



Women's Diaries as Narrative in the Nineteenth-Century Novel

Catherine Delafield, University of Leicester, UK

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Using private diary writing as her model, Catherine Delafield investigates the cultural significance of nineteenth-century women's writing and reading practices. Beginning with an examination of non-fictional diaries and the practice of diary-writing, she assesses the interaction between the fictional diary and other forms of literary production such as epistolary narrative, the periodical, the factual document and sensation fiction. The discrepancies between the private diary and its use as a narrative device are explored through the writings of Frances Burney, Elizabeth Gaskell, Anne Brontë, Dinah Craik, Wilkie Collins and Bram Stoker. The ideological function of the diary, Delafield suggests, produces a conflict in fictional narrative between that diary's received use as a domestic and spiritual record and its authority as a life-writing opportunity for women. Delafield considers women as writers, readers, and subjects and contextualizes her analysis within nineteenth-century reading practice. She demonstrates ways in which women could become performers of their own story through a narrative method which was authorized by their femininity and at the same time allowed them to challenge the myth of domestic womanhood.

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