IN SHELLEY'S WAKE:
TRACING TWO CENTURIES OF IMPACT

A Thesis submitted by

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Abstract

In Shelley's Wake: Tracing Two Centuries of Impact builds upon the strong biographical scholarship on Mary Shelley to consider the conditions and circumstances that allowed her to write what Brian Aldiss labels "the first real novel of science fiction" (30), *Frankenstein*. While this generic categorisation remains contentious, my work draws upon Michel Foucault's concept of discourse and the language of archaeology and geology that he uses throughout *An Archaeology of Knowledge* and *The Order of Things* to build an understanding of culture as a fluid phenomenon and hence one in which we can trace the ripples of impact caused by the publication of Shelley's novel. My close reading of *Frankenstein* explores the major themes of curiosity, education, family, and responsibility to reveal Shelley's position, concluding that she offered fractured mirrorings of each in the three-part narrative of the novel. These ambiguous representations, where none are given clear primacy over the others, are the hallmark of the novel and ultimately establish the moral space for readers to make their own decisions about the potentials of new science.

Moving forward, I explore the utility of emerging research tools in tracing, measuring and quantifying the impact of Shelley's works and the moral space she established in her ambiguous representations of science and its potential outcomes. Ultimately, I conclude with a return to Foucault, arguing that Shelley is, in fact, a founder of discourse, having " produced something else: the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts" ("Author"113). Having surveyed the impact of Shelley's work, I argue that what is revealed is not only the very early elements of the science fiction genre but in *Frankenstein* Shelley also opened a new discursive space for science and morality to interact through fiction. It is this same discursive space that the genre of SF, with all its sub-genres and permutations, has come to occupy today, and so we can see Shelley as not only the founder of genre, but the founder of a new way for culture and society to respond to scientific advancement.

This work offers a new perspective on Shelley and on science fiction, as I argue that Shelley both established a new discursive space and laid the groundwork for the genre (SF) which most often occupies this space. There is an abundance of scholarship on Shelley, with a great deal of new material emerging as it is the

bicentennial year of the first edition of *Frankenstein*, so it is a relevant and current topic of interest to a wide range of scholars. I offer something new to this discussion: in my close reading of the novel, my framing of Foucault's concept of discourse, and to the significance ascribed to Shelley, not only as a founder of genre, but more importantly as opening out the space in which our culture can negotiate the moral landscape of new science.

Certification

This Thesis is entirely the work of Alison Margaret Bedford except where otherwise acknowledged. The work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

Principal Supervisor: Professor Laurie Johnson

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Student and supervisors signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

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Introduction

The bicentenary of the publication of *Frankenstein* has sparked a great deal of reflection upon and re-evaluation of academia's understandings of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley and her works. The intense interest shown in the *Frankenstein* bicentennial by scholars of many different persuasions, across such subject areas and sub-disciplines as varied as Romanticism, science fiction, Christian studies, the Gothic, technology, and psychology, is testament to the enduring hold that Shelley's novel has on both the academy and the wider reading public. No fewer than ten calls for papers for conferences marking the milestone appeared during 2017, and it is to be anticipated that most of these will generate publications, along with the numerous special issues of journals and, of course, theses on the novel. Perhaps most significant is the establishment by Arizona State University's Center for Science and the Imagination of the Frankenstein Bicentennial Project, which has been designed to marry STEM-based research to literary criticism of the novel to encourage ongoing conversation about the moral consequences of scientific research and innovation. Such a flurry of activity at the moment of the bicentennial makes it easy to imagine that the last two hundred years has been replete with continuous scholarly interest in Shelley and her novel. Yet in many ways the academic recovery of Shelley's literary stature has been rather like the work of her titular character, Victor Frankenstein: the recovery has come late and has been something of a hybrid activity, stitching together limited points of interest from small subsets of the broader field of literary criticism. *In Shelley's Wake* takes part in this conversation and offers a re-evaluation of Shelley's significance as an early science fiction author to argue that she can be seen as a Foucauldian founder of discourse and that this discourse still operates in our culture today.

Just as Victor's creature was the result of years of unrecognised toil, Shelley criticism had languished for almost a century after her death, with the majority of scholars focussing their attention on her famous husband. Just as Victor experienced "an anxiety that amounted to agony" (M. Shelley *Frankenstein* [1818] 35) at the moment of creation, a review of the biographical scholarship reveals Shelley was beset by a similar anxiety as she strove to be both a woman and author in the 1800s. Feminist scholars such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Anne Mellor, and Mary

Poovey gave new life to studies of Shelley and her work when they recognised Shelley not only as a woman, but as an author worthy of critical attention, rather than as a footnote in her husband's works. Shelley was one of many of the female authors who had published anonymously (Jane Austen) or under a male pseudonym (George Eliot) during their lifetime whose life and works were investigated in more detail by this wave of feminist scholarship. The late 1980s saw a surge in the academic interest in Shelley with the publication of new editions of Shelley's letters and journals and Muriel Spark's *Mary Shelley*—Shelley's once lifeless body of work was now a living thing. While the emphasis and scope changed, biographical approaches to reading Shelley have dominated scholarly responses to her works. Since the late 1990s, a much wider range of approaches have been adopted in the study of Shelley and her works: just as Victor's creature strikes out on his own, so too academic responses to Shelley have taken diverse and varied paths. Many of these retain a biographical bent, particularly psychoanalyses of Shelley, which seek to find hidden meaning in her works. The potential for Shelley's work to be read through the lens of psychoanalysis was picked up by a number of critics at the turn of this century; however, I will argue that these are a continuation of the biographical tradition, in that they contribute more to our understanding of Shelley as a person rather than to an understanding of how the texts which she authored participated in broader cultural and literary contexts. In examining the major trends in the history of Shelley scholarship, then, I will establish that the scholarship surrounding her work ultimately drifts toward painting a diverse and multifaceted portrait of a life against which her literary achievement can be measured. To cut against the grain of these trends, I will focus on both Shelley's own perception of herself as an author and the responses of others to this sense of her stature as an author.

Chapter Two will build upon the strong biographical foundations of previous scholarship to construct a new contextual biography of Shelley. It is important to note that this thesis is not intended as a biography of Shelley, rather, it draws upon the particular perspective offered by the methodology of contextual biography to position Shelley within her place and time. In so doing, it becomes possible to trace the ideas and individuals that influenced Shelley and her writing, while also seeing her as an active agent within this landscape, one who took these influences and synthesised them into something new. Contextual biography serves as a way to merge our understandings of the many aspects of Shelley into a whole; to step back

and look at the larger picture. This perspective offers new opportunities for understanding and analysis. By considering Shelley's place within her discursive context, this chapter will also articulate the key features of contextual biography, which remains a general practice rather than a well-defined methodology. Contextual biography goes beyond classic biography in that it considers the broader social and cultural forces that may have influenced the subject. One of the key features of contextual biography is that it is evidence-based. Arguments for any correlation between socio-cultural factors and the life or work of the author must be supported by evidence. This stands in contrast to pathography or psychobiography, such as Anthony Badalamenti and Ronald Britton's analyses, in which the critic infers relationships between events and works, often arguing that the author may not have even been consciously aware of these parallels. When the vast amount of work and the wide range of conclusions about the incompatibility of Shelley's dual nature as woman and writer is taken as a whole, it becomes clear that Shelley's sense of self is played out through her fiction. This makes a study of her personality, place, and time significant in an evaluation of her work.

Michel Foucault views the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries as a period of significant change, "certainly one of the most radical that ever occurred in Western culture" (*Order* 220), during which, "a modification and shifting of cultural interests, a redistribution of opinions and judgements, the appearance of new forms in scientific discourse, wrinkles traced for the first time upon the enlightened face of knowledge" (Foucault, *Order* 238) appeared. Yet Foucault is no absolute determinist, as the concept of the founder of discursivity allows for creative agency, albeit under conditions open to epochal change. This study reveals Shelley was at the right place(s) at the right time (nineteenth century Europe, under Foucault's definition) to be the founder of this new discourse. To successfully show that Shelley is a founder of discourse, the method of contextual biography can be applied to demonstrate both how Shelley drew upon her context and how her work in turn changed the discursive contexts of her culture. Coupled with the additional complexity of her personal life and her close relationship to two of the greatest minds of the era (namely, her father William Godwin, and her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft), Shelley was well-equipped to bring to life something new, as she stood at the intersection of traditional beliefs, radical thought, religion, and secular science: the old world and the new.

Chapter Three will posit that Shelley can be viewed as a Foucauldian founder of discourse, not merely the progenitor of a genre. Foucault's conception of society and culture through the language of archaeology and geology seems to support the evolutionary view of culture and change suggested by the cultural turn, as slow and sedimentary. Yet Foucault also acknowledges the ability of individuals to disrupt the slow evolution of culture with his theorisation of the role of the "founder of discourse", a figure who not only creates their own works but "the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts" (Foucault, "Author" 113-114). I argue that Shelley is a Foucauldian founder of discourse—she renegotiated the values framework for the new science of her era. I argue *Frankenstein's* creation is Shelley's reflection upon the potential of the new science of galvanism: she founds a new way to reflect upon the potential impacts of scientific developments by using fiction to pose a moral "what if…?". Most significantly, she leaves the act of negotiation to the reader with the ambiguity of the ending, which condemns neither Victor nor the Creature. As Susan Tyler Hitchcock describes, "the monster … remains a player on the greatest stage of human history because his story continues to raise, not answer, questions" (6). Shelley's choice to leave the ending open to reader interpretation is a key component of her establishment of a new discursive space. In this way we can see the role of the individual biographical subject within their broader cultural context as a potential agent of cultural change, or founder of discourse.

To support this argument and explore the ideas that Shelley was concerned with, Chapter Four offers a close reading of the 1818 edition of the *Frankenstein*. Shelley took the core ideas and concerns of her time and her milieu and synthesised them into something new. Curiosity, education, family and community, and responsibility are all significant themes explored in the novel. Just as lightning both fuses and fractures, so too Shelley's novel synthesises or fuses the concerns of her times in her narrative, yet the ambiguous ending leaves a multiplicity of possible meanings. Charles Schug describes this as a "moral experience [which] goes on after Frankenstein's death, it continues after the novel stops" (611). I see the three narrators as distorted and fragmented reflections of one another, and so the readings of these themes is also fragmented—different meanings can be made depending on which fragment catches the reader's eye. Schug observes, "each narrator interprets his experience in moral terms yet each takes a strong moral position that is

inadequate to encompass the experience of the other two" (612). I argue that it is this diffusion or fracturing of meaning that gives the novel its power and longevity over the past two centuries.

Of course, *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man* were not Shelley's only novels. *Valperga* and *Perkin Warbeck* are other notable works, however they err more to historical fiction rather than something that could be labelled science fiction or speculative fiction. Brooks Landon describes science fiction as "a literature of the possible - or the not yet possible, as opposed to fantasy, where the impossible holds sway" (17). Shelley's other novels take real people and events as their premise, rather than that which may be possible (even if "not yet possible") through science and technology. Shelley's other novels do not operate in the same discursive space, that intersection between science and fiction which was only just emerging. As outlined in Figure 3 in Chapter 1, discursive ripples can interact and overlap. In both *Valperga* and *Perkin Warbeck*, we can see the commonality of the political discourse that operates in *The Last Man*, yet Shelley does not use the science fiction "what if…?" hinge that is so key to the narrative of *Frankenstein* and is also the trigger for the political and social changes in *The Last Man*. The other factor in deciding to restrict this study to only two of Shelley's works was that as a study of impact it made most sense to focus upon the text that has had the most significant impact. The discussion of *The Last Man* only reinforces the slowly emerging tropes of the genre and serves as evidence of texts operating in the discursive space which opened upon the publication of *Frankenstein*.

Many scholars have noted the intertextuality of Shelley's, Percy Bysshe Shelley's, and Godwin's work—Chapter Five will explore these intersections, and assert that Shelley can be seen as an early contributor to the formation of science fiction as a genre. It is not the aim of this thesis to definitively assign a genre classification to Shelley's novel; it is in many ways a generic hybrid, with a strong Gothic foundation. However, I argue that Shelley's work, while drawing on conventions of other genres and with strong links to other works, does do something innovative that can be viewed as a forerunner of the science fiction genre. Then, in the final chapter, I will trace the afterlives of Shelley's work, as it continues to create ripples of influence in our own culture. I will offer some reflection upon tools that may make it possible for academics to better navigate the tsunami of scholarship that has arisen since the 1980s and the proliferation of digital publishing. This is not a

comprehensive survey, rather a starting point for a conversation about how data mining and analytic tools may assist scholars to identify trends which they can then research more deeply. I will argue that the discourse Shelley founded can be seen both in responses from her contemporaries and in our culture today. This discursive space, where readers are left to their own moralising, is most often manifested in books labelled as one of the many sub-genres of science fiction. For reasons that will become apparent throughout this thesis, I opt not to try to pin this discourse down with a name that might give pre-eminence to one or another aspect of the possibilities that it creates in society. This discourse needs to be understood in relation to the social function of science fiction, more broadly, but it is not altogether reducible to the category of science fiction. It draws on prior discourses—for such is the way new discourses are formed, as I shall explain—but it is also not to be aligned principally with one or another of these. It is, in effect, a field of open possibility that resists being fixed by a specific name.

Along these lines, I will conclude my argument by positing that science fiction is *both* a genre and a function of this unnameable discourse—the genre is the literary form that the broader social discourse takes. There is no doubt that science fiction writers fulfil the role that Percy Bysshe Shelley once attributed to poets: “the unacknowledged legislators of the world” (80). It is unlikely that at the time of his death, he could have comprehended the impact that his wife would have in bringing this change to the world. A clear sign of the enduring impact of Shelley’s novel is in the extent to which science fiction regularly defines how scientists and publics think about the role of science in society. Ultimately, through a study of the conditions that facilitated the writing of *Frankenstein* and of its ongoing impact, I will argue that in Shelley’s wake we have been left with a new space for our society to articulate and explore our fears and hopes for the future, and where we can decide where our moral boundaries lie. To begin our exploration of this space, we must first turn to the foundations of Shelley scholarship.

Chapter One

Reading Shelley: A Review and a Response

Scholarly interest in Shelley was slow to emerge in the century following her death in 1851. She was regarded as a "personality" rather than as an author in her own right, often appearing in criticism only as a biographical note in relation to Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shelley did receive some attention from a handful of critics, but they still tended to attribute her writing ability to her associates, such as Percy[1], her father William Godwin, and Lord Byron. She slowly garnered some critical interest but in this period her work is rarely judged on its own merits; rather, critics hunt for evidence of Percy's (or others') influence. So while she was recognised as worthy of study, it was only as a dull reflection of her husband's brilliance. This is clear in one of the earliest evaluations of Shelley's works, Walter Edwin Peck's 1923 contribution to the *PMLA* journal. Peck's title, "The Biographical Elements in the Novels of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley," suggests he will link events in Shelley's novels to events in her life, which also became a common practice in later Shelley scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s. However, Peck does not trace Shelley's autobiographical leavings. Instead, he reads her works as a biography or character studies of Percy and his circle. Peck states, "on five occasions Mary Shelley drew full-length portraits in prose of her husband, and his intimate friends…. these not only serve to verify known data but afford new information of real value concerning Shelley and his circle" (197). This approach of seeing Shelley as an appendage of Percy (wife, mother of his children, and occasional praise for her work as his posthumous editor) would be common into the 1950s.

It was not only Percy's influence critics sought to identify in Shelley's works during this period of criticism. Ernest J. Lovell wrote "Byron and the Byronic Hero in the Novels of Mary Shelley" (1951) in response to the publication of Shelley's *Letters* (1944) and *Journals* (1947). Lovell asserts that Peck's reading of Shelley's characters as representations of Percy is flawed. He argues that many of the

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[1] Rather than write Mary Shelley and Percy Shelley throughout this thesis to differentiate between the two, I have adopted the common practice of referring to the primary author by surname (i.e. Shelley), and using the spouse's first name (Percy) in most instances. The choice to use the surname Shelley also avoids the pitfalls of overfamiliarity with the biographical subject or the adoption of an informal tone. wit7

characters Peck identifies are in fact representations of Byron. Shelley herself admits that "in Lord Raymond and Count Adrian faint portraits … of B. [Byron] and S ---- but this is a secret" (M. Shelley, *Letters* Vol. I 564). Both Peck and Lovell demonstrate the trend of reading Shelley's works biographically that was the norm during this period of criticism. These readings place Shelley in her role of woman and observer, rather than full participant, in her circle and do not regard her as an author of note. These early biographies also serve as evidence of the trend towards the conflation of Shelley's life and works, with many assertions based on assumption and extrapolation, rather than documentary evidence.

Peck foreshadows another key feature of later criticism in his closing remarks: the emphasis on Shelley's role as a mother. Peck quotes from Shelley's *Faulkner*: "To the last she was all mother; her heart filled with that deep yearning, which young mother feels to be the very essence of her life, for the presence of her child" (293). Peck's use of this quote reflects the common practice of reading Shelley's work through the lens of her personal life; tracing events and actions in Shelley's fiction back to her grief at the loss of three of her children and her luminary husband, or to the influence of significant male figures had upon her writing.

This dichotomy between Shelley's personal experiences and her work as an author was again highlighted in 1938 in one of the first full-length biographies. Perhaps one of the most influential insights R. Glynn Grylls offers is that, "Mary (suffered) for the conflict there was in her nature between the feminine and the artist" (xiii). This conflict in her nature has become a key idea in the study of Shelley—the way she sought (and largely failed) to reconcile her sense of self as a woman and mother with her creative ability and role as author. While Grylls's biography is largely narrative in style she does draw heavily from letters and diaries to which she was given exclusive access by Lord Abinger, who had inherited much of Godwin and the Shelleys' papers. This meant that Grylls's biography was the best supported representation of Shelley available at the time.

Elizabeth Nitchie was reliant on Grylls's account of the Abinger papers when writing her 1943 article, "Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*". While Nitchie's research did uncover previously unpublished material, this highlights the problematic nature of early Shelley scholarship, as much of her personal writings and novels were held in private family collections. It also goes some way to explaining why scholars had to

resort to inference and extrapolation when linking Shelley's life and works, as they did not have access to Shelley's own account of events. This article also foreshadows the establishment of what has come to be recognised as one of the most significant collections of Shelley's works: the Abinger Collection held at the Bodleian Library. Nitchie explains that at this time (1943), only one person had been given access to texts still in Lord Abinger's possession: "These have been made available only to Miss R. Glynn Grylls", who gave, "a description of the two notebooks, a brief summary of the story and a few quotations from the final draft" (448). Abinger ultimately donated this collection, which gave unprecedented access to previously unseen writings by Shelley and her circle. The copying of Lord Abinger's collection to microfilm was only completed in 1952 and the full collection was not stored at the Bodleian until 1993 (Abinger Collection). Lord Abinger gave access to the full journals of Shelley to Diana Scott-Kilvert and Paula R. Feldman during the 1970s which resulted in a much more comprehensive and complete text than the 1947 *Journals* that had previously been available.

Nitchie's article is not only significant for highlighting the importance of the papers that would become the Abinger Collection. Nitchie is one of the first scholars to recognise Shelley's wider body of work and to look to these works for Shelley's personal motivations and influences. Unlike Peck and Lovell, Nitchie reads *Mathilda* for clues about Shelley's own motivations, rather than for fictionalised portraits of her circle. Nitchie wrote in response to Newman Ivey White's biography of Percy, which offered "an analysis of the estrangement between Mary and [Percy] Shelley after the death of Clara" (Nitchie 447). Nitchie refutes this using evidence from the then-unpublished *Mathilda*:

> But if Shelley's poems are the obverse of this coin, it also has a reverse which Mr. White has not seen. This reverse is an unpublished story by Mary Shelley entitled *Mathilda*, written in 1819 after the death of William, which renewed Mary's grief but not her antagonism to Shelley, and before the birth of Percy Florence. (447)

Drawing upon the available fragments of *Mathilda* and letters and works from within the Shelleys' circle as evidence that they were not estranged, Nitchie argues that the novel's incestuous theme was Shelley's way of addressing her conflict with Godwin,

not Percy. This is well supported: Shelley was torn between reverence for her father and the reality of his lack of sympathy on the death of her children and his unceasing demands for financial support (Nitchie 457-459). Nitchie's engagement with Shelley's texts, beyond *Frankenstein* and her personal correspondence, mark a watershed moment in Shelley criticism, as it serves as evidence of the gradual move away from simple biography, often more about Percy, towards analysis of Shelley as an author and significant figure in her own right.

By the end of the 1950s, interest in Shelley had waned, but the strong biographical focus of criticism had contributed to the recovery and publication of a body of works that included her letters, diaries, and several previously unpublished novels. Few critics acknowledged the full value of these works, however, as most still read Shelley for traces of Percy. This is not to say that I would disregard the impact of Shelley's circle on her writing and, in particular, on the conception of *Frankenstein*. The impact of Shelley's circle on her writing is considered in this thesis in Chapter Five: Influence, Inspiration and Innovation, but this needs to follow more careful groundwork that situates Shelley as the central agent of the book's creation rather than distributing her agency among her coevals. Her agency is enacted, of course, through the social and familial roles she filled, although it must be remembered at all times that one of these roles, "author," was always very much in play throughout her life, even as she filled other roles. The biographical focus of the scholarship to this point contributes to the recognition of the problematic nature of being a woman, mother, and author during the late Romantic and early Victorian eras. This is something that would be explored by future critics, particularly in feminist readings, right up until today.

1.1 Saved by the Second-Wave Sisterhood

Following on from the biographical readings of Shelley in the first half of the twentieth century, 1970s feminist scholars placed new emphasis on the value of Shelley's works while also continuing to acknowledge the important role her womanhood had in shaping her work as an author. Gilbert and Gubar's ground-breaking feminist reader, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, included Shelley as one of the important women authors that had previously been neglected by first-wave feminism. The authors' stated aim is "to show new ways in which all nineteenth-

century works by women can be interpreted…. in the process of researching our book we realized that, like many other feminists, we were trying to recover not only a major (and neglected) female literature but a whole (neglected) female history" (xii). The book includes analysis of two of Shelley's works, *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*. Gilbert and Gubar read *Frankenstein* as a feminist response to Milton's *Paradise Lost*; a reinterpretation of the role of masculinity and a reaction against it. The feminist approach places great emphasis on Shelley's femaleness—her role as a mother, wife and daughter are integral to their reading of the texts. She is the only author to have two works considered and in this way she is foregrounded as one of the key authors of the period, and her work then read as a critical commentary on the social norms of the day. It is in this work that Shelley begins to emerge as an important literary figure, rather than just as a historical person. Her texts, not just her life, are explored.

Gilbert and Gubar's reading of the fictional author's "Introduction" to *The Last Man* poses that the process Shelley outlines in fact represents her discovery of the authorial power of women:

> This last parable is the story of the woman artist who enters the cavern of her own mind and finds there the scattered leaves not only of her own power but of the tradition which might have generated that power. The body of her precursor's art, and thus the body of her own art, lies in pieces around her, dismembered, dis-remembered, disintegrated. How can she remember it and become a member of it, join it and rejoin it, integrate it and in doing so achieve her own integrity, her own selfhood? (98)

It is this struggle for self-integration that would plague Shelley throughout her life. It is an interesting coincidence that this example also deploys imagery of dismemberment—just as Victor had to create his creature form many parts, Shelley must construct her sense of self from the many roles into which she is placed (and in which she places herself).

Gilbert and Gubar's insights about Shelley's sense of self acknowledge the dichotomy that was explicitly identified in Grylls's 1938 biography. This conflict between her dual role of woman (mother, daughter, wife) and author, and Shelley's response to this conflict, further highlight the importance of Shelley's biography in

understanding her work as an author since her authorship is so inextricably linked to her identity (or, plural, identities). Gilbert and Gubar express this point:

> For her developing sense of herself as a literary creature and/or creator seems to have been inseparable from her emerging self-definition as daughter, mistress, wife, and mother. Thus she cast her birth myth— her myth of origins—in precisely those cosmogenic terms to which her parents, her husband, and indeed her whole literary culture continually alluded. (224)

The tension Shelley seems to have felt between her various roles is usefully labelled an "anxiety of authorship". Gilbert and Gubar explain that for women writers, their male precursors "symbolize authority" yet this cannot define the woman writers' experience as their gendered experiences are so different. Gilbert and Gubar continue: "Thus the 'anxiety of influence' that a male poet experiences is felt by a female poet as an even more primary 'anxiety of authorship'—a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a 'precursor' the act of writing will isolate or destroy her" (48-49). It is true that Shelley's literary precursors are almost exclusively male, however, the shade of her famed mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, served as a 'literary fore-mother' in a way that few women writers of the period would have experienced. During Shelley's life, her literary circle is almost exclusively male—the women she has lasting relationships with (for example, Claire Clairmont, who used her womanhood rather than her intellect to gain a link to Byron, and the frequently pregnant wives of the Shelley circle, including Maria Gisbourne and Jane Edwards) were not authors but mothers, wives and daughters, as expected by society. Shelley also no doubt felt that "the act of writing will isolate or destroy her" (Gilbert and Gubar 49). Her life on return to England after Percy's death was a delicate balancing act between writing to survive, but not stepping beyond the bounds set by her father-in-law and so jeopardising her role as mother to her one surviving child, which will be explored here in Chapter Two.

Mary Poovey also contributed to the growing analysis of Shelley as an author, as well as recognising the importance of her biography, in the chapter "My Hideous Progeny: The Lady and the Monster" in her book *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (1984), which evaluated the works of Shelley, her mother Mary Wollstonecraft, and Jane Austen. Poovey asserts that the triple-narrative of

Frankenstein, and particularly the revisions to the 1831 edition, reflect Shelley's beliefs about creativity, imagination, and the work of the author. Poovey posits that Shelley felt trapped between the irresistible influence of imagination and her creative ability, fostered and fuelled by the most important (predominantly male) figures in her life and the role expected of women in her increasing conservative, proto-Victorian society: "Taken together, the two editions of *Frankenstein* provide a case study of the tensions inherent in the confrontation between the expectations Shelley associated, on the one hand, with her mother and Romantic originality and, on the other, with a textbook Proper Lady" (Poovey 121). Poovey attributes the increasing emphasis on characterising domesticity as good and imagination (the creative drive) as an unstoppable force, akin to fate, in the later edition of *Frankenstein* as a reflection of Shelley's own self-perception at this time. She concludes:

> as a young girl she discovered both the monstrosity and the price of her own ambitions; as a grown woman she experienced a persistent desire to disguise that aggression beneath the manners of the proper lady her society promised that every girl could grow up to be. (142)

This would align with elements in Shelley's life, particularly her father-in-law's demand that she keep her and his son's names from the public eye (Williams 178), hence the pressure to retire to an entirely domestic circle competed fiercely with both her own creative drive and the economic reality of needing to supplement the meagre stipend she was awarded from Percy's estate. Poovey's reading is less overtly feminist, considering Shelley as an author, who as a woman was under different social pressures to her male counterparts. Her gender is not the focus of Poovey's work and so marks the transition from criticism based on her femaleness to criticism focused on her work as author, albeit a female one.

Second-wave feminist readings of Shelley's work built upon the earlier biographical readings by not only recognising the influence of the significant men that made up her circle, but considering her response to the positions these relationships put her in throughout her life. Feminist readings also emphasise the anxiety or tension that Shelley experienced in navigating between being both a woman and an author. This deepens the criticism of Shelley and her works beyond simple biographical readings to a more complete understanding of both how

significant Shelley's experiences are in shaping her works and how significant her identification as an author is. Shelley's sense of self as an author is fundamentally linked to her place, time and personality, which will be explored more fully in Chapter Two. The feminist scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s begins to reveal how Shelley's works address the tensions that were prevalent in the Romantic era as the role of women began to shift and it became possible to be both a woman and a writer.

1.2 SPARK LIGHTS A FIRE

The shift from biographical reading *per se* to a deeper critical understanding to which Shelley's biography contributed key elements was cemented in 1987 to 1988. Three major publications worked in concert to reinvigorate the study of Shelley's life and works. Muriel Spark's biography and two new, much more complete and comprehensive editions (thanks to full access to the Abinger Collection) of Shelley's letters and diaries provided new material for critics. These publications also reaffirmed Shelley as worthy of study, not merely within the context of what could be gleaned about Percy, Godwin, or Byron, but as both woman (as had been highlighted by the feminist readings in the early 1980s) and author in her own right. Spark had already recognised Shelley's significance as an author in 1951, when she conceived the idea of a critical biography to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Shelley's death. The work did not stir a great response initially, but its republication with revisions in 1987 turned the feminist criticism fire into a scholarly inferno. Shelley was finally free from the shadow of her husband and her whole body of work was being critically evaluated, in many cases, for the first time since their original publication. Spark's book is one of the most extensive full length publications dedicated solely to Shelley and marks the shift in academic responses from footnotes commenting on her as merely Percy's wife to wider recognition of her as an author of merit, worthy of critical attention. Spark's work provides a comprehensive discussion of Shelley's life and a rigorous analysis of her work, most notably *Frankenstein*, in which she concludes that the monster is ultimately Shelley's social consciousness made manifest.

Spark closely recounts events from Shelley's life, continuing the strong tradition of biographical Shelley scholarship. She too, like Grylls and Gilbert and

Gubar, recognises the anxiety created by being both woman and author: "It was, however, a decided conviction that she was being denied admittance to 'society' that she began to concede more and more, and too much, to public opinion" (Spark 126). Spark is referring here primarily to the changes made to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*. Importantly, she also goes beyond a reading of Shelley's circle of significant personalities to acknowledge the significance of the time in which Shelley lived: "As Frankenstein clashed with his Monster, so did fixed religious beliefs with science: so did imaginative and emotional substitutes for religion with scientific rationalism; so did the intuitive and lush passions for a new era with the dialectical, material and succinct passions of the eighteenth century" (Spark 166). What Spark foregrounds here is the point that Foucault makes in *The Order of Things*, albeit without explicitly aligning her work with that of the French social philosopher—this point being that the nineteenth century was a time of rapid discursive change as entirely new fields of study emerged. I argue that Shelley was both witness to and participant in this momentous change.

The significance of the Abinger Collection cannot be overstated in enabling the republication and then evaluation of Shelley's diaries and letters. Unlike Nitchie, who in 1943 was reliant on Grylls's account of what she had seen when accessing Lord Abinger's personal collection, the subsequent donation (and in 2004, permanent purchase) of the works to the Bodleian Library gave academics unprecedented access to works that had not been seen by more than a select few in over a century. While these two texts renewed the emphasis on biographical reading of Shelley, they were also influenced by the subsequent shift in criticism and so the editors' comments are focused on Shelley and her work as author, not merely tracing the influence of others upon her.

One of the most significant contributions to Shelley scholarship at this time was Betty T. Bennett's comprehensive editorial effort in compiling and analysing Shelley's letters, with the second volume being published in 1988. This work includes discussion of how various passages that are difficult to see may be read and also provides context for the modern reader. Bennett is also responsible for a number of other Shelley publications, with a volume entirely devoted to Shelley marking in particular the recognition of her literary worth. The 1988 volume of *Letters* also added fuel to the fire as Bennett's extensively researched and annotated publication

brought to light previously unpublished text and so provided new material that reshaped scholars' understanding of Shelley.

1987 saw the publication of Shelley's *Journals*, edited by Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert. As with Bennett, the extensive research of the editors is evident, with many previously unpublished letters and fragments included. Their contextual notes enrich the documents, which are occasionally fragmented or incomplete. For all the remarkable efforts of the editors, though, the most notable (and regrettable) absence in all such editions remains the missing diaries, one of which covers the period of Frankenstein's inception. The addition of Shelley's diaries to the letters that Bennett had edited gave rise to many close readings of Shelley's works through a biographical frame—conflating her life with her work. This trend had dominated the early part of the 1980s and would persist in Shelley scholarship for the next decade. Like many critics, Feldman and Scott-Kilvert note the conflict in Shelley's nature, stating that "the journal is thus in many ways a reflection of the conflict in her own character between her outward reserve and the intense emotionalism she concealed beneath it" (Shelley, *Journals* 1987, xvi). This highlights the conflict between roles that had already been noted, but also explains a conflict between Shelley's outward demeanour and inward thoughts. Sometimes perceived as cold by those closest to her, the diary reveals that this is not the case at all. Both these letters and diaries remain the most comprehensive and well-regarded editions of Shelley's personal writings.

The combination of Spark's new reading of Shelley's life and a rich new trove of original material reinvigorated studies into Shelley. Emily Sunstein's 1989 *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality* built on and responded to Spark's work with a full length academic biography. Her readings of various texts and events function as a summation of the current academic view of Shelley: "Perhaps she will be best remembered for her perception in *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, that the Promethean drive is at the heart of human ends; and even so, if Nature shrugs we perish. In that ambiguity she may be said to have heralded the consciousness that distinguishes the Post-Modern for the Modern Age" (Sunstein 403). It will be argued that this growing consciousness is in fact the establishment of a discourse, and this argument can only be made with a strong contextual biography as its foundation.

Anne K. Mellor turned her full attention to Shelley in her 1989 work *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*. Mellor lays down the new critical

contexts on which her study scaffolds its reading of the relationship between life and writing: “Relation psychology …, feminist critical theory, cultural anthropology, Marxism, and the new historicism” (xii). She also decries those critics who “persist in reading Mary Shelley primarily in relation to her husband’s personality and ideas” (xi), marking a final and distinct shift away from the biographical approach and its emphasis on Percy. Her work is a strongly feminist reading, focusing on a female critique of science, discussion of family, and gendered readings of the text, and is still regarded as one of the key feminist readings of Shelley. Mellor states, “I hope to clarify the subtle ways in which Mary Shelley’s fictions criticise the dominant romantic and patriarchal ideologies of her day” (xii) and, in so doing, reads Shelley’s works as social commentary in a way that had not been done before.

Mellor went on to pose the concept of feminine Romanticism in her 1993 *Romanticism and Gender*; widening the scope of our understanding of the Romantic era to acknowledge the prolific female authors and their differing interests to that of the six male authors who until this time had been considered the canonical Romantic writers. Susan Tyler Hitchcock affirms this shift beyond the previous Romantic canon, citing research which found “the slow infiltration of women writers into our standard teaching canon”:

> Fully half of the courses surveyed, from undergraduate overviews to graduate seminars, included *Frankenstein* on the syllabus. The researcher concluded that “the canon in British Romanticism now includes seven writers rather than the former standard six”. Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley had made it into the ivory tower. (285)

Mellor supports this, continuing with her assertion that a number of the female authors of the period “employed the novel as a site of ideological contestation and subversion, exploiting its generic capacity for heteroglossia and dialogism, for disruptive laughter and a sustained interrogation of existing social codes, to invoke Bakhtin’s terms” (*Romanticism and Gender*, 9). This served to emphasise the less stable role(s) of women during a period of dynamic social change. Mellor does cite Shelley but does not do an in-depth reading of her works, which is hardly necessary considering her earlier study. However, this important redefining of Romanticism further opened the door for others to consider women authors of the period,

including Shelley. These two works by Mellor offer a glimpse of the potential scope and benefits of contextual biography, as Mellor seeks to develop an understanding of how Shelley and other female authors were positioned in their society and how they responded to this, both personally and in their works, although her study stops short of pursuing the broader cultural context that I aim to capture here in my own study of Shelley's life, in which I hope to identify the wider forces at play in creating the conditions that facilitated the writing of *Frankenstein*.

This period of criticism that was ignited by Spark's biography and new editions of Shelley's *Letters* and *Journals* marks another shift in the focus for critics. While the feminist emphasis on female roles is still present, new readings begin to emerge that consider both how Shelley's texts functioned within their context and how they continue to function in the present time. The significance of the time and place in which Shelley wrote is foregrounded, as critics consider how this influenced her work and her sense of self, and how her work also actively responded to and challenged the norms of the period. This approach, less centred on biography and gender, would continue into the 1990s and the new millennium, although the pace of criticism slowed for a time.

1.3 It's Alive!

Academic interest in Shelley waned in the early 1990s, with fewer full-length publications. The journal *Romanticism* devoted a full edition to Shelley in 1993 and this shows that while interest had declined, it had not ceased. Following a number of conferences held in 1997 to commemorate the bicentenary of Shelley's birth, a millennial wave of publications appeared. The most provocative of these was Miranda Seymour's *Mary Shelley*. Seymour's offering gives a more sexualised account of Shelley's motivations, asserting that Percy and Claire were more than likely having an affair (Seymour 132) and that Shelley's interest in Jane Edwards after Percy's death was romantic. Shelley's letters and diary can be read in such a way as to support this argument, yet there is no definite proof to support Seymour's interpretation in any of these documents. Read against Sunstein's 1989 text, Seymour provides some interesting counterpoints, yet Sunstein's (admittedly more conservative) interpretation of events seems better supported by the evidence available in the letters and diaries. Seymour's work highlights the importance of

having a standard of evidence in biography, as she herself acknowledges there is no direct evidence to support her assertions; it is only her interpretation. This is a particular pitfall for biography, as the researcher is creating their own images of the subject, rather than analysing the evidence itself. They are adding to the scholarly understanding of their subject, and may perhaps add misrepresentations that distort the impression of the subject as a whole.

Fred Botting's 1991 *Making Monstrous:* Frankenstein*, Criticism, Theory* offers many insights that are still relevant a half-century on. Botting discusses the complexity of the narrative structure and Shelley's authorial voice—his conception of a "doubling" or mirroring in the characters will be explored in Chapter Four. Botting also reaffirms the strong biographical readings of Shelley's work: "It becomes difficult in many cases to define where the novel ends and biography begins, and whether a distinction is at all possible: the strands of influence are so entangled" (75). Yet Botting does not delve deeply into this entanglement, noting instead that these readings "provide fewer reasons for critical certainty" (78). Botting also clearly identifies the impact of Shelley's ambiguous ending:

> The reader is left suspended uneasily between two poles, without resolution or closure, a position on the margins, neither inside nor outside the text, like the absent reader of the epistolary novel. In this uncertain, suspended space that is neither one nor the other, many meanings may be produced, and many differences may be unleashed. (154)

This ambiguity is essential to the longevity and power of Shelley's novel, a point that will be explored in this thesis in Chapter Six.

The journal *Women's Writing* devoted an issue to Shelley in 1999. This surveys Shelley's relationships with many key figures in her life and considers a wide range of her works. Most interestingly, Claire Clairmont and her step-mother are given consideration, widening the scope of study, which usually focuses primarily upon the males in her life. A number of Shelley's less prominent works are also included, such as *Lodore*. This collation of essays rather than full length books would be the trend in Shelley scholarship as the call for full-length works diminished. Betty T. Bennett also made another watershed contribution to Shelley studies with co-editor Stuart Curran in their anthology of essays *Mary Shelley in Her*

Times. Containing fifteen essays that address the full range of Shelley's writing, this collection again demonstrated the wide array of approaches to reading her work. The most successful of these chapters—William St Clair's "The Impact of *Frankenstein*" and Samantha Webb's "Reading at the End of the World: *The Last Man*, History and the Agency of Romantic Authorship"—consider both the life of the text of *Frankenstein* and a reading of *The Last Man* as a critical reflection on authorship.

St Clair's chapter gives a detailed account of the publication history of *Frankenstein*, highlighting how the rapidly emerging copyright laws of the modern print publication era in fact stymied the novel's readership until late in the nineteenth century. By this point, however, Frankenstein and his creature had already taken on a life of their own: "Refused life in the reasonably stable culture of print and reading, *Frankenstein* survived in a free-floating popular oral and visual culture, with only the central episode of the scientist making the Creature holding tenuously to its original" (St Clair "Impact" 54). This is a key point to note in any study of this text, and St Clair's thorough account of how the text's publication history facilitated the disconnection between text and narrative is valuable background. The fact that Shelley's exploration of science gone wrong triggered such interest, even with her original text unavailable for much of the time, speaks to how the work resonated.

Webb's contribution to *Mary Shelley and her Times* argues that the narrative frame used in the novel provides a critique of the role of the author—particularly, the Romantic author—in relation to effecting real social change. She observes:

> While Mary Shelley certainly believes in the agency of authorship and in the power of writing to change the world, she also believes in the equal agency of readership and is suspicious of the ways texts can be made to function in society. Her critique is certainly located in contemporary debates about the social function of writing; it also proceeds from a sense of alienation from her own audience, surely a uniquely contemporary dilemma for Romantic period authors. (Webb 133)

This text contributes to consideration of Shelley's self-conceptualisation as an author and also the perception of others over time of her as an author.

Another example of the quiet persistence of Shelley scholarship is Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelly's 1995 anthology of essays, *Romantic Women*

Writers: Voices and Countervoices, containing two readings with a particular focus on Shelley. Drawing on the first wave of feminist responses to Romanticism and also responding to newer ideas, the reader has a wide scope, and the two papers on Shelley are stark contrasts. Stephen Behrant's offering (1995) harks back to the most feminist readings while Judith Pike's (1995) application of Freud and Lacan herald a trend in subsequent publications of applying psychoanalytical readings. These starkly different chapters serve to highlight the way in which the field of Shelley studies has broadened in the space of only two decades. All facets of Shelley's life and works were under consideration and many competing perspectives and readings emerge in the scholarship during this period.

Behrant's work serves as a synthesis of the biographical and feminist work that emphasises Shelley's dichotomous roles of woman and author. Behrant utilises Foucauldian language to describe the shift that takes place when the critic applies a biographical lens to read the life through the work:

> The woman writer (who becomes herself an originator of discourse by publishing) is "represented" within public culture as an object of discourse when her work is reviewed by the (generally male) critic. But she is also translated into the subject of discourse when her literary efforts are indiscriminately interchanged with, or substituted for, her self—her individual person—within the public discourse of criticism. (Behrant 71-72)

As will become clear from this thesis, Behrant's claim that publishing is sufficient to become an originator of discourse is overblown—a fuller discussion of Foucauldian discursive formations and Shelley's role in this landscape is undertaken in Chapter Three. More useful is Behrant's observation of the double nature of criticism that makes women writers both object of subject of critical discourse. This tension between being both a writer and a figure who can be "read" is neatly summarised by Behrant:

> The author constantly runs the risk of being made into a fiction by the reader who formulates or extrapolates the author from the text. The woman author is "read" within a system of culturally encoded patriarchal authority over which she has virtually no control but within which she is expected to express

> herself. She is thus deprived at once of subjectivity, creativity, and autonomy. (85)

Behrant's strongly feminist reading reiterates one of the key beliefs of Feldman, Mellor, and Poovey; that is, it is not possible to separate the author and the individual, but conflating them and reading biographically is also fraught. Behrant also acknowledges what has been recognised in almost all Shelley scholarship: she felt torn between her roles as woman and author. This is most clear in his summation that it is "entirely valid to read in *Frankenstein*, as in much of Romantic women's writing, the enigmatic warning … that creativity may be hazardous to one's health—indeed to one's entire existence" (Behrant 85). Shelley would have felt this danger in a way few of her time could have. Her gifted husband died young, and the remainder of her life was spent living from her creative works, while being closely censored by her father-in-law.

