

## REVIEWS

*Outside the Pale: Cultural Exclusion, Gender Difference, and the Victorian Woman Writer* by Elsie B. Michie. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993. ISBN: 0-8014-8085-X. \$34.95 (cloth); \$13.95 (paper).

As Judith Newton remarked several years ago, many of the insights about gender, sexuality, and property that have transformed current perspectives on Victorian literature and culture were initially developed by feminist critics. Elsie B. Michie's *Outside the Pale: Cultural Exclusion, Gender Difference, and the Victorian Woman Writer*, a distinguished addition to Cornell University Press' Reading Women Writing series, illustrates and amply documents the continuing contributions that feminist criticism has made to the analysis of Victorian culture. Reading novels by five major English novelists, Michie demonstrates how specific discursive models of "femininity" shift in the course of the nineteenth century as "what is repressed or denied in the dominant culture changes" (1). While the problem of defining the feminine in Victorian literature is hardly new, Michie takes an original approach to her subject and cites an interesting array of sophisticated neo-Marxist and feminist theory in her exploration of "how discourses having to do with gender work together with politics, economics, colonial thinking, or class relations" in the texts she analyzes (7). Michie begins with a refreshing analysis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, devotes one chapter to Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, two chapters to Elizabeth Gaskell's novels, and one chapter to George Eliot's *Middlemarch*.

Michie's approach to *Frankenstein* displays some of the particular strengths of her approach to her subject: her grounding in Marxist thought, her careful attention to historical context, and her perceptive readings of important passages in these novels. In this chapter Michie shows how the monster's sutured body can be read as displaying cultural anxieties about new processes of production that began to alienate producers from the products of

their labor. Citing several persuasive passages from Marx's "Alienated Labor" and other writings, Michie shows how Mary Shelley's insistence on the materiality of the monster's production exposes what was "repressed by Romantic theories of creativity."

The centerpiece of this study are two chapters on Elizabeth Gaskell's writing, which present Michie's most important contribution to Victorian scholarship. Gaskell's correspondence with Charles Dickens during their collaboration for *Household Words* shows the double bind that publicity created for a woman writer as concerned with respectability as Gaskell necessarily was. Michie then compares Gaskell's treatment of the fallen woman as redeemable in *Ruth* with Dickens's treatment of Lady Deadlock as inevitable sacrifice in *Bleak House*. Having created this finely textured historical context for her analysis of Gaskell's novels, Michie convincingly shows in her brilliant analysis of *Mary Barton* and *North and South* how the figure of the fallen woman displaces and disguises inherent contradictions in middle-class attitudes about upward mobility and the working classes.

The chapter demonstrating the "simianization" of the Irish in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is somewhat less convincing, perhaps because the compressed organization of this chapter forces a surprising elision of fundamental differences in the class positioning of Heathcliff and Rochester. Michie's analysis of *Jane Eyre* seems caught in a false duality that Brontë's novel explicitly refutes; that is, to borrow Michie's words, that men and women must "dominate or be dominated." As Nancy Armstrong has shown in *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, nineteenth-century notions about romantic love popularized by the middle-class novel, and by Brontë's novel in particular, typically inhibited middle-class women's—and men's—ability to recognize their desires for domination. Michie's discussion of Rochester could also have been enriched by the inclusion of recent neo-Marxist readings of the Byronic hero, especially the work of Jerome Christensen. In discussing the