

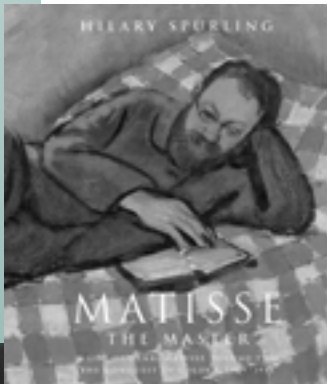
Recent biographical writing

The Factual/Fictional Rapport (Part I)

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For several years now dire prophecies have been made about the imminent demise of the book. Nevertheless, to judge by crammed bookshops, Internet book-sites, overflowing literary journals, including generally first-rate regular book supplements in most British broadsheets, and the proliferation of literary prizes (for every possible category of writing), this pessimistic prophecy seems to be premature, not to say unfounded. Novels abound, with works by both established and new writers appearing each year, many of them gifted and accomplished. The same can be said of biographical writing, both factual and carefully researched, as well as fictional and more speculative.



The divide between fact and fiction, however, is more notional than actual since every biography, no matter how scholarly, inevitably contains elements not strictly factual. Each new generation of biographers brings to bear on its subjects a perspective dictated by the education, environment and disposition of the researchers concerned. Selection is necessary and omissions can also create an inaccurate picture. So frustrated was the eminent biographer Victoria Glendinning with the elusive nature of truth that, in her own words, she felt 'completely off biography. I now think it is an extremely dodgy exercise...I do not believe in it any more' (*Literary Review*, Feb. 2000). Coleridge would have agreed with her and Vernard Malamud certainly did: 'The past exudes legend: One can not make pure clay of time's mud. There is no life that can be recaptured wholly, as it was. Which is to say that all biography is ultimately fiction.' (*Dubin's Lives*, 1979.)



For these reasons there is every justification for including, as I do, several works of fiction in this discussion which seem to me to live up to or at least approach a certain standard of truthfulness. However, so abundant is recent biographical writing that it has been necessary to present this survey in two parts; the second will appear in the next issue of *Cape Librarian* (November/December 2006). Nor is this by any means an exhaustive record of recent biographical writing, but rather an impression of my own preferences and interests. In addition, the article covers mainly - though not exclusively - female writers and/or subjects. This is not to imply that there are no worthwhile biographies by men; on the contrary, these too are burgeoning. The reason for the predominance of women is the need to circumscribe a vast area so as to concentrate on a reasonable selection of work.

Important prizes for works of non-fiction attest to the high regard in which the historical and biographical genres are held. The most prestigious of these as far as biography is concerned is the Whitbread Award which this year was won by Hilary Spurling for her monumental study of the painter Henri Matisse. Besides winning in the biography category, **Matisse the master* (in two volumes subtitled *The unknown Matisse* and *The conquest of colour*) was also awarded the coveted, overall Book of the Year prize and was described by the judges as 'one of the landmark biographies...which has already changed the history of art'.

Such a tribute is rare indeed, and fully warranted by the new light which Spurling has cast on her subject. Far from being the untroubled man which previous critical comment has suggested, Spurling reveals the 'storminess that worked through the artist over the last 45 years of his 85-year life'. It is as if Spurling has taken to heart the words of Flaubert: 'When you write the biography of a friend, you must do it as if you were taking revenge for him.'

Among the myriad other points which Spurling makes about the artist and his work is the fact that Matisse was underrated in France. This she attributes to the perceptiveness of Sergei Shchukin who assembled a large Matisse collection in Moscow, as did Etta Cone in Baltimore. Spurling examines minutely all aspects of Matisse's life, coming up with amusing anecdotes as well as profound insights. She comments informatively on the relationship between Matisse and Picasso (each regarding the other as his only worthy

Hilary Spurling
Photo: Clare Kendall

rival), and counters the popular claim that Matisse slept with all his models. But above all it is her comment on the work which gives Spurling's study such depth and makes this a critical biography of particular distinction.

