

Spring 2017

# Interpellating Mary Shelley into her Writing

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## Recommended Citation

Doxas, Alexandra and Doxas, Fiona, "Interpellating Mary Shelley into her Writing" (2017). *Undergraduate Honors Theses*. 1328.  
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**Interpellating Mary Shelley Into Her Writing**

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Defense Date: April 7, 2017

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**Abstract:**

In this thesis I will argue that Mary Shelley's works form a dialogue with those of her contemporaries and predecessors within the Romantic Movement that criticizes social constructions of gender as well as the narcissistic convictions first, that one can delve into nature and truly access its sublime secrets, and second, that one can then exert the right to harvest what they believe they have found for their own aggrandizement. I will show that the foundations of *Six Weeks' Tour*, *Frankenstein*, and *Matilda* are predicated on a series of paradigms: first, the aesthetic categories of the sublime and picturesque from works by William Gilpin, Edmund Burke, Kant, Milton, Dante, and Percy Shelley; second I will demonstrate how the critiques of gender and education Mary Wollstonecraft offers undergird Shelley's texts; third, by looking at select works by Erasmus Darwin, Sir Humphry Davy, and Sigmund Freud I will explore, more briefly, the connection between *Frankenstein's* scientific specialization and the ways that this encourages his narcissistic delving into the sublime. I will elucidate the point that while feminist scholars have done much to broaden our understanding of Shelley, claims that *Frankenstein* is her "self-conscious revision of Percy Shelley's *Alastor*" and, more generally, a reiteration of "his theories of love" diminish the extent of her originality and grant greater authorship to the nearest man (Fisch et al. 4) to conclude that it is more accurate to say that Shelley's works reimagine in original and dynamic ways the literature and conventions of her era in order to argue against contemporary social norms, thereby establishing them as arbitrary constructions not found in nature—as she does with "Mont Blanc" in *Six Weeks' Tour*—or to use as springboards by which she can rethink binary constructions—as she does in her about-face revisions of gender constructions in Burke. I will thus show that her interactions with these authors demonstrate how thoroughly she inhabits the heart of Romanticism, rather than existing on its periphery as its diminutive Other. And, similarly, that the fact that Shelley argues that the divide between society's female and male is a matter of interpellation suggests both a feminist and a deconstructionist lens are necessary to illuminate her radical vision.

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**Key Words:** sublime, picturesque, interpellation, performative, primal horde, taboo, Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, Matilda, Percy Shelley

**Introduction:**  
**How the Critical Discourse on Mary Shelley Silences and Obscures Her**

A number of problematic assumptions and limitations pepper the scholarship of Mary Shelley. The first such problem is the tendency to force Shelley's work into a box that sees it solely in terms of gender and other issues that could loosely or stereotypically be called "feminine": for example, emotion, sympathy, and domesticity. Recently, feminist readings have exploded the literary criticism on *Frankenstein*. Scholars Audrey Fisch, Anne Mellor, and Esther Schor note in their introduction to *The Other Mary Shelley* that such a limiting practice has proven counterproductive as "the blaze of feminist interest in *Frankenstein* [throws] light on the novel's darkest passages" and yet leaves "Mary Shelley herself in her accustomed obscurity" (3). A feminist critique of a female novelist that fails to connect the author with her text—to credit the writer with her work and define the latter as her voice and not "an un-self-conscious and accidental" creation—perhaps misses the point of feminism (Levine et al. xiii). Similarly, always applying the assertion that Shelley's iconic novel "advances its critique in terms of an incipient feminist politics" limits Shelley's grasp of politics to her sex and consequently fails to adequately address history's mistaken belief that women are incapable of political thought (Fisch et al. 4). Ironically, the essays in *The Other Mary Shelley* by Margaret Homans, Mary Favret, and Kate Ellis and those outside the volume by Betty Bennett, though revolutionary and successful in attributing a self-conscious and deliberate political criticism to Shelley, still sequester her to "feminine" politics: feminism, the home, and family. For example, even Gayatri Spivak argues that the novel's feminism "resists the axiomatics of imperialism" (qtd. in Fischer 4).

This limitation then feeds into the second problem in Shelley scholarship: a tendency to separate her from the Romantic era and the works of her contemporaries, even though these same

scholars acknowledge that in *Frankenstein* she critiques her era. That is, scholars tend to argue that Shelley writes more from a woman's perspective and less from that of a politically cognizant member of her generation. This is born out by Paul Cantor's insistence that Shelley "is increasingly being recognized as a distinct voice within Romanticism, a distinctly feminine voice within what seems to be a male-dominated movement. [...] *Frankenstein* is a protest against Romantic titanism, against the masculine aggressiveness that lies concealed beneath the dreams of Romantic idealism" (Fisch et al. 236, 89). While Cantor here asserts some power for Shelley and grants that she consciously criticizes the seemingly male-dominated Romantic period, his point is problematic for a number of reasons: for one, it insists that her writing is "feminine," which is ironic considering that the public initially assumed Percy Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*, a misconception that suggests that the work is either masculine or genderless. Secondly, it separates her from the Romantic Movement by her sex and the disparate views she holds by virtue of that sex. While Cantor places her within Romanticism, he insists that, in regard to that of her contemporaries, her voice is distinct by virtue of its gender difference. She is the Other of Romanticism<sup>1</sup>—a part of her era but also separate from it. The result is a Shelley placed at odds with the literary, historical, and political paradigm in which she functions.

A third problem in Shelley scholarship is the tendency to analyze and define her other works in relation to her most famous text. Since the initial publication of *Frankenstein* in 1818, Shelley's first novel has ironically overshadowed her and her later works. Consequently, as Fisch et al note, the author is "obscured even by her own renown" while "the pale face of Victor Frankenstein [...] obscures the pale face of his creator;" which reflects how the Creature obscures Victor to the point of conflation and erasure (3, 4). While some argue that "Mary

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<sup>1</sup> This is ironic, considering the title of the collection in which this essay is featured.

Shelley has entered the cannon [of Romanticism] and the classroom with *Frankenstein*,” treatment of the novel has both compounded Shelley’s division from that canon and marginalized her many other works (Fisch et al. 236). In *Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: An Introduction*, Betty Bennett highlights Shelley’s “politicized themes of power and responsibility” in *Frankenstein*, suggesting that such themes represent a “consistent, larger metaphoric question of the exercise of power and responsibility, personal and societal” present in the author’s other writings (Bennett 30). Similarly, when Mary Favret likens Shelley’s contextualizing edits to her husband’s poetry to the labors of Victor Frankenstein she interposes the latter publication onto the former, suggesting that all of Shelley’s subsequent works are mere extensions of *Frankenstein* (Fisch et al. 26). This implication, that Shelley has written one novel several times over instead of a host of divergent texts, thereby diminishes her literary prowess while consigning her other works to general obscurity. That is not to say, however, that *Frankenstein* does not inform Shelley’s later writings—don’t most artists return to similar themes? I am suggesting instead that each later publication cumulatively informs the next in a geometric progression. For example, fragments of *History of a Six Week’s Tour Through A Part of France, Switzerland, Germany and Holland* emanate in *Frankenstein* while aspects of those two works flow into *Matilda*, and of those three into *Valperga*, *The Last Man*, *Perkin Warbeck*, *Lodore*, *Faulkner*, and even her editorial revisions of her husband’s poetry. Thus while Shelley’s own literary and political paradigms—both of which are grounded in her time period and the Romantic movement—inform and unite all her writings, she does not simply repeat the same themes that she established in *Frankenstein*.

At the time of Shelley’s writings, three concepts of aesthetics permeated literary discourse, which granted them an arbitrary hierarchical distinction: the sublime, the picturesque,

and the beautiful. The first involves nature that excites astonishment in the viewer—grand scenes of towering mountains, harsh rushing rivers, and stark contrasts of light and shadow.

Experiencing such phenomena robs humans of their egos, their sense of self; in less extreme, perhaps less traumatic circumstances, the sublime can also act as an inspirational fount, elevating individuals above from the confines of their mortal body and connecting them to a larger being: nature. The sublime's superiority to the beautiful can, unfortunately, be attributed to Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), which contrasts a masculine sublime tied to knowledge to a feminine beauty of a vacuous mentality. The sublime, then, is powerful, while its counterpart, beauty, is not. Similarly, the sublime is meant simultaneously to terrify the observer and shock her. Both these aesthetics contrast with that of the picturesque, which can be described as a scene combining the energy of the sublime and the serenity of the beautiful. For example, when Shelley views Mont Blanc, she deems that it is, on its own a sublime entity, but she sees it transformed as a component of picturesque nature when she observes it framing the background of a lake village.

The binary hierarchical distinction between the sublime and the picturesque is difficult to track to any one treatise; however the fact that William Gilpin feels the need to address the issue in his introduction to *Three Essays: on picturesque beauty and picturesque travel and on sketching landscapes: to which is added a poem on landscape painting*, suggests it was a prevalent point of contention in 1792 that then flowed into the new century:

[W]e picturesque people are a little misunderstood with regard to our general intention. [...] as supporting *all beauty* to consist in *picturesque beauty*—and the face of nature to be examined *only by the rules of painting*. We speak of the grand scenes of nature, tho uninteresting in a *picturesque light*, as having a strong effect on the imagination—often a stronger, than when they are properly disposed for the pencil. We everywhere make a distinction between scenes, that are *beautiful* [...] and scenes that are picturesque. We examine and admire both. (i, ii)

Here Gilpin distinguishes between picturesque, beautiful, and sublime scenes, and though he admits that the latter has the strongest effect on the imagination, he does not use this to support the claim that sublime nature is superior to that of the picturesque or beautiful. Instead he subtly implies that examining and admiring nature of all three aesthetics is preferable and more beneficial to the mind than sequestering your understanding to one medium—his statement, “We examine and admire both” refers to the sublime and picturesque; this is because he argues that the beautiful on its own would be absolutely plain and monotonous.

This thesis attempts to redress some of the issues scholarship on Shelley presents by reuniting her works with the paradigms from which they develop. I analyze her first three works, showing that an overarching theory connects them, one that posits a radical political commentary on her era’s social norms, aligning her more with Gilpin’s views than those of Burke. I will argue that while, as Bennett suggests, Shelley’s novels, travel journals, and novella illustrate her “consistent, larger metaphoric question of the exercise of power and responsibility, personal and societal” (30) they do so through a complicated host of binary oppositions that undermine and subvert each other and the hierarchical distinctions prevalent in her contemporary social order. The first binary occurs between the picturesque and the sublime with the former rendered superior to the latter, which flips the preferences that her society establishes. From this inverted hierarchical opposition stems that between humanity and nature, which connects with that between civilization and nature. Shelley argues that the picturesque is an aesthetic that, because it encourages self-awareness and values human interaction with and respect for things, it has a greater potential for promulgating ethical behavior; this dynamic takes into account the benefits for humans and nature arising from this collaboration of sorts, helping humanity and civilization thrive. Conversely, Shelley argues that the sublime, which is inherently based on power

relations, is more likely to encourage the human desire to dominate nature in an iteration of what Sigmund Freud will later call the Primal Horde. There are of course exceptions to this wherein authors use the sublime for virtuous ends: in “Mont Blanc,” for example, Percy Shelley calls the sublime the “secret Strength of things” (139). In *Frankenstein*, however, Victor Frankenstein himself exploits nature and its sublime power for narcissistic purposes. Shelley, while complicating society’s binary opposition between the sublime and the picturesque, simultaneously creates one in which women displace men as the dominant term, and by doing this, exchanging one construction for another, she deconstructs arbitrary social norms altogether.

**Chapter I:**  
**Social Change Through Mediation of the Sublime and Picturesque in Mary Shelley's**  
***History of a Six Week's Tour Through A Part of France, Switzerland, Germany and Holland***

*Part 1: The "Beautiful" Sublime*

Mary Shelley's travel journal—based on letters written on her tour with Percy Shelley through France, Switzerland, Germany, and Holland—categorizes the scenery that she observes into one of two groups: sublime and picturesque. These categories follow the guidelines for each aesthetic as defined by Edmund Burke and William Gilpin respectively. I begin with an analysis of the ways Burke genders the beautiful and the sublime and then turn to an analysis of Shelley's critique of these terms as Burke defines them. After this, I contrast Mary's travel descriptions to Percy's in "Mont Blanc" to illustrate the former's commentary on the latter's work. I close the chapter with an analysis of *Six Weeks' Tour's* treatment of the picturesque and Shelley's further unraveling of gendered aesthetic constructions. That is, the way Shelley attributes these aesthetic terms to her surroundings flips the traditional gendering of these terms, thereby subverting the era's male-female hierarchy by placing a feminine sublime in a position of superiority over a masculine picturesque. Drawing on the Deluzian conception of mediation as a path to ontological truth, I will argue that Shelley's journal describes sublime and picturesque scenery such that it generates a binary out of the two aesthetics that helps us rethink her era's male-female hierarchy, only to conclude that gender itself is a matter of interpellation.

