

to understand the female characters as they both came from the middle class. The occupations of the heroine showed the interest in the development of education for women. Like many of the authors themselves, the heroines were governesses, teachers and even authors. This was an identification and not simple escapism.

Baym has done an excellent job of compiling brief lives of the various authors (often stranger than the fiction they created) and by giving future scholars and historians the plots of the major novels and information concerning the publication (in several cases the work first appeared in serial form and when published later in book form was given a different title.) She has performed a genuine service, in particular with the chronological biography which analyzes succinctly the literary criticism and social history concerning this period and the way in which the women's rights movement is treating it. *Woman's Fiction* is a first-rate reference for more than one discipline.

If the research and analysis are impeccable, one must quarrel with the organization of the book and question some of the conclusions. The first chapter is called "Introduction and Conclusions" which is confusing as one is presented with abstract statements before having the chance to read either about the authors or their work. The conclusions are more in the realm of social observation than that of literary criticism. One is as intrigued as Baym to know why this genre had the incredible success that it had, but her afterthought, "A note on popularity," is not at all enlightening. It would have been helpful, too, if she had put this genre into its literary perspective. Surely these novels are *romans de transition*; they provided a necessary step towards the work of Henry James, William Dean Howells, and Edith Wharton whose heroines encountered problems as well but whose personalities underwent change during the course of the novel. A note on the continuation of this tradition in later American literature would also have been welcome (e.g. Edna Ferber's *So Big*, 1924, fulfills all the obligations of this genre as set down by Baym). Further, it would have been important for Baym to mention the particularly American flavor of these heroines who are molded by the Puritan ethic of hard work, who choose duty over pleasure, and who are in control of themselves as well as others. Their triumph at the end of their

trials must be seen as another manifestation of the American success story.

In the beginning of her book Baym says she has not unearthed a George Eliot or found another *Scarlet Letter* but she has produced a source book, valuable for historians and critics alike, from her concern for an incredible generation of writers and readers.

E. Mayberry Senter

LLOYD R. FREE, ED.

Laclos: Critical Approaches to Les Liaisons dangereuses
Studia Humanitatis
Washington, DC: Catholic Univ.
of America Press, 1978. Pp. XII+
300, \$17.00.

As if to atone for nearly two centuries of neglect, many academic critics have written perceptively and well of *Les Liaisons dangereuses* in the last twenty years. This new volume boosts the 1978 score by another seven articles, many of them significant contributions to our understanding of a perennially fascinating text. Only two essays seem to be relatively weak: those by Eric Rabkin and Ronald Rosbottom, who say little that could be called new, although ironically they are the only writers who claim to be setting the world right (the latter irritatingly, even offensively).

Rosbottom's essay crushes the nut (already open, one would have thought) of the Valmont-Merteuil relationship under the sledgehammer of communication theory. For a while it looks as if Lloyd Free and Elizabeth Douvan are going to attempt a different marriage of the old and new, and interpret the *Liaisons* in the light of Women's Liberation, but in spite of the misleading title ("*LD* and contemporary consciousness"), what we have is a well-argued account of Laclos's understanding of female psychology: less a case of Laclos's anticipation of the twentieth century than of twentieth-century theory catching up with an eighteenth-century writer's profound intuition.

The central relationships of the book are illuminated in an excellent analysis by Janet Altman of "addressed and undressed language," that is, of the fluctuations in style between a discourse carefully created with the receiver in mind, and one which betrays the writer's real self in spite of his self-consciousness. She argues that Merteuil's moments of vulnerability are perfectly deliberate. The danger in the system is that sometimes the letters are read by the wrong audience. Roseann Runte in the shortest but by no means the least substantial paper, argues that the "actors" are also "authors" who choose their own role, and hence are guilty of manipulating. Merteuil is the arch manipulator, but even she ends by becoming a character in a novel written by Valmont. Keith Palka stresses the importance of chance in *LD*. The libertines are opportunists, not artists, because they have to work with material which is often outside their control. The only artist is the author, Laclos, who is responsible for the total pattern, including the incidents of chance, which he is obliged to include in order to make his tale plausible. The longest essay is by Lester Crocker, who considers the modes of evil in the novel, arguing that in human experience, evil is inevitable and inevitably destructive; there is no need to invoke "divine justice."

An indication of the contents of a collection such as this is bound to stress the framework of each essay. For a reader, however—provided he has time to weigh up and absorb them—the value of the book comes just as much from the perceptions the different critics have of incidents and phrases found in the novel, and these perceptions abound. The subtlety of the internal echoes, the shifting points of view, and the ambiguities which operate on so many different levels simultaneously, offer a rich quarrying-ground, and even the most fundamental issues have not yet, it appears, yielded all their secrets.

Many of the contributors to this volume, including the editor in his introductory "Profile," discuss the denouement. This particular knot will not be untied unless one adopts a perspective curiously absent from this volume (although it is implied by Palka, and by Runte's last sentence): that of our connivance, cunningly engineered by Laclos. We share the ironic vision with Valmont and Merteuil for three-quarters of the volume, but at the end irony overtakes them, and our detach-

ment from them is paralleled by a reduction of the ironic distance which had separated us from Mme de Tourvel. Pointers to this reading were given by Jean Rousset in an important chapter of his *Forme et Signification* (1962); in his quick initial rundown of the history of Laclos criticism Free does not even mention this study.

This brings us to our one major criticism of the volume: editorial indecisiveness. Bearing the title *Critical Approaches*, opening with a survey of the novel's changing fortunes over the years, which is followed by pages by LeBreton, Bourget, and Malraux, the book has the initial appearance of a collection of representative criticism. But after the Malraux we have, as has been said, seven brand new essays which do not seem to have been chosen to illustrate the diversity of current critical approaches, and which leave the period between Malraux (1939) and the 1970s uncharted. In addition, the bibliographical references are handled in a slipshod and arbitrary manner. The seven-page bibliography does not list the three introductory essays, whose source is not adequately given anywhere in the book; it omits Baudelaire, Fauchery, and Thody's *MLR* article (all cited by contributors), as well as Coulet, Doumic, Le Hir, Mistler, Toplak, Trahard (all of whom are important); a reference to one of Free's other articles (correctly listed in the bibliography) is elsewhere quoted as if it is unpublished; and information as to the edition used throughout the volume is repeated in the notes to the essays by Rabkin and Rosbottom.

Anthony R. Pugh

BARBARA HILL RIGNEY
Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel: Studies in Brönte, Woolf, Lessing, and Atwood
 Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978. Pp. 148.
 \$15.00

Barbara Hill Rigney's excellent book "attempts to reconcile feminism and psychology in the area of literary criticism" (p. 3). Working from Charlotte Brönte's *Jane Eyre*, Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Lessing's