



# Romantic Outlaws: The Extraordinary Lives of Mary Wollstonecraft and Her Daughter Mary Shelley

*Charlotte Gordon*

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## **Romantic Outlaws: The Extraordinary Lives of Mary Wollstonecraft and Her Daughter Mary Shelley**

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***Romantic Outlaws* is the first book to tell the story of the passionate and pioneering lives of Mary Wollstonecraft – English feminist and author of the landmark book, *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* – and her novelist daughter Mary Shelley, author of *Frankenstein*.**

Although mother and daughter, these two brilliant women never knew one another – Wollstonecraft died of an infection in 1797 at the age of thirty-eight, a week after giving birth. Nevertheless their lives were so closely intertwined, their choices, dreams and tragedies so eerily similar, it seems impossible to consider one without the other.

Both women became famous writers; fell in love with brilliant but impossible men; and were single mothers who had children out of wedlock; both lived in exile; fought for their position in society; and thought deeply about how we should live. And both women broke almost every rigid convention there was to break: Wollstonecraft chased pirates in Scandinavia. Shelley faced down bandits in Naples. Wollstonecraft sailed to Paris to witness the Revolution. Shelley eloped in a fishing boat with a married man. Wollstonecraft proclaimed that women's liberty should matter to *everyone*.

Not only did Wollstonecraft declare the rights of women, her work ignited Romanticism. She inspired Coleridge, Wordsworth and a whole new generation of writers, including her own daughter, who – with her young lover Percy Shelley – read Wollstonecraft's work aloud by her graveside. At just nineteen years old and a new mother herself, Mary Shelley composed *Frankenstein* whilst travelling around Italy with Percy and roguish Lord Byron (who promptly fathered a child by Mary's stepsister). It is a seminal novel, exploring the limitations of human nature and the power of invention at a time of great religious and scientific upheaval. Moreover, Mary Shelley would become the editor of her husband's poetry after his early death – a feat of scholarship that did nothing less than establish his literary reputation.

*Romantic Outlaws* brings together a pair of visionary women who should have shared a life, but who instead shared a powerful literary and feminist legacy. This is inventive, illuminating, involving biography at its best.

## **Romantic Outlaws: The Extraordinary Lives of Mary Wollstonecraft and Her Daughter Mary Shelley Details**

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# From Reader Review Romantic Outlaws: The Extraordinary Lives of Mary Wollstonecraft and Her Daughter Mary Shelley for online ebook

**Diane S ? says**

3.5 I have thought long and hard what to put in this review. Brilliant mother and daughter, fighters for women's rights, led lives that were frowned upon during their days and penned books that have impacted many and lived on. The author does a great job telling their stories in alternating chapters, using crisp and clear dialogue and moving the narrative forward at a stay pace. At times though I would be interested in one part of the narrative and it would end and switch to the other. Could keep reader a reader at a distance and at times proved confusing. I also thought at times I could sense the author inserting her personal opinions rather than historical fact.

Did get a good sense of who these people were. Such notable names that we still read today. Yet I have to admit to not liking many of them and I think this colored my reading. Wollstonecraft, while I admired her dedication did some mighty strange things. Byron and Shelley were less than desirable humans in my eyes, geniuses or not. Felt that these people often used the cover of brilliance and the notoriety of being thought different to think only of themselves. They mostly did whatever they wanted to at the time, with little concern for others and their feelings. Very selfish people who caused much harm to innocent and not so innocent people. Even Mary, though she loved her children seemed very self centered at times.

Still a very interesting look at a time in literature that is still important today. Women's rights, early defenders, a mother and daughter who never knew each other but made a huge impact during a time period where woman were granted very few.

