

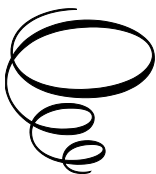
Mary Shelley's
Frankenstein,
1818-2018

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Edited by

Maria Parrino, Michela Vanon Alliata
and Alessandro Scarsella

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FOREWORD

In February 2018 the editors of the present volume organised a two-day international conference in Venice to celebrate the bicentenary of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, one of the most successful and haunting stories of all time. This publication grew out of that event, which was attended by panellists from Europe, the United States, Canada and Asia, and for which we would like to thank Ca' Foscari University of Venice, and in particular the Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Culturali Comparati and its director Maria Del Valle Ojeda Calvo, for providing institutional and financial support.

The nineteen essays collected in this volume, which were originally presented at the Venice conference, have all been extensively revised, expanded, and updated. The book is divided into three parts and preceded by the editors' introduction. While the first part turns primarily to the text itself, analysing its fictional techniques, the second and the third are concerned with placing the novel in a wider cultural context, exploring the numerous afterlives of the novel, its reception, and adaptations in different media, such as drama, cinema, graphic novels, television series, and computer games.

In their various critical approaches, these essays aim to pay tribute to, and account for, the persistent hold that Mary Shelley's masterpiece continues to exert on the imagination of readers, writers and artists in all fields of human creativity.

PART ONE

READING FRANKENSTEIN

INTRODUCTION

MARIA PARRINO

In her *Journal* entry for 12 August 1816, Mary Shelley recorded: “Write my story and translate. Shelley goes to the town, and afterwards goes out in the boat with Lord B. – after dinner I go out a little in the boat, and then Shelley goes up to Diodati. – I translate in the evening and read *Le Vieux de la Montagne*” (Shelley 1987, 124). On Wednesday, 31 December 1817 (the day before its publication) Shelley wrote: “Read Tacitus – Walk – S[helley] reads Gibbon – Fran[kens]stein comes.” Between the two entries, Mary Shelley often mentioned working on the “story” – *Frankenstein* – which was thus accompanied by translation and reading in a foreign language, activities Shelley carried out simultaneously as part of her daily routine. This is not surprising for one whose stepmother was a professional translator and father a political thinker and a committed student of foreign languages. Nor is it surprising for a writer who was a determined and assiduous reader of (and listener to) books covering a diversity of genres. Such a multi-cultural and multilingual background marked her personal and professional life, both characterized by a systematic intersection of languages, motifs and themes.

If reading, writing and translation are crucial features of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, it is from an analysis of her knowledge of European literature and her personal “rambles” in European countries that there emerges a relationship between the author’s multi-language experiences and her writing of *Frankenstein*. Mary Shelley’s multicultural reading influenced her writing, leading her to engage with issues of authenticity, narrative structure and translation. Crossing geographical and language borders was a feature of her writing, as is evident in the fact that she made the most famous Gothic monster a multilingual traveler. The Creature speaks French and English, and meets polyglot characters: Victor is French and speaks German and English; Elizabeth speaks Italian and French; Safie speaks Turkish and learns French; he is a migrant into foreign countries and languages.

Reading *Frankenstein* means more than simply reading Mary Shelley's novel, for the considerable number of texts mentioned lead towards an intertextuality that shows strong commitment, and is of unquestionable interest. The numerous references include Plutarch's *Lives*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*, Volney's *The Ruins*, Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Coleridge's "The Ancient Mariner," Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," Ovid's "Prometheus," and Godwin's *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams*. Similarly expansive is the formative influence of philosophical, political and scientific writings by John Locke, Mary Wollstonecraft, Erasmus Darwin, Luigi Galvani, Humphrey Davy and de Buffon, sources which Mary Shelley used for her novel whilst taking a scholarly and critical approach through which at times she shaped these multifarious works to her needs.

All the chapters in this section reveal a concern with the origins of *Frankenstein*. Although in her "Introduction" to the 1831 edition Mary Shelley articulated a version of the origins of her invention ("not out of void, but out of chaos"), critics nevertheless feel the need to further investigate the author's imaginative powers and trace the nature and the structure of her literary creation. Lia Guerra analyses the issue of origins and creation both in Genesis and in the mythological tradition, and speculates on the foundation myth and the creation of the first humans. She underlines the impressive extent of Mary Shelley's reading before writing *Frankenstein*, which shows an encyclopedic knowledge characteristic of her family and her community. Antonella Braida discusses the origin of Mary Shelley's interest in justice and law. The young author's awareness of contemporary legal and political reforms emerges in the way the novel deals with the trial of Justine and discusses the issue of human rights. The juridical language used proves not only the influence of political thinkers (Godwin and Montagu), but shows both Mary Shelley's "critique of the law by subverting its major tenets" and her desire to deviate from common practice and provoke debate. If the trial highlights the arguments directed against the death penalty, the Creature's final admission of his guilt shows he has learnt the "sanguinary laws of man."

Victor Sage poses the question of how we contextualise the ambiguous nature of the Sublime in *Frankenstein*, analysing the emotional impact of awe in the characters' description of the landscape. Intertwining biographical and textual references, Sage revisits the argument between H.-B. de Saussure and de Buffon, and its connection with the ascent on foot of the Mer de Glace in the valley of Chamonix by Mary Shelley and her husband Percy. A similar double-featured analysis emerges in Michael

Hollington's chapter on "ruinism" which widens our perspective upon the theme of ruins, challenging the exclusive reference to Volney in the novel. Hollington indicates the different images of nature in *Frankenstein* and underlines the paradoxical connection between constructive and destructive creation, the Creature and creator locked in a *doppelgänger* relationship.

Alessandro Scarsella focuses on Mary Shelley's approach to the epistolary form of the novel, analyses the timeline of the letters and the changes in format from Walton's first letter addressed to his sister to the last one – marked simply as "in continuation" – thereby making the move from the epistolary to the modern novel. Maria Parrino's chapter shifts the perspective from Walton's word-for-word transcription of Frankenstein's oral report to the auditory images of his framed writing. By focusing on the prosodic elements which are frequently mentioned in the novel, this chapter invites the reader to deal with "aural literacy," the ability to acquire knowledge by listening and engaging with the acoustic world.

The variety of topics which emerge from any study of *Frankenstein* is so great that no single publication can encompass them. Luckily, we are not the only ones publishing on *Frankenstein*, but proud members of a wider community of writers and scholars who feel the pressure to celebrate such a meaningful text, and experience the pleasure in doing so. We join the number of those who continue to have something to say about this text, those who despite (and because of) their reading and re-reading of the novel continue to find something new and intriguing in the 75,000 words which a 21-year-old author assembled and bid "go forth and prosper." In the final chapter of his book on *Frankenstein*, genetics, and popular culture, science writer Jon Turney warns (and reassures) us thus: "We are never going to be rid of *Frankenstein*, even if we want to be" (Turney 1998, 220). We surely do not want to be.

Works Cited

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CHAPTER ONE

“IN THE BEGINNING...” THE BIBLE AND MYTHOLOGY IN MARY SHELLEY’S EARLY PRODUCTION

LIA GUERRA

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth and the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

This is of course Genesis 1-5, where the first occurrence of the phrase “in the beginning” appears in the text of King James Bible. Another occurrence is in the Gospel of John I:1 and I:2: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.” Paul’s Epistle to the Hebrews 1:10 resumes the image: “And Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the works of thine hands.”

The reasons for my making such a solemn opening lie in the peculiar quality of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* of 1818, a text – to start with – deeply concerned with origin and creation, enrolling as it does among its characters a life-giver and a new-born man. Secondly, it is a text encapsulating in its subtitle a myth – in fact a foundation myth: this is testified in the tragic tradition attached to Prometheus, starting from the drama attributed to Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound* (5th century BC), where the Titan is depicted as chained by Zeus to a mountainside in the Caucasus in punishment for stealing fire from the gods and giving it to humanity – fire standing for the foundation of human technology. Prometheus is a foundation myth also because it resembles the creator-God of the Old

Testament, as the Greek legend describes him creating the first humans from clay or earth. Thirdly, the novel attaches an unusual relevance to the power of the Word, as does the Biblical text: in the narrative the Creature refers to language as “a God-like science” (Shelley 1994, 88). The interconnection of these three items will hopefully clarify the link between mythology and Christianity in the Shelleys’ circle. Biographical research around the Shelleys has long agreed that religion and heathen mythology were present in the early debates going on within the radical group they were part of, influenced by an earlier generation of Jacobin writers (initially Godwin and Wollstonecraft), and by Locke’s philosophical thought.

I will start from two basic statements: a) *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*, first published anonymously in 1818, shares the parentless condition of all myths (Lévi-Strauss, 1969) and also marks the presence of myth in its subtitle; b) the 1818 text itself soon acquired an independent life, transforming itself into something different from the original text, in fact metamorphosing into a myth of its own.

I intend to address the topic of the use of myth in the Shelley circle from a wider perspective, viewing the origin of myth in a collective psychic reality meant to generate doubt and questions rather than offering answers, as ancient mythology was supposed to do. As the expression of pre-logical societies, and as a nonverbal way of knowing, myth enables the cultural man to designate pre-verbal knowledge. As such, it is contrasted with *logos*, the word whose validity or truth can be argued and demonstrated. The Shelleys’ interest in classical authors was supported by the work of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century mythographers, who contributed to general knowledge a careful and considered assessment of the mythology of the ancients, and a possibility of harmonizing it with the philosophical tradition of scepticism. As Gary Kelly has aptly clarified,

[T]he Romantic period saw extensive use of myth and history in literature. Since classical antiquity, myth and history had been used in literature for several purposes: to validate new works by reference to established and prestigious knowledges, to assimilate new subjects to the supposedly common knowledge of an educated and elite readership, to critique contemporary issues indirectly, and to suggest analogies between contemporary issues and supposedly universal, transcendent, or actual historical examples. In the Romantic period, myth and history continued to be used in literature for these ends, but they were also used in various new ways to reconstruct literature in the image and interests of those who wrote and read it, as a brief and partial taxonomy can suggest [...]. History and

historiography were similarly rewritten, imitated, faked, forged, and fictionalized, but especially appropriated for fictional representation of what the historical record did not or could not represent – the subjective and private lives of historic individuals or of fictitious common individuals placed in significant historical events or eras. (Kelly 1998, 70)

Apart from numerous primary sources, the Shelleys could rely for back-up on reference-books that all Romantic poets were familiar with, starting from Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary* (1788), the first example of an encyclopaedic method applied to classical lore, soon to be followed by Bell's *New Pantheon* in 1790. In both, mythological topics are treated as "facts," and not interpreted, and are drawn up alongside historical characters and real places. In addition, pagan idols and their deeds are not compared to Christian revelation in order to emphasize the latter's superiority, but rather dealt with on their own. In 1806 Edward Baldwin's *Pantheon* was published: far from being encyclopaedic, this text revitalized the eighteenth-century allegorical interpretation of mythology and re-established the misused *topos* of ancient Greece vs Christianity. The opening reads: "[Christianity] fears no comparison with the mythology of ancient Greece" (Baldwin 1814, vi). However, the conclusion is not that the Greek religion is so inferior to Christianity that the comparison should not even be made, but rather that there are basic similarities between the two, that the Greek mind is deeply and genuinely religious and that Greek myth *is* religion. Far from being atheists, the Greeks "had the happiness to regard all nature, even the most solitary scenes, as animated and alive, to see everywhere around them a kind and benevolent agency, and to find on every side motive for contentment, reliance and gratitude" (Baldwin 1814, 82). This quotation is interesting for at least two reasons: one is that "Edward Baldwin" is the pseudonym for William Godwin, whose influence on both Percy and Mary was pervasive – even shaping a certain reading of paganism, as Percy clearly showed with his highly emotional reactions and the fascination with pagan features he showed when visiting Pompei in December 1818 (Shelley 1964, 74-75).¹ The second reason is

¹ See letter to Peacock of January 1819 (Shelley 1964, II: 74-75). Surprisingly, the otherwise laconic *Journals* record the impact of the visit to Pompeii on both Mary and Percy: "Tuesday 22 [December] [1818] Go to Pompeii – we are delighted with this ancient city – read Montaigne – S. reads Livy" (Shelley 1987, I: 245). This visit was soon to be followed by a ride to Paestum, enthusiastically discussed in a letter by Percy Shelley to Peacock on February 25, 1819 (Shelley 1964, II: 78-80). No emotional reaction is recorded in the *Journals*, where the facts are simply stated. (Shelley 1987, I: 249). Between the end of 1819 and 1820 Percy Shelley

that Mary Shelley is credited with co-authoring (with Percy Bysshe Shelley) the draft of an essay mentioned by André Koszul as early as 1922 in the “Introduction” to his edition of Mary Shelley’s *Proserpine and Midas* (Koszul, 1922, 26).² Emily Sunstein in 1981 implicitly supported Mary’s authorship for the essay, referred to as “The necessity of a belief in the heathen mythology to a Christian” and tagged it as Mary’s answer to Charles Leslie’s challenging *Short and Easy Method with the Deists of 1697* (Leslie 1733 and Sunstein 1981, 49-54). In 1993 Jane Blumberg contributed to contextualizing the fragment, mentioning another draft of an incomplete *History of the Jews* to be attributed to Mary Shelley – a text that provided a radical reading of Genesis and Exodus and questioned the divine nature of Revelation (Blumberg 1993). The Shelleys’ interest in religious topics and in the religion of the pagans was never superficial or fashionable, and it took different shapes, from the acknowledgment of the archetypal nature of classic mythology to an overall fascination for the life-style of ancient Greece or imperial Rome (Seymour 2000 and Richardson 1993).

As the list of books read by Mary and Percy testifies, from the moment they started to record their common experiences in 1814, Mary’s choice fell on both historical and fictional texts, thus setting a pattern for her subsequent activity as a creative writer who frequently based her fiction on historical settings or on historically researched evidence. Such a double direction involved her “classic library” as well, where translating from Latin and Greek in order to learn these languages turned out to be more than just a scholarly exercise. Mary’s contact with classical authors started in 1814 with Latin and Greek writers (Diogenes Laertius, Cicero, Petronius, Suetonius), followed in 1815 by Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Virgil, Southey’s *Indian Mythology*, the Bible explained by Voltaire, the New Testament, Sallust, and Plutarch.³ 1816 saw Mary reading Quintus Curtius (*Vita Alexandri*, as she names it), some of Horace’s *Odes*, and Cicero’s *De Senectute*, while Theocritus, Aeschylus (*Prometheus*), Lucian, Lucretius, Pliny, Plutarch and Tacitus were readings she shared with Percy. In 1817

also wrote “On the Devil, and Devils” where he discussed the attempt on the part of monotheistic religions to explain evil.

² This was the first time the two dramas appeared in print together. I have treated them in detail in Lia Guerra, *Il mito nell’opera di Mary Shelley* (Pavia: CLU, 1995), 21-43.

³ In the meantime, Percy went through Livy, Seneca, Plutarch, Euripides, Hesiod, Theocritus, Herodotus, Thucydides and Homer. The list of books read by either or both Mary and Percy between 1818 and 1819 is astonishing (Shelley 1987, I).

Mary added Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*, Pliny the Younger's *Epistulae*, *The Story of Psyche* in Apuleius, *Caesar's Life* in Suetonius and Tacitus' *Annales*.⁴ 1818 saw Mary busy with the *Aeneid*, Terence, Horace's *Odes* and a French translation of Lucian. The *Journals* record Mary continuing her reading of Lucian and Pope's *Homer* for the next two years, together with a serious engagement with Italian authors (Ariosto, Tasso, Monti, Alfieri, Dante) and exercises in translation from the Latin (the *Aeneid* and the *Georgics*), Terence's comedies, Horace, and Livy's 45 books of *Histories* (covered between June 1818 and July 1820), Homer's *Hymns*, Greek tragedians, Aristophanes, Plato, and Herodotus. While Percy returned to Euripides, Lucretius and Homer, in 1819 Mary was still busy with the *Georgics* and in 1820 she pursued a serious study of the Greek language with Prince Mavrocordato in Italy. The *Journals* record a steady involvement and the accompanying list of the books they read mentions, for Percy: Sophocles, Plato, Euripides, Apollonius Rhodius; and for both Percy and Mary: Livy, the Bible, the *Aeneid* and the *Georgics*, Lucretius, Cicero, Homer, and *Oedipus Tyrannus* (Shelley 1987).

In fact, far from remaining just a repository of images and a huge vocabulary she could fish from, classical culture became a basic structure for Mary's work, its backbone and possibly the backbone of her life as well. Classic mythology does in point of fact accompany not only her fictional corpus but also the way she looked at her own life. One example is provided by the *Fable of Cupid and Psyche* (Apuleius, *Metamorphosis* iv-vi), read by Mary on 20-21 May, 1817, soon after Percy had read it at Marlow. Even though she initially addressed it as an exercise in translation,⁵ still the fable continued to haunt both her life and her work as an obvious symbol for the brevity of happiness. It must certainly have been with her when she was writing *Mathilda* in Leghorn in August 1819, because images and stylistic features show correspondences between her novella and the Latin text (Guerra 1995, 31-35).⁶ In Apuleius the climax is

⁴ Percy worked instead on Greek drama: Plato, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Homer's *Iliad* and *Hymns*, Arrian's Indian history and also Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* (Shelley 1987, I).

⁵ She used the same exercise book, which included also a passage of translation from *Aeneid* I: 1-30, and Italian exercises in phraseology (de Palacio 1964, 564-71).

⁶ If the *incipit* of Apuleius is in the style of fairy tales ("Erant in quadam civitate rex et regina. Hi tres numero filias forma conspicuas habuere."). "Once upon a time there lived in a city a king and a queen, who had three daughters of great beauty" (Zimmerman 2012, IV, 28; my translation), *Mathilda* describes her family history by providing the most obvious tale of origins, the story of her mother, dressed in

marked by the strength of the Word – Apollo’s oracle – that turns into a powerful act. Psyche’s destiny is defined in Apuleius with the same illocutionary strength with which Mathilda’s father’s secret word defines her destiny, plunging her into a desert that is both physical and spiritual (Apuleius 1984, iv, xxxiii and xxxv).⁷ When Psyche speaks with her sisters about the secret she should keep, she is lost: the spoken word ruins the girl, forcing her existence into a new direction. Such a binary pattern, so typical of the structure of myth, is rooted in the contrast between pairs of mutually exclusive terms: a before and an after, a palace and the desert, happiness and despair, which together mirror a semantic opposition between richness/fertility and barrenness – one that defines the reversal in her own destiny.

A binary pattern structures much of Mary Shelley’s early writings: most clearly in *Frankenstein*, where the Creature, the child of the Enlightenment, who initially perceives language as a divine tool and believes it has power over the order of the imaginary, soon experiences it as useless; this will give a totally new turn to the story. Solidarity is not spurred by the Creature’s rhetorical skills, and no possibility of fusion with other humans emerges: the desert solitudes of the Alps and the icy Poles will contrast with any possibility of social happiness. In *Mathilda* it is the father’s confession (“the Word of the Father”) that overturns events, as mentioned above. But whereas both *Mathilda* and *Frankenstein* keep the dual vision unresolved, Mary’s further access to myth in her two dramas *Proserpine*

fairly-tale style (“There was a gentleman of small fortune who lived near his family mansion, who had three lovely daughters...”); the idealized heroine is in both texts stereotypically perfect (“praecipua, preclara pulchritude”: “the most beautiful... angelically gentle”), and the name of Mathilda’s mother, Diana, makes her the inhabitant of the world of the gods, just like Apuleius’ Psyche. But above all the ambiguous relationship Mary Shelley attributes to Diana with her future husband (and Mathilda’s father) (“she and my father had been playmates from infancy” – echoing Victor’s relationship with Elizabeth in *Frankenstein*) will be re-enacted or doubled in Mathilda’s life, where she becomes the object of the love of her own father. Mathilda mentions Apuleius’ fable explicitly only once (“Like Psyche I lived for awhile in an enchanted palace [...] when suddenly I was left on a barren rock; a wide ocean of despair rolled around me [...] universal death”) even though the echoes are constantly present (Shelley 1990, 190).

⁷ The Latin text describes a high rock where the girl is abandoned (“itur ad constitutum scopulum montis ardui, cuius in summo cacumine statutam puellam cuncti deserunt”: “they reached the destined rock on top of a high mountain and there left the girl on her own on the appointed spot”). *Mathilda* has a “dreary heath bestrewn with stones” that she picks as refuge in desperation.

and *Midas* – also based on a dichotomy of before and after – shows how she tried to discard the dualistic fissure in the name of inclusiveness.

A fissure is always the starting point in Mary's production – it is a moment that frames the texts in a strongly symbolic way and in a complex binary formal pattern, as is so starkly represented in Genesis I:1-5.⁸ *Frankenstein* is a myth of origins and therefore is a deeply feminine myth, bearing as it does on women's role as originators. It explodes the unnatural Creation myth and operates according to that same fissure: it is implicit in the subtitle, which points to the double nature of the myth of Prometheus (as generous giver of life and as rude trespasser upon human and divine laws), and it is present in the act of creation itself that generates a deep crack in Victor's private and social worlds alike. The choice of myth as the dominant isotopy of Mary Shelley's corpus has also to do with the holistic quality myth can offer, when compared to scientific thought. However fascinated she may have been by the discourses of science that entered her famous novel, if faith, magic, imagination and experience had to be included, it was only through myth that a unity could be achieved.

In the "Prefatory Note" to the 1922 edition of *Proserpine and Midas*, Koszul insisted on the fact that these dramas contributed to offer readers, in their "proper setting for some of the most beautiful lyrics of the poet [Percy Bysshe Shelley]," "an example of that classical renaissance which the romantic period fostered" (Koszul 1992, 2). The whole "Prefatory Note" is meant to downplay Mary Shelley's "effort" and to highlight Percy's role as inspirer. Jean de Palacio's reading of the texts, however, has contributed to highlight how Mary Shelley's revision of sources can offer better food for thought (de Palacio 1969). The most relevant aspect for the present discussion is the analysis of how Mary moved away from coeval treatments of both myths (as in comic operas, bucolic pastorals or fantastic renderings) and, particularly in the case of *Proserpine*, how she retold Ovid's tale by giving a new direction to the fable. This in fact turns out to be a fable speaking mainly to women and of women, and of the severing of love ties (mother/daughter, female friendship), but also a fable displaying a binary structure almost as strong as that structuring *Frankenstein*. The myth of the Great Mother takes an unexpected turn: insisting on the mother-daughter relationship rather than on the metaphor of the changing of the seasons, or on the topic of the rape (offstage), the

⁸ Genesis can be read as a myth explaining the world by means of binary categories: darkness vs light, heavens vs air, earth vs water, sea water vs rainwater and so forth.

drama highlights the double nature of the two goddesses, two shapes for the same Ceres (in Sicily the two goddesses Ceres and Proserpine were called Damatres, which means “the Mothers” and were portrayed in ways that made it difficult to distinguish one from the other). Therefore, the *mythos* of their forced separation will come to point to the deep division in the feminine world between the Parthenos and the *gyne*, the virgin and the woman, a division which appears also in Homer, where there is no connection between Demetra and Persephone. Shelley’s choice of myth goes back to the pre-Olympic figure of Demetra as the powerful goddess of the earth, and above all works on the cohesive function of the female relationship within the community of the goddesses, nymphs and naiads that make up the *dramatis personae* of the play. Despite being victims of patriarchal power, they are united against it in the name of feminine solidarity. And here the distance from Ovid is huge: virtually no male character appears, apart from “Shades from Hell” and Aesculapius, the plain villain of the situation in Ovid – and even he is portrayed more as a normative presence, careful to state that justice must be respected, rather than as simply spying on Proserpine’s eating of the pomegranate seeds. Women, on the other side, are pictured as a source of love and knowledge – and are part of the chain of transmission of knowledge through the telling of mythic tales – but also as capable of destruction when wounded in love. And here the connections with Frankenstein’s Creature appear very strong, witness the murderous sequence that characterizes his behaviour after perceiving the void of love in which he is condemned to live, as well as the binary structure brought about by the chasm between before and after. Something should also be said on the relevance of the topic of memory as an instrument of truthfulness: the six months of darkness Proserpine is supposed to spend in Hell will erase the damnation imposed by the Olympus powers, provided they are spent in the memory of the six months of light to be shared with the mother. Memory as a temple turns a time of unhappiness into the actuality of an interior religion, the religion of love.

Turning now to the second drama, devoted to the mythological figure of Midas, a glance at the *dramatis personae* shows a difference: the total absence of female characters. If Ceres embodied the mother-figure and Midas the father-figure, the latter’s lack of empathy and his avarice, closely following the original source, are easily readable as “political” issues, myth speaking quite clearly about the world we live in, just as *Frankenstein* had done. This was an obvious step for a woman who had received her education through classical authors and had always been invited by her father to delve into “male” topics (history, politics, and of

course the male topic *par excellence*, mythology). And the fact that the two dramas were presumably composed as educational tools for two young girls, points to the value of myth as a powerful instrument of communication.⁹ *Midas* opens an even larger gap from the traditional exploitation of myth, but does so in a parodic rather than a dramatic way, since Mary Shelley strives to recapture the ritualistic origins of Greek drama whose roots are in the cult of Dionysus and in the rites concerning the fertility of the earth. The mysteries are the early principles of the ancient religion that culture has contributed to taming. This trend in the reading of myth was probably influenced by the German authors who had uprooted the Dionysian aspect of Greek culture (from Wieland to Schiller to Schlegel) and by the less than orthodox positions of Richard Payne Knight in England.

On 3 May 1820, an entry in Mary Shelley's *Journals* states: "Write – finish Pxxxxxxx [Proserpine] – Read Livy and Robinson Crusoe – spend the evening at Casa Silva" (Shelley 1987, I: 316). This is the only trace left by the mythological drama in the *Journals* (where *Midas* is never mentioned). Something more can be gathered from Mary's correspondence, mainly with prospective publishers for *Proserpine*, in the years 1824, 1826 and 1827. *Proserpine* was finally published as pages 1-20 in *The Winter's Wreath* for 1832, as "by the author of *Frankenstein*" (Shelley 1987, 316). The time of composition must therefore be set after the death of little Clara in Venice, on 24 September, 1818 and of little William in Rome on 4 June 1819; a period of mourning which was, in spite of the devastating family atmosphere, very productive: the first edition of *Frankenstein* came out in 1818, *Mathilda* was written in 1819, and in 1820 Mary started a systematic study of the Greek language. Readers are certainly accustomed to the long silences of the *Journals*, which are nevertheless usually rather detailed on the working activities of the couple. The total exclusion of information on the composition process of the two mythological dramas which involved both Mary and Percy appears all the more surprising, unless we read the texts mainly from Mary's point of view, as the direct output of her deepest feelings with regard to broken family ties. In which case silence is the only feasible reaction.

⁹ The addressees were Lady Mount Cashell's daughters, children of a very special birth: their mother, Margaret King (1773–1835), also known as Lady Mountcashell and Mrs Mason, had been Mary Wollstonecraft's pupil in Ireland and became a constant support to Mary Shelley in Italy. She had adopted the name Mason in honor of Wollstonecraft's fictitious governess in *Original Stories from Real Life* (1788).

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CHAPTER TWO

THE DIALOGIC SUBLIME: THE MER DE GLACE, THE SPIRITS OF LIBERTY, AND *FRANKENSTEIN*

VICTOR SAGE

The Sublime is a type of discourse. More than that, it is a persuasive discourse, a rhetoric, and I shall treat it as such in this chapter, as I try to contextualise its specific function in *Frankenstein*. As a persuasive discourse, the Sublime has certain distinctive features, one of which is a tendency to the self-effacing: it effaces its rhetorical means. The label “sublime” always appears self-evident, so there is a question about whether it can be dialogic. However, Longinus’s 2nd century AD treatise “Peri Upsilon” among other things is a recipe book for how to produce the sublime as a grand style in public speaking (Peri Upsilon literally means “Concerning the High”) and he suggests that to produce a sublime effect in language you need to compose a striking image which acts like a lightning-bolt and takes hold of the hearer in a single flash (Dorsch 1965, 100).¹ It is a semantic label which deliberately loses its referent and surreptitiously retains its connotation of power. We recognise the sublime by its emotional impact of awe, its ability (a) firstly to invoke the phenomenon of relative scale and then (b) to remove scale in its reference to the awesomely large or the Infinite. The conventionally opposed term is

¹ “The extent to which we can be persuaded is usually under our own control, but these sublime passages exert an irresistible force and mastery, and get the upper-hand with every hearer. [...] [A] well-timed stroke of sublimity scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt, and in a flash reveals the full power of the speaker.” (Dorsch 1965, 100). There is an excellently detailed discussion in Isobel Armstrong’s *The Radical Aesthetic*, apropos the “steep and lofty cliffs” at the beginning of Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey,” of how this process of the “effacement” of the referent in the language of the Burkean sublime works (Armstrong 2000, 98).

the Beautiful, which stays within a scale, is orderly and causes not awe but pleasure in the observer, and is associated connotatively with love, rather than fear. For the 18th century, mountains become the archetypal example of the nature of the Sublime. In this chapter, I want to examine some of the contingent discourses that go to make up the particular and highly active use of the Alpine setting in *Frankenstein* – other dialogic parts of the equation, besides the obvious one of “the beautiful” – and then to reach some conclusions about how the rhetoric of the Sublime works in the text.

According to M. H. Abrams in his classic study *Natural Supernaturalism*, the original mythology that attaches to the Sublime and the Beautiful in the landscape of the natural world is the Christian myth of the Paradise that is Lost. In the 17th century, Bishop Thomas Burnet’s *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1681-9) is the prose equivalent of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. God created a beautiful world, without mountains and without a sea, but at the time of Noah, God opened the Abyss because of the degeneracy of man and, says Burnet, “the frame of the Earth broke and fell down into the great Abyss” (Abrams 1971, 100). “The world we now inhabit,” as M.H. Abrams puts it, “is only the wreck of Paradise, with some remains indeed of its original beauty, yet overall the Image or Picture of a great Ruin [...]” Thus the distinction is between the “beautiful” and the “great” aspects of nature: and this distinction reveals, as Abrams puts it in a fine phrase, “the theodicy of landscape.” The beautiful reveals “God’s loving benevolence, while the vast and disordered in nature express his infinity, power and wrath” and cause in us a paradoxical union of delight and terror (Abrams 1971, 101). The romantic poets from Wordsworth on, argues Abrams, set themselves to revealing, in a secularised fashion, all the aesthetic and moral implications of landscape’s “theodicy,” especially in representations of the Alps.

Abrams’s paraphrase, “the wreck of paradise” is indeed very close to Mary Shelley’s characters’ descriptions of the Alps in *Frankenstein*: the setting of this novel is a constant and, I shall argue, insistently ironic background to the dreams of its protagonists. In the vocabulary of the text, the mountains, indeed the whole landscape that surrounds the lake of Geneva – particularly Mont Blanc – are often rendered as the home of “spirits.” Just one random example at this stage will suffice. In Chapter XVIII of the 1831 text, Mary Shelley has the guilt-ridden Frankenstein recall a spontaneous outburst by his murdered friend, the innocent and good-hearted Henry Clerval, as they were journeying through the vineyard-clad, placid, willow-islanded section of the Rhine: “Oh, surely the spirit that inhabits and guards this place has a soul more in harmony with man, than

those who pile the glacier, or return to the inaccessible peaks of the mountains of our own country ” (Shelley 1994, 559). We see here the opposition between the Beautiful and the Sublime, tied as it is to its corresponding landscapes, and in the novel’s landscapes there are also, it seems, corresponding spirits or *genii loci* (including “those that pile the glacier”) which inhabit these opposed landscapes.

The mention of the glacier here is important, because, as is well known, the model for the landscape of the novel is specifically tied to the ascent on foot to Chamonix made by Mary and Percy Shelley and a pregnant Claire Clairmont, which begins on 22 July and climaxes on 25 July 1816, the high point (in all senses) of the Diodati summer. Eloquent journal entries in the hands of both Mary and Percy have survived for this trip to the sources of the rivers Arve and Arveyron and the glaciers beneath the dome of Mont Blanc, jottings which were copied up by Mary, edited by the two of them, and published anonymously in 1817 as *The History of A Six Weeks’ Tour*; and these observations in all their layered form reveal how impressed they are with the sheer desolation of the glaciers, these frozen cataracts of ice. And the notion of usurpation is on their minds: Mary makes a joke on the first day about God and mountains which “sometimes peeped out in to the blue sky higher than one would think the safety of God would permit since it is well-known that the tower of Babel did not nearly equal them in immensity” (Shelley 1987, 114). But as the trip goes on it is their personal encounter with the glaciers which provides up close the shock of the Sublime: Mary Shelley, whose entry for 24 July (“I read nouvelle nouvelles and write my story. Shelley writes part of letter”) indicates, according to her modern editors, that she is composing the first bits of a first draft of *Frankenstein*, sounds the keynote of all their descriptions: “we get to the top at twelve and behold le [sic] mer de Glace. This is the most desolate place in the world” (Shelley 1987, 118-9).

The first draft of Percy Shelley’s letter to his friend and fellow-poet Peacock is written in her journal also, and it gives us more of the context of their view of the glaciers – the notion of “desolation” comes from a difference of opinion between two scientists who belong to two different sides of the Enlightenment, Horace-Bénédict de Saussure, the Enlightenment Geneva geologist and only the third person in history to climb Mont Blanc (his characteristically pragmatic goal being to measure the air-pressure at the summit), and Comte de Buffon, the great French naturalist, author of

the *Histoire Naturelle* (1749-89) (Fischer 2014, 26).² The issue is whether or not these glaciers are steadily encroaching on the fertile valleys and advancing inexorably each year. Here is how Percy Shelley puts it in his letter to Peacock:

There is something inexpressibly dreadful in the aspect of the few branchless trunks, which, nearest to the ice rifts, still stand in the uprooted soil. The meadows perish, overwhelmed with sand and stones. Within the last year, these glaciers have advanced three hundred feet into the valley. Saussure, the naturalist says, that they have their periods of increase and decay: the people of the country hold an opinion entirely different; but as I judge, more probable [...]. (Shelley, 1817, 160)

Saussure in his classic life's work, *Voyages dans les Alpes* (1779-1796), carefully considers the issue and writes that on balance he thinks that he can admit the continual depredations which local people report as increasing each year in the Vale of Chamonix "sans que cela prouvât que la masse totale des glaciers s'augmente continuellement" ("Without that proving that the total mass of the glaciers is continually on the increase") (de Saussure 1779, 46), an argument directed explicitly at Buffon's "Theory of the Earth" section of his *Histoire Naturelle* published in 1643.³ Percy Shelley, on the other hand, writing to his friend, Thomas Love

² This beautifully illustrated and highly informative booklet is on sale at the Geneva Museum of Natural History, which is housed in the traditional lakeside seat of the de Saussure family. For an interesting and well-researched account of the personal relations between Byron, the Shelleys, and the scientific community around Lac Léman, especially in Coligny (Tennant 2016, 18-19). Apparently only the year before, 1815, Humphrey Davy was given to fishing out of the front window of the house on the waterfront, the "Maison Chapuis" at Coligny (now destroyed), which was rented by Percy and Mary Shelley for the Diodati summer. Mary knew Davy through her father, William Godwin. Also Byron introduced Polidori to de Saussure's son. For Polidori's relation to this network see Stott 2013.

³ Buffon insists on the necessity of the processes and forces of Nature: one of these is the "refroidissement de la Terre" ("the cooling of the earth") which he emphasizes as a principle throughout his discussion; for example, in the sixth of his seven epochs in the history of the earth, he draws together, by a typically elegant combination of deductive and inductive reasoning, the behaviour of the glaciers of the North and South poles in the light of what was currently known about these very glaciers of the Alps, "qui ne fondent jamais en entiere" ("which never melt in their entirety"). Shelley shows himself aware of this grand argument ("gloomy and sublime") which forms a motive for his wanting to make such a dangerous ascent in the first place. (de Buffon, 2007, 1321-1322; and note 26).

Peacock, is thinking mythically and it is Buffon's pessimism which provides him with the Sublime view of the glacier:

I will not pursue Buffon's sublime but gloomy theory – that this globe which we inhabit will at some future period be changed into a mass of frost by the encroachments of the polar ice, and of that produced on the most elevated points of the earth. Do you, who assert the supremacy of Ahriman, imagine him throned among these desolating snows, among these palaces of death and frost, so sculptured in their terrible magnificence by the adamant hand of necessity, and that he casts around him, as the first essays of his final usurpation, avalanches, torrents, rocks, and thunders, and above all these deadly glaciers, at once the proof and symbols of his reign [...]. (Shelley 1817, 102)

The “palaces of death and frost” sounds like a Gothic echo of Canto III of Byron's *Childe Harold's* “the palaces of nature” which Mary Shelley uses ironically to describe these mountains as they appear to Frankenstein's “fallen,” would-be naïve vision of his native Alpine surroundings, in chapter VII of her novel (Shelley 1994, 502).⁴ According to the editors of Mary's journals, Shelley had read Buffon in Edinburgh in 1812 and Mary went on to read him in June and July 1817 (Shelley 1987, 114 and 117 n. 2), which may have encouraged her to connect the landscape of the opening chapter of her novel in which Captain Walton, the idealist would-be polar explorer, sights the Monster on the ice and meets Frankenstein, and Chapter X, in which Frankenstein, in this very vale of Chamoni, encounters the creature he has abandoned, an incident which I will come back to in a moment. Percy Shelley here makes reference to “Ahriman” – the Persian Zoroastrian equivalent of Milton's Satan who usurps the seat of Ormuz, the equivalent of God. Peacock, who, like Percy Shelley, was deeply interested in comparative mythology, had written about half a canto of an epic in Spenserian stanzas on this subject, in which there was some potential for a political allegory for the times, and Shelley here is urging him to use the desolation of the glacier as a hallmark metaphor for the revolt of a Demon or a Devil. When Peacock subsequently abandoned this

⁴ The allusion is to Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, III (1816), lxii, 2: “Above me are the Alps,/The palaces of nature, whose vast walls/Have pinnacled in clouds their snowy scalps./And throned Eternity in icy halls/Of cold sublimity, where falls and forms/The avalanche – the thunderbolt of snow!/All which expands the spirit, yet appals,/Gather around these summits, as to show/How Earth may pierce to Heaven, yet leave vain man below.” (Byron 1980, II: 100).

project, he left the stanzas to Shelley, who used the stanza form to write “Laon and Cythna,” subsequently retitled “The Revolt of Islam.”⁵

At the same time in Shelley’s letter the sinister active movement of the glacier seems also to figure as the body of a God who could not be usurped because, paradoxically, he is the body of Nature: “One would think that Mont Blanc, like the god of the Stoics, was a vast animal, and that the frozen blood forever circulated through his stony veins” (Shelley 1987, 167). The apparent paradox of the “frozen blood” that circulates here is given a sensory form by the haunting flow of the mighty rivers of the Arve and the Arveyron far beneath the apparently stationary “Sea of Ice,” in reality itself inching down from the summits. We should also think at this point of the opening of “Prometheus Unbound” (1820) and the frozen world that has come to pass as a result of Prometheus’s curse of Jove, which keeps Jove in power, before the revolutionary action of the “spirits” of Earth in that lyrical drama begins the great thaw.

After the death of Justine, which he knows he has caused, Frankenstein finds himself in a self-made prison of “deep, dark death-like solitude” (Shelley 1994, 513). He decides in Chapter IX to take a trip back to his native mountains to find some consolation. Soon we find him retracing the path up to the source of the “impetuous Arve.” The cottages here and there along the river form a scene of beauty; but it is “augmented and rendered sublime by the mighty Alps, whose white and shining pyramids and domes towered above all, as belonging to another earth, the habitations of another race of beings” (Shelley 1994, 516). The irony of this description is produced by the knowledge the reader has of Frankenstein’s past and his attempt to become one of this other race of beings by making his own creature. For the reader, the sublimity of the landscape is haunted not by “another race of beings” but by Frankenstein’s own romantic, egotistical capacity to forget himself and the irrevocable nature of his past that ties him to earth: following Agrippa and Paracelsus, he has conjured an earth-spirit and stolen fire – i.e. the technology of new chemical and electrical experiments that enabled him to animate dead flesh by imitating the spark of life. But here he stares up at the mountains, at Mont Blanc and Le Buet, as he returns to the glacier that seizes the Arveyron in its grip, calling them

⁵ This paragraph is indebted to Marilyn Butler (1979, 66, and notes, 321, n.13). For the origins and mythic extent of the role of Ahriman in Shelley’s writings (Curran 1975, 33-152); and their extensive notes. Apropos of the Sublime, see also the passage which Curran, *op. cit.*, uses as an epigraph to his chapter 3, namely Mary Shelley’s version of Diotima’s speech in her novella, *The Fields of Fancy*, 119.

“this glorious presence-chamber of imperial Nature” (Shelley 1994, 517) – a dream of absolute power – a dream of entering the inner sanctum of “the palace of nature.” The phrase “presence-chamber” suggests that, in Frankenstein’s dream of sublimity, nature is an imperial monarchy, not a republic.

Mary Shelley’s writing brings him up to this emotional climax and lets him down again the next morning with a capricious rainstorm like the one that beset herself, Percy and Claire in their final ascent to la Mer de Glace. She remembers in her description of Frankenstein’s ascent the climber’s illusion in the apparent motion of the mountain itself:

From the side where I now stood Montanvert was exactly opposite, at the distance of a league; and above it rose Mont Blanc, in awful majesty. I remained in a recess of the rock, gazing on this wonderful and stupendous scene. The sea, or rather the vast river of ice, wound among its dependent mountains, whose aerial summits hung over its recesses [...]. My heart, which was before sorrowful, now swelled with something like joy. I exclaimed: “Wandering spirits, if indeed ye wander, and do not rest in your narrow beds, allow me this faint happiness, or take me, as your companion, away from the joys of life.” As I said this, I suddenly beheld the figure of a man, at some distance, advancing towards me with superhuman speed. He bounded over the crevices in the ice, among which I had walked with caution; his stature, also, as he approached, seemed to exceed that of man. (Shelley 1994, 519)

For a moment here, Shelley makes it seem as if the spirits have responded, and sent a messenger, so rapt is Frankenstein in his identification with the spirits of liberty, who, he is convinced, are the true dwellers in this landscape. But the landscape has emitted a spirit-messenger of another kind, his own special “filthy daemon” (Shelley 1994, 503), the gigantic charnel-house *doppelgänger* he has created, who ties him down irrevocably to earth, “a creature,” as he puts it later, “who could exist in the ice-caves of the glaciers” (Shelley 1994, 553), but who talks with a mixture of Rousseau’s emotional articulacy and Godwin’s moral acuity. It is Frankenstein himself who is threatened with usurpation. It is he who absurdly wants to “close with him in mortal combat” in the beginning of the scene to follow, and it is the creature who is the persuasive, rational being.

Mary Shelley, like Percy Shelley in his poetry, consistently uses the Greek spelling of “daemon” throughout the text, an archaic sign which placed the notion of a spirit, for the reader of this text, outside the simple reference to a Christian devil. The term alludes instead to the Neoplatonic tradition:

Frankenstein's great heroes are the Neoplatonists and the alchemists, Albertus Magnus, Cornelius Agrippa and Paracelsus, all of whom are familiar with this Neoplatonic notion of the "spirits" of nature (Empson 1994, 164).⁶ It is Agrippa who gives the boy Frankenstein the heretical idea of raising the spirits of the dead, which helps to perpetuate his romantic egotism. Paracelsus, in particular, wrote a treatise about a whole series of spirits of nature that have contact with how disease in our bodies is formed and can be cured. But Frankenstein's partial Prometheanism, reflected in his view of the Sublime, misreads this and seeks to convert the spirits of liberty to his own empire over nature.

The Sublime and the spirits of nature are an almost palpable presence in her novel. But they seem to be constantly misread, because the method of narration which Mary Shelley employs, i.e. the succession of retrospective, first-person testimonies, depends in each case on the flawed subjectivity with which she encircles and ensnares her character-narrators. This subjectivity suggests a margin of unreliability when they perceive Sublimity in their desolated environment.

I offer the reader one final footnote to this discussion. Mary Shelley returned in the 1840s to some of her former haunts in the mountains, writing an account of her travels which was published in 1844 as *Rambles in Germany and Italy*. This is how she describes the Simplon pass:

There was no horror; but there was grandeur. There was a majestic simplicity that inspired awe; the naked bones of a gigantic world were here: the elemental substance of fair Mother Earth, an abode for mighty spirits who need not the ministrations of food and shelter that keep man alive, but whose vast shapes could only find, in these giant crags, a home proportionate to their power. (Shelley 1844, 135)

The Italians are longing for freedom from the Austrian yoke, and she makes it clear in the memoir she wrote of her trips with her son Percy Florence and his young friends, that the Swiss Tyrolean spirits of liberty are still highly active in those sublime Alpine valleys – especially, on the Italian side.

⁶ See Empson's source for the treatise by Paracelsus on "the Spirits": 1941, 215-233. See also Empson's discussion of the cultural history of the difference in spelling of "demon" and "daemon," *op. cit.*, 164-5. For a recent sketch of the transmission of this Renaissance tradition to Romantic artists in France and Germany see Sage, 2016, 247-266.

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CHAPTER THREE

FRANKENSTEIN, JUSTICE, THE RIGHTS OF MEN AND THE RIGHTS OF NATURE

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Among the many approaches that have been made to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the question of the importance of justice, and the laws that administer it, still leaves space for further investigation. Justice and the legal system are the focus of chapters seven and eight of the first volume of the 1818 edition, in which the trial of Justine is narrated. The homodiegetic narrator, Victor Frankenstein, contrasts his father's reassuring words, "I shall prevent the slightest shadow of partiality" with his own belief that the trial is a "wretched mockery of justice" (Shelley 2012, 53 and 54). These two viewpoints towards the legal system reveal the coexistence of two contrasting approaches in the novel: one aimed at emphasising the arbitrary nature of law and its potential to inflict unjust punishment, and a more positive one that intends to reassert the importance of civil and political rights, such as a fair trial and freedom of speech. This chapter sets out to retrace the origins of Mary Shelley's interest in justice and the law: it will show how *Frankenstein* sets these two views side by side in order to provoke an implicit debate about the central preoccupations of the rights of men and the rights of nature.

Retracing Mary Shelley's Early Interest in the Law and Human Rights

While it has been claimed that *Frankenstein* shows clear debts to the Revolution Controversy in Britain, its more specific focus on the law and the rights of citizens is paramount. First, its debts to the Gothic novel may have alerted Mary Shelley to the importance of such themes as inheritance, filiation and legitimacy within the genre, as pointed out by David Punter (Punter and Byron 2004). Moreover, as Bridget M. Marshall claims, the

narrative structure could be said to link “the Gothic to a kind of legal framework” (Marshall 2011, 2). Similarly, William MacNeil includes the novel among those that while attacking the law, offer “an imagined socio-Symbolic, an altered vision of the law’s workings and its effects” (McNeil 2012, 12). As will be shown, Mary Shelley’s interest in the law as displayed by Justine’s trial is strongly linked to contemporary and earlier debates on the death penalty. Moreover, it betrays her interest in contemporary legal and political reform. As Betty T. Bennett has pointed out, “Mary Shelley’s letters of 1814-17 demonstrate her early and consistent concern with political events” (Shelley 1988, 1: xiv). For example, when doing research for *The Last Man*, she asked Hobhouse to arrange for her “to be present at a debate in the House of Commons” (Shelley 1988, 1: 466). In 1834 she attended Parliament when the Irish issue and the poor laws were debated, and she expressed her disapproval of Lord Brougham’s speeches on the subject (Shelley 1988, 2: 212-214).

As for the earliest origins of Mary Shelley’s interest in law and punishment, this can be first associated with her reading of William Godwin’s essays and novels, as pointed out by Pamela Clemit (Clemit 2003, 26-44). Not surprisingly, Mary dedicated *Frankenstein* “to William Godwin, *Author of Political Justice, Caleb Williams, &c.*” Among the many ways in which Godwin’s most influential work may have influenced *Frankenstein*, the exposure of the blunders of the legal system, and in particular of the death penalty, is a central one.

Godwin approached this subject in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, which devotes a whole section to the death penalty in Book VII, entitled “Of Crime and Punishment” (Godwin 1985, 650). Having laid out as the foundations of this investigation the central principles of justice, equality, and private judgement, the treatise sets out to apply them to an analysis of existing institutions, including criminal law. Godwin’s main source is “the humane and benevolent Beccaria,” namely the Italian philosopher Cesare Beccaria (1738-94), whose *Dei delitti e delle pene* (1764) was celebrated all over Europe as the source of reform in penal law, and even contributed to the abolition of the death penalty in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. Rephrasing Beccaria, Godwin argues against the death penalty, because “barbarity possesses none of the attributes of persuasion. It may terrify; but it cannot produce in us candour and docility” (Godwin 1985, 647). Moreover, Godwin refers to Beccaria to point out the singularity of each crime and thus the difficulty for a judge to apply one and the same punishment to each criminal deed:

To ascertain the intention of a man, it is necessary to be precisely informed of the actual impression of the objects upon his senses, and of the previous disposition of his mind, both of which may vary in different persons, and even in the same person at different times, with a rapidity commensurate “to the succession of ideas, passions and circumstances” (Godwin 1985, 653).

Godwin points out how an innocent man or woman will struggle to clear themselves of being found in possession of circumstantial evidence, and this is due to the limitations of language in dealing with facts:

How much will every word and every action come distorted by the medium through which it is transmitted? The guilt of a man, to speak in the phraseology of law, may be proved by either direct or circumstantial evidence. I am found near to the body of a man newly murdered. I come out of his apartment with a bloody knife in my hand, or with blood upon my clothes. If under these circumstances, and unexpectedly charged with murder, I falter in my speech, or betray perturbations in my countenance, this is an additional proof. Who does not know that there is not a man in England, however blameless a life he may lead, who is secure that he shall not end it at the gallows? This is one of the most obvious and universal blessings that civil government has to bestow. (Godwin 1985, 655-656)

Godwin’s statement is surprisingly appealing to modern sensibilities because of its emphasis on the “medium”; the reasons for this similarity to contemporary preoccupations are to be identified in the fact that the Romantic period was already characterized by the birth of a “reading nation”, to borrow William St Clair’s phrase, which brought with it a new sense of the “public sphere” in Jürgen Habermas’ sense. (St Clair 2004 and Habermas 1989) Further passages in *Political Justice* show that Godwin’s questioning addresses all types of legislation, and he claims that the “law is an institution of the most pernicious tendency” for its generalising and imprecise nature, and he concludes by expressing clearly his distrust of the legal tradition: “In reality, whatever were the initial source of the law, it soon became cherished as a cloak for oppression” (Godwin 1985, 689; 693). In *Cursory Strictures*, first published in the *Morning Chronicle* in October 1794 (Philp 1986, 117), Godwin intervened actively in the trial of Hardy, Thelwell and other members of the Corresponding Society arrested on 12 May 1794. (Godwin 1794) This case proved the need of reform in the British legal system at a time in which, according to E. P. Thompson, Britain was undergoing “the most sustained campaign for prosecution in the Courts in British history” (Thompson 1966, 700).

Godwin's condemnation of the death penalty is in line with contemporary reaction against bodily punishments, already expressed in Beccaria's treatise, as pointed out by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*. (Foucault 1995, 8) However, the originality of Godwin's approach lies in the application of *Political Justice* to fiction, thus setting a trend for the "Godwinian novel." As Pamela Clemit has pointed out, by adopting "a specific set of conventions for literary communication, the Godwinian novel sets up its own framework for debate," and moreover, by introducing the episode of Justine's trial *Frankenstein* operates "a progressively deepening cultural reevaluation" of the earlier debate in new and changing historical circumstances (Clemit 1993, 2).

Both *Political Justice* and *Cursory Strictures* could have helped Mary write her account of Justine's trial as far as the legal proceedings are concerned, as she had read both works by 1817. (Shelley 1987, II: 649) Although by this time Godwin had substantially revised the views he had expressed in the first edition of *Political Justice*, his indictment of the legal system was still relevant and had been left unchanged in the second revised edition of 1796. There is also evidence that Mary Shelley took a special interest in the death penalty by reading some of Godwin's sources. Among these, her reading list for 1816 includes *The Opinions of Different Authors upon the Punishment of Death, selected by Basil Montagu*. (Shelley 1987, 663)

Basil Montagu, a member of the legal and intellectual network of which the Shelleys and Godwin were part, has been surprisingly neglected. I would like to suggest that he may have played a role in forming Mary Shelley's outlook on the law, and even more importantly on the concept of representation and legal rights as they are introduced in *Frankenstein*. For her exposure to his ideas, one can suggest the closeness between him and Godwin and the regular meetings during Percy Shelley's trial over the custody of his children Ianthe and Charles after Harriet's suicide. Basil Montagu could have provided Mary with a more positive view of the law than Godwin: himself a victim of the system, having lost the case in which he claimed his inheritance from the Earl of Sandwich (1795), and threatened with imprisonment for debt (in 1798) he turned his difficulties with relentless energy into a means to reform the system, both of the administration of bankruptcy and the punishment for debt. At the time of his participation in Percy's trial he was both involved in reforming the bankruptcy law and in the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge Respecting the Punishment of Death, founded in 1808 with William Allen.

