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About this Volume

This volume of *Romantic Circles Praxis Series* includes an editor's introduction by Jerrold E. Hogle, essays by Anne Williams, Matthew VanWinkle, John Rieder, and Marc Redfield.

This collection offers five outstanding Romanticists focusing on the nightmarish sleep into which Victor Frankenstein falls after seeing his creature take its first breaths in Mary Shelley's original novel of 1818. That dream, the dark side of Frankenstein's glorious daydreams about the future of humanity after his experiment, has been explored by several critics already, mostly on psychoanalytic and feminist grounds. Despite these rich interpretations, though, several dimensions—and some later adaptations—of that dream remain unexplained. These essays address those unresolved issues by dealing with several rarely explored aspects or echoes of Frankenstein's dream: its "abjection" of unresolved and interwoven ideological conflicts; the cultural links it reveals between sentimentality and sadism; the inescapable connection between "creation" and parody; the relationship between patriarchal societies and the fecal ejection of its actual foundations; and the ways in which *Frankenstein* on film echoes the movements and dissolves between images that overwhelm Victor at his most pre-conscious moment in the novel. Each of these new explorations also relates these parts of the dream to much wider contexts, not only in the novel itself, but in the history of modern Western culture.

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About the Romantic Circles Praxis Series

The **Romantic Circles Praxis Series** is devoted to using computer technologies for the contemporary critical investigation of the languages, cultures, histories, and theories of Romanticism. Tracking the circulation of Romanticism within these interrelated domains of knowledge, **RCPS** recognizes as its conceptual terrain a world where Romanticism has, on the one hand, dissolved as a period and an idea into a plurality of discourses and, on the other, retained a vigorous, recognizable hold on the intellectual and theoretical discussions of today. **RCPS** is committed to mapping out this terrain with the best and mo st exciting critical writing of contemporary Romanticist scholarship. The **Romantic Circles Praxis Series** was formerly known as **Romantic Praxis: Theory and Criticism**. The name was changed in November 1999.

About the Contributors

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Casebooks collection on *Frankenstein*, edited by Fred Botting, and in *Romanticism, History, and the Possibilities of Genre*, edited by Tilottama Rajan and Julia Wright (Cambridge UP). He is currently at work on a book entitled *The Gothic Image in the Romantic Poem*.

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Frankenstein's Dream

An Introduction

Jerrold E. Hogle, University of Arizona

1. In Mary Shelley's original *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus* (1818)—unlike nearly all of its many adaptations—there are at least two levels of "dream" for Victor Frankenstein, the title character. The first, which is given a dream-like quality by his insistence that it is not "the vision of a madman" (Shelley 47), is his hopeful daydream of what the creation of a human life through science might ultimately mean:

   > Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs. Pursuing these reflections, I thought, if I could bestow animation on lifeless matter, I might in the process of time (although I now found it impossible) renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption. (Shelley 49)

   To be sure, it is this vision to which Victor refers, along with his hope that his creation might be "beautiful," when he later laments, on actually seeing his creature come to life, that "the *beauty of the dream* vanished" to be replaced by "horror and disgust" at a "wretch" more "hideous" than a "mummy again endued with animation" (Shelley 52-53, my emphasis). Even so, this daydream raises far-reaching questions on its own that persist in the Western world to this day, among the many reasons for the long survival of Shelley's arresting story. To what degree, as the biological sciences have developed (now quite rapidly in our age of biotechnology), is Victor's aspiration a valuable one, even within the long-standing middle-class ideology of men whereby the self-made individual achieves his potential in products of his ingenuity that can change the world? Exactly when does this dream, appealing as it was in 1818 and remaining in 2002, "cross a line" (and where *is* that line?) that separates worthwhile ambition from socially destructive obsession? Is there so much ego in Victor's *hubris*, with all the "I"s and "me"s in the above passage, that *Frankenstein* is primarily an attack on scientific aspiration as too often self-serving, as exploitative of manipulated "others" mainly for the sake of how they will reflect back on the scientist or discoverer?

2. Indeed, is such ego separable from the aspiration? Are we looking at science "going too far," assuming a more moderate and sociable version of itself, or is Mary Shelley exposing a dynamic of selfish dominance that is endemic to such quests from their very inception? After all, Victor tells his story using these words, among others, to Robert Walton, the arctic explorer who "frames" Frankenstein's and his creature's stories within a packet of letters sent from the ice-floes of the far North to his sister back in England. Victor's stated purpose for his narrative is to offer warnings to others who "seek for knowledge and wisdom," as Walton is doing (Shelley 24), as though Frankenstein's desires and errors could be universalized to apply to many individuals who have, as Walton has, dreamed of an ultimate discovery (such as the North Pole) that "presents [itself first] to the imagination as a region of beauty and delight" (Shelley 9). Are the features of Frankenstein's daydream, then, too much those of Shelley's contemporaries and too persistent even for many of us today? Is Mary Shelley, as some have suggested (see Homans 100-19 and Mellor), writing a critique of male or Romantic aspiration as she knew it, particularly in such poets and dabblers in science as Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley (whom she married in December of 1816)? Or are such longings bound up, at their time and since, with our best

ambitions for making the world a better place and human life longer? Are the darkest and brightest sides of this dream inseparably mixed together? Have they been so for almost two hundred years in Western culture? And if so, why?

3. The problems that Victor's conscious dream present, however, are greatly complicated when we recall that there is a second, more *pre*conscious dream (really a *nightmare*) into which Victor falls in Mary Shelley's novel. Right after he recoils from the first sight of his finished, and now breathing, creation, at least as he remembers in his narration to Walton, Frankenstein "rushes" in frightened disgust from his makeshift laboratory and, finally giving way to exhaustion after long "depriv[ing him]self of rest and health" (Shelley 52), throws himself on his bed, with his most conscious thoughts of escape from his problems being focussed on his fiancee, Elizabeth Lavenza:

> I slept indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt [his present location]. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought I beheld the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed; when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window-shutters, I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created. (Shelley 53)

This stunning moment, virtually unique to the novel in the many versions of *Frankenstein*, has understandably provoked numerous and varied interpretations, several which I will review shortly. Its immediate effect, though, is to undermine Victor's lofty daydream by revealing a preconscious disposition towards a sort of necrophilia with his mother as what is more truly symbolized in the sewn-together features of the being he has created. Is this the *real* dream—the actual dark urges—at the foundation of Frankestein's project, a deeper motivation that is covered over and obscured by his conscious ambitions? Especially in juxtaposition to its hopeful counterpart, what does this dream tell us about the larger meanings and cultural resonance of *Frankenstein* the novel, about the wider Romantic quest for "brave new worlds" to which it clearly responds, and about the development of this story after the novel appeared in versions that are clearly based on this nightmare, even if (or perhaps because) they refuse to repeat it? In other words, what *is* "Frankenstein's dream" at bottom? What lies most fundamentally behind this tale's ongoing importance to us as a persistent Western myth? The essays in this collection all strive to answer these questions and to do so from very different perspectives that have rarely been applied to *Frankenstein* before now.

4. Most of the answers so far, of course, given the contents of Victor's second dream, have been psychoanalytic ones. *Frankenstein* unquestionably joins with other early nineteenth-century texts (see Ellenberger 143-215) in beginning to craft the ingredients of the unconscious and the interpretation of dreams that Sigmund Freud proposed as scientific truth by the 1890s. For most Freudian critics (see Tropp 19-33; Twitchell 46-60; and Veeder 112-17, for examples), Victor's pursuit of life's deepest secret by digging up body-parts in Mother Earth therefore stems, like his inconsistent pursuit of Elizabeth, from an unconscious desire for *and* a resistance to a reunion with the body of his deceased mother—the very feminine origin he has tried to avoid by producing a "child" without a woman or sexual intercourse. Indeed, Victor's mother in Shelley's novel, Caroline, dies shortly before he leaves for Ingolstadt because she catches scarlet fever from Elizabeth (the initial object of Victor's embrace in his dream), whom the older woman lovingly nurses in the Frankenstein household until her own "fever was very malignant" (Shelley 37). Her death, as Victor recalls to Walton by stopping his narrative cold at this point, is the most devastating event in the young scientist's life:

I need not describe the feelings of those whose dearest ties are rent by that most irreparable evil, the void that presents itself to the soul, and the despair that is exhibited on the countenance. It is so long before the mind can persuade itself that she, whom we saw every day, and whose very existence appeared a part of our own, can have departed for ever—that the brightness of a beloved eye can have been extinguished, and the sound of a voice so familiar, and dear to the ear, can be hushed, never more to be heard. These are the reflections of the first days; but when the lapse of time proves the reality of the evil, then the actual bitterness of the grief commences. (Shelley 38)

Still shattered by such an enormous loss for him, even when he speaks to Walton, Victor not surprisingly covers up his extreme longing in his supposedly very different process of creation. But the repressed manifestly returns the more his efforts come to fruition. Victor's finished product is revealed by his dream at the moment of "birth" to be a cover for his drive to return to his mother—to rejoin himself to her body, for which Elizabeth is but a displacement—and to do so by entering, Orpheus-like, into the world of buried dissolution (the charnel houses and graveyards from which he steals pieces of bodies) where his mother, like Eurydice, has been taken by Death itself and from which he longs to recover her (though with no more success than Orpheus had).

5. Such impulses turn out to be the most fundamental of the infantile drives that Freud finds sequestered in the human unconscious and describes as disguising themselves in half-conscious displacements, especially in dreams. By these lights, Victor is continuing the universal childish longing to return to the body of the mother from which the infant has been thrust (one basis of all the longings of *eros* in life) and pursuing that goal, more than most do consciously, by manifesting a death-wish to re-enter his and everyone's intrauterine state prior to birth (the drive of *thanatos* in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* [1920]). Since such drives have to be radically obscured in any manifestations of the unconscious for Freud, even in dreams, it is no surprise for the psychoanalytic reader that they appear most overtly throughout *Frankenstein* in figures that seem their opposite, in this case the fabrication of a male body by a man that seems to avoid women and motherhood altogether while supposedly making life out of death and not vice-versa. The hero's nightmare in *Frankenstein*, it seems, is at least the Freudian displacement where we are all shown to be concealing, in fact to be *reversing*, infantile longings of both *eros* and *thanatos* (loving procreation and death-seeking destruction) so that they are sublimated within our most "adult" pursuits. Within this theory, the longings and violence in both these deep drives, which Freud sees in some of his works as the drives of the *id*, come out in Victor's creature as they do not in the creator who has projected, even *othered* them, onto his creation as though they all belonged "over there" and not in himself. Such a combination of life-creating and life-destroying impulses in the "monster" is part of what makes him enact the killings of little brother William, the servant Justine, Elizabeth, and even Victor's best friend, Henry Clerval, that Victor subconsciously wishes to bring about, both to dominate his world and to return it all to death, the inclinations he is most unwilling to face as basic aspects of his fundamental being (see Kaplan and Kloss 119-45). It is in this way, after all, that Frankenstein's creature is a form of "the uncanny" as Freud defines that feeling of profound revulsion *and* déjà vu in his 1919 essay of that name. What Victor comes to call his "daemon" (Shelley 94) is so abhorrent in its grotesque unfamiliarity, according to "The Uncanny," because what it harbors is the *deeply* familiar, his creator's own repressed and most infantile drives.

6. For several insightful feminist critics, however, this Freudian scenario about Frankenstein's dream is a cover for another hidden—and more widely cultural and political—unconscious. While *seeming* to long for a reunion of himself with both his mother and death, Victor in his usurpation of "making a baby" may be striving to "kill" the feminine powers, from Elizabeth's to Caroline's, that threaten male supremacy in ways quite apparent to Mary Shelley, the daughter and namesake of Mary Wollstonecraft (best known then and now for *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* [1792]). After all, Victor's "researches into [the] secrets [of the mother], to usurp her powers," be she Mother Earth, his own, or

any mother able to conceive a child, as Margaret Homans shows, really "require that she be dead," that her literal body recede behind and beneath Frankenstein's male metaphor (or substitute) for the process of birth (Homans 142). Since well before Frankenstein's and Mary Shelley's time, "woman" in the West has come to be associated with earthy "nature" (as opposed to "culture"), "death" just as much as life (with Euridyce, like Persephone, staying in the underworld as long as Death commands her, while Orpheus ascends back to the earth), uncontrolled "emotion" or "sensibility" (in contrast to masculine "reason"), and the "body" more than "the mind" (especially as the birth-source of all human beings in their bodily forms). All of that means that woman is too often "the literal," the possibly chaotic and uncontainable "Real" or "Thing in itself," Kant's imperceptible and irrational *Ding an Sich* (see Brown) of which only mental (and masculine) Reason and Understanding can supposedly make some sense. The standard male quest, taken to a revealing extreme in *Frankenstein*, is to contain and distance that amorphous feminine Real by fabricating rationalized constructs and symbols that seem to contain it, or even transcend it, by way of distinctly male frames of reference (such as his male "demonstration" of fabricated life) through which we glimpse the deep and primordial Feminine only "through a glass darkly," preferably as though she were dead and the male constructs that repress her were alive. It is this process that is the real monstrosity, according to this important feminist view. The horror he faces there is that the mother whose birth-powers he has sought to usurp, now joined with death, is also the object of desire that he most wants and *does not want* simultaneously. With *this* kind of unconscious as its real foundation, then, "the novel is about the collision between androcentric [male-centered] and gynocentric [woman-centered] theories of creation, a collision that results in the denigration of maternal childbearing through its circumvention by male creation" (Homans 105).

7. There is even a further dimension in Victor's creature *and* his dream if we consider both from the perspective of a pro-feminist psychoanalytic approach that is more recent—and far reaching—than these others we have noted. According to the view of "monstrosity" advanced by Julia Kristeva (herself a psychotherapist as well as cultural theorist) in her *Powers of Horror* (1980, trans. 1982), grotesque "others" in Western culture are really forms of the "abject" created by the psychological process of "abjection." Literally *ab-ject* means both "to throw off " and "to throw under," so Kristeva defines "abjection" as a process of *ejecting or displacing* preconscious multiplicities in the self into an externalized *alter ego* through which what is preconscious, already quite disguised, is "thrown under" the eventual dominance of sanctioned cultural discourses and other forms of social control. For Kristeva, moreover, the multiplicities most abjected by us—the *anomalies* we most want to "throw off" from the deepest roots of our being—are the state of being half-inside/half-outside the mother at the moment of birth (and thus self and other all at once) and the concomitant state of being half-dead and half-alive at the same moment (thus intermingling in our very foundations what are later thought to be total opposites). Such primordial conditions of the self as "in-between . . . ambiguous . . . composite" are for all of us an "immemorial violence" out of which any child strives to become "separated from another body in order to be" and hence to be able to construct a distinct public identity (Kristeva, 10). The thrown-off *abject*, the product of abjec*tion*, is thus the symbolic and disguised repository of that violence and basic otherness-of-the-self-within-itself, the means for staking out a supposed identity over against it. The monstrous "other" that uncannily seems to harbor all this ultimately exposes and conceals it by being both highly compelling and highly repugnant at the same time. According to this view, Frankenstein's creature is a quintessential example of the *abject* in being a highly differentiated and horrifying double of his creator. The strongest evidence of that in Mary Shelley's novel is Frankenstein's "monstrous" dream of being re-enveloped by his mother and death simultaneously, since there the creature's revolting visage is shown to be ultimately based on the two deepest anomalies that Kristeva sees as the most abjected of all: the visceral sense of being both separate from and absorbed into the mother *and* the sense, both fearful and seductive, of being embraced by death right at what seems the birth of a new form of life. In addition to being a return of the primally repressed and the "uncanny," then, Victor's non-waking dream is also the exposure of an abjection and the abject, in which the irreconcilable deep differences in the self are made to seem outside it in a pasting-together of

bodies as manifestly different from each other as the abjecting subject really is at its most underlying levels.

8. Victor's creature *and* dream as containing the abject, in fact, allow both of them to harbor *numerous* thrown-down anomalies basic to Frankenstein, Walton, and their readers well beyond those that *Powers of Horror* emphasizes. The creature, as the many studies on him have shown, is a throwing off *social and cultural* intermixtures that are just as repugnant as the anomalies in Victor's dream—and consequently as fully abjected -- because they are just as basic to the sources of Victor's (and any middle-class Anglo male's) construction of a self, even as it wants to leave those very sources behind more than most others. That is why the creature is as *racially* mixed as Victor claims not to be, pointing to the interdependency of white and other races in a colonial economy (see Shelley 52; Spivak 248-54; and Malchow 9-31); as *working class* (indeed, as like the "wandering beggars" of Shelley's time) as Victor tries to avoid being in his aspirations to scientific supremacy, thereby showing how the managerial middle classes are *creating* the "monstrosity" of the industrial working class they claim to rise above (see Shelley 99 and O'Flinn); as partly *self-educated* in his accidental reading of older books, as Victor works to be *formally* educated, indicative of Victor's own early process of learning that he falsely claims he transcends at the time he makes his creature (see Shelley 32-37 and 122-26); as *artificial and industrial as well as organic* while Victor claims to be only organic and able to keep these domains entirely distinct; and as *rebelliously uncontrollable* in his insistent and increasingly independent multiplicity, while Victor, without admitting as much, consequently denies the vision in his lofty daydream. The mix of supposed opposites in the creature is the mix in Victor that the young scientist, again and again, tries to deny but can only "abject" onto an other who is pointedly *not* him and *very much* him (or at least the many anomalies on which he is really grounded) at the same time.

9. Frankenstein's preconscious dream, though it reveals less of these mixtures than the creature does, at least shows the abjection of deep Kristevan levels of somatic memory as the fundamental throwing-off-and-under that makes all of the other abjections possible in one terrifying *and* sympathetic creation. The dream even includes its own dimension of socio-cultural abjection in that it throws off Frankenstein's (and many men's) extremely mixed attitudes towards women as objects of desire and domination, mixed with fears of and longings for reabsorption by the mother, in a scene of symbolic shiftings where attraction changes into the repulsion connected to it and sexual longing becomes a death-wish both for the self and for the fundamental Femininity that is so basic to male existence that men often believe they must throw it off to be really masculine beings. These mixtures repeat themselves, we should remember, in Victor's later waking nightmare when he attempts the creation of a female mate for his monster and feels he must finally destroy her instead, killing the potential of her life both for increased female independence and for the reproduction of a different race that could challenge white, as much as male, supremacy (see Shelley 162-64). The dream behind Frankenstein's conscious hopes, it turns out, underwrites his aspirations with several repressed—and abjected—levels of personal and cultural contradictions, many of which remain as basic to us today, fortunately or sadly, as they were coming to be in 1818. One reason that *Frankenstein* and the creature in it have become such lasting and important cultural touchstones since the novel appeared is that Victor's creation, with its foundations in the conflicts animating his dream, has become a symbolic focal point for the abjection of a great many cultural, as well as psychological, inconsistencies and quandaries basic to us all since the Enlightenment, if only so that these anomalies can be both addressed and disguised in a way that allows us to face them or avoid them, as we choose. *Frankenstein*, from the novel through all its adaptations, may well be our modern world's most lasting dark dream, the one that most consistently haunts the industrial and post-industrial West with the many consequences of our fear (or is it sometimes our desire?) that mechanical reproductions of various kinds may replace or threaten the forms of human reproduction in many different ways.

10. After all, we might say, it all began as a dream, one that occurred right at the juncture where the rising

industrial world and the science connected to it were now clearly replacing, while many were still upholding older economies and the social orders that they sustained. If we can believe Mary Shelley in her Preface to the 1831 revised edition of *Frankenstein*, her title character's visions, both conscious and preconscious, look back to one dream she claims to have had herself in 1816 near Geneva, Switzerland. There, while staying near and often with Lord Byron at the Villa Diodati, she agreed, as many of her readers know, to join a ghost-story writing contest between herself, P.B. Shelley, Byron, and the latter's live-in physician, Dr. John Polidori. At first she says she made no connection between this group's nocturnal readings in Gothic tales of reanimated portraits or specters—such as those in Jean Baptiste Eryiès's *Fantasmagoriana* (1812), which is heavily indebted to Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764-65; see Shelley 7n. and Hogle 205-06, n.8)—and the many other conversations she recalls overhearing between Byron and Percy Shelley on "the nature of the principle of life" and on whether it was possible, based on the surmises and experiments of Dr. Erasmus Darwin, Charles's grandfather, that "a corpse would be re-animated" by "galvanism" or some other method (Shelley 227). She states that she heard Byron and Shelley, themselves rebellious descendants of a fading aristocracy, say that it was possible that the component parts of a creature might be *manufactured*, brought together, and endued with vital warmth" (Ibid., my emphasis). She then goes on:

> Night waned upon this talk, and even the witching hour had gone by, before we retired to rest. When I placed my head upon my pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose to my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie. I saw—with shut eyes but acute mental vision,—I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion. Frightful it must be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the creator of the world. His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handywork, horror-stricken. He would hope that, left to itself, the slight spark of life which he had communicated would fade; that this thing, which had received such imperfect animation, would subside into dead matter; that he might sleep in the belief that the silence of the grave would quench for ever the transient existence of the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life. He sleeps; but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtains, and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes. I opened mine in terror. . . . On the morrow I announced that I had *thought of a story*. (Shelley 227-28)

To be sure, we should not simply take this account to be absolutely true, since it is hardly immediate or objective. Given its "witching hour" and "possession" by the "imagination"—quite conventional literary figures by 1831—it is quite clearly heightened for its new readers fifteen years after the events recalled. It is also quite selective in its memories—and repressive in being so. The dream that arises when Frankenstein sleeps, our principal focus here, is completely absent from Shelley's initial dream. Was something like Victor's embrace of his dead mother, and thus the immediate connection of birth with death, too painful to be admitted to consciousness then, considering that Mary Shelley still blamed herself somewhat for the death of her mother just a few days after Mary Wollstonecraft gave birth to her in 1797 (see Rubenstein) *and* was still in great pain from the death of her own first infant shortly after it was born to herself and Percy Shelley in 1815 (see Moers 217-23 and Johnson)? Did the disguising of these dimensions in *Victor*'s dream come after this story was much more developed, or was such nightmarish dream-work already behind the initial conception of the idea and therefore repressed beneath its remembered surface?