Though lacking the breadth and depth of Spurling, **Full bloom: The art and life of Georgia O'Keeffe** by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp is also a fine piece of work. It deals with an artist who, though she does not have the statue of the towering Matisse, became America's most highly paid woman artist and is still today the most famous of that country's women practitioners. A museum in her name was established in Santa Fe and her work now sells for millions of dollars.

O'Keeffe was not always successful and spent her early life in poverty, for seven years eking out a living as an obscure art teacher. Her affair with the married photographer Alfred Stieglitz (whom she later married) caused her humiliation when he exhibited 46 intimate photographs of her, mainly nudes. But he was also responsible for giving her work the admiring credit it deserved and bringing her to public notice. As **Full bloom** chronicles O'Keeffe's pursuit of clarity and decisiveness, demonstrating her development and punctuating the narration with interesting detail, the reader can clearly apprehend her arrival at the stage - especially in view of her wonderful flower studies - so eloquently expressed in the title of this excellent biography.

In **The private lives of the Impressionists** Sue Roe tackles the currently popular group biography, interweaving the lives of Monet, Pissarro, Cezanne, Renoir, Bazille, Berthe Marisot and Degas. Together they formed a set of young, idealistic artists rebelling against the structures of the mid-nineteenth-century Salon des Beaux-Arts. Though himself not an Impressionist, Manet is depicted as the mainstay of the movement, the hero of his younger compatriots to whom he gave generous support, both material and philosophical.

Though each of the artists is presented as a distinct individual, their unity of purpose gives them their cohesion and the outrage with which their work was initially received contributed to their sense of fellowship. Roe has interesting insights into the individuality of their paintings, on the other hand, which to the untutored eye may seem indistinguishable one from the other. She deals, too, with the financial side of the Impressionists' work, especially the promotion of the style by the insightful art dealer Durand-Ruel.

An earlier biography by Sue Roe, **Gwen John: a life** shows an equally perceptive appreciation of a somewhat neglected artist. Tracing Gwen John's life from childhood to her time at the Slade and subsequent periods in Paris and Mendon, Roe makes a persuasive case for Gwen's superiority as an artist to her more highly-acclaimed brother, Augustus.

The delicacy of Gwen John's work is sensitively captured in a fictional tale by Margaret Forster entitled **Keeping the world away**. The central 'character' in the novel is a painting by an unnamed artist, but clearly identifiable as Gwen John after the collapse of her affair with Rodin. Though the picture itself may not exist in reality, the essence of John's

painting and the essential aloneness of the artist are feelingly conveyed in Forster's description. The painting, whose fortunes are followed in this imaginative novel, is of a quiet, almost empty corner of a room which we come to realise is part of Gwen John's temporary home. It is she who attempts to keep the world away, and the subsequent owners of the picture respond to this in various ways.

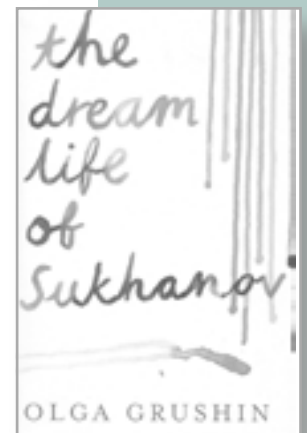
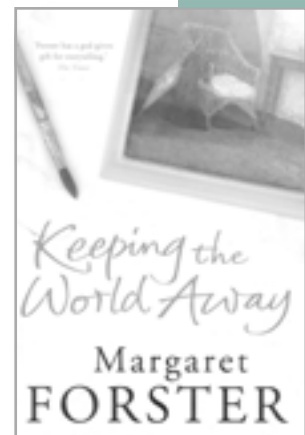
Olga Grushin is also adept at conveying the essence of works of art. In her debut novel, **The dream life of Sukhanov**, she tells the story of Pavlovich Sukhanov who is editor of **The art of the world**, a state organ devoted to the communist ideological line in the visual arts. His world is shaken when the Dali article on which he is working - condemning him, needless to say, as characteristic of western decadence - is not to be published. Instead a complimentary article on Chagall will replace it, a shocking idea for Sukhanov. While Dali is a mere foreigner and therefore of no consequence, the Russian-born Chagall is another matter completely. The uniqueness of Chagall's style is vividly evoked by Grushin, herself Russian-born and the first Soviet citizen to register for an American college degree after the cold war.

