

drive towards reform never took on a life of its own, but was always propelled forward by strong-minded individuals, many of whom disagreed with each other's policies or went over old ground, and who engaged in the rhetoric with a very familiar Victorian moral fervour. Chief amongst these, of course, was John Stuart Mill

Defining the Nation then is an important work in its demonstration of the way in which focusing on a defining national event, be it political as in this case, or more widely cultural, can allow the historian access to that wider arena of ideas about citizenship and what it is to be part of a nation. I found it particularly useful in its opening-up of possible new avenues in literary studies: enabling a move away, for instance, from the familiar view of the mid-nineteenth century which most of the literature reflects in some way; that is, the effect of the industrial revolution, the hegemony of the urban, commercial and industrial middle class, and so on. Could it, for instance, shed some light on other aspects of the Victorian novel, particularly its means of production. Is it too much to suggest that the marked increase in publishing output in this period has some connection with a partial liberalisation of society generally? While the book does not mention the 1870 Education Act which perhaps might have been more delayed had it not been for the widening of the franchise in the Reform Act, wider access to education is perhaps one of the most striking evidences of this liberalisation in the immediate post-Reform Act era.

Barbara Garlick

***Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, edited by Tracy C. Davis and Ellen Donkin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.**

So, *were* there any women playwrights? Yes, indeed, as one might expect, countless named and anonymous women wrote for English theatre in the nineteenth century. But Davis and Donkin want to render my initial query irrelevant (as well as impertinent) by interrogating the terms of the question itself. By so doing they shift the debate away from name-counting or recuperative exercises which, though worthwhile and necessary, risk achieving little beyond making more women visible in discursive and industrial fields already thoroughly colonised by gendered assumptions. They thus ask us to consider questions not about "play writers" but about the functions of the "playwright," and to look more closely at the masculinist assumptions about authority and professionalism which were formative of the rising category of the nineteenth-century dramatic author. As the editors write in their introduction: "This book is organized as a series of questions which intentionally undermine assumptions about where to look for evidence, what authorship means, why locale matters, and how genre functions" (5). The twelve contributors to the volume show a keen awareness of these historiographic drives demonstrating a fertile conversation where the individual scholars are aware of each others' projects as well as the volume's overall thrust of enquiry.

Tracy Davis develops Jeff Weintraub's concept of "sociability" as a political act defined as "discussion, debate, deliberation, collective decision-making, and action in

concert" (18). The contributors, however, frequently demonstrate that women dramatic writers are precisely the people with minimal access to these sociable lives. Both Ellen Donkin and Katherine Newey, for example, write on the novelist Catherine Gore's irruption into public "debate, deliberation and collective decision-making" when in 1843 her play *Quid Pro Quo: or, The Day of Dupes* won a national competition for "the best modern comedy illustrative of British manners" (55). A committee of theatrical notables unanimously declared *Quid Pro Quo* the best script out of the ninety-seven entrants, and as far as we know was not influenced by reputations or gender since the scripts were submitted anonymously. But unfortunately the secret of Gore's identity leaked and her first night at the Haymarket Theatre found the critics awaiting with pens envenomed and there ensued a vigorous display of British bad manners. Such personalised punishment was doled out to both Gore and her play that the myth of *Quid Pro Quo*'s "failure" has persisted amongst scholars who have read the press reports but not checked the creditable length of the play's run. The playing field might be advertised as level, but a woman winning a race on it was perceived as unconscionably unfair.

The outpouring of bile, bias and wounded *amour-propre* from the professional male litterateurs of the day makes instructive reading: clearly something important was at stake. Given that the production of her play was critiqued by press journalists who, as Gay Gibson Cima demonstrates in her chapter on newspaper criticism, were most likely play-writing rivals as well as supposedly disinterested commentators. Gore incurred a risk common to her male colleagues who had to sink or swim in the same hothouse homosocial ambiance. Yet as Donkin concludes: "When a woman won the contest, something shifted. Suddenly the main issue . . . was no longer which kind of drama was going to be the national drama, but who was going to write it" (71). At a moment where the concept of professionalisation was synonymous with masculinity, and where theatre was already culturally marked by dangerous ascriptions of discursive femininity, the incursion of women into the field of dramatic authorship had to be severely policed if male playwrights were to quarantine it and boost their own status.

Heidi Holder examines the output of women writers for the East End: Sarah Lane, Jessie Ashton and Mrs Henry Young. She uncovers a fascinating repertoire of spirited oppositional drama where female virtue, armed with rags and knife, is far safer on the rough streets than in the salons of the West End, and the street Arab, that bugbear of the respectable bourgeoisie, was most often impersonated by transvestite women. "The escapism of much East End melodrama represents a very specific escape, from the confining and damning images purveyed by outsiders from the West" (189). While East End stage heroines at least could act passionately and publicly, no such licence was granted to the "lady" playwrights of Katherine Newey's chapter: Felicia Hemans, Isabel Hill, Caroline Boaden, Elizabeth Planché, Emma Robinson and Catherine Gore. The category "lady" and that of "playwright" are in explicit contradiction when the latter is already defined as masculine-specific, and where "ladyhood" is awarded specifically to the middle classes to contain and control the least display of educated female energies. Relatively higher class status was of little actual help in attaining professional credibility. Susan Bennett's chapter "Genre Trouble" survey the more closeted tragedies

of Joanna Baillic and Elizabeth Polack, showing that genre innovation if performed by women may be read not as exploratory but as incompetence. Searching further into the closet, Denise A. Walen investigates some of the many literary dramas about Sappho written by women in the period, arguing for lesbian homoerotic meanings which might actually find fuller flowering in the private/public space of the closet than on the stage. Finally Susan Carlson rounds off the century by looking at comedy written by women in the reactionary 1890s, when Pinero, Jones and Grundy reigned over an overtly anti-feminist West End repertoire. She demonstrates that, while many women leaned into the dominant anti-New Woman public sentiments, some, such as Dorothy Leighton and Clotilde Graves, were able to publicly suggest other possibilities for their heroines than a curtain-line subjected marriage.