11. We will never know for sure, but we can say, given the above passage's oscillation between age-old

Christian images of the "unhallowed" and the far more recent "mechanism" of the "spark of life," that it does mark, as a dream, the psychological and symbolic effects of a major transition in Western history as many of its elements became "galvanized" together in a well-focussed fictional image. While it may "throw off" what is most abject for Mary Shelley herself by 1831, this remembered *or* reconstructed *or* constructed dream at least abjects the irresolution in Western culture around 1818 (and since) between hearkening back towards old Christian prohibitions about human presumption that might claim the life-giving powers of God and aspiring towards scientific advancement and early industrial technology that could allow human beings to improve their lives themselves. It even abjects the indecision of the eighteen-teens between the source of life as an infused and infusing principle outside any single body, advocated in England by Dr. John Abernathy, and the opposing materialist view that life is generated by the structural interrelation of organic and circulating elements *within* bodies, argued by Sir William Lawrence (Percy Shelley's physician), all of which was debated quite publicly from 1816 on (see Butler). Which of these is the "powerful engine" in the stretched-out "phantasm": a "spark of life" which might just be left to go out or a "vital motion" stirring from within the body dreamt of as coming to life? Moreover, is the use of "engine" here a suggestion of organic vitality or of the ultimately mechanical and industrial possibly taking control of the biological, especially since woman, even here, is pointedly left out of the birth process? If Mary Shelley's inaugural dream contains (as some Freudians might say) the wish-fulfillment of at least giving artificial birth to a story in the face of the deaths of both her mother and her child, it also registers the cultural nightmare of being caught at a crossroads of historical tendencies pulling at each other in the early nineteenth century—and still drawing us into a tug of war today. Whether or not we accept this authorial dream as the "source" of the dreams—and especially Victor's dream—in *Frankenstein* the novel, it joins these others in showing that all these dreams have profound psychological and cultural dimensions, layer upon layer, ones that still need more of the further exploration attempted by the essays in this collection for the Romantic Circles *Praxis* series.

12. What I have tried to provide here, with occasional intrusions of my own perspective, is a coalescence of the dominant *existing* interpretations of Victor Frankenstein's dream as Mary Shelley renders it. After all, it is this previous range of responses to that rich symbolic tangle, along with the novel and its many adaptations, to which the scholars in the accompanying essays react by pointing to several possibilities that remain *un*explored in Victor's dream and the others connected to it. All of these expert contributors, like myself, are not so much out to undermine the interpretations I have summarized or interfaced here as to expose what is *so* abjected in Frankenstein's dream that it has not yet been accommodated by analytical criticism. Though we have not worked towards any uniformity in this collection, the general argument advanced by the included essays is that Victor Frankenstein's dream, despite all that has been said about it, still reveals to us some as-yet-unexamined relationships—ones that go to the heart of both Romanticism and Gothic writing, it turns out -- between literary forms, conflicting cultural agendas, psychological anomalies, and functions of language and images. The need to study Frankenstein's dream remains as ongoing and pressing as it has been for decades because it still causes us to confront what Victor Frankenstein's *and* the reader will not face steadily: the unaccommodated tugs-of-war between cultural tendencies that have been and remain "cathected" onto *Frankenstein* and the endless adaptations of it.

13. If I could recommend an order of reading these all-new interpretations, I would urge proceeding from my overview of the interpretive tradition here to the provocative piece by Anne Williams, author of the important *Art of Darkness* (1995) on the roots of Gothic fiction and their reappearance in Romanticism. In the key dream in Mary Shelley's novel and much that surrounds it, Williams recovers the interplay so many of us have forgotten—or repressed?—between the established eighteenth-century tradition of *sentimental* fiction in England and France, well known to, and often used by, Mary Shelley in ways that very few have discussed, and the dimensions of *Frankenstein* that are genuinely *sadistic* in the quite literal sense that they recall the fictions (and even the life) of the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814). These

seemingly opposite registers of emotion, vision, and writing, Williams shows, surprisingly interpenetrate each other throughout Shelley's novel and especially in Victor's dream. That established, this essay goes on to reveal what is repressed behind and within this combination. Why, Williams asks us, would these symbolic strains be so interrelated, despite their apparent rejection of each other? For her, we discover, their interaction, itself long repressed, serves to both cover and articulate an even deeper abjection enacted by them both: the "throwing off" and "under" of a broadly Feminine set of biological, social, and linguistic levels on which Western culture, like Frankenstein and Sade, is far more dependent than almost anyone wants to admit.

14. The next essay I would recommend is Matthew VanWinkle's, since it builds so well on his established expertise with the *parodic* side of Romantic literature in England. This piece joins Williams' in explaining the intertextuality of Shelley's original novel—very extensive in the book and thus a rich subject for interpreters already—by focusing, not only on its parodies of several texts prior to it, but how it also imports parody into the very core of its story and thereby foregrounds a deep parodic strain in a "second generation" Romantic literature that has long been separated from such impulses except in analyses of Byron. Lest we take "parody" in too simple a sense by emphasizing only its satirical dimension, which is also there in *Frankenstein* in its jibes at solipsistic Romantic aspiration, VanWinkle grounds his discussion helpfully by showing us a fuller range of what parody can embody in writing prior to and in *Frankenstein* itself. He then demonstrates that Victor Frankenstein, as much as the novel about him, is driven by parodic "demons" against his conscious intentions, enough that the creature he makes is itself/himself a parody *both* of contemporary biological debates *and* of the several texts it/he reads and half-imitates in order to, among other things, come into discourse—a process VanWinkle therefore finds *parodic* of standard human discourse in the end. Parody even extends to Frankenstein's dream, VanWinkle argues, in the way it persistently echoes and plays off of Coleridge's "Christabel" (first published in 1816) and in that fashion intensifies what is already parodic in Coleridge's most openly Gothic poem. Though many have explored *Frankenstein*'s allusions to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* as the main key to the novel's extensive conversation with Coleridge, VanWinkle reminds us of a quite different interchange between two Gothic renditions of a deeply parodic dreamscape. He thereby reveals that this kind of nightmare, albeit in several different forms, is one that troubles and underlies much of Romanticism in general far more than most of us have realized.

15. In the next essay I would recommend in this itinerary, the remarkable piece by John Rieder, author of *Wordsworth's Counterrevolutionary Turn* (1997), we return to the perspectives of psychoanalysis, but in a strikingly different way from any of the readings I have recounted above. This analysis probes the most "disgusting" aspects of the creature and Victor's dream in Shelley's novel and then shows how these are altered and/or avoided in later adaptations ranging from R.B. Peake's play *Presumption* (1823) to George Romero's film *Dawn of the Dead* (1978). Rieder thereby exposes the basic story's links to what Freud in 1916 saw as the child's frequent impulse to duplicate the powers of the mother by imaginatively "giving birth" through the bowels, thus producing the abhorrent but fascinating "fecal child." We are then shown, not surprisingly, how Victor's original creature and his dream embody many more dimensions than any other adaption has suggested of what the 'fecal child' abjects, in part because of a strong cultural resistance since 1818 to facing those very dimensions. With this point made, however, Rieder then follows its implications out to expose the as-yet-unseen *social critique* that Mary Shelley is unleashing through her novel's use of the fecal child. Such a figure, as Freud saw, defies traditional male-female distinctions and the patriarchal order that sustains them. Some possibilities of this defiance are thus embedded in Frankenstein's *positive* dream, as well as in his nightmare and Mary Shelley's novel. It is above all *this* set of potentials, Rieder shows, that adaptations of *Frankenstein* have tried to occlude by effacing, while still dimly recalling, the fecal child of the original book.

16. The concluding essay in this recommended succession, the highly arresting contribution by Marc Redfield, shifts the focus quite radically by working *backwards* from a major adaptation—James

Whale's *Frankenstein* film for Universal Studios in 1931—to the movements of phrases and images in Mary Shelley's text, particularly the progression of dissolves in Victor's maternal nightmare. Building on modes of analysis already used suggestively in his prize-winning *Phantom Formations* (1996) and his forthcoming *Politics of Aesthetics*, Redfield exposes how self-reflexive Whale's film really is and thus how it foregrounds the fundamental process of mechanically reproducible image-production and the sheer positioning of manufactured motion pictures prior to any narrative or meaning, though the audience is admittedly most conscious of these latter levels in viewing the film. Despite all the differences between the 1931 film and the Shelley novel in plot-elements and characterizations, this essay argues that the strongest resemblance between the two, not much noted until now, may appear in those dimensions—most revealed in Frankenstein's dream, the many artificial composings of the creature (including his learning of language), and the movement of doublings across characters and descriptions in the book—where the "work in the age of mechanical reproduction" (echoing Walter Benjamin) announces its emergent and relentless process of self-duplicating manufacture. It is *this* "monstrosity," given the rise of industrialism and its post-industrial successors, that may be the most feared and resisted of all the horrors that appear in the novel and its film adaptations. If there is a repressed level in Victor's aspirations of both desire and death-wish associated culturally and psychologically with the deeply Feminine (as Redfield suggests), that level is made possible, as well as partially concealed, this final essay shows, by the moving "technics" of images becoming other images that not-so-subliminally enable and threaten our modern and postmodern lives. As much as abjections of feminine foundations appear in the creature and his creator's dream, so do the most basic modes of image-production that we fear, but in *Frankenstein* we are forced to recognize them as the means by which we construct ourselves and our extensions of our manufactured beings in our post-"Enlightenment" world.

17. These arguments, to be sure, are not the end of the debate over Frankenstein's *multiple* dreams and therefore make no pretense of being "last words" on a subject that still bedevils us, as it should. Indeed, by highlighting levels in Mary Shelley's novel and its progeny that have not yet been clearly exposed amid the barrage of readings that have interpreted this cultural phenomenon, this collection shows the wide range and still-burning urgency of the issues that *Frankenstein* has raised and continues to raise for us as as the most reproduced and studied Romantic *and* Gothic story in the history of published literature and Western film production. Because of the questions raised here, as in *Frankenstein*, these essays are pleased to claim that we are thrown back on the most basic kinds of reflection on Western self-representation, on how "we" have come to be and remain what "we" think we are in the Anglo-European-American West. To be sure, like many readers and viewers, we can ignore these unsettling revelations and let them recede behind the words and images that have vividly articulated them since 1818 in version after version of *Frankenstein*. The collective hope of these pieces, however, is that Western minds will not continue to "throw off" these several anomalous tangles that ground and disturb our modern lives. In our view, we should face them and their consequences, if only to refuse their most destructive possibilities, so that they will not finally be "lost in darkness and distance," as Shelley's famous creature threatens to be (Shelley 221) but in fact has never been, we are happy to say, since *Frankenstein* began haunting us at the height of English Romanticism.

18. In any case, I am deeply grateful to all the contributors here, who made special efforts within their many commitments to bring this collection about; to Jay Salisbury, my excellent Research Assistant on this and other projects at the University of Arizona; and to Orrin Wang, the brilliant General Editor of the *Praxis* series, who proposed the original idea while inviting this collection, as well as to the helpful staff and most able web masters at Romantic Circles. It is a delight to be able to do this kind of work with such extraordinary and dedicated collaborators.

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Frankenstein's Dream

"Mummy, possest": Sadism and Sensibility in Shelley's *Frankenstein*

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Hope not for minde in women; at their best
Sweetnesse and wit, they'are but Mummy, possest. —John Donne, "Love's Alchymie"

1. In 1779 an imprisoned Frenchman recorded the following dream:

   It was around midnight. I had just fallen asleep . . . Suddenly, she appeared to me. . . I saw her! The horror of the grave had not at all altered the radiance of her charms, and her eyes still flashed as brilliantly . . . A black veil enveloped her completely, and her beautiful blonde hair loosely floated above. It seemed as if Love, in order to keep her still beautiful, sought to soften all the lugubrious array in which she presented herself to my gaze . . . 'Why suffer in the world?' she asked me. 'Come and be united with me. No more pain, no more sorrows, no more distress in the endless place where I abide . . . I said to her: 'Oh my Mother! . . .' but sobs choked my voice. She extended a hand to me, which I covered with my tears . . . Overcome by my despair and my affection, I flung my arms around her neck to hold her back or to follow her, and to bathe her in my tears, but the phantom disappeared. All that remained was my sorrow. (Schaeffer 4).

   Similarly, after he "gives birth" in Mary Shelley's novel, Victor Frankenstein also dreams of a dead mother:

   I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her, but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. I started from my sleep with horror . . . (57)

   Awakening, Frankenstein sees this image replaced by one even more horrible to him and one undoubtedly real: the creature

   with his eyes . . . fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he uttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped and rushed downstairs. (57)

   According to the logic of the dream work, the sequence of images (Elizabeth/dead mother/creature) implies an identity confirmed as Frankenstein tries to describe his experience of awaking to see his creature: "A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch."

2. These two dreams are oddly complementary. They illustrate contradictory responses to a dead mother, which is, apparently, a notion exceedingly troubling, indeed virtually unspeakable. Within a patriarchal system in Western culture founded on the assumption that matter and spirit are dual and irreconcilable, matter/*mater* bears the burden of mortality, since everyone born must also die. Within this logic, as the dreams suggest, two contradictory responses to the conjunction of death and the mother are possible: denial or horror. The mother is either so idealized that she has no body at all (is, in fact an unreachable

ideal), or else she is simply "mummy," "dead flesh," the first meaning of the word according to the O.E.D. Donne's lyric, "Love's Alchymie," quoted in my epigraph, epitomizes the revulsion which the body of the mummy evokes. He describes the lover's futile fantasy that love may spiritualize *female* flesh. But this belief is, the speaker concludes, as quixotic as the alchemist's quest to transform base metal into gold. Men who believe in this transforming power of love, he writes, also claim to hear the music of the spheres.[1]

3. Frankenstein's dream concludes much like Donne's poem, with a horrified recognition of "mummy possest." The dreamer of 1779, however, effects the transformation of the dead mother into the real "sorrow" remembered by his conscious mind. Frankenstein has "re-membered" a mummy in his "workshop of filthy creation." But the earlier dreamer's transformation is accomplished in the immaculate workings of language. He is an active participant in an ongoing conversation. By means of words he negotiates a relationship with this woman he knows is dead, while denying, if not entirely repressing, that reality ("The horror of the grave had not at all altered the radiance of her charms . . ."). He fantasizes an explanation for this paradox; "It seemed as if Love, in order to keep her still beautiful, sought to soften all the lugubrious array in which she presented herself to my gaze."[2] Since this dreamer was a native speaker of French, however, his linguistic veil is virtually transparent; the word for "Love" (*l'amour*) sounds perilously like the word for "death" (*la mort*). The dream climaxes in an act of naming, when he exclaims, "Oh, my mother!" ("Mother" is a projection, since he calls her that only after she has defined herself as a source of unconditional love and infinite compassion.) The dreamer's desire "to bathe her in my tears" and to embrace her implicitly regresses toward the infantile state in which gesture replaces language. But she vanishes, dramatizing the plight of the son separated from the mother by the Oedipal crisis. He awakens because he unconsciously recognizes that the escape from earthly suffering that the lovely woman offers in "the endless realm where [she] abide[s]" is in fact the kingdom of death.

4. In contrast to the earlier dream's imaginary conversation, Frankenstein's dream essentially reverses its action, beginning with an embrace and ending with the actual flight of the dreamer, rather than that of the imaginary mother. It is a kind of silent film where images succeed each other in a different kind of regression; eros (Elizabeth) becomes thanatos ("the corpse of my dead mother"), which becomes the face of the newly born creature. This dream suggests that Frankenstein's unhallowed art has accomplished what Donne and millennia of patriarchy had declared to be impossible. He has infused dead flesh with the spark of life; he has animated a mummy.[3]

5. What Frankenstein has done throws everything in his world off balance. Shelley's narrative struggles to accommodate this animate mummy, oscillating between the two contrary responses delineated by the dreams: idealization and horror. Shelley creates impossibly idealized female characters and then inflicts the most extraordinary violence upon them. (And in the case of the creature's bride-to-be, similar violence follows Victor's contrasting fantasy of her demonization in his eyes.) This oscillation also determines the novel's complex narrative technique, which is, I shall argue, a strategy to contain the unspeakable anxiety aroused by the idea of "mummy possest." *Frankenstein* is a peculiar combination of sadism and sensibility—and thereby discloses that there is a profound kinship between them, as is certainly the case in the first dream above. The dreamer, after all, was the Marquis de Sade.

I.

6. Although Sade (1740-1814) and Mary Shelley (1797-1851) were more or less contemporaries, they have seldom, perhaps never, been compared. Superficially, they would seem to be about as different as any two people could be. Shelley was female, English, bourgeois; Sade was male, French, aristocratic. She was troubled by her own inadvertent violations of her culture's notions of propriety, particularly in

her daring to write novels.[4] He reveled in violating all that he had been taught to hold sacred. Nevertheless, they lived in a period of revolutionary upheaval, and they both deployed Gothic conventions in the service of philosophical romance. They both dreamed of dead mothers. And both left a permanent mark on their culture. Sade's name became the standard term for one who takes pleasure in cruelty, and Shelley created a myth for the modern world, most often read as concerning the dangers of technology. (The name "Frankenstein" has become so familiar that it generates its own neologisms, in, for instance, the term "Frankenfood," coined in 1992 to describe plants genetically manipulated to yield edible produce.) Furthermore, Sade and Shelley both reveal an unexpected allegiance to the subject position of the opposite gender. Shelley's dreamer is clearly male. As the novel's first readers immediately noticed, Shelley's imagination seemed "unfeminine."[5] Sade's dream concludes with a culturally "feminine" excess of emotion.

7. In *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (1995), I argued that the Gothic manifests a relationship between gender and literary form. From Horace Walpole through the 1960s, one may discern two narrative traditions. The Walpolean or Male Gothic tells a tragic story of male hubris that is punished. In this fictional world the supernatural regularly intervenes; its reality is in fact a premise of these fictions. The female characters seem to exist primarily to suffer as the objects of often perverted male desire. (It is sometimes difficult to draw a line between this kind of Gothic and pornography, as early readers of *The Monk* realized.) The Male Gothic uses complex narrative techniques such as elaborate frame narratives, multiple points of view, and the fiction of an assemblage of documents (as in Stoker's *Dracula*). The Female Gothic narrative, on the other hand, has a unified point of view (either the limited omniscience characteristic of Ann Radcliffe, or the first person conventional since *Jane Eyre*.) Though the heroine may at times believe herself to be the victim of supernatural events, the ghosts are nearly always explained in the end. Moreover, this kind of story is comic, ending with the heroine's marriage and consequent establishment of herself socially and financially by becoming the wife of a wealthy and powerful man. From this perspective we may discern yet another odd contrast between Sade and Shelley. He writes a perverted variety of "Female Gothic," in which the horrors faced by the heroine are those of the real world, not the intervention of supernatural forces. Shelley's novel is more nearly a "Male Gothic," which uses a characteristically complex narrative structure in tracing the consequences of an impossible and supernatural act: to create a man out of dead flesh and to imbue him with life.

8. What is the origin of these odd misalignments of gender and genre? One may speculate that these disturbances arise from the writers' childhood experiences. Shelley lost her mother at birth. The circumstances of her birth oddly literalize the Oedipal crisis as experienced, according to psychoanalysis, by sons within patriarchy. She was educated by her father, and knew her mother only through her writing, which she often read by the grave. As Nelson Hilton notes,

> the fact of the matter would seem to be that her father was her mother. Mary Godwin's involvement with her biological mother was necessarily imaginary, textual, and relatively late: Mary Wollstonecraft was present as a portrait in the study, some books on the shelf, a character made scandalous in public reception of the *Memoirs* published by Godwin the year after her death (57).

I would only add that Wollstonecraft's body was also present, if "encrypted," in her grave in St. Pancras Churchyard, a quite material enactment of the psychic repression of the mother's body effected by entry into the symbolic order.

9. If Shelley's actual experience literalized the Oedipal situation usually allotted to sons rather than daughters, Sade's curiously literalized that of the Female Gothic. He was exiled very young from Paris and the court where his mother was a lady in waiting because he had gotten into a fistfight with the

equally youthful Prince de Condé. Sade was sent to live with his grandmother in Provence. By the time he was seven years old, his mother had entered the Carmelite convent in Paris where she would eventually die. His childhood and adolescence were a dark version of *Udolpho*, having taken place, as Radcliffe's novel did, in medieval family castles in the south of France. His uncle the Abbé de Sade was the most influential figure of his youth. (How Gothic to have an Abbé for an uncle!) He instructed his nephew in the delights of libertinage, among other things. This influence continued into adulthood. Sade's dream of the beautiful dead mother occurred after reading his uncle's book, which argued that Petrarch's Laura was Laure de Sade, a distant ancestor.

10. Sade's experience of Gothic conventions was thus more literal than literary. Neil Schaeffer notes that the isolated country chateaux of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* or *Justine*, while reminding us of literary Gothic conventions, are also indebted to the medieval castle in which Sade spent much of his youth, the Château de Saumane:

> There were spiraling stone staircases, passageways (some of them secret), and cellars . . . Up above, on the high ramparts . . . the view is extensive and thrilling . . . The darkness, the dampness, even in the height of summer, and the weight of solid stone blocks are oppressive. [. . .] The three distinctive elements of the boy's new home—château, fort, and subterranean caves—became the model for the great and terrible fortresses of his libertine fiction . . . This complex of specialized spaces became the diagram—the pure form—of Sade's conception of the structure of society and man's place in it (Schaeffer, 14-15).

11. Besides these unexpected parallels between Sade's and Shelley's education and experiences, however, there may be one real link between them. One of the cruelest events in Shelley's novel, which is filled with cruelty, is the execution of Justine Moritz, unjustly accused of murder because the creature had slipped into her pocket a miniature portrait of the little boy William's dead mother Caroline. This episode is additionally painful because Justine is executed on the basis of a forced confession:

> "I did confess, but I confessed a lie. I confessed, that I might obtain absolution; but now that falsehood lies heavier at my heart than all my other sins. The God of heaven forgive me! Ever since I was condemned, my confessor has besieged me; he threatened and menaced, until I almost began to think that I was the monster that he said I was. He threatened excommunication and hell fire in my last moments, if I continued obdurate. Dear lady, I had none to support me; all looked on me as a wretch doomed to ignominy and perdition. What could I do? In an evil hour I subscribed to a lie; and now only am I truly miserable." (84)

12. Critics have frequently remarked on the irony of the name "Justine" for Shelley's doomed servant girl. Her fate is remarkably *un*just, and it is additionally pathetic because she was earlier plucked from poverty and unhappiness by the generosity of the Frankenstein family. Furthermore, the reader knows that Frankenstein is responsible for the murder, and he refuses to speak. Like all the women in this novel, she can do nothing to avert her horrible fate. Frankenstein and the creature at least have *chosen* the paths that lead to their destruction, but Shelley's women cannot choose their fates.[6] Like the women in Sade's books, they are helpless. Indeed, it is possible that Shelley chose the name Justine for this hapless victim as an allusion to Sade's *Justine, ou les malheurs de la vertu*, published in 1792.

13. None of Sade's works appears on any of the lists Shelley kept of her and Percy's reading. But it is highly unlikely that she would have admitted to reading such books. We do know that Byron owned a copy of *Justine* in 1816, just before he left England. According to Leslie Marchand, his possession of this book was one piece of evidence Lady Byron adduced as a sign that her husband was mad (2, 559). Mary Shelley, then, may have heard about more than Galvanism while listening to Shelley and Byron's

conversations that fateful summer.

