

Critical Voices: Women and Art Criticism in Britain 1880-1905 by Meaghan Clarke. Aldershot, Hants, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005. xi, 214 pp. + 37 b/willus. ISBN 0-7546-0815-8. \$99.95; £55.00.

Meaghan Clarke's *Critical Voices* sets out to fill a gap in the history of art by focussing upon writings of women journalists in the late Victorian period. The period is well-chosen since it defines an age of professionalization within journalism, covers the development of what became known as the New journalism, and includes one of the century's periods of dramatic proliferation of periodicals. Coincidentally, the "expansion of connoisseurship, and the institutionalization of the museum and art scholarship," contributed to the professionalization of the art critic. Arguing that women's involvement in art debates has received scant scholarly attention, partly because of emphasis on signed work in volume form, Clarke bases her book upon an impressive body of essays, reviews, and commentary culled from contemporary periodicals. She has discovered hundreds of articles by women, and deserves particular credit for her painstaking work uncovering the authors behind anonymous and pseudonymous contributions. She has spread her net widely, encompassing art journals, monthly reviews, and popular weekly papers alongside more obscure specialist journals like the *Tablet* and the *Woman's Signal*.

Clarke widens our knowledge of "feminist interventions in politics and visual culture" and provides compelling evidence of the complex interdependence – culturally and commercially – of journalism and art. Her most ambitious aim, however, is to "challenge existing narratives of 'Victorian' and 'modern' art history" in order to demonstrate that, far from art criticism being a masculine genre in terms of its public impact, women played a key role in discourses on contemporary art.

The main body of the book consists of a general chapter, "Art Criticism: Patterns and Opportunities," and separate ones devoted to Alice Meynell, Florence Fenwick Miller, and Elizabeth Pennell, chosen for their range of publications and as illustrations of "the diversity of art-critical approaches." Such a plan has advantages and disadvantages. The focus permits an in-depth account of individual careers, albeit broadened by reference to the networks of family, friends, and colleagues active in professional circles of journalism and art. It also allows ample scope for a developed, insightful analysis of their criticism – work largely produced under pressure to meet deadlines and editorial requirements, yet which all three women managed to gear to their personal, political, commercial, and aesthetic agendas.

On the other hand, it requires specific art debates to be located within the context of a particular writer. Although in her short Introduction and Epilogue Clarke summarizes the various interventions of Meynell, Fenwick Miller, and Pennell, the present reviewer, with a background in periodical research from