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**Bettie? says**

BOTW

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b064xjn1>

Description: *Juliet Aubrey and Ellie Kendrick read Charlotte Gordon's extraordinary biography of the pioneering feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, and her novelist daughter, Mary Shelley who wrote Frankenstein.*

*Mary Wollstonecraft, famous for her polemic A Vindication on the Rights of Woman, died ten days after giving birth to her daughter who wrote one of the nineteenth century's most significant novels, Frankenstein. Though she never knew her mother, Mary Shelley was inspired and influenced by the way Wollstonecraft had lived her life, and her philosophy on freedom. Charlotte Gordon's dual biography brings together these visionary women and illuminates the many similarities between the two. Both acquired fame and notoriety through their writing, they married difficult men, had children out of wedlock and were assailed by tragedy. Above all both left legacies that continue to endure.*

Looks juicy!

Episode 1: Escape and Elopement

Episode 2: Writing Lives

3/5: Revolution and Notoriety

4/5: Lost Love

5/5: A New Beginning and a Tragic Ending

I had no idea that Mary Shelley had been a while in Göteborg/Gothenburg

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## **Emma Deplores Goodreads Censorship says**

This is such a fantastic biography that I suspect it will become my gold standard. It's a dual biography of two well-known female intellectuals (who were also mother and daughter), Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley. All I knew of either woman before reading this was her most famous book, but as it turns out they both lived fascinating – and, because they were writers, well-documented – lives. Both traveled internationally (Wollstonecraft even lived in France in the midst of its revolution), wrote extensively, and had children outside of marriage, and all this in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

This isn't only a factual account; it brings both protagonists to life in alternating chapters (because Wollstonecraft died giving birth to Shelley, the two barely intersect), with distinct, complex and vivid personalities. And Gordon is an excellent storyteller, rendering their lives in a readable style more compelling than many novels; the end of a chapter would often leave me wanting to read just one more. The book is rich in information about the times, providing the context of these women's lives and the lives of those around them, but despite being a history, the facts never feel inevitable; this is quite an achievement, requiring fresh and vivid storytelling. For the first 100 pages I was concerned that it would be a downer, featuring women oppressed by their gender and culture at every turn, but both women soon grow up and take control of their destinies. In the end, my only concern is that, while the book includes extensive endnotes and a bibliography, the author usually only cites a source when directly quoting someone; I wanted to know where more of the assertions about people's feelings, in particular, came from.

Overall, this is an excellent book, and it left me curious to read both of these writers and see how my analysis of their works compares to the author's. This would be a great choice for anyone interested in the lives of historical women; for those who don't typically read biographies, it's a perfect place to start.

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## **Giedre says**

*Some write of what was; others of what is, she said, but I write of what will be.*

Almost 700 pages of pure crack. I didn't want to put it down. True, I've always been fascinated with Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley, but this book delved into their motivations, their lives and the parallels

between them, on a whole different level. If you don't have time for reading multiple biographies but are interested in these two luminaries, read *Romantic Outlaws*. Give it a chance, even if you think you know all you need to know about them. It's a tremendous work about two women who deserve a lot more recognition.

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### Jaylia3 says

This dual biography of Mary Wollstonecraft and her daughter Mary Shelley utterly enthralled me. Both were talented, groundbreaking, independent thinking women, they each had drama and difficulties in their lives worthy of a Brontë novel, and between them they knew intimately some of the most interesting people involved with Romantic literature and radical political thought from the French Revolution through to the mid-Victorian years.

Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin was born into a poor family with a very difficult, sometimes violent father, but Wollstonecraft was at least as spirited as he was and she struggled to surmount the boundaries gender and poverty put on her life in every way she could, eventually becoming a leading progressive thinker and the author of several influential books, including *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. She loved passionately but refused the traditional roles women were expected to embrace at the time, so she married the political philosopher William Godwin late in life and only reluctantly. Wollstonecraft died days after giving birth to the daughter named for her, so it was through her extensive writings that Mary Godwin Shelley came to esteem, cherish, and love her mother.