14. In *Justine* Sade was rewriting Richardson's *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*. But in contrast to the English heroine who successfully converts her virtue into a marketable commodity (her price is a wedding ring), Justine lives in a world where no one values virtue. Sade inflicts the most horrible suffering on his innocent heroine. The novel begins as Madame la Contesse de Lorsange ("priestess of Venus" and "proud libertine" [55])[7] and her lover invite a woman about to be executed for murder into their carriage to tell her story. When her parents had died bankrupt, she and her younger sister had been cast out of their convent school and left to survive as best they might. The younger sister, Justine, is devoted to virtue and meets with a dreadful series of disasters as she is tortured and raped by men contemptuous of both her and her virtue. Eventually she is condemned to death for a murder she did not commit. Madame de Lorsange, who has prospered by following the path of vice, eventually recognizes that this unfortunate woman is her long-lost sister. She and her lover arrange a royal pardon for Justine, and take her to their château. Shortly afterwards, Justine goes to close the window in the midst of a thunderstorm and is struck by lightning and killed. This the fate of virtue, according to the Marquis de Sade. And as Schaeffer points out, not only is Justine repeatedly and undeservedly abused in the most horrible ways:

> Wherever she turns, either to seek assistance or even to give it to others, she is always disappointed, betrayed, raped, or tortured. When she humbly or feebly protests her ill treatment, her persecutors always offer her a philosophical harangue demonstrating the folly of virtue and the good sense of vice. Here, as in Sade's other erotic novels, the sexual scene, the rape, is sandwiched between a kind of intellectual rape or assault upon the victim. (411).

Though the suffering that Shelley metes out to her female characters is less sensational than the rape and torture Sade repeatedly inflicts on Justine, her Caroline and Elizabeth, as well as her Justine, are all uniformly virtuous and conventionally feminine ideals—good girls. But within her plot they seem to exist primarily in order to suffer and to die. And they are, in the end, all as dead as Sade's Justine, albeit more at the hands of Frankenstein's creature than a bolt of lightning.

II.

15. Both Frankenstein's and Sade's dreams imply that the mother connotes an erotic fusion of passion and compassion. Frankenstein's impulse in his dream to kiss Elizabeth, his "cousin"/fiancée, effects her horrible transformation, and the dead mother of Sade's vision is a blonde beauty, who evokes in the dreamer a fantasy about a presumed affair between her and "Love" (like Romeo's speculation that "insubstantial death is amorous" and has made the body of Juliet his "paramour," Sade sees his relation to the mother figure as part of a triangle). Probably the most surprising element of the dream is its almost hysterical emotionality. As Schaeffer comments, "Tears came to Sade (if only in a dream) as easily as they poured from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, that man of exquisite feeling" (5). The dreamer's "sorrow" remains his consciousness kind epitaph marking disappearance lovely, mother. One would not anticipate that someone so notorious for finding pleasure in the suffering of others, particularly women, could be capable of such "feminine" feelings.

16. But this dream discloses a crucial fact: sensibility and sadism are deeply akin, two possible ways of responding to the primitive psychic wound inflicted by separation from the mother. Sade's dream suggests that, as in the Oedipus complex, the mother is the source of feeling. Hence the "good mother" is imagined as a source of perfect sympathy, a fantasy like that inscribed in the notion of the Virgin Mary as "*fons pieta*." But the (male) subject is also denied access to this source; due to the terms of the Oedipal "contract," he is quite early separated from the female and all that is ascribed to her. Sade's

response is characteristic and perhaps inevitable. His response is filled with *self*-pity. His intense emotion is generated as a response to losing "Mother," who has seemed to be a source of perfect compassion. This dream offers an illuminating pre-text both for the literature of sensibility and Sade's career. On the one hand, it indulges in a luxuriance of emotion, and a valuing of emotion may be the most direct response to it. On the other hand, as Marianne Noble has argued, the reader's pleasure in the literature of sensibility is a masochistic pleasure. The reader responds from a passive and abject position (Rousseau notoriously confessed to enjoying the experience of being beaten).[8] Sadism, though, also involves an active response, finding erotic pleasure in suffering observed or inflicted on other women as unconscious substitutes for the lost mother. In *Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature*, Susan Griffin thus argues, compellingly, that the pornographer's impulse to seek erotic pleasure by inflicting pain on female bodies is based on just the kind of frustration that Sade's dream describes.

17. In *Justine* Sade exploits the conventions of the novel of sensibility. He extracts the maximum pathos from his heroine's plight by picturing her as virtuous beauty in distress. When we first see her:

    > She was tied up like a criminal, and so weak that she would certainly have fallen had the guards not supported her. When a cry of surprise and horror escaped Mme de Lorsange, the young girl turned, revealing the most beautiful form in the world, and the most noble, agreeable, interesting face, everything designed to please, and rendered more piquant by the tender and touching affliction that innocence adds to beauty. (66)

    Young, beautiful, and committed to virtue, Justine is the ideal victim of the sentimental novel.

18. Sade even concludes his book with the characteristic gesture of the genre, a stated desire to reform the libertine, and an apostrophe to the reader pointing out the lessons to be learned from Justine's sad history. Juliette (Mme de Lorsange) improbably abandons her life as a courtesan and becomes a Carmelite nun, a gesture echoing the behavior of Sade's mother. The book's last words are addressed to the reader:

    > Oh, you who wept over the misfortunes of virtue; you, who pitied the unfortunate Justine; in pardoning these sketches, which are perhaps a bit stronger than anyone has ever found a reason for employing, may you at least gather the same fruit from this story as did Mme. de Lorsange! May you convince yourselves like her that true happiness may be found only in the bosom of Virtue and that if, in these imponderable scenes, God permits Virtue to be persecuted on earth, for this suffering she will be rewarded in heaven! (414)

19. At the same time, *Justine* demonstrates just how easily the novel of sensibility may serve the pornographer's desires. And certainly many early Gothic novels such as Radcliffe's *Udolpho* are also novels of sensibility. Still, as much as *Frankenstein*'s status as Gothic novel or as proto-science fiction has been debated,[9] I would suggest that its deepest generic affinity is to the novel of sensibility. Its outer frame narrative, Walton's story, continues the genre's ostensible aim of reforming manners by means of a tale of suffering. One could even argue that this aim is achieved; Walton chooses to renounce his own hubristic quest. As he writes to his sister after Frankenstein's death, "What can I say, that will enable you to understand the depth of my sorrow? All that I should express would be inadequate and feeble. My tears flow; my mind is overshadowed by a cloud of disappointment. But I journey towards England, and I may there find consolation." Characters in Shelley's novel are certainly judged on the basis of their capacity for fine feeling. In addition, one of her most prominent means of characterization is the often pathetic vignettes concerning virtuous behavior: first we hear Walton's story about his ship-master's exemplary actions towards the "young Russian lady, of moderate fortune" with whom he was in love. When her father gave his consent to the marriage, "she was bathed in tears,

and throwing herself at his feet, entreated him to spare her, confessing at the same time that she loved another, but that he was poor . . ." At this point the ship-master not only gave up the marriage but gave out considerable property to his rival. The histories of Caroline Beaufort, Elizabeth Lavenza, and Justine Moritz are all virtually identical tales of a similar generosity. The story of the De Lacey family, too, reveals a consistent delicacy of feeling. When Safie's father, unjustly imprisoned in Paris, offers his daughter's hand to Felix if he will aid his escape, "Felix was too delicate to accept this offer; yet he looked forward to the probability of the event as to the consummation of his happiness" (120).

20. Frankenstein's friend Henry Clerval is also a man of sentiment, "whose eyes and feelings were always quick in discerning the sensations of others" (66). Upon his reading the letter to Frankenstein announcing the death of William, "tears gushed from the eyes of Clerval" (71). Moreover, as always in the novel of sensibility, powerful responses to nature are an index of character in *Frankenstein*. In contrast to the ideally sympathetic response to the natural world, Frankenstein's conception of science is couched in sexual terms connoting rape; natural philosophers, he says, "penetrate into the recesses of nature, and show how she works in her hiding places" (47).

21. Finally, all the women, Caroline, Elizabeth, and Justine, are nearly indistinguishable sentimental heroines. Frankenstein's father "strove to shelter [Caroline], as a fair exotic is sheltered by the gardener, from every rougher wind, and to surround her with all that could tend to excite pleasurable emotion in her soft and benevolent mind" (32-33). She is memorialized by her husband in a painting, representing "Caroline Beaufort in an agony of despair, kneeling at the coffin of her dead father. Her garb was rustic, and her cheek pale, but there was an air of dignity and beauty, that hardly permitted the sentiment of pity" (75). When we first glimpse Elizabeth, she is described as

> thin and very fair. Her hair was the brightest living gold, and, despite the poverty of her clothing, seemed to set a crown of distinction on her head. Her brow was clear and ample, her blue eyes cloudless, and her lips and the moulding of her face so expressive of sensibility and sweetness, that none could behold her without looking on her as of a distant species, a being heaven-sent, and bearing a celestial stamp on all her features. (34)

Justine is much the same, as Elizabeth describes her; "She is very clever and gentle, and extremely pretty . . . her mien and her expressions continually remind me of my dear aunt" (64).

22. By contrast, though Frankenstein is sensitive to natural beauty, his tragedy is set in motion because of his *lack* of feeling. Before the "birth," he is unmoved by the gruesome undertaking, the Gothic accouterments of his grisly task that should have inspired terror in any young man of sensibility: "My attention was fixed on every object the most insupportable to the delicacy of human feelings. I saw how the fine form of man was degraded and wasted; I beheld the corruption of death succeed to the blooming cheek of life"; "Darkness had no effect upon my fancy; and a churchyard 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" (50). Yet, ironically, Frankenstein's greatest failure springs from *inappropriate* feeling. He does behave according to the ethos of the novel of sensibility in which outward appearance —physiognomy—is invariably an index of the inner self. He loathes the creature he has made simply because he is ugly. He immediately calls it "the wretch—the miserable monster I had created," a "demoniacal corpse," "no mummy again endued with animation could be so hideous," "a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived." He remembers Coleridge's simile (from *The Both Frankenstein's and Sade's dreams*) about the one who knows "a frightful fiend / Doth close behind him tread."

23. Thus another aspect of the creature's tragedy is that he is a character whose appearance is *not* an index of his inner self. He is a man of feeling trapped in the body of a murderer. (*The Sorrows of Young*

Werther is, after all, one of the few books he gets to read.) Trapped in a novel of sensibility, in which outer form is assumed to be an index of the inner self, he is doomed from the first. His history cannot follow the conventional path, in which the virtuous self is recognized and the desperate creature saved. Like Justine's, his appearance invites torture. Instead, his story is naturalistic: cruel circumstances prove stronger than individual desire; indeed, circumstances *determine* desire. "Misery made me a fiend," he rightly says (57). The creature capable of feeling and denied relationships with other beings eventually becomes, yes, a sadist who delights in destroying the links that connect his father/mother to the world.[10]

24. His creator Frankenstein's tragic flaw is that he is incapable of empathy. He cannot fulfill his creature's one request, to make a mate for him. He reverts to misogynistic clichés to rationalize his decision to destroy her, cliché; rooted in the impossible ideals demanded of the female by the patriarchal imagination:

> she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate, and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness. He had sworn to quit the neighbourhood of man, and hide himself in deserts; but she had not; and she, who in all probability was to become a thinking and reasoning animal, might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation. They might even hate each other; the creature who already lived loathed his own deformity, and might he not conceive a greater abhorrence for it when it came before his eyes in the female form? She also might turn with disgust from him to the superior beauty of man; she might quit him, and he be again alone, exasperated by the fresh provocation of being deserted by one of his own species. (160)

The female of the species, it seems, is unreliable, not to be trusted with honorable compacts made between men. She cannot be depended on to love, honor, and obey. But Frankenstein's misogyny is clearly a rationalization masking a deeper fear. If the creature is "mummy" in the sense of "mother," to create a female would undo the reversal necessary to concealing one of his two most important functions. Victor's sadistic "abortion" demonstrates not only a failure of empathy, but also his inability to separate sex from reproductive function (even though he had maintained that distance himself in giving life to the creature). He could have created a female creature incapable of giving birth. But that solution is literally unthinkable. In Frankenstein's mind, woman cannot escape her fleshly capacity for motherhood.

25. Power is also an issue in the reader's response to the scenes enacted in the literature of sensibility, the Gothic novel, and pornography. All three genres seek to arouse powerful emotions in the reader, who can be interpellated either as the victim or the victimizer. We can thus become a masochist or a sadist, or both alternately, as we read. Marianne Noble has argued that the novel of sensibility and the Gothic are constructed so as to engage the reader as a masochist. Pornography, in contrast, situates the reader as a voyeur within the detached (and powerful) perspective of the male gaze. The Male Gothic tends to be sadistic, for its characteristic narrative techniques hinder imaginative identification. The Female Gothic, with its limited omniscient or first-person narrative, impels identification with the suffering heroine and is thus inherently masochistic. Perhaps the most original aspect of *Frankenstein* is that Shelley uses both modes of narrative. Walton's tale is a kind of normative Female Gothic plot, and the creature's story is a Female Gothic gone tragically awry. Victor's story follows the Male Gothic pattern of the overreacher punished. The body of Shelley's novel, like that of Frankenstein's creature, is hybrid.

III.

26. The bandages wrapped around a mummy declare the body's status as something "other"—dead—even as they also reveal that form which it is their primary purpose to conceal. I would suggest that the

literary form of *Frankenstein* has a similar function, to express and yet distance us from the unspeakable horror of Victor's dream. I propose that the Male Gothic convention of multiple narratives and narrators used here is linked, especially in Shelley's obscuring of the desired and haunting mother, with the Radcliffean Gothic premise of the unexplained supernatural. We have to accept Shelley's statement that Frankenstein is capable of infusing life into a dead body, like Stoker's assertion that vampires exist, or Walpole's that a gigantic plumed helmet can fall from out of the blue. Furthermore, the Male Gothic's predilection for the unexplained supernatural stems from the Oedipal crisis, through which little boys are separated from their mothers before they have had a chance to become acquainted with women as human beings like themselves. The bad and good mothers of the pre-Oedipal state remain very much alive in their unconscious minds. Multiple layers of narrative can thus serve as a kind of compromise-formation that both distances the ego from the feared (m)other and at the same time accommodates her, revealing her shape without facing her completely.

27. Her mother's death, after all, made Mary Shelley's early experience of father (present and powerful) and mother (absent, though present as a buried body) more like the typical son's than the typical daughter's. But her use of characteristically Male Gothic narrative conventions was also over-determined. She (perhaps unconsciously) chose a literary model that is also a nest of narratives aiming to control an unspeakable vision of another mother horribly married to death: Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

28. Critics of *Frankenstein*, while acknowledging Shelley's allusions to Coleridge, have too rarely analyzed them.[11] In his first letter, Walton writes of how "that most imaginative of modern poets" has influenced his interest in polar exploration, his desire to seek out "the land of mist and snow" in which he may discover "the secret that drives the needle" (a phrase that not only implies a curiosity about origins, but also the erotic motive of scientific discovery). A second explicit allusion occurs after the creature has disappeared from Victor's gaze. In attempting to articulate his fears, Frankenstein quotes the Mariner's ominous simile: "As one that on a lonely road / Doth walk in fear and dread / And having once turned round, walks on / And turns no more his head: / Because he knows a frightful fiend / Doth close behind him tread." The creature's black lips may also echo the Mariner's "black lips baked" (l. 157).

29. When Mary Shelley was very young, Coleridge sometimes came to visit William Godwin. Once she and her half-sister Fanny hid behind the sofa in the parlor in order to hear the distinguished poet recite *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* after dinner. Their presence was discovered, but they were allowed to remain. (Coleridge would later describe the two as "catacombish," implying, presumably, that they were shy and silent, though the metaphor is rather ominous.)[12] But I believe that Shelley, in addition to emulating Coleridge's narrative technique, also owes a probably unconscious thematic debt to *The Rime*. At the core of Coleridge's poem is a vision of a female figure as traumatic as Victor's dream of "the corpse of my dead mother with the grave worms crawling in the folds of the flannel." It is the pivotal sight of "The Nightmare Life-in-Death" who first appears to the Mariner on a "Spectre-ship" alongside her mate, "Death." Coleridge's portrait of her also is a mixture of the erotic and the repulsive, as if it were a grotesque parody of the vision of blonde loveliness in Sade's dream:

> Her lips were red, her looks were free,
> Her locks were yellow as gold;
> Her skin was white as leprosy,
> The NIGHTMARE LIFE-IN-DEATH was she,
> Who thicks men's blood with cold.[13]

(ll.190-195)

30. Coleridge's narrators, however, even the two (or three) in the initial 1798 version, enfold the Mariner's

experience in layers of interpretation that enclose and contain the irrational horror that he has witnessed. In a parallel fashion, on returning to "his own countree," he wanders from place to place, keeping young men from attending weddings and singing the delights of church services in worship of "Our Father," in congregations that apparently exclude mothers and married women, a telling symptom of his trauma. Frankenstein's nightmare, among other things, is Shelley's unconscious revision of Coleridge's *femme fatale*: he sees the Nightmare Life-in-Death, while she sees the Nightmare Death-in-Life.

31. Shelley's strategy of containment is more comprehensive than Coleridge's, though. Just as her narrative remains poised between the Male and Female Gothic modes, and between the sadistic and the masochistic, her novel also contains both the nightmare of the mother's dead body and her alternate vision of idealized maternity, even if her portrait of a woman very like Mary Wollstonecraft is distanced by multiple layers of narrative. We hear this story through Walton's letter to his sister Margaret Saville, and he is repeating what Frankenstein says that the creature has reported about the De Lacey family, whose son Felix has fallen in love with the Arabian Safie. Her mother was

> a Christian Arab, seized and made a slave by the Turks; recommended by her beauty, she had won the heart of the father of Safie, who married her. The young girl spoke in high and enthusiastic terms of her mother, who, born in freedom, spurned the bondage to which she was now reduced. She instructed her daughter in the tenets of her religion, and taught her to aspire to higher powers of intellect, and an independence of spirit, forbidden to the female followers of Mahomet. This lady died; but her lessons were indelibly impressed on the mind of Safie, who sickened at the prospect of again returning to Asia, and being immured within the walls of a harem, allowed only to occupy herself with infantile amusements ill suited to the temper of her soul, now accustomed to grand ideas and a noble emulation for virtue. (120-1)

Here is Mary's fantasy of the ideal mummy—a free, instructive, intelligent, independent Mary Wollstonecraft—encrypted beneath layers and layers of narrative voices, a counterpoise to the horror of Frankenstein's dream about "the corpse of [his] dead mother."

32. Twenty years after his first composition of *The Rime* Coleridge published still another frame, the glosses, that are, among other things, designed to control our reading of the poem. Mary Shelley's preface to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, written about fifteen years after her original "waking dream," has, consciously or unconsciously, a similar effect. Remembering the summer of 1816, Shelley famously recalls the moment of conception:

> I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing that he had put together; I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, stir with an uneasy, half-vital motion. . . . He sleeps, but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold, the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening the curtains, and looking upon him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes.

The ellipses in this quotation obscure what Shelley chose to interject between the elements of her fantasy. She pauses to interpret the meaning of the second image:

> Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handywork, horror-stricken. He would hope that left to itself, the slight spark of life which he had communicated would fade; that this thing, which had received such imperfect animation, would subside into dead matter; and

> he might sleep in the belief that the silence of the grave would quench for ever the
> transient existence of the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life.

Shelley's narrative of her basic dream contains seventy-three words. This interpolation is considerably longer—one hundred and seven words. It invites us to read her story as a much less original tale of male hubris, recasting the story simply as a conflict between fathers and sons. That reading would became the cliché driving a hundred screenplays, partly because this story is congenial to a patriarchal culture. But her last clause also confirms, in a telling subjunctive, the unconscious fantasy that I believe motivated *Frankenstein: "he might sleep in the belief that the silence of the grave would quench for ever the transient existence of the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life"* (my emphasis).

33. In this last stage of her original dream, Shelley describes, from the outside, the moment at which, according to the novel, Frankenstein is dreaming of "the corpse of [his] dead mother with the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel." Her pause to interpret this "birth scene" encloses or encapsulates—and thus both conceals and emphasizes—this nightmare. In her conclusion to the introduction of 1831, when Shelley writes "I have an affection for [my hideous progeny], for it was the offspring of happy days, when death and grief were but words, which found no true echo in my heart," she implicitly repairs (or bandages over) Frankenstein's primal failure to acknowledge his creature as his son. The novel is *her* child, she now declares. But admitting maternity involves another dimension of denial here. As Ellen Moers so vividly demonstrated in *Literary Women*, during the two years that Shelley worked on her novel, death and grief were horrible realities, partly because she herself gave birth to a child who died. She became herself a mother all-too-well acquainted with death and grief. At the moment of the book's conception, however, I would argue that death and the mother, horribly, unspeakably, and inseparably embodied in both sentimental and sadistic terms, became, through love's alchemy, the words that are *Frankenstein*.

Epilogue

34. Shelley's declaration in 1831 that her novel depicts the son's rebellion against the father, a human being's misappropriation of divine prerogative, has proved powerful. This is the plot enshrined in many horror movies, and it has become a myth for the modern world. Given Mary's problematic and quasi-Oedipal relationship with William Godwin, this reading of the tale is not exactly false, but it is partial. True, the patriarchal imagination finds stories about father/son conflict more authentic (because more conventional), but *Frankenstein* shows us that we cannot deny the murky realms of dead mothers and living daughters and reanimated mummies, the levels of the mother (though denied by patriarchy) who has a mind as well as a body.[14]

35. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen reminds us, "The monster's body is a cultural body" (9). It would follow, then, that as culture changes, its monsters change with it. It was unthinkable that Victor could bring his female creature to life because this would have been too blatant a recognition of the creature's maternal dimension. Still, if such a creation were then inconceivable, as Shelley's narrative shows, by the middle of the twentieth century the possibility of a bride for the creature was imaginable. James Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) is generally regarded as that cinematic oddity, the first-rate sequel. But it has few progeny, hideous or otherwise. It was remade once, less successfully, as *The Bride* in 1985, in contrast to the plethora of *Frankensteins* in twentieth-century horror films (from Universal Studios in the 30s and Hammer Films in the 60s), although Kenneth Branagh's version—here departing from the novel he claims to follow more than anyone else—incorporates the idea of "the bride" in Frankenstein's effort to revive Elizabeth after she is killed on the wedding night.