The lyricism and pleasure in aesthetic awareness imparted by both Forster and Grushin form no part of Tracy Emin's vocabulary in her autobiographical **Strangeland**. The self-styled 'Mad Tracy from Margate' is more intent on outrageously confessing details of her rather sordid life and (for some) questionable artistic endeavours. She does not write well but the memoir may be of interest to those who either marvel at or rejoice in her success.

Lucinda Hawksley, by contrast, is a good writer who movingly relates the sad history of **Lizzie Siddal: the tragedy of a pre-Raphaelite supermodel**. At the same time we are given many insights into the dynamics of the Brotherhood - the group of painters who greatly admired Italian quattrocento art and wished to return to the aesthetic principles existing before Raphael's ascendancy. William Morris, a dominant figure in the movement, and his close friend Dante Gabriel Rossetti, both fell in love with Janey, the 17-year-old daughter of a stable-hand. Since Rossetti was already engaged to his other muse, Lizzie Siddal, he persuaded Morris to marry Janey to 'keep her inside the circle'. From about 1849 Morris tutored Lizzie in painting and writing but also encouraged her to model. He married her in 1860 despite the love triangle in which he was caught, but she must have been unhappy and died of a laudanum overdose in 1862.



Gwen John
Self portrait c 1900





While painters and artists in general usually make interesting subjects for biographical examination, literary figures offer even more scope. From the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova (see Feinstein in bibliography) to the now-forgotten nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novelist Mary Arnold Ward (Wilt), and from the tales of J M Barrie (Chaney) or Robert Louis Stevenson (Harman) to the exotic reclusion of Paul Bowles in Tangiers (Carr), literary subjects abound.

Virginia Woolf and her circle seem to be of inexhaustible interest to biographers and lately yet two more books about her have appeared: **Virginia Woolf: an inner life** by Julia Briggs and **Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell: remembering St Ives** by Marian Dell and Marion Whybrow. In the former Briggs attempts to relate the life and works of Virginia Woolf, perhaps rather straining the parallels her thesis imposes on the argument. Dell and Whybrow, on the other hand, offer a more personal approach.



Talland House at St Ives was bought by Leslie Stephen when Woolf was a baby and the authors follow the connections between the family and Cornwall. Although the house was sold in 1895 after the death of Virginia and Vanessa's mother, the place, with its magnificent views and the beams of Godrevy Lighthouse reaching its windows at night, seemed to exert a nostalgic pull. Virginia returned many times to Cornwall and though her profound 1927 novel is ostensibly set in the Hebrides, there is little doubt that **To the lighthouse** springs from recollections of St Ives.



The Stracheys are another family with connections to the Stephen sisters and the Bloomsbury group, especially Lytton Strachey. In **Bombay to Bloomsbury: a biography of the Strachey Family** Barbara Caine shows that the ten offspring of Sir Richard Strachey (a long-time administrator in India) and his wife Jane nearly all had careers of some distinction. James and his wife Alix translated the works of Freud into English, for instance, while Dorothy and Pernel were ardent feminists and Pippa was a force in the constitutional women's movement. Pernel was principal at Newnham College, Cambridge, for nearly eighteen years and Dorothy wrote **Olivia**, described by her cousin, Henrietta Garnett, as 'a gem of a novel now regarded as seminal reading by feminists'.

But it is Lytton who is the most famous, mainly for his **Eminent Victorians** (1918) which remains a landmark in biographical writing for its outspokenness and satiric wit. This was followed by a biography of Queen Victoria and in 1928 by **Elizabeth and Essex: a tragic history** regarded by many as lurid and salacious. He became notorious, too, for his unorthodox private life, living

for 16 years in a ménage à trios with Dora Carrington and her husband Ralph Partridge. In spite of a certain amount of repetition in **Bombay to Bloomsbury** Caine can hardly go too wrong with a large family so full of eccentrics and gifted siblings as the Stracheys.

