

THE REANIMATION OF A GENRE:
CONTROLLING BODIES AND QUEERING TRAUMAS IN
FRANKENSTEIN MYTHS

by

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The Reanimation of a Genre: Controlling Bodies and Queering Traumas in
Frankenstein Myths

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Mad scientists and their monsters have inspired countless filmmakers since the dawn of cinema. This thesis is an exploration of humanity's occupation with the border between known and unknown. It will examine that special place at the very limit of human imagination, and the orchestration of various narratives that manage to push that limit. The mad scientist narrative is timeless because it is always open to reanimation; in order to push the limits of human imagination, each story reconceives of and redefines the genre. As an academic work, this thesis hopes to match that liveliness and flexibility. It will straddle the many borders between new and old, discarded and coveted, known and unknown, real and imaginary, doctor and patient, and creator and creation. Utilizing a primarily queer theoretical stance, this work will examine notions of gender, trauma, and abjection within Frankenstein stories on film, as well as the implications of those notions.

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Introduction

The mad scientist trope is well worn and well loved by audiences to this day. Of course, there have been countless stories of doctors with indispensable patients, or masters with menacing monsters. The origin of this motif can perhaps be traced to a book that popularized the use of fictionalized science in horror stories, effectively fusing the genres of horror and science fiction. Written in 1818 by Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* tells the story of a man, Victor Frankenstein, who discovers a way to bring inanimate bodies to life. Dr. Frankenstein's ultimate creation is the grotesque replication of a man, a creature who is so revoltingly ugly that the doctor runs from the room upon giving it life. The creature exhibits human emotions and desires readily throughout the story, but is continually met with disgust and fear by other humans, and these experiences render him angry and vengeful. Shelley's writing suggests that the creature is not in fact born monstrous, but made monstrous by his interactions with others, especially the interactions that occur with his creator. Through this lens, the story of Dr. Frankenstein and the many incarnations that precede and follow it become, simply, stories of a creator and a creation.

Humans tell and retell creation myths in order to grapple with the meaning of their existence. Shelley's story is fittingly subtitled "*The Modern Prometheus*" because, according to Greek myth, Prometheus was a Titan who created humankind. The Titan took great care of his creations, teaching them skills and trades like mathematics, astronomy, and medicine. Eventually, Prometheus blatantly disobeyed Zeus by giving humans the gift of fire, and the king of the gods sentenced him to an eternity of torture. Unlike his scientist counterpart in Shelley's story, Prometheus gives everything he can to his creations. His empathy for lowly mortals stands out quite apparently among most Greek gods, who are notoriously thoughtless, egotistical, and

spiteful. The notion that the creator of humanity was eternally punished for caring too much for his creations—for *us*—serves to further ingrain the story into our heads. What was it about humanity that willed Prometheus to sacrifice so much? What made his creations so important? In this way, the human obsession with the creation myth correlates closely to an obsession with divine purpose. The maker and the made are forever intertwined.

In *Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness*, author Richard Kearney writes, “human existence is always hovering about those frontiers that mark the passage between same and other, real and imaginary, known and unknown. Indelibly marked by finitude, the human self has never ceased to ponder its boundaries or to imagine what lies beyond—namely, those strangers, gods and monsters that populate its fantasies” (230). As a study of *Frankenstein* narratives on film, this thesis will tease out those monstrous fantasies, to detect the various forces of culture and society that drive individual identities, and to identify and critique the various ways that humans have conceptualized themselves and Others through narrative discourses. This thesis is an exploration of humanity’s occupation with the border between known and unknown. It will examine that special place at the very limit of human imagination, and the orchestration of various narratives that manage to push that limit. The mad scientist narrative is timeless because it is always open to reanimation; in order to push the limits of human imagination, each story re-conceives of and redefines the genre. As an academic work, this thesis hopes to match that liveliness and flexibility. It will straddle the many borders between new and old, discarded and coveted, known and unknown, real and imaginary, doctor and patient, and creator and creation. Utilizing a primarily queer theoretical stance, this work will examine notions of gender, trauma, and abjection within *Frankenstein* stories on film, as well as the implications of those notions.

As an academic study, queer theory extends the work of gay and lesbian studies by focusing on the social construction of normativity and the production and promotion of many diverse and personal identities. Most importantly, queer theory intends *to queer*. Queering, in this case, is a verb that means to upset or disturb. In the introduction of her book, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, Nikki Sullivan explains further, writing, “the aim of this book is to queer- to make strange, to frustrate, to counteract, to delegitimize, to camp up- heteronormative knowledges and institutions, and the subjectivities and socialities that are (in)formed by them and that (in)form them” (vi). In other words, the goal of queer theory is to combat the camouflaged and intricate root system of normativity by drawing it out in non-normative ways. Queer theory seeks to resolve by complicating, to refuse binary simplifications in pursuit of ambiguity and gray area.

Of course, queer theory inherited many of its methods and practices from women’s studies and feminist theories of normativity. In many cases, academic works are just as feminist as they are queer. The difference between feminist and queer theory lies in the framing of its subjects. Writes Sullivan, “rather than focusing on [sex], sexuality and/or sexual practices; [queer theory] aims to consider critiques of normalising ways of knowing and of being that may not always initially be evident as sex-specific – hence the inclusion of topics such as community, popular culture, race, and so on” (vi). In this way, queer theory extends beyond the boundaries of gender in critiquing systems of meaning. Furthermore, more recent works by queer theorists have attempted to transcend the limits of ‘intersectionality’. In his book, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, author Jose Esteban Muñoz explains that ‘intersectionality’ exists “at the point of contact between essential understandings of self (fixed dispositions) and socially constructed narratives of self” (6). This way of understanding identity

is useful because it recognizes essentialist and constructivist perceptions of identity and accepts that a person can be many different identities at once, but it fails to thoroughly comprehend the fluid and ever-changing nature of one's identity. According to Muñoz, while intersectionality is undoubtedly a useful tool for conceptualizing diversities of oppression and conveying the multiplicity of an individual's identity, it is missing a vital dimension of selfhood: ambiguity.

In addition to primarily focusing on normativity and self-making, queer theory lends itself to *Frankenstein* narratives because queering itself is so very ambiguous. "While queer theory may now be recognized by many as an academic discipline," writes Sullivan, "it nevertheless continues to struggle against the straitjacketing effects of institutionalisation, to resist closure and remain in the process of ambiguous (un)becoming" (v). Indeed, "it is a discipline that refuses to be disciplined" (v). In this quote, Sullivan describes an academia that is uncontrollable, unpredictable, and unkempt—much like the monsters I hope to study.

Many scholars have noted the homoerotics of the Frankenstein story. In her book, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, author Eve Sedgwick describes the plot of Shelley's book as "two men chasing each other across a landscape. It is importantly undecidable in this tableau...whether the men represent two consciousnesses or only one; and it is importantly undecidable whether their bond... is murderous or amorous" (ix) In her analysis, the division of the self (are they two distinct selves or one self, split?) is matched to the contradictory notions of murder and love. By comparing and contrasting the creator and creation at the same time, the author manages to highlight their interdependence on each other, or the ways that each is defined in opposition to the other. The quote helps to pin down the odd, ambiguous implications of the story. The characters can be distinctly separate entities and singular unit, at once in love and in hate—all in the queerest way possible.

If the root of the mad scientist trope is the creation myth, perhaps this gives some insight into the correlation between horror and women's bodies. After all, women are the reproducing sex. Their ability to create life is biologically ensured. In *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Barbara Creed writes, "when women are categorized as monstrous, the nature of their abjection is almost always tied to definitions of what constitutes the proper sexual reproductive roles for women" (30). By this, the author means that female figures are rendered monstrous by way of their reproductive ability. It is the mystery of their ability that makes men so fearful of them. The 'mad scientist', a character who is almost always male, is the patriarchal reaction to female mystery. After all, a male who creates life not only exposes and demystifies a typically female trait, he consolidates a power previously unavailable to males. In this way, even in strictly male creator/creation relationships, a feminine power is present.

In Shelley's original book, the monster petitions Victor for a female companion. Victor agrees to make the monster a mate in the hopes that, after doing so, he will finally be free from the creature he loathes. However, later in the story, the scientist changes his mind, positing that

"She might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate, and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness. [The monster] had sworn to quit the neighborhood of man, and hide himself in the 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" (Shelley 177).

Here, the scientist reveals that he fears the female monster's potential agency. He is quite content with making a companion for his monster, but only when the female's existence is directly subordinate to that of the monster's. Upon realizing the female will "become a thinking and reasoning animal" in her own right, the doctor expresses his fear that the female monster will think and act for herself, specifically by refusing to abide by an agreement that was made before her creation. Victor's fear of the female monster is foreshadowed by the epigraph on the title

page of the Shelley's book, a quote from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Milton's poem is an interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis. In *The Bedside, Bathtub, & Armchair Companion to Frankenstein*, author Carol Adams notes that, when critiquing both the biblical story and Milton's poem, feminist scholars have pointed out that God told Adam not to touch the tree of good and evil *before* Eve was created. With this in mind, Eve certainly never took part in Adam's agreement with God to avoid the tree, and it seems as though she was not actually aware that eating from the tree was a violation—yet she garners all of the blame for that violation (Adams 118). Unlike in the biblical story or Milton's interpretation, Doctor Frankenstein never does actually create the female monster, precisely because he is wary of the actions she will take once she is created. Notably, this fear of the feminine has a very significant effect on the shape of the story, so that even without the female monster actually existing, she has left an indelible handprint on the formation of the plot. In her book, Elizabeth Young writes, “especially in an account of monstrosity between men, the female monster is still the Frankenstein story's phantom limb” (18). By this, the author means that any narrative with a character that exhibits or alludes to the creation of life is exuding a typically feminine trait, so all mad scientist stories are examining the structure and bounds of womanhood within a patriarchy.

The female monster narratives that I will examine most closely in this thesis are James Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) and Georges Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* (1960). Both films present female monsters as the creations of male scientists, leading one to further consider the gendered aspects of the 'mad scientist' trope. According to Adam Lowenstein, who writes on Franju's horror films, *Eyes Without a Face* “both participates with and problematizes [the] othering of the feminine body in confirming male immortality” (51). In other words, even as the patriarch of the film 'others' the female body in order to disempower it, the act of making

it other gives it a special power. The film depicts a feminine monster, Christiane Génessier, who is shaped (rendered 'monstrous' or Other) by her father's patriarchal hand, but eventually frees herself from the constraints of her father and, in doing so, becomes truly threatening to the patriarchy, and thus a true monster.

In many ways, Pedro Almodóvar's *The Skin I Live In* is another incarnation of the same story. At the outset, the patient that Antonio Banderas' doctor character keeps locked in his house is apparently female, and apparently monstrous enough to be locked up. Much like Christiane Génessier, Vera is made to wear a mask and is under constant surveillance. The difference is that Vera was not originally female, but male--a fact that successfully complicates notions of the control of bodies within Frankenstein narratives.

Regardless of whether or not the 'monster' and 'master' roles are identifiably gendered, the roles do have identifiable power dynamics. Clearly, the mad scientist always exhibits some control over the physical body of their subject, either by creating or by altering it. Although Shelley glosses over exactly where her doctor acquired his bodily material, Whale's film provides an explanation in the very first scene, when Henry Frankenstein and his assistant are impatiently waiting for a funeral to end so that they can exhume the body. Later, Henry sends his assistant to the local college to poach a brain for his creation. Evidently, Frankenstein's monster is an amalgamation of many bodies. However, when the monster is brought to life, every part of his body is entirely his, and it is the only body he has ever known. Contrastingly, the body that the doctor gives Vera in *The Skin I Live In* is at once hers and not hers. She uses and cares for it, but she certainly never desires it. As Gayle Salamon writes, in "*The Place Where Life Hides Away*": *Merleau-Ponty, Fanon, and the Location of Bodily Being*, "the body does not belong entirely to the realm of the material; it can only be located in the juncture between the psychic

and the physiological” (98). In short, although we often perceive bodies and their persons to be essentially, inherently and undeniably linked, they actually are not necessarily one and the same. It is important to examine the ways that mad scientist stories complicate typical conceptions of the ‘body’, especially in terms of body ownership and the various cultural assessments of bodies.

In many cases, bodies define which characters ‘belong’ and which characters do not. Notably, in both *The Skin I Live In* and *Eyes Without a Face*, the subjugated bodies are changed so that they match normative notions of what a body should be (a young, beautiful face for both Christiane and Vincent), but the bodies that are produced are still defective and unwanted. A similar incident happens in *Seconds* (John Frankenheimer, 1966). In the film, Rock Hudson’s character does not want his normatively ideal body or the normatively ideal life that comes with it. Notably, despite the fact that the audience presumably perceives Mr. Wilson’s life to be qualitatively ‘better’ than his previous one in many tangible ways (his big house, his nice job, his beautiful wife), we still manage to empathize with his character, to believe that he has made a mistake.

In his book *Horror and the Horror Film*, Bruce Kawin explains why Frankenstein’s’ monster, specifically, is so easy to empathize with. He writes, “the Frankenstein monster is a creature whose growing self-awareness, whose knowledge that he is a monster—solitary and hoping to find a companion—is a central issue and a compelling dramatic development” (54). The ‘growing self-awareness’ Kawin acknowledges speaks to the viewer. Everyone has felt ostracized in his or her life, most of us more than we can count. As we watch a given Monster, we start to see the attributes we share with it, the similarities start to outweigh the differences. Kawin continues, “the more the Monster is perceived as a conscious, self-aware being with readable if not sympathetic motives, the more he is seen to be as human as his creator, even if he

represents the dangerous, destructive side of the overreaching creative act” (55). Here, Kawin points out the root of the monster’s monstrosity. He explains that the more we see ourselves in the actions and feelings of the monster, the more likely we are to recognize our own dark qualities. Once again, the empathy of the beholder is a key aspect of the timeless nature of the Frankenstein story.