36. But the deeply repressed significance of Frankenstein's creature does, I think, find expression in an

alternative and prolific sub-genre: tales of the mummy, the zombie, and the living dead. In this way, as well as others, the repressed always returns. In the seventeenth century the female body as "mummy" served Donne as the concrete example of female soullessness in a poem directed at an elite and primarily male audience. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, the notion of the animated mummy was becoming a public locus of horror for a popular audience. A similar though less uncanny pun on "mummy" than Mary's appears in M.G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1796): "The unlucky Duenna never had made a more disagreeable journey in her life: She was jolted and shaken till She was become little more than an animated Mummy. . . "(151),[15] an indication that oft-subordinated women can be reduced to the "living dead" by the social circumstances that contain them. But after *Frankenstein*, the re-animated mummy—the self-disguising locus of the sadistically beaten-down but sentimentally desired mother—would become a stock figure in the Gothic, above all in twentieth-century horror movies with its dozens of mummies, zombies, and living dead.

37. The *Video Movie Guide 2001* lists productions of *The Mummy* in 1932, 1959, and 1999 as well as *The Mummy and the Curse of the Jackals* (1967), *The Mummy's Curse* (1944), *The Mummy's Ghost* (1944), *The Mummy's Hand* (1940), *The Mummy's Shroud* (1967), and *The Mummy's Tomb* (1942). Not listed is the 2001 theatrical release, *The Mummy Returns*, but the zombie offers a variation on this theme as well. The *Video Movie Guide* lists nine titles including this word. And the masterpiece of this sub-genre, *Night of the Living Dead*(1968), does not use the word "zombie." It was remade in color in 1990 by George Romero, who also directed a sequel to the original, *Dawn of the Dead* (1979). Also notable is Val Lewten's *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943). *Pet Semetery* is Stephen King's most prominent homage to the mummy/zombie mode (film version released in 1989).

38. One might suppose that the word "mummy" included in so many of these titles more readily discloses its unconscious significance than the same image does in *Frankenstein*. But the conventions of this mummy/zombie sub-genre wrap additional layers between object and audience. The mummified body that is reanimated is always male. In contrast to Frankenstein's creation story, which is contemporary to 1816, the mummy plot usually originates in the long ago and far away—ancient Egypt. And the mummy's return to life always seems to be caused by some archeologist's hubristic violation of some ancient shibboleth, which, like Shelley's interpretive intervention in the 1831 preface, encourages us to see the story as a conflict between authority and the overreacher, between age and youth, between fathers and sons. If the popular version of Frankenstein warns us of the dangers of technology, the Mummy films imply the dangers of psychoanalysis, of seeking to discover long-buried secrets. Just as the thing one has made may become uncontrollable, so the mummy, the enwrapped burial of our desire for and revulsion at the mother, may come back to life and unwind its bandages, exposing "yellow, watery, but speculative eyes."

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Notes

[1] Mary Shelley may have been familiar with Donne's lyric. According to William St. Clair, Godwin was, unlike most of his contemporaries, an enthusiast of Donne and Sir Thomas Browne. He was given to reciting the poet's work at social gatherings (St. Clair, 222-23).

[2] One is reminded of Romeo's exclamation upon finding Juliet's unconscious body in the tomb: "Shall I believe / That unsubstantial Death is amorous / And that the lean abhorred monster / Keeps thee here in dark to be his paramour?" (*Romeo and Juliet* 5.3.102-105)

[3] As a creation myth, Shelley's narrative revises the Genesis account, in which God the Father circumvents matter altogether in his creation process. Her tale recalls those that Joseph Campbell identifies as being told by cultures in transition from matrilineal to patriarchal orders. In these myths, a hero associated with light slays a dragon or other monster (the disguised body of the mother goddess) and makes the world from her flesh. *Frankenstein*, however, is different in that in this tale of "mummy, possest," the dead flesh is not passive. It is both "realized" within the conscious world and driven by seemingly demonic forces.

[4] Mary Poovey thoroughly explores this dimension of Shelley's anxiety in "My Hideous Progeny: The Lady and the Monster" in *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (114-142).

[5] Gilbert and Gubar cite some of the incredulous responses to the fact of Mary's authorship: "'She has no business to be a woman by her books,' noted Beddoes. And 'your writing and your manners are not in accordance,' Dillon told Mary herself. 'I should have thought of you—if I had only read you—that you were a sort of . . . Sybil . . . but you are cool, quiet and feminine to the last degree. Explain this to me'" (242-243).

[6] Shelley's narrative of the creature's history could be read as an allegorical rendering of Freud's principle of thanatos, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in which he defines as the instinct of living matter to return to its former, inanimate state, but on its own terms. Peter Brooks develops this insight as a principle of literary plotting in his book *Reading for the Plot*.

[7] All translations of *Justine* are my own.

[8] Rousseau writes in *The Confessions*: "I found the experience [of childhood punishment] less terrible than the expectation of it had been, and what is most bizarre is this is that this punishment increased my affection even more for the one [the governess Mlle Lambercier] who had inflicted it on me . . . . Who would believe that this childhood punishment received at eight years of age from the hand of a woman of thirty determined my tastes, my desires, my passions, myself for the rest of my life, and this, precisely in the opposite sense to the one that ought to follow naturally? . . . Tormented for a long time without knowing by what, I devoured beautiful women with an ardent eye; solely to make use of them in my fashion, and to make so many Mlle Lamberciers out of them" (Qtd. in Noble, *The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature*, 13-14).

[9] See, for instance, Hogle.

[10] The ease with which the novel of sensibility blends with the Gothic and even the pornographic is readily explained: feeling is gendered female in patriarchal culture, since the mother seems to be the source of all emotion, as we see in Sade's dream. G.J. Barker-Benfield shows in *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* that the cult of sensibility promoted women's interests by publicly expressing their desires and "capitaliz[ing] on their 'naturalized' gender characteristics, above all, on the moral authority of their putatively finer sensibility." He also notes that "the gendering of sensibility sexualized it, associating

desire with the rake/victim dyad" (xxvii). Furthermore, the cult of sensibility was founded on a "scientific, materialist interpretation of "the nervous system as the material basis for consciousness" (xvii). In other words, the ultimately material basis of the cult of sensibility traps women in the old patriarchal dichotomy of mind and body, even as it offers a basis for ascribing more value to the culturally "feminine." The rake/victim dyad is organized around the cultural power that men have and women do not. It may be represented by Emily St. Aubert and Count Montoni as easily as by Pamela and Squire B; unfortunately, it also furnishes the paradigm for the doomed Justine and the innumerable libertines who abuse her.

[11] This statement was true when I wrote it. I have, however, subsequently discovered Beth Lau's essay "*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Frankenstein*." Her analysis is much more thorough than mine, though essentially congruent.

[12] Allusions to Coleridge are equally prominent in Shelley's second novel, *Mathilda*.

[13] The version of "The Rime" that I have quoted is, of course, the more familiar text Coleridge published in 1818, the same year as *Frankenstein* (See Lau). Even so, I am not particularly interested in questions of direct influence here; more interesting, it seems to me, is that Coleridge's portrait of deadly maternal beauty coincides in significant ways with Sade's.

[14] Shelley's tale may be read in light of cognitive scientists' research into the structure and function of metaphor. We are able to think about abstract ideas, they suggest, by means of mapping concrete experience (the "source domain") onto the "target domain," the unknown thing we want to think about.

[15] Frankenstein's dream was necessarily Mary's, whether it was an actual dream or her fantasy of a dream that she provides for her male protagonist. Prior to that dream, she had probably read *The Monk*, particularly since Lewis was Byron's guest at the Villa Diodati in 1816 (Marchand 2, 644).

Frankenstein's Dream

Mocking Stupendous Mechanisms: Romantic Parody and Frankenstein's Dream

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1. In the 1831 introduction to *Frankenstein*, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley recollects her initial encounter with the process of literary creation: "Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of the void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place be afforded: it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself" (195). Shelley, as though she were furthering this view, incorporates a diverse range of chaotic substances into her masterpiece: the spectacular landscape surrounding the Villa Diodati; conversations with Lord Byron, John Polidori, and Percy Shelley concerning recent scientific inquiries into the nature of life; her own ambivalent experiences of maternity; the countless rainy nights in the summer of 1816. And, as her eponymous protagonist fashions his Creature out of pre-existing bodies, Shelley composes her novel in no small part from other literary texts. In addition to the "volumes of ghost stories, translated from the German into French" mentioned in the introduction, Shelley alludes explicitly to a variety of texts in Frankenstein, most notably Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the poetry of her contemporaries. As the strategic modesty of the above passage might suggest, Shelley acknowledges but also modifies her literary antecedents, provisionally accepting a Romantic model of creativity while maintaining telling reservations about it.

2. A provocative instance of this engagement occurs in Victor Frankenstein's immediate response to his unwelcome success. Reeling from the gruesome enormity of his handiwork, he plunges into a vexed slumber:

   > I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed; when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window-shutters, I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created (39).

   In a novel that takes its epigram from *Paradise Lost*, Frankenstein's horrified encounter with the Creature invites comparison with Milton's Book VIII, in which Adam awakes from an anticipatory dream of a mate to find Eve newly created before him. For Keats, Adam's dream is the perfect type of the imagination: "he awoke, and found it truth." Shelley's recollection of Milton, conversely, grimly twists the promise of nuptial bliss. Elizabeth, Victor's cousin and the favorite companion of his youth, later becomes his wife. But the Creature, after Frankenstein reneges on a promise to assemble a mate for him, vows to "be with [Frankenstein] on [his] wedding night" (140), and murders Elizabeth shortly after she and Victor are married. Loathed as he is by his creator, the Creature becomes the closest thing to a companion Frankenstein has for the rest of his tortured existence. In contrast with Keats's breezy confidence, often taken as exemplary of Romantic poetic theory, Mary Shelley's turn on *Paradise Lost* offers a profoundly sardonic retort to a patriarchal illusion.

3. The critical recuperation of *Frankenstein* begun in the late 70s has often argued for its importance

based on its oppositional relationship to a long-standing canonization of Romanticism as exclusively male and exclusively poetic. Shelley's novel, as this line of interpretation would have it, indicts the fatal overreach and insistent egotism commonly associated with high Romantic quest. For some critics, this indictment announces a complete break between Shelley and her male contemporaries, a position summarized by Mark Hansen when he contends "*Frankenstein* is no mere shadow of the great poems of a Wordsworth or a Blake, a Byron or Shelley, but rather a central text in a different ideology" (578). While I do not intend to contest the value of Mary Shelley's critique of a "Romantic ideology" promoting an original and autonomous creative self, I do want to demonstrate that the ideology critics like Hansen posit for the novel is still recognizably a Romantic one. This alternative tradition reads literary creativity as inherently parodic, in which authors create not out of a void but from a chaos of pre-existing texts. The practice of parody calls attention to the ways in which authors are themselves readers; it also underscores the value of eliciting imitations, flattering or otherwise, from a scribbling readership. In offering a mocking rendition of what Jack Stillinger has called "the myth of solitary genius," Shelley seeks to establish herself as a parodist, only to find that she has made herself eminently available to be parodied in turn. This vulnerability, as might be expected, produces considerable anxiety within her first novel. Less expectedly, and more remarkably, Frankenstein accepts this vulnerability as an inextricable element of literary success.

4. Several recent scholarly anthologies attest to the fecundity of parody in the Romantic era (see Kent and Ewen, Stones and Strachan). Nevertheless, the suspicion that parody is incompatible with Romanticism remains persuasive for many critics. Linda Hutcheon, in attempting to characterize the appeal of parody to (post)modern sensibilities, opposes it to preferences still swayed by "the continuing strength of a Romantic aesthetic that values genius, originality, and creativity" (*Theory* 4). While recognizing that parody is a widespread practice in the Romantic era, Hutcheon contends that it "is almost always aligned with satire" ("Foreward" 7). This satirical purpose, intent on deriding its target as a way of effecting social change, distinguishes romantic parody from its more sophisticated modern descendant, in which "no such negative judgment is necessarily suggested in the ironic contrasting of texts" (*Theory* 44). David Kent and D. R. Ewen concur, offering a contrast between "Victorian parody . . . more often a matter of admiration" for the antecedent text and Romantic parody as "rougher ideological sport, highlighting clashes of ideas, styles and values" (21).

5. I am contending that parody in the Romantic era is less antagonistic than is often assumed and that Mary Shelley's exchange with her contemporaries in *Frankenstein* approaches Hutcheon's more complex description of parody in two important respects. "Parodic art," Hutcheon suggests, "both deviates from an aesthetic norm and includes that norm within itself as background material. Any real attack would be self-destructive" (*Theory* 44). Even as the novel opens up a critical distance on conventionally Romantic attitudes, it maintains a familiarity with them that precludes wholesale dismissal. In addition, Shelley evinces a pragmatic awareness of what Hutcheon recognizes even amid the often contentious upbraiding of Romantic era parody: "many texts have survived into the present simply because they have been parodied" ("Forward" 10). This might be cynically reduced to the first cliché of spin: no publicity is bad publicity. But not all writers, not even all Romantic writers, insist on being enjoyed by a taste they have themselves created. Shelley accepts that being parodied at least indicates an audience, and fosters the possibility of future audiences, however damaging it might be to the fantasy of unqualified success.

6. If Wordsworth and Percy Shelley may be taken as representative of the Romantic ideology criticized in *Frankenstein*, then Coleridge provides the most prominent model for an alternative, parodic tradition. In an archly riddling, anonymous contribution to Southey's *Omniana* (1808), Coleridge expresses his own equivocal concern with parody: "Parodies on new poems are read as satires; on old ones, (the soliloquy of Hamlet for instance) as compliments. A man of genius may securely laugh at a mode of attack, by which his reviler in half a century or less, becomes his encomiast" (*SW & F* I, 305). The

bluff of confidence Coleridge ascribes to the man of genius belies misgivings that the mocking tribute may turn out to be utterly derisive. At the same time, Coleridge obliquely concedes that the relationship between genius and parody is symbiotic, if asymmetrically so. A parody that too absolutely demolishes its target destroys the grounds for its own appreciation. The work of genius, in sustaining the supportive ribbing of its jocular antagonists, secures its own reputation and also provides a dependent endurance for its complementary texts.

7. The explicit allusions to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in *Frankenstein* demonstrate Shelley's interest in Coleridge as an antecedent. Like Walton, the Mariner embarks on a voyage of discovery that leads to "a land of mist and snow." Like Victor Frankenstein, the Mariner initiates a catastrophe that claims his entire social circle while sparing himself. If Shelley's recollections of Coleridge's work were limited to the Ancient Mariner alone, her use of them could easily be reconciled to her critique of solitary genius. But Shelley draws on another of Coleridge's poems as well, in a subtler but no less formative manner. Two days after the ghost story contest was proposed on June 16, 1816, Polidori's diary records Lord Byron's memorable recitation of "Christabel," a poem only recently published but long familiar to Byron from its manuscript circulation. In "Christabel," Shelley finds a complex relationship between heroine and anti-heroine that anticipates the fraught exchanges between creator and creature in *Frankenstein*. Moreover, the shifting nature of authority in "Christabel" traces a parodic model of creativity that Shelley adopts and refines in her novel.

8. The complex and protracted history of the composition and publication of "Christabel" suggests that originals and parodies aren't merely reciprocal; they are virtually interchangeable. The mastiff bitch's garrulously precise time-keeping at the opening of the poem, combined with the narrator's pronounced skittishness, reflects Coleridge's increasing disenchantment with the supernatural machinery of the Gothic romances he had been reviewing at the time he began composing the poem (see Cooper). As the poem progresses, however, Coleridge's admiration for the power of writers like Ann Radcliffe and "Monk" Lewis to involve and terrify their readers eclipses his impulse to send up the genre's more ridiculously elaborate conventions. "Christabel" comes to resemble too closely the very sensibility it had presumed to dismiss, "the degrading thirst for outrageous stimulation" Wordsworth endeavors to counteract in his landmark preface. Originally slated for publication in the 1800 edition to *Lyrical Ballads*, "Christabel" does not see print until 1816. This sixteen-year interval between the poem's practical completion and its eventual publication further confounds any easy distinction between parody and original.

9. "Christabel" encourages speculations on the relationship between parody and originality not only in the circumstances of its publication; the text itself may be read as an allegory of this relationship. The poem begins with our heroine venturing out into the "midnight wood" to pray on behalf of her absent "betrothèd knight." Her pious affections and her naïve disregard for the eeriness of her surroundings mark Christabel as a familiar Gothic figure: feminine virtue in distress. Yet her surreptitious excursion into the midnight wood violates conventional propriety and raises the specter of a less orthodox purpose. In risking the dangers of the forest unattended at the very witching time of night, Christabel may be attempting a fanciful conjuration of her absent lover. Such an attempt aligns her with a Romantic conception of poetry as vatic office, as a supernaturally transgressive invocation of desires (see Rzepka). And, in typically Romantic fashion, her effort produces an unexpected result:

> The lady leaps up suddenly,
> The lovely lady, Christabel!
> It moan'd as near, as near can be,
> But what it is she cannot tell— (ll.39-42).

On closer inspection, "it" turns out to be Geraldine, but as Karen Swann astutely observes, "for a

moment's space, however, we entertain the notion that an uneasy woman has leaped suddenly and terrified herself" (538). In summoning another and producing instead someone suspiciously like herself, Christabel enacts a version of Romantic poetics. Coleridge is sending up Gothic conventions in "Christabel," but he is wryly commenting on the loftier aspirations of his contemporaries as well.

10. If, in unintentionally conjuring Geraldine through the sheer ardor of her solitary call, Christabel becomes a figure for Romantic creativity, then Geraldine, simultaneously dependent and threatening in her potential malevolence, parodies this figure, embodying a revealing distortion of it rather than a simple departure from it. Initially so weak and compromised that she cannot cross the castle threshold unaided, Geraldine exaggerates Christabel's apparent helplessness, a helplessness rendered all the more suspect by the "might and main" (l. 125) with which she aids her guest. Once inside the castle, however, Geraldine exercises an insinuating power of her own, banishing the benevolent influence of Christabel's departed mother (ll. 206-208). No longer merely the unexpected respondent to Christabel's summons, Geraldine, in displacing the woman who brought Christabel into being, has achieved a common goal of parody: the reversal of creative priority. The brainchild has become the mother of the lady.

11. At its most extreme, parody silences its antecedent; its mocking exposure of its inspiration's characteristic flaws precludes any opportunity for rejoinder. Geraldine casts a spell over Christabel that is "lord of [her] utterance"; Christabel may not reveal the horrible discovery she has made concerning her guest. The conclusion to the first part of the poem reinforces the terror of Christabel's situation by pointedly contrasting it with her vigil at the old oak tree. Her silent prayer finds modest expression in "both blue eyes more bright than clear, / Each about to have a tear" (ll. 278-279). Coleridge immediately undercuts this vision of productive silence with a suffocating sense of confinement:

> With open eyes (ah woe is me!)
> Asleep, and dreaming fearfully,
> Fearfully dreaming, yet I wis,
> Dreaming that alone, which is— (ll. 280-283).

The haunting claustrophobia of these lines arises in part from the inverted repetition of "dreaming fearfully," but a subtler constraint is at work as well, implicit in the contrast between Christabel's prayer and her nightmare. Under the old oak tree, Christabel, however inadvertently, calls forth something (someone) previously unimagined to herself. Isolated from the austerity of her father's keep, Christabel participates in the Romantic tradition of autonomous inspiration and creation. In the arms of Geraldine, which twine about her like the parasitic mistletoe around the oak (l. 36), she has lost this ability to introduce a new vitality into a conventionally dreary setting. She dreams "that alone, which is." She cannot innovate; she can only reflect what already exists.

12. Returning now to Frankenstein's dream, we find a chain of substitutions that affords striking parallels to the shifting roles Geraldine inhabits in the first part of "Christabel." Geraldine emerges in response to Christabel's prayer "for the weal of her lover that's far away" (l.32); Victor's dream begins with a vision of his beloved Elizabeth, transported from the family seat in Geneva to Ingolstadt. Geraldine next displaces the spirit of Christabel's dead mother; as Victor embraces her, Elizabeth decays into the form of his dead mother. Finally, Geraldine reveals a monstrous aspect, "a sight to dream of, not to tell!" (l. 247), and climbs into bed with her victim and host. Frankenstein's nightmare is punctuated by the intrusion of the Creature, "[holding] up the curtain of the bed" (39). Even before he falls prey to exhaustion upon the completion of his task, Frankenstein declares that "the beauty of the dream [has] vanished" (39); the being he has shaped fails to match his intended result. The bitter fruit of his ensuing slumber can only confirm an already existent reality. Like Christabel, Frankenstein is reduced to an imaginative paralysis. He can only revisit, without re-imagining, the wretched perversion of his

creative ambitions.

13. The Creature's unwanted (if not entirely unexpected) attempt at intimacy, then, reproduces many of the features of parodic menace we find in Geraldine. His emergence drives Frankenstein to a protracted, guilty silence, similar to Christabel's mute astonishment at Geraldine's machinations in the second part of the poem. But Victor's silence differs from Christabel's in one important respect. Christabel is forcibly deprived of her utterance by Geraldine's charm; Frankenstein's refusal to speak of his ordeal is ultimately his own choice. Nor is the result of his fated project the immediate cause of his silence. Rather, the *pursuit* of this project leads him to cease corresponding with his family, a lapse he repeatedly describes as an ominous "silence" (37,38). Unlike Christabel, whose creative power is intricately bound in her ability to speak, Frankenstein's creativity is predicated on a retreat from verbal articulation. His silence is partly a response to the Creature's parodic threat, but it is also a continuation of the conditions that initially fostered that threat. Frankenstein, embodying a Romantic original or target text, cannot bring himself to curtail his parodic double's activity. Whatever else the Creature is, he is Frankenstein's strongest guarantee of an audience, as Walton's fascination in the novel's outermost frame attests.

14. To this point, "Christabel" and *Frankenstein* alike might be read as utterly dismissive of a conventional Romantic poetics ideally conceived. It should not be overlooked that Coleridge's poem remains incomplete, and that Shelley's protagonist dies tormented in an arctic waste. But while this emphatic critique of solitary genius provides a formative impulse for these works, it fails to prove conclusive. Christabel and Victor Frankenstein recognize the unfortunate consequences of their misguided creative efforts, yet the revulsion that accompanies these recognitions fails to govern entirely our sense of what these author-figures have wrought. For if it is true, as Shelley contends, that authors do not create out of a void, it is also true that they do not send their creations into a vacuum. In "Christabel" and *Frankenstein* the distortions of an individual vision meet with further abuses in their encounters with the larger world. Ironically, in misconstruing the monstrous threats visited upon them, characters within these texts, as well as readers trying to interpret them from without, partially restore the degraded protagonists' original intentions. The result of this confrontation is neither the ideal vision of an autonomous author nor the simple mockery of a sophisticated, unsympathetic audience, but a curiously unstable and yet strangely vital collaboration between writer and reader.