Nobel Prize winner Nadine Gordimer is the subject of Ronald Suresh Roberts' biography entitled **No cold kitchen**. This is not an authorised work and nor does it enjoy the unqualified approval of Gordimer herself. In fact, in 2004 her publishers withdrew from issuing a biography of her by Roberts since it lacked her authorisation. But Roberts was not to be deterred and the title of the present work is his pun on the idea of Gordimer's own imperviousness to critical heat: '[She] is at once furnace, flame and resultant alloy. Not for her any cooled-down kitchen.'

There is no doubt that Roberts is familiar with all Gordimer's writing and has thoroughly researched her roots and upbringing. He takes us from the origins of her immigrant parents, through her childhood and the start of her writing career, quoting frequently from his sources and later from Gordimer herself. We see her maturing and the growth of her literary assurance, her personal and political affiliations right up to her 1991 Nobel triumph and her fiction since that date. This may not be quite the biography that Gordimer would have preferred, but it is certainly worth reading and proffers many valuable insights into her work.

Autobiography is another rich vein of biographical writing, and a mode open to anyone eager to tell their own story or, for that matter, to obscure, glamorise or correct their image. Not always a reliable form - as the rather casual use of facts in the autobiographies of Ford Maddox Ford and Sir Laurens van der Post attest - it allows one plenty of elbow room to nudge out or include what one chooses at will.

The confessional idiom often occurs in memoirs about loss and can serve a therapeutic or cathartic purpose for the writer. Reading about how one person dealt with physical affliction or disfigurement can also help others faced with similar conditions and give them hope and inspiration. Nina Bawden, for example, writes in **Dear Austen** about the loss of her husband in a rail accident, and the bitter irony that he had just recovered from an operation for a brain tumour. Bawden, too, was injured in the May 2002 Potter's Bar rail disaster.

In his play **The permanent way** David Hare features Bawden as the bereaved widow while in her own memoir she remarks pointedly that during her Dagenham childhood some of her friends' fathers were railwaymen. A specific job of 'lengthmen' then existed, and these men were employed to check designated stretches or lengths of the track since it was rightly believed that 'as long as the track is safe, the train is safe, see?' Such jobs no longer exist, with lethal consequences: investigators at Potter's Bar found 83 track defects along with the discovery that no-one had been relegated to check alignment.



Ronald Suresh Roberts

Photo: Sacha Park

The polemical slant of Bawden's memoir expresses outrage at the dereliction of public duty and responsibility. This is partly the tone of Joan Didion's memoir **Where I was from** which deplores the greed that has despoiled California. Throughout its history, Didion claims, there has been a habit of 'trading the state to outside owners in exchange for their (it now seems) entirely temporary agreement to enrich us, in other words the pauperisation of California'.

Giving some appalling statistics (22 prisons built between 1984 and 1997, costing far more than was spent on California's universities), Didion moves from one area of corruption and abuse to another. The oil industry, misguided dam construction, use of pesticides, impoverishment of vast areas in what the world thinks of as America's most glamorous state, not to mention the arms trade. As Didion explains, this is not so much a conventional memoir as 'an exploration into my own confusions about the place and the way I grew up'.

Her second memoir, **The year of magical thinking**, moves into a more personal area as Didion recounts the loss of her husband and beloved adopted daughter Quintana, both in the same year - 2004. Like a lot of very personal, confessional diaries, it does not make for easy reading though it underlines our common humanity. As Didion says, 'Life changes in the instant. The ordinary instant', which is true but hardly reassuring.

