

acknowledged debt to theorists such as Mieke Bal and Jean-François Lyotard. The mix is eclectic, and the exact composition of it less important than the way Gamer deftly uses it to clarify how cultural norms affect the way literature gets written. Gamer's method represents a very quiet revolution, but it is also very clearly in revolt against the simplistic way literary production has been implicitly characterized in traditional histories of the same period (e.g. Renwick's 1963 volume in the *Oxford History of English Literature*), and, to be fair, equally in revolt against the simplistic way in which literary production has been characterized in "new historical" studies of the last decade that, influenced by Foucault and Greenblatt, believe in agencies but not in creative agents. If "post-theory" means that most of the major theoretical projects of the 1970s and 1980s are no longer being actively advanced, it also means that we can enjoy today the ripeness of the fruits that were then sown—such as Michael Gamer's *Romanticism and the Gothic*.

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Michael Eberle-Sinatra, ed. *Mary Shelley's Fictions: From "Frankenstein" to "Falkner."* New York: St. Martin's Press/Palgrave, 2000. Pp. xxvi+250. \$75.00.

A recent electronic exchange on a romanticism list-server illustrates some of the difficulties and prejudices still encountered when discussing the other Mary Shelley, not just "the author of *Frankenstein*" but also of five other novels, one novella, two verse-dramas and various minor texts. In response to a young professor's appeal for advice on teaching *Valperga* and *The Last Man*, a more seasoned colleague recommended focusing on the novels' biographical contexts or on humanistic themes rather than on sociology or popular culture. Part of the problem, the professor hinted, was the lumbering quality of Shelley's prose in these two mid-career novels. This anecdote, all too common in English departments, reveals how, behind scholars' questioning of Mary Shelley's fiction, an uncertainty about the author's artistry still lurks.

Readily accessible, thanks to the splendidly edited *Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley* published by Pickering and Chatto, Shelley's prolific work is richly allusive and often highly erudite, representing over thirty years of professional writing and a wealth of reading. But readability does not always make up for these texts' difficulty, and many of the ambiguities

introduced in *Frankenstein*, including Shelley's views on power and on gender roles, or her relationship to her parents and husband, are not easily glossed by the rest of her writing. While some excellent criticism published in the 1990s helps us better understand these lesser known works, including two important collections of essays, *The Other Mary Shelley* (1993) and *Iconoclastic Departures* (1997), many romanticists today remain unsure how to approach, let alone teach Shelley's fiction as a coherent body of texts. Critics' insistence on reading Shelley according to overly rigid categories has arguably hindered this interpretive effort. In particular, the view made popular by Mary Poovey and Anne Mellor that Mary Shelley becomes increasingly conservative, an apologist for bourgeois, female values as opposed to male romantic individualism, has given direction to much criticism, and Shelley's later novels are too often read in line with this model.

In her bibliographical article on Shelley in Michael O'Neil's *Literature of the Romantic Period* (1998), Pamela Clemit insists on the need to view the writer more broadly, and predicts a significant change in the scholarship generated by the 1997 bicentenary of Mary Shelley's birth. *Mary Shelley's Fictions*, edited by Michael Eberle-Sinatra with the help of Nora Crook, is one of two essay collections culled from these bicentenary conferences, along with Betty Bennett's *Mary Shelley in Her Times* (2000). More heterogeneous in content and uneven in quality than the latter, Eberle-Sinatra's book has the merit of showcasing new scholars alongside better-known names and of covering the full range of Shelley's fiction, including the rarely discussed *Falkner* and Shelley's tales published in the annuals. The Introduction by Nora Crook provides a brief but helpful overview of Shelley scholarship, tracing three different phases in the author's path to canonicity based on landmark essay collections. Crook calls the third phase in Shelley studies and this collection's broadly stated critical alignment, "the inclusive Mary Shelley" (xx). The collection is divided into four thematic sections, encapsulating the issues most often raised in Shelley criticism: "Craft of Writing," "Gender," "The Contemporary Scene," "The Parental Legacy." While five out of the fourteen essays base themselves in part at least on the binary model outlined above, the collection as a whole succeeds in representing Shelley's body of work in a more inclusive, historically faithful and ultimately more interesting manner than past efforts.

