Works Cited

- Brown, E. K. On Canadian Poetry. 1943. Rev. Ed. 1944. Ottawa: Tecumseh, 1973.
- Frye, Northrop. "Canada and Its Poetry (1943)." Rev. of The Book of Canadian Poetry, ed. A. J. M. Smith. The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada: Essential Articles on Contemporary Canadian Poetry in English. Eds. Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski. Toronto: Ryerson, 1967.
- Lemire, Maurice, et al. La Vie Littéraire au Québec. Sainte-Foy, QC: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1991–.
- Lipking, Lawrence. "A Trout in the Milk." *The Uses of Literary History*. Ed. Marshall Brown. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995.
- New, W. H. A History of Canadian Literature. London: Macmillan, 1989.
- White, Hayden. "Historicism, History, and the Figurative Imagination." Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978.

Helen M. Buss, D. L. Macdonald, and Anne McWhir, eds. Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley: Writing Lives. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001. 340 pp. \$49.95 cloth.

This collection of essays on the lives and writings of Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley is an achievement for which the editors, the press, and the Calgary Institute for the Humanities—sponsor of the conference that gave rise to the project—should be congratulated. Books based on conference papers often disappoint, but the present volume offers much of value not only to Shelley and Wollstonecraft specialists but also to two much larger constituencies: those engaged with feminist thought and praxis, and students of life writing in all its forms.

The conference was held to mark the bicentenary of the daughter's birth and the mother's death: the mother, author of a radical critique of the way society infantilized women, stifling their intellects; the daughter, later to become author of a narrative that fatally parodied the male drive to monopolize creation and procreation. This collection does not confine itself to these well-known works, however. What gives it still wider scope is the contributors' awareness of how the post-revolution debate politicized

This collection of essays on the lives and writings of Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley is an achievement for which the editors, the press, and the Calgary Institute for the Humanities ... should be congratulated.

textual production, domestic life, and gender roles—or rather, how the already-political nature of these things became matter for unprecedented controversy. Conservative anxiety is typified by a writer mentioned but not quoted in the volume under review, Jane West:

One of the misfortunes under which literature now labours is, that the title of a work no longer announces its intention: books of travel are converted into vehicles of politics and systems of legislation. Female letter-writers teach us the arcana of government.... Writers on morality lay the axe to the root of domestic harmony ... the novel ... is converted into an offensive weapon. (3: 387–8)

The transgressive coupling of genres stands for all ways in which the times were politically out of joint.

It is against this background that we can understand the startling claim made in Gary Kelly's wide-ranging essay: "the dominant discursive mode of the Revolution debate was autobiographical" (21). Even those who abhorred Rousseau's politics found themselves deploying the "subjective ... sublime" (21), Kelly argues, but Wollstonecraft and Shelley were revolutionary in that they fused the personal and the political, using each to critique the other. Kelly also points out the ironies generated by the mother's ambivalent legacy to her daughter. In Shelley, he suggests, we see the first symptoms of a crisis in the writer's role, as the modern subject was "purged" of "revolutionary excess," and made into the supposedly autonomous subject demanded by bourgeois liberalism (22). The writer's life can become an end in itself, an aestheticized, politically ineffective refuge from bourgeois *ennui*. For Kelly, Mary Shelley's fiction commits the sin of proto-liberalism (22)—a verdict that later contributors to this volume (particularly Lisa Vargo and Jeanne Moskal) challenge and complicate.

Nearly all the essays devoted to Wollstonecraft take up the question of genre, particularly how genre "mediates," as Lawrence Kennard puts it, "the relationship between self and world" (56). Eleanor Ty links the peculiarly hybrid nature of *Short Residence*—"a travel book in the form of letters" (69)—to the transgressive way it articulates female desire. Desire here is not only sexual. Ty illuminatingly invokes Lacan, who distinguished between desire and need and located desire "in the beyond of the demand" (quoted, 71), indicating its revolutionary potential. She suggests that Wollstonecraft, though aware of the exclusion of women from "public achievement" and from the discourse that gave authority to "demands," was nevertheless able to give her reader clues to her dissatisfaction with the existing order of things—travel book as vehicle of politics. The trans-

gressive quality of *Short Residence* also emerges in Syndy Conger's essay, which analyses how Wollstonecraft deploys the pronouns "you" and "we," enabling her to interpellate a reader who is simultaneously a personal someone and an impersonal everyone (51). Thus the very ambiguity of the addressee serves the utopian tendency of the work, arousing sympathy for her sense of betrayal as we discover that the "you" addressed, the absent lover, has become one of the commercial tribe (50).

S. Leigh Matthews examines *The Wrongs of Woman* as an attempt to make sensibility politically effective—the novel as offensive weapon. Ingeniously playing on two meanings of the term "confinement," Matthews explicates the novel's premise—the confinement of a woman in a madhouse, instigated by her husband in order to remove her from her child—as subversively figuring motherhood itself as equivalent to madness. Both kinds of confinement share one purpose, to suppress discourses that threaten patriarchal authority.

