS. Many of the debates and developments in the late Victorian feminist movement are stages that the modern movement has also passed through and by demonstrating a spiritual as well as political continuity between the feminist movements of the later Victorians and the present day, Dixon opens up the history of the contemporary movement as well. Theosophy is an ancestor of Wicca and its occultism is directly ancestral to the ritual magic of Goddess spirituality.

The spiritual wing of the modern movement is in danger of danger of detaching the spiritual from the political much as the TS did in the 1920s (although the strong presence of neo-Pagans in Gaia Resistance and the Pagan Cluster at the G8 protests in Calgary in 2002 indicate that the separation is by no means complete), and Dixon’s history of those developments, bringing in the racial discussion, the sexual politics, and sexuality debates of the time, offers a valuable perspective on our own movement.

The links between the different left-wing, counter-cultural, and occultist communities were not limited to the UK in this period. In Canada the two leading feminists of

the day Emily Stowe and Augusta Stowe-Gullen, together with a feminist associate of theirs, Margaret Denison, were among the founding members of the Canadian Theosophical Society in 1891. Leading members of the Canadian TS formed five of the eight members of the founding Council of the Socialist League in 1894, and many prominent intellectual and cultural figures through to the 1930s belonged to the TS.

By reintroducing the spiritual and by broadening out the term to include the occultist and non-mainstream religions Dixon has explained aspects of the analysis and activism of British feminists in the late Victorian period that were hitherto less clear. The research remains to be done in other countries by my own research in Canada indicates that very similar factors were in operation here and that, if anything, Theosophy was even more important in the Canadian feminist left of the time.

THE BITCH IN THE HOUSE: 26 WOMEN TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT SEX, SOLITUDE, WORK, MOTHERHOOD, AND MARRIAGE

Cathi Hanauer, Ed.
New York: Perennial HarperCollins,
2003

REVIEWED BY SHARON
FERGUSON-HOOD AND MARIE
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The Bitch in the House, a collection of essays from 26 women, is an intriguing exploration of love, sex, work, motherhood, marriage, divorce, and growing older. Contributors are from a wide range of