

9-2000

Review: Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living Word

Brenda A. Ayres

Liberty University, bayres@liberty.edu

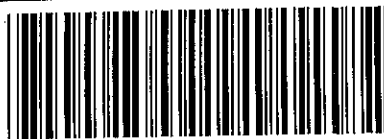
Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/eml_fac_pubs

Recommended Citation

Ayres, Brenda A., "Review: Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living Word" (2000). *Faculty Publications and Presentations*. 4.

http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/eml_fac_pubs/4

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English and Modern Languages at DigitalCommons@Liberty University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Liberty University. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunication@liberty.edu.



ILL: 51319695

Call AS36.V45
Number:
Location: B1
Maxcost: \$0.00

DateReq: 2/25/2009
Date Rec: 2/25/2009
Borrower: VLB

Yes
 No
 Conditional

FEB 26 2009

Request Type:
OCLC Number: 1458163

Source: ILLiad
Affiliation:

LenderString: *VRU,VEH,DHU,EXC,MUM

Staff Email: illoan@liberty.edu

Billing Notes:

Title: Victorians Institute journal.

Scan

Uniform
Title:

Author:

Edition:

Imprint: Norfolk, VA : Old Dominion University, 1972-

Article: : Review of Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living Word by Barbara T.Gates.

Vol: No.: Pages: 178-180 Date: September 2000

Dissertation:

Verified: <TN:38054><ODYSSEY:206.107.43.27/ILL> OCLC 0886-3865

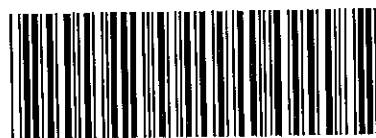
Borrowing Notes: *VIVA* WE DO NOT CHARGE ANYONE FOR LOANS OR PHOTOCOPIES.

ShipTo: Interlibrary Loan Dept./A.Pierre Guillermin Library/Liberty University/1971 University Blvd./Lynchburg, VA 24502-2269

E-delivery Addr: 1-434-582-2017

Ship Via: ODYSSEY, ARIEL, E-MAIL, FAX

ShipVia: ODYSSEY, ARI



NeedBy: 3/27/2009

Borrower: VLB

Return To:

Boatwright Library/ILL/
28 Westhampton Way/
University of Richmond/
Richmond, VA 23173

ILL: 51319695 Lender: VRU

Req Date: 2/25/2009 OCLC #: 1458163

Patron: Stone, Josh

Author:

Title: Victorians Institute journal.

Article: : Review of Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living Word by Barbara T.Gates.

Vol.: No.:

Date: September 20 Pages: 178-180

Verified: <TN:38054><ODYSSEY:206.107.43.27/IL

Maxcost: \$0.00 Due Date:

Lending Notes:

Bor Notes: *VIVA* WE DO NOT CHARGE ANYONE FOR LOANS OR PHOTOCOPIES.

Ship To:
Interlibrary Loan Dept.
A.Pierre Guillermin Library
Liberty University
1971 University Blvd.
Lynchburg, VA 24502-2269

Barbara T. Gates. *Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 292 pp. \$55 (hbk); \$20 (pbk).

Barbara T. Gates' *Kindred Nature* pays homage to the legacy of women's work with natural history and science. This is a record that has gone largely unacknowledged over the last two hundred years. Gates' accounting is revisionist: in her own words, it is a "feminist cultural study intended to recuperate and spotlight women's contributions" (5). Gates selected women who were distinguished in their fields as well as women who were representative of groups of women active in science (7). These activities include environmental protection, animal preservation, scientific illustrations, nature writing, gardening, evolution, and popularization and education of science.

Although not intended to be a survey, *Kindred Nature* does present a bounty of information. Readers would benefit from a table or chronology, had one been provided, that listed and categorized the contributions made by Victorian and Edwardian women. It is difficult to manage all of the material as one reads and is even more difficult to use the book as a reference tool. However, Gates' stated purpose is to provide a theoretical framework. She succeeds in making her concepts readable and provocative. Her abundant details are important especially to the reader who has never heard of many of these women before.

