

REVIEWS

***Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Woman Embrace the Living World,*
by Barbara T. Gates. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998.**

Barbara T. Gates is the author of *Victorian Suicide: Mad Crimes and Sad Histories* (Princeton UP, 1988), and co-editor, with Ann B. Shteir, of the volume *Natural Eloquence: Women Reinscribe Science* (Wisconsin, 1997). The present work combines her interest in the compelling narratives of individual Victorian women's lives with an attempt to provide a cultural framework within which to understand the lives of those women who contributed to a general redefinition of the meaning of "nature" in the wake of Darwin's work. *Kindred Nature* surveys the lives and work of women collectors, illustrators, animal rights activists, writers of popular works on natural history, gardening experts, and travellers. This breadth is the book's greatest strength as it allows Gates to trace general attitudes towards nature as manifested in a wide range of activities and media.

While this broad reach also leads to some occasional inconsistencies in depth, the overall effect is to validate Gates's claim that "the diversity of the women in this book—some feminists, some clearly not; some religionists, some clearly not . . . complicates and challenges contemporary assumptions about women in earlier periods" (249). In fact her title notwithstanding Gates's study suggests that not all of the women who were intimately engaged with nature could be said to "embrace the living world": some of the "hunting narratives" she studies were written by women whose "imperialist hunting mentality" (212) is evident in the distance and condescension of their writing about the animals they hunted. Nevertheless the majority of Gates's examples show that nineteenth-century women thought and wrote about nature in a distinctive and often highly sympathetic mode that separated them from their more "professional" scientific male counterparts.

Gates effectively demonstrates that this separation was caused by a combination of the women's different strengths and the more limited opportunities afforded them. Generally excluded by the formal scientific community both in terms of education and in terms of the recognition they received for work done independently, women carved out niches for themselves as popularisers of scientific ideas by mediating between the increasingly professionalised writing of scientists themselves and a wider public audience.

The book is divided into three main sections, each with two to four subsections with four or five subheadings creating an array of topics that, while making it a bit difficult at times to see the overarching argument, is an indication of the richness of Gates's subject. Part One, "Women on the Edge of Science," focuses on women (including Beatrix Potter, Mary Kingsley, Eleanor Ormerod, and Marianne North) who were involved in natural history in a variety of capacities. Gates contends that women made important contributions in three areas—collection, illustration, and close observation—that are often devalued in relation to "breakthrough discoveries and theoretical conjectures" (67). She shows that women's work in these areas was necessary to the success of many men whose published books contained beautiful,

accurate, but unacknowledged illustrations, or whose research depended on a supply of fossils, rock, or insects collected in the field by women of considerable expertise.

Part Two, "Nature's Crusaders," focuses on women who lobbied vociferously on behalf of animal rights or other environmental issues. In addition to discussing the familiar examples of activists Octavia Hill and Frances Power Cobbe, Gates focuses on several women "visionaries" (Anna Bonus Kingsford, Rosa Frances Swiney, and Florence Douglas Dixie) whose work took on a "messianic" (144) tone that Gates links to a nineteenth-century tradition of "religious authority" given to women preachers (145). Gates also tries to project this tradition forward into our own time by describing these women as "ecofeminist" and "womanist to the core" (157).

Part Three, "Storied Nature," identifies the different subgenres within nature writing to which women contributed such as "garden writing," "hunting narratives," "fishing logbooks," "animal biographies," and beast fables. Gates is particularly interesting when she describes the way in which these genres could be combined with other popular subgenres such as domestic romances and how-to guides to create "ingeniously hybridised literary forms" (199). This section concludes with a brief discussion of several fictional works—W.H. Hudson's *Green Mansions*, *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett, and *Gone to Earth* by Mary Webb—that were Gates convincingly suggests influenced by the view of nature presented in the non-fictional texts discussed earlier.