The empathy a spectator feels for the monster in a mad scientist narrative is directly connected to the ways that traumas are presented on screen and conceived of within the individual viewer. In many cases, the trauma that a monster endures onscreen is a metaphor for something larger. For example, in her book *Black Frankenstein: The Making of an American Metaphor*, Elizabeth Young analyzes a number of American Frankenstein narratives as allegories for the racial politics of their time, and in *Shocking Representation*, author Adam Lowenstein identifies Georges Franju’s film as a metaphor for the traumas endured by France during the World Wars. It is significant that fictional Frankenstein narratives are so commonly used in conceptions of national (and personal) trauma. It would seem that there is a special value in dealing with traumas from a somewhat removed, fictional perspective. “*Bride of Frankenstein* is able to engage with contemporary racism not despite its fantasy elements, but because of them” (Young 177). Clearly, there is a link between fantasy and trauma that will be thoroughly explored throughout this thesis.

The link between fantasy and trauma equates to a link between fiction and realism, as well as human conceptions of the unknown and the known. In many ways the scientist figure, a character who owes their existence to the logic and reason that defines exactly what we *know* through investigation and experimentation, incarnates that whole world of empirical knowledge. On the other hand the creature, whose very life defies natural law and what we

know to be true of physics, is an incarnation of wild fantasy. The madman's technology meets the creature's monstrosity. In the Frankenstein narrative, logic-laden science and terrifying imagination finally meet—the genres of science fiction and horror/fantasy combine and contradict one another to form a unique sub-genre that exemplifies the very same unification through opposition that defines the characters within the story.

Found at the junction of technology and imagination, the Frankenstein sub-genre lends itself particularly well to motion pictures. Film functions by conveying images and meaning through technological means. It is a mechanical medium with the capacity to capture and harness a filmmaker's creativity and translate it into a tangible, visual, material form. Furthermore, film brings motion to still images, gives life to inanimate objects—a task Victor Frankenstein is only too familiar with. In the first chapter of this thesis, I will examine the prevalence of the Frankenstein myth as it has come to exist on film, and with regard to popular culture. In this comparatively brief chapter, I will present a history of the Frankenstein sub-genre on film, paying special attention to James Whale's classics, *Frankenstein* (1931) and *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935): two films which absolutely and resolutely cemented the narrative in the realm of iconic sub-genre. The history I offer is notably but necessarily incomplete, due to the extreme prominence of Frankenstein narratives on film. Next, in order to demonstrate the utter span and versatility of the subgenre, I will examine some films that have a Frankenstein backbone that is not immediately apparent. For instance, John Frankenheimer's 1966 film *Seconds*, which tells the story of a man who desperately wishes for a brand new life and receives it, is not obviously about a mad scientist or a monster. However, my micro-study will position the relative themes of the film (and others like it) within a larger context of human desires and

existentialist curiosities, finally unmasking the Frankenstein narrative that lies hidden within the story.

In Chapter 2, I will work closely with Georges Franju's 1960 masterpiece, *Eyes Without a Face*. The film is about a plastic surgeon, Dr. Génessier, and his daughter, Christiane, who loses her face in a car accident. The doctor will stop at nothing to correct the tragic accident, so he kidnaps women in order to cut off their faces and graft them to his daughter's. In studying this film, I will frame the ways that trauma forms and feeds monstrous beings, the place of patriarchy in the representation and control of 'appropriate' bodies, and finally the ways that a fascination with modernity and technology threaten to strip humans of their humanity.

Finally, Chapter 3 is a study of Pedro Almodóvar's 2011 film *The Skin I Live In*, about a doctor (played by Antonio Banderas) who has invented and perfected a new type of artificial skin by experimenting on a person, Vera, whom he keeps locked in his spacious mansion. In addition to noting the many ways that Almodóvar's film pays homage to Franju's masterpiece, this chapter will use psychoanalytic conceptions of the mind and body to parse out exactly what it means to *be*, as well as exactly how and where conceptions of the self are formed and enforced. This chapter will also investigate the traumatic experiences that one individual can inflict on another, with special consideration for the development and destruction of gender identity on an individual person, who also exists in a unarguably social world.

As we will see, in every Frankenstein-inspired story studied for this project, an unmasking scene of some sort graces the screen. In many cases, the unmaskings are portrayed in an identical manner. The doctor or creator comments on his work as he cuts bandages away from his creation's face or body. Each of these scenes holds great significance within their respective storylines. The camera waits with shortened breath for the big reveal- the discovery of the new

monster, the new mask. The revealing moment will always be a climax in the story, because the viewer is drawn in by the promise of the unknown. The bandages themselves create a physical boundary between one mask and the next. The previous identity is gone, but the new one has not been revealed. In this way, the bandaged face is a border between old and new, discarded and coveted.

Much like Dr. Ledgard from *The Skin I Live In* and Dr. Génessier in *Eyes Without a Face*, I wish to remove a bandage or two from the face of humanity. Starting with Shelley's masterpiece and Whale's early films, then primarily the works of Franju and Almodóvar respectively, I want to (re)construct and (re)define the role of the mad scientist in popular culture as it has varied throughout film history. Ultimately, this thesis seeks to complicate our conceptions of abjection, in the monsters we imagine as well as within our own selves. As abjection manifested, Dr. Frankenstein's monster reflects our personal evils and deeply buried faults back at us. By causing the audience to empathize with an 'other', the Frankenstein narrative endeavors to make the viewer reevaluate his or her self-identity: to remove a mask or two, and perhaps apply another. Kearney observes, "As our ideas of self-identity alter so do our ideas of what menaces the identity. Liminal creatures of the unknown shift and slide, change masks" (4). Because our monsters, or insecurities, are constantly morphing, our appeals to the social world for acceptance are also always changing. We are forever unmasking and re-masking.

Chapter I

The Monster Meets the Screen: A History of the Sub-Genre on Film

Student: But aren't you the grandson of the famous Doctor Victor Frankenstein? Who dug up freshly buried corpses and transformed dead components into—

Frederick Frankenstein: Yes, yes! *We all know what he did!*

Young Frankenstein (Mel Brooks, 1974)

Indeed, we all know what Victor Frankenstein did. At the very least, we are acquainted with the man's name in and through its association with his highly prized (and then quickly rejected) creation: a monster so well known that its likeness is used to sell breakfast cereal and candy around Halloween each year. Together, the scientist and his monster form the core of a story so culturally ubiquitous that comedian Mel Brooks filmed a parody of it. Built on the conventions of the genre or topic it seeks to satirize, parody depends heavily on a shared cultural knowledge to function. With this in mind, *Young Frankenstein* speaks to the widespread popularity of the Frankenstein story, especially on film.

Frankenstein narratives have remained prominent across the whole history of film, from the Edison company's thirteen minute reel in 1910 to Tim Burton's 2012 animated feature film, *Frankenweenie*. As its own sub-genre—the offspring of science fiction and horror—the Frankenstein narrative seems to be particularly suited to a visual medium that is constructed by technology but steeped in fantasy. As a rule, many filmmakers' fondness for frankensteins on film can in many ways be attributed to James Whale's iconic motion pictures, *Frankenstein* (1931), and *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935). In fact, most Frankenstein films made ever since Whale's classics have paid homage to them in one way or another. Notably, the central themes of existence, subjectivity and abjectivity, and the desire to control one's own body and destiny all serve to broaden the list of films that can be interpreted as Frankenstein narratives—beyond

those with clearly defined scientists or monsters. For instance, John Frankenheimer's *Seconds* (1966) is about a man who wants a different life so badly that he is willing to cut all ties with his family and undergo irreversible plastic surgery at a dubious firm called The Company in order to recognize his dream of becoming an artist. The main character can be read as a monster of sorts, and The Company is arguably an incarnation of the mad scientist role, but exact correlations to Shelley's story are scarce, if not completely absent. Regardless, the themes of unmasking and the control of bodies are quite apparent, and they serve to unveil the Frankenstein-like backbone of the story. Frankenheimer's work uniquely exemplifies the diverse world of Frankenstein reanimations that are possible. Notably, the main character in *Seconds* is gendered as identifiably male throughout the film—a fact that sets his monstrous character apart from Franju's Christiane and Almodóvar's Vicente, the two other monstrous characters that will be closely examined in this thesis. In offering a male character, an American setting, and a 1960s time period, *Seconds* offers a counterbalance to the other key films in this thesis.

By focusing primarily on Whales' two iconic 1930s Frankenstein classics and utilizing Frankenheimer's *Seconds* as an example of another American film which posits central frankensteinian themes without succumbing to the specifics of Shelley's story, this chapter will examine the history and contextual implications of Frankenstein narratives on film, especially within The United States and Hollywood. Additionally, by comparing films that were released in different time periods but share their country of origin and have similar themes, my analysis will provide the necessary foundations of knowledge that inform the rest of this thesis, taking special care to accentuate both the significant themes and central conventions of the sub-genre across time and geographic region.

The appeal of Mary Shelley's novel to early filmmakers can be attributed, in some degree, to the author's descriptive skills. As scholar Elizabeth Young explains, "Shelley's focus on faces and portraits constitutes a proto-cinematic use of the close-up" (*Black Frankenstein* 160). Indeed, the author's diligent word choice and imagery make the story particularly suited to visual adaptations--the first stage production of *Frankenstein* premiered just five years after the book was published, and the first known motion picture adaptation (Edison's *Frankenstein*, 1910) was made fewer than fifteen years after the invention of film.

The production of Frankenstein stories on film is doubly significant because, much like the scientist printed within its frames, the medium itself seeks a vivid, life-like movement by conjoining many static, lifeless images. Young writes, "amalgamated and reanimated, the monster's story enacts both the combination and projection of film images" (160). The link from the mechanics of the film to the mechanics of Dr. Frankenstein are made the most apparent in James Whale's 1931 classic. After connecting all of the lifeless parts together, the scientist needs only a mechanical contraption and a bright burst of lightning to bring his creation to life, much like the projectionists who splice together strips of film and project them for a spectating audience. Remarkably, the use of lightning to reanimate the monster was unique to Whales' story in its time. The exact method by which the scientist brings his creation to life is overlooked by Shelley, as well as in Edison's 1910 interpretation. Today, the reanimating power of lightning is a common convention of Frankenstein films—a fact that underscores the iconic effect of Whale's films on future interpretations.

In that very same 1931 film version of *Frankenstein*, the scientist (played by Colin Clive) exclaims, "now I know what it feels like to be God!" as the monster rises from the slab on which it was assembled. The character's cry underscores the true root of the Frankenstein story. Don't

we all wonder what it would be like to be the maker, rather than the made? In that moment, heralded by the clash of loud thunder and the nervous whispers of his onlookers, the scientist is not a creation but a creator. By defining himself in terms of opposition to the monster, Dr. Frankenstein uses the monster to reassure his own divine purpose, to gain control of his life. The desire to be in control is potent. In order to feed this desire, we examine and re-examine the circumstances of our creation and our existence, and bask in tangible images of powerful creators and flawed creations.

The creator and the creation are equally necessary to every mad scientist story. It seems that one cannot exist without the other, and conflicts between them are what fuel the story's narrative in every case, regardless of any specific setting, character, or content. The intersection of creation and creator reinforces that special place at the junction of horror and science fiction, where the mad scientist trope is so codified that it has become a sub-genre all its own, full of a variety of visual representations. Here, characters that preceded the James Whale classic, like the mad doctor in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Weine, 1920) and the tormented inventor Rotwang in *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927) can be linked to Gene Wilder's Dr. "Fronk-en-steen" in the self-reflexive parody *Young Frankenstein* (Mel Brooks, 1974): each creator is consumed by the task of his creation, each man seeks a kind of control over his own life by seeking a control over his creation. Meanwhile, the creations have their own, very different desires and quests for control.

The desire for the control of one's life can also be interpreted as the desire for the control of one's identity. With the desire for the control of one's own identity in mind, I would argue that John Frankenheimer's 1966 film, *Seconds*, offers a unique take on many of the themes found in a mad scientist narrative. In the film, the main character is disappointed in his life, so he arranges to start over new, with a new wife, a new career, and a younger body to boot. The mad

scientist in this story is the plastic surgeon whom the character of Mr. Hamilton pays so that he may become Mr. Wilson (played by Rock Hudson). Despite having requested his makeover (unlike most of the creations that will be examined in this piece), Mr. Hamilton quickly regrets his decision and spends the remainder of the film trying to negotiate his past identity with his newer one; he experiences the same existential crisis of identity that every sentient creation-character experiences.

In the late 1950s and 1960s, when *Seconds* was released, many white-collar, American businessmen would have strongly identified with Hudson's portrayal of Mr. Hamilton. The conservative, suburban culture that developed after the Second World War was too restrictive for some. As the economy grew and the birth rates boomed, expectations increased and societal pressure to fit conventional norms solidified. 'Keeping up appearances' became a necessary tool of success, because image was the key to conforming. Matthew Weiner's *Mad Men* is a current television show that presents the social climate of the 1960s through the fictionalized narrative of Madison Avenue ad man Don Draper, the handsome image of an American success story. Of course, the image is never what it seems at the surface. Don Draper is in fact Dick Whitman, the poor son of an Illinois prostitute, who deserted the Korean War a mere two weeks after being deployed by switching dog tags with a dead man who was about to ship home.

That a character might go so far as to fake his own death in order to acquire an entirely new, normatively 'successful' life (as both Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Draper do) only underscores the socio-political upheaval of the 1950s and 1960s, and the many fracturing identities of the time. In her essay, "Real Phonies: Performativity in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *Mad Men*", Nathalie Childs describes the way that Don Draper "use[s] the power of the surface to entrance" (2). She writes, "through visual and verbal hints, we see the strain on both Betty and Don of

constantly keeping up their performances: yet when the costume slips, there is no true self revealed underneath” (4). Despite their determination to become a different person, Mr. Hamilton and the Drapers cannot possibly avoid who they are. In an interview about *Seconds* near the time of its release, John Frankenheimer described the intended message of the film, saying, “an individual is what he is [and] he has to live with his life. He cannot change anything, and all of today’s literature and films about escapism are just rubbish because you cannot and should not ever try to escape from what you are” (Sterritt 22). According to Frankenheimer, regardless of how much a person ignores or hides their past or their demons, they will always be a part of his or her identity. It would seem that we will never be free of our abjections, that we must always carry them with us.

