### Frankenstein

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### POST READINGS

1. Harold Bloom's "Afterword"  
2. Reader Response 205-229 / Psychoanalytic 230-258 / Feminist 259 - 285 / Marxist 286-311  
3. **Foreword: The Future of Frankenstein**

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**OVER**
Frankenstein

Characters

Walton's Narrative

- Uncle Thomas
- Captain Robert Walton (28 years old)
- Husband = Mrs. Margaret Saville
- Children

Frankenstein Family

German mother = Milanese nobleman
- Elizabeth Lavenza
- Caroline = Alphonse Frankenstein
  - Victor
  - Ernest
  - William
  - "Monster"

Madame Moritz (widow) = M. Moritz
- 2 brothers
- Justine (1 sister)
  - Aunt at Chene

De Lacey (blind violinist)

Christian - Arab (slave) = Turkish merchant
- Agatha
- Felix = Safie

Other Characters

M. Krempe - professor who denounces alchemy
M. Waldman - professor who inspires VF

= creates
## Literary Period Time Line

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Mary Shelley
1797-1851

Remembered today as the daughter of illustrious parents and the wife of a famous poet, Mary Shelley shrank from any form of publicity and contributed to the obscurity that still clouds her name. Many people are astonished to learn that as a quiet, intellectual girl of 19, she wrote one of the most imaginative and horrific novels of the time – *Frankenstein*. Mary’s eight years with Shelley were marked by tragedy, trauma and exile, but they were also years of inspiration for her own distinctive imagination.
The Shadow of Fame

Mary Shelley's life was overshadowed by her famous parents and husband. It was also overshadowed by the deaths of those she loved. She was born on 30 August 1797 to the pioneer feminist Mary Wollstonecraft and the political philosopher William Godwin. But Mary was never to know her mother. She died of sepsicaemia just 10 days after the birth, leaving Mary forever deprived of a secure, loving relationship.

Although Mary adored her father, he had little time to spend with her. He remarried a few years later and Mary took an immediate (and understandable) dislike to her new mother, Mrs Mary Jane Clairmont, an unremarkable but pretentious widow with two children, Charles and Jane. As she grew up, Mary Godwin took refuge in the studies which were to serve as a great consolation throughout her life.

SECRET AFFAIR

In 1812, when Mary was staying with a family friend near Dundee, a young and fervent admirer of Mary's father began to frequent the Godwin household. The visitor was Percy Bysshe Shelley, aristocrat, political revolutionary and poet, who was also highly imaginative, somewhat unstable and, to many women, irresistible. He had married at 19 and had a daughter, Eliza, and the details, however, did not stop him from falling for the 16-year-old Mary when she finally returned from Scotland in the spring of 1814. Mary was not strikingly attractive, but, according to a friend, she was 'agreeable, vivacious and sparkling, very pretty with fair hair and complexion and clear bright white skin' - and she was an intellectual.

For Shelley, now disillusioned with his young wife Harriet, Mary's attraction was all the greater because her parents were the remarkable William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. By the end of June - after a clandestine courtship at Mary Wollstonecraft's grave - Shelley and Mary had declared their mutual love.

Godwin was horrified. He tried to persuade Shelley to patch up his relationship with Harriet, who was pregnant again, and insisted that he stopped seeing Mary. But he could not keep the lovers apart and at the end of July they decided to elope to the Continent. At the last moment they agreed that Mary's step-sister Jane - soon to adopt the name Claire - should come with them. Claire, with her dark hair, olive skin, exuberant and demanding nature, was in many ways the opposite of Mary, and Mary would soon regret the invitation.

The three young people fled to France and embarked on a journey through a country ravaged by war and starvation. Their high spirits carried them through but by the time they reached Switzerland, these, as well as their finances, had begun to wane. Mary was pregnant, unwell and irritated by Claire's company.
Illustrious father
(above) William Godwin was a radical intellectual who attracted a coterie of distinguished admirers. He had published a seminal work entitled An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and challenged contemporary thinking on politics and religion, as well as marriage. Despite his emancipated ideas, he was a distinctly selfish man who caused insalubrious distress to his daughter.

River Tay, Scotland
Frail and unwell, Mary, aged 14, was despatched to her father’s friend William Baxter, near Dundee. She spent two happy years there, going for long walks on the Sidlaw hills and along the river Tay (left). As she wrote in her introduction to Frankenstein, ‘It was beneath the trees of the grounds belonging to our [the Baxter’s] house... that my true compositions, the airy flights of my imagination, were born and fostered.’

perately short of money, the three decided, quite suddenly, to return home.

The problems, however, continued in England. Despite constant visits to banks, lawyers and money-lenders, Shelley had to go into hiding to avoid the bailiffs and the dreaded debtors’ prison, leaving a pregnant Mary, terrify and alone. Eventually, Shelley succeeded in securing a loan, whereupon Mary’s father, who was still hostile to the couple, made the first of a series of demands for money which were to plague Mary and Shelley throughout their life together.

In February 1815, when she was not quite seven months pregnant, Mary gave birth to a tiny, fragile daughter. Two weeks later she awoke to find that her baby had died. She desperately needed Shelley’s support, but he was now more interested in her step-sister Claire, and left Mary to be comforted by an old university friend of his, Thomas Hogg. An entry in her journal reflects the anguish she felt over her loss: ‘Dream that my little baby came to life again; that it had only been cold, and that we rubbed it before the fire and it lived.’

Gradually, Mary began to recover her good spirits, helped no doubt by Shelley’s agreement that Claire should leave their household and by a financial settlement which guaranteed Shelley an annual income of £1000. They moved into a house on Bishopsgate Heath, at the edge of Windsor Forest, and Mary, who was pregnant again, happily settled into a private life with Shelley, in which they studied, wrote, walked and rowed on the Thames with friends. She developed from an ill, anxious girl into a confident young woman, and in January 1816 she gave birth to a strong, healthy son whom they named William after her father.

Childhood home
(above) Mary grew up in the modest surroundings of London’s Skinner Street in Holborn. It was here, over a shop at number 41, that her parents lived, and here that she first set eyes on the ardent young poet and radical, Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Key Dates
1797 born in London
1814 elopes with Shelley
1816 William born; Fanny and Harriet commit suicide
1817 Clara born
1818 Frankenstein published; Clara dies
1819 William dies; Percy Florence born
1822 Shelley dies
1826 The Last Man published
1839 Shelley’s Poetical Works published
1845 son Percy inherits
1851 dies in London
Meanwhile, Claire had succeeded in ‘capturing’ no less a figure than the poet Lord Byron. It was a brief affair, but by the time Byron departed for Switzerland, Claire was pregnant. Shelley and Mary, distressed by Godwin’s continual demands for money, the public’s indifference to Shelley’s poems and their own rejection by society, were contemplating a return to the Continent, and Claire easily persuaded them to take her with them to Switzerland. Mary had been introduced to Byron and, while repelled by his excesses, had found him fascinating, and was happy to meet him again. Once more, the threesome travelled across the Continent and joined Byron, in May 1816, on the shores of Lake Geneva. Here they rented two adjacent villas and spent much time together, going on boating trips and talking long into the night at Byron’s Villa Diodati. The conversation frequently turned to subjects of horror and one night they decided to make up ghost stories. This was the starting-point of Mary’s first novel, Frankenstein.

Relations between the two households were strained, Byron having long lost interest in Claire. And as the summer came to an end, Mary and Shelley decided it was time to leave, and in September they arrived back in England.

UNFORESEEN TRAGEDIES

They settled in Bath, in happy domesticity, until they received the news that Mary’s half-sister Fanny had committed suicide. Mary, stricken with guilt and grief, was almost expecting the next blow when in December they heard that Shelley’s wife Harriet had also committed suicide, by drowning herself in the Serpentine in Hyde Park. Shelley immediately set off for London to claim custody of his two children, lanthe and Charles, and decided that he would have a better chance of doing so if he and Mary married. It was against his principles, but the ceremony duly took place in December 1816.

In January Claire, who was again living with the Shelleys, gave birth to a daughter, Allegra, and the chancery suit for custody of Shelley’s children began. The following month, Mary realized she was pregnant again and they moved to Marlow in Buckinghamshire where she settled down to finishing Frankenstein.

In September she gave birth to a baby daughter Clara, but immediately succumbed to post-natal depression. At the same time Shelley’s health – frequently bad deteriorated drastically. In the meantime, there was a flurry of local speculation about Allegra’s origins. Claire had never publicly explained her daughter’s parentage but had always hoped that Byron would give his daughter a privileged upbringing. Gossip now put the Shelleys under pressure to help her.

In March 1818, they set off for Italy. The lively, affectionate Allegra was sent with their nursemaid, Elise, to Venice, and the rest of the party travelled to Tuscany. Meanwhile Frankenstein had been published anonymously and an excited Mary was beginning to get favourable reports about it.

In August, Shelley and Claire set out to see Allegra and ten days later Mary received a letter asking her to join them. Her daughter Clara, not yet one year old, was ill, but Mary felt that she must go. So began a

Graveside romance (above) In order to escape the constant wranglings at home, and also to conduct her courtship in secret, Mary began meeting Shelley by her mother’s grave in St Pancras Churchyard. It was here that, united in heart and spirit, they pledged their troth to one another.
nightmare journey across Italy in which Mary had to watch her small daughter visibly failing in her arms. On arrival in Venice the baby died. In her anguish, Mary blamed Shelley for Clara’s death and never fully forgave him.

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

Born in London in 1759, Mary Shelley’s mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, experienced a difficult childhood. One of three daughters, she had little formal education and often witnessed her drunken father beating her mother. These scenes planted in her a determination to fight for the cause of women, to ensure, among other things, that girls received a decent education, that they had the possibility of supporting themselves and that they were not always physically and economically at the mercy of men. She wrote a book called Thoughts on the Education of Daughters and gradually found herself part of a distinguished and radical social circle. In 1792 she published A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, a pioneering feminist work which has recently been reprinted.

Her private life was less successful. At 32 she became infatuated with the painter Henry Fuseli and, reeling from that hopeless relationship, she travelled alone to France where she soon became involved with an American adventurer, Gilbert Imlay, and found herself pregnant by him. By the time their daughter Fanny was born in 1794, Imlay had already begun to tire of her. Mary attempted suicide, first in Paris, then in London, and it was not until she formed a friendship with William Godwin that she found genuine happiness. In March 1797 they married – Mary was pregnant. But their joy was to be short-lived – on 10 September 1797 Mary died a few days after giving birth to a daughter, Mary.

Alpine travels

Claire Clairmont (inset left), Mary’s stepsister, joined the young lovers when they eloped to Switzerland and became increasingly unwelcome as their journey progressed. At a certain point Shelley invested in a donkey to help transport Mary and some of their belongings along the way. But the animal was tiny, ill and feeble and Shelley ended up by carrying it clamped to his bosom, with Mary and Claire following, exhausted, at the rear.

Percy Bysshe Shelley

(right) Poet, free-thinker and political revolutionary, Shelley swiftly captured Mary’s heart. At 16, months after meeting him, she wrote the verse: ‘But ah! I feel in this was given/ A blessing never meant for me,/ Thou art too like a dream from heaven/ For earthly love to merit thee!’
ANOTHER WILLIAM

A
n alert and happy child, little William (named after Mary’s father) was his parents’ pride and joy. Mary felt a special closeness to him, but always had a sense of impending doom.

On one occasion, as her son lay sleeping in his cot, she wrote of another – fictional – William “with sweet laughing blue eyes” whose life is cruelly cut short. Her dark imagination pictured this boy “rosy with health” strangled by Frankenstein’s monster. Her vision of death was prophetic. Three years later her own William fell ill with dysentery and died.

throes of an emotional breakdown. Shelley offered her love and care, but she felt incapable of responding.

A son, Percy Florence, was born in November 1819, but Mary doubted that he would flourish and live. It was a difficult time for her. Godwin was demanding money again; Byron was refusing all Claire’s pleas to let Allegra spend some time with her; and things were reaching breaking point between the two sisters. On top of this, Paolo Foggi, an ex-servant and husband of Elise, was attempting to blackmail them over little Elena Adelaide Shelley, who had recently died.

The only alleviation in Mary’s difficulties came when Claire departed from the household and Mary was able to establish a happy working routine, writing her third novel Valperga. At the end of October 1820 the Shelleys moved to Pisa and made a number of new friends, including Edward and Jane Williams. Byron joined them a year later, having left Allegra behind in a convent, and shortly afterwards Edward John Trelawny, a swashbuckling adventurer, also arrived. He fuelled Shelley’s love of water and boats with his tales of adventures at sea.

‘EXPECTATION OF EVIL’
In some ways it was a happy time for Mary, until news came of Allegra’s death from typhus. A distraught Claire joined them as they and the Williamses moved to a house on the Bay of Spezia. Mary was pregnant again and unwell, and while Shelley and Edward Williams threw themselves into the enjoyment of sailing their new boat, she began to feel depressed and inexplicably anxious.

In June she suffered a miscarriage. She was still weak from it when Shelley announced that he and Williams were going to sail up the coast to Leghorn. Years later she wrote that a ‘vague expectation of evil shook me to agony’ and she tearfully begged him not to go.

Both she and Jane Williams, with whom Shelley was now in love, received letters describing his and Will-

Field House
(right) Situated in the village of Warnham, near Horsham, Sussex, Shelley’s family home reflected the luxury into which he was born. Quarrels with his father, however, kept Shelley away from the house for much of his life. Even when his grandfather died, Sir Timothy would not let him in to hear the reading of the will; Shelley reputedly sat on the steps in front of the house reading Milton’s Comus.

In 1844, after old Sir Timothy’s death, Mary’s son Percy inherited the baronetcy and moved into the family residence, reclaiming what his father had been denied.

Funeral pyre
Edward Trelawny, deeply moved by the death of his friends, Shelley and Edward Williams, battled with the Italian authorities for permission to cremate Shelley in the style of his beloved Greeks. Having seemingly moved heaven and earth to do so, he finally won his concession and accordingly set up a funerall pyre in a wild and beautiful spot on the shores close to Via Ragusa, near Florence. In classical Greek fashion, Trelawny poured salt and frankincense to fan the flames and poured wine and oil over the body. A copy of Keats’ last book, which had washed ashore with Shelley, had been placed beside his body – so that the souls of the two great poets might, at some level, be merged together.

As the flames lapped Shelley’s body, Trelawny plunged his hand into the fire and pulled out his friend’s heart, struck by all that it symbolized. At Mary’s request, the poet’s ashes were buried at the English cemetery in Rome beside the body of her and Shelley’s beloved young son William.
Byron's Allegra
Born to Claire Clairmont and Byron, Allegra was soon caught in a bitter tug-of-war between them. Byron would not allow Claire to see her and eventually put her into a convent. Tragically, when Allegra was just 5, she caught typhoid and died before either Claire or Byron could reach her.

MARY SHELLEY

In the days that followed, Mary was overwhelmed with despair. She longed to die, but the future of her son depended on her. So she unwillingly pulled herself together and made plans to stay in Italy and work, in the hope that she would be helped by an allowance from Shelley's family. But when his father wrote that he would maintain her son, Percy, only if she gave him up, she refused and returned reluctantly to England. Here she met up with Jane Williams again and felt the beginnings of a love which was not to be reciprocated, although the two women were to spend much time together.

Faced with lack of money and dismal lodgings, she struggled to write her next novel *The Last Man*. It was then that she heard of Byron's death and more than ever saw herself as the 'last man,' "girded, walled in, vaulted over, by seven-fold barriers of loneliness".

In 1827 Jane Williams went to live with Hogg, with whom she had been having a love affair for some years. Away from Mary she began to gossip about the Shelleys' relationship, trampling on Mary's precious memories. Many of Mary's other old friends were to turn against her in later years. They regarded her as a cold, unemotional, conventional woman who disappointingly rejected the radical beliefs of her husband in favour of society's approval.

Meanwhile little Percy was fast becoming the only male to whom she could give her love. He was never to show any signs of genius, but he was an affectionate, easy-going boy and, eager to give him a good education, she sent him as a day boy to Harrow at the age of 12. Her life was now poverty-stricken and solitary.

LESS TROUBLED DAYS
Mary eventually began to enjoy a middle age in which she travelled to the Continent with Percy and wrote various pieces of non-fiction. And in 1844, when Shelley's father, Sir Timothy, died, leaving his estate and barony to his grandson, her money worries were over. Unfortunately her new status made her vulnerable to blackmail attempts. She fought them but the attacks on her privacy took their toll on her health.

Mary had tried of life by the time she met her son's wife-to-be, Jane St John, in early 1848. Jane was a young widow who quickly became a devoted friend. She contributed much to what happiness Mary enjoyed in the last years of her life. In the winter of 1850, Mary became increasingly paralysed and, knowing she was dying, passed on to Jane the care of Shelley's papers and reputation. On 1 February 1851, Mary Shelley died.
Mary Wollstonecraft from A Vindication of the Rights of Woman

Chapter 2

To account for, and excuse the tyranny of man, many ingenious arguments have been brought forward to prove, that the two sexes, in the acquirement of virtue, ought to aim at attaining a very different character: or, to speak explicitly, women are not allowed to have sufficient strength of mind to acquire what really deserves the name of virtue. Yet it should seem, allowing them to have souls, that there is but one way appointed by providence to lead mankind to either virtue or happiness.

If then women are not a swarm of ephemeral triflers, why should they be kept in ignorance under the specious name of innocence? Men complain, and with reason, of the follies and caprices of our sex, when they do not keenly satirize our headstrong passions and glovelling vices. Behold, I should answer, the natural effect of ignorance! The mind will ever be unstable that has only prejudices to rest on, and the current will run with confusion through the void barriers to break its force. Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man; and should they be beautiful, everything else is needless, for at least twenty years of their lives.

The most perfect education, in my opinion, is such an exercise of the understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart. Or, in other words, to enable the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render it independent. In fact, it is a farce to call any being virtuous whose virtues do not result from the exercise of its own reason. This was Rousseau's opinion respecting men; 1 I extend it to women; and confidently assert, that they have been drawn out of their sphere by false refinement, and not by an endeavour to acquire masculine qualities. Still the regal homage which they receive is so intoxicating, that till the manners of the times are changed, and formed on more reasonable principles, it may be impossible to convince them, that the illegitimate power, which they obtain by degrading themselves, is a curse, and that they must return to nature and equality, if they wish to secure the placid satisfaction that unsophisticated affections impart. But for this epoch we must wait—wait, perhaps, till kings and nobles, enlightened by reason, and preferring the real dignity of man to childish state, throw off their gaudy hereditary trappings, and if

1. ephemeral, short-lived.
2. Rousseau's opinion respecting men.
3. a farce...—the...are.
4. The claims...command.
Great wars are strangely intermingled in their effects. The French Revolution took some people to their graves; others it passed over without disturbing a hair of their heads. Jane Austen, it is said, never mentioned it; Charles Lamb ignored it; Beau Brummell never gave it a thought. But to Wordsworth and to Godwin it was the dawn, unmistakably the dawn of France standing on the top of golden hours.

And human nature seeming born again.

Then it would be easy for a picturesque historian to lay side by side the most glaring contrasts—here in Chesterfield Street was Beau Brummell letting his chin fall carelessly upon his cravat and discussing in a tone audaciously free from vulgar emphasis the proper cut of the lapel of a coat, and here in Somers Town was a party of ill-dressed, excited young men, one with a head too big for his body and a nose too long for his face, holding forth day by day over the tea-cups upon human perfectibility, ideal unity, and the rights of man. There was also a woman present with very bright eyes and a very eager tongue, and the young men, who had middle-class names, like Barlow and Holcroft and Godwin, called her simply "Wordsworth," as if it did not matter whether she were married or unmarried, as if she were a young man like themselves.

Such glaring discords among intelligent people—for Charles Lamb and Godwin, Jane Austen and Mary Wollstonecraft were all highly intelligent—suggest how much influence circumstances have upon opinions. If Godwin had been brought up in the precincts of the Temple and had drunk deep of antiquity and old letters at Christ's Hospital, he might never have cared a straw for the future of man and his rights in general. If Jane Austen had been born a child on the landed estate of her father from thrashing her mother, her soul might have been tortured with such a passion against tyranny that all her novels might have been consumed in one cry for justice.

