

dividual to speak with the collective, the community to help define the individual. Life writings, as the theorists point out, invite readers to shape their own identities in response to their reading. The essays in this collection invite readers to learn—and particularly to learn to assess through cross-cultural comparison their own “insider/outsider” status in their own communities.

CAROL MORRELL



Diane Purkiss. *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations*. London: Routledge, 1996. Pp. viii, 296. \$24.95 pb.

Acknowledging how informed she is as a second generation, second wave feminist by stories of the misogyny associated with the “Burning Times,” Diane Purkiss begins very early in this book to debunk the narrative she has inherited from radical feminists like Mary Daly. Or rather, using her own narrative, premised on late twentieth century inheritances from British cultural studies, poststructuralism, post-modernism, and psychoanalysis, together with her wide-ranging interests and research, Purkiss adeptly redefines the first generation feminist narrative as a myth invested in a reductive reading of woman as victim.

Her thesis about the complexity of early modern women’s stake in witchcraft seeks its evidence in the often contradictory and tangled stories within women witnesses’ witch-trial depositions. British historians have been guilty, she says, of reading them, if at all, with the jaded eye of Enlightenment scepticism and certainly with gendered blinders. And despite three decades of feminist interest in witches, feminist scholars have paid no mind to actual women’s words, ignoring the rhetoric of anxiety and influence which Purkiss as a literary scholar and analyst of popular culture cannot escape. For Purkiss who can point to no major study of English witchcraft by a woman, “the discourse of academic histories of witchcraft is still a male one, composed for the male voice” (59-60) and maintained by the practice of reading in bulk rather than in detail (71).

The alternate history of early modern village women that Purkiss narrates reveals the stories told by women of their fears of contagion and pollution for which gendered household roles held them accountable. Central to those fears were the deaths of children at birth or later, often the results of poverty or infection. Sometimes the women’s words reveal their household angers or frustrations which could only be projected on a dark Other, the witch. Village women, says Purkiss, had a significant investment in perpetrating tropes of the witch as anti-mother and anti-housewife, and sometimes expressing those beliefs in deposition was a way for them to be heard by their betters.

Indeed, witchcraft as agency becomes the subject of an entire chapter entitled “Self-fashioning by Women: Choosing to be a Witch.”

Against a feminist tradition of seeing the confessing or cooperating woman as a patriarchal mouthpiece, Purkiss uses the examples of women who struggled to control their own lives. Anne Bodenham, just such a woman, used everything at hand from folktales to Protestant equations of Catholic rites with diabolism, appropriating from the social, the political, and the theatrical to construct herself "not as run-of-the mill country cunning woman, but as a kind of female wizard . . . [a role] involving authority and appearance of learning normally gendered male in the early modern period" (148). Purkiss obviously admires this sixteenth-century woman who found gain in witchcraft as a business and "a way of asserting a contested political and personal identity through troubled times" (152). Bodenham lost her battle but remained defiant until death: a woman of eighty, she refused to recant, tried to escape custody, and called for drink all the way to the scaffold. Her story fascinates for its contributions to the tropes of witchcraft which inform elite discourses and theatrical presentations.

For Purkiss, the legal focus of feminist burning times mythography is undermined by the loss of interest in women's stories and the superstitions of village folk by an increasingly sceptical and urban elite and growing middle class. The continuance of early modern village women's fears into nineteenth and twentieth century folklore is for her evidence that "rural people did not stop telling witch-stories; courts stopped listening" (111). In the final section of Purkiss's book, witch stories become the province of the stage where the original village tales gave way to male fears about primogeniture and miscreant female sexuality, where sensational spectacle was privileged, where classical mythology was entwined with folklore, where the elite, in particular James I, author of works on demonology, were both catered to and challenged.

And it is in this final section that Purkiss takes aim at critical and reductive readings of Elizabethan and Jacobean plays. For Purkiss the stage was not merely the extension of the mores of the era, nor was it in cultural materialist terms a site of subversion, but a complex negotiation of both, an arena written over and over again with its own powers to influence and its constant anxiety over audience. This is especially true for the figure of the witch on stage as playwrights negotiated her already apocryphal and widely borrowed history for an aging female queen and then for male monarchs.

An engaging and readable text, parts of *The Witch in History* are particularly worth a second reading. Purkiss's fifth chapter "No Limit: The Body of the Witch" speaks of the Protean fluidity of the witch's body which prevented her containment. Her final section contributes new readings of the witch in Shakespeare who, she says, used a witch-figure of one kind or another in all his plays. But her impeccably researched challenge to reductive readings of the witch by historians and feminists alike, her notion of the "aristocentrism" (217) of literary

criticism, and her addressing of the myths inherent in disciplinary retellings of tales as old as time make the book a significant contribution to the library of anyone interested in witchcraft, early modern or contemporary.

WENDY SCHISSEL



Robert Cross and Michael Perkin, comp. *Elspeth Huxley, A Bibliography*. Foreword Elspeth Huxley. Winchester: Oak Knoll Press, 1996. Pp. xx, 187. \$78.00.

This is the fifth and most recent of the Winchester Bibliographies of Twentieth-Century Writers, a series apparently limited to British writers. Although the previous subjects have been males, Robert Cross, the guiding hand at St. Paul's Bibliographies, foresees the inclusion in the series of "a good proportion of women writers." Cross's next bibliography is of Vita Sackville-West (ix)

Section A of this five-part bibliography chronologically lists first editions of Huxley's books and pamphlets as well as other issues and editions, including foreign publications (usually American) and paperbacks. Technically descriptive, it gives details on dust jackets, binding cases, collations, types of paper, contents of pages preceding and following the body of a text, and it identifies individuals who have examined copies of particular editions. Following the helpful notes on the works' publication histories are lists of reviews. In Section B are listed books either edited by Huxley or containing contributions by her. It is not clear to me why two works in Section A, Huxley's edition of Mary Kingsley's *Travels in West Africa* and her compilation *Nine Faces of Kenya*, are not shown instead in Section B. An anthologized Huxley essay omitted from the bibliography is "Disengagement in Africa," in *The African Nettle*, edited by Frank S. Meyer (John Day, 1965).

The newspaper and periodical articles arrayed in Section C most strikingly display the time span of a writing career extending from a 1921 newspaper report on a polo accident in the Kenya colony to an account of Huxley's visit to an independent Kenya 75 years and over 800 publications later. Of particular interest to a North American might be the entries in Section D, "Radio and Television Appearances," for the early 1980s Masterpiece Theatre dramatizations of *The Flame Trees of Thika*, which brought Huxley to the attention of many viewers too young to have been introduced to her through the three popular detective novels published in the US as well as in Great Britain from 1937 to 1939.

Among the "Miscellanea" of Section E are two items directly relevant to the development in eastern Africa of a postcolonial identity. The paper on the Kikuyu tribespeople prepared by Huxley for a London School of Economics seminar she attended in 1937 was commented on—an earlier note by Cross informs us—by fellow-student