It is important that Childs also mentions Betty Draper in her quote. As a housewife of the 1960s, Betty is performing (much like Don and Mr. Hamilton) another role in the service of normativity. Child’s ‘surface to entrance’, in Betty’s case, is a mask of beauty, subordination, and contentment. This superficial mask, which Betty Friedan refers to as “the feminine mystique” in a 1963 book of the same name, may be produced by the same conservative forces that restrict Don Draper and Mr. Hamilton, but it is doubtlessly reinforced by men just like them.

Noting that men have become so accustomed to the housewife stereotype that they often reinforce it without even noticing, Friedan comments “perhaps these Frankensteins no longer have the power to stop the feminine monster they have created” (66). The author’s nod to Shelley’s classic is astonishingly appropriate, given that Mary Shelley was the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, an eighteenth-century proto-feminist whose most famous work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), not only influenced Shelley but paved the way for first-wave feminist activists at the turn of the nineteenth century. Later, the work of those first-wave

feminists prepared the world for the cause that Betty Friedan and her second-wave feminist counterparts supported. The author's nod to feminist ancestry is incredibly fitting as a historical reference and a meaningful metaphor. In calling the men Frankensteins and the women monsters, Friedan perfectly describes the power dynamics that dictate her conceptions of the 'feminine mystique', in which men—functioning as the scientists within the frankenstein metaphor—carelessly conceive of and control the roles that women—functioning as the monsters—are expected to fill.

Bryan Forbes' 1975 film, *The Stepford Wives*, perfectly illustrates Friedan's point. The narrative follows housewife Joanna Eberhart and her family when they move from their busy Manhattan apartment to the quaint and quiet town of Stepford, Connecticut. In time, Joanna begins to realize that the women of Stepford, most all of whom are beautiful, enthusiastically obedient housewives, are not exactly who they claim to be. Joanna eventually learns that the wives of Stepford are all robots who have been designed by and programmed for the needs of their husbands. At the end of the film, Joanna discovers a robotic version of herself that tries to kill her so that it can install her eyes into its head. In the fictional town of Stepford, the men are indeed mad scientists, just as the robotic women are indeed monsters, much like Friedan observed some twelve years earlier.

In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan analyzes various stories of housewives from popular womens' magazines, outlining the negative effects such stories have on a woman's conception of herself. "The end of the road", she cautions, "is the disappearance of the heroine altogether, as a separate self and the subject of her own story. The end of the road is togetherness, where the woman has no independent self to hide even in guilt; she exists only for and through her husband and children" (47). In short, everyone wishes (and deserves) to be the subject of his or her own

story--a fact that is underscored with every 'monstrous' character that seeks independence from their maker counterpart in every Frankenstein narrative. Friedan warns against 'togetherness', or a lack of independence. If the role of the housewife is too constricting, the woman may be indistinguishable from her chores and the care of her children, and the individuality that makes her human will disappear.

In Forbes' film, Joanna expresses the desire for independence to the man appraising her photos. She explains, "I want somewhere, someday, someone to look at something and say 'Hey, that reminds me of an Ingalls'. Ingalls was my maiden name. I guess I want to be remembered". Here, the desire to be remembered is linked to the desire for individuality, and both of these desires are evidently fueled by Joanna's need to be comfortable in her self. As another *Frankenstein* incarnate, *The Stepford Wives* is ultimately about the conception, perception, and control of a self. Many mad scientist stories are steeped in questions of normativity, as well as the creation, coercion, and performance of identities. For this reason, such stories can be read in a queer manner.

Queer identities permeated many of the Frankenstein stories I encountered in my research. In addition to Rock Hudson, directors Almodóvar and Whale both identified as gay. Ian McKellen, who played Whale in a biopic of the director called *Gods and Monsters*, identifies as gay, as does the director of the biopic, a man by the name of Bill Condon. The 1973 musical *The Rocky Horror Show* (Richard O'Brien) and subsequent film *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Jim Sharmen, 1973) both tell the story of a mad scientist, Dr. Frank-N-Furter, who is a self-proclaimed "Sweet Transvestite from Transsexual, Transylvania". Even today, the film is one of the most well known performances of queer and camp aesthetic in popular culture. The cloud of queer productions and personalities that blanket the Frankenstein story in its many iterations

suggests that there seems to be a special fascination with the story among people with queer identities. This fascination can be linked to the phenomenon of identifying with the monster.

In an account of the making of Whale's first *Frankenstein* called *A New World of Gods and Monsters*, James Curtis describes the filmmaker's reaction to an early script: "I was sorry for the goddamn monster". In *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness*, author Richard Kearney writes, "each monster narrative recalls that the self is never secure in itself" (3). Perhaps the queer fascination with *Frankenstein* is rooted in an insecure relationship with the self. At one point in *Seconds*, once Mr. Hamilton has successfully transitioned into Mr. Wilson, his "guidance advisor" tells him excitedly, "you are accepted. You will be in your own new dimension". The assurance that Mr. Wilson is 'accepted' implies that his previous persona, Mr. Hamilton, was not 'accepted'. Of course, Mr. Wilson will eventually discover that he feels just as ostracized in the idealistic world the Company has selected for him, and his artificially secure self will be lost once again. The character spends the length of the film trying to decide what kind of person he is, and his insecurities—the distance he feels between himself and the world—are why the audience is drawn to him.

In Whale's films, the queer tones are much more overt. In his book *Screened Out: Playing Gay in Hollywood from Edison to Stonewall*, author Richard Barrios points out how "Whale's misfit outsiders pitted against hostile mobs, his unholy same-sex friendships, and his amused skewing of heterosexual norms all form a base camp for queer theory" (64). In *Bride of Frankenstein* the latent homoeroticism of the character of Dr. Pretorius can be read as much more blatantly gay. After he is seen eating dinner alone with a long cigarette in his hand ["the homosexual as decadent aristocrat" (Young 181)], he stubbornly beckons Dr. Frankenstein away from his wife so that the two men may work on creating another living being together.

Ultimately, Young argues that the “film’s strongest challenge to normative sexual bonds” can be attributed to the monster’s use of the term “friend” for every major character he encounters, be they his creator, his bride, or the blind hermit he meets in his travels (181). The author points out that, in universalizing one term for every major relationship the monster has, the script “suggests that all affective relationships, with women and men, are as easily ‘friendships’ as ‘marriages’” (181). To take Elizabeth’s Young’s analysis a step further, I would argue that the monster’s use of the term “friend” for every major relationship he develops serves to expand conventional definitions of family and the structure of the family unit because it refuses to acknowledge any power that Dr. Frankenstein may have over the monster as his creator.

In addition to expanding traditional conceptions of romance and companionship, Whale’s *Monster*’s preoccupation with friendship underscores the main themes found in every Frankenstein narrative, regardless of time period or place. After all, we feel at home when we are with our friends. Friendships are built on mutual acceptance and an equality of power. When Mr. Hamilton opts to become Mr. Wilson, he does so because he yearns for acceptance. He wants to feel as though he belongs. He imagines Mr. Wilson, with his good looks and interesting job, will finally achieve a unity of self—a unity that is necessarily defined, in every Frankenstein narrative, by a unity of the individual with their surroundings, a mutual acceptance between self and society. Of course, in order to become Mr. Wilson, Mr. Hamilton must give his entire life over to the Company, so that the entity controls every aspect of Mr. Wilson’s existence. This causes a dissymmetry of power—Mr. Wilson may have garnered some social acceptance, but in striving for acceptance, he has given up the power of individuality, the control of himself.

This brief history of American Frankenstein incarnates and their contexts on film is meant to inform the chapters that follow. As we have seen, a desire to belong is quite universal to

the Frankenstein narrative, as well as a desire for agency. Throughout the rest of this thesis, the various ways that characters seek acceptance and seize power will guide their choices as either maker or monster, ultimately serving to define each one's uniquely specific monstrosity.

Chapter II

Trauma, Modernity, and Other Monstrosities in Georges Franju's *Eyes Without a Face*

“The fantastic is created, while the bizarre is revealed”

-Georges Franju, *Ciné-Parade*, 1982

When Paris was liberated from Nazi occupation on August 25, 1944, Georges Franju already figured prominently among cinephiles in France. After starting a cineclub with Henri Langlois in the mid 1930s and going on to assist in the founding of a large number of culturally-minded film magazines and organizations throughout the decade (Ince 3), Franju set to work on a series of short documentary films (*court-metragé*) between 1946 and 1958 before making his first feature-length film in 1958 (Ince 13). As one might expect, the terrors of World War Two and the Nazi occupation left a lasting impression on the developing filmmaker, and themes of tyranny and innocence are as apparent in his first short documentary films as they are a decade later, in the feature-length horror film *Eyes Without A Face* (1960).

In her book on Georges Franju, Kate Ince notes that victimized innocents, be they humans or animals, are always the “main protagonists of [Franju] narratives.” She continues, “he is always and only concerned to point out inequality and suffering, and to suggest that these derive from the lack of liberty of the individual(s) concerned” (Ince 129). Given Ince’s choice of such definitive language, “always and only”, it would seem as though she believes that the filmmaker values political integrity over cinematic aesthetics—content over style. The director is concerned, first and foremost, with justice. While Franju portrays and exposes injustice quite consistently throughout his body of work, his methods for examining such injustice are far less consistent. Indeed, it is noteworthy that the filmmaker abandoned the realist, documentary style of his earlier shorts in order to gravitate towards a more fantastic story in *Eyes Without a Face*.

Given this trajectory, it would seem that fictional narrative offered Franju some element of political expression that documentary could not. In this chapter, I hope to explore exactly what elements of fictional narrative and horror genre were so appealing to Franju, and the various ways that he used these elements to convey his beliefs about tyranny, suffering, and injustice. I will examine the film through the lens of trauma studies, first as a representation of national trauma and then as a signifier of individual trauma. Then, I will analyze the three monstrous characters in the film, the ways in which they relate to one another and exactly what makes each so monstrous. Finally, I will address the role that modernity plays within the film, with special consideration for the connotations that such a term holds in a world that has been shattered by two World Wars.

In order to clearly convey his sense of justice, Franju orchestrates a matrix of horror on film that succeeds primarily by toeing the line between fraudulent realities and genuine fantasies. The horrific world of *Eyes Without a Face* is one where deep-seated trauma is obscured by allegory, evil monsters hide behind pretty facades of beauty and institution, and modernity deceives itself as progress.

Horror has always relied heavily on the space that exists where fiction borders reality. Fantasy (or imaginative invention) is what creates the specific illusion, but only realism, or the notion that what is imagined is achievable, can elevate such an illusion to actual possibility, thereby making it threatening and no longer pure fantasy. Potential, then, is the crux of the horror genre because without the legitimate concern that one's jarring illusions might be real, there is no actual fear. The use of the term *might* here is important, because ambiguity contributes greatly to whether an experience is scary or not. Horrific story telling requires a fluency of reality and fantasy, and an awareness of the ambiguous region between the two. The ability to not only

move with ease between those spaces, but to stir up the two, causing one to bleed into the other and vice versa, is what distinguishes a good horror story teller.

In an interview for the French television show *Cine-Parade*, Franju addresses his stance on the role fantasy plays in horror, stating, “a character is much scarier if he seems to be normal but acts abnormally. The fantastic is created, while the bizarre is revealed. It’s not created, but seen”. Here, the filmmaker names the ambiguous space between fantasy and reality: the bizarre. Franju articulates the role of potential within horror in a different but comparable way. Rather than bringing realism to the realm of fantasy, Franju brings fantasy to the realm of reality. If horror is fantasy with the potential to be real, then it can also be reality with the potential to be fantastic. Either way, what is realistically abnormal and what is fantastically normal are not distinct entities, but intertwining concepts that relate and influence one another greatly. Horror storytelling requires fluency between fantasy and reality, and relies quite heavily on ambiguous or bizarre experiences at the transitional space therein.

Later in the *Cine-Parade* interview, Georges Franju cites an actual medical film called “*Trepanation for Epileptic Seizures*” as “the best horror film” he has ever seen. Franju describes the premise of the film, in which a doctor actually cuts open the skull of a man and drills into his brain, all while the patient calmly sits and smiles at the camera from his operation chair. The fantastic illusion of the scene is that the patient is actually enjoying the brain surgery, and that his enjoyment is a natural response. Of course, the realist within the viewer understands that this is impossible, that the doctor must have severed some nerve or destroyed a section of the brain that registers pain and bodily harm. The viewer understands that the patient’s response is not normal, that it is certainly not how one would expect to react in such a situation. Yet there is the reaction, real and true and caught on film forever: the impossible made possible. “What makes it truly

horrific”, Franju explains, “is that the viewer’s suffering is not shared. Of course, if we saw the patient suffer, we’d be—there’d be a balance. But not at all. He’s not suffering. He’s laughing. So it’s awful”. It is clear from this quote that Franju believes true horror is derived from a lack of balance, or an uncanny disjunction. The filmmaker makes his audience uneasy by combining familiar and foreign ideas within a single frame or subject, revealing the foreign qualities of the familiar and vice versa.

In *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film*, author Adam Lowenstein notes that, as a filmmaker, Franju “established, if not something entirely new to the French cinema, seemingly so, a cinema of the fantastic and of horror presented by Franju coldly, blankly, as if nothing is out of the ordinary, the strange as natural, normal, acceptable and thereby all the more disturbing” (21). Lowenstein picks up on the uncanny disjunction within *Eyes Without a Face* and affirms its ability to scare, going on to point out the way that Franju achieves terror without editorializing. In one of the most memorable scenes in the entire film, Dr. Génessier (played by Pierre Brasseur) methodically operates on Edna, his newest kidnapped victim, as his assistant Louise (played by Alida Valli) dotingly hands him tools and wipes his brow. Here, the dissonant score that punctuates most scenes from the very opening of the film is nowhere to be heard. In fact, there is absolutely no music or nondiegetic sound of any sort in the entire scene, which adds to the creepy `sterility. The silence is only broken by the quiet clanking of metal tools, the doctor’s heavy breathing, and the muffled, shallow groans that emanate from Christiane, who lies on the operating table behind where her father is working, her body and head entirely obscured by a mound of blankets. After Dr. Génessier steadily outlines Edna’s face in marker, a close-up shot shows his scalpel meticulously cutting along that line. The instrument splits the skin apart, leaving crisscrossing trails of

trickling blood in its wake. By the time the Doctor and Louise are ready to remove the sickeningly pale, flaccid cutout of face-shaped skin from Edna's head with multiple pairs of shiny metal forceps, the viewer is squirming in anguish.