Basil Montagu's anthology, as he claims in the introduction, intends to promote "the diffusion of knowledge respecting the punishment of death and the improvement of prison discipline" by providing the most significant texts against the death penalty. (Montagu 1809, x) Cesare Beccaria's *On Crimes and Punishments* is one of the most important texts included. In the passage entitled "Of the Punishment of death," Beccaria justifies the unfoundedness of the death penalty by comparing it with the legal condemnation of suicide:

Is it possible that in the smallest portions of the liberty of each, sacrificed to the good of the public, can be contained the greatest of all good, life? If it were so, how shall it be reconciled to the maxim which tells us, that a man has no right to kill himself? (Montagu 1809, 20)

Like Godwin, Beccaria claims that the deprivation of freedom is a greater punishment than death, both for the criminal and for the public, because "*it is not the intensesness of the pain* that has the greatest effect on the mind, but its continuance; for our sensibility is more easily and more powerfully affected by weak but repeated impressions, than by a violent, but momentary impulse" (Montagu 1809, 21-22, italics in the original). Montagu accompanies Beccaria's text with a "'Comment' on the Marquis de Beccaria's Work on Crimes and Punishments, Attributed to Voltaire." This includes historical examples of enlightened monarchs who abolished capital punishment, as well as a reference to good practice in Roman times:

The Romans never conducted a citizen to death, unless for crimes which concerned the safety of the state. These our masters, our first legislators, were careful of the blood of their fellow citizens; but we are extravagant with the blood of ours. (Montagu 1809, 178)

This reference may have inspired the Creature's discourse, steeped in references to Roman history, as will be argued here.

Justine's Trial in *Frankenstein* and the Discourse Against the Death Penalty

In *Frankenstein* Mary Shelley draws upon the implications of her two most important sources – Godwin and Beccaria's arguments against the death penalty – in a variety of ways. First, the narrative concerning the accusation of murder against Justine, and her trial, is constructed on the basis of Godwin's method and draws from both texts. Secondly, by

introducing the viewpoint of the real murderer – the Creature – Mary Shelley enriches her critique of the law by subverting its major tenets.

Mary Shelley's novel can be said to apply Godwin's tenets to the letter. After William's death, Justine is found in possession of damaging proof, the miniature held by William. Her inability to defend herself and her dismay are misinterpreted as further proof of her guilt:

“No one did [believe her crime] at first: but several circumstances came out, that have almost forced conviction upon us: and her own behaviour has been so confused, as to add to the evidence of facts a weight that, I fear, leaves no hope for doubt.” [...] He related that, the morning on which the murder of poor William had been discovered, Justine had been taken ill, and confined to her bed; and, after several days, one of the servants, happening to examine the apparel she had worn on the night of the murder, had discovered in her pocket the picture of my mother, which had been judged to be the temptation of the murderer. [...] On being charged with the fact, the poor girl confirmed the suspicion in a great measure, by her extreme confusion of manner. (Shelley 2012, 52)

By drawing upon Godwin's example cited above, Shelley allows her characters to develop the case against Justine on “the evidence of facts,” or, in Godwin's words, on “direct or circumstantial evidence” being accumulated against her, including her emotional reaction and her confusion. Moreover, Justine's trial may be seen to support Godwin's pessimistic approach, despite the fact that Mary Shelley chose as its setting the democratic institutions of Switzerland. *Frankenstein*, a novel whose project originated during her stay in Switzerland in June 1816, opens with an unbounded celebration of the country for its democratic institutions and for its liberal treatment of the lower classes. Victor declares himself “by birth a Genevese” and records that his ancestors had been “for many years counsellors and syndics” (Shelley 2012, 18). Similar statements can be found in *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* where she celebrates William Tell and the Swiss fight against the Habsburgs (Shelley 1817, 49-50). In *Frankenstein* the faith in Swiss democracy is upheld by Frankenstein Senior, who reassures Elizabeth and Victor:

“She is to be tried to-day, and I hope, I sincerely hope, that she will be acquitted.” [...] “Sweet niece,” said my father, “dry your tears. If she is, as you believe, innocent, rely on the justice of our judges, and the activity with which I shall prevent the slightest shadow of partiality” (Shelley 2012, 53).

Victor, too, adduces his faith in Swiss law as one of the reasons for his decision not to speak at the trial. “I had no fear [...] that any circumstantial evidence could be brought forward strong enough to convict her” (Shelley 2012, 53). Yet, as the punishment of Justine points out, this equality is only apparent. Victor turns to despair as the trial becomes a “wretched mockery of justice” (Shelley 2012, 54). Shelley’s use of dramatic irony enables the reader to share Victor’s reaction and thus reveals that the initial celebration of Swiss penal laws is ironical. In fact, as Patrick Vincent and Michael Rossington have pointed out, the failures of the reactionary oligarchy of Geneva were well known in Britain. (Rossington 2000; Vincent 2007) The 1794 execution of four magistrates – whose system of voting by ballots *Frankenstein* imitates – by the new revolutionary government attracted general condemnation in texts such as Helen Maria Williams’ *A Tour in Switzerland* (1798). According to Vincent, Justine’s trial “closely fits historical conditions in a republic such as Geneva” (Vincent 2007, 651). While the novel was inspired by Mary Shelley’s direct knowledge of the changing situation in the European countries she visited with Percy, the treatment of the death penalty partakes of a larger debate.

It is most important that in *Frankenstein* the victim of justice is a woman. Justine’s situation is one of subordination at multiple levels: being a servant, she relies on Victor’s family for her defence and representation; being a woman her role is normally confined to domesticity. Her condition as portrayed in the trial reveals Mary Shelley’s desire to deviate from common practice and provoke debate. A comparison with Mary Wollstonecraft’s novel *Maria: or, the Wrongs of Woman* can illustrate the approach pursued in *Frankenstein*. At the conclusion of the novel the protagonist, unjustly accused of adultery, provides a letter to be read in court, “convinced that the subterfuges of the law were disgraceful” (Wollstonecraft 2004, 142). In fact, as the judge bears out, women were not allowed to plead in court. A principle of common law, established in *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1758) by Blackstone, established this effacement of women through a principle known as “coverture” and thus deprived them of civil and legal rights. (Anolik 2013, 28-30) The judge in *Maria: or, the Wrongs of Woman* decides not to take into account Maria’s letter, as “he had always determined to oppose all innovation” and in particular to oppose “the fallacy of letting women plead their feelings, as an excuse for the violation of the marriage-vow” (Wollstonecraft 2004, 145). In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley introduces a minor advancement, as Justine is invited to speak at the trial. This deviation from the common practice in Britain, while justified by the setting in Switzerland, alerts the

reader to the weakness of Justine's situation as a woman and a servant: not only is she unable to defend herself, but Elizabeth's speech cannot support her innocence. Her social inferiority, perceived as a debt she owes to the Frankenstein family who adopted her, provokes the crowd, "excited by her generous interference, and not in favour of poor Justine" (Shelley 2012, 56). While Ellen Moers and Anne K. Mellor have pointed out that the values in *Frankenstein* are traditionally male-dominated and women are given a submissive position as upholders of family values (Moers 1974; Mellor 1988), the legal position of women should also be taken into consideration. All women in the novel exist from a legal viewpoint thanks to their association with a male figure, be it father or husband. Thus, Justine is passed on from a cruel mother to Frankenstein senior, Elizabeth moves from her father to the Frankenstein household, where she will remain as niece and step-daughter; Victor received her from her mother as a "present" and the playful offer is turned into a promise of marriage by Victor's mother on her deathbed. Freedom exists for women only in so far as education is allowed, and within the family bonds. Thus, Justine's confession responds to the same habits of obedience: she agrees to sign her admission of guilt in order to pacify her confessor: "I confessed, that I might obtain absolution" (Shelley 2012, 58). By introducing an unfair trial against a female servant, the death penalty appears as a measure to be condemned, as the victim has no real possession either of her property or of her body, the body being considered the possession of the State. Mary Shelley introduces her contribution to the debate by making Justine the chosen victim, and empowering Elizabeth as the spokesperson of Godwin and Beccaria's condemnation of capital punishment:

[W]hen one creature is murdered, another is immediately deprived of life in a slow torturing manner; then the executioners, their hands yet reeking with the blood of innocence, believe that they have done a great deed. They call this *retribution*. Hateful name! When that word is pronounced, I know greater and more horrid punishments are going to be inflicted than the gloomiest tyrant has ever invented to satiate his utmost revenge. (Shelley 2012, 58)

Despite its "Gothic" realism, due in part to Percy Shelley's intervention, as Charles E. Robinson has pointed out (*The Shelley-Godwin Archive*, MS. Abinger c. 56, folio 49v), the passage is steeped in Godwinian vocabulary: for example the word "retribution" occurs in Book VII of *Political Justice*, "Of Crimes and Punishments," in the summary introducing chapter I: "Retributive justice not independent and absolute" (Godwin 1985, 631). Moreover, in the novel male characters do not question the justness of the punishment, but only its wrong execution. Thus, Victor describes the trial

a “wretched mockery of justice” as the only person in full knowledge of the facts. (Shelley 2012, 54)

By making Elizabeth the spokesperson of her criticism of the death penalty, Mary Shelley thereby empowers female characters. Moreover, she contributes to Godwin’s criticism of British law by focusing on women’s subordinate situation in society and their lack of legal representation. Having set out to consider the impossibility of women defending themselves, the novel proceeds to a new ground of enquiry by introducing the Creature’s narrative. How can human laws apply to the non-human? Questions as fundamental as this one are now being asked by ethics committees. At a time in which science had not yet touched upon genetics, Mary Shelley turned the question upon “post-humanity” and the rights of the “creature.”

The Creature and the Limitations of “human laws”

The Creature’s introductory speech, occupying chapters III to IX of the second volume, is rich in legal terminology and imitates a claimant’s speech in a trial. However, rather than opening its case, the Creature questions Victor’s accusations of murder by focussing on the nature of his own murderous intentions. These he compares to Frankenstein’s desire to destroy his own creation:

Listen to my tale: when you have heard that, abandon or commiserate me, as you shall judge that I deserve. But hear me. The guilty are allowed, by human laws, bloody as they may be, to speak in their own defence before they are condemned. Listen to me, Frankenstein. You accuse me of murder; and yet you would, with a satisfied conscience, destroy your own creature. Oh, praise the eternal justice of man! Yet I ask you not to spare me: listen to me; and then, if you can, and if you will, destroy the work of your hands. (Shelley 2012, 69)

The comparison aims at annulling the Creature’s responsibility by identifying Victor’s murderous intentions with the Creature’s own murderous acts. In the Creature’s narrative, murder appears as a progression from innocent ignorance to the study of the cruelty and violence of men. This is illustrated by the Creature’s reading list, which is selected from classical and contemporary literature. The Creature reads Plutarch’s *Lives*, Volney’s *Ruins*, modern poetry and prose, Goethe’s *Sorrows of Werther*, and *Paradise Lost*. Milton’s poem enables his identification with Satan:

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 [...]. Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition; for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall rose within me. (Shelley 2012, 83; 90)

In fact, the Creature's narrative of intellectual development is followed by experiments that are aimed at consolidating his knowledge through the senses. He tries his first experiment in virtue by saving a child, and then decides to take William as his companion in order to avoid solitude and rejection. Both experiments having failed, he concludes his speech with an admission of guilt, both in murdering William, and in carefully orchestrating Justine's accusation: "[T]hanks to the lessons of Felix, and the sanguinary laws of man, I have learned how to work mischief. I approached her unperceived and placed the portrait securely in one of the folds of her dress" (Shelley 2012, 101).

By allowing the Creature to speak directly, Mary Shelley has turned the discourse from the realm of the "crime" to a modern one aimed at "doing something other than judge." According to Foucault, this kind of investigation characterizes the post-enlightenment attitude to punishment:

Beneath the increasing leniency of punishment, then, one may map a displacement of its point of application; and through this displacement, a whole field of recent objects, a whole new system of truth and a mass of roles hitherto unknown in the exercise of criminal justice. A corpus of knowledge, techniques, "scientific" discourses is formed and becomes entangled with the practice of the power to punish. (Foucault 1995, 23)

By following the life of the Creature to its most extreme possibilities, Shelley posits a new, more radical set of rights than those established by the French "Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen." Initially the Creature aspires to a Godwinian concept of humanity. As stated in *Political Justice*, "the most desirable condition of the human species is a state of society" (Godwin 1985, 75). The Creature thus demands of Victor Frankenstein a female companion, claiming "my virtues will necessarily arise when I live in communion with an equal" (Shelley 2012, 103-104). This equal is, however, other than human, as it partakes of the Creature's ability to feel at home in extreme natural environments: "The desert mountains and dreary glaciers [...] are a dwelling to me" (Shelley 2012, 68). His ideal dwelling place will be outside "Europe." Moreover, as Carol Adams has pointed out, the new life he will share with the new companion

will not involve killing for food, thus showing an intention to respect animal beings as well as humans (Adams 1990):

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The Creature’s speech is built on the recurrence of two terms that are artfully contrasted: “man” – “human.” The first (“man”) refers to a species associated with cruelty, while the second (“human”) becomes the aspiration to what every being can become when granted equal rights. Thus, by exploiting the structure of the Gothic novel and introducing a post-human Creature into her narrative, Mary Shelley has opened her novel to the question of “universal rights” that are a prerequisite to any idea of just punishment. Having experimented with the human models of praxis put forward by his readings – the heroic one in Plutarch, the vengeful one in Milton’s Satan – the Creature follows Werther’s example, a sacrificial suicide, on a “funeral pile.” As Michelle Faubert has pointed out, this promise is unfulfilled, as in the novella *Mathilda*, but aims at creating a “fictional perspective from which suicide is honourable, responding to Godwin’s query in *Political Justice*, and contributes a subjective voice to the formal debate of the period” (Shelley 2017, 33). Similarly, the Creature’s pleading for a “peaceful” and “human” life is set within the debate about penal law and the need for its reform.

To conclude, *Frankenstein* betrays its strong links with the Godwinian novel in its potential to continue a debate on the theme of justice. The philosopher Jacques Derrida has expressed his concern about the notion of “animal as opposed to human rights:”

To want absolutely to grant, not to animals but to a certain category of animals, rights equivalent to human rights, would be a disastrous contradiction. It would reproduce the philosophical and juridical machine thanks to which the exploitation of animal material for food, work, experimentation, etc. has been practiced (and tyrannically so, through an abuse of power). (Derrida 2004, 65)

Derrida’s main concern is that the law does not achieve the status of universality it aspires to. As Kelly Oliver has pointed out, for Derrida, “giving rights to some animals but not all would repeat the exclusionary logic of the Cartesian subject and the juridical conception of individuality

and freedom resulting from it” (Oliver 2009, 35). Mary Shelley’s Creature expands Godwin’s critique of the law and anticipates modern developments in animal-human studies (Castricano and Corman 2016), thus illustrating the capacity of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* to relaunch new debates two hundred years from its publication.

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CHAPTER FOUR

FRANKENSTEIN: A VIEW FROM VOLNEY AND 18TH CENTURY FRENCH “RUINISM”

MICHAEL HOLLINGTON

The main aim of this chapter is contextual. With the help of recent and not-so-recent scholarship, it returns to the important and frequently-quoted reference in *Frankenstein* to Volney’s *Ruins*, widening the focus a little so as to look back to other major representatives of “ruinism” among the *philosophes* of the 18th century, in particular Diderot and Bernardin de Saint Pierre. It also briefly looks forward to 20th century writing. A work conceived in the Tambora summer of 1816, when a disastrous volcanic eruption in Indonesia kept the inhabitants of the Villa Diodati indoors, can be seen as a harbinger of much later meditation on catastrophe – reaching into the present, I would contend, in the work of W. G. Sebald, for example, though that must be a subject for another occasion. Here I aim only to add a dimension or two to recognition of its complexity, paradoxicality and profundity as a text about an act of creation that unleashes a riot of destruction.

I want first to give prominence to an important image in the novel which, borrowing a term from Walter Benjamin, I characterise as a *Denkbild* for the theme of ruins. Its major, if not exclusive, focus is the Rhine, an important presence, above all because of its ruined castles, in a book ostensibly focussed on Switzerland. For it is clear that – despite Alphonse the father and Victor the son bearing francophone first names, and the former marrying Caroline Beaufort, the daughter of his bosom friend “Beaufort” or “splendid castle” – the Frankensteins and their name belong originally to the Rhineland rather than to the Suisse Romande. *Their* castle – standing in ruins when Mary Godwin and Percy Shelley travelled down the Rhine at harvest time in September 1814, a few days after her

seventeenth birthday, but later restored – lies in the sunny wine-growing area of the Rhineland Bergstrasse. It is a region that Mary Shelley, prior to the publication of *Frankenstein*, had described in 1817 on the basis of a day or so of acquaintance with it three years earlier as “the loveliest paradise on earth” (Shelley 1844, 1: 171). Clerval echoes her in the novel, declaring his view that “there is a charm in the banks of this divine river, that I never before saw equalled” (Shelley 2012, 111).

Paradise imagery – often closely associated with imagery of the sun – abounds in *Frankenstein*, not only in relation to Milton. It may be said to commence on the book’s very first page with Robert Walton’s quest for the mythical kingdom of Thule, a “region of beauty and delight ... [where] the sun is for ever visible” (Shelley 2012, 7), the Arctic summer solstice having for him in fantasy apparently taken on eternal life. It is frequently associated with Clerval, who finds his essential *métier* as a student of Asian writing, where “life appears to consist in a warm sun and garden of roses” (Shelley 2012, 44-45). Of the Rhine itself, Mary Shelley, in her last published book giving an account of a return journey to this beloved region, declares: “Surely, the inhabitants of this region worship the sun” (Shelley 1844, 1: 171).

But conventional paradises do not contain ruined castles, which belong obviously to the world of history and transience rather than to eternity. They bear unmistakable lapsarian significance, especially positioned as they habitually are in this book on top of sheer precipices overhanging the river. Thus, this *Denkbild* is also a kind of *Vexierbild*, a visual puzzle leading directly into some of the central oppositions in a novel where a supposedly “constructive” creator and “destructive” creation are locked in *Doppelgänger* relationship. Shelley’s Rhine, like so much else in these pages, is essentially dualistic, her imagination fired not only by oppositions of light and dark, and thus marking vivid contrast between the shining sun, the ripened grapes, and the labourers singing as they gather them in, and “the dark Rhine,” but equally of high and low, as she portrays a river rushing through a gorge with vertiginous cliffs on either side (Shelley 2012, 111). The prominent vertical axis is again proleptically announced early on in the story of Victor’s authentically Genevese maternal grandfather, who experiences a catastrophic fall from his “beau fort,” and then, in horizontal doubling of the point, exiles himself from the city to live out the rest of his ruined life in Luzern. It is sustained throughout the ongoing modern revenge tragedy of relations between Victor and the monster in a perpetual fantasy of dashing to pieces the other from a height: “I would have made a pilgrimage to the highest peak of the

Andes, could I, when there, have precipitated him to their base” (Shelley 2012, 62). And it is perhaps no mere coincidence that Victor Hugo records in his *Le Rhin* of 1842 the legend of a certain 14th century Rhineland feudal tyrant by the name of Falkenstein (“nom fatal dans les légendes”) whose pastime it was to send his serfs to their doom by throwing them down an immense well which bottomed out beneath the level of the Rhine below (Hugo 2013, 143).

But on to Volney, a crucial source for thinking about ruin and catastrophe in the Romantic era, given unmistakable prominence in *Frankenstein* as an essential pillar of the monster’s education on the topic of human history. According to E. P. Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class*, Volney was of greater importance in radical circles in Britain than Mary Shelley’s father himself, because “unlike William Godwin’s *Political Justice* (1793), whose influence was confined to a small and highly literate circle, Volney’s *Ruins* was published in cheap pocket-book form and remained in the libraries of artisans in the 19th century” (Thompson 1963, 107).

Percy Shelley was probably first introduced to Volney by Thomas Love Peacock, whom he met in the autumn of 1812. Volney’s 1791 *Les ruines* begins at the famous ruined site of Palmyra in Syria, and Peacock had been sufficiently impressed by it to give its name to a volume of poetry published in 1805. Shelley described the ending of its title poem, “Palmyra,” as “the finest piece of poetry I ever read,” and went on to make extensive use of Volney’s book as the model for the structure of his own first major work, *Queen Mab*, published in 1813. It was Walter Benjamin’s future father-in-law Leon Kellner who, in Vienna in 1896, first gave detailed attention to the relationship, thoroughly evident in lines like the following which describe Ianthe’s own confrontation with Palmyra:

Behold! where grandeur frowned;
Behold! where pleasure smiled;
What now remains? – the memory
Of senselessness and shame –
What is immortal there?
Nothing – it stands to tell
A melancholy tale, to give
An awful warning [...]
(*Queen Mab*, ii, 111-118; quoted from Duffy 2005, 45)

Here Shelley echoes the powerful democratic address to the ruins of Palmyra at the opening of Volney's book: "A while ago the whole world bowed the neck in silence before the tyrants that oppressed it; and yet in that hopeless moment you already proclaimed the truths that tyrants hold in abhorrence: mixing the dust of the proudest kings with that of the meanest slaves, you called upon us to contemplate this example of equality" (Volney 1796, vii). And surely Shelley's political and anticlerical work as a whole – the brilliant doggerel of *The Mask of Anarchy*, for example ("I met Murder on the Way – /He had a mask like Castlereagh") – reflects the impact of Volney's savage satiric denunciation of bigotry and superstition in all religions in passages like the following:

It is thus the Jew would sooner die than work on the sabbath. It is thus the Persian would endure suffocation before he would blow the fire with his breath. It is thus the Indian places supreme perfection in smearing himself with cow-dung, and mysteriously pronouncing the word Aûm(r). It is thus the Mussulman believes himself purified from all his sins by the ablution of his head and his arms; and disputes, sabre in hand, whether he ought to begin the ceremony at the elbow(s) or the points of his fingers. (Volney 1796, 86)

Or this, which singles out Christianity for ridicule through its list of warring sects:

the Nestorians, the Eutycheans, the Jacobites, the Iconoclasts, the Anabaptists, the Presbyterians, the Wiclifites, the Osiandrins, the Manicheans, the Pietists, the Adamites, the Enthusiasts, the Quakers, the Weepers, together with a hundred others; all of distinct parties, of a persecuting spirit when strong, tolerant when weak, hating each other in the name of a God of peace, forming to themselves an exclusive paradise in a religion of universal charity, each dooming the rest, in another world, to endless torments, and realizing here the imaginary hell of futurity. (Volney 1796, 161)

But Mary Shelley's take on Volney's book in *Frankenstein* treats it as something more than a mere catalogue of prejudice and crime. She gives more emphasis to the positive assessments of human history in *Les ruines* than many Volney readers might do, so that what the monster learns here of human nature from the book is markedly dualistic. He concludes from it that humanity is "powerful..virtuous...and magnificent" as well as "vicious and base," at some points in time "a mere scion of the evil principle," and at others "all that can be conceived of noble and godlike" (Shelley 2012, 83). And one might note here in passing the Romantic unorthodoxy of her reading of Milton, in whose *Paradise Lost* evil is not a separate principle, and its greater closeness to the Zoroastrianism to which

her circle seems to have been attracted at this time (in the writings of the vegetarian Newton, in Peacock's unfinished *Ahrimanes* of 1813-15, and in *Prometheus Unbound*), the dualist principles of which are clearly set forth in Volney's rationalist survey of the history of human religions in *Les ruines*.

Thus far, in examining the importance of Volney for the Shelleys, I have stressed what Francesco Orlando characterises as his adherence to the "solemn-admonitory" tradition of writing about ruins, descending from Servicius Sulpicius Rufus writing to Cicero in 45 BC through Castiglione and du Bellay and Spenser, but petering out in his view after Volney – that is to say, his place in a long series of "awful warnings" (Orlando 2006, 227). And if we were to treat *Frankenstein* as a cautionary tale in the manner of Robert Southey's "Cornelius Agrippa" (or, for that matter, "Goldilocks" in its original version) it might fit comfortably enough into this matrix.

But the French "Ruinist" context tends to highlight its radical ambiguity. Here we must turn away from Volney, and look briefly at other, earlier *philosophes* who revolutionise thinking about ruins in the 18th century. In doing so I am of course mindful of aesthetic developments in Britain – Burke's "sublime" and Gilpin's "picturesque" – of equal if not greater importance for the English Romantics, but it could be that, just as according to Alexander Cook and Sanja Perovic, Volney himself has been undervalued as a presence in British radical circles of the early 19th century, the name of Diderot, though thoroughly indebted to Burke, ought to be routinely added to that of these innovators in any account of the radical reform of aesthetic taste in the period.

For it is he – the inventor of the phrase "la poétique des ruines," which Roland Mortier borrows for the title of his important book on the subject – who is the *maître à penser* for later writers like Volney or Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. He is so principally through his writings about paintings of ruins, in particular those of Hubert Robert, the subject of a recent stimulating book by Nina Dubin, *Futures and Ruins*. He effects a two-fold move away from the "solemn-admonitory" tradition of the representation of ruins – first, by getting us to look at them from a purely aesthetic perspective, productive of "une douce mélancolie" in the beholder, and second, perhaps even more importantly, by highlighting the beauty of ruins as a consequence of the acts of destruction that bring them into being. "Il faut ruiner un palais pour en faire un objet d'intérêt" (Diderot 1821, 386) is perhaps the most lapidary formulation of this principle in the

Salon de 1767, echoed even more succinctly a year later in Voltaire's satiric *La Guerre Civile de Genève*: "bâtir est beau, mais détruire est sublime" (Voltaire 1990, 155).

For, as a number of commentators have shown, as a quintessential emblem of destruction and catastrophe the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 gave rise, not only to conventional moralising on its significance as a sign of God's judgement on the wickedness of mankind, but also to an entirely new conception of disaster as an aesthetic principle. "Destruction is an essential, inherent component of modern art," writes Dirk de Meyer in his essay "Catastrophe and its Fallout" (de Meyer 2011, 13), and Nina Dubin comments extensively, in the work of Hubert Robert and others, on "the emergence of an aesthetic interest in catastrophe – one that developed alongside, and at times nearly interchangeable with, the cult of ruins" (Dubin 2010, 61). Echoing Edmund Burke imagining a future London in ruins, and the crowds who would come to gawp at it – "there is no spectacle we so eagerly pursue, as that of some uncommon and grievous calamity" (Burke 1864, I: 80). Diderot imagines Paris burnt to the ground, but offering shortly thereafter a pleasant spectacle for *flâneurs*: "au bout de quelque temps vous aimeriez à vous promener sur les cendres" (Diderot 1821, 186-7).

Painters began to cater to this taste by portraying future catastrophes that turn existing structures into ruins. Hubert Robert's 1796 *Imaginary View of the Grand Gallery of the Louvre in Ruins*, depicting the Louvre as an aesthetically pleasing spectacle after a catastrophe, was quickly followed in 1798 by Joseph Gandy's *Vision of Sir John Soane's Design for the Rotunda of the Bank of England as a Ruin*. For rich dilettantes like William Beckford, building structures that might collapse after a certain elapse of time and so produce subsequent pleasing ruins may have been one of the principles of a new sensationalist aesthetics of spectacle. Dani Cavallaro puts forward the view that "Beckford, contemptuous of the classical style and captivated by ruins, is likely to have *wished* Fonthill to have been a crumbling structure able to provide an appropriate setting for his Ossianic passions," and Dirk de Meyer goes on to suggest that he was disappointed to have been absent when it fell down in 1825, and so unable to enjoy the spectacle (Cavallaro 2002, 28; Le Roy 2011, 14).

If we might seem to have wandered away from *Frankenstein* a little, Bernardin de St. Pierre, known nowadays more or less exclusively as the author of the children's classic *Paul et Virginie*, may perhaps bring us back home. A disciple of Rousseau, indebted to but also critical of the

rationalism of the *philosophes*, his *Études de la Nature* of 1784 contains a section entitled “Le Plaisir de la ruine,” which begins with an arresting assertion: “J’ai cru quelque temps qu’il y avait dans l’homme je ne sais quel goût pour la destruction”. He goes on to distinguish between active and passive versions of this disposition, and has particularly interesting things to say about the latter. Relatively few people, he thinks, are actively destructive, although some, including presumably Beckford and certainly Nero, can be counted as both active and passive because of the enjoyment they take in observing the effects of the destruction they set in motion: “Les grandes destructions offrent des effets pittoresques nouveaux; ce fut la curiosité d’en faire naître, jointe à la cruauté, qui porta Néron à mettre le feu à Rome, pour avoir le spectacle d’un incendie” – a taste with its modern equivalent in the fire paintings of Hubert Robert and others.

But it is what Bernardin has to say about “passive destruction” that may make us feel that he has something to say about the malignant destructiveness of the monster in *Frankenstein* – even if this of course expresses itself in “active destruction.” The taste for destruction, he asserts, is more or less universal, but not natural:

La plupart des gens du peuple sont médisants; ils aiment à détruire la réputation de tout ce qui s’élève. Mais cet instinct malfaisant ne vient point de la nature. Il naît du malheur des individus, à qui l’ambition est inspirée par l’éducation et interdite par la société, ce qui les jette dans une ambition négative. Ne pouvant rien élever, il faut qu’ils abattent tout. Le goût de la ruine, dans ce cas, n’est point naturel, et est simplement l’exercice de la puissance du misérable. (Quoted from Mortier, 1974, 126-127)

That phrase – “la puissance du misérable” – seems to me to come close to pinpointing an important aspect of Mary Shelley’s Volney-inspired critique in this book of an unjust system that cannot but incite the impulse to overthrow it.

I conclude by jumping very briefly ahead to a famous 20th century essay, whose title, “Der destructive Character,” may nowadays hover over any discussion of this theme in *Frankenstein*. But if one asks, bearing Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s remarks in mind, whether the monster in the novel can be described as a “destructive character” in Benjamin’s terms, the answer is likely to be a definite “no.” To take no more than one of Benjamin’s defining characteristics – “der destruktive Charakter ist gar nicht daran interessiert, verstanden zu werden” (“the destructive character has no interest in being understood”) – it is clear that the absolute reverse is true of the monster: one of his deepest impulses is to be understood

(Benjamin 2005, 2: 542). His is surely a case of what is at bottom a “passive” inclination towards destruction.

But – without in any sense wanting to nail Victor Frankenstein as a specimen, which would be absurd – a somewhat more complex discussion might ensue in any discussion of his relation to the Benjamin archetype. Ostensibly a creator, some aspects at least of his attitude towards the creature created bear a resemblance to the work of Benjamin’s destroyer, in particular the abnegation of responsibility for the consequences of his work. If the “destructive character” has no desire “zu wissen, was an Stelle der Zerstorten tritt” (“to know what will replace what has been destroyed”) (Benjamin 2005, 2: 541) this creator declines to manage the outcome of his creation, with catastrophic consequences. The general point that might emerge from a reading of the Benjamin text in relation to Shelley’s novel and its French “ruinist” context, is how acutely and profoundly she explores here the paradoxical intertwining and doubling of destruction and creation.

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE EPISTOLARY FORM IN *FRANKENSTEIN*: KEYWORDS AND CHARACTER SYSTEM

ALESSANDRO SCARSELLA

The epistolary component within the structure of *Frankenstein* appears legitimized in the paratext of the 1818 and 1831 editions. In the first edition, the four opening letters precede the first chapter, which was later split into two in the 1831 edition. The letters show variations between the two editions, although these are never substantial and always adhere to the content of the supposed truth of their statements. The propellant function of private writing in this text acts at the level of the performativity of the epistolary message, rather than within the psychological profile of the characters. This confirms on the one hand the decline of the epistolary formula, and on the other the construction of a new model of novel. The following observations attempt to tiptoe into the laboratories of Mary Shelley's novel, finding the traces left by the old style in the course of her literary experiment.

Hypothesis as to the Original Structure of the ur-*Frankenstein*

According to Charles Robinson's chronological reconstruction, Mary "wrote a shorter version of her novel; that she and 'Shelley [did] talk about my story' on 21 August, probably deciding to expand her 'short tale' into the surviving Draft of the novel" (Robinson 2016, 13-14). The Abinger manuscript at the Bodleian is divided into two parts and contains a narrative devoid of Walton's epistolary framework and the last pages of the text; here P.B. Shelley's handwriting has been identified. It must be assumed that the initial lost version was quite similar in layout to *The Vampyre* by Polidori, a text that was analogously published anonymously and is genetically linked to the first instantiation of the plot of *Frankenstein*,

and thus to the stormy night when the company at the Villa Diodati near Geneva during the summer 1816 took part in the ghost story competition, which is also described by the anonymous writer of the “Extract of a Letter from Geneva” that precedes the text. The strategy of identifying the specific author, which could be Byron or P.B. “Shelly,” (*sic*) according to Polidori’s erroneous transcript, is discerned in the paratext of the two works: in the “Preface” to the 1818 first edition of *Frankenstein*, as a testimony published by the author who, hides only her name; *The Vampyre*, however, is preceded by a letter that lacks any closing remarks or signature, and has been sent to the publisher by the editor who has received the text from a third party. We will bear this in mind.

Polidori’s narrative opts for a synthesis that avoids dialogue and favors free reported speech, except during the key dramatic confrontation between Aubrey and Lord Ruthven on the brink of the latter’s apparent death. Polidori proposes a simple structure: “I obtained the outline of each of these stories” (Polidori 1819, xv); this resembles a preparatory work, which anticipates the scripts of the films to come, rather than a novella. We find references to letters in *The Vampyre*:

1. Received by Aubrey during his stay in Rome:

Whilst he was thus engaged, letters arrived from England, which he opened with eager impatience; the first was from his sister, breathing nothing but affection; the others were from his guardians, the latter astonished him; if it had before entered into his imagination that there was an evil power resident in his companion, these seemed to give him most sufficient reason for the belief. (Polidori 1819, 36)

2. The letter that Aubrey writes to his sister begging her not to marry Ruthven, but which will never be delivered:

[H]e wrote a letter to his sister, conjuring her, as she valued her own happiness, her own honour, and the honour of those now in the grave, who once held her in their arms as their hope and the hope of their house, to delay but for a few hours that marriage, on which he denounced the most heavy curses. The servants promised they would deliver it; but giving it to the physician, he thought it better not to harass any more the mind of Miss Aubrey by, what he considered, the ravings of a maniac. (Polidori 1819, 69-70)

There is an evident functional parallelism between these and the family members’ letters received by Victor Frankenstein.

The Longest Letter

Walton's last letter in the first part of the third edition of *Frankenstein* is particularly long and contains almost the entire novel, except for the open ending, and indeed the second part concludes with Walton's last letters, described as "in continuation:" "WALTON, *in continuation* / August 26th, 17—." (Shelley 1818, 231) The last missive before the chapters begin in Book I is dated August 19th. The date is consistent with weekly mailings. So what does "in continuation" mean? It appears to be the residue of a heterodiegetic narrative in which the narrator gives voice to the characters through their own letters. Traces of an early such structure, as mentioned before, and one perhaps similar to the outline of Polidori's *The Vampyre*, can be found in Frankenstein's use of the third person for himself, but it is peculiar that the expression "So much has been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein, – more, far more, will I achieve" should have been added to the third edition (variant transcribed in Appendix F; Shelley 1818, 329). The absence of farewells at the end of the last letter to the beloved Sister – replaced by the epigraphic THE END – seems undoubtedly taken from Polidori in the incomplete letter to the editor that precedes that narrative; it is followed by the unsigned second letter: "Extract of a Letter, Containing an Account of Lord Byron's Residence in the Island of Mitylene," in 1812 (Polidori 1819, [75]-84). By reversing the chronological order of the two letters which frame the tale of *The Vampyre*, we are faced with a different and even more allusive montage compared to the supposition of Byron's involvement in the ghost story, as author or as a strange and sinister protagonist. But Polidori avoided the solution of such a sender of letters as Walton, not least because Byron was not a fictional character like Victor Frankenstein and, indeed, would have been offended, and likely to have denied the authenticity of the episodes related to his stay in Mytilene.

However, the comparison is instructive in understanding the path taken by Mary Shelley in processing her material and procedures. It may be objected that Polidori could not count on the observations and interventions of counsellors of the caliber of P.B. Shelley and William Godwin; but it is also true that the tone of the two complementary letters in *The Vampyre* is very conventional and devoid of artistry. *The Vampyre* is saved in so far as it is deliberately presented as an outline, while in its short form it is endowed with remarkable efficacy.

Epistles in the Narrative Machine

No general theoretical reference is needed to support consideration of the structure of *Frankenstein* as a complex device, whose levels of narrative communication aim mostly to involve readers. The connection to the found manuscripts of the Gothic tradition is consolidated by the introduction of the “Preface” written by P.B. Shelley, which precedes the first narrative sequence of epistolary documents. However, these letters have the double function of a) verisimilitude, connected as they are to the special circumstances taking place, and to the emotions involved; and b) accentuating the interdiscursive context; for this is the intrinsic reality of the text’s indirect relationship with the traditional trope of the *found manuscript*: an object of rewriting, the document bearing the word of others comes to light in the strategies and intentions of its author. An additional aspect that is perhaps worth noting is the homogeneity of voices in the exchange of letters, which all belong to the same family/social group. This explains why the Creature does not write letters but is the author of a long monologue, considered the true essence of the novel and making up the third volume of the first edition. The existence of the Creature represents a destructive factor from the point of view of the family group. As the product of an enclosed education, and destined to render an endogamic choice of a partner, Victor undermines such equilibrium with a parthenogenetic act of creation, whose gestation is accompanied by an autoerotic sexual delirium. But the correspondence becomes in itself a desperate symbolic act in this deprived setting, since it aims to maintain the cohesion of the group and, in its nature as an uninterrupted flow of communication, achieve appropriate behavior and an ethical principle:

I knew my silence disquieted them; and I well remembered the words of my father: “I know that while you are pleased with yourself, you will think of us with affection, and we shall hear regularly from you. You must pardon me, if I regard any interruption in your correspondence as a proof that your other duties are equally neglected.” (Shelley 1818, 83)

However:

My father made no reproach in his letters; and only took notice of my silence by inquiring into my occupations more particularly than before. (Shelley 1818, 84)

In P.B. Shelley's gothic novel *Zastrozzi*, the impossibility of epistolary correspondence with the outside world is connected to the imprisonment of the sequestered Verezzi and his suicidal condition:

He often expressed a wish to write to Julia, but the old woman said she had orders neither to permit him to write nor receive letters – on pretence of not agitating his mind; and to avoid the consequences of despair, knives were denied him. (Shelley P.B., 1810, 10)

A state of mind which can be defined as the epistolary behaviour of particular characters has perhaps, in the long history of *Frankenstein's* reception, prevented the surplus value of the epistolary frame from increasing, whether semiotically or affectively; this can be attributed to the functioning of conventional self-mimetic narrative mechanisms. On the contrary, in the crisis of the epistolary model, there is a reason for the preservation of this fictional device, aimed at readers and, above all, at such consummate and compulsive readers as Mrs Margaret Saville (sister of Walton, whose initials coincide with those of Mary Shelley). However, the deliberate chronotopic consequence of each individual epistle, between distance and closeness, presupposes the impossibility of knowing the intervening facts. This limit to the reading of each letter should be emphasized, both in Walton's letter-frames and in the other letters transcribed within Victor Frankenstein's homodiegetic narrative.

Journals, Papers and Notes

If it is true that the author herself had direct experience of the communicative and personally evocative power of letters and private writing (Freya, 2016, 1; Bennett 2003, 216), and that she was aware of the structure of the epistolary novel (Favret 1993, 178-179), it is also true that the prototype of Walton's letters can be identified, for the context described, in the *Viaggi di Russia* (1760) by Francesco Algarotti (1712–1764). The Venetian intellectual described the journey he had made – following Lord Baltimore – to St. Petersburg on the occasion of the marriage of the Prince of Brunswick to Princess Anna of Mecklenburg, niece of the Tsarina Anna Ioannovna. Translated into English in 1769, the book feigns to be the collection of Algarotti's letters to Scipio Maffei and in particular, to Mylord Hervey (Lord John Hervey), to whom the work is dedicated. Algarotti's itinerary is limited to the Baltic Sea and, while the Arctic Ocean is mentioned, its characteristics are referred to through the secondhand testimonies of the whalers. This strategy distinguishes Algarotti's report from Walton's letters, although there is an interesting

analogy in the overlapping of the terms and functions of letter and journal. The trend of the travel diary is mocked within the text, but he then admits that he too wrote a “journal:”

You see, my Lord, that if I was at all inclined to enter into minute particulars, I could easily make a complete journal of our voyage, and even embellish it with scientific narrations [...]. To finish the journal of our voyage, for, without being aware of it, I think I have led myself into one, I will tell you [...].

Such is my journal of what relates to this strange occurrence up to the present day. [...] I shall continue my journal concerning the stranger at intervals, should I have any fresh incidents to record. (Algarotti 1769, 10, 44)

This is a significant signal in Algarotti, as later in Mary Shelley, concerning the genesis of the text, starting from its first diary entry and leading to the definitive writing of letters; this proceeding is brought to light in the letters of the author, Algarotti. The same procedure, as transferred to the voice of the character Walton, may indicate the outline of a primogenial draft of the incipit of the novel in the form of a diary. In both cases we witness a transfer from the self-referential point of the “I” to the conditions of reception of a “you.” In this context, what emerges is the intersection between the present in the journal and the imminent time of its reception in the form of a letter to a recipient. An analogous transfer of subjectivity to the objectivity of narrative statement emerges explicitly in the Creature’s words regarding Safie’s letters to Felix. The Creature participates as a silent spectator to the daily life of a family, whose destiny has been radically changed as the result of the encounter with a Turk who has been unjustly condemned by the French state, and whom the young Felix helps to escape from prison. The Turk promises the hand of his daughter Safie, who begins to send him letters:

“During the ensuing days, while the preparations were going forward for the escape of the merchant, the zeal of Felix was warmed by several letters that he received from this lovely girl, who found means to express her thoughts in the language of her lover by the aid of an old man, a servant of her father’s, who understood French. She thanked him in the most ardent terms for his intended services towards her father; and at the same time she gently deplored her own fate. “I have copies of these letters; for I found means, during my residence in the hovel, to procure the implements of writing; and the letters were often in the hands of Felix or Agatha. Before I depart, I will give them to you, they will prove the truth of my tale [...]” (Shelley 1818, 148)

Empathy and the Rewriting of a Truth

Involvement in the Turkish affair and the consequent condemnation results in the exile of Felix's family (including his sister Agatha and the blind father) to Germany to endure modest conditions of semi-poverty; into this the foreigner Safie intrudes, wishing to be reunited with Felix against the will of her ungrateful father. This presents a unique opportunity for the Creature: the foreigner must learn a new language; the Creature observes with empathy this effort of communication and learning. The relationship that is generated between the Creature and the foreigner is engaging to the point that he copies Safie's letters which he then claims to be able to show to the person listening to his story, namely Victor Frankenstein, as proof of the veracity of his tale. Victor delivers these same letters to Walton, who accepts them as testimony to the authenticity of the entire context, on a par with his personal experience of meeting the Creature:

His tale is connected, and told with an appearance of the simplest truth; yet I own to you that the letters of Felix and Safie, which he shewed me, and the apparition of the monster, seen from our ship, brought to me a greater conviction of the truth of his narrative than his asseverations, however earnest and connected. (Shelley 1818, 231)

This almost immediately follows the words "Walton, *in continuation*," and the context helps to explain this puzzling phrase, which emerges as an important aspect of the way in which written letters confirm the truth of Frankenstein's spoken narrative. The handwriting of these copied letters must be that of the Creature, and is understood to be equivalent to its physical presence. The production of a letter therefore constitutes a factor of credibility founded on truth. By transcribing Safie's letters, the Creature takes on the function of the author of an earlier, prospective epistolary novel. However, the letter appears to be only one of the means that could have contributed to the constitution of a dialogic or polyphonic novel; this latter solution was discarded by Mary Shelley, but probably long remained hanging in the balance. The formula of a choral novel was never in her mind. These instances of private writing emerge as the tip of the iceberg of a macrotext which questions and disrupts the logic of letters in the epistolary novel, bypassing the socio-anthropological justification of the collective scenario. The chain of temporal causes is connected to the interaction between the characters and the unfolding of the plot. Diaries and documents, journals, papers, notes – the process begins from a discovery by Safie:

“By some papers of her father’s, which fell into her hands, she heard of the exile of her lover, and learnt the name of the spot where he then resided.” (Shelley 1818, 151)

So to the “some papers in the pocket of the dress” found by the monster in Frankenstein’s laboratory; that is, the “journal of the four months that preceded my creation” (Shelley 1818, 155). Clearly the function of the diary here is limited to the reporting, in the present, of those past four months. Similarly for Britton (2009, 6) the monologic narrative of the monster occupies a long but synchronic period of time, like that of a page in a journal: “His tale had occupied the whole day; and the sun was upon the verge of the horizon when he departed” (Shelley 1818, 172). But after the return of Frankenstein to Geneva, the third volume of the novel begins with the projected study trip to England and the hope of a

long correspondence with those philosophers of that country, whose knowledge and discoveries were of indispensable use to me in my present undertaking. (Shelley 1818, 177)

At this point, the synthetic and rapid forward movement of the novel seems to resemble Polidori’s *Vampyre*. The first-person narrative naturally remains constant, although the recurrence of heterogeneous types of private writing marks the almost feverish search for an appropriate narrative regime. Consider the journals kept by Clerval:

And you, my friend [Walton], would be far more amused with the journal of Clerval, who observed the scenery with an eye of feeling and delight, than to listen to my reflections. [...]

“I have seen,” he [Clerval] said, “the most beautiful scenes of my own country.” (Shelley 1818, 179, 180)

Noteworthy is the shift from writing to saying; saying is not speaking, but perhaps a further trace of that first chaotic drafting of *Frankenstein*, the lost ur-Frankenstein, from which these observations have been derived, can be identified in this suspension. Confirmation of the chaotic state, so to speak, of the opening chapter of this final part of the novel, within the long quotation from Clerval’s journal/speech, is the explosive passage from the first to the second person – who is no longer Walton, but rather Clerval:

Clerval! beloved friend! even now it delights me to record your words, and to dwell on the praise of which you are so eminently deserving. He was a being formed in the “very poetry of nature.” His wild and enthusiastic

imagination was chastened by the sensibility of his heart. (Shelley 1818, 181)

“Pardon this gush of sorrow” (Shelley 1818, 182) the protagonist admits, again addressing Walton.

Terms of Reciprocity

In the next chapter, the second in Volume III, “the letters of introduction that I had brought with me, addressed to the most distinguished natural philosophers” (Shelley 1818, 183) are mentioned; and later “we received a letter from a person in Scotland, who had formerly been our visitor at Geneva” (Shelley 1818, 184). However, Frankenstein awaits other letters, which may contain dreaded news of loved ones: “I waited for my letters with feverish impatience” (Shelley 1818, 187). Still, in the third chapter of the third part, Frankenstein is reached in his refuge on the Orkneys Islands, by letters whose texts are not transcribed: “I saw a fishing-boat land close to me, and one of the men brought me a packet; it contained letters from Geneva, and one from Clerval, entreating me to join him” (Shelley 1818, 194). Here, the relational and interactive nature of epistolary material for the development of the plot is explicitly demonstrated in the protagonist’s reaction to reading Clerval’s letter: “This letter in a degree recalled me to life, and I determined to quit my island at the expiration of two days.” (194)

In the fourth chapter, papers and letters become essential in exonerating Frankenstein from the accusation of being the perpetrator of Clerval’s murder, according to the practice of the good judge who considers private writings to be testimonies of truth:

“It was not until a day or two after your illness that I thought of examining your dress, that I might discover some trace by which I could send to your relations an account of your misfortune and illness. I found several letters, and, among others, one which I discovered from its commencement to be from your father. I instantly wrote to Geneva: nearly two months have elapsed since the departure of my letter. –” (Shelley 1818, 203)

The reader must wait until chapter five in order to see the text of this correspondence, in which both Elizabeth’s letter, and Frankenstein’s response containing the promise of marriage, are transcribed. Elizabeth adequately defines the function of her communication, as *an exertion of mine*, a conscious message embodying performativity; Frankenstein

admits its effectiveness but in the opposite direction to what Elizabeth had hoped for. The letter rekindles his dormant fear of the monster's revenge:

My uncle will send me news of your health; and if I see but one smile on your lips when we meet, occasioned by this or any other exertion of mine, I shall need no other happiness. "ELIZABETH LAVENZA. "Geneva, May 18th, 17—."

This letter revived in my memory what I had before forgotten, the threat of the fiend – "*I will be with you on your wedding-night!*" (Shelley 1818, 211)

This is the story told by the monster and repeated in the form of a monologue by Frankenstein in the presence of Walton, who nonetheless scrupulously takes notes. It should not be forgotten that all such content takes the form of a very long letter from Walton to his sister Margaret, a letter begun on 19 August and which ends before 26 August, when Walton tells his sister: "You have read this strange and terrific story." (Shelley 1818, 231) However, to confuse the different authorship paternities and responsibilities, and to consolidate the supposed credibility of the general testimony, comes Walton's clarification that Frankenstein intended to act as an editor of himself, carefully reviewing Walton's transcriptions:

Frankenstein discovered that I made notes concerning his history: he asked to see them, and then himself corrected and augmented them in many places; but principally in giving the life and spirit to the conversations he held with his enemy. "Since you have preserved my narration," said he, "I would not that a mutilated one should go down to posterity" (Shelley 1818, 232).

The nearby phrase "Walton, *in continuation*" is again relevant, as the notes made by him confirm narrative truth. The abrupt closure, deprived of the pleasantries appropriate for the recipient ("*beloved sister*"), expresses unexpected intentions and reveals the overlap of the sender of the framing letters with the function of the second-degree narrator or narratee. Indeed, as we will later learn, the structure of the novel presupposes an additional narrator when Margaret, having received the correspondence from her brother Walton, proposes herself as the real and implicit promoter of the publication. What can be questioned about Walton's testimony is not its truthfulness (since it seems to be presupposed and represented by the existence of an epistolary document in the novel), but its timeliness. In fact, his letters seem to have been written at a distance in space that becomes a chronological separation from what is narrated, and hence of their possible development. The considerable time that separates the sending of the letters from the Arctic Pole to their reception in England

interrupts the transmission of the narrated facts and postpones indefinitely the explanation of their outcome.

A Response to the Crisis

There is undoubtedly an open ending, and it is a solution that is not found, for example, in E.T.A. Hoffmann's novella "The Sandman" (1816). The German author works upon the structure of the epistolary narration in order to propose distinct levels of perception of reality, without however renouncing the intervention of an author-narrator who appeals to the "gracious" and "indulgent" reader. In Hoffmann's work the last word belongs to this first-degree narrator. In *Frankenstein* this function is omitted and Mary Shelley intervenes as author only in the introduction of 1831. Besides the other reasons for this choice (which effectively left open the attribution to P.B. Shelley) the fact that the first edition was published anonymously would have affected this positive absconding of the first-person narrator from the objective fabric of the plot. On the other hand, the shifting order of the narrative voices can perhaps be correlated with the organization of the publication by the publisher Lackington & Co into three distinct volumes within a series. This decidedly paraliterary arrangement included units to be sold separately, almost as booklets, and having a target audience of curious readers passionate about urban legends, esotericism and occultism. However, Mary Shelley insists upon different writing mediums and on the changing positions of the narrative voices. This experimentalism is pushed to the point where it becomes difficult not to consider it almost a parody.

According to P. B. Shelley's valuable indications, the transgressive force of *Frankenstein* does not reside in its fantasy elements, but in the intersection of narrative methods performing as expressions of a human truth, in which the monster also participates. Conceiving it to be against nature is Frankenstein's mistake. And as the Creature is the result of a combination of elements, so the novel is an unprecedented experimental workshop; in P. B. Shelley's words from the "Preface," the author is engaged upon establishing

the truth of the elementary principles of human nature, while I have not scrupled to innovate upon their combinations. (Shelley 1818, 47)

Frankenstein, a product of crisis, interprets, according to a further explicit and perhaps undervalued statement by P. B. Shelley, the social crisis

presented by the novels of the time, which set out to design new ethical frontiers:

[Y]et my chief concern in this respect has been limited to the avoiding the enervating effects of the novels of the present day, and to the exhibition of the amiableness of domestic affection, and the excellence of universal virtue. (Shelley 1818, 47-48)

Evidently the novel form itself must have already established a very solid model of legibility in the second half of the eighteenth century, equipped with extremely persuasive traces of verisimilitude and verifiability in order to sustain the impact of a parody that does not so much demystify the function of the epistolary style, as to recompose the frame of reference of the logical and deontological values of narrative writing.