Burke constructs a binary opposition between the sublime and the beautiful based in the differentiation of "one being founded on pain, the other on pleasure" (113). Pain is the dominant term in the binary, for "the idea of pain, in its highest degree, is much stronger than the highest degree of pleasure" (59), meaning that pain affects the human mind and body to a higher degree than pleasure ever can. The two are further separated by a difference in power: "pleasure follows

the will; and therefore we are generally affected with it by many things of a force greatly inferior to our own. But pain is always inflicted by a power in some way superior, because we never submit to pain willingly” (60). Therefore, something that gives us pleasure, such as a beautiful or picturesque scene, is, for him, inherently inferior both to us and to something that causes us pain, such as a terrifying sublime scene. Burke also differentiates sublimity from beauty by likening the former to intellectual studies, the principle end of which is “[t]he elevation of the mind” (48), and the latter to “the soft green of the soul on which we rest our eyes, that are fatigued with beholding more glaring objects,” such as the sublime (101). He thereby genders the beautiful as feminine, providing examples of the female body to help prove his point, saying that although “both sexes are undoubtedly capable of beauty,” the female provides “the greatest,” thereby subordinating beauty and the female to the sublime and the male (89). Similarly, if beauty is “that quality or those qualities in bodies by which they cause love,” with love being “that satisfaction which arises to the mind upon contemplating anything beautiful [...] from desire or lust” and that feeling is confined to women because “the greatest beauty in men, or in other animals, though it causes love, yet excites nothing at all of desire,” then this vapid beauty is always tied to the female (89). Its binary opposite must then be tied to the male.

Shelley, as I indicated above, critiques this hierarchical framework while demonstrating her knowledge of Burke’s and Kant’s definitions of the sublime and beautiful and Gilpin’s conception of the picturesque when she describes her trip with Percy to Champagnolles, a village in southwestern France. According to Burke, “to strip a considerable degree of strength of its ability to hurt” from the sublime is to “spoil it of everything sublime, and it immediately becomes contemptible” (60) or in the case of the below paragraph (as I will argue), beautiful.

After she analyzes the political atmosphere of France, Shelley moves on to contemplate the sublime experience of her journey:

[W]e proceeded, by the light of a stormy moon, to Champagnolles, a little village situated in the depth of the mountains. The road was serpentine and exceedingly steep, and was overhung on one side by half distinguished precipices, whilst the other was a gulph, filled by the darkness of the driving clouds. The dashing of the invisible mountain streams announced to us that we had quitted the plains of France, as we slowly ascended, amidst a violent storm of wind and rain, to Champagnolles, where we arrived at twelve o'clock, the fourth night after our departure from Paris. (Shelley 11-12)

Here we see Shelley effortlessly drawing on Burke's aesthetic principles—for example, when she describes the precipices as “obscure” (Burke 88) and vast, exhibiting “[g]reatness of dimension” (Burke 66). Similarly, the use of “serpentine” (12) to describe the shape of the road suggests that at times the path ahead is completely hidden by extreme bends or curve, a quality that potentially makes progressing forward “very terrible” (Burke 54). Dark night further shrouds the scene, which limits Shelley's vision to shadows lit by “a stormy moon” (11) “amidst a violent storm of wind and rain,” (89) suggesting that her surroundings depict a form of terror by virtue of their ambiguousness and perilous construction. Additionally, the highway and weather generate a tiered relationship between the Shelleys and the road. One of its twists might hide a cliff face that the carriage could coast over without warning. Given that, as Burke states, “pain is always inflicted by a power in some way superior” (60). The privation the road inflicts, which is illustrated by the fact that no other carriage populates it and no signs of civilization interrupt the author's descriptions, increases the hierarchical distinction between the highway and its travelers. Finally, the writer's assertion that the road is “exceedingly steep” (12) grants it a quality of suddenness, at which “we are apt to start” or to physically shield ourselves from when we perceive peril (Burke 76).

However, Shelley makes no mention of her own terror, an omission that strips the narrative of any immediate threat for the reader. Our reaction to it then is intellectual and abstract: it doesn't inflict alarm on us. As mentioned earlier, theorists often, paradoxically, tie the sublime to knowledge: that is, one who experiences something terrifying, something that defies human understanding is robbed of his or her sense of self; for some writers, however, after the terror or wonder has abated, this experience can offer some insight into the extraordinary nature of human reason. Percy Shelley postulates a similar argument in "Mont Blanc," which was derived from the same scenery that inspired the earlier quoted passage from Mary Shelley's travel journal. This poem describes an "everlasting universe of things" that exists within nature and is "[t]he source of human thought," but one that the author can only engage with through contact with the sublime (1, 5). A defining component of such an experience is the power differential between humans and nature: the scenery threatens the writer with such confusion and obscurity that it forces him to realize his inferiority to nature. Hence Percy Shelley's reference to the sublime Mont Blanc as a throne for Power itself (17).

While Percy Shelley accepts Burke's gendering of the sublime and applies a male pronoun to this Power, Mary Shelley diminishes the terror of her experience, thereby undermining the sublime rather than worshipping it as a source of hidden truth: in doing so she inverts Burke's gendering of the sublime and the beautiful by characterizing her journey as more vapid than terrifying, thereby suggesting that the gender of Burke's two aesthetics are arbitrary constructions that can be reversed. Though the experience described herein is one of great mortal danger, Shelley's account is polished and seems intent on evacuating any sense of the evident peril that a steep, serpentine road with a gulf on one side and tall cliffs on the other poses to her and her traveling companion. Her choice of words is also factual instead of figurative or

metaphoric: the Shelleys “proceeded” by the light of a “stormy moon,” and the road “was” serpentine and “overhung” on one side by precipices. For example, if she had used phrases such as “nearly blinded” and then only “partially guided” by the light of a stormy moon, or “the road wound like a writhing serpent,” or they felt “dwarfed” on one side by half distinguished precipices the ultimate impact would have been more emotionally evocative.

Similarly, when, at the end of this passage she mentions the temporal logistics of their arrival, she provides an anticlimax by suggesting not just that their entrance, but that their timely arrival into Champagnolles is more important than the sublime attributes of the road they took. Her sense of precision seems to follow effortlessly from her rather rote description of a purportedly sublime experience, which is devoid of any hint of a mental epiphany. In leaving out an account of any shocking horror she might have felt—making it seem uneventful and purely observational—even though she uses the vocabulary of sublime aesthetics, she reduces it to the equivalent of Burke’s notion of the beautiful: something to be looked at that lacks power, terror, and virtue; something that has no ties to knowledge—in essence something “feminine.” Shelley’s sublime in this passage aligns with her mother Mary Wollstonecraft’s description of a constructed idea of the female gender, thereby creating a reduced sublime that is “only designed by sweet attractive grace to gratify the senses of man when he can no longer soar on the wing of contemplation” (Wollstonecraft 21) and not to excite that contemplation itself. The result in Shelley’s journal is a passage that manages to establish the traveler’s surrounding scenery as sublime, without giving the reader a sense of the passionate or experimental intensity associated with such an aesthetic experience.

Shelley continues throughout the letter to maintain her status as a detached, emotionless observer of the sublime instead of a more traditionally affected one. Although the following

passage uses more redolent language, it retains the tone of a travel account that seeks to offer information clinically rather than to recreate for the reader the sublime experience via representation:

The scenery perpetually grows more wonderful and *sublime*: *pine* forests of impenetrable thickness, and untrodden, *nay*, inaccessible expanse spread on every side. Sometimes the dark woods descending, follow the route into the vallies, the distorted trees struggling with knotted roots between the most barren clefts; sometimes the road winds high into the regions of frost, and then the forests become scattered, and the branches of the trees are loaded with snow, and half of the enormous pines themselves buried in the wavy drifts. (my emphases 12)

Here the author explicitly states that the surrounding scenery is sublime. However, the fact that a colon separates this statement from the scene's description reduces the lines depicting "pine forests of impenetrable thickness, and [...] inaccessible expanse [...] on every side" (12) to a mere list—a genre of writing that isn't particularly psychologically haunting. This list form jarringly contrasts to the rhythm of the passage itself, which flows like a river as it moves from one description to another, each connected to the others by objects—trees, pines, a forest—and their apparent agency as subjects that struggle, wind, and descend. Thus the current of the passage emulates the everlasting universe of things in Percy Shelley's "Mont Blanc," which "Flows through the mind and rolls its rapid waves" from nature to humanity, only to diminish this entire interaction to nothing more than an objective list of attributes. In what is perhaps an allusion to "Mont Blanc," I suggest that Shelley, by depicting this universe as an unmoving observational record, suggests that perhaps writers like Percy have granted the sublime more power and importance than with which it should be endowed. Shelley's extensive details and the "nay" connecting "untrodden" with the repeated phrase "inaccessible" here suggest that, like Percy, she struggles to find the right words to describe the landscape: that it, to some degree, defies her ability to convey what she sees to her readers. On the other hand, unlike Percy, Shelley

doesn't emphasize how such experiences further understanding. She does not attempt to elucidate any epiphanies this scenery provides her. For example, the "nay" in this passage provides a marker of Shelley's struggle to find the one word or phrase that best conveys the scene before her; however, it only succeeds in modifying the scenery from an "untrodden" expanse to a threateningly "inaccessible" one (12), turning the landscape from a plot of undisturbed land into a vast expanse whose construction actively prevents against human trespass. It is unclear what great life-altering secret Shelley might have gleaned from this view, suggesting that either she received no such revelation from the sublime nature around her or that whatever knowledge she discovered defied explanation. However, this begs the question: how enlightening can an experience be if it cannot be conveyed to others?

In a unique way, her own description also prevents the reader from accessing the aesthetic sublime in its refusal to locate a human experience in relation to the described nature. The objective, detached manner displaces the reader by presenting this as if she were an entirely new, omniscient narrator. She also doesn't mention where she is situated in regard to the scenery, a fact that in turn thwarts the reader from orienting herself in relation to the author. Additionally, the sentence "the dark woods descending, follow the route into the vallies, the distorted trees struggling with knotted roots between the most barren clefts" (Shelley 12) tracks the movement of the scenery instead of the narrator, making her sound like an objective travel guide completely separate from that which she describes. The repeated use of the word "sometimes" also removes the passage, and thus the narrator, from a linear temporality. The result is a narrator—and a reader—who is offered a detached, non-threatening view of a particular moment and place in time.

When she takes on the persona of an omniscient narrator she is perhaps again emulating Percy Shelley's descriptions of "[t]he everlasting universe of things" (1) and its relationship to the sublime, but the passage itself critiques this relationship by refusing to engage in it. In "Mont Blanc," Percy describes a timeless, immortal universe of all things that "[f]lows through the mind" (2) and subsequently connects seekers of the sublime with the "secret springs" (4) from which all "human thought" (5) originates. In other words, Percy's everlasting universe of things is a force that humans can experience only when in contact with the sublime, from which all of human knowledge—scientific and artistic—is derived. However, unlike Percy's universe of things, Mary's travel account does not purport to expose a hidden truth through a connection with the sublime. In contrast to Mary, who offers, through the persona of a travel guide, a taxonomy of sublime aspects, Percy suggests that this everlasting universe provides a path to nature's secrets as they both exist outside of linear temporality. They are "everlasting," meaning they never die out, grow old, or diminish, and have no set beginning or end. The universe and all things have always been, and will always be. Mary's narrator establishes the time and place of what she sees, while Percy sees the eternal universe of things as having no set location or central object. Percy's concept is the universe and constitutes all things—an infinity of space and objects. Thus, disparate from the ceaseless universe of things, Mary's omniscient narrator doesn't flow through anyone's mind, or carry with her the source of all human knowledge. The narrator detaches herself from her own experiences, creating a narrative of mere echoes of sublime characteristics. For Mary, these shadows can't move the viewer to new heights of perception, or inspire the author to a new understanding of the world as Percy argues they do "Mont Blanc."