Actually, Gates intentionally resists cataloging these women. She has written about them as if they were contemporaries; she demonstrates immediacy with their work, frustrations, and personal lives as if she had been amongst them. She does not just recognize their contributions; she recognizes their struggles. The stories reveal how women fought against a male barricade. This was the age of Herbert Spencer, who theorized that women had stopped evolving intellectually in order to conserve their energy for reproduction (14). Henry Maudsley, a leading psychiatrist in the late 1800s, believed that because women were intellectually inferior, they should not be offered the same education as men (15). Many men were proponents of George Romanes' theory that because women had smaller brains, they had decreased intellectual capacity (19). An expert on menstruation, John Tornburn pronounced women unfit for intellectual rigor one-fourth of their entire lives because of their periods (20). These were some of the notions that thwarted women interested in science. Before women would be allowed to join the professional ranks of scientists, they had to dispute the scientific theories that they were incapable of understanding theory.

Usually barred from the laboratory, classroom, and associations, women developed a scientific subculture. The history of these women provides timely lessons to modern women who are still fighting an uphill battle to make strides and receive acceptance, support, and acknowledgement for their own work in science.

Some areas of "scientific participation" were considered legitimately within the domestic sphere of influence. Women were permitted to lead and attend lectures and write books that brought science to women and children, and members of the working class who did not have access to formal education. One such person who first learned about chemistry from Jane Marcet was Michael Faraday (3). One must ponder what scientific progress might not have been if not for the indirect influence of women.

The greatest value of the book, I believe, is that it can inspire women today to forge ahead in the fields of science. However, the one discussion that fascinated me the most also failed me the most. Gates refers to Hunt's painting, *The Awakening Conscience*, and suggests that to the lover, the woman has been his form of nature. This concept of mother nature and essentializing women as nature has been the subject of many studies, from Charles Darwin's *Origin* to Joseph Campbell's work with myths; they were briefly mentioned in *Kindred Nature*. Gates was more interested in what Hunt's woman was seeing as she arose from her lover's lap to gaze out an opened window onto scenery replete of nature. It is a wonderful interpretation of Hunt's painting and metaphor for Gates' study. She analyzes the complexity of women understanding nature when they themselves were perceived as nature by men. To be so signified in an era when many men believed that they needed to and could control nature, and that, for the sake of evolutionary progress, that which resembled nature, like human mothers, had to be tamed and colonized, resulted in stringent constraints on women. Thinking of nature as woman, and vice versa, affirmed that women were not men's intellectual equals; therefore, they would not be afforded educational, professional, legal, and political equality.

What Gates does not address is how this perception of women as nature intersects with women as spirit (although she does devote a chapter to efforts made by women to spiritualize nature). Did the Romantics and Victorians themselves perceive the contradiction of their low expectations of women as being part of nature, low on the chain of being, where men (and not man) had evolved beyond nature? And yet women were perceived as angels-in-the-house and the spiritual guardians of home, hearth, and country. That men possessed animal natures justified imperialism through the argument of survival of the

fittest. As conveyed in Rudyard Kipling's "The White Man's Burden," British men were morally obligated to dominate their brown brothers. It is also because of their animal drives that male sexual licentiousness could be excused, but not so with females of the middle class. Best-selling writer Sarah Ellis understood men to be as competitive as animals in their vocations, and that this was good for the British Empire. "There is so much in the lives of men, and particularly where business engages their attention, to lower and degrade their mind," Ellis advised women in *Wives of England* (1843). A man needed a woman who could advance his "intellectual, moral, and spiritual nature . . . and lead his thoughts to . . . a higher state of existence beyond this present life." I would have liked Gates to have tackled what seems to be a contradiction: woman as animal and therefore inferior vs. woman as spiritual and therefore superior to man who is either evolved beyond animal or is still animal but either way is superior to woman. And what about the perceptions of the lower classes as being regarded as animals?

Granted, Gates identifies her project as a "starting point for further inquiry." She admits that each of her chapters could have been developed into books. Indeed much more could and should be said about other women in still other areas of science. To Gates' great credit, *Kindred Nature* has opened a door that heretofore had been locked, introducing readers to kindred women "who made nature kindred in so many, different ways" (253).

Brenda Ayres
Middle Georgia College

Joseph McLaughlin. *Writing the Urban Jungle: Reading Empire in London from Doyle to Eliot*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000. 256 pp. \$55.

An illustration on the inside front cover of *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, the 1890 chronicle by Salvation Army founder General William Booth, depicts the East End of London as a tropical island. "At the foot of the illustration," Joseph McLaughlin recounts, "shipwrecked souls founder in a turbulent sea," waiting to be rescued by the Salvation Army officers on shore and carried to the "City Colony," a glowing refuge at the top of the page (99). McLaughlin contends that the proliferation of set pieces such as this one in the late Victorian era amounted to something like the emergence of a genre: the urban jungle