Without addressing the question of aesthetic value directly, the three essays in Part I do challenge readers to acknowledge Shelley as an artist who is able to self-consciously craft complex prose, plot structures and characters. Defying commonly held views, in particular Marilyn Butler's claim that the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* is a more politically conventional text, Nora Crook begins the "Craft" section with a feisty defense of the later work, arguing for a "parity of esteem" between the two editions (3). Her

method is to challenge all the prevalent arguments point-by-point, conjectures that have “hardened into fact without supporting evidence” (5). Commonsense prevails as the critic persuasively demonstrates that Shelley made changes not for political reasons, but to improve her style. But when, in the end, she notes that the “stark, pristine, ‘expressionist’ texture” of the 1818 text is the most important difference, Crook’s plea for parity falls on deaf ears, since it is precisely this expressionist texture which makes most readers prefer the earlier edition (17). Sophie Thomas, in a densely written essay that is sometimes difficult to follow, interprets *The Last Man* as “a compelling meditation on the ends of writing” (23). She suggestively links metaphors of fragmentation in the text with the question of narrative structure introduced by the Preface, but her claim that the novel examines the end of writing, or that it cannot be ended leaves the reader unconvinced. In line with Pamela Clemit’s “Godwinian novel” argument and Gary Kelly’s notion of a “coterie” fiction, Richard Cronin in the third essay coins the label “hybrid fiction” to classify Shelley’s last works. The critic gives the example of *Lodore*, in which sentimental and what he labels “styp-tic,” or caustic passages come together to produce a prose style “that tends both towards the antithetical and the oxymoronic” (49). This hybridity extends to characterization. Cronin argues that, like Edward Bulwer, Shelley shows how human beings can be several things at once, setting a tone of “large and calm tolerance” (50).

While the first two articles in the gender section purport to move beyond facile polarization, both are too concerned with prevailing categories to offer the same originality and breadth as does Cronin’s essay. In their article on *Mathilda*, Shelley’s provocative novella on incest, Anne-Lise François and Daniel Mozes argue that the story exposes the limits of the Enlightenment faith in communication. Mathilda seeks her subjectivity through a speech act, her father’s confession, but knowledge, rather than emancipating the heroine, provokes her death. Mathilda’s participation in her own victimization, as Charles Robinson has argued elsewhere, leads the critics to challenge Anne Mellor’s masculine and feminine categories. Daniel White’s essay on *Valperga* and Italy is a well-written addition to the burgeoning literature on Italian republicanism by critics such as Kari Lokke, Nanora Sweet and Michael Rossington. Drawing once more on Mellor’s categories, he states that Italy is the Vienna Congress’ hideous progeny, torn between the beautiful and sublime. White reads Beatrice as a solitary (male) poet opposed to Euthanasia, whose “feminine sublime” represents an “ideology of domesticity and enlightened bourgeois politics” (82). The essay would have been even stronger with more historical specificity (Sismondi is not mentioned), less attention to abstract categories and a less dismissive reading of Corinne, who did after all offer Shelley,

Hemans and many other women writing on Italy an invaluable model of collective selfhood. The third essay, by Michael Eberle-Sinatra, is a psychobiographic reading of paratexts in *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, including titles, names, epigraphs, and prefaces, and suggests very schematically that Shelley struggled over the role of authorship in both novels. The section's final essay, by A. A. Markley, offers a refreshingly novel look at Shelley's too frequently overlooked short stories through the prism of cross-dressing. Markley never proves his claim that Shelley's use of cross-dressing is distinctive, since nearly all the stories end like Shakespeare's plays with a reassertion of order. However, the article demonstrates remarkable erudition and inspires one to read Shelley's stories.