*Part 2: The Queen of the Sublime*

In contrast to Mary Shelley's reduction of the sublime to a succession of numerical attributes, she extols the picturesque in descriptions of affecting scenery that elevate the natural world to a rejuvenating source of relaxation for the body and mind. When describing an "awfully desolate" (13) scene, she remarks that "no river or rock-encircled lawn relieved the eye, by adding the picturesque to the sublime" (13). This account simultaneously elevates the viewer and the picturesque by granting it the ability to offer, to quote Wordsworth, a "fructifying virtue" (1.292) for the viewer, and demotes the sublime by turning it into an unpleasant experience from which one wants to be relieved. She celebrates the picturesque at the expense of the sublime by characterizing it as a gateway to understanding and self-improvement, and the former as a static mode of visual representation.

Shelley emphasizes this opposition in her descriptions of a "diverse" landscape: one that includes a picturesque lake with a sublime mountain and, as I shall show, she further recalibrates gender constructions associated with these landscapes:

From the windows of our hotel we see the lovely lake, blue as the heavens which it reflects, and sparkling with golden beams. The opposite shore is sloping, and covered with vines, which however do not so early in the season add to the beauty of the prospect. Gentleman's seats are scattered over these banks, behind which rise the various ridges of black mountains, and towering far above, in the midst of its snowy Alps, the majestic Mont Blanc, highest Queen of all. Such is the view reflected by the lake [...] (94)

The author begins the passage by describing a lake scene that is in part made picturesque by the fact that it comes pre-framed by the window through which she views it. Her portrayal of the water as "the lovely lake, blue as the heavens which it reflects, and sparkling with golden beams" combines the sublime and the beautiful, allowing it to become a mixture of the two, which of course is William Gilpin's definition of the picturesque. Shelley next illustrates herself as a

picturesque traveler through her criticism of the “picture” of the lake. In his *Essays on the Picturesque*, Gilpin includes one section on “Picturesque Tourism.” This he explains constitutes a journey through rural scenes and the happy discovery of a landscape that is picturesque: winding paths, ruins, a rough, sketchy quality, long views, and hills and water that seem to fold into each other. Next, he discusses the “sources of amusement” one gains from this kind of tourism. Shelley, drawing on Gilpin’s third source of amusement, the “enlarging, and correcting [of] our general stock of ideas” (50), or the improvement of the image of a particular scene within the mind of the observer, asserts that the vines on the lake’s opposite shore “do not so early in the season add to the beauty of the prospect.”

The fact that the lake is picturesque grants it affecting properties that further the viewer’s intellectual study as well as offering her some emotional pleasure. Unlike Shelley’s descriptions of sublime scenery, her account of her excursion on this body of water is playful and intimate: sailing, she says, is “delightful, whether [she] glide[s] over a glassy surface or [is] speeded along by a strong wind” (13). Gliding on the water offers her the rejuvenation necessary to reflect on her experience of more sublime bodies, which she admits afflicts her “with that sickness that deprives [her] of all enjoyment of a sea voyage” (13). Shelley then goes on to relate the picturesque pool of liquid to the sublime backdrop of Mont Blanc: here she continues her denigration of the sublime and salutation of the picturesque, this time not from just the point of view of revitalization, but of gender politics.

Having already, in her earlier description, overrun Burke by “feminizing” the sublime into an unaffecting experience, she now turns his definition of the sublime to her benefit by linking it instead to the picturesque, which, she argues, instills in its viewers “those virtues which cause admiration [s]uch as fortitude, justice, [and] wisdom” (Burke 100). That is, using some of

the characteristics of the sublime to paint the picturesque, Shelley uses these aesthetic categories to make some political observations. First, she establishes the lakeshore as a seat of masculine power, but instead of leaving the description at that—with the “Gentleman’s seats” (that is, the land from which men of rank derive their social standing and authority)—as preeminent, she describes what dominates them: first, “various ridges of black mountains,” but then, “towering far above, in the midst of its snowy Alps, the majestic Mont Blanc, highest Queen of all” (13). In other words, this huge mountain is for her a “Queen” and the seat of feminine power.

Consequently, she directly critiques the traditional gendering of the sublime (a critique that would include her husband’s use of this in “Mont Blanc,” where he refers to such power using the male pronoun (17)). The picturesque thus represents a meshing of the two gender categories.

However, Shelley does not propose an essentialized female or male sublime; instead, I am arguing that the discrepancies between Shelley’s descriptions and Percy’s poem suggest that she is well aware that gender is a social construct and that nature, its creations, and the sublime have no gender in and of themselves, only what we, as humans, grant it. Instead of merely inverting the genders of Burke’s aesthetics, Shelley’s location of a feminine authority within the sublime instead calls the very constructions of those genders and their inherent social hierarchy into question. At a time when women were sequestered to the home, domesticity, and a general lack of education, the idea that the female could be tied to the sublime was absurd bordering on insane. Shelley’s radical subversion of Burke’s gendered aesthetics therefore illustrates the arbitrariness of those constructions, suggesting that it goes one way just as easily as the other, so why is Burke’s construction any more valid than hers? Thus, calling Mont Blanc “he” or “she” constitutes a speech act that then imposes the conventions of those genders onto a physically genderless object. According to Judith Butler, “gender is performative in the sense that it

constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express” (24). In other words, the gender of Chamouni’s majestic mountain does not exist prior to the Shelleys’ portrayal of it in their writing. That is not to say that either author’s interpretation of Mont Blanc is closer to or further away from any original truth the mountain might contain. Instead it suggests that Mary Shelley notices the gendering and questions it.

If we look at Shelley’s letter through the lens of Gilles Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition* (1968), we can see that the passage argues for mediation as a positive tool of social awareness and ultimate change. Deleuze himself begins his argument claiming that simulacra are “the letter of repetition itself” (17)—or a repeated succession of a copy’s archetypal figure. Such a letter is derived from the human mind, which “is capable of forming concepts in general and of drawing something new [...] from the repetition that it contemplates” (Deleuze 14). Applied to Shelley’s view of Lake Geneva through the hotel’s window, this means that the end result of the passage—that of the flipped binary—is only possible because the scene has been mediated through an entire cycle of repetitions. In other words, the human mind can be a witness to a scene in nature, but can in no way represent that scene as “real” or transparently “true.” It can only echo it, and in doing so, focus on some aspects of the scenery while leaving out others to create something entirely new: a simulacrum. However, despite the differences within this host of recurrences that differentiate each iteration from the original—the mask that is a mere semblance of the repeated face—Deleuze argues that, “[t]he mask, the costume, the covered is everywhere the truth of the uncovered” (18). Mediated experiences such as Shelley’s, then, reframe the familiar and allow her to flip Burke’s gender constructions; in doing so, she shows us that such binaries require interrogation since in fact they are “man-made” and dependent on speech acts—interpellations that echo “past interpellations, [binding] the speakers, as if they

spoke in unison across time” (Butler 226). Repetition and speech acts, then, reflect the relationship between Shelley and the authors who inform her paradigm: her works echo the past works of those writers who came before her, binding them together in a manner that defies the confines of time in a geometric progression of simulacra.

Shelley’s closing line explaining that she is actually looking not at the landscape itself but at it “reflected by the lake” supports Deleuze’s optimistic view of simulacra as a liberating agency in which there is infinite play and variety. Shelley’s comment marks one of eight lenses of mediation in this passage: the writer’s viewpoint, the window, the lake, the theories of Gilpin and Burke, the letter through which the reader sees these images, and the reader’s own paradigms of understanding. It is only because the lake presents the scene to Shelley as a reverse image of the original that she can flip the gender binary of the sublime and picturesque, thus creating a new view of reality that elevates both the author’s and the reader’s understanding of the world. Such mediation is possible through the tools the picturesque; these allow the viewer to find connections between nature and humanity, connections the sublime cannot offer, first because it presupposes a direct link without mediation and second because its supposedly masculine energy encourages narcissism. In order to critique this structure, Shelley must engage with the picturesque: a transistor characterized by human society. The issue of mediation as a positive force is a theme common to all of Shelley’s works, most notably her edition of her husband’s poems. An example, albeit a controversial one, of layered mediation occurs in Mary Shelley’s 1839 edition of Percy’s poetry, where she devoted pages of contextual information pertaining to each selection. Her mediation of these poems was effective, as George Edward Woodburry argues in his 1901 edition of the poet’s work where he quotes these notes frequently. Contrary to most later Percy Shelley scholarship, Woodburry contests that he referred

extensively to her notes in his own edition of Percy's poems "because of their extraordinary truth to the feeling and atmosphere of Shelley's Italian life" (Shelley 339). Similarly, he admits that Mary Shelley's note on the poem "The Triumph of Life" "should always accompany the verse because of the clearness with which they render the scene of Shelley's last composition" (Shelley 470), meaning that these notes contextualize the poems in such a way as to make them more palatable—more present for the reader. For Woodburry, Shelley's notes therefore elucidate a truth from Percy's poems that is not readily apparent without such contextual mediation, just as the lake in Chamouni exposes a social truth of humans' interaction with nature that is otherwise invisible.

Throughout her works, Shelley ties such contextualization and sequences of copies with the picturesque over the sublime. In *Six Weeks' Tour* the author argues that the former's acceptance of humanity's inability to grasp nature's original—the source uncovered—makes it a mode of exchange with nature instead of a one-sided conversation. Gilpin's insistence that the picturesque represents what might be characterized as an equivalent exchange between humanity and nature, one in which humans take that which nature gives them and enjoy it, sometimes altering or improving it, similarly proposes that interchanges with such nature are conscious of and revel in their inability to grasp nature's primary knowledge. However, the sublime and nature themselves are not subject to repetitions of identity—unless used in a rote way, such as I demonstrated above; such constructs are the creations of human minds alone. The picturesque and its simulacra thus constitute a more human, socially beneficial way of engaging with nature than the sublime and its promise of an original truth. This argument progresses into Shelley's next published work, *Frankenstein* (1818), which illustrates the problematic nature of sublime interchanges with nature.

**Chapter II:  
The Paradigms that Inform *Frankenstein*—a Novel that Subverts Social Norms**

After questioning eighteenth- and nineteenth-century tendencies to gender the beautiful and the sublime and her efforts to differentiate between the picturesque and sublime in *Six Weeks' Tour*, Shelley expands her arguments in her 1818 edition of *Frankenstein* where she reasserts how a pursuit of the sublime can become incompatible with a healthy human civilization. This novel shows how its particular seekers of the sublime—explorers and scientists—threaten society. Further, in conversation with Sir Humphry Davy's work on the subject, the text itself postulates that scientists, specializing in one discipline (chemistry, for example) and cutting themselves off from the humanities have replaced what Wordsworth in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* called the "man of science"<sup>2</sup>—an individual who works in both the arts and sciences and sees them as compatible and who offers the most effective connection between humanity and nature. Such specialization and such narcissism create a binary between civilization and nature that I will argue parallels one between the picturesque and the sublime while anticipating Sigmund Freud's concept of the Primal Horde.

*Part 1: Sublime Knowledge*

In order to effectively understand Shelley's critique of her era's sublime / picturesque binary, it is first necessary to return to Percy Shelley's concept of a beneficial exchange or dialogue between nature and humanity which he describes in "Mont Blanc" as rendered exclusively through the sublime. The poem's opening stanza lays out an eternal cosmos where all things are joined together in an ever-present plane of existence:

The everlasting universe of things  
Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,

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<sup>2</sup> Such men as Sir Humphry and Erasmus Darwin combine poetry, prose, and artistic disciplines with those classified as the sciences.

Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—  
Now lending splendour, where from secret springs  
The source of human thought its tribute brings  
Of waters—with a sound but half its own. (1-6)

This passage describes a flowing, concentrated sublimity that exhibits Burke's characteristics of sublime suddenness, sound, loudness, and power: its waves are rapid, its tones are varied but sharply contrasted, and it delineates the difference in power between itself and the viewing poet. This universe of things thus functions as a sublime transistor between humans and nature that resembles its tribute's source. Its links to sublime aesthetics suggest that this connection is only accessible through sublime nature, barring the picturesque or the merely beautiful from access to nature's knowledge. Similarly, this force is tied solely to the natural world as it flows and rolls its rapid waves like the ocean, and its dark, glittering surface, reflective like a lake, aligns it with its originating springs. Therefore, accessing this power necessitates viewing an aspect of nature that satisfies Burke's list of aesthetic components:

Dizzy Ravine! and when I gaze on thee  
I seem as in a trance sublime and strange  
To muse on my own separate fantasy,  
My own, my human mind, which passively  
Now renders and receives fast influencings,  
Holding an unremitting interchange  
With the clear universe of things around; (34-40)

Here the poet gazes on sublime nature—a dizzy ravine—that then connects him to the force that flows between himself and the origins of knowledge. Consequently, this sublime pathway seems to transport him to a new state of being that allows him to muse on a fantasy in his own mind separate from the reality that lies before him.

