The background features a dark blue gradient with a subtle pattern of white dots. Overlaid on this are several circular elements: a large scale on the left with numbers from 140 to 260, and several smaller circles with arrows indicating clockwise or counter-clockwise rotation. The text is centered on the right side of the image.

BIOGRAPHY AND BEYOND: THE REANIMATION OF MARY SHELLEY

ALISON BEDFORD, PHD CANDIDATE, USQ

MARY SHELLEY

- Wife
- Mother
- Editor
- AUTHOR

Founder of
discourse



REANIMATION

Initial interest

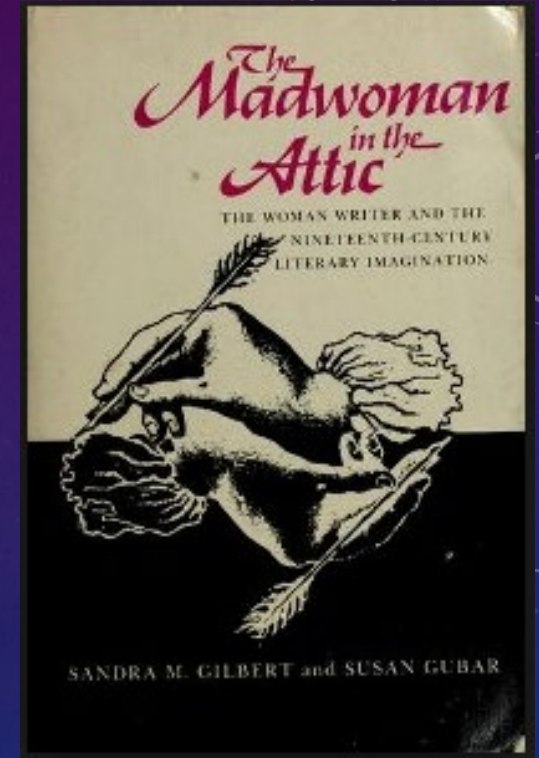
- Footnote to Percy
- Read for information about milieu

Early biography

- Recognition of works other than *Frankenstein*
- Grylls's biography
- “Mary (suffered) for the conflict there was in her nature between the feminine and the artist” (Grylls xxi)

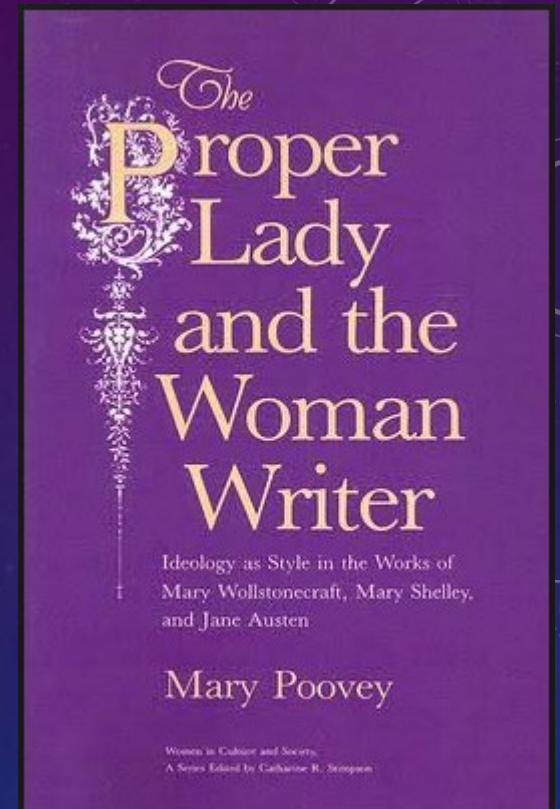
RECOGNITION

- Feminist biographers
 - Gilbert and Gubar – wife, mother and AUTHOR
- “we were trying to recover not only a major (and neglected) female literature but a whole (neglected) female history” (Gilbert and Gubar xii)



RECOGNITION

- Feminist biographers
- Poovey – dichotomous sense of self



- “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).