Part 3 on "The Contemporary Scene" opens with a fascinating piece by Julia Wright on *The Last Man*, which she reads as "an extended refutation of reassuring representations of England as a well-defended sanctuary" (130). Wright develops her argument through texts by Cowper, Barbauld and Austen, showing how, with the development of exploration and cartography, the English gradually lost their imaginative capacity to manage space. In Shelley's apocalyptic novel, Lionel does in the end reassert his mental power, but no longer in terms of space but of temporality, a compensatory strategy which ultimately fails. Lidia Garbin analyzes the influence of Walter Scott on Shelley's historical novels, especially *Perkin Warbeck*. Shelley could read a Scott novel in a day, and Garbin writes that "we cannot understand *Perkin Warbeck* unless we also see that it stands in Scott's shadow" (159). Beyond claiming generalities such as their common use of Shakespeare epigraphs, however, the essay is unsuccessful at showing why the knowledge of Scott's influence really matters. The next article, by David Vallins, seeks affinities between Shelley and another male romantic, Coleridge. Opposing itself once more to Poovey's and Mellor's gendered categories, Vallins argues that male characters such as Lodore and Falkner, usually criticized for being Byronic, seek the kind of "creative compensation" in art which Shelley sympathetically associated with Coleridge. Fiona Stafford closes the section with a very interesting essay on *Lodore* as a response to the 1832 Reform Act and the subsequent publishing crisis. The main character's ambiguity, she argues, reflects Shelley's conflicting political and social allegiances. The essay provides much needed historical detail, but by limiting itself to the character of Lodore, does not help us understand the novel as a whole.

Raising the specter of biographism, the fourth and last section titled "Parental Legacy" in fact contains some of the collection's strongest essays. Marie Mulvey-Roberts' is the most literally biographic of the three. Basing herself on Kristeva's theory of the abject, the critic argues that Shelley must struggle with the paradox that what gives life also kills, and traces a curious

process of “incorporation, defecation, resuscitation and reunion” (200). The argument is unfortunately weakened by an indiscriminate search for examples both in Shelley’s life and in her work. The last two essays are particularly welcome because they both address Shelley’s too-often-ignored last novel, *Falkner*. Julia Saunders’ well-written article defends domestic characters such as Elizabeth, Ethel and Lady Lodore as representing an alternative kind of “radicalism” grounded in human relationship. There are some kinks in the argument, particularly in her discussion of gratitude, and the term “liberal” (the kind of liberalism advocated by De Staël and Hemans) instead of “radical” would have been more historically accurate. But by staying closely grounded in the texts and taking into account Shelley’s entire body of fiction, the essay is particularly helpful. The collection closes with an extensively researched and highly intelligent piece by Graham Allen on Shelley’s little known and unfinished “Life of Godwin” and *Falkner*. In memorial writing, a person’s private name is put on trial and often found guilty, and thus needs to be strictly controlled. Godwin’s *Cursory Strictures* controlled public naming and vindicated the truth, whereas his *Memoirs of the Author of Vindication of the Rights of Women* helped defame Wollstonecraft and her daughter. Allen shows how Shelley disproves making private material public but also sees the value of faithfully representing an author-subject’s life. Both the “Life of Godwin” and *Falkner* reflect the anxiety which results from this double bind. Falkner’s narrative, Allen cleverly argues, does not betray its subject, defeating the logic in which one party must be vindicated at the expense of another.

While the overall content of *Mary Shelley’s Fictions* validates Charles Robinson’s dustjacket comment that the collection “moves beyond limiting binary thinking that has oversimplified the study of Shelley,” several essays devote too much space to reiterating this binary thinking, limiting their scope. On the other hand, the articles which approach the material from a different tack, including essays by Cronin, Markley, Wright and Allen, help renew Shelley scholarship by highlighting the rich complexity of Mary Shelley’s work. It is this complexity, our very inability to come to grips with Shelley, which makes studying her so worthwhile. As Nora Crook writes evocatively in the Introduction, “today, her constituency is increasingly those, who, like writers and readers of this volume, pay close attention to what she has to impart to us from behind her many veils” (xxv).

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