focused instead on the poor grammar and poetic technique of the poems, refusing to see that these were part of the book's aim to create an authentically revolutionary proletarian voice in verse" (107). But we are not given any examples of this "revolutionary proletarian voice" and there is little attempt to compare Adams's works with that of other contemporary poets.

Though Tasker has chosen not to try to revivify Adams for the reader, it is clear from her evocation of his effect on most of those who met him, as well as from the striking photographs included in her book, that Adams's youth and physical beauty contributed to the impact of his ideas. Like others of his ilk, his conversation was apparently even more enthralling than his writing. A casual acquaintance recalled being "entranced, bewitched, with the marvellous power of the man. The earth ceased to be earth: all was emotion" (153). One can only speculate on what Francis Adams might have accomplished had he lived longer. Perhaps, as Tasker suggests, knowledge that his time on earth would be short influenced both his hectic output and his iconoclasm. The book's title appropriately comes from Adams's epitaph, taken from his own *Poetical Works:*

> Bury me with clenched hands
> And eyes open wide
> For in storm and struggle I lived
> And in struggle and storm I died. (214)

Elizabeth Webby

***Florence Fenwick Miller: Victorian Feminist, Journalist and Educator*, by Rosemary T. Van Arsdel. Nineteenth Century Series. Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2001.**

Although Rosemary Van Arsdel states in the first paragraph of her introduction that "nearly every book on nineteenth-century British feminism published over the last 20 years cites her [Florence Fenwick Miller's] contributions to the movement," one could be forgiven for asking Florence who? In fact I've been through my own library and have found only a couple of very fleeting references to her daughter Irene, a militant suffragette (she called herself Irene Miller, rather than Ford, her father's name) and one to Florence herself in connection with the journalism of Isobel Somerset (dealt with at some length in the present book). However, when we set aside Van Arsdel's quite justified attempt to puff her biography, it is possible to view this project as an important one, for Fenwick Miller (named after Florence Nightingale) is a fairly typical example of the many largely unknown (at least to posterity) women who did break the bounds of Victorian domesticity, and it is salutary to be reminded of the numbers of women who defied public opinion to speak in public, lecturing, as Fenwick Miller did and often for pay, on subjects as diverse as education, medical training for women, birth control, prostitution, and the suffrage. While her name has

now been eclipsed by the more famous figures in the campaigns in these areas, during her lifetime she was as well known as they were and interacted with most of the leading activists for women's rights in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century, not always amicably it must be said, however.

Van Arsdel begins her biography with a quotation from Carolyn Heilbrun's *Reinventing Womanhood* which sums up this lost history and her sense of the importance of a figure such as Fenwick Miller:

> What becomes evident in studying women [. . .] who moved against the current of their times, is that some condition in their lives insulated them from society's expectations and gave them a source of energy, even a sense of destiny, which would not permit them to accept the conventional female role. Some condition of being an outsider gave them the courage to be themselves.

Interestingly enough the title of Fenwick Miller's unpublished autobiography, upon which the present book is partially based, is "An Uncommon Girlhood"; it is a record of the first twenty-five years of her life which had been for many years in the possession of the Fenwick Miller family, but which has now been presented to the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine in London. In those first twenty-five years she gave ample evidence of her courage and energy, turning to writing as an escape from adolescent frustration and the strain of living with an equally strongminded and frustrated mother. She says that she first became conscious of the woman question and women's inequalities at the age of ten, and at the age of sixteen she studied for the matriculation exam in order to enter into medical study in Edinburgh, as part of Sophia Jex-Blake's campaign to make medical education available to women. While the campaign was not successful at this time, Fenwick Miller now had sufficient education to enter the Ladies' Medical College in London, from which she graduated before the age of nineteen, with a licence in midwifery rather than a medical degree, however. She hung up her shingle on her own front door, much to the annoyance of her mother who objected to the frequent night calls. It was a hard life with little money coming in from her mostly impoverished patients, but she gained as much extra medical education as she could and also found time to attend the London Dialectical Society and the Sunday Lecture Society, where she began her career in public speaking. Soon she was embarking on courses of lectures on women's health to the Working Women's College in London, monthly physiology letters for periodicals and by the time she was twenty five she was fully involved with the suffrage movement.

Her activism, however, gained her a fair number of enemies, particularly when she publicly supported the Bradlaugh-Besant contraception campaign, for which she nearly lost her seat on the London School Board. She eventually married Frederick Ford, the honorary secretary of the Dialectical Society, keeping her own name and courting controversy once again. Over the next few years she continued her writing, developing her skills as an observer of people and events which made her move into

regular journalism a simple step. She wrote a women's column for the *Illustrated London News* for thirty-three years, reported from and lectured at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, participated in the 1899 International Council of Women in London, was close colleagues with most of the famous women activists of her day particularly in the United States, such as Susan B. Anthony, May Wright Sewall, Rachel Foster and Frances Willard, continued to campaign for women's education and the suffrage, held public office, wrote nine books including a biography of Harriet Martineau, and edited and wrote for a number of women's journals.

A pretty formidable *curriculum vitae* by anyone's standards, into which she also crammed what appeared to be a happy marriage for the most part (although the family dark secret is that it appears possible that eventually Ford ran off with a music hall actress called Dora), and two daughters who both called themselves Miller and both distinguished themselves as politically active women. Fenwick Miller's life may thus be read as exemplary of the courage and energetic contributions made by women activists in the last half of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth, a history of the movement no less.

The book is another example of Ashgate's commitment to publishing worthy new work on the nineteenth century in the series edited by Joanne Shattock and Vincent Newey, and it is therefore as handsomely produced as the rest of the titles in the series. Van Arsdel occasionally resorts to questionable generalisations such as most nineteenth-century vessels being sailing ships (steamships were increasingly being used from the mid-century onwards) and women rarely engaging in commerce as Fenwick Miller's mother did – with some success, it appears. It's not an exciting read, but somehow it engages because I found myself thinking, how could I not have known more about this woman? Could she possibly have done more with her life? I think not. Why isn't she up there with the Beckers, the Cobbes and the Fawcetts? Perhaps it was only with the release by the family of private papers that it was possible to do justice to her life, and there's a certain sense of irony in that as well. The book would also have benefited greatly from some illustrations. The only one is that on the dustcover of the subject herself.

Barbara Garlick

The Selected Letters of W.E. Henley, by Damian Atkinson. Nineteenth Century Series. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000.

I have to admit I'm a bit of an historical voyeur. I've always enjoyed perving on the lives of those who have gone before. And I'm not the only one. A visit to any bookshop shows that at the moment biography is BIG – big sales and big books, often padded out to enormous size by a surfeit of information. To me the sight of one of these tomes is utterly discouraging: rather than prompting me to buy, it makes me yearn for something more manageable, something less portentous, something more of the essence. And here in this selection of W.E. Henley's letters I have it, the real