capable of expressing "genuine feelings" (101); and "music" in the novels of George Eliot "has a spiritual authenticity that she would surely not claim as an attribute of all music in the real world" (145)—especially of the music made by characters such as Rosamond in her quest for a husband or a lover.

Wide-ranging as she is in her treatment of Victorian literature (even George Eliot's verse drama *Armgart* plays a cameo role in her argument), Byerly sometimes gains her breadth at the expense of depth. In her chapter on George Eliot, for instance, she curiously declines to investigate Eliot's use of specified artworks such as the ancient sculpture of the reclining *Ariadne* ("then called the Cleopatra") to which Naumann compares Dorothea in Chapter 19 of *Middlemarch*. Taking the *Ariadne* as simply a generic work of visual art, Byerly argues that Dorothea breaks the frames that others would impose on her; the variability of the human form, as Ladislaw says (echoing Lessing), cannot be caught in painting, and Naumann should not presume to use a woman of Dorothea's class as a model. But Byerly misses a paradox noted by Amy Richlin: while art emerges from the conversation between Will and Naumann as a means of petrifaction or exploitation, Will has joined Naumann in viewing Dorothea as yet another beautiful object in the sculpture gallery, and the act of imagining her in a picture makes him conscious of his own desire for her. Hence art "functions as an agent of change in Will, thereby becoming a vehicle for narrative dynamism."[2]

To resist Byerly's argument at certain points is not, I hope, to understate the value of her book as a whole. It is simply to say that her book provokes—and should provoke—the kind of spirited debate which this kind of forum seems designed to elicit. She has tackled an immensely complicated topic with admirable lucidity. In explaining how art and nature interact in Romantic poetry, in Victorian fiction, and finally in the aestheticism of Pater and Wilde, she has also enlarged our understanding of just what constitutes "realistic" representations in literature and of the crucial role played by all of the arts in the literature of nineteenth-century England.

Patricia O'Neill

In well-documented chapters on the novels of Charlotte Brontë, William Thackeray, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, Alison Byerly shows how nineteenth-century writers represented the arts of painting, music, theatre, and, in Hardy's case, architecture, in order to examine the relations of art to life. Those relations were important to Victorian novelists because, in depicting the common life, they had to confront cultural assumptions about the truth or falsehood of literary representation. According to Byerly the novelists' invocation of multiple arts within the novels asks the reader to understand the relative value of their representational abilities "not against external reality but

[2] "Beside the Reclining Statue: Ekphrasis, Narrative, and Desire in *Middlemarch*." *PMLA* 111 (1996): 1125. Richlin also notes that Ariadne's situation parallels that of Dorothea. Abandoned by their respective lovers (Theseus and Casaubon), both women are about to be rescued by new lovers (Bacchus and Will Ladislaw) (1126-27). In addition, the juxtaposition of the Dorothea with the sensuous figure of what was then (circa 1829) called the Cleopatra suggests a latent sensuality in Eliot's nunlike heroine (1125-26).

against each other. . . . The effect of 'aesthetic cross-referencing' is to give coherence and unity to fictional worlds by constructing different levels of representation within them" (6). If the goals of "coherence and unity" sound unusually modernist for works that James described as "big, baggy monsters," Byerly's focus on the ways in which Victorian novelists self-consciously allude to the problem of aesthetic representation offers a new way to consider the Victorians' understanding of the moral and social function of art.

Beginning with a discussion of the Romantics' rejection of the picturesque and their privileging of song, Byerly suggests a hierarchy of aesthetic forms which Victorian novelists adapted to distinguish mere artifice from genuine self-expression. Thus Thackeray's career as an art critic and illustrator anticipates what Byerly describes as "the Victorian sense of theatricality as a form of deception" (53). Brontë too is first understood in relation to her brother Branwell's failed career as an artist. Byerly calls one of Branwell's sketches "expressive," but "its obvious function as a prop to his theatrical self-delusion robs it of what his sister would call 'genuineness'" (91). In her own work Brontë's heroines use painting and theatre to express their own feelings rather than cater to male desire. Relying on Michael Fried's distinction between "absorption" and "theatricality," Byerly shows how both Thackeray and Brontë believed the function of a performance outweighed its meaning as an aesthetic object: "Brontë, like Thackeray, refuses to detach the artistic production from its social context."

This insight into Victorian aesthetics is important to an understanding of "realism" as a culturally and historically specific style or attitude rather than as a mode of representation. The distinction is not always clear in Byerly's book but is crucial for understanding her work in relation to other critical studies of the Victorian novel. In Byerly's argument the novelist's representation of the social context and reception of art replaces both Romantic preoccupation with the creative process and traditional critical concerns about the proper subject of artistic representation. By moving from a concern with the mimetic function of novels to one that treats them as autonomous illusions of reality, Byerly can examine the relations of other artistic forms to the society within the novels without jeopardising the novel's own autonomy (not to say, superiority) as a work of realistic representation. In developing such a view Byerly avoids the issue of the social context or reception of literary art itself, for example, the ways in which reading is represented in the Victorian novel. Instead, the performative arts of theatre and music exemplify art's capacity to manipulate or express the social or moral feelings of the performer and audience.

Unlike Thackeray and Brontë Eliot does not condemn acts of self-display if the actor is unselfconscious. The primary example is Dinah's performance as a Methodist preacher in *Adam Bede*. Although Byerly's analysis of Eliot's use of the arts in her novels suggests that music represented for Eliot an "inner reality" (134), she also notes that in *Daniel Deronda* music is "portrayed as a complex and demanding profession" (140). Klesmer is Eliot's mouthpiece when he insists on the influence artists have on the moral and social life of a nation. Byerly's illuminating discussion of the status of musicians in Victorian society, especially foreigners like Klesmer, explains why the musician's views are marginalised in the world of the novel. Her analysis does not explain, however, why Eliot marginalised professional artists in her novels. By focusing

on the difference between Mirah's unselfconscious artistry and Gwendolyn's superficial talents, Byerly shows how Eliot reinforces the same themes represented by Thackeray and Brontë. The contradictions between art's role as commodity and its moral charge to reveal a higher truth or express genuine feeling remain unresolved.