While still a teenager Mary Shelley began writing *Frankenstein*, a social commentary many consider the first science fiction novel, while holed up in Switzerland with a crowd that included Lord Byron. Like her parents she rejected social conventions about love, life, and marriage and at sixteen she scandalized her more staid contemporaries by running away with the already married poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, though that particular rebellion she came to regret because it hurt so many people. Mary longed for and looked up to her mother, using her mother's writings as guideposts for her own life, and that reverence was shared by her husband, her stepsister, Lord Byron, and many of Mary's other peers.

*Romantic Outlaws* is written in a back and forth chronology, with chapters about the two women alternating, so the section about Wollstonecraft's early life is followed by one about her daughter at a similar age. I thought this might be confusing, especially since they're both named Mary, but their circumstances were different enough that it was usually simple to keep track of who I was reading about, and structuring the book that way makes it easy to compare the lives of the women, which adds even more interest to their stories.

The book is well researched and documented with notes, but far from being a dry recitation of facts I found it very compelling. Many of the chapters even end in what might almost be called cliffhangers, a technique that definitely kept me highly engaged.

Before reading this biography both Marys were more symbols to me than women with families, lovers, personal trials and private doubts, but Charlotte Gordon illuminates the hearts and minds of her subjects and succeeds at bringing the two women and the era they lived in to life. William Godwin, Percy Shelley, and Lord Byron are among the people who are also well rendered, and many other fascinating people spend time on the book's pages, including Coleridge, Keats, and John and Abigail Adams.

Saying it's engrossing is almost an understatement--I don't remember ever finding a biography so hard to put

down. I read an advanced review ebook copy of this book supplied by the publisher through NetGalley, but I've already preordered my own copy hardback edition of *Romantic Outlaws*.

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## Jenn says

I've never been much for lengthy non-fiction tomes. I can count on one hand the number of biographies I've made it through, and yet, I'm obsessed with history - with the stories and human accounts, not the dry, sterile statistics. However, I was determined to at least skim through this book, because, after just finishing *Frankenstein*, I've become obsessed with Mary Shelley and her obvious genius. I've always been a poetry lover, but I have come late to the appreciation of the Romantic poets. I've often felt that they were silly, exhausting try-hards who use too many exclamation points as if everything in Nature was part of a Dick and Jane story: "Look! Breathe! Run naked through the daffodils!" Especially Wordsworth, who I still mainly appreciate for his revolutionizing ideas about imaginative writing (and his great capacity for walking...100,000 miles in his lifetime? Seriously?). I do like Coleridge, but admittedly I first liked him because he wrote "Kubla Khan" while stoned and the idea just tickles me pink. My favorite, if I had to choose, would, of course be Lord Byron, because, besides the self-obsessed, hypersexuality, he's **FREAKING LORD BYRON!** I have come to love Keats for the beauty of his language (and the heartbreak: "When I have Fears That I May Cease To Be" - seriously? Craaaaack! my heart is breaking!) But I honestly always thought Percy Bysshe (how the hell do you even say that?) Shelley was an asshole. His getting kicked out of Oxford for publishing a pamphlet celebrating atheism seems so overly dramatic and staged: give me a break. However - and here I've gone and done it myself - all of these MEN have completely overshadowed the true geniuses and revolutionaries of the 18th and 19th centuries: Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley. These women are incredible, and without them, I do not believe that much of the social reform ideas would have occurred (thanks, M. Wollstonecraft) and I do not believe that much of the imaginative, science-fiction literature and romantic ideas would have impacted what they have done (thanks, M. Shelley). And I wouldn't know any of this were it not for the exquisite writing and gripping storytelling and meticulous research of Charlotte Gordon. This book is now one of my very favorite books. I've always thought of myself as a feminist, but never a rage-against-the-patriarchy feminist, until now. After reading the frustrating, agonizing story of what these two women went through simply attempting to be true to themselves and their principles, I wanted to rage and tear down pillars and wreak havoc. I'm grateful to them for their bravery and ashamed that I, too, have bought into the commonly held beliefs about them, especially the unbelievably amazing Mary Wollstonecraft: what a life! What stories! I love every page of this beautiful biography and am so grateful to have read it. It has enriched my insights into the body of work of all the writers and philosophers of the time and has helped me understand that time in history in a way that I had not understood it before. For much of the book I was weeping and raging as I was telling Paul about it and he kept apologizing to me for "men- historically." Poor guy :). Ever since finished the book, I've had a favorite poem running through my head, Maya Angelou's poem "Phenomenal Woman" -

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.  
I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size  
But when I start to tell them,  
They think I'm telling lies.  
I say,  
It's in the reach of my arms,  
The span of my hips,  
The stride of my step,

The curl of my lips.  
I'm a woman  
Phenomenally.  
Phenomenal woman,  
That's me.