Just as the family romance of Mary Shelley can be glimpsed in the intertwining plot of *Frankenstein*, so again influences and models must be sought in a biographical context in which authoritative guidelines were not lacking. William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794), which is a homodiegetic narrative, contains in the plot, across its three volumes, important reports of sent letters; but these are only fully transcribed where necessary (notably the main narrator's letters of resignation sent to his supporter Falkland, whom he suspects of a murder for which innocents were executed). This correspondence is the main task of Caleb Williams, acting as secretary for business and literary exchanges:

My employment was easy and agreeable. It consisted partly in the transcribing and arranging certain papers, and partly in writing from my master's dictation letters of business, as well as sketches of literary composition. Many of these latter consisted of an analytical survey of the plans of different authors and conjectural speculations upon hints they afforded, tending either to the detection of their errors, or the carrying forward their discoveries. All of them bore powerful marks of a profound and elegant mind, well stored with literature, and possessed of an uncommon share of activity and discrimination. (Godwin 1794, 7)

Frankenstein will also be published in three volumes, but in a more condensed form than the extended paternal novel. The basic narrative structure remains the same, both in the father's work and in that of the daughter. The need for synthesis forced William Godwin to select the most dramatic or narratively functional letters. Otherwise the protagonist would have been lost in the proliferating correspondence, like Bartleby "the Scrivener." But this same narrative function, not taken to the extreme but rather alluded to in *lettres* and *papiers*, is found in the French

Fantasmagoriana, the reading that provoked inspiration in the company at Villa Diodati and which is quoted by Mary Shelley in the introduction of 1831: there are papers in *L'heure fatale* (*Fantasmagoriana*, 153–156), letters in *La morte fiancée* (*Fantasmagoriana*, 2, 66) and *Le revenant* (*Fantasmagoriana*, 2, 178–179). This is obviously a simplification that coincides historically with the decline of the epistolary novel, whose position of historical mediation towards the modern novel seems to have been implicitly recognised here. But the directions are different: the detective story in Godwin; the ghost story for *Fantasmagoriana*; a *mélange* of the two in Mary Shelley. Viewed from a distance, the structure of *Frankenstein* appears to be that of a spiral; it is all contained within the letters, in the transcriptions, in the papers which, against Walton's expectations ("it is highly probable that these papers may never reach you," September 5th [Shelley 1818, 235]) instead reach the hands of the beloved sister and compulsive reader, Margaret. Following the logical thread of the strategy of fiction, Margaret – the recipient who is addressed by the narrator Walton – serves as the unnamed editor who brings the text to light in 1818. The same editor is in turn proposed from the point of view of Mary Shelley as a personal feminine *alter ego* and thus an additional narratee at the first level, so to speak, in a narrative machine of unparalleled complexity.

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CHAPTER SIX

“HE MIGHT HAVE SPOKEN,
BUT I DID NOT HEAR.”

AUDITORY IMAGES IN *FRANKENSTEIN*

MARIA PARRINO

Among the innumerable readings of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, a considerable amount of criticism has focused on language, discussing across decades such issues as language acquisition, dialogic intercourse, and the apostrophe (Brooks 1979; Macovski 1994; Guyer 2006). More recently, the acts of reading and reading aloud have been analysed both as they emerge in the novel and in the author’s own life (Webb 2015), underlining the relevance of the oral and aural features so often mentioned in the novel. The aim of this essay is to focus on the discourse of the voice. By pausing on the acoustics, my reading of *Frankenstein* intends to be an auscultation of a text whose prosody of the human voice is not only descriptive but has agency. Moreover, by comparing the 1818 with the 1831 edition, this study shows how Mary Shelley’s interventions in her revised version frequently call attention to the need to foreground the auditory over the visual.

The core of *Frankenstein* lies in a meaningful auditory image represented by the Creature’s first spoken words, the ones he pronounces after a long and patient self-training on the acquisition of language in the attempt to interact with the family in the nearby cottage. Those first words, “Pardon this intrusion” (Shelley 1992, 115),¹ serve not only for the body – he is aware he is entering the cottage without having been invited – but also for his act of speaking, giving voice to his words as a literal and symbolic intrusion in the human. As we well know, despite the blind man’s

¹ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*. Edited by Johanna M. Smith. Boston: St. Martin’s Press, 1992. Further references to this edition are in parentheses in the text.

welcome and the articulated verbal interaction between the two, the intrusion is *not* pardoned and when the children arrive, convinced he is about to hurt their father they assault the Creature who – deeply frustrated – interrupts the conversation and gives vent to his anguish “in fearful howlings” (118), thus failing his aural/oral relationship. Yet the point at which the Creature completes his language acquisition depends on this failure, since the non-linguistic expressions are not evidence of his regression but rather of his becoming a subject, and his confrontation with the humans and their reactions is what makes the Creature human.

Besides its literal and symbolic meaning, the Creature’s first oral expression reveals an acoustic trait which is attentively scrutinized by the listener. “By your language, stranger, I suppose you are my countryman; – are you French?” (116) says the blind interlocutor who by identifying the speaker’s accent as familiar includes him in his social and ethnic rank. A similar scrutiny occurs the first time the reader *hears* Victor speak in the novel. When the crew find a stranded traveller on a sledge at the North Pole and try to persuade him to board the ship, Victor surprises the captain with his request to know where the ship is directed, for a man in such a critical condition is expected to be wanting help rather than wishing to discuss geography. Nevertheless, what strikes the captain is the sound of the stranger’s spoken words whose accent, unlike the Creature’s in the episode mentioned above, is detected as “foreign,” an apparently marginal yet itemized prosodic feature which I will discuss later.

Oral/aural features form part of the characterization of the Creature throughout the novel, and range from his practice of language learning (Parrino 2015) to his manifestations of anger, from “gnash[ing] his teeth in the impotence of anger” (142) and the “howl of devilish despair and revenge” (141) which follows the destruction of his companion, to the monstrous laughter Victor hears while chasing him in the mountains:

I was answered through the stillness of night by a loud and fiendish laugh. It rung on my ears long and heavily; the mountains re-echoed it, and I felt as if all hell surrounded me with mockery and laughter. [...]. The laughter died away, when a well-known and abhorred voice, apparently close to my ear, addressed me in an audible whisper – “I am satisfied: miserable wretch! you have determined to live, and I am satisfied.” (169)

The aural imagery used in this passage questions the ordinary matching of sounds and bodies. The Creature’s “fiendish laughter” which echoes in the mountains entraps Victor who feels “as if” hell itself transforms into a huge mouth engulfing him with its laughter. Then a detestable voice starts

whispering words of rage which penetrate Victor's ears, acoustics the listener cannot but hear. Eventually the disembodied sound materializes into a speaking Creature with a wide range of oral skills, from the non-linguistic to refined and elaborate eloquence, proving once again that he has fully appropriated language for himself. The Creature's loud and monstrous laughter anticipates another fiendish laugh, the one very similarly described by Charles Maturin in *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) when introducing his demoniac main character: "The echo of that laugh rung in Melmoth's ears" (Maturin 2000, 75). In both cases, the laughter echoes and chills the body, evoking horror; and it is even more disquieting when represented as a disembodied voice, a living presence disjointed by the body from which it emanates, an acousmatic voice (Dolar 2006, 60). To draw a parallel between the two novels seems legitimate as both stories deal with frequent auditory devices and wanderers, although the enthusiasm which makes Walton call Victor a "divine wanderer" (36) contrasts with the terror of the characters who meet Melmoth.

On the other hand, Victor's first oral/aural interaction occurs on board the ship where he is rescued while chasing the Creature at the North Pole. Convinced of the importance of preserving the stranger's extraordinary story, Captain Walton keeps a written record of his oral report "as nearly as possible in his own words" (37). Yet, as he explains in the letter to his sister, his faithful text will inevitably lack one crucial feature:

This manuscript will doubtless afford you the greatest pleasure: but to me, who know him, and who hear it from his own lips, with what interest and sympathy shall I read it in some future day! (38)

Confident that the reader will benefit from the story, Walton nevertheless regrets the fact that she will be denied the acoustics of the speaker's voice. Instead, to one who hears it "from his own lips," the *ex post* reading of the text will procure more intense "sympathy" and "interest." Listening to Frankenstein's oral account offers Walton an enjoyable experience in the present and anticipates the pleasure of reading the text in the future, a meta-literary device which underlines the relevance of acoustics in the appreciation of a text. An example of Mary Shelley's particular interest in sound emerges in the vivid auditory imagery she added at this point of the story in the 1831 edition, a paragraph in which Walton recollects the image of Victor speaking to him.

Even now, as I commence my task, his full-toned voice swells in my ears; his lustrous eyes dwell on me with their melancholy sweetness; I see his thin hand raised in animation, while the lineaments of his face are

irradiated by the soul within. Strange and harrowing might be his story; frightful the storm which embraced the gallant vessel on his course; and wrecked it – thus! (38)

Having heard the teller's "full-toned voice," Walton portrays himself as the privileged *ear*witness of Victor's oral account, the auditory imprint sealing a bond between speaker and listener (Macovski 1994, 35 and 127). Walton's word-for-word transcription of Frankenstein's oral report – his written text – represents what Jeanne M. Britton calls a form of "compensatory sympathy" which "ultimately depends on auditory, not just visual experience" (Britton 2009, 3). For Garrett Stewart, Walton is like those characters who in the absence of their own life stories seek out the narratives of others to fill the void, and "await final engagements and understanding through the rerun of all such experience *as read*" (Stewart 1996, 117-118, emphasis in original). Aiming to be the reader of his own writing, Walton records Victor's words and notes the prosodic elements of his voice in silence, the writer using someone else's voice to unfold his story, a form of ventriloquism, a repetition of another speaker's discourse of which the novel is made (Newman 1986, 146). Yet, during the writer's faithful recording of Victor's speech, Walton receives the offer of the speaker himself to put "life and spirit to the conversation" (175), a clear signal of the need to add prosodic elements to what is otherwise mere voiceless writing. In the above-mentioned added paragraph, Walton's memory of the auditory is accompanied by the image of Victor's hand raised in "animation," visual and aural details revealing the novel's autobiographical features, with Mary Shelley most likely reminiscent in 1831 of the lost voice and body of her husband Percy Shelley, whose "vessel" likewise had been wrecked in a "frightful" storm in 1822.

Among the issues which Victor's oral account raises, one that is rarely analysed concerns – as mentioned earlier – his foreign accent.² Victor's native language is French ("by birth a Genevese") but he speaks English to Robert Walton whose concern over reporting the stranger's story *in his own words* seems to disregard the fact that they are being translated, Victor enacting the role of a simultaneous translator of himself. When Walton establishes his first verbal contact with Victor he hears and notices his "foreign accent" (33), yet such prosody does not affect Walton's listening. The captain does not seem to be much concerned about the non-

² Peter Brooks mentions the "crisscrossing of languages implicit in the text" when analyzing the arrival of Safie at the De Lacey's cottage. "[W]e have a lesson in French being offered to a Turkish Arab, in a German-speaking region, the whole rendered for the reader in English." (1979, 209)

native speaker who immediately engages in a verbal negotiation which distracts Walton from the foreigner's accent. As Mladen Dolar writes: "when we listen to someone speak, we may at first be very much aware of his voice and its particular qualities, its colour and accent, but soon we accommodate to it and concentrate only on the meaning that is conveyed" (Dolar 2006, 15). This is exactly what happens to Walton, whose interest and sympathy in the foreigner's life story prevail and neutralize the prosody, his preoccupation with reporting the exact words resonating with the Bakhtinian idea of the novel's dialogical nature, a text claiming to be the perfect imitation of primary speech genres (Macovski 1994, 18).

After being rescued in precarious conditions on board the ship, the foreigner spends the first two days without speaking. When he recuperates his voice, however, his remarkable articulateness strikes Walton who notices that his words "flow with rapidity and unparalleled eloquence" (35), generating what Beth Newman calls a persuasive and seductive narrative containing "something spellbinding" (Newman 1986, 145). Indeed, both Walton and his crew are enchanted by Victor's words which in the 1831 version, once again, are not only words but verbal expressions acoustically marked: "a voice whose varied intonations are soul-subduing music" (37), a crucial feature that proves the acoustics have agency on the listeners to Victor's much admired and praised speech:

Even the sailors feel the power of his eloquence: when he speaks, they no longer despair; he rouses their energies, and, while they hear his voice, they believe these vast mountains of ice are mole-hills, which will vanish before the resolutions of man. (177)

Not only Victor's powerful eloquence but his voice gives the listeners strength and helps them face the most adverse conditions. He seduces by means of words and by modulating his voice to his different feelings, a strategy which "moves" the crew and gives a human touch to the adventurous men in the middle of the ice. The above passage shows Mary Shelley's evident attention to the acoustics of the voice, a feature she touched on in her private writings on several occasions. In a letter of 22 November to her friend Maria Gisborne, for example, she wrote that "when [Lord Byron] speaks I wait for Shelley's voice in answer as the natural result" (Shelley 1998), and in a journal entry of October 19, 1822, she noted: "when Albe speaks and Shelley does not answer, it is a thunder without rain [...] and I listen with an unspeakable melancholy [...] Albe has the power by his mere presence & voice of enticing such deep and shifting emotions within me." (Shelley 1987, I, 291)

Voices seduce and move listeners in Shelley's real life and in her novel. In *Frankenstein* however, despite Victor's eloquence, there are moments when his verbal expressions become inarticulate, and turn into screams, groans, or cries. As Walton notes:

Sometimes he commanded his countenance and tones, and related the most horrible incidents with a tranquil voice, suppressing every mark of agitation; then, like a volcano bursting forth, his face would suddenly change to an expression of the wildest rage, as he shrieked out imprecations on his persecutor. (174)

To this vivid description of contrasting oral expressions, when describing one of Victor's frantic attempts to communicate with Walton, Mary Shelley added in the 1831 version the line "a groan burst from his heaving breast," Victor's cry an act which shocks and induces Walton into empathic participation, causing the listener's own voice to "quiver" and "fail" him (35). Such emotional empathy here affects not only the feelings but the listener's voice which resounds in unison with it. Moreover, when Victor recovers from his state and expresses his fear and concern that the captain is pursuing a purpose too similar to his own, his warning of the consequences is underpinned by a claim for aural attention: "Hear me, – let me reveal my tale" (35). In a crescendo that unites both Victor's compelling need to speak and Walton's strong desire to listen ("I felt the greatest eagerness to hear the promised narrative," 37), the tale promises to be enticing: "Prepare to hear of occurrences which are usually deemed marvellous" (37). Not surprisingly, to a listener like Walton whose projects are undertaken with "a love [and] belief in the marvellous" (30), Victor's narrative is more than welcome.

Throughout the novel, Victor's speech acts oscillate from scarcity to excess. When he understands the Creature has murdered his young brother William, for example, convinced that no one will believe his "story," Victor decides to remain silent, so that by withholding his own voice he brings about Justine's death, his silence juxtaposed not only with the words Justine is asked to provide to defend herself but also with the sentence of the jury, the *pronunciation* of a punishment ("heard the harsh unfeeling reasoning of these men") which he hears and which his silence legitimizes. Thus, while Justine is sentenced to death, after verbally comforting Victor, and pronouncing her farewell speech "in a voice of half-suppressed emotion" (82), Victor observes this painful scene powerlessly, suffering the tortures of his heart and sharing with Elizabeth a "voiceless grief," both characters made dumb by their sorrow. Unable to produce articulated words, Victor uses non-linguistic expressions to

manifest his anger, his passionate and indignant appeals suffocated in his mouth and replaced by the physical struggle and failure to speak the truth: “I gnashed my teeth, and ground them together, uttering a groan that came from my inmost soul” (81). By focussing on teeth and mouth Victor’s private torment is represented as animal-like, resembling a failed human, one unable to articulate words, the imagery reinforced by another level of estrangement as we are told that the sound out of the mouth (the groan) comes from his “inmost soul,” an internal part of himself over which he seems to have no control.

Lack of control, and absence of the so-much-celebrated eloquence, recurs frequently in the novel. For example, after the trial, when Frankenstein recovers from his state of dumbness and comes face to face with his Creature, he first finds himself “deprived of utterance” (90), and then produces verbal expressions mostly limited to one semantic field, an outbreak of verbal attacks (“vile insect,” “daemon,” “abhorred monster,” “fiend,” “wretched,” “abhorred devil”) eventually interrupted by the Creature’s request to be allowed his say, which Victor grants after a firm and passionate plea. The two characters initiate a verbal conflict made up of Victor’s verbal attacks and the Creature’s threats which ends only when the latter realizes the former is about to attack him physically. At this point, the Creature adopts a different language register, and tries to persuade Frankenstein to listen to him, but when the request is rejected, the Creature’s appeal becomes more and more pressing:

Listen to my tale. When you have heard that, abandon or commiserate me, as you shall judge that I deserve. But hear me. The guilty are allowed, by human laws, bloody as they are, to speak in their own defence before they are condemned. Listen to me, Frankenstein. [...] listen to me. [...] listen to me. [...] Hear my tale. (91)

The repetition of the words *listen* and *hear* evokes an echo-like sound effect (the scene is aptly set in the mountains), a voice ominously bouncing back. Victor surrenders in the end, and consents to listen to what has become one of the most famous embedded narratives in literature, a narrative which at this point sounds like a double ventriloquism, Walton reporting Frankenstein’s account of the Creature and appropriating to himself the voice which is heard but not seen.

Other auditory images in *Frankenstein* emerge when Victor recalls the voices of friends and family members; a particularly vivid description being reserved for his dead mother:

It is so long before the mind can persuade itself that she, whom we saw every day, and whose existence appeared a part of our own, can have departed for ever – that the brightness of a beloved eye can have been extinguished and the sound of a voice so familiar, and dear to the ear, can be hushed, never more to be heard. (47)

To accept the silence of the voice of loved ones requires time, challenges the intellect and produces frustration. Resounding with and anticipating Poe-esque acoustics, Victor not only struggles with the idea that his mother's voice ("dear to the ear") will "never more" be heard but knows and fears the most penetrating and devastating of the acoustics, the sound of death, i.e. silence. Thus, whereas Victor suffers from the loss of his dead mother's voice, Walton does not conceive of having to renounce the auditory, convinced as he is that he has stored Victor's voice in his written text and will hear it again when he reads it, proving he is able to reanimate both the man on board the ship and his voice.

More comforting for Victor is the recollection of the voices of those who lead him to his extraordinary project, the professors in Ingolstadt, both Mr Krempe's "gruff" voice and the "sweetest ever heard" of Professor Waldman, who lectures by pronouncing "with fervour" the names of distinguished discoverers. Waldman's words are particularly striking for the young student who recalls listening to them and feeling the physical perception of the acoustics upon his body: "one by one the various keys were touched which formed the mechanism of my being; chord after chord was sounded" (51). For one who will be so much influenced by this professor, the sound has a meta-narrative function, playing on the student an uplifting tune that affects the intellect and the body.

More difficult to detect is the voice of his Creature, whose birth Victor vividly recollects primarily as a visual experience:

His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped, and rushed down stairs. (58)

Victor admits hearing the Creature's inarticulate sounds, sounds produced neither in the mouth nor in the throat but, as Sara Guyer underlines, out of the Creature's animal-like "open jaws" (Guyer 2006, 92). Such inarticulate sounds might have been words, they might have meant something, but Victor claims he *did not hear* them, a rather unreliable statement most likely meaning that he did not listen. Missing here is not only human

affinity (Macovski 1994, 126), but what Jennifer Lynn Stoever calls “aural literacy,” the ability to acquire knowledge by listening and engaging with the world through making and perceiving sound (Stoever 2016, 47). At the same time, Frankenstein attributes to the Creature a skill as extraordinary as the creation itself: an infant’s ability to speak being a contradiction in terms. But more than the unheard words, what strikes Victor is the Creature’s facial expression and in particular the mouth, its jaws open and its grin, a wide smile inscribed upon the monstrous, a close encounter with the mouth of which Victor remembers the visual aspect but is at a loss with the auditory. Moreover, he is completely terrified by the tactile, the Creature’s outstretched hand a request that the creator refuses and escapes from, a denial of the Creature’s subjectivity and senses. Interesting features emerge when we compare the episode of the birth of the Creature with the moment Victor dies on board the ship. In a close-up of Frankenstein on his deathbed, Walton describes the scene thus:

His voice became fainter as he spoke; and at length, exhausted by his effort, he sunk into silence. About half an hour afterwards he attempted again to speak, but was unable; he pressed my hand feebly, and his eyes closed for ever, while the irradiation of a gentle smile passed away from his lips. (181)

In a semi-chiasmic pattern, voice, hand and mouth come together in the two episodes. In both cases the strenuous attempts to speak fail, but whereas the Creature is denied physical contact, Walton and Frankenstein’s hands, albeit weakly, do touch. Moreover, the new-born’s grin on the wrinkled cheek is juxtaposed with the irradiating gentle smile of the dying man, whereby in the two visual representations, mouths are silenced but have agency by grinning at the moment of birth and smiling at death, a scene in which the discourse of the voice (and the mouth) comes full circle.

Victor and the Creature’s narratives are framed within Walton’s letters to his sister. The final version of the story in the novel is the result of two authors who are also two listeners. They produce one text containing a third voice, the Creature’s, a voice which is the residue, the most profound level of the acoustics in the written text. What is at stake here is not only a double narrative authorship but a fusion (and a confusion) of two forms of communication: by merging the aural and the oral in the written text Victor and Walton converge with the Creature, whose voice is embedded in Walton’s epistolary narrative from beginning to end. Yet there is a moment when the Creature’s voice is subtracted from Walton’s written

text. At one point, while writing to his sister of his desperate mourning at Victor's death, Walton hears an unexpected sound.

I am interrupted. What do these sounds portend? It is midnight; the breeze blows fairly, and the watch on deck scarcely stir. Again; there is a sound as of a human voice, but hoarser; it comes from the cabin where the remains of Frankenstein still lie. I must arise, and examine. Good night, my sister. (181)

The voice Walton hears resembles a human voice but it is not-quite-human, a voice which, as Guyer observes, “troubles the distinction between the human and the non-human,” functioning as an “impossible testimony,” a moment in which “the faceless monster interrupts the novel’s frame” (Guyer 2006, 109). When the Creature’s voice is no longer mediated but places itself *live* between Walton and Victor, that voice interrupts the narrative. In other words, when the Creature’s real voice is added to the narrative, the narrative becomes impossible and the writing stops. The text goes blank. Then the narrative starts again:

Great God! What a scene has just taken place! I am yet dizzy with the remembrance of it. I hardly know whether I shall have the power to detail it; yet the tale which I have recorded would be incomplete without this final and wonderful catastrophe. (181)

Between the two passages – between the two phrases “Good night, sister” and “Great God” – there is a hiatus, a separation which the 1817 manuscript at the Bodleian Library visibly marks by drawing a line at this point. This hiatus is a fissure in the writing, as the writing can only be suspended and the text fissured. But through this fissure the voice finds a place beyond the embedded narratives and beyond writing itself. When Walton starts writing again his encounter with the Creature becomes the subject matter, an act which by his own admission is performed for the sake of “completing” the recorded tale, of presenting the self-completeness of the text. Something nevertheless resists this aim; no text is complete and the fissure is the mark which indicates that writing is without end.

Instead of running away, Walton’s response to the Creature is to approach and speak to him. Yet at first the verbal interaction between the two fails, the captain’s words “die away” on his lips, and the Creature continues to utter “wild and incoherent self-reproaches” (182). When after some effort, however, the captain does manage to speak he articulates a severe reprimand: “‘Your repentance,’ I said, ‘is now superfluous. If you had listened to the voice of conscience [...] Frankenstein would yet have

lived” (182). Walton expects the Creature to be guided by conscience, represented as an inner voice which tells one of the differences between good and evil. Is morality, then, embodied in sound? Dolar speculates that human consciousness is “a vocal affair,” and refers to Rousseau’s proposition in *Emile* that human dignity cannot be defined by reason and understanding alone, for they lead to error if “they are not anchored in the voice as their guide and principle.” Dolar reports a passage from Rousseau which resonates with Walton’s words to the Creature: “Conscience! Conscience! Divine instinct, immortal and celestial voice; firm guide of an ignorant and limited being, but one which is also intelligent and free” (Dolar 2006, 86). However, Walton should know that the Creature, in a more literal sense, has done almost nothing but listen to his own voice all his life, having been denied any opportunity to interact with other voices, either literal or figurative. Indeed, the Creature’s inner voice coincides with his outer voice, made audible only after Victor’s death.

The novel closes with a sequence of phrases in the future tense (“shall die,” “will be no longer,” “will be extinct,” “shall ascend,” “will fade away,” “will be swept,” “will sleep,” “will not think,” 185) pronounced “with sad and solemn enthusiasm” by the Creature as he promises and prophesies his own death. Unlike Melmoth’s final silent theatrical exit in Charles Maturin’s novel, in *Frankenstein* the end is filled with human acoustics. The Creature exits the scene in full command of his voice: “Frankenstein! If thou wert yet alive, and yet cherished a desire of revenge against me, it would be better satiated in my life than in my destruction. [...]. I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly” (185). The speaker who is about to enter “darkness and distance” is given the last verbal expression of the story, an apt salutation: “Farewell,” a term announcing the end (of the Creature’s existence and of the overall story), a word which comes full circle with the first ones pronounced at the De Lacey’s cottage: “Pardon the intrusion.” Unlike Frankenstein, the Creature is given the privilege to plan, perform and announce (give voice to) his entrance and final exit.

Reading *Frankenstein* by focusing on its auditory imagery shows that listening may be an important epistemology in a critical context that too often privileges the eye. The opening lines of Mary Shelley’s novel – so often and so well visualized in the last two hundred years – seem to encourage such a change of perspective. As Walton promises in the first letter to his sister: “You will rejoice to hear [...],” a literal and metaphorical reminder that words on the page are audible.

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PART TWO

**ADAPTATIONS, REWRITINGS,
AND RECEPTIONS**

INTRODUCTION

MICHELA VANON ALLIATA

In his 1991 book *Why Read the Classics?* – a brilliant collection of essays on literature, ranging from Homer to Mark Twain, Borges and beyond – Italo Calvino writes: “a classic is a book which with each rereading offers as much of a sense of discovery as the first reading” (1999: 5). This is certainly true of *Frankenstein*, a work of fiction which, like *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, has become a powerful modern myth and a cultural icon with a distinct place in global culture.

Published anonymously in 1818, when Mary Shelley was only twenty-one years old, *Frankenstein* can indeed claim the status of a classic, so profoundly resonant with contemporary readers are its far-reaching philosophical, ethical, scientific, and psychological implications. Despite its overt concerns with science, technology and sacrilegious experimentation, Mary Shelley’s novel has been identified, since Ellen Moers’s pioneering *Literary Women* (1977), as a specifically female text. Conceived as a *divertissement* during the “wet, ungenial summer” of 1816 on the shores of Lake Geneva in circumstances that themselves read like a work of fiction, *Frankenstein* is indeed, as Mary Shelley wrote, much more than a tale of terror intended to “curdle the blood and quicken the beatings of the hearts.” Its origins lie in her childhood experiences of abandonment and loss, in her anxieties about pregnancy and parenting, as well as in feelings of literary inadequacy derived from the pressure of measuring up to the standards set by the already famous Percy Shelley and Lord Byron.

The novel, while deploying some of the topoi conventionally associated with the Gothic, such as the hideous creature assembled in charnel houses from grave-robbled bodies to signal the horror of his creator’s transgressive and insane enterprise, contains supernatural happenings, aberrant psychological states, and the general atmosphere of doom which is *de rigueur* for the genre. Yet, as David Punter argues, it is “a unique kind of Gothic,” dealing primarily with contemporary fears and anxieties rather than with the traditional motifs of a genre at its height of popularity in late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In addition, unlike *Dracula* and

other traditional Gothic works, *Frankenstein* does not link back to old legends or fairy-tales. It is instead a speculative narrative echoing the coeval philosophical and scientific debate about the possibility of reanimating the dead and generating life through human dissection and experiments on animals.

A cautionary tale about the perils of playing God and venturing into the unknown, *Frankenstein* has been widely read as the progenitor of science fiction, a form of literary fantasy that draws upon earlier kinds of utopian and apocalyptic writing. It prophetically anticipates “the dangers of modern science, which has produced technologies, such as nuclear fission, bioterrorism, and cloning, that are capable of destroying the earth and the human species” (Mellor: 2006, 523).

However, *Frankenstein* is also a morally probing meditation on creation and parental responsibility, on the scientist’s refusal to love and nurture his creature, as well an exploration of the principles of liberty and human rights so dear to Shelley’s parents, famous radical writers of the day.

There can be no doubt that the proliferation of translations, adaptations, and rewritings of *Frankenstein* across different media and fields – stage, cinema, and performance arts – in short, the legacies and countless afterlives of Mary Shelley’s masterpiece, attest to its persistent fascination and enduring success. The success of these adaptations, which are to be regarded as “autonomous works” because they refer to “both a product and a process of creation and reception” (Hutcheon 2013, xvi), is firmly connected both with “the explicit unorthodoxy” of its subject (Poovey 1987, 83) and with the archetypal chords it strikes. From Richard Brinsley Peake’s *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein* (1823), its first theatrical adaptation, to Nick Dear’s recent stage adaptation directed in 2011 by Danny Boyle, with Benedict Cumberbatch and Jonny Lee Miller,¹ *Frankenstein* has been transformed from a horror story into a myth, “a myth sustained in popular rather than literary culture” (Botting 1995, 3).

Understandably, the unusual and tragic circumstances of Mary Shelley’s life, a life punctuated by a relentless cycle of birth and death, have prompted many contemporary writers and playwrights to reconstruct its most salient stages. Liz Lochhead, Scottish poet and playwright in her

¹ According to Michael Billington, the play is “a humane, intelligent retelling of the original story in which much of the focus is on the plight of the obsessive scientist’s sad creation, who becomes his alter ego and his nemesis: it’s rather like seeing *The Tempest* rewritten from Caliban’s point of view” (2011).

biographical psycho-drama *Blood and Ice*, first performed at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in August 1982, rewrites the genesis of the novel as narrated by Mary Shelley in her “Introduction” when she, together with her stepsister Claire Clairmont and Percy Shelley stayed at Villa Diodati on Lake Geneva and because of bad weather, the famous horror-story contest was conceived at Byron’s instigation. The author, still a teenager, was not only overcome by anxiety at being unable to meet Percy Shelley and Byron’s expectations, but she “identified her inability to write a story with a woman’s inability to conceive a child” (Mellor 1988: 54). Far from being a faithful adaptation of the novel, Lochhead’s play is a visionary dramatization of Mary Shelley’s life, offering, as Maria Elena Capitani maintains, a complex portrayal of “a distraught mother” and “a struggling writer” trying to fulfil her artistic and personal ambitions.

These conflicts, intensified by the traumatic loss of her mother in childbirth and by the death of her own illegitimate first child, who had been born prematurely two years earlier, are ingeniously explored in Stephanie Hemphill’s *Hideous Love* (2013). This fictionalised verse biography, as Anya Heise-von der Lippe persuasively suggests, highlights Mary Shelley’s “ambiguous stance towards having to publish her work anonymously,” while feeling the pressure to write in the tradition of her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, a passionate advocate of educational and social equality for women and, as such, an icon of modern feminism.

Before *Frankenstein* was completed, news arrived of the suicide of Fanny, Mary’s half-sister, followed, two months later, by the drowning of Harriet, Shelley’s wife. Given these events and those surrounding the genesis of *Frankenstein*, which is essentially a birth myth, it is hardly surprising that the novel revolves incessantly around the creation and destruction of life, and that throughout the novel “birth is presented as a hideous thing” (Lemma 2010, 48). These themes are indeed so important that they resurface in *Mathilda*, Shelley’s second novel, published only in 1959. A tale of loss, incest and suicide, it is the dramatization of the author’s strained relationship with her father, who was outraged at the novel’s subject matter, and possibly an expression of her own desire to die. *Mathilda* is read by Michelle Faubert as the earliest adaptation of *Frankenstein*. Like Mary’s debut novel, *Mathilda*’s epistolary form, with its different, sometimes contradictory accounts, stresses its disorientating subjectivity, while the emphasis on monstrosity, loneliness, and isolation are key elements of the Gothic genre.

The dark creation story of the prototypical mad scientist who gives life to a monster by whom he is eventually annihilated, a *dénouement* that is also a fatal consequence of his hubris – an excess of pride, ambition, and self-confidence – soon reached the United States, where echoes are to be found in *Moby Dick*, the leviathan of a bygone era pursued by the monomaniacal Captain Ahab. In Hawthorne’s “The Birthmark” and in “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” Mary Shelley’s explicit warning against unbridled curiosity and blind belief in the happy progress of humanity through scientific development appears in conjunction with boundless aspirations, the violation of the laws of nature, and finally identification of knowledge with power which the Faustian motif entails. As Elisabetta Marino pertinently observes, in a striking parallel with Frankenstein’s creature, Beatrice, the monstrous offspring of her father Rappaccini’s depraved fancy, was apparently generated without a mother.

Conversely, in Stephen Crane’s novella *The Monster*, Dr. Trescott, far from abandoning his role as father in order to fashion himself into an egotistical mad scientist, acts as a foster father to a disfigured creature, whose facelessness and imprisonment mirror the general dehumanization of black people in post-Reconstruction America. In a similar vein, the final part of H.P Lovecraft’s story “Herbert West: Reanimator” – a twentieth-century reiteration of the Prometheus myth, which chronicles the life of a medical student trying to bring dead humans back to life – touches on the real horrors of the Great War that have turned the protagonist into a monster.

The war scenario is also the centre of gravity of Ahmed Saadawi’s acclaimed *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013) set in the ruins of US-occupied Iraq and possibly the latest literary tribute to Shelley’s masterpiece. Hadi, a junk dealer collects body parts blown up by explosives, stitches them together, and brings them back to life in the form of a murderous and apparently immortal monster called Whatsitsname. This animated, vindictive, and surprisingly eloquent corpse is a literal embodiment of the Iraqi people and a metaphor for the senseless devastation of the war. As Angiola Codacci Pisanelli shows, although there are relevant continuities with the original *Frankenstein*, the focus here is most powerfully upon mourning and grief. What moves Hadi is pity: all he wants is to give the scattered remains of the innocent a proper burial. Part horror story, part dystopia, part meditation on how violence can only beget violence, this darkly humorous novel, despite its harrowing subject matter, is also a proof that the imagination can still transcend such a panorama of savagery and cruelty.

In post-communist Poland, the numerous translations, as well as a general transformation of the publishing and film industries, have greatly contributed to popularise Shelley's novel. Interestingly, as Agnieszka Łowczanin argues, the figure of Frankenstein, previously associated only with violence and crime, has been converted into a symbol of transformation and even a metaphor for rebirth.

But of course, at the core of *Frankenstein* and in the diverse re-creations that since the early 1990s have transplanted the story to the present day, is the psychological tension between Victor and his creature, and especially the pathos surrounding the monster's cry for love, acceptance, and companionship. Abandonment, isolation, and need for acceptance soon turn into desperation. Rejected by all whom he approaches because of his repulsive physical appearance, the superhuman monster eventually expresses his hatred for his maker by murdering the members of his family, becoming the unintended agent of devastation, spreading "havoc and destruction" among the human race and enjoying its "ruin." From this moment onwards the scene, inner as well as outer, is set for both characters' descent into a maelstrom of endless suffering which will terminate only with their deaths.

The infinitely suggestive combined themes of creation and monstrosity, as many commentators have claimed, embrace both Frankenstein and the creature, and, perhaps even more importantly, the blurring of victimhood and guilt. For there is no doubt that Frankenstein, "a thwarted idealist" (Smith 2016, 4), who in his "solitary chamber" is secretly bent on generating life out of death, only to run away, "effectively abandoning the 'newborn' to die" (Lemma 2010, 44), is indeed the real monster of the story, while the monster's murderous actions are a direct consequence of the violence and injustice to which he has been subjected. By the same token, the conflict between the ambitious scientist and his unnamed, forlorn creature, the two halves of a single being, is crucial. The shadow or double of the self is for Harold Bloom "the dominant and recurrent image and accounts for much of the latent power the novel possesses" (1987, 2).

In Susan Heyboer O'Keefe's compelling novel, *Frankenstein's Monster: A Novel* (2010), a direct sequel to Shelley's novel, analysed here by David Punter, the creature is provided with a new voice, and the narrative is written almost entirely from his perspective. Frankenstein's rampant obsession and grandiose delusion in defying mortality now invest the intrepid Arctic explorer Robert Walton, determined to avenge the death of his friend. The original Frankenstein's pursuit and manic flight from

depression into an omnipotent state of mind, is transferred to Walton, another young isolated scientist, engrossed in utopian ideas and dreams of masculine adventure. Instead of giving up his quest for knowledge and returning home, Walton re-enacts Frankenstein's crazed pursuit across icy waters.

The fear that in violating the limits of what can be known man may unleash catastrophe – which at many levels is at the heart of *Frankenstein*, as well as the representation of a world virtually emptied of God – powerfully resonates with contemporary readers, with the anxieties and concerns expressed in so many revisitations. Mary Shelley's dark fable, born from a waking nightmare, is ultimately shown to be not only one of the seminal texts of British literature, but a classic, one of those books, as Calvino says, which “exercise a particular influence, both when they imprint themselves on our imagination as unforgettable, and when they hide in the layers of memory disguised as the individual's or the collective unconscious” (Calvino 2000, 4).

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CHAPTER SEVEN

MARY SHELLEY'S *MATHILDA*, THE FIRST ADAPTATION OF *FRANKENSTEIN*

MICHELLE FAUBERT

In January of 1818, at the age of 21, Mary Shelley published *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. Her first published novel, it would prove to be one of the most iconic ever written, a classic of the Romantic period and Gothic form. Given the immediate and enduring popularity of her first novel, one might expect her subsequent completed novel – *Mathilda*, composed in the latter half of 1819 – to be welcomed enthusiastically by readers.¹ After all, the two texts share many characteristics, besides authorship and contemporaneity: both the Monster and Mathilda have been abandoned at birth and are (to put it mildly) overly concerned with their fathers, both literal and metaphorical; both novels contribute to the Gothic form through themes of incest, insanity, suicidality, monstrosity, and isolation; and both tales are epistolary. However, the reception of *Mathilda* was abortive from the first. It was not published until 1959, 140 years after Shelley wrote it. Building on the work of Pamela Clemit, who argues in “*Frankenstein, Matilda, and the legacies of Godwin and Wollstonecraft*” that the novels’ similarities can be traced back to the influential work of Shelley’s famous parents (Clemit 2003), I will trace a more direct lineage between Shelley’s two earliest novels via their shared themes. I will show that Shelley’s more straightforward discussion of incest in *Mathilda* accounts for its failure, both in the author’s own lifetime and afterward, as well as that the shared theme of incest is key to understanding *Mathilda* as a corollary of the first tale. While in *Frankenstein*, Shelley asks essentially, “When is a Monster a human?”, in

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Mathilda she explores the inverse of the question: “When is a human a Monster?” The answer to this question derives from her consideration of the psychological – and especially self-reflexive – response to incestuous feelings. Equal to *Frankenstein* in suggestiveness and daring – its Gothic double in many ways – Shelley’s *Mathilda* is a powerfully challenging novel that deserves a place beside the earlier work as a seminal contribution to the Romantic canon.

The troubled publication and critical history of *Mathilda* began with Shelley’s own father, William Godwin, a celebrated novelist and philosopher. Having started the tale while she was living with Percy Bysshe Shelley at the Villa Valsovano near Leghorn, Shelley sent the finished manuscript to Godwin, but – as Elizabeth Nitchie states in the Introduction to the first publication of *Mathilda* – the “manuscript apparently stayed in Godwin’s hands” (Nitchie 1959, x, xi). He was outraged at the novel’s overt subject matter, one of several *Frankensteinian* echoes: that of incestuous passion, which Godwin called “disgusting and detestable” (Nitchie, Introduction xi). While Shelley’s delineation of the theme of incest is indirect and subtle in *Frankenstein*, being limited mostly to Victor Frankenstein’s romance with his sisterly-cousin Elizabeth Lavenza – who, creepily, turns into the corpse of Victor’s mother as he begins to kiss her in a dream (Shelley 2012, 84) – Shelley is considerably more direct about the topic of incest in *Mathilda*. In that novel, Mathilda’s nameless father confesses his irrepressible desire for her and she is destroyed by his words. Thinking of their happy relationship before the confession, Mathilda comments: “I lament now, I must ever lament, those few short months of Paradisaical bliss; I disobeyed no command, I ate no apple, and yet I was ruthlessly driven from it. Alas! my companion did, and I was precipitated in his fall” (Shelley 2017, 55). Despite her claims of innocence, however, several critics, such as Ranita Chatterjee, have pointed out that her father’s confession is nearly matched on Mathilda’s side (Chatterjee 1997). For example, in describing her suicidal feelings, Mathilda declares: “In truth I am in love with death; no maiden ever took more pleasure in the contemplation of her bridal attire than I in fancying my limbs already enwrapped in their shroud: is it not my marriage dress? Alone it will unite me to my father when in an eternal mental union we shall never part” (Shelley 2017, 113). Additionally, before Mathilda’s father admits to his desire for her, Mathilda praises Italian tragedian Vittorio Alfieri’s *Myrrha* (1786), which is about a daughter’s desire for her father, but she claims to be confused and surprised by her father’s powerful reaction to her words: “I chanced to say that I thought *Myrrha* the best of Alfieri’s tragedies; as I said this I chanced to cast my eyes on

my father and met his: for the first time the expression of those beloved eyes displeased me, and I saw with affright that his whole frame shook with some concealed emotion that in spite of his efforts half conquered him” (Shelley 2017, 59). While incestuous feelings are confessed directly by Mathilda’s father, they are only hinted at from Mathilda’s side – but all of it was too much for Godwin, and he suppressed the manuscript of *Mathilda* intentionally: Janet Todd notes in her Introduction to it that he “did not return the manuscript to his daughter despite repeated requests” (Todd 2004, xvii). Godwin’s frank censorship of Shelley’s text was probably motivated by his fear that readers would interpret it autobiographically, casting him as the incestuously desiring father. After all, the circumstances of Mathilda’s birth echo Shelley’s closely, since both author and character are left motherless in infancy. Godwin’s actions contributed to the novel’s burial for almost a century and a half.

Although the theme of incest may have triggered *Mathilda*’s burial, it is nevertheless key to why Shelley reworked *Frankenstein* in a way that reformulates the theme of monstrosity in it. Arguably, the incestuous passion outlined in *Mathilda* motivates all of the other circumstances that establish the novel’s thematic links with *Frankenstein*, including isolation. Mathilda’s father’s confession of his incestuous love for his daughter leads to their separation and Mathilda’s subsequent social isolation, so like the Monster’s and Victor’s isolation in *Frankenstein*. In *Frankenstein*, we find all three main characters – Walton, Victor, and the Monster – in geographically extreme locales that underscore and contribute to their solitude. Walton begins his letters to his sister from a ship trapped in the ice floes of the North Pole, surrounded by his crew – men with whom, importantly, he claims to feel no sympathy: “I have no friend, Margaret,” Walton complains, adding: “I shall certainly find no friend on the wide ocean, nor even here in Archangel, among merchants and seamen” (Shelley 2012, 54). Likewise, during his creation of the Monster, Victor was separated from all friends and family: “my eyes were insensible to the charms of nature,” he recounts: “And the same feelings which made me neglect the scenes around me caused me also to forget those friends who were so many miles absent, and whom I had not seen for so long a time” (Shelley 2012, 81). Significantly, too, the Monster’s isolation echoes that of his creator: the Monster laments, “I was dependent on none and related to none” (Shelley 2012, 142). In Shelley’s subsequent novel, *Mathilda*, similar situations appear. After her father’s confession of his incestuous love and then suicide, Mathilda is geographically divided from society, since she leaves busy London to live in a remote area in the north of England (Shelley 2017, 187). Her home is “a solitary house on a wide

plain near no other habitation: where,” she claims, “I could . . . wander far without molestation from the sight of my fellow creatures” (Shelley 2017, 188). Notably, too, Mathilda attributes her isolation to her relationship with her father: “my father had for ever deserted me, leaving me only memories which set an eternal barrier between me and my fellow creatures. I was indeed fellow to none” (Shelley 2017, 97). And to illustrate that Mathilda has been driven to such isolation because of her father’s unwanted attention to her sexuality, Shelley creates a character who adorns her body in a way that seems to forbid contact with it: like a “youthful Hermitess dedicated to seclusion,” Mathilda adopts a “fanciful nunlike dress” (Shelley 2017, 188). By throwing himself off a cliff into the sea, Mathilda’s father deprives his daughter of her best friend, while her “memories” of his incestuous love for her deprive her of all future human contact.

Shelley’s daring and – viewed in terms of the reception history of *Mathilda* – damning theme of incest proves to be essential to the later novel’s reworking of *Frankenstein* through the theme of insanity. Mathilda’s father identifies his obsessive love for his daughter as a form of madness, something like Victor’s insane obsession to create new life. In *Frankenstein*, Victor’s claim, “I am not recording the vision of a madman,” appears disingenuous, as the opposite appears to be true; he describes his passion for creating the Monster in a way that suggests he was, indeed, insane at the time: “a resistless, and almost frantic, impulse, urged me forward; I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation, but for this one pursuit” (Shelley 2012, 79, 81). Similarly, Mathilda’s father frames his love for his daughter as insanity when he writes to her:

And now, Mathilda I must make you my last confession. I have been miserably mistaken in imagining that I could conquer my love for you; I never can. The sight of this house, these fields and woods which my first love inhabited seems to have encreased it: *in my madness* I dared say to myself – Diana [Mathilda’s mother] died to give her birth; her mother’s spirit was transferred into her frame, and she ought to be as Diana to me. With every effort to cast it off, this love clings closer, this guilty love more unnatural than hate, that withers your hopes and destroys me for ever. (Shelley 2017, 76; my emphasis)

The obsessive “madness” that is this incestuous love breeds yet more madness, as well: Mathilda’s father claims that his “unnatural” love for his daughter leads to a “remorse that rends the brain as madness” (Shelley 2017, 74). Furthermore, this madness also grows through its apparently contagious qualities, as it seems to infect others: in a passage that recalls

Victor's plea to Walton concerning the dangers of their obsessions – "Unhappy man! Do you share my madness?" (Shelley 2012, 315) – Mathilda seems to experience the obsessive love once experienced by her father:

[O]n my knees I have fancied myself close to my father's grave and struck the ground in anger that it should cover him from me. Oft when I have listened with gasping attention for the sound of the ocean mingled with my father's groans; and then wept until my strength was gone and I was calm and faint, when I have recollected all this I have asked myself if this were not madness. (Shelley 2017, 86)

In both novels, insanity does not abate with time, but it increases itself, leading, in both works, to the creation of a monster.

Connected to the theme of insanity is the theme of suicidality in both novels, since, after all, many people presumed the two concepts to be inseparable in the Romantic period. Arguably, Victor brings about his own death in *Frankenstein* by chasing the Monster into locations fatal to his physical health, such as mountains and frozen seas, but Shelley also represents suicidality more directly through the Monster, who promises to kill himself on his own funeral pyre at the end of the novel with a "solemn enthusiasm" for the end of his "bitter . . . remorse" (Shelley 2012, 221). Such "remorse," or guilt, also motivates Mathilda's father's suicide and Mathilda's subsequent desire to die, but these characters' guilty feelings arise from incestuous desire. Mathilda's father writes to her: "the grave dreaded yet desired, [will] receive me free from pain. . . . My child, if after this life I am permitted to see you again, if pain can purify the heart, mine will be pure: if remorse may expiate guilt, I shall be guiltless" (Shelley 2017, 77). Mathilda's father is convinced of the futility of his struggle against his desires and believes that no change in setting or time can eradicate them (Shelley 2017, 76-77). Mathilda's father looks to death as the only relief from his overwhelming guilt for his incestuous feelings, and he duly kills himself.

Mathilda's suicidality—one of the main organizing principles of a narrative that may be identified as one long suicide note—follows her father's confession of incestuous feelings. It is worth remarking, though, that several critics have located an extra-textual inspiration for Mathilda's suicidal feelings by describing them as an expression of the author's own desire to die. To be sure, this period marked a particularly difficult time in the young author's life: upon baby William's death from an outbreak of malaria at three and a half years old, Shelley – then only 21 years old –

had already lost three children, her first daughter having lived for less than a month in 1815 and baby Clara having died in September 1818. Childless, Shelley wrote on 29 June 1819 to Marianne Hunt: “I feel that I am no[t] fit for any thing & therefore not fit to live but how must that heart be moulded which would not be broken by what I have suffered” (Shelley 1980, 102). Thus, Nitchie, the first editor of Shelley’s *Mathilda*, claims that the eponymous character “is the Mary who wrote to Miss Curran after [her son] William’s death: ‘Let us hear also, if you please, anything you may have done about the tomb, near which I shall lie one day, and care not, for my own sake, how soon. I never shall recover that blow; . . . everything on earth has lost its interest to me’” (Nitchie 1943, 455). Even before the deaths of her children, though, Shelley may have felt that suicide was her fate and family inheritance, for her mother Mary Wollstonecraft attempted to kill herself twice, and her half-sister Fanny (Wollstonecraft’s daughter with Gilbert Imlay) accomplished the act in 1816. Likewise, Mathilda seems to believe that her own suicide is only a matter of time after her father’s suicide: “too deep my wounds were for any cure,” she confesses about the psychic pain of her father’s suicide and the certainty of her own (Shelley 2017, 24-25, 100).

In terms of the pervasive themes of isolation, insanity, madness, and suicide, then, *Mathilda* is identifiable as a reworking of *Frankenstein* – as the earliest adaptation of her first and most famous novel. Yet, the novels’ similarities are yet more pervasive and central than even these shared themes show them to be, since *Mathilda* echoes *Frankenstein* in narrative form and basic plot. That is, both novels are epistolary and both are about the making of a monster. That they both share the epistolary form is irrefutable. *Frankenstein* opens with the words of Walton to his sister: “LETTER I. To Mrs. Saville, England. . . . You will rejoice to hear that no disaster has accompanied the commencement of an enterprise which you have regarded with such evil forebodings. I arrived here yesterday; and my first task is to assure my dear sister of my welfare” (Shelley 2012, 51). *Mathilda*, too, opens with a direct address to the narrative’s recipient: “What am I writing?” asks the eponymous protagonist in the third paragraph, and she continues: “I must collect my thoughts. I do not know that any will peruse these pages except you, my friend [Woodville], who will receive them at my death” (Shelley 2017, 41). Nor is Shelley’s use of this narrative form surprising, given the Gothic themes these novels share: the letter format was a popular frame for Gothic stories and is particularly notable in those that may well have influenced Shelley’s writing of *Mathilda*, specifically John Polidori’s *Ernestus Berchtold* – written simultaneously with *Frankenstein* during the famous summer at the Villa

Diodati – and William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*. But how may *Mathilda* be said to echo *Frankenstein* with respect to its basic plot, specifically the making of a monster? Admittedly, the novels appear to be quite different at first glance; Shelley's later novel is, on the surface of it, the story of one young woman's existential struggle after learning of her father's desire for her, a tale that unfolds almost completely in the wilds of Scotland and northern England, with nary a scientific lab, disembowelled human, or detached animal limb in sight. And, yet, *Mathilda* is *Frankenstein*'s equal in being about the making of a monster – or, rather, monsters – although not in the physical sense.

In offering the present reading of monstrosity, I am adding a psychological dimension to a field of criticism that focuses mostly on the body. The most notable critical foray into monstrosity is, perhaps, Paul Youngquist's *Monstrosities: Bodies and British Romanticism* (2003), which “modifies Judith Butler[’s] . . . claim that ‘a performative norm both produces and excludes, produces by excluding. The norm of the proper body thus constitutes monstrosities through exclusion’,” as Emily Stanback notes in her own recent contribution to the field, *The Wordsworth-Coleridge Circle and the Aesthetics of Disability* (Stanback 2016, xxvii). Also noteworthy is Denise Gigante's article “Facing the Ugly,” in which the critic identifies the Victor's creature as representative of the Lacanian “real,” “the unsymbolized: the repressed ugliness at the heart of an elaborate symbolic network that is threatened the moment he bursts on the scene” (Gigante 2000, 577). And, yet, even in this psychoanalytic reading of monstrosity, Gigante focuses on bodily monstrosity. In my reading of Shelley's *Mathilda*, monstrosity is entirely metaphysical, operating in the realm of what may be called the soul, the psyche. It is not visible, but it is as manifest and inescapable as the enormous size and hideous features of Victor Frankenstein's creature. In *Mathilda*, monstrosity is mental, but it is imbued with the heft of worldly matter.

As she does in *Frankenstein*, but with a focus on the unseen, Shelley examines the perceptual nature of monstrosity in *Mathilda*. The author also touches on this aspect of monstrosity in *Frankenstein* in the episode involving the old, blind man, De Lacey, and his short relationship with Victor's creature: since De Lacey could not see the creature, he did not perceive him as a monster and responded only positively, at first, to the creature's overtures of friendliness to him (Shelley 2012, 146-148). Similarly, in *Mathilda*, Shelley provides the examples of two people, decidedly not monsters in physical form, but who, nevertheless perceive themselves as such. Herein lies the major difference between Shelley's

explorations of the perception of monstrosity in the novels: while in *Frankenstein* the Monster is identified as such by others, Mathilda's father and Mathilda see *themselves* as monstrous. The label of monstrosity is thus not only metaphysical in *Mathilda*, but it is also self-imposed.