In stark contrast, Pike's psychoanalytical reading also marks a shift in criticism to centre on issues of the body and the Creature. Criticism of the texts, rather than close study of the author, would be a trend that would grow as the twentieth century moved to a close, as academia explored avenues other than biography. Pike observes, "the reanimated corpse awakens a powerful dread that brandishes itself in our psyches. Mary Shelley captures this dread when she resurrects her Monster and transforms the exquisite corpse of the eighteenth century into a menacing sublime corpse that resists fetishization" (153). Reading Frankenstein and the Creature in terms of identities, the body, and the sense of self draws on a wide array of theoretical approaches and so Pike's contribution marks a new way of reading Shelley's work that would only become more prevalent in the twenty-first century.

1.4 Reading a Mind: Psychoanalysis and Shelley

Pike's chapter was a forerunner for the many psychoanalytic readings of Shelley that would proliferate in the 2000s. These psychoanalytic readings demonstrate the complexities and challenges of reading and critiquing literature that has clear references to the author's own life. Some of these readings highlight the risks of applying psychoanalysis to literary criticism, while some suggest Shelley is "proto-

Freudian" as her works show an early application of Freud's talking cure. Shelley famously attributes the inception of her most well-known novel, *Frankenstein*, to a dream, which could then be seen as a dream wish in Freudian terms. What is clear in Shelley's work are the complex narrative structures she uses to distance herself from being identified as the authorial voice, which are explored more fully in Chapter Three. I argue that rather than reading Shelley's work, and particularly the inception dream, to support psychoanalyses, it is more fruitful to see the inception dream as evidence of Shelley's exploration and critique of the authorial process.

The psychoanalytic approach to literature adopts "Freud's belief that writers betray who they are, their core conflicts and well-guarded secrets revealed as they emerge in dreams and literary works" (D'Amato 119). This approach aims to close the gap between the "real" and the implied author by finding parallels between the author's life and their works, allowing for assumptions about their beliefs or mental state to be made. How does having this psychoanalytic understanding of the author enrich our understanding of the text and its importance? The rich promise of psychoanalysis is that it can deliver what structural theory aspires to identify when, for example, Foucault explains that texts are ascribed value based on the responses to these questions: "From where does it come, who wrote it, when, under what circumstances, or beginning with what design?" ("Author", 108). Some of these questions can be answered empirically through contextual biography, through which method we can see evidence for the influences of place and time upon the author and their work. The one thing that can rarely be answered with any degree of certainty is the question of "design"—even if the author has left a written record of their intent, we have little way of knowing if they feel they fulfilled this goal, or if the stated intent was in fact their true purpose in the first place. It is this question of "design" or motivation that psychoanalysis attempts to answer and it is clear that it is an almost-impossible task, especially if Foucault is right when he claims that through "the contrivances that [the author] sets up between himself and what he writes the writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular individuality" ("Author" 102).

It is certainly possible to see the shadows of an author's lived experience behind their works and authors often acknowledge this themselves, as Shelley did. However, some psychoanalytic readings purport to be able to divine the unconscious motivations of authors, which is difficult to support with evidence, since unconscious content is by its very nature concealed by the text and can only be

brought to light through the mode of interpretation of the psychoanalyst. This is the case in many of the psychoanalytic readings of Shelley's *Frankenstein* and, particularly, her account of the dream that inspired the writing of the story. Most of these readings suggest that in writing *Frankenstein*, Shelley was subconsciously exorcising her personal demons, or practicing an early form of Freudian therapy through literature. These readings are a study of the person rather than a study of the text and so may more accurately be considered pathographies (biography through psychoanalysis) rather than literary criticism. This is an important distinction for this thesis, as I view psychoanalysis of Shelley as pathography, and so part of the long tradition of biographical approaches to reading and understanding Shelley's works. Those who apply psychoanalysis to the characters within a text I argue are engaging more in literary psychoanalysis than biographical analysis. The aim of this thesis is not to uncover the "real" Shelley but, rather, through the method of contextual biography, to establish the contextual conditions which enabled her to write *Frankenstein* and establish a new discursive space.

The clear and intentional links between life and works that many literary psychoanalyses draw are more suited to pursuits in the field of psychobiography whose significance "lies within personality and creativity research" (Kőváry 741) (or studies of persons) rather than literary criticism (studies of texts). Some of the examples in this section are in fact more pathographies, which Schioldann defines as:

> historical biography from a medical, psychological and psychiatric viewpoint. It analyses a single individual's biological heredity, development, personality, life history and mental and physical pathology, within the socio-cultural context of his/her time, in order to evaluate the impact of these factors upon his/her decision-making, performance and achievements. (Schioldann in Kőváry 742)

It is in these biographical genres that psychoanalysis finds a place, as psychoanalysis is ultimately a study of persons rather than a study of works. A study of the works may contribute to a study of the person in the form of psychobiography or pathography, but the inverse is not necessarily true. While an understanding of the discursive origins of texts assists in understanding how the text functions within its

discourse, suppositions about the author's internal life or motivations are not always well-founded.

Frankenstein was published in 1816 with no author given, establishing Walton as the authorial voice within the narrative. By 1831, Shelley had been recognised as the author and, propelled by the wave of stage adaptations that followed its initial publication, particularly the 1823 production *Presumption*, her novel had entered the zeitgeist as a warning against playing God and the dangers of modern science. The widespread cultural impact of Shelley's novel will be addressed in Chapter Six. Prior to the republication, Shelley was asked to write a new "Introduction" to the novel (M. Shelley, *Letters Vol. II* 129). It is here that she recounts the dream that became *Frankenstein* and that has provided rich fodder for psychoanalysis. However, her account of the inception dream allows Shelley to again distance herself from the act of authorship, instead crediting the narrative to an inspired dream. As Fred Botting notes, "From the outset *Frankenstein*'s author is displaced" (2).

1.5 Freudian Dreaming

Shelley recounts her inception dream in the "Introduction" to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, some fifteen years after it occurred. This provides rich material for analysis, yet is also problematised by the significant gap in time and the resultant questionable veracity of the account of the inception dream. While the veracity of the 1831 "Introduction" is questionable, particularly the claim that the story came in a waking dream and associated denial of ownership, the basic outline of the story competition is given in the 1818 "Preface": "The circumstance on which my story rests was suggested in casual conversations. It was commenced, partly as a source of amusement, and partly as an expedient for exercising any untried resources of mind" (M. Shelley 1818, 5). This hints at the conversation about the principles of life outlined in the 1831 "Introduction" and also at Percy's encouragement for Shelley to extend her initial effort into a more complete novel. The ghost story challenge is also established:

> in the evenings we crowded around a blazing wood fire, and occasionally amused ourselves with some German stories of ghosts, which happened to

> fall into our hands. These tales excited in us a playful desire of imitation. Two other friends (a tale from the pen of one of whom would be far more acceptable to the public than any thing I can ever hope to produce) and myself agreed to write each a story, founded on some supernatural occurrence. (M. Shelley 1818, 6)

It seems the events of the "Introduction" do have a basis in fact but the addition of the "waking dream" problematizes Shelley's simultaneous acknowledgement of and distancing herself from the act of authorship.

In the "Introduction" Shelley portrays herself as a dreamer from childhood: "Still I had a dearer pleasure than this, which was the formation of castles in the air—the indulging in waking dreams—the following up trains of thought, which had for their subject the formation of a succession of imaginary incidents" (M. Shelley, "Introduction" [1831] 165). These flights of imagination were her "refuge when annoyed—my dearest pleasure when free" (M. Shelley, "Introduction" [1831] 165). She goes on to recount the dream that offered the tale of *Frankenstein*, which came to her fully formed: "When I placed my head on my pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie" (M. Shelley, "Introduction" [1831] 168). It is important to note her denial of authorial agency in the formation of the novel; she attributes the narrative to her "independent" imagination, which, "*unbidden, possessed* and guided me, *gifting* the successive images" (M. Shelley, "Introduction" [1831] 168; emphasis added). Here, Shelley evokes the Romantic idea of imagination, which bestows visions upon the author to inspire their works, rather than taking direct responsibility for authorship.

Shelley concludes her dream account by describing the dream's lingering residues:

> I opened mine in terror. The idea so possessed my mind, that a thrill of fear ran through me, and I wished to exchange the ghastly image of my fancy for the realities around. I see them still; the very room, the dark parquet, the closed shutters, with the moonlight struggling through, and the sense I had that the glassy lake and white high Alps were beyond. I could not so easily

> get rid of my hideous phantom; still it haunted me. ("Introduction" [1831] 168)

In these passages, the potential for Freudian dream analysis seems evident. As Freud asserts, "all the material composing the content of a dream is somehow derived from experience, that it is reproduced or remembered in the dream—this at least may be accepted as an incontestable fact" (6). The long history of imagining, a dream that seems to come unbidden, and the after effects, particularly the lingering sense of horror and the inclusion of the lake, moonlight and Alps that would be key features in the novel all lend themselves to psychoanalytic interpretation linking the novel to the dreamer's day residues and experiences. Yet, these same features also serve as evidence of Shelley invoking the Gothic heritage of the novel, featuring ghost stories, disturbing dreams, and sublime settings. This increased emphasis on features of genre shows Shelley engaging in the work of an author, rather than evidence of a troubled mind.

The problems of psychoanalysis conducted through literature are evident in Anthony Badalamenti's reading of *Frankenstein*. Badalamenti outlines his psychoanalytic approach of decoding as a more current interpretation of Freudian theory:

> Decoding is the chief tool used in this attempt to divine Mary Shelley's motives. It is a means of finding the unconscious meanings hidden by substitution, a defense used to consciously express an emotionally charged but unconscious issue that would be unbearable were its real meaning open to conscious view…While Freud discussed this procedure as interpreting the return of the repressed, the idea of substitution, or encoding, is more current and more exact. (420)

The use of the word "divine" immediately signals the issues of literary psychoanalysis. While Badalamenti claims that his approach is "more current and more exact", the ancient pagan practice of divination is invoked. The claim that he can accurately draw conclusions about Shelley's unconscious motivations and meanings through analysis of her works is tenuous, and offers little of critical weight

in adding to an understanding of the value or significance of the text. He concludes by drawing upon other psychoanalytic approaches:

> The specific inner processes behind the novel's creation are more properly in Jung's ideas on the transcendent function (Jung, 1967). Some of the explanation offered here is specific to Langs' psychology (1994) where one member of a relation has feelings of persecution in response to frame breaks by the other. The first member uses messages that encode the perception of the frame breaks with story-like elements to try to communicate the event to the second member. This makes Shelley's novel an effort to tell Percy something important about their relation. (Badalamenti 438)

The definitive assertion that the work is Shelley's attempt to communicate with Percy is not supported by any direct evidence. Since Shelley kept a shared diary and spent the vast majority of her time in his presence, other avenues of communication were available to the couple. While it is difficult to disprove Badalamenti's claim, there is also no tangible evidence to support it. This is the fundamental flaw of psychoanalysis when it masquerades as literary criticism—the "right" or "true" answer is entirely unknowable, and so psychoanalysts continue to argue for their interpretation or "diagnosis" *ad nauseam*.

Badalamenti decodes not only the inception dream but also the novel itself. One of his primary arguments is that the character of Victor Frankenstein is a manifestation of Shelley's suppressed negative feelings about Percy. Badalamenti offers a 21-point comparative table (426-427) drawing links between Percy and Victor. While the similarities are there, such as a connection between character names and real people (Shelley and Percy's son William, also the name of her father; Percy's sister Elizabeth; and Percy's youthful pseudonym of Victor), other links are much more tenuous. The claim that the novel's opening scene being set in the North Pole is a direct reflection of Percy's desire "to see the poles unfrozen" (426) is unsupported by any other evidence. Coincidence is also given meaning, with the author noting that the writing of *Frankenstein* began in a November, as did her relationship with Percy, and the opening lines of the novel (Badalamenti 427, 429). Again, there is no evidence to support the claim that is was intentional—relying instead on some presumption of the power the repetition compulsion maintains over

conscious activity—or that it carries significance in developing a critical understanding of the novel. There can be little doubt that the similarities between Victor and Percy were at least in some ways intentional, but the reach for much deeper meanings here seems implausible. Shelley herself acknowledged that she drew heavily upon figures from her life in her works; for example, she acknowledges both Percy and Byron as being represented in *The Last Man* in a letter to Leigh Hunt in 1824: "I have endeavoured but how inadequately, to give some idea of him [Percy] in my last published book—the sketch has pleased some of those who best loved him" (Shelley quoted in Luke Jr. xi).

Badalamenti goes on to argue that if the Creature is the encoding of Shelley's concerns about her relationship with Percy, Percy offers a rejection of her view of their relationship in his work, *Prometheus Unbound*:

> There is little, if any, hint that Percy sensed that the story and its title might be about him. However, there is evidence of his unconscious perception of that idea… If Frankenstein stands for Percy as an irresponsible lover/spouse then *Prometheus Unbound* makes his reply to Mary's message to be exempt from its claims. (Badalamenti 431-432)

Since even Badalamenti acknowledges that Percy's work is written eighteen months after the publication of *Frankenstein* makes the likelihood of this claim even more fragile. It is here that we can most clearly see the pitfalls of psychoanalysis; links being drawn between texts and ideas under the claim of "unconscious perception". If the author was not consciously aware of the influences upon their writing, how can critics assert to know their thoughts, over one hundred years after the author's death? It is certainly possible to see traces and influences in works, but it is impossible to attribute this to the will or intent (conscious or not) of the author, without additional supporting evidence.

Badalamenti interprets the inception dream as being a manifestation of Shelley's dissatisfaction with her relationship with Percy at the time and a series of other competing emotional stressors:

> Mary's dream, whose imagery is laden with feelings of persecution and depression, as the resultant of several emotional forces. Mary was pressured

> to create a story by two eminent men, one of whom loved her and both of whom shared an interest in incest. The latter was likely known to her at some level, for such things tend to be sensed non-verbally if not openly. She was still dealing with the loss of her first child and Percy's failure to support her while he was giving himself to Byron and his own interests. The frightful dream image can represent her loss of a child by nature's failure to bring it to term and by its being the wrong gender in Percy's eyes. (424)

The claim that Percy was interested in incest is inaccurate. While some critics note his interest in "free love" or polygamous relationships there is little to support that this stretched to incest. He did encourage Shelley in a "love experiment" with Thomas Jefferson Hogg, but there is no evidence this was ever consummated (St Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys* 375) and while some critics read Shelley's frustrations with both Claire Clairmont and Percy as evidence of them having an affair (Seymour 132) there is no definitive proof this actually occurred. Clair's presence was certainly a point of contention within Shelley and Percy's relationship, but we cannot assume to know more specific detail without evidence. In Badalamenti's offering, the flaws of trying to know the author are manifestly evident. There are clear parallels between Shelley's life and works, as is the case for the vast majority of authors, but to argue for a definitive causal relationship, as Badalamenti does, is a next to impossible task. That is not to say that there is no place for psychoanalysis in literary studies, but it would be better directed towards a study of characters, where the entire being is confined within the work, and what can be known is limited to the page. Hence, a study of Victor, which may acknowledge the biographical shades of Percy, would seek out the clues to the characters' actions within the novel, rather than as a manifestation of the author's ultimately unknowable mind or experience.

Like Badalamenti, other critics adopting a psychoanalytic approach to *Frankenstein* have made much of the origin-dream. Ronald Britton states, "I treat the preface to the 1831 edition as if it were like a preliminary consultation, with the other parts of her history and the novel itself as what might have emerged in subsequent analysis" (3). He suggests "Mary's daydream of scientific experiment opened a door to unconscious phantasies of a dreadful scene of childbirth" (3). Shelley's mother died after giving birth to her and Shelley lost three children and

suffered a miscarriage so childbirth is an important part of her biography, yet the majority of her own losses post-date the writing of the first edition of the novel, making the suggestion that it is linked to her experiences of childbirth less convincing (see, for example, Knoepflmacher for more discussion). Britton continues his analysis:

> We know from Mary's account of her daydreaming method that she inhabits her three characters in her novel: she speaks for them and they speak for her…The third and by far the most eloquent voice is that of the Monster and he speaks for Mary's unconscious, saying things she does not really know about herself. (7)

It is not clear which passage of the "Introduction" Britton is referring to here, but the claim that her three characters "speak for her" is overly reductive—it ignores many other characters that inhabit the narrative, and reduces the function of the focal characters to authorial mouthpieces. Given Shelley's repeated efforts to obscure acknowledgement of her authorial voice, as we shall see in Chapters Three and Five, it seems more likely that having the characters speak for her is exactly what she wanted to avoid. Furthermore, Britton's suggestion that the Monster reveals things Shelley does not consciously know is impossible to prove, as we cannot know how aware Shelley was of her own influence or subconscious manifestations in the narrative. While Britton's psychoanalytic offering provides possible links between biography and narrative, it does little to add to our critical understanding of the text and its discursive function.

Perhaps what the critics such as Britton fail most to question is the veracity of the inception dream. No mention of the dream is found in Shelley's diaries or letters from 1816, although we have evidence that Shelley did record dreams that had troubled her. An example of this is recorded shortly after the death of her first child: "Dream that my little baby came to life again" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 70). The ability of critics to draw conclusions about the truthfulness of the inception dream account is hampered by the absence of Shelley's diary from this time. The diary covering the period between 14 May 1815 and 21 July 1816 has not been traced and so Shelley's record of the inception of *Frankenstein* is lost, leaving her claim in the 1831 "Introduction" as the only record of the dream. Shelley's *Letters* also make no

mention of the dream, neither at the time it supposedly occurred, nor at the time she was asked to write the 1831 "Introduction". This lack of a primary account of the dream lends weight to an argument that the "Introduction" is more an authorial conceit than a lived experience.

Ultimately, it is not possible to truly know what Shelley was thinking, as even her diaries and letters are likely to have been written with a reader other than herself in mind. Her early diaries are shared with Percy, and the practice of personal writings being made public was more prevalent at the time. Things that Shelley wished to genuinely conceal from others were written in code; for example, a number of symbols are used when she writes about Claire Clairmont. This is discussed in detail by the editors in *The Journals of Mary Shelley* (581). So even her most personal writings have been drafted with an eye for potential publication, and could be considered in some degree to be literary rather than genuinely personal as a result. While the assumptions or extrapolations made by literary psychoanalysis may be correct, or a valuable thought experiment as a study of persons, there is no evidence to definitively support their conclusions. Rather than being proposed to reveal authorial intent, then, the benefits of psychoanalysis are most suited to speculative biography rather than criticism.

In surveying the evolution of academic approaches, it becomes clear that Shelley's life and times are fundamental to her productions as an author and so she is an excellent subject for a contextual biography, as will be shown in this thesis. Initial criticism saw value in her work for what it revealed about her luminary circle, but at the expense of any revelations about the author herself. Feminist readings place tremendous emphasis on her womanhood and various feminine roles (daughter, mother, mistress, wife, widow), which inevitably influenced her work, but also place great emphasis on her role as author and so approach her work with a more critical view. While not denying the incredible significance that Shelley's place, time, and personality had on her work as an author, criticism tends to consider just one element as the focus of any sound study. Issues of the body as represented by the Creature, concerns about new sciences, the consolidation of a new genre are just some of the aspects that are being considered by Shelley scholars today. Invariably, the result still remains partial, highlighting one element of Shelley, her work, or its background, without pulling the disparate elements together. In what follows, I propose that contextual biography provides the necessary coverage of place, time,

and personality through which it becomes possible to understand the complex interplay of forces acting upon Shelley as well as her capacity to act upon them. To demonstrate the extent of Shelley's lasting impact on ways of thinking and writing about science, it is important to refigure Shelley as an agent shaping the reception of her work. By considering the contextual evidence, and its relationship to the works Shelley produced, we can build a quantitative argument for the forces that shaped Shelley's writing and also see revealed her awareness of the role of author, her own place in this role, and her critical response and experimentation with what it is to be an author.

Chapter Two
Shelley's Context: Place, Time and Personality

As the previous chapter revealed, there is a tremendous emphasis upon Shelley's personal life in the criticism of her works. This chapter will revisit Shelley's biographies through the lens of contextual biography to establish in richer detail the conditions which made the writing of *Frankenstein* possible. As the scholarship on Shelley shows, biography as a study of lives is a broad field. Biographers may choose from many lenses through which to view their subject. In the case of Shelley, she was first perceived through a canonical lens as the wife of Percy, rather than as a figure in her own right, and then through a feminist lens that placed greater emphasis on her female roles as wife and mother. These lenses place emphasis on particular aspects of the subject, giving the criticism a particular tint or hue, emphasising those 'colours' or themes that catch the biographer's eye, much like a black and white image in which only one additional colour is included. Each lens thus also skews the image in a particular fashion. If we look at the same image multiple times, each with a different dominant colouration, the eye cannot form a single composite image, so the effect is instead of multiple individual images—so, too, the sense of the many biographies of Shelley, each viewed through a different lens, is of there being multiple different lives rather than a coherent assemblage of place, time, and personality. Contextual biography allows the biographer to step back from the image of their subject and, instead of focusing on a single hue, see the rich multi-coloured and multifaceted tapestry that made up their subject's life in a more holistic way. In so doing, the scholar can see the interrelationship between the differing perspectives offered by the many lenses available to critics today and also view the background within which their subject lived.

Contextual biography does not seek to denigrate other perspectives or scholarship which has adopted a particular critical lens, although the biographer may give greater weight to some perspectives when they are considered in relation to others and against the socio-cultural context of the author's time. A case in point is the psychoanalytic readings discussed in the previous chapter. These have merit as studies of persons in the discipline of biography, as pathographies or psychobiographies, yet may be given less emphasis in the study of the texts the

author produced. So too the early biographies of Shelley that were more centred on what they could reveal about Percy may offer less to the understanding of the subject. This is compounded by the early biographers having little or no access to much of Shelley's personal writing, which meant that many of their conclusions about her life were extrapolations or assumptions gleaned from her fiction, rather than based upon tangible evidence. Of course, given the plethora of scholarship surrounding Shelley and other important literary figures, a contextual biography cannot attempt to create the definitive or totalising understanding of its subject; rather, contextual biography is the adoption of a different critical position, one which recognises and considers the views foregrounded by the key lenses of preceding scholarship and seeks to synthesise these into a broader image that takes into consideration events that directly affected the subject as well as the broader discursive and cultural shifts that form the background of the subject's life and time. This wider, multi-coloured view may allow scholars to better understand the many forces at play in shaping the author's work and in turn offer new ways of assessing the impact of these works, both within and beyond their own cultural context.

2.1 Contextual Biography as Methodology

While the term "contextual biography" has been in use since the early 1970s (for example, Cutler (1971)) the methodology remains not clearly articulated or defined. Two notable contextual biographies highlight this lack of clarity about the methodology. In *James Joyce in Context*, John McCourt states that a study of the broader context of an author allows us "to see him [the subject] as both the product of and interested participant in a whole variety of worlds which provide the contexts and co-texts of his fictional output" (xv). This is an excellent summation of the scope of contextual biography, however, McCourt's collection of essays goes on to focus on one context at a time, not really considering the intrinsic connectedness of this "variety of worlds". It is a contextual biography in that many facets of the subject's life are considered as being shaped by the multiple contexts in which Joyce lived and wrote—his Irish heritage and youth, the European context of his adult life, and the British world in which his writings were circulated—yet it does not ultimately achieve a more holistic image of its subject as each lens is adopted individually, rather than being overlaid to create a synthesis of understanding. In some respects,

McCourt's study of these multiple contexts also leads to a picture of a deeply fragmented life in writing, and an equally fragmented critical heritage to which these contexts give rise.

Another successful contextual biography is James Shapiro's *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare*. Shapiro observes the relationship between text and context that can be seen through contextual biography: "it is no more possible to talk about Shakespeare's plays independently of his age than it is to grasp what his society went through without the benefit of Shakespeare's insights" (xvii). This chiastic formulation represents Shapiro's response to a critical heritage that has either sought to detach the playwright from his age as if he was "for all time" or to embed his writing so deeply in his life that biographers need not concern themselves with the lack of detailed records about his life—they need only read his plays and poems and they will know the man himself. Focusing on a specific year in his life, the book positions both Shakespeare and his works alongside events to which his writing responds and, importantly, which Shakespeare or his works influenced. This is a defining feature of contextual biography: it is not only a study of the "variety of worlds" that shaped the author's works, but how these works in turn shaped the discourses of which they become a part. The benefit in taking the multifaceted view offered by contextual biography resides in allowing an impression of the subject as a whole, rather than placing emphasis upon just a small fragment of their life. In doing so, we can trace the impact of culture upon the author and vice versa in a way that is not always possible in other biographical approaches.

Turning to literary criticism for a definition of contextual biography offers little in the way of additional clarity. One such example is the half a page on contextual biography in Ira Nadel's *Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form*, an introduction to the practice of biographical writing. Nadel states:

> in examining the life with the work in its social/historical context, the biography provides a broader vision and greater breadth to the subject while expanding the nature of the genre. Contextual biography incorporates the concern of group biography with the social aspects of psychobiography creating a form that enlarges the foundations of biographical writing … contextual biography redresses the emphasis on chronology to one of totality. (200)

This is a sound outline of the scope of contextual biography, but does not go on to consider the weight that should be given to various components of context or clearly describe a methodology. Indeed, there is no easily located comprehensive scholarly work that offers a clear definition of contextual biography. The most frequently cited paper is Fernando Vidal's 2003 offering, "Contextual Biography and the Evolving Systems Approach to Creativity", which summarises the key elements of a contextual biography:

> First, the individual is considered as an evolving system structured as a network of intellectual and existential projects. Writing a biography implies tracing and reconstructing such a network. The network image emphasizes the nonlinear nature of an individual life and highlights the interaction between the different dimensions of existence. Second, different conceptual levels are distinguished: the internal environments that regulate the subject's activity "from the inside" …, the immediate environments involved in the processes of socialization and individuation, and the distant contexts (history) ... Third, the subject of the biography is attributed an intrinsic and existential psychology. His productions are not seen as the manifestation of some underlying essence, but rather as part of the construction of a mental universe. (81)

In summary, Vidal is looking at the works of the subject, their socio-historical place, and the author's personal response or approach to this, similar to Nadel's identification of "group biography with the social aspects of psychobiography" (200).

It is important to note Nadel's emphasis on "totality". This is the multi-coloured image that can be constructed by considering a wider, more multifaceted view of the subject. It is an academic long-shot of the subject, where we can see the discursive landscape in which they stand and where the subject fits within it. Yet we must keep in mind that this is not a two-dimensional picture. Context seen only as a colourful backdrop in an image of the subject undervalues the complex interplay between the subject's life and the world in which they lived and worked. Rather, we must imagine the subject constructed through a contextual biography to be multi-

dimensional—we see the author as a part of their context and so can begin to see the interplay between the subject and their world: how they interacted and reacted to their context both in life and works, how they were acted upon by others, and how their works acted to change the context of the culture of which they were a part. In seeing the biographical subject *in situ*, contextual biography allows for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the subject, not only as an individual, but as an integral and active part of the culture in which they lived.

While we build this more colourful image, we must keep in mind the great trap of biography: the feeling that we can come to "know" our subject. For example, while Vidal provides some important points for consideration, the study continues to place significant emphasis on the internal processes of the biographical subject, which are difficult to definitively establish, even when evidence such as personal letters and diaries exist, as is the case for Shelley. If we approach contextual biography with this awareness of the dangers of assuming too much, Nadel and Vidal do offer some ideas about the potential key features of contextual biography as a methodology. These can be summarised as a study of the author's socio-cultural place and time, their position within this landscape, and their responses (both private and published) to this, with the caveat that these personal responses must be supported by corroborating evidence and not merely represent the biographer's assumptions or extrapolations.

This recognition of the complex interplay between a biographical subject's personality, place, and time are useful in further defining the method of contextual biography. A study of personality aligns with more traditional styles of biography such as psychobiography and hagiography, with their emphasis on the first-hand experiences and thoughts of their subject. A study of the subject's place within their society and culture draws upon cultural studies, tracing the ebbs and flows of discursive influence. Finally, a broad view of the subject's time draws upon historiography (in particular, cultural history), allowing the contextual biographer to trace the large forces shaping the subject's world, and to position them within the many voices of the time; what McCourt refers to as "co-texts" (xv). Many biographies of literary figures draw on these fields, yet few consider all of them equally or holistically. In moving towards a definition of the methodology of contextual biography, the differing yet complementary perspectives offered by these more well-established research methodologies are useful in framing how we can

build a multi-dimensional image of the authorial subject as a person (biography) situated within a particular culture and society (cultural studies), then begin to trace the forces that influenced them and, in turn, how they influenced their world (cultural history).

The question that follows then is how do we study these three areas and what weight do we give them? I argue that the answer, like any good research outcome, is to use evidence from the author's place and time, including the works, personal writings, and others' responses to them. Unlike openly speculative biographies or historical fictions such as the recent fictionalised account of the writing of *Frankenstein*, Antoinette May's *The Determined Heart*, which present suppositions or assumptions about the author's state of mind or feelings derived from their works, contextual biography must set a higher standard of evidence. Documentary evidence must be given to support assertions linking events and the author's fictional works. This is most important when attempting to discuss the author's personal view or motivations. In the case of Shelley, we are fortunate to have access to both her diaries and letters so we do have some evidence from which to draw conclusions, but this must be done with care, and with a constant eye to other contextual material that may shape our understanding of her work. Contextual biography must reach beyond the immediate to look at the cultural landscape of which the subject was a part. Newspaper articles, parliamentary discussions, scientific papers do not need to make reference to an author or their work to have relevance to a broader study of context. Studying this material allows scholars to establish the tenor of the time—how the author felt about a topic, but also how many others felt and the ideas they expressed about such matters—and so situate their subject within this discursive landscape.

While I construct contextual biography as a method which draws upon a number of other disciplines, it is still firmly a biographical method. It may be tempting to position contextual biography as a form of *material* cultural history, such as in Arjun Appadurai's cultural biography of *things*, which traces the history of objects (Elerie and Spek 90). While the works of an authorial subject may be viewed as objects that have a far longer history that extends beyond the life of the subject, and a study of works is a part of contextual biography, these works are not the focus of biography unless in the context of seeking to understand how they relate to their author. Nor is a study of the biographical subject's physical space intended to become a biography of landscape. While the idea that "landscape biography is both a

description of the history of the material landscape and of the world of ideas grafted onto that landscape in various periods" (Elerie and Spek 90) is a useful one in the process of defining contextual biography, in that it emphasises the link between physical spaces and changing schools of thought, landscape biography again moves the emphasis away from the human subject. It may seem that by broadening our scope to consider the subject's context, the subject is, *as a subject*, "borne away ... lost in darkness and distance" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818], 160). This is not necessarily the case.

With its emphasis on the subject's socio-cultural time and place, contextual biography can be construed as part of the cultural turn in history and literary criticism. In this mode of thinking, culture is seen as "collectively structured meaning" (Reinfandt 67) of which the author and their works are a part. The cultural turn places emphasis on the strong, inescapable forces of enculturated behaviour and this suggests a lack of agency on the part of the subject. Cultural change is evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, systemic rather than individual. Clifford Geertz defines culture as "a set of control mechanisms—plans, recipes, rules, instructions … for the governing of behaviour" (46). It may seem to devalue the role of the subject to view culture in this way, yet this is not the case for contextual biography, as what this view of culture allows us to see is how "collectively structured meaning" is evident in the author's life and works, and how in turn, their works influence, and perhaps reshape, this landscape of meaning. Stephen Greenblatt, whose New Historicist approach was influenced heavily by Geertz and dominated literary history from the 1980s to 1990s, explains that "literature functions … in three interlocking ways: as a manifestation of the concrete behaviour of its particular author, as itself the expression of the codes by which behaviour is shaped, and as a reflection upon those codes" (4).

It is this reflection upon the codes or rules, as Geertz would label them, which reveals the power of the individual within their culture. While Greenblatt's work tended to focus on the power of cultural control mechanisms to contain individual agency, the capacity for reflection that he attributed most often to Shakespeare offers opportunities for the historical subject to cast a critical eye over their world. This is reinforced by Reinfandt's discussion of Homi Bhabha's *Location of Culture,* in which he observes,

> culture resides in individual subject positions and in intersubjective and collective experiences. This cultural communality and the resultant formation of organisations and institutions result from a complex negotiation of both potential disrupting and integrating impulses. In this sense, culture is not a more or less stable sum total of a society's values, but rather a mode of persistent self-observation which negotiates values and possible counter-values. (69-70)

It is in these acts of reflection and negotiation that we can begin to trace the influence of individuals in cultural change, as the "collectively structured meaning" or "rules governing behaviour" are changed. As Anna Green argues, "cultural history, therefore, can be defined as an approach to the past that focuses upon the ways in which human beings make sense of their worlds, and this places human subjectivity and consciousness at the centre of cultural inquiry" (4). So while contextual biography does consider the broader forces at work in culture, it must nonetheless retain a sharp focus upon its individual subject as an agent within this landscape.

Contextual biography is thus a hybrid methodology, drawing upon a range of methods drawn from across multiple disciplines in constructing an understanding of the subject within their place and time, without becoming a study of place and time in their own right. What is most important is the idea of the subject within their context: the human subject is at the centre of the work, but drawing upon other approaches provides a more complete understanding and not just an image of the complex interrelationships between the individual and the place and time in which they lived—we can see them as agents within their contextual landscape. I would argue, as Laurie Johnson does in his brief study of the evolution of the video game industry from both much older histories of key technological innovations and more immediate cultural, industrial, and even personal contexts, that we must "attempt to set up some parameters for mapping what we might call the fields of influence, which at key historical moments (or milestones) create the possibility for an individual act or product to achieve widespread or long-term cultural impact" ("Speculation" 177).

This is where contextual biography's potential is seen—it allows us not only to construct a new image of Shelley, but it in turn offers new opportunities to engage

with and trace the impact of her works. As a methodology, then, contextual biography has the key pillars of:

- a survey of the cultural landscape of which the subject was a part. This includes both the discourses with which they directly engaged and more general trends in the era;
- consideration of the subject's personality and personal experiences, which must draw upon direct evidence, rather than emotive supposition;
- reflection on how the author's works drew upon the discourses identified, again with a reliance on the evidence available; and
- study of how the author's works were received, and how this then reshaped the culture in which they lived. This final stage may be a part of a contextual biography, or be a standalone study, facilitated by the findings of a contextual biography.

To use this framework, based upon Vidal's suggestion of a study of the relationship between works, socio-historical place and personal responses, there is ample evidence for a contextual biography of Shelley. Access to all of Shelley's works are readily available. Extensive personal writing in the form of diaries and letters are also available through the Abinger Collection, which gives insight into Shelley's thoughts and feelings on various issues. We are also fortunate to have direct evidence of what the Shelleys were reading, and so what ideas and discourses they were engaged with, since they kept a reading list as a part of their shared journals. Additionally, a large amount of correspondence from members of their social circle is also available, as further evidence of the ideas that their milieu pursued. We can also turn to the broader historical record for corroborating evidence of major events and social changes that impacted the lives of the Shelleys, such as the Greek Revolution. Consideration of all of these factors offers an understanding of the conditions of and influences upon the creation of Shelley's works, and allows us to see her as an active agent in the multidimensional space she occupied.

A contextual biography of Shelley involves, as we have noted, the multifocal view afforded by being able to step back and look at Shelley in her place and time. As Foucault argues, the period in which Shelley lived was one of significant change (*Order* 217), and indeed she also moved among some of the greatest thinkers of her

era, with whom we tend to associate the revolutionary ideas contributing to changes in society. Constructing a contextual biography of Shelley allows for exploration of both Shelley's place and time and how she and her works fit within this broader context, yet room can also be made for a study of Shelley's writing and correspondence to develop an understanding of how she positioned herself within the socio-cultural context of her time and how she responded to events and developments. This enables us to add a third point of focus for the contextual biography: to time and place, we can add personality. This new reading of Shelley and her works within their context show that Shelley's experiences, social milieu, and also her personal interests combined in such a way that she can be considered a figure who synthesised and embodied the discourses of her era, paving the way for the emergence of a new discourse that shaped the way scientific advancements would be viewed from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day.

2.2 Time and Place: A Context of Reanimation and Revolution

Shelley was born into a world shaped by revolution. This section will explore two of the most significant areas of change: the rapid growth of the sciences, and the growing call for political reform throughout Europe. These political and scientific revolutions have their origin in the Enlightenment, "characterized by dramatic revolutions in science, philosophy, society and politics; these revolutions swept away the medieval world-view and ushered in our modern western world" (Bristow). One tool that is useful in providing a snapshot of how these discourse ebbed and flowed during Shelley's time is the Google Ngram search tool, which provides a visual and numerical representation of the word frequency in digitised books accessible through Google's search engine. While this may seem a scholarly "short cut", it provides a way for researchers to engage with and begin to make meaning of the huge number of texts now available to modern scholarship. Doing similar research manually to collate the results is now next to impossible—a Serial Summons search through the University of Southern Queensland's Library alone gives 99 279 results in a search for texts with both "Frankenstein" and "Shelley" as key words, as of 20 December 2017. By the time this thesis is being read, the number is sure to be in excess of 100 000, highlighting the challenges facing researchers in ensuring they cover the wide range of content now available.

This huge volume of material presents a challenge to modern scholars and while nothing will take the place of thorough and discerning engagement with source materials, tools like the Ngram search can highlight patterns, both in popularity and in discursive shifts that may not otherwise be discernible as part of a traditional research approach. The 99 000+ results for "Frankenstein" and "Shelley" reveal the large pool of material a researcher would have to wade through and stands as evidence of the enduring interest in Shelley and her most famous work. However, this is unsurprising and does not offer a great deal of new insight. Using the Ngram tool in a more nuanced way can allow scholars to trace the way discourses can ebb and flow over time, by selecting key words that have emerged in their research and analysing the frequency of their collective occurrence over time. As an example, a search of the key terms "rights" (which was selected as the rights of the individual was one of the key concepts in political reform) and "science" highlights how these two fields of discourse grew in reach during the eighteenth and nineteenth century (see Figure 1). The terms "religion" and "god" are also included to show that while the traditional influence of organised religion was in decline (Elson Roessler and Miklos 2), religion was still an area of significant discussion; "science" does not surpass "religion" in terms of frequency of use in the published works available to the Ngram search engine until 1935. Interestingly, there is a sharp spike in "religion" in approximately 1750 that coincides with the upward movement of both "rights" and "science". It is a logical correlation that rights and science were both discussed through a religious lens: how did God intend people to govern themselves, and was science tampering with God's omnipotent control over life?

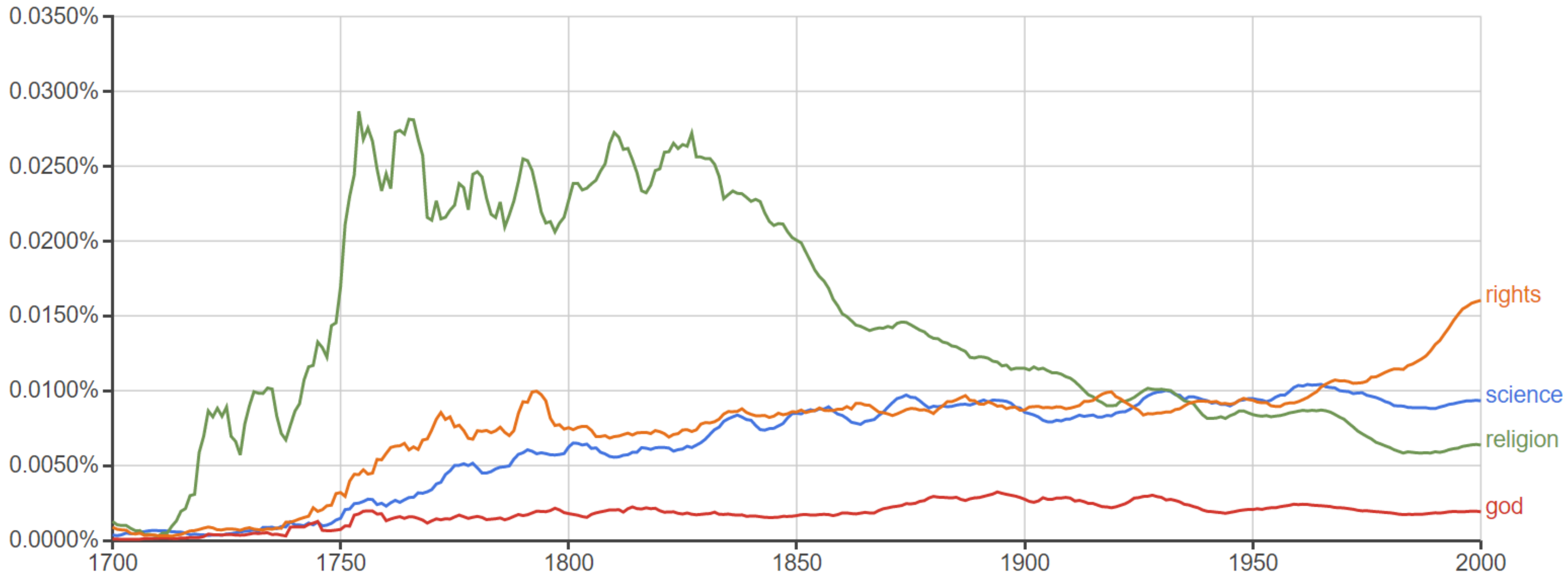

FIGURE 1: Google Ngram of word frequency in text, search terms “science, god, religion, rights”, 29 March 2018.

What the Ngram data does not represent is the way in which the author was discussing religion, whether writing in support of its traditional institutions or lamenting its fall in the face of scientific and social change. Enlightenment “philosophes saw no or little incompatibility between science and religion” (Merriman 313), so it is likely that both “science” and “religion” could be used within the same texts, which is what the Ngram results reflect. What is important to note is the steady decline in discussion of religion from 1826 (coincidentally, the year Shelley’s *The Last Man* was published). “Science” and “rights” follow a very similar upward trajectory right into the latter half of the twentieth century. It also seems that reference to “God” remains relatively constant, despite fluctuations in the use of “religion”. These results do not in and of themselves provide a nuanced understanding of the differing ways these terms were used, or the details about the variances in attitudes towards religion at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but they do reveal trends that can serve as a starting point for deeper research. Such data sets remain of value to scholars as this kind of broad survey of language use is only possible using a tool like the Ngram search of digitised books, one of the applications of big data that only a couple of generations ago was unavailable. While the data provided by this Ngram search reflects frequency rather than being able to pinpoint attitudes towards the areas of religion, science, and rights, it does serve to highlight the rapid growth in the discourse of science and also the concurrent increase in the use of “rights”, used here to reflect rising political and social consciousness.