Mary Wollstonecraft

by Virginia Woolf

Such had been Mary Wollstonecraft's first experience of the joys of married life. And then her sister Ercina had been married miserably, and had borne two children to pieces. She had once been a burden on her father's farm; and in order to start that disgraceful line with the red face and the violent temper and the dirty hair in life again she had gone into bondage among the aristocracy as a governess—indeed, she had never known what happiness was, and, in its default, had fabricated a creed fitted to meet the sorrid misery of real human life. The staple of her doctrine was that nothing matter'd save independence. "Every obligation we receive from our fellow-creatures is a new shackle, taken from our native freedom, and debases the mind." Independence was the first necessity for a woman; not grace or charm, but energy and courage and the power to put her will into effect was her necessary qualities. It was her highest boast to be able to say, "I never yet resolved to do anything of consequence that I did not adhere readily to it." Certainly Mary could not have expressed herself better. When she was a little more than thirty she could look back upon a series of actions which she had carried out in the teeth of opposition. She had taken a house by prodigious efforts for her friend Fanny, only to find that Fanny's mind was changed and she did not want a house after all. She had started a school. She had persuaded

Fanny into marrying Mr. Skeff. She had thrown up her school and gone to Lisbon alone to nurse Fanny when she died. On the voyage back she had forced the captain of the ship to rescue a wrecked French vessel by threatening to expose him if he refused. And when, overcome by a passion for Fuseli, she declared her wish to live with him and was refused flatly by his wife, she had put her principle of decisive action instantly into effect, and had gone to Paris determined to make her living by her pen.

The Revolution thus was not merely an event that laid happened outside her; it was an active agent in her own life. She had been in revolt all her life—against tyranny, against law, against convention. The reformer’s love of humanity, which has so much of hatred in it as well as love, fermented within her. The outbreak of revolution in France expressed some of her deepest theorist and concepts, and she dashed off in the heat of that extraordinary moment those two eloquent and daring books—the Reply to Burke and the Vindication of the Rights of Woman, which are so true that they seem now to contain nothing new in them—their originality has become our commonplace. But when she was in Paris lodging by herself in a great house, and saw with her own eyes the King whom she despised driving past surrounded by National Guards and holding his head in his hand with more dignity than she expected, then, “I can scarcely tell you why,” the tears came to her eyes. “I am going to bed,” she said, “and, for the first time in my life, I can’t look out the window.” Things were not so simple after all. She could not understand even her own feelings. She saw the most cherished of her convictions put into practice—and her eyes filled with tears. She had won fame and independence and the right to live her own life—and she wanted nothing different. “I do not want to be loved as a goddess,” she wrote, “but I wish to be necessary to you.” For Imlay, the fascinating American to whom her letter was addressed, had been very good to her. Indeed, she had fallen passionately in love with him. But it was one of her theories that love should be free—that mutual affection was marriage and that the marriage tie should not bind after the death of love, if love should die.” And yet at the same time that she wanted freedom she wanted certainty. “I like word affection,” she wrote, “because it signifies something habitual.”

The conflict of all these contradictions shows itself in her face, at once so resolute and so dreamy, so sensual and so intelligent; and beautiful into the bargain with its great coil of hair and the large bright eyes that Southey thought the most expressive he had ever seen. The life of such a woman was bound to be tempestuous. Every day she made theories by which life should be lived; and every day she came smack against the rock of other people’s prejudices. Every day too—for she was no pedant, no cold-blooded theorist—something was born in her that thrust aside her theories and forced her to mold them anew. She acted upon her theory that she had no legal claim upon Imlay; she refused to marry him; but when he left her alone week after week with the child she had borne him her agony was unendurable.

Thus distracted, thus puzzling even to herself, the plausible and trenchant Imlay cannot be altogether blamed for failing to follow the rapidity of her changes and the alternate reason and unreason of her moods. Even friends whose liking was impartial were disturbed by her discrepancies. Mary had a passionate, an exuberant love of Nature, and yet one night when the colours in the sky were so exquisite that Madeleine Schweitzer could not help saying to her, “Come, Mary—come, nature lover—and enjoy this wonderful spectacle—this constant transition from colour to colour,” Mary never took her eyes off the Baron de Turgenets, wrote Madame Schweitzer, “that erotic absorption made such a disagreeable impression on me, that all my pleasure vanished.” But if the sentimental Swiss was disconcerted by Mary’s sensuality, Imlay, the shrewd man of business, was exasperated by her intelligence. Whenever he saw her he yielded to her charm, but then her quickness, her penetration, her uncompromising idealism harassed him. She saw through his excuses; she met all his reasons; she was even capable of managing his business.

There was no peace with her—he must be off again. And then her letters followed him, tearing at him, urging him with their sincerity and their insight. They were so outspoken; they pleaded so passionately to be told the truth; they showed such a contempt for soap and alum and wealth and health and comfort; they repeated, as he suspected, so truthfully that he had only to say the word, “and you shall never hear of me more,” that he could not endure it. Tickling minnows he had hooked a dolphin, and the creature rushed him through the water. He was dizzily and only wanted to escape. After all, though he had played at theory-making too, he was a business man, he depended upon soap and alum; “the secondary pleasures of life,” he had to admit, “are very necessary to my comfort.” And among them was one that for ever evaded Mary’s jealous scrutiny. Was it business, was it politics, was it a woman that perpetually took him away from her? He shivered and shuddered; he was very charging when they met; then he disappeared again. Exasperated at last, and half insane with suspicion, she forced the truth from the cook. A little actress in a strolling company was his mistress, she learnt. True to her own creed of decisive action, Mary at once took her skirts so that she might sink unhappily, and threw herself from Petney Bridge. But she was rescued; after unseparable agony she recovered, and then her “unspeakable, indescribable greatness of mind,” her girl’s creed of independence, asserted itself again, and she determined to make another bid for happiness and to earn her living without taking a penny from Imlay for herself or their child.

It was in this crisis that she again saw Godwin, the little man with the big head, whom she had met when the French Revolution was making the young men in Somers Town think that a new world was being born. She met him—but that is a euphemism, for in fact Mary Wollstonecraft actually visited him in his own house. Was it the effect of the French Revolution? Was it the blood she had seen spill on the pavement and the cries of the furious crowd that had rung in her ears that made it seem a matter of no importance whether she put on her cloak and went to visit Godwin in Somers Town, or waited in Judd Street West for Godwin to come to her? And that strange upheaval of human life was it that inspired that curious man, who was so queer a mixture of meanness and magnanimity, of coldness and deep feeling—for the memoir of his wife could not have been written without unusual depth of heart—to hold the view that the did right—that he respected Mary for tampering upon the idiotic convention by which women’s lives were tied down? He held the most extraordinary views on many subjects, and upon the relations of the sexes in particular. He thought that reason should influence even the love between men and women. He thought that there was something spiritual in their relationship. He had written that “marriage is a law, and the worst of all laws... marriage is an affair of property, and the worst of all properties.” He held the belief that if two people of the opposite sex like each other, they should live together without any ceremony, or, for living together is apt to blunt love, twenty days in a hotel, say, in the same street. And he went further; he said that if another man liked your wife “this will create no difficulty. We may all enjoy her conversation, and we shall all be wise enough to consider the sensual intercourse a very trivial object.” True, when he wrote those words he had never been in love; now for the first time he was to experience that sensation. It came very quietly and naturally, growing “with equal advances in the mind of each,” from those invisible, yet palpable, “ties which held them to improperly alone in his room.” It was friendship, he wrote. “When, in the course of things, the disclosure came, there was nothing in a manner for either party to disclose to the other.” Certain they were in agreement upon the most essential points; they were both of opinion, for instance, that marriage was unnecessary. They would continue to live apart. Only when Nature again intervened, and Mary found herself with child, was it worth while to lose valued friends, she asked, for the sake of a theory? She thought not, and they were married. And then that other theory—that it is best for husband and wife to live apart—was that also incompatible with other feelings that were strong in her? “A husband is a convenient part of the furniture of the house,” she wrote. Indeed, she discovered that she was passionately domestic. Why not.

5. the King... to her appear. The king was Louis XVI, who was guillotined by the revolutionary government in France in 1793.

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then, revise that theory too, and share the same roof? Godwin should have a room some doors off to work in; and they should dine out separately if they liked—their work, their friends, should be separate. Thus they settled it, and the plan worked admirably. The arrangement combined "the novelty and lively sensation of a visit with the more delicious and heartfelt pleasures of domestic life." Mary admitted that she was happy; Godwin confessed that, after all one's philosophy, it was "extremely gratifying" to find that "there is some one who takes an interest in one's happiness." All sorts of powers and emotions were liberated in Mary by her new satisfaction. Trifles gave her an exquisite pleasure—the sight of Godwin and Imlay's child playing together; the thought of their own child who was to be born; a day's jaunt into the country. One day, meeting Imlay in the New Road, she greeted him without bitterness. But, as Godwin wrote, "Ours is not an idle happiness, a paradise of selfish and transitory pleasures." No, it was an experiment, as Mary's life had been an experiment from the start, an attempt to make human conventions conform more closely to human needs. And their marriage was only a beginning; all sorts of things were to follow after. Mary was going to have a child. She was going to write a book to be called The Wrongs of Women. She was going to reform education. She was going to come down to dinner the day after her child was born. She was going to employ a midwife and not a doctor at her confinement—but that experiment was her last. She died in child-birth. She whose sense of her own existence was so intense, who had cried out even in her misery, "I cannot bear to think of being no more—of losing myself—nay, it appears to me impossible that I should cease to exist," died at the age of thirty-six. But she has her revenge. Many millions have died and been forgotten in the hundred and thirty years that have passed since she was buried; and yet as we read her letters and listen to her arguments and consider her experiments, above all that most fruitful experiment, her relation with Godwin, and realise the high-handed and hot-blooded manner in which she cut her way to the quick of life, one form of immortality is hers undoubtedly: she is alive and active, she argues and experiments, we hear her voice and trace her influence even now among the living. 

Consider this topic.

In her essay on Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf gives a number of the earlier writer's views, some of them contradictory. 

Attack or defend one of the opinions expressed by Wollstonecraft.
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- **Lit**: Epigram, Formal essay, History book, Lyrical poem, Mythological story, Ode, Rhyming couplet, Supernatural tales, Medieval romances, Classical Greek & Roman Literature, Gothic novel, Satire

- **Gov't**: Democracy, Discipline, Freedom, Law, Liberty, Oligarchy, Aristocracy, Revolution, Tradition, Beethoven, Mozart, Rousseau, Goethe

- **People**: Aristocrats, Commoners praised, Conservatives, Even-tempered, Liberals, Melancholic, brooding, Byronic hero, Outspoken, Reserved, Emotion, Logic, Spontaneity, Stability

- **Places + Things**: Formal portraits, Jungles, Landscapes, Rock gardens, Stately houses, Versailles Gardens, Wild outdoors, Natural beauty
Before the Romantic Movement, artists see themselves as the spokespersons for society. Artists believe that individual effort will restore order in the world.

1837 – 1901 Victorian Era, named for Queen Victoria known for prudery, but art & lit were both romantic and realistic. Gothic novels exaggerate and examine that part of human nature the Victorians repressed.

1830 – 1860 Transcendentalism
(A philosophical form of romanticism) Important in the U.S.

1885 – 1895 Symbolism
(Some critics date the symbolist movement from the author Baudelaire - 1857

Modernist Movements:

1909 – 1918 Imagism (American and British)

1910 – 1930 German Expressionism

1916 – 1923 DADAism
1920’s + - Cubism
124 – 1960’s – Surrealism (French)

1945 + - French Existentialism

1950 – 1960’s Absurdism
American, British, European

1965 + Post Modernism

Classicism and Modernism / Post Modernism both focus on the individualism but for different reasons.

Individuals have control - individual: no control

1650 AD – 1800 AD
Neoclassicism and The Age of Reason
English Restoration – 1660 – 1688
English Augustan 1700 – 1750
Enlightenment: 1750 – 1800
(French and American Revolutions are products of the Enlightenment)

1850 – 1890 Realism

1890 – 1930 Naturalism

1300 AD – 1650 AD
Renaissance sweeps northward across Europe.

500 AD – 1500 AD
Medieval Age
Battle of Hastings 1066 AD

900 BC – 500 AD Classicism
Greece: 900 BC – 300 BC
Rome: 500 BC – 500 AD
Gothic Horror

The sensational, the supernatural and the macabre were essential elements of the ‘new’ kind of novel that thrilled readers of all kinds and classes and made them thirsty for more.

Yet tales of terror are her dear delight,
All in the wintry storm to read at night.

So wrote the poet George Crabbe, describing the fashion for the Gothic novel—a type of story of the macabre and supernatural that had immense popularity during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The craze for such books was particularly strong in England, but they also flourished on the Continent, especially in Germany, where they were known as Schauerromane (‘Shudder Novels’). There is much more to Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein than horror, but all the contemporary reviews treated it as a Gothic romance, and it does indeed use many of the trappings and themes typical of this kind of book—“vaults and charnel-houses” and the “decay and corruption of the human body”.

Horror and the supernatural in literature were, even then, part of a long tradition. Some of the standard constituents of the ghost story, for example, go back almost 2000 years, to the Roman writer Pliny the Younger, who told a tale about a large sinister house haunted by a spectre that moaned and rattled its chains at dead of night.

But the Gothic novel broke new ground in its use of situations and props that have since become the stock-in-trade of horror movies: bleak castles, lightning, cobwebbed rooms lit by guttering candles, skeletons dressed in monks’ cowls, torture chambers, dungeons, graveyards, gargoyles. The term ‘Gothic’ originally referred to the medieval settings typical of such stories, but during the late 18th century the meaning changed to suggest a more general notion of remoteness, strangeness and mystery.

IRRATIONAL FEAR

The Gothic novel was one aspect of the very broad movement known as Romanticism, which marked a reaction from the prevailing ‘Age of Enlightenment’. Much European thought in the 18th century was characterized by rationalism—asserting the value of reason over imagination. But such a sensible, intellectual stance left unsatisfied a deep-seated human need—
The appeal of ghosts

‘All were alive to the solemn and terrible graces of the appalling spectre’, wrote a commentator, assessing the public’s obsession with stories of the supernatural. The Mysteries of Udolpho (below) gave a rational explanation to every outlandish incident, which tickled some of Mrs Radcliffe’s readers. Homely and shy of publicity, Mrs Radcliffe had no experience of the places she described.

Sex and violence

Matthew Lewis’ book The Monk is charged with all the adolescent sexual intensity of the 19-year-old who wrote it. Its heroine Mathilda (above) is captivated by the eloquence of Abbot Ambrosio and enters the abbey disguised as a monk. Her passion for the Abbot arouses his, and devastates these two chaste lives. Because of its explicit violence and sex, there were demands for the book to be banned.

Horror upon horror

Walpole’s Castle of Otranto (spelt wrongly above!) is no literary masterpiece, but its supernatural mystery makes use of elements which were to become the established conventions of the Gothic novel.

Fuseli’s ‘Nightmare’

(left) This is one of two versions of a painting by the great Anglo-Swiss artist Henry Fuseli, depicting a woman in the grip of an erotic nightmare. Remarkable for its daring subject matter, it represents not just the natural show of terror but also suggests the dark recesses of the mind.

a need which horror stories could partly satisfy without involving the reader in any personal risk. In 1798, the physician Dr Nathan Drake commented ‘Of all the various kinds of superstition which have in any age influenced the human mind, none appear to have operated with so much effect as the Gothic... even the most enlightened mind, the mind free from all taint of superstition, involuntarily acknowledges its power.’

The most popular phase of the Gothic novel was from 1765 to 1820. It affected America as well as Europe, and attracted readers of all social classes, from rich intellectuals to poor servants. Some novels were published in sumptuous three-volume editions, others as cheap throw-aways.

THE GRAVESIDE MANNER

Acknowledged forerunners of the Gothic novelists were the ‘Graveyard Poets’ who wrote reflective, melancholy works dealing largely with human mortality. The best known of these is Thomas Gray, author of Elegy written in a Country Churchyard (1751). But the very first Gothic novel is generally held to be The Castle of Otranto (1764) by Horace Walpole. Walpole, the 4th Earl of Orford, was a son of Sir Robert Walpole (Britain’s first Prime Minister). He was a connoisseur of works of art, as well as a writer, and had an extremely varied career as a man of letters. The Castle of Otranto was written at his home, Strawberry Hill at Twickenham (a pioneering work of the Gothic Revival in architecture) and was inspired by a dream: ‘I thought myself in an ancient castle... and that on the upper bannister of the staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour.’

Walpole, who wrote the book in under two months, published it anonymously, offering it as a translation ‘From the Original Italian of Onuphrio Muralto, Canon of the Church of St Nicholas at Otranto’, a 13th-century dean. Walpole feared ridicule, and to a literary public accustomed to novels of domestic sentiment, his tale must have seemed outlandish. The plot was as labyrinthine as the castle’s gloomy passages and vaults. It featured ghosts, giants, and statues that came to life, while its human characters gave unrestrained vent to their emotions. Sensation rather than subtlety was Walpole’s strong point – and the public loved it. A second edition was called for within a year, and ten more followed, as well as French and Italian translations.

To modern readers, the book seems convoluted, artificial and not very well written. Certainly it is now hard to credit that after reading it, the poet Thomas Gray (an old schoolfriend of Walpole) was ‘afraid to go to bed o’ nights’. Walpole himself did not try to follow up The Castle of Otranto – and in spite of its success it was some time before imitations appeared. The next Gothic novel with a claim to fame was Vathek (1786) by William Beckford.
beautiful heroine is abducted by her villainous uncle. Various inexplicable horrors beset her, which are all eventually shown to have human origin. Mrs Radcliffe was the chief representative of this 'rational' approach, and in spite of her popularity, some readers felt cheated when apparently supernatural events were ultimately given a prosaic explanation.

**EXPLICIT TREATMENT**

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* the heroine's honour as well as her life is threatened, but the sexual element is veiled and timorous compared with its treatment in *The Monk* (1796). Matthew Lewis wrote *The Monk* at the age of 19, when he was attaché at the British Embassy in The Hague. Set in Spain, it is a lurid tale of a once-worthy monk who becomes sexually obsessed, uses supernatural aid to pursue the object of his desires, and finally rapes and murders the unfortunate girl. After being discovered and tortured by the Inquisition, he is hurled to damnation by the Devil, with whom he has attempted to make a pact.

Not surprisingly, this heady mixture of sex and violence caused a sensation, and there were calls for the book to be suppressed. It was excitingly and skilfully written, however, and Lewis was befriended by leading literary figures such as Scott and Byron (Byron called him 'Wonder-working Lewis'). To the public at large he became known as 'Monk Lewis'; he never again wrote anything of the quality of his masterpiece.

**SHOCKING IMAGES**

The fascination with the mysterious, horrific and erotic found in Gothic novels is paralleled in contemporary painting, most notably in the work of Henry Fuseli, for whom Mary Shelley's mother had an obsessive infatuation. Fuseli was Swiss-born (his original name was Johann Heinrich Füssli) and settled permanently in England in 1779. A writer as well as a painter, he was much respected in intellectual circles, and the great poet-painter William Blake described him as:

> The only man that e'er I knew
> Who did not make me almost spew.

**Pleasure in pain**

Agony and torment, inflicted either by human torturers (such as the Spanish Inquisition above left), or by the fires of Hell, often occur in Gothic literature. The voyeuristic sadomasochistic implications are obvious. Readers of such books as *The Monk*, *Vathek* and *Udolpho* were invited to witness the most lurid extremes of human behaviour for their dubious pleasure.

**Sympathetic elements**

(above) Scenes of fictional horror were almost always accompanied by dramatic weather — illuminated by lightning or lashed by pitiless rain — so as to heighten the atmosphere. Science had been making efforts to analyze lightning's cause and harness its energies. Electricity was held in awe and some people even believed that it could imbue the inanimate with life.
GREAT BRITISH WRITERS

Beckford came from a family that had made a vast fortune from sugar plantations in the West Indies (Lord Byron referred to him as 'England's wealthiest son'). He grew into a beautiful young man, but it was rumoured that he was involved in black magic, and one of his female cousins described him as 'a second Lucifer'. In 1784 Beckford was caught in the bedroom of a 13-year-old boy - a nobleman's son for whom he had conceived a passion - and the ensuing scandal caused him to leave England with his wife and daughter.