Mathilda's father is the first to identify himself as a monster, and he does so immediately after telling Mathilda of his incestuous love for her: "Monster as I am, you are still, as you ever were, lovely, beautiful beyond expression. What I have become since this last moment I know not; perhaps I am changed in mien as the fallen archangel. I do believe I am for I have surely a new soul within me" (Shelley 2017, 68). He believes that his very nature – not his body, but his "soul" – reflects his unnatural love for his daughter and establishes his monstrosity. Through this confession of his incestuous love, Mathilda's father also *makes a monster* of his daughter, at least from her perspective; she queries:

Why when fate drove me to become this outcast from human feeling; this *monster* with whom none might mingle in converse and love; why had she not from that fatal and most accursed moment, shrouded me in thick mists and placed real darkness between me and my fellows so that I might never more be seen? (Shelley 2017, 107; my emphasis)

While this passage is the most direct announcement of Mathilda's perception of her own monstrosity, her other expressions of disgust for herself have similar implications, such as her claim that her "soul . . . [is] corrupted to its core by a deadly cancer" and that she is as "a marked creature," the last word clearly establishing her link with Victor's Monster in *Frankenstein* (Shelley 2017, 107). Irrationally – but accurately, according to documented psychological responses in incest victims – her father's passion makes her being shameful in her eyes: "my very existence was a secret known only to myself," she claims (Shelley 2017, 87). The "secret" that began as her father's incestuous love has become her "very existence" – and since his love for her is monstrous, so, too, is her very being, in her view. Using physical descriptions to express her perception of her inner monstrosity, Mathilda laments: "infamy and guilt was mingled with my portion; unlawful and detestable passion had poured its poison into my ears and changed all my blood, so that it was no longer the kindly stream that supports life but a cold fountain of bitterness corrupted in its very source" (Shelley 2017, 97). Mathilda's references to herself as "a living pestilence . . . only fit for death" (Shelley 2017, 107) further reveal her belief that her father's unnatural love for her has reformed her being into an image of itself, erasing her humanity and leading to her suicidality.

Mathilda's perception of her own monstrosity results from her father's incestuous love and leads to her isolation, insanity, madness, and suicidality – all of the other themes that this novel shares with *Frankenstein*. While Shelley's increased focus on the theme of incest in *Mathilda* may have been the cause for its unfortunate suppression, it is however also essential to her reworking of the notion of monstrosity in this adaptation of *Frankenstein*. If, as I have suggested, Shelley asks in *Frankenstein*, "When is a Monster a human?" then we may view *Mathilda* as her examination of the inverse of the same question: "When is a human a Monster?" The latter novel provides an answer to the second question: when perverse feeling makes one so. If monstrosity is what is rejected and, as Julia Kristeva would say, abjected, from society – what is unnatural, what horrifies, and what must be expelled to maintain the borders of the self and norm – then Victor's creature is certainly monstrous in physical form, given that he is enormous and composed of both human and animal parts. But Shelley demonstrates in *Mathilda* that society's judgements regarding what is unnatural and horrific also applies to the psychic and moral realm, rather than just the physical, and that these judgements are furthermore internalized and may be turned on the self. Thus, in reworking her first novel's main plot – the making of a monster – to signify within the psychic realm, Shelley reveals that monstrosity does not only concern the exclusion of the Other from the self or norm. In *Mathilda*, a tale of self-torment and victim-guilt, Shelley demonstrates that the fatal effects of exclusion may be enacted from within.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

FRANKENSTEIN AND ITS AMERICAN PROGENY

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From its very conception until the most recent adaptations and rewritings of the story,¹ Mary Shelley's debut novel has nurtured multiple connections with the literary and artistic context of the United States. The American roots of *Frankenstein* have been widely acknowledged by several scholars, who list *Wieland; or, the Transformation: An American Tale* (1798) by Charles Brockden Brown among the most probable sources Mary Shelley drew on in crafting her narrative. As Mervyn Nicholson has elucidated, in fact, Mary "read Brown extensively" (1999, 154), no doubt also because he was a devout admirer of both her parents' works. Furthermore, *Wieland* (a sordid story of murder and violation, centered on a weird and devious ventriloquist) is included in her reading list for 1815, the year before the famous ghost story competition at Villa Diodati (Feldman and Scott-Kilvert 1987, 89).

Reprinted in Philadelphia in 1833, and in Boston in 1869 (leaving aside the pirate editions that never ceased to appear during the nineteenth century), *Frankenstein* soon became a rather popular novel in the US, "widely known" and "fully admired by every reader of romance," according to a *New York Mirror* review, published in 1833 (Pollin 1966, 30n.). Its traces are easily discernible in masterpieces such as (to name a few) Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (which features Captain Ahab's dramatic chase of a monstrous white whale, resulting in the annihilation of both), and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*, where the theme of unnatural creation is thoroughly subverted, through the depiction of a utopian society composed entirely of women, who reproduce asexually via parthenogenesis. Given the abundance of American texts somehow

¹ An interesting example is provided by *Patchwork Girl* (1995) by Shelley Jackson, an innovative work of hyperfiction.

stemming from *Frankenstein*, its thriving American progeny, this essay will focus on four narratives that, while bearing a conspicuous resemblance to Mary Shelley's novel, are all centered on the relationship between a daring physician, who defies either moral laws or social conventions, and his Creature: two short stories by Nathaniel Hawthorne, namely "The Birthmark" and "Rappaccini's Daughter," a novella by Stephen Crane entitled *The Monster*, and "Herbert West: Reanimator," a serialized horror story by H.P. Lovecraft. As will be shown, the mad scientist trope is effectively employed by the three writers to either explore crucial issues (such as gender and race), or to ponder contemporary historical and political scenarios.

Hawthorne's Short Stories: "The Birthmark" and "Rappaccini's Daughter"

Even though *Frankenstein* is never mentioned among Hawthorne's reading, in Burton Pollin's opinion it could be reasonably argued that he was familiar with the 1833 Philadelphia edition (30).² "The Birthmark" was first published in *The Pioneer*, in March 1843, and then reprinted in his short story collection entitled *Mosses from an Old Manse*, three years later. It tells the story of a promising man of science, Aylmer, and his charming wife Georgiana, whose flawless beauty is stained by a hand-shaped birthmark on her left cheek. Obsessed with her defect, he persuades her to drink a potent and dangerous concoction that will cause her repulsive birthmark to disappear. The experiment proves successful: the little red hand slowly vanishes, but Georgiana's life eventually fades away with it.

Hawthorne's description of the scientist's ambitious aspirations faithfully mirrors Victor Frankenstein's dream of achieving knowledge and mastery over nature. In Mary Shelley's words, Frankenstein is "attracted by the structure of the human frame" (Shelley 1998, 51) and "long[s] to pioneer a

² In Pollin's words: "*Frankenstein* is a distinguished specimen of the Gothic tale, a genre which was prominent in Hawthorne's reading" (30). According to this scholar, traces of Mary Shelley's masterpiece can be detected in *The Scarlet Letter* and in *The House of the Seven Gables*, as well as in a few short stories (30-31). Chris Baldick has underlined the connection between *Frankenstein* and *The Blithedale Romance*; moreover, he has observed the slight resemblance between Shelley's novel and Hawthorne's short stories (namely "Ethan Brand," "Rappaccini's Daughter," "The Artist and the Beautiful," "The Man of Adamant," "The Ambitious Guest," "The Birthmark," and "The Christmas Banquet") (Baldick 1987, 68-71).

new way, [to] explore unknown powers, and [to] unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation” (48). Likewise, Aylmer “studie[s] the wonders of the human frame, and attempt[s] to fathom the very process by which Nature assimilates all her precious influences from earth and air, and from the spiritual world, to create and foster man, her masterpiece” (Hawthorne 2013, 156). Both eagerly delve into the works of ancient philosophers and alchemists, such as Paracelsus, Cornelius Agrippa, and Albertus Magnus, seduced by the enthralling combination of knowledge and power embedded in their theories.³ Both aim at perfecting and surpassing the work of God: Victor, by defeating human mortality, and Aylmer, by endowing his wife’s cheek – a synecdoche for her body and soul – with a faultlessness and a purity she never before possessed (in the text, the birthmark is identified as “the symbol of [her] liability to sin, sorrow, decay, and death” [Hawthorne 2013, 154]). While the two scientists are very much alike, their Creatures (always labeled with the same adjective, “hideous”)⁴ are remarkably different: as Galia Benziman has argued, in “The Birthmark,” the victimized bride of Victor Frankenstein and his degenerate offspring are seemingly merged “into one detestable Other” (Benziman 2006, 388), doomed to succumb. Hence, in Hawthorne’s story, the scientist’s creation is stripped of her literary ancestor’s harmful potential and strength; moreover, her physical monstrosity (corresponding to her alleged proneness to transgress) is turned into an instrument to reaffirm her subordinate position in the social order. Thus distancing herself from Frankenstein’s Creature (enraged after perusing his Maker’s papers, which record all the stages of his filthy labor), Georgiana is neither angry nor preoccupied with her own safety when she reads Aylmer’s diary, which presents clear evidence of his failed experiments. Quite the opposite, she willingly accepts her fate, while “reverenc[ing her husband] and lov[ing] him more profoundly than ever” (Hawthorne 2013, 161). A dutiful and submissive wife, the epitome of true womanhood – were it not for *that* crimson stain – she is compared, until the very last page of the narrative, to a beautiful commodity, an ivory sculpture carved by her

³ Victor Frankenstein soon becomes their disciple; initially, he views Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Albertus Magnus as “men who had penetrated deeper and knew more” (Shelley 1998, 40). Their “dark old tomes” (Hawthorne 2013, 160) are showcased in Aylmer’s library and attract Georgiana’s attention.

⁴ From the 1831 *Introduction* to the novel onwards, Mary Shelley frequently uses the adjective “hideous” to describe the Creature, and identifies her novel as her “hideous progeny” (1998, 10). The “bloody hand” on Georgiana’s cheek, renders “her countenance even hideous” and is capable of “convert[ing] the Eve of Powers to a monster” (Hawthorne 2013, 153).

Pygmalion-husband.⁵ It is then that “the marble paleness of [her] cheek” (165) ominously reveals not just her newly acquired and much longed-for integrity, but her unavoidable death.

Similar anxieties regarding female sexuality and gender prerogatives are voiced in “Rappaccini’s Daughter,” first published in the *Democratic Review* in December 1844, and then in *Mosses from an Old Manse* in 1846. Set in sixteenth-century Padua, it tells the story of a beautiful maiden, Beatrice, who, since her birth, has been nourished with poisons by her father, an experimental physician, until “she herself ha[s] become the deadliest poison in existence” (Hawthorne 2013, 246). When her beloved Giovanni (a trainee doctor) finds out her dreadful secret – also because their intimacy in her luxuriant garden is starting to undermine his own health – he gives her an antidote which she obediently takes, even though she is aware it will ultimately cause her death.

Among other scholars, Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (2014, 49) and Gabriella La Regina (1971, 46) have identified *Frankenstein* as one of the most obvious sources for this story. Indeed, one of the central male characters is a Frankenstein-like scientist, Rappaccini, a man “fearfully acquainted with the secrets of Nature” (Hawthorne 2013, 250). In open violation of Hippocrates’ Oath, he is not remotely interested in his patients’ wellbeing, if that interferes with his ground-breaking research and boundless, almost Faustian curiosity. As Hawthorne remarks, the doctor

cares infinitely more for science than for mankind. His patients are interesting to him only as subjects for some new experiment. He would sacrifice human life, his own among the rest, or whatever else was dearest to him, for the sake of adding so much as a grain of mustard seed to the great heap of his accumulated knowledge. (Hawthorne 2013, 234)

Acting thus as a wicked God, he creates his own alternative “Eden of poisonous flowers” (245), a lush garden filled with “unnatural” (241) and artificial shrubs, “indicating that there had been such commixture, and, as it were, adultery of various vegetable species, that the production was no longer of God’s making, but the monstrous offspring of man’s depraved fancy” (241). In a striking parallel with Frankenstein’s Creature, Beatrice (this time, not an Adam but a modern Eve) was apparently generated without a mother, who is never mentioned in the narrative. Furthermore,

⁵ Aylmer compares himself to Pygmalion, in his proud intention to manipulate his wife’s appearance: “Even Pygmalion when his sculptured woman assumed life, felt no greater ecstasy than mine will be” (156).

the maiden shares the Creature's yearning to be accepted and loved; yet, just like Victor's progeny, she was bred as a new, pioneering species, excluded from the bliss of an ordinary life and condemned to loneliness and alienation: despite her attractive looks, any lasting association with her proves lethal. The scientist's intention in poisoning his daughter is eventually disclosed at the end of the narrative, when he replies to Beatrice's helpless revolt against her misery:

“What mean you, foolish girl? Dost thou deem it misery to be endowed with marvelous gifts against which no power nor strength could avail an enemy – misery, to be able to quell the mightiest with a breath – misery, to be as terrible as you are beautiful? Wouldst thou, then, have preferred the condition of a weak woman, exposed to all evil and capable of none?”
(Hawthorne 2013, 253)

In “Rappaccini's Daughter” Hawthorne arguably expresses his own perplexity over a new type of assertive and self-confident woman (such as Beatrice is supposed to be, at least in her father's intentions), whom he views as a threat to social stability. Accordingly, the girl becomes toxic and venomous because she does not entirely belong to the weaker sex: her female attributes and qualities have been hybridized with typically male features such as strength, audacity, and power, thus creating a treacherous and deceptive monster. In her seminal essay on the cult of true womanhood, Barbara Welter identified “piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity” (1996, 152) as the fundamental qualities of a proper lady's personality, besides emphasizing the affinity between a true woman (as delicate and innocent as a flower) and the domesticated space of the garden. Surrounded by a vast array of demons (the noxious blossoms growing in her perverted Eden), Beatrice is scornfully portrayed by Giovanni as a curse, as “a world's wonder of hideous monstrosity,” and a “loathsome and deadly creature” (251). Just like Georgiana in “The Birthmark,” therefore, Beatrice resorts to self-inflicted death as the only possible remedy for her nonconformity.

***The Monster* by Stephen Crane**

While in Hawthorne's time the supposedly deviant violation of gender expectations was often perceived as a major hazard, Stephen Crane seems to employ the Frankenstein trope to investigate the controversial relationship between blacks and whites at the turn of the twentieth century. The connection between *The Monster* and Mary Shelley's novel was first highlighted by Julian Hawthorne, in his review of the novella, published

two years after its release in 1898 (Hawthorne 259).⁶ Contemporary scholars such as Elizabeth Young (with her 2008 *Black Frankenstein: The Making of an American Metaphor*) have further elaborated this insightful association. Set in Whilomville, an imaginary New York suburb, Crane's narrative tells the story of a black coachman, Henry Johnson, whose face is horribly disfigured when he rescues little Jimmie (the son of his employer, Dr. Trescott) from a fire blazing inside his house. Regardless of his friends' and acquaintances' advice, out of sheer gratitude, the protagonist (a physician) decides to care for the repugnant *monster*, as Henry is now universally called, until he and his wife become ostracized by the whole village.

The social and historical context of Crane's story is worthy of investigation, as it helps cast light on its meaning. As David Greven has emphasized, the author wrote his novella "in the chaotic atmosphere of post-Reconstruction America" (2017, 54), also characterized by the struggles over women's suffrage, the Jim Crow laws (designed to separate the races in public spaces, according to the so-called "separate but equal" doctrine), and the frequent lynching of black men who dared to trespass upon the racial and moral boundaries set by the whites.⁷ Elaine Marshall maintains that *The Monster* bears an obvious resemblance to an eyewitness account, penned by Crane's brother, William, of the lynching of a black man (Robert Lewis), accused of raping a white woman in 1892 (Marshall 1996, 207).

Even though Crane's text is at times ambiguous (Henry is often infantilized⁸ and, together with other African Americans, he constantly

⁶ Julian Hawthorne was harshly critical of both the novella ("an outrage on art and humanity" [Hawthorne 1973, 269]) and the writer: "[Crane] is anything but an artist. He has everything belonging to art to learn; and he evinces no disposition or ability to learn it" (1973, 261).

⁷ The so-called "Ugly Laws," enforced across the US in the nineteenth century, might have influenced Crane in shaping his novella. These laws prevented maimed, mutilated, deformed or diseased people from appearing in public. As Susan Schweik has established, two years before Crane began to write *The Monster*, Charles Kellogg, a charity reformer, had drafted the New York City version of the "Ugly Laws" which, however, had failed to be introduced (2008, 221).

⁸ Henry's underdeveloped thoughts resemble those of a child: "[Henry] grinned fraternally when he saw Jimmie coming. These two were pals. In regard to almost everything in life they seemed to have minds precisely alike" (Crane 1899, 6).

strives to mimic white gentlemen),⁹ it certainly condemns the *effacing* effect of racism in contemporary America. Consequently, far from being a Frankenstein-like scientist driven by his wild hubris, Dr. Trescott is portrayed as the brave and thankful foster father of a hideous and disquieting Creature the community would rather see dead (as is actually announced in the local papers). When one of the most prominent citizens, significantly a judge, strongly advises the doctor to contemplate the consequences of “preserving [that] negro’s life” (Crane 1899, 44), he compares what he deems his friend’s folly to something strikingly resembling Victor Frankenstein’s fabrication of the monster: “he will be your creation, you understand. He is purely your creation. Nature has very evidently given him up. He is dead. You are restoring him to life. You are making him, and he will be a monster, and with no mind” (45).

Interestingly, Henry’s defacement (caused by corrosive chemicals) occurs in the doctor’s laboratory, where he carries Jimmie while looking for a possible escape. In Elizabeth Young’s words, the laboratory, so central in *Frankenstein*, becomes “a metaphor for the environment in which racism is forged, as well as a metonymic reference to the role of medicine in eugenics and other forms of racist pseudoscience” (Young 2008, 86). There, the “terror-stricken negro” (Crane 1899, 27) is subjugated and once again enslaved by chemically coloured flames and compounds which, paradoxically, seem to be more animate and humanized than himself: the orange-coloured flames “lea[p] like a panther” (30) reaching for Henry’s trousers; the fumes from an explosion assume the shape of a sapphire-coloured “fairy lady” (30); “a ruby-red snakelike” (31) potion corrodes the unfortunate man’s face. Conversely, Henry Johnson is transformed into a blackened “thing” (36), neither fully dead nor completely living, like Victor Frankenstein’s creation. (Be it noted, incidentally, that the working subtitle of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe was originally “the man that was a thing.”) From that moment in the story onward, the Creature with no face loses his human identity, only to be called a “dark figure” (48), a “dim form” (48), a “silent shape” (50), a “devil” (56), “the most terrible thing in the world” (60-61), a “spectre” (65), a “corpse or a

⁹ When Henry visits his beloved Bella Farragut, he is dressed in his fancy “lavender trousers” (8), handed down by one of the villagers who mock him. At Bella’s house, where he is welcomed by Mrs. Farragut, the three of them “exchang[e] the most tremendous civilities” (16): “They bowed and smiled and ignored and imitated until a late hour, and if they had been the occupants of the most gorgeous salon in the world they could not have been more like three monkeys” (16).

phantom" (66), "simply a thing, a dreadful thing" (72) and, finally, until the end of the novella, a "monster" (72). He is either staged as a freak show, a spectacle to entertain Jimmie's friend (once "his pal" [27], the boy is now described as "the owner and exhibitor of one of the world's marvels" [83]), or hidden behind a black veil, reminiscent of Hawthorne's dark story "The Minister's Black Veil," a canvas where collective and individual fears of both blacks and whites are equally projected. It could be even argued that, in Crane's story, Henry is already considered a monster *before* his terrible accident: his impeccable lavender trousers and dandy-like manners are simultaneously ridiculed and feared by Whilomville's white citizens: as Nick Lolordo points out, therefore, "the black man (or more specifically, the black man in unsegregated social life) is inherently monstrous" (2001, 48). At the end of Crane's novella, Dr. Trescott almost appears as the *doppelgänger* of his hideous Creature, since he and his family are also pushed to the margins of society.

H.P. Lovecraft's "Herbert West: Reanimator"

The metamorphosis of the doctor into the real monster of the narrative is clearly evident in H.P. Lovecraft's "Herbert West: Reanimator," serialized between February and July 1922 in *Home Brew*, a limited-circulation magazine. Narrated from the point of view of his unnamed friend and assistant, the story chronicles the experiments of a materialist physician, firmly convinced that "the so-called 'soul' is a myth" (Lovecraft 2015, 2), and that an injection of a chemical solution into the veins of a *fresh* specimen can restore it to life. As time passes, the scientist's experiments become increasingly bizarre and nightmarish: for example, he attempts to revive a headless body and its detached limbs. The text ends with the disappearance of the doctor, possibly kidnapped by a grotesque herd of zombies.

Given its hyperbolic tone, "Herbert West: Reanimator" has been described by Paul Sheehan as "a semi-parodic rewriting of Shelley's novel" (Sheehan 2015, 249); nonetheless, Sunand Joshi (one of the leading scholars in the study of Lovecraft's works) believes the correspondence is merely superficial (Joshi 1996, 93). Even though the reanimation scene is repeated several times in the six parts that compose the narrative, Creatures are not particularly relevant to the plot: unlike Victor Frankenstein's creation (whose complex feelings and personality are profoundly explored by Shelley), they are just mindless and hideous agglomerates of flesh, whose outlines are "human, semi-human, fractionally

human, [or] not human at all” (Lovecraft 2015, 41).¹⁰ Conversely, Lovecraft offers many descriptions of Dr. West, who progressively turns into a monster, a perverted (albeit technically perfect) mechanism. The purely physical description of the scientist included in the first part is repeated in the second with a significant addition: “the supernatural – almost diabolical – power of [his] cold brain” (9). In the third part he is equated to a “scientific automaton” (17) who, as readers gather in the fourth part, “scarcely look[s] a day older” (23), while his fanaticism increases. However, it is in the fifth part, set during the First World War (significantly associated with the adjective “hideous” [28]), that Dr. West fully reveals his true colors, working as a surgeon on the battlefield with the sole intention of obtaining “a prodigious supply of freshly slaughtered human flesh” (32). As the narrator observes:

I came to find Herbert West himself more horrible than anything he did [...]. His interest became a hellish and perverse addiction to the repellantly and fiendishly abnormal; he gloated calmly over artificial monstrosities which would make most healthy men drop dead from fright and disgust. [...] Dangers he met unflinchingly; crimes he committed unmoved. (31)

In the final part of the story, the Great War, with its horrors that surpass all understanding and the wildest imagination, is actually held responsible for “intensify[ing] this side of West” (37), for enhancing his monstrosity. During the First World War millions of people were killed or wounded; mutilated veterans, maimed heroes (lost in the crowd of ordinary people), shell-shocked soldiers who came back from the front seemingly as reanimated corpses, became part of American daily life after 1918. Maybe Dr. Herbert West himself could be partially interpreted as the Creature of a new, ruthless and ambitious villain: the War.

To conclude: as this essay has tried to demonstrate, the multifaceted American progeny of *Frankenstein* certainly fulfilled Mary Shelley’s wish for her literary creature to “go forth and prosper” (Shelley 1998, 10). As a complex body of work, it deserves critical attention and a thorough examination; indeed, the icon of the mad scientist and his abhorrent Creature has been fruitfully employed, manipulated, and even reinvented

¹⁰ Lovecraft lingers on the description of one of the specimens, reminiscent of Crane’s monster: a “negro [...] a loathsome, gorilla-like thing, with abnormally long arms [...] and a face that conjured up thoughts of unspeakable Congo secrets and tom-tom poundings under an eerie moon” (Lovecraft 2015, 19). The writer’s well-known fear of the Other is evident in the sentence that follows: “the body must have looked even worse in life” (Lovecraft 2015, 19).

by numerous artists in order to investigate pivotal issues, as well as to reflect on the contemporary world, its tragedies, and the ways we might possibly come to terms with them.

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CHAPTER NINE

FRANKENSTEIN 1973-2015: VARIETIES OF ABJECTION

DAVID PUNTER

This paper is, in part, an updating of and reflection on an essay I published in 2016 in *The Cambridge Companion to Frankenstein*, edited by Andrew Smith, concerning later literary versions of the novel – and so it does not attempt to deal with the vast repertoire of more recent texts in film, the graphic novel and other media. But in any case, the afterlife of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is huge and complex. Of course, the reasons for this impact on posterity have been much discussed; they obviously include the original novel’s dealings with science and technology; the constantly reinterpreted relations between Victor Frankenstein and his creature; the obsessive nature of Victor’s fascinations; and age-old myths to do with transgressive knowledge and human aspiration. It is no accident that Mary Shelley’s subtitle was “The Modern Prometheus,” although even here, as in so many other aspects of the work, there is an ambiguity, even perhaps a series of ambiguities. It would seem natural to assume that the Promethean figure thus indicated is Victor himself, but the creature’s own search for knowledge of the world and knowledge of his self has also been seen as Promethean; one might also want to question the exact tone of the word “modern” here – is Victor meant to be presented to us as a worthy successor to the original Prometheus, or rather as a downgraded equivalent, thus satirising the whole notion of the Promethean, at least within a “modern” context? And this vexed and complex notion of the ‘modern’ underlies much of this essay.

One of the matters, it is fair to say, that has proved most tantalising down through the last 200 years of literary history has been the clash of viewpoints between Victor and the creature, which seems to have demanded constant rewriting. In Mary Shelley’s text, we are on the surface presented for much of the time with Victor’s viewpoint; he, after all, is human, while

the creature is not, at least in the sense that he has not been born of human reproduction. Yet it has been frequently pointed out that it is often with the creature that the reader feels most sympathy, for a variety of reasons. The creature is irrationally shunned by human society; the creature is, to begin with, helpless and in need of our pity as much as our scorn; the creature evolves into a being whose attitude towards Victor, and towards wider issues of social organisation, can often seem far more rational, more well-considered, indeed more articulate than that represented in Victor's increasingly frantic and rage-filled speeches. Among the questions which therefore arise are ones to do with paternal and filial feelings and duties; the creature, after all, like any human child, is not responsible for his own origins, and Victor's rejection of him can, on some readings, seem callous and vindictive.

But then, of course, the creature proceeds to supply what may be considered good reason for Victor's resentment; he does, after all, become a killer, although again it has come to seem unclear whether we should consider this behaviour as innate to the creature himself, or as a response to his treatment at the hands of a world which considers itself humane and yet reacts to his intrusive presence in an exceedingly inhumane way. Mary Shelley's text thus opens for us a variety of readerly subject positions; and it is arguably this "open-ness" which has been the cause of the apparently endless series of reinterpretations which have continued until the present day. And all of this, of course, is further complicated by questions of gender: I have thus far referred to the creature as masculine, and shall continue to do so, but I recognise that there are other ascriptions possible.

So in this essay, had it been longer, I would have looked at four (out of 30 or so) recent *Frankenstein* literary narratives: Brian Aldiss's well-known *Frankenstein Unbound*, from 1973; Dean Koontz's series of five *Frankenstein* novels, published between 2005 and 2010; Susan Heyboer O'Keefe's *Frankenstein's Monster*, from 2010; and Michael Bunker's *Brother, Frank*, published in 2015. These are vastly different books, appealing to widely different readerships, which serves to show that it is not only the content of *Frankenstein* which is open to reinterpretation; there are questions of genre as well. We might want to say that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a classic; but there would be a number of critical reservations about this. It is, after all, the work of a very young author, and the text is melodramatic, to an extent two-dimensional, inexplicit if suggestive about psychological complexity. We might want to say that it is Gothic, and it is indeed within the Gothic canon that it has been most usually discussed; but it is an unusual, if not unique, kind of Gothic,

dealing not in antiquity, the remnants of the feudal and other motifs emblematic of the “original Gothic,” whatever that might have been, but rather in contemporary fears and anxieties. We might want to consider it as a horror story, and to do that would immediately be to place it within a small, ill-regarded sub-genre, characterised by instant shock and thrill rather than by any deeper engagement with the human plight.

However, I am only able here to look at one of these narratives, and I have chosen Susan O’Keefe’s *Frankenstein’s Monster*. O’Keefe’s book may have an unpromising title, but it turns to great advantage an increasingly prominent feature of Shelley’s novel, namely the permission it seems to give to writers to roam, historical and geographically: Aldiss, for instance, moves from the “frozen wastes” of Walton’s expedition to a time-slipped Geneva; Dean Koontz transposes geography with barely a word of explanation.

O’Keefe’s book is written almost entirely from the perspective of the creature. Victor himself has died; but the creature finds himself the object of a more or less crazed pursuit by Walton, who has taken up Victor’s cause with, as it were, a vengeance. The reasons for this seem initially not entirely clear: Walton has certainly pledged himself to avenge the death of his friend – if Victor can be called that – but the depth of his attachment to Victor’s memory seems largely inexplicable, although this does lay bare one of the prime concerns behind Mary Shelley’s original novel, and behind many of the remakes, namely scenarios of attachment and loss, and of the abjection that follows from the absence of lost objects.

For just as Victor and the creature may be seen, from the very beginning, as engaged in an unending rehearsal of thwarted parent/child relationships, here the broken attachments seem to be felt most strongly by Walton, the loner who, unable to entertain ideas of attachment outside his obsession with pursuing and destroying the creature, turns in on himself and converts his love for Victor – itself a peculiar and no doubt “transferred” love – into hatred of the creature. Similarly, the creature himself is in search of attachment. He finds it twice, first in the form of a young woman called Mirabella, but Walton appears and the inevitable occurs:

I stood. The captain’s mouth gaped with astonishment. From the side a soldier grabbed Mirabella and pulled her away. She struggled, striking his face, trying to twist loose. And in a single dreadful moment: Mirabella’s frantic movements distracted the captain.

He turned toward her. She jerked free from the soldier and ran back to me for protection. Walton shook off his trance, seized the pistol from the captain, aimed at me, fired, and – Mirabella fell dead within the circle of my arms. (O’Keefe 2010, 52)

Once again – as so often – the creature has been the unintended agent of the destruction of someone he loves, and who has seemed capable of loving him despite his appearance:

As I write these words, faces flash before my mind’s eye: Frankenstein’s brother, his friend, his bride, he himself worn to fatal sickness, tracking me down; the nameless who, like the Austrian soldiers, unwittingly placed themselves in the path of my rage; even the myriad bodies that comprise my parts. All of these clamour in noisy accusation: *You are death*.

And now Mirabella, I am bruised and beaten, but it is her blood that stains my hands. (O’Keefe 2010, 53)

The important connection here is between the “deaths” that *comprise* the creature – the deaths which have preceded him, but which have been essential to the very composition of his charnel-house body – and the deaths which he is doomed to re-enact. The creature is, in John Donne’s words, “every dead thing,” and thus it is inevitable that he spreads death around him.

But this may, of course, be a metaphor for an apparently quite different scenario, namely that which runs through *Frankenstein* like a seeping vein, the rejections and struggles of adolescence. On this reading, we would want to say that as soon as a possible partner for the creature appears, the forbidding dictate of the father steps in; you are not allowed, says the Voice of the Father, to grow up, you are not allowed to leave your subaltern position, you are abject before me; and if you try, then the punishment – by the father himself, by the whole of a superegoic society which the father represents – will be terrible; you will have visited upon you the wrath of God, and the punishment will be all the more severe – as in the past it has been for Victor – because it will actually be on your nearest and dearest that the punishment will be visited, while you walk free but in the knowledge that it is you who have (again) caused death. Perhaps it is here that the abject plight of the creature connects most closely with the abject plight of women, forever at the command of the Law of the Father, prevented from freedom, their bodies and minds held under strict control.

The creature's second relationship, however, is altogether more complex, and it is with Lily, who is, apparently, Walton's niece. This relationship is a masterpiece of subtlety: sometimes Lily appears to be with the creature; sometimes she manifests a venomous hatred towards him; sometimes she leads him on sexually; at other times she professes herself repulsed by him. She herself is a mystery, although some aspects of this mystery are clarified as the novel progresses: she *needs* her frantic "escape" with the creature, the endless journeying, the return to the Orkneys, because she herself is fleeing the wrath of her father – the inexplicable bloating sickness from which she suffers, and in which the creature sorrowfully believes, turns out to be pregnancy, and one to which she cannot own even to her own family. Furthermore, however, it is revealed at the end that she is not even the daughter of this supposed father, Winterbourne, but rather Walton's own daughter; and thus the ties of family love and hatred and abjection are knotted even more ferociously together.

And they are knotted together in another way, for throughout the novel there is a theme of madness – of a very human madness, quite aside from the creature: Walton is clearly deranged, and it becomes clear that Lily has inherited this insanity, first manifested in the multiple partners whom she takes and which makes it impossible for her or anybody else to know the identity of the baby who is born at the end of the book, and second in her wild, ever-changing attitudes towards the creature, who appears to her to be at once her saviour and her doom.

In a sense, then, this is the drama, like so many others, of a woman driven mad by repressive social attitudes; but this theme in turn loops back to another perennial Frankensteinian theme, perhaps expressed most fully when the creature, rejected yet again by Lily, howls his rage and sinks deeper into the animality which, he fears, is his true status:

I was not a man? I was not a monster? At best I was an animal? Then I would be one fully; she would not take that little from me: I would glory in it. Piece by piece I shed my clothes, that poor disguise of humanity that I had worn always in vain; piece by piece I shed the mask till I ran naked. In the thick underbrush, stickers and branches made a gauntlet that would flay me of this skin, stolen from men to hide the beast beneath. I ran mile after mile, deeper and deeper into the woods, until, at last, they claimed me for their own, and I was no longer not a man, no longer not a monster; I became in my mind an animal in truth, a wondrous, undiscovered species. (O'Keefe 2010, 210)

The ending of the novel provides a fit translation of the creature's exile, and at the same time a kind of salvation: finding himself amid a landscape of coalmines and collieries, where endless fires burn, an explosion enables him to exert his peculiar strengths and thus at last to become welcomed as a saviour of life rather than as a destroyer of it. Even there, Walton finds him; but it is a monstrous Walton, himself destroyed from within by his unassuageable lust for vengeance, and in the end it is this implacable fixation which finishes Walton, while the creature's ability to see more clearly the world outside his own narcissistic concerns – even if that entails recognition of the abjected, 'animal' part of himself – allows him to enter into a new kind of life.

O'Keefe's book is sensitive, subtle, intriguing and successful in providing the creature with a substantially new voice. However: to proceed towards a conclusion. It is increasingly being perceived that manifestations of mental illness or disability should not be seen merely as themselves but rather as a series of protections against fear, perhaps the greatest fear of all, which is of the disintegration of the self, and it is at least arguable that this fear is integral to the whole body of Frankenstein works from Mary Shelley onwards. Victor, after all, forms his own scientist-self around the dissolution of family ties, attachments, relationships: he forms a "substitute-self" impervious to affections and feelings, and it is at least arguable that the creature is, at least to begin with, an externalisation of that separateness, the abject loneliness which is the inevitable effect of cutting oneself off from human community.

And so, on this reading, the quasi-myth would not merely be about the perils of science and technology: rather, it would be about what the lust for knowledge – through scientific, alchemical, magical or any other means – represents or conceals, as it becomes a carapace over a lonely, suffering self which has given up on familiar or social attachment. If this is the case, then it would go a long way towards explaining the continuing fascination with the Frankenstein scenario, for it would be emblematic of the very essence of post-industrial modernity.

The aim of the modern, if we put it in very abstract terms, is to form an alternative: a cleaner, more enlightened, better organised alternative to the messy, shadowed structures of what is taken to be 'traditional society'. But there is a price to be paid, and it is a price which Victor and his many avatars are charged with paying: namely, the return of all that threatens high-level social organisation – as it threatens the most basic of "civilized" organisational structures, as Victor repeatedly discovers on his wedding

night. It is possible, of course, that the West is now engaged in a process of moving beyond “modernity,” as generally conceived, into a cultural condition where randomness, the continual presence of chaos, instabilities of mapping – whether it be of the universe, the planet or the atom – are more accepted: this, at least, would be the hope and trajectory of the postmodern.

But there remains that which haunts these projections into the future, and it could be said that one of these sites of abject haunting is the human body itself. That body can be changed, it can be subjected to all manner of prosthesis, extension, invasion, and it may well be that in the end, as various lines of argument have it, we are all in the act of becoming cyborgs; but while that transformation is incomplete, we still have to confront the fruits – and indeed the by-products – of our labour, creatures which are not fully created, humans who suspect that they are not fully human, monsters who are even capable of entertaining doubts as to their own monstrosity; and it seems as though, while we are engaging in that confrontation, that process of endless flight and pursuit, the figures of Victor Frankenstein, his creature, and indeed the enigmatic Walton will remain and continue to develop in our imaginations.

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CHAPTER TEN

BLOOD AND ICE, OR LIZ LOCHHEAD'S "HIDEOUS PROGENY"

MARIA ELENA CAPITANI

A prolific adaptor of well-established narratives particularly interested in female voices, the Scottish poet and playwright Liz Lochhead, born in Motherwell, Lanarkshire in 1947, has rewritten a number of dramatic hypotexts during her prolific career. These include (the genesis of) Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in *Blood and Ice* (1982); Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1985); Molière's *Tartuffe* (1986), *Le Misanthrope*, re-baptised *Miseryguts* (2002) and *L'École des femmes* (*Educating Agnes*, 2008); Chekhov's *Three Sisters* (2000); Euripides' *Medea* (2000); Sophocles' Theban trilogy (*Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone*), Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* and Euripides' *The Phoenician Women*, which were rearticulated into a single text entitled *Thebans* (2003). The former Scottish Makar is also the author of a variety of plays for children and young audiences and performers, such as *The Magic Island* (1993), her appropriation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.¹ As Jan McDonald and Jennifer Harvie observe, Lochhead's re-interpretations of canonical and mythical sources adopt a revisionary approach in that they "do not simply repeat and thus reify 'official' versions of myths and legends or their subversions promulgated, and accepted, by popular culture. Rather, Lochhead's work reconfigures each story, both thematically and structurally, from a feminist standpoint" (1993, 124).

Lochhead's debut play *Blood and Ice*, the work on which this chapter will focus, was first performed at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in August 1982 at the Traverse Theatre. In fact, her first full-length piece, which reconstructs the events of the stormy summer of 1816 and the story of the

¹ Lochhead was appointed Scotland's Makar (national Poet Laureate) in 2011. She was succeeded by Jackie Kay in 2016.

creation of *Frankenstein*, evolved from a previous version of the play. This Ur-text first appeared under the evocative title *Mary and the Monster* at Coventry's Belgrade Theatre in 1981. As Lochhead writes in the "Introduction" to her final revision of the play, completed in 2003 for a production at Edinburgh's Royal Lyceum Theatre directed by Graham McLaren, the "first full incarnation" of *Blood and Ice*

was far too long for one thing, and was, literally, all over the place. I, for one, must admit that I can't, now, make head or tail of the original script, although within its excesses I can see it also contains what proved to be the still-beating heart of the whole creature, which is an exploration of the sources, and consequences for its creator, of an enduring and immortal myth. (2009, v)

Despite being aware of the structural problems of the play, Lochhead acknowledges the affective potential of her grotesquely excessive text, a permeable and malleable dramatic product that crosses its own generic and theatrical borders.

Blood and Ice investigates the relationship between the female creator and her creation, and the problems women face when they confront their own artistic inspirations and ambitions. The disturbing burden of female creativity – carried by Mary Shelley and, specularly, by Lochhead herself – is well exemplified by the various rewritings and revisions *Blood and Ice* has been subject to. This dis-membered and re-membered artefact underwent a long process of structural and textual metamorphosis, especially during the 1980s, and became a radio play first broadcast on Radio 4 in 1990. Thus, this aborted piece revolving around the semantic field of monstrosity may be defined as Lochhead's "hideous progeny," as Shelley describes *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* in her 1831 "Introduction" to the novel (Shelley 1998, 10). Despite being long-winded, unfocused, excessive, and unsuccessful, the first version of *Blood and Ice*, like a monstrous creature, can be described as an always unfinished product continuing to haunt and obsess its creator, who cannot escape its sinister shadow:

I got on with trying to write other plays, but, all through the 1980s, like a dog returning to its own vomit, I'd go back to it, trying, *abortively*, to solve the problem of the structure, find what would finally seem the satisfactory form, keeping up the pursuit myself – for its own sake, whether there was an upcoming production or not – happily scribbling away through long lonely nights, just as obsessively, I had to own, as half-mad Frankenstein himself labouring with his unlovely creation, looking for the spark of life. (Lochhead 2009, vi, my emphasis)

Even the initial theme was reworked. Originally, Lochhead wanted to write a play on Mary Shelley's mother, the eighteenth-century English writer and advocate of women's rights Mary Wollstonecraft, but then she became more interested in the reason why the daughter of a leading feminist wrote a ghost story. Despite this shift in focus, the shadow of the offstage character of Wollstonecraft looms large over the play, haunting her daughter's painful transition into adulthood. Lochhead was struck by the antithesis between Mary's rationalist heritage and the phantasmatic quality of her novel:

[I]t niggled at me that the daughter of a great rationalist would grow up to write Gothic Horror. Why? (Because in my utter ignorance – I hadn't even read *Frankenstein* because I didn't think it'd be very good and who needed to? One Knew The Story – I thought *Frankenstein* was a Gothic Novel!). So I read *Frankenstein*, an obsession was born, and any fantasies about writing a play about Wollstonecraft evaporated. I wrote like a being possessed. (quoted in Poggi 2001, 273-274)

Although Lochhead's 2003 rewriting of the play is "the very last word" from her "on these characters, this particular dilemma" (2009, viii), this chapter will examine the first published version of *Blood and Ice* (1982), whose strong imagery revolves around the motif of the spark of life in the play. From a generic point of view, this stitched text defies categories: it might be argued that Lochhead's piece is as much a biographical play as a memory play or a history play. Indeed, in *Blood and Ice*, the Scottish dramatist reconstructs and dramatizes a short period in Mary Shelley's life through biographical elements such as her journal and other literary and fictional sources, including Muriel Spark's biography of the writer, *Child of Light* (1951). The question of truthful historical narration and subjective (re)interpretation is a crucial theme in the text, which recreates (part of) Mary Shelley's biography through a feminist lens. As anticipated, this approach is typical of Lochhead's output, in which "The cultural icons she challenges are the myths, historical and contemporary, that have accumulated around Scottish national identities, and traditional ideologies of gender, specifically those engaging with the concept of 'sisterhood,' and with women as creative artists or in positions of power" (McDonald 2006, 454).

Blood and Ice is a two-act play. The first act stages some consecutive evenings in the summer of 1816 in the Shelleys' rented villa in Switzerland, near Geneva. Mary Godwin, her future husband Percy Shelley, and her half-sister Claire Clairmont spent that iconic summer near Villa Diodati, where Lord Byron and his personal physician John Polidori stayed. As is

well known, one night, after reading from a French translation of German horror tales entitled *Fantasmagoriana*, Byron proposed a ghost-storytelling contest:

BYRON: Let us have a little contest. Who can contrive the best, the most stirring un-natural tale. We shall all try our hand.... Shelley, can you come down from those aery and evanescent clouds long enough to terrify us among the dark and rat-infested dungeons of the human soul? Can *you* Mary? (Lochhead 1982, 10; original emphasis)

Percy Shelley wrote what became known as “A Fragment of a Ghost Story”, while Mary started working on the first draft of *Frankenstein* after having a nightmare. Byron wrote and abandoned after a few pages a fragment of a story that was the starting point of the first modern vampire tale, Polidori’s “The Vampyre” (1819). In Act Two, Lochhead blurs generic and temporal boundaries by merging the dramatic universe and the narrative world: Mary Shelley’s memories of the time she spent in Switzerland, and later in Italy, are interpolated with her present and with the rewriting of some excerpts from *Frankenstein*. In so doing, Lochhead opts for a non-linear narrative, characterised by a forward and backward movement which is sometimes difficult for the reader/spectator to follow. As in a Chinese box, Mary’s past on the Continent is encapsulated in her English present (the play ends shortly after Byron’s death in Missolonghi in 1824, when Mary is back in her motherland with little Percy Florence, her only child to survive to adulthood).

The cast is formed by five actors, and Lochhead employs what will become one of her favourite theatrical techniques, the doubling of roles. In the 1982 published version of the play, she explicitly links each *dramatis persona* to one of the fictional roles in Mary Shelley’s novel. Remarkably, Mary is the only character who remains herself throughout; Percy becomes Frankenstein, while Byron intriguingly turns himself into the Monster (and in Act 2, Scene 8 – a rewriting of the novel – also the Accuser of Frankenstein’s maid Justine); Mary’s step-sister, Claire, becomes Frankenstein’s bride-to-be Elizabeth, while the actress playing the Shelleys’ Swiss maid, Elise, is both Justine and the female monster. With its “series of shifting and merging dualities” (Poore 2013, 97), *Blood and Ice* perfectly expresses and exemplifies Lochhead’s deep interest in doubles, alter egos, and multiple selves, which permeate her stratified dramatic (and poetic) output. This distinctively Gothic feature originates from the Scottish tradition in which Lochhead is embedded: the fact of being a Scot whose Scottishness has been traditionally subsumed by Britishness and a woman writer struggling against patriarchal culture can

be considered as an instance of the so-called "double marginalisation" affecting many Anglophone female authors. (Poore 2013, 97)

Focusing on her subjectivity and taking place entirely in her consciousness, *Blood and Ice* traces the personal and creative evolution of Mary Shelley (and possibly of Lochhead herself). While the first act presents a very insecure young woman desperately struggling to find a balance between her intellectual/rational side and her sexual/irrational dimension, the second act stages a still split and troubled personality but, at the same time, Mary's growing awareness and self-controlled sense of authorship. As McDonald and Harvie have pointed out, in Lochhead's play Mary appears

not only as the reluctant author of *Frankenstein*, a novel which critics have interpreted as autobiographical, but as the even more reluctant author of her own 'story.' In order to take control of the latter, she must deconstruct and reconfigure the various mythologies that she (and coincidentally the audience) has inherited, not least the myths of her celebrated parents, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. (1993, 125)

In the first act, Mary Shelley is visibly burdened by her parental heritage. Moreover, we should remember that Wollstonecraft died of a retained placenta a few days after giving birth to her daughter, who, growing up, became overwhelmed with a sense of guilt for having caused this tragedy and, relatedly, for her own children's deaths. Having witnessed the premature passing away of many of her loved ones, Mary merely feels a survivor from a familial tragedy. She is extremely anxious about herself and her capacities as a writer and mother, epitomising a talented woman who represses her artistic creativity and her craving for love and attention. Although Mary is unable to see and fully appreciate who she really is, Byron pushes her to confront herself and her frustrated ambition:

BYRON: [...] And how about you, Miranda-Mary? Won't you write up a revolution – like your papa, Mary – Godwin was ever one for writing up a storm [*sic*] of Brave New Worlds, wasn't he?

SHELLEY: *And* her mother.

BYRON: Ah yes, excellent lady I believe, although I never read –

[...]

SHELLEY: Mary writes very well. Oh, you do, Mary. When you've a mind to. That novel you began, that promised –

BYRON: Novel?

MARY: I did not complete it, it was worthless.

SHELLEY: Now, how could one with a parentage like yours write anything worthless?

MARY: I don't want to be a writer. (Lochhead 1982, 9, original emphasis)

Embodying a darker facet of Mary's split self and accusing her of living in the shadow of Percy Shelley, Byron constantly teases and upsets the young woman. Thus, he helps his friend's partner to complete her transformation from someone oppressed by her sense of guilt and lumbering parental heritage into an independent creature, who becomes more assertive towards Percy and more aware of herself. In this light, it is worth pointing out that, in her plays, Lochhead aims to rewrite historical and literary female characters – such as Mary Stuart and Elizabeth I, besides Mary Shelley – overturning inherited clichés which tend to diminish them: “Lochhead takes the common view of these women [...] and peels back the mythology, drawing out the person's essential humanity. [Her] feminism strives to find in each of her creations a more empowering identity than has traditionally been projected” (Scullion 2013, 117). Torn between Shelley's Platonic idealism and Byron's cynical mind and passionate soul, by the end of the play Mary has acquired the ability to accept the complexities of her dualistic nature, trying to integrate the opposite sides represented by the two poets. In *Blood and Ice*, the wicked Byron is described as the skeptic, the “libertine who breaks the code” (Lochhead 1982, 17), the ironic part of the Romantic ego. Quoting Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, he mockingly compares himself to the demonic and monstrous Caliban and draws a parallel between Mary and Prospero's daughter Miranda, while defining Percy's idealism as “Ariel's head-in-the-clouds hopefulness:” (Lochhead 1982, 19) “BYRON: Lord, Shiloh, I'm not much of a one for such aery platonics. I am a simple man. Ladies, I am as ditchwater dull and tethered to the earth as clodhoper [*sic*] Caliban” (Lochhead 1982, 9). Percy's idealistic attitude renders him an ethereal creature embracing spiritual beliefs and vegetarian principles, an airy character that contrasts starkly with Byron's materialism and flesh-and-blood carnality. The lame and earthly figure of Byron-Caliban, with his deviant body and disturbing thoughts, both attracts and repulses others, while his dark and ominous onstage presence “announces itself (demonstrates) as the place of corruption” (Halberstam 1995, 2).

Acting as a catalyst for Mary's growing awareness, Byron pushes the hesitant young woman to express herself and develop the creativity she has stifled in order to feed her man's ego: "I look at you Mary and I see someone who is holding it all within. A lovely lady, who yet suppresses every gust, every gale, every giggle. Don't sit on your wit just to please Shelley" (Lochhead 1982, 20). The ambivalent relationship between Byron and Mary Shelley, as Valentina Poggi notes, is characterised by "an undercurrent of mixed antagonism and sexual attraction" which emerges from the dialogues: "each of the two occasionally seems on the point of giving in to this attraction, and angry that the other lacks the nerve to do so. Byron is interested in Mary not, as to some extent is the case with Shelley, *because* of her exceptional pedigree, but *in spite of it*" (Poggi 2001, 276, original emphasis).

Shortly after this intimate conversation with Byron, which has increased her nagging anxiety, in the final scene of the first act Mary Shelley wakes from the nightmare giving rise to the central idea of *Frankenstein* on 16 June 1816. Anne K. Mellor aptly suggests that the source of this nightmarish vision was Mary Shelley's feeling of biological and literary inadequacy: "It is out of this doubled fear, the fear of a woman that she may not be able to bear a healthy, normal child and the fear of a putative author that she may not be able to write, that Mary Shelley's nightmarish reverie was born" (1998, 54). In the following passage, which is worth quoting at length, Lochhead rewrites the genesis of the novel, as recounted in Mary Shelley's 1831 "Introduction" to *Frankenstein*. Despite its terrifying nature, Mary's waking dream serves a therapeutic function by stirring her imagination and stimulating her finally to put pen to paper:

MARY: Last night I tried to rest, placed my head on the pillow but I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think...

My imagination, unbidden, possessed me.

I saw – oh, with shut eyes, but I saw him. The pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous, hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then with a jolt from some powerful engine stir with an uneasy half movement then snap up rigid and live.

Oh how such success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his handiwork, horror-stricken.

He would begin to hope that, left to itself, this slight...spark of life would fade...this thing would...

He sleeps. But he is awakened. He opens his eyes. Behold it stands by his bedside looking down at him with yellow, watery but hungry eyes.

I opened mine in terror.

[...]

Hallelujah! I have found it. What terrifies me will terrify others. I need simply describe the spectre that haunted my midnight pillow.

I have thought of a story!

(Sit down and begins to write)

It was on a dreary night in November... (Lochhead 1982, 20)

Immediately after this scene, the Monster is conceived offstage between the two acts. At the beginning of Act 2, in a highly Gothic atmosphere (thunder and lightning wage war outside), Frankenstein (played by the actor who plays Percy Shelley) comes out of the cupboard while Mary is frenetically writing her masterpiece. Interweaving novel and dramatic action, Lochhead incorporates very detailed stage directions into the script which describe the aesthetics and the kinesics of this powerful scene:

(FRANKENSTEIN looking down on MONSTER. He is almost naked and nearly beautiful. He spreads the arms and legs to the classic X-crucifixion/Leonardo-da-Vinci-ideal-man pose, MONSTER's fingers making tubes into which FRANKENSTEIN puts the "battery ends" of the wires, there is some machine (bellows-like?) that FRANKENSTEIN has to do a deal of some sort of sexy huffing and puffing to get going, then lights and sparks begin travelling along through glass tubes and conduits, but before it reaches flare-point the battery ends clatter from the MONSTER's fingers, the machine goes phut. FRANKENSTEIN weeps in frustration....