Clearly, cold and distant observation lends itself well to the horrific narrative of the film. The entire sequence is only few minutes long, and the fully static camera does not take any especially dynamic shots, but the understatement in the scene is exactly what makes it so horrifying. The sterile distance produces a realism that prompts empathy; the audience is struck by the similarities between this world and their own. This could happen to them. Without music, camera movement, or any other clues that might hint at a world outside of the diegetic one, *Eyes Without a Face* shows an extraordinary event occurring in an ordinary way—blending the strange and the normal. Fantasy and reality bleed across a boundary that becomes increasingly murkier.

[Trauma]

This surgery scene is an example of what Adam Lowenstein calls the “allegorical moment”, or “a complex process of embodiment, where film, spectator, and history compete and collaborate to produce forms of knowing not easily described by conventional delineations of bodily space and historical time” (2). In short, the ‘allegorical moment’ is the extraordinary event occurring in the ordinary way, when viewers unexpectedly find themselves identifying with that transitional space between fantasy and reality. More specifically, however, Lowenstein’s allegorical moment occurs when an improbable event (the fantasy) meets a necessarily *historical* context (the reality). It follows, then, that the allegorical moment is particularly effective when the history in question holds significant psychological weight. Indeed, the subtitle of the chapter, “Surrealism, Modernity and the Holocaust in the Cinema of Georges Franju” underscores the

crux of Lowenstein's argument throughout: that Franju's proficiency at horror can be directly correlated to his experiences and the experiences of his peers throughout World War II and the German occupation of France.

With this in mind, *Eyes Without a Face* can be read as both an exploration of trauma and an exercise in trauma studies, or what Ann Cvektovich defines as "an interdisciplinary field for exploring the public cultures created around traumatic events" (*An Archive of Feelings* 18). "Defined culturally rather than clinically," Cvektovich writes, "[the study of] trauma becomes a central category for looking at the intersections of emotional and social processes along with the intersections of memory and history; it gives rise to what Marita Sturken and others have called 'cultural memory'" (18). It should be of no surprise that a traumatic event can have a long-lasting effect on a cultural psyche. Likewise, it is probably unsurprising that these effects are often misconceived for what they truly are. In the aftermath of trauma, painful wounds are easily ignored, displaced, or buried, only to be excavated in the future as aching scars with forgotten origins. Displacement—and also misplacement, for that matter—is a defining feature of traumatic experience.

In an essay entitled "Postwar Facial Reconstruction", Stefanos Geroulanos explains the central trauma that informs *Eyes Without a Face*: it is the chaotic destruction of both World Wars, especially the mutilation of the human body. "The presence and shock posed by facial manglees turned the figure of the destroyed face into a crucial description of the effect of [modern warfare] on man's image itself". The author continues, "not only did manglees themselves—not to mention families and hospital staff—have to struggle to find a place for themselves amidst a society that could no longer hide them; but policies of skin grafting and prostheses contributed greatly to the

dual sense of man as having come undone by modern technological culture and being stitched back together thanks to it” (Geroulanos 23).

With the advent of modern warfare, soldiers, their families, and entire nations found themselves in a new world, where technology could build as deftly as it could demolish, scientists seemed to sacrifice ethics in the name of discovery, and populations impatiently awaited the newest incarnation of the future, without thought for the present or the past. Franju’s film deals directly with the aftershock of these cultural memories by displacing the legitimate injuries and real fears that plagued France at the time into a fantasy world--a world where a well-respected scientist might tell an adoring fan, “the future, Madame, is something we should have started long ago” before performing illicit amputations on kidnapped girls and caged dog. Suddenly, science and rationality are exposed as fraudulent symbols of progress. No longer thought to be inherently good or progressive, they devastate and annihilate just as soon as they cultivate and cure. Natural chaos and scientific order are revealed to not be so very different after all.

In order to portray this relationship between science and nature, Franju’s film utilizes inner and outer spaces, and sets up a complex dichotomy between the two. Although Christiane explores the many rooms and hallways of the Génessier Villa with ease, she is imprisoned within the house for most of the film, much like the stray dogs and pet doves that her father experiments on are imprisoned within their cages. In addition to the other inner spaces of the film (police station, lecture hall, hospital), the quiet, cavernous, man-made interiors of the Dr. Génessier’s villa serve nicely as a metaphor for civilization, order and institution. On the other hand, the outer spaces of the film are wild, unkempt and chaotic. Indeed, the river and the cemetery become hiding places for horrifically mutilated bodies, and the busy public streets of Paris

witness Louise preying on unsuspecting new victims for Dr. Génessier's experimentation. When Christiane finally does leave the villa, the howling dogs and flapping doves that encircle her tiny frame help to proclaim the excitement of her newly realized, wild freedom. However, this freedom comes at a cost. Christiane can only enter the outdoors after killing Louise directly, and her father indirectly. In order to physically move from the interior to the outdoors, Christiane must defy the laws of civilization and accept her new place in an animalistic world. Of course, Dr. Génessier (the character incarnation of scientific rationality) has also committed murder, but in the name of science. Despite their apparent differences, the separate inner and outer spaces in the film share many similarities, much like the separate worlds of science and nature that they are metaphors for.

The inner and outer spaces of the film each offer a form of pain, as well as a kind of safety. The labyrinth of hallways within the Génessier Villa are confining, but they also offer protection from a society that would most likely recoil at the sight of Christiane's mutilated face. Likewise, the forest that she escapes to is wild and unpredictable, but it also provides a comforting anonymity—the dogs she escapes with have no interest in whether or not she has a face. In many ways, Christiane's mask provides that dichotomy of space on a smaller scale. It hides Christiane's mutilation and assures a kind of anonymity—anyone could wear the mask and look like she does—but it also distinctly marks her as different—without a mask of their own, no one actually looks like she does. She is at once anonymous and unique. In his essay, Stefanos Geroulanos underscores the importance Christiane's mask, especially in a world so obsessed with faces:

“The face serves as the ultimate display of transparency: the idea that not only you are yourself only because of the visage, but also that your visage confirms relations with others without really showing itself—that in being visible, and human, it remains relatively undistinguishable; it denies you an escape as much as it confirms that the

everyday belongs to a reality that is undisturbing and bearable because it is ostensibly not dependent on disguise, masks, dissimulation, but on a transparency of human faces.” (Geroulanos 24)

Clearly, faces are the primary sight of human relationships. Our faces share enough in common that we use them to determine that another being is human, but they are different enough that we use them to distinguish between people. Our dependence on facial recognition makes the face the most reliable gateway to a person’s inner psyche, but it is still a dependence that informs a system of meanings that surround the face and dictate how we relate to one another. Without a human face, Christiane will never truly be an anonymous member of the ‘undisturbing and bearable reality’ that Geroulanos refers to, and this is the most notable form of her trauma. Writes Lowenstein, “her face remains the same and functions as an undeniable reminder that her features will never truly be her own, that she must always (as she says herself) ‘live for the others’ who have died during the attempts to restore her face” (42). In a way, Christiane must suffer the loss of her own face as well as the loss of the faces of all of her father’s victims. The intersection of these two forms of pain is accented by the mask, which represents both Christiane’s individual face and, more universally, all human faces.

Christiane’s personal, physical injury is successfully shielded by her mask, but in protecting it also draws attention to her difference and magnifies her social, psychological pain. A form of healing one kind of pain has aggravated another kind of pain. Writes Cvektovich, “trauma discourse is important precisely because it challenges distinctions between the mental and physical, the psychic and social, and the internal and external as locations or sources of pain” (18). Here, the author describes the paradox of traumatic experience and expressions of trauma: pain can originate from many different places at once, and in many cases, attempts to correct past traumas produce newer traumas. Cvektovich continues, “discourses of trauma serve as a vehicle

for sorting through the relation between these categories rather than resolving them in a definition” (18). According to the author, the key to alleviating the psychological effects of cultural trauma lies not in identifying and eliminating the various forms of pain, but in uncovering the relationship between the various forms, and identifying the links between them.

It is important that Cvektovich does not see value in tidy resolution. ‘Definition’, for Cvektovich, holds too many risks of new trauma. To exemplify her point, Cvektovich points to performance artist Lisa Kron, who attempts to grapple with the horrors of the Holocaust through performances that relate memories of the Holocaust to everyday occurrences. By comparing the Holocaust to everyday experience, Kron rejects the prevailing belief that the Holocaust is uniquely evil. Refusing to elevate the Holocaust to its own arena of abomination stops the kind of psychological removal that many representations of the Holocaust yield. Explains Cvektovich, “[Kron] painstakingly attempts to avoid some of the effects frequently prompted by [Holocaust] representations, including empty sentimentality and its not-so-distant relation, incapacitating awe” (21). In this case, ‘empty sentimentality’ and ‘incapacitating awe’ are exactly the type of responses that fail to soothe the original trauma. Instead, they cause newer traumas.

When artistic representations of trauma merely cope with the traumatic event by refusing its historical and psychological weight, it is no surprise that one might be wary of representations of trauma. Still, the trauma cannot be relieved without focusing in some way on itself or its origin. Otherwise, the trauma is ignored and the scar merely grows and is buried even deeper. Lowenstein explains that, “Rather than offering reassuring displays of artistic ‘meaning’ validated as ‘productive’ in the face of historical trauma, [*Eyes Without a Face*] demand[s] that we acknowledge how these impulses to make productive meaning from trauma often coincide with wishes to divorce ourselves from any real implication within it (8)”. Once again, the desire

to psychologically remove oneself from the representation is apparent. The ‘impulse’ to make what Lowenstein calls ‘productive meanings’ is not an inherently good or healing response. The author understands what Cvektovich points out: that sometimes these ‘meanings’ merely produce useless responses and empty sentimentality by positioning the event in a context so insular that it cannot be properly analyzed. In order to combat such responses, the representation of trauma cannot let the viewers ‘divorce’ themselves from the meaning. Therapeutic forms of representation, then, must negotiate the various spaces between representation and non-representation.

The value of the allegorical moment, according to Lowenstein, lies in its ability to “navigate tensions between those who feel a certain traumatic event *cannot* be represented and those who feel the same event *must* be represented” (1). Indeed, the most effective therapeutic representations of trauma do not directly address or ignore the trauma, but seek a more vague approach that leaves room for the individual viewer’s interpretation. “Unrepresentability and aporia can be integral to lived experience rather than the deconstruction of experience” (Cvektovich 27). Indefinite representation requires activity on the part of the viewer, who must decide for his or herself what the representation means or alludes to. Some viewers, like Adam Lowenstein, may see a distinct link between Pierre Brasseur’s cold, methodical Doctor Génessier and the Nazi scientists of the Holocaust (42), while other viewers may downplay any specific connection or deny that such a link even exists. The beauty of the allegory is that each of these interpretations is as accurate as the next; the ambiguity allows for as much individual interpretation as individual reflection and healing. Active decision making is what personalizes the viewer’s response to the film and alleviates the pain of the trauma without elevating it

beyond treatment. The largely universal, ‘cultural memory’, of the trauma has become individualized and manageable.

Rather than one expansive gaping wound, the trauma has been broken into pieces, like grains of sand in a colony of mollusks. Each individual softens the ache of the trauma in their own way, and the cushion of personal interpretation that forms around the agitating event is like the pearl around the grain of sand. Artistic expression not only relieves the pain, it produces a plethora of unique approaches to (and interpretations of) the trauma. In *Eyes Without a Face*, Louise’s pearl necklace hides the scars of her facial surgery while also framing them. In many ways, the film as a whole serves the same purpose as Louise’s necklace: it points to trauma while veiling it in fantasy.

[Monsters]

In addition to symbolizing her trauma, Louise’s necklace and the scars beneath it serve another notable purpose. Kate Ince writes, “to disguise her surgical scars Louisa [sic] wears a choker made up of several rows of pearls, a visual marker that identifies her with the figure of the Bride of Frankenstein, the separation of whose head from her body is one of her primary characteristics” (141). Given the shared themes of mad creators, captive creations, and science gone awry, it is no surprise that Ince would equate Franju’s film to James Whale’s *Bride of Frankenstein*. For the author, the necklace that Louise wears recalls the image of Elsa Lanchester as the female monster in Whale’s film. In fact, the female monster does not wear a necklace in *Bride of Frankenstein*, but she does have stitches running under her chin that imply her head and neck were once separate. Perhaps Ince is remembering Lanchester’s other role in the film, as *Frankenstein* author Mary Shelley (a character who does wear a choker). In the case of either

role, there is indeed a visual border between the actress's head and body--much like the one that Louise's necklace creates. Ince goes on to note that, "If Louisa is Frankenstein's Bride, then Génessier is in a sense also Frankenstein: just as the name circulates between the scientist Victor Frankenstein and his creature in Shelley's novel, monstrous characteristics circulate in Franju's story" (141). This time, Ince knowingly mixes up two separate roles in the *Frankenstein* story. The female monster is made to be a bride for Dr. Frankenstein's monster, but Dr. Génessier much more resembles Dr. Frankenstein himself. Well aware that the monster and its creator are often interchangeably called Frankenstein in popular culture, Ince sees a similar pattern of interchangeability in Franju's film.

It is true that monstrous characteristics circulate in *Eyes Without a Face*. Just like Ince, who cannot untangle the roles of Mary Shelley and the Bride in James Whale's film, or the various references found in pop culture which cannot distinguish the name of the creation from the name of the creator in Shelley's mythic tale, it is quite difficult for the viewer to decipher exactly which characters are evil in Franju's film. For the filmmaker, 'monster' is not a fixed identity. Instead, it is a much more fluid category, one that is just as easily slipped into as it is stepped out of. In fact, all three of the main characters in the film can be read as monstrous at one point or another, and this permeability of persona ultimately unnerves the viewer and achieves a better horror film.