He returned ten years later, a widower, and lived in eccentric seclusion at Fonthill in Wiltshire. There he built, at frantic speed, an enormous Gothic house - Fonthill Abbey - which was soon regarded as one of the architectural wonders of the age. He collected vast numbers of books and works of art, but in 1822 he was forced by financial pressures to sell the house. Three years later the 280 foot high tower collapsed and crashed through the building.

ORIENTAL ALLURE

Beckford's novel, Vathek, was written in French but translated into English. Subtitled 'An Arabian Tale', it is a prime example of the 'Oriental' type of Gothic story, which took the exotic Middle or Far East as its setting. Vathek is a cruel caliph who, in his thirst for power and forbidden knowledge, becomes a servant of Eblis (the Devil). The story is fast-moving and full of dramatic incident, as ghastly crime follows ghastly crime. It sustains the sense of fantasy more effectively than Walpole's book, and ends powerfully with Vathek condemned to eternal torment. Beckford claimed to have written it in three days and two nights while in a kind of trance, inspired partly by the engravings of the 18th-century Italian artist Giambattista Piranesi, who produced a famous series of powerful etchings with

William Beckford
(above) He had everything money could buy, plus books and intelligence, but he dabbled in the occult and disgraced himself with a sexual scandal. Forced to leave England, he travelled in Europe and wrote his oriental fantasy Vathek.

'Imaginary prisons'
The engraving below, made by Giambattista Piranesi as one of a series of nightmarish interiors, was an inspiration to William Beckford and shows a similar concern with the grim and terrifying.

Whereas both Walpole and Beckford were both very well travelled, the most commercially successful of the Gothic novelists, Mrs Ann Radcliffe, rarely ventured beyond London or Bath, and was such a retiring figure that she was rumoured to have died some time before her actual demise. But she excelled at descriptions of exotic places and the wild forces of nature. Her inspiration came partly from paintings by artists such as the popular 17th-century Nespolian Salvator Rosa.

Mrs Radcliffe wrote half a dozen Gothic romances, the best known of which is The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794). An indication of her popularity is that she was paid a publisher's advance of £200 for this book, then an unprecedented sum. Mrs Radcliffe's tale is set in a gloomy castle in the mountains of Italy, to which the
Fuseli’s most celebrated painting is The Nightmare, (1781) an unforgettable image of a woman in the throes of a violently erotic dream. Like Lewis, he shocked his public, but overcame their moral scruples by force of his genius.

SATIRE AND PARODY

By the time Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein appeared in 1818, the heyday of the Gothic novel had passed. Indeed, in the same year two books appeared ridiculing its conventions – Northanger Abbey by Jane Austen and Thomas Love Peacock’s Nightmare Abbey. Jane Austen is subtle in her satire, but Peacock is gleefully mocking, his characters having names like Diggery Deathshde and Mr Toobad. At the end of the book Scythrop Glorwry (a character based on Shelley) thinks of killing himself, but decides instead to open a bottle of Madeira.

The end of the great period of the Gothic novel is marked by the publication of Charles Maturin’s Melmoth the Wanderer in 1820. It is the only one of Maturin’s works which is still remembered, and is perhaps the most powerful of all Gothic novels – one of the few whose reputation has not decreased.

At the outset of the novel, Melmoth is already over 100 years old, having sold his soul to the Devil in return for prolonged life. He can escape from his dreadful pact only by finding someone to take over his part in it, and the plot involves his attempts to persuade a succession of characters to do this. They include a prisoner in the hands of the Inquisition and a man whose children are dying of hunger, but none of the unfortunates will buy freedom at the price Melmoth asks, and he is condemned to eternal torment.

The plot is involved and potentially repetitive, but the pace never flags and Maturin handles the story with magnificent bravura. Professed admirers of the book have included William Makepeace Thackeray and the painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Oscar Wilde called himself ‘Sebastian Melmoth’ after his release from prison, finding the name of the doomed wanderer appropriate to his plight as a social outcast.

LATER CREATIONS

The Gothic novel did not disappear overnight after Melmoth the Wanderer, but it had run its course as the most popular literary form of the day, to be succeeded by the historical novel, of which Sir Walter Scott was the great pioneer. Echoes of the Gothic tradition recur in Victorian literature, however (for example, in Dickens’ novels). And the most celebrated of vampire stories, Dracula by Bram Stoker, was not published until 1897.

The chilling tale of Dracula’s relentless pursuit of his victims has inspired a multitude of horror movies, which tend to highlight the lurid and sensational elements of the tale, rather than its imaginative power. Frankenstein, like Dracula, has been widely interpreted and promoted on film. Indeed, perhaps the most moving recreation of Mary Shelley’s story is the 1931 cinema classic. Boris Karloff’s monster, like the original, is not merely bestial – he is a pathetic creature who suffers because of his creator’s presumption in trying to usurp the power of God.

The joy of fear

There is no modern literary equivalent for the massive cult following Gothic books enjoyed. Their appeal overstepped the bounds of class, and the most respectable, refined and genteel of ladies (above) were gripped by the taste for gore, rape and supernatural terror. The absurd extremes to which some novelists went gave rise to Gothic parodies by such sly observers as Jane Austen.

Twentieth-century Gothic

Although Gothic literature burned itself out and largely disappeared during the 19th century, its elements survive today in horror movies and ‘pulp novels’. Some motion pictures based on the best of the literature (right) have created legends of their own.
Name ____________________________________ Hr ______

Read *Gothic Horror* and answer the following questions:

1. Who wrote the original ghost story?

2. To what does the term "Gothic" originally refer? Now what does it refer to?

3. What classes of people were attracted to Gothic novels?

4. What was Walpole's strong point in his writing?

5A. How long did Beckford claim it had taken to write *Vathek*? Why?

5B. How does this explanation fit the Gothic/Romantic time period?

6. How did William Blake describe Henry Fuseli?

7. How does *Dracula* fit the requirements of a Gothic novel?
true instructions given by Raphael, he learns appropriate knowledge. When Eve and Adam eat of the tree, they fall into the limited reasoning of humanity. To acquire knowledge is to understand how the material world works; to seek wisdom is to rehabilitate human reason in order to resee the world from a higher—a divine—perspective. On the other hand, the seventeenth-century writings of Francis Bacon promote the modern emphasis on useful learning; modern philosophers sought the advancement of learning to improve the material condition of human life.

My choices of Bacon and Milton are not arbitrary. Echoes of their writings help create the tension between moral and scientific knowledge in Frankenstein. In the early chapters, Baconian language abounds. Moreover, Mary Shelley selected the passages in which Bacon particularly advocates dominance over nature. I give the students a passage or two from Bacon’s writing to show what I mean; for example, in New Organon, Bacon advises new philosophers to “penetrate” nature to “find a way at length into her inner chambers” (329). (Students can pursue this theme in Merchant, ch. 7.) In Frankenstein, the modern Prometheans are identifiable with Baconian. Waldman defends the modern philosophers because they “penetrate into the recesses of nature and show how she works in her hiding-places” for “the solid advantage of mankind” (47, 48). Walton aspires to “tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man”; he will confer an “inestimable benefit” on humanity; he will acquire “dominion” over “elemental foes” (15, 16, 26). The young Victor Frankenstein longs to unveil and “penetrate the secrets of nature”; he seeks to “pioneer a new way”; he pursues “nature to her hiding-places” (39, 47, 53). Mary Shelley’s modern Prometheus achieves the highest of human aspirations to divinity: “A new species would bless me as its creator...” (52). But when the consequences of human progress are guilt, horror, and destruction, Victor falls back on the ancient attitude; for instance, he warns that intellectual success is “a serpent to sting you” (28), reflecting the belief that the original sin is acquiring knowledge.

To clarify Frankenstein’s cultural meaning, I find it particularly useful to contrast Mary Shelley’s treatment of triumphant Prometheusism with those of her famous relatives, William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Percy Shelley. A few passages from Godwin’s Enquiry concerning Political Justice show that he shared the Baconian faith that the human estate could be restored through science and technology. Particularly relevant is the chapter “Of Health, and the Prolongation of Human Life,” in which Godwin speculates that the human mind might overcome the death of the body and thus create a race of cultivated, virtuous adults impervious to the natural processes of childbearing and dying. Likewise, Percy Shelley’s
Prometheus Unbound prophesies the triumph of Prometheus and our species’s intellectual conquest of earth:

The lightning is his slave, heaven’s utmost deep
Gives up her stars, and like a flock of sheep
They pass before his eye, are numbered, and roll on.
The tempest is his steed, he strides the air;
And the abyss shouts from her depth laid bare,
Heaven, has thou secrets? Man unveils me, I have none. (4.1.420–25)

To ensure that the students do not simplistically reduce Frankenstein’s message to its overt didactic one, I confront them with the problem of Victor Frankenstein’s internal confusion. Victor tells his story to teach Walton to seek the values of conservative harmonism: “how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow” (52). Yet, in the end, he exhorts Walton’s crew not to return to their safe firesides but to continue to the North Pole: “You were hereafter to be hailed as the benefactors of your species. . . . Oh! Be men, or be more than men” (203–04). His last words sum up his contradictory perspective: “Seek happiness in tranquility and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries. Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed” (206).

Once encouraged, the students will find many similar examples in which Victor vacillates between advocating the values of staying home, cultivating sympathy and harmony, and the values of enterprise, cultivating science and progress.

Does Frankenstein favor or oppose scientific progress? Or, in other words, is Mary Shelley a radical or a conservative? During the first discussion hour, I ask the students to take a position on the question and to give significant reasons and textual evidence in support of their position. I stress that the students should use the ensuing debate to refine (or reinforce or even refute) their initial positions. This is a complex process, but one illustration may indicate in general how it works. One usually reticent engineering student came to class feeling that Frankenstein was an attack not on science but on a bad scientist. During discussion he ferreted out more and more textual details, mostly from chapters 3–5, to convict Victor Frankenstein of violating the scientific code: (1) Victor is motivated by self-glory rather than the public good. (2) For that reason, he rushes the project, thus creating a gigantic monster. (3) He works in isolation and in secret when he should work with colleagues who might restrain and evaluate his work. (4) He is too emotionally unstable for discovery; otherwise, why does he collapse in horror? A good scientist would see creating a monster as part of the trial-and-error process, as an experiment and not as a disaster. (5) He is ethically unsound in letting his experiment out of the lab without considering the consequences. The other students were not necessarily convinced that this was the ideal interpretation of Frankenstein, but they respected the engineer’s skillful reconciliation of his personal values with an authoritative reading of the text. Discussion elicits a stimulating diversity of readings, and together students come to tolerate ambiguity and complexity.

The question for the second discussion hour is, What is the nature of Victor Frankenstein’s guilt? It helps the students to get at the complexities of this question if they discuss it in three stages: How would each of the following characters answer the question: Walton, the Creature, Elizabeth, Clerval, Justine, Alphonse, Victor? How would Margaret Saville, the designated reader, answer the question after reading all of Walton’s letters? How do the students answer the question? This third question is crucial in healing another manifestation of the compartmentalization of knowledge, namely, the widespread student habit of distinguishing between “what I really feel and think” and “what I say and write for courses.” Many students consider this distinction necessary for academic survival, the tragic result being that they rarely see the classroom as a place to assess, develop, and integrate their intellectual, social, and personal pursuits. I repeatedly urge them to use the course as a place to discover what they want to argue about a topic. I ask the students to express their feelings on a topic, and then I help them gradually take responsibility for their views and assess the intellectual and social implications of holding such views.

- If the discussion on guilt goes well, the students will progress from treating Victor as an individual to recognizing that he is a cultural type and from talking about the imaginary events in the novel to naming current Promethean successes. They easily supply examples of great inventions—everything from DDT to thalidomide—that went awry when released from the lab into society. For example, as I was teaching Frankenstein in January 1986, the space shuttle Challenger exploded. In an interview broadcast across Canada on the CBC, one NASA engineer described his anguish: he had spent years in careful research to benefit humankind; the step-by-step conquest of space had made him feel “godlike”; but tonight, he said, “I feel like a squashed Prometheus.” Recent attempts to “play” the Creator—cloning, artificial intelligence, test-tube babies—are also relevant. Like Victor Frankenstein’s successful “maternity” in the lab, these discoveries provoke the difficult ancient question about whether there should be limits
to the pursuit of knowledge. Should science concern itself only with technical expertise—how it can be done—and neglect the moral question of whether it should be done? What I hope will come out of the discussion is an awareness of our profound ambivalence toward science. Discoveries may improve the human lot, but their consequences are often unforeseen and horrifying. Despite our technological successes, our modern culture shares the novel's tension between intellectual and moral knowledge. Is it the triumphant Prometheus that symbolizes humanity for us or the self-doubting, failed Frankenstein?

At the end of my first term of teaching engineering students, I asked them a final question: Which work studied in the course most challenges and transforms the contemporary reader's understanding and why? Most of them answered Frankenstein, which is perhaps not surprising given the personal relevance of the novel's theme. "Frankenstein," wrote one student, "questions the basic code I live by." Many students identified with Victor Frankenstein's tragic dilemma: "As an engineer," one student reported, "I believe science must be pursued to create a better world; yet, as the novel warns, the pursuit is unnatural and ultimately destructive." Even more remarkable, these students came to appreciate the novel as a "mosaic of unreliable viewpoints." The conflicting sympathies required of the reader of Frankenstein allowed them "to see the problem of the scientist's responsibility from various angles." From their struggle with Frankenstein and other works, they came to recognize why literature deliberately refuses to simplify an issue. One student even conceded that engineers needed to know "more about people and culture, which can best be learned through literature." Not all but most of the students appreciated the way literature could sensitize a reader to a more complex and holistic perspective on science. As one student discovered, "It is very necessary for engineers to understand that rational thinking and technology are only one aspect of our human experience." Clearly, the bridging of the "two cultures" can start in classroom conversations about the meaning of Frankenstein.
PROMETHEUS

PROMETHEUS, a Titan, was the creator of humankind, whom he made out of clay and water. Although he and his brother Epimetheus sided with the Olympian god Zeus (Roman Jupiter) during the war of the Titans (see box), Prometheus' relationship with Zeus was uneasy because Zeus thought him ugly and, being mortal, more loyal to humankind than to the gods. In an argument over which parts of an animal should be sacrificed to the gods, Prometheus tricked Zeus into choosing the bones and the fat rather than the meat. In retaliation, Zeus removed the gift of fire from the world, causing great suffering to humankind. In response, Prometheus stole fire from the sun, which he gave back to the world. Furious, Zeus chained Prometheus to a rock, where his liver was eaten each day by an eagle, and grew back each night.

CLASH OF THE TITANS

The 12 Titans, children of Uraeus, the sky and Gaia, the earth, were the first gods. They were deposed after a 10-year struggle by Zeus, son of Cronus (see p. 21), and from Tartarus in the underworld, locked behind twelve bronze doors guarded by twelve 100-armed giants. Zeus and his siblings then became the gods of Mount Olympus. Prometheus and Epimetheus sided with Zeus in this war; his older brother, Mnemosyne and Ate, supports Zeus. Mnemosyne chained Prometheus to a rock, where his liver was eaten each day by an eagle, and grew back each night.

PANDORA'S BOX

Pandora, the first mortal woman, was created by several gods, as Zeus ordered, to take her place after Prometheus stole fire from heaven. Hephaestus (Vulcan) shaped her; Aphrodite (Venus) gave her beauty; Hekate taught her to sing. Hermes (Mercury) taught her to dance and Eurynome (Ocean) taught her. Although Prometheus told her that the gift of fire could not be undone, Pandora accepted it and married her. As instructed, she brought an open, forbidden jar to the house of Helen (Myrcia) to be opened. Pandora opened the jar and released all the evils of the world: plagues, wars, diseases, misery, and death. Only one thing remained unopened: hope. For hope remained in Pandora's heart, as she reasoned that it was the one thing she could not open.
The Old Familiar Faces

I have had playmates, I have had companions,
In my days of childhood, in my joyful school-days,—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have been laughing, I have been carousing,
Drinking late, sitting late, with my bosom cronies,—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I loved a love once, fairest among women:
Closed are her doors on me, I must not see her,—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have a friend, a kinder friend has no man:
Like an ingrate, I left my friend abruptly;

Left him, to muse on the old familiar faces.

Ghost-like, I paced round the haunts of my childhood.
Earth seemed a desert I was bound to traverse,
Seeking to find the old familiar faces.

Friend of my bosom, thou more than a brother,
Why went thou born in my father's dwelling?
So might we talk of the old familiar faces—

How some they have died, and some they have left me,
And some are taken from me; all are departed,—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

Charles Lamb

Mutability

by Percy Bysshe Shelley

We are as clouds that veil the midnight moon;
How restlessly they speed, and gleam, and quiver,
Streaking the darkness radiantly!—yet soon
Night closes round, and they are lost for ever:
Or like forgotten lyres, whose dissonant strings
Give various frail response to each varying blast,
To whose frail frame no second motion brings
One mood or modulation like the last.

We rest.—A dream has power to poison sleep;
We rise.—One wandering thought pollutes the day;
We feel, conceive or reason, laugh or weep;
Embrace fond woe, or cast our cares away:

It is the same!—For, be it joy or sorrow,
The path of its departure still is free:
Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow;
Nought may endure but Mutability.
Mutability

by William Wordsworth

From low to high doth dissolution climb,
And sink from high to low, along a scale
Of awful notes, whose concord shall not fail;
A musical but melancholy chime,
Which they can hear who meddle not with crime,
Nor avarice, nor over-anxious care.
Truth fails not; but her outward forms that bear
The longest date do melt like frosty rime,
That in the morning whitened hill and plain
And is no more; drop like the tower sublime
Of yesterday, which royally did wear
His crown of weeds, but could not even sustain
Some casual shout that broke the silent air,
Or the unimaginable touch of Time.

from William Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey"

The sounding cataract
Haunted him like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to him
An appetite; a feeling, and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, or any interest
Unborrow'd from the eye.

---

To Wordsworth

by Percy Bysshe Shelley

Poet of Nature, thou has wept to know
That things depart which never may return:
Childhood and youth, friendship and love's first glow,
Have fled like sweet dreams, leaving thee to mourn.
These common woes I feel. One loss is mine
Which thou too feel'st, yet I alone deplore.
Thou wert as a lone star, whose light did shine
On some frail bark in winter's midnight roar:
Thou hast like a rock-built refuge stood
Above the blind and battling multitude:
In honoured poverty thy voice did weave
Songs consecrate to truth and liberty,—
Deserting these, thou leavest me to grieve,
Thus having been, that thou shouldst cease to be.
Hear the rime of the ancient mariner
See his eye as he stops one of three
Mesmerises one of the wedding guests
Stay here and listen to the nightmares of the sea.
And the music plays on, as the bride passes by
Caught by his spell and the mariner tells his tale.
Driven south to the land of the snow and ice
To a place where nobody's been
Through the snow fog flies on the albatross
Hailed in God's name, hoping good luck it brings.
And the ship sails on, back to the North
Through the fog and ice and the albatross follows on.
The mariner kills the bird of good omen
His shipmates cry against what he's done
But when the fog clears, they justify him
And make themselves a part of the crime.
Sailing on and on and north across the sea
Sailing on and on and north 'til all is calm.
The albatross begins with its vengeance
A terrible curse a thirst has begun
His shipmates blame bad luck on the mariner
About his neck, the dead bird is hung.
And the curse goes on and on at sea
And the curse goes on and on for them and me.
"Day after day, day after day,
we stuck nor breath nor motion
as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean
Water, water everywhere and
all the boards did shrink
Water, water everywhere nor any drop to drink."
There calls the mariner
There comes a ship over the line
But how can she sail with no wind in her sails and no tide.
See... onward she comes
Onward she nears out of the sun
See, she has no crew
She has no life, wait but here's two.
Death and she Life in Death,
They throw their dice for the crew
She wins the mariner and he belongs to her now.
Then... crew one by one
they drop down dead, two hundred men
She... she, Life in Death.
She lets him live, her chosen one.
"One after one by the star dogged moon,
too quick for groan or sigh
each turned his face with a ghastly pang
and cursed me with his eye
four times fifty living men
(and I heard nor sigh nor groan)
with heavy thump, a lifeless lump,
they dropped down one by one."
The curse it lives on in their eyes
The mariner wished he'd die
Along with the sea creatures
But they lived on, so did he.
and by the light of the moon
He prays for their beauty not doom
With heart he blesses them
God's creatures all of them too.
Then the spell starts to break
The albatross falls from his neck
Sinks down like lead into the sea
Then down in falls comes the rain.
Hear the groans of the long dead seamen
See them stir and they start to rise
Bodies lifted by good spirits
None of them speak and they're lifelesss in their eyes
And revenge is still sought, penance starts again
Cast into a trance and the nightmare carries on.
Now the curse is finally lifted
And the mariner sights his home
spirits go from the long dead bodies
Form their own light and the mariner's left alone.
And then a boat came sailing towards him
It was a joy he could not believe
The pilot's boat, his son and the hermit,
Penance of life will fall onto him.
And the ship sinks like lead into the sea
And the hermit shrives the mariner of his sins.
The mariner's bound to tell of his story
To tell this tale wherever he goes
To teach God's word by his own example
That we must love all things that God made.
And the wedding guest's a sad and wiser man
And the tale goes on and on and on.
ubla Khan

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

This poem was inspired by a passage about Kubla Khan (kōˈbly kən'), the founder of the Mongol dynasty in China in the thirteenth century, in Samuel Purchas's Purchas His Pilgrimage (1613): “Here the Khan Kubla commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto. And thus ten miles of fertile ground were inclosed with a wall.” Coleridge claims to have fallen asleep while reading this passage due to the effects of medication he was taking for an illness at the time (1797). Three hours later, he awoke from a dream, finding his mind was filled with two to three hundred lines of poetry, which were an elaboration of the description he had read immediately before drifting off to sleep. Coleridge immediately began to write down the lines that filled his head, but when he was interrupted by a visitor, he forgot the lines that he had not yet transcribed. As a result, he was unable to complete the poem.