In D.L. Macdonald's essay, as in Conger's, the careful analysis of two pronouns reveals rhetorical strategy. In this case the pronouns are "I" and "we," and the texts analysed, the two Vindications. Macdonald finds, for example, that agency is ascribed to the "I" of the Vindication of the Rights of Woman far more often when the "I" is the writer, as opposed to the woman. Lawrence Kennard, like Ty and Conger, takes up the question of the genre of Short Residence, showing through some suggestive comparisons with passages from Wollstonecraft's "On Poetry," how the Short Residence develops emotional and aesthetic responses to landscape not only through poetic metaphor, but through diction that is in the narrower sense "poetic," even if not in poetic meter.

In the last of the essays focussing on Wollstonecraft, Jeanne Perreault reads Wollstonecraft's comparisons between Englishwomen's chattel state and the state of slavery through Harriet Jacobs' feminist and anti-slavery writings. Taking issue with Moira Ferguson's criticism that Wollstonecraft fails to attack the real problem, the bourgeois notion of private property, Perreault argues that both writers use "the apparent contradictions of property" as a "lever against the weight of ownership" (101). This is valid enough, but it hardly answers Ferguson's point that European concepts of property contribute to the mystification of selfhood and the myth of the autonomous individual, so that to claim similar individuality on behalf of women, or slaves, under the banner of "self-possession," is to support a halfway liberation, a cause that—however well-intentioned and however necessary at the time, in both Jacobs' case and Wollstonecraft's—perpetuates flawed values.

At the mid-point of the volume, Helen Buss offers a subtle analysis of Godwin's *Memoirs* of Wollstonecraft. In place of the criminally naive Godwin of some older accounts, Buss reveals a more complex figure who, despite his stance as repository of biographical facts about his late wife, is simultaneously the judge of her career, albeit one who "cannot get past partiality" (119), and the lover-husband. Buss suggests that Godwin made a mistake about genre that involved him in an ethical failure. He believed he could publish a woman's "public 'life" in the new genre of biographical memoir, failing to understand that in the ethos of the time a woman's life had to be subordinate to her reputation (122).

Charles E. Robinson offers a summary of Mary Shelley's reading of her mother, with brief commentary, information that will be useful to specialists and should stimulate further research. As an essay, however, his contribution is disappointing, since Robinson does not risk any generalizations or theories about how Shelley read her mother's work. Judith Barbour examines the unfinished "Life" of Godwin which Mary Shelley wrote at the instigation of the publisher Colburn, a project that became part of the "genealogical romance of her own poetic election and exceptional parentage" (140), her chance to write herself back into the family tree. Barbour shows how vexed a task this was for Shelley, the work being concurrent with the editing of her late husband's poetry. As a woman entangling herself with the lives of men, Shelley was Pandora to the Promethean figures of her father and her husband.

Lisa Vargo, taking her cue from Marlene Kadar's productive suggestion that even the most fictive texts can be approached as life writing, reads the underrated *Lodore* as "an imaginary conversation with Mary Wollstonecraft" (178). Vargo sees *Lodore* as a virtual-reality version of Shelley's own life, in that the principles by which Shelley was educated are activated once more in this novel so as to challenge the nineteenth-century ideology of domesticity (178). The character Fanny Derham struggles to live as Wollstonecraftian revolutionary in an era that shuns revolution; but more than this, Vargo suggests, she is metonymy for the labouring classes themselves, who are otherwise excluded from upper-class narratives. Vargo's provocative reading should make it impossible for future critics to overlook *Lodore*, and challenges the still-current view that Shelley failed to live up to her parents' radicalism.

Even art criticism can be read as life writing, as Jeanne Moskal shows in a subtle analysis of Mary Shelley's *Rambles in Germany and Italy.* In her life of Cervantes, Shelley hinted that autobiography could be a form of self-protection—in Moskal's neat phrase, "a defence against full knowl-

edge" (190). But what's omitted from the explicitly autobiographical may make itself known through interpretations of paintings. Shelley's responses to Madonnas and Nativities by Titian, Murillo, Raphael and Ghirlandaio involve her in her own erotic history, even while she constructs her authorial persona as a cultured, respectable woman contemplating great art.

Anne McWhir uses the Pandora analogy to unlock those two mysterious caskets of troublesome gifts, Frankenstein and The Last Man. The latter, in particular, emerges as an ambivalent commentary on literary legacies and what we do with them. Lionel Verney's desire to reanimate his dead friends as text is succeeded by the patience of the fictitious editor who unpacks the "broken artifacts" and "untold stories," recovered centuries later (172). McWhir's essay uncannily anticipates the reflections on the editor's and the biographer's craft contributed by (respectively) Betty Bennett, editor of Mary Shelley's Letters, and Anne Mellor, author of a landmark biography of Mary Shelley. In Bennett's view, the letters argue strongly for Shelley as a highly professional writer, despite their fugitive and often misleading nature: they are indeed scattered, sibylline leaves. Mellor admits—or rather, if we've been attending to the arguments of earlier contributors, reiterates—the autobiographical subtext present in biography: it's the biographer's as much as the subject's personal experience and feminist commitment that make Mary Shelley live again.

The collection ends with *Caves of Fancy*, a sharp, sexy dramatization by Rose Scollard of the lives of Mary Shelley, Fanny Imlay, and Claire Clairmont that also reprises themes from several of the essays. It is a lively conclusion to a volume that significantly advances the study of life writing, of these two women's lives, and of their writings.

Anthony John Harding University of Saskatchewan

Works Cited

West, Jane. A Tale of the Times. 3 vols. 1799. Rpt. New York: Garland, 1974.