Although linked to the other novelists in Byerly's thesis, Hardy's use of the arts in his novels suggest a different paradigm. In Hardy "art becomes a natural medium through which to view the world" (149). Taking on the debate about Hardy's many allusions to specific works of art, Byerly contests the idea that Hardy is simply showing off the results of his self-education or rejecting realism in favor of a proto-aestheticism. For Byerly Hardy's method is part of his realism, a way to increase the clarity of his readers' understanding and "provide an 'objective' view of his characters" (152-53): the purpose of comparing a face or a landscape to a work of art is "the act of comparing. Art and life, it seems, can be regarded in exactly the same way" (154). More importantly Byerly notes how class and gender roles are reversed in Hardy's treatment of the arts. The humblest characters are most worthy of aesthetic regard and the men become the focus of Hardy's critique of theatricality rather than the women. In addition Hardy's Ruskinian conviction that the beauty of a building is inseparable from its use reinforces the view that art manifests reality rather than illusion or some separate category of experience. His characters labour at the arts that express their being, as does Hardy, for whom the novelist's work is "to see in half and quarter views the whole picture" (183). Although it may seem that Hardy's use of the arts in his fiction belies the autonomy of realistic representation that Byerly delineates in the work of other Victorian novelists, he does not substitute art for life, and so Byerly sees Hardy's fiction as closer to the moral aesthetic of earlier writers than the aestheticism of decadent writers.

Byerly's last chapter contrasts the work of Pater and Wilde with that of earlier novelists. Her main point is that the detached narratives of the Aesthetic novelists seem theatrical, in the sense that their characters and events are to be observed rather than engaged by the reader. Their representation of theatre is not an occasion for noting the perils of confusing art and life for the actor. Instead all of the arts are celebrated for their forms rather than for their relations to life: "The Aesthetic novel is a mélange of aesthetic experiences in which the crucial distinctions among various forms of art that we have seen in the earlier novelists are deliberately erased." By making the arts equivalent to each other and to life itself, the novels of Pater and Wilde create for Byerly a "kind of flatness" in which only the moment of perception matters: "By viewing moments in isolation, as discrete entities rather than part of a continuum, Pater avoids the Victorian preoccupation with the moral consequences of the aesthetic perspective" (194). If Victorian writers used different forms of art to define a space for their own representation of the "real," they also contributed to the view that art is a central concern of life (195). Ironically once Pater and Wilde represent art as a central concern, other aspects of reality appear insignificant and the morality of literary realism becomes irrelevant. For this reason Byerly finds the aesthetic novel less satisfying than the Victorian novel.

Byerly's discussion of Thackeray's illustrations for *Vanity Fair*, her overview of portraiture as a genre of painting, and her revealing analysis of the contradictions between Victorian theories of music and the low status of musicians all contribute

greatly to our understanding of the novelists' references to the arts. Throughout her argument Byerly is particularly good at synthesising the critical work of other literary scholars and theorists. Her sophisticated interpretation of the novelists' use of the arts as a textual strategy for promoting their own views of art's social and moral function offers a fine model for examining other Victorian writers. Largely unaddressed, however, is the treatment of literary art as authentic discourse. While Byerly's chapters rarely engage the social or cultural conditions that shaped Victorian artists' interest in the "real," her descriptions of how the arts were performed and appreciated in the nineteenth century are significant and engaging. Still, one might question whether establishing the autonomy of artistic modes of representation is necessary in order to distinguish the novel's moral effects from those of other realistic discourses like science or journalism.

George Levine

Modernist writers tended to write off realism. The increasingly aesthetic and yet austere commitments of modernism manifested themselves in part through a deep distrust both of the possibility and of the usefulness of realism—a mode that had marked much European narrative, and with increasing intensity, down to the end of the nineteenth century. Lukacs's brilliant and often wrongheaded celebration of realism, against modernism, remained a minority position except in the early century tradition of socialist realism. But post-war left-oriented and Marxist-inspired theory also abandoned realism; Brecht and the intensely modernist (and left-oriented) Frankfurt School went well beyond representationalism; and realism became even more suspect under the regime of French post-war theory. There is no such thing as realism, the argument goes, as the very possibility of representation is put to question.

Certainly since the 1960s it has been impossible to make a serious case for realism without recognising that it is not what it seems, or tries to seem: a direct representation of things as they are. Yet realism has kept reasserting itself, if not as a style (and it keeps doing that, too), then as a disturbing subject for critics and scholars. There is already a long tradition of scholarship that has attempted to rewrite realism's history in the light of our current critical suspicions. Since the 1960s traditional realists of the nineteenth century seem always to have known the impossibility of their enterprise. Realists, in the glow of modernist thought, have not only always recognised the art (and artificiality) of their work, but have struggled brilliantly, with a deep understanding of their medium, to create the impression of the real out of the impossibilities of language and art. Critics like Harry Levin, Robert Alter, Northrop Frye, Ian Watt, and Michael McKeon, among many others who have preceded or worked outside of post-structuralist theoretical positions, have rethought realism inside a history of genres, or cultural history, or new forms of aesthetic sensibility.

Byerly's study seems to me to work out of that tradition, bringing it into contact with some post-structuralist thought, but most important, seeing realism in its ambivalent relations to its sister arts, particularly music, painting, and theatre. Her argument is built on the assumption, which she effectively confirms through her careful