15. The first part of "Christabel" presents an allegory of the relationship between original and parody, and the second half stages the variety of responses available in receiving parody and original alike. As Geraldine emerges into the light of day with a much-diminished Christabel in tow, these competing interpretive possibilities attempt to account for her. Bracy, forewarned by his dream of a concealed serpent strangling a dove, suspects that some malevolence is afoot without tracing it immediately to Geraldine's presence. Clearly a great deal in the poem supports Bracy's suspicions. Christabel would confirm them, could she work herself free of Geraldine's spell. As it is, she can only reflect the "look of dull and treacherous hate" of the apparition she had hoped would reflect her own virtue. Bracy's suspicions and Christabel's plight both cast Geraldine's parodic agency in the worst possible light, as the gleefully ungrateful destroyer of its antecedent.

16. But while Bracy gropes toward a discovery of Christabel's apprehensions of what her guest has become, Sir Leoline welcomes Geraldine in much the same fashion as Christabel does at the poem's beginning. In accepting Geraldine's improbable story of her abduction and abandonment, Sir Leoline, like his daughter, "recognizes Geraldine as a certain type of heroine and embraces her" (Swann 534). In overlooking what Christabel has come to see in Geraldine, Sir Leoline compounds his daughter's initial error, at considerable danger to them both. Yet in accepting Geraldine as the damsel in distress Christabel first thought she was, Sir Leoline also implies, in the calculated generosity of his response, that his daughter's creative efforts may not be as misguided as she now finds them herself. By offering

a laughable distortion of Christabel's own revised sense of her achievement, Sir Leoline presents a more nuanced account of the effects of parody, one which allows for the possibility of parody encourages its antecedent's success as well as contributing to its decay.

17. In Coleridge's poem, this salutary potential of parody acts as a teasing counter-current to the menacing drift of the plot. In Shelley's novel, the brutal extent of the Creature's vengeance threatens to render parody's destructive qualities absolute. And a good thing, too, we might say, since Victor Frankenstein's model of exclusively male creativity could use a thorough demolition. Perhaps a grim satisfaction inevitably results from contemplating the fate Frankenstein has conjured for himself. Nevertheless, to indulge this response too extensively is to ignore what the Creature endures as the result of his own actions; in witnessing the demise of his creator, he discovers the exhaustion of his *raison d'être*. Like all parodies, the Creature must at least partially sustain his antecedent; otherwise his own existence becomes meaningless and untenable. Frankenstein may inadvertently reveal as much when he describes the fortuitous circumstances that sustain his pursuit of the Creature:

> Sometimes, when nature, overcome by hunger, sunk under the exhaustion, a repast was prepared for me in the desert, that restored and inspirited me. The fare was indeed coarse, such as the peasants of the country ate; but I may not doubt that it was set there by the spirits that I had invoked to aid me (173).

With characteristically risible obtuseness, Frankenstein ignores a likelier alternative. The Creature, who often responds to Victor's vague conjuration of spirits in the novel, has quite possibly provided these repasts himself, if only to prolong the cruel enjoyment he derives from his creator's futile exertions.

18. Instead of locating Frankenstein's doom in the awful effort to bring something into existence, we might rather attribute it to his refusal to allow the results of this effort to have unanticipated, even comic, consequences. In assuming too readily that he has produced an irredeemable atrocity, Frankenstein refuses to consider how his Creature could, in spite of his deformity, satisfy his creator's ultimate ambition. This ambition, which Frankenstein expresses as he assembles the materials for his first attempt at bestowing life, is to foster "a new species [that] would bless [him] as its creator and source" (36). And, despite his initial murderous forays into revenge, even as he vows an absolute break with his creator and his creator's kind, the Creature partially restores the intention that conceived him. In demanding that Frankenstein provide him with a mate, he unwittingly seeks to establish the necessary conditions for the fulfillment of his creator's dream to stand as the origin not just of a being, but of a "species." This idea occurs again to Frankenstein himself as he labors to complete the Creature's bride; it culminates the train of thought that leads him to abandon the task: "one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth" (138). Like Christabel, unable to reconcile her fiendish vision of Geraldine with her initial expectation of a Gothic heroine, Frankenstein cannot recognize in his Creature's request an advance toward the success of his own grandest aspiration. The catastrophe that results from Frankenstein's refusal could be averted, were he only able to acknowledge the Creature's potential cursèd race as his.

19. Shelley's own reaction to her novel's reception, by turns bemused and peeved, offers a glimpse of what such an acknowledgment might look like. On August 29, 1823, she attended a performance of Richard Brinsley Peake's *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein*. This stage adaptation proved popular, "initiat[ing] enough interest in Mary Shelley's novel that less than one month after its debut a second edition had been published" (Forry 3). The evening's playbill recorded the Creature in the dramatis personae as "------by Mr. T. Cooke," which, Shelley says in a Sept. 9 letter to Leigh Hunt, "amused [her] exceedingly . . . this nameless way of naming the unnamable is rather good" (378). Like many who saw the play, Shelley was impressed by Cooke's acting, though her admiration for James Wallack's

performance as Frankenstein was not widely shared. Her letter to Hunt generally expresses approval of the production, with the surprisingly unruffled qualification that "the story is not well managed."

20. Peake's melodrama introduces several features that have become commonplace to audiences of subsequent adaptations of Shelley's original, among them a servant employed for comic relief who provides the inspiration for countless future lab assistants. More tellingly, however, *Presumption* inaugurates a long tradition in which the Creature remains silent. In Shelley's novel, the Creature's improbable rhetorical skill provides an important element of the tense equilibrium that balances his claims on the reader's sympathies with those of Frankenstein. While Cooke's performance compensates for this loss in other ways, the confrontation between creator and creature becomes slightly asymmetrical. Frankenstein, often inept at crucial moments in the novel, assumes a greater competence (if not a corresponding practical efficacy) on stage.

21. One other change marks Frankenstein's barely perceptible advance in status within the play. Though much of Shelley's first description of the Creature is reproduced verbatim in *Presumption*, the dream which immediately follows it is not. Peake's production relocates Frankenstein's vision to a much earlier moment in the story. Fritz, the excitable servant, reports on his master's unquiet sleep:

    [Frankenstein] was asleep, but frightfully troubled; he groaned and ground his teeth setting mine on edge. "It is accomplished!" said he. *Accomplished!* I knew that had nothing to do with me, but I listened. He started up in his sleep, though his eyes were opened and dead as oysters, he cried, "It is animated — it rises — walks!" (Forry 138).

    Unlike Frankenstein's dream in the novel, the dream in the play drifts toward the more Romantic convention of proleptic ambition and creativity. In presenting it through the mediation of the easily rattled Fritz, the play suffuses the awful anticipation of Frankenstein's project with jumpy laughter.

22. Mary Shelley dispenses a similar blend of shudders and chuckles, and toys with a parallel shift toward Romantic conventions, in her 1831 introduction. Her description of the waking dream that delivers the core of the novel to her famously rehearses Frankenstein's horrified recoil from his dreadful accomplishment shortly after its animation. By presenting her inspiration as a version of Frankenstein's first encounter with his Creature, Shelley declares an affinity with her protagonist. This moment reads less as a triumphant breakthrough, however, and more as a kind of imaginative arrest, similar to what Christabel experiences at the conclusion to Part I. Shelley's vision arrives "unbidden," her authorial task reduced to "making only a transcript of [her] waking dream" (197). Although Shelley's reluctance to admit any deliberate craft in producing her tale might be taken as a coy preclusion of any further inquiries by a curious readership, it serves an additional purpose. The simple equation Shelley offers between authorial intention and the reception of an obedient audience reads as disingenuously naïve: "What terrified me will terrify others; and I need only describe the spectre which had haunted my pillow" (196-197). Shelley hesitates tauntingly between identifying with her surrogate author and exposing the shortcomings of his creative process.

23. The odd humor of this introduction changes from biting satire to jocular burlesque when Shelley shifts her attention from Frankenstein to the Creature: "And now, once again, I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper." As well as alluding to the very real financial pressures that prompted the 1831 edition, the substitution of "prosper" for the more Biblically precedented "multiply" suggests that Shelley may share some of Frankenstein's reservations about any offspring the Creature might sire. More importantly, though, the rueful chuckle implied by the phrase concedes that the uncanny sympathy the Creature elicits at the novel's center will have more to do with its continued success than the author could have anticipated. Readers of Victor Frankenstein's narrative, it would seem, find in the fruits of his labor the achievement he hopes for but cannot comprehend.

24. Until recently, critical accounts of parody in the Romantic era have tended to emphasize the practice's antagonistic energies, the ways it appropriates from and ridicules its antecedents. In *Frankenstein*, the monstrous consequences of a distorted authorial intention demonstrate the nature of this threat. At the same time the Creature, menacing as he is, unerringly (if inadvertently) continue to preserve, even restore, the kernel of a vision his creator has given up as lost. If parody often "wrongs" the text it targets, exposing its characteristic flaws, it often redresses these flaws, too, in unexpectedly sympathetic ways. As parody, *Frankenstein* invites further rejoinders, even stranger turns on its target and on itself. This invitation, taken up by the near-constant reinterpretation of Shelley's novel on stage and screen, provides an alternative to the "myth of solitary genius" that has long haunted Romanticism and its critics. The writers of the Romantic era, this alternative model proposes, engaged their audience in comic and complementary ways, anticipating in turn a potentially derisive but ultimately salutary response to this exchange

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Frankenstein's Dream

Patriarchal Fantasy and the Fecal Child in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and its Adaptations

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The Freudian unconscious is situated at that point, where, between cause and that which it affects, there is always something wrong.

—Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 22

1. Frankenstein's dream, like all dreams, can only be told by the one who has woken up from it. Between a dream and its telling there always looms the chasm between sleeping and waking, and the telling can only approximate or appropriate one state of being or one vision of things by and for another. Victor Frankenstein wakes from dream to reality twice in the creation scene of *Frankenstein*. Upon seeing his creature come to life, he tells us, "the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart" (59). Shortly thereafter, Frankenstein falls asleep, dreams that his kiss transforms Elizabeth into his mother's corpse, and wakes to find the creature looking at him. This time, instead of contradicting the dream's "beauty," the creature seems to repeat and corroborate its horrifying significance. Any reading of Frankenstein's dream must also be a reading of this double awakening's play of discontinuity and repetition.

2. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* has come to occupy a place in literary history that might well be compared to the moment of awakening from a dream. Her novel has become a kind of nodal point connecting biblical, classical, Miltonic, and popular versions of the story of the fabrication of human life by a male creator. Moreover, Shelley's novel both connects these texts and marks a crucial break between the earlier and the post-Shelleyan ones, because Shelley's novel alters the relation between the natural and the paternal that is central to all versions. The divine fabrication of human life in *Genesis* and *Paradise Lost* becomes an all-too-human accomplishment in the workshop of Victor Frankenstein. The nature/culture opposition thereafter remains one of the main stakes in adaptations of Shelley's novel, which sometimes reassert the primacy of the natural order by turning Frankenstein's act into blasphemy or a transgression of fatally determined boundaries, and at other times make it increasingly difficult to untangle the natural human from the manmade one.

3. The novel's representation of the paternal is of course implicated in this drawing and redrawing of the boundaries of nature. Shelley's subversion or parody of the biblical creation myth probably strikes most modern readers less as an estrangement of natural order than as a kind of awakening to it—that is, a way of exposing or emphasizing the prior symbolic violence of attributing the birth of the first human to a father rather than a mother. The Frankenstein story's denaturalizing of conventional gender roles reverberates in any number of its adaptations—e.g. *The Rocky Horror Show*, the campier elements of *Bride of Frankenstein*, or the entire genre of science-fiction "gender benders." The problem of gender has been even more central to the academic criticism devoted to Shelley's novel, as in the recurring questions of whether the monster represents a male or female subject position, or of how Victor Frankenstein's labors allude to Mary Shelley's own traumatic experiences with childbirth, or of what sort of Oedipal or negative-Oedipal conflict the relation of Victor to his creature enacts.[1] Shelley's

displacement of the paternal disturbs the entire web of gender and familial identities, and both popular adaptations and criticism of the novel continue to explore and exploit the effects of this disturbance.

4. It is not surprising, given its destabilization of gender, its weird family romance, and the concurrence of these themes with a revisionary treatment of the emergence of culture from nature, that there have been so many psychoanalytic readings of *Frankenstein*.[2] But the very plenitude of psychoanalytic interpretation of the novel itself invites further analysis. What is the meaning of their seemingly interminable proliferation? Perhaps *Frankenstein* points to a place in our literary and cultural traditions "where, between cause and that which it affects, there is always something wrong." A rupture between cause and effect is both the crux of its fable and the dominant motif of its reception. Most popular adaptations of the story seem to take as its main feature what Benjamin would have called the story's counsel ("The Storyteller"), the wisdom that overreaching ambition recoils upon the subject. Eve, Prometheus, Pandora, and Frankenstein all try to usurp upon divine authority and all suffer the consequences. What will be argued here, however, is that the story's fascination lies not in its counsel but in that radically different power Benjamin attributed to the lyrics of Baudelaire: *Frankenstein* and its adaptations are "traumatophilic" ("Remarks on Baudelaire"). Placing the counsel against overreaching at the center of the fable, in fact, is a way of avoiding its traumatic content even while the act of repeating the story testifies to the trauma's undiminished power. Shelley's story enters literary and cultural history like an event that is insistently remembered but just as insistently revised.

5. The process of revision, then, is like the retelling of a dream, and therefore compelled to repeat the chasm or rupture of awakening. I am bearing in mind, here, Lacan's famous reinterpretation of one of the dreams first told in Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*. In the dream, a father's recently deceased child appears to him and speaks the haunting words, "Father, can't you see that I'm burning?" The dreamer wakes to find that a fire is indeed burning in the next room, where a fallen candle has set fire to the cloth covering the child's corpse (*Standard Edition [SE]* 5:509-10). While Freud says that the dream itself is constructed in order to keep the dreamer from awakening to the reality in the next room, Lacan adds that the dreamer's awakening is precisely a flight from the unbearable, traumatic reality that repeats itself in the dream: "How can we fail to see that awakening works in two directions—and that the awakening that re-situates us in a constituted and represented reality carries out two tasks?" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 57-60). In bringing psychoanalysis to bear (again) on the reading of *Frankenstein*, then, I am proposing to put at stake both the repetition of Victor Frankenstein's traumatic awakenings in the novel and the process of reading and writing that catches up the story's trauma and won't let go of it. The object of interpretation is not Mary Shelley's psyche or even the coherent intention of her novel but rather that collective fascination or collective fantasy that gives the novel its unusual place in literary and cultural history. This essay proposes to read *Frankenstein* as if it had inflicted a wound upon the social body that the retellings try to close, and yet the energy of the retellings radiates from their failure to do so.

I.

6. Let us begin with Victor Frankenstein's first traumatic awakening at the moment when the creature opens its dull yellow eyes and stirs convulsively to life. Frankenstein had desired this event, he says, "with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart" (59). What motivates this instantaneous transformation of desire into disgust? The way anticipation crumbles into horror could allude to Mary Shelley's feelings about the short-lived infant daughter she bore in February, 1815. The creature's coming to life recalls not so much the child's birth as a dream recorded in Mary's journal shortly after the infant's death: "that my little baby came to life again; that it had only been cold, and that we rubbed it before the fire, and it lived" (*Journal* 39). The novel records Frankenstein's awakening from a

similarly happy, impossible dream. The difference is that Victor's fantasy of childbirth yields to waking nightmare not because his waking reality contradicts it, but rather as the very result of the fantasy's being fulfilled. It is not the frustration of his desire but its realization that disgusts him.

7. The relation between desire and disgust here points toward another allusion close at hand that involves an awakening from happy dream to nightmarish reality. More than one reader has connected Frankenstein's revulsion for his creature to the moment in P. B. Shelley's *Alastor* when the Poet wakes from his dream to find the world rendered empty and meaningless by the absence of the Poet's dream vision. Margaret Homans uses this comparison to connect Victor's disappointment to the structure of the "male romantic economy" of desire: "The romantic quest is always doomed, for it secretly resists its own fulfillment: although the hero of *Alastor* quests for his dream maiden and dies of not finding her, his encounter with the Indian maid makes it clear that embodiment is itself an obstacle to desire, or more precisely, its termination" ("Circumvention of the Maternal" 147). According to Homans, what dooms the romantic quest is the fact that its desire is fundamentally narcissistic, a method of defending oneself against the absence (or in Victor's case the death) of the mother. Any embodiment of the desire painfully intrudes upon and disrupts its basis in narcissistic fantasy. This male romantic economy in turn duplicates the more general fate of desire described by Lacan. Thus Victor's "breathless horror and disgust" register the inevitable failure of any real object to fulfill the fantastic demand for what Lacan calls the "cause of desire" ("Signification of the Phallus," 287).

8. Victor is certainly narcissistic, but Homans's reading of his disgust does not account very well for one of its most crucial features. Not only Victor but everyone who looks at the creature shares his immediate loathing for it. Yet no one else who sees the monster is grieving for Victor's mother or has shared in the dreams or desires that predicate Victor's repulsion at their embodiment. In order to accept Homans's reading, one would have to say that Victor's Oedipal desire ("the predicament of Frankenstein, as of the hero of *Alastor*, is that of the son in Lacan's revision of the Oedipal crisis" [Homans 148]) functions as a kind of generalized social background in the rest of the novel. For the fact that the creature is universally recognizable implies that he embodies something intrinsic to the society's identity, and the fact that the creature is immediately repulsive to all implies that he embodies an aspect of the social fantasy that ought never to have shown itself. Although it does not disturb Victor's meager sense of the reality of others when everyone else acts as if the meaning of the creature were simply identical with his private nightmare (indeed he never seems to imagine for a moment that it would not be so), a less solipsistic reader should wonder why the creature is not merely a disappointment to Victor's narcissism, but a scandal to the entire social framework.

9. In order to explain this odd consonance between the novel's social framework and Victor's psyche, we need first to look more carefully at the dissonance between them. This involves stepping back for a moment from the novel's traumatic moment and the motif of awakening from dreams to take stock of one of the novel's strangest qualities, Victor Frankenstein's profound stupidity. I have found that students, when asked to respond to Victor's decision to destroy the nearly-completed female companion for his creature, often wonder why Victor did not forestall his fears about proliferating a race of monsters by simply making the female sterile. Doesn't he know how? (How could he not?) Or is he simply blind to the possibility? The question gives rise to others. Why is it that the creature's request for a female companion seems to come as such a surprise to Victor? Could he have treasured the fantasy that "a new species would bless me as its creator and source"(55) without having ever planned to create females as well as males? Apparently Victor suffers from a remarkable deficiency of imagination when it comes to understanding or even contemplating the process of sexual reproduction. And of course his stupidity about Elizabeth is equally egregious, as becomes most obvious in his incredible failure to correctly understand the creature's threat to take his revenge on Victor on Victor's wedding night. Is it simply his patent narcissism that prevents him from understanding that the creature is threatening to attack Elizabeth, not Victor? Or is his narcissism only one aspect of an infantilism that

leaves him generally befuddled about relations between men and women?

10. The creature's character is not determined by Frankenstein's ambitions or motives but rather by his creator's ignorance, bungling, and misrecognition of himself and all around him. Thus the whole problem of the way Oedipal conflict enters into the reading of the novel runs up against the rock of Victor's stupidity, which injects something grimly farcical into the tragic rivalry of Victor and his creature, something similar, as Phillip Stevick observed twenty years ago, to the comic quality of Kafka's narratives. Alphonse Frankenstein is not a very important character in this novel, certainly not the forbidding, rivalrous father some readers have made him out to be.[3] Victor acts less like the father's rival than like someone who does not even understand that his father has a role in sexual reproduction. Thus, instead of impregnating a woman, Victor becomes a father by piecing together a body and, in a famously vague moment, "infus[ing] a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at [his] feet" (58). The vagueness here is crucial, because it follows closely that of Shelley's most important source: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (*Genesis* 2:7). But as the creature says, Frankenstein is a grim parody of the Hebraic creator: "[God] made man after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of your's" (154).

11. What ties together Frankenstein's infantilism, the loathing the creature provokes, and the biblical and Miltonic account of creation? Perhaps the epithet the creature applies to himself points toward an answer. Frankenstein echoes his "filthy type" by describing him, shortly thereafter, as "the filthy mass that lived and moved" (175). The creature's filthiness associates him with an infantile sexual theory that accords well with Frankenstein's stupidity: "From the very first," says Freud in the *Introductory Lectures*, "children are at one in thinking that babies must be born through the bowel; they must make their appearance like lumps of faeces" (*SE* 16:319). A good deal of textual detail supports the notion that the creature consistently alludes to this asexual theory of birth. The creature's appearance, for instance, alludes to his excremental status. The near-transparent skin insufficiently separates the inside of the body from the outside, hinting at the noisome scandal of the feces' exteriorization of the body's interior processes. The wrinkled face and straight black lips horridly contrasted to the pearly white teeth refer to and short-circuit the oral-anal track. The creature's luxuriantly excremental hair crowns the portrait. Furthermore, Frankenstein's creative process itself, which strikes the creature as "odious," "disgusting," "loathsome" (154), suggests infantile play with feces. Frankenstein at first undervalues the work of modern chemists who "dabble in dirt," (47), but later he "dabble[s] among the unhallowed damps of the grave" (55) to prepare material for his "workshop of filthy creation" (56). When Victor agrees to start work again in order to fabricate the female companion, anal-sadistic hallucinations hound him: "I saw continually about me a multitude of filthy animals inflicting on me incessant torture" (178).[4]]

12. The scatological character of Frankenstein's creature also conforms to Shelley's religious—or should we say blasphemous—allusions. The most frequent epithet Frankenstein applies to the creature is "monster," but after this come "fiend" and "daemon" (Baldick 65). Since this identification of his creature as a devil precedes any possible moral judgment, the widespread and deep association of the European devil with scatological imagery suggests that Victor is here repeating a conventional set of terms in reaction to his startlingly fecal child (Brown 207-10). But the fecal child has divine implications as well. The scholar of comparative mythology, Alan Dundes, argues that the fantasy of birth by defecation figures recurrently and widely in male god creation myths, including the second chapter of *Genesis* ("Earth-Diver"). Thus the creature is not only a good Miltonist but also a keen-sighted folklorist when he compares his own status with that of the mudchild, Adam.[5]

13. The religious allusion and the psychoanalytic hypothesis present the same problem at this point. When Jehovah looks at his handiwork he sees that it is good, and Freud tells us that children at the stage of development in question are far from feeling disgust at their own feces. On the contrary, they take

pleasure in manipulating them and are apt to express pride and affection for these "children." Even though it would be normal adult behavior for Victor and everyone else to express disgust at the "mass of filth" he has produced, the reactions the creature provokes significantly exceed a normal level of repulsion. A partial explanation of this excess, at least, is that the reference of the whole situation to *Genesis* amplifies conventional disgust for feces into the intense loathing all onlookers exhibit towards the creature. This excessive affect marks precisely the cultural trauma enacted in *Frankenstein*. Reactions to the creature go beyond mere disgust because they also register a crisis in the articulation of the natural and the paternal: God is an impossible father, his mudchild Adam is an impossible son, and *Frankenstein* denaturalizes them, rendering their fantastic character scandalously obvious. And the novel does not merely expose the element of the fantastic in Jehovah's paternity, it also forces the myth's specific allegiance to the infantile theory of birth by defecation to declare itself. That declaration of allegiance in turn provokes a defensive, vehement repudiation of the fecal child. Thus Victor Frankenstein stands between Jehovah and the mad scientist, not so much mediating the two figures as locating a rupture between the "natural" basis of paternal authority laid down in *Genesis* and a version of quasi-paternal authority disrupted by its "unnatural" fascination with technical manipulation.