I walk into a room  
Just as cool as you please,  
And to a man,  
The fellows stand or  
Fall down on their knees.  
Then they swarm around me,  
A hive of honey bees.  
I say,  
It's the fire in my eyes,  
And the flash of my teeth,  
The swing in my waist,  
And the joy in my feet.  
I'm a woman  
Phenomenally.

Phenomenal woman,  
That's me.

Men themselves have wondered  
What they see in me.  
They try so much  
But they can't touch  
My inner mystery.  
When I try to show them,  
They say they still can't see.  
I say,  
It's in the arch of my back,  
The sun of my smile,  
The ride of my breasts,  
The grace of my style.  
I'm a woman  
Phenomenally.  
Phenomenal woman,  
That's me.

Now you understand  
Just why my head's not bowed.  
I don't shout or jump about  
Or have to talk real loud.  
When you see me passing,  
It ought to make you proud.  
I say,  
It's in the click of my heels,



The bend of my hair,  
the palm of my hand,  
The need for my care.  
'Cause I'm a woman  
Phenomenally.  
Phenomenal woman,  
That's me.

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## **Louise says**

Mary Wollstonecraft (Godwin) died within days of giving birth to Mary Godwin who became Mary Shelley the writer/creator of "Frankenstein". While death was a physical separation of Wollstonecraft and her daughter, author Charlotte Gordon explores how Wollstonecraft and her views on the role of women were embedded in Mary Godwin Shelley.

While the facts speak for themselves (women had no legal rights either to their property or their children in deference to a father or husband) Gordon shows through the lives of her two subjects the very thing they wrote about - the horrible situation of a battered, unwed pregnant and/or emotionally abused woman. Society looked the other way, and most women, joined the powerful male authority structure in blaming the victim. What else could they do when all in their lives depended on a husband or father?

One common reaction of women to the pecking order was a sense of entitlement. This is exemplified by Wollstonecraft's sisters who, since the males in their family either would not or could not support them, made demands on Mary who was barely afloat herself. Claire, Mary Shelley's half sister, similarly demands support from the Shelley's all the while interfering with their marriage. Mary-Jane, Mary Shelley's step-mother who undermined her very life, similarly expected much of Mary Shelley. Both Mary's responded with charity as they could.

Another reaction is despair for being a burden which is exemplified in Fanny, Mary Wollstonecraft's first daughter and Harriet, Percy Shelley's first wife.

As per the title, both Mary's stepped outside society's laws by following their hearts. Wollstonecraft's passion for Gilbert Imlay was freighted with her unmet needs which we barely understand today. Her daughter "eloped" with a married man (and her step sister). These relationships, for which the women risked so much, were far from ideal. Gordon shows how friends and society found many ways to condemn them for things beyond their control.

The hypocrisy of men in their lives was staggering. William Godwin (whom Mary marries to save her unborn child the crushing stigma suffered by her first child) continues to instruct Mary, a more celebrated writer than he, in grammar, style and technique. He writes against marriage as bondage for women but, without a hint that he sees the irony, will not speak to his daughter until she marries. Later, this father, after shunning his daughter for years (while seeking a loan from the man he thinks she should marry) and publishing her mother's most personal and embarrassing letters demands (and receives) support from her. Percy Shelley and Lord Byron are a pair... both blithely have affairs and leave partners and children to fend for themselves.