In the first chapter of *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, author Barbara Creed examines the production of monstrous female characters on film using Julia Kristeva's work, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Abjection, as defined by Kristeva, is the condition of a "jettisoned object", or one that is "radically excluded" and "lies beyond the set" (Kristeva 2). It is "not me. Not that. But not nothing either. A 'something' that I do not

recognize as a thing” (Kristeva 2). Abjection radically opposes any desirable human quality, but in doing so, the abject helps to define those human qualities. For Barbara Creed, abjection is the defining factor of monstrosities on film. She writes, “definitions of the monstrous as constructed in the modern horror text are grounded in ancient religious and historical notions of abjection -- particularly in relation to the following religious ‘abominations’: sexual immorality and perversion; corporeal alteration, decay and death; human sacrifice; murder; the corpse; bodily wastes; the feminine body and incest” (Creed 9).

True to form, *Eyes Without a Face* deals out horror in the form of a number of these abominations. The first few minutes of the film introduces both a living female-bodied character (Louise) and a female-bodied corpse. As Louise struggles to throw the female corpse into the river, the viewer identifies the first monster of the film. In fact, because of the dark setting, the unidentifiable corpse, and the general lack of expose, Louise’s evil is perhaps the first narrative element that viewers are actually sure of. By establishing Louise as a monster right away, Franju ensures that the audience will have a harder time identifying any other monsters. If Louise is evil, it is possible to point out that other characters are ‘not Louise’ and therefore not (as) evil. Louises’ evil makes the evil of the other characters much more startling because the viewer expects them to be identifiably *different from Louise*. The revelation that characters are not always what they first seem to be serves the horror genre well.

Within the film narrative, Louise is a fairly simple character with fairly simple motives: Dr. Génessier once restored her face, so now she feels indebted to him and would stop at nothing to repay him. By these terms, she is less a monstrous entity than a monstrous conduit. Kate Ince explains, “through the person of Louisa, Génessier’s criminal activities are entirely mediated by women, hidden from public view and official record, the visible world of the patriarchy” (142).

In this quote, it is not Louise's actions that are the most upsetting, but the source of her actions. Patriarchy, which produces and enforces systems of meaning that serve white male desires, is notoriously concerned with female appearance and can be identified as one of the largest causes of Christiane's designation as a monstrous other. Ince is most upset by the fact that Louise is participating in and even propelling a patriarchal agenda. Ince elaborates,

“Louisa's key role in the narrative of *Les Yeux Sans Visage* supports a reading of patriarchy often made by feminist critics and implicit in Lacan's concept of the Symbolic order, namely, that phallogentric power makes itself felt as violence or loss in all social relationships, including relationships between women. Louisa appears to be and indeed is a kind of substitute mother to Christiane (whose real mother we are never told anything about), but all her kindness to Christiane amounts to is repeated coaxing to wear the mask that makes her appearance socially acceptable, in other words, to collude with Genessier's [sic] patriarchal regime.” (Ince 141)

As a monstrous conduit beset by a patriarchal world, Louise becomes accomplice to the patriarchy. Her participation is unexpected because she is female, and all that more jarring because she herself has experienced the loss of a face. After Edna's surgery scene, Louise tells the doctor, “I'll never forget that I owe you my face”. With their shared experience, it seems that Louise is the ideal a peer (or ‘substitute mother’) for Christiane, but in fact the secretary is far more concerned with pleasing Dr. Génessier, and gratefully honoring her debt to him. There is a scene in the film when Louise asks the doctor, “Why are you lying to me? I've known you long enough to read your face”. In a movie that is all about the importance of faces to human interaction, ‘reading a face’ is the highest form of intimacy. It seems that Louise not only feels indebted to Dr. Génessier, but that she has fallen in love with him, and her blind infatuation helps to explain her complicity with the patriarchy.

It is not entirely clear if Dr. Génessier is as fully infatuated as Louise in the narrative, but he is definitely complicit in the romance. Notably, despite the fact that the Dr. Génessier and his secretary appear to be consenting adults without other romantic involvements, the hushed and

shameful way that the two interact implies that their romance is supposed to be read as immoral. Indeed, as a monster, Louise's primary form of abjection is probably sexual immorality.

“Most horror films also construct a border between what Kristeva refers to as ‘the clean and proper body’ and the abject body, or the body which has lost its form and integrity” explains Creed. The author continues, “the image of the woman’s body, because of its maternal functions, acknowledges its ‘debt to nature’ and consequently is more likely to signify the abject” (11). When Kate Ince points out that Louise is a substitute mother figure to Christiane, but that her motherly efforts essentially amount to reinforcing patriarchal ideology, the author is picking up on the an important characteristic. In fact, Louise is the best example the film has of a ‘clean and proper body’. A hair is never out of place, her eyeliner is always perfectly winged-- her pearls and perfect coif help to convey that Louise is a downright perfect specimen of femininity. Having no children of her own, her care for Christiane is hardly motivated by motherly instinct. Louise’s inability to show motherly affection (beyond shallow attempts to get Christiane to wear her mask) eliminates her ‘debt to nature’ and make her all the more ‘clean and proper’. In this way, Louise serves as a foil for her ward.

Christiane fully lacks Louise’s proper and impeccable femininity. She wears the same housecoat for all of the film, her hair usually looks quite disheveled and, unlike Louise, she frequently disobeys the orders of her father. However, the characters’ wide eyes and soft voice give Christiane a pure innocence that Louise will never achieve. After Christiane’s facial surgery is complete, Louise observes, “there’s something angelic about you now”. It seems that, while Louise may embody an immaculate femininity, it is Christiane who embodies *the* immaculate, in the religious sense of freedom from sin. Christiane then responds, “angelic? I don’t know about that. When I look in a mirror, I feel like I’m looking at someone who looks like me, but seems to

come from the Beyond.” Here, Christiane is pointing out her own abjection. According to Barbara Creed, the abject “must be ‘radically excluded’ from the body and deposited on the other side of an imaginary border which separates the self from that which threatens the self” (9). The imaginary border, in Christiane’s case, is what she calls ‘The Beyond’, and it keeps the horrific actions that have granted Christiane a face away from the life she now has with that face. Still, when Christiane looks into a mirror, she cannot deny that her ‘new face’ is the product of treachery. She recognizes herself in the mirror, but instead of seeing the angelic beauty and hope for a future that Louise sees, Christiane sees the evil of the past: the haunting deaths of Edna and the other girls that came before her. The white housecoat, flawless but masked face, and the way that she seems to float from room to room make it clear: Christiane is paradoxically both a virtuous angel and a sinful ghost. Her actions are sometimes those of a savior (like when she sets the animals free from their cages), and sometimes those of a monster (like when she stabs Louise in the neck with a scalpel).

In the following scene, a series of stills show Christiane’s facial graft failing. By week 10, Christiane’s face is almost unrecognizable because of the gangrene and decay that have set in. She looks much more like a decaying corpse than a living being. Barbara Creed writes, “within a biblical context the corpse is also utterly abject. It signifies one of the most basic forms of pollution—the body without a soul” (10). According to the author, the viewer feels disgust at the sight of Christiane’s deteriorating face because it reminds us of our own death, of the loss of our soul. In a five-minute sequence in the film, Christiane is presented as an angel, a ghost, and a soulless corpse. Whether she is a soul without a truly human body, or a human body without a soul, her monstrosity depends on an ever-shifting crack in her humanity but, because it is

unclear, it is also the hardest to label as ‘monstrous’. The monstrosity itself is flawed, which makes it all the more human and relatable; less abjective and more subjective.

As a monster, Christiane is striking because she garners as much compassion as she does contempt. Viewer opinion seems to differ on just how monstrous or innocent Christiane truly is. The final scene of the film, in which Christiane stabs Louise in the neck and sets free the dogs that will attack and kill her father, has been interpreted in a number of different ways. Kate Ince sees the scene as an indication that it is “not too late to arrest the repeated violence being done to other young women” and believes Christiane is acting “for other women, not just for herself” (140). Adam Lowenstein, on the other hand, believes the scene to be proof of Christiane’s inherent evil. He notes the way Christiane “tacitly condones the deaths of the young women sacrificed for her benefit and eventually becomes a murderer herself” (42). Finally, Stephanos Geroulanos points out what he perceives to be a lack of agency on Christiane’s part, criticizing the way that she “doesn’t seem to consider herself responsible” for the deaths of her father’s victims “in the least”(15). Differing opinions about her motives and actions make Christiane ambiguously heroic and monstrous. Geroulanos explains,

“Christiane is a character marked by nothing but opacity. If she poses an interesting problem for the viewer, this is because her status as scarred victim is ambiguous in a complex and fragile sense. Dead yet living, she dreams of returning to her old life yet wishes she were really dead; because her identity has been destroyed, her faculties and emotional force have been heightened. Dead yet living, she elides the laws of others by persisting in her own opaque and sub-human space.” (28)

Like Dr. Frankenstein’s monster, Christiane is the being we pity at times and fear at others. When Christiane tells Louise, “my face frightens me. My mask frightens me even more”, she is revealing a fear of separation from the world around her. The loss of a face is the mark of a loss of identity. At this moment, she is less a monster and more a girl who ‘dreams of returning to her old life’ and knows that she cannot. The audience identifies with her heartache, her desire

to belong, but shatters at her endeavors to re-enter society. Intrigued by the contradiction, we empathize with the pain of her physical flaws but recoil when we witness her flawed behavior. She is not the hero of the narrative, but the anti-hero.

If Louise is the first monster we encounter in the film, and Christiane is the most ambiguously monstrous, then Dr. Génessier is the final monster to be discovered by the audience. Introduced giving a scientific lecture to an enamored audience, Génessier's collected demeanor and the warmly lit lecture hall comfort the viewer, who has just watched Louise struggle to throw an unnamed corpse into a river under cover of darkness. Here is the beloved town doctor, a trustworthy figure of authority. As the narrative progresses, Dr. Génessier cool and calculated actions continue to be misconstrued as compassion and benevolence, when in fact they are the signs of his ties to a controlling patriarchy. It is Dr. Génessier who urges Christiane to hide her face behind a pretty white mask and who stops Louise as she lifts her pearl necklace to show him the scars of her own facial surgery. Clearly, the doctor prefers the clean white facades of the mask and the necklace to the messy scars underneath. Kate Ince explains, "these exaggerated signs of ideal femininity compensate for anxiety about the proximity of femininity and death, which always threatens to undermine Génessier's illusory masculine authority over immortality (he is, after all, a celebrated plastic surgeon)" (52). In the world of *Eyes Without a Face*, where truths lie behind facades and the real monsters must be unmasked, the doctor's misogyny is obscured by his intellectual authority as a doctor.

Feminine energy threatens the doctor's patriarchal desire for control. After Christiane's seemingly successful facial graft, the doctor admires his handiwork, telling Christiane to smile. She barely obliges, and the doctor asks her to smile once again. When Christiane's face finally cracks into a full smile, Dr. Génessier quickly reprimands her, "not so big!" Something about

Christiane's smile has upset her father. In that facial expression, Dr. Génessier senses the limitations of his authority—a femininity he can never truly command. In smiling without the mask, Christiane has taken control of her face and expressed an interior emotion. It is a sign of her inner spirit, and in an effort to maintain his power, Dr. Génessier orders it to stop.

Order and control, the very foundations of Dr. Génessier's value system, become apparent through his actions as well as his appearance.. When Louise brings Edna back to the Villa, the women approach the front door. Suddenly, the lights within the house turn on and the illumination gives the pillars on the front porch long shadows that look like the bars of a cage. Then, as if by some mechanism, the doors automatically open to reveal the doctor himself, standing very still. The lenses of his glasses reflect the chandelier and, briefly, his eyes are obscured with bright white light. For a moment, the doctor has a face, but he has no eyes: he is an automaton. The authority, reason, and logic which were comforting for the first part of the film become mechanized and inhuman. No longer a loving father but a robotic patriarch, the doctor's true monstrosity is revealed.

[Conclusion]

As a symbol of rationality and medicine, Dr. Génessier represents the true horror in Franju's film: modernity. Modernity has always presented itself as both good and progressive. Science and reason, the central principles of modernity, are considered virtuous even now, after the destruction of World War II—a destruction that is indebted to many scientific discoveries. It seems that Franju was acutely aware of modernity's deceiving presentation as progressive, and his film is a critique of this deception. Geroulanos explains that the film “presents modernity as a convergence of technical kinds of violence that prey upon the weak, undermining rites and laws,

and covering this up through the celebrated successes of medical and scientific innovation, namely aesthetic perfection and upper-class respectability” (27). Indeed, humanity is nothing without empathy, and the elevation of science and reason above human relationship has been detrimental to instinctual human compassion. The author continues, “modernity has destroyed the naturally beautiful, and with it the realm of ethical co-existence. Modern man can try to scientifically reconstruct these; yet the success he aspires to will prove at best momentary” (27). Franju is afraid of where scientific discovery will lead us. He fears modern innovation gone wrong—a rationality so mechanical that it obstructs our deepest ethics. The true monster of the film is not the mad scientist himself, but the science he has gone mad over.

Chapter III

What It Means To Be: Psychoanalytic Conceptions of the Self in a Social World in Pedro Almodóvar's *The Skin I Live In*

“The relation of one person to his surroundings is a continuing preoccupation. It can be casual or close, simple or involved, subtle or blunt. It can be painful or pleasant. Most of all it can be real or imaginary.”

Louise Bourgeois, 1992

In his extensive work on the films of Pedro Almodóvar, scholar Ernesto Acevedo-Muñoz has noted the Spanish director's preoccupation with the human body, and the ways that this preoccupation can be linked to the socio-political orientation of an entire country in post-Franco flux. The author explains that Almodóvar's diverse array of transgendered and transsexual characters “emphasize the human body as one of the locales of negotiation, tension, and trauma, suggesting the body itself as a sign of the social contradictions of a country involved in a process of profound cultural transition” (“The Body and Spain” 26). Acevedo-Muñoz is careful to point out how public, socio-politically macro events and problems can translate to the micro realm within Almodóvar's films, where they are reincarnated as relationships between people and even dialogues within a single individual. The director's most recent thriller, *The Skin I Live In*, exercises precisely this type of macro/micro reincarnation. In the film, Antonio Banderas's character, Roberto Ledgard, is a plastic surgeon who keeps a mysterious woman, Vera, captive in his house. Eventually, the viewer learns that Vera (played by Elena Anaya) was once a young man, Vicente¹, who raped Ledgard's teenage daughter, causing her to commit suicide. Dr.