Despite this interchange, a division persists between the poet's human mind and both the universe of things and its source. Though the author can passively receive influencings from this other energy through a sublime force, he cannot become either that transistor or its other

terminal. Consequently, the fantasy nature transports Shelley to his own creation separate from the nature that inspires it. This is due to the fact that Shelley and nature are completely different existences. As I explained in Chapter I, the latter is “everlasting,” meaning it has no beginning and no end—it has always been and will always be and is thus indifferent to humanity’s brief mortal existence. The former is the exact opposite: a being limited to a linear temporality and invested in the existence and betterance of his species. Therefore, an interaction between two such dissimilar beings results not in an understanding of nature’s secret knowledge but of its mirror image. Shelley describes how the universe of things lends splendor to humans’ endeavors by bringing a tribute of waters with a sound but half its own to their minds. In this resulting relationship, mortals borrow a portion—a fragment—of a higher being’s understanding and shape it to their will, ending in a wisdom half created by humanity and half by nature. From such fragments humans learn “awful doubt, or faith so mild, / So solemn, so serene, that man may be, / But for such faith, with Nature reconcil’d” (77-79). “Mont Blanc” therefore proposes that humans raise themselves above base nature by attempting to access nature’s secrets, drawing on a mediated version of that knowledge to make it their own through an involvement akin to religious fervor: a mental experience not so much guided by nature but one in which nature—uncaring, unchanging—exists like a rushing river while those who covet her secrets toss themselves into her stream and flow along her banks for as long as possible before they need to come back to land and safety. This results not in an understanding of the base from which our man-made knowledge springs, but merely more simulacra of this originating wealth of data.

*Part 2: Institutional and Social Education*

In Part 1 I elucidated a method of acquiring knowledge through sublime nature through “Mont Blanc.” In Part 2 I will examine a more institutionalized form of education espoused by

Mary Wollstonecraft. As I will explain later, Shelley's *Frankenstein* uses Percy Shelley's representation of a sublime experience to support Wollstonecraft's argument for the education necessary to develop socially active human beings in both her *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Before I turn to that topic, however, this opening section surveys the basis of Wollstonecraft's vision of an ideal education. In the latter treatise, Wollstonecraft argues for a universal education that concentrates on personal and thus societal development, one not based on sex or gender, but one that lays a foundation for the principles from which active citizens develop the ability to reason and exercise the virtue that will lead them to immortality. She states that "[m]en and women must be educated, in a great degree, by the opinions and manners of the society they live in. In every age there has been a stream of popular opinion that has carried all before it, and given a family character, as it were, to the century" (*VRW* 128-129), or what Thomas Kuhn will later call a paradigm shift. In other words, there is one area of knowledge necessary to human development that is unchanging: the growth of an individual or the attainment of the "habits of virtue as will render [us] independent" by "strengthen[ing] the body and form[ing] the heart" (*VRW* 129). Another depends on shifts in civilization itself or scientific revolutions that alter "the historical perspective of the community that experiences it" (Kuhn xi). Her other *Vindication* sets up a binary opposition between truth and artifice, as expressed in her critique of Burke's "romance": "From observing several cold romantic characters I have been led to confine the term romantic to one definition—false, or rather artificial, feelings. [...] [R]omance destroys all simplicity; which, in works of taste, is but a synonymous word for truth" (*VRM* 61). Considering that women in this time period were considered romantic objects—a theme that persists today—romance in this context can be considered a barrier between women and the reason necessary to exercise virtue. The men who

are indoctrinated to consider women in this light, and thus themselves as romantic actors, are similarly barred from human happiness. Wollstonecraft reiterates this concept in her later treatise using an argument that ties together the fates of men and women.

When she vindicates women, the author consistently illustrates a plight particular to their sex, only to subtly apply the same systemically developed shortcomings to men, thereby exposing a universal social ill. For example, she closely tails her claim that “[w]omen, it is true, obtaining power by unjust means, by practicing or fostering vice, evidently lose the rank which reason would assign them, and they become either abject slaves or capricious tyrants” with the assertion that “[t]hey lose all simplicity, all dignity of mind, in acquiring power, and act as men are observed to act when they have been exalted by the same means” (158). She similarly draws a relationship between military men and those members of her own sex whom she pities and deplors: “As proof that education gives this appearance of weakness to females, we may instance the example of military men, who are, like them, sent into the world before their minds have been stored with knowledge or fortified by principles. The consequences are similar” (131). Without a proper educational foundation men and women deprecate virtue and exalt tyranny, becoming nothing more than gloriously imaged husks. Similarly, an imbalanced cultivation of the mind and body generates passive citizens who “acquire a little superficial knowledge” that only allows them to “practice the minor virtues” while mistaking this as an exercise of the true virtue that can only be utilized with regard to reason (131). In other words, the belief that a concentration on the development of the intellect at the expense of physical strength leads to intelligence is “a false conclusion, in which an effect has been mistaken for cause” (149). The passions of genius “bearing proportion to the vigor of their intellects, the sword’s destroying the scabbard has become almost proverbial,” and the destruction of the body through the

overexertion of the intellect has become a tragic commonality (149). The body, therefore, must be strengthened in order to withstand the intellectual passions derived from genius or poetic thinking while the mind must be educated so as to exercise enough reason to, in turn, exercise virtue so as to obtain immortality.

The virtue to which Wollstonecraft refers derives from ancient moral codes and then those values Christianity adapted from Plato and Aristotle—justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude—that help improve upon humans’ enlightenment and happiness. From the Christian framework, these form a gateway to immortality—to save your immortal soul you must exercise that morality which transcends mortal vices. Under Christianity, these virtues stand between mankind and damnation. Mary Wollstonecraft, as an enlightenment figure, then tied the ability to understand and therefore implement these virtues to education and the skill of reasoning which only humankind can employ. She subsequently utilizes the *modes ponens* argument that if women are humans, then they must be able to obtain immortality, in which case they must be able to exercise that reason which men cultivate: thus women and men must achieve their own betterance through the same means: education.

### *Part 3: Sublime Contact and Virtuous Education*

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* explores the connection between Robert Walton and Victor Frankenstein’s development as seekers of the sublime and as doubles suffering from educations deficient in the areas that Wollstonecraft claims are necessary for virtuous and moral development. That is, their tendency toward narcissism (especially Victor’s) arises in large part from their inadequate educations. The novel opens with a frame story describing Walton’s glorious and treacherous polar expedition—his attempts to confer an inestimable benefit on all mankind “by discovering a passage near the pole to those countries, to reach which at present so

many months are requisite; or by ascertaining the secret of the magnet, which, if at all possible, can only be effected by an understanding” such as his (50). In other words, this pursuer of Nature’s secrets hunts them in her hiding places—in this case the uninhabitable expanse of the North Pole—so that he might effect such an understanding as to lend himself splendor and thus garner distinction from his fellow men. Similarly, “the variety of feelings which bore [Frankenstein] onwards, like a hurricane” or like a sublime might of nature, led to his “first enthusiasm of success”: that is his creation, which transformed life and death into ideal bounds so that he could “first break through, and [thereby] pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless [him] as its creator and source” (80). In other words, like Walton, the power and distinction promised by an understanding of nature’s mysteries as rendered through a sublime force—in this case accessed through science—direct Frankenstein’s actions and propel his studies forward. Both men suggest that the world as it stands can be improved upon only through their own labors and unique understandings of the requisite aspects of nature. However, Frankenstein’s use of the word “source” to describe himself aligns him with nature as the spring of human thought, suggesting that he sees himself as that originating fount. Unlike Walton, the modern Prometheus wishes not to harness a fragment of nature’s power, but to take her place entirely and keep it all for himself—he seeks the original and does not realize that he is only capable of obtaining a mirror image.

These doubles also describe their pursuit of nature as a sublime experience akin to a religious fervor that possesses them completely, but with different goals. Walton’s rather arrogant appellation of his expedition’s outcome as “enticements [...] sufficient to conquer all fear of danger or death” suggests that this pursuit is a sublime experience in the traditional sense: it has robbed him of his sense of self—his ego—thus freeing his death drive and spurring him

toward his own demise (50). Similarly, Frankenstein “seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit” of nature’s secrets pertaining to the divide between life and death (81). He portrays his research as a sublime experience that he was only able to dissect and understand upon reflection. To begin, his discovery itself fills him with astonishment that then gives “place to delight and rapture” (79). However, “this discovery was so great and overwhelming, that all the steps by which [he] had been progressively led to it were obliterated, and [he] beheld only the result”; in other words, his discovery so overpowered his mind that everything he did while in the grip of this influence disappears when he beholds “the summit of [his] desires”: the conclusion of his research (79). Although both men lose their egos to the energy of their studies, only Frankenstein’s “human nature turn[s] with loathing from [his] occupation,” suggesting that Walton is better able to withstand the sublime possession than his double. While they each engage with nature through the everlasting universe of things, Walton doesn’t seek to supplant nature through this interaction, and thus his occupation remains within the limits of his human nature. Conversely, Frankenstein “aspires to become greater than his nature will allow” and consequently from his interchange with nature stems an invention that threatens humanity.

Frankenstein believes that because some kind of power or force drives him to assemble the Creature, he is not responsible: “Unless I had been animated by an almost supernatural enthusiasm, my application to this study would have been irksome, and almost intolerable”; such a statement implies that without this external, driving force, this manufactured being would never have been engineered, and that the natural world that inspired Victor is partially to blame for his actions (78). However, this assessment constitutes merely the protagonist’s own self-justification, and the text itself concludes that such a defense is insupportable—the desperate attempt of condemned man to somehow lessen his own crimes’ severity. Walton, on the other

hand, makes no such efforts to justify his own actions, but instead always cites the benefits to humankind that his work will produce as reason enough to excuse his actions, which endanger both himself and the crew for whom he is responsible.

Differing imbalanced educations develop minute differences between these seekers of the sublime. Walton's "education was neglected, yet [he] was passionately fond of reading," as he admits in the letter to his sister that opens the novel (Shelley 52). In this context, a neglected education is a euphemism for a lack of formal schooling, a fact supported by the omission of any mention of schoolmates in Walton's past. Although he did "became a poet, and for one year lived in a Paradise of his own creation," no mention is made of a formal apprenticeship or study of his then area of interest (52). Instead, Walton was "self educated" through, primarily, his uncle Thomas's books (52, 53). However, after his failed attempt at the poetic discipline, Frankenstein's double entered a life of exploration and discovery that he "commenced by inuring [his] body to hardship. [He] accompanied the whale-fishers on several expeditions to the North Sea; [and] voluntarily endured cold, famine, thirst, and want of sleep" (53). Thus to prepare for his pursuit of nature's secrets, Walton offset his intellectual education with a physical one, often working "harder than the common sailors during the day, and devot[ing his] nights to the study of mathematics, the theory of medicine, and those branches of physical science from which a naval adventurer might derive the greatest practical advantage" (53). Additionally, his education is further balanced by his brief sojourn in the arts, which establishes him as an imperfect version what the eighteenth century would have called a "man of science," one who, like Humphry Davy, does not specialize in any one field, but who combines branches of the arts with those of the sciences: for example, Wordsworth hopes that in the future the poet "will be at [the scientist's] side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the Science itself" (Preface to

*Lyrical Ballads* 423). I say “imperfect” because despite Walton’s equilibrium between art and science—his refusal to specialize—he still lacks the formal education that Wollstonecraft argues is necessary to understand a society’s prevailing paradigm. This leaves him open to the influence of outdated paradigms, just as Frankenstein is. Also like the title character, his tendency toward isolating himself arises he says from the “greater evil” of having been self educated [...]. Now I am twenty-eight, and am in reality more illiterate than many school-boys of fifteen. It is true that I have thought more, and that my day dreams are more extended and magnificent; but they want [...] keeping” (53). Walton longs to understand the guiding principles—those nuances of an era only accessible through a social education—that should naturally frame his thoughts and subsequently direct him away from those outdated paradigms which he has thus far managed to avoid, though they have entrapped his double. Such a desire seems lost on his counterpart Frankenstein, given his propensity toward alchemical texts.