RESTORATION

- *Letters and Journals* restore Shelley's personal voice
- Spark's biography emphasises the importance of place and time in understanding Shelley and her works
 - "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)

RE-EVALUATION

- “there is no such thing as a definitive biography” (Lee, 18).
- Understanding of biographical context allow us to discern the conditions which enabled Shelley to write *Frankenstein* and so found a new discourse.

RE-EVALUATION

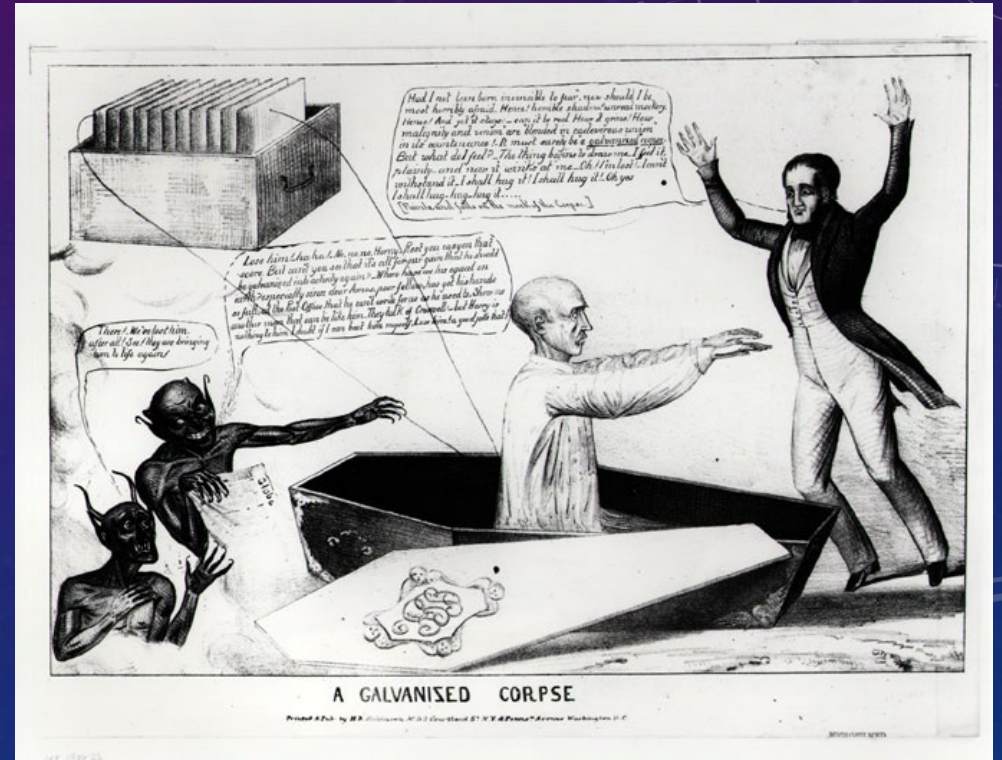
Science fiction as discursive space

- 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)

PLACE AND TIME



Mer de Glace



Galvanism

RE-EVALUATION

Founder of discourse

- “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. (Foucault, *Author* 114)

THE LAST MAN.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF FRANKENSTEIN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

Let no man seek
Henceforth to be foretold what shall befall
Him or his children.

MILTON.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

HENRY COLBURN, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1826.

RE-IMAGINING OUR UNDERSTANDING

- “"plagues" don't come merely from germs or viruses, they come from a society's inability to handle those germs, because of a lack of both medical knowledge and, more importantly, sociopolitical capability” (Fisch 271).
- Science fiction is the cultural response to its own inability to respond to rapid change.

Contextual biography

- Enlightenment ideals
- Romantic milieu
- Broader social change

Works

- *Frankenstein*
- *Last Man*

New critical insights

Science fiction as a discursive space

- In viewing Shelley as a founder of discourse we witness the ultimate power of biography: when it restores figures worthy of study and so gives critics the opportunity to go beyond biography and assess the emergence of new cultural forms and offer new insights into the discourses that underpin how we engage with our modern world.