she uncovers. *Queer Kinship after Wilde* is at its most satisfying when Mahoney alludes to lively critical discussions around these themes in her footnotes, directing her readers toward active scholarship.

JO MIKULA, BOSTON COLLEGE
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JO MIKULA is a first-year PhD student at Boston College.

NOTES

1. Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 131.
2. Joseph A. Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), xxii.

Tabitha Sparks. *Victorian Metafiction*.

University of Virginia Press, 2022. 208 pp. Hardback $95.00; Paper $29.50.

Oxymoronic as it may sound, the title of Tabitha Sparks's study of nineteenth-century "novels about women novelists" that "feature [their] own artistic construction as part of the story" is neither inaptly chosen nor purely polemical—although a subtitle might have been in order (1). Challenging the ongoing association of metafiction mainly with postmodernist experimentation and building on recent criticism that emphasizes realism's "capacity for model building rather than its declarative power," *Victorian Metafiction* locates its chief examples in what might appear the most unlikely of sources (8). Its central sites of analysis, excluding Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), consist of underread nineteenth-century fiction by women, novels not known (if known at all) for taking narrative risks or playing the sort of games to which we have become habituated by Margaret Atwood and Don DeLillo. That the historical antecedents for metafiction don't include nineteenth-century realism, and certainly not domestic realism, is for some critics axiomatic. Thus, even if scholars outside Victorian studies assert that "metafiction is not a historical phenomenon per se"—Sparks cites the seventeenth-century *Don Quixote* and

the eighteenth-century *Tristram Shandy* as paradigmatic examples—they all agree that it is decidedly not a feature of the Victorian novel and indeed deploy nineteenth-century realism as a straw man against which the "metafictional self-consciousness and irony" of Umberto Eco or Ishmael Reed can be measured (13). Of course, Sparks challenges the reductive account of realism's naïve dependence on access to "the real" even as she enriches our understanding of what metafiction might look like in a historical moment other than our own. In the process, she also makes a valuable contribution to rethinking the role that feminist criticism has played in keeping in place some of the assumptions that still consign a significant strand of nineteenth-century women's fiction to noncanonical status.

Sparks's critical intervention depends on revising the genealogy of metafiction as it was established primarily in the 1970s and 1980s more or less simultaneously with—although at some distance from—the emergence of a feminist literary criticism that emphasized the recovery of women writers whose voices had been suppressed in and by the past. That genealogy itself depends on the usual story, invented by modernists and reinforced by modernist and postmodernist criticism, regarding the break from nineteenth-century realism: "Around or about 1910," Sparks archly writes, "the artistic imagination changed and novelists like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, tired of the superficiality of novels (and novelists) that described a world of surfaces, turned their attention to experimental representations of consciousness and other ineffable dimensions" (2). Taking these high modernists at their word, second-wave Anglo-American feminist criticism identified feminist aesthetics in the genre "as an extension or invention of the twentieth century," thus relegating the works of Woolf's and Joyce's mothers and grandmothers to a dull and dusty bookshelf (24). At the same time, groundbreaking scholarly studies of nineteenth-century women writers, such as Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* and especially Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*, persuasively argued that the patriarchal repressions and gendered ideologies of Victorian society issued in coded texts with subversive subtexts that were forged in relation to critical judgments of the time, in which particular suppositions about women's limited sphere shaped the reception

of their published work. But the Victorian assumption that all women's writing was based in, and thus suffered from, the limitations of their personal experience, Sparks suggests, was reinforced rather than challenged by second-wave feminist criticism: as she writes in her conclusion, "when we evaluate women's fiction primarily through the lenses of projected empathy and personal expression, we are not redressing the reasons that make these lenses so easy to identify with in the first place" (158).

Victorian Metafiction takes an alternate path: in a particularly telling formulation, Sparks wonders how it is that "the patent insecurity of historical women writers in Victorian culture appears, again and again, in novels *about* a woman writer's disputed, hidden, or maligned identity" (28–29). Herein lies her take on Victorian metafiction as practiced by women writers: she concentrates on "examining an aesthetic register that eclipses their personal emotions or experiences with attention to literary form" as part of an effort to credit them with "metafictional, not biographical, self-consciousness" (3). From one point of view, then, we might see such figures as Charlotte Brontë, Rhoda Broughton, Charlotte Riddell, Eliza Lynn Linton, and a host of New Woman writers from the 1890s as anticipating, albeit by different means, Woolf's subsequent effort to limit or transcend biographical readings of her creative work. As Sparks shows in a brief reading of the infamous critique of *Jane Eyre* from *A Room of One's Own* that baldly "conflates Brontë with her heroine," Woolf enforced in her critical practice a putatively modernist emphasis on impersonality that actually has deep roots in the mid-Victorian thinking she had internalized about what women writers were—and were not—capable of achieving (154). If the formal strategies Woolf employed in creating Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse* (1927) differ dramatically from those that Emily Morse Symonds used to form Cosima Chudleigh in *A Writer of Books* (1898), then the impulse underlying these creations may nonetheless derive from a similar motivation: to achieve the credibility and claim the credit Sparks seeks to bestow.