In her unconventional memoir, **Reading Lolita in Tehran: a memoir in books**, Azar Nafisi is, in a totally different way, also critical of state decisions in her country, Iran. In the late 1990s Nafisi was expelled from her post at the University of Tehran and is currently a professor in the School For Advanced International Studies at John Hopkins University in the United States of America. Before she left her homeland Nafisi gathered together a group of her former female students for weekly discussions of Western literature.

At first a trifle uneasy and stiff, these gatherings soon loosened up and became a vital part of the young women's restricted lives. Among the books discussed against the background of Nafisi's own experiences from the start of the revolution are **The great Gatsby**, works by Henry James and Jane Austen, and, of course, most daring of all, Nabokov's **Lolita**. The discussions themselves offer many valuable insights while at the same time revealing more and more of the participants and their semi-cloistered way of life.

At the age of 94, Sybille Bedford published **Quicksands: a memoir**, but though the book is an achievement for someone of her advanced years, it tells us little that hasn't already featured in her small body of fiction. Her debut novel **The legacy** (1956) and its sequel, **Jigsaw** (1989) both mined her life though altering events at will. Despite being heavily autobiographical, **Jigsaw** was nominated for the Booker Prize in 1989. Born in Germany Bedford was educated in France, Italy and England and became a proficient linguist. As a journalist she covered many interesting law cases, not least the Auschwitz Trial in Frankfurt after World War II. **The best we can do** (1958) covers closely the case of Dr John Bod-

kin Adams who was accused of killing an elderly patient with morphine and heroin. Her major work which she called 'a labour of love...done in a spirit of detachment' is a two-volume biography of Aldous Huxley published in 1973 and 1974.

Another autobiography by a literary figure is **When I grow up** by Bernice Rubens who died in 2004 at the age of 76. Since her writing career started in 1960 she had written over 25 novels, seldom repeating her material, if ever. She had a wry sense of humour and a sharp wit, remarking to an audience when she visited Cape Town in the mid-nineties that Anita Brookner keeps writing the same book - perhaps not really fair to Brookner's fastidious insights, but certainly in strong contrast to Rubens herself who ever sought to vary her output. She was also innovative as a film-maker, working on features and on documentaries for the United Nations and other organisations.

Born in Cardiff to an orthodox Jewish family of Russian immigrants, the cultural diversity of Rubens's background together with her Welsh education gave her a rich frame of reference and a refined understanding of the concentric circles created by family, religious grouping, local society and the wider world. Never one to take herself too seriously, however, she talks of her mother's worry about her over-imaginativeness, but, she goes on, 'I was simply a liar by nature. I was happily at home with mendacity. It was less boring than the truth. My natural home lay in fiction.'

This is an engaging and modest autobiography working chronologically through the various stages of her life, starting with a stint as a teacher, her film experience, marriage, children, divorce and, of course, her illustrious career as a writer. An added bonus is an introduction by her close friend Beryl Bainbridge. When Rubens won the Booker Prize for **The elected member** in 1970 she feared (as with many second novels following an initial success) that she would never be able to write as well again. Luckily for her numerous readers she was proved wrong.

The overtly fictional treatment of factual events and real people is an approach to biographical writing that has gained increasing popularity over the years. One of the most intriguing of these 'factual' works recently published is Emma Tennant's **Heathcliff's tale**. The Brontës have for years been



Bernice Rubens





the source of great interest and speculation, not least the mystery of how these secluded and unmarried sisters could have produced works of such insight and, most notably in the case of **Wuthering Heights**, such passion.

Tennant uses as her starting point the idea that when Emily Brontë died she was working on a second novel now lost. This gives her the plausible pretext to send Henry Newby, young nephew of Ellis Bell's publisher, to Haworth Parsonage in order to retrieve the alleged manuscript in accordance with his uncle's contract with the writer. Not realising that Ellis Bell is the nom de plume of the late Emily Brontë, Newby is soon tangled up in a welter of fact and fiction.