The book is full. There is description of the culture of the times, not only male/female roles, but different climates in France as it pursued its Revolution and terror, and the awareness of the freer climate in the former colonies an ocean away. There is analysis of literature produced by the principles (Wollstonecraft, Godwin, M. Shelley, P. Shelley, Byron) a description of its meaning for the writers and where it fits in their relationships. Most intriguing to me were the ongoing descriptions of how the two women were viewed in their lifetimes and how the perception of them changed... some by design, and some by their writings which we see today as being way ahead of their times.

The style of defining one woman and then the other at a comparable life milestone was jarring and took a few rounds to get used to. The Index got me everywhere I needed to go. There are good illustrations that help you envision the key people. While times are well defined, a timeline for quick reference would have been helpful.

If you are interested in these women, this period, British literature, women's rights or just enjoy a thought provoking book, this book is for you.

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## TheSkepticalReader says

Read for Tales & Co. | **Review originally posted on A Skeptical Reader.**

*Romantic Outlaws: The Extraordinary Lives of Mary Wollstonecraft and Her Daughter Mary Shelley* by Charlotte Gordon is a biography about the infamous mother-daughter duo, Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley. Each chapter alternates between Shelley and Wollstonecraft and captures as much detail as is speculated or established about the two women. Although an intimidating tome from the outside, the biography within is a fast-paced, almost thriller-like, read sure to capture any nonfiction reader's attention.

Many historians have spent centuries telling and retelling Wollstonecraft and Shelley's lives, but what makes Gordon's biography exceptional is that she also uncovers the biases with which the original sources have been tainted. In more than one instance, Gordon informs us that not only were the biographies written on these women by their relatives (their husbands, daughter-in-laws, sisters, etc.) rewriting the women as they were but the original correspondences were also tampered with throughout history, even as far as some material having been destroyed purposely. In one example, there is some indication of Mary Shelley's 'unusual' attachment to a woman Percy was having an affair with and Gordon speculates such strong attachment might indicate a more intimate relationship but any evidence of it is likely to have been destroyed by Shelley's inheritors. Furthermore, as illustrated via the speculation over how much of Percy Shelley's influence remains on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Gordon also asks us to observe how a man's contribution must be measured to the exact when Mary Shelley's contribution to Percy's work has been offhandedly dismissed.

Within the parallel structure, there are clear indications of hereditary struggles faced by both women even in different periods of time. Both mother and daughter struggled to reach the heights of privilege the men in their lives enthusiastically exercised. There remained a dark cycle of abuse in their lives as they sought to retain agency whilst being bound by societal norms that allowed them to survive at all.

Not only is the book thoroughly satisfying in everything it shares about the Marys' but we also learn a lot about the other people in their lives. Being that Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron were amongst the

most important figures in the romantic era of the English literary period, Gordon has much to share about them in relation to Mary Shelley's life. Although both men proclaimed themselves of great ideals and progressive notions, what is revealed by Gordon here are two narcissistic men full of toxic selfishness who couldn't respect a woman to save their own lives.

In the end, *Romantic Outlaws* was a fantastic and thoroughly satisfying biography. It does lack a certain level of citation and footnote etiquette but I'd claim it was still worthwhile in the end. The author does attempt to clarify any speculation on her part so I'm happy with the way the book has been written and how it reads as a whole narrative. If you're a fan of Mary Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft or of English literary figures in general, this should be a must-read on your shelf.

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## Amy Sturgis says

These comments are based on an advanced reader copy provided by NetGalley in return for an honest review. Thanks to NetGalley and Random House for making it available.

"Without knowing the history of the era, the difficulties Wollstonecraft and Shelley faced are largely invisible, their bravery incomprehensible. Even those who revere mother and daughter do not fully realize how profoundly they challenged the moral code of the day. Yet both women were what Wollstonecraft termed 'outlaws.' Not only did they write world-changing books, they broke from the strictures that governed women's conduct, not once but time and again. Their refusal to bow down, to be quiet and subservient, to apologize and hide, makes their lives as memorable as the words they left behind," writes Charlotte Gordon, author of *Romantic Outlaws: The Extraordinary Lives of Mary Wollstonecraft and Her Daughter Mary Shelley*. Gordon's project is to put mother and daughter in their historical contexts and then, in uncovering their stories, to draw parallels between these women, their works, and the revolutionary ideas they embraced.

