

Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (Mary W. Shelley)

1797-1851



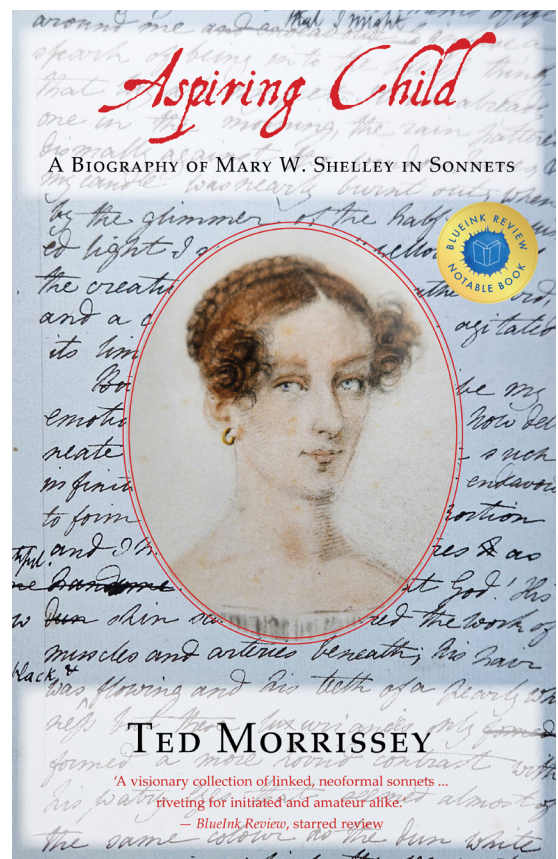
Artist: Richard Rothwell, 1840
Mary Shelley, age 43



Artist: Reginald Easton, c. 1857
Mary, allegedly from her death mask



Artist: Unknown
possibly Mary Godwin, age 18
Geneva, Switzerland, 1816



1797-1823



William Godwin
1756-1836



Mary Wollstonecraft
1759-1797

married 1797



Frances "Fanny" Imlay
1794-1816
Mary's half-sister



Claire Clairmont
1794-1897
Mary's stepsister



Percy Bysshe Shelley
1792-1822
married Mary 1816



Lord Byron



Samuel Taylor Coleridge



Leigh Hunt

In English, there are two major forms of sonnets — the Shakespearean (or “English”), and the Petrarchan (or “Italian”). Both have 14 lines, but vary primarily in terms of structure and rhyme scheme.

In *Aspiring Child*, I use a free-verse version of the Petrarchan sonnet, something a reviewer termed a “neoformal sonnet” (which I rather like the sound of).

Sonnet I
“Vindication”

Your mother left you, eleven days old.	1
Taken away by her newest lover,	2
Death. Septic poisoning, likely from	3
the doctor’s dirty nails as he groped	4
for her obstinate placenta. You always	5
felt responsible, a lonely little girl	6
burdened with that and a clever mind	7
out of time. Your name echoed her absence.	8
But she bequeathed you her books,	9
her revolutionary spirit, the vindication	10
of your alienated rights. Her words	11
worked to fill the emptiness, the void,	12
as you grew and read and waited, aching	13
for a dangerous affair of your own.	14

In a Petrarchan sonnet, the first 8 lines (the *octave*) introduce the subject in the form of a question, issue or problem.

The *volta* is the turn from the opening octave to the sestet.

The concluding 6 lines (the *sestet*) respond in some way to the question, issue or problem.