

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

range of Victorian and psychoanalytic narratives, including *Bleak House*, *The Woman in White*, *Daniel Deronda*, *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin*, *To the Lighthouse*, and a number of works by Freud, Klein and Winnicott. Another way of explaining the power of representations of maternal loss in these texts—whether through abandonment, dereliction or death—would be to maintain a Foucauldian focus on the normalising functions of discourse and the ways in which historically specific ideologies of family and female identity are implicated in the depiction of “bad” or missing mothers. But Dever uses a psychoanalytic approach which attends instead—and interestingly—to the melancholic structure shared by Victorian fictions and the narratives of Freud and the object-relations theorists who drew upon and revised his developmental models.

In two introductory chapters Dever offers an overview of the missing mother as a symptomatic figure in Victorian and psychoanalytic narratives. The first establishes the representational challenge offered by the spectacle of maternity through the figure of Queen Victoria as monarch and mother, and goes on to examine the ways in which medical discourses of maternity trod a fine line between canonisation of the mother and engagement with the material implications of her embodiment. Examining extracts from midwives’ manuals, annual statistical reports of the Registrar-General and a range of medical journals, Dever provides a fascinating analysis of the extent to which the pressure of the maternal ideal was felt in even the driest actuarial discourses of maternal mortality. She notes that the death rate of mothers in the Victorian novel far exceeds actual mortality rates in the period and finds the explanation for this discrepancy in the novels’ need to reconcile “a maternal ideal with the representation of embodied—and potentially eroticised—female subjects” (19). Dever identifies a paradigm of female disembodiment—established by *Clarissa*—which “coincides [in the late 1830s] with narratives structured around maternal absence” (22) to consolidate the mother as the powerfully disembodied figure behind the Victorian novel: one whose very absence is the source of her utility in enabling the text to negotiate a range of cultural anxieties.

This same figure is structurally central to the accounts of subject formation to be found in psychoanalytic narratives. Dever’s second chapter considers Freud’s discussion of maternal absence in the context of work by Melanie Klein and D.W. Winnicott, noting the ways in which their psychoanalytic theories reproduce the narrative paradigms of Victorian fiction. One of Dever’s most refreshing contentions is “that the analysis of Victorian fiction has as much to teach us about psychoanalysis as psychoanalysis teaches us about the Victorian novel” (3); and her second chapter supports this proposition as she shows how Freud, Klein and Kristeva as theorists are themselves implicated in a *fort-da* game with the mother symbol in their work, thereby suggesting the extent to which psychoanalysis as an institution is pervaded by an anxiety about the mother’s return: an anxiety that is confronted in those Victorian novels in which missing mothers reappear, such as *Bleak House* and *Daniel Deronda*.

Unfortunately this dual analytic focus in which Victorian and psychoanalytic narratives are read backwards and forwards, as it were, so that each set of texts proves instructive to the understanding of the other, is not evenly sustained in the chapters on the novels that follow. Here the psychoanalytic perspective too often takes precedence. To my mind, Dever’s discussion of *Daniel Deronda* is the most compelling with its attention to the novel’s transgression of mid-Victorian genre and gender conventions

and its more explicit historical positioning of the psychoanalytic paradigm that George Eliot's novel is here shown to anticipate. Dever analyses the connection between Daniel and Mordecai, explaining their complex passion for one another as part of Daniel's fantasy of maternal reunion and using the psychoanalytic perspective to illuminate the emergence of "a specifically maternal form of relating" (159) in the novel. In the female characters of the novel Dever shows George Eliot deploying the conventions of the Gothic—with its emphasis on the uncanny, the sexually transgressive, and its central trope of the missing mother—to explore the implications of objectification and to critique domesticated femininity as bondage and captivity. *Daniel Deronda* explores the crisis which arises when the missing mother returns: "When that mother speaks up, she announces her final departure from the stage of Victorian fiction, not in yet another long-suffering death, but in a rejection of the lexicon of feminine convention" (175).

