

which has a chapter on Cottin and locates her among eighteenth-century writers, and Olwen Hufton's magisterial *The Prospect Before Her*, 1995: the chapter on European women writers up to 1800 would have been relevant.) At the least, some sense of the overlap between Cottin's subjects and those tackled by her contemporaries would surely be needed to "prove" that she was writing out of frustration rather than because, say, she had the imaginative and intellectual curiosity to engage with the literary issues of her time. Or ... because she could write well and knew it? Some letters quoted by Call himself, particularly late ones, strongly suggest this. One might therefore advance the picture of a rather different Cottin: one who, initially self-deprecating and almost fearful of her authorship, became ever more confident, enjoying the income from her publications and able finally to recognize that she was writing from sheer pleasure in creativity. A dynamic Cottin, in short. "I cannot express how delightful writing is for me ... I cannot describe the pleasure I find in composing a work" (cited on 135). Call's comment here is that the writer's craft has "clearly become for her a therapeutic activity": would he have offered this reductive "explanation" of a male writer revelling in his own inventiveness?

- Readers of this review may like to know that Cottin's *Amélie Mansfield* (1809 edition) has been retyped and placed on the Internet by Ellen Moody. This important and gripping novel is not likely to be reprinted in the near future. Text: www.jimandellen.org/cottin/amelie.show.html; introduction (critical and textual notes): www.jimandellen.org/cottin/AMtextnote.html; bibliography: www.jimandellen.org/cottin/SCBiblio.html

Alison Finch
University of Cambridge

Annibel Jenkins. *I'll Tell You What: The Life of Elizabeth Inchbald*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003. viii+596pp. US\$39.95. ISBN 0-8131-2236-8.

Jenkins's critical biography of Elizabeth Inchbald (1753–1821) retraces her remarkable fifty-year career from her early days as a player on the circuit through her acting days on the London stage to her later years as a popular and respected playwright, novelist, and essayist. Meticulously written and edited, its thorough, highly readable synopses of every literary work written or translated by Inchbald will make it valuable to students without other access to these documents, but its special strength is its judicious use of contemporary documents as sources. Inchbald destroyed her memoirs at the end

of her life upon the advice of a priest, leaving future scholars to mull over what remained in the author's original hand: in addition to her considerable list of plays written and translated, and her novels and essays, the correspondence and the series of "pocket-books" she kept throughout her life. Elliptical and often downright enigmatic, the pocket-book entries nevertheless record what must have seemed for Inchbald the major occurrences or accomplishments of each day, month, or year. In recounting critical events, Jenkins weaves together the often lively eyewitness narratives or insights from Inchbald's pocket-books or letters with those from various friends, acquaintances, or associates, including, among many others, Amelia Alderson (Mrs John Opie), George Colman the elder, George Colman the younger, Maria Edgeworth, William Godwin, George Hardinge, William Hazlitt, Thomas Holcraft, John Philip Kemble, Sarah Lennox, Mary Robinson, Sarah Kemble Siddons, and Mary Wollstonecraft. The result is a rich, dialogic version of such events that enhances and complicates them and reduces the burden on Jenkins of trying to explain persistent mysteries. More than once in the course of her book, in fact, when texts resist clarification, Jenkins acknowledges that she cannot be sure what a pocket-book entry or a remark in a letter means and, in lieu of a single explanation, offers several possibilities (see, for example, her treatment of a letter about the reception of *A Simple Story*, 316–18). Not only does this intertextual presentation of Inchbald's life enable Jenkins to better measure Inchbald's literary achievements and professional accomplishments, it also lends her restrained and thoughtful speculations about some of Inchbald's words and actions increased plausibility.

Jenkins's method is well illustrated in her discussion of an important moment near the beginning of Inchbald's long career: her husband's unexpected death. Joseph Inchbald died a sudden death at the age of forty-four on 6 June 1779, while the couple were on circuit in Leeds with the York Theatre Company—just seven years after he and Elizabeth had married, and seven years and two months after she had left home to "find a place as an actress" (1). In his nineteenth-century biography of Inchbald, James Boaden takes the opportunity of Joseph's death to offer a vision of Elizabeth as immobilized by grief and guilt, isolated, and professionally handicapped, in some respects for life ("devastated" is his word), by "that hour of horror" (49). Jenkins adds to Boaden's somewhat sentimentalized picture some contemporary documents that present Inchbald as deeply affected but not permanently devastated by his sudden death, and as finally quite willing and able to go on with her life, her writing, and her stage career. Among those documents are (1) Inchbald's pocket-books before and after the death, with their steady record of her professional work and dreams, declarations of financial independence, and records of living apart from her husband for certain periods; (2) her and others' records of visits from friends, family, and fellow actors after the death, of benefit performances sponsored by her theatre manager, of her own return to the stage several weeks afterward, and

of hours of supportive conversation about the death with fellow actor and Roman Catholic John Philip Kemble; (3) letters of support written to Inchbald after the death from family and friends; and finally (4) an eighteenth-century treatise written for Roman Catholics about how to prepare for “sudden death.” Having discussed these, Jenkins is ultimately able to adjust the reader’s sense of the nature of Elizabeth Inchbald’s grief—what haunted her for “days and weeks,” Jenkins believes, was the swiftness of Joseph Inchbald’s death, who, like Elizabeth, was Roman Catholic, too swift even for him to say “Lord have mercy on my soul,” let alone summon a priest for extreme unction. “She must have remembered that her husband summoned the priest when she had been at the point of death in Aberdeen, but in the end it was he who had been overtaken with ‘Sudden Death’” (52).

