

Mary Wollstonecraft, September 1797

The labour is hard and long, but finally you produce
a frail and puny child - a daughter, who'll later dance
with poets and at age nineteen create a monster she names
Frankenstein. 'Tis a pity - you're not to know. For you've
only ten days more to live. Your bed will shake with your
trembling, pain screaming jets of blood. Inside you, festering
fragments of afterbirth will do unfettered work. Invisible.
Murderous. Your intelligence and eloquence will haemorrhage
out when, placed upon your engorged breasts, tiny puppies
begin to suckle there and thus draw out your milk.
An eighteenth century grotesquerie to be sure.
Defiled, debased, distressed, your rational mind will reel.
So much for the *Rights of Women and the Perfectibility
of Man*. There'll be no Reason in your bedchamber. But you
know the signs. You've seen how Reason can go mad. Back when
black despair darkened the sunny skies of hope, when tumbrils
rumbled over cobblestones and the blood-soaked blade of
the guillotine fell on the deadly drumbeats of the Reign of Terror.
No commemorations or honouring then. Nor any now for you.
No dignity either - just the stench of bloodied bedsheets
and a sullied reputation for being you.

Had you but known your life, your work would one day become
a milestone, a blazing beacon of inspiration for all womankind,
would you have smiled?

Roslyn McFarland