14. Perhaps we can reach toward a fuller understanding of the way Victor Frankenstein's private nightmare bears upon the social trauma creator and creature are both caught in, however, by setting Victor beside Freud's most charming exponent of infantile sexual theories, Little Hans. Near the end of Hans's case history the little theorist has a crucial series of conversations with his analyst father about Hans's imaginary children. Hans's fantasies of childcare involve defecation (*SE* 10:97), and his account of their origin identifies them as pieces of "lumf," the family's pet word for feces (*SE* 10:95). But the crucial moment that marks these conversations as signals of Hans's cure is his answer to the father's admonition, "You know quite well a boy can't have any children." Hans replies, "I know. I was their Mummy before, now *I'm their Daddy*" (*SE* 10:96; italics in original). In Freud's interpretation, Hans's reply marks his successful negotiation of the Oedipal crisis by means of identification with his father. Another way of putting this, however, is that it marks his final accession to the splitting of the human race into two classes, one possessing the penis and one lacking it. That is, his "cure" also coincides with his final break from another infantile sexual theory, his belief in the phallic mother (see *SE* 10:9-10).

15. Freud remarks about this belief that "Hans was a homosexual (as all children may well be), quite consistently with the fact, which must always be kept in mind, that *he was acquainted with only one kind of genital organ*—a genital organ like his own" (*SE* 10:110; italics in original). Hans believes his mother has a penis, and he believes that he himself can become a mother. At this stage of things, when his mother playfully threatens to "cut off" his "widdler" (his penis), he calmly replies that in that case he will have to widdle "with my bottom" (*SE* 10:8). The threat of castration provokes anxiety only from the moment his belief in the phallic mother is called into question, for only then would it "no longer be incredible that they could take his own widdler away, and, as it were, make him into a woman" (*SE* 10:36). The crucial point is not, however, the possibility or impossibility of castration. On the contrary, the crux of the matter is that "woman," in Freud's sentence, does not mean "Mummy" in the sense Hans was wont to use the term when he identified himself as the mother of his imaginary children. Instead it means "castrated." Thus the onset of Hans's castration anxiety coincides not only with a stricter differentiation of the functions of the anus and the penis, but also with a devaluation of femininity. Within Freud's narrative and therapeutic scheme, the passage from belief in the pre-Oedipal, phallic mother into full participation in the Oedipal crisis involves splitting humanity into those who have penises and those who have lost them, which means, those who can possess the mother (that is, be fathers) and those who can merely be possessed.[6] Hans's cure, in turn, consists to a significant extent in embracing his father's and Freud's interpretation of "woman"—for Hans's mother, we should remember, insists that she really *does* have a "widdler" (SE 10:10).[7]

16. What I've called the stupidity of Victor Frankenstein shares some broad areas of agreement with the theoretical speculations of Little Hans. Little Victor is similarly ignorant, or at least resistant, of the notion that boys can't have babies, and seems just as confused about the relation between genitalia and reproduction. Unlike Hans, however, Victor never clearly graduates into understanding and acceptance of his society's normative gender scheme. The moment of the creature's awakening, when Victor's dreams turn into disgust, does mark a transition between delight in the fecal child and quasi-normal disgust. But this passage is catastrophic and traumatic because Victor never really abandons the pre-Oedipal scheme so as to be able to adopt the normative one. He remains mired, instead, in the strange family economy of the Frankensteins. Victor's inability to understand the dynamics of sexual rivalry motivating the creature's wedding-night threat, for instance, is only one aspect of the odd absence of courtship in Victor's story. Where one might expect to find courtship, one finds instead the astounding generosity of the Frankenstein family, one that apparently overrides the prohibition against incest. The 1818 text blandly disguises the Frankenstein family economy as sentimentalized domesticity: "mutual affection engaged us all to comply with and obey the slightest desire of each other" (41). A literal reading of a sentence like this is borne out by Victor's projected, familially approved union with his cousin-sister Elizabeth, not to mention the addition of Caroline Beaufort to the Frankenstein family first as Alphonse's daughter, then as his wife—as if entering the family were the prerequisite for becoming a sexual partner. The family economy becomes more explicit in the 1831 text when, in an apparent effort to deflect the incestuousness of Victor and Elizabeth's relationship in the 1818 version, Shelley has Caroline explain the appearance of the now exogamous Elizabeth to young Victor as a *gift* from mother to son. Rather than Oedipal rivalry over sexual possession, the Frankenstein family operates an economy where giftgiving solidifies the worth and authority of the giver. Rivalry therefore does not take the form of jealousy (you possess what I want) but rather, as Klein says of the pre-Oedipal child, envy (you are what I am not, can give what I cannot).

17. What Victor's dilemma puts at stake, then, is not merely the allusion of the fecal child to Jehovan paternity, but a system of gender identification, an economy of possession and exchange, and the delineation of endogamous and exogamous relations within that system and economy. Gayle Rubin, laying Levi-Strauss's theory of kinship structures over Freud's and Lacan's theories of family romance, calls this set of functions a "sex-gender system" (159), and our placing Victor Frankenstein next to Little Hans makes it clear that Victor's "circumvention of the maternal" is in fact a stubborn resistance to the dominant sex-gender system's differentiation of maternity and paternity from one another. Victor misconstrues the creature's threat to Elizabeth because he continues to cling to this resistance. When he destroys the female creature, he bars the creature from entry into the sex-gender system and so succeeds in continuing to elude it himself. If Little Hans's cure consists in resolving his Oedipal crisis, Victor's private nightmare cannot be ended in this way because he never stops resisting the terms of the Oedipal structure itself. Thus Victor's suffering and the creature's isolation prefigure Deleuze and Guattari's critique of the conservative logic the Oedipal structure imposes on analysis: "Oedipus informs us: if you don't follow the lines of differentiation daddy-mommy-me, and the exclusive alternatives that delineate them, you will fall into the black night of the undifferentiated" (*Anti-Oedipus* 78). Victor's transgression of the normative sex-gender system and his resolute refusal to allow his creature into it throw the two of them into that black night.

18. Victor's failure to name his child bespeaks the same exclusion. The name Frankenstein cannot or will not give, the "proper" or paternal name, also marks the child as the father's property and as representative of the father's phallus. The disgust inspired by the creature's visibility registers not just the allusion of the Jehovan creation myth to the fantasy of fecal reproduction, but the dependency of the entire system of patriarchal appropriation upon the fantasy of the fecal child (cf. Irigaray, 73-74). The proper name's claim to make the father the only parent that counts depends, first, on the fantasy that the father *is* the only parent (cf. Athena's famous argument to this effect in *The Eumenides*), and second on the logic of castration (that is, the logic of Hans's cure) that translates womb envy into penis-

envy, the gift into a barter of phalluses, and woman into a castrated man. In order to render in detail this more extended implication of the fecal child in normative paternity and the Oedipal economy, however, we need to move to Victor Frankenstein's second awakening.

19. Frankenstein's dream on the night of the creature's "birth" recapitulates in detail the links between Elizabeth as gift, the fantasy of fecal reproduction, and the catastrophic reinterpretation of gift and child under the sign of castration anxiety. The latent dream thoughts clearly center on Frankenstein's manufacture of his creature and his recent, traumatic awakening from his fantasy. The transformations worked upon this content by the dream work itself run parallel to the set of metaphorical meanings Freud maps out for feces in his short essay "On the Transformation of Instincts with Special Reference to Anal Erotism." Freud's essay charts the feces' significance within a developmental narrative that makes it first a gift, then a child, and finally a castrated penis. The dream begins innocently enough with Victor seeing Elizabeth and kissing her. This apparently normal expression of desire and object choice turns out to have been something rather different, however, when his kiss transforms Elizabeth into a corpse. Victor's wish now appears not to have been to produce a child through a sexual union with Elizabeth, but rather to reproduce Elizabeth herself in her role as gift-child. He accepts the gift and attempts to reciprocate it, but his oral gratification produces a fecal "lifeless object" rather than a living baby.

20. Next Victor identifies the lifeless object as his mother. She is no doubt both the original giver and the intended recipient of Victor's gift, and identifying her as the lifeless object discloses Victor's desire to mimic her reproductive power. Although Freud spends much of his essay talking about the significance of the feces as penis-envy in girls, the fantasy of fecal reproduction springs first from womb envy. The first two meanings Freud assigns to the feces, the gift and the child, concern the pre-Oedipal relationship of the infant to the mother's body, so that the dynamics of incorporation, debt, and gift-giving that motivate the fantasy of fecal birth do not necessarily recognize or give any significance to the difference between men and women - a mouth is a mouth, an anus an anus. Only once the gendered antitheses of Oedipal identification enter into the situation do fantasies of anal fecundity and envy of women's productivity become signifiers of the castrated penis.

21. In the dream's final turn Victor sees worms crawling in the corpse's winding sheet. The spontaneous generation of worms from the corpse corresponds most closely to the moment when the creature comes to life. The shudder of horror that awakens Victor at this point declares once again Victor's repudiation of the child. But is not this shudder of horror also a moment of arousal—a hysterically displaced erection identifying, as well as fleeing, Victor's genital desire for the mother/feces/child presented to him in the image of the corpse? As such the moment of awakening finally moves Victor to the third item in Freud's series of identifications for the feces, the castrated penis, and simultaneously suggests a retrospective interpretation of the creature's convulsive awakening as the detachment of Victor's phallus. Thus the second awakening enacts an overshadowing of the fecal child's pre-Oedipal significance by castration anxiety, but only a partial one. The intensity of the disparagement directed at the creature here and throughout the rest of the novel testifies to an obtrusive conflict between competing economies of desire and identification, fueling the excessive violence with which the Oedipal economy repeatedly disavows and repudiates its opponent.

22. In Freudian terms, the novel plays out a struggle between perversion and normality, healthy development and regressive desires, infantile anal-erotic fantasy and mature genital sexuality. But even Freud's own work points beyond the evaluations imposed by such terminology. In *Totem and Taboo*, for instance, Freud's consistent equation of western European infantile psychology with non-Western "savage" maturity surely indicates, once the ethnocentric bias is removed, that mature, normative sexual arrangements in one sex-gender system may well be considered perverse, immature, and criminal in another. Thus Frankenstein's project, rather than being merely perverse or hubristic, also

expresses the utopian possibilities figured in the gift economy of the Frankenstein family. His desire to give to the world the same gift his mother gave to him pits itself against the social norm of patriarchal appropriation and tries to introduce an alternative sex-gender system into the world. Rubin could almost be glossing Victor's project when she announces her own version of the feminist utopia: "Cultural evolution provides us with the opportunity to seize control of the means of sexuality, reproduction, and socialization, and to make conscious decisions to liberate human sexual life from the archaic relationships which deform it" ("Traffic" 199-200). The failure of Frankenstein's project recapitulates a pattern familiar to any reader of the period's literature, the dissolution of revolutionary ambition into tortured repetition of the system it endeavored to overthrow. Like the fate of the Poet in *Alastor* or of the would-be revolutionary Rivers in Wordsworth's *The Borderers*, Victor Frankenstein's attempt to break free of the social contract ends up merely reiterating its deep structure. Yet this reiteration, by making that structure explicit, exposes it to the possibility of critique. In this play of desire, repetition, containment, and critique Victor's project turns out (as Zizek says of Kafka's universe) to be "not a 'fantasy-image of social reality' but, on the contrary, the *mise en scène of the fantasy which is at work in the midst of social reality itself*" (*Sublime Object* 36, Zizek's emphasis).

23. Another way of putting this is that the story of Victor Frankenstein, quintessential male hysteric, shows how the splitting of genders within the patriarchal sex-gender system of Freud and Jehovah paradoxically eternalizes or naturalizes a radical denial of difference between men and women. Castration anxiety splits men from women by differentiating the way they bear a common signifier, the phallus. The resulting (Oedipal) sex-gender system opens a gulf between those who have the phallus and those who merely bear it, and therefore it strips femininity of any positive identity, instead rendering it merely as absence or lack; as Irigaray puts it: "A man minus the possibility of (re)presenting oneself as a man = a normal woman" (*Speculum of the Other Woman* 27; see also 18, and *passim*). The wandering phallus of the male hysteric is not pathological because it moves about. On the contrary, the "proper" journey of the phallus is the very map of normality. The problem with the male hysteric is that his phallus wanders from the prescribed circuits of ownership and exchange. It should not be unexpected that these movements refer to normality in ways that are normally kept hidden. The character Marlowe in Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*, for instance, who is struck hysterically mute in the presence of "proper" ladies, finds himself entirely comfortable with women whose sexual favors can be had for money because, as he puts it, such women "are of us, you know" (II.i). The exchange of money for woman reassures Marlowe that manipulation of the anal-phallic signifier effectively negates sexual difference. Victor Frankenstein's wandering, demonic fecal child exposes the same negation in a far more startling, emphatic, and critical way.[8]

24. That Shelley's novel aims beyond delineating a moral dilemma (regarding the proper use of science, for instance), the shortcomings of a particular male personality-type (e.g. a type like her husband or the Poet in *Alastor*), or a displaced rehearsal of her grievous experiences with family and childbirth, to a critique of what I'm calling the social fantasy appears with equal force in the plight of the creature. Although the pathos of the creature's situation would seem to depend upon its utter privacy, his problem is anything but private in the crucial sense that everyone who sees the creature rejects him in the same immediate, unthinking way Victor does at the creation scene. "Monster! ugly wretch! you wish to eat me," cries little William, as if the creature's oral-anal character were stamped on his features (170). Shelley's Godwinian demonstration of the creature's natural benevolence being perverted into criminality by his miserable circumstances depends upon this universal, unthinking rejection and exclusion. The irony of allowing the creature to so eloquently voice his desires is that he can act upon them only within the severely restricted range given to him by his "nature," that is, by the unthinking and immediate rejection and exclusion he meets with on all fronts. Victor's decision to keep the creature isolated and secret, thereby channeling his extraordinary strength and energy into serial homicide, acts out a repression woven into the social fabric.

25. The fact that the creature's limited options are imposed upon him most actively by Victor, and therefore seem to reify Victor's desire, encourages the illusion that the creature is merely Victor's double. They are indeed locked together in their secret misery, as the bizarre *pas de deux* of the final chase sequence most clearly illustrates, and their actions are at times ironically symmetrical as well, as when Victor's disposal of the aborted female runs parallel to the creature's strangulation of Clerval. But these examples serve to emphasize the way the creature's actions are constrained to the field of possibilities imposed upon him by Victor, or rather by society at large with Victor as its intermediary. The illusion of doubling is also supported by Victor's tendency to misrecognize the relation between himself and the creature, repeatedly imputing his own failures of insight or responsibility to the creature's malevolent intervention. When Victor describes his misunderstanding of the creature's wedding night threat, for example, he claims that "as if possessed by magic powers, the monster had blinded me to his real intentions" (233). In such instances the creature functions as a mere exteriorization of Victor's psyche, but this function is only another aspect of Victor's mystification, an illusion depending on Victor's narcissistic perspective.

26. Rather than being the "vampire" Victor projects as his nemesis, however, the creature wants nothing more than normalcy. Perhaps the most pathetic thing about the creature's situation is that the novel's strongest voice for normative heterosexuality is his. The creature's yearning for a female companion carries far more conviction than Victor's tepid acquiescence to his marriage with Elizabeth, and it is the creature who wants to turn Victor into an unambiguous father and identify his paternity with the authority of the Hebraic-Miltonic creator. The creature's disastrous infatuation with the De Laceys acts out all too well his relation to the patriarchal paradigm he yearns to inhabit.[9] His participation in the cottagers' domestic economy is beneficial as long as he remains hidden, but the elder De Lacey's blindness to the fecal child's deformity cannot forestall Agatha's fear, Safie's flight, and Felix's aggression when the creature shows himself. His appearance is scandalous, its effect traumatic. The patriarch's health can only be restored by abandoning the spot and re-establishing the family elsewhere. The novel remains fascinated with the creature's poisonous intimacy with his creator, and its considerable emotional power emerges from their secret and deadly romance. The popular adaptations, however, seem from the start to have taken a clue from the De Lacey family.

II.

27. Any adaptation of *Frankenstein* perpetuates the contamination of the natural and the paternal enacted by exposing the motif of the fecal child inherent in Jehovan or Promethean creation. However much the retellings elide the rest of Shelley's plot, the monstrous non-birth of the non-person holds firmly onto its central place, so much so that it often draws the name "Frankenstein" away from Victor and onto his creature. Nonetheless the theatrical and film adaptations of *Frankenstein* also consistently set themselves the task of containing the critical energies of Shelley's fable within a resolute reaffirmation of patriarchal norms. The hallmark of this reaffirmation is the project of curing Victor Frankenstein—a plot development that highlights one of the singularities of Mary Shelley's novel, the absence in it of any recognition that Victor needs to be cured. Of course Victor has his breakdowns in the novel, and his recoveries as well. But Victor's self-righteousness, Walton's admiration, and the creature's eulogy all conspire at the novel's end to deny the unregenerate narcissism and willful misrecognition evident throughout the story of his pursuit of the creature. The adaptations, in contrast, make Victor's departure from and return to conventional sexual normalcy a far more explicit and integral feature of the plot. The ending imposed upon James Whale's immensely influential *Frankenstein*—wherein Baron von Frankenstein repeats his wedding toast to the "son of the house of Frankenstein" while, through the open bedroom door, we see Elizabeth administering to the recuperating Victor (renamed Henry)—epitomizes this strategy.[10] Indeed the eventual reversion to problems of gender identity in *The Rocky Horror Show* or the explicit re-emergence of the creature's sexual energies in Brooks's *Young*

Frankenstein appear by way of parodying Whale's film rather than as ways of returning to the fable some of its Shelleyan edges. The project of curing Victor Frankenstein predates the Universal Studios production by more than a century, however. The earliest stage adaptations stake out a coherent set of strategies, later adopted and modified by Whale, to cure Victor and to restabilize "natural" paternity.

28. 1) *The moral*. The clear tendency of both R. B. Peake's 1823 *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein* and H. M. Milner's 1826 *Frankenstein; or, The Man and the Monster!* is not to interpret Frankenstein's project as a "filthy parody" of divine creation, a strategy that implies the malleability of the norm it mocks and perhaps subverts, but instead to render Frankenstein's achievement as a blasphemous transgression of a fundamentally unquestionable divine prerogative and natural order. The 28 July 1823 playbill to *Presumption* tells its readers: "Exhibited in this story, is the fatal consequence of that presumption, which attempts to penetrate, beyond prescribed depths, into the mysteries of nature" (quoted in James, 88, and Forry, 5). Milner puts the sentiment in the mouth of Frankenstein himself: "I am the father of a thousand murders. Oh! presumption, and is this thy punishment?" (I.vii). Shelley's 1831 edition itself picks up the chorus, both in the introduction, where Shelley recounts her original vision of the "pale student of unhallowed arts" whose work inspires fear because "supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world" (281), and in the emphatic cautionary motive Victor declares for sharing his narrative with Walton: "'Unhappy man! Do you share my madness? Have you drank also of the intoxicating draught? Hear me, — let me reveal my tale, and you will dash the cup from your lips!'" (286) In the novel, however, this only adds one more moment to Victor's patently contradictory range of self-recrimination and self-justification. In the plays, once Frankenstein recognizes his guilt, he consolidates his moral recovery by immediately pursuing and attempting to destroy the creature. But the relatively unambiguous moral resonance of all of this depends on a number of other related changes to the story.

29. 2) *The assistant*. An obvious change is the addition of Frankenstein's assistant to the cast of characters. Both Peake's and Milner's assistants are comic foils to Frankenstein's ambition. Peake's Fritz opens *Presumption* with a song ("Oh, dear me! What's the matter / How I shake at each clatter") about how nervous his master's mysterious doings have made him, and he wants nothing more than to go back to his cottage and be reunited with his cow. Milner's assistant, Strutt, instead brags in the opening scene about his master's ability to make gold. Soon after, the assistants both begin to deliver Frankenstein's "dabbling" from its isolation and secrecy by being clandestine witnesses to the creature's birth. It is only in Whale's film that the lab assistant (Fritz again) begins to take on some of the responsibility for the bad end Frankenstein's project comes to. The 1931 Fritz's misshapen body and his delight in terrifying and mistreating the creature mark him as a kind of Mr. Hyde to Frankenstein's Jekyll, less a foil than an embodiment of Frankenstein's sick desire. Fritz's botched brain theft has been deservedly ridiculed (James 91), but the perverse relationship he shares with Henry Frankenstein serves a more important function as the diseased counterpart to Henry's healthy attachment to Elizabeth. The function of pointing the way toward Frankenstein's cure is already served quite differently by Milner's Strutt, however, whose sociability and straightforward pursuit of the butler's daughter, Lisetta, implicitly rebuke his employer's self-serving, secretive, and devious ways.

30. 3) *The girlfriend*. A more decisive strategy for making Frankenstein's situation less ambiguous is the reconfiguration worked on Victor's romantic attachments. *Presumption* erases any trace of Victor's alliance with Elizabeth, instead attaching her to Clerval. Victor plays the role of the father in approving and helping to arrange this match. The novel's odd, endogamous gift economy disappears along with Alphonse Frankenstein, to be replaced by this thoroughly proper, exogamous transaction. Victor himself is then quite suitably wed—so to speak—to the De Laceys. We find that Agatha De Lacey is the love of his life, and that his "blighted love" for her (they were separated by fate, and he thinks she is dead) has driven him into his obsessive pursuit of "abstruse research" (I.ii). On the wedding day of

Elizabeth and Clerval, which has been disrupted by the return of the De Laceys bearing news of the creature's recent enormities in the countryside, Victor and Agatha are reunited at the moment just after Victor, in a soliloquy, has dedicated himself to taking responsibility for the effects of his "cursed ambition" by pursuing and destroying his renegade monster (III.i). His resolution to place the public safety above his attachment to his research clearly runs strictly parallel to his turning away from his strangely begotten child to the proper sexual object, Agatha. By the time he dashes off in pursuit of the creature (to meet an unhappy end when the two are buried together by an avalanche in the play's spectacular finale) he has undergone the cure prescribed for him in the play's opening scene by Clerval: "I am bound in duty to counteract this madness, and discover the secret of his deep reflections. . . . I will seek the cause, and, if possible, effect his cure."