¹ This brings me to the special problem of pronouns in this chapter. The character of Vicente never has any desire to become a woman, but for much of the film, the viewer knows him as a woman named Vera. If Vicente were an actual person, his pronoun preference would almost undoubtedly be male, regardless of his appearance. For this reason, I have chosen to use male pronouns when referring to Vicente for the entirety of this essay. If I am referring to the character of Vicente that looks like a man, I will call him Vicente and use male pronouns. If I am referring to the Vicente that looks like a woman, I will make an effort to use the name “Vera” as often as possible, but if a pronoun is necessary, it will still be male.

Ledgard's tortuous surgeries make Vicente an ideal character for questions of bodily ownership, experience (both public and 'private'), and materiality (the way a physical body is sensed or perceived by its owner/inhabitant; the way a body is felt to be one's own). In a typical Almodóvar fashion, the film is comprised of a complicated web of flashbacks and altering points of view. Its labyrinth-like quality enhances the narrative by confusing and unsettling the viewer—reinforcing the idea that one is never truly safe or at home in what they (think they) know. By interrogating the very concept of a 'socially constructed gender', *The Skin I Live In* examines perceptions of the human body and the way that past traumas and present fears play out physically, psychoanalytically, and publicly on an individual's body and ego.

Commonly, we conceive of the physical body and the mental ego as two discretely separate entities. The mind and the body exist as a binary system, so that one domain always opposes the other and this opposition reinforces the autonomy of both. This binary concept, of the domain of the body versus the domain of the ego (the physical versus the mental), is handily represented in *The Skin I Live In* by the interactions between Dr. Roberto Ledgard and his daughter Norma's psychiatrist. Roberto, who is first and foremost a plastic surgeon, represents the physical body. Ledgard is never satisfied with Norma's psychiatrist, who is first and foremost a doctor of the mind, an expert on the ego. Much like the binary concepts themselves, the characters are telling foils for one another. When Norma climbs into her closet to hide from her father at the psychiatric hospital, Roberto angrily blames her psychiatrist, who suggests that the surgeon visit Norma less often. In response, Roberto states, "she's my daughter"—a claim that establishes the authority of biology. The psychiatrist replies, "but she doesn't recognize you"—a claim that, contrastingly, establishes the authority of the mind. It is clear from this scene that the two men will never agree on anything, that they are forever at odds. Of course, the two men do

share an interest in Norma's well-being—much like the body and the ego are primarily concerned with the harmony of the self.

Despite being conceptualized in binary opposition, the body and the ego have a number of characteristics in common. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud describes the ego as “first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface” (22). Here, both the mental and material spaces of an individual are equalized as ‘surfaces’—they share an external quality, a kind of facade for what lies underneath. So, even though the ego lacks the physical qualities of a body, it can project the same characteristics as the body. This concept, of the ‘projection of a surface’, is crucial to psychoanalytic readings of the relationship between the mind and the body. In *Assuming a Body*, French Psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu is credited with proposing that the ego is “an envelope that contains the psyche in the same way the skin contains the body” (Salamon 26). Author Caron Harrang recalls Anzieu's work in her essay, “Psychic Skin and Narcissistic Rage: Reflections on Almodóvar's *The Skin I Live In*”, when she writes about “psychic skin”, or “the mental membrane that encompasses our sensations, thoughts, and feelings analogous to the way our physical skin provides an anatomical protective barrier between the internal and external environment” (1301). If this is the case, then the ego, like skin, must perform the twofold task of protecting *from* and defending *against*; of keeping that which is external out and that which is internal in at the same time. The ego is a border between psychological spaces, it defines the conscious and the unconscious, and can act as either a gateway or a wall between the two.

Assuming a Body author Gayle Salamon notes the significance of the fact that Anzieu occasionally flips his skin/ego metaphor, suggesting, conversely, “that the psyche itself is a metaphor for the skin” (26). By Salamon and Anzieu's estimation, the skin and the ego are not

only comparable elements of being, but fully invertible concepts. Consequently, we can read Almodovar's title, *The Skin I Live In*, as having a dual meaning. The skin does not just protect and defend the material body, it also protects and defends the mental psyche. In an interview for *Sight and Sound*, Almodóvar says, "skin is the largest and most extensive organ that we have—it's what identifies us and separates us from others. It's the frontier between one individual and another" (5). Here, the director's interest in skin exists not only at the anatomical level (how "our face identifies us", as Dr. Robert Ledgard's first line in the film explains), but also at a deeper level: one where our skin is the surface onto which our egos are projected. Skin can be a physical, superficial manifestation of the ego of the individual.

Within the film, neither Dr. Ledgard nor the psychiatrist is capable of healing Norma's wounds, she eventually commits suicide, an act that merely signals the culmination of a number of traumatizing events that neither doctor has much control over. Even though the doctors represent a complete foil, the concepts they embody are not, in and of themselves, complete. The effect of the outside world, society as a whole, and the egos of other individuals are not accounted for in the simple, psychoanalytic relation of body to psyche. Salamon argues that "psychoanalysis offers a subject, fragmentary and incomplete, comprised of a body and a psyche. Not only do these two elements not add up to a coherent whole, neither the body nor psyche can be properly thought of as whole or complete" (24). So, while the mind/body couplet is undoubtedly important to the materiality of the body—the way that a person feels like themselves within their own skin—there is a missing element that affects the experience of the conjoined mind and body of a subject. According to Sullivan, "The lived experience of these particular modes of bodily-being is constituted by their dwelling in a world of others, a world of

discourses and perceptual practices thoroughly imbricated in the material” (*Wrong Bodies* 107). This ‘world of others’ has a crucial effect on negotiations between the ego and the body.

Skin is not the only external means by which the ego expresses itself. Clothing offers a form of protection that skin cannot because it does not have to balance the dual agenda of protecting and defending. It is meant to defend the body against external forces. However, in a social world, clothing is often understood less as a suit of armor and more as a suit of identity, a facade which expresses a person’s identity to that ‘world of others’ Salamon describes. Of course, the paradox here is that the clothes used to protect and express a person’s ego—their supposedly unique, individual, nature—are produced and distributed by a plethora of societal forces, which operate a system of presentation that values some expressions while discounting others.

In the film, Dr. Ledgard admonishes his daughter’s psychiatrist for letting her wear a hospital gown rather than the dresses Ledgard has purchased. The hospital gown serves as a visual badge of Norma’s psychiatric illness. Socially, it is understood to denote sick, diseased, or somehow ‘wrong’ bodies. The doctor’s concern for his daughters’ appearance can be read not as an interest in her well-being, but as a desire to see Norma as ‘normal’. He wants to see his daughter conformed to societal expectations. Dresses are the most normal, socially-sanctioned attire for a young woman in the world that Dr. Ledgard lives in, so he buys them in the hopes that Norma will be perceived as normal and, socially-speaking, *become* normal.

The influence of the outer world on the body/mind pairing is termed, by the scholar Ken Corbett, to be the “mind-body-social matrix” (*Speaking the Body/Mind Juncture* 225). This concept is described in other words by Nikki Sullivan, who explains, “identity and differences are continually (re)negotiated in and through relations with others and a world” (*The*

Somattechnics of Bodily Inscription: Tattooing 131). Norma's mental illness and subsequent suicide can be attributed equally to the witness of her mother's death, her rape by Vicente, and the staying association of the rapist with her father—each of which strongly impact Norma's relationship to the outer world and take a toll on her psyche, negatively altering her mind-body-social matrix, and the way she conceives of herself and interacts with the world. Of course, for the most part, these events were out of Roberto's control; a fact that only serves to fuel the doctor's guilt, his desire for control, and, ultimately, his rage.

Psychoanalytically speaking, the social aspect of the identity matrix is upsetting because society exists quite distinctly separate from the mind-body pair, and this segregation disputes the harmonious unification and oneness that an unconscious desires. Caron Harrang explains that “Rage, as distinct from other forms of aggression, such as anger and even hatred, emanates from an omnipotent state of mind that denies separateness between self and object” (1301). Here, the author explains how the separation of the self, a division inherent to a mind-body-social matrix, can (at times) yield a negative response from our unconscious mind, which seeks unification over division. The author continues, “rage tears at the fabric of our psychic skin, eroding the boundary between inner and outer experience” (1301). As a manifestation of the unconscious, rage will ignore or destroy the boundaries that our psyche depends on, the borders that differentiate body from mind, inner from outer, individual from other. Suffering from the torn psychic skin that Harrang refers to, Dr. Ledgard is unable to differentiate his own pain from the pain of others; he severely lacks empathy.

The deterioration of Ledgard's empathy begins long before the film begins, when the doctor discovers his wife has been sleeping with his housekeepers' son, Zeca. After the wife burns her skin in a car accident, Dr. Ledgard puts his life force into inventing a new, synthetic

skin for her. Unfortunately, his desire to repair his wife's body is not born from everlasting love but from suppressed anger- he did not know she was unfaithful until she was found with Zeca in the car crash. Lemma explains, "she is kept alive as his appendage, a shadow of her former beautiful self, a woman now so defaced by her burns that no one could be attracted to her. It is her disfigured self that guarantees that she is only his and effectively becomes his prisoner – until she frees herself of his control through the act of suicide" (1296). For Dr. Ledgard, his wife's infidelity signifies that they are not a coherent unit, that he cannot omnipotently control her. This discovery causes the doctor to use her injuries to deny the separation between them. Rather than reject her for hurting him, the doctor fights the estrangement, pulling his wife closer. He appoints himself to be in charge of her damaged body, and she becomes his ward; an 'appendage' so dependent upon his care and his will that she cannot survive without him. In her weak state, she is nothing if not *his*, so the doctor's omnipotence is reinforced.

Dr. Ledgard's desperate desire for omnipotent control only grows after his wife's suicide, a fact that is exemplified by the scene with Norma's dresses. In addition to marking Norma as mentally ill, the hospital gown signifies the source of her illness: her rape. In a psychoanalytic reading of the film, scholar Alessandra Lemma sees Dr. Ledgard's interest in Norma's attire less as an attempt to protect Norma and more as an attempt to protect himself from the free expression of Norma's ego—an ego that erroneously believes her father to be her rapist. The author observes that Dr. Ledgard "wants to 'make over' reality, changing the surface of the body in an attempt to distance himself from the painful reality that is inscribed on it" (1294). Dr. Ledgard did not rape his daughter, but he was there when she woke up. He is associated with her rapist, just as he caused her mother's suicide. Serving as a reminder of both his wife's death and Norma's rape, the hospital gown silently accuses Dr. Ledgard, causing the doctor to feel guilt.

Dr. Ledgard seeks to comfort his own ego by forcing a ‘skin’, of sorts, onto Norma’s. The doctor’s motives are purely selfish: if she wears the dresses, he will not feel as guilty. This response is topical and inadequately matched to the trauma that has occurred in both character’s lives, but Dr. Ledgard is far too wrapped up in a cycle of re-opening trauma wounds to notice. Rather than accept his tragic role in the story and face his own demons, the doctor gives in to his id and a raving, raging ‘mad scientist’ is born.

In both these scenes, the common theme of control is quite apparent. For the entirety of *The Skin I Live In*, Dr. Ledgard forcefully projects his own will onto the women around him. As the doctor’s need for control becomes more apparent, his actions become more extreme and less identifiably human. Caron Harrang explains that a self-propelled cycle of emotional trauma has started, that every time Dr. Ledgard grasps at a new form of control, a new way to impose his will on another human being, he identifies less and less with that human being, and his madness increases. The author writes that “rage may damage or destroy libidinal connections and, at a deeper level, the distinction between self and other or [...] of time itself”. Dr. Ledgard clearly lacks the ability to distinguish between his own anguish and the anguish of others. He also refuses to recognize the passage of time—a fact that is best evidenced by the narrative structure of the film, which offers a complex lattice of time-jumping flashbacks, sometimes within other flashbacks. Harrang continues, “this creates a vicious cycle in which damage to the psychic skin necessary for protecting beneficial object relations creates a greater reliance on ‘second skin’ formations that by definition limit the individual’s capacity for healthy dependency” (1304). Once he has experienced the distress of discovering his wife’s infidelity, Dr. Ledgard cannot disentangle himself from that moment. His obsession only causes further personal upsets to

occur, resulting in more rage-fueled responses. As the audience finds it harder and harder to relate to Dr. Ledgard's actions, his character becomes scarier and the suspense of the film grows.

In an early scene in the film, the doctor comes home and turns on a wall-sized color monitor in his own room. Apparently, the monitor is connected to a camera in Vera's room, because it shows a larger-than-life, live image of Vera, who is reading. Ledgard reclines on his couch and, after a moment, he picks up the remote and zooms in on Vera's face. The doctor is presumably fascinated, as the viewer is, by the beauty of the face he has constructed. The act of zooming in reminds us that Roberto is in full control of every aspect of this character's life. Vera lives in the scientists' cell in his house and can only communicate with the world via his apparatuses (the intercom, the camera). Likewise Vera's skin, his creation, has been desensitized to pain and is resistant to burns or bites, so that even Vera's sense of touch has been alienated from Vicente's internal psyche by Ledgard's medical practice. As Alessandra Lemma points out, "Ledgard needs to keep his objects alive because he needs them to suffer. The pain he inflicts on them is the insurance against knowing about his own pain" (1296). The doctor controls every facet of Vera's life in order to maintain some semblance of control of his own. Jeremy Biles explains, "like some sadistic deity, Ledgard wants to impose transcendence of a sort on his victim, whose body would be the site of his own redemption. He aims to make of Vera's mortal, corruptible body a perfect body, impervious to time as well as fire" (4). Clearly, the creation of Vera's body signifies the many traumas that have plagued Dr. Ledgard from the beginning of the story, and Vera's design is the doctor's attempt to heal those traumas.