“Rights” has a distinct peak in 1793, which coincides with the French Revolution and the publication of Thomas Paine’s *The Rights of Man* and the many subsequent responses to his work. It is clear that rights, representative of reform and socio-political change, and science were areas that had been of significant interest since the 1750s and only continued to grow throughout the nineteenth century. It is within this rapidly shifting discursive landscape that Shelley lived and worked, and the influence of these burgeoning discourses upon her work is evident. William Bristow (2011) states that the Enlightenment changed philosophy from ”a handmaiden of theology, constrained by its purposes and methods, to an independent force with the power and authority to challenge the old and construct the new, in the realms both of theory and practice, on the basis of its own principles”. This is most evident in the way that philosophical debate about the nature of man and social order

underpinned the political revolutions of the eighteenth century. The French Revolution was particularly influential, as Shelley's mother travelled to France during the Revolution and was asked by her publisher, Joseph Johnson, to write a response to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolutions in France.* It was during this time that she developed her ideas for her famous *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Taking up some of the ideas that Wollstonecraft explores, Thomas Paine's slightly later *Rights of Man* argued for universal or natural rights, a more equal relationship between the classes, which would in turn reshape society:

> Man is not the enemy of man, but through the medium of a false system of Government. Instead, therefore, of exclaiming against the ambition of kings, the exclamation should be directed against the principle of such governments; and instead of seeking to reform the individual, the wisdom of a nation should apply itself to reform the system. (170)

This idea would be taken up, challenged, and reshaped throughout the next century, but the overall theme was the same: a greater equality amongst men (and for some writers, women), and an end to unquestioned institutional power of State and Church.

Scientific discoveries fuelled a questioning of established religion and the church. While some Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment figures, such as Percy Shelley, turned to atheism, most retained some engagement with the idea of a higher power. At the same time, new denominations continued to form. This destabilisation of the established church had two effects: in the socio-political realm, the dominance and control of the church over both the State and social order was called into question; and the nature of God was thrown into doubt. On the first of these, as Jean Jacques Rousseau argued, "the law of Christianity at bottom does more harm by weakening than good by strengthening the constitution of the State", however, he still advocated that there should exist a "religion of Man" in which the individual had a personal relationship with God. The questioning of the nature of God had arguably more profound impact on the hegemonic hold of religion over the lives of post-Enlightenment subjects: if Man could discover the hidden workings of nature, was God really all-powerful? This destabilisation and decentring of organised religion resulted in a significant discursive shift: "Just as the sun replaces the earth as the

center of our cosmos in Copernicus' cosmological system, so humanity itself replaces God at the center of humanity's consciousness in the Enlightenment" (Bristow). This is clearly an idea that Shelley drew upon, as *Frankenstein* centres on a man-made Man, and God is conspicuously absent from her original narrative.

Scientific and technological advancement also had a more tangible impact in Shelley's world. A United Nations report on urban population growth observes that the population explosion of the past century has its origins in these advancements: "Currently, the world is in a new revolutionary phase of human settlement pattern which became conspicuous less than 200 years ago [i.e. during the nineteenth century]. This new revolution is associated with the modern revolutions of philosophy, science, technology and power-using machinery" (United Nations 1). Urbanisation was a key outcome of this revolution as people moved to new industrial centres. The field of Literature and, with it, the nature of authorship were also radically altered by these shifts: in conjunction with the improvements in printing and publication technology and increasing rates of literacy, urbanisation created centralised, easily accessible markets for author's works in a way that had not been possible previously. Yet if these global shifts had their origins in the Industrial Revolution, it is also fair to say that Shelley's world was as yet relatively untouched by the shifts—they lay in the future. If Shelley's work could be shown to have changed the way people think about science, then it may even be that the field of discourse she propagated has had a more significant impact than has previously been recognised. This remains, of course, to be shown.

The brief introductory survey provided here establishes the philosophical context in which Shelley's works emerged as one centred in revolutionary thought, with the broader industrial boom to follow. The influence of ideas around science and human rights is evident in both broad social trends, as seen in the Ngram data, and also in her personal life, with both her parents having strong views on the need for social change. A more detailed exploration of the political and scientific influences on her work follows and provides a greater contextual understanding of how and why Shelley wrote.

2.3 TIME: THE SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

The sciences that held such fascination for nineteenth century Europe had begun to emerge almost two centuries prior. John Merriman proposes this as a kind of "culture of science" that began in Western Europe and spread throughout the continent:

> By the 1660s, letters, newsletters, and periodicals linked Europeans interested in science. Gradually a "republic of science" took shape, spawning meetings, lectures, visits by travelling scholars, correspondence, book purchases, personal libraries, and public experiments. (Merriman 302)

This "republic of science" became progressively more democratic as literacy spread from the upper classes, as a result of social programs motivated by the Enlightenment emphasis on education. The first circulating library was established in London in 1740 (Bruno 191) and "by the end of the [eighteenth] century, perhaps half of the men in England, France, the Netherlands, could read, A smaller proportion of women—between a third and a half were literate" (Merriman 328). Melvyn Bragg adds a third, even earlier strand that impacted this significant social change, acknowledging the development of printing and increase of literacy but adding that through "the translations from Latin into English there was a new dynamic—the King James Bible.… both in itself and what it led to and inspired was a transfusion which revitalised the consciousness of the post-medieval world" (Bragg). Bragg disputes the idea that religion and science were antithetical to one another during the seventeenth century, arguing that in this time "the King James Bible joined religion and science together in a marriage which has just about held despite massive bombardment".

Just as the King James Bible, written in English and printed *en masse*, allowed the wider population to explore the word of God for themselves, so too the new sciences allowed educated men to investigate the world of God directly. Bragg explains that this relationship "validated" the work of scientists: "The intellectual energy, social acceptability and moral authority that science gained through such close association with the King James Bible were undoubtedly of benefit to the scientists" (Bragg). I would dispute that "moral authority" was one of the direct outcomes of this book, as ultimately the revelations of science did challenge some

more literal readings of the Bible, but overall Bragg's argument that the King James Bible did in some ways enable a "republic of science" to form is surely valid. What cannot be disputed is that the changes occurring during the seventeenth century were foundational to the writing of Wollstonecraft and Godwin and, in turn, their daughter. As Merriman points out, "the seventeenth-century Scientific Revolution was above all a revolution in thought. Technological inventions that would change the way people lived lay for the most part in the future" (Merriman 307). By the time Shelley was born, the Industrial Revolution was in full swing and the scientific and technological advances being made shaped the world in which she lived—her writing needs to be understood as positioning itself in relation to this scientific revolution.

Shelley's exposure to and engagement in scientific discussion is well documented. Her father introduced her to some of the most preeminent scientists of the era: Godwin's friends, William Nicholson and Anthony Carlisle, would discover electrolysis while working on a voltaic pile (Seymour 4) and in 1803 Carlisle witnessed the 'reanimation' of a dead dog through the application of electricity (Seymour 44), which he possibly shared with the Godwin household. Godwin himself published *Lives of the Necromancers*, which evaluated the ideas of 'scientists' in the light of rationalism and reason (Knellwolf and Goodall, *The Significance of Place* 197). Throughout England and Europe, scientific experiments were becoming more and more commonplace; for example by the 1830s almost two thirds of those who died had autopsies performed (Furst 6). This practice impacted the Godwin household directly: after Mary Wollstonecraft's death, Godwin was asked to donate her body to science for dissection, an offer that he declined (Seymour 30). Miranda Seymour suggests that despite not believing in an afterlife, Godwin's love for Wollstonecraft meant he could not bear the thought of dissection and she was given a traditional funeral in a church (Seymour 30). This demonstrates a key trait of Godwin: while he was willing to discuss scientific and political reform, he was often unwilling to act upon those beliefs within his own life. Wollstonecraft's writing and the portrait of her in the Godwin home meant that she remained present in Shelley's life (Grylls 26 and Seymour 31). Godwin's inconsistency in living out the beliefs he espoused was also evident in the attitude he adopted toward marriage in his writing, wherein he called for the abolition of the institution of marriage and labelled it "a system of fraud" (Godwin, *Political Justice Vol II*, 849). Yet when

Wollstonecraft fell pregnant with Shelley, Godwin arranged for them to be married rather than have Wollstonecraft deal with the stigma of being an unwed mother.

Godwin saw no inconsistency in this action. He wrote to a friend, Thomas Wedgwood in April 1797:

> Some people have formed an inconsistency between my practicing this instance and my doctrine but … attachment … between two people of opposite sexes is right, only that marriage as practiced in European countries is wrong. I still hold to that opinion. … Having done what was necessary for the peace and respectability of the individual … I hold myself no otherwise bound than I was before the ceremony took place. (Godwin MS Abinger c.3 fol. 61r).

After Wollstonecraft's death, Godwin actively sought a new wife to assist with the raising of his children, marrying his neighbour Mrs Clairmont (Spark 13). The mismatch between his espoused beliefs and lived actions would again arise when Shelley and Percy began their relationship, with Godwin's rejection of their union remaining until they were wed (Seymour 121). This rejection by her father would be the first of many that would make her feel a social outcast for the rest of her life. The clash of new ideas and lived realities had a profound impact on Shelley and her work. Godwin was often host to eminent scientists and philosophers and so Shelley grew up hearing about and discussing many of the advancements occurring in science and technology. As an example, Shelley took a keen interest in the emerging science of geology. The term "geology" had only really emerged in the previous thirty years, first being used regularly by Horace Benedict de Saussure in *Voyages das les Alpes* in 1779, after he had climbed mountains to explore them scientifically (Bruno 282). The Geological Society of London had only been established in 1807 (Bruno 286). Shelley's interest in this new field of geology (Sunstein 307) was such that she proposed publishing a history of the earth before 'regular history' commenced (Seymour 403).

Having been raised by Godwin and exposed to a range of scientific ideas, Shelley would continue to develop her interest in science once she eloped with Percy. During her life with Percy, Shelley continued her education, learning Latin (Seymour 142) and attending a number of scientific lectures (Seymour 155), in

addition to her well-documented wide reading. Shelley's interest in the new sciences is borne out by the evidence that she and her husband attended the popular scientific lectures of the aeronaut Garnerin (M. Shelley, *Journals* 56) and in 1816 another series at the Bath Literary and Philosophical Society Rooms (Seymour 166). She also read a number of scientific works, including Humphrey Davy's *Elements of Chemical Philosophy* (Sunstein 127). Although there is no record of Shelley having attended lectures or read Davy's other work, Davy's representation of what we have come to term a scientist reflects how Shelley's culture understood the work of natural philosophers like Victor:

> Science has given to him an acquaintance with the different relations of the parts of the external world; and more than that, it has bestowed upon him powers which may be almost called creative; which have enabled him to modify and change the beings surrounding him, and by his experiments to interrogate nature with power, not simply as a scholar, passive and seeking only to understand her operations, but rather as a master, active with his own instruments. ("Discourse" 319)

In *Elements of Chemical Philosophy*, which Shelley did read, Davy debunks Agrippa, who would be one of Victor's greatest influences:

> Agrippa, Paracelsus and their followers above mentioned all professed to believe in supernatural powers in an art above experiment in a system of knowledge not derived from the senses. It would be a tedious and useless task to describe all the absurdities in the opinions and practices of this school. (Davy, *Elements of Chemical Philosophy: Part 1* 9)

Davy also states, "The laws which govern the phenomena of chemistry ... which insure the uniformity of the system of nature the arrangements of which are marked by creative intelligence and made constantly subservient to the production of life and the increase of happiness" (*Elements of Chemical Philosophy: Part 1* 287). Unfortunately for Victor, Shelley was not as inspired by the link between the "production of life and the increase of happiness".

Another prominent scientist also had direct contact with the Shelleys, as Shelley's first pregnancy was attended by Dr William Lawrence (M. Shelley, *Journals* 55), and he also treated Percy. Lawrence was considered a leading physician, holding such views as the soul being present in matter itself (Pelis 11) and being a critic of the idea that African people were more like monkeys than humans (Seymour 137). Lawrence rejected the argument that there was a link between Africans and apes, arguing the "notion of specific identity between the African and orang-utang … is as false, philosophically, as the moral and political consequences, to which it would lead, are shocking and detestable" (108). It is also fair to say that scientific development was not merely a backdrop to Shelley's life; she actively engaged with science through her reading and attendance at lectures and demonstrations. Her circle included some of the field's leaders and various sciences were often topics of discussion with Percy and others. Understanding that Shelley and her milieu were actively engaged with the new sciences strengthens an argument that her work in *Frankenstein* is responding to these ideas and in so doing establishes at the very least a new, literary mode of responding to scientific developments.

2.4 TIME: THE REVOLUTION IN POLITICS

Concurrent with the emergence of modern science was the call for political reform throughout Europe. Napoleon's reign ended in 1815, just as Shelley began her literary career with the conception of what would become *Frankenstein* in 1816. Timothy Ruppert observes that the changes that swept through Europe after Napoleon's defeat, in effect, "transported Europe backward in time to the *ancien régime* … Mary Shelley and her circle evoked the Miltonic tradition in works designed to inspire both immediate socio-political change and permanent transformations in the human mind and heart" (143). This is clear in both *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, where Shelley considers the impact of science and also conveys her political concerns through her fiction. Milton reimagined the story of Satan's fall, and Shelley invoked Milton's imagery of a fallen figure in Frankenstein's creature to reimagine the potential outcomes of science. When we take a slightly wider view, we can also see that Shelley had already had first-hand experience of fiction as social commentary in her father's work, *Caleb Williams*, and

this may have shaped her writing to a degree, a prospect that will be discussed further here in Chapter Five.

In the eighteenth century, increasing literacy and the development of the middle class saw the political landscape change, as Merriman notes: “In Britain, as the role of the House of Commons expanded and political parties emerged, newspapers and organizations in which politics was discussed created public opinion, transforming the public sphere as more people demanded political reform” (387). Increasing literacy was a major driver of social change, the inverse of which is also true, through the emergence of a culture of reading:

> Literary and “philosophical” societies, which had sprung up in most large towns, facilitated the emergence of an even wider political culture than that which had developed during the political crises of the seventeenth century. Inns and coffeehouses added special reading rooms to accommodate their clientele. By 1760, London printing presses … had increased from seventy-five in 1724 to over 200 … by 1790, there were fourteen daily London newspapers, and the number of provincial papers had multiplied by four times. (Merriman 414)

It is clear that the general populace’s interest in and engagement with the processes of government underwent a radical change during this time as the increased availability of information and more people being able to read the material enabled them to participate in a way that was not previously possible. This is the landslide of literacy that reshaped Shelley’s culture. There is no more famous example of the outcome of this increased literacy and political engagement than the French Revolution, news of which contributed to fervour for change in England. As Merriman explains, “The French Revolution mounted the first effective challenge to monarchical absolutism on behalf of popular sovereignty. The creation of a republican government in France and the diffusion of republican ideals in other European countries influenced the evolution of European political life long after the Revolution ended” (435). This is evident in much of Shelley’s writing, including *The Last Man*, and also in her personal writings that express her interest in and hopes for political reform in England, Spain, and particularly Greece (Sunstein 178). In all her writings, she conveys her interest in the “republican ideals” of the revolution,

supporting the call for change in Greece and experimenting with representing different forms of government in *The Last Man*.

Shelley inherited her political interest from her parents. Godwin and Wollstonecraft "were young adults when Watt invented the steam engine and Cook discovered the new continent, Australia; … As they turned thirty the French Revolution began" (Sunstein 11). They were part of a group of English revolutionaries who "hailed science as a symbol of change. To the government and the less educated, it had become a threat" (Seymour 6). Their concerns with the development of an egalitarian social structure (including the rights of women) is evident in both their publications and their close interest in the French Revolution. Godwin argued against monarchy, describing it as "unavoidably corrupt" (*Political Justice Vol I*, vii). Wollstonecraft demanded social change, accusing the monarchy and aristocracy of "false-refinement, immorality, and vanity" and of being "weak, artificial beings, raised above the common wants and affections of their race, in a premature unnatural manner [who] undermine the very foundation of virtue, and spread corruption through the whole mass of society" (3). The call for enfranchisement of the growing middle class and greater rights for those of the third estate would be a defining feature of the political life of Europe for the next century and would be reflected in Shelley's work.

Shelley, having missed the Revolution that so shaped her parent's world view, inherited their interest in egalitarian models of society and she was a keen supporter of the Greek Revolution, which commenced in 1821 when Greece revolted against Ottoman rule, ultimately being declared an independent nation in 1830 (Elson Roessler and Miklos 132-133). The rights of the individual were paramount to the Revolution, with the *Greek Proclamation of Independence* declaring, "It is not aimed at the advantage of a single part of the Greek people; it is a national war, a holy war, a war the object of which reconquer the rights of individual liberty, of property which the civilized people of Europe, our neighbours, enjoy to-day" (Robinson). Shelley's interest in the Greek Revolution was also personal, as she became friends with and was taught Greek by the leader of the Revolution, Prince Mavrocordato. Byron was also a supporter of the Greek cause, working closely with Mavrocordato and ultimately dying while in Greece from fever and bloodletting (Hawkins). While she never travelled to Greece, Shelley had a keen interest in their cause.

Political revolution was not Shelley's only interest. Her concern with social and political change also encompassed slavery and the rights of the working class. There are some readings of *Frankenstein* that consider the Creature as a metaphor for the enslaved races (Mulvey-Roberts) or the plight of the working class (Brantlinger 63-64). Shelley was also influenced by her time in Scotland in her early teens, which helped shape her knowledge of politics, as both the Booths and Baxters with whom she spent her time were politically active Jacobins (Seymour 74). As was the case with science, Shelley was raised surrounded by and continued to engage with political ideas. She was not merely an observer but a participant. By using this contextual information to look at the broader discursive forces at work in shaping Shelley's world, we can see a more complete image of Shelley. She was deeply interested and engaged in the major upheavals of her time and her responses are played out in her works.

It was not just Shelley's broad cultural engagement that drove her interest in science and politics. If we apply another lens to consider the influence of her milieu and her personal thoughts we can develop an understanding of how Shelley positioned herself within these discourses. Shelley's politics and love of learning would be fostered by her husband, who would come to be viewed as one of the most significant figures in British Romanticism, thanks in large part to her work in later life editing and collating his works. Accordingly, Shelley's interests coincided with the social and cultural movement that

> focussed on classicism, the secular study of myth and religion, and condemned the evils of despotic and over-extended governments. In short, this particular Romanticism championed individual, creative thought.… "The unknown" was there to feed the imagination and provoke exploration—impulses fuelled by the Romantic fascination with scientific knowledge. (Pelis 13)

This description embodies the beliefs of both the Shelleys, not just Percy. Shelley married a known atheist, demonstrating that she did not entirely value religion, although she did not forsake her beliefs, attending church both during and after her time with Percy (M. Shelley, *Journals* 386 and 448). The condemnation of government she inherited from her parents was applied in her support of the Greek

Revolution. Ultimately, she applied her creative thought to the unknown potential of new scientific knowledge that was of great interest both to her and her circle in her authorship of *Frankenstein*.

Shelley was initially a strong supporter for reform in Britain, but she moderated her position over time, particularly following her return to England after Percy's death. In her youth, her politics was radical, and shaped by the works of her parents. She defied social norms to elope with Percy and supported revolution, as her mother had done. Sunstein provides a summary of Shelley's attitude by quoting from her letters at the time:

> "Will not England fall? I am full of these thoughts" … In a long hot letter to the Hunts she vowed she would not return to England's degradation and maddening cant. "No—since I have seen Rome, that City is my Country, & I do not wish to own any other until England is free and true". (Sunstein 178)

In December of 1820, Shelley explicitly identifies herself as political in a letter to Leigh Hunt: "But perhaps we exiles are ultra-political —but certainly I have some hopes that something fortunate will soon happen for the state of things in England" (M. Shelley, *Letters* 173). Later in life, as Europe became more conservative and early Victorian morality began to emerge, Shelley moderated her position. Debate about the degree to which Shelley's later politics can be considered more conservative is ongoing, with Jane Blumberg arguing that Shelley always emphasised the importance of the domestic sphere in her politics (32), so this shift was not as radical as scholars such as Poovey suggests in her argument Shelley was pressured to be a "proper lady" (123).

It is clear that Shelley's Europe was a changing political landscape and just as her interest in science was active, she maintained her political engagement and her willingness to moderate her position as times changed. This interest would underpin works such as *The Last Man*, which uses bleak dystopian tropes to critique monarchy and other traditional political institutions. By taking this broad view of Shelley we can see how contextual biography builds a more complete picture of the subject and enables us to trace the interconnections of her personal beliefs, experience, and engagement with socio-political forces. Shelley is not a rogue political radical nor is her interest in science unusual—these were the dominant

discourses that shaped the world in which she lived. Her work can thus be seen as an insight into how society was responding to the discursive upheaval happening in these areas.

2.5 Place: An Experience of Sublime Isolation

Context refers not only to engagement in the discourses of the time, but also physical spaces. Shelley travelled throughout Europe from her early teens. This was not an uncommon practice, particularly amongst those of a similar or higher social class (the eponymous Grand Tour), but the experience of place has a dual significance when considering the context for Shelley's writings. Her travels not only provided the landscapes in which she would set her novels, but also served as the backdrop to some of her most significant personal experiences, which helped shape her understanding and interpretation of the world. Growing up in nineteenth century England meant Shelley was surrounded by some of the most rapid industrial, technological and scientific developments occurring at the time. As Seymour describes, "Up and down the country, the inventions of chemists and electricians were being observed and discussed" (4). Shelley was actively engaged in these discussions, however her sense of place at times also contributed to a feeling of isolation, which is evident in both *Frankenstein*, as Victor and the Creature leave civilization behind to do battle, and in *The Last Man* as Lionel Verney is ultimately left totally alone. Throughout her life, Shelley felt that she was a social outcast. While her parents were famed, they were not always well regarded. Even in childhood, Shelley was raised in Somer's Town, which housed many French exiles, fleeing the war between England and France. Because of this, the area was not considered a desirable address, with some giving it the derogatory name "Botany Bay" (Seymour 42), a reference to the Australian penal colony.

This experience of being physically exiled from 'good society' was only reinforced with Shelley's youthful travels in remote and challenging landscapes. Shelley travelled widely from a young age, sent to Ramsgate in 1811 for 6 months for her health and then spending almost all of the years between 1812 and 1814 in

Scotland (Seymour 60). The influence of this early travel is evident, Shelley herself stating that it was while in Scotland that her imagination first took flight (Seymour 72). The descriptions of whaling ports and vessels in *Frankenstein* clearly draw upon what she would have seen in Dundee (Seymour 111). Even in childhood, Shelley's sense of place was one of isolation and difference. On her return from Scotland she would meet her future husband, with whom she would travel throughout Europe. Having being raised in a community of exiles, sent away in childhood, then rejected by her father when enacting the ideals he espoused in forsaking marriage as she eloped to Europe, Shelley would again experience being an outsider, shut out from her husband's life at times. For example, Percy was aware of Claire Clairmont's pregnancy to Byron a full month before Shelley was told (Seymour 160). Her frustrations with Claire's presence manifest themselves clearly after the death of Shelley's first child in March 1815. Her brief notes display her desire for Claire to leave: "talk about Clary's going away—nothing settled—I fear it is hopeless—she will not go to Skinner St.—then our house is the only remaining place—I see plainly —what is to be done" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 69). Three days later her dislike of Claire is even more clear: "S & I go upstairs & talk a Clary's going—the prospect appears to me more dismall than ever—not the least hope—this is indeed hard to bear" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 69). While no reason is given for her strong wish to be free of Claire's presence, it is evidently a source of anxiety for Shelley. She received a reprieve when Claire departed for Lynmouth on 13 May 1815 (M. Shelley, *Journals* 78).

By the time her journal recommences, Claire has rejoined them. In June 1820 Shelley is again pleased to be rid of Claire: "Better day than most days & good reason for it though Shelley is not well. C[laire] away at Pugnano" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 320). What we can conclude from this is Shelley's dislike of Claire's intrusions upon her marriage. While some critics read this as evidence of an affair, the documentation available as part of this contextual biography does not definitively support that idea. Godwin espoused an end to the institution of marriage, and Percy believed in a model of 'free love', for example, encouraging Shelley to attempt a 'love experiment' with Thomas Jefferson Hogg, which she initially agreed to, although it was never consummated and ended when Shelley fell pregnant (St Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys* 375). In this context, it is not surprising that the Shelley's marriage seems tenuous at times, and Claire's intrusions are obviously

unwelcome. Shelley's complex relationship with her husband and step-sister, in which she was sometimes the outsider or interloper, contributes to the sense of isolation that shapes Shelley's world view and appears in her fiction. Despite the ongoing tension between Shelley and Claire, they travelled with Percy across France and settled for a time in Switzerland—it was here amongst the sublime mountainous landscape that *Frankenstein* began. They roved further afield, with Italy being a particular favourite of Shelley's, despite the death of her daughter in Venice. As Shelley commenced work on *Frankenstein*, she visited Mer de Glace, which she described as "the most desolate place in the world—iced mountains surround it—no sign of vegetation appears except on the place from which [we] view the scene—we went on the ice—It is traversed by irregular crevices whose sides of ice appear blue while the surface is of a dirty white" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 119). This setting is one of the key battlegrounds within the novel, where Frankenstein agrees to create a second creature (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818], 104). It is also notable for its isolation and desolation.

Her extensive travels exposed her to a range of people, ideas, and experiences that would not have been possible otherwise. While England was at the forefront of the Industrial Revolution, Shelley's travels broadened her horizons as she saw the living conditions of others. Less than two months into her life with Percy, when particularly displeased by the appearance and conduct of foreign travelling companions, Shelley commented in her diary: "'Twere easier for god to make entirely new men than attempt to purify such monsters as these" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 21). Applying the standards of evidence needed for a genuine contextual biography we cannot fall into the trap of suggesting this foreshadows the inception of *Frankenstein*, almost two years before the idea for the novel developed. However, it is uncanny that Shelley was considering the making of "entirely new men". A fortnight later, in September 1814, Shelley notes having a dispute with a traveller about the slave trade (M. Shelley, *Journals* 24). A popular concern of the period, some have argued that Shelley's Creature was a representation of the enslaved races and again evidence is presented that she held these concerns about how man is formed both physically and morally from an early age. Shelley was not only influenced by the landscapes she saw first-hand. Her reading went well beyond Gothic and scientific texts; she also read a number of travel or expedition works, for example *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa and Outlines of the Globe* (M.

Shelley, *Journals* 51). Text such as these allowed her to create a number of significant landscapes in *Frankenstein*, most notably her descriptions of the Artic landscape, which she never experienced first-hand.

Shelley enjoyed her time living in continental Europe and its influence upon the settings within her novels is evident. As her return to England approached after Percy's death, her frustration and disappointment grew. Percy's death left her alone in a world where he was viewed with derision and she was the benefactor of this dislike. She stated that, "here or in England I must suffer many humiliations & horrors" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 433), as she would become reliant on her father-in-law for financial support. After Percy's death, on her return to England, Shelley's father-in-law suggested she give Percy Florence up to be raised by the Shelleys. Shelley declined, and so was only ever given a small allowance to support her raising of her son (Seymour 322). Shelley again experienced a type of social exile as she could not risk drawing too much attention that might result in Sir Timothy refusing to pay her allowance—she ultimately had to choose between her own happiness and the welfare of her son. In making this choice she was forced to remain in England, where she could not see the people she wished to, disliked the environs, and was generally a social outcast. She states that her only reason for returning to England in 1823 was for her son Percy's advantage (M. Shelley, *Journals* 462). A year after her arrival, the negative impact of both her social isolation and England's climate became intolerable:

> This then is my English life! And thus I am to drag on existence! No—I must make up my made mind to break through my servitude and go—I cannot—cannot live here. Of what use am I? confined in my prison-room—friendless—Each day I string me to task; I endeavour to read & write—my idea a [for are] stagnate and my understanding refuses to follow the words I read—day after day passes while torrents fall from the dark clouds, and my mind is as gloomy as this odious sky—but though I talk of the country what difference shall I find in this miserable climate. (M. Shelley, *Journals* 475-476).

Shelley's sense of belonging (or unbelonging) in the various places she lived and visited is important to understanding both her pervasive sense of isolation and also

her interest and engagement in the wider politics of Europe. Consideration of Shelley's place/s through the lens of contextual biography allows us to conclude that her many experiences informed not only the settings of her works, but broadened her horizons culturally and politically through exposure to a wide range of people and ideas. Shelley's personal experiences of exile and exclusion were reinforced by her experiences of place, sent from her home and then choosing to roam Europe as an English exile.

2.6 PLACE: GENEVA AND THE POLITICS OF 'HOME'

Victor's hometown is a significant location both in Shelley's world and in the novel. As Anne Mellor points out in *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*, Geneva is symbolic of a particular ideology, as it is the birthplace of Rousseau (81). Patrick Vincent argues "Shelley's contemporaries would readily have made the parallel between Geneva and Britain" as a site of reactionary politics (646). Vincent argues that Shelley's setting of the novel in Geneva is a deliberate act, because as Shelley was "drafting volumes two and three of her novel in 1817, [British] magistrates were using bribery, spying and outright violence to quell the Manchester 'blanketeers' and the Pentridge rising" (646). This class conflict echoed the previous revolutions in Geneva, and held the same moral ambiguity:

> As in neighboring France, the "disastrous consequences" of the 1792 Revolution in Geneva made it more difficult for foreign observers to establish a moral distinction between the patrician class, who used rule of law to deny citizens their liberties, and the revolutionaries, who used "liberty" as an excuse to violate the rule of law. (Vincent, 650)

The Creature and Victor mirror this political stalemate, as Victor uses his superior standing and knowledge to deny the Creature that which he justly deserves, and so the creature in turn violates the rule of law in killing Victor's family. Ultimately, Vincent concludes that "Shelley's novel warns us of the dangers inherent in this false sense of trust in a state's institutions" (657).

Fred V. Randel corroborates this perspective, arguing that, like Percy, Shelley "views revolutionary thinking and practice as an informed, critical observer

and liberal sympathizer who wishes to prevent both continued injustice and revolutionary violence, by motivating readers to overcome their prejudices sufficiently to accept fundamental reform" (488). *Frankenstein* certainly does offer political reflections, however to argue that the novel has such an explicit agenda is difficult to support. Like *The Last Man*, Frankenstein explores but does not dictate various political positions. Randel sees Geneva as a conflicted site for Shelley, one in which:

> The legacy of Rousseau, including the treatment of women and the sidestepping of personal responsibility, is as Janus-faced and problematic for Mary Shelley, as it had been for her mother in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. She is much indebted to the Genevese thinker, but she seeks a more balanced and inclusive way to rectify the social wrongs that he exposes. (474)

Shelley was concerned with concepts of justice, and it is little surprise that this is played out in Geneva as the site of Justine's farcical trial. Randel argues that Victor's visit to Hampden further reinforces the political overtones of the novel as both Godwin and Percy were ardent admirers of Hampden's politics (479).

Geneva's influence on *Frankenstein* may also extend beyond the philosophical and revolutionary past it symbolises, to include the current conditions and mood the location actualised for Shelley. John Clubbe argues that it is not only the four months Shelley spent in Geneva and its surrounds that shaped the writing of *Frankenstein*—he makes the hyperbolic claim that "The weather in 1816 may even be the single most determining influence upon the novel's creation" (27). Clubbe goes on to argue that the influence of the bad weather of 1816 is evident not only in Shelley's works, but Byron's and Percy's as well (32). As is discussed in the close reading in Chapter Four, storms are an important symbol within the novel and Shelley remarked on the storms she witnessed while in Geneva. So it is not only the political landscape of Geneva that shapes the novel, but also the physical surrounds. As Clubbe reminds the modern reader, much of the world was still uncharted in Shelley's time: maps still bore the warning "here there be monsters" in locations like the Arctic and large parts of Africa and the Americas (37). These isolated and desolate landscapes are where the exiled find refuge in Shelley's novel.

In her short article, "The Interaction of Humans and the Landscape in *Frankenstein*", Yuhong Zhao argues that the landscapes of the novel reflect Romantic ideals: "In the case of *Frankenstein*, landscapes seem often to be about escape, in the case of the daemon they are about learning. This underlines a key Romantic theme; the wisdom of acquiring affinity with nature—to which the monster aspires—rather than running from it, like Frankenstein" (Zhao, 34). This idea that the Creature is representative of the Romantic veneration of nature and it is when he is isolated from men (even if in close proximity but concealed, as with the DeLaceys) that he experiences the greatest peace will be discussed in Chapter Four. This stands in contrast to Victor, who seeks refuge in the familiarity of Geneva after his Creature flees, yet the Creature intrudes upon the site of Frankenstein's childhood idyll, bringing violence and death. Having the safety of his home destroyed, Frankenstein then sets out into increasingly wild locations, the Orkneys and the Arctic. The significance of both the Creature's experience of being driven into the wilderness and the destruction of Victor's peaceful home mirror Shelley's own life to a degree. Shelley's home was intruded upon by Godwin's second marriage, and the conflict caused when Shelly and Percy eloped meant that any happiness associated with her childhood home was lost as she experienced a form of social exile as her father placed his own needs above hers. Like the Creature and her Romantic contemporaries, Shelley revelled in the sublime landscapes of Scotland, Switzerland and Italy. However, these locations would become tainted, just as the Alps are tainted for Victor when he meets the Creature on Mer de Glace, as it is while she travelled through Europe that Shelley lost all but one of her children and her husband. Despite this, Shelley could not bear the thought of returning to England, as she dreaded the weather and the social isolation which awaited her. As Zhao observes of Victor, "on the one hand there is the landscape of home, sister and father, lowland, urban, cultivated, civilised. On the other are those regions in which he must interact with the daemon, the wild and the sublime" (Zhao, 36). Just like Victor, Shelley was suspended between these landscapes, and both offered hope and heartache at the same time.

Jane Nardin's account of the history of Alpine mountaineering is helpful here in understanding Shelley's engagement with this landscape, which is so key to the novel. Nardin explains that prior to the scientific expeditions of the late eighteenth century, alpine regions were viewed as "haunts of gods and demons, [men] venturing

into the mountains only when the exigencies of war or commerce required them to do so" (442). It is not surprising then that Victor's "daemon" is at home in this treacherous landscape. However, as Enlightenment scientists sought to reveal the mysteries of the Alps and the Romantic authors wanted to commune with nature in these sublime settings, the secrets of the Alpine regions were slowly uncovered. Nardin credits the inclusion of the monster amongst the Alps to the Shelleys' first hand experience and Percy's (although I think she overlooks Shelley's) interest in geology. Nardin recounts the Shelleys' tour of Chamonix and explains what this afforded Shelley:

> opportunities to learn this history that were not available to most Englishwomen of her class. In July 1816, while Mary was in the early stages of writing Frankenstein, she and Percy left their headquarters on Lake Geneva for a six-day excursion to Chamonix. On muleback, they toured the area, visiting valleys and glaciers, always accompanied by guides. Mary's journals record the many details about the local people which one guide related. (445)

Nardin also notes the shift in Victor's relationship with the Alps between the 1818 and 1831 editions; in the first, he is both a Romantic wanderer, entranced by their beauty, and a scientist, hoping to reveal nature's secrets. In 1831, he is a scientist only, rarely effected by the landscape, instead only wanting to conquer and understand its workings: "Instead of adoring the peaks for the treasures they willingly reveal, Victor, like Saussure and his fellows, thinks in terms of forcing them to surrender their secret" (448). Mont Blanc and the Arctic are both sites of isolation and exile. Shelley made her monster at home in these uncharted and inhospitable landscapes, just as she herself sought a home in exile from England, despite the fact that these locations would become memorials to her husband and children who did not survive.

Just as Victor and the Creature both flee and pursue one another at different points in the novel, Shelley's experience of place was both one of running away and running towards. Shelley fled the Godwin home, in pursuit of a life with Shelley, although Claire Clairmont (literally, *clear mountain*) was a problematic obstacle in Shelley's attempt to reshape her personal landscape. The choice to visit Lake Geneva

was motivated by Percy's wish to spend time with Byron, so they moved towards what would be one of the most influential landscapes in both Shelleys' works. During their later travels in Europe, as her children and husband perished, the Shelleys were often fleeing their debts or racing towards another location that offered the promise of better health. While Shelley's self-imposed exile in Europe was a time of tremendous loss, she saw England as an inhospitable place, just as the Creature realised he can never be welcome in society with man. Shelley became an exile at home. Shelley's sense of place, and experience of isolation, loneliness and exclusion resonate throughout both her life and works.

2.7 Personality: Mary Shelley's Sense of Self

This section outlines, as best as can be done, some of the key relationships and ideas that shaped Shelley as both a person and an author. This is the most difficult part of any contextual biography, which does not aim to be a mere documentary study, but also must avoid narrativising the author's life and interpretation of the subject's thoughts and feelings. In the case of Shelley we are fortunate to have access to a significant supply of extant personal correspondence so observations can be well-supported. While Shelley travelled to some of Europe's most sublime locations and moved within the loftiest of intellectual circles, engaging in the discourses of science and politics, her personal experience in this context was marked most by loss and loneliness.

The brief preceding study of the places and times in which Shelley lived and wrote reveals that they are marked by constant change. Her engagement with and interest in both science and politics has been made clear, but the nature of this engagement may seem purely reactive if not understood in the light of a study of her personal experience. The Abinger Collection has preserved the majority of Shelley's diaries and a good deal of correspondence, providing a wealth of source material for Shelley's thoughts and feelings. As this is a contextual biography this material will not be read for psychoanalytic purposes, although some understanding of her motivations and drives is necessary, albeit only to draw conclusions where the evidence clearly supports the interpretation. Shelley and Percy kept a joint diary from the date of their elopement, with Shelley being the main contributor (M. Shelley, *Journals* 1987, xv). The entries during her time with Percy are frequent yet

brief, noting visitors, books read, and key conversations. Percy's contributions tend to be more cohesive prose, but are infrequent. There are some long breaks in the diary, usually at the times of significant stress (usually over Claire or Godwin) and long breaks after the death of her children. The diary for the period between 14 May 1815 and 21 July 1816 has not been traced and so Shelley's record of the inception of *Frankenstein* is lost. She starts the following journal with an inscription: "Begun July 21—1816 Ended with my happiness June 7th 1819" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 112), the latter being the date her son William died. On Percy's twenty-ninth birthday, which would later prove to have been his last, Shelley reflected:

> 7 years are now gone—what changes what a life—we now appear tranquil —yet who know[s] what wind—I will not prognosticate evil—We have had enough of it—When I came to Italy—said all is well if it were permanent—it was more passing than an Italian twilight—I now say the same—May it be a polar day—Yet that too has an end. (M. Shelley, *Journals* 377).

After Percy's death in July 1822, she opens her journal with the lines, "The Journal of Sorrow Begun 1822 But for my Child it could not End too soon" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 428).

In the post-Percy diaries, there is a significant change in style; a shift away from the brief notes to comparatively long tracts in which Shelley pours forth her grief over the loss of Percy and her largely negative feelings about the future. As Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert note, "the journal is thus in many ways a reflection of the conflict in her own character between her outward reserve and the intense emotionalism she concealed beneath it" (M. Shelley, *Journals* xvi), a dichotomous sense of self that was explored extensively in Chapter One. A reading of her journals allows us to see her sense of loss and rejection that fostered her desire for acceptance later in life. Shelley and Percy, despite their marital issues, had four children, but only one was to survive childhood. Her first child lived for only days and she noted its death on March 6, 1815 with the record, "find my baby dead" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 68). In her grief she turned to Thomas Jefferson Hogg, rather than her husband:

> My dearest Hogg my baby is dead—will you come to me as soon as you can—I wish to see you—It was perfectly well when I went to bed—I awoke in the night to give it suck it appeared to be sleeping so quietly that I would not awake it—it was dead then but we did not find that out till morning—from its appearance it evedently died of convulsions Will you come—you are so calm a creature & Shelley is afraid of a fever from the milk—for I am no longer a mother now Mary. (M. Shelley, *Letters* 10-11)

Over the following fortnight, glimpses of her grief can be seen. On 9 March Shelley notes, "still think about my little baby—'tis hard indeed for a mother to loose a child" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 68). On 13 March, she outlines, "stay at home & think of my little dead baby—this is foolish I suppose yet whenever I am left alone to my own thoughts & do not read to divert them they always come back to the same point- that I was a mother & am so no longer" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 69).

Almost a week later, Shelley records a dream: "that my little baby came to life again—that it had only been cold & that we rubbed it by the fire & it lived—I awake & find no baby—I think about the little thing all day—no good spirits" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 70). The final entry that refers to this child is a record that she dreamt of her baby again (M. Shelley, *Journals* 71). The stress of this period was exacerbated by Claire's presence and concerns about the Godwins' finances: "Skinner St.—they are very badly off there—I am afraid nothing can be done to save them" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 70). Shelley records the death of her step-sister Fanny on 9 October 1816 simply as, "Fanny died this night" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 139). Fanny had remained at Skinner Street when Shelley and Claire left with Percy, and became a key connection between the two parties. However, left behind while her sisters travelled, Fanny committed suicide.

Shelley and Percy's son William was born on 26 January 1816 (M. Shelley, *Journals* 106) and they were married on 30 December 1816, although Shelley's brief note about the event has the incorrect date: "a marriage takes place on the 29th" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 152). On William's first birthday, Shelley confides her hopes: "My William's birthday—How many chances have occurred—during this little years—May the ensueing one be more peaceful and my William's star be a fortunate one to rule the decision of this day" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 155). Shelley gave birth to their third child Clara on 2 September 1817 (M. Shelley, *Journals* 179). On 24 September

1818, her daughter Clara died while waiting for a doctor to arrive in Venice (Seymour 214). Less than a year later, her son William died of malaria (Seymour 231). Two months afterwards, Shelley's sense of loss is made clear: "to have won & then cruelly have lost the associations of four years is not an accident that to which the human mind can bend without much suffering" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 293). Percy and Shelley's last child, Percy Florence, was born on 12 November 1819, with Shelley commenting on New Year's Eve that, "I now begin a new year—may it be a happier one than the last unhappy one" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 302). Shelley almost lost her own life in 1822, when a miscarriage caused haemorrhaging that was only stopped by Percy making her sit in a bucket of ice (Seymour 299). This traumatic series of events, the death of three children and her step-sister, all happened while Shelley was preparing to publish *Frankenstein,* but the novel had actually already been completed earlier, in May 1817 (M. Shelley, *Journals* 169), predating the deaths of her children and husband.

While this contextual biography does not seek to undertake a psychological analysis of the impact of these events upon the work, the evidence of loss, particularly of her own children, may seem to support an argument that questions about the nature of life and death were particularly poignant for Shelley as she wrote. One critic argues that this is evidence of Shelley spiralling into depression and perhaps even contemplating suicide (Seymour 235). However, to conduct this kind of diagnosis with two centuries of hindsight is a difficult contention to support and it is the kind of conjecture that the methodology of contextual biography seeks to avoid. It is indeed worth observing that rather than the prevalence of loss, births were the more common occurrence as Shelley was writing the novel—the deaths of Percy and their children ultimately can only be said to have flavoured the memory of the writing after the fact. Following Percy's death, one of Shelley's had most significant tasks was the collation and editing of Percy's works, although she was reluctant to publish as his father would cut off her income if she did so. Only three months after his death, Shelley had identified the promotion of Percy's works as her key purpose: "And I am then moonshine, having no existence except that which he lends me, & through his influence glimmering on the earth, known & sought through the light he bestows upon me. Thus I would endeavour to consider myself a faint continuation of his being, & as far as possible the revelation to the earth of what he was" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 436). While Shelley felt the glorification of Percy's work was her

key endeavour, she in fact continued to contribute both essays and novels that developed into a significant body of work in their own right; she built a career as an author.