Gordon traces the lives of Wollstonecraft and Shelley not in chronological order, but in alternating chapters; in this way, readers can see comparisons and contrasts in their lives at every stage of development, education, and literary accomplishment. This proves quite effective. The sections on Wollstonecraft's "foreign correspondent" work covering the French Revolution and Terror with great success and at considerable personal risk are particularly riveting. Perhaps most intriguing here, though, is Gordon's argument that both Wollstonecraft's and Shelley's professional reputations suffered greatly and for far too long from the well-intentioned but ultimately disastrous biographies written about them after their death by loved ones (namely Wollstonecraft's husband and Shelley's daughter-in-law).

The author offers a solid analysis of how the ideas that Wollstonecraft and Shelley espoused – about reason and education, rights and responsibilities – not only dictated how they tried to live their lives (against tremendous odds and with mixed but ultimately impressive success), but also permeated their non-fictional and fictional works, translations, and editorial efforts. Perhaps *Frankenstein*'s central message about shirked responsibility, which is so relevant to Gordon's larger thesis, receives somewhat short shrift here due to the novel's widespread popularity, but the scales are balanced by Gordon's insights into lesser-known publications.

Gordon is at her best when she responds to ongoing scholarly debates. Her answers are well researched and convincing. For example, her proposed solution to the mystery of the infant Elena Adelaide Shelley registered in Naples as Percy's child not only fits the facts better than previous theories, but it also follows

what we know of Mary's lifelong and principled commitment to helping unwed mothers and other legally and economically vulnerable women. In another case, Gordon's comparison of Percy's involvement in editing *Frankenstein* to Mary's involvement in editing his *Poetical Works* puts the couple's professional achievements in a most instructive light.

In short, Gordon takes both women and their ideas seriously, and she offers compelling evidence why readers today should do so, as well. Highly recommended for those interested in human rights and liberty; intellectual history and biography; Enlightenment, Revolutionary, and Romantic thought; educational theory; and, of course, literature.

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## Quirkyreader says

As soon as I started reading this double biography I got sucked in. It chronicles the lives of two amazing Marys. Mary Wollstonecraft the reformer and her daughter Mary Godwin Shelley.

MW and MGS both became famous in their own right during the times when they lived. Nowadays the more well known of the two is MGS because of her story "Frankenstein".

I have read previous biographies about both Marys. And this one will proudly sit on my shelf with other biographies I have about these amazing women along with other books I have dealing with "The Romantic Movement" and "Frankenstein".

Charlotte Gordon's writing style kept me engaged and I wanted to keep reading more. And I am grateful for the bibliography that she created for this book. I will get a chance to add more new books to my TBR that I have missed out on.

Give this wonderful biography a go.

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## Marita says

This biography of mother Mary Wollstonecraft and daughter Mary Shelley served my purposes very well. Whilst knowing of them, I didn't know very much about them. It is written in an easy to read novelistic style, with notes and bibliography in the last part of the book. What was a bit awkward was that the chapters alternated between the two women, and so I found that I would just be enjoying a particular part of the story when suddenly I would have to do a mental scene change and switch to the other Mary. I initially thought that it might have been done for comparative purposes, but this did not seem to be the case.

However, I very much enjoyed reading this book and I recommend it. I particularly liked the sections devoted to Mary W, as I came to think of her. Both women had problems and many sorrows to overcome, but both were intelligent, independent, unconventional, imaginative and resourceful. They were also ahead of their time in their thinking, behaviour and writing, which resulted in their being much maligned. They were trail blazers for women's rights. Both ladies travelled extensively, Mary W spending a considerable amount of time in Paris during the French Revolution and also spending time in Scandinavia which resulted in her

writing her 'Letters from Sweden' which included observations, thoughts and feelings. Mary S also travelled a great deal and spent many years in Italy, a country which for her became home but where she also suffered several personal losses. There is a wealth of information in this book not only about these two women, but also of those close to them.