Dr. Ledgard cannot seem to grasp the fact that Vera will never forget that he was once Vicente. Fittingly, the doctor ignores the division between mind and body. "The character of Robert", explains Harrang, "represents a person for whom the outer appearance of the body—

skin, at a concrete level—is synonymous with personal identity, something to be consciously manipulated without recognizing the distinction between internal and external reality” (1305). For Robert, the distinction between the mind and the body is completely false: bodies and minds are unified beings. If this is the case, then the actions he once took to modify his injured wife’s appearance were also attempts to modify her feelings towards him. He sought emotional change through physical means. Similarly, Vicente’s vaginoplasty and facial surgeries, which render him the spitting image of the doctor’s now deceased wife, are enacted in order to alter Vicente’s inner psyche. Physically, Dr. Ledgard manages to eliminate Vicente and bring back his wife at the same time, but he does not understand that he cannot eliminate Vicente’s internal being, the ego within.

In caging and controlling Vicente, Dr. Ledgard has chosen a ‘quick fix’, if you will, for his mental anguish. Writes Lemma, “Ledgard’s character powerfully represents the human tendency to reshape the world according to our own needs and desires rather than accomplishing the more messy internal psychic work required to accommodate reality, not least when trauma is its hallmark” (1292). Of course, an individual’s denial cannot alter the world around them, and while Dr. Ledgard may strive to believe that he has complete control of Vicente, this does not make it true. On some level, the doctor is aware that he lacks some control of Vera, a fact that is evidenced by the standoffish way the doctor interacts with his creation. Ledgard seems to only take pleasure in controlling Vera from the safe distance the monitor makes. The apparatus ensures that Vera can be “kept both at a distance but also very close” (Lemma 1297). Ledgard visibly relishes making the camera zoom in on her face, but, when the two interact in person, the doctor is cold and distant. Personal interaction seems to remind the doctor that Vera is not nor ever will be fully within his control.

In the scene where Ledgard is watching Vera from his study, an important thing happens. Suddenly, as the doctor watches, Vera looks up, directly into the lens of the camera, out of the monitor, and into Roberto's study. He is propelled by this image, of the woman looking directly into the camera and out at him, to go and speak to Vera in person. With one look, Vera ceases to be a figure on his wall and becomes a human that he must contend with. When Roberto comes to the cell and Vera tells him, "I'm yours. I'm made to measure for you", the character is affirming the doctor's control. However, when Vera continues, "I know you look at me", Ledgard's power is destabilized. Said with a second look into the lens of the camera, this time directly out into the audience, with no extra framing, Vera's statement establishes Vicente's inner willpower. Vicente may be imprisoned in the house and the body of Vera, but he is not helpless. He is still a sentient being, an individual with an inner ego and the doctor will never be able to completely control him. Vicente's body may be hostage, but his mind is his alone. Vera's act of looking back, of returning the gaze to the camera that surveils her, reveals Vicente's willpower. It is the expression of his inner ego. Harrang writes, "Unlike the diabolical doctor, Vicente is able to distinguish between what happens to him in the external world and his internal psychic reality" (1305). When Vera looks back at him through the monitor, Roberto feels compelled to go and speak to Vera in person, to re-establish his control. Later on, Roberto's brother Zeca, dressed as a tiger, will see Vera look back through the black and white monitors in the kitchen and be compelled to find the woman and rape her. These responses are telling. Sensing Vera's inner will through a single look, the men suddenly feel that they must regain control. The destabilization of their power is so upsetting, they are driven to immediately retaliate, but their retaliation, once again, can only affect Vera's body, not Vicente's mind within.

[Vera/Vicente]

In an essay entitled “The Role of Medicine in the (Trans)Formation of ‘Wrong’ Bodies”, queer theorist Nikki Sullivan elaborates on how we conceive of bodies. She describes the difference between “having” and “being” a body (114). “Being” a body, of course, requires a complete identification with a physical self. Contrastingly, if one merely “has” a body, they are “alienated from the world, from others, and from the self” (114). “The experience of alienation, then, is understood on this phenomenological model, not in terms of the loss of ownership over one’s body, but rather as the reduction of the lived body to a thing, an object separate from the self” (114). The significance of this quote lies in the connection it makes between alienation and objectification. Roberto’s unwarranted physical alteration of Vicente, and Vera’s subsequent captivity in Roberto’s house both undoubtedly display a “loss of ownership” of Vicente/Vera’s body, but, more importantly, the torture has reduced the body to something less than human; it is no longer a component of a subject, but a solitary object; no longer a body, but a thing.

As the narrative progresses, Vicente slowly convinces Dr. Ledgard that he has indeed become the woman the doctor built, a true replica of the doctor’s dead wife. Vera gains privileges within the house and is even allowed to go shopping once or twice. However, at the end of the film, Vicente kills Dr. Ledgard and his housekeeper and returns to his mother’s store, nervously hoping to be recognized as the man he once was. It becomes clear that there never was a Vera, that she was only a mask that Vicente wore in order to survive. Alessandra Lemma writes, “Vicente’s fate makes it clear that appearances really do not change reality. Yet, in our advanced technological culture body images appear to be infinitely mutable, promulgating the fantasy that by changing the body we can change who we are” (1299). This quote reinforces the significant effect that social relations have on an identity and the gravity that we attribute to bodies as representations of a self. Writes Gayle Salamon, “psychoanalysis... can complicate the

assumption that the material body is unproblematically available to us; within psychoanalysis, the body is available to a subject only through a complex set of mental representations, of psychic images designated alternately as the bodily ego or the body schema” (4). Although we have already determined that the ‘material body’ is inseparable from its subject, the broader implications of a connection between the physical and the psyche are quite complicated. When Dr. Ledgard projects his will on Vicente and turns him into Vera, Vicente has fallen victim to a force from the outer world, and his body is now someone else’s project. Notably, however, the body has been and always will be a project, and it will never stop being molded by the individual and the outer world alike.

Lemma explains that the body is always being “manipulated at will and without conscious acknowledgement of the developmental history imprinted on [it]” (1292). In fact, the true strength of the body within the mind-body-social matrix that produces identity can be attributed to its very malleability. The malleability of the body is best represented in *The Skin I Live In* by Vera’s clear interest in yoga. Vicente discovers yoga on one of the three television channels he is allowed to watch (one of few connections to the outside world), and the yoga books he subsequently acquires provide a simple, safe way for Vera to begin to navigate his new relationship with an outside world. Ultimately, yoga becomes a useful moderator of the mind-body-social matrix Vera finds himself inhabiting. Not only does yoga prove the body’s malleability through stretching, but it establishes and reaffirms the divisions that support a healthy mind/body pairing. As a component of his reparative journey, the meditation and stretching of yoga provides a way for Vicente to develop his mind separately from Vera’s body, and visa versa. By distinguishing the domain of the mind from the domain of the body, Vicente

no longer feels defined by his (female) body. Instead of feeling trapped in his body's supposedly absolute form, he can take solace in its actual malleability, its propensity for constant change.

In terms of the mind-body-social matrix, Vicente's social surroundings and body may be under control, but his mind is distinctly separate. Vicente does not want a vaginoplasty or any other surgery, but he receives them because he is under the control of Roberto, a separate ego and outside force. Consequently, Vera must negotiate spaces of being that were once entirely inconceivable to Vicente. Vera's first approach can be seen in the writing on the walls of the cell. In some scenes, a drawing of a female body with a house for a head is visible on the wall behind Vera. This image is a direct reference to the *Woman Houses* of artist Louise Bourgeois, whose work is incredibly relevant to both Vicente and the narrative of the film itself. Nestled among Vera's scribbled encouragements ('respiro', meaning 'breathe') and dutiful date keeping, the drawing is large enough to stand out in the mise-en-scene. The picture tells the viewer that Vicente has found a home in his mind. Unable to accept the destructive reconstruction of his body, Vicente takes comfort in his original, untouchable psyche.

The difficulties and dangers of retreating within one's mind are easily guessed at, and the complete disavowal of one's body is not a sustainable way of existing. In *Sight and Sound*, Pedro Almodóvar points out a drawing on the wall: a recreation, he tells the interviewer, of Louise Bourgeois's 1990 self portrait. "There's a circle", he describes, "and within that circle there is a woman, and within that woman there is a man, and within that man there is a child. So all ages and genders merge as an expression of humanity" (6). This drawing, perhaps drawn after the first one of the female body with a house on its head, implies that Vicente is beginning to come to terms with his changed body. The 'merging', of gender and age in a single unit provides the comforting notion that every individual holds a little of every identity inside themselves, that

males and females are inextricably bound by the nature of the human experience. Once again, the body is not ever completely concrete; it is always open to reconfiguration and reinterpretation, both by the owner and the beholder.

At the beginning of the film, Vera is introduced as a faceless figure, stretched out across the arm of a couch. A number of shots slowly follow the curve of her body from different angles, but none show her face or eyes. By ignoring her eyes and face as a whole, the camera introduces Vera simply as a body, associated more with the eyeless sculptures at his desk than any human character. The eyeless figure of Vera (in a beige body suit) is associated with those eyeless sculptures because they are both well-shaped imitations of bodies and of each other, complete with visible stitching or sutures on each of their ‘skins’. Of course, those eyeless sculptures are also imitations in and of themselves, copies of the sculptural artwork of Louise Bourgeois.

Vera’s fascination with Bourgeois’ work is quite fitting. The artist is often praised for her interest in what we have come to call the mind-body-social matrix in this essay. Scholar Alex Potts writes, “by involving the viewer in a vividly physical sculptural drama, incessantly moving between interiority and exteriority, intimacy and exposure, closeness and distance, Bourgeois’s work momentarily empties the mind of unwanted rubbish and pleasurable residues of everyday psychic and social existence, and then incites these to re-emerge with quite unpredictable intensity” (53). Certainly, the eyeless figures that Bourgeois creates are studies in the perceptions of the body externally—as object to those outside it—and internally—as subject to the person within. In recreating these figures, Vicente accomplishes the difficult task of negotiating between internal and external. Lemma explains, “in the very act of creating [the figures], one senses that Vera asserts the reality of her mind—of who ‘she’ really is—over her sewn up, unreal body and so restores a sense of unity within herself” (1298). According to Lemma, it is the very *act* of re-

creation that helps to resolve the conflict between outer Vera and inner Vicente. The sewing together of fabric likewise sews together the two spaces of being Vicente finds himself divided between and allows the character to face the reality of his unwanted body with a determined and persevering mind.

As we watch Vicente explore his clearly divided reality, we are also struck with the less obvious divisions of our own reality. Just as Vicente struggles with Vera, all humans struggle with the ways that our inner being manifests on our physical self, with how we choose to project our own reality out into the world. Bourgeois grappled with the theme of physical self-expression in a social world for years, throughout her body of work. Scholar Alex Potts explains:

“Through the medium of the work, not only the artist, but the viewer too is staged so as to make public and externalize what is usually envisaged as an indefinitely defined interiorized experience. What makes this possible is not any particular understanding Bourgeois might have of the existential parameters of such experience, but the way she is able to play it out and give it public currency in an unusually astute staging of sculptural objects and spaces, a staging that provokes in a viewer who engages closely with her work a state of mind suspended somewhere between anxiety and fascination.” (53)

For Potts, staging is the key to Bourgeois’ work. Indeed exhibition, or the presentation of the work to a significantly public audience, is as important to the art as its material form and conceptual content. Additionally, the use of the term “currency” in “public currency” helps to underscore the value of dialogue within the art experience. Potts stresses that it is not any specific meaning that strengthens Bourgeois’ works, but the very exchange of meanings between artist, sculpture, and viewer. Here, another matrix is formed, where the mind of the artist meets the body of the work, and the two work together (or in opposition) to convey meaning to a very public, very social audience. In *The Skin I Live In*, Almodóvar examines the same matrix of identity and meaning in and through his film, a medium that is perfectly suited to studies of social projections because it is made explicitly for public exhibition. With this in mind,

Almodóvar's film becomes a thrilling lesson in self-expression: not just an explanation, but a demonstration of the mind-body-social matrix.

[Traumas and the Creation of Monsters]

Vicente is not the only character who must negotiate systems of meaning in a world colored by inner and outer forces. In her analysis of Almodóvar's film, Carol Harrang points out the tenuous relationship that Dr. Ledgard has with reality. She writes, "Robert cannot afford to doubt his perception of reality because, doing so would open him to unbearable anguish" (1307). To avoid this anguish, Ledgard chooses to ignore his trauma altogether. Rather than turning his attention inward to heal the wounds that plague his psyche, Dr. Ledgard projects his inner pain outward, onto the body of Vicente. "Thus, a vicious cycle is perpetuated wherein intolerance of hesitation, doubt, and uncertainty interferes with access to differing points of view necessary for reality testing, which in turn increases reliance on omnipotence as a bulwark against vulnerability of any sort" (Harrang 1307). Here, the author explains' Dr. Ledgard's most apparently flawed approach to his trauma, his need to completely control the events of the past. A blind and obstinate pursuit of revenge leaves the doctor unable to heal his emotional wounds. He avoids vulnerability at any cost, and this refusal ultimately provides the basis for his monstrosity. Author Di Ceglie explains, "[Dr. Ledgard's] objective is not an option, but a necessity. [...] Like a crusader, he pursues his goals to the ultimate end" (1312). Much like Dr. Génessier in *Eyes Without a Face*, Dr. Ledgard values the product over the process, the goal over the pursuit. He is the most comfortable when he is removed from humanity, either by the alienating apparatus of a surveillance monitor, or when he is surrounded by the sterile walls and cutting edge devices of his state-of-the art operating room. Lemma explains that when Dr. Ledgard is in his operating room, or lecturing at university, or watching Vera from the safety of

his office, “the guilt of survival, the guilt of triumph and the pain of separation are all abrogated. Despite the phantasy that pain can be done away with, however, this denial is costly to the self. The dead and the living are now fused in a concrete identification dominated by hatred as the film chillingly portrays” (1296). His desire for measurable progress, or constant improvement over time, far outweighs any interest in his own mental well-being—and this blind pursuit of progress is what makes him abject and inhuman.