In Xanadu¹ did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree:
Where Alph,² the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man

So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round;
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,³
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;

And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart¹ a cedarn cover!⁵
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a wantoning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon lover!

And from this chasm, with ceaseless tumult seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing.

A mighty fountain constantly was forced:
²⁰ Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hall,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail;
And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
It flung up momentarily the sacred river.

Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far

Ancestral voices prophesying war!
The shadow of the dome ofpleasure
Floated midway on the waves;
Where was heard the mingled measure
From the fountain and the caves.

It was a miracle of rare device,⁶
A sunny pleasure dome with caves of ice!

A damsel with a dulcimer⁷
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian⁸ maid,

And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.⁹
Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight 'twould win me,

That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!

His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honeydew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

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¹. Xanadu (zanˈə də): An indefinite area in China.
². Alph: Probably derived from the Greek river Alpheus, the waters of which, it was believed in Greek mythology, joined with a stream to form a fountain in Sicily.
³. rils: Brooks.
⁴. athwart: Across.
⁵. cedarn cover: Covering of cedar trees.
⁶. device: Design.
⁷. dulcimer: (dulˈə mar) n.: A musical instrument with metal strings which produce sounds when struck by two small hammers.
⁸. Abyssinian (ə bə nən): Ethiopian.
XANADU
by - Rush

To seek the sacred River Alph
To walk the caves of ice
To break my fast on honeydew
And drink the milk of Paradise.

I have heard the whispered tales
Of immortality, the deepest mystery
From an ancient book - I took a clue
I scale the frozen mountain tops of
Eastern lands unknown, time and man alone
Searching for the lost Xanadu. XANADU!!!

To stand within the pleasure dome
Decreed by Kubla Khan.
To taste anew the fruits of life
The last immortal man.
To find the sacred river Alph
To walk the caves of ice!
Oh, I will pine on honeydew
And drink the milk of paradise, OH, PARADISE!!

A thousand years have come and gone,
The time has passed me by
Star-stopped in the sky
Frozen in an everlasting dew
Waiting for the world to end
Weary of the night, praying for the light
Prison of the lost Xanadu. XANADU!!

Held within the pleasure dome
Decreed by Kubla Khan.
To taste my bitter triumph,
And a many immortal man.
Never more shall I return -
Escape these caves of ice.

For I have dined on honeydew -
And drunk the milk of Paradise, OH, PARADISE!!
Frankenstein for the Twenty-first Century:
An Exploration of Contemporary Issues

Eileen A. Simmons

As they face life in the twenty-first century our students are confronted by Frankensteinian questions, moral and ethical, that will become more common, yet more complex:

- When and under what conditions should life be medically prolonged?
- Should tissue from aborted fetuses be used to help people who are suffering from Parkinson’s Disease?
- If you’re a fundamentalist Christian, how do you adjust your view of the cosmos in the face of scientific theories of creation by the “Big Bang,” the expanding universe, and the theory of relativity?
- What moral and ethical considerations should engage scientists who are investigating and manipulating DNA and genetic material?
- As the definition of family changes, how are parental roles changing, especially the father’s role?

Like Victor Frankenstein, who created his monster with the best of intentions—to prevent death by learning to create life—scientific and medical discoveries have sometimes grown, like the monster, with unexpected consequences, independent of their creators. Students must learn to evaluate, judge, and make decisions about issues that seem deceptively simple but quickly become complicated.

My students have representatives of, in about equal numbers, Christian fundamentalists and those who have no religious background. Both groups are reluctant to confront moral and ethical questions, not only the fundamentalists because they’ve been taught that the Bible is the revealed Word of God, unchanging and unchangeable, and that the answers to all questions can be found there, but also the nonreligious because they feel
One of the most interesting issues identified by the students involves education. Victor was in charge of his own education, reading unguided in his father's library. He often attended school but says, "I was to a great degree, self-taught with regard to my favorite studies. ... I was left to struggle with a child's blindness, added to a student's thirst for knowledge." Victor's preoccupation with finding "the hidden laws of nature" is contrasted with his sister Elizabeth's serene contemplation of the maj-

An issue for modern students to explore is the role of a guided liberal arts education, balanced between the sciences and the arts.

An issue for modern students to explore is the role of a guided liberal arts education, balanced between the sciences and the arts. In part of the frame in which Shelley sets the story, she shows Frankenstein's "paroxysm of grief" at Walton's revelation that he shares Victor's single-minded pursuit of knowledge. This issue that Mary Shelley introduces for modern students to explore is the role of a guided liberal arts education, balanced between the sciences and the arts. Another interesting issue in the novel is the monster's feeling that he can never be fully human because he doesn't have a history. During the time he is living in the novel attached to the DeLacy's cottage, he listens as Felix educates SiEdie from a history book, Volney's Ruins of Empires. The monster realizes that he has no past, no friends, no history and that without those he is doomed to loneliness and a subhuman condition. He is an outcast, not just because of his hideous appearance but also because he lacks a history that connects him to all other humans. The monster's realization that history is necessary for complete "humanness" has interested several students, who view history as a dead subject.

As the students finish reading the novel, I give them a prewriting assignment for the position paper. I go through several weeks of magazines and pull out articles that relate to the issues the students identify. The issues Mary Shelley raises in Frankenstein are current; I have no problems finding articles on DNA, genetic manipulation, biotechnology, education, and family and children's issues. Particularly valuable was the Feb. 22, 1993, Newsweek cover story, "Cures from the Womb: A Search for Limits" (121: 48-53). However, the most fascinating discussions resulted from the September 23, 1991, Newsweek story, "African Dreams" (118: 42-5). The cover with a picture of Cleopatra and the word "Was Cleopatra Black?" guarantee a lively discussion of history, which writes it, and its importance for all people, especially minorities.

The students group themselves and choose an article to discuss and relate to the novel. At the end of the class period, a spokesperson from each group summarizes the article, relates it to one as-

Other students relate the pervasiveness of Shelley's major theme—the responsibility of scientists to consider the societal and moral implications of their work. This perspective of Frankenstein, and presents the findings orally. This prewriting exercise gives the students experience in making the connections between the articles and the novel in explaining them to their peers.

From that point, the students go to the library for research. Popular articles on all aspects of the issues are easily available, and students have no trouble collecting the information. The resulting papers are among the best students write all year. Significantly, they show a change in attitude, although most students agree that Frankenstein is still with us today.

Several students, firmly anti-abortion when they begin the project, document their attitude change when they write that, although abortion is wrong and they would never choose it for themselves, they think that if a woman chooses to have an abortion, the fetal issue should be used for medical research, providing good out of bad. Other students realize the pervasiveness of Shelley's major theme—the responsibility of scientists to consider the societal and moral implications of their work, citing examples of genetic manipulation that could be used for good or ill.

The students who choose to research ethnic history also show a dramtic change in attitude. One Latina researched the history of Hispanic people in the United States and expressed her indignation that many of their contributions had been ignored by mainstream history writers. An African American student who researched his history echoed his sentiments. Significantly, the student on whom this had the most effect was a white student. She realized how many contributions minorities had made to US history and how these contributions had been overlooked. Through this she began to better understand some of the impatiences that her minority classmates expressed with the majority society.

Most of the students have chosen to write about the rejection-child syndrome and the responsibility of the creator toward the created. In a school where pregnancy is frequent enough for the administration to consider instituting a daycare center, I find this choice interesting. The students report that researching this issue reinforces their realization of the importance of good parenting, especially the father's role in child rearing.

As the culminating activity, the students watch the classic movie Frankenstein, (Frankenstein, The Re
tained Version, 1931 video of 1931 black and white film, Director James Whale, Universal) starring Boris Karloff. After the intensity of their research and writing, they position the movie somehow between ridiculous and hilarious. The resulting class discussion focuses on their reaction to the monster as opposed to the characters in the movie. The novel, they say, makes the monster a sympathetic character whereas the movie monster is a wholly unsympathetic creature.

At the end of the school year, I ask the students to compile a course portfolio. Almost without exception, they choose the Frankenstein paper as their best or favorite paper. It brings together the themes of English literature of the past and relates them to the students' futures.

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English Journal 32
Frankenstein and the Sublime
Anne K. Mellor

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1. Is the Creature in Frankenstein good or evil?
2. Is he innately so? Or does he become good or evil?
3. If he becomes so, what causes this change?

As the discussion develops, the class usually divides into those who believe the Creature is good and those who believe he is evil. The former cite the Creature's assertions: "I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend" or "My vices are the children of a forced solitude that I abhor; and my virtues will necessarily arise when I live in communion with an equal" (Rieger 95, 143; all subsequent page numbers refer to the Rieger edition). After pointing out that the Creature here invokes Rousseau's notion of the "natural man," born free and good but everywhere enchained by society, I turn to the rest of the students, who usually cite Victor Frankenstein's immediate perception of the Creature as evil: "Abhorred monster! Friend that thou art! The tortures of hell are too mild a vengeance for thy crimes. Wretched devil!" (94); they also cite the long list of the Creature's crimes (burning the De Lacey cottage, murdering William, Clerval, Elizabeth).

To clarify the question of whether the Creature is innately good or evil, a Romantic child of innocence or an Augustinian child of original sin, I ask the class to look at the central scene in which the Creature first sees himself:

How was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification. (109)

This passage suggests that in Frankenstein, identity is a process not so much of knowing (re-cognition) as of seeing. Even though the Creature is unable to recognize himself in the mirror of the pool, "unable to believe it was indeed I," his eyes convince him: "I was in reality the monster that I am."

Since the Creature's internal sense of himself (his belief) differs from his external perception of himself, he becomes the emblem of the very questions we are pursuing: What is the thing in itself? How do we perceive it? Do we perceive what is really there? I ask the class how the characters in Frankenstein perceive the Creature. They quickly respond that all but one see him as evil, monstrous, frightening. Frankenstein interprets the Creature's affectionate embrace as an attempt "seemingly to detain" him and flees from "the demoniacal corpse to which [he] had so miserably given life" (53); the old man in his hut, perceiving the Creature, shrieks and runs away (100); the villagers pelt him with stones (101); the rustic whose drowning girlfriend the Creature saves shoots him (137); Felix, horrified by his appearance, throws him down with superhuman force in order to rescue Father De Lacey from his grasp (131); even the innocent William Frankenstein sees him as an "ogre" and a cannibal (139). I point out that all these characters are endorsing Johann Lavater's and Johann Spurzheim's contemporary theories of physiognomy and phrenology—the assumption that the external human form or the shape of the skull accurately manifests one's internal moral qualities.

The one character who does not immediately read the Creature as an evil monster is, of course, blind. Father De Lacey listens to the Creature's eloquent speech and hears truth in his assertion.

I have good dispositions; my life has been hitherto harmless, and, in some degree, beneficial; but a fatal prejudice clouds their eyes, and where they ought to see a feeling and kind friend, they behold only a detestable monster. (130)

Father De Lacey articulates the students' own response: "there is something in your words which persuades me that you are sincere" (130). As several students observe, the reader—as opposed to the filmgoer—has not seen the Creature but only heard descriptions of his appearance. At this point in the novel, the reader's sympathies have shifted away from the horrified Victor Frankenstein and toward the speaking Creature, whose eloquent language is at least as powerful as the words earlier spoken about him. But whether the blind Father De Lacey reads the Creature's innate character correctly, we as readers can never know, because he is ripped out of the novel by his prejudging son.

Walton is the other character who does not immediately reject the Creature on the basis of a first impression, primarily because he has heard—through Victor—the Creature's autobiography. Confronting the Creature for the first time at Victor's deathbed, Walton is initially repulsed: "Never
did I behold a vision so horrible as his face, of such loathsome, yet appalling hideousness. I shut my eyes involuntarily” (216). But, because he is thus momentarily sightless, he is also attracted to the Creature: “I called on him to stay” (216). Walton’s responses to the Creature continue to veer between hostility and sympathy. But Walton’s final judgment on the Creature’s moral nature is mute; after the Creature’s apologia pro vita sua Walton says nothing, and in the final sentence of Mary Shelley’s manuscript (which differs from the 1818 text; see “Choosing a Text” in this volume), he significantly loses “sight” of the Creature “in the darkness and distance.”

This last sentence brings us back to the fundamental epistemological problem in the novel: How are we to see the nature of the Creature? Walton, who of all the characters in the novel knows him best, has “lost sight” of him. The Creature thus represents the confrontation of the human mind with an unknowable nature, with the experience that eighteenth-century philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke called the sublime. The Creature inhabits the very landscapes that Burke explicitly identified as the locus of the sublime experience in his A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful:

whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger; that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotions which the mind is capable of feeling. (39)

I show the students several examples of sublime landscapes, landscapes that seem to threaten the viewer’s life, culled from Salvator Rosa’s depictions of towering mountains, huge dark caves, and marauding bandits; from John Martin’s images of the biblical deluge; and from Caspar David Friedrich’s depiction of a shipwreck in the frozen arctic seas. Confronted with these scenes, the students themselves experience the process Burke describes, a movement from terror or fear to astonishment (as the instinct of self-preservation is gradually relaxed) to admiration and perhaps reverence and respect, as they acknowledge the awesome revelation of a power (call it nature or God) capable of creating such overwhelming landscapes.

Returning to the novel, students quickly recognize that the Creature inhabits such sublime landscapes, whether in the Alps near Geneva over which violent storms rage, the desolate rocks of the Orkney Islands off the Scottish coast “whose high sides were continually beaten upon by waves” (161), or the “mountainous ices of the ocean” at the North Pole, where the Creature is finally “lost in darkness and distance” (Rieger 221). Not only does the Creature bound through such sublime landscapes, but he also embodies the sublime. His gigantic stature, his enormous physical strength, and especially his origin in the transgression of the boundary between life and death—all render him both “obscure” and “vast,” qualities that are the touchstones of the sublime. His very existence seems to constitute a threat to human life.

I suggest to the class that Mary Shelley’s calculated association of the Creature with Burke’s sublime is intended to do more than rouse a powerful aesthetic response in the reader. It also raises the question of what we know and how we know it. When the human mind encounters a sublime landscape, it tries to determine the meaning of the image before it. Burke and Kant suggested that the meaning of such an immense landscape is the infinite and incomprehensible power of God or nature (the thing in itself). In this reading, what is signified (divine omnipotence or the ding an sich) is greater than the signifier (the landscape and our verbal or visual descriptions of it). With Thomas Weiskel, we might call this mode the “negative” sublime, since the human mind is finally overwhelmed or negated by a greater, even a transcendent, power.

As contrast, I ask the students to read the Mount Snowdon episode of Wordworth’s Prelude and Coleridge’s “This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison.” These two Romantic poems suggest that the meaning of a sublime landscape may lie, rather, in its capacity to inspire the poetic imagination to a conception of its own power as a “mighty mind” or “almighty spirit.” In this reading, what is signified (the landscape) is less than the signifier (the poetic language produced by the creative imagination); hence this mode can be called the “positive” sublime, since the human mind finally confronts its own linguistic power. I then remind students that the aesthetic experience of the sublime they received from looking at the paintings by Rosa, Martin, and Friedrich was based not on nature but on art, on the power of a visual language created by human beings.

With this distinction in mind, I ask the students to determine whether Frankenstein’s Creature represents the positive or the negative mode of the sublime. Again, the class usually divides. Some say the negative, observing that the Creature is a vast power beyond Frankenstein’s linguistic control. As he threatens Frankenstein,

Slave, I before reasoned with you, but you have proved yourself unworthy of my condescension. Remember that I have power; you believe yourself miserable, but I can make you so wretched that the light of day will be hateful to you. You are my creator, b— I am your master; obey! (165)
In this reading, the Creature represents the power of universal human destruction, the unthinkable, unimaginable, unspeakable experience of a deluge or a nuclear holocaust. He is the thing in itself, the elemental force of nature that can annihilate all human life.

But insofar as the Creature is the unknowable thing in itself, I remind the students, he is always already interpreted or read by the characters in the novel and by themselves. In this sense, he also represents the positive sublime, the meanings or systems that human beings construct out of the elemental chaos of nature. Like Kant, Mary Shelley forces us to see that the human mind always imposes a phenomenological order on an unknowable noumenon and that these orderings or semiotic constructions are the social ideologies that we call reality.

I argue that Mary Shelley’s purposes in the novel are finally ethical rather than epistemological. After showing students several of Diane Arbus’s photographs of freaks, the Jewish giant, transvestites, and transsexuals, I ask them how they have responded to these images of the unfamiliar, the abnormal, the unique. Invariably, they express unease, discomfort, anxiety, even repulsion and fear. I suggest that human beings typically interpret such images negatively. In other words, we use language to name the normal and the abnormal, the human and the nonhuman, and thus to fix the boundaries between them. As Michel Foucault has pointed out in *Madness and Civilization* and *Discipline and Punish*, we use language as an instrument of power, as a way to define the borderline between reason and madness, between the socially acceptable and the criminal, and thus to control the terrors of the unknown.

In Mary Shelley’s novel, this linguistic process of naming the unknown, the Creature, becomes a discourse of power that leads directly to the creation of evil. By consistently seeing the Creature as evil, the characters in the novel force him to become evil. Whatever his moral nature might be, the Creature becomes a monster because he has been denied access to a human community, to female companionship, to parental care, to love. His violent rage and malicious murders are the direct result of a humanly engendered semiotic construction of the Creature as terrifying and horrible. Mary Shelley thus shows us that when we see nature as evil, we make it evil. What is now proved was once only imagined, as William Blake said in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Having conceived his Creature as a “devil” and his “enemy” (94, 199), Victor Frankenstein has made him so.

Moreover, since we can consciously know only the phenomenological or linguistic universes that we have ourselves constructed, if we read or imagine the Creature as evil, we write ourselves as the authors of evil. In Blake’s pithy phrase, “we become what we behold.” Frankenstein gradually becomes the monster he constructs: “I considered the being whom I had cast among mankind... nearly in the light of thy own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave” (72). Many students notice that, by the end of the novel, Victor and his Creature have become indistinguishable—they embody one consciousness, one spirit of revenge, one despair. More literally, Frankenstein has become the monster he named: in the popular imagination informed by the cinematic and comic-book versions of Mary Shelley’s novel, his name, Frankenstein, has become the monster’s.

Mary Shelley’s answer to the questions originally raised in class—is the Creature innately good or evil?—is thus one of radical skepticism. Since the human mind can never know the thing in itself, it can know only the constructions of its own imagination. Because the mind is more likely to respond to the sublime or the unknown with fear and hostility than with love and acceptance, the unfettered imagination celebrated by the Romantic poets is more likely to construct evil than good. Mary Shelley believed, I argue, that the Romantic imagination must be consciously controlled by love, specifically a love that sees all the products of nature—the old, the sick, the handicapped, the freaks—as sacred life-forms to be nurtured with care and compassion.