Dever's chapter on *Daniel Deronda* is a stimulating demonstration of the powerful presence of the Gothic behind Victorian melancholic narratives of maternal loss. Thus it is all the more strange to find no reference to the importance of Gothic influences in the discussion of *The Woman in White*. Dever reads this novel as a "domestic detective fiction" (109) with the dead mother, Mrs Fairlie, positioned as "the unreadable and disturbing centre of the novel's detective plot" (111). But this narrow focus on the mystery plot surrounding the identity of Anne Catherick and Sir Percival Glyde's secret ignores the peculiar generic hybridity of the sensation novel's form: there is another missing "mother" here—Ann Radcliffe—to whom Collins is indebted for his figuration of domesticity and marriage as nightmare and for his magnificent Gothic villain Count Fosco, whose nationality recalls Radcliffe's last novel. Despite his crucial implication in the novel's concern with gender redefinition, and despite the fact that it is Fosco's brilliant conspiracy which turns Laura into a revenant and provides the occasion for Walter's quest to surpass the maternal and bring about the symbolic rebirth of his wife, he is never mentioned in Dever's account. A similarly partial reading limits the analysis of *Bleak House* which deals exclusively with Esther's narrative, ignoring the dialectic between the two narrators which must impinge on any reading of Esther's self-fashioning as well as the fact that much of Lady Dedlock's story is allocated to the omniscient narrator.

Dever's focus on the relationship between autobiographical and detective plots is given a new twist in her account of *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin* as a "parthenogenetic phantasy." Casting himself as the evolutionary subject, Darwin translates the phylogenetic narrative of origins into an autobiographical mode in such a way as to construct "a supplementary parental structure, in which he is father and mother alike" (199). In her concluding chapter Dever examines Virginia Woolf's "Victorian novel," arguing that *To the Lighthouse* "refigures the central conventions of life-writing in both Victorian and psychoanalytic contexts" (203) by moving the mother's death from the beginning to the middle of the novel, and by providing her with a private, interior life through which she emerges as a subject on her own terms. Dever notes that *To the Lighthouse* was written at a moment in the history of psychoanalysis when Freud's phallogocentric theories were being challenged by the mother-centred developmental theories of object-relations; Woolf's response to this institutional conflict is shown in the implications of Mrs Ramsay's death, which "reiterates the

centrality of her powerful presence, even in absence, within the economy of aesthetic production" (211). Dever is similarly concerned to situate the mother at the centre of her scholarly narrative, offering a fresh explanation by way of object-relations theory for the construction of the good mother as a cultural ideal in the Victorian novel. Her book ultimately demonstrates both the enabling and the containing power of the trope of maternal loss.

Catherine Waters

***A.W. Franks: Nineteenth-Century Collecting and the British Museum*, edited by Marjorie Caygill and John Cherry. London: British Museum Press, 1997.**

I think I may fairly say that I have created the department of which I am now Keeper [British and Medieval Antiquities and Ethnography], and at a very moderate cost to the country. When I was appointed to the Museum in 1851 the scanty collections out of which the department has grown occupied a length of 154 feet of wall cases, and 3 or 4 table cases. The collections now occupy 2250 feet in length of wall cases, 90 table cases and 31 upright cases.

A.W. Franks (1893)

As the title of this quality publication suggests, this is not merely a general book about nineteenth-century collecting. It is a collection of essays focusing on Augustus Wollaston Franks, doyen of the British Museum who in his active career from 1851 to 1897 was largely responsible for the quality and diversity of the British Museum's collection. This biographical approach to the topic makes for a readable foray into the history of Victorian collecting which, whilst a very different experience from the more general texts on the subject, is just as enlightening. In many ways the book resembles a long overdue Festschrift—marking as it does the centenary of Franks's death—and the reader can be left in no doubt as to the debt owed to Franks's diligence and scholarship, as well as, in a more general way, the important role individual personalities have had on the development of national collections.

Because of the biographical focus of the book, fifteen of the seventeen chapters concentrate on Franks's role within specific collecting areas, and despite the breadth of Franks's collecting interests he was no shallow dilettante. Considering himself a public servant dedicated to collecting for the benefit of the nation, Franks was also fulfilling a personal need, declaring in 1893, "Collecting is an hereditary disease, and I fear incurable" (318). To his credit, Franks contributed a good deal of his personal income to the British Museum's collection, either by subsidising purchases or through outright gifts. Although primarily a medievalist, he was swept up in the wave of interest in prehistory burgeoning in the middle of the nineteenth century and became a widely published professional at a time when few archaeologists or historians existed beyond amateur societies.