

Mathilde Blind: Late-Victorian Culture and the Woman of Letters by James Diedrick. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2017. xix, 313 pp. + 18 b/w illus. ISBN 9780813939315. \$49.50.

This well-written biography of the politically radical woman aesthete Mathilde Blind is important for several reasons. It changes the way we think about aestheticism, since it shows how women such as Blind were central in aesthetic circles that have been traditionally presented as male dominated, and it characterizes aestheticism as more politically aware than has typically been acknowledged. In addition, it provides a more nuanced view of the relationship between the New Woman and male decadents by indicating the complex relations between New Women such as Blind and decadents such as Arthur Symonds. Finally, it adds significantly to our awareness of how literary criticism about the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley developed, since Blind (who wrote in a variety of genres, but is known primarily for her poetry) contributed significantly to this development in the 19th century.

Using archival material from a variety of sources (including the British Library, Bodleian Library, Harry Ransom Center, and University of British Columbia Library), Diedrick's book emphasizes the biographical, literary, theoretical, and cultural contexts for Blind's work. This biography moves chronologically, but it also characterizes specific periods of Blind's life according to theoretically and culturally informed themes and identities. For example, Blind's early years from 1841 to 1867 are characterized as "The Making of a Cosmopolitan" in chapter 1, where Diedrick highlights how Blind's position as the child of Jewish German immigrants to Britain and her family's participation in radical politics, including her stepfather's involvement in the Baden Uprising, produced a worldly young woman who brought a cosmopolitan eye to even her earliest poetry, written under the pseudonym Claude Lake.

Over the course of her career, Blind also was a "Pioneering Female Aesthete" (chapter 3), "Freethinker and Feminist" (chapter 5), "Polemical Poet" (chapter 6), "Leading New Woman" (chapter 7), and "Bird of Passage" (chapter 8). Within each chapter, there is significant space devoted to analysis of individual works by Blind, including a fascinating discussion in chapter 1 of a typescript held in the British Library: a "fragmentary, retrospective narrative" that may have been a draft of an "autobiographical New Woman novel." This narrative, in which a "precocious, rebellious girl" named "Alma Mornington" is the central character, reveals the specifics of Blind's life while at school in the mid-1850s, including her same-sex desire for one of her schoolmates, named "Amy Carleton" in the narrative. The narrative also highlights the broader cultural conditions for young women's independence