Finally, I point out that Mary Shelley’s criticism of the unfettered Romantic imagination and its celebration of the sublime entails a different aesthetic commitment, an affirmation of the beautiful over the sublime. As Burke wrote, the sublime appeals to the instinct of self-preservation and rouses feelings of terror that result in a desire for power, domination, and continuing control. But the beautiful appeals to the instinct of self-procreation and rouses sensations of erotic and affectional love. I illustrate this distinction by showing the class several examples of beautiful landscapes by Claude Lorrain and Richard Wilson, emphasizing the sensuously undulating curves, balanced symmetries, controlled tonal harmonies, and careful framing of these compositions. The idealized figure of Clerval in the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein* explicitly prefers the brightly colored and gently undulating landscapes of the beautiful, the banks of the lower Rhine (153), for instance, to the “majestic and strange” mountains of the Swiss Alps (153). By celebrating the beautiful over the sublime, Mary Shelley through Clerval advocates a loving acceptance of all the productions of mother nature (significantly, in this novel even the Alps are gendered as female). Only by reading the sublime, the unknowable, as lovable can we prevent the creation of monsters, monsters both psychological and technological, monsters capable of destroying all human civilization.
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Finally, I point out that Mary Shelley’s criticism of the unfettered Romantic imagination and its celebration of the sublime entails a different aesthetic commitment, an affirmation of the beautiful over the sublime. As Burke wrote, the sublime appeals to the instinct of self-preservation and rouses feelings of terror that result in a desire for power, domination, and continuing control. But the beautiful appeals to the instinct of self-procreation and rouses sensations of erotic and affectional love. I illustrate this distinction by showing the class several examples of beautiful landscapes by Claude Lorrain and Richard Wilson, emphasizing the sensuously undulating curves, balanced symmetries, controlled tonal harmonies, and careful framing of these compositions. The idealized figure of Clerval in the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein* explicitly prefers the brightly colored and gently undulating landscapes of the beautiful, the banks of the lower Rhine (153), for instance, to the “majestic and strange” mountains of the Swiss Alps (153). By celebrating the beautiful over the sublime, Mary Shelley through Clerval advocates a loving acceptance of all the productions of mother nature (significantly, in this novel even the Alps are gendered as female). Only by reading the sublime, the unknowable, as lovable can we prevent the creation of monsters, monsters both psychological and technological, monsters capable of destroying all human civilization.
The Shadow of Frankenstein looms over us far into the horizon. Continually it haunts us in the news.  

We are not Frankenstein-type people!  
So scientists, after every breakthrough in cloning, feel compelled to reassure the public. But the public is further disquieted by the implicit admission that there are still "Frankenstein-type people"!  
Frankenstein food! Frankenfood!  
So demonstrators shout after each new genetically modified food goes on sale.  
Dr. Frankenstein, Please Call Your Office  
So runs a page-wide headline in the New York Times over a story summing up the case for and against the good intentions of the twenty-first-century scientist.  
And everyone understands the allusions: They are clear references to Mary Shelley's scientist and the monster he created that got out of human control.  
By 2035—several experts prophesy—gene manipulation will feed the hungry Third World, cure cancer and even death; gene manipulation may make us immortal. We'll have low-cost solar energy and super-computers. Maybe even before 2035, we'll be served by machines not only intelligent but sentient, by gadgets that maintain and repair themselves, by totally automated factories: that is, factories that even manage themselves.  
But other scientists warn that humanity may be hurtling toward mass suicide. These rapid advances can, like the Frankenstein experiment or the development of certain antibiotics, simply boomerang, bringing new types of accidents and destructive conditions. The long-range effects of gene manipulation are unpredictable. Super-intelligent ma-
chines can evolve to compete with humanity, compete for our resources, “squeeze human beings out of existence.” Some scientists file suits to stop a physics lab from creating an artificial black hole that could—they fear—devour the earth in a few moments. A perennial fear is that some experiment, like creating super-bacteria for benevolent purposes, might leak out of the lab into the hands of terrorists and provide them with new bioweapons. And everyone remembers that Frankenstein himself imagined he could make a creature immortal.

Like Joseph Heller’s Catch-22, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s Frankenstein did give us a name to help identify one of our modern problems. But giving us a much-needed symbol to keep us conscious of the threat of “science run amok” is just one of the many accomplishments of the nineteen-year-old Mary Shelley. She had intended, in 1816, simply to write a thrilling horror story. But she underestimated herself. Because of her family background, the books she’d devoured and had heard discussed, the people she’d talked with, and her own genius in sensing the spirit of modern times, she produced something greater than just a “horror story”—she produced a major novel of ideas. Here’s a short list of some of the other cultural achievements of the greatest “horror story” writer ever:

She dramatized—on a stage stretching from snow-peaked Switzerland to the polar ice fields—major questions posed by philosophers like William Godwin, John Locke, Voltaire, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. And in her implicit rebuttal of the claims of scientists like Francis Bacon and Humphry Davy, she accurately identified, rather early in studies of the history of ideas, what feminist critics now call “masculinist science.”

She cast a new and sickening light on some of the most sacred aspects of the patriarchal system, from its deepest, unacknowledged animosities toward females to its glorification of its dangerous work ethic and of hierarchy.

She insisted on recognizing and coming to terms with the role of the irrational in human affairs—this, mind you, long after Shakespeare’s emphasis on it had been down-

graded by the Age of Reason and long before Freud, Jung, and Lacan would upgrade it again in modernist times.

She not only pioneered what we now (since 1926) call science fiction, she supplied it with one of its perennial themes: right down to Michael Crichton’s Jurassic Park and last night’s science fiction on TV. And the Frankenstein myth she launched has proliferated into dozens of sequels, in film: such as the James Whale/Boris Karloff classic, and in fiction: The Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein by Theodore Roszak (another writer who gave us a much-needed new word: counterculture).

“The cloud of mind is discharging its collected lightning.”

So Mary Shelley’s husband Percy wrote about the growth of democratic sentiment in England. He could just as easily have been describing what happened to Mary one evening in 1816, when all her lifelong sentiments, anxieties, and principles suddenly converged into one lightning bolt of inspiration.

In that sense, her novel Frankenstein actually began to “collect” when her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, brilliant author of Vindication of the Rights of Woman, gave birth to our Mary in August 1797, and died eleven days later. Daughter Mary would brood all her life on the plight of a person brought up without a real mother: notice how many characters in Frankenstein struggle with the problems of the orphan or of the broken family. Her father, William Godwin, equally famous author of Enquiry into the Principles of Political Justice, gave up trying to be father and mother to Mary and her half-sister, and married a widow who clearly favored her own two children. Mary had plenty of opportunities to reflect on family influence and responsibilities, a major theme in Frankenstein.

Although deficient in family feeling, Godwin did help young Mary in several literary ways. The Godwin Juvenile Library, which he founded with his new wife, published Mary’s clever 156-line satirical ballad, “Monseer Nongtongpaw,” written when she was only eleven! He trained his daughter in the stimulating practice of reading several books concurrently. And he allowed her to sit in on social evenings
he'd staged for other literary giants like William Wordsworth, Charles Lamb, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. One awesome evening she actually heard Coleridge read aloud his *Ancient Mariner*. Her impressions of the sailor supernaturally punished for his violation of Nature would clearly influence her conception of her scientist Frankenstein.

Usually deprived of her father's intimate company—he often sent her on long visits to Scotland—she nevertheless interacted with his ideas, and her mother's, through her passionate readings of their respective treatises and novels.

Godwin believed, like Voltaire, in the power of pure reason to solve all social, political, and personal problems. And like Rousseau, Godwin felt that humans are by nature benevolent and become evil only when abused by society. Government, he preached, and other institutions like marriage and the family, impose evil restraints on citizens and must be abolished. But he opposed violence as a means of changing things. Instead, he saw well-educated citizens working toward a better world by repressing emotions and reasoning person-to-person. And so he became the father of philosophical anarchism. His ideas of progress, of the perfectibility of humanity, of perpetual peace through arbitration, inspired writers such as William Wordsworth and Percy Shelley. Godwin's all-out critique of the Establishment lies behind several stinging passages in *Frankenstein*, as when the monster learns about European life:

[T]he strange system of society was explained to me. I heard of the division of property, of immense wealth and squalid poverty, of rank, descent, and noble blood... A man might be doomed to waste his powers for the profits of the chosen few.

Mary's mother, in writings published mainly before her marriage to Godwin, defended the French Revolution with an implicit threat that it could spread to England, where, she said, the miseries (an important word in *Frankenstein*) of the poor were radicalizing the workers. She attacked the hierarchical system that required underpaid mechanics to support the rich and idle aristocracy and deprived women of any chance to realize their human potential. She de-
made her reservations clear in her novel. A typical disquieting
note is Davy’s passage in which he praises “modern mas-
ters” who “penetrate into the recesses of nature, and shew
how she works in her hiding places.” Here Davy is follow-
ing in the tradition of Francis Bacon, who called on natural
philosophers to put Nature on the rack and torture her secrets
out of her! This recurrent image of male scientists violating
female Nature surely figured—at least subliminally—in Mary’s
stunning insight into Frankenstein’s character: he would be a
man deeply conflicted between love and misogyny.

The “cloud of mind” was darkening. On nights famous
in literary history, the Shelleys visited their neighbors on
Lake Geneva, Lord Byron and his physician, Dr. John Poli-
dori. Some nights Percy and Byron discussed “the principle
of life,” a topic in vogue because of sensational experiments
with reanimating dead bodies. Galvani, for example, had
made dead frogs jerk as though alive by sending electricity
through their legs. Hanged men taken down from the gal-
lows had also been made to thrash about. Mary herself suf-
fered from recurrent dreams that she had massaged her dead
baby, Clara, until she was brought back to life. Then on the
night of June 15, 1816, they all read ghost stories aloud.
And Byron proposed that they each write one.

The way that Mary struggled with ideas for what could
have been a simple tale (see pp. xxiv-xxv) shows that she
felt she needed a chance to bring all her experience together
into one great symbolic synthesis. Her anguish as the ne-
eglected child of a genius, as the mother of an unanimated
dead daughter and of the infant William for whose life she
(correctly) feared; her wealth of still unintegrated ideas—
some attractive to her, some repugnant—gleaned from the
works of her parents, her husband, and other writers; her
dread of her father’s impersonal rationalism and her hus-
bond’s unconditioned love of science—all this was sud-


enly concentrated and discharged into one bolt of “collected
lightning.” One of those evenings, in a deep reverie, she actu-
ally envisioned the horrible scene that (in our 1831 edition)
opens Chapter 5 (p. 42).

Working backward and forward from that germinal fan-
tasy, she finished her book in eleven months. Perhaps she
was too exhausted to write a Preface, so Percy wrote it for

her (pp. xxvii-xxviii). As James Rieger and Mellor have
made clear to us with cogent evidence, Percy also edited her
text, changing some of Mary’s simple prose to more elabo-
rate and often stilted “literary” English. (Where she wrote
“we were all equal” he rewrote “neither of us possessed the
slightest preeminence over the other.” But in his editing had
obviously assumed preeminence!) The first edition was pub-
lished anonymously in 1818, and was widely assumed to be
Percy’s work. Godwin put out a second edition in 1824, to
take advantage of a stage version that was running in Lon-
don. But the third edition, issued nine years after Percy’s
death, contains Mary’s own byline on the title page, her own
“Author’s Introduction” (pp. xxi-xxvi), and her own final re-
visions. That’s the text we are discussing here.

Most of our demonstrators against “Frankenfood,” “Franken-
clones,” and other technological innovations doubtless draw
their analogies from film or TV versions of Frankenstein rather
than from the original novel. This kind of thing happens with
literary classics that become myths. Most of us hear “To be
or not to be” long before we come to read Hamlet. And so
our readers of this edition of Shelley have probably absorbed
the myth before picking up the book. Just to make sure, I
checked this out with Brian Taves, Library of Congress ex-
pert on both film and science fiction. He assures me that view-
ing the classic James Whale/Boris Karloff version (1931,
syndicated for TV in 1957), is still part of the “rite of pas-
sage” of young people today.

And so our readers might already be puzzled over our re-
ferences to Shelley’s “novel of ideas,” seeing little in their
experience of the myth to correspond to what we’re talking
about. We should straighten this out before we go into even
deeper discussion of Shelley’s masterpiece.

First, we must put aside our images of “Doctor” Frank-
stein’s humpback assistant who steals a “criminal” brain; of
Karloff, with a bolt sticking from his neck, never learning
to get out more than a groan or a growl; of his drowning
the girl with the flowers; of the windmill burning, of the
“happy ending” survival of Frankenstein’s bride at the close
of the Whale fantasy. None of these modern icons can be
found in Shelley’s novel and, worse yet, they all downgr
and pervert her meaning. While she raised the horror story to the level of intellectual fiction, Whale and the writer Robert Florey (whose work Whale had co-opted without credit) demoted it back to almost pure horror.

We can cinch this point with just three of many examples that crowd to mind:

Shelley actually tells how the well-meaning monster saves the girl from drowning. Then he is shot by somebody too terrified by the looks of an eight-foot creature to grasp the situation. Shelley’s message here is that we humans tend to panic at the sight of the strange and different, that we judge others by appearance not character.

Whale’s simplistic idea that the monster’s crimes are caused by his creator’s inadvertently giving him an “evil” brain is the opposite of Shelley’s intention. She wanted to show that he, according to Rousseau’s teaching that she was following, was born virtuous and gentle and that only society’s mistreatment of him could turn him violent and malevolent. She was also testing out John Locke’s psychology. He’d taught that each human is born a tabula rasa, a blank slate, and that society, writing indelibly on that slate, determines much of the individual’s character.

And Shelley—unlike Whale—could not forgive and reward Frankenstein (the symbol of irresponsible science and unacknowledged misogyny) with a wife and ongoing existence, for reasons we must clarify here.

Whether we agree or not with Rousseau and Locke, we cannot deny that the classic Whale “interpretation” is a crude travesty on Shelley’s profound treatment of human development. In fairness to Whale, though, we should acknowledge that Shelley’s main message—that science can run dangerously off track—is preserved and popularized in his film. (But only for the sake of horror?)

Briefly stated—just enough to provide a basis for our arguments here—this is Shelley’s story:

Polar explorer Captain Walton writes to his sister (whose initials after her marriage are MWS, the same as Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s!) about the confessions of a scientist rescued from an ice floe. Convalescing from exhaustion, Victor Frankenstein told of his upbringing in Geneva, his parents adopting the orphan Elizabeth, and their growing up together with the family assuming that they would marry. In college, he had secretly sought and found the means of creating life. But when the eight-foot being he had planned to make beautiful proved to be hideous, Victor abandoned him and fell ill. While friend Clerval nursed him back to health, Victor found he could not confide the truth about what had caused his breakdown. From Geneva came news that Victor’s young brother William had been strangled and their servant Justine charged with the murder. Although Victor realized who the real murderer was, he still could not talk about the monster, convincing himself that no one would believe the truth, and so Justine was hanged.

Hiking in the Swiss Alps, Victor met the monster, who told of his experiences after he had been abandoned. He had found shelter in an unused shack adjoining a poor farm-family’s house. Eavesdropping, he’d learned the use of language and even how to read. After secretly helping the family by performing chores at night, he’d felt he could approach them as a friend. But his appearance terrified them; embittered by this and other rejections, he set out to seek revenge on Frankenstein’s species. Murdering William, he planted the evidence that convicted Justine. But now he offered Frankenstein a deal:

I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend.
Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous.

If the scientist would create a mate for him, he guaranteed the couple would go far away and leave humanity in peace. Impressed by the monster’s arguments that a creator owes something to his creature, Frankenstein at first consented but—working in secret in coastal Scotland—found reasons to renge on his promise and destroyed the monster’s mate. In retaliation, the monster killed first Clerval and, on Victor’s wedding night, Elizabeth, and then lured Frankenstein into a mad and hopeless chase into the frozen North. At this point the reader, knowing that the monster has “shadowed” his creator ever since the creature had set out for revenge, looks forward to his appearance on board Walton’s ship.

Walton’s presence in the story serves several artistic functions (not exploited in the film versions until Kenneth
Branagh’s courageous *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*, 1994). Walton’s polar expedition provides a dramatic, enhancing framework for Frankenstein’s confessions. It also supplies a foil and a parallel for Frankenstein’s own exploits. The explorer’s work, like the scientist’s, is bold and risky. But at least Walton is the Baconian scientist, whose work is public and offered for the general benefit of humanity. Frankenstein represents the Faustian scientist, working in dark secrecy, ostensibly for public good but largely for personal power (as master of a super race), and concealing all responsibility for his action. Walton’s struggles are more objective, external, Frankenstein’s deeply subjective, internal. Finally, Walton’s expedition makes it easier for Shelley to drive home one of her main points, and with a magnificent twist of irony. Early in his stay on board, Frankenstein told his rescuer how he regretted having neglected family, friends, and fiancée to finish his years-long project:

If the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections and to destroy your taste for those simple pleasures in which no alloy can possibly mix, then that study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not befitting the human mind.

This and many related passages constitute one of the strongest attacks on the patriarchal “work ethic” we have in Western literature. (It will not be surpassed until Paul Auster writes *New York Trilogy.*) To show how deeply this self-destructive trait is ingrained in the Western male, Shelley first has the scientist condemn it, as above, and then *relapse* into it. In Frankenstein’s dying hours—in one of Shelley’s most bitter scenes—he tries to shame Walton’s crew into pursuing their goal against hopeless odds, even using the patriarchal tactic of accusing them of not being real men.

Shelley extends her attack on the system by showing what it means for women. The Greeks, with their simple talent for acknowledging the unacknowledged (witness Sophocles on how men dream about sleeping with their mothers), knew well that the macho male would *prefer to do without women entirely*. Euripides, for example, in his *Medea*, has Jason shout:

If only children could be produced some other way. Without females! If there were no females

Human life would be relieved of all miseries!

Aristotle and his Christian disciple Thomas Aquinas were more subtle, more “civilized,” more “rational” in their put-down or put-aside of women. They “proved” that in any event women are almost nonexistent in the reproductive process. They saw the fetus as entirely a male creation; the woman adds nothing to it but nine-months’ shelter! Even as late as the nineteenth century, the respectable English pundit Herbert Spencer (who invented “social Darwinism” over Darwin’s objections) propagated this utterly tendentious and absurd idea that there is really only one parent: the father.

But Frankenstein goes all out to relieve Jason of his historic agony. *Frankenstein invents the ultimate technique for siring heirs without having to love a woman.* And his new race would be superior to any children produced in collaboration with women! Thus Shelley highlights this deep masculine jealousy of women’s reproductive power by pushing it to its extreme with magnificent hyperbole.

Digging beneath the unacknowledged to the very unconscious itself, Shelley portrays Frankenstein as first dreaming that he is going to cause Elizabeth’s death and then ignoring what his own mind has told him. Typical Age of Reason mentality (Godwinian, as Mary saw it?), he refuses to listen to his inner voice, he fails to realize the significance of the dream—the “irrational”—until he’s on his deathbed. Notice, too, that when the monster tells him “I will be with you on your wedding-night,” Frankenstein’s reaction is to take precautions for himself, but not for his bride. University-trained genius, he is unable (or unconsciously unwilling?) to see the monster’s obvious strategy: to punish Frankenstein not by hurting Frankenstein, but by killing those close to him. We might attribute his blindness to his unconscious commitment to fulfill Jason’s classic patriarchal wishes.

Most women in *Frankenstein* act just as mother Wollstonecraft says the system conditions them to act: as servants to men, wholly dependent on men, grateful for a decent arranged marriage, passive. *Frankenstein* almost c
controls Elizabeth's adult life, mainly by keeping her waiting and in total ignorance. He nullifies her courtroom defense of Justine simply by maintaining an overpowering silence. The monster, for all his liberating insights as the Outsider, also assumes he will make all decisions for the mate he expects to possess. She will be created not to work out her own needs and preferences, but to play out a destiny that the monster and his creator have outlined for her. When Frankenstein realizes she might tear up the script, he tears her up instead.

