

téressantes découlent de cette délimitation du terrain littéraire. Le surréalisme, bien avant, a-t-il joué en France, pour certains facteurs, le même rôle polarisateur que le féminisme au Québec? Par exemple en ce qui concerne l'écriture spontanée/automatique?

Le "je" réel, le "je" narrateur, le "je" littéraire et le "jeu" jouent un rôle de premier plan dans chacune des études littéraires au sujet de ces femmes poètes. Le cadre demeure freudien et la foi manifestée dans cette théorie aujourd'hui moins suivie que naguère peut étonner plus d'un et plus d'une!

Le glissement de la poésie vers la prose et la difficulté de saisir ce trajet intérieur/extérieur constituent aussi certaines des artères de ces trois études. La poésie serait l'irrationnel et le sacré; la prose se tournerait vers le laïque, le profane, le célibataire.

Louise Dupré étudie attentivement le langage (par exemple la danse des pronoms) pour se fabriquer une toile d'araignée qui retienne le sens. Elle conclut sagement "que quelque chose là résiste et fuit."

MARY SHELLEY: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters

Anne K. Mellor. New York: Methuen, 1988

Deborah Kennedy

Other readers may be misled as I was by the title of Anne K. Mellor's book, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*, and by Nina Auerbach's comment on the dust-jacket that the book is the "fullest account of Mary Shelley we have or are likely to have." Unfortunately this is not the scholarly biography of Mary Shelley that has long been needed. Mellor devotes about 20% of the book to biography, 50% to *Frankenstein* and 30% to Shelley's other novels. In the 113 pages devoted to Shelley's best-known work, Mellor provides an interesting and thorough account, echoing and expanding on much of what has previously been argued in, for example, *The Endurance of*

Frankenstein (eds. George Levine and U.C. Knoepfelmacher, 1979). She gives detailed attention to the composition of the novel and textual changes, by examining the manuscript versions, Percy Shelley's revisions, and the two editions (1818; 1831). Since many people are now teaching *Frankenstein*, Mellor's book will be a useful tool, providing in one volume a scholarly and interesting account of that novel, framed by a discussion of the life and the other novels.

However, Mellor's reading has certain theoretical weaknesses, foreshadowed in her opening statement that due to Wollstonecraft's death after childbirth, Mary Shelley had a "powerful and ever-to-be-frustrated need to be mothered." Mellor pays little attention to Wollstonecraft's writings, which Shelley read avidly, and makes a great deal out of the fact that Wollstonecraft's death left Shelley motherless. This seems to me a decidedly limited approach. The author refers in passing to theories of Carol Gilligan and Nancy Chodorow, but never explains how she uses their work. She does not define key terms like "to mother" and "to parent" and uses them indiscriminately, claiming, for instance, that Victor Frankenstein refused "to parent his child" and failed to "mother his child." The reader is left wondering what Mellor means by mothering. Is it a white middle-class woman reading bedtime stories? Is it a wet-nurse, nursing? Can men mother? By using this undefined gender-specific term, Mellor presents mothering as a universal rather than historically specific experience. She also views mothering as a moral act, making mothers responsible for society's ills, as in the comment that "The absence of a mothering love, as *Frankenstein* everywhere shows, can and does make monsters, both psychological and technological." Later Mellor writes that Shelley missed that unconditional love she would have known from Wollstonecraft. By assuming that unconditional love is possible and that Shelley would have felt it from her mother, she makes heavy demands on Wollstonecraft and on all mothers, expecting them to be angels in the house.

Mellor makes convincing use of current research on incest in her discussions

of *The Last Man* and *Mathilda*, but frequently her use of contemporary studies is strained. For example, she writes that "Frankenstein represents a case of a battering parent who produces a battered child, who in turn becomes a battering parent." But Frankenstein deserts the creature; he does not batter him, and the creature has no children of whom he is a battering parent. In another annoying anachronism, she puts post-structuralist jargon in the mouth of her subject, when she writes, "Mary Shelley assumes that consciousness functions entirely within a linguistic universe in which the figural and literal are but differing signs of linguistic markers." Finally, some of Mellor's claims for Shelley are excessive. The interesting discussion of *The Last Man* does not need the concluding hyperbole: "But as the author of the first fictional example of nihilism, Mary Shelley expresses the emotional desolation that such philosophical conviction brings as has no writer since." Though this is a useful book, Mellor's striving for contemporary relevance often produces vague assertions that wrench Mary Shelley away from her own time and life.

A Word on Book Reviews

Because of the uncertainty of our financial and publishing future, and because we have such a backlog of excellent book reviews, I have had to cut most of the reviews printed here, in the interest of including as many as possible. My apologies to the readers, and to the reviewers.

—Fran Beer, Editor
CWS/cf Book Reviews