Evidence reveals that Shelley's sense of social and personal isolation did not stem only from Percy's death. As early as November 1814, Shelley's relationship with Percy was costing her social connections. The husband of her close friend Isabel Booth wrote to Shelley explaining that he had forbidden his wife to correspond with Shelley. Her disappointment is clear when she states, "so all my hopes are over there—ah Isabel—I did not think you would act thus" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 42). In April 1815, Shelley received, "a parcel from Fanny in which is a letter from Christy Baxter received last September in which she professes friendship—but such friendship—we see how much worth it is" (M. Shelley, J*ournals* 75). These two events foreshadow Shelley's social experience throughout the remainder of her life. She did experience explicit rejection which bred a sense of distrust and at times unwarranted dislike of those closest to her. After Percy's death some of her circle saw her as cold and unfeeling, but her diary belies this, both indirectly through the intense outpouring of grief and directly in statements such as, "I feel dejected & cowed before them, feeling as if I might be the senseless person they appear to consider me. But I am not" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 441).

It also reveals the frustration she felt at the way she was treated: "More usually the unfeeling nature of my companions rekindles my misery" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 451). In December 1824 this frustration and disappointment culminated with a lament: "I am sick at heart—I shall grow proud—disdainful of ye all—careless of your censures or praise—yet cannot yet forego the hope of loving & being loved—the failure of this sweet nourishment fills my heart with gall my soul with sorrow" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 488). One of the greatest betrayals Shelley would suffer occurred in July 1827, when her closest friend, Jane Williams, whose husband had died with Percy, remarried. Shelley perceived this to be a personal betrayal: "my friend has proved false & treacherous" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 502). She does not seem to acknowledge or accept her potential to be socially accepted until almost a decade after Percy's death, noting in January 1830 that "I have begun a new kind of life somewhat—going a little into society— & forming a variety of acquaintances—People like me flatter & follow me, & then I am left alone again. Poverty being a barrier I cannot pass—still I am often amused & interested" (M.

Shelley, *Journals* 512). While her financial situation would always limit her to a degree, by this time, just prior to the release of the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, Shelley had finally found some degree of the acceptance she so craved.

This sense of being outcast, both geographically and socially, plays a huge role in understanding Shelley, despite the fact that her milieu consisted of some of the most significant figures of the day: "Not only Coleridge, Byron, Scott, Trelawny, but Melbourne, Disraeli, Lady Blessington and Caroline Norton—Mary had known them all. Outcast though she felt herself to be, her friends had included the most fascinating and influential people of her times" (Seymour xiv). Shelley's desire for social acceptance is evident in the many changes she makes to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, which is a great deal more moral in its tone and focus, and downplays many of its earlier, more radical suggestions, as will be demonstrated shortly.

Chapter Three
Authorship and the Founding of Discourse

Shelley's account of the inception dream should not be read in isolation from the critical reception of the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein*, to which it explicitly responds. It is not taken from a personal record, such as a diary or letter, and it quite clearly seeks to answer the questions of *Frankenstein*'s original critics, who labelled the work "a tissue of horrible and disgusting absurdity" ("Rev. of Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus" 382). Most reviews oscillated between praise for the writing style and repulsion at the content.[2] A clear example of this comes from the April 1818 edition of *The Gentlemen's Magazine*, which described *Frankenstein* as "the production of no ordinary Writer; and, though we are shocked at the idea of the event on which the fiction is founded, many parts of it are strikingly good, and the description of the scenery is excellent" (*Gentlemen's Magazine*). Other reviews were more overtly positive, with one labelling the work "a very *bold* fiction" displaying "originality, excellence of language, and peculiar interest" *(La Belle Assemblée*). In contrast, *The Literary Panorama* had little praise: "a feeble imitation of one that was very popular in its day,—the St. Leon of Mr. Godwin. It exhibits many characteristics of the school whence it proceeds; and occasionally puts forth indications of talent; but we have been very much disappointed in the perusal of it" (*The Literary Panorama*). The mixed reception of Shelley's style provides no clear reason for the novel's enduring impact, it being just as likely that no attempt would have been made to later resurrect critical interest in the novel based on its literary merits if its early reception is any gauge. Yet the almost universal disgust at the novel's content surely makes its enduring impact even more bewildering.

These conflicting views of early critics were also fuelled by debate about the identity of the author. In March 1818, Sir Walter Scott offered a positive review in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, describing Shelley's novel as an "extraordinary tale, in which the author seems to us to disclose uncommon powers of poetic imagination", but of course it is altogether possible that his perception was framed

[2] In addition to The Mary Shelley Chronology and Resource Site that is cited throughout this section, The Shelley-Godwin Archive provides a very detailed chronology of *Frankenstein*'s drafting and reception.

by his belief that the novel " is said to be written by Mr Percy Bysshe Shelley, who, if we are rightly informed, is son-in-law to Mr Godwin; and it is inscribed to that ingenious author" (Scott). By contrast, in April of 1818, *The Literary Panorama* offered a different view: "We have heard that this work is written by Mr. Shelley; but should be disposed to attribute it to even a less experienced writer than he is. In fact we have some idea that it is the production of a daughter of a celebrated living novelist" (*The Literary Panorama*). While Shelley did not want to be acknowledged as the author, she was quick to correct those who asserted that it was Percy. In response to Sir Walter Scott's review, she wrote to him explaining, "I am anxious to prevent your continuing in the mistake of supposing Mr. Shelley guilty of a juvenile attempt of mine; to which—from its being written at an early age, I abstained from putting my name—and from respect to those persons from whom I bear it. I have therefore kept it concealed except from a few friends" (M. Shelley, *Letters Vol. I* 71). From the outset, then, Shelley was not averse to setting the record straight on the question of her authorship of the novel, even if only via personal correspondence, but even this—knowing of Scott's literary reputation—must be considered as a potentially deliberate attempt to reveal instead of conceal her identity. It follows that Scott would dissuade others from offering the same misattribution. By the second edition of 1823, her name was emblazoned on the title page.

Conversely, her reluctance to engage with critics concerning the content of the novel remained unshaken until the publishers of the Standard Novels Series, Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, asked her to write a few words on this very question to accompany the third edition of 1831. I will argue here that her response frames not just the 1831 edition, in which telling changes were made also on the basis of criticism of the novel's content in the dozen years that had passed since its first release. Her "Introduction" to the 1831 edition also frames a rereading of the 1818 edition and of Shelley's own agency or, as she might say, "guilt" in the inception of what she described to Scott as her "juvenile attempt". In so doing, she raises important questions about the role of the author both in the creation of the work and in its reception. I will propose that these questions anticipate what Michel Foucault describes as the "author-function", the attachment of the name of an author being a necessary precondition to its legitimation as a work of literature even as this process also strips the individual of her ability to control the wider uses of the work. Yet Shelley's engagement with such questions, and her amendments to the 1831

edition, suggest an attempt to wrest control from a public that were already shaping a dominant perception of the novel as defined simply by its shock factor within a tradition of Gothic literature. It is in relation to Shelley's attempt to reclaim an authorial stake in the novel, while also divesting herself of a claim on a singular moment of conscious creativity in the novel's central idea, that I will then raise the issue of whether the novel's synthetic origin constitutes what Foucault called the founding of a new discourse.

3.1 A Dream of Authorship

Shelley states the intent of her 1831 "Introduction" as being to "give a general answer to the question, so frequently asked me—'How I, then a young girl, came to think of, and to dilate upon, so very hideous an idea?'" ("Introduction" [1831] 165). By providing the inception dream as the introduction to the 1831 edition, Shelley acknowledges her role as author, but also distances herself from the work, crediting the idea to a dream, rather than to her own literary ability. In this way, she both claims and denies her authorship of the novel. Shelley's attribution of the idea to a dream further problematises the already complicated question of authorship in the novel. In *Frankenstein*, Shelley creates three authorial voices, since Walton, Victor, and the Creature all tell their stories in narratives nested in one another. The lack of a credited author for the first edition only gives a greater sense of veracity to the story; the reader's ability to suspend disbelief and engage with Walton's account would perhaps be more limited if there was a known author. However, by 1831, Shelley's authorship of *Frankenstein* was acknowledged, but by nesting her story within a dream, she again reframes the narrative. Just as Walton's narrative frames Victor's and the Creature's in turn, in the 1831 addition, Shelley frames the whole narrative again as a dream, linking it more firmly to its Gothic heritage and her identity as an author.

The addition of the inception dream "Introduction" were not the only changes made to the 1831 edition. These changes can be read in two ways: as evidence of the personal experiences and changes Shelley had undergone since writing the original *Frankenstein*; and as evidence of her awareness of her work as a commodity (according to which the attribution of an author and the content may affect the potential audience and sales). A brief account of some of these changes, understood

in such terms, thus helps to reframe the dream account as part of a suite of changes that move the novel further away from its inception. Shelley was eager to improve upon what she had described to Scott as her "juvenile attempt", recording revisions to a copy of the novel as early as 20 December 1818. This annotated copy was given to a Mrs Thomas (M. Shelley, *Journals* 245) and contains editorial notes about the structure of the novel. Shelley wanted to "re-write [the] two first chapters. The incidents are tame and ill arranged—the language sometimes childish— They are unworthy of the rest of the … narration" (Ch.2 fn39 *New Annotated*). Shelley ultimately did rewrite the first two chapters in the 1831 edition, and these revisions reveal her awareness of the moral potential of her work and a desire to make it more palatable to the society in which she sought to find acceptance. This is clear in the increase in overt moral references, which respond to critics' observations that the original work led "to no conclusion either moral or philosophical. In some passages, the writer appears to favour the doctrines of materialism" *(The Monthly Review*). This moral ambiguity, which I will argue in Chapter Four is what gives the novel its power and longevity, and why it can be seen as foundational to both genre and discourse, is less evident in the 1831 edition although not erased altogether. Evidence of this can be seen in a comparative reading of the two editions.

When Victor is taken in by Walton, he is initially reluctant to share his story. In the 1818 edition, when he invites Walton to listen to his tale, he states,

> I believe that the strange incidents connected with it will afford a view of nature, which may enlarge you faculties and understanding. You will hear of powers and occurrences, which as you have been accustomed to believe impossible: but I do not doubt that my tale conveys in its series internal evidence of the truth of the events of which it is composed. (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 17)

By 1831, Shelley's desire to make her work more palatable to her more conservative, proto-Victorian, social circle is evident with the addition of Victor's statement that, "I imagine that you may deduce an apt moral from my tale" (*Frankenstein* [1831] 31).This short addition radically shifts the revised edition away from its predecessor. In 1818, Shelley's modern Prometheus invited the reader to explore the consequences of playing with the fire of creation, but did not overtly moralise

against this. By 1831, the tale has become explicitly moral. Perhaps this can be attributed to Shelley's desire to be more accepted, or perhaps she herself had come to recognise the moralising potential of narrativising new science.

In 1818, Victor begins his education with letters of introduction to a number of eminent scientists. In 1831, a malevolent guiding force is credited for setting him on this road to his ultimate destruction: "Chance—or rather the evil influence, the Angel of Destruction, which asserted omnipotent sway over me … led me first to M. Krempe" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 47). This is one of the most overt allusions to a more Christian dichotomy between good and evil than was present in the original work. Another significant addition follows, with the description of the moment that inspiration strikes. Fate is again invoked: "Such were the professor's words—rather let me say the words of fate—enounced to destroy me" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1831] 49). Victor goes on to boldly claim,

> my mind was filled with one thought, one conception, one purpose. So much has been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein, more, far more, will I achieve: treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation. (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1831] 49)

This dramatic declaration is absent from the earlier edition and again explicitly invokes Victor's goal to equal God in the creation of life, which in turn has clear biblical connotations for the late Romantic reader. With these more overt references to morals and religious ideas, such as fate or a demonic force driving Victor, rather than a spirit of scientific enquiry, Shelley as author shows her awareness of her audiences' changing tastes and also links the work back to more traditional novel forms, where a clear moral lesson is taught. When Clerval seeks to comfort Victor after the Creature has murdered William in the 1818 edition, he advises against the Stoic approach, commenting "even Cato wept over the dead body of his brother" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 48). However, this reference is removed in the 1831 edition. Here again, we see a move away from a genuine Romantic approach, which holds the Classics in high regard. In making the characters less radically Romantic, Shelley distances them from herself and her infamous husband, and so makes the work accessible to a wider readership. The linking of Victor to a higher power gives

the 1831 edition a religious overtone which was absent in the original work, and also demonstrates Shelley's awareness of what will make the work more palatable to her audience, as his downfall can be construed more directly as a consequence of his daring to delve into God's domain.

In some instances, in the 1831 edition, Shelley has removed more direct references to scientific specifics, effectively removing the science from her science fiction. In 1818, had Victor's father steered him away from Cornelius Agrippa, Victor "should probably have applied myself to the more rational theory of chemistry which has resulted from modern discoveries" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 22). By 1831, he would have merely "returned to his former studies" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1831] 41). Victor was "floundering in a slough of multifarious knowledge" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1831] 42) in 1831, as opposed to the following from 1818, which is removed in the revised edition: "The natural phenomena that take place every day before our eyes did not escape my attention. Distillation, and the wonderful effects of steam, processes of which my favourite authors were utterly ignorant, excited my astonishment; but my utmost wonder was engaged by some experiments on an airpump" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 23). The clearly negative connotations of "slough" again suggest the idea that seeking too much knowledge is inherently wrong; therefore, it makes sense that Shelley would remove evidence of her detailed knowledge of the wonders of the new sciences. Additionally, with a decade of advancement, the wonders of steam may have become more commonplace. Taken in conjunction with the conservative revisions of the text, it can be argued that Shelley is repositioning both herself and the work as part of a past Gothic heritage, and so responding to the backlash against the original publication. In considering Shelley's origin dream, written fifteen years after the actual event, a case can be made that the inception dream is itself a work of fiction, designed to again deny direct authorship of the novel.

I suggest that what the denial of authorial intention in the inception dream account reveals is Shelley's awareness of and experimentation with the role of author. Evidence supports a psychoanalytic argument that the identity of author is essential to Shelley's sense of self—as she acknowledges in her dream introduction (M. Shelley, "Introduction" [1831] 165), she is the daughter of two famous authors. Shelley's writing could be interpreted as an attempt to take the place of her mother, as she is simultaneously the reason for her mother's absence but also the victim of

her loss. Barbara D'Amato applies a psychoanalytic lens to the question of Shelley's motivations to write: "On an unconscious level her novel may have symbolised more than a writing contest with her husband. The fantasy of both oedipal strivings to outshine and replace her mother, and preoedipal desires to become her mother" (121). This Freudian reading is certainly possible, as evidence exists of Shelley's fascination with her mother. While this insight into the possible state of mind Shelley had is interesting as an intellectual exercise or as a study of personality, it is still a psychobiography rather than literary criticism.

The uncertainty of psychoanalysis is apparent in D'Amato's musings on the function or cause of the inception dream:

> This dream may have been Mary's solution to the problem of creating fiction that could compete with that of Percy Shelley and Lord Byron…. She may also have struggled with a conflict about writing itself. Did you want to compete with her husband in the literary world of men? Or did she want to produce babies as a way to fulfil her creative energies? (121)

Some of these questions are definitively answered if consideration is given to the historical record of Shelley's life, particularly after Percy's death. It is unlikely Shelley saw herself as in competition with Percy, as she wrote novels like her father, rather than poetry. She also continued to support herself for the remainder of her life as a writer, despite strong opposition from her father-in-law, upon whom she was reliant for support for her one surviving child. This clearly suggests that Shelley did see herself as a writer even after Percy's death. It also highlights how significant the mantle of author was to Shelley, and I posit that this is the more valid reading of both the dream inception and the novel itself—as evidence of Shelley's experimentation with the role of author. In Geneva, she was with two other great authors, Percy and Byron, whose conversation gave rise to her inception dream. While Percy was yet to reach the level of fame (or infamy) as Byron, Shelley viewed both men as part of a great literary community. Her desperation to think of a story reflects her desire to identify as an author, and so occupy the same intellectual space as Percy and Byron. Additionally, this would also make Shelley more like Byron and Percy than like Claire, so creating a distance between the two stepsisters that Shelley was eager to increase.

Katherine Montwieler and Mark E. Boren claim that “Shelley’s characters’ articulated confessions before a witness (the reader) anticipate Freud’s ‘talking cure’” (16). This idea of Shelley as proto-Freudian is emphasised by D’Amato, who contends that *Frankenstein* “is one author’s desire to understand herself through unconscious dream material” (119). Anthony Badalamenti echoes this idea: “The present view is that the story she chose to write is the story she needed to write and, further, that her need was already expressed in the seminal dream itself. The novel uses the image of the monster to accommodate encoded images of hurtful parts of her life with Percy, just as the inspiring dream served the same function” (438). While obvious parallels between Shelley’s life and works are undeniable, the claim that Shelley was conducting Freudian “literary therapy” for herself by writing *Frankenstein* is difficult to substantiate. I argued in the previous Chapter that psychoanalytic approaches to *Frankenstein* may offer interesting points of speculation on which to construct biographical readings of the text, but they suffer too often from lack of any direct evidence in support of their claims. Where the psychoanalytic framework might help here by providing a language through which to explain the extent to which Shelley’s sense of self became bound up in her authorial identity, it can weaken the case when it runs toward hyperbole, as it does when claiming that the novel is Shelley’s own psychotherapy. By the same token, the psychoanalytic method can at times lead to finding abstraction where things are really very explicit as, for example, in in claims that the novel “symbolises” the competition with Percy—Shelley’s account makes it clear that the competition was very real. I therefore want to move away from this model by incorporating Foucault’s ideas about the relationship between authorship and the individual whose name adorns a work.

3.2 An Authorial Voice

Foucault asked “what is an author?” in 1969, but I would argue that Shelley was exploring possible answers to this question 150 years before Foucault and Barthes. As Foucault observes, “the coming into being of the notion of ‘author’ constitutes the privileged moment of the individualisation in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy, and the sciences” (“Author” 101). While much is made of the inception dream outlined in the 1831 “Introduction”, little attention has been given to

the content that suggests Shelley is looking at the role and function of the author and at the creative process. The "Introduction" starts with a self-effacing justification of its inclusion, noting "it will be confined to such topics as have connection with my authorship alone, I can scarcely accuse myself of a personal intrusion" (M. Shelley, "Introduction" [1831] 165). This explanation is significant as it clearly states Shelley's intent to focus on her work as an author, thus framing the inception dream recollection as less of a personal insight and rather an exploration of her literary creative process. She conveys her frustration at being unable to conceive a suitable ghost story: "I felt that blank incapability of invention which is the greatest misery of authorship, when dull Nothing replies to our anxious invocations. Have you thought of a story? I was asked each morning, and each morning I was forced to reply with a mortifying negative" (M. Shelley, "Introduction" [1831] 167). This "writer's block" and resultant frustration can be interpreted as the common experience of the author and a part of their role, rather than a manifestation of a troubled mind. It may be a professional complaint, rather than a personal one.

As has been seen in the psychoanalytic readings already discussed, much is made of the obvious parallels between events and characters in *Frankenstein* and Shelley's personal experiences and what this reveals about her mental state, the perception of her relationships or impact and meaning of the novel. Yet Shelley herself acknowledges the impact of past experiences in the authorial process:

> Every thing must have a beginning, to speak in Sanchean phrase; and that beginning must be linked to something that went before. The Hindoos give the world an elephant to support it, but they make the elephant stand upon a tortoise. Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of the void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place, be afforded: it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself. In all matters of discovery and invention, even of those that appertain to the imagination, we are continually reminded of the story of Columbus and his egg. Invention consists in the capacity of seizing on the capabilities of a subject, and in the power of moulding and fashioning ideas suggested to it. ("Introduction" [1831] 167)

Shelley's life and times provided ample "substance" to which she applied her authorial "power of moulding and fashioning ideas". In her diaries and also her letters, Shelley's interest in science is evident, with a reading of Humphry Davy's *Elements of Chemical Philosophy* (*Journals* 142) and attendance at public scientific displays (*Journals* 56) recorded, for example. She also had a political and social awareness that is manifest in her works. Her father's and husband's ideas are often referenced, and she took a keen interest in the Greek Revolution while in Europe. This contextual information shows how *Frankenstein* is both a reflection of and a response to the place and time in which Shelley lived, but does not assume to guess at her mental state or intention in writing. This evidence-based contextual study allows us to see how Shelley's work reflects and reframes the ideas of her times and so accurately places the work within its discursive context.

Furthermore, Shelley also denies the deep melancholy many psychoanalytic readings find present in the novel. She describes the novel as,

> the offspring of happy days, when death and grief were but words, which found no true echo in my heart. Its several pages speak of many a walk, many a drive, and many a conversation, when I was not alone; and my companion was one who, in this world, I shall never see more. But this is for myself; my readers have nothing to do with these associations. ("Introduction" [1831] 169)

This closing is particularly significant as Shelley recognises that the reader is outside of the control or influence of the author's motivations for writing—they will not make the associations that Shelley drew upon in writing the novel. This is the flaw of psychoanalysis; it is critics assuming to know or be able to divine the associations that inspired and influenced Shelley as she wrote. Here Shelley recognises the unknowability of the author that Foucault describes: "Using all the contrivances that he sets up between himself and what he writes, the writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular individuality. As a result, the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence; he must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing" (Foucault, "Author" 102). This closing, in which her readers "have nothing to do with these associations", demonstrates Shelley's full awareness of her role as an author and the scope of her influence upon her reader.

If we read the inception dream as Shelley experimenting with the notion of author, we have new opportunities for critical engagement. Katherine Montwieler and Mark E. Boren argue that Frankenstein's creature serves as a critique of the Romantic creative ego. The Creature reveals that "although solitude is necessary for intellectual and creative development, the survival and emotional health of the self depends, however, not on distancing oneself from others, but through inter-subjectivity, if not community" (Montwieler and Boren 3). What Shelley presents in *Frankenstein*, with Walton only surviving because he agrees to return to society rather than continue his individual quest, is a refutation of the Romantic belief in the genius alone in nature. Montwieler and Boren touch upon the idea that Shelley is critiquing and posing an alternative to the archetypal Romantic author:

> Through parodies of narcissistic melancholia throughout *Frankenstein* and *Mathilda*, and overt authorial "interventions" at the end of both texts, Shelley distances herself from the alienated subject and imagines a different way of being for some of her characters, and potentially for the reader. (3)

I would extend this to argue that she is also imagining a different way of being for herself as an author. Like the lone Romantic genius, "Women, Shelley observes, respond to trauma through a kind of folding in, or reclusion" (Montwieler and Boren 4). This was certainly Shelley's response to the traumatic loss of her children and husband. She describes her perception of being isolated from others: "I feel dejected & cowed before them, feeling as if I might be the senseless person they appear to consider me. But I am not" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 441). Shelley quite clearly longs for the connection that she suggests would redeem her characters and in so doing rejects the isolation of being both a woman and an author in the Romantic era. This rejection and subsequent reimagining of what it is to be author is manifest in her works.

Montwieler and Boren's analysis of *Frankenstein* centres on the characters and content of the novel. This seems a more valid application of psychoanalysis, as we are provided with the character "complete"—whatever there is to know about them as an individual is contained within the work. Montwieler and Boren argue that both *Mathilda* and *Frankenstein* feature characters who represent a flawed Romantic ideal:

> The idealised Romantic subject suffers from a condition similar to Freud's melancholia, akin to our modern pervasive and ever-expanding diagnosis of depression. That is, to divorce oneself from humanity, to see oneself as fundamentally apart, bespeaks not autonomy and greatness, but rather a kind of despair that, although perhaps generative, is more often destructive. (1)

Their application of Freud's concept of melancholia is evident in the actions of the characters. Victor Frankenstein's isolation results in an unprecedented achievement in creation, which is ultimately a hugely destructive force. This use of psychoanalysis, when applied to characters, has merit, as the evidence is self-contained: if it is not present in the text, it is not present. This approach makes Montwieler and Boren's use of Freudian theory more successful, as it provides insight into the text and its possible meanings, without resorting to divination of authorial intent. They also reinforce the idea that Shelley was reflecting upon what it is to be an author:

> In both novels, Shelley hints at a way out of morbid melancholia—a cure, if you will. Almost as a coda, at the end of *Frankenstein*, Walton follows his men's suggestion, and turns his ship towards home. This turn to an intersubjectivity that is not solely interiorised and thus doomed, this acceptance of community indicates that unlike Frankenstein, who does not approve of this decision, Walton has learned the importance of listening and negotiating with others. (Montwieler and Boren 20)

This ending does reflect Shelley's concerns about the isolation of the Romantic subject, but particularly the Romantic author—connection and community is necessary for the author to be successful both professionally and personally.

Frankenstein is not the only evidence of Shelley's exploration of authorship. *The Last Man* also reveals Shelley's critique of the role of an author. The complex premise of the text, having been written by the last man in 2100 yet being discovered in 1818 and reinterpreted by the nameless adventurer who found the Sibylline leaves, creates questions about who the real author of the text is. This unnamed translator-

editor-narrator explains their method and offers their musings on what form the work would have taken should another person have found the leaves:

> I present the public with my latest discoveries in the slight Sibylline pages. Scattered and unconnected as they were, I have been obliged to add links, and model the work into a consistent form. But the main substance rests on the truths contained in these poetic rhapsodies, and the divine intuition which the Cumaean damsel obtained from heaven.
> I have often wondered at the subject of her verses, and at the English dress of the Latin poet. Sometimes I have thought, that, obscure and chaotic as they are, they owe their present form to me, their decipherer. As if we should give to another artist, the painted fragments which form the mosaic copy of Raphael's Transfiguration in St. Peter's; he would put them together in a form, whose mode would be fashioned by his own peculiar mind and talent. Doubtless the leaves of the Cumaean Sibyl have suffered distortion and diminution of interest and excellence in my hands. My only excuse for thus transforming them, is that they were unintelligible in their pristine condition. (M. Shelley, *The Last Man* ix-x)

This passage clearly denies authorial ownership in its questioning of what another translator-editor would have produced. It shows Shelley directly questioning the role and work of the author. This ongoing critique and experimentation with the role of author and the act of attribution position Shelley as a writer actively engaged in her craft and profession, but not in the workmanlike fashion of a guild member, for example—here, Shelley participates in the process of inquiry through which, in the Romantic era, the individual author becomes an important concept (Foucault, "Author" 109). As Martha Woodmansee outlines, in response to Foucault's call to examine "how the author became individualised in a culture like ours" ("Author" 101), the idea of the author was initially twofold, seen either as a craftsman who plied a given set of tools to produce an expected product or as someone "inspired", who went beyond the rules and tools of the craftsman-author (Woodmansee 427). But by the eighteenth century, theorists began to place greater emphasis on the role of inspiration as an internal rather than external force and so the concept of the "'original genius', with the consequence that the inspired work was made peculiarly

and distinctively the product—and the property—of the writer" (Woodmansee 427). Shelley was writing at the time that authorship as a profession was a still-emerging and under-legislated area, and so her experimentations with authorship can be seen as an attempt to define what it is to be an author in her place and time.

3.3 Discourse and Disruption: Beyond the Archaeological Paradigm

Foucault describes the author-function as the dead zone into which the individual who writes will inevitably recede, stripped of agency and adopting the role of the "dead man in the game of writing", but he does reserve a place for a special class of author—those he calls "founders of discourse" ("Author", 113). To understand how an author might escape the fate of the dead man by exceeding the author-function role, and to begin to explain how Shelley achieves this particular feat, it is necessary to focus momentarily on Foucault's explanation of authorship as a construct of a discursive formation. He explains "whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a *discursive formation*" (Foucault, *Archaeology* 38). This idea of 'statement sets' sounds like a form of linguistic analysis, but as Alec McHoul and Wendy Grace clarify the point, "Foucault thinks of discourse (or discourses) in terms of bodies of knowledge. His use of the concept moves it away from something to do with language (in the sense of a linguistic system or grammar) and closer towards the concept of discipline" (26). This idea of "bodies of knowledge" is useful in moving the definition of discourse toward the way we might think of disciplines, but we make a mistake if we move away from language altogether. The move is necessary for Foucault to take us away from seeing thought restrained by operations or structures within language, and to move us toward systems of control that apply to language in use: the 'language rules' that operate within bodies of knowledge. McHoul and Grace observe that in any given historical moment, "we can write, speak or think about a given social object or practice (madness, for example) only in certain specific ways and not others" (31).

These ideas of bodies of knowledge, bounded by rules of what can and cannot be said helps us move toward a clear understanding of Foucauldian discourse.

An important point to consider is where these rules are established. If discourses are relatively static bodies of knowledge, discursive practice (that is, how the body of knowledge is used or deployed in culture) is what creates these rules of what can and cannot be said: “Fundamentally, then, Foucault’s idea of discourse shows the historically specific relations between disciplines (defined as bodies of knowledge) and disciplinary practices (forces of social control and social possibility)” (McHoul and Grace 26). While discourses shape the rules for what can and cannot be said, they are themselves shaped and perpetuated by practices of “social control” (behaviour codes, laws, and such), but then there are also forces for “social possibility” representing the prospect for cultural change that can occur within a discipline—that is, changes that mean new things can be said. If we accept a general definition of Foucauldian discourses as “bodies of knowledge” or disciplines, there is a tendency to focus on the static qualities of discourse but I am interested here more in the forces of change that constantly reshape the boundaries of what can and cannot be said. This also gives rise to consideration of Foucault’s concept of the “founder of discourse”, an author who creates something entirely new, thereby shifting the discursive boundaries once more. The shift does not come from outside discourse—rather, the author works upon the existing materials and the rules of language as they pertain at any given time—so it should be thought of more as a disruption than a total rupture. Foucault uses the language of rupture, as I will show, because he relies on geological metaphors to emphasise the relatively static but sedimentary nature of discourse (revealing the gradual change as well as the potential for cross-sectional analysis over time). I will argue here that if we think in more fluid terms about how change emerges from the “possibility” that inheres in discourse, we can gain a clearer analogy for the role of an author in founding discourse. This is possible, I suggest, because bodies of knowledge behave more like bodies of water.

In *Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault explains the function of the “work” within discourse partly in terms that explain why reading literature in the New Critical mode—to understand the literary work on its own—both ignores the role that books play in certain kinds of things unsaid and participates in perpetuating that blindness to what cannot be said:

> The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network. And this network of references is not the same in the case of a mathematical treatise, a textual commentary. A historical account, and an episode in a novel cycle; the unity of the book, even in the sense of a group of relations, cannot be regarded as identical in each case. The book is not simply the object that one holds in one's hands; and it cannot remain within the little parallelepiped that contains it: its unity is variable and relative. As soon as one questions that unity, it loses its self-evidence; it indicates itself, constructs itself, only on the basis of a complex field of discourse. (*Archaeology* 23)

This construction of the "book" as a "node within a network" is particularly useful in this study as it allows us to trace the complex interactions between the discourses from which it derives and the discourses which it writes back into. However, the linear, structural nature of a "network" does not enable us to capture the more organic nature of discursive interactions. It is necessary to keep in mind the capacity of the nodes within the network to be sites where the possibility of the founding of discourse is also always potentially in play. The nodes are not mere meeting points for mouthpieces of discourse; rather, they are sites in which agents act upon one another, and they are sites where competing or at least parallel discourses may come into contact.

In his discussion of the development of Original and Regular discursive formations, Foucault uses the language of geology and archaeology to describe the formation and fracturing of discourse. Original discourses are compared to violent forces at work beneath the earth, which over time in the past "rose up in turn to produce the *landscape* that we know today; it is the task of the historian to rediscover on the basis of these isolated points, these successive *ruptures*, the continuous line of an *evolution*" (*Archaeology* 141; emphasis added). Continuity is thus ascertained after the fact, a product of historical recovery and interpretation rather than a feature of discursive change itself. His greater interest is of course in showing how discourses and their operations can be discerned, after the fact, in any

given period in history, which is why he applies the archaeological model to Regular discourses:

> The second group [Regular], on the other hand, reveals history as inertia and weight, as a slow accumulation of the past, a silent *sedimentation* of things said; in this second group, statements must be treated by weight and in accordance with what they have in common; their unique occurrence maybe neutralized; the importance of their author's identity, the time and place of their appearance are also diminished; on the other hand, it is their extent that must be measured; the extent of their repetition in time and place, the *channels* by which they are diffused, the groups in which they circulate; the general *horizon* that they outline for men's thought, the limits that they impose on it; and how, in characterizing a period, they make it possible to distinguish it from others" (*Archaeology* 141; emphasis added).

Applying Foucault's model to the period of relevance to this study, we can use the idea of *sedimentation* to picture the gradual emergence of a bedrock layer, built up over centuries, broadly labelled "Western Christian Tradition". This is the foundation on which medieval and Renaissance European socio-political structures are built. To represent this, in Figure 2, I show the deep substrate of the Western Christian Tradition, on which a surface layer of more permeable, shifting sediment constituting "Socio-political Boundaries" is accumulated. These top layers also serve as the *horizon* or boundary for discursive formations.

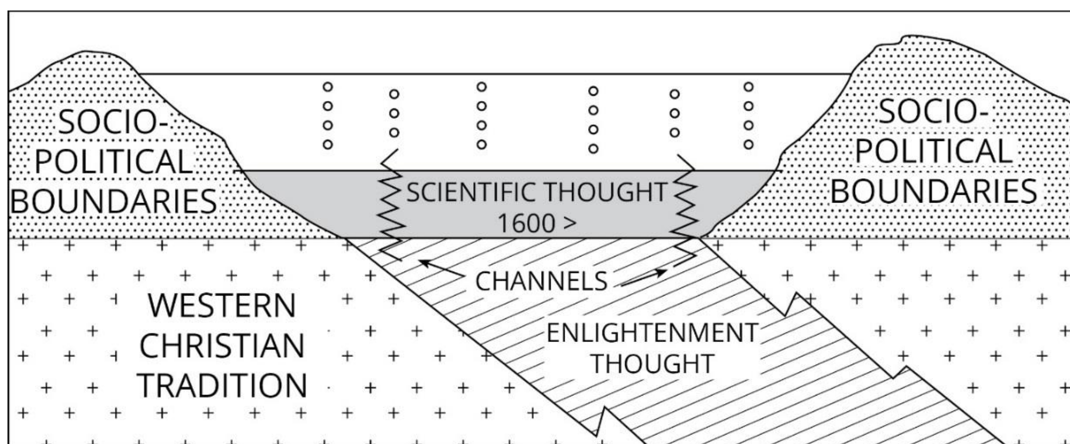

FIGURE 2: Cross section of the formation of society and culture

The same figure illustrates how even the violent ruptures of Original discourses will deposit the record of the event in sedimentary fashion, if we are to extend the analogy to account for how the documentary record retains evidence of such ruptures. Foucault argues that one such rupture, "certainly one of the most radical that ever occurred in Western culture" (*Order* 220), was the "somewhat enigmatic event, [a] rising up from below which occurred towards the end of the eighteenth century" (*Order* 220). The rupture and subsequent *evolution* and growth of Enlightenment ideas and scientific thought are represented here as a massive fault within the bedrock, a radical break in the foundations of the Western Christian Tradition. This rupture caused shifts in the socio-political boundaries; for example, the questioning of monarchy and the calling for greater recognition of human rights in all classes. "Scientific Thought" is represented as a layer of fresh sediment, arising from the new *channels* opened by the rise of the Enlightenment. I have represented science in this way, as I would argue that it has become a part of the bedrock of modern Western society since this time: what was once radical or revolutionary is now part of the substrate on which our own Regular discourses are grounded, and are deeply embedded in the disciplinary practices of the modern world.

What I want to now consider is the capacity for Original discourse to emerge as a result of processes that occur on top of the bedrock, if it is to be at all possible for the writings of an individual to contribute to or even to bring about changes of such magnitude. If we retain Foucault's view of the bedrock of society as one of the strata in a deep geologically embedded structure, the model need not be discarded for this change element to be added at the top level—it is in culture that I see this element being added, if imagined here as a lake or pool that rests atop these solid and slow-moving foundations. Positing culture atop Foucault's geological analogy is also useful in differentiating between society and culture. Raymond Williams defines society as "clear in two main senses: as our most general term for the body of institutions and relationships within which a relatively large group of people live; and as our most abstract term for the condition in which such institutions and relationships are formed" (291). These "institutions and relationships" are the more static formations of a society, the socio-political boundaries delimiting discourse as a set of disciplinary practices. Defining culture is more problematic. As Williams explains, it can have three main meanings: "a general process of intellectual, spiritual

and aesthetic development"; the resultant "works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity"; but it also "indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general" (90). This last definition seems to be more relevant to a discussion of "society" and it is from this sense that Williams seeks to move culture into the domain of the social sciences. Combining the three points Williams makes, culture can be described broadly as the creative, intellectual output of a society, and this output provides the field of evidence from which historians or archaeologists derive similarities to construct broad-reaching categories like "Renaissance culture"—the most obvious early example of a study that used such an approach was Jakob Burkhardt's *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860).

My approach to culture, interested as I am in demonstrating the potential for the individual to be able to activate changes in both society and culture, does not do away with the broad-reaching focus that combines the various definitions identified by Williams, but it does insist on a return to the less fashionable early definition of "culture" as a process of intellectual and artistic activity. A culture, even understood more broadly, thus reflects those who do not just live in but are actively involved in shaping the modes of expression of their society, by which I mean those who read, write, or practise within a field of cultural production. Contrast this with the individual who takes no interest in art, literature, or politics—this person may be counted as a member of society from the perspective of a social or demographic study, yet the same individual is not an active participant in culture. We can envisage such a character as one of the many anonymous grains of sand that do, however, participate in and thus make up the socio-cultural boundary of the cultural pool. While the ripples of culture may wash over such people, or perhaps even change their surrounding landscape, they remain inanimate, touched and moved by the cultural currents but lacking the agency to create ripples of their own. Here, it is important to keep in mind Shelley's context. Increasing rates of literacy (Merriman 327-329), more affordable printing technology (Merriman 414), and greater social agitation for education and rights of the lower classes (Merriman 454) meant that the number of people engaged in the cultural pool was far greater than previously possible. That is, in what we may imagine as a landslide of literacy, many of these grain of sand figures slipped into the cultural pool as they began to be able to engage both as individuals and larger groups with the discursive formations of their culture.

3.4 Ripples on the Surface of the Cultural Pool

In *The Order of Things,* Foucault re-envisions history not as a linear sequence of events, but rather as a number of epochs, each marked by its dominant discourses. Epochs end not with a gradual evolution into a new age, but in a radical rupture in the discursive field or practice. Foucault argues that one such shift occurred during Godwin and Wollstonecraft's lifetime and the landslide of literacy that changed the shape of Shelley's cultural pool is just one such rupture:

> And it took a fundamental event—certainly one of the most radical that ever occurred in Western culture—to bring about the dissolution of the positivity of Classical knowledge, and to constitute another positivity from which, even now, we have doubtless not entirely emerged. This event, probably because we are still caught inside it, is beyond our comprehension. Its scope, the depth of the strata it has affected, all the positivities it has succeeded in disintegrating and recomposing, the sovereign power that has enabled it, in only a few years, to traverse the entire space of our culture, all this could be appraised and measured only after a quasi-infinite investigation concerned with no more nor less than the very being of our modernity. (*Order* 220)

While this claim may sound hyperbolic, the changes wrought on our world that can be traced back to the emergence of modern science in the sixteenth century, and its exponential growth from the eighteenth century onward, coupled with the social changes wrought by Enlightenment thinking, are self-evident. Foucault goes on to outline some of the specific events that are evidence of this rupture: "The constitution of so many positive sciences, the appearance of literature, the folding back of philosophy upon its own development, the emergence of history as both knowledge and the mode of being of empiricity, … the formation, here of philology, there of economics, there again of biology" (*Order*, 220). The most concentrated expression of this rupture arises, he explains "between easily assignable dates (the outer limits are the years 1775 and 1825)" (220), which of course coincide not only with the careers of Godwin and Wollstonecraft, but of Shelley herself.

While Foucault sees this momentous cultural shift as rupture, his attempt to describe the scale of the phenomena of human activity touched by the shift leads him

to find a need to move his language toward the fluid analogy I have sought to use here:

> This somewhat enigmatic event, this event rising up from below which occurred towards the end of the eighteenth century in these three domains, subjecting them at one blow to one and the same break, can now be located within the unity that forms a foundation for its diverse forms. Quite obviously, it would be superficial to seek this unity in some progress made in rationality, or in the discovery of a new cultural theme. The complex phenomena of biology, of the history of languages, or of industrial production, were not, in the last years of the eighteenth century, introduced into forms of rational analysis to which until then they had remained entirely foreign; nor was there a sudden interest - provoked by the "influence" of a budding "romanticism"—in the complex forms of life, history, and society; there was no detachment, under the pressure of its problems, from a rationalism subjected to the model of mechanics, to the rules of analysis and the laws of understanding. Or rather, all this did in fact happen, but as a surface movement: a modification and shifting of cultural interests, a redistribution of opinions and judgements, the appearance of new forms in scientific discourse, wrinkles traced for the first time upon the enlightened face of knowledge. (Foucault, *Order* 238)

Where he starts with an enigmatic event "rising up from below" that subjects everything at the same time to the same "break", he ends "rather" with "surface movement", "modification and shifting", and "wrinkles" as he realises the breadth and range of the phenomena that he is describing. Even then, the shifting and wrinkles are an uneasy fit for the sedimentary image of bedrock and strata, but if we shift this to flows and ripples the model opens up more easily to account for the relationship between agents of cultural production and the operations of deeply embedded discursive formations. Just like a spring-fed lake, whose waters rise up thought the bedrock and sediment below, the discourses that dominate a culture "bubble up" from below, rising out of the more slow-moving forces that shape a society. When these "thought bubbles" break the surface, they cause ripples that affect how we see the surface of the pool.

