

Sisters Relation and Rescue in Nineteenth-Century British Novels and Paintings by Michael Cohen. London and Toronto: Associated UP, 1995. 187 pp., 81 illustrations. ISBN 0-8386-3555-5.

The Daughter's Dilemma Family Process and the Nineteenth-Century Domestic Novel by Paula Marantz Cohen. Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1991. 226 pp. ISBN 0-472-10234-6, \$37.50 (cloth); ISBN 0-472-08232-9, \$19.95 (paper).

The two books under review examine novels by major writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with regard to relationships between the sexes. *Sisters* presents a thematically challenging dilemma of how women are viewed, which connects two modes of artistic expression initially, but ultimately expects the reader to extend the literary/artistic connections. *The Daughter's Dilemma* carefully constructs a reading of father-daughter relationships within five novels according to family systems theory: *Clarissa*, *Mansfield Park*, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Mill on the Floss*, and *The Awkward Age*. Both books are concerned with the boundaries of convention. *Sisters* declares the 19th-century artist unable to cross the boundary and directly confront the issue of a woman's nature embodying both good and evil. In contrast, *The Daughter's Dilemma* reveals the culture's ideological limitations and potentialities, making visible the transformation of what appeared to be a closed form, the domestic novel tradition. Systems theory helps identify the progression from the original open system to the closed one.

Michael Cohen's *Sisters* is based on the premise that contemporary portrayals of sisters in paintings and novels reveal the same understanding of relationships. To establish the connection between the two art forms, Cohen begins with a thorough, persuasive reading of Augustus Egg's *The Traveling Companions* from which he derives a "grammar of sisterhood": "Egg's twins, for example, are a way of depicting equality acceptably in a society that finds the idea difficult to embody in any other way--a society that may be said not to believe in equality"(24). Although such statements seem to anticipate fuller analysis, Cohen prefers to provide a broader spectrum of sometimes minute variations rather than a meticulous analysis of a few exceptional or representative examples. Thus the book suggests and frustrates at the same time by including a range of artists from Blake, Morland, and Reynolds through the Pre-Raphaelites, Abraham and Rebecca Solomon, Sargent, and Continental paintings from the 16th through the 19th centuries. The selection evokes other examples, such as several paintings by Hogarth who preceded the time period chosen. The particular time parameters seem more a matter of convenience than a delineation of a discrete period and a precisely defined subject. *Middlemarch*, for example, published in 1872, is discussed in the final chapter in connection only with novels which preceded it, whereas novels from the last quarter of the century are virtually ignored. Surely, Thomas Hardy's explorations of the boundary between virgin and whore in his novels merit consideration in this context.