In spite of the monster's conventional views about women, he is often seen as a symbol of rebellion against the Establishment. No real surprise here: most rebels in the past were fighting for the rights of man in the narrow sense. According to the principles of Locke and David Hartley that guided Shelley, the monster first knew sensations, then made connections and formed ideas on the basis of his treatment by society and learned to express his conclusions. His "misery-made-me-a-fiend" speech is an echo of Wolstonecraft's famous phrase about the "continual miseries" of the poor and disadvantaged that could result in revolution.

Many critics think of the scientist and his creation as two sides of the same (split) personality. It's not so simple as saying that one is the Ego, the other the Id (as it might be with Beckett's Didi and Gogo), because each of them acts with a full, dynamic combination of Ego and Id. Perhaps it's more accurate to say that the monster is an extension of certain of Frankenstein's powers that he is unwilling to take responsibility for. This would include intellectual forces and savage, instinctive forces he is afraid to recognize in himself. (As Professor Bloom makes clear in his Afterword, the monster surpasses his creator in both.)

Certainly we have to consider Frankenstein as the ultimate cause of the monster's misdeeds. Moreover, starting with the murder of William, Frankenstein was morally obliged to reveal his secret. His refusal to do so, with rationalizations convincing only to himself, makes him an accomplice. What he can only dream of doing—killing Elizabeth—he in effect allows the monster to do.

While readers will differ in their view of Frankenstein's complicity in the murders and terror, there can be little dis-agreement that Shelley was pioneering what we would later call the alter ego, the doppelganger, the double, the Jekyll-and-Hyde personality. The literary use of the concept goes beyond Conrad's The Secret Sharer to the postmodernist idea of "multiple selves" as in Auster's New York Trilogy.

Some critics even see Shelley's splitting of character as manifest again in Henry and Victor: Henry as modeled on the social, sweetly creative Percy, Victor as Percy's more uncontrollable, wild, destructive side. (This reminds us again of the Whale/Floreys irresponsibility: Shelley dubbed her scientist "Victor" for the ironic value of the name, but in the 1931 film, Clerval's and Frankenstein's first names are actually switched!) Other critics, considering the monster as the victim of neglect by a genius, think Shelley unconsciously extended herself into the tragedy of the miserable creature.

In any event, note how the popular imagination accepts the idea of the "double" in the very name "Frankenstein": our volunteers, as we implied at the start of our discussion, could well be thinking either of the scientist or of the monster or of both as they shout their "Frankenstein" slogans.

After Frankenstein appeared, Mary's life was a mixture of new tragedy and muted triumph. Her second daughter, Clara Evelina, and her son, William, were dead by 1819, the same year that Percy Florence was born. Mary's fifth pregnancy miscarried in 1822. She was saved from bleeding to death by her science-minded husband: he sat her down in an ice bath until the doctor arrived. Three weeks later he was standing home in his skiff Ariel, sailing off the coast of Viareggio and—as Mary tells us in her brilliant and sensitive notes to his poems—he was "wrapped from sight" by a thunderstorm, and when the "cloud of the tempest passed away, no sign remained of where" he had been. Ten days later his body was washed ashore and cremated.

Widow Mary returned to London to groom her sole-surviving child to inherit the baronetcy of his grandfather, Sir Timothy Shelley. Meanwhile she supported self and son by producing a steady stream of short tales, encyclopedia articles, and novels, along the way turning out landmark editions of Percy Shelley's works. She resigned herself to the
fact that Percy Florence, son and grandson of great talents, had no ambition beyond being called Sir Percy. Exhausted and paralyzed by strokes, she died in 1851, at age fifty-three. With symbolism rarely so well achieved in cemeteries, she is buried in Bournemouth between mother, Wollstonecraft, and father, Godwin. Most of her major works are always in print now, she is the subject of hundreds of critical studies, and her *Frankenstein* lives on as a great cautionary tale—and a major novel of ideas.

—Walter James Miller
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CIRCLE EIGHT: Bolgia Eight

The Evil Counselors

Dante turns from the Thieves toward the Evil Counselors of the next Bolgia, and between the two he addresses a passionate lament to Florence prophesying the griefs that will befall her from these two sins. At the purported time of the Vision, it will be recalled, Dante was a Chief Magistrate of Florence and was forced into exile by men he had reason to consider both thieves and evil counselors. He seems prompted, in fact, to say much more on this score, but he restrains himself when he comes in sight of the sinners of the next Bolgia, for they are a moral symbolism, all men of gift who abused their genius, perverting it to wiles and stratagems. Seeing them in Hell he knows his must be another road: his way shall not be by deception.

So the Poets move on and Dante observes the EIGHTH BOLGIA in detail. Here the EVIL COUNSELORS move about endlessly, hidden from view inside great flames. Their sin was to abuse the gifts of the Almighty, to steal his virtues for low purposes. And as they stole from God in their lives and worked by hidden ways, so are they stolen from sight and hidden in the great flames which are their own guilty consciences. And as, in most instances at least, they sinned by gluttony of tongue, so are the flames made into a fiery travesty of tongues.

Among the others, the Poets see a great doubleheaded flame, and discover that ULYSSES and DIOMEDE are punished together within it. Virgil addresses the flame, and through its wavering tongue Ulysses narrates an unforgettable tale of his last voyage and death.

Joy to you, Florence, that your banners swell, beating their proud wings over land and sea, and that your name expands through all of Hell!
more than the flame, a cloudlet in the sky,
once it had risen—so within the fosse
only those flames, forever passing by

were visible, ahead, to right, to left;
for though each steals a sinner’s soul from view
not one among them leaves a trace of the theft.

I stood on the bridge, and leaned out from the edge;
so far, that but for a jut of rock I held to
I should have been sent hurtling from the ledge

without being pushed. And seeing me so intent,
my Guide said: “There are souls within those flames;
each sinner swathes himself in his own torment.”

“Master,” I said, “your words make me more sure,
but I had seen already that it was so
and meant to ask what spirit must endure.

the pains of that great flame which splits away
in two great horns, as if it rose from the pyre
where Éteocles and Polynices lay?”

He answered me: “Forever round this path
Ulysses and Diomede move in such dress,
united in pain as once they were in wrath;

there they lament the ambush of the Horse
which was the door through which the noble seed
of the Romans issued from its holy source;

there they mourn that for Achilles slain
sweet Deidamia weeps even in death;
there they recall the Palladium in their pain.”

“Master,” I cried, “I pray you and repray
till my prayer becomes a thousand—if these souls
can still speak from the fire, oh let me stay

until the flame draws near! Do not deny me:
You see how fervently I long for it!”
And he me: “Since what you ask is worthy,
Hercules' pillars rose upon our sight.
Already I had left Ceuta on the left;
Seville now sank behind me on the right.

"Shipmates," I said, "who through a hundred thousand
perils have reached the West, do not deny
to the brief remaining watch our senses stand
experience of the world beyond the sun.
Greeks! You were not born to live like brutes,
but to press on toward manhood and recognition!

With this brief exhortation I made my crew
so eager for the voyage I could hardly
have held them back from it when I was through;
and turning our stern toward morning, our bow toward
night,
we bore southwest out of the world of man;
we made wings of our oars for our fool's flight.

That night we raised the other pole ahead
with all its stars, and ours had so declined
it did not rise out of its ocean bed.

Five times since we had dipped our bending oars
beyond the world, the light beneath the moon
had waxed and waned, when dead upon our course
we sighted, dark in space, a peak so tall
I doubted any man had seen the like.
Our cheers were hardly sounded, when a squall
broke hard upon our bow from the new land:
three times it sucked the ship and the sea about
as it pleased Another to order and command.

At the fourth, the poop rose and the bow went down
till the sea closed over us and the light was gone."

Notes

7. if the truth is dreamed of toward the morning: A semi-pro-
verbal expression. It was a common belief that those dreams that
occur just before waking foretell the future. "Morning" here would

8. Prato: Not the neighboring town (which was on good terms
with Florence) but Cardinal Niccolò da Prato, papal legate from
Benedict XI to Florence. In 1304 he tried to reconcile the warring
factions, but found that neither side would accept mediation. Since
none would be blessed, he cursed all impartially and laid the city
under an interdict (i.e., forbade the offering of the sacraments).
Shortly after this rejection by the Church, a bridge collapsed in
Florence, and later a great fire broke out. Both disasters cost many
lives, and both were promptly attributed to the Papal curse.

53-54. the pyre where Eteocles and Polynices lay: Eteocles and
Polynices, sons of Oedipus, succeeded jointly to the throne of Thebes,
and came to an agreement whereby each one would rule separately
for a year at a time. Eteocles ruled the first year and when he re-
fused to surrender the throne at the appointed time, Polynices led
the Seven against Thebes in a bloody war. In single combat the two
brothers killed one another. Statius (Thebaid XII, 429 ff.) wrote
that their mutual hatred was so great that when they were placed
on the same funeral pyre the very flame of their burning drew apart
in two great raging horns.

56-63. Ulysses and Diomede, etc.: They suffer here for their joint
guilt in counseling and carrying out many stratagems which Dante
considered evil, though a narrator who was less passionately a
partisan of the Trojans might have thought their actions justifiable
methods of warfare. They are in one flame for their joint guilt, but
the flame is divided, perhaps to symbolize the moral that men of
evil must sooner or later come to a falling out, for there can be no
lasting union except by virtue.

Their first sin was the stratagem of the Wooden Horse, as a result
of which Troy fell and Aeneas went forth to found the Roman line.
The second evil occurred at Scyros. There Ulysses discovered Achilles
in female disguise, hidden by his mother, Thetis, so that he would
not be taken off to the war. Deidamia was in love with Achilles and
had borne him a son. When Ulysses persuaded her lover to sail for
Troy, she died of grief. The third count is Ulysses' theft of the
sacred statue of Pallas from the Palladium. Upon the statue, it was
believed, depended the fate of Troy. Its theft, therefore, would res-
ult in Troy's downfall.

72. since they were Greek: Dante knew no Greek, and these sinners
might scorn him, first, because he spoke what to them would seem a barbarous tongue, and second, because as an Italian he would seem a descendant of Aeneas and the defeated Trojans. Virgil, on the other hand, appeals to them as a man of virtuous life (who therefore has a power over sin) and as a poet who celebrated their earthly fame. (Prof. MacAllister suggests another meaning as well: that Dante [and his world] had no direct knowledge of the Greeks, knowing their works through Latin intermediaries. Thus Virgil stood between Homer and Dante.)

80-81. one of you: Ulysses. He is the figure in the larger horn of the flame (which symbolizes that his guilt, as leader, is greater than that of Diomedes). His memorable account of his last voyage and death is purely Dante’s invention.

86. Circe: Changed Ulysses’ men to swine and kept him a prisoner, though with rather exceptional accommodations.

87. Gaeta: Southeastern Italian coastal town. According to Virgil (Aeneid, VII, 1 ff.) it was earlier named Caleta by Aeneas in honor of his aged nurse.

90. Penelope: Ulysses’ wife.

98. both shores: Of the Mediterranean.

101. narrow pass: The Straits of Gibraltar, formerly called the Pillars of Hercules. They were presumed to be the Western limit beyond which no man could navigate.


105. Seville: In Dante’s time this was the name given to the general region of Spain. Having passed through the Straits, the men are now in the Atlantic.

115. morning ... night: East and West.

118. we raised the other pole ahead: i.e., They drove south across the equator, observed the southern stars, and found that the North Star had sunk below the horizon. The altitude of the North Star is the easiest approximation of latitude. Except for a small correction, it is directly overhead at the North Pole, shows an altitude of 45° at North latitude 45, and is on the horizon at the equator.

124. a peak: Purgatory. They sight it after five months of passage. According to Dante’s geography, the Northern hemisphere is land and the Southern is all water except for the Mountain of Purgatory which rises above the surface at a point directly opposite Jerusalem.

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Canto XXVII

CIRCLE EIGHT: Bolgia Eight

The Evil Counselors

The double flame departs at a word from Virgil and behind it appears another which contains the soul of COUNT GUIDO DA MONTEFELTRO, a Lord of Romagna. He had overheard Virgil speaking Italian, and the entire flame in which his soul is wrapped quivers with his eagerness to hear recent news of his war-torn country. (As Farinata has already explained, the spirits of the damned have prophetic powers, but lose all track of events as they approach.)

Dante replies with a stately and tragic summary of how things stand in the cities of Romagna. When he has finished, he asks Guido for his story, and Guido recounts his life, and how Boniface VIII persuaded him to sin.

When it had finished speaking, the great flame stood tall and shook no more. Now, as it left us with the sweet Poet’s license, another came along that track and our attention turned to the new flame: a strange and muffled roar rose from the single tip to which it burned.

As the Sicilian bull—that brazen spit which bellowed first (and properly enough) with the lament of him whose file had tuned it—was made to bellow by its victim’s cries in such a way, that though it was of brass, it seemed itself to howl and agonize:
Keats' poem
"Endymion"

Endymion: A Poetic Romance

And each imagined pinnacle and steep
Of godlike hardship tells me I must die
Like a sick eagle looking at the sky.
Yet 'tis a gentle luxury to weep
That I have not the cloudy winds to keep
Fresh for the opening of the morning's eye.
Such dim-conceived glories of the brain
Bring round the heart an undescivable feud;
So do these wonders a most dizzy pain,
That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude
Wasting of old time—with a billowy main—
A sun—a shadow of a magnitude.

Mar. 1 or 2, 1817

From Endymion: A Poetic Romance

"The stretched metre of an antique song"

INSCRIBED TO THE MEMORY OF THOMAS CHATTERTON

Preface

Knowing within myself the manner in which this Poem has been produced, it is not without a feeling of regret that I make it public.

What manner I mean, will be quite clear to the reader, who must soon perceive great inexperience, immaturity, and every error denoting a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished. The two first books, and indeed the two last, I feel sensible are not of such completion as to warrant their passing the press; nor should they if I thought a year's castigation would do them any good;—it will not: the foundations are too sandy. It is just that this youngster should die away: a sad thought

1. This poem of more than 4,000 lines (based on the classical myth of a mortal beloved by the goddess of the moon) tells of Endymion's lot, a long and agonized search for an immortal maiden whom he loved in several visions. In the course of his wanderings he comes upon an Indian maid who had been abandoned by the followers of Bacchus, and to his utter despair succumbs to a sexual passion for her, in apparent betrayal of his love for his heavenly ideal. In the resolution, the Indian maid reveals that she is herself Cynthia (Diana), goddess of the moon, the celestial subject of his earlier visions.

Keats set himself to writing a long poem before he was entirely ready in range of knowledge, clarity of thought, or stylistic assurance; the poem reaches a high level only in isolated passages. The interpretation that seems best to fit the text is that ideal love and imaginative beauty are to be found only by way of instinctual impulses and earthly sexuality, which the ideal repeats, in one of Keats' phrases, "in a finer tone." The poem is so cloudy, however, that its purpose is disputed. But Keats has disarmied all external criticism with his self-criticism in the candid and insightful Preface, which has become a classic statement of the characteristics of unripe genius.

The verse epigraph is adapted from Shakespeare's Sonnet 77, line 12, "And stretched metre of an antique song." Thomas Chatterton (1752-70), to whom Endymion is inscribed, wrote a number of brilliant pseudo-archaic poems which he attributed to an imaginary 15th-century poet, Thomas Rowley. Reduced to despair by neglect and poverty, Chatterton poisoned himself with arsenic when he was only 17. He came to be greatly admired in the Romantic period. Wordsworth, in "Resolution and Independence," lines 43-44, called him "the marvelous Boy," the sleepless Soul that perished in his pride," and Keats described him as "the most English of poets except Shakespeare."
for me, if I had not some hope that while it is dwindling I may be plotting, and fitting myself for verses fit to live.

This may be speaking too presumptuously, and may deserve a punishment: but no feeling man will be forward to inflict it: he will leave me alone, with the conviction that there is not a fiercer hell than the failure in a great object. This is not written with the least atom of purpose to forestall criticisms of course, but from the desire I have to conciliate men who are competent to look, and who do look with a zealous eye, to the honour of English literature.

The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted: thence proceeds mawkishness, and all the thousand bitters which those men I speak of must necessarily taste in going over the following pages.

I hope I have not in too late a day touched the beautiful mythology of Greece, and dulled its brightness: for I wish to try once more,2 before I bid it farewell.

Teignmouth, April 10, 1818

From Book 1

[A THING OF BEAUTY]

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases; it will Never Pass into nothingness; but still will keep A bower quiet for us, and a sleep Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.
Therefore, on every morrow, are we breathing A flowery braid to bind us to the earth,
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman death Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways Made for our searching; yes, in spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall From our dark spirits. Such the sun, the moon,
Trees old, and young sprouting a shady boon
For simple sheep; and such are daffodils
With the green world they live in; and clear rills
That for themselves a cooling covert make
'Gainst the hot season; the mid forest brake,
Rich with a sprinkling of fair musk-rose blossoms:
And such too is the grandeur of the dooms
We have imagined for the mighty dead;
All lovely tales that we have heard or read.

5. The poet sets up, and searches to resolve, the basic opposition between the inevitably "mortal" pleasures in this life and the conceived possibility of "immortal" delight. Thus "essences" (line 25) seem to be the things of beauty in this world, punged of the mutability that is incapable in ordinary experience. The central passage dealing with this theme is below, book 1, lines 777 ff.

6. The sister to whom Endymion confides his troubles. Of lines 769-837, Keats wrote to his publisher, "I have written it, when I wrote it, it was the regular stepping of the imagination towards a Truth. My having written that Argument will perhaps be of the greatest Service to me of anything I ever did—It set before me at once the gradations of Happiness even like a kind of Pleasure Thermometer, and is my first step towards the chief attempt in the Drama—the playing of different Natures with Joy and Sorrow." The gradations on this "Thermometer" mark the stages on the way to what Keats calls "happiness" (line 777)—his secular version of the religious concept of "felicity," which, in the orthodox view, is to be achieved by surrender of self to God. For Keats the way to happiness lies through a fusion of ourselves, and the love of objects and art (lines 781-97), then on a higher level, with other human beings through "love and friendship" (line 801) and, ultimately, sexual love. By this "self-destruction," or loss of personal identity through our imaginative identification with a beloved person outside ourselves, we escape from the material limits and self-centered condition of ordinary experience, to achieve a "fellowship with essence," which is a kind of immortality within our mortal existence (line 844).

7. Transformed by alchemy from a base to a precious metal.
A rose leaf round thy finger's taperness,
And soothe thy lips: hist, when the airy stress
Of music's kiss impregnates the free winds,
And with a sympathetic touch unbinds
Eolian's magic from their lucid gums:
Then old songs waken from enclouded tombs;
Old ditties sigh above their father's grave;
Ghoststhem melodious prophecies rave
Round every spot where trod Apollo's foot;
Bronze clarions awake, and faintly bruist
Where long ago a giant battle was;
And, from the turf, a lullaby doth pass
In every place where infant Orpheus slept.
Feel we these things?—that moment have we stept
Into a sort of oneness, and our state
Is like a floating spirit's. But there are
Richer entanglements, enthrallments far
More self-destroying, leading, by degrees,
To the chief intensity: the crown of these
Is made of love and friendship, and sits high
Upon the forehead of humanity.
All its more ponderous and bulky worth
Is friendship, whence there ever issues forth
A steady splendour; but at the tip-top
There hangs by unseen film, an orbed drop
Of light, and that is love: its influence,
Thrown in our eyes, genders a novel sense,
At which we start and fret, till in the end,
Melting into its radiance, we blend,
Mingle, and so become a part of it,—
Nor with aught else can our souls interknit
So wingedly: when we combine therewith,
Life's self is nourish'd by its proper pith,
And we are nurtured like a pelican brood.
Aye, so delicious is the unsatiating food,
That men, who might have tower'd in the van
Of all the congregated world, to fan
And winnow from the coming step of time
All chaff of custom, wipe away all shame
Left by men-slugs and human serpentry,
Have been content to let occasion die,
Whilst they did sleep in love's elysium.
And, truly, I would rather be struck dumb,
Than speak against this ardent listlessness:
For I have ever thought that it might bless
The world with benefits unknowingly;

On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again

As does the nightingale, upperch'd high,
And cloister'd among cool and bunched leaves—
She sings but to her love, nor e'er conceives
How tip-top Night holds back her dark-grey hood.
Just so may love, although 'tis understood
The mere commingling of passionate breath,
Produce more than our searching witnessest:
What I know not: but who, of men, can tell
That flowers would bloom, or that green fruit would swell
To melting pulp, that fish would have bright mail,
The earth its dower of river, wood, and vale,
The meadows runnels, runnels pebble-stones,
The seed its harvest, or the lute its tones,
Tones ravishment, or ravishment its sweet,
If human souls did never kiss and greet?