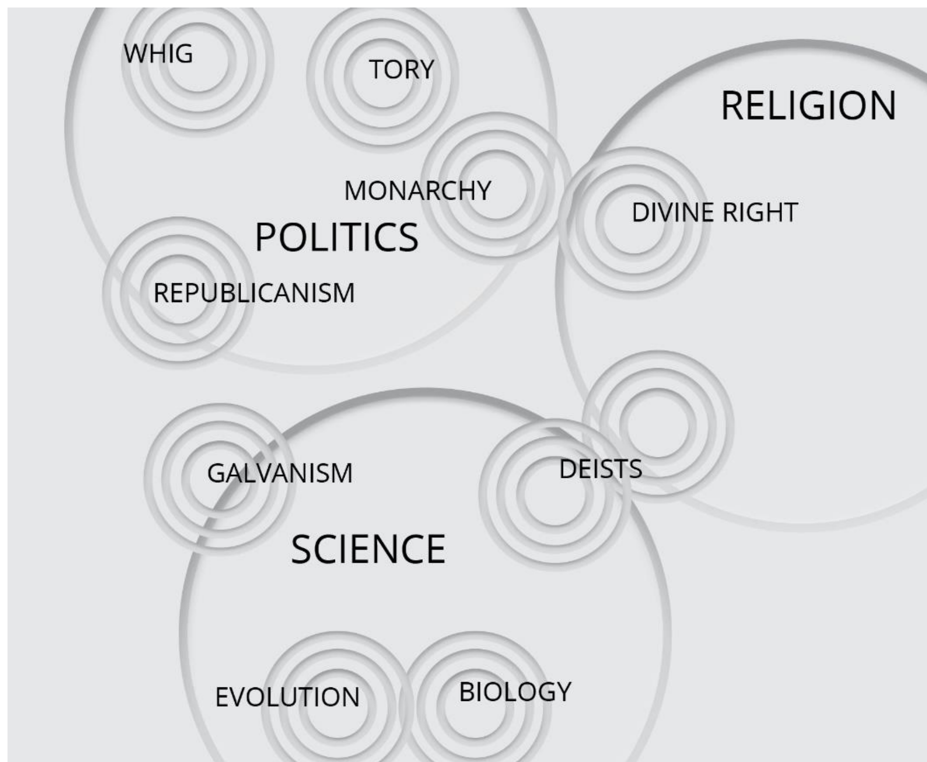

FIGURE 3: Top view: Discursive Formations in Culture

Figure 3 represents three major discourses that dominated society and culture at the time of the great rupture described by Foucault: politics, religion, and science. Three key points follow from viewing discourses as ripples within a pool. The first is that a large discourse, such as "Politics", is not really seen as one set of ripples, but rather as a series of overlapping and intersecting ripples that occupy a large space within the cultural pool. For example, Tory and Whig ideas are different, yet both belong within political discourse. The second point to note is the interactions between the discursive fields: just as in a real pool, if two points of disruption break the surface, they will both create ripples that interact with one another. This is represented here where the ripples of Religion touch upon the political structure of the monarchy. It is important to note that these ripples do not travel in only one direction, and each interaction triggers yet another set of ripples, which may vary in size. Foucault observes in "What is an Author?" that discursive fields produce a necessary "return" to a point of origin which is both "part of the discursive field itself" and yet "never stops modifying it" (116). By looking back, the "return" also redefines the discourse, changing the way statements operate within it. Thinking of

the surface of culture as a pool, the "return" is always visible in the ripples that emanate from the source even as they spread out further from the source. Ripples may fold back towards their origin point, or interact with other ripples, all of which serves to "transform the discursive practice itself" (Foucault "Author" 116).

Importantly, the pool analogy reinforces the point that change does not only come from below. Significant ripples are also caused by throwing rocks into the pool, and these resultant ripples interact with the others already present. To further extend this idea, the formation of Regular discursive fields occurs as ripples form a regular wave motion or become incorporated into a current, or over longer time spans as they simply settle into becoming a stagnant body of water. Here, too, the geological model is not abandoned, since bodies of water also interact with the earth through the water table, and it is this that eventually leads to the greatest source of instability in the ground on which we walk. Just as water settles downwards, so too the most disruptive Original discursive formations may originate not from the depths: they may occur when a rock is thrown into the pool, creating a splash and then a series of new waves. Shelley's *Frankenstein* hardly rated as a work of Literature in its time but I will argue in what follows that it connected the discourses of science and religion/morality in new ways, and that this was possible only if it created enough ripples to enable new points of intersection to emerge on the surface of her culture. Shelley drew her work from the pool of existing ideas, but when she published *Frankenstein* she created a new set of interactions: she founded a new discursive space. Figure 4 shows how the novel intersected, for example, with science in its deployment of the principles of Galvanism, but it also moved toward key political ideas that had been expressed in the work of her parents. Later, in *The Last Man*, Shelley would revisit these ideas, and having seen the impact of Shelley's work, other authors later began to absorb her originating ideas into their own literary practice. While not a critical success, the novel's impact was certainly felt elsewhere throughout the culture. As a founder of the discourse in which science and fiction interact, Shelley may be understood as the one who cast the first stone.

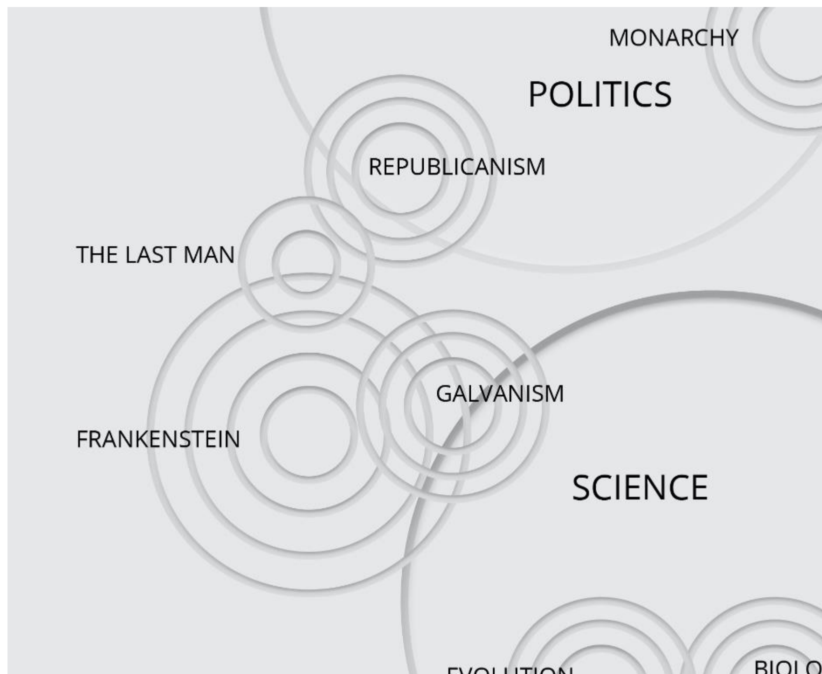

FIGURE 4: New Discursive Formations

To further delve into the ripples metaphor: the superposition of waves is a useful metaphor for exploring how ideas intersect and interact in the pool of culture. When two waves with positive amplitude (or, for the metaphor, two congruent ideas) intersect, the size of the wave is amplified. That is, the idea gains strength. The same is true of two waves of a negative amplitude. To apply this to ideas or discourses, two negative representations will further strengthen the negative representation of the idea. When two waves of differing amplitude intersect, that is when two conflicting ideas intersect, a new waveform is the result. This is depicted in Figure 5. The yellow wave and blue wave are negative and positive respectively. At the moment they intersect a new waveform which is the sum of the two results. In physics, this new waveform only occurs at the point of intersection, with the original waveforms continuing after the moment of intersection. That is, the yellow and blue lines are unchanged, even after intersection. However, for this metaphor, I bend the laws of physics, as the resultant (green) waveform, representing the comingling of the two ideas/ discourses continues onwards. I argue that significant moments of discursive intersection operate like new origin-points for discourse – it is as though when two ideas meet with sufficient impact or force, an entirely new object enters the cultural pool. That is, the collision between these ideas triggers a new moment so significant it has a physical presence.

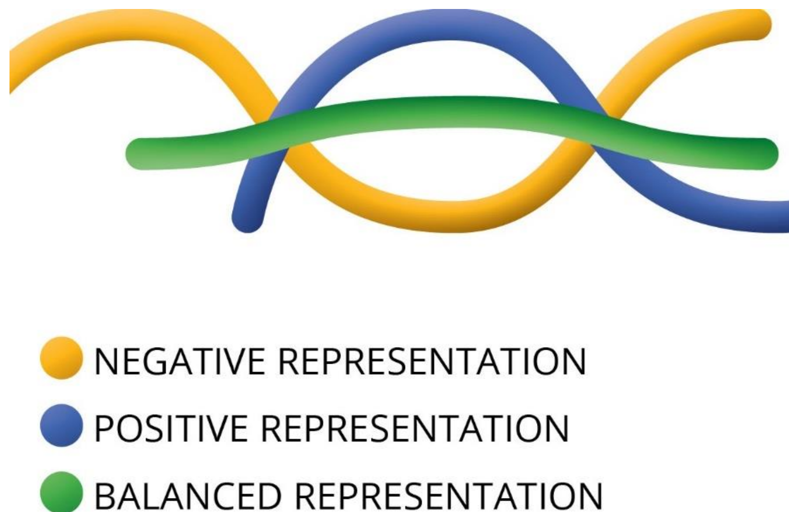

FIGURE 5: The superposition of discursive ripples

This has a two-fold effect of both changing the two original (ideas/discourses) waves as they intermingle and also creating new ripples. These resultant waves carry ideas from both of the original discourses and these in turn may perhaps form a new discursive space. One small example of this is the way the term "Franken-" has entered scientific and popular discussion of genetic modification. Ksenia Gerasimova gives an account of the emergence of one such term: "In 1977, Arthur Lubow in the *New Times* newspaper article raised concerns that 'modern Dr Frankensteins have found a way to create brand new forms of life'. Once the debate on GMOs focused on food … a new term, 'Frankenfood' appeared. It was coined by Paul Lewis … in his letter to the *New York Times* in 1992". This adoption of the 'Franken-" stem demonstrates how the core imagery of the monstrous assemblage of the Creature has entered popular culture as a broad reference to anything that is manipulated by science to create new, 'unnatural' forms. Susan Merrill Squiers conception of Catherine Waldby's "biomedical imaginary" as understanding "narratives to function as working objects, in experiments that take place not in the biomedical laboratory but in the biomedical imaginary: the rich intertidal zone where, as Waldby puts it, 'biomedicine *makes things up*'" (16). The use of "Frankenfood" is one example of the "imaginative" – the adoption of narrative elements to explain science and also express the fear that it could go wrong, as it did in Shelley's novel. Squiers argues that "fiction, the zone where objective truth is not told, paradoxically becomes the site where one specific kind of truth is best

articulated … the workings of the biomedical imaginary, the desires propelling biomedicine, can be expressed in fiction" (17). This "intertidal zone" of interaction extends the metaphor of two ripples interacting. In the case of "Frankenfoods" we see the overlap of the ripples caused by Shelley's novel, the developments in the complex science of genetic modification and the fear that this evoked. Ultimately, the discursive space which Shelley established provides the spark of humanity to pure science. It is a space where we can respond not only intellectually but emotively to scientific potential. Waldby's "intertidal zone" is the space in which these new discursive forms can be observed, as the ideas from the novel interact with and in turn reshape our conception of science, and at times, our understandings of the novel's potential meanings.

We can also use this metaphor of ripples as a way of measuring the impact of a work. Recall Foucault's description of the book as a system of references to other books—here we can see this also as a reaching back toward the origin, as in the pattern made on the surface of the pool by the ripples. The smaller ripples, close to the origin-point of the discourse represent the most direct impacts and references to the origin-work/idea, while the outer ripples may be more tangential references or interactions with the discourse, which nonetheless serve as a measure of reach and impact of a discourse. As Laurie Johnson explains, "When we find patterns, we are exercising the wholly productive force of the imagination. Beyond creators, generators, programs, archives and so on, there is the observer whose capacity for making sense of texts is what ultimately gives to culture its contours, patterns and limits" (Johnson "Agency"). I frame these "contours, patterns and limits" as ripples in the pool of culture. Because a book can function to reiterate and standardise these contours, patterns, and limits, it can also serve as a force for disruption by originating a new waveform.

It is this shifting of cultural interests, marked by the almost exponential growth in the fields of science, that coincided with "a redistribution of opinions and judgements". What Foucault suggests is that as cultural knowledge changed, so did people's way of judging (or drawing moral boundaries around) these changes. It is in this moment that Shelley writes *Frankenstein* and so finds a new way for the fields of science and literature to interact, and in turn one new way for people to form "opinions and judgements". These passages establish the time in which Shelley wrote was one of significant upheaval in terms of the dominant discourses within her

culture. Not only did she bear witness to these changes, she and her milieu were active participants in these discursive spaces. Her father was a political writer and her husband explored religious and political themes and had a deep interest in the new sciences. Shelley synthesised these factors—her milieus' politics, her (and Percy's) interest in science, and the group's general apathy towards religion—through her writing to speak about science in a new way. In doing so, she founded a new discursive space and also explored what it meant to be an author.

3.5 Shelley's Authorship: Throwing Stones

For an author whose body of work has been read through a biographical lens for decades, it may seem counter-intuitive to take on a Foucauldian approach when analysing Shelley and her works, as Foucault seems to strip the author's biography of its significance. As Foucault asserts, "author function … does not refer purely and simply to a real individual, since it can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subjects—positions that can be occupied by different classes of individuals" ("Author" 113). However, the contextual biography I have offered in Chapter Two did not seek to read Shelley's biography to find the "real individual", because, as Hermione Lee points out, "there is no such thing as a definitive biography" (18). Rather, an analysis was undertaken of Shelley's biography to discern the conditions that made it possible for her to found a discourse, while recognising that she experienced a conflict between her "several selves" —the roles in which her society cast her and the roles which she sought. This conflict of self was not unique to Shelley, as many women writers struggled to establish themselves during the period. However, her conflict was exacerbated by her circumstances—famed parents, infamous husband, and a circle that included some of the most well-regarded authors of the age, meant the mantle of author held a particular significance to Shelley.

In Shelley's time, the idea of the author as an individual, and as a career, was a relatively new one. Foucault states the "coming into being of the notion of 'author' constitutes the privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy and the sciences" ("Author" 101). It is in this time of change that Foucault establishes a new kind of author, a "founder of discursivity":

> Furthermore, in the course of the nineteenth century, there appeared in Europe another, more uncommon, kind of author, whom one should confuse with neither the "great" literary authors, nor the authors of religious texts, nor the founders of science. In a somewhat arbitrary way we shall call those who belong in this last group "founders of discursivity". They are unique in that they are not just the authors of their own works. They have produced something else: the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts. ("Author" 113-114)

Foucault expands upon this unique/repeated binary in his later book, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, when he discusses Original and Regular discursive formations. As we have seen, his description of Original discursive formations tends to disregard the potential for the originating force behind their eruption to come from within the field of an existing discourse. By opposing Original to Regular formations, he tends to constrain cultural activity to the latter and sees new discourses rising up from below in a sudden momentous break from the past. Yet in "What is an Author?" he clearly moves away from this idea by positing the special class of author as one who triggers the formation of discourse. Thus, it may be said that this class of author provides the break that Foucault had viewed as the Original discursive formation. As I have argued in the adjustment to Foucault's geological metaphor, this can be understood not as a single moment of break; rather, the work that precipitates a momentous shift must first be cast into the pool of existing discourses and only through its interactions with the other wave formations in the same pool can its influence begin to spread throughout the culture and then filter into the bedrock of thought on which social formations are founded.

In "What is an Author?" Foucault concerns himself with "the solid and fundamental unit of the author and the work" (101). Having given some consideration to Shelley as an author we must also give equal weight to her works, then, and their discursive function. As previously discussed, Foucault describes founders of discourse as "unique in that they are not just the authors of their own works. They have produced something else: the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts" ("Author" 114). This stands in contrast to those authors who merely replicate previous works. This echoes Foucault's Original/Regular binary. He states in relation to a Regular discursive formation that "the importance of

their author's identity, the time and place of their appearance are also diminished" (*Archaeology* 141). Seeing Shelley as a founder of an Original discursive formation also lends weight to the argument that some consideration of her identity as author is justified.

The vehicle for this moment of original creation is the author's work. The works an author produces are inextricably linked to their discursive context: they both come out of and write back into the discursive fields of their culture. As such, we must analyse *Frankenstein* as a new stone, cast into the cultural pool, and Shelley then as a founder of discourse. As I will discuss in Chapter Five, *Frankenstein* has long been regarded as a Gothic novel (Mulvey-Roberts 211), but then it has also been credited as a foundational work in the history of science fiction. This focus on genre would of course be a way to situate *Frankenstein* within a Regular discursive formation; that is to say, it is derivative, "sometimes going so far as to repeat it word for word, from what has already been said" (Foucault, *Archaeology* 141). As Lobke Minter points out, "Shelley combines the Gothic genre with an investigation into the transgressions of scientific inquiry. Shelley's tale of horror is not in the classical sense a story about ghosts or monsters, but rather an insight into the consequences of technological or scientific research" (n.p.). This focus on the possible outcomes of scientific inquiry shifts *Frankenstein* from the Gothic to something new, the nascent science fiction genre. Yet I will argue that it does more than merely offer the necessary "insight" needed to transform literary genres.

Foucault was mindful of the potential for readers to misconstrue his definition of discourse as an account of genre, so to explain the distinction, he discusses Anne Radcliffe, pioneer of the Gothic. He argues that Radcliffe's novels,

> put into circulation a certain number of resemblances and analogies patterned on her work—various characteristic signs, figures, relationships, and structures that could be integrated into other books. In short, to say that Anne Radcliffe created the Gothic Romance means that there are certain elements common to her works and to the nineteenth-century Gothic romance ("Author" 114).

While Radcliffe's work was foundational to the Gothic, for Foucault it is more a genre than a discourse as her tropes were merely adopted and adapted by later

writers—it is a part of a Regular discursive formation. Foucault identifies the characteristic features of a discourse using Marx and Freud as examples:

> on the other hand, Marx and Freud, as "initiators of discursive practices" not only made possible a certain number of analogies that could be adopted by future texts, but, as importantly, they also made possible a certain number of differences. They cleared a space for the introduction of elements other than their own, which, nevertheless, remain within the field of discourse they initiated. ("Author" 114)

I would reframe Foucault's "clearing of space" as instead the filling of a previously empty space; that is, casting a stone outside the bounds of the current discursive formations within the pool. While Shelley did draw upon the Gothic genre, and Victor was adopted as the archetypal mad scientist trope, she also created a new space for subsequent authors to respond in their own way to scientific developments. This strengthens the case for a Foucauldian reading, as unlike Radcliffe, whose works created a series of tropes that were replicated ad nauseum, *Frankenstein* was an idea rather than a rigid set of generic rules. It gave readers and viewers of the stage plays it spawned space to explore and answer their own questions about the moral rightness of Victor's actions. The field which Shelley created is a space in which narrativising science allows for moral thought—it is far more than a series of tropes that have been adopted by a genre. This new space is the broader social and cultural discourse underpinning science fiction, which, through exploration of scientific potential, allows for a new way for both authors and readers to create boundaries and to imagine a new role for science in their world.

Chapter Four
Mirror Fragments: A Close Reading of the 1818 Edition of *Frankenstein*

The strong emphasis on biography in Shelley scholarship demonstrates the importance that has been ascribed to Shelley's lived experience, but with a contextual biography it becomes possible to reveal the broader conditions under which *Frankenstein* was authored, without ceding Shelley's agency as author. Using the revised model of Foucault's discursive formations, either Original or Regular, as revealing themselves in culture like ripples across water, the author's agency can be understood as participating in the propagation of existing discourses but also potentially always capable of creating a big enough splash as to give rise to a new discourse. Importantly, I reject any sense in which this new discourse emerges from nowhere—instead, Foucault's explanation of the role of the book as an intersection of past texts enables us to see where the materials from which a new discourse is produced are drawn. In this close reading of the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein*, I will demonstrate how the novel creates a space for making open-ended moral judgments about the achievements of the new science, by presenting these achievements in a fictive space with mirrored narrative structures focused on the characters whose lives are touched by these advances.

Fred Botting, in *Making Monstrous: Frankenstein, Criticism, Theory,* observes that in Shelley's novel, "the complex epistolary structure of three interdependent and interrupted narratives incorporates, displaces and questions acts of reading, while the internal organisation leaves the oppositions and divisions irresolvably shifting and doubling" (36). The structure of *Frankenstein* is sometimes referred to as a frame or box narrative (Schug 608), however, a case can be made that the structure is more interwoven than either frames or boxes suggests. Taking Botting's "shifting and doubling" as a way of conceptualising the novel's structure, Frankenstein could be termed a mirror narrative, with each of the characters offering a reflection of elements of one another. These mirrored "doublings" are fragmented and distorted, as Botting continues, "open to productive conflicts and plays of difference that undermine the possibility of identifying an authorial voice or fixing the text with a final authoritative meaning" (36). By offering differing perspectives

through the three narrators without giving any one voice primacy, Shelley avoids “a final authoritative meaning” and so closes the novel with the moral ambiguity that makes it such a significant work. As Botting elucidates, “the frame that delimits the borders of the text also functions as the edge of the mirror wherein the reader may recognise his/her own position” (7).

Percy’s introduction to the 1818 edition claims that the author does not seek to convey her own beliefs or morals and also recognises that each reader will be affected differently:

> I am by no means indifferent to the manner in which whatever moral tendencies exist in the sentiments or characters it contains shall affect the reader; yet my chief concern in this respect has been limited to the avoiding the enervating effects of the novels of the present and to the exhibition of the amiableness of domestic affection, and the excellence of universal virtue. The opinions which naturally spring from the character and situation of the hero are by no means to be conceived as existing always in my own conviction; nor is any inference justly to be drawn from the following pages as prejudicing any philosophical doctrine of whatever kind. (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 5-6)

The final claim that she does not favour any particular doctrine does seem contradictory given the book is dedicated to a *philosophe*, Godwin. Against Percy’s claims the work is an “exhibition of the amiableness of domestic affection, and the excellence of universal virtue”, Michael Scrivener proposes that the novel is overtly moral, giving it a “generic identity as a didactic fiction in the tradition of the Jacobin novel of the 1790s” (305). He argues the novel is an exploration of Godwinian utilitarianism.

Additionally, Lee E. Heller presents a case that *Frankenstein*

> focuses on the problematic influence of experience—both social and literary—on those vulnerable, unstable groups around whom cluster cultural concerns about education and reading. Although Mary Shelley does not seem explicitly to raise issues of class and gender, her novel is very much about

> controlling the formation of character among potentially dangerous and endangered social groups.

Heller links "formation of character" with education while, like Scrivener, Anne Mellor sees the novel as having a clear moral purpose related to family. She argues that it is a moral defence of the nuclear family, the "domestic affections" that all should value:

> Mary Shelley endorsed a traditional mimetic aesthetic that exhorted literature to imitate ideal Nature and defined the role of the writer as a moral educator. Her novel purposefully identifies moral virtue, based on self-sacrifice, moderation, and domestic affection, with aesthetic beauty. (Mellor "Processing Nature", 230)

The dangers of isolation and non-participation in "domestic affection" are clear in both Victor's account of the time preceding the Creature coming to life, where he worked in solitude, and in the outcome of the DeLaceys' rejection of the Creature from the domesticity of which he had come to feel a part. Devon Hodges argues that Shelley is providing a defence of traditional family structures and gender roles, citing Percy's introduction to the 1818 edition. Hodges argues that this is

> an apologia for *Frankenstein* that attempts to blur the contradiction between the text's transgression of and adherence to the familiar opposition of masculine and feminine. He insists that the text functions to show the virtue of the domestic sphere—a place for women that has been largely defined by men (Hodges 160)

While all three of these scholars view the work as a didactic defence of family values, even when the novel transgresses these boundaries, my thinking aligns with Sarah Canfield Fuller's view that "the consistent sympathy for the Creature, the apparent failure of domestic institutions, and the relative lack of virtue exhibited by Victor despite Walton's hero-worship suggest the inadequacy of this authorized interpretation" (223). The "authorised interpretation" Fuller refers to is both Percy's initial "apologia" and Shelley's later recollections of the novel's

inception, the problematic nature of which was discussed in Chapter One, which have informed scholars' perception of the work as overtly moral. *Frankenstein* is not a defence of "domestic affection, and the excellence of universal virtue", but more an exploration of how these things interact, can be dependent upon on another, or operate entirely separately. Shelley includes a subtle critique of novels with overt moral lessons, as Victor chastises himself for boring Walton: "But I forget that I am moralizing in the most interesting part of my tale; and your looks remind me to proceed" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 35). This lack of moral didacticism is precisely what makes the novel so powerful and enduring and it is where the space is established for a new discourse to emerge. The fact that academic debate about the moral purpose of the work continues shows that *Frankenstein*'s message is ambiguous; just as the novel's structure and characters are fragmented and distorted shards of one another, so too the novel's moral lesson cannot be definitively located amongst the refracted and reflected possibilities of meaning.

The fragmented mirroring of the characters can be organised into a number of broad themes: curiosity, education, fraternity, responsibility, and nature. A thread that runs through all these themes is the threat of isolation and the impact it has upon how the three narrators view and engage with the world around them. While the narrators are in many ways a reflection of one another, a key feature that causes distortion in this mirroring is the degree to which the character is isolated. For example, Victor completes his education in isolation and so his curiosity is unfettered, not moderated by others' views. In contrast, Walton seeks someone to "regulate his mind" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 10) and temper his decision making. Mary Poovey recognises some of these interwoven threads:

> More in keeping with eighteenth-century moralists than with either William Godwin or Percy Shelley, Mary Shelley characterizes innate desire not as neutral or benevolent but as quintessentially egotistical. And, unlike Mary Wollstonecraft, she does not conceive of imaginative activity as leading through intimations of mortality to new insight or creativity. Instead, she sees imagination as an appetite that can and must be regulated—specifically, by the give-and-take of domestic relationships. If it is aroused but is not controlled by human society, it will project itself into the natural world, becoming voracious in its search for objects to conquer and consume. This

> principle, which draws both mechanistic and organic models under the mantle of conventional warnings to women, constitutes the major dynamic of *Frankenstein'*s plot. As long as domestic relationships govern an individual's affections, his or her desire will turn outward as love. But when the individual loses or leaves the regulating influence of relationship with others, imaginative energy always threatens to turn back on itself, to 'mark' all external objects as its own and to degenerate into 'gloomy and narrow reflections upon self'. (123)

I frame Poovey's "desire" and "imagination" as curiosity, which must be regulated to a degree. Poovey's assertion that domestic relationships are an essential part of this regulatory framework is reiterated throughout the novel, in Victor's single-minded experimentations and the anger the Creature reveals when rejected by the DeLaceys. Yet Shelley's work is not a morality tale espousing proto-Victorian domestic bliss, rather in the fractured reflections of each character Shelley explores the complex interplay of human desire, curiosity and fallibility with the social forces of her era which impact upon the development of the characters' actions and sense of self.

4.1 The Cost of Curiosity

Curiosity is a driving force for all three of Shelley's narrators, who are on "a voyage of discovery to the land of knowledge" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 38). We meet Walton as he prepares for his (literal) journey to seek the North-West Passage, Victor undertakes a voyage of intellectual endeavour in seeking an elixir of life, and the Creature is on a journey of self-discovery, seeking to understand his origins and selfhood. The mirroring of these characters' journeys is evident; one physical, one intellectual, and one spiritual. Additionally, all of their quests have a mythic quality—the North-West Passage was ultimately proven to be a false hope and while Victor technically succeeds in his Promethean quest, it has none of the mythic wonder or glory associated with such an achievement. The Creature's search is for the most unattainable of myths: true self-knowledge. Not only are each of the narrators driven by curiosity, but each quest has with it a series of obligations. To achieve his goal, Walton must have a crew, and so is obligated to keep them safe as

they journey north. Victor has an obligation both to his creation and society at large, as his success would have significant ramifications for all humanity if he has indeed conquered death. The Creature is bound only by social convention, which his creator does not teach him, but he gleans through observation and his own inherent understanding of right and wrong.

Curiosity is the major motivator for both Walton and Victor. Walton describes the motivations for his northward expedition using language such as "I shall satiate my ardent curiosity" (7) and "the inestimable benefit which I shall confer on all mankind to the last generation" (8). Walton links his personal ambition to a greater good that will result from his efforts. This closely reflects Victor's own aims later in the novel, when he states, "what glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!" (23). Curiosity to find new knowledge that will benefit mankind seems to be an inherent good, however, the dangers of unfettered curiosity are realised as the novel closes, with Victor's staunch refusal to disclose the secret of how he gave life to his Creature to Walton: "'Are you mad, my friend?' said he. 'Or whither does your senseless curiosity lead you? Would you also create for yourself and the world a demoniacal enemy? Or to what do your questions tend? Peace, peace! Learn my miseries, and do not seek to increase your own'" (151). The famed ambiguity of the ending of Shelley's novel begins to emerge when, despite having berated Walton for his "senseless curiosity", Victor exhorts that the would-be mutineers should not abandon their quest. This ambiguity is further reinforced as Victor dies: "Walton! Seek happiness in tranquillity, and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries. Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed" (157). While Victor discourages Walton from seeking to know how the Creature was made, he is not condemning curiosity out of hand, as he encourages the sailors not to give up because they are afraid, perhaps reflecting the key flaw in Victor—he should have given up when (and if?) he had reservations about making his creature, instead of persisting, which ultimately leads to his downfall. He also fully expects that curiosity in the form of scientific inquiry will continue, and continue to improve on the failed experiments of the past. The various and at times contradictory ways in which Victor speaks about curiosity in these passages creates a degree of ambiguity the reader must navigate alone.

Walton offers a more positive reflection on the cost of curiosity. The benefits of curiosity in the form of intellectual endeavour for the greater good have a reciprocal benefit to the subject, as Walton suggests: "for nothing contributes so much to tranquillize the mind as a steady purpose, a point on which the soul may fix its intellectual eye" (8). Victor too sees the potential benefits of exploring the boundaries of knowledge: "In other studies you go as far as others have gone before you, and there is nothing more to know; but in a scientific pursuit there is continual food for discovery and wonder" (30). However, Victor's narrative shows the outcome of this search for "discovery and wonder" being taken too far. His focus upon his goal is too intense, and comes at the expense of his wellbeing and relationships with others. This abandonment or neglect of his domestic sphere or community is portrayed negatively. It is here that the thematic thread of isolation emerges—it is his self-imposed isolation from others that allows Victor to transgress the boundaries of death without any voice to caution him.

Additionally, this intense, isolated focus means Victor does not consider the full impact of his actions. In his confrontation with the Creature on Mer de Glace, Victor acknowledges his folly, the "spark which I so negligently bestowed" (68). The Creature's impassioned plea to have his maker hear his story causes Victor to reflect, "For the first time, also, I felt what the duties of a creator towards his creature were, and that I ought to render him happy before I complained of his wickedness" (69-70). His sense of responsibility does not last, however. As Victor approaches the completion of the second, female creature, he considers the potential consequences of his actions:

> As I sat, a train of reflection occurred to me which led me to consider the effects of what I was now doing. Three years before, I was engaged in the same manner and had created a fiend whose unparalleled barbarity had desolated my heart and filled it forever with the bitterest remorse. I was now about to form another being of whose dispositions I was alike ignorant; she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness. He had sworn to quit the neighbourhood of man and hide himself in deserts, but she had not; and she, who in all probability was to become a thinking and reasoning animal, might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation. They might even

> hate each other; the creature who already lived loathed his own deformity, and might he not conceive a greater abhorrence for it when it came before his eyes in the female form? She also might turn with disgust from him to the superior beauty of man; she might quit him, and he be again alone, exasperated by the fresh provocation of being deserted by one of his own species. Even if they were to leave Europe and inhabit the deserts of the new world, yet one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror. (118-119)

This long passage stands in contrast to the lack of reflection Victor undertakes during his first act of creation. It is not until this moment that he realises the female is likely to be just as individual as the Creature, with her own wants and needs and will. In yet another blow to the Creature, Victor goes on to destroy the female, seeing his obligation to humankind as greater than that he owes his creation. Victor argues,

> Had I right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations? I had before been moved by the sophisms of the being I had created; I had been struck senseless by his fiendish threats; but now, for the first time, the wickedness of my promise burst upon me; I shuddered to think that future ages might curse me as their pest, whose selfishness had not hesitated to buy its own peace at the price, perhaps, of the existence of the whole human race. (118-119)

While it seems Victor is willing to sacrifice his own wellbeing to save humanity, his self-involvement is cemented when the Creature threatens, “I shall be with you on your wedding night” (121). Despite having spent most of his narrative agonising over the safety of his family, he sees this as a personal threat and is more concerned about how bereft Elizabeth will be without him. It is difficult for the modern reader not to wonder at the seeming arrogance of this passage: “The prospect did not move me to fear; yet when I thought of my beloved Elizabeth—of her tears and endless sorrow, when she should find her lover so barbarously snatched from her” (121). When Victor realises the real target on his wedding night, he claims, “I would rather

have banished myself for ever from my native country, and wandered a friendless outcast over the earth, than have consented to this miserable marriage" (137-138). Victor continues: "when I thought that I prepared only for my own death, I hastened that of a far dearer victim" (138). The mirroring of the characters here is twofold. In his appeal for a mate, the Creature promises Victor that he will leave Europe and travel only with the other creature to the wilds of South America. Ironically, both the Creature and Victor end up friendless outcasts as they pursue one another across the frozen north. The mirroring is also present in the Creature's murder of Elizabeth: just as Victor destroyed his intended mate, so too the Creature destroyed Victor's bride. Upon seeing Elizabeth dead, Victor cries, "A fiend had snatched from me every happiness: no creature had ever been so miserable as I was; so frightful an event is single in the history of man" (142). Victor's claim that no event could equal this is untrue; these exact words could easily have been spoken when the Creature observes Victor's destruction of his intended mate.

Victor returns again to his theme of his obligation to humanity: "A thousand times would I have shed my own blood drop by drop, to have saved their lives but I could not, my father, indeed, could not sacrifice the whole human race" (134). The cost of Victor's curiosity is stunningly high—despite the Creature's claim that should Victor create a mate he would retire from the world, Victor chooses his perceived obligation to humankind as greater than his obligation to his own creation. As a consequence, Victor loses everyone he loves, and ultimately his own life. But this was only possible because Victor isolated himself from the moderating voices of his father and the scholars at Ingolstadt who sought to temper and direct his studies. Instead, in what would become the 'mad scientist' trope of science fiction, Victor isolated himself in his garret-lab to "penetrate the recesses of nature" (29). Shelley does not condemn curiosity, but she does offer an indictment of the consequences of unchecked curiosity, suggesting that both community and education can protect against dangerous follies like Victor's.

4.2 A Moral Education

If the pursuit of curiosity through endeavour entails a series of obligations, from whence does this awareness of obligation come? Why does Victor fail in his obligations to his creation, despite receiving an extensive education? The merits of

education are explored throughout the novel, with each of the three narrators recounting their formative experiences. Walton's early reading was limited, as "a history of all the voyages made for purposes of discovery composed the whole of our good uncle Thomas's library. My education was neglected, yet I was passionately fond of reading. These volumes were my study day and night" (8). Like Walton, the Creature receives an opportunistic education, studying that which he finds and hears around him, rather than having a structured course of learning. The Creature stumbles upon an abandoned portmanteau which contains *Paradise Lost,* Plutarch's *Lives,* and the *Sorrows of Werter* (89). From these texts the Creature learns about human nature, values the lessons of the peaceful lawmakers in *Lives* and sees what responsible creators do, as God cares for Adam in *Paradise Lost*.

The lack of structure in the self-directed educations of Walton and the Creature is problematic. While Shelley seems to suggest that this leaves them both with a lack of intellectual discipline, they also seem to be more well-rounded than Victor, whose education was far more directed by his father and M. Waldman. Walton recounts the problems his lack of formal education have afforded him:

> But it is a still greater evil to me that I am self-educated: for the first fourteen years of my life I ran wild on a common, and read nothing but our uncle Thomas's books of voyages. At that age I became acquainted with the celebrated poets of our own country, but it was only when it had ceased to be in my power to derive its most important benefits from such a conviction, that I perceived the necessity of becoming acquainted with more languages than that of my native country. Now I am twenty-eight, and am in reality more illiterate than many school-boys of fifteen. It is true that I have thought more, and that my day dreams are more extended and magnificent; but they want (as the painters call it) keeping—and I greatly need a friend who would have sense enough not to despise me as romantic, and affection enough for me to endeavour to regulate my mind. (10)

This passage seems to associate Walton's reading of voyages, poetry, and foreign languages as "romantic". He immediately follows that he wants someone to "regulate his mind". This suggests that a 'romantic/Romantic' education (which parallels Shelley's reading list) results in a mind that needs regulation; that is, a

romantic education is not a strong foundation for common sense (which at its extreme can extend to morality). Victor's education is less romantic: his modern education includes,

> the mathematics, and most of the branches of study appertaining to that science. I was busily employed in learning languages; Latin was already familiar to me, and I began to read some of the easiest Greek authors without the help of a lexicon. I also perfectly understood English and German. This is the list of my accomplishments at the age of seventeen and you may conceive that my hours were fully employed in acquitting and maintaining a knowledge of this various literature. (24).

Regardless of the form or quality (romantic or not) of education, having an education stifled or misdirected can have dire consequences. This is compounded if the student works in isolation, with no suitable guiding voice, no one to "regulate" the learner's mind.

Walton is disappointed when he learns that the dreams he has built, based on his early readings, cannot become reality, as "my father's dying injunction had forbidden my uncle to allow me to embark in a sea-faring life" (8). Victor experiences a similar paternal injunction when he shows his father his copy of Cornelius Agrippa's work: "My father looked carelessly at the title-page of my book, and said, 'Ah! Cornelius Agrippa! My dear Victor, do not waste your time upon this; it is sad trash'" (22). Both sons defy their fathers, yet Victor blames his father's "careless" response for "the fatal impulse that led to my ruin" (22), as, had his father more thoroughly debunked Agrippa, Victor may have turned to more suitable studies: "the cursory glance my father had taken of my volume by no means assured me that he was acquainted with its contents; and I continued to read with the greatest avidity" (22). This marks the beginning of Victor's turn away from the domestic connections that had shaped his education thus far. In his childhood, Victor's father "devoted Himself to the education of his children" (19) and the children's "studies were never forced; and by some means we always had an end placed in view, which excited us to ardour in the prosecution of them. It was by this method, and not by emulation, that we were urged to application" (21). This seemingly idyllic childhood, which featured indulgent parents and amiable companions (21), breaks down with

the casual dismissal of Agrippa, and is cemented when Elizabeth also shows no interest in Victor's reading: "I was left by her to pursue my studies alone" (23). In his isolation, with no friend or father to guide his reading to more fruitful ground, Victor's "dreams were therefore undisturbed by reality; and I entered with the greatest diligence into the search for the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life" (23). It is not only alchemy that appeals to Victor, as "the raising of ghosts or devils was a promise liberally accorded by my favourite authors, the fulfilment of which I most eagerly sought" (23). Shelley's conflation of the "science" of alchemy and the supernatural shows how misguided Victor's autodidactic approach is; despite being told that alchemists were more like magicians or sorcerers than modern scientists, he attempts to use modern methods to achieve "magic".

Victor's father does achieve the overthrow of Agrippa when he performs Benjamin Franklin's kite and key experiment before a wondering Victor, who had, after seeing a lightening-blasted tree, inquired of his "father the nature and origin of thunder" (24). However, this is undone when his father sends him to a lecture series on natural philosophy:

> The professor discoursed with the greatest fluency of potassium and boron, of sulphates and oxyds, terms to which I could affix no idea; and I became disgusted with the science of natural philosophy, although I still read Pliny and Buffon with delight, authors, in my estimation, of nearly equal interest and utility. (24)

Victor's turn to Pliny and Buffon, and another missed opportunity to study the emerging science of chemistry, suggests his education at the hands of his father has been a failure. Instead of joining the contemporary academic debate about the sciences, Victor, isolated, pursues an arcane, semi-mystical course of learning. His father, and father-figures at Ingolstadt, fail to guide Victor into contemporary debates and so his education is misdirected and incomplete. Victor's treatment of his creature is a reflection of this; his failure to care for and educate his creation results in the Creature literally wandering through the wilderness to discover what it is to be human.

As a counterpoint to the close ministrations of Victor's father in his education, Clerval's father wishes to deny him an education all together, preferring

him to immediately enter the world of business. Yet Clerval's father finally relents: "But his affection for me at length overcame his dislike of learning, and he has permitted me to undertake a voyage of discovery to the land of knowledge" (38). Just as Walton rejoices as he prepares for his journey north, so too Clerval relishes his experiences as a student:

> The delight of Clerval was proportionally greater than mine; his mind expanded in the company of men of talent, and he found in his own nature greater capacities and resources than he could have imagined himself to have possessed while he associated with his inferiors. (115)

Clerval blossoms as he is educated amongst like-minded men, whereas the results of Victor's isolated study is misery and death. Unsurprising, the opportunities for women are even fewer, as suggested by Elizabeth's response to Victor's supposed study tour of England: "Elizabeth approved of the reasons of my departure, and only regretted that she had not the same opportunities of enlarging her experience, and cultivating her understanding" (110). All of Shelley's characters have their education limited in some way, either through a failing to have it properly guided, or the restrictions of a father or gender. Perhaps Shelley is suggesting that no education can be complete and therefore education is not essential to a good moral grounding.

Shelley devotes a significant section of each narrator's time to these accounts of their education. The Creature, the most self-educated of all the characters, values justice and care, and while he commits horrendous crimes, does so knowingly breaking the ideals which he has come to value. Walton is lured by adventure, yet uses his education to serve and protect those that accompany him. Victor in contrast, receives a comprehensive education yet seems to miss the vital lesson that Walton and the Creature have both learned: that care and community are essential to wellbeing and success. Victor, while aiming to conquer death for the good of all mankind, sees this as a personal and individual challenge, something that will bring him glory. His concern is only for his immediate circle and he does not show the care he should for the creature to which he gave life. There is no equation of a formal education with being a morally superior person.

4.3 FRATERNITY AND FAMILY

If a good education does not necessarily entail a strong moral framework, what can? I argue that Shelley sees intellectual endeavour as only being beneficial if done amongst and for community. Walton studies topics of interest with great zeal: he "voluntarily endured cold, famine, thirst, and want of sleep; I often worked harder than the common sailors during the day, and devoted my nights to the study of mathematics, the theory of medicine, and those branches of physical science from which a naval adventurer might derive the greatest practical advantage" (8-9). Walton's efforts are akin to Victor's, as both suffer privations as they strive to master new knowledge. Victor is "so ardent and eager, that the stars often disappeared in the light of morning whilst I was yet engaged in my laboratory" (30). However, the two accounts differ in that Walton's studies are of practical benefit to his goal of safely navigating a crew through the north-west passage, while Victor's result in illness and isolation.