He pulls himself together, tries again, puffing and blowing. It begins. FRANKENSTEIN flings himself on top of his MONSTER holding the terminals in place, the sparks and lights connect and flare, FRANKENSTEIN jerks and climbs off from the MONSTER. Thunder and lightning. Very slowly – the classic MONSTER-movement – it sits up and opens its eyes. It stands up slowly and starts toward FRANKENSTEIN, FRANKENSTEIN stands transfixed, then reacts horrified into a panic start, rushing helter skelter across the stage to where MARY Shelley is sitting writing "Frankenstein" her novel, by the time he reaches her he is SHELLEY. (21)

The spectacular moment in which the Monster first appears on stage can be reasonably considered the climax of the entire play. As Diego Saglia states, the theatrical process defined by Keir Elam as "ostension," that is to say, "the *showing* of objects and events [...] to the audience" (Elam 2002, 26, original emphasis), is a distinctive feature of Gothic theatre, which "creates visible and tangible versions of the uncontestable." The displayed Monster becomes a disturbingly fascinating object laden with "affective power" that suddenly "appears out there, in front of us, in the performative arena of the stage" (Saglia 2014, 354- 355). The deviancy of the almost-naked body described by Lochhead is ambiguously attractive and offers itself as a focus of interest for the audience. However, her description of the Monster differs from Shelley's: with its tubes, wires, batteries and conduits, Lochhead's nearly cinematic account seems to be more influenced by screen adaptations of *Frankenstein* than by the novel itself.

In the 1982 version of *Blood and Ice* what hinders the smoothness of the narrative flow is probably the inclusion of scenes from the nineteenth-century novel, whereas the belated introduction of the figures of Frankenstein and the Monster in the second act confuses the thematic and metaphoric flow. Remarkably, in the subsequent reconfigurations of *Blood and Ice*, the Monster is staged from the very beginning and the *Frankenstein* intertexts are cut. However, Lochhead believes that the main problem with the 1982 script is not the structure but the imagery, which she will investigate and develop in later versions. As its title makes clear, the play revolves around the elements of blood and ice. Blood refers to female sexuality, by which Mary is simultaneously attracted and disgusted (more precisely, it refers to the onset of menstruation and to the blood that is shed in childbirth and/or in miscarriage). It represents an irrational force, a source of creative energy, while ice symbolises scientific rationality, cold intellect, self-control, and frigidity. Here, rather than alluding to the majestic glaciers described in *Frankenstein*, ice refers to a real event in the protagonist's life and acts as a saving element containing the flow of blood. On 16 June 1822, when the Shelleys lived at Casa Magni in San Terenzo, Percy saved his wife from bleeding to death from a miscarriage by putting her in an ice bath, a dramatic moment which can be considered both a suspension of the creative force of blood "scribbling as if a quill was dipped in blood" (Lochhead 1982, 12) and an act of preservation:

SHELLEY: To be a woman is to risk spilling...everything. You lost so much blood, I had never seen such... [...]. I ran, ran all the way to the Ice

House, I woke Umberto, I made him pack the last shard of ice, we packed a bath of it, Claire would not help me: she said the shock would kill you, but I lifted you up in my arms and I plunged you in that bath of ice and that stopped the flow. (29)

This episode makes plain that *Blood and Ice* is not a faithful adaptation of *Frankenstein*. Rather, it should be considered as a re-visionary dramatisation of Shelley's life. As Poggi observes, the play "does not focus on the *blood* shed by the vengeful Monster, nor on the *ice* of the Northern sea where Walton encounters the protagonists." In contrast, "The title hints at Lochhead's interpretation of those aspects of Mary Shelley's inward and outward experience that went into her creation of scientist, monster, explorer: daring men all, yet instinct with self-doubt and finally doomed to loneliness." (Poggi 2001, 274)

A monster play that might be defined as "a hybrid form, a stitched body of distorted textuality" (Halberstam 1995, 33), *Blood and Ice* has undergone a long process of metamorphosis. The play stages the strained relationship between the female creator (Mary Shelley but, at the same time, Liz Lochhead herself) and her creation/creativity, offering a double vision of Mary as a struggling writer and a distraught mother, and simultaneously exploring the heavy burden women carry while fighting to fulfil their artistic and personal ambitions. Lochhead's palimpsestic text also examines "the network of emotional tensions variously operating among the four main characters: Shelley, Mary, Byron and Claire" (Poggi 2001, 274), reconstructing momentous years in their existence and in the history of English literature. Indeed, this highly intertextual (and metatextual) play is interspersed with more or less explicit references to English classics, including Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel." McDonald and Harvie suggest that Lochhead's dramas "juxtapose their own narratives with other writers' narratives, 'making strange' those narratives and highlighting some of their assumptions." For instance, re-contextualising and de-familiarising Coleridge's poetry, the Scottish playwright questions the idea of stable identity and some of the Romantic instances of femininity that convey male writers' vision of "discursively constructed sexualised women as dangerous and transgressive, leaving virtually the only other representation for women an impossible, ever innocent, idealised 'Woman'" (McDonald and Harvie 1993, 141-142).

Through the multi-layered texture of her "hideous" bio-drama, Lochhead rewrites Romantic lives, assumptions and beliefs, and enters the English

canon from a new angle, offering us her theatrical refraction of a protean and prismatic myth such as that of the Modern Prometheus which "remains potent for our nuclear age, our age of astonishment and unease at the fruits of perhaps-beyond-the-boundaries genetic experimentation" (Lochhead 2003, vi). After all, contemporary bio-drama and bio-fiction emphasise the presentness of the past and "are therefore not characterized by a retrogressive but by a decisively progressive movement to explain and interpret the present" (Middeke 1999, 18).

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

“BRIDES NEVER FARE WELL IN STORIES”: REPRESENTATIONS OF AUTHORITY AND (GENDERED) DIFFERENCE IN *FRANKENSTEIN* ADAPTATIONS

ANYA HEISE-VON DER LIPPE

This article traces a history of writing that is directed against the omission and suppression of female writers in the context of *Frankenstein* – from Mary Shelley’s own work to that of literary critics and adaptors. Rather than present a monolithic theory, based on the essentialist assumption that women write differently from men or that literary production might somehow be rooted in the biological setup of a writer’s body, it addresses a number of questions related to what might tentatively be termed a poetics of omitted writing. The discussion further engages with the ways in which writers from minority groups in general, and women specifically, address and meta-critically comment on their under-representation in mainstream culture – that is, the ways in which they write against their own omission by mainstream cultural discourse.

To start with a recent example: in October 2016 Carmen Maria Machado published a piece on the *Electric Literature* site, entitled “How to Suppress Women’s Criticism.” The title is, of course, an intertextual reference to Joanna Russ’s 1983 book *How to Suppress Women’s Writing*. In this earlier critical text, Russ, who is better known for her feminist science fiction narratives, draws attention to the culturally ingrained processes and strategies by which women’s writing is omitted, presenting a meticulously curated network of literary and critical connections between the work of several generations of women writers in the process. Russ mentions Mary Shelley twice – first in the context of denial of agency, which I shall comment on below, and secondly in her chapter on “Isolation,” drawing attention to the fact that, until relatively recently,

Shelley's other novels were simply not as widely available to the public as *Frankenstein*, suggesting that the novel was largely regarded as an "isolated achievement" (Russ 1983, 62). As Machado points out, Russ's text itself is "not nearly as famous as it should be" (Machado 2016) as it, quite ironically, fell victim to the cultural processes of omission it draws attention to.

Machado's essay draws on Russ's text to highlight the necessary task of remembering the interconnected literary and critical work of women, as well as other/intersecting underrepresented minorities, and to draw attention to how women are often omitted from the process of canonization. Rather than content ourselves with the occasional, usually posthumous rediscovery and celebration of a brilliant female writer, Machado argues: "we need [...] more thoughtful vigilance; to help women and people of color and queer folks and working-class artists and so many others find their rightful place in the canon – ideally, while they're still alive to witness it" (Machado 2016). Machado's piece was written in response to Neil Gaiman's blurb for Ruth Franklin's 2016 biography of horror author Shirley Jackson. Machado's criticism of Gaiman is directed at his use – without attribution – of a slight variation on Russ's title phrase, and not so much at Gaiman himself, the "prominent, living male artist inserted between Russ' ideas and Jackson's reality" (Machado 2016). Instead, Machado uses Gaiman's blurb as an opportunity to draw attention to the ingrained cultural habit of omitting women's work to the point that, as Machado quotes from a 2011 article by Lee Mandelo: "Each generation feels that they're the first and the only to want to be a woman writer, that they must do it on their own" (Mandelo 2011).

I would like to trace this idea back to feminist theory, more precisely to Hélène Cixous' concept of an *écriture féminine* – not for its essentialist insistence that women write differently, but for its usefulness in addressing the question of how people who find themselves at the margins of culture might go about finding a subject position to write from. Cixous argues that women's writing, specifically, is always writing against its own suppression. As she phrases it: "To prove that I'm rightfully in the wrong, I've invoked all the reasons for the fact that I have no right to write within your Logic: nowhere to write from. No fatherland, no legitimate history. No certainties, no property" (Cixous 1991, 36). Cixous reads women's writing as coming from a place of radical cultural Otherness, an observation which is still relevant to the ways in which writers from marginalized groups use writing Otherness as a form of resistance. Richard Grusin, for instance, draws attention to "the continued flourishing of speculation and

imagination as forms of queer and feminist knowledge production” (Grusin 2017, xi). The work of feminist critics like Cixous might serve as a gateway to what could be termed an intersectional and interconnected feminist poetics of omitted writing and of writing against omission.

That there is such a poetics must be evident from the simple fact that these processes of omission are not only historically well documented (I shall give a number of examples in what follows) but are also ongoing, suggesting that the sense of cultural isolation described by Mandelo and Machado, as well as by Cixous, is a crucial part of the processes of literary production for countless writers from the margins, whose social or economic minority status limits their cultural representation as well as the perception of their work. Consequently, their writing is often rife with meta-narrative commentary on, and criticism of, these limitations.

As an example of this kind of writing-against, I would like to cite Machado’s own short story “The Husband Stitch,” which is, among other things, a narrative about storytelling – a complex, multilayered tale, which invites a number of readings by actively resisting interpretation and closure. As the narrator suggests: “For these questions and others, and their lack of resolution, I am sorry” (Machado 2017, 29). Harking back to all the stories about brides that she has heard, Machado’s nameless autodiegetic narrator comments that “Brides never fare well in stories. Stories can sense happiness and snuff it out like a candle” (Machado 2017, 9). Meta-commentary on how the story should be told constructs the female narrator’s voice as “high-pitched, forgettable” and suggests that “all other women” speak with a voice that is “interchangeable with [her] own” (Machado 2017, 1). Moreover, all female bodies are “marked” with ribbons, which they must protect from the male touch or risk falling apart, in a very Frankensteinian manner, as the narrator does when her husband pulls off the ribbon around her neck at the end of the story: “As my lopped head tips backward off my neck and rolls off the bed, I feel as lonely as I have ever been” (Machado 2017, 29). The ribbon, the narrative suggests, is not a secret, but it is the only thing that is hers, the only thing holding her together. The narrative implies an easy, culturally-condoned complicity between the male characters, the husband, the doctor and the son, which is negotiated through their power over, and their impact on, the woman’s body – specifically via the medical tradition of stitching up a woman’s body after she has given birth in a manner that is designed to give the husband pleasure: “My husband jokes around with the doctor as he holds my hand. ‘How much to get that extra stitch?’” he asks (Machado 2017, 15). The narrator’s experience of being subject to the combined

male gaze of husband and medical practitioner is underlined by her helplessness, her inability to speak up against her husband's wishes while she is under the influence of the anesthetic. Instead, she repeats the stories she once heard and how their focus on pain and on being silenced mirrors her own:

There is a story about a woman who goes into labour when the attending physician is tired. There is a story about a woman who herself was born too early. There is a story about a woman whose body clung to her child so hard they cut her to retrieve him. There is a story about a woman who heard a story about a woman who birthed wolf cubs in secret. When you think about it, stories have this way of running together [...]. (Machado 2017, 16)

On a meta-narrative level, the stories remembered by the narrator create a network of references highlighting women's experiences of pain and silencing, as well as the role of oral storytelling as a way of making sense of their experiences and passing them on to other women, especially where they are not heard by the heteropatriarchal mainstream culture. References to monstrosity and stitching place the narrative in the context of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, specifically the creation of the female monster that Victor Frankenstein destroys out of fear that she might become a force to be reckoned with.

Like Machado, whose stories are full of meta-commentary on the possibilities of storytelling, writers from the margins are, quite often, literally writing against socially and culturally ingrained structures, attempting to establish authority where society so often denies it to them. The context of *Frankenstein*, and its publication and adaptation history, offers a unique opportunity to explore a network of such instances of writing against omission on various intra- and extra-textual levels (whether in Shelley's original novel, in her autobiographical writings and letters, or in adaptations of *Frankenstein* and biographical texts about Mary Shelley). Stephanie Hemphill's *Hideous Love* (2013) – a poetic biography of Mary Shelley, based on the author's journals and letters – summarizes Shelley's ambiguous stance towards having to publish her work anonymously:

I think that when
I can name myself
I shall use Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley
in memory of my mother.

If I were a man

I might not wear
the cloak of anonymity.
(Hemphill 2013, 182)

Hemphill presents Mary Shelley as an early feminist writer in the tradition of her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft. Someone who is aware of her own position in the world: “I want to be equal, but I am not” (Hemphill 2013, 1). Hemphill’s Mary Shelley uses writing as a tool to undermine her position in society: “the wiser, patient Mary just keeps writing without a name” (Hemphill 2013, 182). Drawing on Shelley’s letters and diary entries, *Hideous Love* presents a similar picture to that in Haifaa al-Mansour’s 2018 biographical film *Mary Shelley*, which also attempts to establish her as a writer in her own right against the overbearing demands of Percy Shelley’s public fame and personal unreliability. The film conflates several years of the Shelleys’ lives into one sustained narrative of upheaval and abandonment, only to present a romanticized solution to the writerly power dynamics, by simply having Percy proclaim Mary’s authorship of *Frankenstein* in front of a gathering of male writers and critics at the conclusion. Both texts highlight the sheer tenacity of the question of Percy’s role in the publication and possibly the writing of *Frankenstein*. This question of authority can be traced back to Mary Shelley’s own account in her “Introduction” to the 1831 edition, where she sets out to “give a general answer to the question, so frequently asked [...] ‘How I, then a young girl, came to think of, and to dilate upon, so very hideous an idea?’” (Shelley 2009, 437). As Wendy Lesser points out, this is actually the wrong question to ask about a text like *Frankenstein*: “Would it be any less amazing if an Oxford don of forty-five had written *Frankenstein*?” Lesser suggests that, like Shakespeare’s plays “*nothing* can really explain them. And this is also true of *Frankenstein*” (Lesser 1992, ix).

That the question was, nevertheless, at the forefront of everyone’s mind is clear from Shelley’s own account, but also from the frequent medial repetitions of the origin story. The frame narrative of James Whale’s Universal Pictures classic *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), for instance, shows Mary as a gentle young woman who is focused on her needlework and alarmed by thunderstorms – a fact that leads the character of Byron to wonder: “Can you believe that bland and lovely brow conceived of Frankenstein?” (Whale 1935). It would, certainly, be tempting to read Whale’s version of Mary Shelley as representative of its production period, but such an interpretation would, in itself, be a clear indicator of the ingrained cultural bias against the work of writers from the margins,

which often manifests itself in denying the existence and continuity of systemic oppression. Russ's *How to Suppress Women's Writing* draws attention to how subtly and often without malice women's work is systematically belittled or not recognized as work, or *their* work, or meaningful. In the chapter "Denial of Agency," for instance, she quotes Ellen Moers' summary of an early twentieth-century male critic's assessment of Mary Shelley's work. As Moers writes:

Her extreme youth, as well as her sex, have contributed to the generally held opinion that she was not so much an author in her own right as a transparent medium through which passed the ideas of those around her. 'All Mrs. Shelley did,' writes Mario Praz, 'was to provide a passive reflection of some of the wild fantasies which were living in the air around her' (Moers 1977, 144; quoted in Russ 1983, 21).

Mrs. Shelley – deprived of her own name in a manner that is reminiscent of the creature in *Frankenstein* – is, in Praz's view, merely an appendage to a male writer, a vessel that collected and passed on the great ideas of the male geniuses at work around her. This view dominated literary criticism of Mary Shelley's work well into the second half of the twentieth century, as Bertold Schoene-Harwood points out. Even as late as 1979, the editors of the highly influential collection *The Endurance of Frankenstein*, George Levine and U.C. Knoepfelmacher, felt the need to defend their critical interest in her work and ask: "How much of the book's complexity is actually the result of Mary Shelley's self-conscious art and how much is merely the product of the happy circumstances of subject, moment, milieu?" (quoted in Schoene-Harwood 2000, 28). Even Muriel Spark, arguably Mary Shelley's most famous biographer in the twentieth century and an acclaimed author in her own right, argues:

Frankenstein is Mary Shelley's best novel because at that age she was not yet well acquainted with her own mind. As her self-insight grew [...] so did her work suffer from causes the very opposite of her intention; and what very often mars her later writing is extreme explicitness. In *Frankenstein*, however, it is the implicit utterance which gives the theme its power. (Spark 2013, 127)

As Schoene-Harwood neatly summarizes: "Spark appears to be arguing that an enduring success like *Frankenstein* could never have been written by a woman in full possession of her mental faculties, but only by a girl, confused and ventriloquizing" (Schoene-Harwood 2000, 27). In a recent article in the *New Yorker* Jill Lepore calls the critics' stance "This enduring condescension, the idea of the author as a vessel for the ideas of other

people – a fiction in which the author participated, so as to avoid the scandal of her own brain” (Lepore 2018).

An 1818 letter Mary Shelley wrote to Sir Walter Scott to defend her authorship of *Frankenstein* exemplifies this position:

Mr Shelley soon after its publication took the liberty of sending you a copy but as both he and I thought in a manner which would prevent you from supposing that he was the author [*sic*] we were surprised therefore to see him mentioned in the notice as the probable author, – 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. (Bennett 1995, 34)

Shelley finishes her letter by begging Scott’s pardon for the “intrusion of this explanation” (Bennett 1995, 34), but its purpose is very clear by this point. She is reclaiming authority over her work, while taking an apologetic stance for its shape by suggesting it was “a juvenile attempt” and by drawing attention to the fact that, as Lepore summarizes it, socially: “She herself had no name of her own. Like the creature pieced together from cadavers collected by Victor Frankenstein, her name was an assemblage of parts” (Lepore 2018). Shelley’s careful claim for authority in the context of family tradition is mirrored in the 1831 “Introduction,” in which she acknowledges her heritage as “the daughter of two persons of distinguished literary celebrity” (Shelley 2009, 437) – without naming Mary Wollstonecraft or William Godwin – as well as her husband’s role as an editor, but also clarifies that:

I certainly did not owe the suggestion of one incident, nor scarcely of one train of feeling, to my husband, and yet but for his incitement, it would never have taken the form in which it was presented to the world. (Shelley 2009, 442)

The distinction between “incidents” and “trains of feeling” on the one hand and “the form in which it was presented” on the other, could not be clearer, as Mary Shelley distinguishes her own ideas from her husband’s contribution to how they ultimately came to be phrased and presented. Charles E. Robinson’s edition of what the book’s cover identifies as *The Original Frankenstein* (2009), which reproduces most of Mary Shelley’s original draft of the novel and Percy Bysshe Shelley’s “contributions to his wife’s novel” (Shelley 2009, 40), does an ambiguous job of reestablishing Mary Shelley’s authority over her own text. On the one hand the edition meticulously highlights Percy’s edits and preserves Mary’s original draft

as an invaluable scholarly resource; on the other hand the title page suggests that the 1818 manuscript of the novel was produced by “Mary Shelley (with Percy Bysshe Shelley)” – an honor rarely awarded to the editors of male authors, however large or small their contribution. To blame this highlighting of Percy’s role on Mary’s reticence in presenting herself as the author would disregard the ways in which male and female authors were regarded as quite different at the time. While Romantic poets like Percy Shelley and Lord Byron were imbued with an aura of genius, women’s writing was often regarded as formulaic and lacking in originality – resulting in its omission from the “serious” literary canon. This difference can even be traced in Mary Shelley’s description of the writing process, which she outlines in the “Introduction.” This suggests an awareness of writing as an intertextual process drawing on pre-existing materials:

Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of 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. (Shelley 2009, 440)

This description bears a striking resemblance to the process of creating a monster out of existing structures, suggesting that the creation scenes can also be read within the framework of the above-mentioned question of authority over one’s work. It also demonstrates an awareness of questions of authority and poetics that belies the critics’ view of Mary Shelley’s capacities. While this passage might be misconstrued as a simple admission of Mary Shelley’s debt to the male authors, or figures of authority, surrounding her, it could also be read as the core of a feminist poetics of storytelling, as a process of intellectual kinship with previous writers and ideas. That the passage does not specify the creator’s gender but is rather presented as a general comment on the nature of “invention” suggests that Mary Shelley saw herself in the tradition of early feminist writers like her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, fighting for the equality of women’s voices at the time.

While *Frankenstein*, as well as its paratext and a number of intertexts can be read as comments on female authority, Mary Shelley’s assertion that the idea for the novel presented itself to her in a nightmarish vision, in a state somewhere between sleep and waking – after being “a devout but nearly silent listener” to the “many and long [...] conversations between Lord Byron and Shelley” (Shelley 2009, 440) – contributed to the contrary impression of an almost unconscious creation, fueled by the ideas of

others. This view made its way into later literary adaptations of the novel and fictionalizations of its creation narrative. Liz Lochhead's play *Blood and Ice* (1982), for instance, lets its main character, Mary Shelley, claim that the monster presented itself to her to be written: "As for my last monstrosity, my grotesque invention, my scandal, to my surprise my enduring and popular success, no, I didn't invent you, I didn't write you, you came unbidden and I wrote you down" (Lochhead 2009, 40). The creature's voice continues to haunt the fictionalized Mary Shelley in Lochhead's play in a manner that is reminiscent of Shelley's view of the novel as her "hideous progeny" (Shelley 2009, 442), a creation that is both undeniably hers and, at the same time, a monstrosity in itself.

The careful construction of female authority established in the "Introduction" to *Frankenstein* is echoed in the text itself in the form of the monster's mate, who is destroyed before she is even complete. The novel presents Victor Frankenstein's reasoning for his act of destruction, which also takes into account the creature's gender:

She might be ten thousand times more malignant than her mate, and delight in murder and wretchedness. [...] [A]nd she who was in all probability to become a thinking and reasoning animal might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation. (Shelley 2009, 188)

Frankenstein's argument clearly highlights female authority and power as a force to be reckoned with – a reading that is underlined by the fact that women are, notably, absent from the novel's main action, simply serving as catalysts for the male narrators and, ultimately, as victims of Frankenstein's failure to properly care for his creations. Frankenstein's decision to destroy the female creature precisely because she would be "a thinking and reasoning animal" serves to underline his misogynist fear of women's agency, and feminist adaptations from Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (1995) to Kate Horsley's *The Monster's Wife* (2014) often reimagine this particular aspect of Shelley's novel in favour of letting the female monster live and thrive in an environment that has proven hostile to the male creature. Horsley's main character Oona, for instance, manages to escape her creator's clutches only to discover that her appearance is not read as monstrous outside her small Orkney islander community: "She was from Orkney where the funny lot lived and that was all they saw" (Horsley 2014, 252). Theodora Goss's *The Strange Case of the Alchemist's Daughter* (2017) even imagines Justine – the female monster – as part of a tight-knit and adventurous community of monstrous women who manage to outwit their male creators. Shelley Jackson's meta-

critical hypertext novel *Patchwork Girl* re-imagines not only the female monster but also the writing process, claiming that the text was written by “Mary/Shelley, and herself.” (Jackson 1995) By presenting several parallel creation stories, the text’s labyrinthine structure also offers a meta-commentary on the concept of authoritative textual production, as well as feminist criticism of *Frankenstein*. Commenting on her corporeal and textual multiplicity, the female monster claims: “I was not one body and there is more than one way to write this” (Jackson 1995).

Over the last 200 years, Mary Shelley’s authority over her own text has been undermined by a process of cultural obliteration to the point that *Frankenstein* is now, as Fred Botting claims, “a product of criticism, not a work of literature” (Botting 1991, 3). As Ann Marie Adams argues: “Mary Shelley’s authorial experience demonstrated how a literary artist could be rendered almost superfluous to the artwork that she created” (Adams 2009, 403). By becoming what Adams terms a “mythic archetype” (Adams 2009, 403), *Frankenstein* facilitated adaptations; and adaptors, uninhibited by notions of unchallengeable authorial genius, assembled their own hybrid textual monsters from the ideas and concepts evoked by the novel. As her comments in the “Introduction” suggest, Mary Shelley herself was aware of the tendency of her “hideous progeny” to take on a life of its own. Moreover, Shelley’s struggle for recognition began a tradition of meta-commentary on textual production from the margins, a poetics of writing against omission, which can still be traced in contemporary adaptations and rewritings of *Frankenstein*.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

FRANKENSTEIN AT 200 IN POLAND

AGNIESZKA ŁOWCZANIN

Frankenstein as a Metaphor for Crime

Probably the two most notorious serial killers in the post-war history of the communist Polish People's Republic were Zdzisław Marchwicki (1927-1977), charged with the murder of fourteen women and the attempt to kill six more between 1964-1970, and Joachim Knychala (1952-1985), charged with the murder of four women and a teenage girl between 1975-1982, both men being sentenced to death. They carried out their crimes in the heavily industrialised Dąbrowa Coal Basin (*Zagłębie Dąbrowskie*) and in Upper Silesia. Their arrest and, in the case of Marchwicki, months-long show trial were highly publicised cases, badly-needed evidence of the efficiency of the militia forces in the troubled, waning days of the communist regime in Poland. From the very beginning, in police records, journalistic reports, and then in public memory, Marchwicki and Knychala have been identified respectively as "The Vampire" and "Frankenstein." In the years following their execution numerous newspaper articles, book publications and films have contributed to solidifying their public identities: Marchwicki has endured as the "Zagłębie vampire," as evidenced for example by the 1982 film "*Anna i wampir*," directed by Janusz Kidawa and based on the fictional documentary *Na tropach zabójcy* by Tadeusz Wielgolawski, published in 1977; while Knychala continues to be known as the "Silesian Frankenstein," as for example in the recent 2017 publication *Kryptonim "Frankenstein"* by Przemysław Semczuk, the title of which refers to the operational codename given in 1979 to the police taskforce responsible for his arrest. (Semczuk 2017, 378) "Frankensteina",

The two cases above are symptomatic of the way in which the notions of vampirism and Frankensteinian monstrosity function in public discourse.

Serial killers enter public consciousness only because of the crimes they commit. Their moral hideousness thrusts them outside the margins of the human and into the realms of the bestial, providing a metonymic link to the most culturally recognisable and equally unnatural murderers: a vampire and Frankenstein's monster. These two have thus become metonymies for violence, crime and blood, used synonymically and interchangeably. Moreover, the fact that throughout Mary Shelley's novel the creature remains the "anonymous androdaemon" ("Unsigned review," 1818, 104) created an awkward nomenclatorial void which the public have conveniently supplanted with the name of his maker. Thus, the Shelleyan literary duo of Frankenstein and his Creature have been transformed into the scientist and his Frankenstein. As long as victims of serial killers proliferate, the public imaginary seeks to contrive an easily identifiable and aesthetically gruesome symbol, an imagistic shorthand for the unnameable hideousness of crime. In this way Frankenstein has not only been equated with the idea of vampirism, but taken to signify his own creation as well.

***Frankenstein* is not "immutable"**

This inclination towards the name-swapping of the two literary characters, scientist and creation, has certainly been facilitated by the popularity of the novel's numerous adaptations, appropriations, retellings and sequels. *Frankenstein* slipped out of its author's hands quite early on after its first publication in 1818 and, as the historian Christopher Frayling has observed, "it was the many unauthorised and stripped-down theatrical adaptations rather than the novel itself which launched the F-word into the culture" (Frayling 2017). In the twentieth century, Shelley's novel has fascinated film studios ever since the first cinematic version in 1910, making Frankenstein the monster an enduring visual presence in the popular cultural imaginary. Having felt "that great incapability of invention" as she struggled to come up with the idea (Shelley 2013, 8), and then for months being unable to secure a publisher (Sampson 2018, 156), Mary Shelley could not have envisaged that her "hideous progeny" would be alive for centuries to come. The unwavering interest *Frankenstein* has enjoyed on the stage and on the screen has obliterated its literary original, and, outside Britain, few enthusiasts of its copious retellings realise the existence of a teenage writer behind the well-known story. Few of them are aware of the fact that the most popular line associated with *Frankenstein*, "It's alive! It's alive!" was not conceived by Shelley back in 1816-17 when she penned the novel. Victor's poetic but

highly un-cinematic deliberations in the literary original, “the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart” (Shelley 2003, 58), were replaced in James Whale’s influential 1931 production by a dramatic and memorable expression of the feverish excitement of fruitful creation.

Appropriated by popular culture and academia, journalists and artists, politicians and scientists, over decades the story has permanently departed from its literary original and enjoyed a public life of its own. *Frankenstein’s* post-Shelleyan existence reflects the nature of the text itself: rewritten by the author thirteen years after its first publication, reduced to an abridged single volume edition, and greatly influenced by its stage productions, it has never been a “set text,” which would be “immutable” (Frayling, 2018). It “has accreted [...] many wildly different and irreconcilable readings and restagings” and thus, has been successfully “made to mean just about anything” (Lepore 2018) for anyone anywhere across the globe.

Translations into Polish

For over a century after its first publication, the dynamic history of the novel’s reception did not include the territory of Poland. *Frankenstein* was first translated into Polish in 1925 by Henryk Goldman, and between 1958 and 2001 five editions of this translation were published (“*Frankenstein książka*”). A new translation by Paweł Łopatka appeared in 2001, and both were translations of the revised 1831 edition of the novel. The most recent translation into Polish was made in 2013 by an acclaimed writer and translator, Maciej Płaza, who for the first time rendered into Polish the original 1818 version, together with its preface. Illustrated by Lynn Ward’s engravings, this translation, which has already gone into two editions, is accompanied by Lord Byron’s unfinished vampire story, known as “The Burial: A Fragment” from the 1819 *Mazepa* collection, John Polidori’s “The Vampyre”, and ghost stories from Percy Shelley’s *Letters from Abroad*. Thus far *Frankenstein* has had altogether eleven editions in post-war Poland, six of which have been published in the last two decades (“*Frankenstein książka*”), a fact which has undoubtedly contributed to the growing awareness among the general reading public of the literary text behind its cinematic versions and spin-offs.

Around the turn of the century, between 1989 and 2009, the novel was published seven times, and it seems that this burgeoning of new translations and editions has at least two causes. The first was the revival of the publishing industry after the downfall of communism in 1989, and

the arrival of new publishing houses which sprang up to satisfy readers' growing demands for new publications and translations. Another cultural consequence of the lifting of the iron curtain was the fact that films began to be distributed in Poland almost simultaneously with their general release elsewhere in Europe. 1994 saw one of the most popular adaptations of *Frankenstein*, Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, which manifestly paid tribute to the literary original in its title. The film was released in Poland the following year, and its launch was accompanied by reviews and interviews with its producers in the most popular film magazine of the day, *Film*, which has been published in Poland since 1946. Undoubtedly, the transformation of the publishing and film industries in the post-communist era of the 1990s has greatly contributed to popularising Mary Shelley's novel in Poland and resulted not only in a growing awareness of the existence of the literary text, but also in a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of it, which goes beyond equating Frankenstein with the monster or identifying the latter's bestiality with vampirism.

Frankenstein as a Political Metaphor

The shift in the understanding of the novel and the resultant manifestations of the Frankenstein myth in public discourse can be seen in the fact that it has provided us with useful symbolism to voice current anxieties and dilemmas; it has been appropriated, for example, to articulate the changing political situation in Poland. The rapid ideological and economic transformations in the first decade after the fall of communism required a new idiom to express the forging of a fundamentally new post-communist identity for Poles. The rhetorical figure of Frankenstein the monster, previously associated solely with the sordid world of crime, morphed into a symbol of transformation and a metaphor for rebirth in the new political circumstances of the nineties. An example of this revision of the understanding of the Frankenstein figure is the title of a poem (and of the collection in which it appeared), *Frankenstein nasz współczesny* ("Frankenstein Our Contemporary"), by the poet and songwriter Bogdan Loebl (1932-). The volume was first published in 1991, two years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and following the changes in power relations in Central and Eastern Europe.

thus the night in my country ends
and the long-awaited dawn breaks
soon the body of our contemporary Frankenstein
multiplied by thirty million

will wake up from its slumber
 it will be endowed with the posture and the
 countenance of Józef Piłsudski
 but the brain and the heart of Józef Stalin.
 (Loebl 2002, 5; my translation)¹

Although Frankenstein's name is still used for the Creature rather than for its creator, here it stands for the idea of metamorphosis rather than crime. The poem addresses the problem of how political transformations inevitably make the inhabitants of a former communist country redefine their identities, a process symbolically represented by the merging of two antithetical historical figures, Józef Piłsudski (1867-1935) and Józef (Joseph) Stalin (1878-1953). As the founding father of the Polish Republic in 1918 and military leader of the successful campaign against the Bolsheviks in 1920, for the Poles Piłsudski stands for political sovereignty and resistance to foreign rule; Stalin, on the other hand, represents the totalitarian regime and imposition of a new communist identity upon millions of people in Central and Eastern Europe. In the poem, Loebl juxtaposes these two political and moral opposites to offer an impossible metaphorical amalgam of the two figures who in Polish political consciousness represent life and death respectively. Examination of pre-Second World War anti-communist Polish propaganda – especially of posters published during the Polish-Soviet War (1919-1921) – reveals that this is how the Bolsheviks were represented and existed in public consciousness: as the emissaries of death. Images such as these were meant to convey the reality of Soviet Russia, where persecution, execution, deportation and famine were facts of life, and where gulags anticipated the arrival of Nazi concentration camps. (Fig. 1)

After the Second World War, however, contradictory ideological values were superimposed on Polish society. In numerous posters of the 1950s, the arch-enemy from three decades before, the communist – embodied especially in the figure of Stalin – was represented as “a beloved father of the nation [...] a good and sensitive man” with children in his arms (Pielka). This radical incongruity between the ideological templates of the

¹ oto kończy się noc w moim kraju
 oto wstaje tak długo oczekiwany dzień
 zaraz ocknie się ze snu
 pomnożone przez trzydzieści milionów
 ciało naszego współczesnego Frankensteina
 wyposażone w postać i oblicze Józefa Piłsudskiego
 lecz z mózgiem i sercem Józefa Stalina.

pre- and post-war periods imprinted itself on the consciousness of the people, and when yet another volte-face took place in the early 1990s, in the poem the two contradictory ideologies, symbolised by Piłsudski and Stalin, can be seen merging to inform the new post-communist identity.

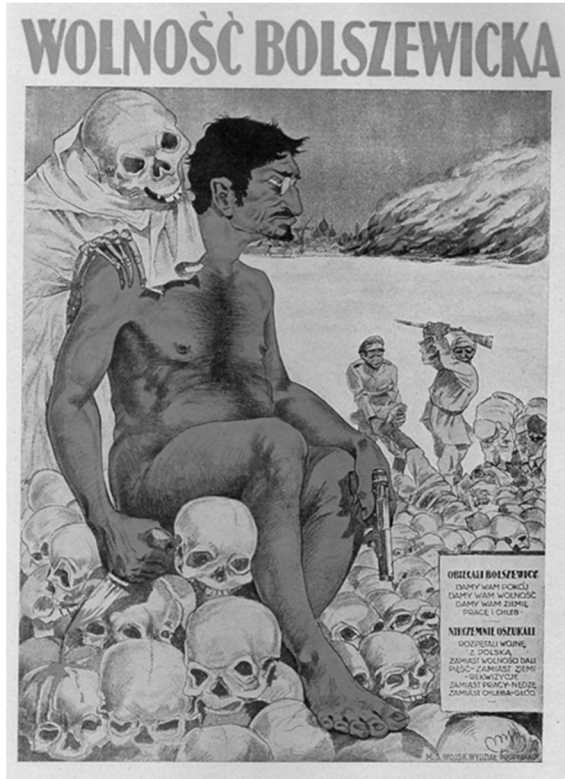


Fig. 1 Polish government anti-communist poster countering Bolshevik propaganda from Russia during the Polish-Soviet war (1919-21), dated 1920, showing the People's Commissar for the Army, Lev Davidovich Bronstein (Leon Trotsky), with the caption reading "Bolshevik freedom."

These political figures are used symbolically to illustrate the transience and ultimate fragility of power relations and the way in which their shifts invariably shape the mindsets of ordinary people. The poem captures the condition of post-communist identities on the verge of a new political era, and symbolically represents their inevitable instabilities and distortions. Nearly five decades of communism are seen as an ineradicable imprint on

consciousness, which is why “the brains and the hearts” of central-eastern Europeans will be forever bruised by its consequences. In this context the figure of Frankenstein the monster becomes a useful political metaphor to express the patchwork formation of their identities, fractured by adverse ideologies and battered by history and its ruptures. To communicate the dynamics and consequences of the two political adversaries who shaped the post-communist worldview and the identity of the people at the dawn of a new era, the poem draws on the essence of Frankenstein’s Creature: although it is alive, it will forever be a jumble of dead matter. No matter the nurture, its nature will always be cadaverous. Victor’s reaction when he sees the creature move for the first time in his laboratory, and which is expressive of his disgust, is not merely an act of aesthetic disapproval and rejection, but a painful realisation that his creation will never be anything else but a cadaver imbued with life, forever stamped by the histories of its component parts. In the poem, the poet projects this vision of the sinister identity of the creature onto himself, and onto the whole thirty-odd-million-strong Polish nation on the threshold of a revolutionary transformation. Reversals of political fortune in which Poles had unwittingly to participate in recent decades have turned them into Frankenstein-like assemblages, composites of what will become a genealogical burden for generations to come.²

Cinderella, Frankenstein and Others

The 1990s, a decade of political and economic transformation, was also a time which fostered revisions of our understanding of our cultural and literary heritage. A surge of new publications appeared, offering rereadings of literature from fresh critical perspectives. Feminism was one of the new critical approaches which at that time confidently entered the academy and became more solidly anchored in criticism, and as a result the late 1990s saw the first academic centres devoted to gender studies open in Warsaw, Kraków and Łódź.

In 2001 the literary historian and critic, academic and television personality Kazimiera Szczuka published a critical reassessment of literature and myth, *Kopciuszek, Frankenstein i inne. Feminizm wobec mitu* (“Cinderella,

² The title of the collection, *Frankenstein Our Contemporary*, and especially its notable pronoun “our” does not seem to be an instance of the cultural appropriation of a foreign entity, but rather a reference to a shared European cultural reservoir, and a possible nod to the title of Jan Kott’s collection of essays on another cultural icon, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (1964).

Frankenstein and others: Feminism and myth”) in which she offered rereadings of canonical literary works and their delineation of female characters as commentaries on myth-making practices. In a chapter devoted to *Frankenstein*, following Mary Jacobus and Barbara Johnson in their interpretations of Shelley’s novel as a story of the exclusion and absence of women, Szczuka reads it as a text about the “destruction and elimination of woman by the anthropocentric culture of the Enlightenment, and perhaps also more generally by western culture” (Szczuka 2001, 173), and the Creature as “a metaphor for the narcissistic vicious circle of self-destruction” (174).

However, beneath the surface of Shelley’s text, Szczuka unearths also its hidden message, the novel’s secret energy which does not belong to its narrative order but seeps out from the unconscious structures of language and of the body, and bubbles up to the surface of culture. In this light she reads *Frankenstein* as a novel about the “inextricable connection between the writer and the text, between a woman and her creation, born from the flesh and the writing, in madness and in suffering” (2001, 174).³ For Szczuka the monstrous creature is female writing, which Mary Shelley – and other women writers like her mother – begot for mankind, and which two centuries later is still alive.

Szczuka’s interpretation of *Frankenstein* ends with a *postscriptum* where she gives an account of a performance organised with a group of students after a seminar in a Gender Studies centre devoted to Shelley’s novel. The performance, entitled *Frankenstein’s Sisters*, staged in the summer of 2000 during a festival of street theatre in Warsaw and Poznań, was constructed as a metaphor of birth, culminating in the tearing up of a paper cocoon, a symbolic creation of sisterhood out of flesh and scripture. In the background, a white sheet bore an inscription in red: “Here, Frankenstein’s sisters are born. Childbirth 10 minutes” (Szczuka 2001, 175). At a time when political barriers had been broken down and the reading of culture was no longer stifled by ideological constraints, brave new values could be freed from all-too-familiar myths and dusty texts. At the dawn of the new millennium, Mary Shelley’s novel acquired a new meaning, one which went beneath and beyond the story it narrated, and was seen as a feminist milestone. Shifting critical attention from the male characters to its female author, Szczuka and her students read it as a record of feminine creativity,

³ Jest to opowieść o prześladowczym, nierozzerwalnym związku między piszącym a pisanym, między kobietą a jej dziełem, rodzącym się z mięsa i z pisma, w szaleństwie i cierpieniu.

a culturally marginalised potential, and enacted its genealogy and meaning as the symbolic birth of a novelistic energy which would nurture future generations of women writers.

Readers' Responses in the New Millennium

As has been said above, the new millennium has seen the arrival of two new translations of Mary Shelley's novel into Polish, with the most recent 2013 translation, based for the first time on the 1818 version, being especially popular with the reading public. An examination of readers' comments made on the popular website *lubimyczytać.pl*, an equivalent of *goodreads.com*, gives an insight into the increasing appreciation of the novel, and reveals how deeply cinematic versions have imprinted themselves upon the popular perception of the story and its characters. For the vast majority of respondents – who are all avid readers with records of over a thousand books read – their first encounter with the Frankenstein myth was on the silver screen, making the novel's film adaptations a recurrent point of reference in their reviews. “Denudatio pulpae,” for example, a reader of 1,674 books, expresses a genuine fascination with Shelley's novel, and juxtaposes it with its film versions:

If you reach out for Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's novel hoping to get a banal history about a frenzied doctor screaming: 'It's alive! It's alive!' and a macabre outcome of his experiments, then you are in for a surprise. *Frankenstein* is not a horror story about a soulless monster fond of violence [...] before reading this novel I had only seen a very shallow film adaptation of this story. (“Frankenstein,” my translation)⁴

Paweł, who admits to having read the novel for the sole purpose of building up his canon of classic literature, was likewise taken by surprise:

I expected to encounter a “wooden” prototype of the novels of terror in a slightly naïve romantic version [...]. But in fact we have here a very deep

⁴ Jeżeli sięgniecie po powieść Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley oczekując banalnej historii o nawiedzonym doktoru wrzeszczącym “It's alive! It's alive!” oraz o makabrycznym wytworze jego eksperymentów – możecie się trochę zdziwić. “Frankenstein” nie jest opowieścią grozy o bezdusznym monstrum ze skłonnością do przemocy [...] przed lekturą tej książki znam bardzo splotą filmową wersję tej historii.

novel about a human desire for love, acceptance, and injustice resulting from a shallow judgement of others. (“Frankenstein,” my translation)⁵

The reader goes on to blame the film industry for trivialising the story and reducing it to a mere horror shocker. Another bibliophile reached for *Frankenstein* in order to keep up his resolution to read each year one book “about which everybody knows but hardly anyone has read”:

[F]or me, and I suppose for a majority of readers, Frankenstein is associated with a monster born out of nothing, who murders innocent victims, and has the face and grimace of Boris Karloff. And it turns out we can’t be more mistaken. (“Frankenstein,” my translation)⁶

Although, as stated above, these comments were made by erudite readers, for all of them the encounter with the literary *Frankenstein* was secondary and came after the cinematic experience. These opinions illustrate how deeply the novel’s various film versions have taken root in the popular imaginary, and especially how profoundly Boris Karloff’s characterisation has dominated and informed our perception of the myth: for many, Frankenstein remains the bestial monster-murderer who walks awkwardly as he preys on his innocent victims. The fact that the creature does not have a name has made it possible to conveniently reduce him to a sub-human, inarticulate, and therefore unfeeling monster, an emotionally underdeveloped killing-machine, physically revolting, but cinematically attractive.

Frankenstein on Stage

The arrival of new translations on the literary market in Poland and the resulting growth in awareness of the novel’s thematic potential, coupled with the increasing number of cinematic versions available for Polish audiences, have contributed to making Frankenstein a recognisable cultural icon, and one which made its way to the stage. A recent performance premiered in March 2016 in Warsaw’s Syrena Theatre. The

⁵ Spodziewałem się spotkania z “drewnianym” pierwowzorem powieści grozy w nieco naiwnym romantycznym wydaniu [...]. A tym czasem mamy bardzo głęboką powieść o ludzkich pragnieniach miłości, akceptacji, o niesprawiedliwości wynikającej z płytkiego osądu bliźnich [...].

⁶ I tak też w tym roku padło na “Frankensteina,” który mi, podobnie jak przypuszczam większości, kojarzy się z powstałym z niczego potworem, mordującym niewinne ofiary, o twarzy i grymasie Borisa Karloffa. I jak się okazuje, nie bardziej mylnego [...].

play was adapted and directed by Bogusław Linda, one of the most popular film actors in Poland and an occasional film and theatre director.

The Warsaw version was based on Nick Dear's script for the 2011 adaptation staged at the Royal National Theatre in London, in which Benedict Cumberbatch alternated with Jonny Lee Miller in the characters of Victor and the Creature. In his script, Dear capitalised on the tension within their relationship, because, as he revealed in an interview, rereading the novel he was struck by "a great central dynamic" in the middle of the story "which was never told in the films," and which he considered to be "a missed opportunity" ("Frankenstein Lives!").

The device of using alternating actors was not repeated in the Warsaw performance. The play was divided into two acts, the first adopting the Creature's perspective, and the second the creator's. In this way the first part, centred on alienation and social ostracism, moved from the depiction of the painful struggle over what it takes to be human, to end with the havoc and destruction brought about by rejection and the thirst for revenge. The second part focused on obsessive scientific overreaching and Victor's resultant gradual loss of humanity. Although the play received a mixed reception from critics and audiences alike, its visual effects, its choreography, and the actors' masterly performances were unanimously praised.

Undoubtedly the play's most important asset was adopting the themes of Shelley's novel and Nick Dear's script to address the pressing anxieties and imminent social problems of our own times. For example, the shift of attention to the Creature in the first part, coupled with the impressive performance of the lead actor, Eryk Lubos, brought the Creature's multi-faceted vulnerability to the surface, allowing the audience to witness the realities of physical disability, the resulting social inadequacy and consequent exclusion. Before the Creature learns to speak, he can only be seen as an awkward bodily presence on the stage. With distorted features, a bent posture, uncoordinated movements, animalistic groans and crumpled skin covered in surgical stitches smeared with iodine, his arresting physicality posed questions about the nature of existence and the essence of humanity. (Fig. 2)



Fig. 2 Eryk Lubos in *Frankenstein* directed by Bogusław Linda. Courtesy of Teatr Syrena.

The Creature's inarticulateness and social inadequacy are put to the test when he meets the De Lacey family and learns how to speak and write from the blind man, the father. When, in moving and intimate scenes, De Lacey touches the Creature in order to get to know him, very tellingly he mistakes the stitches on his body for war scars, and attributes his tattered clothing and slurred speech to the damage and deprivation caused by warfare. For the audience, bombarded as it is by formidable war reporting in daily news coverage, scenes like these unmistakably steer the play towards being an allusion to current military conflicts. Staged in 2016 at the peak of unrest in the Middle East, together with the resultant immigrant crisis, it enacted not only the physicality of war injury but, more importantly, confronted viewers with the acute moral dilemma that Europe was facing for the first time as thousands of immigrants continued to move into its territories. There was no unanimity of response among the members of the European Union towards the humanitarian crisis initiated when the total number of forcibly displaced people rose to almost sixty million, the highest level since the Second World War. Poland was not among the recipients of either refugees or asylum seekers. However, the animated discussion which ensued in the media, blaming the government for failing to address the problem, demonstrated that the refugee crisis was one of many which would bitterly polarise Polish society in the months that followed.

At the onset of the migrant crisis occurring in Europe at that time, the poster advertising Linda's performance, with human bodies tightly packed in plastic, could be understood as an allusion to the images of those who perished while crossing the Mediterranean, their bodies stacked in bags on the shores of Italy and the Greek islands. (Fig. 3)



Fig. 3 Poster for Bogusław Linda's 2016 Warsaw production

In the context of these humanitarian crises, the Creature's battered appearance and inadequate communication skills symbolise unwelcome otherness, and become a metaphor for the irreparable damage caused by rejection. In a verbal clash between De Lacey's children and the Creature, the play stages a drama of humiliation and social exclusion. When Agatha confronts him for the first time, she shouts: "What is IT?", tellingly stripping the Creature of all vestiges of humanity, only to follow this with abusive screams that point to his cadaverous nature: "*Ty ścierwo!*", which translates as "You, carcass!"

An act of unmitigated revenge features in one of the most controversial scenes in the play: the rape of Elisabeth. (Fig. 4) When the play premiered in March 2016, the memory of the horrific scenes of the 2015-2016 New Year's Eve celebrations, when sexual assaults and rapes were carried out on the streets of many German cities, was still vivid. The scene, which is a

significant intervention by Nick Dear into Mary Shelley's text, and which was retained in Linda's adaptation, is certainly not merely a gratuitous escalation of stage violence, but a poignant contribution to the debates on both the refugee crisis and the question of stricter sexual assault legislation.



Fig. 4 Katarzyna Zawadzka in *Frankenstein*. Courtesy of Teatr Syrena

***Frankenstein* and the Tourist Industry**

The above examples of the reception, reworking and various appropriations of *Frankenstein* demonstrate that the myth is alive and that the figure of the Creature, and perhaps also that of its creator, have secured a permanent place in current Polish cultural, and, to a lesser extent, literary consciousness. Associated with a merchandisable element of darkness and mystery, forbidden science and blasphemous creation, the story is recognisable and attractive for contemporary readers and viewers alike, and sells well in whatever form it is packaged.

That Frankenstein has become a saleable commodity is best evidenced in the marketing strategy developed in a historic border town in south-western Poland, nowadays called Ząbkowice Śląskie, but until 1945 known as none other than Frankenstein. Tapping into the potential offered by its former name, a surprising narrative concerning the supposed Polish roots of the novel has been developed by local people. A writer and regional historian, Jerzy Organiściak, claims that the direct inspiration for the novel and its title might have come from Mary Shelley's conversations with John Polidori, who, as a young doctor, had read much about various medical curiosities, and may have come across a story which occurred in this Silesian town of Frankenstein. (Lamparska)

In an item on his website entitled “A legend. Was Frankenstein the monster born in Ząbkowice?”, Organiściak quotes an article from *Neue Zeytung* published in Augsburg in January 1606, which reports that the town of Frankenstein had been decimated by the bubonic plague. When it had abated, the locals began to hunt for those whom they believed could have contributed to transmitting the disease. The chronicle *Annales Frankostenen* mentions eight local gravediggers who were held responsible for digging up infected corpses to produce a plague-ridden powder, which they then smeared on to door handles and knockers to guarantee a steady rise in the number of deaths in order to secure their own income. More bloodcurdling facts, such as ripping foetuses from the wombs of pregnant women and eating their hearts, surfaced during the investigation; however, as the report admits, these admissions might have been the result of torture during interrogation. In September 1606 the trial of the criminals and their accomplices culminated in the public execution of as many as seventeen people. The history of the unscrupulous gravediggers from Frankenstein became a local legend, and for centuries the town was notorious for its association with body snatching. (Organiściak) This story of the deadly consequences of meddling with matters of life and death might have been discussed during the famous conversations at Villa Diodati in the summer of 1816, and could have served as an inspiration for the novel.

Nowadays the town’s clever marketing strategy taps into possible connections with the most recognisable character of pop culture mythology. Local town council and cultural institutions capitalize on the marketing potential of its former name and cultivate Frankenstein’s gruesome past. Its tourist attractions include an underground museum which houses Doctor Frankenstein’s Laboratory, an annual event called “Monster’s Parade,” and “A Weekend with Frankenstein,” all accompanied by meetings with the authors of science fiction stories, showings of horror films, exhibitions, and concerts. On a local website this is advertised as featuring “realistic-fantastic events in an atmosphere of horror.” (“Weekend z Frankensteinem”) In the story of how this town is cleverly reinventing itself, relying on what is likely to be a fabricated, though intriguing, connection with Mary Shelley’s story, there is a discernible element of preying upon matters of life and death and a curious connection with Victor, for whom, similarly, dead matter dug up from graves was to secure fame and recognition for generations to come.