Davis also sets the context of the volume's enquiry into the scope and agency of women's play-wrighting by questioning the valorisation of professional over amateur theatre as sites for acts of public sociability, extending enquiry to female writing activity in the home and school, and even closer to drama. Here the discipline boundaries between theatrical, dramatic and literary history are being eroded as we are asked to consider as relevant any site where "socializing and cultural production both occurred" (21). Davis exhorts us here not to perpetuate the Victorian fantasy of the absolute split between the public and private spheres, with women situated firmly in the latter which is then misrepresented as depoliticised. She questions too the already suspect fetishisation of the "professional" which dismisses play-writing with local, limited or "merely" domestic outreach. Even closet drama is in implicit dialogue with its culture, historical moment and generic predecessors, and hence in a vital sense a public act. While some may find problematic this dissolution of useful and even essential categories, such as the richly polyphonic and historically situated meanings specifically mobilised by realised performatives, as distinct from readerly, textual reception. Davis is signalling a vital paradigm shift in how cultural production may be theorised.

From another angle, Jacky Bratton, Jane Moody and Jim Davis attach the singular notion of the "play-writer" by considering the role of significant performers in the authoring of performance texts. Bratton examines the fertile writing career and repertoire of the actor-manager Jane Scott, founder of the Adelphi Theatre, arguing that after the Theatre Regulation Act of 1843, when as we have seen in Gore's case the stakes grew higher, "her removal from history began" (77). She situates Scott's career at the historic nexus when the young turks of reform clamoured for the downfall of the aristocratically identified patent system, deploying a rhetoric of the "decline of the drama" so successfully that it survives to this day as historiographic "fact." Moody most usefully summarises the significance of the formation of the Dramatic Authors' Society in 1833 with ladies as honorary members only—no public sociability for them. Theatrical creative agency, Moody argues, can best be located "in intricate, often uncertain relationships between performance, management and authorship" (102). Her examples are the prominent actor-managers Eliza Vestris and Céline Céleste; active in extravaganza and pantomimed melodrama respectively. Who "authored" their plays, Planché and Buckstone or these powerful female director-performers? Certainly *The*

Green Bushes and *Flowers of the Forest* became such Céleste-identified vehicles that, as with Irving in *The Bells* or J.C. Williamson in *Struck Oil*, their literary collaborators have largely dropped from cultural memory. Jim Davis offers similar speculations about the East End repertoire of the actor-manager Sarah Lane at the Britannia, arguing for expansion rather than diminution of concepts of both authorship and translation.

This performer-driven interrogation of dramatic “authorship” in favour of collective authorship of the spectacle (including the agency of the audiences) is a well-established line of argument within theatre scholarship, and would operate as effectively without the factoring in of gender. Here gender concerns are passengers in an already operative historiographic trend. If one accepts the conclusions of these scholars, then “authorship” should be extended to all the women and men who laboured in the collaborative arts of popular theatre in the nineteenth century. While maintaining some unease at this broad-church approach, with its potential dissolving from view of specialised contributions to theatrical crafts, I would have little basic problem with this democratising development. In fact I’d welcome the radical interrogation of dramatic authorship as a strategic assault on those specifically high-art Modernist demiurgic heroes: the Playwright and above all the Director. These masculinist self-fashionings successfully created, through their narratives of revolution, transcendent talent and unique creative authoring of the spectacles, enduring avant-garde fantasies now overdue for a severe overhaul even as Author and Director continue to duke it out for theatrical authority. Scholars and popular theatre are inescapably aware of the material and institutional conditions of cultural production; its interactive and collaborative nature with historical moment, immediate audiences and craft colleagues. This well-researched and provocative feminism-driven volume launches such a central historiographic critique from within the disciplines of nineteenth-century popular theatre scholarship and feminist history, and calls for a wide readership well beyond its primary audience of Victorianists.

Veronica Kelly

***The Book Beautiful: Walter Pater and the House of Macmillan*, edited by Robert M. Seiler. London: Athlone Press, 1999.**

Walter Pater, like Dante Gabriel Rossetti before him and William Morris, James MacNeill Whistler and Oscar Wilde after him, believed that the book should be thought of as an aesthetic object. One of Pater’s primary objectives, therefore, was to exercise control not only over the content of his writing, but also over the shape and form of its publication. Robert Seiler’s *The Book Beautiful* records in great detail the relationship that eventuated between the author and his publisher by presenting in one volume a complete collection of the Pater-Macmillan correspondence, 189 letters in all. These letters exemplify the role Pater played in the bibliographical aspects of textual production, such as page layout, typography, paper selection and binding, a role normally reserved for the publisher. They also illustrate the challenges faced by