Distinctly unwelcome in the Brontë home, the young man is assailed by curious imaginings which threaten both his health and his sanity, Tennant handles her theme brilliantly, composing her narrative in documentary fragments with comments from an editor whose reliability and identity remain doubtful. Echoes of Brontë's narrator, Mr Lockwood, contribute to the complexity of the novel and to a puzzling intimacy not unlike that of **Wuthering Heights** itself. As Lucasta Miller has remarked (*TLS*, 6 May 2005), 'Whether or not you accept all Emma Tennant's theories, as an imaginative response to **Wuthering Heights** her beautifully-crafted tale is wonderfully engaged and engaging.'

Less complex and less successful perhaps is Tennant's earlier novel, **Felony**, which presents an actual situation on which Henry James based his famous novella **The Aspern Papers** (1888). Interwoven with this account is a second version of the story inspired by James's own relationship with the popular American novelist Constance Fenimore Cooper.

Felony was the first in the current stream of novels taking their inspiration from either Henry James's life or his works. The most distinguished of these is the Booker short-listed **The master** by Irish writer Colm Toibin. Opening in 1895, the story initially focuses on the disappointment James feels at the failure of his play **Guy Domville**. He leaves the London social scene to visit friends in Ireland and returns solely to engage the services of a stenographer.

James withdrew to Lamb House, the home he purchased in Rye; setting his novel there, Toibin goes on to imagine the encounters and influences that shaped the work of this great writer. The resulting novel is a pleasure to read, creating what one critic has called 'a lovely portrait of the artist, rich in fictional truth'.

David Lodge's **Author, author** is probably just as rich in that type of truth. Unfortunately, coming immediately on the heels of **The master**, the book was less enthusiastically received. In his memoir **The year of Henry James: the story of a novel** Lodge expresses his regret and comments on the double irony attaching to his novel. **Author,**

author examines James's reaction to the failure of his play **Guy Domville** in contrast to the critical and popular success of **Trilby** (1895), the novel written by his dramatist friend George du Maurier. This circumstance Lodge sees as paralleling his own, with Lodge playing James to Toibin's du Maurier.

Michiel Heyns was, perhaps, even more disappointed when he found his brilliant Jamesian novel, **The typewriter's tale**, pipped to the post by two such eminent novelists. In this **Tale** the South African writer visualises the last years of James's working life from the point of view of his typist, hired in London and ensconced in Rye to be near Lamb House where James dictated his late novels.

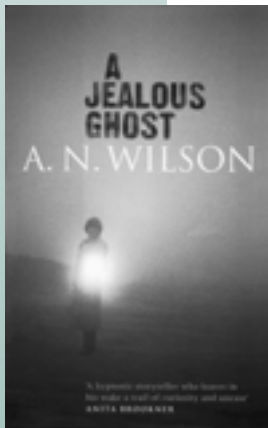
A really fine and imaginative piece of work, **The typewriter's tale** focuses on Frieda Wroth, Henry James's typist who often feels she is treated as nothing more than an extension of the machine she operates. She becomes infatuated with the handsome Morton Fullerton, a young friend of Henry James, but, as Frieda learns to her cost, also the lover of the dazzling novelist Edith Wharton.

The proliferation of books relating to Henry James and his novels does not end there. Wendy Lesser, for instance, tried her hand at Jamesian pastiche in **The Pagoda in the garden**, a title inspired by **The golden bowl**, but the resultant novel is rather inept. The accomplished novelist AN Wilson, on the other hand, has a much surer touch in **A jealous ghost**, based on **The turn of the screw**. Probably the most effective of this group, though, is Alan Hollinghurst's **The line of beauty** in which the narrator is a postgraduate whose field of research is Henry James. The book won the Man Booker Prize for 2004 and, besides its critical success, also found considerable popular favour.

Two other literary figures whose life and work have recently received fictional reworkings are Jane Austen and Violet Hunt (1842-1962). The latter was a friend of Henry James and of many other literary figures, including a long affair with Ford Maddox Ford. As the **Spectator** critic remarks in a review of **There were no windows** by Norah Hoult, all her work is now out of print and 'she is remembered, if at all, as a footnote in the lives of the great'. Hoult, however, does remember her and her 30 or so books, including ghost stories, novels, autobiography and a life of Lizzie Siddal (see Hawksley above).