Walton clearly outlines the benefit of having human connections as he laments his lack of a friend of equal standing on his voyage:

> But I have one want which I have never yet been able to satisfy and the absence of the object of which I now feel as a most severe evil. I have no friend, Margaret: when I am glowing with the enthusiasm of success, there will be none to participate my joy; if I am assailed by disappointment, no one will endeavour to sustain me in dejection. I shall commit my thoughts to paper, it is true; but that is a poor medium for the communication of feeling. I desire the company of a man who could sympathize with me; whose eyes would reply to mine. You may deem me romantic my dear sister, but I bitterly feel the want of a friend. I have no one near me, gentle yet courageous, possessed of a cultivated as well as of capacious mind, whose tastes are like my own, to approve or amend my plans. How would such a friend repair the faults of your poor brother! I am too ardent in execution, and too impatient of difficulties. (10)

Walton describes the absence of a friend to "approve or amend" his plans as "a most severe evil". This impact of not having this moderating voice of friendship, which

may “repair the faults” of Margaret’s poor brother, is seen in Victor’s narrative, where there are none to intercede and question the wisdom of his actions. Walton’s wish for a friend and appreciation of the value of community is reflected in the care he shows for his crew and himself. While he acknowledges the dangers of his voyage, he reassures Margaret that she knows him “sufficiently to confide in my prudence and considerateness whenever the safety of others is committed to my care” (12). He will not “rashly encounter danger. I will be cool, persevering and prudent” (13). Walton recognises his obligation to the crew to keep them safe. While throughout the novel Victor often frets about the safety of his family, he does little to remain “cool” or “prudent” in his decision-making. This lack of regard for the wellbeing of others, should it stand in the path of his intent, is clear from his first introduction in the novel, where, upon being discovered languishing on the sea ice, he asks Walton, “will you have the kindness to inform me whither you are bound?” (14). Walton reacts with incredulity that Victor would not welcome being rescued: “You may conceive my astonishment on hearing such a question addressed to me from a man on the brink of destruction, and to whom I should have supposed that my vessel would have been a resource which he would not have exchanged for the most precious wealth the earth can afford” (10). In this exchange, Victor’s relentless focus on his goal, at the cost of others’ wellbeing and potentially his own life is established, as is Walton’s contrasting inclination towards building human connections. Despite this inauspicious start to their brief relationship, Walton is effusive in his joy at having found the friendship and connection he so craved as he commenced his journey: “I said in one of my letters, my dear Margaret, that I should no friend on the wide ocean; yet I have found a man who, before his spirit had been broken by misery, I should have been happy to have possessed as the brother of my heart” (16).

Like Walton, the Creature longs for a friend: companionship. In a Godwinian passage, the Creature explains how he came to learn of human society:

> For a long time I could not conceive how one man could go forth to murder his fellow, or even why there were laws and governments; but when I heard details of vice and bloodshed, my wonder ceased, and I turned away with disgust and loathing. Every conversation of the cottagers now opened new wonders to me. While I listened to the instructions which Felix bestowed

> upon the Arabian, the strange system of human society was explained to me. I heard of the division of property, of immense wealth and squalid poverty; of rank, descent, and noble blood. The words induced me to turn towards myself. I learned that the possessions most esteemed by your fellow-creatures were, high and unsullied descent united with riches. A man might be respected with only one of these acquisitions; but without either he was considered, except in very rare instances, as a vagabond and a slave, doomed to waste his powers for the profit of the chosen few. (83)

The opening of this passage reveals the Creature's natural state, one disinclined to violence, as when he hears about why laws are needed to prevent "vice and bloodshed", he feels disgusted. Like Godwin, who believed that wealth should be shared (Godwin, *Political Justice*, 484) the Creature is bemused by the respect given to those of noble birth who have great wealth, which leaves others in "squalid poverty". The Creature does not become didactic, but this passage does suggest Shelley's interest in and concern for the structures of society and reflects some Godwinian ideals. The Creature then reflects on his place within this structure:

> And what was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant; but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property—I was, besides, endowed with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; I was not even of the same nature as man. I was more agile than they, and could subsist upon coarser diet; I bore the extremes of heat and cold with less injury to my frame; my stature far exceeded theirs. When I looked around, I saw and heard of none like me. Was I then a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled, and whom all men disowned? (83)

He does not know from whence he is descended and has none of the things valued by society.

Unlike Victor, who possesses these things and despite having isolated himself can return to society and be warmly welcomed, the Creature is truly and utterly isolated because he has nothing to make him endearing, except his acts of kindness, performed under the cover of darkness. In this scene, the Creature repeatedly refers to himself as a monster, yet as Shelley poignantly shows, he is not

monstrous by nature, but made monstrous through rejection both by individuals and society at large. His actions become monstrous when he seeks to impose a similar isolation upon his creator, killing those around Victor so he no longer feels safe sharing and connecting with his loved ones.

The Creature at this moment is also an intertextual mirror, closely aligning with the experience of Godwin's title character in *Caleb Williams*. As explored more fully in Chapter Five, Caleb is driven from society into the rural environment by his more educated and higher-class benefactor. Just as the Creature is forced into isolation and ultimately criminality, so too is Caleb driven to desperation by his master's desire to keep his secret misdeeds hidden. Yet unlike Caleb, who strives to do what is right throughout Godwin's novel despite the huge toll this takes, the Creature comes to see his murderous acts as justified. The Creature's final rejection of the inherently good nature which he first possessed is completed in Victor's act of destruction. The Creature frames the injury Victor does him in terms of a loss of connection with others:

> "Shall each man," cried he, "find a wife for his bosom, and each beast have his mate, and I be alone? I had feelings of affection, and they were requited by detestation and scorn. Man! You may hate, but beware! Your hours will pass in dread and misery, and soon the bolt will fall which must ravish from you your happiness forever. Are you to be happy while I grovel in the intensity of my wretchedness? You can blast my other passions, but revenge remains—revenge, henceforth dearer than light or food! I may die, but first you, my tyrant and tormentor, shall curse the sun that gazes on your misery. Beware, for I am fearless and therefore powerful. I will watch with the wiliness of a snake, that I may sting with its venom. Man, you shall repent of the injuries you inflict." (120-121)

Here the Creature suggests he is at the mercy of Victor, who is now both "tyrant and tormentor". The Creature also refers to himself as a slave at the close of the novel. In another Miltonic passage, he states, "I knew that I was preparing for myself a deadly torture; but I was the slave, not the master of an impulse, which I detested, yet could not disobey. Yet when she died!—nay, then I was not miserable. I had cast off feeling, subdued all anguish to riot in the excess of my despair. Evil thenceforth

became my good" (159) This turn away from what he knows to be right and the suggestion that the Creature is slave to Victor's powers (just as Satan is still bound by God's powers) is reversed and distorted, as Victor positions himself as a slave subject to the Creature's superior strength.

The Creature's education, his care for the cottagers and similarly Walton's concern for his crew, all highlight that the development of community, of human connection, is really about obligation to do what is right by one another. When this obligation is forced rather than voluntary, the relationship is no longer of two people in community, but of master and slave. Victor portrays himself as a slave of the Creature's desire for a mate. Victor wishes that, "some accident might occur to destroy him, and put an end to my slavery for ever" (107). Victor feels bound to do as the Creature wishes as he fears what the Creature will do to his family. He refers to this as "the whole period during which I was the slave of my creature" (109). This sense of forced obligation is further established with the use of "promise" and "free" as Victor departs for England, he "resolved to fulfil my promise while abroad, and return, if possible, a free man" (110). Throughout his journey, Victor feels the weight of his obligation to the Creature again drawing on the imagery of a master/slave relationship:

> We visited the tomb of the illustrious Hampden, and the field on which that patriot fell. For a moment my soul was elevated from its debasing and miserable fears to contemplate the divine ideas of liberty and self-sacrifice, of which these sights were the monuments and the remembrances. For an instant I dared to shake off my chains, and look around me with free and lofty spirit; but the iron had eaten into my flesh, and I sank again, trembling and hopeless, into my miserable self. (115)

The "chains" which weigh down Victor's spirits are so burdensome that "the iron had eaten into my flesh". The irony of this is that while his soul reflects upon the "divine ideas of liberty and self-sacrifice" he cannot see that these are the ideals he is duty-bound by the act of creation to perform for his creature. The Creature should not need to force his compliance. Victor is blind to the moral crime he has committed in casting out his creature into a world where it is impossible for him to experience genuine friendship or community. He says, "I felt as if I had committed

some crime, the consciousness of which haunted me. I was guiltless, but I had had indeed drawn down a horrible curse upon my head, as mortal that of crime" (116). Just as Victor seems to be about to atone for his neglect by creating a companion for the Creature, he instead destroys his work. The Creature berates him: "Slave, I before reasoned with you, but you have proved yourself unworthy of my condescension. Remember that I have power; you believe yourself miserable, but I can make you so wretched that the light of day will be hateful to you. You are my creator, but I am your master; obey!" (120). The Creature's assertion that his physical (and perhaps by this time, moral) mastery trumps Victor's negligent act of creation further highlights the obligation Victor owes the Creature. This language reinforces the idea that obligations should be met willingly; Victor and the Creature are both enslaved to one another because of their failure to meet their obligations. Had Victor discharged his obligation to his Creation, he would not owe the Creature anything and so be 'free'.

4.4 A Moral Dilemma: Who is to Blame?

Ultimately, *Frankenstein* gives readers the opportunity to explore the question of who should be held responsible when science goes awry. Blame cannot be laid at God's feet, but is it the hubristic scientist, the community that fostered him, failings in his education, his lack of connection with others, or indeed is it even perhaps his creation who is to blame? What if he had been less monstrous in appearance? Would he still have been the same character if given an education by Victor? Shelley's novel suggests both all and none of these factors are to blame for the tragic outcome of Victor's experiments, and that each character has a degree of responsibility (and guilt) for their part in the tragedy. One's conscience is fundamental in shaping a sense of responsibility and feelings of guilt. Victor, in describing his own childhood, suggests his parents provided an idyllic and ideal role-modelling of parental responsibility:

> their child, the innocent and helpless creature bestowed on them by heaven, whom to bring up to good, and whose future lot it was in their hands to direct to happiness or misery, according as they fulfilled their duties towards me. With this deep consciousness of what they owed towards the being to which

> they had given life, added to the active spirit of tenderness that animated both, it may be imagined that while during every hour of my infant life I received a lesson of patience, of charity, and of self-control. (42)

Despite this upbringing, Victor fails to mirror or imitate his parents, not developing the "deep consciousness of what they owed towards the being to which they had given life" that his parents recognised.

The Creature calls upon this sense of conscience to no effect: "Listen to me, Frankenstein. You accuse me of murder, and yet you would, with a satisfied conscience, destroy your own creature" (69). Victor does eventually recognise he has a degree of responsibility for the Creature, and admits to feeling guilt. After Justine dies, Victor reiterates that he acted with nothing but the best intentions:

> Yet my heart overflowed with kindness, and the love of virtue. I had begun life with benevolent intentions, and thirsted for the moment when I should put them in practice, and make myself useful to my fellow-beings. Now all was blasted: instead of that serenity of conscience, which allowed me to look back upon the past with self-satisfaction, and from thence to gather promise of new hopes, I was seized by remorse and the sense of guilt. (61)

He does acknowledge feeling guilty, but this seems fleeting or insincere, as he later claims in his act of creation he was "guiltless" (116). After the death of Clerval, while imprisoned awaiting trial, Victor muses, "At one time I considered whether I should not declare myself guilty and suffer the penalty of the law, less innocent than poor Justine had been" (129). Still, he does not in fact do so, even when the woman sent to care for him outlines her belief in his guilt, yet discharges her duty: "I am sent to nurse you and get you well; I do my duty with a safe conscience; it were well if everybody did the same" (128). Here, in another subtle mirroring, the woman suggests that conscience rests easy when obligations are met, and they should be met, even to those we despise—even as Victor despises his creature, this does not abdicate his moral responsibility. Victor acknowledges feeling some degree of responsibility for Clerval's death, but this does not translate into a confession or acceptance of guilt:

> I remember, as I quitted the prison, I heard one of the men say, "He may be innocent of the murder, but he has certainly a bad conscience." These words struck me. A bad conscience! Yes, surely I had one. William, Justine, and Clerval, had died through my infernal machinations. (132)

His "surely" here seems as much an attempt to convince himself of the possibility that he has something for which to be guilty than it does a definitive admission of the same.

These passages suggest that Victor recognised that he, through his failure to meet the obligations he has to the Creature, is to a degree responsible for the Creature's subsequent actions. The theme of conscience is mirrored in a number of other characters. Justine's mother believes all of her children's deaths except Justine were "a judgement from heaven to chastise her partiality" (42). Just like Victor, Justine's mother showed contempt for her offspring and so was punished. The Creature too offers a suggestion that conscience should shape action. Walton accuses the Creature of acting without conscience: "'Your repentance,' I said, 'is now superfluous. If you had listened to the voice of conscience and heeded the stings of remorse before you had urged your diabolical vengeance to this extremity, Frankenstein would yet have lived'" (158). The creature responds in a way that shows he has a conscience and feels guilt: "Do you think that I was then dead to agony and remorse?" (158). Again the Creature mirrors Victor, however his regret is more extensive, he does not seek to shift blame, recognising that while he felt driven to act by others, he is ultimately guilty of the acts he has committed.

Victor equivocates this responsibility or guilt, seeing himself as a victim, rather than the root cause of all his losses. Victor suggests his personal losses make him martyr-like:

> I trembled with excess of agitation as I said this; there was a phrenzy [sic] in my manner, and something, I doubt not, of that haughty fierceness, which the martyrs of old are said to have possessed. But to a Genevan magistrate, whose mind was occupied by far other ideas than those of devotion and heroism, this elevation of mind had much the appearance of madness. (144)

The idea that Victor is a tragic fallen hero, a victim of circumstance, is reiterated when Walton mourns Victor in a Miltonesque way: “What a glorious creature must he have been in the days of his prosperity when he is thus noble and godlike in ruin. He seems to feel his own worth, and the greatness of his fall” (152). Walton’s favourable view of Victor as a victim is also evident in his remonstration of the Creature:

> “Wretch! ... It is well that you come here to whine over the desolation that you have made. You throw a torch into a pile of buildings, and when they are consumed you sit among the ruins, and lament the fall. Hypocritical fiend! If he whom you mourn still lived, still would he be the object, again would he become the prey of your accursed vengeance. It is not pity that you feel; you lament only because the victim of your malignity is withdrawn from your power”. “Oh, it is not thus-not thus”, interrupted the being. (159)

Walton’s comments are another example of the distorted mirroring that exists between the characters. Victor too spends long passages of the novel “whin[ing] over the desolation that [he] has made”. Like the Creature, who threw a torch into the DeLacey’s home, Victor’s failure to be responsible for his act of creation is a torch he throws into his own life, where he then “sits among the ruins” and laments the fall of those he loves and his hopes for fame and glory. What both the Creature and Victor fail to recognise is that they are both responsible and both guilty of crimes against one another.

Just as Victor equivocates his responsibility, so too the Creature sees himself as not entirely to blame, driven to his wicked deeds by the treatment he received at the hands of others:

> Still I desired love and fellowship, and I was still spurned. Was there no injustice in this? Am I to be thought the only criminal, when all human kind sinned against me? Why do you not hate Felix, who drove his friend from his door with contumely? Why do you not execrate the rustic who sought to destroy the saviour of his child? Nay, these are virtuous and immaculate beings! I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on. Even now my blood boils at the recollection of

> this injustice. "But it is true that I am a wretch. I have murdered the lovely and the helpless; I have strangled the innocent as they slept, and grasped to death his throat who never injured me or any other living thing". (160)

This is in a way another mirroring, as the Creature blames others for his poor treatment of Victor but also leaves it to the reader to decide if his argument is reasonable. The Creature equivocates his decision to murder those close to Victor, saying he was driven to act, against his better nature, as a result of the injustices he has suffered. Walton also reflects both the Creature and Victor at the close of the novel, as he shares the Creature's sense of unbearable injustice, that the actions of others should compromise his hopes, and he has Victor's implacable drive to see his efforts to fruition:

> How all this will terminate, I know not, but I had rather die than return shamefully, my purpose unfulfilled. Yet I fear such will be my fate; the men, unsupported by ideas of glory and honour, can never willingly continue to endure their present hardships…. The die is cast; I have consented to return if we are not destroyed. Thus are my hopes blasted by cowardice and indecision; I come back ignorant and disappointed. It requires more philosophy than I possess to bear this injustice with patience. (155)

While Walton reflects these aspects of the other narrators, he differs in that, while infuriated and disappointed, he nonetheless consents to return. This reveals a key difference in that Walton acts upon his obligation to others, over his personal agenda.

Shelley's rendering of the Creature's desire for connection and Victor's self-pitying and dangerous isolation bring into question the monstrosity of being alone. Despite being denied community and companionship from inception, the Creature seems to be more feeling, more 'soulful' than Victor, who has every opportunity to develop as a good, moral person. Yet Victor chooses isolation. After the death of Justine, consumed with guilt, Victor turns further inward: "I shunned the face of man; all sound of joy or complacency was torture to me; solitude was my only consolation—deep, dark, death-like solitude" (61). Despite the Creature's unnatural origins, he seems to be imbued with more natural goodness than Victor. This hints at

the conception of a soul. The Creature's actions only become monstrous when he abandons his natural inclination to goodness, perhaps suggesting that to abandon the natural, right, or just inclinations of the inherent soul is to abandon our obligations to mankind, and so too abandon any hope of being in community. This is seen in Victor as well, as his soul is 'blasted' and he becomes more isolated, he fails his obligations and has his right to community taken from him by the Creature.

4.5 The Bolt: Fusions and Fractures

Like many other Romantic authors, landscape and nature are a feature in Shelley's work. Shelley does not often dwell on description of urban or domestic settings, but gives a great deal of time to the remote and rugged natural landscapes that inspire and influence her characters. This is another distorted mirroring, as different characters respond in different ways to the landscapes in which they find themselves. Many of the key events in the narrative occur in sublime, remote landscapes, and it is often in these moments, immersed in the natural world, that the characters reflect upon their human nature (or soul). Shelley fuses imagery of the natural world with ideas about what it is to be human, and shows her readers how easily human nature can be fractured. Victor captures this idea when he refers to himself as, "a blasted tree; the bolt has entered my soul; and I felt then that I should survive to exhibit, what I shall soon cease to be—a miserable spectacle of wrecked humanity, pitiable to others, and abhorrent to myself" (114-115). This passage brings together a number of important elements: the use of natural imagery in *Frankenstein* and the conception of a soul (as a natural phenomenon).

The barren Arctic frames the whole novel, as it is here that Victor is rescued by Walton from the sea ice and can relate his tale and that of the Creature. For Walton, these icy climes carry a "wind of promise" (7) and "present itself to [his] imagination as a region of beauty and delight" (7), and the Creature feels at home as he does not feel cold as most humans do (147). For Victor, however, the Arctic is a wasteland that must be overcome in pursuit of the Creature. Yet he is not unaffected by the region's beauty:

> Even broken in spirit as he is, no one can feel more deeply than he does the beauties of nature. The starry sky, the sea, and every sight afforded by these

> wonderful regions seem still to have the power of elevating his soul from earth. (17)

Yet Victor contradicts Walton's praise of his sensitivity when he describes his journey across the Arctic as "destructive and endless … across the mountainous ices of the ocean,—amidst cold that few of the inhabitants could long endure, and which I, the native of a genial and sunny climate, could not hope to survive" (149). Victor is also unable to appreciate the beauty of the rugged landscape of Scotland, which reminds him of Switzerland: "I could now almost fancy myself among the Swiss mountains. The little patches of snow which yet lingered on the northern sides of the mountains, the lakes, and the dashing of the rocky streams" (115). Clerval revels in this landscape, and in the company he keeps: "'I could pass my life here', said he to me; 'and among these mountains I should scarcely regret Switzerland and the Rhine'" (115). Instead of staying with his friend and their new acquaintances in this setting, Victor retreats to an isolated island to create a mate for the Creature. This island is "hardly more than a rock, whose high sides are continually beaten upon by the waves. The soil was barren" (117). The juxtaposition of such a barren, lifeless landscape being the place where Victor seeks to create life suggests his actions are futile. The animals and residents of the island are described as "miserable", "gaunt and scraggly", and "benumbed" (117). This does not bode well for the life which Victor plans to create, and which he ultimately destroys.

Another key setting is the Valley of Chamonix and the towering Mont Blanc, where Victor and the Creature meet upon Mer de Glace. The valley is

> wonderful and sublime…The high and snowy mountains were its immediate boundaries, but we saw no more ruined castles and fertile fields. Immense glaciers approached the road; we heard the rumbling thunder of the falling avelanche [sic], and marked the smoke of its passage. Mont Blanc, the supreme and magnificent Mont Blanc, raised itself from the surrounding *aiguilles*, and its tremendous *dome* overlooked the valley. (64-65)

This sublime setting has a positive effect on Victor, affording him "the greatest consolation that [he] was capable of receiving. They elevated [him] from all littleness of feeling; and although it did not remove [his] grief, they subdued and

tranquilised it" (65). As he ascends the mountain, he describes the scene as "terrifically desolate" and "sombre" (64). The view from the glacier towards Montanvert is one of "awful majesty", a "wonderful and stupendous scene" (65). As a result, Victor's heart, "which was before sorrowful, now swelled with something like joy" (65). The restorative, positive experiences of being immersed in a sublime landscape are snatched from Victor when he sees his creature approaching across the ice. This juxtaposition of the Creature's unnatural appearance amongst such natural beauty is jarring and Victor is overcome with hatred. Adam Roberts argues that such jarring juxtapositions are characteristic of the novel's account of the extreme otherness of the sublime:

> The extremities of experience in the novel, the extreme violence, the extreme fear, are Gothic attempts at sublimity, at articulating a state of being other than the ordinary. The polar landscapes of the novel's conclusion are the apotheosis of this. The narrator encounters both Frankenstein and his monstrous creation in an environment as far removed from the sorts of environment we are used to as it is possible to find on the surface of this planet. (Roberts 58)

Aiden Day reaffirms this idea of sublime landscapes being both elevating and alienating.

> There is also a connection between Mary Shelley's representation of unregulated imagination and her representation of nature … Shelley invokes Romantic treatments of the sublime as that which exceed formulation and representation, that which signifies transcendence. And she places Frankenstein's monster—as the grotesque objectification of the self's own sublime potential—within this awesome, typically Romantic landscape. Instead of being celebrated, however, the more-than-human, the sublime, is here portrayed as inimical to the human, as dangerously inhuman. (Day 146)

The binary of natural/unnatural is another point of fragmentation in the novel. The natural world offers a transcendent experience to those like Walton and Clerval whose souls are not troubled. Yet while Victor can see and briefly appreciate these

sublime scenes, his act of unnatural creation means his troubled soul cannot find comfort in nature. This question of soul is particularly poignant for the Creature, as unlike all mankind, who are assured of a soul by God, the Creature's creator might have been able to animate his frame, but did he provide a soul? This supports Day's view that in the novel,

> individual subjectivity and nature are, moreover, transcendentalised: they are attributed a spiritual dimension that is greater than the merely individual and the material. Nature is important insofar as it manifests the same transcendental energy as informs the human mind and at the same time provides an objective, material barrier that allows the individual subject to recognise transcendence without being overwhelmed by it. (40)

For Walton, poetry is another force, like nature, that can lift his soul "to heaven" (8). Victor, however, is consumed "heart and soul in one pursuit. It was a most beautiful season … but my eyes were insensible to the charms of nature … [and] caused me also to forget those friends" (34). In abandoning the right or natural structure of community, companionship and the natural world, Victor's soul is corrupted by his single-minded pursuit. The impact upon Victor's soul is further emphasised with the addition of the following in the 1831 edition: "Thus not the tenderness of friendship, nor the beauty of earth, nor of heaven, could redeem my soul from woe; the very accents of love were ineffectual" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1831] 89). Victor's soul is destroyed by being isolated from all that is good, natural, and right.

This mirrors the Creature's recognition of the impact of being totally isolated: "Believe me, Frankenstein, I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity; but am I not alone, miserably alone?" (68). The Creature's natural state is one of love and benevolence, but, isolated, he acts against his nature. In the 1831 edition, Victor rebuts the Creature's self-representation as having a soul that is inherently good, saying that in the Creature he "had endued with the mockery of a soul still more monstrous" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1831] 158). He warns Walton that the Creature's "soul is as hellish as his form, full of treachery and fiend-like malice" (150). Yet the Creature's own narrative rejects this idea that his soul is as unnatural as his body. His wonder as he encounters nature, desire for connection, kindness to the DeLaceys and rescue of the drowning child all suggest he is

inherently good, but his soul is corrupted by the evils perpetrated against him. The Creature here stands in stark contrast to Victor, whose circumstances should have fostered a good soul, yet he cuts himself off from all that is natural and good, thereby triggering his own downfall.

Shelley's other use of natural imagery is that of storms. Roseanne Montillo highlights that storms are an important part of Shelley's own personal story, having been born during a storm, the summer *Frankenstein* was conceived being wracked by storms, and after the novel's publication, losing Percy in a boating accident during a storm. In the novel, Victor's interest in galvanism is sparked by witnessing a powerful lightning strike:

> When I was about fifteen years old we had retired to our house near Belrive, when we witnessed a most violent and terrible thunderstorm. It advanced from behind the mountains of Jura, and the thunder burst at once with frightful loudness from various quarters of the heavens. I remained, while the storm lasted, watching its progress with curiosity and delight. As I stood at the door, on a sudden I beheld a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak which stood about twenty yards from our house; and so soon as the dazzling light vanished, the oak had disappeared, and nothing remained but a blasted stump. When we visited it the next morning, we found the tree shattered in a singular manner. It was not splintered by the shock, but entirely reduced to thin ribbons of wood. I never beheld anything so utterly destroyed. (23)

Victor's problematic curiosity is stirred by witnessing nature's destructive power. The oak that is struck by lightning is not merely "splintered" but "utterly destroyed". This catastrophic fracturing is a stark contrast to the fusion Victor achieves when he bestows the "spark of being" upon his creature, which, unlike in many film adaptations, is not achieved through a lightning strike, although it is a "dreary night" and raining (35). The choice of this "spark" provides a stark link to both the scientific study of electricity and also the notion of the divine spark or soul.

Nature is again disturbed by storms on the night Victor realises it is the Creature who is responsible for William's death. The storm, which was "beautiful yet terrific … elevated [Victor's] spirits" (50). However, this is short-lived as a flash

of lightning reveals the Creature following Victor, and at this same moment Victor is struck by the insight that the Creature is “the murderer of my brother? No sooner did that idea cross my imagination, than I became convinced of its truth” (50). Nature here both reveals the Creature’s presence and his murderous act. Victor suffers another loss during a storm; as he and Elizabeth arrive at the inn after their wedding, “a heavy storm of rain descended” (140). As Victor patrols the inn, the Creature enters their room and kills Elizabeth, then, “with the swiftness of lightning” (141), escapes. Victor has disturbed nature in creating the Creature, and it seems that when the Creature acts malevolently, nature mirrors his anger. These storms also represent the disruption caused in Victor’s life; each one marks another blow to his chances of peace and happiness.

Storms and lightning are nature’s power made manifest, and they occur at moments of revelation for Victor. The use of lightning in the novel can be read as a metaphor—the “vital fluid” of Galvinist science which descends from the Heavens. This fusion of storms as a demonstration of both the power of God’s natural world and the potential for man to harness this power for themselves. The secrets of the spark of the divine are being uncovered by science. Victor is a “blasted tree”—he is struck by the scientific insight to uncover the most divine of mysteries, the secret of life, yet he is “blasted”, reduced to “ribbons of wood”, a shattered and ruined thing, as a result of his attempts to harness nature’s power. Shelley’s representation of the moral and ethical responsibilities that bind a society together is an organic one. Each character in her narrative is tied to others by bonds of family, responsibility, or a sense of community. How they respond to the pull of these ties varies, and it is these competing tensions that cause the distortion or fragmented mirroring in the characters’ behaviours. Like lightning that both fuses and fractures, Shelley’s *Frankenstein* brought together ideas from a range of discourses and shaped them into something new, with an ending that allows the reader to reach their own varied, fractured responses.

Chapter Five
Influence, Inspiration, and Innovation

Having considered how *Frankenstein* creates a new space for moralising by presenting the reader with a fractured multiplicity of meaning in the close reading, what remains is to demonstrate how the novel does this by drawing upon existing discourses inasmuch as they are expressed through other books. In keeping with the account of the relationship of culture to society, it is no surprise to find that the books to which Shelley is most indebted are those to which she was exposed through her familial and social circles. In addition to considering the impact of her parents, Percy, and others on Shelley's thinking, as personal influences, the writings of the many authors to whose works she was introduced through these connections helped to shape Shelley as a reader and as an author. Dennis R. Perry argues that "intertextuality is the very seed of Mary Shelley's novel. Like Frankenstein, she is an adapter, sewing together parts from older texts like the Prometheus myth, *Paradise Lost*, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Faust and *Caleb Williams*" (138). Perry also follows Jerrold Hogle's observation that each of the characters in *Frankenstein* "root their stories in previous texts … in a sense, each of these narrators' lives is an intertextual adaptation from the parts of other lives, books and ideas" (138). Shelley's use of intertextuality is clear in her works, and can be traced in the extensive reading lists kept by both Shelley and Percy throughout their relationship and in the many direct and indirect references she makes. It is also clear in the many experiments with form and genre Shelley undertakes, as she hones her craft as an author. Yet Shelley was not a passive lump of clay, moulded by others; rather, she took up the ideas, arguments and imaginings of her time and created something new. Her innovation, I argue, is the discursive space that underpins the genre she is widely credited with founding: science fiction.

5.1 A Father's Influence: *Caleb Williams*

The most obvious and earliest influence upon Shelley in her youth was her father, William Godwin. Their personal relationship was explored Chapter Two: Place, Time and Personality, but Godwin was also an important influence upon Shelley's

writing. Shelley dedicates the novel to her father, "William Godwin, Author of *Political Justice, Caleb Williams* etc" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 4). This shows both her esteem for her father, despite their troubled relationship, and also links to the political and social ideals explored in Godwin's work. Some view *Frankenstein* as derivative, both from Godwin's thinking and the Gothic genre, however, as Christopher Small argues,

> the real point is less a question of identifying precise derivations—in a work bringing together so many diverse threads, at second and first hand, it is hardly possible to name any one as pre-eminent or original – than of observing parallels and resemblances which must have been apparent to Mary herself. It would probably be truer to find in … Mary's creations, a common debt to Godwin and beyond Godwin, to an 'intellectual climate' impossible to particularise. (99)

The "intellectual climate" of Shelley's world was one of great diversity and change, as new ideas rose and fell in popularity. As was discussed in full in the contextual biography in Chapter Two, one persistent thread was a greater concern for individual rights and an interest in political reform. These were topics both Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft explored in their philosophical writing and, for Godwin, in his fiction. These were topics of interest to Shelley and are manifest in her own writing. She explored her views not only in *Frankenstein* but in her later works, most notably, *The Last Man.*

Godwin's 1794 novel *Caleb Williams* has several points of ideological and narrative similarity to *Frankenstein*. The most obvious of these is the motivation of the protagonists: both Victor and Caleb are driven by the pursuit of knowledge above all else. Caleb states,

> The spring of action which, perhaps more than any other, characterised the whole train of my life, was curiosity. It was this that gave me my mechanical turn; I was desirous of tracing the variety of effects which might be produced from given causes. It was this that made me a sort of natural philosopher; I could not rest till I had acquainted myself with the solutions that had been invented for phenomena of the universe. (Godwin, *Caleb Williams* 6)

Shelley's Victor shares this same "curiosity" to explore the "phenomena of the universe". His aim is not wealth "but what glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 23). His lofty goal is driven by a desire to discover the secrets of life and death itself. This is further reinforced by the character of Walton who, like Caleb, aims to "satiate my ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of the world never before visited, and may tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man. These are my enticements, and they are sufficient to conquer all fear of danger or death" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 7). While Caleb's pursuits are not as scientific as Victor's or Walton's, it is clear that both Godwin and Shelley recognise the human impulse to know, which was being played out in the new sciences of the Enlightenment and Romantic eras, and both explore the dangers of this in their narratives. For Caleb, sharing his knowledge of Falkland's crime leaves him feeling remorse. Victor's knowledge results in the death of everyone he loves. Walton abandons his quest, but with great reluctance and regret. In all instances, it is the goal and glory that drive these characters, and none of them (except perhaps Walton) give deep or reflective though to the consequences their pursuit of knowledge and truth may entail. Caleb believed in exposing Falkland his life would return to normal, but he is instead devastated. Victor attains his goal of bestowing life but then does not take the appropriate degree of responsibility for his creature, resulting in tragedy. Walton, although bitterly disappointed, does recognise the danger he has put his crew in when they threaten mutiny, and abandons his quest. In these characters, it is clear both Godwin and Shelley suggest that the pursuit of knowledge, discovery and glory can be fraught with unseen consequences and the price of the wrong decision can be incredibly high.

Protagonist motivation is not the only shared feature of Godwin and Shelley's novels. In accordance with the popular thinking of the time, physical characteristics were often linked to personality. This pseudoscience of physiognomy was popular throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and Godwin was initially an adherent. He was interested in the associated practice of phrenology, where personality is predicted based on facial features and head shape. He had the infant Shelley read by William Nicholson at three weeks of age (Seymour 31), and he had a reading himself in 1820 (Bennett 10). The relationship between physical

characteristics and personality was also explored in Godwin's fiction. In *Caleb Williams* the character of Grimes is described thus: "His complexion was scarcely human; his features were coarse, and strangely discordant and disjointed from each other. His lips were thick, and the tone of his voice broad unmodulated. His legs were of equal size from one end to the other and his feet misshapen and clumsy" (Godwin, *Caleb Williams* 50). This unappealing physical appearance is paired with a personality that is "in an inconceivable degree boorish and uncouth … He had nothing spiteful or vicious in his disposition, but he was a total stranger to tenderness; he could not feel for those refinements in others, of which he had no experience in himself" (Godwin, *Caleb Williams* 50). Grimes's "scarcely human" physical appearance is akin to Shelley's misshapen Creature:

> His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips. (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 35)

In terms of personality, however, Shelley reverses the thinking of her father. Godwin's portrayal of Grimes suggests his coarse appearance is a result of his coarse personality, in line with the tenets of physiognomy. In contrast to this, Shelley's Creature is initially innocent, finding pleasure in the natural world and in helping others. Having fled Frankenstein's laboratory, he finds shelter in the woods, eating berries and roots and discovering the benefits of fire (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 72). After being attacked by villagers, the Creature seeks refuge at the DeLacey farm, and here receives an education and masters language. He observes their manners and society and desires to join their community. The Creature aids the family by collecting firewood and doing chores throughout the night and recounts, "I afterwards found that these labours, performed by an invisible hand, greatly astonished them; and once or twice I heard them, on these occasions, utter the words *good spirit, wonderful;* but I did not then understand the signification of these terms" (M. Shelley *Frankenstein* [1818],79; emphasis added). All of this suggests that the Creature's nature is fundamentally good; he takes pleasure in nature, seeks to aid

others and desires to belong to a loving family. His physical form does not reflect his personality, as is the case in Godwin's work.

Having been set upon by people during his journey, the Creature is aware he is terrifying to behold. With this in mind, he formulates a plan to reveal himself to the elder, blind DeLacey and win his affections before revealing himself to the other cottagers. The old man responds positively to the Creature as he can perceive only his nature, not his outward appearance. However, upon being seen on the younger DeLacey's return, violence erupts and this brings an end to the Creature's rural idyll: the final lesson he learns from the DeLacey's is one of cruelty, terror, and rejection. Having learned the family has fled his presence, the Creature burns down the cottage. It is here that Shelley's viewpoint is evident: it is not one's appearance that drives them to violence and crime, but how they are treated by others (perhaps as a result of their appearance). Shelley seems to suggest that people are fundamentally good in their "natural" state, as reflected by the Creature's initial development in the wilds of nature and his education in rural innocence. It is the treatment one receives at the hands of others that changes behaviour. The Creature eloquently expresses this: "I am malicious because I am miserable; am I not shunned and hated by all mankind?" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 102). He hurts others because he has been so hurt by their rejection.

This goes to a deeper argument about the rights of men and if the common man could be trusted with greater social responsibility. Shelley's portrayal of the Creature's development and the DeLaceys' simple but wholesome lifestyle suggests that she sees a rural life, while lacking culture and refinement, as a fundamental good. Care of family takes primacy and life is free of the artifice and complexity of the urban environment. Godwin, too, advocates for the benefits of the rural lifestyle, with a similar outcome. Fleeing from Falkland's relentless pursuit, Caleb finds, for a time, a happy retreat in a small village:

> therefore decided in favour of the project which had formerly proved amusing to my imagination, of withdrawing to some distant rural scene, a scene of calmness and obscurity, where for a few years at least, perhaps during the life of Mr Falkland, I might be hidden from the world, recover the wounds my mind had received in this fatal connection, methodise and improve the experience which had been accumulated, cultivate the faculties I

> in any degree possessed, and employ the intervals of these occupations in simple industry and the intercourse of guileless, uneducated, kind-intentioned minds. (Godwin, *Caleb Williams* 298)

This rural setting offers a chance for rejuvenation and, more clearly than Shelley, associates the "guileless, uneducated, kind-intentioned minds" of rural people with a fundamental goodness in their mode of living. However, just as the Creature is driven from his retreat, Caleb's pursuers find him and turn the villagers against him, forcing him to flee again. Here, the representatives of Falkland's educated, cosmopolitan high society intrude upon and destroy the peace of the rural environment. In both narratives, Godwin and Shelley seem to allude to the encroaching urban/industrial environment on the previously idyllic and natural mode of rural living. This suggests that the rural is no longer available or as innocent as it once was—its natural benefits cannot stand before the power and encroachment of urban/high/scientific culture. While neither text has the critical and explicit commentary of, for example, a Dickensian social critique, both novels clearly allude to the wider concern of the period about urbanisation and the loss of rural innocence. The power of nature is also explored in many of the settings of *Frankenstein*, as discussed previously.

While Godwin is clearly an influence upon Shelley's writing, she has not merely dressed Victor in Caleb's robes. In fact, Caleb is ultimately more akin to the Creature than Victor; relentlessly pursued by the person responsible for their fall from grace. Falkland's accusations drive Caleb from all society. The concept of the fall is more explicitly addressed by Shelley in *Frankenstein* than in *Caleb Williams:* her Creature refers to his fall, linking himself repeatedly throughout the text to Adam and Satan from Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Shelley establishes this relationship from the outset of the novel, with the inscription on the title page, from *Paradise Lost*: "Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay/ To mould be Man? Did I solicit thee/ From darkness promote me?" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 4). The fall that both characters suffer is a fall away from society. Caleb laments having being driven from society, "pursued by a train of ill fortune, I could no longer consider myself as a member of society. I was a solitary being, cut off from the expectation of sympathy, kindness, and the good-will of mankind" (Godwin, *Caleb Williams* 256). The Creature in the same way mourns the lack of opportunity to connect with others:

"When I looked around, I saw and heard of none like me. Was I then a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all fled, and whom all men disowned?" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 83). Their fallen, isolated and pursued state make Caleb and the Creature more akin than Caleb and Frankenstein in their shared curiosity. They are united in their isolation.

Both Godwin and Shelley clearly argue that man requires society, even if it is the simple rural communities in which their characters find refuge for a time, to function well. Total disconnection and rejection result only in dejection and anger. Caleb condemns the society that have rejected him:

> Here I am, an outcast, destined to perish with hunger and cold. All men desert me. All men hate me. I am driven with mortal threats from the sources of comfort and existence. Accursed world! That hates without a cause, that overwhelms innocence with calamities which ought to be spared even to guilt! Accursed world! Dead to every manly sympathy; with eyes of horn, and hearts of steel! Why do I consent to live any longer? Why do I seek to drag on an existence which, if protracted, must be protracted amidst the lairs of these human tigers? (Godwin, *Caleb Williams* 260).

Caleb's fall is all the greater because his only crime has been curiosity; he has done no wrong under the law. The Creature goes a step further: rather than merely questioning if he should continue to live, once his nemesis/creator dies, he plans his suicide (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 160), as he sees no hope for redemption and no place for him in the society that has rejected him so utterly. Just as with knowledge, Shelley and Godwin highlight the human need for society and acceptance. Both works then go on to consider the outcome of these needs being thwarted.

Both Caleb and the Creature are unable to exercise their will – they remain at the mercy of the more powerful, more respected men who created and perpetuate their circumstance. Here again there exists a parallel between Godwin and Shelley's narratives. Harking back to *Paradise Lost*, Falkland took Caleb in and educated him, and so "promoted him from darkness". Much more literally, Frankenstein moulded man. Both Falkland and Victor abuse their creations. Falkland works to destroy Caleb when he discovers his secret, despite the fact the Caleb is willing to keep the

secret closely. Victor also denies his responsibility to his creature. Despite the Creature's appeal that, "I ought to be thy Adam" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 68), and his challenge to Victor—"How dare you sport thus with life? Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 68)—Frankenstein disregards the responsibility he clearly owes the Creature, claiming his duty to wider Mankind is more significant:

> I created a rational creature, and was bound towards him, to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being. *This was my duty; but there was another still paramount to that.* My duties towards my fellow-creatures had greater claims to my attention, because they included a greater proportion of happiness or misery. Urged by this view, I refused, and I did right in refusing to create a companion for the first creature. (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 156; emphasis added)

Falkland too lays claim to a greater benefit to society—his reputation and service to wider society are more important than Caleb's happiness and reputation. Caleb attacks Falkland's assumption of superiority, just as the Creature attacks Victor's reasoning, asking "What is it that you require of me? That I should sign away my own reputation for the better maintaining of yours. Where is the equality of that?" (Godwin, *Caleb Williams*). In this way, Godwin poses questions about Falkland's assumption of his own importance, with the close of the novel seeing Caleb bring Falkland to justice but then bemoan his mistake. Falkland is too virtuous, too good, to have his crime revealed and Caleb spends the remainder of the narrative berating himself for his mistake.

In both Shelley and Godwin's narratives, the power of the creator outweighs the rights and freedoms of the individual, despite them either initially having done no wrong. Godwin's work has overt political overtones, while Shelley's references are more allusions than direct, didactic positions. Her message is a more moral rather than political one—she is less interested in Frankenstein's abuse of social power and privilege rather than the devastating personal impact it has upon the initially good Creature, driving him to murder. It is the actions of Frankenstein that lead to the murder of his family, as the Creature states, he is dependent upon his creator for happiness: "I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy,

and I shall again be virtuous" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 68). Neither Falkland nor Victor can meet this need in their creations. Victor refuses to make another creature and the revelation of Falkland's crimes only add to Caleb's misery. And so it is their failing that causes the tragedies of the novels and provides both political and moral commentary on the responsibility of those who have power to honour these responsibilities, even if that requires admitting their personal failings and wrongdoings. It suggests a moral imperative that a both a political and individual level, the responsibilities that exist for those in power must be met, to ensure that all can participate fully in society, which is a fundamental need for people to be good.

It is evident that Shelley took inspiration from her father's ideas and works, but it would not do *Frankenstein* justice to label this as derivation. Shelley does not transpose characters from Godwin's narrative to hers, but rather draws on the deeper ideas of human drive, the boundaries of knowledge, the power of one individual over another, and just as her father aimed, "to expose the evils which arise out of the present system of civilised society, to disengage the minds of men from presupposition, and launch them upon the sea of moral and political enquiry" (Godwin, *Caleb Williams* xi). Setting readers upon the same "sea of moral enquiry" is one of the key features and most powerful narrative elements in Shelley's work.

