*Jesus Is Female* is the latest and most ambitious application of gender theory to Moravian history. It offers provocative interpretations that readers inclined to this interpretive approach will find convincing and innovative, along with many important new sources warranting further scholarly examination. Others will take it as a book arguing an extreme interpretive position that is theoretically reductive and, at a number of crucial points, frankly conjectural.

**Stephen A. Marini**
Wellesley College

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***The English Cult of Literature: Devoted Readers, 1774–1880***. By **William R. McKelvy**. Victorian Literature and Culture Series. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007. xiv + 323 pp. $45.00 cloth.

In *The English Cult of Literature*, William R. McKelvy reexamines a claim frequently made in nineteenth-century Britain, namely, that literature was becoming modernity's functional religion. Both in the nineteenth century and in subsequent scholarship, this transference of cultural authority has been given alternative narrative interpretations. One version presents a story of secularizing displacement, a history of "culture's triumph over religion" (3), in which the erosion of religious authority opens a space within which the cult of literature emerges. Another version repeats this story of spiritual erosion but reverses its significance by nostalgically accentuating the loss of custom and sense of place that had infused the older religious world. A third version of the story, brilliantly articulated in the scholarship of M. H. Abrams, emphasizes that a cultural and spiritual crisis gave birth to a new aesthetic-religious synthesis, in which religious ideas were assimilated and reinterpreted in literary forms. In all of these narratives, "a waning, institutionalized religious power finds compensatory expression in acts of cultural faith" (2).

McKelvy, who teaches English at Washington University, fully acknowledges the declining identity of church and state during the period from the 1770s to the 1880s, but he argues that scholars should not confuse this political secularization with a general decay of religion. Instead, "the functionally agnostic state" unfolded while church and religion retained large cultural significance (30). McKelvy most effectively articulates this interpretation through his reappraisal of another commonplace about nineteenth-century literature: the notion that the author pursued a sacred vocation, "with the power to sanctify human experience and redeem national

life" (1). This literary vocation exercised extensive influence by taking a near-mythic form in which "an intellectually ambitious young man has his religious faith compromised, is unable to pursue a career in the church, and takes to literature instead" (11). In tales built on this model, nicely exemplified in James Anthony Froude's novel *The Nemesis of Faith* (1849), literature is not only a vocational alternative to the ministry but also a primary solvent of orthodox belief.

However, McKelvy demonstrates that the history and sociology of authorship in this era presents a very different picture from this mythic choice between ministry and the literary profession. Instead, history reveals manifold institutional and professional links between the religious and literary domains, and it identifies a prominent tradition of the clergyman who addressed the nation as an author, "appearing to write as an extension of his pastoral duties" (21). Furthermore, since "a sizable 36 percent of all novelists were women," McKelvy also notes that a significant number of these female writers, most famously Jane Austen, had direct family ties to the clergy (15). The core of McKelvy's book is a close reading of the various authors who engaged in this long cultural dialogue about the relation of religion and literature. He very effectively illuminates the importance of clerical authors such as Robert Lowth in the production of books associated with the rise of modern literary history. He explores how the work of Walter Scott—especially Scott's idealization of the ancient minstrels as the progenitors of the modern poetic vocation—produced a divided reception. John Keble and John Henry Newman admired Scott's ability to stir readers with a love of the marvelous and a reverence for ancient institutions, whereas George Eliot found that Scott's novels stimulated historical sensibilities that ultimately led to the rejection of the claims of supernatural Christianity. And, in a fascinating chapter on William Gladstone, McKelvy explains how Gladstone combined a long career of parliamentary leadership with five books and over forty articles about the authorship, unity, and historical value of the Homeric poems, a literary avocation that directly arose from Gladstone's theological commitments.

In addition to this reassessment of nineteenth-century texts and authors, McKelvy gestures toward, but does not successfully integrate, another topic: the historical sociology of reading. What McKelvy designates as the reading nation emerged between the 1770s and the 1880s, more or less in tandem with the sacred vocation of authorship. Whereas, at the beginning of Victoria's reign in 1837, one third of all men and one half of all women could not read or write, these statistics changed dramatically over the next fifty years. Literacy rates evened out for men and women and exceeded 90 percent for the nation as a whole. Reading and writing became both important indicators of social status and, rather suddenly, the "preconditions

for legitimate labor" (34). These are the "devoted readers" of McKelvy's subtitle, but they never directly appear in his account. He has nothing to say about reading practices or tastes, and he does not indicate the responses of devoted readers to his authors. This absence is not simply unfortunate in its own right, but, more seriously, it undercuts McKelvy's principal claim that the cult of literature "developed in intimate collusion with religious culture and religious politics" in a social context "in which the individual reader, and the evolving reading of the nation, had become sacralized" (35).

**W. Clark Gilpin**
University of Chicago

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***Gilfillan of Dundee, 1813–1878: Interpreting Religion and Culture in Mid-Victorian Scotland***. By **Aileen Black**. Dundee, Scotland: Dundee University Press, 2006. xv + 280 pp. £25 paper.

The inscription on his funeral monument describes George Gilfillan as "critic, poet, divine." At the height of his career, he was renowned as "Gilfillan of Dundee," his name inseparable from his beloved Scottish city. According to that Dundee poet of dubious merit, William McGonagall, the people flocked "to hear him night and day," and he was "the greatest preacher of the present day" (154). Gilfillan was indeed a force in Victorian Scotland, famed for his sermons, public lectures, and literary and historical essays. A Presbyterian minister, he was a dissenter from the established Church of Scotland and a "Broad Church" Christian. In politics, he was a liberal, and a champion of the rights of the laboring orders. He was, in short, a representative of the urban, dissenting, liberal, and provincial culture that thrived across Britain in the mid-Victorian years.

In this beautifully crafted book, Aileen Black of the University of Dundee provides the first scholarly biography of George Gilfillan and a lively exploration of the cultural life of mid-Victorian Dundee. Gilfillan comes across as an attractive figure. The youngest son of a Presbyterian Seceder minister, his father died when he was a child—after informing his wife on his deathbed that she was soon to "be a widow, and a poor widow" (21). Educated amid poverty at Glasgow University, the young Gilfillan wished to pursue a literary career, but, needing an income, he followed his late father into the ministry of the United Associate Secession Church and in 1836 became minister of the School Wynd church in Dundee, where he would