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Review of *The Bright Work Grows: Women Writers of the Romantic Age* by Jonathan Wordsworth; and *Closet Stages: Joanna Baillie and the Theater Theory of the British Romantic Women Writers* by Catherine R. Burroughs

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gendered epistemologies for reading work important to women's cultural history. It calls on feminists who take women's experiences as their touchstone to consider another kind of epistemology, not least to compare empirical and "epistemological" theories of "feeling" and "experience"

(71). Many of us are more than one of the above, critic, historian, feminist. This only ensures that after reading Pinch's book we'll come away more haunted than ever by "phantom feelings" and "fond and wayward thoughts" (111, 106).

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**Catherine B. Burroughs, *Closet Stages: Joanna Baillie and the Theater Theory of British Romantic Women Writers***

(University of Pennsylvania Pr., 1997), xii + 238.

**Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Bright Work Grows: Women Writers of the Romantic Age***

(Woodstock Books, 1997), xiv + 283.

A Review by Diane Long Hoeveler, *Marquette University*

The recent publication of these two books—Burroughs' *Closet Stages* and Wordsworth's *The Bright Work Grows*—signals how radically the field of British Romantic literature has changed during the past decade. Ten years ago one would not have thought there was enough material in Joanna Baillie's "Prefaces" to warrant a book-length study, while the women writers that Wordsworth introduces would not have been taken seriously enough to warrant reprinting in the impressive series he edits—"Revolution and Romanticism." Burroughs' book contains a wealth of material not simply about Baillie as a dramatist, but about women as actresses, playwrights, and theater theorists, while Wordsworth's reprinting of works of long-neglected women writers of the Romantic era stands as a major gesture in the history of recovering Romantic women authors.

Catherine Burroughs' book stands as a model of contemporary theory intersecting with the recovery of the major works of a neglected woman dramatist—Joanna Baillie. Her study provides a mass of valuable research on the condition of the theater during the Romantic period, as well as recent feminist theoretical approaches to the male gaze, homoerotic structurings of desire on stage, and the "closet" as metaphor for both mind and body in theater history. The first two chapters explore the larger theoretical issues raised by her study: Romantic women's theater theory, celebrity narratives, women's theories of acting, and the condition of social theaters. The final three chapters focus closely on three of Baillie's major dramas: *Basil*, *DeMonfort*, and her first attempt at a comedy, *The Tryal*. The book concludes with a very useful appendix that reprints major texts containing women's theater theory published in Great Britain between 1790-1850. The footnotes are voluminous and informative, while a bibliography is also provided. As for supporting material, however, I would have appreciated an appendix that provided summaries of all of Baillie's twenty-six dramas. Burroughs

makes a gesture toward filling in the complete picture of Baillie's other works when she summarizes four other comedies (163-65), but more of this would be appreciated by the reader who has not had access to all of Baillie's works.

Burroughs' study is predicated on complicating the concept of "closet" drama, traditionally defined as a masculine genre that privileges mental theater of the sort Byron offered in his *Manfred*. Burroughs wants to resituate the concept of the "closet," claiming that Baillie's closet dramas are not "incompatible with theatricality," but rather that the closet can be "the literal site where one can trace the progress of 'the soul' as it etches its passions on the countenances of men and women during their most private moments. Baillie's theory brings into stronger focus the fact that British Romantic closet spaces contained self-conscious, sometimes ritualized, stagings of events traditionally associated with women's solitary pleasures" (12). Burroughs further argues that a "study of Baillie's early plays suggests the extent to which closet dramas show characters struggling with what are today considered subjects central to gay dramaturgy—that is, the ways in which particular characters comply with or rebel against prescribed gendered and sexual identities in both private and public settings" (16). As such, Burroughs relies heavily on Judith Butler's notion of "performativity," as well as the recent feminist theoretical work of Jill Dolan, Sue-Ellen Case and Janelle Reinelt.

In addition to discussing three of Baillie's works at length, Burroughs attempts to recover the history of British women writers as theater theorists engaged in the process of "constructing a female-authored theater theory before 1850" (25). Here the writers she concentrates on are Anne Matthews, Mary Berry, Anna Jameson, Sarah Siddons, Dorothy Jordan, and Helen Maria Williams. Her other stated intention for the volume is to examine "how British Romantic wo-

men—in a certain sense female actors all—conformed to social strictures for the ‘correct’ performance of feminine behavior while also finding ways to experiment with alternative approaches for enacting feminine roles in the closeted and public spaces of formal and social theaters” (25). This is a rich study, filled with interesting information that would be useful in a variety of writing and teaching contexts.