Despite their differences, a kind of compulsion leads both men to the sublime. Frankenstein’s early education took place in a domestic bubble that allowed him to focus on works from a previous paradigm shift instead of current ones. It was while on a family trip to baths near Thonon that the then 13-year-old boy discovered the outdated, but to him, fascinating alchemical text that allegedly precipitates his fall:

I opened it [...]. A new light seemed to dawn upon my mind; and, bounding with joy, I communicated my discovery to my father. I cannot help remarking here the many opportunities instructors possess of directing the attention of their pupils to useful knowledge, which they utterly neglect. [...] If [...] my father had taken the pains to explain to me, that the principles of Agrippa had been entirely exploded, and that a modern system of science had been introduced, which possessed much greater powers than the ancient because the powers of the latter were chimerical, while those of the former were real and practical [...] [i]t is even possible, that the train of my ideas would never have received the fatal impulse that led to my ruin. (68)

I'd like to argue two points here: first, in this instance, Shelley illustrates a failed attempt at what Wollstonecraft called "[t]he only way to avoid two extremes equally injurious to morality"—the combination of a private and public education (VRW 300). Although Victor both studied at home and then went to University at Ingolstat as shown in the passage above, overall his learning was undirected and neglected. This led to a failure on both the individual and social level: he was not able to cultivate the reason necessary to exercise virtue and he was completely unaware of his time's prevailing scientific paradigm. He therefore did not develop a moral compass adequate to judge his own actions.

My second point is that, in this edition of the novel, Frankenstein was clearly, from early on, drawn to the magic and revolutionary opinions that these ancient authors professed. Cornelius Agrippa, of whom Percy Shelley was a great admirer, was known for a number of works, but two of them relate to Frankenstein's educational failings: *De occulta philosophiae*, which defends magic as a hidden philosophy and *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum*, which critiques what we now know as scientific theory. While the former work exalts alchemy and other supernatural modes of study as ontologies capable of getting at the raw truth of nature, the latter attributes a degree of narcissism to contemporary scientific practices that renounce their predecessors. Alchemy's promises of a greater connection with nature's wealth of truth, in addition to the implicit assumption that more guided studies are based in vanity and are therefore tainted are, perhaps, what drew Frankenstein to such methods over those more conducive to his era's paradigm. They also suggested to him that a direct, unmediated connection with nature was possible.

Shelley then aligns this concept of the potential for immediate access to nature's mysteries with Percy Shelley's everlasting universe of things to propose that unguided

interactions with the sublime can endanger humans by leaving them open to influences that are opposed to the positive progression of human thought, understanding, and civilization.

Frankenstein, however, does not heed this warning, and instead develops a dangerous attraction to the sublime. Indeed, it was a scene of sublimity which birthed “that passion, which afterwards ruled my destiny, [that arose], like a mountain river, from ignoble and almost forgotten sources; but, swelling as it proceeded, [...] became the torrent which, in its course, has swept away all my hopes and joys” (67): he observes

a most violent and terrible thunder-storm [that] advanced from behind the mountains of Jura; and the thunder burst at once with frightful loudness from various quarters of the heavens. I remained, while the storm lasted, watching with curiosity and delight. As I stood at the door, on a sudden I beheld a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak, which stood about twenty yards from our house; and so soon as the dazzling light vanished, the oak had disappeared, and nothing remained but a blasted stump. When we visited it the next morning, we found the tree shattered in a singular manner [...] entirely reduced to thin ribbands of wood. I had never beheld any thing so utterly destroyed. The catastrophe of this tree excited my extreme astonishment. (70)

This passage reflects the interchange between humans and nature laid out by Percy Shelley with one major distortion: unlike him, Frankenstein revels in the dazzling, destructive force of the sublime. Frankenstein consciously notes the storm’s ruinous power, repeating the same concept using synonyms such as violent, terror, and frightful. It is this proof of nature’s destructive force that excites his curiosity, delight, and astonishment, suggesting that unlike Shelley who sought a creative energy, he seeks through the sublime the power to obliterate. Like Shelley, however, he witnesses a sublime scene, creates a link between himself and a sublime transitor, and from that connection gleams a portion of the nature’s knowledge. Similarly, the gateway to nature’s secret knowledge is portrayed as a light that illuminates a sublime database—“a light so brilliant and so wondrous, yet so simple that [...] he] became dizzy with the immensity of the prospect which it illustrated” of an astonishing secret (79).

The fact that it was the destruction of an oak tree that helped push the modern Prometheus's fate to its inevitable conclusion serves simultaneously as a cunning foreshadowing of his future and a compressed version of Shelley's overarching argument that interchanges with the sublime can lead to the devastation of civilization, not its furtherance. The oak tree's symbolic significance throughout British history has arguably been traced back to the Druids who "prized the Oak for its ability to withstand a lightning strike"; scholars such as Edythe Preet found that "it symbolized kingship" (97). Whether that's the true origin or not, oak trees have played a significant role in British history. Susan Ronald contends that Queen Elizabeth I's "first act of symbolism in her reign" was to take "the royal ring that had signified Mary's reign and now her death, [...slip] it upon her own finger," kneel by a "gnarled tree and storm-struck oak," and utter those famous words: "'A domino factum est mirabile in oculis nostris.' This is the lord's doing, and it is marvelous to our eyes" (Ronald 7). Ronald explains the choice of an oak tree, stating that "ancient oaks equated a nation's strength and durability—the ancient Britons worshipped them" (7). This symbolism survived Elizabeth I's reign and gained added meaning. Charles Stuart's coronation marked the establishment of Oak Apple Day, a holiday that celebrated the day (September 6, 1651) the then wanted man escaped capture by hiding in an oak tree (Richard 5). Though this holiday was abolished in 1859 it was celebrated at the time that Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*.

Given the cultural meaning attached to oak trees in British history, Victor's account of his sublime inspiration takes on new meaning: the oak symbolizes England, which in turn is (supposedly) synonymous with civilization itself. A lightning bolt's annihilation of the oak therefore translates into the obliteration of the human realm by the sublime force with which Frankenstein communes. In contrast to Percy Shelley's sublime, which provides a moral code for

humanity through “[t]he secret Strength of things / Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome / Of Heaven is as a law, inhabits,” Victor’s delights in separation of nature and human (139-141) . Mary Shelley thus argues that once the “dazzling light” of nature’s knowledge dissipates, humanity is left with the ruins of its civilization that this interchange with her transistor created. To engage with this power without any kind of mediation and guidance is to attempt to harness a power that is beyond human understanding. All that will come of such a transaction is a blasted stump where civilization once stood. However, because Frankenstein lacks the ability to exercise virtue—to reign in his narcissism by recognizing it as such and addressing his subsequent behavior—he does not heed this warning. Instead this incident only served as inspiration for his own sublime creation.

Mary Shelley, in allusion to Canto I, “Economy of Vegetation,” from Erasmus Darwin’s *The Botanic Garden*, refers to lightning as a “fluid,” thereby connecting it to both the hidden springs of nature’s knowledge and the fluid that animates life in a human body (70). Darwin aligns “the quick Ether through the fibre-trains / Of dancing arteries, and of tingling veins” that animate life with lightning, calling them both Ether, or fluid, and claiming that as the former “Goads each fine nerve, with new sensation thrill’d, / Bends the reluctant limbs with power unwill’d [...]. So from dark clouds the playful lightning springs” (239). Consequently, for Darwin, lightning becomes synonymous with the force that produces life while the use of the words “spring” and “fluid” align it with the everlasting universe of things. Shelley’s description of the fateful lightning storm also associates this natural phenomenon with the sublime. It excites Frankenstein’s extreme astonishment, causing him both “curiosity and delight,” and inspires him to inquire after the origins of thunder and lightning (Shelley 70). As in Percy Shelley’s poem, where he describes a similar tempest, witnessing this storm propels Frankenstein into a host of

instantaneous associations that build a unique fantasy. As defined by Wollstonecraft in her *Vindications of the Rights of Woman*, such associations are those over which we have little power “when the mind is enlarged by excursive flights, or profound reflection [and] the raw materials [...] in some degree, arrange themselves” much as the idea of the Creature arranged itself in Frankenstein’s mind thanks to the intercession of the blasted tree stump (Shelley 238).

Shelley also aligns Frankenstein with Benjamin Franklin, who appears in Darwin’s poem as the ideal scientist who successfully harnesses nature’s power for humankind. Both Franklin and Frankenstein set their bold arms to invade “the lowering sky, / And seize the tiptoe lightnings, ere they fly” thus fostering the paradigm necessary in Franklin’s case to discover electricity and in Frankenstein’s to create the Creature (Darwin 239). Additionally, a breakdown of Frankenstein’s name suggests it evolved from a combination of a diminutive form of Franklin and the German word “stein” which means stone. However, by doing so, Shelley’s doubling highlights more differences than similarities: Victor’s work, characterized by the specialization of science and the misuse of power which solidifies thought, creates an emotional and intellectual paralysis—that is, he is stone—rather than flexibly and positively furthering ideas for culture, as did Franklin’s.

These differences, results of Frankenstein’s deficient education coupled with his specialized studies in chemistry—his failure to avoid what Davy refers to as “the artificial divisions of language” that separate chemistry from physics, from art, and poetry and which Walton sidesteps (Shelley 246)—enable him to invent his own sublime transistor and terminal in an attempt to achieve what Freud will come to call the Primal Horde. Thus the modern Prometheus’s education has primed him to be moved by an energy beyond the scope of human thought to examine and analyze “all the minutiae of causation, as exemplified in the change from

life to death” (Shelley 72) that he might harness that potential for himself, to “banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death” (69). If one enters the picturesque, one makes deliberate revisions of the natural world. Frankenstein, however, enters a sublime state that constitutes a different compact with nature. Freud describes such compacts as those characterized by

the dwindling of the conscious individual personality, the focusing of thoughts and feelings into a common direction, the predominance of the emotions and of the unconscious mental life, the tendency to the immediate carrying out of intentions as they emerge—all this corresponds to a state of regression to a primitive mental activity, of just such a sort as we should be inclined to ascribe to the primal horde. (“Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego” 1922)

The resultant power of such an interaction with nature, however, is not something that humans can fully comprehend, let alone wield or create. Unlike the primitive man—who Freud argues kills the leader of their primal horde out of jealousy in order to obtain his power for himself—Frankenstein cannot claim the seat of his horde’s power. No matter the paradigm—chemistry or alchemy—it is impossible for a human mind to grasp nature’s secrets without invariably altering them in order to facilitate an understanding.

Thus, because harnessing nature’s sublime power is impossible, instead of creating a new race of sublimely beautiful superhumans, Frankenstein uses a simulacrum of that force, himself becoming a copy of nature, resulting in the birth of a sublimely horrible monster. His creator’s assertion that he is “a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived” (84), suggests that the Creature is more hideous, more horrible in appearance than Satan himself. As Dante’s conception of the fallen archangel is that of a hideous beast, it is implied that the creature is more repulsive and atrocious than the ultimate “monster” that natural or divine power has created. Similarly, Frankenstein asserts that “no mortal could support the horror of that countenance”—that the terror of the creature’s appearance is beyond the capacity of the human mind either to

comprehend or assess (84). The creature's face, especially, so violates natural law that the human mind shuts itself down upon viewing it, much as nature's sublime, according to Burke, astonishes the viewer, transporting him into "that state of the soul in which" Kant argues "all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that, far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force" (53). Such a description of a sublime state recalls both that in which Frankenstein created his invention, as discussed earlier, and that to which his creation transports him, suggesting that the two illustrate conflicting modes of sublimity that bleed into one another: horror and beauty. Kant adds to this idea of a suspended mind, arguing that this condition then transports the viewer to a new understanding. As a simulacrum of nature's sublime, however, the Creature's appearance can only induce a viewer into a paralyzed state of horror without later making her revel in the glory of her own mind's ability to reason. In other words, Victor's creation isn't a product of nature, and therefore cannot connect the viewer with the everlasting universe of things. The result of a man-made sublime power is therefore the exact opposite of a creation of nature: a horrible and grotesque being instead of inspiringly terrifying (sublime) or serenely calming (the beautiful), or energetically stimulating (picturesque). The reason that such a simulacrum threatens society instead of benefiting it, as Shelley argues those derived from picturesque nature do, is that sublime copies of nature's truth presume a greater proximity to that originating fount of knowledge, though they are not in fact closer. This results in narcissistic, specialized scientists tampering with powers they cannot and will never be able to understand, resulting in creations that oppose society in terms of aesthetics, morals, and laws.

It is the Creature's hideousness that compels Frankenstein to flee from his creation as opposed to any fear of attack or physical danger: "Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room" (85). This thought is reiterated later when Frankenstein prevents his life-long friend Henry Clerval from entering the room lest the invention should still be in it, not because he worries for his friend's safety, but because he "dreaded to behold this monster; but [...] feared still more that Henry should see him" (88). Just as the pursuit of nature's secrets overpowered Frankenstein to the point that he "seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit" (82)—a pursuit that "swallowed up every habit of [his] nature" (83)—the terror of his creation takes over his entire being, resulting in a fever of nightmares limited to visions of this new being. While vanquished by this fever, the protagonist cannot converse with his loved ones, pursue his studies.