"Now, if this earthly love has power to make
Men's being mortal, immortal; to shake
Ambition from their memories, and brim
Their measure of content, what merest whim,
Seems all this poor endeavour after fame,
To one, who keeps within his stedfast aim
A love immortal, an immortal too.
Look not so wilder'd; for these things are true,
And never can be born of atomies,
That buzz about our slumbers, like brain-flies,
Leaving us fancy-sick. No, no, I'm sure,
My restless spirit never could endure
To brood so long upon one luxury,
Unless it did, though fearfully, espy
A hope beyond the shadow of a dream."

April—November 1817

On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again

O golden-tongued Romance, with serene lute!
Fair plumed syren, queen of far-away!
Leave melodizing on this wintry day,
Shut up thine olden pages, and be mute.
Adieu! for once again, the fierce dispute
Betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay
Must I burn through; once more humbly assay
The bitter-sweet of this Shakespearean fruit.

1. From Aeolus, god of winds.
2. Young pelicans were once thought to feed
on their mother's flesh; so our life is unutterable
another's life, with which it fuses in love.
3. The word 'syren' (line 2) indicates Keats's
feeling that "Romance" was enticing him from
the poet's prime duty, to deal with "the agonies,
the strife! Of human hearts" (Sleep and Poetry, lines
124-125).
Promethean Politics

When Mary Shelley subtitled her novel “The Modern Prometheus,” she forcefully directed our attention to the book’s critique both of the promethean poets she knew best, Byron and Percy Shelley, and of the entire Romantic ideology as she understood it. Victor Frankenstein’s failure to mother his child has both political and aesthetic ramifications. The father who neglects his children can be seen as the archetype of the irresponsible political leader who puts his own interests ahead of those of his fellow citizens. Victor Frankenstein’s quest is nothing less than the conquest of death itself. By acquiring the ability to “bestow animation upon lifeless matter” and thus “renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption” (49), Frankenstein in effect hopes to become God, the creator of life and the gratefully worshiped father of a new race of immortal beings. In his attempt to transform human beings into deities by eliminating mortality, Victor Frankenstein is himself participating in the mythopoetic vision that inspired the first generation of Romantic poets and thinkers. William Blake had insisted that the human form could become divine through the exercise of mercy, pity, love, and imagination; Coleridge had stated that human perception or the primary imagination is an “echo of the Infinite I AM;” Wordsworth had argued that the “higher minds” of poets are “truly from the Deity;” while both Godwin and his disciple Percy Shelley had proclaimed that man was perfectible. In their view, the right use of reason and imagination could annihilate not only social injustice and human evil but even, through participation in symbolic thinking or what Blake called the “divine analogy,” the consciousness of human finitude and death itself.1 Victor Frankenstein’s goal can be identified with the radical desire that energized some of the best known

English Romantic poems, the desire to elevate human beings into living gods.

In identifying Victor Frankenstein with Prometheus, Mary Shelley was alluding to both versions of the Prometheus myth: Prometheus plasticator and Prometheus pyrphoros. In the first version, known to Mary Shelley through Ovid’s Metamorphoses which she read in 1815, Prometheus created man from clay:

"Whether with particles of Heaven’s fire
The God of Nature did his Soul inspire,
Or Earth, but new divided from the Skie,
And, plastick, still, retain’d the Aetherial Energy;
Which Wise Prometheus temper’d into paste,
And mix’t with living Streams, the Godlike Image caste . . .
From such rude Principles our Form began;
And Earth was Metamorphos’d into Man. (1:101–6, 111–12)

In the alternate, more famous version of the myth, Prometheus is the fire-stealer, the god who defied Jupiter’s tyrannical oppression of humanity by giving fire to man and was then punished by having his liver eaten by vultures until he divulged his secret foreknowledge of Jupiter’s downfall. By the third century A.D., these two versions had fused; the fire stolen by Prometheus became the fire of life with which he animated his man of clay.2 As both the creator and/or savior of man and the long-suffering rebel against tyranny, Prometheus was an often invoked self-image among the Romantic poets. Blake visually identified his heroic rebel and spokesman Othoosh with the tortured Prometheus in his design for Plate 6 of “Visions of the Daughters of Albion,” while Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner echoes Prometheus both in his transgression of an established moral order and in his perpetual suffering that he may teach mankind to be both sadder and wiser. Even more directly, Goethe in both his verse drama Prometheus and his monologue “Bedecke deinen Himmel, Zeus” portrayed Prometheus as a self-portrait of the artist who has liberated himself from serving dull, idle gods and who rejoices instead in his own creative powers. Mary Shelley specifically associated her modern Prometheus with the Romantic poets she knew personally. During the summer in which she began writing Frankenstein, Byron composed his poem “Prometheus,” a celebration of the god’s defiance of Jupiter which emphasizes Prometheus’ unyielding will, noble suffering, and concern for mankind —qualities with which Byron clearly identified himself.3 Mary Shelley copied this poem and carried it to Byron’s publisher John Murray when she returned to England in August 1816. Byron’s Prometheus persona appeared again in Manfred, which Mary Shelley read soon after its publication on June 16, 1817. Manfred’s Faustian thirst for
unbounded experience, knowledge, and freedom leads him, like Victor Frankenstein, to steal the secrets of nature. As Manfred confesses:

[I] dived,
In my lone wanderings, to the caves of death,
Searching its cause in its effect; and drew
From wither'd bones, and skulls, and heap'd up dust,
Conclusions most forbidden.

(Manfred I.i.i.173–77)

Manfred’s quest also enchained him in a Promethean suffering for his lost sister Astarte, a painful remorse that articulates Byron’s guilty conscience over his incestuous affair with his half-sister Augusta Leigh. In his defiance of Ahrimanes and all other deities, Manfred proclaims Byron’s personal belief in the ultimate creative power and integrity of the human imagination, using phrases that Mary Shelley condensed into that single “spark of being” infused by her modern Prometheus into the lifeless creature at his feet:

The mind, the spirit, the Promethean spark,
The lightning of my being, is as bright,
Fiercely, and far darting as your own,
And shall not yield to yours, though coop’d in clay!

(Manfred I, i.154–57)

In England, Mary Shelley met another poet who became a close friend and associate of both Byron and the Shelles, Leigh Hunt, who intensified the identification of the Romantic poet with the Prometheus myth. Hunt commented in 1819 after the publication of Frankenstein that he too had thought of writing a poem entitled Prometheus Throned in which Prometheus would successfully defy the gods and be depicted as “having lately taken possession of Jupiter’s seat.”4

Above all, Mary Shelley associated her modern Prometheus with Percy Shelley, who had already announced his desire to compose an epic rebuttal to Aeschylus’ Prometheus Bound when he reread the play in 1816, although he did not begin writing Prometheus Unbound until September 1818, after Frankenstein was published.5 As William Veeder has most recently reminded us, several dimensions of Victor Frankenstein are modelled directly from Percy Shelley.6 Victor was Percy Shelley’s pen-name for his first publication, Original Poetry; by Victor and Cazire (1810). Victor Frankenstein’s family resembles Percy Shelley’s: in both, the father is married to a woman young enough to be his daughter; in both the oldest son has a favorite sister (adopted sister, or cousin, in Frankenstein’s case) named Elizabeth. Frankenstein’s education is based on Percy Shelley’s: both were avid students of Albertus Magnus, Paracelsus, Pliny, and Buffon; both were fascinated by alchemy and chemistry; both were excellent linguists, acquiring fluency in Latin, Greek, German, French, English, and Italian.7 By sending Victor Frankenstein to the University of Ingolstadt, Mary Shelley further signalled his association with the radical politics advocated by Percy Shelley in Queen Mab (1813), “Feelings of a Republican on the Fall of Bonapart” (1816), and Laon and Cythna (1817). Ingolstadt was famous as the home of the Illuminati, a secret revolutionary society founded in 1776 by Ingolstadt’s Professor of Law, Adam Weishaupt, that advocated the perfection of mankind through the overthrow of established religious and political institutions. Percy Shelley had eagerly endorsed Weishaupt’s goals—namely, “to secure to merit its just rewards; to the weak support, to the wicked the fetters they deserve; and to man his dignity” by freeing all men from the slavery imposed by “society, governments, the sciences, and false religion”—when he read Abbé Barruel’s vitriolic attack on the Illuminati, Mémoires, pour servir à L’Histoire du Jacobinisme (1797), during his honeymoon journey with Mary in 1814. He had even used Barruel’s account of the Illuminati, reading white where Barruel wrote black, as the basis of the utopian society depicted in the novel entitled The Assassins that he began during the summer of 1814.8

More important, Victor Frankenstein embodies certain elements of Percy Shelley’s temperament and character that had begun to trouble Mary Shelley. She perceived in Percy an intellectual hubris or belief in the supreme importance of mental abstractions that led him to be insensitive to the feelings of those who did not share his ideas and enthusiasms. The Percy Shelley that Mary knew and loved lived in a world of abstract ideas; his actions were primarily motivated by theoretical principles, the quest for perfect beauty, love, freedom, goodness. While Mary endorsed and shared these goals, she had come to suspect that in Percy’s case they sometimes masked an emotional narcissism, an unwillingness to confront the origins of his own desires or the impact of his demands on those most dependent upon him. Percy’s pressure on Mary, during the winter and spring of 1814–15, to take Hogg as a lover despite her sexual indifference to Hogg; his indifference to the death of Mary’s first baby on March 7, 1815; his insistence on Claire’s continuing presence in his household despite Mary’s stated opposition—all this had alerted Mary to a worrisome strain of selfishness in Percy’s character, an egotism that too often rendered him an insensitive husband and an uncaring, irresponsible parent.

Percy Shelley’s self-serving “harem psychology” may have originated as some Freudian critics have suggested, in an unresolved Oedipal
desire to possess the mother. This desire emerges in his poem “Alastor” (1816) as a wish to return to the gravelike womb of Mother Earth. Mary Shelley’s insight into this dimension of Percy’s psyche informs the dream she assigns to Victor Frankenstein immediately after the creation of the monster:

I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. (53)

Like Percy Shelley’s, Victor Frankenstein’s strongest erotic desires are not so much for his putative lover as for his lost mother. Percy unwittingly revealed this incestuous desire during the troubled period after his expulsion from Oxford. Barred from his mother’s and sisters’ company, he violently accused his mother of having an affair with his sister Elizabeth’s “music master” and of trying to conceal the affair by marrying Elizabeth to him.9 Percy seems here to have projected onto his innocent friend Edward Fergus Graham his own erotic fantasy: to be the lover of both mother and favorite sister. His efforts to marry Elizabeth to his best friend Hogg can be seen as yet another attempt to close the sexual circle between himself and his sister. Percy Shelley’s persistent desire to be the sexual partner of every woman he admired was not only self-indulgent. It also revealed a fundamental inability to separate his ego from his mother’s and to function normally without the unquestioning emotional and sexual support of a devoted woman.10 Mary Shelley projected her irritation with this facet of Percy’s character into her portrait of Victor Frankenstein.

But even as Mary Shelley modelled Victor Frankenstein upon Percy Shelley, she introduced into her novel an entirely flattering portrait of her beloved mate. Henry Clerval is both an alter-ego of Victor Frankenstein and the embodiment of all the qualities of Percy Shelley that Mary most loved. By splitting her husband into two characters, Mary Shelley registered her perception of a profound contradiction in Percy’s personality as well as her intense ambivalence toward the man she loved. Clerval, in whom Victor Frankenstein recognizes “the image of my former self; . . . inquisitive, and anxious to gain experience and instruction” (155–6), possesses a “refined mind” (39), a passionate love of natural beauty, a fascination with languages and literature, and above all a capacity for empathy. He is a poet. As a child he studied books of chivalry and romance and wrote fairy tales, plays, and verse. In the novel he becomes a positive archetype for the Romantic poet, with a mind “replete with ideas, imaginations fanciful and magnificent, which formed a world, whose existence depended on the life of its creator” (154). As Frankenstein eulogizes him, Clerval was a being formed in the “very poetry of nature.” His wild and enthusiastic imagination was chastened by the sensibility of his heart. His soul overflowed with ardent affections, and his friendship was of that devoted and wondrous nature that the worldly-minded teach us to look for only in the imagination. But even human sympathies were not sufficient to satisfy his eager mind. The scenery of external nature, which others regard only with admiration, he loved with ardor: . . . “The sounding cataract haunted him like a passion.” (153–54)

Identified with both Leigh Hunt and Wordsworth in this passage, Clerval embodies Mary Shelley’s heroic ideal, the imaginative man who is capable of deep and abiding love and who takes responsibility for those dependent upon him. Clerval both embarks on “a voyage of discovery to the land of knowledge” and also immediately delays that voyage to nurse his sick friend back to health. He thus combines intellectual curiosity with a capacity for nurturing others. Unlike Percy Shelley, Clerval does not openly defy his provincial father’s injunctions. Instead, he uses his powers of persuasion to convince his affectionate father to let him attend university. Clerval and Victor Frankenstein together comprise the Percy Shelley with whom Mary Godwin had fallen in love. But the murder of Clerval annihilates the most positive dimensions of Percy Shelley in the novel, leaving Frankenstein as the image of all that Mary Shelley most feared in both her husband and in the Romantic project he served.

For Victor Frankenstein is above all a creator. In a replica of Percy’s editorial control over Mary’s manuscript, Victor Frankenstein exerts final authority over Walton’s journal account of his experiences. As Walton tells us:

Frankenstein discovered that I made notes concerning his history; he asked to see them, and then himself corrected and augmented them in many places; but principally in giving the life and spirit to the conversations he held with his enemy. “Since you have preserved my narration,” said he, “I would not that a mutilated one should go down to posterity.” (207)11

Victor Frankenstein thus becomes an author, and like Percy Shelley, justifies his defiance of convention (scientific, social, and literary) as the quest for a new and deeper truth. Frankenstein’s goal, to discover “whence . . . did the principle of life proceed” (46), specifically echoes the goal of the Narrator of Percy Shelley’s poem “Alastor, or The Spirit
of Solitude," composed at Marlow during the previous autumn of 1815. At the beginning of "Alastor," the Narrator expresses ambitions identical to Frankenstein's:

Mother of this unfathomable world!  
Favour my solemn song, for I have loved  
Thee ever, and thee only; I have watched  
Thy shadow, and the darkness of thy steps,  
And my heart ever gazes on the depth  
Of thy deep mysteries. I have made my bed  
in charnnels and on coffins, where black death  
Keeps record of the trophies won from thee,  
Hoping to still these obstinate questionings  
Of thee and thine, by forcing some lone ghost  
Thy messenger, to render up the tale  
Of what we are. In love and silent hours,  
When night makes a weird sound of its own stillness,  
Like an inspired and desperate alchymist  
Staking his very life on some dark hope,  
Have I mixed awful talk and asking looks  
With my most innocent love, until strange tears  
Uniting with those breathless kisses, made  
Such magic as compels the charmed night  
To render up thy charge. (11. 18–37)

Mary Shelley's Note on "Alastor," which she describes as "the outpouring of his [the author's] own emotion," suggests that she did not see the ironic distance charted between Percy Shelley and the Narrator by such modern critics as Earl Wasserman and Lisa Steinman. In her view, both the Narrator and Victor Frankenstein desire to penetrate Mother Earth, to discover the secret of "what we are," of life and death. By so doing, Frankenstein becomes "the author of unalterable evils" (87).

Mary Shelley sharpens her identification of Frankenstein's scientific quest with Percy Shelley's poetic quest by specifying that both of Frankenstein's alter-egos in the novel, Clerval and Walton, are aspiring poets. Walton shares Frankenstein's desire to "break through" boundaries. Where Frankenstein seeks to eliminate the "ideal bounds" between life and death (49), Walton seeks to "tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man" (10). Walton would, moreover, wrest Frankenstein's own secret from him if he could: "I endeavoured to gain from Frankenstein the particulars of his creature's formation; but on this point he was impenetrable" (207). Above all, Walton desires to create or discover a perfect world. As a youth, he reminds his sister, "I also became a poet, and for one year lived in a Paradise of my own creation" (11). Blocked in his ambition to become a second Homer or Shakespeare, he redirects his desire to the discovery of the North Pole, a land "surpassing in wonders and in beauty every region hitherto discovered on the habitable globe" (10), a land where in his imagination "snow and frost are banished" and Eden is regained. To fulfill this desire to bring to mankind a land of perpetual fire and light, radiant with the Aurora Borealis, Walton like Prometheus has defied his father's final injunction. On his deathbed, Walton's father prescribed a "sea-faring life" for his son. Walton is thus another Prometheus poet, seeking to create a more perfect humanity by revealing a new land of fire and light to man.

Once she has carefully excluded Clerval, the poet who brings no fire and defies no one, but seeks only to please others and to become his father's partner, a "very good trader" yet with "a cultivated understanding" (39), Mary Shelley offers a critique of this Romantic project through her calculated identification of Frankenstein, Walton, and Percy Shelley with the "modern Prometheus." For both Prometheus plasticator and Prometheus pyrophoros transgressed the boundaries of the established order in their desire to create a better world. In Frankenstein, the modern Prometheus who seeks to know and bestow life itself is explicitly identified with the two greatest overreachers and usurpers of God's divine prerogatives within the Judeo-Christian tradition, Faust and Satan. In his attempt to create a homunculus, Frankenstein, like Faust, has sold his soul to gain forbidden knowledge. As Frankenstein admits, "I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit" (50). Walton too has allowed his "senseless curiosity" (207) to lead him into a "mad" search both for Frankenstein's secret and for a nonexistent tropical paradise at the North Pole, a search that first separates him from his beloved sister and finally alienates him from his crew. Rewriting Paradise Lost, Mary Shelley insistently links Victor Frankenstein with Satan. Having usurped God's creative power, Frankenstein is forever cursed: "like the archangel who aspired to omnipotence, I am chained in an eternal hell" (208). Walton's voyage to paradise, departing from Archangel, is similarly cursed by his willingness to sacrifice the lives of his crew to his own ambition, a point underlined in a passage inserted in the 1831 edition of Frankenstein in which Walton proclaims:

I was easily led by the sympathy which he evinced to use the language of my heart, to give utterance to the burning ardour of my soul, and to say with all the fervour that warmed me, how gladly I would sacrifice my fortune, my existence, my every hope, to the furtherance of my enterprise. One man's life or death were but a small price to pay for the acquirement of the knowledge which I sought, for the dominion I should acquire and transmit over the elemental foes of our race. (231–32)
Both Walton and Frankenstein are thus numbered among the damned. Both are associated with Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner, whom Mary Shelley saw as a type of the wandering Jew, forever ostracized from the human community for killing an innocent creature (14, 54)—Victor finds himself unable to enter the marriage festival “with this deadly weight yet hanging round my neck” (149). Frankenstein is further identified with Cain, the original murderer. “Blasted and miserable” (187), he laments that “I had turned loose into the world a depraved wretch, whose delight was in carnage and misery; had he not murdered my brother?” (72).

Mary Shelley’s modern Prometheus is also a fire-bringer. Lévi-Strauss emphasized the anthropological significance of fire as the separator of the cooked from the raw, of culture from nature, of that which human beings organize and domesticate from that which is free of human control. Fire thus becomes the instrument of civilization and political power. When Prometheus pyrophorus stole fire from Jupiter and gave it to man, he violated the divine order and thereby created a world where men might defy the gods. When Victor Frankenstein steals “a spark of being” from nature to infuse into the lifeless thing lying before him, he creates a being who need not die, a creature who has the capacity to do great good or great evil. But to appreciate the subtlety of Mary Shelley’s criticism of the modern Prometheus pyrophorus, we must track the crossing paths of fire in this novel.