31. *The Man and the Monster* accomplishes even more explicitly Victor Frankenstein's reclamation by conventional sexual mores. Frankenstein now becomes a mere cad who has abandoned his wife (at least she calls herself his wife; whether a legal ceremony has taken place remains vague) and infant child (!) in order to pursue his project under the patronage of one Prince Piombino who envisions Frankenstein as the ideal match for his daughter, Rosaura. In the final scene of Act I, at a ball given by the Prince in Frankenstein's honor, Frankenstein confronts his monster in public, taking this opportunity to make the play's moral crystal clear: "I am the father of a thousand murders. Oh! presumption, and is this thy punishment?" A short time later, Frankenstein completes his moral reconstitution by acknowledging his wife and (genital) child. At this point the play's thematic development is over; the monster promptly abducts the wife and child, an extended chase sequence ensues, and all ends once again in the destruction of both man and monster.

32. 4) *The monster*. What happens to the motif of the fecal child concomitantly with the pat moralization of the fable and the normalization of Victor's sexuality? If the interpretation pursued here is valid, one would expect the creature to become more phallic, and for castration anxiety to become more predominant in his representation, his actions, and his dealings with Victor. The adaptations fulfill these expectations abundantly. The logic of castration tends to overshadow any hints of fecal reproduction, for instance, when instead of the "filthy process" by which Victor manufactures his eight-foot behemoth, the theatrical tradition begins to develop the idea that the creature has been stitched together from dead body parts, eventually producing the wounded-looking, sutured figure familiar to twentieth-century cinema.[11] The most obvious and remarkable change Peake and Milner make in the representation of the creature, the decision to render Shelley's Miltonic spokesman mute by conflating him with the stage tradition of the Wild Man (James 84-90), also considerably softens the creature's reference to the fantasy of the fecal child. This decision could be considered a way of adopting the perspective of the creature and dramatizing his desire for normalcy, for while to a reader of Shelley's novel the creature's eloquence is one of its most striking features, what really matters to the creature is that no one is willing to listen to him. At the same time, however, this strategy now presents the mute creature to us as unspeaking brute energy hysterically disconnected from rational control: he becomes the wandering phallus of the male hysteric. As the tradition develops further, the issue of Frankenstein's loss of control over the Monster more and more displaces the irrational disgust and rejection the creature inspires in the novel, and concurrently the figure of the mad scientist "playing God" obscures Victor's "filthy parody" of patriarchal appropriation.

33. It has been argued that the decision to deprive the creature of his eloquence takes away his only effective claim to sympathy and therefore places even greater, because more exclusive, emphasis on his hideousness (Lavalley 244). What this interpretation fails to take into account is that the dumb-show stage monster is able to communicate through his gestures, something utterly impossible for Mary Shelley's creature. What disappears is not the creature's claim to sympathy, but rather the unbearable tension between the creature's desire and the scandal of his embodiment. The novel presents this tension most explicitly in the dilemma of Walton when he finally meets the creature. The creature's

voice inspires in him "a mixture of curiosity and compassion," but, says Walton, "Never did I behold a vision so horrible as his face, of such loathsome, yet appalling, hideousness. I shut my eyes involuntarily . . . I dared not again raise my looks upon his face, there was something so scaring and unearthly in his ugliness" (268). James A. W. Heffernan is very much on the mark when he suggests that cinematic representations of the creature necessarily dramatize the tension between the impersonal, male-dominated "gaze" theorized in Lacan's *Four Fundamental Concepts* and the individual "look" with its more focussed and less predictable desire (140). It is at the level of the "gaze" that theatrical and cinematic representations so consistently, almost inevitably, protect the patriarchal fantasy's normative status by framing the creature's visual appearance in the anatomical grid of castration and the sex-gender system it implies. Shelley's fecal child thus becomes not only phallic, mute, detached, fragmented, and brutalized, but also the child of light, emerging in spectacular fashion from pyrotechnical display. As if to proclaim the retreat of the patriarchal appropriation of the womb's fertility into a law-like, all-encompassing background, the allusion to Adam as mudchild recedes into echoes of creation *ab nihilo*.

34. Nonetheless the moralization of the fable and the normalization of Victor never quite overshadow what I began by calling *Frankenstein*'s traumatic content. The creature always seems to steal the show, perhaps because that stubborn resistance to Oedipal identification lodged in the motif of the fecal child continues to energize the creature's role as a non-person. The directions for costuming Peake's "Monster," for instance, call for a blue tunic "fitting quite close, as if it were his flesh." His bare face, hands, arms, and legs are meanwhile painted blue to match the tunic. Thus the costume simulates flesh while the actor's flesh simulates the costume, rendering the Monster neither clothed nor naked, both clothed and naked. The creature's simulacral presence, human but not a person, living but unborn, persists through the many retellings of *Frankenstein* and spills over into the story's science-fiction progeny. The breach Shelley made in the construction of nature, paternity, property, and the proper name remains open, unsettling, and prolific.

35. By engaging a collective fantasy about paternity, *Frankenstein* also puts at stake the economy of inheritance and retribution tied to that patriarchal dream. In the chase sequences and mob scenes of Whale's two cinematic versions of *Frankenstein*, the creature turns into a scapegoat for Victor's transgressions. Thus he finally gets to participate in the community, and in fact heals it, but only by being vilified and excluded from it. The creature's screams of terror and pain in the burning windmill at the close of *Frankenstein*, and the parodic crucifixion scene in the middle of *Bride of Frankenstein*, both demonstrate that when he becomes a vehicle of justice, the creature continues to evacuate the content of the form he inhabits. It is not necessarily in adaptations of *Frankenstein*, however, that the disruptive energies of Mary Shelley's fecal child are most fully put into play.[12] Let me close, then, with two other examples of this motif, one from the Gothic novel and one from horror cinema.

36. After Shelley's creature, the Gothic novel affords no more extended exploration of the fecal child than Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. Heathcliff is a filthy, dark child mysteriously born(e) out of the elder Earnshaw's travelling cloak. In the act of birth he first destroys, and then is substituted for, the gifts the father had promised his children. No patronymic is ever bestowed on him; instead he draws his name from the soil, as if to declare his chthonic affinity with Adam. More than one character thinks he should more appropriately be associated with the devil. Heathcliff is an alien force who inspires uncontrollable intensities of love and hatred in the members of the family, and the bonds he forms with Catherine are, according to both of them, radically incommensurable with those that bind together the kinship structure of Thrushcross Grange. The story resolves itself by erasing Heathcliff's monstrous incursion into that economy of kinship, or, more precisely, by transforming him into the *genius loci* of the heath. Like Shelley's creature departing to his self-immolation at the North pole, Heathcliff fulfills the desire of the narrators in a way impossible within the territory they can inhabit; and like the creature disappearing into the Arctic mist and darkness, Heathcliff removes himself from view so as to

allow the resettling of normality.

37. In the horror film, one of the most effective re-conceptions of the fecal child is the return of the dead in George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*. Romero turns the myth of origins on its head, recasting it as a story of apocalyptic judgment. But it is a judgment wholly devoid of rationality. The dead of *The Night of the Living Dead* (whose grunting and shuffling inevitably refer back to Karloff's performances as the Frankenstein monster) rise to eat the living, not in order to enact justice or impose a final meaning on the world, but simply as an etiological repetition of the non-birth of the non-person, the fate of having been eaten and discarded.[13] Rarely has society been represented more vividly as a besieged and precarious fortification against our own appetites. The two sequels shift the location of the fortress, focusing Romero's scenario on consumerism in *Dawn of the Dead* and militarism in *Day of the Dead*, and in the third film a scientist nicknamed "Dr. Frankenstein" tries in vain to call upon the family itself as a means of salvation from the contagious cannibalism of the undead. But this last reference to the Frankenstein story is only a kind of afterthought and even something of a distraction from the trilogy's fundamental debt to Shelley. It is not "Dr. Frankenstein" but rather Romero's *mise en scène* of social fantasy that most strongly connects his resurrection fable with the traumatic content of Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

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Notes

[1] Knoepflmacher assigns the creature a female subject position (106) and May interprets the creature, by way of Victor's nightmare, as his "sister-cousin-lover-mother" (679). Knoepflmacher and Moers both stress Mary Shelley's experience of childbirth. For Oedipal and negative-Oedipal readings, see the following note.

[2] Of the many psychoanalytic readings available, those I have benefited from most include Brooks, Kestner, Homans, Collings, Veeder, and Hobbs.

[3] Veeder sees Alphonse Frankenstein's death as the culmination of the sequence of the creature's murders and as the ultimate goal of Victor's desire, but also draws a sharp contrast between Alphonse and the "truly domineering" M. Clerval (380). Hobbs stresses the way Alphonse enforces a code of emotional restraint that Victor rebels against.

[4] The repeated references to filth have most often been connected to the topic of masturbation, for instance in Eberle-Sinatra, 257; see also Grant, 120-21. Youngquist's reading of the response the creature inspires as "a primitive and visceral disgust aroused by impurity" (345) comes much closer to the present interpretation, but connects the disgust to a version of female sexuality Shelley wants to place "beyond enculturated norms" (343).

[5] The version of the Prometheus myth in which Prometheus shapes mankind from clay adds another important instance to this set of allusions.

[6] For a clear and compelling exposition of the split between having the phallus and bearing it, and on the traumatic instigation of this split, see Butler, 45-47. Within a Lacanian framework, one would not talk of castration anxiety's onset coming at this late date in Hans's development. We would need to speak instead of a reassignment of Hans's anxiety about lack, and of that anxiety here acquiring a specific anatomical referent

with a normative social function. "Castration anxiety" throughout this essay is used in this anatomically referential sense.

[7] As regards Hans's mother's "widdler," it is worthwhile remembering that in Freud's essay on femininity he makes it clear that for a woman to gain full genital maturity she must give up clitoral masturbation and instead achieve vaginal orgasm. The notorious "extra task" assigned to women, then, which Freud explains as the task of repressing identification with the child's first, strongest, but, for girls, homosexual desire for possession of the mother, has an unstated anatomical referent: clitorectomy (*SE* 22:117-18). The silent status of (symbolic or hysterical) clitorectomy, as compared to the expansive theme of male castration, testifies eloquently to the historical and ideological boundaries of Freud's version of normal or mature genital sexuality.

[8] Cf. Hobbs on male hysteria in *Frankenstein*, and Mullan, ch. 5 on male hysteria in eighteenth-century medicine. On male hysteria and castration anxiety, see Hertz.

[9] On the novel's critique of domesticity, see Ellis, and cf. the different emphasis given to the De Lacey family as domestic ideal by Mellor, 221-23.

[10] On the ending's "tacked-on" quality see Grant, 127, who also quotes Colin Clive, the actor who played Henry Frankenstein, saying that he was supposed to have been killed by the monster in the previous scene. The sequence in which the monster strangles Frankenstein and then tosses his limp body from the top of the windmill certainly supports Clive's testimony.

[11] Although the "dissecting room and the slaughter house furnished many of [Victor's] materials" (56), the notion of patching together fragments of different individuals is entirely undeveloped in the novel (cf. Heffernan 144). In fact, it appears explicitly only in Peake's 1823 *Another Piece of Presumption*, a parody of his own *Presumption*, where the tailor Frankinstitch murders his apprentices and sews pieces of them together to make the monster. The stitched-together, fragmented character of the monster is of course one of the ruling commonplaces of twentieth-century cinematic representations—cf. the exploitation of the creature's composite subjectivity in Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* and its development into a central motif of Shelley Jackson's hypertext novel, *Patchwork Girl*.

[12] On the more generalized influence of *Frankenstein*, see James's concise summary, 77-80, with its excellent bibliographical references.

[13] Cf. the first line of dialogue in *Day of the Dead*: "The shit's really hit the fan."

Frankenstein's Dream

Frankenstein's Cinematic Dream

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I am in my mother's room. It's I who live there now. I don't know how I got there. . . . The truth is I don't know much. For example my mother's death. Was she already dead when I came? Or did she only die later? I mean enough to bury. I don't know. Perhaps they haven't buried her yet. In any case I have her room. I sleep in her bed. I piss and shit in her pot. I have taken her place. I must resemble her more and more. All I need now is a son. Perhaps I have one somewhere. . . .

—Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*

1. What novel has been negated and preserved—recreated and reanimated—by twentieth-century cinema more fantastically than *Frankenstein*? And what can be made of this cultural event? Can a reading of Mary Shelley's novel help us understand its cinematic career; and can the *Frankenstein* film phenomenon help us read the novel? I take up these questions without any intention of doing them justice in a conventional sense. By one count more than two hundred films have been inspired by *Frankenstein* over the last seventy years (Heffernan 136, citing Forry, 127); my commentary will restrict itself to James Whale's important film of 1931, which I shall risk treating as an exemplary act of cinematic appropriation. At stake in what follows is a reading of a certain monstrousness of vision and figuration: a monstrousness that both the novel and Whale's film in different ways exploit, evade, and allegorize. This allegory of monstrous vision, furthermore, can ultimately be extended to the cinematic and pop culture Frankenstein phenomenon, which can then be read as a small, symptomatic wrinkle in the techno-aesthetic manifold of modern consumer culture: a trace, like the Dracula tradition with which it overlaps, of technoculture's profound inability to say for sure what it means to be human, or what it is to be alive or dead. I wish finally to suggest that this disturbance in and of media technology is already legible in Shelley's 1818 novel, and that the novel provides us with a powerful critique of the illusions of transparency and self-mastery that technoculture propagates about itself.

I.

2. Let me start with a few observations about Whale's 1931 *Frankenstein*, a film that left such a profound mark on popular culture as to drive Shelley's novel into highbrow obscurity. Unlike much of the literate population of the United States or elsewhere, readers of an essay in *Romantic Circles* may be expected to know well that practically nothing of Shelley's text except the main conceit—the frenzied scientist animating a body made out of corpses—survived the transition to screenplay. In Whale's film, the frame narrative with Walton disappears, as does the monster's narrrative; the locale moves from Geneva to a vaguely German setting (presumably Ingolstadt); and Victor's father becomes a "baron," which is to say a paterfamilias Hollywood style, who rules over his small town and worries about his son's postponed marriage. Even the names of the main characters shift around, as though Whale and his writers had so absorbed the Gothic principle of doubling and secret sharing that they were driven to perform compulsive substitutions.[1] (Victor is now "Henry" Frankenstein; Henry Clerval becomes "Victor Moritz"—his patronymic borrowed from the servant Justine Moritz, who has no role in the screenplay. Only Elizabeth remains—nominally—Elizabeth. Popular culture will, of course, take this substitutive principle one step further in dubbing the monster "Frankenstein."). The film will have a happy ending, insofar as Henry gets his Elizabeth, who has survived the monster's bedroom assault; the monster, for his part, perishes in flames after a brief and rather undermotivated career in crime (trying

clumsily, it seems, to play a game, he throws a young girl—a substitute for the novel's William—into a lake; a little later, for reasons unexplained, he invades Baron Frankenstein's manor to attack Elizabeth, and then flees to the hills, where a search party armed with torches and dogs eventually traps and burns him in an abandoned windmill). In short, Shelley's novel and Whale's film are so different that it would be of small interest to compare them, were it not for the central, haunting figure of the monster and his making: a textual site dense enough to make legible a certain entanglement of novel and film, on a plane that has little to do with questions of a film's fidelity to a novel's plot or atmosphere, or, conversely, of a nineteenth-century novel's ability to convey what we ordinarily call "cinematic" effects.

3. Of all the changes Whale and his writers made, arguably the most significant was their reimagination of the creature as seeable, and the making of the creature as a visual experience, though it is also true that in giving Shelley's novel this cinematic twist, they were not simply contradicting it. In the novel, we recall, the creature is a *monster* precisely and only to the extent that he is glimpsed. His voice, though rough and discordant, acceptably simulates a human voice—indeed, as critics have frequently observed, the creature is a master rhetorician and storyteller, despite the foreignness of the language, or languages, into which he is thrown.[2] As a visual experience, however, he is unbearable: he is a phobic object, a dark sun at which the human eye cannot stand to look directly. In the famous opening paragraph of the novel's fourth chapter, Victor, like the kid who hates kreplach in the old Jewish joke, flinches away when his fully animated creation looks back at him, opening its "dull, yellow eye" (34); William, Victor's brother and the creature's first victim, behaves similarly ("As soon as he beheld my form," the monster tells us, "he placed his hands before his eyes, and uttered a shrill scream" [96]), as does Walton ("I shut my eyes involuntarily. . . . I approached this tremendous being; I dared not again raise my looks upon his face, there was something so scaring and unearthly in his ugliness" [153]). The monster himself, blasted Eve that he is, cannot bear the sight of himself ("how was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool!" [76]). James Heffernan claims that "film versions of Frankenstein prompt us to rethink [the creature's] monstrosity in terms of visualization" (136); he is right, but the particular sense in which he is right can only be seized if we keep in mind that the novel has already defined the creature's monstrousness precisely as visual.

4. Some change of approach was no doubt encouraged by the medium of film itself, to the extent that a cinematic entity must usually meet the camera's gaze in some fashion; but it is equally clear that Whale, steeped as he was in expressionist technique, could have done a great deal with shadow and indirection if he had wanted to suggest the monster's monstrous unseeability. He chose another and seemingly—but I think only seemingly—opposite tack. Seeing, and the seeing of seeing, is announced as the film's main theme by images of eyes that drift behind the opening credits—evocations, perhaps, of the novelistic monster's dull, yellow eye, but also the signs of a peculiarly cinematic appropriation of what is now to be no more (and no less) that "the Frankenstein story." In this story the monster is stripped of voice and rendered up to the camera as the film's most cherished visual experience. Whale furnishes the monster with something like a visual equivalent to the eloquence he possesses in Shelley's novel: laced with shadows, emerging out of dark corners of the expressionist set, all knobs and scars and clomping boots, the monster is nonetheless by far the most human figure in this frequently shamelessly B-grade film. His voicelessness shores up the silent-film theatricality of his efforts to touch light when Frankenstein first exposes him to it (more on that in a moment), and grants extra power and poignancy to Boris Karloff's angled, yearning, threatening, and at times (because of the angles and the rolled-back eyes) seemingly blinded face. Yet having said that we must also say—and it is here, I believe, that we begin to touch on a kind of "rethinking of monstrosity in terms of visualization" that cinema can provide—that despite Karloff's subtle, haunting performance, despite the humanness, even at times the weird beauty of his monster, there is something about this character, this expressive body, that suggests how quickly it will be rendered iconic and self-parodic, and cartooned on breakfast cereal boxes.[3] This monster's visibility is a *cinematic* visibility: the

hypervisibility of an image in the age of mechanical reproduction.

5. Before pursuing this line of thought further I should note that if one claims that the monster embodies "the cinematic" in Whale's film, one is simply paying homage to the film's own interpretive emphases. "Quite a good scene, isn't it?" snarls Henry Frankenstein to the three onlookers—Elizabeth, Victor Moritz, Dr Waldman—who have barged into his lab at the critical moment, and are now in their seats, ready like the rest of us to enjoy the show. In Shelley's novel, Victor Frankenstein labors in sick solitude, but in Whale's film monster-making is a collective activity, involving a tyrannical director, an assistant, an audience, and a grand spectacle, the ur-scene of monster-movie tradition: the lab, the slab, the sheet-covered body rising heavenward amidst chains and pulleys, switches and coils, and great bursts of life-giving lightning. Hoisted up, the slab flickers with light exactly as if an old-fashioned projection bulb were being trained on it. And now it moves down; the sheet over the body is a teasing veil, for one of Karloff's long, elegant hands hangs loose and exposed, and, as the camera moves in, begins to curl its fingers. Cinema has animated it, figuratively as well as literally. It is thus hardly an exaggeration to say that Whale self-consciously stages here a primal scene readable as cinema's own. [4] Other carefully composed shots elsewhere in the film reinforce the lesson. I mentioned earlier the monster's first introduction to light, which occurs a little after the animation scene, when Frankenstein, interested in viewing the effects of light on a creature that he has thus far kept (literally) in the dark, hauls on chains to open a skylight, so that a theatrically precise spotlight falls on Karloff. And near the end of the film Whale stages another almost coyly self-reflexive joke: Henry Frankenstein and his monster face each other in an abandoned windmill, separated by the mill's large, wooden, slowly turning cogwheel; as the wheel turns, their faces flicker through its square reticulations—a brilliant evocation of the moving celluloid strip that allows cinema to animate bodies, which is to say, to be cinema per se.

6. If we then ask what such self-reflexivity means in such a context, we soon see the usefulness, I think, of the conceptual tools developed in Walter Benjamin's classic essay on the "artwork in the age of its mechanical reproducibility." It is no coincidence that the idiom of this film's self-reflexivity is indistinguishable from that of its cultural impact, for the film's central pun—its teasing alignment of monster-making and movie-making—has in the end little to do with traditional aestheticism. No doubt Whale had his ambitions; but his cunning attention to his medium tends rather to uncover that dimension of cinema that drew Benjamin's attention: its inherent reproducibility, which is to say its deep, if ambivalent, hostility to the "aura" of the artwork. Allegorizing itself, *Frankenstein* opens its offering of kitsch: the castle; the hunchbacked assistant; the abnormal brain; the slab, chains, vials, switches, and flickering electricity—everything is in place "elsewhere," having been, as it were, "always already" reproduced and parodied; all that *Young Frankenstein* or *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* will really add are the pleasures of knowing homage. Thus, though the act of seeing this endlessly, even comically reproduced monster seems at the furthest remove from the trauma described by Shelley's novel, the monster's hypervisibility bears the mark of a less obvious sort of shock: the "shock effect" (*Chockwirkung*), as Benjamin famously called it, of modernity as mechanical reproducibility.

