

1-1-1998

Review of *Sexual Politics and the Romantic Author* by  
Sonia Hofkosh

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manistic scholarship in Germany has been through several cycles of decline and re-emergence, and Marchand's ability to delineate them is impressive. Marchand describes the genesis and early establishment of the institutions that would nurture the professionalized fields of philological and archeological study, the challenges to classical study from Nietzsche, Schliemann, educational reform movements, and

German prehistorical studies, and finally its evolution in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the end Marchand summarizes the various threads of decline as having been "specialization, institutional inertia, demographic and economic changes, nationalism, hyperaestheticization, and the social irresponsibility of those who benefited from the perpetuation of 'disinterested' learning" (374).

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### **Sonia Hofkosh, *Sexual Politics and the Romantic Author***

(Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1998), xi + 188. \$54.95.

A Review by Diane Long Hoeveler  
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Sonia Hofkosh's *Sexual Politics and the Romantic Author* offers six carefully argued, beautifully written chapters on "the way invisible girls are scripted into romantic tradition in particularly material configurations—as bodies, among objects, like books, in the marketplace—even as they appear to be overlooked or, what may amount to the same thing, looked over" (3). Hofkosh's study focuses on texts that have themselves been overlooked: Mary Shelley's gift-annual stories, Sarah Hazlitt's *Journal*, documents relating to the definition of prostitutes and milliners, and the popular ladies' magazines of the era. Examining these marginalized texts, Hofkosh argues, allows her to interrogate the "ideologies of the everyday, the inscape of romanticism, by which I mean those suppositions about value that reverberate not just in the sanctioned forms of High Culture—finished products, public pronouncements—but also through the most (seemingly) ordinary occasions of social transaction" (8).

Hofkosh's thesis expands and reverberates throughout the book, and each time she states it the book takes on further depth and nuance. Early in the study she notes that "disciplinary definitions such as 'High Romantic' or 'Poetry' or 'Literature,' have ignored or devalued work by women not because such work did not exist, was not consequential or, even, 'good,' but precisely because it was so formative, so responsive to and resonant with the literate culture's emerging concerns, desires, aspirations . . ." (11). Later in the text, Hofkosh again elaborates on this, her main point: "What I want to suggest is that the very judgments which comprise that [high Romantic] tradition and claim for it an historical order and consistency are informed by (among other things) a sexual politics that is as embedded in critical history as it is in contemporary discussions of authorship and audience and in other overlapping cultural institutions as well" (116).

Hofkosh actually charts in this study the forces that opposed the privatization of the masculine imaginary. And so she concentrates on prostitutes and circulating libraries, commerce in women's writings and women's bodies, and "on

the way women and images of them function to describe a model of writing that the male author represses. Such an exploration is based on the interplay between private and public realms, between the individual personality and the culture of production and consumption" (38). When Hofkosh examines Lockhart and Hunt on the status of women milliners, she concludes that this textual debate reveals an anxiety about "the visibility of women's labor in an industrialized market economy, an economy in which the sites of production and patterns of consumption are shifting and signs of value, like capital, are being redistributed and reconsolidated" (67). Hofkosh then shifts her argument from manual labor to literary labor, stating that what is at stake in the abjection of lower-class women and their productions is "a politics of production that claims authorship as a sign of subjectivity, of inspiration, knowledge, judgment, power, as well as a politics of consumption, of who reads and values what books and why, what counts as significant writing" (68).

Hofkosh's book is as persuasive and well-grounded as any I have seen on this issue. My only problem with the text is that it is at least a decade overdue. Would anyone, in fact, dispute her thesis? I think not. New Historicist readings of marginalized historical texts have been current for over a decade, while "sexual politics" is a term borrowed from Kate Millett who first coined it over two decades ago. In short, Hofkosh's project is not new nor are many of these chapters, one of which first appeared in 1988. The two new chapters—one on milliner girls and the magazines and one on Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*—are valuable discussions that lend depth and substance to Hofkosh's earlier work on Keats and the Bluestockings; Lamb, Coleridge and the circulating library; Byron and Scott; Mary Shelley; and the Hazlitts' strange divorce discourse. The chapter on milliners, in fact, seems to me to embody the newest and most promising direction that new historicist work is moving: a genuine engagement with supposedly obscure texts that actually explains the crucial absences and gaps in the dominant discourse system.