Rewritten, reworked and repeated countless times, Frankenstein, now a canonical text, a literary character, and a popular myth, recognisable and predictable, has inevitably become a staple of popular culture. But perhaps

this is how myths are inevitably bound to evolve. On the one hand, Frankenstein, as Victor's Creature is commonly identified, can be treated deadly seriously in political discourse when he serves as a timeless metaphor for the human condition and a medium to express political and social anxieties. On the other hand, because of his longevity, a degree of self-reflexivity and tongue-in-cheek-ness is unavoidably inscribed in his cultural presence and evolution. He can be frightening and thus have great metaphoric potential, but because he has also become a household name, he consequently risks losing his intellectual credibility in popular discourse. Repackaging, rebranding and recycling are now part of the economy of his hybrid nature and cultural existence. However, whatever its/his meaning and intellectual weight nowadays, one thing is certain, as the examples above illustrate: *Frankenstein* survives because, just like its fictional characters and its authoress, it is characterised by a peripatetic nature, in both a geographical and a temporal sense – Shelley's masterpiece is likely to continue to cross the boundaries of genre, culture, *époque* and interpretation for years to come.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

RAVAGES OF WAR: *FRANKENSTEIN IN BAGHDAD*

ANGIOLA CODACCI-PISANELLI

Frankenstein in Baghdad by Iraqi author Ahmed Saadawi is perhaps the latest literary tribute to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. It has certainly been the tribute most talked about by English-speaking readers during the last year. It appeared in Arabic in 2013 and was published in English in Jonathan Wright's translation in January 2018 and it has since collected a huge number of good reviews. Dwight Garner in the *New York Times* has described it as "funny and horrifying in a near-perfect admixture," and Sarah Perry in *The Guardian* as "an acute portrait of Middle Eastern sectarianism and geopolitical ineptitude, an absurdist morality fable, and a horror fantasy." Writing about the book before the English translation was published, Ursula Lindsay in the *New Yorker* said that "Saadawi sets out a reality that is so gothic in its details that, when the novel makes a turn to the supernatural, it barely shocks." A few days after the translation appeared, rumours of a Hollywood adaptation spread, linking the production of the movie-to-be to George Lucas' name. But what is so special about this book?

Frankenstein in Baghdad is set in the capital of Iraq in the years 2005-2006, during the American invasion, a time of turmoil and terrorism that preceded the outbreak of civil war. The novel centers on Hadi al-Attag, a junk peddler who, after having lost a very close friend in a terrorist attack, sets out to collect the body parts of victims of bombs and stitches them together to build a complete corpse:

The rest of the shed was dominated by a massive corpse – the body of a naked man, with viscous liquids, light in color, oozing from parts of it. There was only a little blood – some small dried patches on the arms and legs, and some grazes and bruises around the shoulders and neck. It was hard to say what color the skin was – it didn't have a uniform color.

(Saadawi 2018, 45)

After an attack, however, the soul of a victim enters the corpse and the creature comes to life. This new Frankenstein starts to move around in Baghdad, killing bad men. He looks for the people responsible for the attacks that caused the deaths of those who gave him the parts of his body. But soon enough a problem arises. After each attack is revenged, the part of the monster's body related to that killing decays and falls out:

One night I went home with my whole body riddled with bullets. It had been a fierce battle and a perilous chase, and I only just managed to get my hands around the neck of my target, a criminal who was supplying many of the armed gangs with dynamite and other explosives regardless of their ideological or political background. He was a merchant of death par excellence. [...] When I got up the next day, I found that many parts of my body were on the ground, and there was a strong smell of rot. [...] Over the next three hours, I lost my right thumb and three fingers from my left hand. My nose was disintegrating and large holes appeared on my body – my flesh was melting. (Saadawi 2018, 219-22)

This brings the monster to kill anybody he meets, and therefore more and more innocent people, only to get the new body parts he needs. He is no longer an enforcer who punishes criminals for their sins. He becomes an ordinary serial killer. And this takes him to a deep existential crisis:

The Whatsitsname was now at a loss for what to do. He knew his mission was essentially to kill, to kill new people every day, but he no longer had a clear idea who should be killed or why. The flesh of the innocents, of which he was initially composed, had been replaced by new flesh, that of his own victims and criminals. (Saadawi 2018, 294)

The police chase him while journalists set out to tell his story. The Iraqi Frankenstein decides then to tell his story himself and records it on a tape recorder. The monster's life becomes more and more difficult and the same happens to the city around him. The police finally announce the killer has been captured, but this does not bring peace to Baghdad. And the book closes just before the al-Askari mosque bombing, the attack at the most important Shia holy place that is seen as the true beginning of the civil war.

Readers around the world have known *Frankenstein in Baghdad* for some years now. Published in Arabic in 2013, after winning the most important prize for Arabic fiction in 2014, Saadawi's book has been translated into many languages: French, Italian, Chinese, Turkish, Hebrew, and Bosnian.

Arabic language scholars working in Great Britain and at international universities have already published papers on the novel. Bushra Juhi Jani from the University of Sheffield has linked Saadawi's monster to Julia Kristeva's "Abject," to moral pollution or "death infecting life" (Juhi Jani 2015, 321). Hani Elayyan from the American University of the Middle East, based in Kuwait, traces the book's inspiration back to Judith Butler's idea of the special terror that stems from "a precarious life in which sudden and violent death is always looming" (Elayyan 2017, 158).

Everywhere the book has received very good reviews and won prizes: in 2017 it was awarded the Grand Prix de l'Imaginaire in France, while in Italy a mention has gone to Barbara Teresi's translation for Edizioni E/O, who are today perhaps the most famous Italian publisher, being the publisher of Elena Ferrante's novels, and the sole guardian to her identity. Saadawi's novel in its English translation has been shortlisted for the Man Booker International Prize.

Ahmed Saadawi, the book's author, was born in 1973 in Baghdad, where he still lives. He works as a freelance journalist and as author of TV documentaries, but has also published short stories and three novels: *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is his latest. He was living in Baghdad, then, in the years when his book's story is set. This explains why the chronicles he tells are so vivid, and so dramatic. When Saadawi writes that "never in your life will you smell anything like the smell of smoke, plastic car seats and bodies burnt up together in an explosion," and that: "you wouldn't have smelled anything like it in your life and you would never forget it" (Saadawi 2018, 37), the reader can feel that he is not inventing, that he is writing about something he has experienced in real life.

Western readers have been fascinated by the book's mixture of realistic war chronicle elements and Gothic motifs, passing through quotations from all kinds of Hollywood monster movies. Saadawi is evidently fond of Western literature and cinema. The aim of this chapter, however, is to hint at some Arabic sources that give the book its unique depth and flavour.

The first Arabic literary source is hidden in the very birth of Saadawi's monster. As we all know, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* stems from a young doctor's desire to be able to dominate life – and this is the reason for the book's subtitle, *The Modern Prometheus*. This background remains the same in all the most famous variations on the theme of Mary Shelley's monster. But not in Saadawi's book. Hadi, the creature's "father," never hopes to snatch the power of life away from God. On the contrary, his aim

is pious: he wants to give a proper burial, according to Islamic religion, to corpses shattered by explosions. When his friend Nahim, who is almost a son to him, is killed in an attack, Hadi suffers because nothing is left of his body. Nahim's wife and children cannot mourn him at a funeral, they don't even have a grave to visit. That is why, after a new attack, Hadi sets out to put together the monstrous corpse: not to give it life, but to bury it properly.

"I wanted to hand him over to the forensics department, because it was a complete corpse that had been left in the streets like trash. It's a human being, guys, a person," he told them.

"But it wasn't a complete corpse. You made it complete," someone objected.

"I made it complete so it wouldn't be treated as trash, so it would be respected like other dead people and given a proper burial," Hadi explained. (Saadawi 2018, 46)

This pious desire takes us straight back to one of the most famous Arabic tales: "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" from the *Arabian Nights*. The first man to enter the enchanted cave, Ali Baba's greedy brother Kasim, is discovered by the thieves, killed, and cut into four pieces. His wife and his brother, with the help of the clever slave Morgiana, rescue the body parts from the cave, and have them sewn together by a blindfolded tailor so that they can give Kasim a proper funeral.

The roots of this story can be traced much further back, to a country that is now part of Muslim culture, in one of the founding myths of Ancient Egypt. Shortly after the creation of the world, the god Osiris is murdered by his younger brother Seth. Osiris's corpse is cut into fourteen pieces that are scattered up and down the Nile so that the crocodiles might eat them. But Isis – who was Osiris' sister and also his wife – painstakingly recovers all the pieces. Every time she finds a part of the shattered body she holds a funeral for it, so that finally Osiris's soul may have peace. One piece only she does not find: the genitals have already been eaten by animals in the river. Isis gathers the pieces together by magic, and by magic makes a new version of the missing member, so that Osiris is complete. Then, in two different versions of the myth, Osiris is either embalmed and properly buried or comes back to life. As one can see, both versions of the myth could be related to Saadawi's monster: he is created only to be buried, but then magically comes to life.

Saadawi's monster's story is more complicated than Osiris'. His body is made up of parts of different corpses: one could indeed define it as a sort of horrible *Arlecchino*. Harlequin's dress is made up of scraps of different fabric. In an interview given to *The New Arab* Saadawi has explained that the pieces of the monster's body have different colours because he wanted to show that they come from victims belonging to the different ethnic groups of Iraq. He has traced back this idea to the very inspiration of the book, that came to him "in a cold room of a hospital:"

I found there a man crying because his brother had died in a big attack. Families came to identify bodies of their relatives but this man couldn't find his brother. A male nurse told him to check in another room, reserved for body parts and flesh. He was asked to collect what he could find to compose an entire corpse. (Müller, 2018)

This is the horrible reality from which the book starts. But the passage from reality to novel is marked by many steps and many literary reminiscences and movie references. If you trust Saadawi's words, it was utterly natural to think about Mary Shelley's creature if you were living in Baghdad during the war:

There are many Frankensteins in Iraq. Everywhere. There is a story told in the Shia community. It is the story of a thief. He was taken to Imam Ali, who ordered his hand to be cut off. Once his hand was cut, the thief began crying, and read aloud a poem to praise Ali. His text shows love for his leader, who became an executioner. After that, Imam Ali collected the hand, severed on the ground, put his shawl over it, and read some holy words of the Quran. The hand was then returned to the arm of the thief. (Müller, 2018)

When the reader meets Hadi, he is loitering in a blood-smeared street after a terrorist attack, looking for the final part of his horror puzzle. All he needs is a nose:

The area where the nose should have been was badly disfigured, as if a wild animal had bitten a chunk out of it. Hadi opened the canvas sack and took out the thing. In recent days he had spent hours looking for one like it, yet he was still uneasy handling it. It was a fresh nose, still coated in congealed, dark red blood. His hand trembling, he positioned it in the black hole in the corpse's face. It was a perfect fit, as if the corpse had its own nose back.

Hadi withdrew his hand, wiped his fingers on his clothes, and looked at the face with some dissatisfaction, but his task was now finished. Actually, it wasn't quite finished: he had to sew the nose in place.

The nose was all the corpse needed to be complete, so now Hadi was finishing the job. (Saadawi, 2018, 45-6)

Bushra Jahi Jani has already linked this passage to Nikolai Gogol's famous short story "The Nose" (Jahi Jani 2015, 324). As we all know, the nose in this story has been considered a phallic symbol. Since Saadawi seems to know all the Hollywood movies about Frankenstein, the link between Gogol's nose and Saadawi's monster could be traced back to a famous joke in *Young Frankenstein*. When Doctor Frankenstein tells his assistant Inga that "for the experiment to be a success, all of the body parts must be enlarged," she comments: "His veins, his feet, his hands, his organs would all have to be increased in size." Then she looks shocked and adds, in pseudo-German: "He would have an enormous schwanzstucker."

Saadawi's Frankenstein is different in many ways from Mary Shelley's. In the novel the complex feeling that links Victor to "his" monster is often shown as if they were in some horrible way father and son. Saadawi's monster can barely be considered as Hadi's son. On the contrary, as Hani Elayyan has noticed, "unlike Frankenstein's monster, the Baghdadi monster has a mother" (2017, 161).

Baghdad's Frankenstein foster-mother is a bereft woman who 'adopts' him as her son as soon as she sees him. After twenty years, Elishva is still hoping for her son Daniel to come back from the Iraqi-Iranian war. Her daughter has moved to Australia with her husband and tries to convince her to move there but Elishva doesn't want to go: she doesn't want to leave her house unattended, in case Daniel returns. People in her neighborhood consider her mad but at the same time think that she is blessed with the power to protect the streets near her house from terrorist attacks. Elishva is a Christian woman and lives next to the Jewish ruins: another symbol of the complexity of Iraqi society before the civil war. When the monster escapes from Hadi's shed and seeks refuge in the woman's house, she is sure that her son Daniel has come back:

"Get up, Daniel," Elishva shouted. "Get up, Danny. Come along, my boy."

He stood up immediately. [...] With her words the old woman had animated this extraordinary composite – made up of disparate body parts and the soul of the hotel guard who had lost his life. The old woman brought him out of anonymity with the name she gave him: Daniel. [...] She didn't ask him anything – she had promised her patron saint that she wouldn't ask too many questions. All this time she had left her thick glasses dangling from her neck, but she still knew this man didn't look much like Daniel. No matter. Not many people came back looking the

same as when they left. “She had heard enough stories to explain the differences and the changes – stories “told by a succession of women ravaged by the effects of time and by the realization that they would never again see the missing faces they remembered so well. (Saadawi 2018, 83-5)

Elishva is not afraid of the monster, she is not shocked that he looks weird or silent, because so many soldiers have come back from the war either horribly shocked or shockingly changed. She cures his wounds, she feeds him, she dresses him with her son’s clothing: Elishva is one of the most important characters in the book, and she inspires some of its most beautiful pages.

Mary Shelley’s monster becomes a killer because he hates his creator. He kills Victor Frankenstein’s brother and wife because he wants to hurt him. In contrast to what we read in *The Economist’s* review, Saadawi’s monster has no similar score to settle with Hadi. He becomes a killer too, but one of a different kind: he is a killer with a mission, taking revenge for the people whom he borrowed body parts from. He only starts to kill innocent people when he has to hunt for the body parts that fall off. In doing this, Saadawi’s monster engages with themes that are popular in Hollywood movies. He starts as a member of the “Zombie Franchise,” which, as Indian scholar K.S. Arsch has noticed, owes much to Mary Shelley’s novel. He soon becomes a kind of superhero, revenging victims of violence and bringing justice where law and order cannot reach. This is a popular subject in American movies: the latest film on this theme is perhaps Roger Donaldson’s *Seeking Justice* (2011), starring Nicholas Cage. Iraqi police start investigating this serial killer, until a strange investigatory department takes the lead on the case: bursting with fortune-tellers, necromancers and magicians, this “Tracking and Pursuit Department” takes *Men in Black* alien-hunting strategies to a fantasy level:

Under the direct management of Brigadier Majid, [the Tracking and Pursuit Department] had employed several astrologers and fortune-tellers, on high salaries financed by the Iraqi treasury, not by the U.S. authorities. According to Brigadier Majid’s testimony, their only purpose was to make predictions about serious security incidents that might take place in Baghdad and surrounding areas. It is not clear to the committee to what extent these predictions helped avert security incidents or whether they had any practical benefits. (Saadawi 2018, 13)

When the monster finds himself forced to kill innocent people in order to stay alive, he finally becomes in a way a member of the popular “Vampire Franchise” too. All this makes Saadawi’s Frankenstein a very contemporary

monster. The author doesn't actually take as a model Mary Shelley's novel, but rather the entire Frankenstein *imaginarium* formed by two hundred years of novels, movies and cartoons. Mary Shelley's book is actually never mentioned: but there are references to "the De Niro movie," an allusion to the 1994 Kenneth Branagh movie starring Robert De Niro, *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*.

The Iraqi monster is only called "Frankenstein" in the final pages of the book, when a journalist, Mahmoud al-Sawadi, writes an article about "Urban Legends from the Streets of Iraq" (387-9). In Arabic the monster is called "Shesma", the name Hadi gives him, a word translated into English as "Whatsitsname:"

He [Brigadier Majid] didn't want to tell Mahmoud that the Whatsitsname he had written about – the Frankenstein's monster in his article – was not fantasy but a real person, or that he had spent most of his time for the last several months trying to have him arrested, or that his personal life and his professional future were riding on this strange man, or that he was trying to dispel the aura of mystery with which the man surrounded himself, or that he had sworn to grab him with his own hands and expose him on television so the whole world could see he was nothing more than a useless, despicable, lowly person who had made himself. (Saadawi 2018, 250)

The reason why the monster has no proper name is explained by Saadawi in the interview with *The New Arab*:

"Before, an Iraqi could wonder: who am I? Am I an Iraqi, a Kurd, a Turkmen, a Christian, a Sunni, a Shia? If your personality was different, people made of you an enemy," says Saadawi, refusing to incriminate neither communities, nor political figures.

The bloody misfortune of Iraq belongs to the responsibility of every Iraqi citizen and their ignorance about each other. This dangerous unknown, he says, is symbolised by the character of "Without Name" (Müller 2018).

Another important difference between model and homage is how life gets into the monster. Mary Shelley was inspired by electricity – a theme that has been studied by many authors, lately in Italy by Marco Ciardi and Pier Luigi Gaspa. One would expect Saadawi to turn to modern technologies or to science fiction. On the contrary, he gets back to Middle Eastern traditions. *In exergo*, the author quotes a Christian tale about Saint George, Elishva's favourite Saint: George is chained to a wheel covered by swords so that his body is slain, but the Lord gets the pieces together, heals the body and resurrects the saint.

But this is a miracle, an exception. Ordinary people in the Arabic world have a simpler fate. In one of the first chapters of the book, the displaced soul that will end up in the monster's body wanders in the city. In Najaf's cemetery this soul, that of Hasib Mohamed Jaafar, a twenty-one-year old man who has just been "killed in an explosion caused by a Sudanese suicide bomber driving a dynamite-laden garbage truck stolen from the Baghdad municipality" (57), meets a young man sitting on a tombstone. This young man's portrait is so vivid that it definitely seems a life study, a homage to an author's friend. Saadawi describes him as "a teenager in a red T-shirt, with silver bangles on his wrists and a necklace of black fabric [...] sitting cross-legged on a raised grave" (61): to the Western reader he looks like an Arabic Peter Pan. The young man tells the confused soul that, after the body is dead, souls are free to wander for some days, before the body begins to decompose. This is because

sometimes the soul leaves the body and you die, but then the Angel of Death changes his mind or corrects the mistake he has made, and the soul goes back inside its body. Then God commands the body to rise from the dead. In other words, the soul is like the fuel in a car. It takes a spark to ignite it. (Saadawi 2018, 62)

But if a soul doesn't find his body when it's time to get back to it, the boy says, "things are going to end badly" (Saadawi 2018, 63). Hasib's soul then begins wandering again. His body, destroyed by the explosion, is nowhere to be found. Then he finds Hadi's creature, and it looks as if it were waiting for him: "He lodged inside the corpse, filling it from head to toe," Saadawi writes, "because probably, he realized then, it didn't have a soul, while he was a soul without a body" (Saadawi 2018, 64).

Other links to Arabic tradition are not so evident, but they are sure to be there: I am looking forward to Arabic literature scholars investigations of them. Then we shall have a clear view of the unique mixture of Western and Arabic themes that make this book so fascinating. We must remember that in the *Arabian Nights* there is a continuous coming and going from the world of the dead and back. It is difficult for a Western reader to imagine how strong the influence of these tales is, even nowadays. In Middle Eastern cities they are still told in marketplaces by storytellers: and Hadi is himself a storyteller. He tells stories to the customers in Aziz the Egyptian's cafe. He is a very successful storyteller, and he knows how to make his stories more compelling by keeping them linked to reality. It is the same ability that the reader finds in Saadawi's novel.

To make the stories he told more interesting, Hadi was careful to include realistic details. He remembered all the details of the things that happened to him and included them every time he recounted his experiences. (Saadawi 2018, 20)

But then one day Hadi starts to tell the customers in the bar about his “Shesma,” and the story of this bloodthirsty “Frankenstein in Baghdad” is so strange that nobody in Aziz’s cafe can believe it is true.

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PART THREE
VISUAL FRANKENSTEIN

INTRODUCTION

ALESSANDRO SCARSELLA

The latent visual and iconographic features informing the genesis of *Frankenstein* have been brought to light both in the reception of the novel and in its numerous adaptations and rewritings. Exploring the complex relationship between *moulages*, science, superstition and *Frankenstein*, Jennifer Debie sheds light on a world of wax hidden in *Frankenstein*. Eternal, beautiful, and undamaged despite dissection and re-dissection through the ages, the *moulages* (wax models) of European medical schools have been tied to art and science since the Enlightenment. When Mary Shelley recorded seeing Clemente Susini's Anatomical Venus and her sisters in Florence in 1820, such reclining ladies had long been exhibited there, scandalizing British visitors for decades. Even before their use as anatomical instruments, wax models were symbolically used as tools for healing – reproductions of afflicted limbs were hung in churches in the hope they would heal physical ailments, something Mary Shelley noted in her *History of a Six Weeks Tour*. But the uncanny character of the wax masks highlights the relationship between representation of the body as a simulacrum and the effects of achieving that visual dimension.

The parodistic assumptions inherent in this dialectic would be developed in Mel Brooks' masterpiece, *Young Frankenstein* (1974) which, in Michela Vanon Alliata's interpretation, consolidates their effectiveness as a rewriting that takes the contents of the novel and of the Universal films to their extreme, presenting itself as something more than a comic parody. Mel Brooks' attention to the theme of the double and to the play on language makes *Young Frankenstein* an object of remarkable intellectual provocation that is susceptible to psychoanalytic interpretation.

In Gilles Menegaldo's reading of the film *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994), which was produced by Francis Ford Coppola, British director Kenneth Branagh returns to the romantic sources of the narration twenty years later, paying homage to Mary Shelley in the prologue and restoring the narrative framework of the explorer, Walton. Visually the film's images celebrate the sublime polar and alpine landscapes. Branagh restores many scenes from the novel (while adding others) and recreates

its historical and cultural context, reclaiming the themes of childhood and family. The differences from the novel are nevertheless important, particularly with regard to the external focus upon the Creature, notably in the ice cave scene, but also to the re-imagined episode of the creation of the Bride, and finally the representation of science and the implications of transgressing the limits of knowledge. Branagh gives the word back to the monster and explores the relationship between the innate and the acquired. The film insists on the importance of memory in the constitution of identity, and highlights the incestuous subtext through the brother/sister relationship as well as in the relationship between the father and Elizabeth. A similar initial attention for Mary Shelley, author and conflicting character, is highlighted by Beatriz and Fernando Moreno who analyse the edition of *Frankenstein* illustrated by Elena Odriozola, and published in 2013. This version became important for two main reasons: on the one hand, because the illustrator was a woman; on the other, because it does not focus on the key moments of the text that are traditionally represented, but rather on Mary Shelley's preface to the 1831 edition and her personal experience during the creation/writing of the novel. Within the entire tradition of American illustrators, for the most part male (Carbé, Ward, Everett, Moser, Wrightson, etc.) who tackled the novel by moving away from stereotypes and simplifications, Odriozola is positioned along the path opened out by Broutin in 1968 and Marcia Huyette in 1977. Huyette was the first woman to illustrate *Frankenstein*, and Odriozola the first to exclusively illustrate the 1831 "Preface" by treating it as a mythical narrative linked to the theme of birth, which in turn establishes a feminist perspective.

Psychoanalytic and gender elements are also found in the most recent adaptation of the story of Frankenstein in *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016), a British-American television series created by John Logan and analysed here by Greta Colombani. Starting from the duplicity of man and non-man in the personality of the monster, Logan explores and further develops this theme by making Frankenstein and the Creature overlap. Most interesting is that the absence of Victor's family coincides with a tripling in the number of his creatures, including a female one, for whom he eventually develops the same desire as his firstborn, and who replaces the novel's Elizabeth. Frankenstein is not only defined as a "monster" and a "demon" like his Creature, but also shares his profound isolation and desire for companionship. Finally, thanks to the insertion of a theatrical setting, the Creature has been represented as an eternal subject of "perpetual resurrection" and rewriting in literature, and in transpositions to cinema, a television series and video games.

As Jon Garrad demonstrates, by rewriting myths and stereotypes in video games, the player or players adopt a point of view similar to the Creature's, as an avatar and as a central character pursuing this playful itinerary. The adaptation of the literary work is always more indirect, although the narrative and the methods of transferal manage to evoke a similar way of "feeling" and "reliving" the plot. The essays published in this third section confirm the primacy of the visual factor in the transmission of the imaginary icons present in the source, and in the plot of the novel. Indeed they are part of it, even when the reader's point of view and the questions asked by the public seem to set new priorities for reusing the text, and invoke new ideological perspectives that are partly incompatible with the romantic context of the original narration.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

HANDMADE: *FRANKENSTEIN* AND EUROPE'S WAXWORKS

JENNIFER DEBIE

From the funerary rites of ancient Romans to the drawing room experiments of London's 19th century elite, wax has long been equated with human flesh. By the early 19th century a variety of wax figures depicting humans, both whole and partial, were common across Europe, woven into the fabric of tangled religious beliefs and scientific study. Mary Shelley viewed and actively engaged with wax figures throughout her career as a reader, writer, and general traveler across Europe in the early decades of the 19th century. Even though *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*, her first novel and arguably her work that is most enmeshed in contemporary debates concerning the roles of religion, science, and entertainment does not mention wax figures explicitly, careful examination of the text and engagement with her reading at the time and subsequent writing reveals myriad connections between various wax figures and the *Frankenstein* text.

To my knowledge, the first time Mary Shelley mentions wax figures in her writing is in her 1817 *History of a Six Weeks Tour*, a travelogue of her 1814 honeymoon across Europe with Percy Shelley and Claire Clairmont. While at Lake Lucerne, she recounts seeing "the figure of a saint in wretched waxwork," one of many scattered among the rocks that make up the lake's islands (Shelley 1817, 61). There are three primary forms, or categories, of wax figures that this essay will touch on; since the first to be mentioned by Mary Shelley herself are the figures of saints, the 18th and 19th century religious significance of waxworks will be the first we explore here. Waxen figures of saints adorned cathedrals and chapels alike, often donated by the pious in exchange for, or in recognition of, divine favor. To leave these figures of waxen saints, whether within a place of worship or outside it, for all the world to see was a sign of devotion, though these

were not the only wax figures having religious connotations at this time. Another form of wax figure, *ex voto* offerings, was common in catholic centers of worship. Votive offerings were:

[a] custom, [whereby] any person was afflicted in the arm or leg, [sent] a representation of the limb affected to some church [...] hoping that the saint to whom it might be dedicated would effect a cure or intercede with a higher power to restore the member to its pristine vigour. (Tussaud 1838, 24-25)

The author of this excerpt is the infamous Madame Tussaud, whose particular brand of entertainment for the masses, and the shadows of her waxworks on the *Frankenstein* text, will be described later in this chapter. First, we shall focus on those segments of waxen bodies that were scattered throughout cathedrals across Europe while Mary Shelley was traveling and conceiving *Frankenstein*.

Votive practice dates back centuries and was still prominent, though dying out, by the time Mary Shelley first toured Europe in the early 19th century. Doctor John Polidori, Lord Byron's travelling companion in the summer of 1816, makes note of votive offerings in his *Diary*, describing them as "silver representations, very small, of bad limbs etc., offered by the devout" (Polidori 1922, 49). These silvered votive offerings, more potent options than their waxen counterparts for those who could afford them, appear in Mary Shelley's later novel *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*, when a "silver heart [...] suspended near the altar" of Winchester Cathedral becomes a signal for a clandestine meeting (Shelley 2001, 44). Polidori's particular notice of votive offerings just weeks before meeting Mary Shelley, and her pointed inclusion of them in her 1830 novel shows a distinct knowledge of, and demonstrates a possible interest in, these medical and religious curiosities; this in turn leads to the conflation of science and sacrilege that is Frankenstein's creature.

Frankenstein dreams of his creature as being the first of "A new species [that] would bless me as its creator and source" (Shelley 2008, 36). Frankenstein believes himself to be more than a saint, a god, assembling his creation from imperfect segments gathered in "The dissecting room and the slaughterhouse" (Shelley 2008, 37). Blinded by his own ambition, Frankenstein does not recognize the conglomerate being he is working on as hideous until after the experiment is complete and his "workshop of filthy creation" becomes an unholy birthing chamber (Shelley 2008, 36). Like the devout offering votives to their preferred saints, Frankenstein sought to perfect his creature by assembling disparate but proportionate

limbs and “features selected as beautiful” (Shelley 2007, 39). A votive offering practitioner might desire a healed leg, and thus offer a bad leg to their saint in exchange for this divine favor. Frankenstein desired an entire human, or its equivalent, and thus offered a patchwork of dead limbs, organs and tissues scavenged from the mortuary and abattoir alike on the altar of his own divinity, and is rewarded with a monstrous son and the attendant tragedies of the rest of the narrative.

With votive offering practice we not only see attempts at human perfection through divine intervention, we also see the human body as a physical, moldable craftwork, something Frankenstein implicitly agrees with by undertaking his studies. Even before “discovering the cause of generation and life” that led to the construction of his creature, Frankenstein notes that what “peculiarly attracted [his] attention [in his studies] was the structure of the human frame;” this shows a perception of humans as modularly constructible that predates his expressed desire to construct a human (Shelley 2008, 34 and 33). Frankenstein's desire to construct a complete human follows the next step in the evolution of 18th century wax figures: the creation of full human forms meant to serve medical purposes. Unlike the waxen saints, which were likewise full human forms and could be life-sized, these waxen cadavers were variously designed to serve as tools for educating students and the public alike, and were most famously exhibited in the Gabinetto di Fisica (Cabinet of Physics) in Florence, Italy.

Following the increased demand for votive offerings because of plague in the 17th century, Florence grew as an important hub for the trade in waxen representations, with workshops solely devoted to votive production coming into existence and being sustained into the 18th century (Ebenstein 2016, 88). Generations of waxworkers in Florence devoted their lives to crafting the human form in wax, meaning that when in the late 18th century Felice Fontana, the court physician to Grand Duke Leopold II of Florence, set out to create an “encyclopaedia of the human body in wax” there were craftsmen available with experience, albeit on a smaller scale, in handling the combination of morgue work and artistry necessary for such a task (Ebenstein 2016, 28). I do not use the word *artistry* by chance here, because the productions of Fontana's project were then, and are to this day, works of art. Where Frankenstein's toil with crafting a body reduces him to something akin to “one doomed by slavery to toil in the mines [...rather] than an artist occupied by his favourite employment” (Shelley 2008, 38), and thus implicitly foreshadows the creature's ugliness before explicitly recognizing it, the anatomical Venuses still displayed in

Florence remain artifacts of human beauty as well as macabre relics of a bygone era in medical study.

The 18th century saw wider recognition of the importance of corpse dissection in medical communities, but most students across Europe continued primarily to study sets of anatomical drawings rather than the extensive cadaver study still requisite in medical schools today. These diagrams, some of them hundreds of years old, were problematic for many reasons: limited by their inherent two-dimensionality, inaccurate in some instances and incomplete in others (Simoni 2009, 382). Cadaver study, likewise, could be problematic above and beyond societal disgust with the practice; a dearth of human corpses for dissection left anatomists dissecting animals in a practice called comparative anatomy and making assumptions about parallels between the animal carcass and the human interior (Marshall 1995, 71). Specimens could be preserved in jars of fluid for later study, but by being drained of blood these examples also lost their color, becoming ghostly masses of tissue distorted through glass and by liquid and light refraction. In this world of imperfect images for medical study, the Florentine anatomical waxes were revolutionary. Created through collaboration between anatomists and artists, the full-sized wax figures, known as the Venuses for their exterior beauty and a posture reminiscent of classical portrayals of the goddess, were comparable to today's advanced imaging software. Through their very nature as three-dimensional objects, the Venuses allowed students to more accurately understand the positions of, and relations between, organs and processes. In addition to this, the Venuses were lacquered wax, and thus fragile, but not prone to the putrefaction or corruption experienced by almost all anatomical preparations.

There are two species, for lack of a better term, of anatomical Venus housed in what Mary Shelley knew as the *Gabinetto di Fisica* and visitors today would call *La Specola* in Florence. Joanna Ebenstein describes them as the “demountable Venuses” and the “dissected Graces” (Ebenstein 2016, 32). The Graces are static: female figures resplendent in carefully coifed hair and with fine features, who have also been cleft from breastbone to pelvic saddle, their inner organs exposed for observation, though not for tactile exploration. The Graces are opened and arranged at various stages of dissection, highlighting specific organs or organ systems to allow students and the public alike to study these processes in relative isolation. Demountable Venuses, on the other hand, are designed for repeat dissections. Fredric Leopold, Count Stolberg, viewed the dissection

of a demountable Venus at a Milanese university and described it in great detail, saying:

Under a glass cover [...] there is a beautiful female figure, in wax [...] the size of life. Surprised as we were, at the workmanship of the external parts, how much more fearfully were astonished, and how was our curiosity excited, when, after removing successively the outward membranes of the body, which are in different divisions, the entire internal structure of a pregnant woman was exhibited! (Stolberg 1802, 420-421)

Stolberg's account was translated by Thomas Holcroft and published in English in 1802, the same year Holcroft returned from an extended stay in Germany and entered the early days of a steady falling out with William Godwin, Mary Shelley's father, that would culminate in a total severance of the friendship in 1805. (St. Clair 1989, 276-278). Tensions between Holcroft and Godwin aside, it is reasonable to assume that the content of Holcroft's massive project, four volumes each running to over 400 pages, would have been a topic of discussion in the Godwin household while Mary was a child.

In addition to it being likely that she read Stolberg's description, Mary Shelley actually viewed the Florentine anatomical waxes herself, recording "go to the Gabinetto di fisica" in her *Journals* in January, 1820 (Shelley 1995, 306). Though Shelley does not describe her impressions in detail, the fact that she recorded the excursion at all is potentially telling. Mary Shelley was well aware that private writings did not necessarily stay private and she could be notoriously cagey in her record keeping. That she recorded entering the notorious museum where the "awful region, which should be sacred to men of science is open to all" and "the very apartment where the gravid uterus and its processes lie unveiled is a favourite lounge of the ladies," perhaps indicates a certain degree of comfort with, or interest in, the wax figures housed there (Forsyth 1816, 56). This said, Mary Shelley read Forsyth's scandalized account the year before choosing to view the waxes in person, leading to the possibility that the museum's notoriety was a draw rather than a distraction. Lord Byron viewed a similar demountable Venus at the University of Bologna in 1817 and in the weeks following his encounter with the *faux* cadaver, sent multiple letters gleefully describing "many models of [anatomy] in waxwork – some of them not the most decent" (Byron 1976, 231). We do not have records of Byron communicating his enthusiasm for naked, dissectible women in letters to the Shelleys but, like the Shelleys, Byron read extensively and could have known about or even seen anatomical waxes well before this excursion to Bologna.

All of this evidence means it is very likely that Mary Shelley knew about the wax Venuses while writing *Frankenstein*, and their shadows can be found in the construction, or rather deconstruction, of the female creature. Like both creatures, the Venuses could only be constructed after the dissection of numerous human cadavers. While we do not know exactly how many bodies Frankenstein rifled to supply his creations, the archives at La Specola show that “astoundingly over two hundred” dissected cadavers, “or parts of a corpse were necessary to make a wax model” (von Düring, 2014, 13). Thus, the anatomical Venuses collectively become the beautiful conglomerate cousins to Frankenstein’s creations; even their hair is just as shining and carefully selected as the creature’s “lustrous black, and flowing” mane (Shelley 2008, 39).

However, it is in the demountable Venus that we find the most open parallels with the deconstructed female creature. Nearing the end of his second project, Frankenstein grows to fear the consequences of creating a female. One of these fears is that her presence and the “sympathies” between his two creatures would lead to offspring and thus “a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth” (Shelley 2008, 138). Fear overtakes the scientist and he tears “to pieces the thing on which [he] was engaged” (Shelley 2008, 139). Later, when returning to clean his workshop and dispose of the evidence of his work, Frankenstein sees “The remains of the half-finished creature [...] scattered on the floor, and I *almost* felt as if I had mangled the living flesh of a human being” (Shelley 2008, 142; emphasis added). Laying aside the irony, Frankenstein has mangled the flesh of several humans in the pursuit of this project, whilst the female creature is reduced to a thing, an *almost* human. Neither the female creature, nor the demountable Venuses, has agency. They are designed to be taken apart by men of science, endlessly dissected and destroyed by students and experimentalists alike. Like the Venuses, whose beauty was intended to detach and distract from the horror of their repeated dissections, the female creature is an inherent, inhuman *other*. Her destruction can only be mourned by the Creature, a fellow assembled being, rather than her creator, who only views her as “a modular collection of organs, muscles, ducts, cavities and tissues” (Simoni 2009, 382).

Finally, we come to the reason Frankenstein tears his female to pieces in the first place. He passes through multiple justifications, notably fear that her temperament will not be amiable, despite his Creature’s assurances to the contrary. He furthermore fears that the two beings will be repulsed by each other physically, or that she might “turn with disgust from [the Creature] to the superior beauty of man” (Shelley 2008, 138). This fear of

the female's sexuality leads to the fears of propagation previously mentioned, and here Frankenstein dwells on this for several sentences before shredding the incomplete female. In his imagination, the coupling of a single breeding pair gives rise to a wave of descendants "who might make the very existence [...] of man a condition precarious and full of terror" (Shelley 2008, 138)

This seems a gross overreaction given what we know today about the difficulties of recuperating endangered species, but makes more sense if the female creature is truly an allegory for the demountable Venus. Stolberg's account of the demountable Venus dissection he witnessed is specific: he views "the entire internal structure of a *pregnant* woman" (Stolberg 1802, 421; emphasis added). The demountable Venuses created at Fontana's direction intentionally invoked "the Mater gravida [...] – in which a pregnant Mary was shown with the baby Jesus visible [...] through a door or cutaway" in her womb (Ebenstein 2017, 36). Thus, the demountable Venuses were perpetually pregnant with a near-grown fetus waiting in their uteruses. Likewise, maternal mortality rates in the 18th and 19th centuries meant that logically Frankenstein harvested the corpses of young pregnant women while searching for raw materials for his female (Cody 2005, 41). Mary Shelley's difficult birth, and the dangers she experienced during her own pregnancies, meant that she knew at first-hand how deadly giving birth could be. If Frankenstein was raiding the graves of victims of maternal mortality, then the female creature was constructed of human women with known libido and fertility, making his fears for a "race of devils" that would threaten "the existence of the whole human race" (Shelley 2008, 138) less far-fetched than they appeared at first blush.

The woman who would come to be known the world over as Madame Tussaud was born Marie Grosholtz. In the mid-1760s her mother's employer, a Dr. Philippe Curtius who had a talent for molding wax likenesses, caught the eye of the Prince de Conti and was subsequently invited to Paris under royal patronage. Curtius took his housemaid and her young daughter with him in the move, soon recognizing an aptitude for waxworks in the child and making her his adoptive niece and *protégée*. For the purposes of this essay, it is important to note that Curtius' Parisian exhibit, and the exhibition Marie would travel with in England after the turn of the century, consisted of two distinct sections. The main exhibit displayed notable faces and figures of the day, where the public could view life and death masks of royalty, philosophers, and revolutionary heroes. The other room, La Caverne des Grands Voleurs or the Cave of Thieves, was devoted to the gruesome. In this chamber, Curtius and his

protégée modeled their figures of known criminals of the day, their features cast either in the days before execution or quickly after, and displayed by showing the punishments said criminals were sentenced to for their trespasses. In his 1804 *Travels*, Thomas Holcroft described this separate room as:

darker than twilight and partitioned off to resemble cells. The malefactors were put in different attitudes; sitting, standing, and lying, each in straw, not the cleanest, and loaded with chains. The effect was [...] oppressive; and yet was produced by something like contemptible means: for these heroes were [...] nothing but stuffed manikins; stuffed dresses [...] with wax rudely modeled. (Holcroft 1804, 209)

The image of a man “rudely modeled,” and a poor craftsman’s failed attempt at art, calls to mind Frankenstein’s Creature, but more than that we have the shadowed jail cells that, likewise, echo through the *Frankenstein* text. When Frankenstein and his cousin Elizabeth visit their servant Justine in her prison cell, they find her “sitting on some straw at the further end [of the jail]; her hands were manacled, and her head rested on her knees” (Shelley 2008, 65). Justine is innocent and yet will be condemned to death for the murder she did not commit. While Elizabeth engages with the prisoner, weeping with her and professing belief in Justine’s innocence, Frankenstein “retire[s] to a corner of the prison-room” and does not speak (Shelley 2008, 67). Even after Justine directly addresses him, it is Elizabeth who speaks for her cousin. The tableau created by the two women in the cell is self-contained, Frankenstein is unable to speak aloud and thus intrude even when invited to do so. Like a visitor to Curtius’, and later Tussaud’s, exhibit, Frankenstein can only watch and be horrified by the plight of a woman condemned to die. Later, when Frankenstein himself is jailed for a murder he likewise did not commit, he finds himself “stretched on a wretched bed, surrounded by gaolers, turnkeys, bolts, and all the miserable apparatus of a dungeon” (Shelley 2008, 149). Moreover, prior to this awakening he lay “for two months on the point of death” (Shelley 2008, 148). This is two months of being viewed by an unspecified number of gaolers and turnkeys, at least one woman hired to nurse him, Mr. Kirwin, the magistrate who adjudicates the initial questioning after Clerval’s murder, and eventually Frankenstein’s father, summoned to collect his son. Thus, rather than being the voyeur in a jail cell tableau, Frankenstein becomes the object of it, he becomes the cautionary tale for those who pass by his cell to view the malefactor caged within its “barred windows, and wretched” space (Shelley 2008, 152).

In 1802 Madame Tussaud left her husband and second son to travel to England with her waxes and her elder son, and there seek her fortune in a country “which has always proved a safe and hospitable retreat to the foreigner” (Tussaud 1838, 505). She and her exhibit remained in London for a few years, during Mary Shelley's childhood, before touring the British Isles to wide acclaim. Tantalizingly, William Godwin's journal notes several excursions to *exhibitions*, as the Tussaud waxes were then billed, while Tussaud remained in London, but as prolific a diarist as Godwin was, he was not a detailed one (Godwin, 2010). As with Mary Shelley and the anatomical waxes, we can only guess that one of these outings could have been to view these imported, French curiosities. Their nature as French could also prove a connection between the Godwin household and Madame Tussaud's creations. Mary Jane Clairmont Godwin, the second Mrs. Godwin, was a woman who purposefully muddled her past while she was alive, and those details remain murky to this day. What we do know is that she spoke fluent French, “had close connection with the French émigré community” and that the Godwin's home, the Polygon in Somers Town, was a neighborhood widely populated by French transplants (St. Clair 1989, 242). Madame Tussaud had lived in a very visible home in Paris, in her youth Voltaire and Rousseau were known to argue over her adoptive uncle's dinner table, she herself spent almost a decade in the royal household as Princess Elizabeth's waxwork instructor, and when the Bastille fell in 1789 she was among the first to tour it, in a party with Robespierre (Tussaud 1838 10, 21, 96). Even if Madame Tussaud's face was not as familiar as those she crafted in wax, it is difficult to believe that such a woman would have gone unremarked upon in the *émigré* community that swirled around the Godwin home.

Despite substantial evidence of interest in and connections to various European ceroplastics, Mary Shelley never uses the words *wax figure* in the *Frankenstein* text. However, the central concept of *Frankenstein*, a constructed man, alone suggests an interest in and knowledge of these manufactured people. Further analysis of her reading, personal connections, and experiences as documented by private documents shows that Shelley had ample opportunity to learn about and engage with the various categories of wax figures that dotted the European continent. The piecing together of the initial creature and his subsequent awakening stands as a sacrilegious mockery of votive offering pleas for healing. Shadows of the modular nature of the demountable Venus lurk in the destruction of the female creature, just as echoes of Curtius and Tussaud's Cave of Thieves can be heard in the two prison scenes in the *Frankenstein*

narrative. Mary Shelley never explicitly mentions wax figures in the *Frankenstein* text but that does not mean she was unaware of their presence and their prominence on the knotted map of European religion, science, and entertainment.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE USES OF PARODY AND THE PRACTICE OF LAUGHTER IN MEL BROOKS' *YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN*

MICHELA VANON ALLIATA

In the introduction to *The Story of the Making of the Film*, the wildly successful spoof *Young Frankenstein* (1974), legendary director and actor Mel Brooks, remembers that he was five years old when James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931) came out and that it was his older brother Bernie who took him to see it.

I was so grateful to cinema for opening up worlds that were not open to me as a poor Jewish kid from Brooklyn. [...] My father had died of tuberculosis when he was only thirty-four and I was two. And there was Mama, thirty years old, with four little boys. Bernie said, 'I am going to see *Frankenstein*, maybe he will get scared.' My mother said, 'I don't care! Take him.' So Bernie took me, and that movie scared the hell out of me. I was really terrified. [...]

More than forty years later, when I was a little less scared, Whale's movies would inspire me and my friend and collaborator Gene Wilder to make *Young Frankenstein*. (Brooks 2016, 9, 10, 14)

Born Melvin James Kaminsky in 1926 to a Polish and Russian Jewish family, in Brooklyn, New York, in a ghetto-like district where many immigrants, fleeing the pogroms that swept eastern Europe, had settled in overcrowded dwellings,¹ Brooks' artistic sensibility has largely been shaped by his sense of being, as a Jew, an outsider in mainstream

¹ Located on the eastern edge of Brooklyn, Brownsville "which became known as the Jerusalem of America was a densely-filled slum with oppressive tenement dwellings, sweatshops [...] and over 70 synagogues, generally lacking paved streets or proper sewage system" (Parish 2007, 15).

American society.² A short and sickly child, often ridiculed by his peers, Brooks, in recalling his almost Dickensian childhood, makes an important statement which is pertinent to a discussion of parody: “You have to really know a genre to make fun of it, and to really know it, you have to love it” (Brooks 2016, 9).

Defined by the dictionary as “a work in which the style of an author or work is closely imitated for comic effect or in ridicule,” parody is an old and versatile form employed in literature since ancient Greece and in all kinds of media.³ Because it necessarily includes comment on the source work, parody is therefore highly, if not radically intertextual. Its understanding requires a knowledge of the conventions, styles and registers it ironically or humorously deconstructs and challenges. Linda Hutcheon persuasively argues that parody is “a sophisticated genre in the demands it makes on its practitioners and its interpreters” (Hutcheon 1985, 33). Unlike pastiche, which stresses “similarity rather than difference,” parody resembles metaphor. Both require that the decoder construct a second meaning through inferences about surface statements, and supplement the foreground with acknowledgement and knowledge of a background context (Hutcheon 1985, 33-34). To put it briefly, parody is a self-conscious and self-reflexive practice that involves the intention of the artist in the encoding, as well as the interpretative activity of the reader in the decoding. Gérard Genette, one of the major theorists of parody, along with Hutcheon and Margaret Rose, in *Palimpsests*, originally published in France in 1982, discusses parody and its related literary modes – burlesque, imitation, pastiche, satire, and travesty – as one form of hypertextuality, and limits the term to a playful transformation of a hypotext by its hypertext. This practice, which includes and informs all literary genres, is according to Genette “any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call this the *hypotext*) upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary” (Genette 1997, 5).

² “My comedy comes from the feeling that, as a Jew, and as a person, you don’t fit into the mainstream of American society. It comes from the realization that even though you’re better and smarter, you’ll never belong” (Parish, 3).

³ Of the mock-heroic, a form related to parody, which applies the idiom of epic poetry to everyday or ‘low’ subjects, to comic effect, the *Batrachomyomachia*, or *Battle of the Frogs and Mice*, is the earliest survivor of the genre (Dentith 2000, 10).

In contrast with Genette, Hutcheon argues that parody, a practice “usually considered central to postmodernism, both by its detractors and defenders” (Hutcheon 1989, 89), is “a form of imitation, but imitation characterised by ironic inversion,” or, in another formulation, as “repetition with difference” (Hutcheon 1985, 6). She also contends that parody, and especially modern and postmodern parodic art, does not necessarily involve comic elements and that it is wrong to define parody by its polemical relation to the parodied text, the hypotext in Genette’s terms, since many contemporary works do not have that polemical edge to them.⁴ In her wide-ranging study *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern*, Margaret A. Rose, while praising Hutcheon for having elevated parody from the “negative and one-dimensional form of ridicule with which the modern definition of parody as burlesque has been associated” to the higher status it deserves (Rose 1993, 238), questions Hutcheon’s failure to stress the comic character of parody, which in her view constitutes the essence of all laughter and humour. Discussing the genre as a form of metafiction, Rose claims that parody cannot be divorced from comicality. Since its ultimate aim is mockery, modern parody can and should comprise at the same time both comic elements, which she views as crucial, and inter-textual and/or meta-fictional elements.

Though helpful to an extent, these various accounts do not correspond entirely to the way in which parody operates in *Young Frankenstein*, primarily because the tone is always outlandishly comic – parody is never aligned with satire – but especially because of the freedom with which Brooks treats the original text, ranging from mockery to respectful admiration. Relying as it does on irony and low comedy, parody here seems closely related to the modern notion of the burlesque, an umbrella term employed by John D. Jump to describe different kinds of humorous imitation. Originating in the Italian *burla*, a joke or a trick, burlesque, which is always defined as “low” in some sense, is understood as the comic imitation of a serious artistic work that depends on an extravagant incongruity between a subject and its treatment.

The Ultimate Story about Man Playing God

After serving in the U.S. Army during World War II, Mel Brooks began his career as a stand-up comic at resorts in the Catskills and, “like so many

⁴ In this connection, Dentith suggests that parody “includes any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice” (Dentith 2000, 9).

other comedians of his era, he became famous on TV,” writing for numerous variety shows. (Parish 2007, 15) He entered the motion picture industry in 1963 with the Oscar-winning animated short *The Critic* (1963), a witty lampoon of avant-garde art-films. In the next decade he cemented his reputation as Hollywood’s foremost exponent of hilarious comedy with *The Producers* (1967), based on his experiences working with Broadway executives, and *Blazing Saddles* (1974), a burlesque of the western genre, starring Gene Wilder and introducing Madeline Kahn and Harvey Korman, who would become regulars. His next film was *Young Frankenstein*, which earned him and the film’s star and co-writer, Gene Wilder, an Academy Award nomination for best screenplay and for best sound.⁵

In the age of colour, *Young Frankenstein* was shot in black and white in order to stylistically mirror the 1930s classic Universal horror films, especially James Whale’s *Frankenstein* and *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), its first sequel – an aspect which Brooks had to fight for during production.

James Whale’s talent was in how he told the *Frankenstein* story visually. Gene and I watched Whale’s movies together multiple times. We saw how the guy took his time. Whale wanted everything to be deep, dark, somber. (Brooks 2016, 43)

In the end Brooks, who sought the tone of the old movies, “bathed in antique radiance,” in a stroke of good fortune, was able to re-use the laboratory set from the original film (Yacowar 2015, 174), as well as the same “marvellous sparking and buzzing lab equipment” and props designed by Kenneth Strickfaden, the special-effects artist in Whale’s film, “alive and working since 1931” (Brooks 1916, 130-131).⁶

⁵ In his book Mel Brooks recalls that the film was the brainchild of Gene Wilder, who wrote the entire first draft of the script and then he and Brooks wrote several more drafts before filming began. The idea “for a movie about Baron Frankenstein’s grandson” came to him one winter in Westhampton, New York. “He is an uptight scientist who does not believe any of that nonsense about bringing the dead back to life. Even though he is clinically a scientist, he is as crazy as any Frankenstein. It’s in his heart. It’s in his blood. It’s in the marrow of his bones. He can’t help it” (Brooks 2016, 24).

⁶ Michael Gruskoff, the film producer, recalls that their production manager, Frank Bauer, made the astounding discovery that Kenneth Strickfaden was living in Santa Monica with the original electrified props packed into his garage. “So we went to Strickfaden’s garage, and he plugged it all in for us. Mel and Gene were going crazy. They loved it! [...] Strickfaden asked for a rental fee of one thousand

Unanimously regarded as a high-water mark in comedy history, Brooks' commercially and critically successful film is both a loving tribute to his cinematic forebears and an irreverent parody of Whale's films. As such, it closely recalls the concept of "complicity and critique" defined by Hutcheon in her definition of parody as "a perfect postmodern form" since it "paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies" (Hutcheon 1988, 11).

Through a large web of references to these films, including the voice of Colin Clive, who played the doctor in Whale's film,⁷ and through a system of irresistible reversals – there is no emphasis on the Monster's destructive rage and hideousness, an aspect that the stage and film productions have always tried to exploit, nor on his creator's punishment for his hubris – Brooks' humorous parody is mainly achieved by means of hyperbole, distortion, and especially incongruity, which is prevalent in contemporary psychological classifications of humour (Raskin 1985, 32-3).

By creating a continuous oscillation between similarity and difference in relation to the lexical, syntactic, and stylistic categories of the 1930s *Frankenstein* films, which "retain the basic cycle of creation and destruction" present in the novel (LaValley 1974, 245), all their formulaic conventions are subjected to ribald, surreal humour and fresh comic twists.