7. Yet it is also necessary to understand these scenes in Whale's film as fantasies: fantasies of seeing the mechanisms of seeing—of mechanically reproducible seeing—itself. Lab and slab trope the lighting, the cables, the stage set, in short, everything that you do *not* see when you see a film:

> The shooting of a film, especially of a sound film, affords a spectacle unimaginable anywhere at any time before this. It presents a process in which it is impossible to assign to a spectator a viewpoint which would exclude from the actual scene such extraneous accessories as camera equipment, lighting machinery, staff assistants, etc.—unless his eye were on a line parallel with the lens. . . . That is to say, in the studio the mechanical equipment [*Apparatur*]

has penetrated so deeply into reality that its pure aspect freed from the foreign body of equipment is the result of a special procedure, namely, the shooting by the specially adjusted camera [*Apparat*] and the mounting of the shot together with other similar ones. The equipment-free [*apparatfreie*] aspect of reality here has become the height of artifice; the sight of immediate reality has become a blue flower in the land of technology. (Benjamin, German 495; English 232-33)

Yet though the "equipment-free" gaze of the camera is the height of artifice, no self-reflexivity is adequate to this artifice. One can film (portions of) one's own equipment as one shoots, but the camera and its supporting apparatus will never entirely be able to film itself filming. Such, however, is the fantasy animating the monster's animation in *Frankenstein*. Even as it records its world as saturated with technology, the film dreams of a monstrous moment in which it could expose itself to itself, capture and possess itself for itself, and thus ward off the shock of its own self-replication, its mechanical self-differentiation and dissemination—in a word, its *mediation*. The cinematic Frankenstein monster, from Karloff's version to the endless ranks of imitations, spinoffs and cartoons that followed it, ambivalently incorporates, as living-dead body, the "waning of the aura" refetishized as kitsch. As Jennifer Wicke has suggested of another undead cultural icon, Dracula, the monster provides "a stand-in for the uncanny procedures of modern life," which is also to say "an articulation of, a figuration for . . . mass culture" (Wicke, 473, 475). In the case of the Frankenstein monster, one could even add that his theatrical scars and prostheses and his awkward mechanical movements offer a displaced figure for the utter constructedness of cinematic vision—as though the record of angled shots, cutting, editing, etc. could be inscribed on a visible body. And if the monster's career in the movies and in popular culture alerts us to the scope of the question concerning technics that (as I shall now argue) his creation already raises in Shelley's novel, the novel, for its part, provides us with a powerful critique of the fantasy of self-seeing that inhabits and in a sense makes possible Whale's film.

II.

8. Unlike Whale's film, of course, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* offers us little on which to feast our eyes as Victor amasses his forbidden knowledge and prepares for his grand experiment. The scenes leading up to the opening of the creature's yellow eye are fast-paced but circumlocutory and abstract; even Victor's graveyard experiences unfold in a somewhat distanced, formulaic idiom ("Now I was . . . forced to spend days and nights in vaults and charnel houses. . . . I saw how the fine form of man was degraded and wasted; I beheld the corruption of death succeed to the blooming cheek of life; I saw how the worm inherited the wonders of the brain" [30]). This Gothic mixture of luridness and obscurity has goaded critics into any number of painfully literal discussions of what Victor did and how. (Since his creature is both "about eight feet in height" and "proportionally large" [32], clearly he isn't simply sewing together the limbs of five-foot-five-inch corpses. John Rieder proposes, sensibly enough, that we think of Victor's monster-making as a kind of corporeal knitting or weaving). Eventually I want to circle back to consider more fully the visual metaphors by means of which Victor narrates his discovery of the secret of life ("I saw . . . I beheld . . . I saw"), but we may first jump-cut to the legendary opening of chapter four, which I think we may take as the novelistic equivalent to the primal scene of monster-making in Whale's film:

> It was on a dreary night of November, that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavored to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! —Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriancies only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips.

The different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature. I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room, and continued a long time traversing my bed-chamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep. At length lassitude succeeded to the tumult I had before endured; and I threw myself on the bed in my clothes, endeavoring to seek a few moments of forgetfulness. But it was in vain: I slept indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. I started from my sleep in horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed; when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window-shutters, I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped, and rushed down stairs. I took refuge in the courtyard belonging to the house which I inhabited; where I remained during the rest of the night, walking up and down in the greatest agitation, listening attentively, catching and fearing each sound as if it were to announce the approach of the demoniacal corpose to which I had so miserably given life.

Oh! no mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch. I had gazed upon him while unfinished; he was ugly then; but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived. (34-35)

I have quoted at length in order to recall as fully as possible a scene so overfamiliar to Romanticists that at least one eminent professional colleague seems to have confused it with the film it is not: when Marilyn Butler, in a putatively historicist account of *Frankenstein*'s relation to early nineteenth-century science, confidently tells us that Victor "uses a machine, reminiscent of a battery, to impart the spark of life" (307), we witness the enlivening of literature with props borrowed from the warehouse of the cinematic imaginary. (Butler offers her proof in a decisive though understandably unspecific footnote: "See the opening sentences, *Frankenstein* (1818), ch. 4." She presumably has in mind the phrase "instruments of life", possibly augmented by a phrase in Shelley's 1831 preface, "some powerful engine." Victor, unlike his Hollywood progeny, keeps his technological images carefully vague.) Certainly there are various ways to think of those opening sentences as cinematic. Heffernan, for instance, writes of Victor's dream that the "sudden dissolving of one image [Elizabeth] into another [Victor's dead mother] is 'supremely cinematic,' as [director Kenneth] Branagh has said of

Frankenstein as a whole." And he notes as an attendant irony the fact that the nightmare scene has never, to his knowledge, been included in any film version of *Frankenstein* (Heffernan, 141). In part, one may speculate, this is because the film versions do not need it; they have their own primal scene, as it were. In any event I would suggest, somewhat following Heffernan's lead, that we seek to discover the "cinematic" character of Shelley's novel not simply in its visual cues, but in the relation between the narrative's repetitive, even strained invocations of visual metaphor ("I beheld"; "I saw") and the proliferating acts of articulation and substitution that compose the text of *Frankenstein*.

9. What that last phrase suggests is that the novel's substitutive chains may be understood as its "technic": technic here meaning not the instrumental usefulness with which rhetoric has always been associated, but rather the globalized mobility of significance in an era of mechanical reproduction. One of the things we imply when we call a text Gothic is the hypercoded substitutability of its places, characters, signs, and desires: everything, in such a world, can and must always mean something else, with the result that everything is over- and under-legible, and, visually speaking, is in motion toward a "dissolve into" or "cut to" something else. Victor's dream is in this respect exemplary. His Elizabeth dissolves into his dead mother and then into the waking dream of the animated monster, a chain of substitutions so overdetermined that critics never tire of discussing it, as witnessed by this special issue. And rightly so, for this scene has a claim to being the hallucinatory heart of *Frankenstein*. Not only is its final transition—from sleep to the sight of a seeing monster—the vision, if one credits Mary Shelley's preface of 1831, out of which the novel grew; the specific transformations enacted by the dream also summarize the novel's question concerning technology as one indissociable from matters of gender difference, desire, and maternity.

10. We need to pursue this thread briefly before returning to questions of vision and figuration, for the "seeing" of a body always at some point raises the specter of (the visibility of) sexual difference. Much of the last quarter-century's writing about *Frankenstein* has explored in some fashion or other Victor's usurpation of maternal power in the creation of his monster; less frequently noted is the paradox that a thoroughgoing unsettling of gender identities accompanies this insistent homology between the maternal and the technical. If Victor's overreaching consists in—is exemplified by—the transformation of maternal productivity into mechanical reproducibility, his individualistic Prometheanism nonetheless finds itself displaced into and consumed by the Gothic substitutive chains that make the novel a dream-like array of doublings and mirrorings. What is it to be male, or a mother, or even a monster in a novel in which everyone is a double for everyone else?[5] One can start off with a transitive chain of seemingly male characters: Walton is Victor (the W doubling the V) and Victor is his creature; Victor is also Clerval (who like Walton "reanimates" Victor—in Clerval's case, right after Victor has animated his creature [37-38]). Victor sees in Clerval as in Walton "the image of [his] former self" [109]), and Percy Shelley, it has been hypothesized, might have seen in Victor the image of *his* former self, given Victor's youthful interest in necromancy and raising the dead [22]. Yet this chain of male characters also leads us toward the text's nominally female roles: as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar noted many years ago, Victor must be read not just as a refiguration of Satan and Adam, but also of Eve (232), and of course the same holds for the creature (238-9). The creature discovers an ambivalent double in Safie, and a more lurid one in Justine (who calls herself a "monster" [56]) and Elizabeth (who, proleptically echoing Victor's own self-condemnations, feels *she* has murdered William [72]). Upon the death of Victor's mother, Elizabeth replaces her; and if Victor symbolically kills off his mother by usurping her reproductive powers, Elizabeth kills her off more directly by infecting her with scarlet fever—while Justine, again like Victor, seems in some figurative way responsible for the death of her own entire family (40-41).[6] Walton, meanwhile, in the feminized informality of his education ("my education was neglected, yet I was passionately fond of reading" [8]) resembles both his sister Margaret, the epistelory addressee of the frame-novel, and Mary Shelley; and Mary Shelley, in her famous account of the dream that gave birth to *Frankenstein* in her 1831 preface, imagines herself as Victor, awakened by the gaze of his double—an account that, given the amplitude of our present medium, the Internet,

might as well be examined in full:

> When I placed my head on my pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie. I saw—with shut eyes, but acute mental vision—I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion. Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human edeavor to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handiwork, horror-stricken . . . . He sleeps; but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold the horrid thing stands at his beside, opening his curtains, and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes.
>
> I opened mine in terror. The idea so possessed my mind, that a thrill of fear ran through me, and I wished to exchange the ghastly image of my fancy for the realities around. I see them still: the very room, the dark *parquet*, the closed shutters, with the moonlight struggling through, and the sense I had that the glassy lake and white high Alps were beyond. I could not so easily get rid of my hideous phantom; still it haunted me. I must try to think of something else. I recurred to my ghost story,—my tiresome unlucky ghost story! O! if I could only contrive one which would frighten my reader as I myself had been frightened!
>
> Swift as light and as cheering was the idea that broke in upon me. "I have found it! What terrified me will terrify others; and I need only describe the spectre which had haunted my midnight pillow." On the morrow I announced that I had *thought of a story*. I began that day with the words, *It was on a dreary night of November*, making only a transcript of the grim terrors of my waking dream. ("Introduction" to the 1831 *Frankenstein*, Shelley 171)

And thus the novel is her "hideous progeny" (173). Shelley's own anguished relation to and experience of mothering is inscribed in the textual chain; if *Frankenstein* can always be read "as the experience of writing *Frankenstein*," what this means, as Barbara Johnson puts it, is that "Mary, paradoxically enough, must [as the daughter of two famous writers] usurp the parental role and succeed in giving birth to herself on paper. Her declaration of existence as a writer must therefore figuratively repeat the matricide that her physical birth all too literally entailed" (249). In the novel that resulted from this predicament Johnson discerns an allegory of (female) autobiography as monstrosity: an allegory that offers "the painful message not of female monstrousness but of female contradictions" (250).

11. One must add, however, that *Frankenstein* makes legible—indeed, underwrites to the point of making necessary—readings such as Johnson's precisely by forcing us to understand gender and sexual difference as effects *of* reading. The usurpation and technologization of maternity may be an archaic male dream, but this is also to say, as Avital Ronell remarks in another context, that "technology in some way is always implicated in the feminine" (247), with the result that the more technically saturated the world is, the more unstable becomes the difference between the "male" and its feared and fantasized others. The challenge is to follow out the techno-textual exchanges and economies that generate yet also undermine the illusion of a stable binary opposition between a (male) subject and its (feminized) object. *Frankenstein* pushes us toward a double reading: on the one hand, in this textual universe of replications and replicants, there is seemingly nothing—not life, not death, not gender or sex or natural bodies, or by extension any natural process or state—that cannot be (monstrously) reproduced.[7] On the other hand, the novel's plot offers a recuperative recursus: Victor's refusal to make a female monster halts the technologization of the world precisely at the figurative site of the

world's technological violation—the mother's body. Victor gives birth to his monster, but not to a monster who could in turn give birth. The doubleness of the technotext sharpens here: on the one hand, by *choosing* to interrupt his labor Victor nourishes the illusion that technology is the tool of a masterful (and sinful, and now repentent) subject; on the other hand, the sheer fact that he has a choice to make suggests that no area or aspect of the natural world is safe from technological penetration, and that Victor's individual genius is finally beside the point (as he says right before dying, near the end of the novel, "I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed" [152]). The idea that Victor's male ego can be held entirely responsible for the plot is, appropriately, Victor's own idea. Statements such as "I, not in deed but in effect was the true murderer" (61) or "William, Justine, Henry —they all died by my hands" (128) are ethically valid only to the extent that they are legibly fantasmatic, narcissistic, and compensatory. Victor's is a Gothic enactment of the illusion that Heidegger diagnoses as the self-concealment of modern technics: its fallacious mistaking of itself as the will-to-power of a subject over objects.

12. The Walpolean Gothic tradition, as read by critics such as Jerrold Hogle, may be taken as a decisive early manifestation of Western culture's processing of itself as technoculture, as an era of mechanical replication: it is the Gothic's "ungrounded fakery," Hogle writes, "its re-presentation of antiquated symbols largely emptied of their older meanings, that opens up a peculiar cultural space in which the horrors generated by early modern cultural changes . . . can be 'thrown off' or 'thrown down and under'—'abjected' in the senses emphasized by Julia Kristeva. . . ." (178). The more visibly counterfeit the signs—including, to be sure, the signs of gendered identity—the more emphatic these gestures of abjection; and what is abjected in Gothic narrative is always in the first place a mother (or, better, a figure of the "maternal") who serves as a vehicle for the expulsion of the "least acceptable, most heterogenous aspects of human being in the early industrial era" (Hogle 179).[8] Or indeed, heterogenous aspects of modernity that shake the foundations of "human being" as the subject of its self-fashioned universe. Victor's dream maps the terror of the dead and decomposing mother—the mother who, as it were, cannot ever quite die enough, cannot stop reappearing elsewhere—onto the vision of a techno-creature looking back at him, beyond his control as only another consciousness can be (the creature looks with *speculative* eyes, Mary Shelley adds in her account of her own dream-vision). And this loss of control inhabits the self, for the borders of the self become impossible to establish. Under this monstrous gaze the difference between dreaming and waking becomes as tenuous and vexed as that between monster and maker: the entire novel might easily be read as "Frankenstein's dream," except for the fact that the identity of Frankenstein has become impossible to pin down. Walton, after all, dreams Frankenstein into existence, just as Frankenstein dreams up Clerval at an opportune moment (36); the word "dream" appears repeatedly in the text, as it might well given the uncanny repetitions forming its plot.[9] Everything becomes fungible when everything can be reproduced elsewhere; and if, in a universe of counterfeiting, the maternal body provides a figurative vehicle for the invocation and expulsion of anxieties about identity and meaning, the creature's body—or rather, a certain aspect of the creature's body: its visual unbearability—functions as a thematic focal point for these anxieties. We must now return to the lab and the slab, and ask why this should be so.

13. What is a monster? Peter Brooks, noting the contrast between the monster's eloquence and his unseeable body, suggests that in *Frankenstein* a monster is that which, visually or corporeally, "exceeds the very basis of classification, language itself" (218). Yet that claim needs nuancing. The text makes clear that the act of seeing is bound up with language: in the first place, with language as representation:

> How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavored to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! —Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black,

and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriancies only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips.

The inability to see is an inability to "delineate": a persistent equation in the novel ("Over him hung a form which I cannot find words to describe," Walton says [152]). To see is to integrate visual data into forms accessible to understanding. Seeing is reading: hence the fundamental role of the aesthetic in epistemological philosophies such as Kant's, and hence the burdened role of the human body in phenomenological or psychoanalytic discourses, where the body must provide fundamental shapes and surfaces for the production of meaning, yet must also serve as a screen or surface onto which the possibility of form is projected. Elsewhere I have discussed the importance and volatility of the figure of the body in aesthetic discourse (see Redfield, ch. 2); for present purposes it will suffice to note the emphatically aesthetic vocabulary with which Victor seeks to "delineate" his creature's monstrosity. The creature's limbs are in proportion, Victor tells us (though Walton will contradict this, claiming that the creature's form is "distorted in its proportions" [152]). The creature's features were selected as "beautiful" (though a couple of paragraphs later, as we saw in the extended quote above, Victor will tell us that he was "ugly" even before being animated). A Petrarchan, or even Byronic, catalogue of male beauties jars as a "horrid contrast" with eyes that match in yellowness their sockets and the body's racially marked skin. We are intended to understand by all this, I think, that Victor *cannot say* why his creature is so terrible to see. The creature is monstrous in Kant's sense of an object that "by its magnitude nullifies the purpose that constitutes its concept" (Kant, par. 26; 109; for an intesting analysis of Frankenstein that pursues this definition of monstrosity, see Freeman, 79-90). Something has gone wrong in the formation of form: Victor can build and animate a body but cannot grasp it *as* a body in an aesthetic perception.

14. This inability in turn has to do with the body's being animate, or animated. Its animatedness is troped as the power to see, to look back; the eyes are the same color as the body framing the eyes. The creature's body, in other words, is all eye—or his eye is all body: sheer materiality, as it were, looking back. Victor animated that eye; and though as we noted earlier the text offers us little concrete detail in its account of Victor's discovery of the secret of "bestowing animation" (31), those paragraphs nonetheless bear close reading, since after its fashion the primal scene of monster-making turns out to be, in Shelley's novel no less than in Whale's film, an affair of illumination and lighting effects. Despite the dank and obscure surroundings in which Victor is forced to work, he "sees" processes and differences of life and death: "I saw how the fine form of man was degraded and wasted; I beheld the corruption of death succeed to the blooming cheek of life; I saw how the worm inherited the wonder of the eye and brain....until from the midst of this darkness a sudden light broke in upon me . . . ." (30). Victor pauses here for an oath, an invocation of vision for the sake of vision: "Remember, I am not recording the vision of a madman. The sun does not more certainly shine in the heavens, than that which I now affirm is true" (30).[10] And then a peculiar blindness strikes from within this solar light:

> After so much time spent in painful labor, to arrive at once at the summit of my desires, was the most gratifying consummation of my toils. But this discovery was so great and overwhelming, that all the steps by which I had been progressively led to it were obliterated, and I beheld only the result. (31)

There is, *avant la lettre*, a touch of *The Triumph of Life* about that second sentence: the light of discovery is "sudden" to the point of obliterating the temporality of its own genesis. The secret of life disrupts, to the point of destroying, the narrative of its appearance—effacing, one could say, the "seeing" of degradation and death that enabled life's lightning-bolt triumph. Victor may think he is protecting Walton, but the truth is that he cannot share his "secret" (31), for he does not really possess it. It possesses him. Victor can animate a body that he cannot then conceptualize as a body because he

is doing something he does not understand—or, better, his understanding and his act never catch up with each other: he knows the secret of life but what he does outstrips his knowing. The sign of this rupture between cognition and act is speed. "As the minuteness of the parts formed a great hindrance to my speed, I resolved, contrary to my first intention, to make the being of a gigantic stature" (31-32). The creature becomes, specifically, a monster (Kant again: a monster is an object that "by its *magnitude* nullifies the purpose that constitutes its concept") because Victor is on speed, hooked on and keyed to the temporality of technics.[11]

15. If the light that breaks upon Victor animates him—monstrously, rendering him a zombie consumed by a hysterical labor of animation—this coincidence of light and (monstrous) life reinforces the interdependence between vision and language, seeing and sense-making. Animation in *Frankenstein* is everywhere, suggestive of a textual effect rather than of a single accomplishment of a mad scientist: Elizabeth is "lively and animated" (19); Victor is "animated" while animating his creature (30); the creature periodically receives supplemental "animation" by a "fiendish rage" (98). At the end of the novel, Victor is animated by his own rhetoric and little else: worn out from a speech to Walton's crew in which he repeats his old error ("You were hereafter to be hailed as the benefactors of your species"), he collapses, "sunk in languor, and almost deprived of life" (150). That language should give (and exhaust) life is no trivial conceit in a literary text; Walton writes, but Victor polishes the account to give it "life and spirit," and to prevent Walton from producing a "mutilated" narrative (146). Rhetorical animation, the text suggests, is the technical effectivity of language. And the creature's monstrosity is that of the figure of personification that he literalizes. The catachresis of his animate body animates in turn the frenzied, apocalyptic plot of the novel, which repeats in the cadences of Gothic hysteria the monstrous process through which novels come alive. *Frankenstein*'s cinematic heritage helps us recognize that monstrosity as a dimension of technoshock, while the novel itself destroys any illusion that we can see seeing, or read reading. Modernity is the name we give to the ever-accelerating visibility and occlusion of this predicament. The monster's yellow eye opens as the shutter of a camera that has never since stopped scanning our world, but with which we have long since developed ways of living, if living is what we still do in a world where life and death have become potential moments within an ongoing process of technological manipulation that has no end in sight.

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Notes

[1] I refer here to "Whale's *Frankenstein*," but as James A. W. Heffernan rightly notes, "the genesis of this film exemplifies the way filmmaking disperses the notion of authorship" (135n10). See Heffernan's note for an informative summary of the complications: the screenplay, based on an American version of a 1927 London stage adaptation of Shelley's novel, is credited to two writers, and shaped in part by as many as four more; and at least one important scene—the scene in which the monster drowns the girl Maria—was, according to Heffernan, shaped by Boris Karloff's wishes rather than Whale's (Heffernan, 135-36n10; 145).

[2] See here Marder on translation in the text: Walton speaks only English, so if the monster speaks to him at the end of the novel, he does so in a foreign language. Marder links this linguistic exile to the absence of the mother.

[3] As hypervisible body, the movie monster can also at times appear less sexually complicated than his textual original—hence the Mel Brooks's parody in which the creature ends up in bed reading the *Wall Street Journal*, his monstrous body capable of awakening and satisfying the desires of Madeleine Kahn's Elisabeth.

[4] In this respect as in all others, Mel Brooks's *Young Frankenstein* pays canny tribute to its model. "This is where it all began," says the main character wonderingly, upon seeing the lab. Later, Igor draws a sketch of a sample monster and sets it swinging, and the camera fades to a hanging body—a fine, and finely parodic, recollection of the 1931 *Frankenstein*'s troping of cinema as the animation and motion of (dead) bodies.

[5] Lawrence Lipking acutely if somewhat irritably notes of the plethora of *Frankenstein* interpretations that these "readings seldom take the trouble to notice, let alone challenge each other" ("Is Frankenstein a story of homophobic paranoia? the repression of the proletariat? an abandoned woman? Collectively, the response of modern criticism has been, Why not?" [315, 314]). The text's densely overdetermined doublings and redoublings make this possible.

[6] I expect that someone has long ago noted that Elizabeth's role is in some ways modeled on that of Lotte in Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* (one of the monster's favorite books): like Elizabeth, Lotte promises her mother on her (the mother's) deathbed to take her place: "In the quiet of evening, the shade of my mother always hovers round me, when I sit in the midst of her children, my children...." she tells Werther.

[7] It is a nice detail, given the later use of an equivalent German word by Benjamin, that Walter Scott would write of the "shock" that *Frankenstein* gives to "some of our highest and most reverential feelings."

[8] For an interesting account of *Frankenstein* as a "machine text" associable with the early Industrial Revolution, see Hansen.

[9] Victor's scientific ("chemical") studies, for instance, closely repeat his fantastic ("alchemical" and "chimerical") childhood obsessions (21); both, of course, turn out to be versions of a desire to raise the dead.

[10] The creature will later, appropriately, swear "by the sun" (100).

[11] On speed and technology, see Derrida.