The fictional Mrs Temple in Hoult's novel is so closely based on Violet Hunt's later years as to be tantamount to a memoir. The pathos of mental degeneration and the fear that accompanies it are wonderfully evoked by Hoult in her character's lonely musings: 'For though I am old, and look old and fearfully shabby, yet my heart still flows with pain just as when I was young, only now there is no one to run to, no letter to expect, no possibility of the long estrangement ending, no one to say goodnight to.'

Hoult also recreates the atmosphere of World War II London as Mrs Temple wanders the streets of Kensington during the black-out. And despite its overall sense of sadness and loss there are touches of wit and humour, though very much on the dark side.



A N Wilson
Photo: Magali Delporte

In **Cassandra and Jane** Jill Pitkeathley visualises Cassandra Austen's feelings on the untimely death of her younger sister Jane, subtitling her book 'a personal journey through the lives of the Austen sisters'. Though the text is poorly edited, Pitkeathley does succeed in vividly conjuring up the mutual affection of the sisters and the world in which they lived. She pays special attention to Cassandra's reasons for destroying some of Jane's personal correspondence and also elaborates on the subordinate role of women. This is a condition from which only an independent income can emancipate them, a theme prevalent in all Austen's novels.

Concern with the female condition informs a great deal of the literature by and about women. It has occasioned the retrieval of many formerly unacknowledged lives and achievements, often previously obscured by the men in the families or circles concerned. It seems appropriate therefore to close Part I of this article with Lyndall Gordon's magnificent tribute to the work and influence of one of the first feminists, **Mary Wollstonecraft: a new genus**.

In this powerful biography, Lyndall Gordon displays her habitual scholarly thoroughness. Though Wollstonecraft lived only 37 years (1759-97), dying shortly after the birth of her daughter, Mary, she exerted a lasting influence not only in the realms of feminism and education, but on literature. It was through the work of the 19-year-old Mary (now Mary Shelley) who, despite never having known her mother, nonetheless believed ardently in her teachings. This is especially evident in **Frankenstein** with its theme of the destructiveness of ill-treatment.

Gordon quotes (and uses in her title) Wollstonecraft's announcement as a young woman that she intended 'to be the first of a new genus...I tremble at the thought'. And indeed she lived up to this dictum, being a pioneer in many areas. She travelled alone, for instance, going unaccompanied on a three-month journey through Scandinavia and undertook other adventures on behalf of her lover, Gilbert Imlay, visiting France at the height of the Revolution (in the tenets of which, incidentally, she believed). She understood the link between disease and dirt years before figures such as Florence Nightingale, and successfully nursed her daughter Fanny Imlay through smallpox. More importantly, perhaps, were her advanced views on education for women, her first book being **Thoughts on the education of daughters** (1787). As a governess in Ireland, Wollstonecraft was an inspiration to her pupil Margaret King who later became one of the first women to study and practice medicine.

Probably Wollstonecraft is best remembered for her ideas about feminism and undoubtedly the most famous of her many books is **A vindication of the rights of women** (1792). What Gordon achieves in her far-reaching biography of a complex and multi-faceted person is a rounded portrait, acknowledging both strengths and weaknesses. With great compassion and insight she outlines the many setbacks in what could be regarded as a harrowing career. But although Wollstonecraft was often misunderstood, lost her place in Ireland, was deserted by her lover and suffered many humiliations, Gordon also records her successes and triumphs,

including her brief but loving marriage to William Godwin, father of Mary Shelley.

As Lyndall Gordon declares, 'This will not be a story of defeat', and what she presents is in effect a vindication of Wollstonecraft herself, of her attainments and lasting influence as 'a new genus'.

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Note:

* Volume 1 in CPLS catalogue recorded under **The unknown Matisse** and volume 2 under **Matisse the master**.

† Both **Felony** and **The master** are briefly mentioned in a previous article (**Cape Librarian**, May/June 2004, p.9).