5.2 A Romantic Inspiration

The other significant influence in Shelley's personal and professional life was her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley. While Godwin's thinking was of a definitively Enlightenment caste, Percy was a famed Romantic poet. Both modes of thought are evident in Shelley's work. Aiden Day recognises Godwin as an important Enlightenment figure and describes Enlightenment thinking as,

> exalting reason and the scientific method—which had its roots in seventeenth-century intellectual achievements such as the scientific discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton, the rationalism of Descartes and the empiricism of Francis Bacon and John Locke. It is often of reason human beings could clear away the darkness of ignorance, intolerance and prejudice, and move towards a juster and better life. It opposed reliance on tradition for

> tradition's sake and sought to found its vision of progress towards an ideal state on universal principles. In Britain the line of descent ran from Bacon through Locke to later eighteenth-century figures such as William Godwin. (Day 57)

These ideas are clearly explored in both *Caleb Williams* and Godwin's political treatise, *Political Justice*, as well as in Shelley's novels. Yet, as a close reading of *Frankenstein* reveals, this is not the only source for Shelley's world view. Her works also have a distinctly Romantic bent, which can be linked to her time and place, her milieu and, most importantly, her husband. While the Shelleys' marriage suffered its trials and tragedies, Percy was also a significant presence in Shelley's life as an author. He edited the draft of *Frankenstein*, wrote the "Introduction" to the 1818 edition and many readers initially believed him to have written the novel. Percy offered his most direct and eloquent statement of his Romantic ideals in his prose work, *A Defence of Poetry*. While this latter text was written after the publication of *Frankenstein*, Percy's and Shelley's thinking in their two texts do reflect their common values.

Both Godwin and Percy espoused the importance of social connections and one's obligation to their fellow man. This idea is one that Shelley takes up in both *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, as well as her other works. In *A Defence of Poetry*, Percy states,

> The social sympathies, or those laws from which, as from its elements, society results, begin to develop themselves from the moment that two human beings coexist; the future is contained within the present as the plant within the seed; and equality, diversity, unity, contrast, mutual dependence, become the principles alone capable of affording the motives according to which the will of a social being is determined to action, inasmuch as he is social; and constitute pleasure in sensation, virtue in sentiment, beauty in art, truth in reasoning, and love in the intercourse of kind. (P. B. Shelley 28)

Shelley's understanding of this idea is evident in the treatment of the Creature, who should experience "social sympathies … from the moment that two human beings coexist" (P. B. Shelley 28). Instead, Victor does not afford his creation these

sympathies, and he is left to literally wander in the wilderness, where he develops an understanding of intolerance and cruelty, as no one will show him "love in the intercourse of kind", as they view him as non-human, as "Other". Botting summarises why the Creature as Other is so problematic for readers:

> The adaptability of the monster, its plural and constantly changing significance, stems from its construction as other. Even though such otherness is problematized in the novel—the monster speaks, its alterity, more specifically its alterity to humanity, seems to be what engages the reader's or viewer's fascination. The monster remains our, human and universal, antithesis, intimately and inextricably bound up in the complex processes in which our human values of individuality, self-possession, freedom and liberalism are constructed, reproduced and transformed, a process which, in order to define itself as unified, always excludes the other whose proximity we cannot tolerate: it shadows our destiny. Doubles our identity for, as it threatens our sacred limits and timeless values, the other precisely delineates what we can and cannot be. (192)

This conception of non-human is particularly important in the Romantic era as the debate about the practice of slavery continued. Even the Shelleys' personal physician and eminent member of the Royal College of Surgeons, Dr William Lawrence, engaged in debate about if Africans were closer to monkeys than European man (Seymour 137). Some scholars read *Frankenstein* as a critique of slavery, viewing the Creature as a representation of the dangers of neglecting those that are labelled "Other" as a means of justifying their mistreatment or exploitation. Shelley's Creature poses questions about what it is to be human and also reflects both her personal concern (Seymour 162) and the broader social debate about the continued practice of slavery. Another interpretation of the "Other" is viewing the Creature as a representation of the working classes (Tenniel). Seeing the Creature as a representation of "Other" demonstrates not only Shelley's Enlightenment concern for the rights of the third estate in European culture but also a wider view of what "man" encompasses, reflecting the Romantic concern for the enslaved races. Both Shelley and Percy reflect the Romantic conception of Godwinian ideals regarding

the rights of the individual and apply this to their contemporary debate about the rights of all men, including those not just of other classes but other races.

Shelley's novel opens with an epitaph from Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Both Shelley and Percy were inspired by Milton, with Percy penning *Prometheus Unbound* shortly after *Frankenstein*. Percy felt that,

> this bold neglect of a direct moral purpose is the most decisive proof of the supremacy of Milton's genius. He mingled as it were the elements of human nature as colours upon a single pallet, and arranged them in the composition of his great picture according to the laws of epic truth; that is, according to the laws of that principle by which a series of actions of the external universe and of intelligent and ethical beings is calculated to excite the sympathy of succeeding generations of mankind. (P. B. Shelley 70)

Shelley's own work also shows a "bold neglect of a direct moral purpose", although none of her contemporaries considered her a genius of the same calibre as Milton. This lack of moral didacticism empowers the reader to draw their own conclusions and boundaries. The impact of the ambiguous ending of *Frankenstein* is pivotal, in fact, to my reading of the novel as a vehicle through which Shelley was able to make an impact of the order of the founding of a discourse. Shelley establishes the moral frame of the novel at the very outset, asking "Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay / To mould me? Did I solicit thee / From darkness promote me?" (Milton's *Paradise Lost*). This serves two purposes: the implicitly moral nature of these questions suggests the novel will have an answer or lesson for the reader, yet the novel ends ambiguously, leaving it to the reader to draw their own conclusions; and from the outset, the Creature, as the assumed voice of this statement, is portrayed in a sympathetic light, just as both Milton's Satan and Adam are given a degree of sympathy or empathy. Immediately, we see the Creature as more than a mere monster, but a rational thinking and feeling figure.

The use of Adam's questioning of God's right to "mould" him seems to immediately align the Creature with the character who is spurned and cast out by his creator. However, it was not only Adam who had this experience. Shelley draws upon Milton's device of having both Adam and Satan mirror aspects of one another. Considering the motivations of Milton's characters, rather than just the outcomes of

their actions, offers some useful insight into Shelley's characters. Satan is motivated to rebel against God because he is jealous of the special treatment the Son receives. He resents his creator favouring someone else over his wants and needs, which he sees as owed to him. In this way, Satan is more akin to the Creature, who desires to connect with his creator Victor, and have the obligations owed to him met. He, like Satan, only turns to evil when his creator cannot fulfil this perceived obligation. It is possible to argue that Victor should be the character who is a mirror of Milton's Satan, as he defies God by seizing the power of creation for himself. However, Victor is also motivated by a desire for knowledge, just as Adam was when he took the forbidden fruit. In one of Walton's first descriptions of Victor, he uses language that suggests Victor has fallen from a once-noble state: "He must have been a noble creature in his better days, being even now in wreck so attractive and amiable … I have found a man who, before his spirit had been broken by misery" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 16). While Walton sees Victor this way, Shelley provides her readers ample opportunity to form a different, less noble view of Victor. Just as Satan rails against the injustice of being cast out from Heaven, so too Victor equivocates his responsibility for his actions: "nor do I find it blameable" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 156).

Science fiction scholar Adam Roberts sees the origin of the science fiction genre in *Paradise Lost*, claiming that "Milton's Satan is the original bug-eyed monster" (Roberts 56) because he is so radically "Other"; just as the Creature is, Satan is cast out from his creator's presence. Roberts also notes the moral ambiguity in Milton, which Shelley adopted:

> because Milton's conception of Satan is so beguiling, because, intentionally or otherwise, Milton did not simply represent Satan as an incarnation of wickedness to be easily dismissed, that *Paradise Lost* works so powerfully. And it is this aspect of the poem, this way of reading it as being about the tragic career of an overreacher, rather than being about the pious articulation of a religious ideology as well as its imaginative recreation of Otherness in character and setting, and its mind-grabbing sense of the Sublime, that drew Romantic writers to it. (Roberts 56)

Perhaps it is not just the interest in the "Other" of Milton, Shelley and Percy's works that make them canonical, but the fact that they all possess a moral greyness that challenges the reader to reach their own conclusions. Another important role that Percy attributes to poets, and can be extrapolated to apply to all literary writers, is the assertion that poets are both,

> legislators, or prophets: a poet essentially comprises and unites both these characters. For he not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and the fruit of latest time. (P. B. Shelley 31)

Shelley's work "beholds intensely the present" by considering the science of the day and also "beholds the future in the present" as she explores and provides a space for moral consideration of her readers of the future of this new science. Should science be allowed to progress unimpeded by ethical or moral consideration in an unadulterated application of the scientific method of experiment and application? Shelley leaves this question without a definitive answer or moral imperative, but in so doing plants the seed in the reader's mind that allows them to draw their own conclusion.

Milton was not the only author to be cited in the writing of *Frankenstein.* Shelley also quotes Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* usually in association with Walton. The poem's narrative of a sailor who tampers with nature by killing an albatross and so draws the wrath of the spirits down on himself and his crew are mirrored in both Walton's desire to find the secret of the North-West Passage and in Victor's violation of nature in the creation of the Creature. Unlike the mariner, Walton avoids the condemnation of his crew by abandoning his quest when the ice proves insurmountable. Walton's statement that "I shall kill no albatross" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 12) separates him from the mariner to which he refers. He came to the brink of nature's secrets and turned back. Victor however has killed his albatross, violating nature's secret realms, and is tormented by the very spirit which he created. Just like the mariner, he is condemned to wander the earth in pursuit of the Creature. This juxtaposition of Walton and Victor, as literal and figurative mariners on the sea of knowledge, serves to make Coleridge's work

integral to the meaning of *Frankenstein* and again demonstrates the influence of Romantic thinking on the text.

Perhaps Percy's most significant contribution to the writing of *Frankenstein* was his encouragement to persist in developing it into a full length novel. He had a sincere belief in the power of literature to shape the minds of readers and obviously saw merit in Shelley's original idea. His words about the significance of poetry could equally be applied to an imaginative work such as *Frankenstein*:

> The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause. Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight, which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts, and which form new intervals and interstices whose void for ever craves fresh food. Poetry strengthens that faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb. (P. B. Shelley 40-41)

Using Gothic tropes such as Walton's letters as the framework for the narrative, the garret/laboratory, the stormy weather at the moment of creation, and the isolated and barren retreat of the Orkneys creates the atmosphere of the novel. This is further enhanced with the addition of Romantic sublime landscapes. The confrontation amongst the peaks and ice of Mer de Glace intensifies the imaginative force of the scene. The impact of sublime scenes upon Victor, sometimes restoring and sometimes crushing his hope of being rid of the Creature are also classically Romantic in their appreciation of the power of nature over the spirit of man. By creating scenes filled with imagery to fire the reader's imagination the work becomes a vivid representation of the ideas within, and thus allow the reader to, "form new intervals and interstices" in their thinking about these issues. Percy's words can be appropriated to describe the imaginative power of *Frankenstein*: "it is impossible to read the compositions of the most celebrated writers of the present day without being startled by the *electric life* that burns within their words" (P. B. Shelley 79-80; emphasis added).

Shelley also draws on later Romantic poets, including her husband. Percy's *Mutability* is cited as Victor climbs towards Mer de Glace and his impending

meeting with the Creature (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 66-67). While this may have been an exercise in promoting her husband's work (which would become Shelley's main focus after his death), she uses the passage to emphasise the power the sublime setting has on Victor's thinking. Another influence was the work of Gothic writers. Shelley read "the monk (sic)" (M. Shelley, *Journals* 28)—Matthew "Monk" Lewis's popular Gothic novel, which included themes of "lust, murder, incest and every atrocity that can disgrace human nature" (McEvoy vii). As Emma McEvoy explains, Lewis's novel caused widespread outrage, with uproar over the questionable content employed in it and the dubious morals it seemed to convey. It is hard to know whether Shelley might have been equally shocked by some of the graphic material in *The Monk*, and it cannot be said that her own novel replicated any of Lewis's most shocking content, but any work that appeared to be cast from the same mould as Lewis's was bound after its publication in 1796 to attract scorn. While Shelley replaces the supernatural elements of Lewis's work with the wonders of the new science, his influence on her thinking about the impact of the objective world on the morals and thoughts of her protagonists is clear, and the conjunction of science and gothic horror is a defining feature of *Frankenstein*. By the end of November 1814, Mary was reading *The Italian*, by famed Gothic author Ann Radcliffe (M. Shelley, *Journals* 48). The impact of the Gothic genre upon Shelley's work is very clear, so much so that some view the work as best categorised as a Gothic novel.

It is not possible to easily define *Frankenstein* as belonging to a particular genre or ideology. Shelley clearly drew heavily upon a range of ideas and modes of writing in her construction. The text draws on many Gothic tropes in its narrative structure, but is not a truly Gothic story, lacking the supernatural element. It reflects many Enlightenment ideals, and is dedicated to a famed Enlightenment thinker, Godwin, however is not merely a social critique. It explores Romantic concerns of slavery, social obligation and man's relationship with nature, particularly as science begins to reveal its secrets, but cannot be called a definitively Romantic novel. How then can Shelley's debut work be labelled? The most fitting appellation is not Enlightenment, Gothic, or Romantic but rather, as an amalgam or synthesis of these elements, something entirely new: arguably the first modern science fiction story.

5.3 An Author's Innovation: Foundations of Genre

As science fiction and Shelley scholar Fred Botting explains, the Gothic and science fiction genres "are complex and contradictory effects of modernity, bound up in the metaphors and practices with which it transforms the world" (114). The common ancestry of these genres is further described by Anne Cranny-Francis, although the emergence of science fiction out of the Gothic was signalled by the desire to explain that which the earlier genre would have had unexplained in order to heighten the affect, but science fiction retained the Gothic writers' radical motive to critique both religious orthodoxy and Enlightenment idealism:

> Bourgeois science and technology challenged the divine by assigning rational explanations to previously inexplicable phenomena and so caused great crises in faith for many people. It also enabled the development of new kinds of machines which not only revolutionised the domestic environment of the country, but also transformed England into an imperialistic world power. The nature of knowledge, of belief and of the everyday real were under challenge and this new genre evolved to meet that challenge: as both interrogator and apologist. The "science" in this earliest science fiction was a focus or reference point for the social critique. (65)

This idea of science fiction as a form of social critique is clear in the many readings of Shelley's Creature as "Other" as discussed earlier, and in the way Victor Frankenstein was subsequently demonised as the 'mad scientist' that would become a trope of the science fiction genre. As Isaac Asimov has argued, Shelley's novel contributed to the rise of "socially-oriented" science fiction, based on which, Phillip Pecorino adds, "the real cultural and philosophical importance of science fiction emerges. These science-fiction works focus on the implications of technological progress for society" (4).

Darko Suvin's conception of the "novum", referring to the scientifically plausible technology on which science fiction narratives are often based, functions within the genre in the same way that an apparition or demon might in a Gothic

horror, focusing the reader on an object of estrangement or novelty, but as Adam Roberts explains, the novum also brings the reader back to their own world through the plausibility of the object: science fiction as "a symbolist genre, one where the novum acts as a symbolic manifestation of something that connects it specifically with the world we live in" (Roberts, *Science Fiction* 16). This connection to reality and social reflection aligns with Brian Aldiss's description of the core elements of science fiction, which he outlines in relation to the work of H.G. Wells:

> Firstly, he begins by drawing a recognisable picture of his own times, "the present day"… Secondly, he uses the newer scientific principles of his times … as a hinge for the story. Thirdly, he allows a criticism of his society, and possibly of mankind in general, to emerge from the narrative. This remains a classic ground plan for an SF novel. Veracity, capacity, universality. (122)

Shelley herself acknowledged the "veracity" and "capacity" of the science on which she based her work—in the opening lines of the Preface to the novel she asserts a validity or truthfulness to the narrative while acknowledging its fictionality: "The event on which this fiction is founded has been supposed, by Dr Darwin, and some of the physiological writers of Germany as not of impossible occurrence. I shall not be supposed as according the remotest degree of serious faith to such an imagination; yet, in assuming it as the basis of a work of fancy" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 5). This could be seen as the first articulation of the genre of science fiction, with a real scientific possibility taken as the hinge for a patently fictional work, which nonetheless resonates closely enough to reality to allow for moral reflection.

This encounter with some form of "Otherness" in a realist setting is "the strength of the science-fictional mode" (Roberts 180). Shelley herself supports this and in so doing completes Aldiss's final component of "universality": "However impossible as a physical fact, affords a point of view to the imagination for the delineating of human passions more comprehensive and commanding than any which the ordinary relations of existing events can yield" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 5). Botting explains how this space for imagining and "delineating" (or drawing boundaries) functioned within both the Gothic and science fiction genres. He explains that both *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*

> engage with the effects of economic, political, and scientific change on individual, familial, and social structures. Enmeshed in the uneven development of modernity, in economic shifts to commerce, industrial production, and imperial expansion, in political calls for reform and democracy, in aesthetic notions of free, imaginative individuals, and in scientific innovations rapidly and visibly transforming the conditions of human existence, the novels identify monstrosities in the new: revolutionary mobs are many-headed monsters, industrial workers are hulking brutes, new economic and political structures reduce humanity to slaves or automata. (Botting 114)

Botting's recognition of the common elements of the two genres is helpful in moving towards a categorisation of *Frankenstein*. My earlier discussions of the Gothic have explored the impact of the genre upon Shelley's writing and identified some of the Gothic tropes present in *Frankenstein.* These commonalities are unsurprising given her own interest in the genre and its widespread popularity. Yet *Frankenstein* is not only a Gothic work. As Susan Lederer and Richard Rattan observe, the novel is "a convergence of several literary genres—the romance, the epistolary novel, the Gothic, travel stories into which Shelley wove ideas from contemporary scientific workers and developments in physics, chemistry and medicine" (455). They add that there is debate about whether Shelley's novel should be considered primarily as one of these existing literary genres, or whether it constitutes "the ur-text of science fiction", but they are certain "no one disputes that Frankenstein represented a significant moment in the historical development of the genre". I argue that *Frankenstein* can be called the first science fiction, as it establishes the discursive space in which the genre operates, albeit a text with strong Gothic heritage.

In contrast, Markus Oppolzer stands firm in his reading of Frankenstein as "a classic of Gothic fiction" (93). He argues that Victor Frankenstein is not a scientist and the modern conception of him as such is more a result of later adaptations of the novel. Oppolzer does concede a hybridity of genre:

> the basic premises that underlie *Frankenstein*'s integration into the canon of science fiction literature are hardly tenable. There is enough evidence to identify it as a forerunner or hybrid narrative, but many of the attempt to

> sever the novel from its Gothic roots and recontextualise it as a meditation of bioethics *avant la lettre* seem more indebted to the countless pop-cultural adaptations of the novel than the text itself. (Oppolzer 92)

This disavowal of *Frankenstein* as science fiction is not particularly constructive, but the recognition of the strong Gothic forces at work, such as “autodidactism, blindness and manipulativity” (Oppolzer 79) do highlight the generic hybridity of the work. Shelley in fact distanced herself from the Gothic, stating, “I have not considered myself as merely weaving a series of supernatural terrors. The event on which the interest of the story depends is exempt from the disadvantages of a mere tale of spectres or enchantment” (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818] 5). Sir Walter Scott also notes the lack of the supernatural, and importantly, the impact this has upon readers:

> A more philosophical and refined use of the supernatural in works of fiction, is proper to that class in which the laws of nature are presented as altered, not for the purpose of pampering the imagination with wonders, but in order to show the probable effect which the supposed miracles would produce on those who witnessed them. In this case, the pleasure ordinarily derived from the marvellous incidents is secondary to that which we extract from observing how mortals like ourselves would be affected. (Scott 220)

Scott here considers the impact upon readers, alluding to the moral potential of Shelley’s work. Adam Roberts supports Shelley’s assertion that she has not merely created a tale of supernatural terror, claiming that “the premise of an SF novel requires material, physical rationalisation, rather than a supernatural or arbitrary one” (Roberts 5). Chris Baldick sees this as the novel “observ[ing] (perhaps even invent[ing]) the rules of what we now call science fiction, tracing a change of probable from a single implausible premise without resort to magical interventions” (181).

It is more constructive, I contend, to recognise the Gothic origins of a number of elements in *Frankenstein* without consigning it irretrievably to that genre. Cranny-Francis notes that from the Gothic form, “*Frankenstein* retains the frame narrative, the story-within-the-story technique which is used to distance the reader and induce a

critical perspective. From the Gothic also are the exotic European setting of the tale and its references to alchemy and magic" (64). Whereas Gothic writers used such distancing features to interrogate their world while also heightening social and individual anxieties, Cranny-Francis argues further that "Shelley's genius was to direct this interrogative genre to a new and different area of contemporary interest and concern, science and technology which she embodies in the creature and his maker" (64-65). Christa Knellwolf suggests that Shelley goes so far in extending this "interrogative genre" as to interrogate the very anxieties that Gothic fiction sought to stir up, adopting Gothic tropes merely as a sleight of hand:

> While it contains the necessary ingredients for a horror story, the novel is not satisfied with simply eliciting emotional turmoil, but also explores the nature of these emotional responses. In particular, it investigates the cultural context of fear, contrasting physiological causes with the cultural gatekeeping mechanisms of a conventional world view. This explains why *Frankenstein* does not demonstrate an easy fit with the Gothic, the genre called into existence in order to satisfy the Romantic taste for a portrayal of emotion and passion.… At the same time, the Gothic is just a façade that detracts from the real interests of the novel concerning the limits of ambition, passion, curiosity and knowledge. (54)

Shelley's ambiguous morality, about which I have said much already, leaves it to the reader to decide where to situate these limits of "ambition, passion, curiosity and knowledge" that Knellwolf identifies. Not knowing or being able to see these boundaries is a fear-inducing prospect. Cranny-Francis corroborates Knellwolf's position, noting that it is not the science *per se* that motivates the narrative; rather, the chief concern is with "the social consequence of that science, signified by the production of a being who is rejected by his creator, who is monstrous in the eyes of those he encounters, and who eventually turns to violence as a result of his personal and social rejection. He is an embodiment of social pathology" (Cranny-Francis 65). This concern about the perceived lack of boundaries around scientific potential and its possible outcomes is a key feature of the genre of science fiction.

Lobke Minter identifies that the Gothic, of which there are recognisable features in Shelley's work, was concerned with borders between the protagonist and

the exterior world: “Gothic texts are fundamentally concerned with the anxiety about boundaries … those that separate the individual self from something that is other”. This fear or anxiety stems from the untold possibilities presented by new science. What Shelley does in *Frankenstein* is offer one scenario, making a tangible way (and manageable in scope) for readers to think about new science in a hypothetical way. Minter continues, “this concern about what it means to be human, or what it means to be ‘me’ in a modern world, is one that is constantly asked by Science Fiction”. As a genre, science fiction builds upon this to consider, in a world where science can now intervene upon the individual body in unprecedented ways, the border at which we may cede our humanity. Shelley was writing at a pivotal moment in time. At this critical intersection, it became possible to talk about religion, creation, and what it is to be human in a new way, and Shelley laid the foundations for the genre and established the discursive space to do this.

Scott’s 1818 review of *Frankenstein* takes note of the way in which the text functions as a space for critical thinking about the outcomes of science: “The author’s principal object, … is less to produce an effect by means of the marvels of the narrations, than to open new trains and channels of thought, by placing men in supposed situations of an extraordinary and preternatural character, and then describing the mode of feeling and conduct which they are most likely to adopt” (Scott). Though Scott would have been unaware at the time, the “supposed situations” he describes would become the “what if…?” scenarios that are the premise of all science fiction narratives. Not only does he identify this key feature of genre, but he also alludes to the way in which Shelley’s new discourse functions. In an uncanny parallel to the geographic language Foucault uses, Scott’s “channels of thought” can be reframed as discourses, as in opening these new spaces, Shelley is providing a new way for her readers to think about the world in which they live. Not only does Scott identify the discursive space Shelley has opened, he also alludes to the way this functions as a moral space. Shelley does describe “the mode of feeling … they [her characters] are most likely to adopt”, yet does not dictate to the reader which character they should most feel for, nor turn to a religion to condemn her characters.

Allan K. Hunter reinforces that this thinking is freed from a religious framework: “These ‘supposed situations’ include the implications of scientific revelations concerning the function of a natural law which suggested a significantly

different worldview than the one based in traditional religious doctrine" (138). It is this new perspective or way of thinking about science that Shelley offers her readers that marks her work out as distinctly different from the Gothic genre. This is where we can begin to see how science fiction as a genre serves as a manifestation of the discursive space Shelley established, which allows for thought and boundary making on the part of the reader, rather than applying a strict moral framework. Hunter summarises this ambiguity or indeterminacy that is left to the reader to fill:

> By incorporating and extrapolating current in scientific thought, Shelley articulates the fears of a populace faced with the prospect that they are not the end result in a progressivist drive to perfection. While Victor and his hideous progeny do not survive, the reader is left with the knowledge that the possibility of man engineering his own obsolescence did not perish in the Artic wasteland. It merely lies dormant within our species. (147)

The reader's consideration of the dormant potential of people to create their own demise is a core premise of the discourse Shelley established. While asking "what if…?" can produce fear and anxiety, it is also a remedy to these to a degree, in that the reader has the opportunity to prepare their response through reacting to the fiction. What Shelley achieved in *Frankenstein* goes beyond the establishment of the tropes of a genre, and a study of "science fiction" reveals the genre is in fact the way in which the discourse which Shelley founded is made manifest in our culture.

Hunter gives additional consideration to why science fiction took the form it did. Hunter outlines Robert Scholes's contention that "this period's scientific discoveries led to the first point where man was able to think of himself historically and conceive of a future that would not resemble the present" (145). Simultaneously, "there was a confluence of public interest, gentlemen scholarship and political concern that culminated in an unprecedented effort to make available the tools of science and demonstrate their utility" (Hunter 145). This combination of interest in the sciences and an understanding that the future would not resemble the present supports the emergence of the science fiction genre at this time. Fiction was a new vehicle for the discourse of science, and it allowed for imagined futures. This imagining provided a "safe" space for consideration of science and its potential outcomes. This further reinforces Knellwolf and Minter's observations about the

cultural context of fear and anxiety. Hunter sees Shelley's establishment of the genre of science fiction as allowing "the reader to enjoy a fictive experience and form reactions to situations that only exist in the realm of possibility" (138). The offset of this fear of the potentially negative outcomes of scientific curiosity is the safety of knowing that it is fictional.

Hunter goes on to link both Shelley's use of fiction and her impact upon discourse, because her novel's portrayal of the unpredictability of new science responded to the very real fears throughout contemporary society about revolutionary change, and this response reached beyond fiction as it "entered the public discourse over progress science's problematic implications for the human species" (133). Shelley's impact on literature was not so rapid, but her story quickly furnished the public with a language through which to question the morality of the new sciences while still gazing with awe at the advances it offered. It was not until late in the same century that science fiction finally fulfilled the literary potential that Shelley's novel once promised. As Cranny-Francis concludes, it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the "new genre" of science fiction "was characterised as a fiction which 1) referred the reader to specific scientific theories and/or technologies; and, 2) in so doing, articulated contemporary hopes and fears about the impact on everyday life of science and technology, about the kinds of society they produced and about its consequences for the individual subject" (68). Yet she is also in no doubt that Shelley anticipated these features so perceptively as to signal "contemporary awareness of the radical change to the industrial base of nineteenth-century society, figured in the science and technology described in the text" (68), and this brings her to the firm decision that it is science fiction rather than Gothic.

While *Frankenstein* has Gothic features, then, it is also distinctly something else, and the "what if…?" question applied to the new sciences does mark in the text what I think is the establishment of the nascent science fiction genre. Shelley responds to the fear and anxiety about the implications of the new sciences with a new narrative form. Yet it is also more than this, and its impact was clearly felt like a wave throughout society in the years immediately after its publication. The genre it founded took time to manifest more fully within the staid practices of the literary elite, but to the lay reader it established a way and a space for culture to respond in moral terms to scientific advancement free of religious orthodoxy. I would take

Hunter's final point one step further and argue that *Frankenstein* did not just "enter public discourse" but in fact established an entirely new discursive space, the effects of which can still be seen in our culture today. Their impact, however, can be traced more precisely in the size of the ripples her work created throughout her culture—this remains my final task.

Chapter Six
In Shelley's Wake: Measuring the Impact of *Frankenstein*

In the previous chapter, Shelley was identified as an innovator in the nascent genre of science fiction, but the innovation took some time to make a significant impact through the rise of the new genre in the latter part of the same century. Yet as Shelley's innovation was to rework a number of influences and intertexts, my focus has shifted from the internal workings of the novel (while not forgetting the importance of close attention to the text) to examining how it grew out of and wrote back to the cultural pool of Shelley's time. As Roseanne Montillo has explained, Shelley's novel addressed major concerns and anxieties about new science, which provided a point of focus for the novel's immediate reception:

> Perhaps, some critics felt, the author had a great understanding of the philosophical debates and moral implications that arose from discussions about nature, the quest for knowledge and power, Man versus God, and man's ability to create another entity without God's help. After all, at its most basic level, the book also spoke to society's fear that scientists were delving into regions unknown … the book was, some realised, a scathing critique of society, science and religion. (Montillo 201)

While some readers may have seen the novel's reflections on such questions through the figure of the compromised scientist as a "scathing critique", I argue instead that the moral ambiguity of Shelley's novel is precisely why her consideration of these big questions about science has resonated within culture for the last two centuries. With that in mind, this final chapter will utilise research tools that allow for a quantitative analysis of the impact of Shelley's works, to plot the evidence for cultural impact from the year of its publication rather than to rely on an account of its literary impact that tends to collapse the interval from publication to the rise of the new genre, some six or seven decades afterwards. By using this approach, I aim to demonstrate the widespread discursive impact of Shelley's work. The broad discursive reach of her novel may, ironically, have been a factor in the delay of its literary impact, as it would have made it easy for the initial, negative critical

reception to remain relatively unchallenged by viewing the work as merely a popular oddity.

Of course, the numbers our quantitative tools generate allow for the measurement of the size or scale of a phenomenon, but do not always readily account for the form that it takes. Returning to the metaphor of culture as a pool, bounded by socio-cultural practices, we can assure ourselves that this quantitative lens need not be adopted independent of the point of view that has been brought to bear on the material so far. Contextual biography is the methodology that has allowed me to map this landscape (pool and boundary), and place the author-subject and her work within this fluid multi-dimensional context. The close reading I have offered might be described here as an explanation of the weight or mass of the stone Shelley cast into the cultural pool, to understand its contours and the likelihood that it would have made the kind of impact I now expect to be able to trace. The study of the broader cultural influences on which the novel drew creates an immersive view from that point of impact within the pool, tracing the ripples with which the novel already intersected or which its arrival amplified. The quantitative lens means adopting an aerial view, so to speak, from which the trajectory of the ripples created by the work can be plotted, tracing its popularity and reception as its ripples react and rebound amongst other discourses. This may be achieved through studies of sales, numbers of early adaptations, and direct references to the work. Some examples of such an approach have been offered previously in this thesis, and I will begin what follows with further details.

Yet I suggest that this can be taken much further, by shifting our lens to a position from which we can see the further reach of these ripples as they rise as waves upon the shore—from this perspective, we can chart the impact of the ripples created by the work, even though we may lose sight of the work itself. This is the act of tracing the influence of the work in more tangential ways, understanding how imagery, ideas and practices reshape the cultural pool of which they are a part. The focus of this chapter will be on tracing the influence Shelley's writing has had both as a literary work and as an agent of discursive change. As Christa Knellwolf and Jane Goodall observe in their discussion of Hollywood's adoption of Frankenstein's creature, "Once embodied in the cultural imagination, the myth and the monster could propagate even more broadly, infusing popular culture as well as the literate" ("Introduction" 9). The way *Frankenstein* has entered our cultural imagination can

be explored by using relatively new research tools that allow us to trace the size of the ripples, and to ascertain their broad discursive reach. This final chapter closes with consideration of how the discursive space that Shelley founded continues to be an important imaginative, moralising space in our culture today.

6.1 From Where the Stone Lands: Shelley's Impact

By Shelley's death in 1851, 7000 copies of *Frankenstein* had been sold, there were seven editions, a French translation, and two American editions released, and fifteen different stage adaptations had been produced (Hitchcock 101). In the bicentennial year, *Frankenstein*'s sales figures are impossible to accurately estimate—there are currently 84 versions of the novel available on Amazon alone. *Frankenstein* is also in the public domain as it is no longer bound by copyright, so is available freely to readers online. The Project Gutenberg edition of the novel has had 13249 downloads in the last 30 days, according to a bibliographic record count (12 June 2018). While not firm data, this proliferation is evidence of the popularity of the work and begins to reveal a sense of a way in which we can trace the work's impact. Mark Davies's Google Books (Advanced) Interface operates in a similar way to Google's NGram tool, tracking word frequency across time in digitised copies of books in the Google Books repository. Davies's Advanced Interface displays a count of occurrences per decade in the "List" view, providing valuable quantitative data allowing us to track frequency of use of key words. The most obvious key term to use to track the cultural reach of Shelley's novel is "Frankenstein," analysis of which reveals a significant upward trend over time but also some telling periods in which this trend was bolstered by rapid increases (see Figures 7 and 8).

Unsurprisingly, the trend is not universally upward, but this in itself may speak to how resilient the term has been at times when it might well have faded into complete obscurity. We may note, for example, the relatively small number of references in the remaining years of the 1810s following its publication and throughout the next decade, although I would argue in any case that the 114 references in just over the first decade after the novel was first released reveals a high level of interest in the story. Yet the figure from the 1820s almost quadruples in the decade following the publication of the 1831 edition, suggesting that "interest" in the story is by this time no longer in any doubt, and it might be that this is an index

of true impact. A gradual rise continues throughout the following four decades before a second sharp increase in the 1880s. This figure of 841 declines slowly into the first decade of the twentieth century, but this is followed by a sharp decline to a low of 312 in the 1910s. As this is the decade in which Europe was plunged into war and depression, a significant drop in any cultural activity is to be anticipated—even then, a figure of 312 sees the frequency of references to "Frankenstein" on a par with the boom figures following the publication of the 1831 edition. Usage of the term does not return to 1890s levels again until the 1950s. What then follows is an almost exponential growth, with usage almost doubling each decade since, with well over 11,000 references to "Frankenstein" in the 2000s (Davies).

We must of course be cautious in our reading of this numerical data, as both Ngram and the Advanced Interface are drawing upon digitised books, so some caveats are required about the capacity of these tools to cover all published (or even unpublished) usage. The other factor to consider is the growth of publishing and the use of the internet: with more texts being published digitally this century, it is unsurprising that the search results show the greatest preponderance of usage in the 2000s, as the search tool would have greater access to these. Like Google's Ngram tool, the Advanced Interface's more detailed "Chart" view also displays the data visually, which further reinforces the sense of steady growth in the usage of "Frankenstein". The significant benefit of the Davies's Advanced Interface over the Google Ngram tool is the ability to then see the Google Books entries from which the data is being drawn. This makes the Advanced Interface a more useful research tool, as researchers can see not only word frequency, but also go on to analyse the different ways in which the word is used. Unsurprisingly, in the first decade (1810—1819) the references are largely to reviews of Shelley's book following its publication in 1818. The following decade is characterised by reviews and advertising for the theatrical adaptations and reviews of Shelley's later works, including *The Last Man*, billed as "by the author of *Frankenstein*". The almost continuous upward trend can be attributed in large part to new editions, then stage adaptation, and in latter years to film adaptations. The sharp rise in the late 1970s into the 1980s is indicative of the renewed academic interest in Shelley and her works, as outlined in previous discussion of scholarship surrounding Shelley.

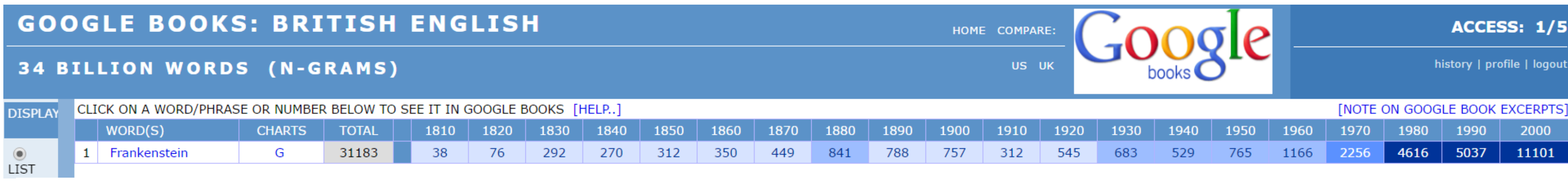

Figure 6: Advanced Interface List view

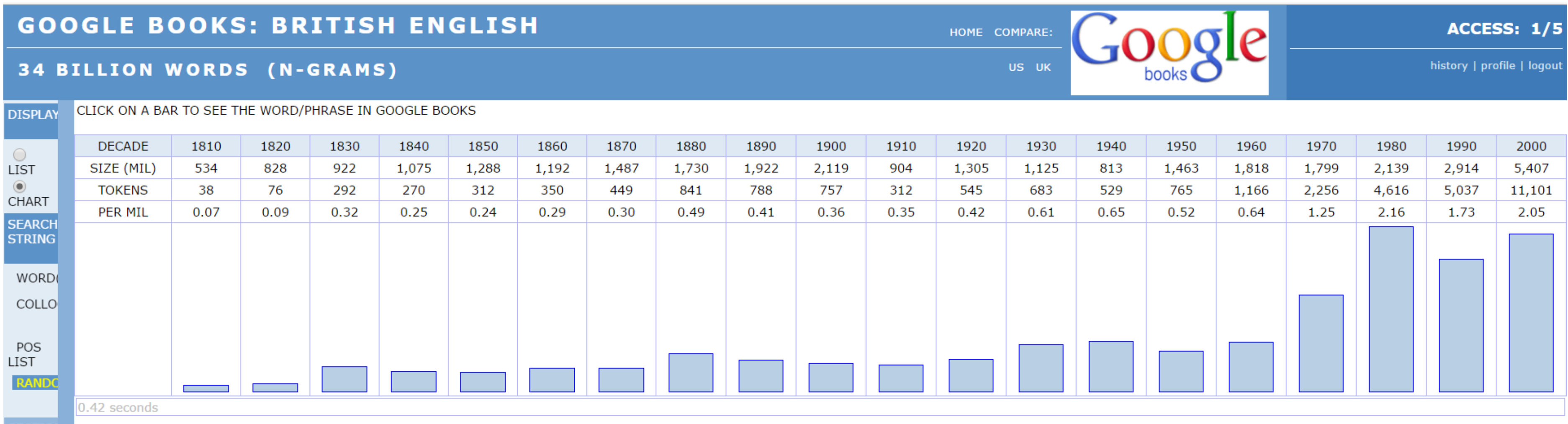

Figure 7: Advanced Interface Chart View

Despite these caveats around the sources available to the tools, they are nonetheless useful in discerning a pattern of increasing usage of the term "Frankenstein" over time, which supports Susan Tyler Hitchcock's assertion that "Frankenstein and his monster had entered the vernacular" (106). This serves as evidence in part of Shelley's work functioning long-term as foundational to a new way of thinking and speaking about science—"Frankenstein" is frequently invoked as symbol, rather than just as direct textual reference (Hitchcock 106). "Frankenstein" has become a cultural touchstone, freed from the pages of the novel itself. What the Ngram and Advanced Interface tools reveal is the continuous interest in and invocation of *Frankenstein* over the last two centuries. Ngram and the Advance Interface tool make possible large scale trend analysis as a starting point for more detailed research. With the number of texts now available on Shelley and *Frankenstein*, this kind of analysis would be impossible without a digital search tool. While these tools allow us to see that "Frankenstein" was popular, we must consider how the term was used. To frame it another way, the tools allow us to see the size of the ripples caused by the novel. A study of the way in which "Frankenstein" is used, reveals the shape of the ideas carried within the ripples.

6.2 Discerning the Shape of the Waves

Perhaps the best evidence of the cultural impact of Shelley's new way of speaking about science is found in a longitudinal study of the uptake of the core imagery of the novel—Frankenstein's creature. The Creature is often misnamed as Frankenstein himself, however, this error does not change the invocation of the name Frankenstein to mean either something made from disparate parts, or someone who is pushing scientific and moral boundaries. As Marilyn Butler puts it, we "take the very word Frankenstein to convey an awful warning: don't usurp God's prerogative in the Creation-game, or don't get too clever with technology" (Butler 404). Frankenstein's creature was rapidly absorbed into the zeitgeist; "the story was alive in the nations memory" (St Clair, "The Impact of *Frankenstein*" 261). Hitchcock's excellent *Frankenstein: A Cultural History* provides a detailed and very thorough survey of how Frankenstein and his creature have entered popular consciousness. It is well established that popular culture has misappropriated the name of the creator and given it to his creation. However, Hitchcock shows that this misappropriation is not

the work of Hollywood, as is often assumed, but can be traced back to as early as 1819, only one year after the novel's original publication. Hitchcock cites Colburn, the publisher of Polidori's *Vampyre* as having named the Creature, the "wretch abhorred", as Frankenstein (Hitchcock 79). From this moment on, representations of the novel and its protagonists began to drift further and further from Shelley's novel itself:

> by the middle of the nineteenth century, propelled as much by adaptations as by the novel itself, the myth of Frankenstein and his monster had entered the vernacular. The name "Frankenstein" had become a code word form misguided ambition, for new ideas conjured up with good intentions but destined to grow and change beyond all reckoning, ultimately overwhelming those who conceived them. (Hitchcock 106)

From this moment on, representations of the novel and its protagonists began to drift further and further from Shelley's novel itself.

In 1824, in a Parliamentary debate, Tory politician George Canning cited Frankenstein's creature as a warning against the dangers of ending slavery too rapidly, as "to turn [the 'Negro'] loose in the manhood of his physical strength, in the maturity of his physical passions, but in the infancy of his uninstructed reason, would be to raise up a creature resembling the splendid fiction of a recent romance" (UK Parliament). This was not the only meaning assigned to "Frankenstein". The invocation of Frankenstein's creature was used as a warning against the dangers of granting the vote to the working class in political cartoons such as "The Brummagem Frankenstein" (Tenniel – see Figure 8). Frankenstein was also adopted as a symbol of the monstrous power of the first corporations in "The American Frankenstein" (Bellew – see Figure 9). In this image, the power of the railway monopolies to further ruin the lives of the working class is depicted as a large monster made of train-parts. These serve as examples of the widespread adoption of "Frankenstein" as a symbol invoked as a warning against "monstrosity" of all shapes, particularly the dangers of racial or social groups perceived as Other, even as these references drift further from their textual origins.