Appropriately, Sparks's first chapter concerns *Villette*, in which an elusive first-person narrator writes the story of only some passages in her life, either leaving out or elliptically revealing those parts that readers, whether Victorian or modern, might otherwise use as a key

to diagnose or dissect the novel's protagonist or, worse, its author. Unlike most of Sparks's other primary texts, which center on "the business and art of writing as the subject of the novel," *Villette* certainly does not present Lucy Snowe as an aspirant to literary fame or aesthetic achievement (2). It rather features a "resistance to self-disclosure" that—however much that reticence might mimic Brontë's own—marks the novel as "a piece of experimental writing" comparable to Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1832–33) (55). In Sparks's words, *Villette* "does not deny the autobiographical so much as call into question where a distinction between autobiography and fiction lies, and if it can be made at all" (58). By contrast, Broughton's *Cometh Up as a Flower* (1867), the subject of chapter 2, takes its subtitle—*An Autobiography*—from *Jane Eyre*, but its protagonist moves ever closer to fictionalizing, as the real life she begins by reporting grows less and less compelling than the novels she has read. Analyzing Nell LeStrange's use of the historical present tense and a compulsion to quotation that borders on pastiche as among the metafictional elements Broughton deliberately deploys, Sparks concludes that the novel is "so indebted to literary and other intertextual influences that its obtrusive constructedness overwhelms its illusion of realism or reportage" (87). A look at Broughton's final novel, *A Fool in Her Folly* (1920), shows how Nell's dilemma is refigured when its protagonist's "wish to understand writing as an art form and technique" is deprecated by others and ultimately abandoned (89).

The third chapter juxtaposes Margaret Oliphant's *The Athelings* (1857) with Riddell's *A Struggle for Fame* (1883) and moves from the prior consideration of how metafictional strategies "identify and critique barriers facing Victorian women writers" to examine how two very prolific professional novelists construct their portraits of the (female) artist in accord or in conflict with ideas about gender, genius, and the vicissitudes of the marketplace (91). The far less metafictional of the two, Oliphant's novel subordinates any account of its protagonist as a writer to a conventionally gendered script. Though she apparently earns both, Agnes Atheling does not write for money or fame: "her writing matters not for her critical or public repute but for its efficacy in fulfilling her personal destiny": marriage and, presumably, eventual motherhood (96). By contrast, Glenarva Westley has

an agenda that alters over time. Although Glen imbibes Romantic ideals of the writerly vocation, Riddell increasingly ironizes them, as her protagonist migrates from Ireland to England with her impoverished father to seek their fortune in literary London, where her fiction—itself a product of a long struggle just to be published—is met with the usual critiques of women's writing. Emulating her most successful contemporary, however, when Glen "adopts a view of art as *practice* in the pattern of Eliot's experimental realism," she produces a novel that meets her own evolving aesthetic standards (102). And this, rather than lasting fame, is her reward: she has completed "a bid for autonomous art"—as Riddell arguably did in taking up "the doubled position of a novelist writing a novel about a novelist"—that would not be judged solely by commercial standards or construed as an expression of the writer's personal experiences (107).

The final two chapters, on pseudonymity as metafiction and what Sparks terms "neo-Victorian Victorian" fiction by New Women writers, explore other strategies that writers adopted to evade gendered judgments, even as they further illustrate the stakes of Sparks's argument. Conceiving the pseudonyms of Eliot and Brontë as a means to "disaffiliate from personal history by fronting their novels with a fiction," Sparks demonstrates through reading the slim critical archive on fiction by Julia Nordau (pseud. Frank Danby) and Margaret Harkness (pseud. John Law) that even today these writers' work is judged as much or more on a biographical (and sometimes political) basis as an aesthetic one (111). The feminist quest to uncover an authentic woman's "voice" behind the male pseudonym disregards the metafictional status of the pseudonym itself as a species of what Wayne Booth called the implied author. Sparks drives home this point in an extended reading of *The Autobiography of Christopher Kirkland* (1885) that draws on Linda Hutcheon's work to cast Linton's text, in its likeness to and divergence from Linton's "real" life, as historiographic metafiction. Continuing to use critical tools from the study of metafiction to inform her analysis, Sparks looks to Grant Allen's *The Type-Writer Girl* (1897; pseud. Olive Pratt Rayner) and *A Writer of Books* (1898) by Symonds (pseud. George Paston)—both of which take aspiring women writers as their chief protagonists—for the ways in which their narratological and formal choices, "including

intertextual allusion and parody," announce that aspiration, especially in their resistance to realism (141).

Albeit not surprising that she identifies a high degree of play in these late Victorian fictions, Sparks's consideration of the cross-gender pseudonyms adopted by the two writers effectively illuminates a cultural shift over the course of the last half of the nineteenth century: from judging a book primarily by reference to its author's sex to understanding "that writing can be gendered as a stylistic choice or representational technique" (150). Here as elsewhere, Sparks makes a double critique, in that she simultaneously calls out the feminist failure to observe or analyze the formal innovations of those women writers who aimed to change the terms by which their work was assessed and who contested the hegemony of realism well in advance of either Woolf or Joyce. On these points and others, *Victorian Metafiction* thus issues a clear and persuasive call to reorient feminist scholarship in new directions.

MARY JEAN CORBETT, MIAMI UNIVERSITY
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MARY JEAN CORBETT is University Distinguished Professor and Interim Chair of English at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. She is the author of four books, including *Family Likeness: Sex, Marriage, and Incest from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf* (2008) and, most recently, *Behind the Times: Virginia Woolf in Late-Victorian Contexts* (2020).

Heidi Kaufman. *Strangers in the Archive: Literary Evidence and London's East End*.

Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2022. 240 pp. Hardback $45.00.

An exciting work of research that is partly a story of the investigative process itself, *Strangers in the Archive: Literary Evidence and London's East End* by Heidi Kaufman both documents and theorizes the tension between insider and outsider status in Victorian depictions of the East End. Kaufman documents archival materials offering traces of what the East Enders themselves thought and wrote about their neighborhoods as insiders within their community but