As many commentators have argued over the years, humour, a defining and universal characteristic of humanity, is "a serious business, a land for which the explorer must equip himself thoughtfully" (Nash 1985, 1). Although it is a form of play, humour indeed serves a number of social, cognitive, and emotional functions. "No stimulus, perhaps, more mercifully and effectively breaks the surface tension of consciousness, thereby conditioning it for a new forward movement, than humor" (Kline 1907, 421). From Plato who, along with Aristotle, laid the foundations for today's modern theories of humour, down to Kant, Hobbes, Freud, and Bergson, philosophers and linguists have classified humour and laughter as falling under one of three main categories: superiority theories, release theories, and incongruity theories.

dollars for the equipment. That was too low, even for us. We gave him twenty-five hundred" (Brooks 2016, 130-131).

⁷ While Frederick, Igor, and Inga enter the laboratory, the voice of British stage and screen actor Colin Clive (1900-1937) is heard shouting instructions in the background to help animate the Monster.

In analysing this film, which shares some of the most common features of stand-up comedy, such as wordplay, punning, and body part gags, I will mainly refer to Freud's *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), which can be considered a synthesis of the principal theories of humour. Freud introduced the notion of psychic energy as a fundamental postulate of psychoanalytical theory, arguing that any psychic movement can ultimately be linked to a phenomenon of energy. He claimed that in all laughter situations, pleasure is derived from the saving of a certain amount of psychic energy.⁸ In his account, laughter basically operates like a safety valve in a steam pipe, releasing built-up nervous energy. Like many of his contemporaries, Freud made the distinction between humour as a benevolent, positive, an innocent emotion, briefly as psychologically healthy, and wit (*der Witz*) as essentially aggressive, tendentious, and of debatable psychological value.

Written jointly by Brooks and Gene Wilder, *Young Frankenstein* boasts a uniformly remarkable cast, that includes Madeline Kahn, Teri Garr, Cloris Leachman, and Peter Boyle as the Monster.

I was blessed with such a talented group of actors on *Young Frankenstein*. But the truth is, you can cast talented people, and that still doesn't mean a movie is going to turn out. There was a certain indefinable chemistry on this set, a magic in the way this ensemble of gifted misfits worked together. It was kismet. [...]

I had three weeks of rehearsals before we began shooting. I like rehearsals, because it gives the actors an opportunity to get comfortable with each other, with their costumes, their accents. I said to the actors: 'we are making a riotous comedy here, but it's got to be very sweet and sad, and at times very scary. And it's got to be real – no heightened acting. When it's funny, our character doesn't know it is funny. You're just doing your job. We know when it's funny. The *audience* knows when it's funny. But you don't. So don't you ever play funny. (Brooks 2016, 50)

The film, which can be viewed as a sort of parodic sequel to Shelley's story, "one of the first true works of science fiction and the ultimate story about man playing God" (Brooks 2016, 43), involves Frederick Frankenstein's efforts to resume experiments in re-animation pioneered by his grandfather, Victor Frankenstein. It begins very much like a conventional horror film with a panning shot of a creepy castle atop a mountain. It is of course, a dark and stormy night and parody is quick to

⁸ In all three theories, laughter releases nervous energy that was summoned for a psychological task, but then became superfluous as that task was abandoned.

intrude. A clock strikes – midnight, except it strikes 13 times. The camera pans through a window and one sees a coffin on a table with the name Baron Von Frankenstein inscribed on the lid. It opens. There's a skeleton inside holding firmly to a little box. A man reaches in and takes it.

In the second scene, this man sits down among the students at the back of a New York medical school's room. Dr. Frankenstein, a professor of neurosurgery, played by the incomparable Gene Wilder, is teaching a class about the human brain, giving hilarious demonstrations of the difference between voluntary and involuntary reflexes, stabbing himself in the thigh with a scalpel in the process. When a student asks him about his grandfather's work on the reanimation of dead tissue, he dismisses it as the ravings of a madman. He is so embarrassed by the association with his ancestor that he turns from the blackboard and, with a wild-eyed look of revulsion, insists his family name be pronounced "Fronk-en-steen" Class is dismissed. But the professor's past returns to haunt him when the man with the box approaches him to give him his ancestor's will.

After a hasty goodbye to his fiancée Elizabeth, Frederick journeys to Transylvania, the native land of Dracula, a conventional realm of barbarity and superstition. Brooks does not concern himself either with geographic accuracy or consistency with the original text; what matters most is that these locals are foreign and quintessentially other. Frankenstein waits on the platform. A little man with big bug eyes and a hump sidles up next to him in the mist. It is Igor, his future lab assistant, whose grandfather worked for Frederick's grandfather. Igor, who insists his name is pronounced "eye-gor," is the classic servant figure of popular comedy, added to the Frankenstein story in Richard Brinsley Peake's 1823 play *Presumption*. To Frankenstein, who says he is a "brilliant surgeon" and could help him with his shifting hump, Igor, played by Marty Feldman, responds: "What hump?"

Here one can see how the Superiority theory, central to Bergson's view of laughter, does not apply to the film. This theory refers to the negative and the aggressive side of humour, which is mainly used to disparage and humiliate specific opponents and involves a pleasing realization of one's superiority to some other being. The Superiority theory, also known as disparagement, hostility or derisive theory, was first advocated by Plato, who in *Philebus* maintained that "malice or envy is at the root of comic enjoyment and that we laugh at the misfortunes of others for joy that we do not share them" (Raskin 1985, 36). Hobbes, consistently with his pessimistic view of humankind in *Leviathan* (1651) later held that "the

passion of laughter is nothing but *sudden glory* arising from sudden *conception* of some *eminency* in ourselves, by *comparison* with the *infirmities* of others, or with our own formerly” (Raskin 1985, 36).⁹ What causes laughter in the film is not so much Igor’s hump, and consequently the viewer’s feeling of superiority over his very obvious physical defect, but rather his being totally oblivious of his handicap.

Before arriving at his family’s ancestral castle, Frankenstein is welcomed by Inga, a real ‘blonde bombshell’ who promptly invites him “to have a roll in ze hay,”¹⁰ and by the housekeeper Frau Blücher who causes horses to whinny in fright at the mere mention of her name. Played by Cloris Leachman, this character is modelled on Judith Anderson’s portrayal of the manipulative Mrs Danvers in Hitchcock’s *Rebecca*: “very stern, very rigid, and very crazy” (Brooks 2016, 82).

At first Frankenstein denies any interest in replicating his grandfather’s experiments, but when he is led on by Frau Blücher to discover in the secret laboratory his ancestor’s journal *How I Did It*, detailing how he had brought his Creature to life, his scientific curiosity is piqued and he cannot keep himself from conducting his own experiments to create a new monster. Although the classic image of the Monster, personified by Boris Karloff as both terrifying and pathetic, lives on in Brooks’ parody, the wretched Creature does not steal the show, unlike in Whale’s and in the other classic Frankenstein films.

Abby Normal and the Sensational Schwanzstucker

With the help of a purloined brain which Igor has mistakenly retrieved from a criminal and not from Hans Delbruck, “scientist and saint” – he takes the brain to be labelled “Abby Normal” rather than “Abnormal,” hence the monster’s lack of mental capabilities – he succeeds in his enterprise after a massive electricity charge brings the corpse to life.¹¹

⁹ The Superiority theory dominated Western thinking about laughter for two millennia and was also sponsored by Descartes who, in *Les Passions de l’âme* (1646), claimed that people with very obvious defects such as those who are lame, blind in an eye, or hunchbacked are specially given to mockery.

¹⁰ Brooks recalls that Teri Garr, an American actress, singer and dancer, “didn’t know she was sexy. She acted so innocently, like a little farm girl” (Brooks 2016, 73).

¹¹ After having entered the village hospital’s laboratory, Igor spots the glass jar holding the brain of Hans Delbruck on deposit for transplants. He lifts it from the

From this moment on, the stage is set for an outrageous revision of the Frankenstein myth and the laughs come along at a fast and furious rate. Image after image and line after line are nodded to and then undermined, impressing themselves upon the viewer's memory, each a primer in perfect comic timing, a crucial ingredient in producing humour: whether Wilder's genius, particularly as he struggles with others' mispronunciation of his name, his ability to know exactly where to land a punch-line; or Frau Blücher, a cigar-smoking old crone and her exaggerated German accent, as when she coquettishly offers Frederick "a brandy before retiring? Some varm milk, perhaps?"; or his sexy lab assistant Inga's remarking that since the body to be reanimated will have to be larger than normal to make it easier to operate on, he would have an enormous "*Schwanzstucker*". Brooks' penchant for hyperbole are also revealed in the invention of this word. A compound of *Schwanz* which, like the Latin *cauda*, means both tail and the male genitalia, and *Stück* which means piece, this pseudo-German term produces a comic effect in spite of its meaninglessness, while recalling *shvantz*, one of the many Yiddish words for penis that has found its way into American slang. Further, Wilder's use of paralanguage, his various facial expressions – ranging through disbelief, terror, and crazed inspiration – pertain to the very nature of the comic which, as early as 1900, Henri Bergson had described as highly gestural, linking it explicitly to the physical humour of the *commedia dell'arte*.

Another memorable comic scene is Gene Hackman's hilarious cameo performance as blind hermit. Hackman was at the time "a huge star for playing tough guy Popeye Doyle," a driven New York cop on the trail of international heroin dealers in William Friedkin's crime thriller *The French Connection* (1971), "but he was itching to do comedy" (Brooks 2016, 91). In *Young Frankenstein*, his warm hospitality nearly kills the lumbering and grunting Monster he mistakes for a mute, a direct reference to a similar scene in *The Bride of Frankenstein* – only, in the original, the hermit does not accidentally spill hot soup into the poor Creature's lap, nor does he light his thumb, mistaking it for a cigar. Hackman's "line readings were hysterical, but he didn't push it. He destroyed the monster, innocently, with one thing after another, topping it off with the wonderfully

shelf, but as he turns lightning strikes and he is so frightened by his own full-length mirror image that he drops the jar and the brain crashes to the floor. Not wanting to return to the laboratory empty-handed, he grabs a brain from another jar in the lab, not noticing the warning sign of "Abnormal." This led to what Wilder said is his favourite scene and gag in the film.

delivered, "Where are you going? I was gonna make espresso" (Brooks 2016, 91).

The Notion of Incongruity

Humour in the film is created primarily out of incongruity, a notion which plays a central role in most contemporary treatments of humour. Incongruity essentially derives from expectancy violation and is viewed by philosophical, psychological, and linguistics theories as the essence of laughter. It is the perception of something incongruous and absurd – something that violates existing mental patterns and expectations and where understanding, therefore, can find no satisfaction – that elicits laughter. Incongruity involves a moment of surprise or shock that results from the clash of two contrastive meanings. This primarily cognitive approach, always comprising deviation from convention, is similar to the techniques of stand-up comedians who rely on the set-up, the first part of the joke that creates the expectation, and the punch-line, the last part of the joke that violates that expectation, and is utterly incongruous with the beginning.

Brooks' film, which is more theatrical than cinematic in conception, also relies on the improvisation by its brilliant performers who again, like stand-up comedians, have to find the perfect mixture of scripted material and spontaneous reaction, and must improvise in order to maintain the interaction with their audience and make them laugh. A perfectly paradigmatic instance of this spirit and of the felicitous collaboration with co-writer Gene Wilder is the exhilarating music hall number as the Monster, played by Peter Boyle, in top hat and tails, dances and vocalises his garbled version of Irving Berlin's song "Puttin' on the Ritz" before the Bucharest Academy of Science. Brooks recalls that it was Gene's idea and that, though he found it funny, initially they had a fight over it because he feared this vaudeville number, which proved to be one of the funniest scenes in the film, was too ridiculous.

Of course, Gene was dead right because it took the movie to another level – our level. We left James Whale and we went where we wanted to be. That's what audiences were paying for. They weren't paying for a true artist resemblance to James Whale's movies. They wanted to laugh. (Brooks 2016, 26)

One scene which carries the Monster's need to be loved to its most literal and amusing extreme, and is emblematic both of the element of absurdity

involved in incongruity and of the fact that the film, despite being a parody, still retains the essence of Shelley's novel, occurs in scene 11 when Frankenstein, instead of showing his repugnance and fleeing, lovingly comforts his Creature, telling him that "he's very handsome and people hate him because they are jealous."

Another comic reversal, and an instance of how humour often results from the difference between what one expects to happen and what actually happens, and of the fact that incongruity is always something "out of context, inappropriate, unreasonable, illogical, exaggerated" (McGhee 1979, 10), is the episode concerning the seduction of Elizabeth, who has unexpectedly arrived in the Transylvanian's castle and turns out to be similar to Mary Shelley's Elizabeth in name only. The Monster, a big, dumb creature with a zipper round his neck, who has in the meantime escaped, comes into her bedroom while she is brushing her hair. Elizabeth screams and faints, only to unexpectedly break into the aria "Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life" after her intimate acquaintanceship with the Monster, a further illustration of Brooks' politically incorrect brand of humour.

The film is punctuated by slapstick humour, rapid-fire wordplay, and *double entendres*, "one of the most fertile sources for the technique of jokes" (Freud 1978, 39). It is also interspersed with a relentless succession of gags and obscene jokes, deploying the trope of genital size, that is the opposition between the normal, or average, size of male or female genitalia, and their gigantic, usually grossly exaggerated dimensions. Like the standard ethnic motifs of stinginess and cunningness, this specific sexual trope also comes under the umbrella of Jewish humour (Raskin 1985, 166, 212).

Through these sexual jokes, serving the purpose of exposure, as Freud claimed, versus hostile jokes, serving the purpose of aggression, satire, or defence (Freud 1978, 96), the film upends traditional notions of gender construction that were already being challenged by the sexual revolution of the 1960s. After her close encounter in the cave with the monstrously well-endowed Creature, whom she will eventually marry, Elizabeth – now showing "a fantastically bizarre hairdo, with white streaks all the way up the side," lifted from Elsa Lanchester in *Bride of Frankenstein* (Brooks 2016, 79) – apparently not yet appeased, complains: "Oh. Where you going? Oh, you men are all alike. Seven or eight quick ones and then you're out with the boys to boast and brag."

The Relief/Release Theory

However, incongruity is not the only element producing laughter. Freud, as the major proponent of the relief/release theory, which focuses on the psychological effects humour elicits in the recipient, claims that incongruities are a way to intensify the comic effect, arguing that the most relevant characteristic of humour is the pleasure that it produces, and that what humour ultimately provides is a legitimate means of releasing inhibitions, allowing repressed desires to be satisfied in an appropriate and socially acceptable way, rather than through more direct and natural expression. In *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* Freud maintains that the unconscious processes involved in the development of jokes are nearly identical to those involved in dreaming. Repressed wishes, particularly those associated with hostility, aggression, or sexuality, are released in dreams when the inhibitory demands of wakefulness diminish. Similarly, through unconscious joke-work, the waking correlate of dream-work, the energy formerly contained by repression is released, and dangerous feelings become expressible in a now innocuous form, a joke, that bypasses the internal and external censors – and can thus be permissibly enjoyed. It is a substitution mechanism that enables us to convert unacceptable impulses and emotions into pleasurable ones, by replacing obscenity, aggression or cynicism with laughter. The only difference being that, whereas dream-work seeks to minimize displeasure, joke-work seeks to maximize pleasure. Indeed, “all our mental activities converge in these two aims” (Freud 1978, 180).

Jewish Humour and the Schlemiel Character

Humour reaches its climax at the end of the film after a procedure, at once extreme and heroic, foolhardy and comic, that transfers some of Frankenstein's intellect into the monster's brain – the Creature, who in the classic Frankenstein films was simplified to a being of brute primitive force and emotions, is finally able to speak nearly as eloquently as Shelley's character – while his creator, now happily married to Inga, seems to have acquired in return a little of the potency of the monster's sensational *Schwanzstucker*.

While poking fun at the standard Jewish preoccupation with smartness – in this case the ‘transference’ procedure is so extravagant as to be utterly absurd and unreal – Brooks also alludes to the self-disparaging nature of Jewish humour. This particular kind of humour, the ability to laugh at

oneself (best exemplified by Woody Allen's comedies), is never motivated by aggressive impulses; it rarely attacks others, as in the theories of superiority, disparagement, or hostility, focusing instead on the foibles of the producer of the humour. Like Allen's witty and neurotic persona, who constantly makes self-deprecating fun of himself – short, thin, balding, sex-obsessed and frustrated, his alter ego in *Annie Hall* quips that he is one of the few males to suffer from penis envy – Brooks' Frankenstein stands in sharp contrast to the American ideal of powerful manliness. He is a simpleton, clumsy and gauche, naïve and gullible, in essence a Schlemiel, a Yiddish word to describe an unfortunate, inept person, a chump, basically a perennial victim who has become over the years one of Yiddish culture's most enduring stock comic characters.¹² A psychological misfit, aloof from the world, the little man at odds with his surroundings, who consistently expresses anxieties, feelings of inferiority, and a genuine unhappiness with himself, the schlemiel “stands in the age-old company of fools, embodying the most outstanding folly of *his* culture: its weakness” (Wisse 1971, 12). And yet the schlemiel is not just a born victim and a born loser; he differs “from most antiheroes who are characterized – as the term accurately implies – by means of negative definition,” becoming a potential hero, challenging accepted notions of heroism. (Wisse 1971, 39)

This figure was made iconic during the sixties by some of the dominant voices of Jewish literature, such as Bernard Malamud and Saul Bellow, and particularly by Philip Roth, the *enfant terrible* of the American literary world, a writer noted especially “for his ability to exploit his Jewish background for comic effect, as well as to satirize the Jewish middle-class” (Walden 1974, 410). The common trait of their most prominent schlemiels – Arthur Fidelity, Herzog, and Alexander Portnoy – is a penchant for catastrophe and a talent for survival. In *Portnoy's Complaint*, the humour, as in Brooks, is absurd, wild and uproarious, the main desire of Roth's fictional alter ego being to achieve a guilt-free life of pleasure.

¹² In accounting for the importance and popularity of the schlemiel figure in Jewish culture and literature, Pinsker suggests that this unique sort of humour originally “developed as a weapon in the uphill battle for survival. [...] Powerless by any conventional standards, Jews became masters in the arts of self-mockery...rather than merely turn the sharp edges of their humour against their oppressor, they tended to turn it inward, to establish their own humanity by comic extensions of universal follies” (Pinsker 1971, 14-5).

The conclusion of the film – breaking loose from the logic and constraints of reality and ushering in, through Frankenstein's sexual antics, the triumph of the pleasure principle, the drive which motivates children to avoid pain and seek immediate gratification of their desires – highlights the compensatory nature of humour, its liberation principle, as well as its intimate connection with the unconscious mechanisms of dreaming. As Freud wrote in the final lines of his book, it is only through humour that adults are allowed to temporarily regain the pleasures and the mood of childhood:

For the euphoria we endeavour to reach by these means [jokes, the comic, humour] is nothing other than the mood of a period of life when we were accustomed to deal with our psychical work in general with a small expenditure of energy – the mood of childhood, when we were incapable of jokes, and we had no need of humour to make us feel happy in our life. (Freud 1978, 236)

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE FRANKENSTEIN MYTH REVISITED: *MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN* (KENNETH BRANAGH, 1994)

GILLES MENEGALDO

Frankenstein, published in 1818, revisits one of the great classical myths, that of Prometheus, in the light of literary and aesthetic modernity (the romantic movement) and of the scientific, political and metaphysical preoccupations of the beginning of the 19th century. The main theme of the novel, the creation of man by means other than God's or nature's, owns a potential fascination all the more powerful as it implies a certain form of subversion, and raises the issue of the material origins of mankind. Mary Shelley deals with another topic: transgression of the boundaries between life and death. The unnamed creature, a product of scientific experiment, is a rational avatar of the living dead (both the Dracula and Frankenstein myths thrive on screen at the same moment), and the unnamed Creature calls into question a conception of the monstrous inherited from the Middle Ages, the idea that physical deformity is a reflection of moral evil. Indeed, the Shelleyan monster associates ugliness and spiritual depth, wickedness and goodness. Generations of readers have been thrilled by this paradoxical combination, which conjures up at once fascination and horror, a sense of the Burkean sublime, and the oxymoronic delight of terror. The dramatic potential of the narrative was first exploited on stage, then on screen. Indeed the cinema is characterized, like the creature, by fragmentation and suture linked to the editing process. The relationship established between the young medical student and his Creature is imprinted in the collective memory through numerous incarnations, at times very remote from the source text, but which contribute to an enrichment of this enduring modern myth.

After the early Edison silent short film of 1910, there are two main cycles in the adaptation of the Frankenstein myth. First the Universal cycle (from 1931 to 1948) with James Whale and Boris Karloff and the famous mask made by Jack Pierce, but also the archaic and futuristic laboratory tower, Elsa Lanchester's Nefertiti hairdo as the Bride, and the hunchback assistant (Dwight Frye, followed by Bela Lugosi); then follows the Hammer cycle with Terence Fisher (but also Freddie Francis), Christopher Lee (the creature in the first film only) and Peter Cushing as Baron Frankenstein in six films. Through these films and many others – including the parodies *Young Frankenstein* (Mel Brooks), and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharman) – the myth is gradually built up, assembling heterogeneous fragments and retaining from the novel only a minimal narrative kernel. In the wake of Franc Roddam's *The Bride* (1985), featuring Sting as the doctor and Jennifer Beals as his creation Eva; and of Roger Corman's 1990 adaptation of Brian Aldiss' novel *Frankenstein Unbound*, Kenneth Branagh – already well known for his Shakespeare adaptations – aims to return to the text of Mary Shelley's novel. This had been largely discarded in previous adaptations, so that to return to it raised the questions of inheritance and “fidelity” to the source text. As Branagh puts it in his introduction to the script, entitled “Frankenstein Reimagined:” “We wanted to follow the events of the novel as closely as practicable, to include as much of the story as possible, while tying everything to an overriding response to the material – that is our interpretation of it” (Branagh 1994, 17). In this chapter we shall see how far Branagh succeeds in this challenge, but also to what extent, and how, he renews our interpretation of the myth.

An Apparent Return to the Literary Source

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is a companion piece to Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992). As their titles indicate, both films purport to return to the source text, which they do, but only up to a point. Branagh and scriptwriters Frank Darabont and Steph Lady first pay tribute to the author¹ by giving her a narrative voice in a kind of prologue. On a black background suggesting a void, an emptiness where the titles unfold, Mary Shelley recites in voice-over a fragment of her preface, emphasizing the effect that must be conveyed to the reader. These are well known words: “I busied myself *to think of a story*.... One which would

¹ Thus Margaret Saville, Walton's sister, is erased from the film; so are Walton's letters, as he has no narrative function. The Polar episode is thus seen from the outside, with no subjective perspective.

speak to the mysterious fears of our nature, and awaken thrilling horror—one to make the reader dread to look round, to curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart” (Shelley, 7-8) The white luminousness of the title ominously coming towards us, with the camera tracking backwards, adumbrates the future electric shocks leading to the creation of the monster. Like Whale before him, Branagh re-appropriates the author, but contrary to him, asserts his desire to be close to the original text. Branagh begins by restoring original names and indeed restores most of the characters who are generally blotted out, such as Victor’s mother and father, Justine Moritz, William, Krempe, Walton and Clerval.

Branagh also seeks to respect (to some extent) the narrative structure of the novel, its embedded texts, the episodic appearances of its characters, its romantic mood and sublime landscapes. For the first time on film (there was a TV adaptation in 1992), Branagh reintroduces the prologue and the epilogue, set on an icy wasteland close to the North Pole, whilst also foregrounding Captain Walton (Aidan Quinn), who is usually discarded on screen. Walton, Frankenstein and the Creature reach the frontiers of the known world, in the Arctic ice pack, a universe devoid of colour, in order to search symbolically for meaning. By reintroducing Walton, an explorer ready to sacrifice² his crew in order to find a new passage to the Pole, Branagh underlines his position as Victor’s double, as in the novel.

Branagh reproduces the circularity of the book by making a final return to the framing narrative, and he dramatizes not only the sublimity of the icy North Pole, but also that of the Alpine landscape. He sets into relief the parallelism between Walton’s quest and that of Victor. He also highlights the family dimension and the privileged relationship between Victor and his mother (the first scene in Victor’s retrospective narrative). He restores numerous rarely-dramatized scenes in the novel, such as the tree blasted by lightning, and more importantly the confrontation between Victor and his Creature on the Mer de Glace in the Alps, here displaced into an icy cave, where a contract is arranged between Victor and the monster, who demands a female companion resembling himself. Branagh also integrates the episode of Justine’s death, though she is not submitted to an unfair trial as in the novel, but is hanged by an angry and hysterical crowd after the death of William. She was wrongly accused of that murder because the creature left a medallion on her body while she was asleep in a barn after

² Walton is presented as a tough rugged sailor and a ruthless character, less benevolent than in the novel. He refuses to give up his quest despite the danger of death and the risk of mutiny, and only yields at the very end.

having vainly searched for William. The camera highlights the Creature's erotic desire as he bends over Justine's body, which adumbrates a subsequent moment when he selects her body for Frankenstein to create a female companion.

The director also recreates the historical and cultural context of the novel. A title-card situates the Walton episode in 1794. Victor's flashback narrative starts in 1773 while he is still a child. Branagh presents his childhood in a harmonious, loving family until a tragic event occurs: the death of the mother that will trigger Victor's scientific quest. He leaves Geneva to attend university at Ingolstadt in 1793 in order to study natural philosophy. Branagh manages to recreate the mood of the time with a certain degree of realism, thanks to lavish sets and costumes.³ The film is mostly shot on sound stages (at Shepperton Studios) in order to obtain a sense of "heightened realism." A number of sets are oversized, such as the vast blue-coloured ballroom, dominated by an immense curved staircase that is used to dramatic ends. Branagh uses vivid colours (also sunshine and light) for the Frankenstein mansion in order to convey a mood of happiness and family love, contrasting this with the drab colours (grey, green) of the grimy disease-ridden town of Ingolstadt. The North Pole episodes were also shot on a soundstage, three ships of different sizes being built. Rather than seeking the authentic look of a period-piece film, Branagh seeks to create an effect of verisimilitude, "an impression" of a period. He also wishes to convey the mood of a fairy tale: "A fairy tale where we are scared, where people die and have their heads chopped off" (Branagh 1994, 28).

He stages the episode with the old blind De Lacey and his family⁴ from the perspective of the Creature who, attracted by the sound of a flute, seeks refuge in a pigsty, but helps the family, which is unaware of his presence, by digging out potatoes from frozen ground. He also rescues the blind man from a mean and brutal landlord. As the blind man tries to comfort the Creature, touching his scarred face with his hands, Felix the

³ However this recreation is often based on clichés, romantic or Gothic. As Bouriana Zakhariyeva states: "The film's almost caricatural period-piece atmosphere illustrates the post-modern attempt to render visually the 'truth' of a particular historical time through its rather clichéd, popular, and media-digested version" (Zakhariyeva 1996, 740).

⁴ However, Branagh dispenses with Safie, the emancipated young Turkish woman fleeing from paternal authority. Agatha and Felix, brother and sister in the novel, become a married couple in the film; Branagh also adds two young children, who associate the Creature with the "spirit of the wood" (another touch of fairy tale).

son enters the cottage, beats him and throws him out, frightened by his appearance and mistakenly thinking he is dangerous. After the family's flight, the Creature discovers the empty cottage and sets it on fire out of rage and dismay. Even though he does not meditate on *Paradise Lost*, Saint Augustine (only in the film) or Goethe as in the novel, the Creature learns how to speak and he eventually acquires the same language skills as his creator, enabling a metaphysical and moral debate between them in the ice cave sequence.

However this "faithfulness" to the original text has obvious limitations, as Branagh also operates deep transformations, cutting, adding, displacing, and condensing, in order to provide a more realistic account than in the novel. As he states in his introduction to the published script: "It was after all, the work of a very young writer who is sometimes confusingly inconsistent with the plot." He refers, consequently, to his own "inventions and re-directions" (Branagh 1994, 9).

The Transformation Process

Indeed, Branagh substantially modifies certain episodes. Victor's mother dies, not from cholera while tending to Elizabeth as in the novel, but when giving birth to William. This scene highlights the association between life and death and the ambiguous status of procreation. Victor's mother implores: "Cut me to save the baby." Her husband complies while the "downward camera movement associates the heavy rain and the amniotic fluid liberated by the dying body of the mother upstairs" (Mellet 2011,141; my translation). The scene is dramatized by the storm, the howls of despair from Victor's father (unable to save his wife), and the discovery of the bloodied⁵ corpse of the mother. While his mother is both giving birth and dying in the process, and while his father strives to save her life, Victor – whom Elizabeth tries to reassure – contemplates with fascination a big tree being blasted by a flash of lightning, thereby conflating death and life, and emphasizing the powers of Nature that the young scientist will challenge. Victor and Elizabeth watch the scene

⁵ The color red is essential and plays both a dramatic and symbolic role. It is present as the blood smearing the bodies and clothes of Victor's mother and father, and also on Waldman's body, stabbed by a patient. When Elizabeth visits Victor in Ingolstadt, she wears a red dress, a symbol of her energy and will. When she is killed by the Creature, she also wears a long red dress, this time associated with the gory murder. William also wears a red costume on the day he is killed. Red and pink hues dominate in the laboratory, which comes to resemble an organism.

through windows blurred by the rain, their faces each enclosed by a pane, which acts as a framing device. Their attention is drawn back within the house when the father gives an almost inhuman scream⁶ and they race upstairs to the mother's bedroom. While Victor is giving way to his sorrow with melodramatic outbursts (tears and prayers), the camera shifts from the dead mother's bloodied corpse to the newly born baby on which this long take ends. Branagh suggests here that the death of a human being enables new life, a natural cycle that Victor will challenge.

A dissolve leads to the next sequence, following a three-year ellipsis. While visiting his mother's grave, alone on top of a hill, surrounded by snowy mountains (a romantic, sublime locus), Victor is filmed in closeup, almost facing the camera, and reiterates his ambition to create life in order to fight death: "Oh mother, you should never have died, no one should ever die, I will stop this." This may seem a rather naïve statement, but it clearly provides a personal motivation for Victor's further experiments, and goes beyond mere scientific interest.

Branagh also develops the scenes set at the university of Ingolstadt, dramatizing the conflict between Victor and Krempe, who is a caricature of the narrow-minded conservative rationalist, and making of Professor Waldman (John Cleese in an unusual part), a precursor of Victor's research on the reanimation of corpses, and a mentor, an initiator who however refuses to go beyond certain limits. Having given up his transgressive experiments (the example is the animated monkey's forearm), he sets himself the task of simply preserving life, not creating it. It seems – as he states cryptically – that some of his experiments have resulted in horror. Branagh however dispenses with the conventions of the classical horror film, gets rid of the traditional figure of the assistant (thus foregrounding Victor's solitude in his act of creation) and refuses to exploit the clichés of the mad scientist, building up Victor as an idealistic and romantic character, a victim of *hubris* and exacerbated passions and desires. Waldman's murder by a patient unwilling to be injected a vaccine against cholera, is an invention, and so is his execution by hanging, foreshadowing that of Justine Moritz.

⁶ The scream motif is important and establishes a link between the father, Victor and the Creature, who all scream in despair at various dramatic moments.

Intertextuality

Branagh's telling borrows from previous filmic versions as much as it reinterprets Mary Shelley's novel. In that sense, it illustrates the idea of adaptation as "palimpsestuous" or "multilaminated," as theorized by Linda Hutcheon. (Hutcheon 2006, 21) The film pays tribute to James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931) in the scene where Clerval and Elizabeth force admittance into Victor's laboratory while a cholera epidemic is raging in the city. Branagh also takes up in his own way the creation scene, foregrounding even more than Whale the scientific element, almost absent in the novel. As Javier Pardo states: "As in Whale and other Universal films, the creation involves the vertical ascension of the creature towards the sky as well as the electric apparatus associated with it" (Pardo 2005, 233). Branagh also takes up the famous formula uttered by the actor Colin Clive in Whale's film: "It's alive, it's alive!" as he sees the monster's hand banging forcibly on the glass of the tank. The hand motif is indeed foregrounded in both works.

Like Whale, Branagh raises the issue of the causes of the violent behaviour of the monster, but while Whale attributes this to a defective brain dropped by accident by a clumsy assistant, Branagh associates it with the body of the criminal that has been used to create him. Branagh follows his predecessor in emphasizing the blind destructive power of the crowd which first chases the Creature through the streets, and then exerts its fury upon the innocent Justine. Lastly, Branagh reinvents another seminal sequence from Whale's *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), that of the creation of the Bride, but again he completely changes the orientation of the scene. In Whale's film the Bride (Elsa Lanchester) is beautiful, but almost subhuman and deprived of language and agency. When she recoils from him in terror, it is the male creature that takes the initiative and decides to blow up the laboratory tower. In Branagh's version, the Bride, distraught by her physical monstrosity, sets fire to her own body and to the house.

Branagh also borrows some elements from the Frankenstein Hammer cycle. As in *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957), Victor uses the brain of his mentor Professor Waldman, who has been killed⁷ by a reluctant patient. The *modus operandi* is partly similar. In both films the still-dead body is plunged into a tank of liquid and electricity is used to stimulate it. The fire

⁷ In the Hammer version, the Baron kills Professor Bernstein by pushing him through a balustrade.

motif, present in Whale's *Frankenstein* when the mill is burnt down, is taken up in *Frankenstein Must be Destroyed* (1969), another Hammer variation. Lastly, Branagh may have been influenced by David Wickes' television film, *Frankenstein, The Real Story* (1992). This film uses the North Pole episode as an extended framing narrative, both at the beginning and at the end. It also makes use of the Ingolstadt cholera motif, and of the dance motif. Lastly it features a scene where the monster is chased by the crowd and uses a close low-angle shot of the monster sprawled upon a glass pane, watching from inside the room, very similar to the one used by Branagh prior to Elizabeth's murder. Apart from these references, Branagh borrows from previous films, such as Franc Roddam's *The Bride* (1985) and Roger Corman's *Frankenstein Unbound* (1990). According to Javier Pardo: "Branagh's film self-consciously adds and re-interprets motifs and episodes inspired by disparate film traditions, and it is thus, like the creature, a composite body itself" (Pardo 2005, 237).

Science, Frankenstein's Hubris and the Creature's Self-Discovery

Frankenstein explains to a playful Elizabeth early in *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*: "It's energy. It never disappears, it merely changes form. It's possible to convert this candle wax into the convulsions of this mechanical dog." As a student, he explains his ambitions: "If we can replace one part of a human being, we can replace every part. And if we can do that, we can design a life." The body of Professor Waldman's murderer – played by an already transformed and almost unrecognizable Robert De Niro – is recuperated by Victor in quest of "raw materials." To reassure himself, he claims: "Raw materials, that's all they are. Tissue to be re-used." Waldman's brain, limbs and amniotic fluid, and close-ups of sewing and stitching operations, are elements added by Branagh in order to show the various stages of the creative process.

Like Whale and Fisher, Branagh pays attention to the laboratory, aiming at a certain realism in representing the scientific apparatus (which in the novel remains rather sketchy), so that his film is more akin to the Hammer cycle, where science is foregrounded. In order to pass from death to life, Branagh's version proposes a complex form of the birthing process, far removed from Whale's limited reanimation by means of electricity coming from a storm.

Victor's method combines several techniques: acupuncture needles, electric stimulation carried out by eels thrown through a transparent tube into a kind of copper sarcophagus filled with amniotic fluid (we see Victor borrowing that fluid from a pregnant woman as she gives birth). The creature comes to life in a kind of artificial matrix, filled by an enormous, scrotum-like bag, with gushes of amniotic liquid, acting as a simulacrum of, or substitute for, the female body. Branagh justifies his choices of *mise en scène*: "We tried to make [the whole issue of pregnancy and the birthing process] explicit in that sequence. Indeed, the entire conception/creation process is full of explicitly sexual imagery" (Branagh 1994, 20).

For this creation scene, far more developed than in any previous film, Victor is alone, bare-chested like a worker in a machine-room, constantly moving between the various instruments and pieces of apparatus; he is followed by a dynamic camera zooming in and out, ample tracking shots, very rhythmic editing, and an almost operatic musical score by Patrick Doyle, mimetic of the action. The scene also lays stress on Victor's bodily relationship with the naked and clumsy Creature which he tries to hold straight as it constantly collapses, slipping and sliding across the slimy floor, the two holding close to each other in a kind of homoerotic⁸ ballet. By playing Victor, Branagh highlights his own narcissistic bodily representation and the sexual aspect of the scene. He also stages in close-up the distorted, heavily stitched face of the monster, its pathetic look, more human than Karloff's monster. Branagh wants De Niro to be fully expressive despite the makeup and prosthetics: "It had to be striking and scary, yet allow De Niro's face and expressions to be very clearly read through the makeup" (Branagh 1994, 22). The bodily fragmentation of the monster is duplicated on screen by the quick, sometimes halting, editing and the numerous jump cuts.

Victor's rejection of his Creature is not deliberate, as in the novel, but the consequence of a misunderstanding. After the accident that propels the Creature to the ceiling where he hits his head and remains motionless, Victor thinks he is dead (a diving shot and a downward zoom onto his face express his desperation and sense of failure). As he says aloud and notes in his diary: "Massive birth defects. Greatly enhanced physical strength but the resulting re-animante is malfunctional and pitiful, and dead." We never see how the creature recovers and manages to free himself, but during the following night, Victor has a nightmare (or is it real?) where he sees the Creature bent over him, then chasing him through the laboratory while Dr

⁸ On this topic, see Laplace-Sinatra (1998).

Krempe, a ghostly superimposition upon the screen, reminds him of the blasphemous origin of the monster made of fragments of corpses, including a murderer's: "How is it pieced together? Bits of thieves, bits of murderers? Evil stitched upon evil stitched upon evil," and warns him ominously: "God helps your loved ones." Victor, awake, picks up an axe to confront the Creature, who has vanished.

The film then devotes much time to the Creature's discovery of the world; this we partly see from his perspective. Branagh invents new scenes, especially the one where the monster is harassed, chased and beaten up by a hysterical crowd who think it is he who brought the cholera epidemic. A lengthy fragment is then devoted to the De Lacey family, showing various scenes with the blind old man and his relatives. Eventually the Creature manages to read Victor's diary and heads for his mansion, hungry for revenge, raising his arms high and howling "Frankenstein!" A dissolve leads to a wide mountainous landscape, the Creature a tiny silhouette progressing on the snow, the camera (a helicopter shot) revolving round him, then cutting to a close-up of his scarred face, uttering threateningly: "Geneva!"

Interpreting the Myth

The ice cave scene does not lead to a lengthy narrative⁹ devoted to the Creature, but sets into relief a dialogue about the consequences of that experience. The sequence alternates shot/reverse shot close-ups of Victor and of the Creature. The camera gets even closer to the Creature, who faces his "father" directly while Victor averts his eyes and bends his head, expressing some kind of guilt. When the camera moves into close-up the spectator identifies with Victor, while his antagonist seems to be looking right at us. The Creature asks Victor about his composite origin and openly accuses him: "You gave me emotions but did not tell me how to use them." He raises the issue of the origin, identity and respective parts played by innate and acquired characteristics, and evokes the role of the memory process in building up the self. He challenges Victor with a series of questions: "What of my soul, do I have one? Or was that a part you left out? Who were these people of which I am comprised? Good people, bad people?" Victor's answer, "Materials, nothing more" does not satisfy the monster, who evokes his ability to play the flute: "In which part of me did

⁹ In fact, contrary to the novel, the Creature is never given a narrative voice. He is mostly seen from the outside, apart from a few subjective shots; and we have no access to his consciousness.

that knowledge reside? In these hands? In this mind? In this heart? And reading and speaking. Not things learnt so much as things remembered.” According to Dominique Sipièrè, the cave scene suggests two levels of acquired competence: firstly, those taught to the Creature by daily life-experience, for instance the ambivalence of fire, which warms but may burn; secondly, competences that others have learned but of which his body has kept memory traces, such as his ability to play the flute. Later he plays the instrument as a warning, before murdering Elizabeth. (Sipièrè 1999, 229),

As Branagh states: “We wanted to show also that the Creature, though patched together from a collection of people, is illuminated by a confused but significant intelligence” (Branagh 1994, 22). The Creature will learn through reading Victor’s diary (which he has stolen), the identity of the human material of which he is made: Professor Waldman’s brain, the body of his murderer, the limbs of Schiller, the athletic student who died from cholera. In that diary, the monster also finds his own image, drawn by Waldman and pasted in by Victor.

The ice cave scene ends on a close-up of Victor as he accepts the Creature’s request, his face still bent down, conscious of his responsibility. The camera cuts abruptly to his arrival at the house in Geneva, where he is confronted with Elizabeth’s anger in reaction to this new breach of promise. The editing then alternates shots of Victor reassembling his equipment with Elizabeth gathering her belongings and preparing to leave (she shows more agency than her literary counterpart).

The re-Creation of the Bride

Latent rivalry, another sign of the double motif, is expressed in the seminal scene of the second creation, which marks the most radical departure from the novel. It starts in the same way. Victor seemingly keeps his promise to create a female companion and starts to assemble “materials,” with the help of the Creature, who brings back Justine’s body. This may be seen as a form of atonement, since he is responsible for her death, but it may also be an expression of desire, as he was also attracted to her. In answer to Victor’s question “Why her?” the Creature throws his arguments back at him: “Materials, remember? Nothing more. Your words.” Victor, unconvinced and horrified, challenges the Creature and finally breaks his own promise. Again, each character remains singly in the frame and the shot/reverse shot editing highlights the conflict, the

scene ending on a frontal close up of the Creature uttering his famous threat: “If you deny me my wedding night, I will be with you on yours!”¹⁰

Victor reconciles with Elizabeth, confesses he has done “something terrible and evil” and collapses close to a crucifix. She proposes to marry him if he tells her the truth. The scene conveys a sense of their intimacy by filming them in the same frame in two-shot. They both depart on horseback after a very simple wedding ceremony celebrated in the ailing father’s bedroom. However, the Creature follows them and signals his presence by playing the flute, thus interrupting the love scene where the entwined bodies are filmed in close up and with quick editing. He lures Victor outside, while he gets inside the red-lit bedroom and reaches Elizabeth. His body appears, illuminated by a flash of lightning, ominously spread on the glass pane, filling the whole frame; this is animalistic or monstrous – indeed, almost vampire-like. However, he does not kill Elizabeth right away and even seems to relent (another shift), fascinated by her beauty. Seen by Elizabeth in a subjective close-up shot as he bends over her body, he exclaims, softly holding her face: “You are even more beautiful than I imagined.” As Victor, alarmed by what he sees from a distance, the window open and the lights on, bangs on the door; calling her name, he rushes into the room and the charm is broken –this is further signified by a flash of lightning. The monster performs the murder with Victor as spectator, accompanied by the sound of dramatic music. He tears out her heart in the fashion of Jacobean theatre, brandishing it in front of a distraught Victor. The editing juxtaposes a close-up of the bleeding and palpitating heart (we can still hear the heartbeat) with a reaction shot of Victor’s horrified face, followed by a medium shot of the Creature stating: “I keep my promises” while his face is again illuminated by lightning. Victor carries Elizabeth’s body back to his family home on horseback, dragging it, with its flowing long red¹¹ dress, to his attic laboratory, despite Clerval’s exhortations.

Victor then decides to re-create Elizabeth, using Justine’s body and Elizabeth’s head. The editing and the constantly moving camera (revolving shots, pans and tracking shots) are even more frantic than in the first creation scene, conveying a sense of urgency and desperate hope, the music dramatized with brass instruments and percussion. Branagh multiplies the shots of mutilation and of sewing limbs together. We see the

¹⁰ The text is altered. In the novel, the Creature says: “It is well. I go; but remember, I shall be with you on your wedding night” (Shelley 1818,163).

¹¹ Clearly evoking Dracula’s long robe in Coppola’s movie.

severed head of Justine discarded on the floor while Elizabeth's is stitched onto her body. While Victor stands above the body and screams: "Live!" a despondent Clerval shouts "Nooo!" in answer, aware of the transgressive nature of Victor's actions.

By contrast, the following scene of Victor taking care of the female creature is presented at a much quieter pace, with slow enveloping camera movements and a subdued musical score that includes a violin solo. The female Creature, a half grotesque, half pitiful avatar of the unfortunate murdered bride, seems at first to recognize Victor, who asks her to "say his name" and carries her out, like a puppet, into a rather lugubrious waltz, a sad echo of past happiness (recovered by means of the insertion of flashbacks), the music slowly altering as the bride collapses, almost inert, supported by Victor.

As in Whale's *The Bride of Frankenstein*, but at a more dramatic, almost operatic register, the film then sets up a confrontation between Victor and the monster, each claiming, and seeking to appropriate, the female creature. When the monster appears very suddenly and imposingly, almost out of nowhere, interrupting the dance, he begins to claim the bride, who reaches hesitatingly at first towards him, exploring with her fingers the deep scars of his stitched face, comparing them with her own crude scars, and becoming aware of their mutual ugliness. Again the film uses shot/reverse shots, close-ups, even extreme close-ups of parts of the face and eyes. While Victor claims her back, she hardly manages to utter his name. Torn between the two pretenders who fight over her, she sets her own body on fire, a living human torch running through the corridors, spreading flames to the whole building. This substantial addition to the text, partly grotesque, at times on the verge of provoking ridicule, but also deeply emotional, sets into relief the question of creation and re-creation, and is possibly also a metaphor for the opposition between the return to the source text and the freedom of re-adaptation.

The conflict between Victor and his Creature ends in the polar epilogue to which we return after the destruction by fire of the family house (another addition, but also a wink to the Hammer adaptations). In tears, kneeling close to Victor's dead body, the monster designates him as his father, whilst confessing that he "never gave him a name." He refuses to go back to civilization with Walton, who has acknowledged his humanity despite his monstrous appearance because he shows emotions – tears – and manages to express his feelings in words. This encounter between Walton and the Creature is also Branagh's invention. As the ice breaks, liberating

the ship, the Creature swims to the funeral pyre, setting it alight. This tragic gesture, which is witnessed by the crew, leads Walton to give up his journey to the North Pole. Contrary to the novel, which leaves a margin of ambiguity as to the fate of the Creature, Branagh chooses to stage his sacrifice in front of the sailors. After a close-up of Walton uttering the word “Home!”, the film closes on alternating shots of the fire and the ship sailing on the open sea, contrasting death and life, nemesis and salvation.

Reflexivity

The Frankenstein myth, as has already been stated, is eminently cinematographic. In Whale’s film, the faces of Colin Clive and Boris Karloff in the revolving millwheel act as if they were images in a zoetrope, suggesting movement. Branagh also emphasizes this aspect: “I think Mary Shelley’s story was made for [film] – it is a supremely cinematic experience” (Branagh 1994, 177). He adds: “I sometimes feel there are uneasy parallels between Victor’s obsessive desire to create his monster and what we have done in making a film of this size and scale” (Branagh 1994, 21). The central parallel concerns: the body of the monster and the filmic material; the human organ and the shot; the assembled body; and the continuity of the film once edited. The filmmaker cuts and edits his film as Frankenstein builds up his monster, which may be seen as a metaphor for the work of art, specifically a film, with its cuts and sutures between images. The re-assembled body of the monster is akin to the cinematic editing process. As William Nestruck states: “In Frankenstein the filmmaker finds a story that offers a narrative analogy to film itself. [...] Editing reassembles separate shots into an illusion of continuity. It is a mechanical stitchwork, a piecing together that becomes another cinematic equivalent of the Frankenstein Monster” (Nestruck 1979, 294, 303).

Branagh’s movie has the great merit of invoking Mary Shelley’s novel even though it is far from “faithful” to the text. It also recreates rather convincingly (despite some formal excesses and a *mise en scène* at times verging on hysteria) the romantic, at times exalted mood of the novel, without neglecting to reflect on scientific knowledge and its limits, as well as on the question of origins and the construction of selfhood. Branagh endows the Creature with the gift of language and explores the relation between the innate and the acquired. The Creature is constructed by empirical experience, but also keeps memory traces of the past for each of its components. Branagh emphasizes the part played by memory in the

building up of identity. The monster is akin to an amnesiac that gradually recovers fragments of experience. In the same way, the female creature issued from Elizabeth's brain and Justine's body remembers how to dance. Branagh also sets into relief the sexual and incestuous subtext through the relationship between a brother and sister who progressively feel attracted to one another, a motif prolonged in the ambiguous relationship between a re-born Elizabeth and her former lover/father. There have since been several other filmic adaptations of the myth – Bernard Rose's rather impressive *Frankenstein* (2015) set in a contemporary context and told from the monster's point of view, Paul McGuigan's more classic *Dr Frankenstein* (2015), the calamitous *I, Frankenstein* (2014), and even more recent TV series such as *Penny Dreadful* (2014-16) and *The Frankenstein Chronicles* (2015-17) – but Kenneth Branagh's re-appropriation remains a landmark moment in the mythmaking process.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE FEMALE IN THE SPANISH ILLUSTRATED EDITIONS OF *FRANKENSTEIN*

BEATRIZ GONZÁLEZ MORENO
& FERNANDO GONZÁLEZ MORENO

The Wife of the English Poet Shelley

It is notable that when an illustrated edition of *Frankenstein* was published for the first time in Spain, in 1944 during the Francoist regime, the only illustration included did not represent the main male characters of the novel – Victor Frankenstein or the Creature itself – or show any of the most iconic episodes, such as the creation scene; on the contrary, it was fully dedicated to Elizabeth Lavenza, who appears lying on a bed. Juan (Joan) Palet Batiste (1911-1996) created this frontispiece – which may not be so innocent as we might expect. At first glance Elizabeth looks like a woman sleeping placidly, or she may have fainted or even be peacefully dead, but certainly not savagely murdered as Mary Shelley describes her. The image is apparently both romantic and tragic, and was one that could easily pass the censorship of the time, which would not have allowed any representation in bad taste. However, if we look carefully we discover a lurking presence staring through the draperies of the bed: the hidden menace of the Creature waiting to murder Elizabeth. This detail may go unnoticed by many readers, but it indicates that the artist, in deciding which episode of the novel he was going to illustrate, has recognised and chosen to emphasize the iconic significance of the moment when the female is destroyed.

This 1944 edition included a brief introduction – perhaps by the translator, Simón Santainés – where Mary Shelley is highly praised and the book distinguished as the first science-fiction novel:

[S]i bien el propósito de su creación basábase en un mero pasatiempo, el resultado fue insospechado y magnífico. “Frankenstein o el moderno Prometeo”, no sólo es la obra maestra del género terrorífico, sino que dignificó este género infundiéndole profundidad psicológica y enriqueciéndolo con la descripción de tempestuosas pasiones humanas, cosa de que habían carecido, hasta entonces, esta clase de novelas. En “Frankenstein” los clásicos elementos terroríficos ceden el sitio a lo maravilloso científico. [...] Unidas estas excelencias a su calidad literaria, no es de extrañar que “Frankenstein o el moderno Prometeo”, dando categoría a los desprestigiados y horribles relatos de espectros y hechizos, iniciara el género fantástico-científico que diera más tarde origen a tantas obras. (Shelley 1944, 5-6)

(Although the origin of her creation was conceived as a pastime, the result was unexpected and magnificent. *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* is not only a masterpiece of the terror genre, but it also dignified this genre by infusing it with psychological insight and enriching it with accounts of tempestuous human passions; something which until then had been missing from this kind of novel. In *Frankenstein* the classic elements of terror give way to scientific marvels. [...] When these attributes are linked to its literary quality, it is no wonder that *Frankenstein*, by enlivening the discredited and awful tales of specters and spells, initiated the fantastic-scientific genre which later gave rise to so many other works.)

This edition of the text is especially valuable for understanding the notable early efforts that Spanish scholars were making to appreciate the literary value of the book – by not treating it as a mere terror novel – and to acquaint the public with the original text and its author. After the release of James Whale’s film adaptation *Frankenstein* –in Spain it was widely anticipated throughout 1931 and was finally released in 1932 – the majority of the public thought that the story of the movie was original and not based on any previous text. This situation is described by the Spanish writer Pío Baroja, who related an encounter in a train with a couple in 1936: the woman praised the superior novelty of the cinema in comparison with literature, and mentioned *Frankenstein* as an example. Baroja tried to persuade her out of her mistake: “*Frankenstein* es una novela de la mujer del poeta inglés Shelley, y se publicó a principios del siglo XIX”; and the woman answered: “¡Ah! No sabía” (1936, 5) (“*Frankenstein* is a novel by

the wife of the English poet Shelley, and it was published at the beginning of the nineteenth century.”– “Ah! I did not know”).