To further her picturesque / sublime binary first espoused in *Six Weeks' Tour*, Shelley contrasts the harmful sublime state the Creature's appearance stimulates with a healing picturesque one—beauties of nature that can relieve Frankenstein from that fever. He describes how "fallen leaves had disappeared, and that the young buds were shooting forth from the trees that shaded my window," a scene that is the first to give him pleasure after his long pursuit of the sublime (90). He witnesses an ordinary, everyday landscape (Gilpin's definition of the picturesque scene) through a window, echoing Shelley's own view in her travel journal through her hotel window. Similarly, the beauties of the season bring back "sentiments of joy and affection" to Frankenstein's heart, feelings which he had suspended during his pursuit of the sublime, and again when under the power of sublime horror (90). That picturesque nature transports Frankenstein from a toxic state suggests that Shelley elevates it above the sublime and that she uses both of her narratives to establish the picturesque as a gateway to understanding and

self-improvement, while the sublime remains that static mode of visual representation that I elucidated in Chapter I.

Frankenstein's creation thus takes on the form of what Foucault referred to as the human monster. The Creature breaches both human and divine law by being "a mixture of life and death" (Foucault 63-64). He is created from the combination of numerous dead bodies and then brought to life by a human, facts which violate the natural laws of birth through a mother's womb and life begun in a new body. He calls social law into question and disables it (Foucault 64) by being Frankenstein's son through invention. In other words, the ways that the Creature's existence violates natural law places him in two conflicting categories of social law that cannot exert punishment on him for his infractions so long as he is a party to the other. To be more specific, the Creature, on the one hand, is an invention, which means he has no autonomy and his inventor is responsible for his crimes. On the other hand, he is a living being that Frankenstein devised: his unnatural son. If we view him as Frankenstein's first-born, then he is a self-governing individual subject to the same laws as his father, and any crimes he commits are his to atone for as the law requires. In the first case, Shelley uses the trial of Justine Moritz for the murder of William Frankenstein to illustrate that the Creature's existence is so unnatural that man's judicial law cannot touch him. After Justine is found with the locket William was carrying, the judge and jury find this evidence makes her culpable for the crime, and she is automatically arrested for the boy's murder. Despite this fact, the modern Prometheus "was fully convinced in [his] own mind that Justine, and indeed every human being was guiltless of this murder" (106) because he knows the culprit to be his unnatural creation. The Frankenstein family, as the father urges them to, decides to "rely on the justice of [their] judges, and the activity with which [their father] shall prevent the slightest show of partiality" (107). Thus they

trust that Justine will be acquitted of William's murder because she is innocent. However, because the judicial system is corrupt and because a creature who defies natural law is responsible for the crime, the trial is a "wretched mockery of justice" (107) that results in not only Justine's conviction, but also in her concession to a crime to which the Priest coerces her to confess.

Consequently, through the intersection of the Creature and Justine, Shelley comments on how laws make monsters of women while using their inability to punish the appropriate party to further delineate human civilization from sublime nature: a nature that the monstrous invention has a greater connection to by virtue of his origins. In relation to the second part of my argument, I suggest that the law, made by humans and applied to humans, exists solely within human society. It cannot apply to nature, or any other entity that exists outside the social constructs that compose civilization. Therefore, as a human monster the Creature cannot be punished for his crime because the judicial laws in place apply to humans of natural origin. Similarly, Frankenstein argues (wrongly as we discover later in the novel) that he cannot seek justice against the Creature because the thing's existence is so far out of the scope of the natural world that the man would appear mad if he even suggested it existed. In other words, according to Frankenstein, his sublime creation cannot be believed and therefore he cannot be tried for the crimes he has committed. Instead, the law tries Justine, a human framed by the Creature and an anthropocentric social order. The manufactured being's existence which leads to the execution of an innocent woman thus is an event that satisfies Foucault's requirement of a human monster: that its existence causes the law to "question its own foundations, or its practice, or fall silent, or abdicate, or appeal to another reference system, or again invent causality" (Foucault, 64) so that the guilty will be punished and the innocent acquitted. Consequently, Justine's contemporaries

invent her guilt so that appropriate punishment can be met out as required by law, which brings me to the second part of my argument: the fact that Justine can be wrongfully accused, berated, and threatened into believing her own guilt parallels the plight of Shelley's contemporary women and those fictional constructs found in Wollstonecraft's *Maria*. This earlier novel concludes with the protagonist's trial as she tried to defend her adultery in court by claiming a divorce from her husband in soul and mind that eclipses that recognized by law to defend her adultery in court (Wollstonecraft 144). The court, as it does in *Frankenstein*, rests the crime solely on the shoulders of the involved woman, thereby subordinating her humanity to her status as a criminal. The failure of human laws that turns those to which they apply into inhuman others in *Frankenstein* are tied to both the title character and the disciplines of specialized sciences that threaten the very fabric of human civilization, unlike their predecessors.

In *Frankenstein*, Shelley proposes that specialized scientists such as Victor and his professor, Monsieur Waldman—whose very name, which translates to “forest man,” critiques scientists' assumed superior connection to nature by uniting it with humanity just as Percy Shelley's poetic persona did in “Mont Blanc”—replace the sublime poet as humanity's connection to nature:

“The ancient teachers of this science,” said he, “promised impossibilities, and performed nothing. The modern masters promise very little; they know that metals cannot be transmuted, and that the elixir of life is a chimera. But these philosophers, whose hands seem only made to dabble in dirt, and their eyes to pour over the microscope or crucible, have indeed performed miracles. They penetrate into the recesses of nature, and shew how she works in her hiding places. They ascend into the heavens; they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows.” (76)

Waldman here suggests that scientists, like poets pursue nature to her hiding places, engaging with her through the everlasting universe of things. Unlike “ancient teachers”—perhaps he refers

here to Agrippa—these scientists are practical, down to earth, capable of getting their hands dirty with the tangible work that pouring over microscopes and crucibles requires. Shelley’s descriptions herein of the voltaic battery—commanding the thunders of heaven—and John Michell’s work on earthquakes take on a dramatic, prosaic tone, which recall in order to critique that of Davy in his *Discourse 15-17*: “Science [...] has bestowed upon [man] powers which may almost be called creative; which have enabled him to change and modify the beings surrounding him, and by his experiments to interrogate nature with power, not simply as a scholar, passive and seeking only to understand her operations, but rather as a master, active with his own instruments” (Shelley 247). Waldman, echoing Davy, thus suggests that modern practitioners have not only displaced alchemists but perhaps also poets as that select group of humanity who traditionally achieve “miracles” through an interchange with nature. However, modern science, through which “man has employed almost all the substances in nature either for the satisfaction of his wants, or the gratification of his luxuries” nurtures that sublime connection which Shelley argues ultimately destroys humanity as lightning does an oak and therefore offers not an exchange but a one-way interaction with nature (Davy quoted in Shelley 246). Similarly, Shelley suggests that though modern scientists’ scorn of superstition—an outdated form of power—mocks that invisible realm, allowing them to harness its shadows for their own purposes—which raises them above their predecessors—contributes to Frankenstein’s unbalanced education.

The modern Prometheus’s learned fearlessness in the face of the unnatural illustrates a difference between poets and scientists widely used to elevate the latter above the former, but here instead portrayed as a failing and threat to humanity. As a scientist, Frankenstein claims that he shuns superstition, explaining that “[i]n my education my father had taken the greatest precautions that my mind should be impressed with no supernatural horrors. [...] Darkness had

no effect upon my fancy; and a church-yard was to me merely the receptacle of bodies deprived of life, which, from being the seat of beauty and strength, had become food for the worm”

(Shelley 78). This ability helps convert him to the specialized science of chemistry, which shares his disdain for supernatural threats though not his enamor with supernatural power.

Consequently, he views a churchyard without reverence, dead bodies as nothing more than empty vessels, and his poetry reflects his narcissism instead of his sensibility: “I beheld the corruption of death succeed to the blooming cheek of life; I saw how the worm inherited the wonders of the eye and brain” (78). His need to stress his own position in this poetic reverie highlights his vanity while his focus on those aspects of death practical to his ends instead of to their universality suggests that he has no interest in sharing his understanding or visions with others. Instead he hopes to reveal his end product as a self-aggrandizement of his own genius. The last line of his prose suggests either that the worm inherits the abilities and history of the eyes and brains it consumes (in other words, the knowledge of those organs remains with them and are bequeathed to the worm), or that it belittles that accumulated data by merely devouring their stores as a source of sustenance, implying that man’s accomplishments mean nothing to nature.

#### *Part 4: Gender in Frankenstein*

While Part 3 looked at the geometric progression—that is, her incorporation and dilation of ideas from her travel account into her novel—of Shelley’s picturesque / sublime binary argument from *Six Weeks’ Tour* into *Frankenstein*, Part 4 addresses her argument of interpellated gender as it progresses from the first text to the second. The contrast between Victor, suffering physically and growing progressively weaker during his time of creation, and Walton, vigorous and robust as he heads toward the Pole, genders the two while simultaneously mocking the

stereotypical signs of genders by applying them to two men instead of a man and a woman:

Walton writes that Frankenstein's

limbs were nearly frozen, and his body dreadfully emaciated by fatigue and suffering. I never saw a man in so wretched a condition. We attempted to carry him into the cabin; but as soon as he had quitted the fresh air, he fainted. We accordingly brought him back to the deck, and restored him to animation by rubbing him with brandy, and forcing him to swallow a small quantity. As soon as he shewed signs of life, we wrapped him up in blankets, and placed him near the chimney of the kitchen-stove. By slow degrees he recovered, and ate a little soup, which restored him wonderfully. (Shelley 59)

Here Walton and his crew transform into romantic actors who save a weakened, similarly romanticized "damsel in distress" who even has the sense of propriety to faint. The saviors are thus gendered as male while the victim is described like a weak female, one subsequently placed in the kitchen, possibly the most female-gendered location in Western culture. The fact that such signals of chivalrous male and fragile female roles can be applied to a group of men suggests that Frankenstein is simultaneously male and female. However, as he is not a hermaphrodite this gendering is a matter of social construction, which begs the question, is such a construction necessary if its veracity lies in bonds to nature that are made up by society solely in order to maintain this arbitrary distinction?

Shelley also feminizes the sublime creation of her novel, thereby portraying society's male / female hierarchy as a monstrous construct that, like the Creature's existence, violates natural law since his yearnings have more in common with those of the stereotypical female than the male. When he commands Frankenstein to create a mate for him, he doesn't mention any wish to propagate his species or to satisfy any sexual appetites with his proposed mate. Instead, he argues that his father "must create a female for [him], with whom [he] can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for [his] being" (156). Such allegedly feminine longings carry into his relationship with humanity in general when he says that, should man treat

him kindly, he would “bestow every benefit upon him with tears of gratitude at his acceptance” (156). In wanting someone with whom to exchange “sympathies,” he intimates that these are wholly platonic; in other words, this apparent monster wants a mate not for sex, but for domestic companionship and the all-encompassing acceptance that comes with familial bonds. He therefore requests a wife out of the wants women are expected to satisfy through marriage: love, warmth, acceptance and the safety and social standing that comes with all three. Conversely, the Creature never states that he longs for what men are expected to want out of marriage: an heir and a being who will satisfy his sexual desires. As a sublimely horrible creation, the Creature is closer to the real sublime than any normal human. If he is emancipated from a distinct masculine-feminine hierarchy, this would suggest that the sublime itself is not subject to such a hierarchy and that we as humans are imposing an unnatural social male / female hierarchy on both ourselves and nature itself. Shelley thus feminizes her protagonist and his creation in order to expose the masculine-feminine hierarchy as an unnatural and therefore monstrous creation.

Similarly, Clerval juxtaposed with the Creature—who was in part born out of the loneliness Frankenstein felt due to his separation from his best friend—contrasts with the harmful, destructive capacity of the unfeeling masculinity that Shelley attributes to Frankenstein. The author’s many binaries spring from society’s dearth of balance, suggesting that such oppositions can be eliminated through an even integration of such terms. Her masculine / feminine dualism compares two non-intersecting categories: an ideal male devoid of feeling against a female animal possessed by feeling. Frankenstein’s profession is based in an objectivity that—it claims—raises its practitioners above the sentiments of base nature while denying the uninitiated from such an elevation of mind. Consequently, the objective, detached Frankenstein who can view the horrors of a graveyard as mere tools to an end finds himself placed on a

pedestal that crushes the man of feeling who would flee in terror from such a scene—men, in other words, who balance traditional masculinity with traditional femininity. With this reading in mind, Frankenstein's greater abhorrence for a female monster represents his horror at the subconscious realization that the male-female hierarchy on which society is based is an unnatural monstrosity.