Within a year after her husband’s death, Inchbald left the York Theatre Company to try her fortune in London at the Covent Garden Theatre. This move ends her apprenticeship (this period is treated in Jenkins’s chaps. 1–3) and begins her gradual rise during the 1780s from some obscurity as an interesting actress, but one with a speech impediment, to recognition and increasing social prominence as a highly successful dramatist (this period is treated in Jenkins’s chaps. 4–8). These middle chapters present the reader with an actress and playwright who is professionally ambitious and canny enough to keep herself financially solvent throughout her life—now negotiating with a theatre manager for the best possible price for a new dramatic production, now collaborating closely and frequently with managers and other writers and players to make each production as good as possible, the sign, Jenkins suggests, “of a true professional” (231). One of her most far-reaching successes during this period was to gain written acknowledgment from her theatre manager in 1786 that she owned the copyright to her own plays. As a result, she struck what became a lifelong arrangement with the publishing firm G.G.J. and J. Robinson to publish all her work, the senior member of that firm became her friend for life, and many of the other writers, some prominent, who worked with or for Robinson became acquaintances of hers as well, including William Blake, William Godwin, and Mary Wollstonecraft. Then, too, the arrangement obviously contributed to her financial well-being, and enabled her to support her family, something she continued to do all her life.

Beginning with her discussion of Inchbald’s first successful play, Jenkins also pays steady attention to the material creation, reception, and interpretation of each of her publications. Her descriptions of original works and translation-adaptations identify unique characteristics of each, while drawing attention as well to any features that come to distinguish the works of Inchbald. Three receive special and repeated analysis: attention to current events; incisive and insightful social commentary; and “the Inchbald heroine”: “Independent but loving, with far more common sense than her husband; the ‘Inchbald women’ were, with few exceptions, always independent, and almost always they showed sense, not sensibility” (167).

Throughout her book, Jenkins offers fascinating glimpses of Inchbald. Among many anecdotes, one must suffice, one that illustrates and explains Inchbald's lifelong reputation among acquaintances of being a difficult, unpredictable friend, a letter from friend George Hardinge describing his chance encounter with her in a park: "I have often heard the Siddons's and Mr. Kemble ... declare—but I would not believe it—that you were not only capricious, but ill-bred enough to look your friends in the face as if you had never seen them. I saw this, which I thought a calumny, demonstrated Monday last. It was nearly two o'clock, and in St. James's Park. You had on your black muslin, had a little umbrella in your hand, and a little dumpy woman in white as a foil. I passed as close to you as I am now to my pen, and you would not appear to know me." Jenkins identifies the "little dumpy woman" as "probably her sister Hunt," with whom she walked frequently in the park, then attributes her failure to greet Mr Hardinge to her weak eyesight: "She was very nearsighted and kept her glass with her at all times" (325).

Jenkins also makes sure her readers can imagine Inchbald's daily life, work habits, health, and social activities—changing her lodgings frequently, studying her parts, creating her costumes, attending rehearsals, enjoying the green room after performances, going to plays at theatres other than her own, supporting her mother and her siblings, borrowing a friend's coach, house-sitting for friends, having friends to tea, joining friends for meals, paying visits, receiving visits, studying in bed, denying friends while deeply involved in a project, writing for long hours at a time, writing with friends or family in the same room, taking walks, taking excursions to the bank. Finally, Jenkins's book includes a number of narratives of unique and often gripping events that intersected Inchbald's life: the treason trials of 1794, for example, or the Great Fire that destroyed Covent Garden Theatre and the subsequent OP (old price) riots in the rebuilt theatre. Even the least accessible, latter part of Inchbald's career (covered in chaps. 9–12, esp. 12) is illuminated in this book in large part because Jenkins positions the reader to sense the significance of Inchbald's final changes of lodging, and her gradual withdrawal from society and from the major literary projects that had energized and financed her all her life. And, in the last pages of the biography, Jenkins and Inchbald still have pleasant surprises for the reader: "Although Inchbald herself did not seek out people to meet socially, many people refused to allow her to be a recluse. One of the most interesting of the friendships she formed in these last years was with Maria Edgeworth Another memorable person she met was Mme de Staël, who was at the time a refugee in London, having fled France" (495). This is a finely crafted scholarly biography that can be enjoyed by specialists and nonspecialists. It gives Elizabeth Inchbald an intriguing life and lifts many literary personages of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries out of their dusty annals and swirls them into social circles surrounding her.

Sydney McMillen Conger
Iowa City, Iowa