It was perhaps with the same purpose in mind that in 1949 the Madrid publisher Aguilar issued *El doctor Frankenstein o el moderno Prometeo* as part of its acclaimed “Crisol” collection, and a portrait of the author was included as frontispiece. Unfortunately, the woman represented in the portrait – painted by Samuel John Stump (1831, National Portrait Gallery, London) – has recently been recognized as an “unknown woman,” and not Mary Shelley, as it was once thought. Furthermore, the edition opens with a brief introduction by the translator, Antonio Gobernado, which shows that in Spain the novel was read under a dominant assumption: an ethical and religious one. However, this commentary also indicates the aesthetic dimension of the novel and the weight of social criticism behind it: “Su fealdad, únicamente su fealdad [...] es lo único que el pobre y desgraciado hombre artificial tiene de monstruo. Y porque es feo, horriblemente feo, los hombres le temen y le huyen, haciéndole tan desgraciado que termina cometiendo crímenes” (Shelley 1949, 13). (“His ugliness, only his ugliness, is what the poor, artificial wretch has of monster. And because he is ugly, terribly ugly, men are scared and fly away, making him so unhappy that he ends up committing crimes”). The edition proved to be a success and was re-issued in 1959 and 1964, keeping the text and Mary Shelley’s memory alive throughout Francoism.

Exploring the Female Question

We have already seen the interest taken in Elizabeth’s death, itself a key instance of female destruction in the novel; other similar episodes are Victor’s nightmare – which includes the vision of his decaying mother – Justine’s imprisonment and execution, and the destruction of the female Creature. We have to wait until 1980 to find any of these episodes represented by a Spanish illustrator. In that year, the Barcelona publisher Bruguera prepared a new edition with twenty-five black and white drawings by Fernando Aznar. He is the first artist in Spain to fully illustrate the complete novel. His interest in presenting readers with a visual depiction of the main episodes of the novel is remarkable, acknowledging its complex structure (Captain Walton and the North Pole, the cottagers...all are present). As part of this complexity, Aznar includes two illustrations from Justine’s story – her imprisonment and Elizabeth’s

visit to her – which emphasize her drama and anguish as well as her resignation. We must also highlight the importance of the representation of Safie, whose special meaning has usually gone unnoticed by illustrators. Safie, unlike Elizabeth or Justine, epitomises an active woman with a desire for self-improvement and independence. With the female elements of the novel in mind, another illustration from this edition deserves to be mentioned: the moment when Victor Frankenstein observes the oak reduced to a blasted stump after having been struck by lightning. The tree, as a symbol of life, birth and regeneration, is traditionally regarded as female; lightning, however, is a symbol of male supremacy. (González-Moreno 2007, 199)

We cannot leave this edition without remarking on the portrait that heads the biography of Mary Shelley given here. Once more, as it had already happened in 1949, the illustrator failed to base his portrait on a true image of Mary Shelley, although, in that case, the mistake is a little less serious. This portrait does not represent Mary Shelley, but her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft. Aznar's drawing is based on John Opie's painting (c. 1797, National Portrait Gallery, London) of the author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Spanish readers, at least if we only take into consideration the illustrated editions of *Frankenstein*, had not yet known a true portrait of Mary Shelley.

In the general history of *Frankenstein's* graphic reception, the North American artist Marcia Huyette must be considered as the first woman to engage with this novel. *The Annotated Frankenstein* was published in 1977 with her artwork, so that she became not only the first woman to illustrate the novel, but also the first illustrator to accentuate a feminist visual reading, paying attention to the female body and to images of *disjecta membra*. Huyette had a clear influence upon Miguel Alfonso Rodríguez Cerro, whose illustrations were included in one of the most popular editions of *Frankenstein* during the 1980s and 1990s: that published in Madrid by Anaya in 1982 (and by Altaya since 1993). Four of the twelve black and white drawings designed by Rodríguez Cerro can easily be related to Huyette's illustrations; in particular those where the scene has been resolved as an oneiric vision, and where the female element is a key part of the narration.

The first illustration these artists have in common refers again to the character Elizabeth Lavenza, whose beauty and natural grace are emphasized

by the use of arabesques quite in keeping with late Art Nouveau. It is noticeable how Marcia Huyette has embellished Elizabeth's hair with daisies, symbol of innocence, purity and true love, while Rodríguez Cerro has included white calla lilies, which symbolize purity, holiness, and faithfulness. The next pair of images depict the instant when Victor destroys the female Creature in the Orkney Islands, and triggers the Creature's anger. Huyette represented this episode by focusing on the cruelty of Victor's act, recreated in macabre detail, while the Creature remains a mere silhouette in the background; by contrast, Rodríguez Cerro avoids depicting the most gruesome details – Victor seems to be only pulling the female Creature's hair with certain anger – while the violent reaction of the Creature is included. The third pairing represents Elizabeth's death, her naked corpse appearing in the middle of the scene while Victor and the Creature confront each other from opposite sides as if they were disputing her body. The beastlike appearance that Huyette uses to characterize the Creature in this scene is especially remarkable. And finally, in the fourth design that connects both illustrators, the most oneiric of all, suggests a vision of Victor Frankenstein. In the Anaya edition, the illustration accompanies the chapter where Victor describes to Captain Walton how he has been chasing the Creature and seeking revenge for the death of his relatives, friends and lover: "for in sleep I saw my friends, my wife, and my beloved country; again I saw the benevolent countenance of my father, heard the silver tones of my Elizabeth's voice, and beheld Clerval enjoying health and youth" (Shelley 1985, 197-98). In the case of Huyette, the illustration has been used to decorate the endpapers and its complexity, although based on the same idea, is greater. Here we can see, as part of Victor's vision/dream, several naked figures – only one is male – entangled in a sensual dance in which Death, represented as a skeleton and reinforced by the presence of several tombs, is included; from the background, a pair of eyes, a lurking menace, observes the scene. Huyette's drawing reflects a mix of contradictory feelings (carnality, fear, remorse, lust, despair, envy) that make us reflect on the very essence of what it is to be human. (González-Moreno 2018, 236).

Rodríguez Cerro's illustrations, thanks to Huyette's influence, are able to transmit the relevance of the "female question," neglected by previous illustrators and editors. The novel had been read as a mere terror story about monsters; now, on the contrary, other readings were taking precedence. Scholars had begun to defend a feminist vision of the novel

and, specifically, developed the idea of the absent mother in order to understand much of the story. Thus, María Engracia Pujals, translator and author of an appendix, insisted:

Quizá el no haber conocido el afecto materno aporte una de las razones para que *Frankenstein* sea una novela de «padres», en el sentido de que la ausencia en ella de la madre es eminentemente conspicua e intencionada: Víctor Frankenstein, Elizabeth, Robert Walton, los De Lacey, Safie, todos pierden a su madre siendo niños. [...] Muchos son los interrogantes que podríamos proponer; pero el texto es uno e inequívoco: Frankenstein se arroga para sí el papel de padre y madre simultáneamente, y creará un nuevo ser, incluso quizá una «nueva raza», que espera que lo bendiga y agradezca eternamente el haberles dado vida. Pero el mismo monstruo, al verse privado de su ansiada compañera, invierte los papeles, y se erige en el señor de su creador, imponiéndole condiciones de dependencia e inseguridad. En contraposición, tenemos que el único personaje central que escapa a la destrucción final es Walton, precisamente el único que había tenido en su juventud el tutelaje femenino de su hermana, Margaret Saville. (Shelley [1982], 229, 233-34).

(Maybe the fact that he did not know motherly love provides us with one of the reasons why *Frankenstein* is a novel of fathers, in the sense that the absence of mothers is eminently conspicuous and intentional: Victor Frankenstein, Elizabeth, Robert Walton, the De Laceys, Safie – all lose their mothers as children. [...] There are many questions we could propose, but the text is simple and clear: Frankenstein adopts the role of father and mother simultaneously, and he will create a new being, maybe even a “new race,” by which he waits to be blessed and eternally thanked for having given them life. But the same monster, deprived of a long-desired companion, reverses these roles; and he becomes the master of his creator, imposing on him conditions of dependency and insecurity. In opposition, we have the one central character who escapes destruction, Walton; precisely the only one who had spent his youth under the feminine tutelage of his sister, Margaret Saville.)

A final comment on the Anaya edition must refer, again, to the portrait of the author. Justo Barboza etched a portrait of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley that appears as a frontispiece to the edition. However, the artist made the same mistake that we have noticed previously; he used as a referent Opie's portrait of Mary Shelley's mother, wearing a high-waisted white cotton gown and a soft hat.

The argument that *Frankenstein* is not a novel that should be read as a simple story of terror, but can only be correctly understood in the context of Mary Shelley's own life, and from a female perspective, appears again in the edition promoted by Lumen in 1987. This edition opens with a prologue by the poet, storyteller, translator, and editor Ana María Moix. She reminds us that most people know this character from the movies, but ignore the book; and she insists that we should not take the novel for a mere story of terror – as the movies show it – but as a tale that intends to “sobrecoger el alma” (Shelley 1987, 8) (“To shrink the soul”). Ana María details the well-known episode at Villa Diodati when Lord Byron challenged Percy Bysshe Shelley, Polidori and Mary Shelley to conceive a story of terror and how, from that moment on, Mary Shelley began to suffer a series of tormenting nightmares. Finally, *Frankenstein* will be born from those nightmares and ghosts that startled Mary Shelley's soul; so, in this sense, the book becomes a way of exorcizing her own demons. The illustrations by Ricard Castells reflect this reading, where the Creature is not any more a mere monster, but a mirror of Mary Shelley's suffering. Here, we see an abandoned Creature who looks for our help, who awakens sadness, pity, and compassion; a Creature that is even able to cry when its father dies. By contrast, Victor Frankenstein is always represented with his face sunk in shadow. The scene depicting the instant when an oak is struck by lightning, whose symbolism was discussed above, is included here.

Spanish Female Pioneer Illustrators

The first woman to illustrate *Frankenstein* in Spain was Fuencisla del Amo, who together with Francisco Solé prepared thirty-one illustrations in colour (2006). This edition, by Vicens Vives, was intended for students and includes teaching materials and related activities and, finally, a reproduction of the portrait of Mary Shelley by Richard Rothwell (1840, National Portrait Gallery, London). Bearing in mind the target readership of this edition, which was young students, the illustrations are literalistic and focus on action. Their major value lies on the symbolic use of colour, sometimes dominating as warm tones and at other times showing a prevailing coolness. In this way, the reader is taken through a sequence of feelings and passions: blueish colours emphasize loneliness, melancholy, and abandonment, while red and orange accentuate, in some cases, the warmth of home and, at others, anger and violence. Regarding the topic of this discussion, Fuencisla del Amo and Francisco Solé have incorporated a

well-represented selection of episodes involving women, such as Elizabeth's infancy and death, Justine's imprisonment, and the experiences of Agatha De Lacey and Safie.

From this point onwards, Spanish female illustrators have had much to say regarding *Frankenstein*, although this has mainly been done through editions for children and young people. In 2007, Cristina Picazo illustrated an issue based on *Frankenstein* for *El País*' "mis primeros clásicos" ("my first classics") collection. The adaptation, by Nuria Ochoa, is limited to twelve double-page illustrations with a very brief text intended for children aged between seven and ten years. Despite the brevity of the text, most of the complexity of the structure has been retained: Walton's story, the cottagers, the different narrators, the murders of William, Henry and Elizabeth; the character of Safie is mentioned and we are shown how the Creature learns to read by listening to her. Cristina Picazo's illustrations use a gentle style appropriate to children; however, the image of the Creature lacks originality and is indebted to Boris Karloff's hackneyed impersonation. Another adaptation, for children older than ten years, appeared in 2009 with Maria Espluga's delicate watercolour drawings. Her more than ninety illustrations perfectly back up the framed structure of the original narration. The female presence is more than notable among these illustrations: the importance of Victor's mother is emphasized among the initial illustrations; Elizabeth, of course, is represented from her infancy until her death; Justine's imprisonment has been included, emphasising her resignation; and there is a noteworthy and accurate contrast between the images of Agatha, a domestic and complaisant woman, and Safie, who appears galloping on horseback to denote a strong and active personality. Also worth highlighting here is the romantic and symbolic use of landscape (craggy mountains, placid valleys, vast seascapes, stormy nights, the deserted North Pole...) to reflect the emotional state of the characters, especially feelings of freedom, loneliness and abandonment, or the melancholy of the Creature.

With an older age range in mind, in 2008 Bruño published another illustrated edition as part of its "Clásicos Juveniles" collection. In this case, the target readers were teenagers, so the illustrations could assume a more serious tone. In charge was Beatriz Martín Vidal, one of the most prominent and promising illustrators in Spain today. Her ten black-and-white drawings show great originality by presenting the characters as

children. This may be a way to persuade her readers to empathize more easily with the story, but it also symbolizes the irresponsibility of Victor Frankenstein, whose reckless and immature behaviour in abandoning his newborn creature is the origin of all the tragedies in the story, as well as the cause of the fragility of the other characters. Several of these illustrations are especially remarkable, such as the creation scene, where the Creature appears hanging from various wires and adopts the position of a crucified Christ; William's corpse appears, lying on a dry branch that reminds us of the stump blasted by lightning, but also of a gigantic claw; Agatha, Felix, and Safie, depicted as children observed by the Creature; and the scene when Victor, before leaving Geneva to accomplish the construction of the female Creature, expresses such great despair that even Elizabeth is unable to comfort him: "the gentle affection of my beloved Elizabeth was inadequate to draw me from the depths of my despair" (Shelley 1998, 123). Beatriz Martín Vidal represents this key moment by showing Victor, as a child, seated and with his head hidden between his arms; drawn on the wall behind him, two silhouettes of the same woman appear to form a protecting bell over Victor. We may think that the silhouette belongs to Elizabeth, but it suggests the figure of a woman, not a girl as Elizabeth is elsewhere represented. The silhouette reminds us of Victor's mother or, more plausibly, of his attempt to transform Elizabeth into a surrogate and protective mother who, in the end, will be unable to save him.

Comic adaptations have also been commonly intended for a youthful public, although sometimes the result is a more original approach to the novel than in other more traditional versions. In Spain, Meritxell Ribas has been the first woman to adapt Mary Shelley's novel into a comic (2009). Her work is, certainly, outstanding not only for artistic and technical reasons, but also for her successful translation of the original text into a distinctive visual language. Regarding the technical aspect, we should indicate that the technique used by Meritxell to produce these images is *grattage*; the designs are engraved by scraping into dry black paint laid on a white surface. The result is notable for its strong white and black contrasts; moreover, it creates a dark atmosphere that accompanies the characters through the entire work. The adaptation is quite close to Mary Shelley's novel, although we miss Safie's story, which has been eliminated (though the cottagers' story has not). In general, Meritxell's work seems to emphasize the dangers of any obsession; that perseverant

blackness justly reminds us of the obscure depths of the human mind, inhabited by our obsessions. In Victor Frankenstein's case, his obsession brings him closer to the Creature, which becomes his double; a phantom that will pursue him, will destroy everything around him, and will disappear only after his death. In Meritzell's vignettes, Victor and the Creature sometimes seem to be the same figure, distinguishable only because the Creature's eyes are vacant, completely white.

Finally, the journey that began in 1944 brings us to 2013 and to Elena Odriozola's visual reading of *Frankenstein*. The edition published by Nørdica does not include any illustration depicting the most popular episodes, such as the creation scene, the confrontation between Victor and the Creature, or Elizabeth's death; the text, which reproduces the 1831 version, appears plain, lacking any image that might disturb our reading. On the contrary, Odriozola has dedicated her attention to Mary Shelley's prologue, where the author explains the special circumstances that occurred during the summer of 1816 at the Villa Diodati when the story was conceived. Throughout this essay we have seen how editors, scholars, and illustrators have progressively emphasized the autobiographical elements of the novel, recognizing in those female episodes a mirror of Mary Shelley's own life. Those elements were ones which made this novel a piece of literature worthy of praise, more complex than the simple terror story that the movies had presented. In this sense, Odriozola's merit lies in her capacity to create an illustrated departure point that will accompany the reader throughout the entire novel by evoking the feelings that accompanied Mary Shelley when *Frankenstein* was born; while, at the same time, she endorses the reading of the novel as a "birth myth" (Moers 1974, 24).

Odriozola produces her illustrations in a very artisan way. She designs her characters and their settings, paints and cuts them to build up a little paper theatre, and photographs the different arrangements to create her own story. As a result, she presents thirty-four double-page illustrations divided into four acts. In the first, we observe Mary Shelley pregnant and reading; she wears an orange gown and walks up and down a room, looking out of a window and a door as if she were waiting for someone or something that does not arrive. In the second act, we see her leaving the house, wearing a red cloak and looking back with a mix of suspicion and sadness, checking that no one is following her. In the next act, Mary Shelley, no longer

pregnant, returns to the house, where she begins to cry. And finally, in the fourth act, she appears standing and wearing a white gown; a black baby lies at her feet, a creature that begins to grow till it becomes a giant who consoles her. At the end, this monster remains and the author vanishes.

Elena Odriozola, through a series of scenes that distil melancholy, sadness, abandonment and elegance, knows perfectly how to evoke all the daemons that were present during *Frankenstein's* conception. Mary Shelley had been repudiated by her father, William Godwin, to whom she dedicated her novel with the Miltonian reproach "Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay / To mould me man? Did I solicit thee / From darkness to promote me?" In 1815 she had lost a two-month premature baby girl who could not survive, an episode that questioned her own capacity as a woman to generate life; also, her own literary capacities were swallowed up by a male environment that offered her only agony and despair. However, Odriozola's greater achievement lies in the conception of an illustrated prologue that goes beyond the specific, and that is able to create a generalised metaphor concerning the writer's agony. Mary Shelley may have exorcized her daemons, but there is a high price to be paid in exchange. She, like any immortal author, cannot survive her creature.

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

BLURRING THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN MONSTER AND HUMAN: THE RETELLING OF *FRANKENSTEIN* IN *PENNY DREADFUL*

GRETA COLOMBANI

Among recent adaptations of the Frankenstein story, one of the most compelling is found in *Penny Dreadful*, a British-American television series created by John Logan which aired on Showtime for three seasons from 2014 to 2016. *Penny Dreadful* is set in London during the last decade of the 19th century and revolves around Vanessa Ives (played by Eva Green), a young woman endowed with supernatural powers and haunted by the forces of darkness, whose path crosses those of other characters belonging to the Gothic repertoire – some invented by Logan, others taken directly from the literary milestones of this genre, such as Dorian Gray, Dracula, Mina Harker, Abraham Van Helsing, Dr Jekyll, Victor Frankenstein (played by Harry Treadaway) and his Creature (played by Rory Kinnear).

The Overlapping of Creator and Creature

Although the Frankenstein story seems to be just one of the main narrative threads constituting the multi-plot structure of the series, its pivotal importance emerges from the key role it played in the development of the series as a whole. In an interview with *Adweek* published on 27 June 2014, John Logan revealed that he drew his very first inspiration for *Penny Dreadful* from Mary Shelley's novel:

I was reading a lot of Romantic poetry, particularly Wordsworth, and that led me to Byron, Shelley and Keats and eventually to re-reading Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which I hadn't read since I was a kid, and it just shocked me how powerful it was and how moving it was. And I just started thinking about that, and the themes that Mary Shelley plays with. If you read the binary narrative of *Frankenstein*, the question you have to emerge with is "Who is the monster, Victor Frankenstein or the monster he creates?" And the duality therein I thought was really interesting. (Thielman 2014)

In this passage, Logan clearly suggests that the component of the novel that caught his interest most was the monster/human binary, or rather the questioning of this binary attempted by Mary Shelley. It comes therefore as no surprise that his retelling of the Frankenstein story starts from the problematisation of the definition of monster and human in the novel, but he further develops this theme by bringing it to its extreme consequences. This chapter, which will focus on the first two seasons of the series, aims to show how Logan makes Frankenstein and his Creature overlap by means of the insertion of various elements that deviate from the original story and, by doing so, to draw critical attention to this intelligently crafted series, and in particular to the preeminent role of a *Frankenstein* retelling that emerges from the story of its genesis and that has so far usually been overlooked in the few studies that exist.¹

First, the symmetry between the two characters – which is explicitly acknowledged by the Creature when he says to Frankenstein: "We are the Janus mask. Inseparable" (Logan 2014, S01E03)² – is established through the mutual use of derogatory vocatives. Whereas in the novel, when Frankenstein and the Creature confront each other, the latter reacts to his

¹ Lauren Rocha, for instance, focuses on the specific role of *Dracula* as hypotext: see Rocha 2016. Many others deal with the theoretical issues of adaptation and with the general strategies of rewriting which *Penny Dreadful* resorts to, but they do not explore the specific dynamics through which it is related to its different sources: see Lee and King 2016 and Poore 2016. Poore lays particular emphasis also on the model provided by penny dreadfuls. Barbara Braid deals with the relationship between *Frankenstein* and *Penny Dreadful*, but she too concentrates on the question of adaptation: see Braid 2017.

² The same idea is restated in the first episode of the second season, when Frankenstein asks if John Clare – one of the names the Creature adopts – will leave him alone after he creates a companion for him and the Creature answers: "You would better do to ask your soul to leave you. We are bound on a wheel of pain, thee and me. I ask you, what is Dr. Frankenstein without his Creature?" (Logan 2015, S02E01), which also has clear metaliterary implications.

being called “devil” by addressing Frankenstein as nothing more than “man,”³ in *Penny Dreadful* they exchange the epithet “demon,” a term that, throughout the book, refers exclusively to the Creature – just like “monster.” Conversely, in the series not only is Frankenstein called “demon” by his own Creature,⁴ but he is also acknowledged as a monster by Vanessa Ives, who says to him: “You are a beautiful monster and there are those who could love you and shall” (Logan 2015, S02E09). What this implies about Logan’s conception of monsters will be returned to, but it is now necessary to identify the other strategies through which the blurring of the boundary between monster and human is achieved in the television series.

One of the major points where *Penny Dreadful* departs from its source is in the creation of a female companion for the Creature, which is successfully carried out. In order to get a suitable body, Frankenstein suffocates with a pillow a prostitute dying of tuberculosis. By intentionally and personally killing someone, Frankenstein crosses a boundary that distinguished him from his Creature in the novel, where murder is an exclusive prerogative of the monster⁵ and Frankenstein’s guilt stems only from his indirect responsibility for his offspring’s crimes. Shelley’s Frankenstein feels that he “not in deed, but in effect, was the true murderer;” (Shelley 1818, 72)⁶ Logan’s equivalent becomes a murderer in deed as well.

³ See this exchange as an example: ““Man, you shall repent of the injuries you inflict.’ ‘Devil, cease; and do not poison the air with these sounds of malice.’” (Shelley 1818, 140)

⁴ In the third episode of the first season, Frankenstein calls the Creature ‘demon’ in line with the novel: “What do you want from me, demon?” Yet, in the very same exchange, the Creature addresses him with the same term: “I do not seek your love, demon.” (Logan 2014, S01E03)

⁵ Murder is linked to monstrosity also in the words of the wrongly accused Justine: “Ever since I was condemned, my confessor has besieged me; he threatened and menaced, until I almost began to think that I was the monster that he said I was.” (Shelley 66)

⁶ The same idea is restated later in the narrative: “I felt as if I had committed some great crime, the consciousness of which haunted me. I was guiltless, but I had indeed drawn down a horrible curse upon my head, as mortal as that of crime.” (Shelley 135)

The Multiplication of Creatures and the Reduction of Human Relationships

Frankenstein's decision to keep his promise results in the addition of another specimen to the number of his creatures, which is actually tripled in the television series. The first one, who has been so far referred to as simply "the Creature" but goes under the names of Caliban and John Clare, corresponds to the character in the literary source, whereas the other two are introduced by Logan. The second one, called Proteus, is killed by John Clare out of jealousy when he ultimately finds the creator who abandoned him at birth, whereas the third is Lily, the murdered prostitute who is brought back to life in order to be John Clare's companion, but for whom Frankenstein develops the same desire as for his firstborn, another element that leads to the overlapping of the two characters. The multiplication of the creatures is paralleled by a drastic reduction in the extent of Frankenstein's human relationships. Elizabeth is not a character in *Penny Dreadful* and Lily substitutes for her in the role of romantic interest. Their convergence is further confirmed by the fact that Lily is introduced into society by Frankenstein as his cousin, that is, with the same degree of kinship as Elizabeth in the first draft of the novel.⁷ What is more, Lily speaks of herself as "maybe just the cousin you always wanted" (Logan 2015, S02E02), stressing Frankenstein's longstanding desire for companionship in the absence of the strong familial ties that he has in the novel.

In fact, Frankenstein's family – which plays a pivotal role in the novel, as it is the centre of his affections from which he is progressively alienated by his all-absorbing work and by the murderous actions of his Creature – is almost completely absent in the television series. Viewers get only a glimpse into his family life, in a flashback that shows his last happy moments before his mother's death when he is only a child – that is, much earlier than in the novel. Not even those moments, however, are truly happy, as Frankenstein is confronted with the death of his dog before that of his mother, who, immediately before vomiting blood, says to him: "Ourselves alone" (Logan 2014, S01E03), and thus seems to leave him a legacy of loneliness. Besides, no mention is ever made of his father and only a cursory one of his brothers. There is no reason to believe that

⁷ This analogy with the book is too specific to be a mere coincidence and it is one of the main reasons why I have chosen to quote from the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein*, as Logan seems to be well acquainted with it to the point of creating subtle intertextual references to it, such as this one.

Logan's Frankenstein could say anything comparable to the words he utters during his journey to Ingolstadt in the novel: "I, who had ever been surrounded by amiable companions, continually engaged in endeavouring to bestow mutual pleasure, I was now alone" (Shelley 28). In the television series, his loneliness dates further back in time and is more complete – whilst at this stage in the book, it is just a matter of geographical distance.

Frankenstein's different net of relationships affects the configuration of space too. In the novel, space is structured through a dichotomy between Geneva and Ingolstadt, that is, between home and the laboratory, between the place where his loved ones dwell and the place where he devotes himself to his work. In *Penny Dreadful*, however, as Frankenstein's family and his beloved are absent or projected into a dim past, there is no home to which he can go back. His whole life is confined to London, in particular to his laboratory, where he also happens to live, so that the home has been literally absorbed into the laboratory, thereby effacing the dichotomy of the book. Yet another house plays a central role in the storyline of the character and in the series in general, but, rather than being Frankenstein's, this is Vanessa Ives' dwelling, Grandage Place, where every character – including Frankenstein – ends up converging from different starting points. These dynamics determine an opposite kind of movement in the series as compared to the book: on the one hand a centripetal drive that has its centre in Grandage Place, on the other a mainly centrifugal one according to which the characters leave Geneva⁸ never to recover their original sense of togetherness, whether because of physical distance, death or alienation.

A Shared Loneliness

All these elements – the multiplication of the creatures, the lack of human relationships, the absence of a home – function to further bring the characters of Frankenstein and John Clare together under the sign of loneliness.⁹ What determines the Creature's actions and shapes his destiny

⁸ Rieger identifies Geneva as "the center of the novel's centrifugal action." (Rieger 1982, xi-xxxviii)

⁹ The theme of loneliness is central in the novel too, as it is tackled from the very beginning of the text in Walton's letters: "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,

both in the novel and in the series is precisely the experience of constant rejection, and the impossibility of being accepted by any human being; hence his longing for a companion. In the book, he states: “Every where I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. [...] Believe me, Frankenstein: I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity: but am I not alone, miserably alone?” (Shelley 77-78). Likewise, in *Penny Dreadful*, John Clare recalls the first moments after his birth in the following terms: “The first human action I experienced was rejection. So do not wonder at my loathing of your species. I waited, but you did not return. Has there ever been a creature so alone? So utterly helpless?” (Logan 2014, S01E03).

As already pointed out, however, the series portrays Frankenstein as alone and outcast as his firstborn from the very beginning; this is also suggested by the different function his work has in the two texts. In the book, his work causes his alienation from his loved ones, together with the actual death of some of them, as the following quotations show: “And the same feelings which made me neglect the scenes around me caused me also to forget those friends who were so many miles absent” (Shelley 37); and: “Study had before secluded me from the intercourse of my fellow-creatures, and rendered me unsocial” (Shelley 50). Conversely, in the series, there are no friends to forget and work itself seems to be an attempt at breaking an already existing state of isolation, which explains why, unlike in the source, Frankenstein does not give up his endeavours after the first failure¹⁰ but goes on creating other beings. Frankenstein smiles when Proteus calls him a friend and adds rather bitterly that he will have

no one will endeavor 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.” (Shelley 8-9)

¹⁰ In the novel, instead, Frankenstein’s reaction is a complete rejection of his studies: “Ever since the fatal night, the end of my labours, and the beginning of my misfortunes, I had conceived a violent antipathy even to the name of natural philosophy. When I was otherwise quite restored to health, the sight of a chemical instrument would renew all the agony of my nervous symptoms” (Shelley 48); “I had resolved in my own mind, that to create another like the fiend I had first made would be an act of the basest and most atrocious selfishness; and I banished from my mind every thought that could lead to a different conclusion.” (143)

many only if he is lucky.¹¹ Proteus is killed immediately after uttering this sentence and it is not by chance that, in the series, in order to deprive Frankenstein of his loved ones, the Creature does not kill his little brother but rather his second-born, as he seems to be Frankenstein's sole companion in his isolation.

Even more tellingly, while leaning on the bathtub where Lily's inanimate body waits to be brought back to life, Frankenstein sighs: "I'll miss talking to you. It's good to have someone to talk to. You'll learn that soon enough" (Logan 2015, S02E01), revealing all his aching loneliness and leaving us to wonder for whom he is actually creating her. The contrast between a centrifugal movement and a centripetal one highlights this same reversal. Just as the novel can be seen as revolving around the disintegration of a family,¹² so *Penny Dreadful* tells the opposite story of how different outsiders – including Frankenstein himself – are joined together in the alternative family of Grandage Place, a family that is composed of people who are not blood relations but share the same experience of isolation and of outcastness, in short, a family of monsters. As Logan said at the Comic-Con 2014 Panel: "To me, all television is about family. To me, that is the bridge crew of the Enterprise from Star Trek. And so I structured the eight hours to build a family and bring them together" (Diaz 2014).

Conceptions of Monstrosity

Loneliness is not simply a point in common between Frankenstein and John Clare. More importantly, it questions the boundary between human and monster, since isolation is a major trait in the definition of monstrosity as presented in the series. In the already quoted passage where Frankenstein is explicitly defined as a monster, Vanessa comments on the failure of his relationship with Lily in the following terms: "I'm sorry she hurt you. I'm sorry you feel so unloved. You are a beautiful monster. And there are those who could love you and shall" (Logan 2015, S02E09). Being a monster is thus directly linked to being unloved. A few episodes earlier, again talking about his feelings for Lily to Vanessa, Frankenstein confesses: "It's the oddest thing, Miss Ives. My whole life, I've thought I

¹¹ "'Friends are something different. They're people you've known for a while, you're comfortable with, close to.' 'Like Victor.' 'Yes.' 'Will I have many?' 'If you're lucky'" (Logan 2014, S01E03).

¹² He says to Walton: "Know that, one by one, my friends were snatched away; I was left desolate" (Shelley 167).

was bound to live with exceptionality. I was not like my brothers. I was resolutely this disjointed thing, this freakish thing” (Logan 2015, S02E06). As already hinted, Frankenstein has always been alienated from his brothers because he is not like them. For this reason he sees himself as a disjointed and freakish thing, epithets that would better suit his Creature,¹³ traditionally composed of nothing less than disjointed limbs. As far as the Creature is concerned, both the series and the novel portray the path leading him to become the monster he is bound to become, as determined by utter isolation and constant rejection. As he says in the series, the experiences he endured brought him to the moment when “the malignance has grown [...] from the outside in” (Logan 2014, S01E08), while in the book he asserts: “My vices are the children of a forced solitude that I abhor” (Shelley 121).

As a result, being a monster equates with being an outsider. It is the outcome of a relational dynamic of isolation and alienation, so that it has more to do with the way we interact with others than with our nature. Yet, this positional¹⁴ rather than essentialist definition of monstrosity, however hinted at,¹⁵ is never fully embraced by Mary Shelley, as the names of monster, devil and demon (as well as the act of killing) are limited to the being that seems to be essentially monstrous and is invariably perceived as such because of his deformed physical aspect. By making the characters of

¹³ The feeling of kinship with freakish, unloved beings is what brought the Creature to choose John Clare as a name: “I’ve always been moved by John Clare’s story. By all accounts he was only five feet tall, so considered freakish. Perhaps due to this, he felt a singular affinity with the outcast and the unloved, the ugly animals, the broken things” (Logan 2015, S02E05). The reference is to the English poet John Clare (1793-1864).

¹⁴ ‘Positional’ refers to a relational understanding of identity that relies on the notion of ‘position’ as first introduced by Hollway and then further developed by Harré and van Lagenhove. It is opposed to essentialist conceptions and constitutes “a dynamic alternative to the more static concept of role,” (Harré and van Lagenhove 1999,14), according to which identities depend on the positions that we occupy in interactions and can exist only “in relation to other people” (Hollway 2005, 233).

¹⁵ That the Creature’s actual monstrosity is the outcome of interactional and social dynamics is highlighted by many critics: see, for instance, Cimatti 2016 and Bernatchez 2009. In addition, a possible identification between Frankenstein and his Creature in the novel is suggested by the following passage: “I considered the being whom I had cast among mankind, and endowed with the will and power to effect purposes of horror, such as the deed which he had now done, nearly in the light of my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to me” (Shelley 57).

Frankenstein and John Clare converge and partly overlap, with a special focus on the element of isolation, *Penny Dreadful* develops this idea and openly presents a relational conception of monstrosity, thus acknowledging and doing justice to the complexity and boldness of Shelley's vision but also taking it a step further.

The retelling of the Frankenstein story, which not by chance was the first inspiration for the whole series, brings to the fore a central theme in the overall poetics of *Penny Dreadful*, which is an exploration of the outcastness, loneliness and monstrosity that mark all its characters,¹⁶ as Logan goes on to say in the *Adweek* interview: "I think all the characters grapple with a version of [feeling different], with a version of exceptionality. Can they come to peace with that thing that marks them as alien to their families and their loved ones?" (Thielman 2014). This monstrosity, in fact, is not seen as something to reject but rather to embrace, as we all have the potentiality to become monsters, to be excluded and marginalised just like Frankenstein. At the Comic Con 2014 Panel, Logan said: "[W]hat I think this show is about is the monster in all of us – the thing we must embrace, the thing that frightens us, and the thing that makes us who we are" (Diaz 2014). In *Penny Dreadful*, monsters as misfits and outsiders are given a voice, are re-evaluated and cherished, as suggested by the creation of their alternative community at Grandage Place. If it is true that Vanessa, an outcast herself, calls Frankenstein "monster," the adjective she chooses is not to be overlooked: to her eyes Frankenstein is a "beautiful monster," just as John Clare is "the most human man" (Logan 2015, S02E10) she has ever known.

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¹⁶ Other studies have emphasised the centrality of monstrosity in *Penny Dreadful* and focused on its representations, but they have failed to acknowledge the pivotal role of *Frankenstein* rewriting in developing this specific conception of monstrosity: see Locke 2017 and Philips 2017, who, however, recognises the performative and relational nature of monstrosity in the series.

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

MONSTER, CREATURE, NAMELESS, CREATED: *FRANKENSTEIN* TRANSFORMED IN ROLE PLAYING GAMES

JON GARRAD

Fred Botting describes the “Introduction” to *Frankenstein* as offering a glimpse of its own future: the aesthetic circumstances in which its filmic adaptations would be produced. Assembled from bits and pieces, the novel is like the monster itself, and stands in for the monster of Gothic romance as a genre. In this respect, *Frankenstein* also resembles a collection of media which have picked the bones of Gothic, of fantasy, of science fiction and of pulp in establishing their generic coordinates. I am, of course, talking about games. Tabletop games and, later, computerised Role Playing Games – hence RPGs – have carried out transformative work on Victor Frankenstein and his creation for decades. In doing so, the medium has joined a tradition that was well underway when the second edition of *Frankenstein* entered publication: the novel saw fifteen direct theatrical adaptations in three years, and reached a far broader audience than its original print run would have allowed.

Since then, as Botting has it, *Frankenstein* has escaped any sense of authorial control, becoming a modern myth, a cautionary tale about overreaching ambition and ethical distortion. This chapter considers how RPG adaptations of *Frankenstein* have taken that idea and run with it, engaging with and extending the moral core of Shelley’s novel in ways that no other medium can achieve. First: the Flesh Golems of *Dungeons & Dragons* (*D&D*), including an iteration from the *Ravenloft* campaign setting which pays direct homage to *Frankenstein* – a direct, superficial and immature copying of Shelley’s Creature, implementing the Creature as part of a library of genre tropes, using it without adequately understanding what makes it worth using. Second: the Nameless One,

protagonist of the *D&D*-based computer RPG *Planescape: Torment*, a more developed version of the Creature who becomes both the story's protagonist and the player's avatar, and demonstrates the potential games media have as a method for transformative, interactive adaptations as variants on a theme.

Third: the playable characters of *Promethean: The Created*. The Storyteller series, to which *Promethean* belongs, explicitly represent Gothic archetypes and make them accessible for collaborative, narratively driven play, directly engaging with the themes that underpin the genre. *Promethean* transforms the avatarial experience offered by *Planescape* into a group activity, with multiple origin stories and archetypes for Creature-like artificial beings available, and an emphasis on character development.

That concept of character development is the crux of the discussion here. RPGs have a great deal to offer in terms of character development, identification and understanding, thanks to the specific technologies of complicity and affect which they offer. Such technologies are a cornerstone of the Gothic too: Nick Groom argues that despite the Gothic's location in the past, it is inherently a technological genre, inspired by and looking toward the future. Groom talks up modern architectural technology as superseding structural medievalism, scientific developments as providing inspiration to generations of authors, and the fundamental association between the Gothic and early cinema, specifically the attraction which the moving image held for creators adapting Gothic coordinates and texts. Gothic is technological and it is transmedia, adapting to the capacities and limitations of the medium in which it finds itself and pushing against them.

The technology of games – be it the digital visual/audio/tactile technology of computer games, or the imaginative and social-systemic technology of tabletop “pen and paper” games – extends the Gothic into new realms of interactive complicity. Through repetition, agency and mastery sited in a character who is not them but under their control, players become responsible for moral choices and consequences within the game's simulated world. Staffan Björk and Jesper Juul, in their discussion “Zero-Player Games” analyse the construction of this “player” concept, in relation to games as self-contained created texts. Players are directly responsible for what their avatars do, and for how they behave, and often for establishing their moral compass, albeit in terms presented by the games' designers.

At the most basic level, the RPG mode offers players a simple choice between nasty, nice and neutral behaviour; at the most advanced, players determine the moral circumstances of the entire imagined world by setting the specific tenets and convictions at the heart of their experience. In either case, as players, our finger is on the button, our hand rolls the die: whatever happens, we made it happen. This capacity for complicity has a lot to offer for adaptations and transformations of a text like *Frankenstein*. In particular, the classic theme of Gothic doubling is present between player and avatar, and resonates with questions posed by source texts when games draw on them for inspiration and context.

Aija Ozolins identifies the *doppelgänger* effect as a motif of second selfhood which constitutes the chief source of the novel's latent power. Her analysis is classically Freudian and traditionally moral, highlighting the negative epithets Victor uses for his creation – devil, fiend, daemon, horror, wretch, monster, etcetera – and his thinking of the creature as “my own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to me” (Shelley 1818, 57). The creation is explicitly associated with Victor's baser nature, detached from his alleged higher instincts. To me, this analysis does not entirely ring true, since Victor's vaulting ambition speaks to a flaw in his character that is at best duplicated in his creation's. Victor himself acknowledges that he, “not in deed but in effect, was the true murderer,” (Shelley 1818, 72). making questions of complicity and responsibility the novel's moral centre.

If the Creature, or the Monster, or whatever Victor is calling it today, is his own self one step removed, then it lacks agency; it does nothing Victor would not do, if he was removed from the mores and processes that govern him. Give the Creation agency and moral responsibility for his own actions, however, and we move into a more interesting moral territory.

According to Maria Mahoney, the *doppelgänger* effect resolves when one confronts and recognises the dark aspect of one's personality in order to transform it by an act of conscious choice. Victor's attempt to flee and then to kill constitutes a rejection of this choice and of his own moral agency, placing him on shaky moral ground compared to the Creation, who seizes moral agency from the moment he is aware that he has the capacity to do so. The Creature tries to make himself useful; he derives pleasure from being good; he has, according to the Godwinian moral precepts of Shelley's novel, the potential to be good, and his final

withdrawal from society constitutes either a tragic failure to make good on that, or a noble sacrifice in the cause of trying to.

That level of moral choice is afforded to the protagonist figures – the player characters – in RPGs. Provided that the games’ authors and developers can restrain themselves from restricting it for the sake of imposing their own moral paradigms, players can seize the moment and shape the moral context of their characters’ stories. The reader turns writer, engaging with the author of the game’s text in a storytelling *doppelgänger* effect of their own. Of course, providing any sort of story – a narrative hook to attract and maintain player interest beyond play for play’s sake and to establish the terms of moral quandary – demands a certain amount of authorial imposition. Striking and sustaining that balance is the sign of a good developer. In today’s context, it is also the sign of an effective transformation of *Frankenstein* – to wit, one which maintains the moral significance of its inspiration but also makes the most of playability.

The first case study in this paper does not achieve that, and – regrettably – still defines the public perception of RPGs to the extent that they are seen as an inherently immature medium. The material in question was written in the 1980s, and represents the infancy of the form. Think of it as akin to the silent movies of the 1910s, developing into the Universal series beginning in 1931. Contemporary cinema is capable of more, but needed to move through these simplistic adaptations and crude techniques in order to develop. RPGs are an even younger medium, still finding their feet and exploring their potential. Be kind, and look to the more recent developments in the second and third case studies as a sign of where gaming can go in the future.

AD&D and Ravenloft

Cinema’s adaptation of and perspective on the Creature was the first to appear in the RPG mode. *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons* (or *AD&D*) collapses Shelley’s Creature down into a mere Monster, a simplistic caricature that owes more to the snarling Karloff than the eloquent figure of the novel, and the Flesh Golem wears its cinematic origins on its scalp. Described as semi-intelligent, able to follow simple commands from its master, and prone to fits of berserk rage when provoked, this superficial interpretation of the Monster is characterised by the distinctive square-head-and-stitches aesthetic, and by its habit of smashing through furnishings and bludgeoning you senseless for bothering it. Furthermore, the golem is

animated by an elemental spirit: it is not considered an artificial or reanimated human personality at all. Considered as a transformation of *Frankenstein*, it basically removes all moral depth from the original: it is a superficial iteration based on an already simplified version. From here, the only way is up.

Ravenloft, originally published in 1990, is a campaign setting for *AD&D* which explicitly draws on Gothic tropes and sources and moves the game's coordinates into a combination of Hammer Gothic and post-Tolkien fantasy. Within that mandate, it partially rehabilitates the *Frankenstein* Creature from the lowly status to which other *D&D* settings consign it – although the operative word is 'partially.'

The setting presents us with Doctor Victor Mordenheim: scientist and surgeon, grey-haired and mad-eyed, and – as the material is honest enough to admit – “*Ravenloft*'s Doctor Frankenstein, loosely based on the character from Mary Shelley's classic Gothic novel.” Mordenheim's crime, in a game where magically-induced resurrections and reanimations are a matter of course, available to the most Lawful Good of law-abiding do-gooders, is atheistic rationalism. Like Victor Frankenstein, he was dabbling in the work of gods, and the gods, in turn, dabbled in him. *Ravenloft* explicitly states that he is punished out of divine spite, and that his future efforts are divinely mandated to fail. His creation, Adam Mordenheim, is far more powerful within the game's rules system, and is the true antagonist of the cursed domain in which both of them are trapped by supernatural means. Adam lives as a reclusive wild man, but he wants to be human; his frustration at his inhuman state drives him to violence and evil. Although Adam has elements in common with the primitive Flesh Golems – including the special rules for electrical attacks empowering and healing him, a nod to the galvanistic principle of the novel – *Ravenloft*'s authors are at pains to point out that he resembles neither a flesh golem nor a lumbering dolt with neck bolts. They describe him as nimble, swift and clever, using the terrain for tactical advantage, accustomed to living in danger.

Adam Mordenheim represents a step up from the Karloffian imitation in standard *AD&D*, back towards the pursuing threat of the novel, but this detail and depth is not grounded in any context or interaction. The doubling effect is present only at its most basic, since the two characters are presented in isolation, rather than in the metaphysical and personal opposition of *Frankenstein* proper. They are done with each other: Adam is not pursuing vengeance on his creator, and Mordenheim has moved on

to attempting a resurrection for the local Elizabeth Lavenza substitute. Neither of them can gain anything from accepting the other, as Mahoney suggests was essential to complete the moral narrative of *Frankenstein*. There is no resolution to their situation, bar player characters coming along and killing one of them because they're there, in the usual non-logic of early RPGs. It's a static, leaden pastiche of *Frankenstein*, which assumes homage is interesting for its own sake and mines other media for 'gameable content.'

Planescape: Torment

AD&D can do so much better than this, and by the end of the 1990s it would do so with *Planescape: Torment*. This single player computer adaptation of *AD&D* puts players in the role of the Nameless One: an immortal, quasi-undead figure with no clear recollection of his past, whose memories and ambitions are expressed through modifications of his apparently indestructible, clearly reconstructed body. In one of the finest slow-burn openings computer RPGs have ever seen, the Nameless One literally wakes up on a slab, in an industrial-scale re-animator's laboratory. In the early stages, barring his talking skull sidekick, he chiefly interacts with mindless zombies and other undead whose bodies contain parts of his and thus, through magical means, parts of his absent memory. All of this serves to differentiate him from the handful of living people he encounters, but also to separate him from the mere undead. He belongs in neither of their worlds; he has a degree of agency above and beyond a mere Creation. In a past life, he asked a hag to make him immortal so he had time to atone for his terrible crimes. Her magic resurrects him every time he dies, but robs him of his memories, and has – spoiler warning – also created the game's antagonist. The Transcendent One is the Nameless One's mortality, separated and decanted into its own discrete person. Since he enjoys being alive, and has no intention of being decanted back into the Nameless One's body, the Transcendent One has remained one step ahead of his creator, erasing clues and killing informants who might lead the Nameless One to the truth. The *doppelgänger* effect described by Mahoney is in full flow here, and as Mahoney predicted, it resolves on the death of the Transcendent One.

However, the moral route to this resolution is permeable and plastic, heavily shaped by player choices. Morally speaking, the Nameless is a blank slate. Many minor choices as to how to go about resolving plot points, completing quests, and treating the automated Non-Player Characters

encountered during the game, act to shift his morality to and fro on the classic *AD&D* alignment grid. This framework describes ethics between a kind of idealised White Anglo-Saxon Protestant ‘good’ and ‘evil’ in one direction, and a societal or cosmological sense of ‘law’ and ‘chaos’ in the other, with ‘neutrality’ existing between the ideological extremes. Every player’s Nameless One starts out True Neutral: my Nameless One ended up Neutral Good; a genial bruiser willing to help anyone who said they needed helping, disinterested in the technicalities of order and disorder. This is a consequence of my preferred playstyle – I don’t like to cheat myself out of opportunities for adventure by being rude to someone who may have a quest I can do. It also created a moral perspective on later events, and it puts me in a particular relationship with the Transcendent One, who’s killing his way through Sigil out of pure self-interest. My Nameless is the man who made a monster: a well-meaning Victor who happens to resemble the Creation. Yours might be quite different.

On a basic level, the Nameless One represents a Promethean over-reaching worthy of Shelley’s Victor. Although the actual legwork of ‘creating’ the Transcendent One wasn’t his own, the choice certainly was. He is a reasonably intelligent man who has inadvertently created a new form of life out of his own ambition. He is also, however, the Creature; a physically repulsive near-carcass who, depending on how you choose to play him, can be driven to extremes of violence by his frustration, or pursue a course of moral goodness, of service to the society through which he moves, making an effort to belong.

In one person, the Nameless One embodies both popular uses and understandings of the name “Frankenstein,” collapsing the *doppelgänger* effect into a single figure to boot. He is both the creator and the creation, seeking to reconcile himself with the past self who created his present, and the severed aspect of him who defines his future. He also highlights and partially collapses the *doppelgänger* effect existing between player and avatar or character – unlike other adaptations of *AD&D*, where players select their characters’ alignment at creation, his is entirely emergent from their in-game choices; authorship is deliberately restricted in a way that ends up remarkably liberating. Going further, he also troubles the relationship between game developers as authors, game players as readers, and games as both text and transformative activity – but that argument is one for another time.

In summary: morally and narratively, the Nameless One is the most complex transformation of Frankenstein that gaming has produced to date.

However, *Planescape: Torment* is a computer RPG. As such, it is innately a structured, authorial project that lends itself to a sort of novelistic fluidity, what Espen Aarseth calls “ergodic literature.” A tabletop RPG like *Ravenloft* is a troupe activity: it offers potentiality to a group of players and it is up to them to implement and develop that potentiality. The task of creating a moral centre falls further and further away from the game’s creators, who can only advise on how the activity *should* unfold. To capture and develop moral complexity there requires a slightly different approach.

Promethean: The Created

Promethean: The Created is one of the World of Darkness games, which draw on classic figures from horror or weird fiction – vampires, werewolves, faeries and so on – and use them for self-described Storytelling Games. The explicit goal of a Storyteller System game is to create, with a group of players, a satisfying ergodic narrative that expresses a consistent theme and consistently explores a character conflict or drive. *Promethean* is a Storytelling Game of Stolen Lives. Like *Ravenloft*, *Promethean: The Created* cites Frankenstein’s Monster among its inspirations, which also include *Pygmalion*, the Golem of Prague and the legend of Osiris. All of these sources lend their name to a character archetype, so you may well be literally playing “a Frankenstein.” The very title of *Promethean: The Created*, of course, calls to mind the subtitle of Shelley’s novel, with its themes of attempting the scientifically and morally unthinkable, stealing the forbidden knowledge of fire from the gods. However, the game is concerned less with the Modern Prometheus than with the after-effects of his work. Players of *Promethean* take on the roles of monsters created from the corpses of dead humans, reanimated through various means, whose ultimate goal is to become fully human and gain a soul. In the meantime, they are burdened by a supernatural effect called Disquiet: a game mechanic which represents the hatred and fear normal human characters feel upon encountering and spending time with the Prometheans, and which grows more acute over time. Effectively, the Disquiet is meant to ensure the characters experience the isolation which shapes the Creature’s character.

However, as a tabletop RPG, *Promethean* is a co-operative multiplayer game. This means a given troupe of players will play multiple Created, and the expectation is that they will interact and collaborate in a manner which produces a satisfying ergodic narrative. To function, the game relies

on a sense of found-family kinship among the disparate characters that players create, and amongst the players themselves. It is similar to the kind of radically domestic postmodern gothic posited by William Hughes, whose sense of the Gothic regards the ordinary, mortal, heterosexual, reproductive “family” as an anachronism. Gothic, according to Hughes, posits radical alternatives along self-selecting lines, including the shapeshifting werewolf encampments and secretive urban vampire clans on which *Promethean* and its sister games are based. The greater family of species and society, as Hughes writes, is now irrelevant within the confines of domestic Gothic, made up as it is of nominative found families.

Promethean stands out among RPGs and among *Frankenstein* transformations because it represents a radical step away from its specific inspiration. The Creature in *Frankenstein* is defined by his loneliness, his outcast status, the revulsion with which he is greeted by everyone who sees his face. Arguably, to give the Creature a peer group is to fatally undermine this. However, the Created – like the original from whose mould they are cast, and like all the troupes of supernatural beings in the World of Darkness – are stuck with each other. *Promethean* refuses to integrate the playable Created within conventional human models of domestic living. Their Disquiet permanently exiles them from human communities and consigns them to a facsimile community composed exclusively of their own kind – unless they successfully transcend their condition. In Mahoney’s terms, this would require the Promethean characters to destroy their creator, resolving their *doppelgänger* status – but as far as the played experience of the game goes, *Promethean* aims for something darker. The Created must effectively destroy themselves. Overcoming their separation puts them outside the game’s remit. They become merely human, and thus are no longer Promethean player characters. They are rendered unplayable: their story is over and they are out of the game, exactly as if they had died.

Conclusion

As Botting has it, the monster is a being cast out from human society or made monstrous by their inhumane norms and practices. A monstrous protagonist comes to realise that something about them – whether their ‘normal’ day-to-day existence, or the events which made them what they are – has rendered them an essentially abject figure, a permanent outsider. All of these games at least recognise this essential truth, although only two of them manage to deploy it on any meaningful level. *Planescape* and

Promethean succeed where *Ravenloft* fails because they reframe the Creature as protagonist. They locate the player's perspective within a created entity who is in search of identity, purpose and a sense of the world. This avatar is confronted with an evolving moral education, and the player is personally responsible for what – if anything – they get out of it. By creating complicity in the role of the Creature, *Planescape: Torment* and *Promethean: The Created* directly engage players in the process of growth, development and discovery which the Creature undergoes. These games offer an opportunity to confront and embrace the dark side of the avatar-protagonist's nature, completing the moral journey which ultimately destroys Victor Frankenstein and drives his Creation into exile. That is the power games media have to reframe and re-present their sources, drawing the reader/player into their moral world on a personal level. They may never produce a faithful adaptation of *Frankenstein*, but they can produce some fascinating transformations.

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