When Frankenstein looks at the female Creature several outcomes occur to him that, if she were to come to life, would shake his understanding of the world and force him to question not only society's male-female hierarchy, but also what makes a woman a woman. When he lists his fears of the new being he's about to give life to, he spins from horror at the thought of the new couple's "children"; further he speculates that the female "might turn with disgust from [The Creature] to the superior beauty of man" (174). In other words, that she might prefer an aesthetically pleasing mate, just as humans do. Frankenstein's alarm, then, is that typical human wants—to attain a beautiful partner, to start a family—will lead to the creation of a race of abnormal monsters "at the price perhaps of the existence of the whole human race" (174).

However, I suggest that this allegedly noble panic is a shield Frankenstein uses to mask the real source of his terror: that the sublimely horrible female could fulfill the role of wife and mother, and perhaps even do well at them. The only women Frankenstein comes into contact with in the novel are his mother, Justine, and Elizabeth: they, therefore, form the basis of Victor's definition of their sex. Elizabeth, for example, exemplifies Wollstonecraft's concept that both "sexes" should be equal since Shelley's descriptions emphasize her intelligence and activity: her "person was the image of her mind; her hazel eyes, although as lively as a bird's, possessed an attractive softness. Her figure was light and airy; and, though capable of enduring great fatigue, she appeared the most fragile creature in the world" (66). Her body and mind are

so balanced that they mirror one another. She is “picturesque”: soft but lively—meaning that she has not been compelled to increase her natural deficiencies to the point of vapid uselessness. The fact that she can “enjoy liberty” does not prevent her from being able to exercise the virtue of temperance when necessary, and while her imagination is “luxuriant, [...] [and] her application [is] great” (66). However, while Frankenstein “admired her understanding and fancy, [he] loved to tend on her, as [he] should on a favorite animal”—that is, on a being with an inferior capacity for intelligence than humans, a purely physical creature. Despite all that Elizabeth actually is, Frankenstein reduces his vision of her to that which he wishes to see: a being of more corporeality than thought. All that matters to him is her physical form and he wishes to pay homage to that form. To him Elizabeth merely represents Burke’s concept of the beautiful. Justine also fulfills a similar requirement of beauty: her appearance is refreshing, one that can relax or console a person. Frankenstein himself claims that if he “were in an ill humour, one glance from Justine could dissipate it, for the same reason that Ariosto gives concerning the beauty of Angelica—she looked so frank-hearted and happy” (90). Again, regardless of Justine’s real character, Frankenstein sees only her in terms of aesthetics and what she can do for him. In addition, this beautiful woman comes to represent the ideal caregiver; a role shared by Frankenstein’s mother, a lovely lady who attended her own father on his deathbed “with the greatest tenderness” (64).

If, for Frankenstein, the beautiful “helpmate” constitutes the ideal female, then we gain some insight into his obsession with external beauty. More important however, is his belief that external beauty reflects internal abilities and selfhood. His assumption that his mother, Elizabeth, and Justine, were loving caregivers solely because of their beauty develops into the presumption that only a beautiful member of the female sex can be a loyal mother or wife. Consequently, the

idea that Frankenstein's ugly invention could have an exquisite inner life or that his sublimely horrible female counterpart might become a mother, might take on the role that only an aesthetically pleasing woman such as Frankenstein's own mother should hold, terrifies him immensely. If such a thing were to come to pass, he would have to question the delineations between both good and evil and man and woman that he has constructed based on appearance. If beauty is not the source of these divisions, then it could be any number of characteristics—masculine, feminine ones, perhaps even an intersection of the two. If an exchange of gendered characteristics were possible, then Frankenstein would have to admit, as Shelley suggests, that the male-female hierarchy on which society is based is an unnatural monstrosity that humanity places on the world. It is for this reason that he finds the prospect of a female Creature more chilling than the male one; she would incite him to question society at large.

*Conclusion: The Arbitrary Nature of Gender and Hierarchical Distinctions*

The threat of a repulsive woman reproducing would also force Frankenstein to rethink another parallel: that intelligent women can't be successful caretakers. From poets such as Percy Shelley to theorists such as Friedrich Schiller, the sublime has been portrayed as a pathway to intelligence, offset by its binary opposite, beauty, which is vacant of understanding (Schiller 11). The gendering of the sublime thereby bars women from what Wollstonecraft argues is the "improvable reason [which is] the dignified distinction which raises men above the brute creation, and puts a natural sceptre in a feeble hand" (*VRW* 109-110). In other words, women who are denied education and forbidden rightful access to the sublime, cannot demonstrate themselves as fully human because they cannot develop the ability to reason—they have no knowledge, and their minds are vacuums. However, Wollstonecraft and Shelley's societies dictate that a beauteous void is all the female sex should aspire to and the only subject who can

be a responsible mother. It is in such a society that Frankenstein's character has been raised and that has instilled in him his perceptions of the world. Thus the notion that a sublime female creation who defies every trait supposedly ideal to the gender could make a good mother forces him to question the whole social structure of which he is a part. It is this prospect that renders a female Creature more terrifying to the modern Prometheus than the male version could ever be.

### Chapter III: The Geometric Progression of Shelley's Picturesque / Sublime Binary and Interpellated Gender from *Six Weeks' Tour* and *Frankenstein* into *Matilda*

If *Frankenstein* is a novel illustrating the dangers of the sublime, then its successor *Matilda* depicts the benefits of the picturesque and the divide between humanity and nature. This novella explores monstrosity as a social construct through a female protagonist who, facing the horror of her father's incestuous desires, makes this taboo sin her own, thereby establishing a connection with nature that transcends the bounds of civilization and transforms human souls into inhuman ones. This result of an interchange with nature combines with weather and scenery reflective of the protagonist's mental state that then directs the plot of the novella to argue for a picturesque / sublime binary.

The scenery in *Matilda* oscillates between the picturesque and sublime to echo the sentiments of the narrative, eventually bringing them in line with those of the protagonist. Therefore, to set the novella's tone it begins with a sublime scene that evokes a terrifying calm: we read Matilda's description of her life

in a lone cottage on a solitary, wide heath: no voice of life reaches me. I see a desolate plain covered with white, save a few black patches that the noonday sun has made at the top of those sharp pointed hillocks from which the snow, sliding as it fell, lay thinner than on the plain ground: a few birds are pecking at the hard ice that covers the pools—for the frost has been of long continuance. (151)

Here the act of specifying that no voice of life reaches her suggests that those not covered by this category—voices of death and inanimate nature—meet her ears. When combined with the knowledge that this novella constitutes a lengthy suicide note, the silence surrounding Matilda—the snow's movement is the only action in the passage described in the past tense. It is therefore not a current source of noise—takes on an unnatural tone that contributes to a general sense of finality: *Matilda* begins at its protagonist's end. Additionally, a quality of expectant danger

emanates from the threatening blades of the razor-like hillocks that have conspired with the sun to cut through the white plain. Consequently, the chiaroscuro of white snow and black earth coupled with no life-giving sound and a frozen wasteland stress the narrator's isolation not just from humanity but all convivial company, including the rejuvenating picturesque nature of *Six Weeks' Tour*. Matilda is thus trapped in a monochrome world devoid of life and human involvement. Her sublime cage is edged by sharp peaks, hard ice, and snow that blazes in the sunlight. It is here in solitude separate from human companionship and immersed in sublime nature that Matilda can contemplate her own death in what she calls "a strange state of mind," a phrase that evokes that state of mind necessary to connect with the everlasting universe of things in "Mont Blanc" (151). At this point in the novel the landscape is both reflective of the plot and the feelings of the protagonist, meaning that the sublime lens is necessary not for Matilda's contemplation of her fate but for the reader's preparation for the rest of the novel: it foreshadows the plot.

The scenery reflects Matilda's emotional state and characterizes the novella's plot. Here she is "alone—quite alone—in the world—the blight of misfortune" having passed over and withered her, just as the blight of winter has passed over and withered the world around her. Her reiteration offset by the dashes emphasizes her utter solitude, and the word "blight" connects the dead world to her own blasted life. Such syntax and diction suggest a secret—why this "misfortune"?—compelling us to read on. I want to draw here on Terry Pratchett's concept of "psychotropic weather" (Pratchett 174)<sup>3</sup>. He claims that Uberwald—which combines aspects of

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<sup>3</sup> The vampire Otto Chriek explains "'If I was to say something portentous [...] back home in Uberwald, zere would be a sudden crash of thunder. [...] And if I was to point at a castle on a towering crag and say, 'Yonder is...*zer castle*,' a wolf would be bound to howl mournfully. [...] In zer old country, zer scenery is psychotropic and knows vot is expected of it. Here, alas, people just look at you in a funny vay'" (Pratchett 174).

almost every gothic tale, including *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*—is a fictional realm in which this kind of weather appears. Psychotropic weather occurs when a scene’s surroundings react to people’s expectations and needs. Consequently, in Uberwald lightning strikes whenever someone says something dramatic and ominous, such as a threat, and a lone wolf’s howl accompanies anyone’s attempt to point out a castle. We see this phenomenon in *Matilda* when the setting simultaneously reflects and compounds the heroine’s feelings in a manner that then establishes the narrative’s tone as terrific, dreadfully expectant (as in *Matilda*’s beginning which mirrors the reader’s prediction of a dramatic, tragic narrative), happily expectant, or conclusive (as at *Matilda*’s end which echoes the protagonist’s sentiments).

In another example, which folds in this idea of psychotropic weather, we see a second instance of what I am calling geometric progression. This occurs when Shelley transports her oak tree analogy from *Frankenstein* to *Matilda*, concentrating the metaphor of its destructive ether on the latter’s protagonist, thereby arguing that the taboo feelings that she undertakes constitute sublime, devastating forces. In the confrontation between Matilda and her father<sup>4</sup>—the point at which he declares his incestuous love for her—that precipitates their fall, the latter’s “eyes had glared on [her] like lightning,” suggesting that in his gaze exists a sublime power that will shatter her as lightning does the oak at Belrive (166). Matilda, never anticipating the outcome of her desires to know what obsesses him, demands his admission of these feelings ““though it be as a flash of lightning to destroy [her],”” again likening such sentiments to a catastrophic sublime phenomenon (172). Her father’s reflection following his subsequent confession illustrates his transformation by virtue of this sublime energy: “Monster as I am, you [Matilda] are still, as you ever were, lovely, beautiful beyond expression. What I have become in this last moment I know

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<sup>4</sup> Matilda’s father goes nameless throughout the novella, just as the Creature does in *Frankenstein*.

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, and my blood riots through my veins: I am burnt up with fever” (173).

Unlike the monster in *Frankenstein*, who was made an inhuman creature, this one mutates from a human into a different entity—he falls from grace like Satan.

The father’s fall results from his interaction with the sublime through what Sigmund Freud calls a taboo practice, making this concept a heuristic device through which to read *Matilda*. Shelley, anticipating Freud, aligns the taboo with the natural world; however she uses this division to argue for a non-existent delineation between civilization and nature while Freud argues the opposite and values the former over the later. *Totem and Taboo* defines incest as a taboo practice, explaining that

the meaning of taboo branches off into two opposite directions. On the one hand it means to us sacred, consecrated: but on the other hand it means, uncanny, dangerous, forbidden, and unclean. The opposite for taboo is designated in Polynesian by the word *noa* and signified something ordinary and generally accessible. Thus [...] taboo expresses itself essentially in prohibitions and restrictions. (30-31)

Such acts then are those that threaten the fabric of a given society by transforming a behavior into a crime, just as an incestuous attachment combines into something criminal the normal and necessary relationships between lovers incongruently with that of a father and daughter. Taboos are not generally accessible to citizens within the societies in which they operate because such practices challenge the civilizing forces that maintain the division between man and nature. At first glance, aligning the sublime with the taboo thereby associates the former with crime.

However, given that crime and law, good and evil are all social constructs, in reality this only serves to connect the sublime with a nature that makes no such distinctions and, by virtue of that lack, inevitably commits the very crimes that it refuses to recognize. In other words, morals need to be imposed on nature through a consciously mediated interaction that the sublime cannot

provide, and consequently any knowledge garnered through the everlasting universe of things is more likely to oppose the morals of human society than that gleaned through a picturesque frame. Thus the taboo cannot be engaged with through a picturesque experience, only through a sublime one.