Figure 8: Tenniel's "The Brummagem Frankenstein", 1866

Figure 9 Bellew's "The American Frankenstein", 1874

Hitchcock echoes Foucault's observation about the social upheaval that gave rise to Shelley's novel: "It emerged at a turning point in Western history, when the moral universe was shifting and when some dared to believe that advances in scientific knowledge promised humans dominion over that which for centuries had been God's alone. The story of Frankenstein's monster is a myth of claiming long-forbidden knowledge and facing the consequences" (Hitchcock 4). Hitchcock goes on to consider the mythic archetypes that underpin the novel—those who like Odysseus break boundaries yet receive great rewards, or those like Prometheus who transgress and are punished: "In this moral universe, life presents a perpetual temptation. There is always further to go, but the reward of a long and serene life comes to those who hang back and toe the line" (Hitchcock 4). However, as she observes further, unlike Prometheus and Odysseus, Frankenstein has no god: "To the centrally human quandary between risk and obedience, *Frankenstein* adds one more crucial, haunting, modern twist. What if there is no divine source for the rules, no final moral answer, no divine authority to judge, punish, or reward, to create, destroy or control? In short, what if there is no God?" (6). What Hitchcock observes here is the key feature of *Frankenstein* that makes it a potentially foundational text for discourse. It is not just that this is a 'what if?' question (a fundamental element of the genre of science fiction), but that it is *this* question, the question of fundamental socio-religious significance, that underpins how this discourse operates in creating a space for readers to draw their own boundaries. As Phillip A. Pecorino states, "Science fiction in these works becomes a vehicle for the exploration of values well as an exposition of possible alternatives for the future" (7).

Hitchcock's work is particularly useful in tracing how differing periods responded to the moral spaces opened up by Shelley's novel. In a way, she is conducting a contextual biography of the Creature's life in popular culture. *Frankenstein* had been adapted for the stage almost immediately after publication, and the new medium of film brought the Creature to life again exactly 100 years after Shelley's 1831 edition. James Whale's 1931 *Frankenstein*, starring Boris Karloff, "shimmered in a zone of moral uncertainty, which is part of its lasting power. Without the added final scene—the cheery toast to the house of Frankenstein—the film would have ended in even more of a moral limbo, with creature and creator hovering between life and death against the background of the flaming windmill" (Hitchcock 164). Whale's adaptation recognised and wrote into

the discursive space Shelley had established, casting doubt over the culpability of both the creator and his creature. Yet the moral ambiguity that is so essential to the novel and the 1931 film was subsequently lost as representations of Frankenstein and his creature moved further away from the original in later productions. Hitchcock outlines how this occurred midway through the twentieth century:

> Just as a metaphor can die from overuse, so too, after numerous retellings, a myth can lose vitality. The story becomes an empty shell, an externalisation without inner meaning. Complicated moral questions—the kind that cannot be answered simply by saying yes or no, good or evil—drop out altogether. In the middle of the twentieth century the Frankenstein monster was facing such a demise. (Hitchcock 210)

This change from moral ambiguity to a more didactic, definitive message would be the result of the many cultural and social forces that shaped responses to the novel and films. It is not the work of this thesis to focus on this specific period's turn away from moral ambiguity, but the most logical reason would be that these productions during the 1940s and 1950s were concurrent with the Second World War and its aftermath, which held enough moral questions of its own. Audiences were looking to escape and be entertained, not have the waters of their morality muddied further.

It is also worth reminding ourselves here that the lowest ebb in the frequency of usage of the term "Frankenstein" was during the preceding war to end all wars, and that this number was returning to a level approximating the 1890s levels during the 1950s. If, as Hitchcock observes, the myth of Frankenstein was losing its vitality, it continued to be wheeled out even if only as a cliché with the same regularity in the middle of the twentieth century as it had been when its vitality must have seemed to be at its most urgent: during the rise of science fiction as a literary genre in the 1880s and 1890s. The return of this vitality is attributed by Hitchcock to a form that has only recently begun for its own part to gain critical attention. It was in the comics of the 1960s (and the popular works of the Golden Age of science fiction) that new cultural forms "managed to recapture the essential ambiguity of Mary Shelley's story" (Hitchcock 226). The space Shelley had opened was now being flooded with texts that function in the same way, although they differed in form. As my review of critical attention to Shelley and her works in Chapter One also reveals, this

resurgence was only magnified by the spotlight of the academy, and the multiplicity of responses to her works further added to the discourse she had created. What Hitchcock's discussion reveals is the way in which *Frankenstein* has permeated popular culture—evidence, I contend, of its continuing force and of the extent to which its initial impact is still felt. Its ripples within the pool of culture are still visible today, even as the source text recedes imperceptibly from view in the case of the vast majority of texts on the outer reach of this wave.

6.3 THE QUESTION OF SCIENCE FICTION

Shelley has been credited with establishing the science fiction genre (Aldiss; Stableford). I would argue that she popularised a certain approach to thinking about science through a fictive lens and so to a degree shaped "the rock" of genre that others would emulate. What she really established was a discursive space for thinking about science, the most frequent "way of speaking" or boundaries of the discourse are manifest in, but not limited to, the tropes of the science fiction genre. Searching the British corpus in the Advanced Interface, the first appearance of the term "science fiction" occurs in the 1890s, with 17 texts using the term in that decade (Davies, see Figure 6). However, the American corpus reveals a statistical outlier, with one text using the term in 1851. "Science fiction" is not cited again until the 1870s (Davies). This may seem to undermine the assertion that Shelley's *Frankenstein* was foundational to the genre, however, the first search result in 1850, while appearing in the American corpora, is in fact published in London.

This 1851 reference comes from William Wilson, who uses the term "science fiction" in his discussion of a poem that recounts the perspectives of seven different small insects and animals of the one object:

> Fiction has lately been chosen as a means of familiarising science in one single case only, but with great success, it is by the celebrated dramatic poet, R. H. Horne, and is entitled "The Poor Artist; or, Seven Eye-sights and One Object." We hope it will not be long before we may have their works of Science-Fiction, as we believe such books likely to fulfil a good purpose, and create an interest, where, unhappily, science might fail. (Wilson 137)

As Wilson observes, the purpose of the poem is to familiarise science through fiction. Shelley's goal is not quite so direct—*Frankenstein* does not take interest in the science directly; rather, it focuses on the potential consequences of radical new science. Importantly, Wilson notes, "such books [are] likely to fulfil a good purpose, and create an interest, where, unhappily, science might fail" (137). This shows a recognition of the ability of the discursive interaction between science and fictional literature that Shelley established to allow science to be spoken about or considered in cultural spaces in which the discourse of science does not operate alone. Essentially, Wilson is arguing that fiction allows science to broaden its reach. Although it is impossible to know what "good purpose" Wilson had in mind, the obvious moral connotations are unavoidable. Wilson's more direct definition of science fiction can be summarised as fiction that conveys scientific fact: "Science-Fiction, in which the revealed truths of science may be given, interwoven with a pleasing story which may itself be poetical and *true*—this circulating a knowledge of the Poetry of Science, clothed in the garb of the Poetry of life. The influences of science inter-penetrate the whole Earth" (139-140). His closing observation is just one example of the perceived importance and pervasiveness of the discourse of science. I would argue what Wilson is really observing is the interaction between the discourses of science and the as yet undefined discourse of secular morals, with literature as the vehicle that allows scientific ideas to be considered through a different lens.

Allan K. Hunter highlights the complex and changing relationship between discourses at the time Shelley was writing. He describes *Frankenstein* as:

> an examination of the tensions between various kinds of science and political reform associated with their appeal to scientific laws of development. The renewal of conservatism in England led to a condemnation of both revolutionary political thought as well as the scientific inquiry that flourished under its aegis. Shelley personified this conflation in a creature that was a product of Enlightenment materialism, without the morality formed from familial connection or regulating religious philosophy. The resulting fear applied equally to evolution's seeming dismissal of the need for the divine, as well as the possibility of the underclass gaining power that it lacked the social virtue to wield. (135)

Hunter picks up on a number of important themes in the readings of Shelley and her discursive context. Broadly speaking, these are centred on scientific development, political reform (both in revolutionary politics and the unknown threat of a more politically aware lower class), and the absence of divinity. It is unsurprising that a sense of fear or trepidation about the future was prevalent in this rapidly changing landscape and it is this fear that Shelley allows her readers to consider from the safety of fiction.

Christa Knellwolf reaffirms Hunter's observation that there was a lack of "virtue" in the use of power (both scientific and political) at the time Shelley wrote:

> In the early nineteenth century, curiosity could no longer be indicted as a dangerous pursuit. The age of Enlightenment had already defined curiosity as a healthy, or indeed vital, element in the overthrow of a superstitious and narrow-minded world view. But little attention was devoted to the question of how the age could cope with the experience of seeing the fall of long-established myths. The novel, therefore, reminds us that the process of expanding geographic and intellectual boundaries needs to be embedded in a context of care, responsibility and respect. (*Geographic Boundaries*, 64)

Joan Kirkby agrees that human curiosity, the will of man, could not be stopped. As Victor dies, Kirby argues that "he is troubled that the demon should live after him, but of course their fate is intertwined. Frankenstein's death spells the death of his creature, although the fact that we do not witness the Creature's immolation suggests Schopenhauer's idea that the will of man—and Schopenhauer's will is the blind, eternal drive of the Freudian id—does indeed live after death" (113). This, Knellwolf argues, has become a defining feature of our modern world:

> Most Romantic philosophers and writers might have insisted on the unrestricted exertion of genius in response to their tacit understanding that the highest form of intellectual activity would necessarily benefit human justice and prosperity. The idea that no limits should be put to intellectual creativity has established itself as a core value, with only very minor restrictions, since the late twentieth century. (61-62)

If then curiosity is a given, I would argue that Knellwolf's assertion that boundary making needs to be done with "care, responsibility and respect" is exactly the *lesson* of Shelley's novel. She does not didactically impose a boundary, but gives the reader the space to draw their own.

This space for boundary-making is established in the way both Victor and his creature are given a voice as the novel closes. On his death bed, Frankenstein offers a self-assessment of his conduct:

> During these last days I have been occupied in examining my past conduct; nor do I find it blameable.… My duties towards my fellow-creatures had greater claims to my attention, because they included a greater proportion of happiness or misery. Urged by this view, I refused, and I did right in refusing, to create a companion for the first creature. (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818], 156)

Frankenstein believes he is not "blameable" and he "did right". Yet this is contrasted to the Creature's lament, which calls into question Victor's confident assertion of having no responsibility to his creation: "Still I desired love and fellowship, and I was still spurned. Was there no injustice in this? Am I to be thought the only criminal, when all humankind sinned against me?" (Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818], 160). In presenting both the creator's and the creation's perspectives, without favouring one over the other, Shelley's closing opens a space for the reader to decide if in fact the Creature is "the only criminal" in the narrative. Unsurprisingly, as a result of this ambiguous ending, different readers will take differing positions.

Melinda Cooper reads *Frankenstein* as a lesson for figures like Victor, arguing that Shelley's audience is the scientist himself and the novel is:

> at times critical reflection on the scientific approach to monstrosity. In no sense does Shelley propose a simple moral condemnation of the scientific manipulation of life—but neither does she simply endorse the progressivist optimism of a materialist such as Lawrence. Instead, Shelley is concerned with exploring the ethical and relational dimension of the scientist's encounter with the monster. (89)

This suggests a more didactic lesson—scientists must be cautious and responsible. However, it is the broader social boundaries that would dictate a scientist's behaviour, and the work of this cultural boundary making is done by all participants, not merely the scientists themselves. Cooper continues with this idea of responsibility: "The supreme irony of Shelley's *Frankenstein* is that the teratological creature grows up to offer an extremely articulate philosophical and political challenge to his creator's pretensions. What he demands of his creator is no less than a new understanding of justice—one that would embrace the rights of the 'monster' along with the newfound rights of universal man" (96). Clearly, a number of critics agree that it is not a question of right or wrong, but more importantly taking responsibility for the results of your curiosity. This is the responsibility not only of the individual, but of the culture that gave curiosity free reign. As Frankenstein advises Walton, "Seek happiness in tranquillity and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries. Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed" (Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818], 157). The curiosity that fuels scientific inquiry is unlikely to be dulled by an admonishment to "avoid ambition". In giving this reminder to the reader that while Frankenstein's project failed, another's "may succeed", Shelley broadens the scope of potential meaning, opening a space for readers to reflect upon the possibility of other projects, real or imagined, coming to fruition and the moral boundaries they would draw in these circumstances.

Knellwolf adds a crucial caveat to this discussion of the relationship between curiosity and responsibility, arguing that it lacks an understanding of what is needed *after* curiosity is satisfied:

> Its warning about the dangerous consequences of scientific curiosity, however, does not instruct us to desist from the desire to know but urges us to build the context for an understanding of self and world that benefits each and every one. Therefore, it suggests that the first cause of all misfortunes is not unreasonable curiosity but insufficient knowledge about the qualities and needs of human life. (*Geographic Boundaries* 65)

Shelley does not condemn Victor for his curiosity, pursuit of knowledge or violation of religious boundaries in his attempt to create life like God. As Alexandra Aldrid argues, "Shelley was not condemning scientific research as forbidden knowledge … instead … she alerted them [her contemporaries] to the social dangers contained in a newly forming mythos" (17). Victor's greatest flaw is not his use of science, but his failure to care for his creature that results. Shelley has Victor acknowledge this: "In a fit of enthusiastic madness I created a rational creature, and was bound towards him to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being" (Shelley, *Frankenstein* [1818], 156). However, Victor decides his responsibility to mankind as a whole supersedes his obligation to his creation. It is not curiosity that Shelley condemns, but the fact that in this headlong rush to know and to find the answer, little consideration is given to the most important "what if?" of all: what if this works? What if this goes wrong? Knellwolf continues with this idea:

> *Frankenstein*, by contrast, deplores most scientists' sad lack of reflective consideration of what they are doing. The novel draws attention to the fact that a precarious lack of responsible foresight characterises our culture's valorisation of progress. It clearly advocates certain boundaries to the application of scientific discoveries but it is far from suggesting that curiosity should be restrained. (*Geographic Boundaries* 62)

Or more simply, as Jeff Goldblum's Dr Ian Malcom so aptly states in another modern tale of science applied without responsibility or forethought, *Jurassic Park*, "Your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could, they didn't stop to think if they should" (1993). It is this idea that is the real crux of the novel, and the real "what if?" question that drives the discourse Shelley founded—not "what if scientific endeavour resulted in *x*?" but, "how would I respond if *x* occurred? Where are my personal boundaries?" This is a question that is not only the responsibility of the scientist to consider, but one of society as a whole.

This intersection between science and literature was not formally labelled as the genre of science fiction until some 70 years after the publication of *Frankenstein.* This presents a challenge in categorising Shelley's work, as modern critical tradition seeks to situate the novel retroactively as either a Gothic text or as a science fiction one. Unlike the Gothic, whose tropes were established prior to Shelley's writing,

science fiction was yet to develop clearly defined tropes, as the genre had not yet gained sufficient recognition to be labelled. I argue that what we see in *Frankenstein* is the first manifestation of some of the tropes that would ultimately come to be recognised as part of the science fiction genre *and* a new way of thinking about science through fiction, through which it achieved its initial cultural and social impact, paving the way for its literary influence to come into effect.

6.4 Ripples and Rebounds: The Reach of Discourse

This study of impact, both from a textual perspective and a cultural perspective reveals much. Having mapped the landscape of Shelley's time and her place within it through contextual biography, we can use tools such as Google Ngram and Davies's Advanced Interface to not only see the size of the ripples caused by texts, but also delve into the form these ripples took, as responses, criticisms, or tangential references that reveal the vast reach of *Frankenstein* as a symbol. Criticism most often takes a textual perspective, placing themselves at the point of impact in the cultural pool, and tracing the ripples caused by the text as they race outward, perhaps intersecting with other discursive ripples. Having built a rich, multidimensional image, we are only then able to view the impact of the author-subject's work in a new way, to position ourselves on the shore—where we may lose sight of the original text itself, but can see its influence as the surface of culture shifts and reforms under the work's influence, and perhaps even see the most powerful of ripples reach the shore, reshaping society itself.

Hunter, Knellwolf and others identify that curiosity, or wanting to discover the unknown, is a key driver of Shelley's novel and its readership. The final question to consider is this: how does this discourse of moral curiosity continue to operate today? To get to this point, we should not leap headlong into the present—a final summary of how the discursive space opened out during Shelley's own time will be undertaken. Tod Chambers argues that "fiction does not simply reflect the world … but, by engaging the reading in a particular presentation of the world, fiction argues for that particular view" (80). He continues, "It is the power of fiction to argue for a way of seeing the world by constructing an imagined space where conflicting values are able to enter into a struggle with one another and, most importantly, a space where one of those values is portrayed as winning" (81). This is where Shelley's

work differs, as she does not portray a particular set of values "winning". The consternation this caused is clear when we consider, for example, the opinion expressed in *The Quarterly Review*: "it inculcates no lesson of conduct, manners, or morality; it cannot mend, and will not even amuse its readers, unless their taste have been deplorably violated" ("Rev. of Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus").

This void of moral clarity was quickly filled in the 1823 stage adaptation of the novel, *Presumption*. As Lillian Furst notes, "Literary works are especially valuable for disclosing the variegated human responses to the scientific advances of the period. These responses run the whole gamut from enthusiastic embrace of the new to doubts, falterings, scepticism, and downright rejection" (xii). John Robbins argues that the play's more overtly moral message was more palatable to audiences precisely because it did portray particular "values as winning" (Chambers 81) and showed a rejection of the ambiguous morality of Shelley's original work. Robbins cites *The Morning Post*'s July 1823 review of *Presumption*: "in the novel the rigid moralist may feel himself constantly offended, by the modes of reasoning, principles of action, &c. – But in the Drama this is all carefully kept in the background. Nothing but what can please, astonish, and delight, is there suffered to appear" (Robbins 194-195). One of the ways the play mitigates the moral questions of the novel is the removal of the Creature's potential for procreation with the absence of the female creature (Robbins 195). Robbins notes it is not only *Presumption* performing this act of moral reinterpretation:

> Taken together, *Frankenstein* and *Presumption* provide a case study in how drama helped shape, and in many cases ameliorate, public perceptions of scientific knowledge during this transformational period: Peake's play converted a narrative of unease into one of containment and an assertion of humanity's dominance over its creations, one that allowed for a more comfortable engagement with scientific advancements that were occupying an ever-expanding place in the lives of common citizens. (195)

This more conservative framing of the dangers of science, with a clear moral lesson and man triumphing over the mute Monster, coupled with the play's success, demonstrate how Shelley's ambiguous close allowed people to respond in their own way. The popularity of this more conservative, definitive outcome, with its clear

moral prerogative shows that the general feeling about the original *Frankenstein* was one of unease—people wanted a happy, clear cut, ending. In this way, we can see *Presumption* as a reaction to the ripples of discontent caused by Shelley's ambiguous ending.

In turn, Shelley's own editorial efforts responded to the success of *Presumption*: the impact of the adaptation rebounded back to affect the original work in the much more overtly moral tone evident in the 1831 edition. As Robbins explains:

> Such a framing helps shed light on Shelley's reworking of her own novel between the two editions of 1818 and 1831, during which she revised the text to make its moral condemnation of Frankenstein more apparent: by appearing before a mass spectatorship throughout the 1820s, *Presumption* had altered the public discourse on the new advances in the life sciences … *Presumption* and its many adaptations are the heirs of such works in their exploration of contemporary anxieties about scientific progress and industrialization, but they adopted a distinctly more optimistic take on the effects of such curiosity, rendering their source text more socially palatable in the process. (195)

I argue that Robbins's observation that "*Presumption* had altered the public discourse on the new advances in the life sciences" is not entirely accurate: Shelley's novel established a new discursive space for people to think about the "life sciences", and *Presumption* is one of the first responses to the work that operates in this same discursive space. *Presumption* does alter the discourse about the new sciences, as it shows the more conservative message people were comfortable hearing.

This discussion clearly demonstrates that Shelley's society was grappling with new moral questions, and her text was the first to explore science through fiction in a way that was taken up in popular culture, so creating a new space for the plays, films, and adaptations that followed to test the moral boundaries that Shelley has left undefined. As Robbins notes, many of these texts offered a more didactic and reassuring view than that of the original, but the space was nonetheless open and the conversations about the boundaries of science were being had. In this way, we

can see these early plays and texts as a response to Shelley's work, an answer of what society would find acceptable.

6.5 Discourse Today

Academic debate about the relationship between literature, reading and ethics is ongoing. Some see a direct casual relation between reading and action, while others counter this view. Martha Nussbaum's argument that literature cultivates "powers of imagination that are essential to citizenship" (85) centres on literature as a vehicle for empathy and, in turn, social action. Yet Suzanne Keen suggests that "a society that insists on receiving immediate ethical and political yields from the recreational reading of its citizens puts too great a burden on both empathy and the novel" (168). While Nussbaum and Keen offer differing positions on the social role of literature, both focus on its ethical function, suggesting reading should affect readers' sense of responsibility to others in society. As Geoffrey Galt Harpham describes, "Ethics is the arena in which the claims of otherness—the moral law, the human other, cultural norms, the Good-in-itself etc.—are articulated and negotiated" (394). For my part, I argue the work of *fiction* is of fundamental importance here, as the fictive element of a work provides a "safe" space for readers by limiting demands upon them in the real world. As Keen points out:

> readers' perception of a text's fictionality plays a role in subsequent empathetic response, by releasing readers from the obligations of self-protection through skepticism and suspicion. David Miall has noticed a similar effect. The fiction reader who suspends disbelief, Miall argues, encounters devices that vouch for a novel's fictionality and that are "capable of eliciting the decentering response of empathic projection. (88)

A reader's knowledge of the novel as fiction allows freedom to engage imaginatively in both emotive and ethical responses. Keen argues that popular fiction is even less likely to result in social change:

> When a novel becomes a popular bestseller, I have suggested, the psychological effect of diffusion of responsibility may deter readers from

> acting upon their empathetic reading. The link between feeling with fictional characters and acting on behalf of real people, I have argued, is extremely tenuous and has yet to be substantiated either through empirical research into the effects of reading or through analysis of demonstrable causal relationships between novel reading as a cultural phenomenon and historical changes in societies in which novel reading flourishes. (146)

While I do not think it is the necessary goal of fiction to achieve broad, tangible social reform as Nussbaum suggests, I do not agree with Keen's assertion that popular fiction cannot have a social impact. As David White argues, "Science fiction as extrapolative thinking helps us to decide whether or not the catastrophic projection is realistic. Because of its moral consequences for the present, such speculation is anything but idle" (186). What some forms of fiction do is provide a safe space for readers to form individual, perhaps empathetic, but certainly ethical, responses. This is where I feel the power of science fiction truly lies—in giving the reader the imaginative space to explore possibilities without didactically proposing a solution or demanding an action. It is here that the value of readers and reading, both recreationally and critically, becomes evident. As Christopher Small argues, "it is not simply a question of literary descendants; *Frankenstein* belongs to the literature (and so of course does any work worth talking about in some degree) which has progeny not only in other writing but in ways of thought and consequently in acts: bringing not only other books but worlds into sight" (196).

Yet as Keen points out, "empathy for a fictional character need not correspond with what the author appears to set up or invite … Self-reported readers' empathy appears to be unpredictable and sporadic" (75). Shelley cannot have predicted if the reader would respond to Victor's search for knowledge in a positive or negative way or if they in fact empathised with the Creature, or Walton, or any other figure in the novel. The reader may feel greater empathy for the Creature, and so view Victor as having failed his duty to his creation. As Colin McGinn notes, "one purpose of fiction is to present and reveal character in such a way as to invite moral appraisal" (2-3). These "evaluative attitudes" are both "affective as well as cognitive" (McGinn 3). A capacity for inviting differing responses is further enabled because Shelley provides no guidance from her privileged authorial position over the text—she does not condemn Victor or the Creature. McGinn describes the Creature

as a "rich source of human anxiety" (144), because his story is "complex, pregnant, and salutary—an emblematic tale of moral metamorphosis" (146). The uncertainty of the ending is reinforced as we do not see the Creature perish: as Walton sails away, he is "lost in darkness and distance".

The potential survival of the Creature and the lack of clear lesson in Victor's story opens a space for the reader's response to take primacy over any intended authorial meaning. As Wolfgang Iser established, "the convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified with either the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader" (277). Because the ending is not clear cut, there is greater scope for the disposition of the reader to play a larger role in meaning-making, as the reality of the text does not provide a definitive ending. This "essential ambiguity" (Hitchcock 226) is what establishes a space for moralising or ethical thinking. Unlike the didactic lessons given in other nineteenth century novels, such as the Bronte's exhortations on good social conduct, which teach the reader what the world *should* be like, Shelley's work shows the reader one potential view of what the world *might* be like, if we allow the "what if?" to become a "when I". The *lack* of ethical guidance given by Shelley creates a vacuum that the readers must fill with their own conclusions. There are those readers that, as Shelley encourages in the more conservative 1831 edition of the novel, "deduce an apt moral from my tale" and condemn Victor, the Modern Prometheus, for attempting to usurp the creative powers of God. Others see it as a warning not against scientific experiment, but a lesson in the responsibility that must accompany this.

The discursive space which Shelley founded with *Frankenstein* continues to provide readers today with texts which ask "what if?" and give readers room to create boundaries for themselves. Even in texts which present a more overt moral judgement of their characters, readers can still choose to take a resistant reading and so form their own position. While Frankenstein made his creature from many parts, science today allows for exact replication—cloning. Cloning technology has been explored in science fiction and Amit Marcus argues, "despite its transgressions of the boundaries of the actual world, science fiction can contribute to the bioethical discussion of cloning" (429). I argue it is not "despite" but *because* of fiction's "transgressions" of reality that fiction contributes by providing a hypothetical space

to think through and explore the potential outcomes of new science. Marcus notes three ways in which fiction contributes to the cloning debate: "it can highlight potential problematic situations that cloning may bring about, which are ignored or marginalised in current bioethical debate"; also, while modern sciences are bound by strict codes of ethical conduct, science fiction offers a lens through which the broader social or relational impacts of science can play out, mirroring science's "can we?" with a more reflective "should we?"; and science fiction can also serve as a "social barometer" in that it can "give voice to and amplify popular conceptions about science in general and clones in particular" (429).

It has in fact become commonplace for scientists and their publics to look to science fiction for guidance on innovation. It is widely accepted, for example, that without Arthur C. Clarke's vision of a global satellite network we would not have that particular technology that makes global telecommunications a reality. Conversely, the cause of robotics and AI innovations has no doubt been held back to some degree by decisions made by government agencies and funding bodies on the basis of fears of a world in which the vision of Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot* or of the *Terminator* film franchise might be close to reality. Yet the impact of science fiction is not always so immediately obvious—as Laurie Johnson has explained, the uptake of virtual reality technologies should have been inspired by William Gibson's wildly successful *Neuromancer* (1984), and as early as 1987 a viable VR kit was ready for domestic distribution with the VPL *Reality Built for Two* package released by Thomas Zimmerman and Jaron Lanier, but the personal computer had already cornered the domestic market, forcing VR technologies to have to be developed to interface with domestic computers ("Spectral Machinery," 47-49). As Johnson explains further, the success of the personal computer was based in large part on it having been developed hand-in-glove with computer games, because the developers of the earliest personal computers were also science fiction fans who wanted to demonstrate the capabilities of this technology by replicating the space operas of Doc Smith in the program *Spacewar!* (49; see also Johnson, "Speculations").

Alexandra Aldrid suggests that "science fiction … is better understood and appraised as a register of newly emerging values. In that sense it often serves as a fictive seismograph of not altogether visible social change before that change becomes institutionalised" (16). Marcus argues that "bioethicists should take [these conceptions] into account, even if they deem these conceptions false and misleading"

(429). Science fiction offers scientists insight into how their work is perceived within the community. While this is done through a fictional medium, it nonetheless serves as a representation of the fears and hopes laypersons hold for emerging technologies and scientific advancements. Marcus's concludes then that "science fiction … defamiliarises the perception, conventions and habitual thought of its readers, thereby making them aware of their often unstated presuppositions" (429). That is, by being offered a fictive experience, readers have the opportunity to reflect hypothetically upon how they position themselves on the topic, without the real world pressure of making a decision that will affect their life and their society. Aldrid recognises that science fiction as we understand it today operates in the same way as *Frankenstein*, noting that "both Shelley and LeGuin have produced exceptionally popular science fiction novels that … are teeming with ideas that reflect the romantic counterargument to the scientific rationalism of their respective times" (18).

It is not only LeGuin's fiction that offers this counterpoint—this is a key feature of the discursive space in which these texts operate. Anne Franciska Pusch explores the relationship between Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy and xenotransplantation, to reveals the ongoing discursive interactions between hard science and science fiction. Pusch argues that like Shelley, Atwood was well positioned to write science fiction:

> Being brought up among scientists, [Atwood] found inspiration in her family's discussions of scientific experiments they conducted themselves, in addition to popular scientific magazines she read. This paper views the connection of fiction and science from two angles: first, how science fiction is inspired by science and second, how science fiction might inspire science. I argue there are mutual exchanges which can lead to reciprocal influence. (56)

Pusch continues this argument about the interaction possible between science and science fiction:

> For bioethics, this means that with the help of imagined scenarios such as in science fiction, ethical concerns can be made visible and debated in a less constricted space. Liminal beings emerging from xenotransplantation do not

> need to remain shadowy figures, they can be revived in the fictional context, which helps to make them more approachable and understandable. Repercussions of biomedical research can equally be made more comprehensible within the fictional realm. Both bioethics and literary studies can thus inform each other on critical topics that affect us all. (59-60)

What Pusch observes here is also true of the Creature—he is a liminal being, not quite human and pushed out from the society in which he desperately seeks acceptance. Shelley's representation of the Creature, the way he is humanised and also given a voice, makes him "more approachable and understandable". Rather than the shambling, grunting figure of B-grade horror adaptations, Shelley's original Creature offers an articulate plea for recognition as more alike than Other, as solid rather than liminal.

This is something that Dolly the Sheep or the pigs growing human organs cannot (yet) do. As Pusch continues:

> Engaging with literary works that treat the problematic relationship between human and nonhuman beings in future capitalist consumer societies can help readers better understand their current society. The trends that Atwood extrapolates are dystopian, but they are also realistic and eerily possible. Her writing focuses on topics that are highly relevant for today's world and it thus has the power to get the reader's attention. (71)

Here again Pusch articulates a key feature of the discourse in which both Atwood and Shelley write: that their writing is popular, it "has the power to get the reader's attention" and in turn may allow the reader to "better understand their current society". That is, "The utilization of fictional characters allows for a greater sphere in which moral questions can be reframed and applied to actual scientific developments" (55). Aldrid's comments on LeGuin and Pusch's observations of Atwood recognise the moralising space made available in science fiction, it a way that is not possible in standard scientific discourse. As Pusch notes, "fictional scenarios can help to shift the focus away from the anticipated positive outcome to that of the ethical and moral concerns not being examined in the context of the

experiments themselves and not being written down in the proposals for research grants" (63).

6.6 In Closing: The Final Suture

Speculative fiction asks "what if?" and I think great works in this genre leave it up to the reader to make their own decisions. In this way, fiction reading does shape culture, at an individual level, as each reader, in their response, draws a new boundary for themselves—Victor is to be condemned, celebrated for his endeavour, chastised for his lack of care for his creature, and so the reader may respond similarly when science does pose the same question in the real world. Frankenstein's entry into the zeitgeist as a warning against playing God or irresponsible science suggests this is the dominant reading of the text. It also turns us back towards Nussbaum's view that fiction can have a social outcome. The dominant view is that Frankenstein's frequent invocation indicates that our culture has recognised the perilous nature of Victor's lack of responsibility and so we have adopted a cautious approach to genetic and biological experimentation. Taking another example from the contemporary debate about cloning, Anne Lawton's "The Frankenstein Controversy: The Constitutionality of a Federal Ban on Cloning" opens with a quotation from the novel and makes a bold claim for the lesson that the book continues to provide:

> [it] tapped into a societal uneasiness about the proper limits of scientific inquiry. Scientific discoveries do not unfold in a vacuum. They play out against a cultural backdrop in which both fantasy and reality are intertwined. Tampering with the process of creation, whether it be in the form of assisted reproductive technology, genetic testing, or, at its most extreme, cloning, plays on "profound concerns regarding the nature of humankind and its relationship to other aspects of the natural world". (279)

This highlights that the "what if?" of Shelley's novel taps in to real world, and in this way reveals the operating of the discursive space that underpins the genre of science fiction. Readers can respond to the "what if?" with their own personal moral boundaries, safe in the knowledge that it is a fictional scenario. Yet at the same time,

as the premise has an air of reality, readers can also reflect upon their own real world experience, without necessarily having to be moved to action or a change in behaviour.

Overall, I think Nussbaum's argument that literature should serve as an ethical primer is potentially unachievable—literature's ethical dimension cannot be ignored, and writers and readers must take responsibility for the texts they produce, but the role of the primer seems to be impossible for all literary texts to live up to. Reader's responses will always vary based upon which character they feel the greatest empathy for and so no consistent lesson can be guaranteed to be learned. Keen acknowledges the complexity of the relationship between writing, reading and responding:

> That the novel should be singled out as a technology most adept at invoking empathy and shaping moral behaviour challenges what psychologists have been able to discover about empathy, but it endorses what many people believe about the transformative power of reading and of reading fiction in particular. (35)

I would add to Keen's point that speculative fiction is more likely to provoke ethical responses that come to bear in the real world. The reason for this, is that the "what if?" of the science fiction genre, coupled with ambiguity in the author's ending, works to create a space for the readers to draw their own boundaries. In the case of *Frankenstein*, the narrative has transcended its readership, with the term becoming a cultural marker for the dangers of unfettered scientific experimentation. While speculative fiction broadly, and the science fiction genre particularly, are often seen a pulp or low brow, the popularity of the genre speaks to its appeal in our time of rapidly developing scientific change, just as was the case in Shelley's time. Shelley helped establish a new way for fiction and reality to interact—an intersection where the reader is offered the security of fiction but the intellectual room to consider the potential realities of the author's "what if?" premise. In this way we can see the act of reading as a rehearsal, rather than an enactment, of citizenry.

The reading of fiction does not have to result in social action, but fiction does serve a social function—the safe space for readers to draw their own ethical boundaries within "what if?" scenarios provides a space for thinking about how we

would respond to similar changes in our real lives. McGinn's observation about the *experience* of reading is perhaps most pertinent in this respect:

> In reading a novel we have ethical experiences, sometimes quite profound ones, and we reach ethical conclusion, condemning some characters and admiring others. We live a particular set of moral challenges (sitting there in our armchair) by entering into the lives of the characters introduced … A tremendous amount of moral thinking and feeling is done when reading novels … we can put an ethical idea through its paces, testing its ability to command our assent. We can also explore its alignments, limitations, repercussions. We can face moral reality with all its complexity and drama. (174-176)

What this final chapter has revealed is that science fiction is not merely a series of generic tropes, such as the fantastic tales of mad scientists. Science fiction provides readers space for moralising, for explorations of ethical boundaries. In this way, science fiction is more than a genre, rather than genre is the manifestation of the moral discursive space Shelley established with *Frankenstein.* As Brooks Landon eloquently explains, in reading science fiction, readers have "the sense that you are a part of an enterprise with an agenda, a way of seeing the world as a problem to be solved or an opportunity to be taken, but most of all as an excuse for thinking, for endless speculation, fuelled by the simple words 'what if?'" (Landon 36). It is thanks to Mary Shelley that we have this way of seeing the world through the lens of fiction that imagines 'what if?' and it is left to us to find our own answers.

Conclusion: Afterlives

Thanks to Mary Shelley, authors and their readers can look through the lens of a microscope or into the infinite vastness of space and wonder “what if…?” together. Opportunities for further exploration of the texts which occupy the discourse Shelley founded and their impact abound. Scholars of science fiction have already looked closely at the Golden Age of SF in the 1950s and the undeniable cultural impact of the *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* franchises, which have taught us to “live long and prosper” as we fight injustice and tyranny. With the research tools now available it becomes possible for scholars to trace and quantify the ongoing cultural impact of Spock and Skywalker, who, like the Creature, are readily recognisable even if the viewer has not seen the original series or films. Perhaps there is a case to be made that those authors who first turned their eyes to the stars as space travel loomed as a real possibility in the 1960s are the next wave of influence within Shelley’s discourse, reshaping it with a hope that man will do better and be kinder if given the chance amongst the stars – a moral hope rather than a moral ambiguity.

Alternately, the approach I have taken in my reading of Shelley and *Frankenstein* may be applied to another genre altogether, identifying other authors whose works have had a significant cultural impact; the ripples of which we can trace using new research tools. Stephen King springs to mind as an interesting study, as another famous creator of ‘monsters’. While Shelley has one hugely influential character, King’s works have permeated Western, particularly American, popular culture with a range of influences: a generation of parents who don’t let their children play near storm water drains (*It*) or those who dislike seeing twins in hotels (*The Shining*), for example. Just as Shelley’s work was rapidly annexed by theatrical productions, so too King’s characters have been adapted for the screen. Like Frankenstein’s Creature, King’s characters are also present in a wide array of intertextual references and borrowings and it is now possible to trace and measure the reach of his impact in our culture.

Ultimately, this thesis has been a study of lives and afterlives, of the ripples that a single figure can cause. Building upon the rich biographical tradition in studies of Shelley and her works, I aimed in Chapters One and Two to explore the utility and better articulate the methodology of contextual biography as a way of seeing Shelley

positioned within the multidimensional time and place she occupied. While a study of the subject is still a key pillar in any form of biography, the defining feature of this methodology is a survey of the cultural landscape of which the subject was a part. This includes not only works and discourses that directly impinged upon the subject, but more broad forces of change and continuity in their society. This allows the biographer to better place their subject within this landscape, and begin to trace the intersections and interactions between the author's life and works, and the world in which they lived. By adopting this contextual approach, we build a richer, multidimensional image of the biographical subject, and are able to see the author-subject as an agent, both impacted by and impacting upon, their cultural landscape. There remains a great deal more work to be done in articulating a clear methodology of contextual biography, as many biographers do consider context, yet I think for a work to be considered a genuine contextual biography, there should be a detailed study of "contexts and cotexts" (McCourt, xv), while avoiding the pitfalls of psychobiography.

Foucault's conception of discourse and those who can found a discourse proved helpful in ascribing Shelley more significance than she is given in most scholarship. By looking at culture as a metaphorical pool, we can see both the ideas that flowed into shaping Shelley's work and in turn how her culture responded to her ideas. The most important feature of *Frankenstein* is its ambiguity, its lack of condemnation. This opens a space to readers that was rarely found in other novels of the time, and not in reference to new sciences. The impact of this space can be traced as we see the growth of the science fiction genre, where the morality of science is often thrown into question. Chapter Five gave consideration to what could be framed as a biography of authorship, tracing the influence and inspiration Shelley derived from those around her and other significant literary works. Here, I argue, we can see Shelley pick up the threads of the both her father's and her husband's thinking, and offer her own perspective, the innovative form and content that would be one of the earliest and certainly the most pervasive intersections between science and fiction. The debate about whether *Frankenstein* is genuine science fiction or not can be reframed—it is a fiction based on science, but more importantly it is a space for thinking about science.

Contextual biography's mapping of landscape not only allows the biographer to place their subject in context, but also chart the afterlife of the subject by

providing a way to trace and measure the impact of their works. Tools such as the Advanced Interface provide new opportunities for researchers to see both the size and scope of the ripples of impact caused by their author-subject, long after their physical death. The more traditional textual perspective, where we trace the ripples of influence radiating outward from the work can be complemented by adopting another position, where we place ourselves on the socio-cultural boundary and watch how it is effected, even though we may have lost sight of the origin-text itself.

This is well-evidenced in the case of *Frankenstein*, where the name of the novel is often misascribed, yet the ideas of the novel continue to shape our culture today. Hitchcock outlines the pervasiveness of the imagery of *Frankenstein* within our culture:

> While in Mary Shelley's novel, the monster disappears "lost in darkness and distance", he is never far away from us today. Many adaptations call the monster immortal; that claim might just as likely apply to the myth itself. Frankenstein's monster is on our bookstore, on our film and television screens, from morning cartoons to wee-hours rerun movies. He plays roles in advertising and political debate, he appears at public library story hours and on graduate-level reading lists. He is both a joke and a profound ethical dilemma. Known around the world by name and appearance, he is an emanation of the current human condition—a bundle of contradictions and universal meaning all in one. (Hitchcock 317)

The range of ways "Frankenstein" is invoked in our culture is indeed a kind of immortality—the "idea" of Frankenstein has become so well known that it can be referred to without any direct reference to or knowledge of the original text. The ripples that continue to emanate from Shelley's work provide "a bundle of contradictions and universal meaning all in one" (Hitchcock 317). These contradictions are the many differing responses to Shelley's work, both critical and literary. These texts are a part of the discourse Shelley established, a space where we as a culture attempt to construct a "universal meaning" for how we respond to science. Yet, as the ambiguous ending of *Frankenstein* highlights, it is ultimately up to the reader to chart their own moral boundaries within our cultural landscape.

I argue that *Frankenstein* as a text has sunk into our culture to become a part of the bedrock of how we think about science through fictional literature. It opened new channels and the ripples caused by this new discourse are still felt today. *Frankenstein* was cast into Romantic English culture at a time where the cultural bedrock was shifting, and new discourses were emerging throughout culture. Being able to trace the impact of this work allows us to see Shelley as a founder of discourse, and so ascribe her greater significance and recognition than a mere pioneer of genre. Proposing that Shelley is a Foucauldian founder of discourse offers a new perspective on her significance not only as a Romantic author, but as a figure who has shaped the world in which we live today, as the ripples and afterlives of the ideas in her novel continue to inform conversations about modern debates like cloning. This opens new opportunities to revaluate the genre of science fiction, not as a literary form, but as a discursive space in which the genre plays out a social function, allowing for the testing of moral boundaries through its fictional "what if?" There also exists many more opportunities for a detailed study of particular discursive interactions, of moments when Shelley's novel had a visible impact upon scientific thinking or cultural perceptions of science.

These opportunities stem from the ambiguity of Shelley's novel, and the lack of moral didacticism that was the norm at the time. This moral ambiguity, or moral curiosity as I have framed it at times throughout this thesis, is the key feature of the discursive space Shelley established. I have intentionally not given this space a formal name, as Scientific Moralism or Moralisation through Fiction, prioritises one discourse over another. Rather, it is the fluid and changing interplay between the discourses that I see as one of the key ways this space works. The space is constantly being reshaped as the ripples and their rebounds interact, so it is an active and dynamic space, whereas bounding it with the use of a proper noun would only limit its potentials. The closest I can come to a name is to identify that the moral curiosity or ambiguity that Shelley let her readers explore is most often manifest in the genre of Science Fiction (whose name balances the two key interactions of Shelley's work—asking the 'what if?' of new science through fiction, as discussed earlier). It is less about identifying what is present and more about seeing in works that operate in this space a lack or a vacancy—the moral decisions are left to the reader rather than filled in by the author.

It took over one hundred years for scholarship to recognise the significance of Shelley as anything more than the young wife of Percy, who happened to write a contentious debut novel. While Frankenstein and his creature rapidly took on a life of their own, two hundred years on we can now see how important the life Shelley lived was in creating the conditions that made a novel like *Frankenstein* possible. The impact of the novel both in Shelley's time and now shows that what has been left in Shelley's wake is a space within our culture for readers to engage with and create boundaries for themselves around the sciences that continue to shape and reshape our world.

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