The sort of textual analysis that dominates Part Three makes that section the strongest and most coherent of the book. The organisation of the earlier sections occasionally suffers from the perceived need to stop and fill in background information, sometimes in an inescapably cursory way on such large topics as the education of women in the nineteenth century, the Contagious Diseases Act, or theories of the sublime and the beautiful. Similarly the pace of the narrative seems to falter a bit when contemporary critical perspectives surface sporadically but are not sustained. While the book is admirable in its effort to situate its topic in the larger context of Victorian culture some of its generalisations, like the statement that "these women did not allow their lives to be negatively overdetermined by their culture" (101) or the casual labelling of a male doctor's views as "elitist and classist," (20) can seem a bit offhand or simplistic. A book that makes this important a contribution to feminist cultural history should not feel the need for obligatory critical correctness.

In fact detailed and sensitive textual analysis is a linchpin of the book's strongest points throughout. Gates examines the many different genres of writing at hand with consistent sensitivity, and does a wonderful job of showing the nuances hidden in apparently routine or objective description, noting for example the "combination of polite deference and ironic deflation in the name of self-authorisation" (95) in a passage of Mary Kingsley's writing. Gates also describes Kingsley's position as a researcher and cataloguer as being analogous to that of "an advanced PhD candidate today" (92) and her adeptness at placing these idiosyncratic and marginalised figures within a variety of contexts that show the structural similarities in their positions provides important support for her argument.

Kindred Nature concludes by suggesting that the attitudes and gestures seen in these women's writings and lives are traceable in twentieth-century nature writers like Rachel Carson, Annie Dillard, and Gretel Ehrlich. While the book grapples heroically

with larger questions involving Darwin's legacy and the origins and pitfalls of biological determinism, ultimately it is less concerned with tracing a general theoretical lineage than with revealing more specific stylistic and thematic patterns in women's writing about nature. Gates's analysis of the cross-fertilisation of different scientific and non-scientific genres gives the reader a taste of the abundant fruit that resulted and also demonstrates the importance of a cultural history that examines the genetic makeup of a body of writing—nature writing—that continues to grow in importance today.

Alison Byerly

***Fiction and the Law: Legal Discourse in Victorian and Modernist Literature,*
by Kieran Dolin. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999.**

This book is both a significant contribution to the criticism of Victorian fiction and a decisive intervention in the expanding field of Law and Literature. Dolin grounds his approach in both disciplines: he adduces Ian Watt and John Sutherland to suggest affinities or analogies between the methods of the trial and the novel and he shapes his own readings of literary texts according to the relationships between legal institutions and narratives theorised by Robert M. Cover, late Professor of Law at Yale. Brook Thomas, whose readings of nineteenth-century American literature in *Cross-examinations of Law and Literature* (1987) also draw on Cover, is something of a methodological precursor but the strengths of *Fiction and the Law* are attributable to the energy of Dolin's own analyses.

The book is organised as a series of six chapters on individual novels, from Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian* to Forster's *A Passage to India*, contextualised by two introductory chapters and a brief conclusion. The readings of the novels are unified by an ongoing dialogue or dialectic between the "narrative" and the "normative"—a term which derives from "Nomos and Narrative" an essay by Cover in the *Harvard Law Review* (1983) and which requires some explanation. Cover argues that the normative world we inhabit is known through narratives and is "constituted by a system of tension between reality and vision." It is with the explication of this tension, one version of which is the tension between legal and novelistic narratives, that Dolin is concerned. Cover's distinction between two aspects of *nomos*—the "imperial" or world-maintaining, and the "paideic" or world-creating—is the basis of Dolin's analysis of *Lord Jim*. As Marlow's normative world, an imperial one characterised by "fidelity to a certain standard of conduct," is challenged by Jim's case, so Marlow's ensuing epistemological crisis is also a normative crisis. Jim's attempt to establish a new order in Patusan is decidedly paideic but as Dolin's analysis of Jim the law-giver reveals, Jim's utopian fantasy "is formulated out of the facts of English imperialism," specifically the practice of James Brooke as Governor of Sarawak, and the "combination of idealism and cultural domination" that determined the law written for India by the British. The concept of *nomos* therefore unifies the novel, illuminates its conflicts—Dolin says superbly of Jewel's great scene with Marlow that its "dialogic articulation of the fears of both European and Eurasian is precise and prophetic"—and