Freud ties the taboo to the bestial base nature in humanity that civilization hopes to correct; in doing so, he thereby explains why punishments are needed to actively dissuade members of what he calls primitive societies from engaging in such crimes deemed taboo. Freud's proposal that "savages are even more sensitive to incest than we, perhaps because they are more subject to temptations than we are, and hence require more extensive protections against it" (15) reinforces the divide between nature and culture. Here he equates an inability to resist temptations to a base nature that needs to be restrained in order for civilization to develop, implying that these desires are based in morals and therefore are not unnatural, but uncivilized. Shelley argues that the tendency to characterize these attachments as unnatural in the production of works such as *Myrra*<sup>5</sup> robs them of their immediacy and thus of their power as subjects of study: "inequality of aging adding to the unnatural incest. To shed any interest over such an attachment, the dramatist [of *Myrra*] ought to adorn the father with such youthful attributes as would be by no means contrary to probability" as she herself does in *Matilda* (Bennett 51). Treating incest as a taboo, though not impossible crime within a modern novella thus creates what Shelley argues is a "worse evil" than that of an exaggerated unnatural, improbable crime by bringing such acts out of irrelevant, uncivilized antiquity and into the realm of contemporary

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<sup>5</sup> *Myrra* is a play about incest and the transcendence of the human frame. In summary, Myrra falls in love with her father and through deception has sexual intercourse with him. He attempts to kill her once he discovers the crime that she has forced him to commit, but the gods intercede and turn her into a tree for her own protection. As a tree, Myrra gives birth to a son, Adonis, who was such an enchantingly beautiful individual that two goddesses—Aphrodite and Persephone—fell in love with him.

probability, “and the more possible such criminal passions become the more violently does the mind revolt from dwelling on it” (Bennett 51). Thus by interacting with an uncanny reflection of civilizing practices, the father in *Matilda* crosses the divide between humanity and nature and enters into a feverish sublime state that then transfigures his soul into a monster that echoes the physical horror of the Creature in *Frankenstein*.

Unlike her father, who interpellates his monstrosity into being by confessing his taboo, Matilda’s metamorphosis from a socially accepted human to a monster rejected by society stems from believing she has called a loved one’s death into being while in the midst of a sublime state. While pursuing her father to save him, Matilda prophesizes his suicide, which he intended as recompense for his crime:

A strange idea seized me; a person must have felt all the agonies of doubt concerning the life and death of one who is the whole world to them before they can enter into my feelings—for in that state, the mind working unrestrained by the will makes strange and fanciful combinations with outward circumstances and weaves the chances and changes of nature into an immediate connexion with the event they dread. It was with this feeling that I turned to the old Steward who stood pale and trembling beside me; “Mark Gaspar, if the next flash of lightning rend not that oak my father will be alive.” I had scarcely uttered these words than a flash instantly followed by a tremendous peal of thunder descended on it; and when my eyes recovered their sight after the dazzling light, the oak no longer stood in the meadow. The old man uttered a wild exclamation of horror when he saw so sudden an interpretation given to my prophecy. (183)

The idea that seizes her is strange only because it arises spontaneously from associations she makes in viewing and interacting nature. Wollstonecraft calls this poetic thinking. In *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* she suggests that memory facilitates an association of ideas that is either habitual or instantaneous. The former kind involves an exercise of will while the latter depends on the temperature of mind. Instantaneous associations happen when thoughts are moved into the formation of an understanding on their own—from here comes poetic thought, which is the ability of “intractable spirits [who] appear to be the essence of genius” whose glowing minds

“concentrate pictures for their fellow creatures; forcing them to view with interest the objects reflected from the impassioned imagination, which [those without such passion] passed over in nature” (245). She argues that “[t]he generality of people cannot see or feel poetically,” and are, consequently, dependent on a minority of the population to show them the “fancy” of the imagination that they themselves desire to see, but cannot (245). Most people therefore practice a habitual association of ideas, one that is learned, that to an extent cannot be unlearned, and that necessitates an exercise of will in order to learn and adhere to. Similarly, Wollstonecraft’s comment that there exists a “quick perception of truth, which is so intuitive that it baffles research and makes us at a loss to determine whether it is reminiscence or ratiocination [reason], lost sight of in its celerity, that opens the dark cloud,” suggests that though poetic thought—which she equates with an intellectual genius—comes from a place of reason. However, because reason must be exercised in the same way virtues need be, truths derived from instantaneous associations, which are the instigators of poetic thought, are the product of reason, but not of *our* reason. It is similar to the line in “Mont Blanc” where Percy Shelley describes the everlasting universe of things as flowing “with a sound but half its own” (Shelley 6) which implies that the sound we hear is half made-up by us because the actual sound itself is too foreign to our ears for us to hear it directly. Truths found by instantaneous associations—such as that in which Matilda engages in the above passage—and poetic thought are therefore sublime products. Her omen therefore acts as a transistor between herself and nature through which her words may travel so that the latter can interpret them, resulting in a lightning strike that foretells the extent of the protagonist’s fall. Taboo crimes connect her, by association, her with a terrifying energy that shatters her and her father’s humanity in the eyes of the world; this parallels the way a lightning bolt obliterates the oak’s form, both of which are foreshadowed by Matilda’s comment that

“[t]here were no degrees which could break [her] fall from happiness to misery; it was as the stroke of lightening—sudden and entire” (164).

While *Matilda* uses taboo practices to argue for the sublime’s danger and the picturesque’s ability to offer some measure of healing, psychotropic weather illustrates the latter’s superiority. In Shelley’s works, weather and scenery function as tools to guide readers into a particular emotional state that relates back to the narrative. The stark, isolated, sublime, threatening scene at the novella’s beginning readies readers for a tragic, dramatic story. Similarly, lightning storms and other sublime episodes portend tragic yet unavoidable events while chirping birds and picturesque views framed by windows signal a briefly happy occurrence soon to be replaced by yet more tragedy—hence the shift in how Matilda’s surroundings are described in the novel’s beginning versus at the end. The novella’s conclusion returns to this landscape, describing it as a pleasantly picturesque one, thereby signaling a change in both the plot and protagonist: “I rose and walked slowly to the window; the wide heath was covered by snow which sparkled under the beams of the sun that shone brightly thro’ the pure, frosty air: a few birds were pecking some crumbs under my window. I smiled with quiet joy [...] and thus addressed the scene before me” (207). Unlike before, a window limits and shapes the scenery, its frame allowing the landscape itself to change from sublime to picturesque as Gilpin suggests picturesque travelers alter and improve that which they see—birds peck at nourishing crumbs instead of hard ice, the snow sparkles in the sun that before was left implied but not specifically mentioned. Its inclusion now brings a warmth to the passage that’s reflected by the air’s purity, all of which lift Matilda to a quiet joy that could not form in the desolation of the previous sublime description.

This change is reflected in the protagonist, who, instead of falling into the abyss of sublime nature as Goethe's Werther does, takes comfort in nature's indifference to her and the crime she is associated with via her father's desires. Addressing nature, she exclaims,

“I have loved thee; and in my days both of happiness and sorrow I have peopled your solitudes with wild fancies of my own creation. The woods, the lakes, and mountains which I have loved, have for me a thousand associations; and thou, oh, Sun! hast smiled upon, and borne your part in many imaginations that sprung to life in my soul alone, and which will die with me. Your solitudes, sweet land, your trees and waters will still exist, moved by your winds, or still beneath the eye of noon, though what I have felt about ye, and all my dreams which have often strangely deformed thee, will die with me. You will exist to reflect other images in other minds, and ever will remain the same, although your reflected semblance vary in a thousand ways, changeable as the hearts of those who view thee. One of these fragile mirrors, that ever doted on thine image, is about to be broken, crumbled to dust. But everteeming Nature will create another and another, and thou wilt loose [sic] nought by my destruction. Thou wilt ever be the same.” (207)

Here Shelley advances her argument from *Six Weeks' Tour* that nature can be beneficial when properly mediated, thereby challenging Werther's conception of nature as “an eternally devouring, eternally regurgitating monster” centered on “the destructive force that is concealed in the totality of nature [...] which has never created a thing that has not destroyed its neighbors or itself” that “undermined” Werther's heart (40). Instead, she creates a blank canvas out of nature, the act of populating its emptiness serving as a comforting form of control over her own world as opposed to the harmful mastery Frankenstein attempts to exert through the sublime. The resultant simulacra are truths, as Deleuze later suggests in his own work, that live within her—they are alive, creating a mental child between Matilda and nature whose own life is directly attached to the protagonist's. Though she is a fragile mirror, and therefore incapable of simulating nature as it truly is, she ever doted on that image which she could neither reproduce nor see in its raw entirety since a mirror sees by reflecting, and therefore never sees the original that it replicates. Similarly, her assertion that nature “will exist to reflect other images in other

minds” postulates that nature itself echoes back the images imposed on it by human minds. Here we see the exchange missing in Frankenstein’s interaction with the everlasting universe of things: the anti-narcissistic acceptance that nature will exist the same as it always has whether humans are here or not and that we can never grasp the original fount of knowledge for ourselves. However, nature itself will forever remain the same because its copies could not penetrate to its originating source. Consequently, those negative attributes that Werther expounds take on positive meaning: eternally regurgitating becomes evertteeming, and eternally devouring transforms into a never-ending succession of constantly reproducing and destroying mirrors.

Matilda addresses her farewell solely to the picturesque nature of woods, lakes, and mountains that the sun smiles upon—sweet lands, a term inapplicable to sublime nature—thereby establishing the former aesthetic as preferable to the latter. Any part of nature can arguably be picturesque or sublime. However, when Shelley describes lakes, as we saw in *Six Weeks’ Tour*, she does so within the register of the picturesque, insisting on the importance of the highly mediated exercise associated with this aesthetic practice, one that reflects images and instigates a thousand associations in the fragile mirrors of humanity. The omission of sublime nature in Matilda’s above address suggests that she does not regret leaving such scenes for another world. Further, while she bids goodbye to the picturesque, she doesn’t take leave of the sublime or need to reflect on how its brand of nature has enriched her life: quite the opposite, since it was responsible for her father’s fall, his subsequent death, and the trauma she is left with in the aftermath. The nature that she has loved—that which created and then destroyed her and will do so to another and another after her—will ever remain the same nature from which she derived happiness. Though Matilda feels that mere association with her father’s monstrous desires has ostracized her from human society and trapped her in destructive sublime nature, the

picturesque frees her, absolving her of sin-by-association and providing her a space for her ideals and hopes to take shape—which the sublime does not—by giving her the space she needs to cope with the trauma of her father’s confession. Thus, Shelley elevates the picturesque above the sublime by its superior beneficence to humanity.

### **Conclusion: How Mary Shelley Functions Within and Critiques the Romantic Period**

This thesis has argued that Mary Shelley's works form a dialogue with those of her contemporaries and predecessors within the Romantic Movement that criticizes social constructions of gender as well as the narcissistic convictions first, that one can delve into nature and truly access its sublime secrets, and second, that one can then exert the right to harvest what they believe they have found for their own aggrandizement. Thus, as I have shown, the foundations of *Six Weeks' Tour*, *Frankenstein*, and *Matilda* are predicated on a series of paradigms: first, the aesthetic categories of the sublime and picturesque as articulated by William Gilpin, Edmund Burke, Kant, Schiller, Milton, Dante, and Percy Shelley; second I have demonstrated how the critiques of gender and education Mary Wollstonecraft offers undergird Shelley's texts; third, by looking at select works by Erasmus Darwin and Sir Humphry Davy, I have explored, more briefly, the connection between Frankenstein's scientific specialization and the ways that this encourages his narcissistic delving into the sublime. While feminist scholars have done much to broaden our understanding of Shelley, claims that *Frankenstein* is her "self-conscious revision of Percy Shelley's *Alastor*" and, more generally, a reiteration of "his theories of love" diminish the extent of her originality and grant greater authorship to the nearest man (Fisch et al. 4). It is more accurate to say that Shelley's works reimagine in original and dynamic ways the literature and conventions of her era in order to argue against contemporary social norms, thereby establishing them as arbitrary constructions not found in nature—as she does with "Mont Blanc" in *Six Weeks' Tour*—or to use as springboards by which she can rethink binary constructions, as she does in her about-face revisions of Burke's gender constructions. Her interactions with these authors demonstrate how thoroughly she inhabits the heart of Romanticism, rather than existing on its periphery as its diminutive Other. Similarly, the fact that

Shelley argues that the divide between society's female and male as a matter of interpellation suggests both a feminist and a deconstructionist lens are necessary to illuminate her radical vision.

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