BENJAMIN DABBY. *Women as Public Moralists in Britain: From the Bluestockings to Virginia Woolf*. (Studies in History.) Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell Press, 2017. Pp. xv, 288. Cloth $90.00.

Benjamin Dabby's *Women as Public Moralists in Britain: From the Bluestockings to Virginia Woolf* is an absorbing exposition of the contributions of women to extant and emerging print media and public discourse in Britain in the long nineteenth century. Added nuance comes courtesy of Dabby's adaption of Stefan Collini's *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850–1930* (1991), which sees him depict Mary Ann Evans (pen name George Eliot), Virginia Woolf, and other less well-remembered women writers—Anna Jameson, Hannah Lawrance, Margaret Oliphant and Eliza Lynn Linton, Beatrice Hastings, and Rebecca West—as public moralists.

Dabby's decision to add a more emphatic gender dimension to Collini's notion of public moralism more than twenty-five years after it was first proposed is a measure of his admiration for Collini's approach. It is also indicative of the significant impact that analyses of gender have had and continue to exert on the disciplines of history and literature. It is perhaps unfortunate then that Dabby chose to make his case by emphasizing those early iterations of feminist history produced in the so-called second wave, which portrayed women as "uniformly oppressed or in retreat from a golden era of bluestocking culture" (6). By doing so, Dabby—albeit unintentionally—fails to give due credit to the more sophisticated studies of the gendered history of nineteenth-century Britain that exist in work by Anna K. Clark, Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, Jane Rendall, Sarah Richardson, John Tosh, and many others. On closer reading, there is little to disagree with in Dabby's call to move beyond fixed notions of women's writing as a site of resistance to patriarchy and in his assessment of separate spheres as an idealized notion of gendered behavior that was regularly transgressed.

In the chapter on the writings of the anti-suffragist feminist Linton, Dabby rightly acknowledges that women moralists' recognition of gender difference and inequalities did not begin or end with the demand for political enfranchisement; nor was the vote necessarily the most radical aspect of the reforming agenda of those campaigning for greater rights and freedom for women. While Dabby's observations are undoubtedly salient, again, there is much here that tallies with existing work, notably Julia Bush's *Women Against the Vote: Female Anti-Suffragism in Britain* (2007), Lucy Delap's *The Feminist Avant-Garde: Transatlantic Encounters of the Early Twentieth Century* (2007) and Ben Griffin's *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women's Rights* (2012).

Some important issues raised in response to Collini's 1991 book apply here too. Dabby asserts that the eight female subjects he has chosen to include in his volume situated themselves in cultural traditions of social and moral commentary. However, as with Collini's study, it is unclear how representative those designated as public moralists really were. To ask the question more directly: Why are these eight women and their writings chosen over other seemingly eligible candidates? For instance, women like Teresa Billington-Greig, arguably one of the most intriguing and radical feminist thinkers in early twentieth-century Britain. Answers to this question should rightly draw attention to issues of class, ethnicity, race, and other characteristics, alongside that of gender.

In many respects, seven of the chosen subjects in this volume combine well. The exception is the final chapter on Woolf. Perhaps because Woolf is so well known relative to the others, this chapter lacks the biographical context that is evident elsewhere, and instead the focus is firmly on her literary output. And while reference is made of the impact of the Second World War on Woolf's writing, the same level of scrutiny is not applied to the writings of Hastings and West, who were similarly affected by major global conflict.

Where Dabby excels is in conveying the richness of the writing of his chosen "women of letters" in the numerous nineteenth-century periodicals he has consulted (1). This volume is a splendid example of the possibilities presented by the digitization of print media, and it is a testament to a huge amount of work. Dabby's appraisal of Jameson's role in the production of picturesque history is particularly rewarding, and he packs this and other chapters with rich sketches of women's past contributions to history. Examples such as the roles of Isabella of Castile, Queen Caroline, and other European female monarchs linger in the reader's mind. The narrative is helped by the inclusion of several superb illustrations—and this is a rare enough feature of modern academic publishing to feel like a welcome bonus. Overall, what comes across brilliantly is the significance Jameson, Lawrance, and the others placed on history—and specifically how they portrayed women's role in history—as a vehicle for raising awareness about women's crucial role in Britain's moral and social progress. It makes the possibility of further study in women's use of history to make sense of their own and their nation's past, present, and future—ideally one that reaches beyond intellectual elites—a very exciting prospect.

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