Mary Wollstonecraft by John Opie 1797

Mary Shelley by Richard Rothwell

(Both pictures from Wikipedia)

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## **Abigail says**

This book borders on wrist-breaker status but despite the volume I wish there was more to read. I picked it up as more of a self-education piece and break from fiction, not really thinking about the entertainment factor. I learned so much. I had no idea who Mary Wollstonecraft was or how much hardship she and her daughter, Mary Shelley, went through during their lifetimes. Their hardships, strengths of character and literary talent make them incredibly inspirational.

Mary Wollstonecraft is born into a poor family with an alcoholic, abusive father, a depressed mother and many siblings. With this rough beginning, she chooses to educate herself and takes over the care of her two younger sisters for much of her lifetime. Despite living in a very misogynistic and conservative time, Mary W. is able to publish her opinions of the need to educate young women and to banish the ideals of the dainty, unintelligent housewife.

Mary Shelley grows up in a house where people want to meet her simply because of her parents' celebrity. Her mother passed away shortly after Mary's birth, but the author proves throughout the book how much Mary W's ideals affected her daughter. Mary S. also struggles with the conservative nature of the time and spends much of her life in exile with her husband, stepsister and yes, sometimes Lord Byron.

It's amazing to me how strong these women were in such difficult times and how their family depended on them but gave them little credit for their hard work. For example, when Mary S. ran away with Shelley, her father refused to talk to her...except to beg for money. Both Mary's suffered from depression yet somehow overcame their mental illnesses to continue writing important works of art.

I highly recommend this book.

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## **Amanda says**

I listened to the audiobook, which was really well done. I had very little trouble remembering who was whom and such, though I didn't stress about remembering every single detail. It was fascinating to learn about the two Marys, how their work intersected with their lives and what unorthodox lives they led. This was overall a really, REALLY engaging dual biography and I highly recommend it.

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## El says

I read about this book on Guardian.com and immediately wondered where a book like this has been all of my life.

I've been a longtime fan of both Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley, more so about their lives than their writing itself, though fully appreciating their writing even if I haven't always enjoyed what I read. But these two ladies, they had cojones and I think either one would have been a hoot to spend time with in their days.

As far as I know, this is the first dual biography which is a wonderful idea and I wonder why no one has done it before this. Maybe because Wollstonecraft died not long after giving birth to her daughter, so Mary Shelley grew up without ever knowing her mother on a personal level; undoubtedly historians and readers alike figure there's no real connection between the women, so a dual biography would not serve any real purpose. But that's unfair to the extreme. Gordon is clearly researched in both Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley, and she put her information together to draw parallels between mother and daughter.

Occasionally the parallels felt a bit forced, but that's okay, actually, because the information in this book is incredibly fascinating to those of us who are interested in either women. Gordon wrote about their lives - what it was like to be a woman in their respective day and how neither really fit their society's expectations of what made a "good" woman - their relationships, and their writing, all in great detail. There are black-and-white images throughout the text which always make me giddy because I'm a sucker for context.

I enjoyed this book enough to keep it about a week and a half overdue from the library, so my apologies to the Carnegie Library and whoever was waiting in the queue after me to read this book. (I'll overlook the fact that you, good sir/woman, are the reason I was not able to renew the book in the first place.) This biography has inspired me to take on another reading project! I have pulled out all of the books from my shelves that are by or about Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, or any of their buddies. As always with my reading projects, this will take a while, but it will be nice to revisit Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* with a more mature eye.

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## Hannah Greendale says

Click [here](#) to watch a video review of on my BookTube channel, *From Beginning to Bookend*.

An intimate look at the lives of two extraordinary women who unapologetically broke with convention and scandalized Victorian England.

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