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Embrace the Living World by Barbara T. Gates  
Book Review

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and multifaceted notions of identity and their moral dimensions, Otis would have to widen the scope of her analysis considerably.

JUTTA SCHICKORE

**Barbara T. Gates.** *Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living World.* xviii + 293 pp., illus., bibl., index. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1999. \$20, £15.95.

The most famous figure in *Kindred Nature* is Beatrix Potter, the author of the Peter Rabbit stories. Potter's talents in mycology and scientific illustration are less well known. Moreover, why Potter turned from her pursuits in nature study to write animal stories for children has been given very little attention. Feminist historians of science are beginning to examine the life stories of women like Potter to expand our understandings of women's contributions to the biological sciences. Barbara Gates practices such a retrieval in her study of British women's roles in nature study and appreciation during the Victorian and Edwardian periods.

Gates divides her book into three sections: the practice and popularization of natural science, activism, and literary and aesthetic responses to nature. Brief biographies structure the book, as Gates probes the social factors influencing each woman's pursuits. Opening with a summary of the issues Darwin posed for women in his comments on female nature and sexuality, Gates surveys women's reinterpretation of natural selection, evolution, and female sexuality in popular science narratives. She argues that such writers as Jane Marcet, Jane Loudon, and Arabella Buckley established a unique narrative style that created a profitable market but that the economic success of the new genre, coupled with the shift to stronger professional control of the scientific narrative, led to the field being overtaken by men. Women experienced a similar displacement as scientific collectors and illustrators. Beatrix Potter was only one of a mass of women whose field experience, observational skills, and artistry were dismissed when natural history shifted to laboratory-based science.

Women crusading for the protection of nature also revised evolutionary ideas about the kinship between humans and other animals to argue for the protection of birds, domestic animals, and native wildlife. Gates analyzes how they engaged scientific debates about natural selection to make space for morality and altruism in the relations between humans and nature. Her anal-

yses of the connections these activist feminists made between sexism and the degradation of nature are quite interesting, as is her finding that the most radical crusaders, who argued for women's superiority in matters spiritual and natural, reinterpreted Darwinian narratives to fit a feminist perspective. One of the most ingenious was Rosa Frances Swiney, whose tortured reading of genetics supported her conclusion that men represented a lower evolutionary stage than women.

*Kindred Nature* concludes with women's literary and aesthetic contributions to nature study. Gates discovers a feminist approach to the picturesque and sublime traditions that emphasizes a giving in to rather than a surveying of the scene. This section also includes sketches of garden writing (Gertrude Jekyll), hunting and farming narratives, and animal stories (Beatrix Potter again) and concludes by considering a set of early twentieth-century novels, including Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*. In discussing the novels Gates probes how the mythologies of woman and nature changed over the period, but her reading does not really come to a convincing conclusion on the central question of the interplay between narratives of modern female sexuality and Darwinian nature. Synthesis and analysis are a bit short throughout the book, in part because of the focus on numerous individual life histories. Gates aims for a larger view in a brief afterword, bringing her narrative into contemporary interpretations of natural selection, ecology, and radical feminist narratives of nature. The conclusion would be stronger had she established the historical processes by which we got from the Victorian women's concerns to those of women today. And, since so many of the contemporary women mentioned in her afterword are American, it would have been interesting to think about the interplay between British women and U.S. feminist and naturalist circles.

VERA NORWOOD

**Ian Tyrrell.** *True Gardens of the Gods: Californian–Australian Environmental Reform, 1860–1930.* xiv + 313 pp., figs., bibl., index. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1999. \$48, £35.

During my suburban California childhood we landscaped intensively and watered everything. Roadside eucalyptus and acacia seemed definitively Californian. Yet I have found the trees around Melbourne, the orange groves of Mil-