JAMAICA KINCAID
Writing Memory, Writing Back to the Mother
J. Brooks Bouson

Offers a new perspective on the psychological and affective dynamics of Jamaica Kincaid's fiction and nonfiction.

“I've never written about anyone except myself and my mother. I’m just one of those pathetic people for whom writing is therapy.” — Jamaica Kincaid

Haunted by the memories of her powerfully destructive mother, Jamaica Kincaid is a writer out of necessity. Born Elaine Potter Richardson, Kincaid grew up in the West Indies in the shadow of her deeply contemptuous and abusive mother, Annie Drew. Drawing heavily on Kincaid's many remarks on the autobiographical sources of her writings, J. Brooks Bouson investigates the ongoing construction of Kincaid's autobiographical and political identities. She focuses attention on what many critics find so enigmatic and what lies at the heart of Kincaid's fiction and nonfiction work: the "mother mystery." Bouson demonstrates, through careful readings, how Kincaid uses her writing to transform her feelings of shame into pride as she wins the praise of an admiring critical establishment and an ever-growing reading public.

“Bouson offers a highly intelligent and detailed reading of Kincaid's work from the perspective of shame and trauma theory. She shows the intersection of the personal and the social in the work, with a central emphasis on the troubled mother-daughter relations. This is a major contribution to the field.” — Joseph Adamson, coeditor of Scenes of Shame: Psychoanalysis, Shame, and Writing

J. Brooks Bouson is Professor of English at Loyola University Chicago. She is the author of Quiet As It's Kept: Shame, Trauma, and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison, also published by SUNY Press; Brutal Choreographies: Oppositional Strategies and Narrative Design in the Novels of Margaret Atwood; and The Empathic Reader: A Study of the Narcissistic Character and the Drama of the Self.

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BECOME WHO YOU ARE
Hedwig Dohm
Translated and with an Afterword by Elizabeth G. Ametsbichler

Two texts—one novella and one essay—that exemplify Dohm's passionate arguments for gender equality.

Hedwig Dohm (1831–1919) was a thinker and writer significantly ahead of her time. She championed women's rights in Germany and criticized with acerbic wit the social, political, and familial inequities inherent in gender relationships at the time of the first wave of the women's movement. Her novella Become Who You Are is about a woman, Agnes Schmidt, whose husband has died and who is grappling with finding an identity for herself as an aging widow—reflecting the restrictions imposed especially on aging, widowed women who often yearn for a life and identity of their own. Also included here is the English translation of Dohm's essay, “The Old Woman,” which is a compelling call for women to resist the social, intellectual, psychological, and physical restraints placed on women of Dohm's time.

“For a modern reader, it is shocking to realize that women's lives were over so soon and that nineteenth-century German society made no provision to integrate independent women once their husbands died. While in many cases Hedwig Dohm separates her political views from her fiction, this piece resonates with an indictment of the restraints placed on bourgeois women's education and identity formation.” — Susan L. Cocalis, editor of The Defiant Muse: German Feminist Poems from the Middle Ages to the Present

Elizabeth G. Ametsbichler is Professor of German at the University of Montana. She is the coeditor (with Elke P. Frederiksen) of Women Writers in German-Speaking Countries: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook.

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MY BELOVED TOTO
Letters from Juliette Drouet to Victor Hugo 1833–1882
Juliette Drouet
Edited and Annotated by Evelyn Blewer
Preface by Jean Gaudon
Translated and with an Introduction, Additional Notes, and Glossary by Victoria Tietze Larson

Selected letters from Juliette Drouet to her lover, Victor Hugo, offering insights into nineteenth-century French culture as well as an insider’s look at the character, behavior, working habits, and day-to-day life of France’s most monumental man of letters.

My Beloved Toto, a collection of letters written by Juliette Drouet to her lover, Victor Hugo, tells the story of a life and of the great love affair that shaped it. From 1833 until her death half a century later, Drouet wrote to Hugo twice daily on average, resulting in thousands of letters. The 186 translated here—most appearing in English for the first time—offer insights into nineteenth-century French culture as well as an insider’s look at the character, behavior, working habits, and day-to-day life of France’s most monumental man of letters.

"J uliette Drouet’s extraordinary story has been told many times—but never as vividly as she tells it herself in her letters. Here, at last, is a lucid, accurate modern English translation of a representative selection. The intelligence, wit, devotion, passions, and frustrations visible in them should do much to dispel the myths fostered by Drouet’s critics and biographers." — E. H. and A. M. Blackmore, editors and translators of Selected Poems of Victor Hugo: A Bilingual Edition and The Essential Victor Hugo

"Written from the body and soul, Juliette Drouet’s love letters to Victor Hugo, spanning some fifty years but written in and for the moment, are engaging bits of écriture féminine. Filled with wordplay and allusion to contemporary events both personal and public, these texts present formidable translation problems expertly contextualized by the translator in her introduction, notes, and glossary." — Kristine J. Anderson, Purdue University

Victoria Tietze Larson is Professor of Classics and General Humanities at Montclair State University and the translator of My Double Life: The Memoirs of Sarah Bernhardt, also published by SUNY Press.

ACTING BEAUTIFULLY
Henry James and the Ethical Aesthetic
Sigi Jöttkandt

Addresses ethical and aesthetic issues in three major works by Henry James.

What is the matter with the women in Henry James? In The Portrait of a Lady, The Wings of the Dove, and his short story “The Altar of the Dead,” one woman returns to a monster of a husband, another dies rather than confront the truth of her lover’s engagement, while yet another stakes her all on having a candle lit for a dead lover, only to promptly reject it. Exploring these strange choices, Sigi Jöttkandt argues that the singularity of these acts lies in their ethical nature, and that the ethical principle involved cannot be divorced from the question of aesthetics. She combines close readings of James with suggestive tours through Kantian aesthetics and set theory to uncover the aesthetic underpinning of the Lacanian ethical act, which has been largely overlooked in the current drive to discover a Cartesian origin for the subject as the subject of science.

“If ‘instant classic’ means anything at all today, it means Jöttkandt’s book! Henry James is the silent partner of Jacques Lacan: never mentioned in Lacan’s work, he nonetheless, in an uncanny way, ‘stages’ all main Lacanian concepts. Jöttkandt’s book brings this secret link into the open: after reading it, our perception of both Lacan and James will change fundamentally. Those who freely decide to ignore this book are simply those who are bent to freely choose stupidity!” — Slavoj Zítek

“The author offers brilliantly original and detailed readings of three important works by Henry James. No one has ever read these works in just this way, and I read the book with great intellectual exhilaration. It makes a major contribution not only to the literature of James but also to ethical theory and to the general issues of the uses of theory. It is a superb work of scholarship.” — J. Hillis Miller

Sigi Jöttkandt is Flanders Research Council Fellow in the Department of English at Ghent University in Belgium.

Victoria Tietze Larson is Professor of Classics and General Humanities at Montclair State University and the translator of My Double Life: The Memoirs of Sarah Bernhardt, also published by SUNY Press.

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