It is a paradox of sorts that Dr. Ledgard’s desire for revenge—a unique and unarguably human emotion—is what makes him so inhuman. The doctor’s comprehensible anger seems to have been replaced with blinding rage, and any empathy he once had has lost all meaning and significance. In a way, the doctor’s psyche has come to resemble Frankenstein’s monster itself. Just as Lemma hints, the doctors’ ego had become an amalgamation of lifeless, inhuman rage permanently affixed to and driven by a deep and lively hatred.

When Vera is introduced, the camera takes a lot of time to gaze longingly at the figure of her body. In the scene where Dr. Ledgard zooms in on Vera with his wall-sized monitor, her face is roughly the size of his entire body, and every part of it is flawless. Indeed, Vera is strikingly flawless, and her beauty is made all the more grotesque after the audience learns of her surgeries. There is a special horror derived from Vera’s beauty, a horror which Alessandra Lemma tries to sum up in her analysis. She writes, “beauty frames the horror and the horror is all the more brutal against this surfeit of beauty, which is but a corruption of the reality it masks. Vera’s flawless skin, which conjures up unreality in its perfection, covers up a profound traumatic injury which, unlike the new skin grafted on her by Ledgard, never heals” (1299). Much like Christiane’s mask in Franju’s *Eyes Without a Face*, Vera’s face and body are a facade that

manages to both obscure and explicitly point to Vicente's history—a history that is wrought with the traumas he has experienced, but also those he has inflicted.

Unlike Dr. Génessier's female victims in *Eyes Without A Face*, who are just as undeserving of the doctor's surgeries as they are unsuspecting of being kidnapped, Vicente holds a different space in the moral fabric of the film. After all, Vicente really is a rapist. In a flashback that takes place at a wedding, Vicente meets Norma, who has just been released from the psychiatric hospital after witnessing her mother's suicide. The two young people retreat to the garden, where Vicente begins to undress Norma. When she struggles to stop Vicente's advances by biting him, he knocks her unconscious before running away. Vicente's lack of innocence serves to complicate our perceptions of the monstrosity of the characters. We sympathize with Vera when she is captive, especially when she is the clear victim of Zeca's rape. However, it is not so easy to sympathize with Vicente, even when he kneels, naked and shivering, in the dark and cavernous dungeon of Dr. Ledgard's villa. The director seems uninterested in transparent, unambiguous definitions of good and evil, of human and monster, or self and other. Instead, Almodovar seeks to portray the similarities between opposites, or the contradictions within singular beings. Di Ceglie writes, "we can speculate here that the new creatures that both Dr. Ledgard and Dr. Frankenstein have created are a part of themselves as they constitute a solution to their intense wishes to circumvent the limitations of external reality. The link between creator and the creature is maintained through the use of projective identification" (1312). In the film, the link between Vera and Dr. Ledgard is first born and then severed in violence. Norma's rape is not avenged by Vera's rape nor Dr. Ledgard's death, but the chain of violence maintains that ever-important link between creator and creation that is the very foundation for Frankenstein stories.

[Conclusion]

“If *The Skin I Live In* can be read as a story of loss that becomes perverted into revenge, it is also a story about the way the good internal object can prevail under the most extreme circumstances. It is in essence a story about inner resilience” (Lemma 1298). In her reading of the film, Lemma sees an ultimately positive spin on the story of Vicente/Vera. Indeed, it would seem that the end of the film leaves the viewer with an ambiguously optimistic outlook—one that is perhaps confusing in the light of Dr. Ledgard’s murder and Vera’s escape. The hopeful but fleeting ending of the film, in which Vera (calling himself Vicente once again) returns home and is reunited with his mother, leaves the viewer with many questions. Many critics, like Rob White and Paul Julian Smith, in a debate published in the online magazine titled *Film Quarterly*, question the implications of a character who is harmed (in fact, punished) by gender-reassignment surgery, and can only identify negatively with their own transsexual body. Almodóvar, who until now, represented transgendered characters in a mostly if not completely positive light, seems to be denying his principles.

To understand this concern, one might apply the work of Jose Esteban Muñoz in his book, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. Muñoz establishes a place for negativity in queer representations through what he has termed “disidentification”. Muñoz writes, “radical negativity, like the negation of the negation, offers us a mode of understanding negativity that is starkly different from the version of the negative proposed by the queer antirelationist. Here the negative becomes the resource for a certain mode of queer utopianism” (13). By this definition, *The Skin I Live In* can be read as an example of ‘radical negativity; an overly dramatized portrayal of a tortured identity that is so incredibly negative it becomes, in a sense, positive again. In an interview, Almodóvar describes the ending of his film, saying

“women’s dresses, in different colours and from different periods, are hanging from the walls and ceiling. Because of the way they’re lit, they look like ghosts of women. It’s just at that moment when the ghost of her own femininity disappears. As soon as she steps into her mother’s shop, Vera feels that she’s Vicente again” (*Film Quarterly*). By correlating Vicente’s experience with the ghosts of former women, themselves having experienced innumerable injustices and monstrous men, the director aligns the victimization of this human not with other rapist men, but with other raped women. Vicente is welcomed home into a world that references the countless victims who came before him. Likewise, his healing is aligned with the healing of countless others before him. The moment is marked by a multiplicity of temporalities, it commemorates the suffering of every former victim while testifying to the hope of the future. The past is equalized with the present and the future: an undeniable history is acknowledged, but not without a nod to the infinite possibility of the future.

In her study of trauma as it relates to queer experiences, Ann Cvektovich notes how history and futurity must participate in a single space, at once and within the individual in order to successfully heal trauma. Testimony, she writes, “has implications for understanding history, raising questions about the role of memory; for understanding therapy, opening up the possibility of a public form of storytelling, but one that involves the work of psychoanalysis; and for understanding culture, since the mode of representation of trauma is complex and challenges the very possibility of representation” (28). Almodóvar’s film is a testimony of sorts—one that seeks complexity over simplicity and resolution through contradiction.

Conclusion

“I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper”

--Mary Shelley, Preface to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*

Mary Shelley’s novel provides an important foundational context for the master/monster narrative, but her scientist and his monster have erupted from the confines of her story—they have become icons that exist quite beyond the bounds of the book they were born in. Audiences are far more likely to recognize the image of the mad scientist or his monster before they recognize Mary Shelley’s name—a fact that is best articulated in and through the images of mad scientists and their unnatural creations that saturate every corner of our culture today.

Remarkably, it is the monster icon itself that is usually identified as “Frankenstein” in popular culture, not the scientist of that name in the novel. Quite often, a “mad scientist” is simply known as a “mad scientist”, but the scientist’s experiment—commonly portrayed as a dim-witted, greenish-skinned man with a square forehead and bolts coming out of his neck—is automatically identified as “Frankenstein”. In fact, neither Shelley’s novel nor either of James Whale’s classic films ever gave the monster a name, but with time, Boris Karloff’s iconic portrayal of the creature and Shelley’s scientist’s surname have become inseparable. The doctor and his monster are now permanently bonded within a single symbol. This bond serves not only to define the characters by relating them to each other, it also underscores the equality their correlation is based on. Frankenstein’s famed accomplishment has become his accomplice. Each character type is equally necessary to the story; both maker and monster have the same pull within the narrative, and each steps in where the other steps out. The characters are not just dependent, they are co-dependent.

The name switch between the scientist and the monster signifies the life of the icons outside of their origin story. Each character is a conglomeration of those origin narratives, but they have become more than mere conglomerates in and through their use in popular culture. They are living, ever-evolving referents. In this current culture, stories of the creator and his creation, or the scientist and his monster, or the doctor and his patient are all replicas of the original Frankenstein narrative in some fashion. Indeed, each new narrative is a cultivated combination of any number of previous incarnations of the same narrative—each new iteration is an experiment in giving life to a fusion of former characters and events, a monstrous reanimation.

The theme of existence and questions of identity are quite pervasive to Frankenstein films. In the Introduction of this thesis, I mentioned the prominence of unmasking scenes. In addition to scenes in which a physical mask is actually removed, all of the films relied heavily on close-up shots of faces. Most often, the monstrous character's face was presented within a tight frame. In an essay entitled "Murdered Souls, Conspiratorial Cabals", author David Sterritt explains the numerous close-ups of Tony Wilson's face in *Seconds*. "His scars and sutures hint at a Frankenstein-like unnaturalness, yet his features are a field of pure virtuality, exemplifying what Deleuze calls the *reflective face*" (24). It would seem that our desire to empathize with the monster within the Frankenstein narrative can be attributed to the camera's interest in the character's face. Indeed, the notion of *reflection* implies that when an audience looks into a face up close they immediately equate that face to their own face, or some inner part of themselves.

The "reflective face" that Sterritt alludes to is made apparent in Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein*, when the monster stops in the woods to drink from a pool. Upon seeing the reflection of his own face in the water, the monster violently splashes the reflection away.

Although he concedes that it is altogether unclear whether the monster has recognized the reflection as his own, Bruce Kawin suggests that “in this scene, horror faces and becomes conscious of itself” (*Horror and the Horror Film* 59). The Monster sees his ugly face and experiences the same repulsion that every other character has felt upon seeing him. Kawin’s observation underscores the phenomenon of recognizing a part of the self outside of the self; specifically, and unwanted or abject part of the self. The monster’s negative reaction to his own reflection—his own self—displays a feeling that every viewer has experienced to some degree, and his or her recognition of that feeling evokes a sympathy for the monster. Describing Frankenheimer’s penchant for filming Tony Wilson in many tight close-ups, Sterritt continues, “his identity and purpose are disturbingly out of whack, but his *presence* and *portentiousness* are inescapably clear” (24). The identification that the audience feels upon looking closely into Tony’s face matches the pity they feel as the monster scorns his own reflection: it is not so much an understanding of the character’s inner psyche, but an understanding of their own inner psyche, as projected onto him. When we look at the Monster, who is always portrayed in some way as ‘other’, we see our own feelings of exclusion, our individual experiences as other.

The monster character is very often the focus of many Frankenstein narratives, perhaps because being a creation is a universal concept—it is far easier to conceive of a product than a producer. By the rules of the narrative, the monster will always inevitably be forced to deal with its role as a product, the entity that the producer claims as its creation. In claiming the monster as his creation, the creator is defining himself as opposed to the monster. The creator can point to the creation and say, “I am myself and this is what I have created” and then, “I am not what I have made”. In this way, the monster character immediately becomes abject. Abjection, simply, describes what is not of the self. It is the state of being that defines an “Other”. In the moment

that the monster is defined as the product of a producer, the monster becomes abject, or *other* than the subject. Of course, the monstrous character still feels like a subject to itself, and so it is forced to negotiate existence in a seemingly impossible place: a world that is both subject *and* abject at once.

In *Eyes Without a Face*, Christiane must grapple with being both subject and abject, and her frustration eventually culminates in killing her father and Louise and escaping into a wilderness that is undefined by such distinctions. Stefanos Geroulanos writes, “Christiane’s fury lies at the failure and impossibility of restoration, and then turns into an at once animal and angelic (in any case *inhuman*) assault upon ‘the human,’ and thus she emerges in the closing titles reconciled with nature and the animal kingdom, refusing any humanist reconciliation” (19). In his explanation, the scholar notes that Christiane’s position cannot be ‘restored’. Because she lacks a face, Christiane will never be just a subject in the human world, she must always also be abject. The key to Geroulanos’ quote is the concept of reconciliation. The author notes that Christiane will never achieve reconciliation with the human world because that world will never see her as simply human. Even so, she can achieve reconciliation of a different sort: that of the natural world. It is important that the term ‘reconcile’ is used here. The character is not *solving* the conflict—a verb that would imply the neat and simple conclusion to her problem. Nor is she vanquishing one of the two conflicting elements so that the conflict no longer exists. Rather than the impossible task of ridding one part of herself of another part of her self, Christiane flees to the forest in order to find solace in a world that can accept the contradiction she embodies. Christiane seeks a world where she can exist comfortably in the middle, as a subject in abjection: a natural world that is at peace with its own contradictions.

If self-contradiction is what defines a monster figure in the Frankenstein narrative, then blind refusal of human contradiction might be what defines the mad scientist character. It would seem that every mad scientist is defined as mad because he is unable or unwilling to see contradictions, either within himself or within the larger world. This refusal is founded on an unchecked demand for logic and reason over empathy or morality. With this interest in logic and reason in mind, it is clear that the ‘science’ part of the term ‘mad scientist’ is far more descriptive than the ‘mad’ part. In his analysis of *The Skin I Live In*, author Xavier Aldana Reyes notes how our current culture is still obsessed with Frankenstein narratives, and posits that this obsession is an “indication that our struggle to keep up with science and its advances is still very much a contemporary fear” (821). Indeed, the mad scientists of Frankenstein narratives come to dismay the audience because they value technology over humanity, they embrace linear progress while turning a blind eye to the nonlinear, ambiguous contradictions that are inherent to human nature.

The creator and the creation are equally necessary to every mad scientist story. One cannot exist without the other. This interdependence is what propels the story forward, what makes it timeless and fascinating. Audiences witness the divine link between master and monster or doctor and patient, and the way each must define itself in opposition to the other. Humanity seeks out creation stories because they help us consider the implications of our own creation, the meaning of our existence. Similarly, these stories shed light on the multitude of ways we enjoy playing maker. Frankenstein narratives readily frame the passion our species has for creativity, as well as our desire for control—a control of ourselves, our work, and the world around us.

The existentialist search for meaning that is conveyed by creator/creation stories is also defined by duality. Because we are both created and creators, we find ourselves identifying with

both the monster and the maker. Makers and monsters are dependent on each other but also necessarily contradictory and as humans, we find those same contradictions within ourselves. In *Bride of Frankenstein*, Dr. Pretorius cheers, “to a new world of gods and monsters!” His words underscore the divided but inseparable way we conceive of ourselves and the world. Our lives are filled with ambiguous relationships between good and evil, control and desire, and subject and abject. Frankenstein narratives reflect the contradictions we see in our world back at us; we are intrigued by our role as god and monster at once, and we are fascinated by the reconciliation of those seemingly irreconcilable parts of ourselves.

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