and transliterating readings of conversations between M. Paul and Lucy are offered as "a kind of aural pastiche composed of a series of finally nonpersonal interactions," and when the novel's notoriously ambiguous ending is invoked as implicating the reader in the game of "reading home" as an emplotting of "nonpersonal sociability."

The *Felix Holt* chapter brings suggestively into play the idea of renunciation as essential to vocational commitment, neatly aligning the Rev. Lyon's homekeeping-as-vocation with the renunciations made by both Felix and Esther in pursuit of relocated vocational paths and positioning the argument for its final destination, via *Daniel Deronda*, in which literary professional domesticity "subsumes" another equally powerful story about English national identity. This move rests on the view that the "true" homes of these novels are located in the experience of alienation that coincides with a sense of vocation, and that the home is depicted "not as a real place" but as a metaphoric space where leave-taking and vocation merge. Cohen's book will challenge, though it might not in the end change, the ways in which we understand Victorian domestic ideology.

Jennifer Gribble

Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century Fiction, by Garrett Stewart. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.

Dear Reader

This book looks sexy—*very* sexy . . . it has a hot cover and a titillating title. In fact, whenever I was reading it, or should I say wading through it, people would smile broadly and say to me: "Mmm, that looks interesting." And I'd smile weakly and think: "You've got to be kidding,"—that is until I remembered what it looked like. The cover is great, a detail from an 1853 painting called *The Romance Reader* by Antoine Wiertz. Sounds pretty chaste doesn't it? But in actual fact, it would get anyone's gaze working overtime. The depicted romance reader is not exactly your typical, furtive, shady bower type but rather a voluptuous woman who lies naked on her single bed with her legs slightly apart while she reads an obviously engrossing book. Next to her on the bed is a line up of other books for her future reading pleasure and these books are being surreptitiously stacked up by the devil who crouches unseen alongside her bed. The painting has all the wonderful "in your face" attitude that Gustave Courbet's 1866 painting of close-up female genitalia *L'origine du monde* has—a painting that literally transfixed me for a good half hour when I saw it at the Musee d'Orsay in Paris. But enough about the cover, what about the book? Well, at this point, one has to fall back upon the ever-so appropriate platitude—"you can't judge a book by its cover," and what a shame that is.

There are a few problems with this book. The first is its basic premise. According to Garrett Stewart whenever a writer directly addresses their readership (for example, W. Harrison Ainsworth's 1834 narrative *Rookwood*: "we are going at the rate of twenty

knots an hour . . . and the reader must either keep pace with us, or drop astern" or Carlyle's book of the same year, *Sartor Resartus*: "Forward with us, courageous reader; be it towards failure, or towards success!") readers become conscripted to texts. Stewart puts it like this:

> How exactly does reading, an activity carried out upon an inscription, become a site of conscription? In the event of a reading, fictional structure commandeers a response that it may also structure in replica as a described event. The rhetoric of narration passes thereby to the narration of rhetorical efficacy itself. Whether through direct address or structural parallel, at such times you as reader are not simply inscribed by prose fiction. Instead, as member of an audience, your private reading—along with that of every other reader—is actually convoked and restaged, put in service to the text. Either as an identifying notation or as a narrative event, this reading in of your reading—or of you reading—is what I mean by the notion of a conscripted response. Implicated by apostrophe or by proxy, by address or by dramatised scenes of reading, you are deliberately drafted by the text, written *with*. In the closed circuit of conscripted response, your input is a predigested function of the text's output—digested in advance by rhetorical mention or by narrative episode. As independent reading agent outside the story, your relegation by text to a delegate of attention within it converts you to either a second or third person, either an addressee or a character, even if, in the latter case, only "the reader." (8)

Stewart is more than a little worried about readers' rights. He is concerned that by being hailed, readers enter texts only in a manner of speaking. Rather than being "well met" free agents they become instead disenfranchised figures of speech. If this is the case, then why haven't readers over the centuries thrown down their books, taken to the streets and protested? I'm all for rights of any description and I'd willingly trample on my glasses for a just cause, but this gentle reader finds it hard to get hot under the collar about trope abuse. Yes, one can become a figure of speech if one allows oneself to become a figure of speech. I don't know about other readers but I've always felt that I could put down or cast aside a book at any point. However, this may be a problem for Stewart; perhaps he has unnecessary qualms about abandoning authors. I've never felt compelled to serve an author and I've never felt that I was forcibly enrolled in an author's rhetorical system. But some readers might be impressed with notions of conscription; after all, conscription has a sexy ring to it.

The second problem with this book is that it is needlessly and unrelentingly abstruse and turgid. Stewart certainly has a command of the English language but this command can in no way be thought enviable. Why? Because one very important word is missing from his vocabulary—lucidity. There is little likelihood that Stewart will be able to conscript an audience let alone a willing reader. *Dear Reader* is for the most part painfully difficult to read. Admittedly, however, there are readers that find the prospect

of being hit with weighty words attractive, people who enjoy what they call a disciplined reading. Such readers could quite readily become slaves to the rhythm of Stewart's somnolent simulacrum of style, and such conscripts would no doubt identify with a sentence like this: "The illocutionary mode of 'directive,' along with the other vocative and imperative forms of reader address, serves to mime a perlocutionary (or extratextual) force that it can only inscribe, never effect" (28). Or how about this: "By address or anecdote, apostrophe or parable, the Victorian novel conscripts the attention it solicits as a wholesale figure for the communicable legibility that alone can channel consciousness within the semiotic immersion of social existence" (30). If those sentences did it for you then you'll be amply rewarded by this book.

The third and final problem with *Dear Reader* is that its premise is hardly earthshattering. Stewart professes to trace the development of the interpolated audience in nineteenth-century fiction but the development is, in Stewart's hands, by no means clear and the whole exercise seems quite pointless. His point that the interpolated audience diminished throughout the Victorian period and became virtually phased out with the advent of modernism is so circuitously delineated as to be almost futile. Dear Reader, don't bother.

Shale Preston

***Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud: Victorian Fiction and the Anxiety of Origins*, by Carolyn Dever. Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture 17. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.**

> I merely desire information. Until yesterday I had no idea that there were any families or persons whose origin was a Terminus.
> Oscar Wilde

The first epigraph to the first chapter of *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud* indicates her concern to trace the central role of maternal death in modern narrative accounts of the birth of subjectivity. The importance of the cult of domesticity in general and the maternal ideal in particular has long been a matter for discussion in studies of Victorian culture, and revisionist accounts of the family and of the lives of nineteenth-century women in recent years have emphasised the extent to which attitudes and beliefs may depart from social realities. Dever's study rightly points out that the ideal mother is more often than not the "ghost that haunts the Victorian novel": Victorian fictions typically portray a protagonist whose mother is dead or lost, leaving her child with a mystery to solve that "motivates a formal search for 'origins' in narratives ranging from the orphan discovering the truth of family history to the natural philosopher explicating, in somewhat larger terms, the origin of species" (xi). Paradoxically the maternal ideal assumes its power precisely through the absence of the mother because identity is constructed in the breach in narratives that need to contain all that is transgressive about the embodied mother. Dever examines the symbolic figure of the missing mother in a