After reading of Baillie’s importance as a dramatist, it is surprising to read in *The Bright Work Grows*, Jonathan Wordsworth’s introduction to Baillie’s volume of *Poems* (1790): “it seems a pity that such a good writer should have turned to drama in a period when no one quite pulled it off. She had it in her to be a poet of real stature” (66). In Wordsworth’s opinion, Baillie’s “Storm-beat Maid” is “an important poem,” a work that probably influenced William Wordsworth’s composition of the *Lucy Poems* (63-65). Jonathan Wordsworth’s introductions are filled with just such information—erudite, unexpected, and helpful to anyone trying to bring a broader context into her classroom teaching of the Romantic period.

*The Bright Work Grows* usefully compiles a collection of the essays Jonathan Wordsworth wrote as introductions to the facsimiles that the Woodstock Press has published. So undervalued in this country that the series is perhaps better known to acquisition librarians than to scholars of Romanticism, the Woodstock series makes available such works as Charlotte Smith’s *Letters of a Solitary Wanderer*, Joanna Southcott’s *Dis-*

*pute between the Woman and the Powers of Darkness*, Amelia Opie’s *Adeline Mowbray*, Sydney Owenson’s *Wild Irish Girl*, Mary Mitford’s *Our Village*, Caroline Lamb’s *Glenarvon*, and Anna Barbauld’s *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*—all works that scholars today would acknowledge as central to a fuller understanding of the period. In designing a graduate course that would incorporate some of these titles in the reading list, however, I was immediately chastened by the cost of each volume (between \$35. and \$225.). Clearly such a series is financially out of the reach of our students, but the volumes themselves should be ordered by research libraries and made available to students.

It is obviously impossible to summarize Wordsworth’s position on all thirty-seven women writers included in this volume. Suffice it to say that the book is a treasure-trove of information about these women—details about their lives, their publishing histories, their major works, and their influences on the male canonical poets. If I have any quibble with the volume it would be to notice that Jonathan Wordsworth does tend to focus on the influences these women writers had on William Wordsworth’s writings or vice versa more, perhaps, than he does on Byron or Shelley, for instance. But that is, I would think, only to be expected. As for all of Wordsworth’s introductions, they are written with a deft touch, charming, insightful, and in no way ideological. His contributions in opening up the vistas of Romantic scholarship with the publication of this series stands, in my mind, in the same category as J. R. D. J. Jackson’s *Bibliography*.

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**Edward Copeland, *Women Writing About Money: Women’s Fiction in England, 1790-1820***

(Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1995), xviii + 291.  
\$52.95.

**Andrea K. Henderson, *Romantic Identities: Varieties of Subjectivity, 1774-1830***

(Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1996), xiii + 198. \$44.95.

A Review by Toby R. Benis, *Saint Louis University*

In its aim to expand the repertoire of Romantic subjectivities, Andrea Henderson’s *Romantic Identities* manages to be both critically sophisticated and entirely readable. Henderson sets out to situate what she calls the “depth” model of Romantic identity, that sees personality in terms of three dimensions, as only one paradigm among many in circulation during the period. As this summary suggests, the study lacks a unifying premise but instead seeks to offer multiple perspectives on the representation of identity. Nevertheless, many of Henderson’s chapters end up exploring models of identity which are in fact characterized precisely by superficiality or flatness rather than depth, though the consequences of this trait vary from text from text. In general, *Romantic*

*Identities* focuses on texts that are, more or less, within the canon, and Henderson’s challenge to scholarly commonplaces initially seems modest. However, a chief characteristic of this study is its surprising ability not just to revisit, but to breathe new life into, texts and the critical viewpoints brought to bear on them. In the end, *Romantic Identities* is a quietly distinguished book, and all the more welcome for its unassuming intelligence.

Henderson begins with a detour, a brief exploration of the traditional Romantic psychological model she seeks to challenge. But Chapter 1, “Doll Machines and Butcher Shop Meat,” engages this model through innovative reference to