The creature created from the dead by Victor Frankenstein’s stolen “spark,” after having gradually learned to distinguish between differing sensations and ideas, encounters a fire left by some wandering beggars. His first reaction to Prometheus’ gift is intense delight at its warmth; his second reaction, after having thrust his hand into the live embers, is intense pain. His judgment, “How strange, I thought, that the same cause should produce such opposite effects!” (99), focuses the moral dilemma of the novel: was the cause that Frankenstein served, the creation of life from death, good or evil or both? The creature’s use of fire thus becomes emblematic. Initially, the creature tries to achieve a reunion with both the natural and the human order by domesticating fire. He learns to tame his fire to his own purposes, using it to provide warmth, light during the night, and heat for cooking his raw nuts and roots. More important, he attempts to ingratiate himself with the De Lacey family by bringing them love-gifts of firewood. But finally, this “tamed” fire and what it represents—the possibility of including the creature around the family hearth or within the circle of civilization—is refused by the De Lacey. In his despair, the creature reverts to raw nature: “I gave vent to my anguish in fearful howlings. I was like a wild beast that had broken the toils; destroying the objects that obstructed me, and ranging through the wood with a stag-like swiftness.” (132)

Fire now becomes the agency of destruction. The creature, learning that the De Lacys will never return to their cottage and filled with “feelings of revenge and hatred,” burns down the only home he has ever known.

I lighted the dry branch of a tree, and danced with fury around the devoted cottage.... I waved my brand; [the moon] sunk, and, with a loud scream, I fired the straw, and heath, and bushes, which I had collected. The wind fanned the fire, and the cottage was quickly enveloped by the flames, which clung to it, and licked it with their forked and destroying tongues. (133)

Fire, with its forked tongue, is now the instrument of Satan. As such, it recurs in the last moments of the novel, when the creature promises Walton (perhaps falsely) that he shall “consume to ashes this miserable frame” in his funeral pyre at the North Pole.

As Andrew Griffin has observed, Mary Shelley thus denies the romantic dream of fusing the contraries of fire and ice, life and death, in a triumph of the divine poetic imagination. Despite Kubla Khan’s “miracle of rare device, / A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice,” despite Walton’s image of a tropical paradise at the North Pole where “snow and frost are banished,” Mary Shelley’s Mariner discovers only mutinous betrayal and destruction at the North Pole while her creature sees only death in the coming together of snow and fire. The romantic attempt to marry opposites, to unite the mortal and the immortal in a transcendent dialectic, to create the human form divine, is seen by Mary Shelley as pure fantasy, no more real than Walton’s dream.

Worse, as Frankenstein suggests, it is a very dangerous fantasy. Hidden behind Godwin’s and Percy Shelley’s dream of human perfectibility and immortality is a rampant egoism, the cardinal sin of the Satanic Prometheuses. For Godwin and Percy Shelley, as for Coleridge and Blake, it was the mission of the philosopher-poet to guide mankind toward salvation, to participate in the infinite I AM, and to destroy the mind-forged manacles of society. Mary Shelley had seen just how self-indulgent this self-image of the poet-savior could be. Her father had withdrawn from his children in order to pursue his increasingly unsuccessful writing career and had remorselessly scrounged money from every passing acquaintance in order to pay his growing debts; her father’s friend Coleridge had become a parasite on his admirers, unable to complete his Magnum Opus; Byron had callously compromised numerous women, including her stepsister.
Claire; Percy Shelley had abandoned his first wife and daughter in his quest for intellectual beauty and the perfect soul-mate, and might do the same again to Mary; and even the amiable Leigh Hunt tormented his wife with his obvious preference for her more intellectual sister Bessy Kent. Mary Shelley perceived that the Romantic ideology, grounded as it is on a never-ending, perhaps never successful, effort to marry the finite and the infinite through the agency of the poetic imagination, too frequently entailed a sublime indifference to the progeny of that marriage. Even before Percy Shelley in his *Defense of Poetry* dismissed the composed poem as a “fading coal” of its originary inspiration, Mary Shelley understood that the romantic affirmation of the creative process over its finite products could justify a profound moral irresponsibility on the part of the poet. When Percy Shelley’s dream of a utopian community or free love and intellectual creativity foundered on Harriet Shelley’s ignorance of Mary Godwin’s and Claire Clairmont’s mutual jealousy, Percy Shelley seemed oblivious to the pain he caused; so too Victor Frankenstein callously fled from the outstretched arms of his loving, needful, freakish son.

A Romantic ideology that represented its own poems as self-consuming artifacts within a never-ending dialectical process, that valued the creative act above the created product, and that allowed the poet to attack the past in the name of an unrealizable future, was not in Mary Shelley’s eyes a moral ideology. She believed that a poet must take responsibility for his actions, for the predictable consequences of his poems, as well as for the abstract ideals he serves. Percy Shelley’s inability to satisfy fully the emotional and financial needs of his first wife, her children, Mary Godwin, Claire Clairmont, and Mary’s own children is represented in his second wife’s novel in Victor Frankenstein’s inability to love and care for his monster. However much she shared her husband’s desire for a better world, Mary Shelley conveyed in *Frankenstein* her conviction that it could not be achieved by simply ignoring or destroying past relationships. Instead one must take full and lasting responsibility for all one’s offspring and continue to care for the family one engenders.

Mary Shelley’s critique of romantic Prometheanism thus has direct social and political ramifications. Encoded in the Romantic poets’ use of the Promethean myth is an affirmation of revolution, of rebellion against the established social order. Prometheus defied Jupiter’s will in order to liberate humanity from tyranny. For Byron, Leigh Hunt, and Percy Shelley, the figure of Prometheus connoted a radical democratic stance, a defiance of the existing monarchy and egalitarian class system, and a recognition of the equal rights and freedoms of all individuals. Mary Shelley’s “modern Prometheus” embraces the political principles of Locke, Rousseau, and Godwin. Not only does he seek his education at the University of Ingolstadt where Illuminism or Jacobinism flourished, but his effort to create a perfect, immortal being entails a profound revolution in the concept of human nature itself. As Lee Sterneburg has suggested, Victor Frankenstein is a latter-day Godwinian and his creation can be seen as the force of Jacobinism let loose in the land. For Frankenstein’s creature articulates one of the fundamental tenets of Jacobin ideology, a belief in every individual’s innate capacity for reason, benevolence, and justice. As the creature insists to Walton:

> Once my fancy was soothed with dreams of virtue, of fame, and of enjoyment. Once I falsely hoped to meet with beings, who, pardoning my outward form, would love me for the excellent qualities which I was capable of bringing forth. I was nourished with high thoughts of honour and devotion. . . . my own desires . . . were for ever ardent and craving; still I desired love and fellowship, and I was still spurned. Was there no injustice in this? (219)

One can see Victor Frankenstein’s creation as an attempt to achieve the final perfecting of Rousseau’s natural man, to produce an immortal being of great physical strength and powerful passions who transcends the chains of social oppression and death. And indeed, Frankenstein’s creature might even be invoking Rousseau’s *Social Contract* when he claims that social injustice has corrupted his natural affection for others—“I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend” (95)—and that, given the sympathy of other human beings, and especially of a like-minded female companion, he would again be virtuous.

But the creature cannot obtain the human sympathy he craves and is driven to violence by the constant suspicion, fear, and hostility he encounters. He thus becomes an emblem for the French Revolution itself. Originating in the democratic vision of liberty, equality, and fraternity disseminated by the idealistic and benevolent Girondists—Condorcet, Mirabeau, Lafayette, Talleyrand—the Revolution failed to find the parental guidance, control, and nurturance it required to develop into a rational and benevolent state. Unable to accommodate their historical resentments toward the aristocracy and the clergy, the Girondists could not create a state which recognized the rights and freedoms of all its citizens or find a legitimate place in the revolutionary social order for the dispossessed aristocrats and clergy. Unable to reconcile the old order to the new, the Girondists unleashed a political movement that—spurned by the King and his ministers—resorted to brute force to attain its ends, climaxing in the
violence of the September massacres and the executions of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette.

Mary Shelley conceived of Victor Frankenstein’s creature as an embodiment of the revolutionary French nation, a gigantic body politic originating in a desire to benefit all mankind but abandoned by its rightful guardians and so abused by its King, Church, and the corrupt leaders of the ancien régime that it is driven into an uncontrollable rage—manifested in the blood-thirsty leadership of the Montagnards—Marat, St. Just, Robespierre—and the Terror. Frankenstein’s creature invokes the already existing identification of the French Revolution with a gigantic monster trooped in the writings of both Abbé Barruel and Edmund Burke. Barruel warned the readers of his final volume:

Meanwhile, before Satan shall exultingly enjoy this triumphant spectacle (of complete anarchy) which the Illuminizing Code is preparing, let us examine how ... it engendered that disastrous monster called Jacobin, raging uncontrolled, and almost unopposed, in these days of horror and devastation.19

And Edmund Burke, in his widely distributed Letters on a Regicide Peace (1796), proclaimed:

... Out of the tomb of the murdered monarchy in France has arisen a vast, tremendous, uniformed spectre, in a far more terrific guise than any which ever yet have overpowered the imagination, and subdued the fortitude of man. Going straight forward to its end, unpalled by peril, unchecked by remorse, despising all common maxims and all common means, that hideous phantom overpowered those who would not believe it was possible she could at all exist. (my italics)20

(Note that for Burke, as for Victor Frankenstein, the most hideous monster of all is female). That Mary Shelley had intended to associate her creature with the French Revolution is suggested by the account of Godwin’s radical politics in 1789 that she gave after his death in 1836:

The giant now awoke. The mind, never torpid, but never roused to its full energies, received the spark which lit it into an unextinguishable flame. Who now tell the feelings of liberal men on the first outbreak of the French Revolution. In but two short a time afterwards it became tarnished by the vices of Orleans—dimmed by the want of talent of the Girondists—deformed & blood-stained by the Jacobins. But in 1789 & 1790 it was impossible for any but a courtier not to be warmed by the glowing influence.21

In fact, the representation of the French Revolution as a male giant

was initiated by the National Convention itself. In November 1793, one year after Victor Frankenstein gave birth to his creature “on a drear night in November” in the year 179222 (midway between the September Massacres and the execution of Louis XVI on January 21, 1793), the National Convention in Paris publically denounced the Catholic Church (on November 7, 1793 several priests and bishops among the deputies to the Convention abjured their clerical offices), held the first Festival of Reason in Notre Dame Cathedral, and proclaimed a new symbolic image for the radical Republic. That image, proposed by the painter David, was a colossal statue of Hercules to be erected on the Pont-Neuf and depicted on the new seal of the Convention: “This image of the people standing should carry in his other hand the terrible club with which the Ancients armed their Hercules!”23 Hercules was thus intended to represent, as transparently as possible, the strength, courage, labors, and unity of the common man (or sans-culottes) as he destroyed the many-headed Hydra of monarchical, aristocratic, and clerical tyranny.24 The Herculean metaphor had already appeared in radical discourse, in Fouché’s description in June 1793 of the victory of the people of Paris over the Girondists:

The excess of oppression broke through the restraints on the people’s indignation. A terrible cry made itself heard in the midst of this great city. The tocsin and the cannon of alarm awakened their patriotism, announcing that liberty was in danger, that there wasn’t a moment to spare. Suddenly the forty-eight sections armed themselves and were transformed into an army. This formidable colossus is standing, he marches, he advances, he moves like Hercules, traversing the Republic to exterminate this ferocious crusade that swore death to the people.25

As Lynn Hunt comments, we can see in this passage how the power of the people has become to the very men who released it both a gigantic liberating energy and a potential monster, the Terror incarnate in the strength and irrational fury of a sublime Hercules.26 This ambivalent image received perhaps its most vivid graphic representation in an engraving for the journal Révolutions de Paris in 1793 entitled “Le Peuple Mangeur de Rois” (see Plate VIII, top) in which the giant Hercules, clad “sans-culottes” in rolled-up trousers and Phrygian cap, bare-chested, club in hand, cooks the child-sized figure of the king over an open Regency pyre. This engraving powerfully presages Mary Shelley’s images of the gigantic creature firing the De Lacey cottage and strangling the child William Frankenstein by the throat; it thus points up the novel’s encoded representation of the French Revolution and the Terror as a monstrous male giant.
By representing in her creature both the originating ideals and the brutal consequences of the French Revolution, Mary Shelley offered a powerful critique of the ideology of revolution. An abstract idea or cause (e.g. the perfecting of mankind), if not carefully developed within a supportive environment, can become an end that justifies any means, however cruel. As he worked to restore life where death had been, Victor Frankenstein never considered what suffering his freakish child might later endure. By 1816, Mary Shelley could see that the Girondists, in their eagerness to end monarchical tyranny and social injustice, had given insufficient thought to the fates of the aristocrats, clerks, and peasants who would necessarily be hurt, even killed, during the process of social upheaval. She had seen at first hand the suffering inflicted on the French villagers by fifteen years of warfare when she travelled through France with Percy Shelley on her elopement journey to Switzerland in the summer of 1814. She had then found the village of Echemine "a wretched place ... [which] had been once large and populous, but now the houses were roofless, and the ruins that lay scattered about, the gardens covered with the white dust of the torn cottages, the black burnt beams, and squalid looks of the inhabitants, presents in every direction the melancholy aspect of devastation."27 Two years later, in 1816, she perceived a further deterioration in the manners of the Parisians as a result of the recent foreign invasion: "the discontent and sullenness of their minds perpetually betrays itself."28

While correcting the proofs of Percy Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* for publication in 1839, she commented that her husband "had indulged in an exaggerated view of the evils of restored despotism; which, however injurious and degrading, were less openly sanguinary than the triumph of anarchy, such as it appeared in France at the close of the last century."29 And that same year she criticized Condorcet, in her *Lives of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of France*, for his failure to recognize the probable consequences of the political enactment of his beliefs:

Condorcet ... showed his attachment to all that should ameliorate the social condition, and enlarge the sphere of intellect among his fellow-creatures. He did not, in his reasonings, give sufficient force to the influence of passion, especially when exerted over masses, nor the vast power which the many have when they assert themselves, nor the facility with which the interested few can lead assembled numbers into error and crime.30

What Mary Shelley realized, looking back in 1816 at the Terror and Napoleon's restoration of the monarchy after the coup d'état of 18th Brumaire, "was that means become ends: no political ideology can be detached from its modes of production. At every step one must balance the abstract ideal one serves against a moral obligation to preserve the welfare of living individuals, especially those family members most dependent upon one.

For Mary Shelley, this ethical position was powerfully reinforced by her rereading of Godwin's *Political Justice* in the year before composing *Frankenstein*. In the most famous passage of the first edition of *Political Justice* (1793), Godwin had insisted on utilitarian grounds that in the case of a fire, one had an obligation to rescue first the person most likely to benefit humanity (in his example, the Archbishop Fénelon, radical humanist and author of *Telemachus*) rather than an immediate relative (e.g. Fénelon's chambermaid—or valet in the second edition of *Political Justice* (1795)—who just happened to be one's mother, or brother). Godwin had insisted upon this logical conclusion to his utilitarian theory of justice until he fell in love with Mary Wollstonecraft in the spring of 1796. He then revised his position to acknowledge that the "private affections" were a virtue in themselves. In a passage first published in his *Memoirs of Wollstonecraft* in 1798 and regarded by Godwin as so crucial to his developing political theory that he reprinted it verbatim both in *St. Leon* (1799) and in his *Reply to Parr* (1801), Godwin announced

> a sound morality requires that "nothing human should be regarded by us as indifferent;" but it is impossible we should not feel the strongest interest for those persons whom we know must intimately, and whose welfare and sympathies are united to our own. True wisdom will recommend to us individual attachments; for with them our minds are more thoroughly maintained in activity and life than they can be under the privation of them, and it is better that man should be a living being, than a stock or a stone. True virtue will sanction this recommendation; since it is the object of virtue to produce happiness, and since the man who lives in the midst of domestic relations, will have many opportunities of conferring pleasure, minute in the detail, yet not trivial in the amount, without interfering with the purposes of general benevolence. Nay, by kindling his sensibility, and harmonising his soul, they may be expected, if he is endowed with a liberal and manly spirit, to render him more prompt in the service of strangers and the public.31

Mary Shelley clearly endorsed Godwin's later position, which she may well have attributed to her mother's superior understanding of human nature.

From Mary Shelley's ethical perspective, we can see that if Victor Frankenstein had been able to love and care for his creature, he might have created a race of immortal beings that would in future times have blessed him. And if the Girondists had been able to recon...
the nobility, and the clergy to their new republic and to control the suspicion, hostility, and fears of the people, the French Revolution they engendered might have become the just and benevolent democracy they envisioned. As Victor Frankenstein finally acknowledges, in a passage that functions in the novel as both authorial credo and moral touchstone:

A human being in perfection ought always to preserve a calm and peaceful mind, and never to allow passion or a transitory desire to disturb his tranquillity. I do not think that the pursuit of knowledge is an exception to this rule. If the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections, and to destroy your taste for those simple pleasures in which no alloy can possibly mix, then that study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not befitting the human mind. If this rule were always observed; if no man allowed any pursuit whatsoever to interfere with the tranquillity of his domestic affections, Greece had not been enslaved; Caesar would have spared his country; America would have been discovered more gradually; and the empires of Mexico and Peru had not been destroyed. (51)

No revolutionary herself. Mary Shelley clearly perceived the inherent danger in a Prometheus, revolutionary ideology: commitment to an abstract good can justify an emotional detachment from present human relationships and family obligations, a willingness to sacrifice the living to a cause whose final consequences cannot be fully controlled, and an obsession with realizing a dream that too often masks an egotistical wish for personal power. As she later observed of Condorcet:

like all French politicians of that day, he wished to treat mankind like puppets, and fancied that it was only necessary to pull particular strings to draw them within the circle of order and reason. We none of us knew the laws of our nature; and there can be little doubt that, if philosophers like Condorcet did educate their fellows into some approximation to their rule of right, the ardent feelings and burning imaginations of men would create something now unthought of, but not less different from the results he expected, than the series of sin and sorrow which now desolates the world.93

Mary Shelley grounded her alternative political ideology on the metaphor of the peaceful, loving, bourgeois family. She thereby implicitly endorsed a conservative vision of gradual evolutionary reform, a position articulated most forcefully during her times by Edmund Burke. In her view, if political decisions are based on the “domestic affections”—or on what Carol Gilligan has recently described as an “ethic of care”—on a genuine concern to protect the legitimate interests and welfare of every member of the family politic, then tyranny, war, and cultural imperialism can be prevented and the historical examples of national enslavement and military destruction which Shelley cites—Greece, Rome, native America, Mexico, Peru—will not recur. By unveiling the pattern of psychological desire, self-delusion, and egotism that informed Frankenstein’s revolutionary goals, Mary Shelley drew our attention to the extent to which a political ideology serves the psychic as well as the economic interests of a specific class: in the case of Frankenstein, the class of the male bourgeois capitalists who would profit from the overthrow of the aristocracy and monarchy. She thus subverts any claim a political ideology might make to serve the universal interests of humanity.

Mary Shelley’s own political ideology would serve instead the interests of the family; she thus encourages the active participation of women in the body politic. However, her conservative program of gradual reform, grounded on the preservation of the loving family-politic, necessarily replicates the inequalities inherent in the hierarchical structure of the bourgeois family, whether based on gender or on age. These inequalities were clearly manifested in the nineteenth-century British class system, a social hierarchy which Mary Shelley found acceptable. We must recognize that Shelley’s commitment to political reform modelled on bourgeois family relationships, in which no activity interferes with the tranquillity of the domestic affections, entails the acceptance of the domination of parents over children even in an egalitarian family in which husband and wife are regarded as equals. In other words, implicit in Shelley’s ideology of the polis-as-family is the constitution of certain political groups as “children” who must be governed. Her endorsement of this hierarchy is tellingly revealed both in her revulsion from the lower classes, particularly those of foreign nations—the German peasants whose “horrid and slimy faces” she found “exceedingly disgusting” during her honeymoon voyage along the Rhine in 1814—and in her unquestioned assumption that she belonged to “society,” the upper-middle-class world of her husband’s gentry ancestors, rather than to the artisan and dissenting lower-middle classes of her own parents.

Since the personal is the political, it is not surprising that Mary Shelley’s political ideology embodies the same contradiction between caring and controlling, between equality and domination, manifested in the dream that engendered Frankenstein. Mary Shelley there identified both with the abandoned monster and with the student of unchallenged arts who abandons him. This dream, together with the murder of little William Frankenstein in the novel, articulates her
horrified recognition that she was capable of asserting the final
domination of a parent over a child, infanticide; just as her Journal
comments on her German boat companions articulate her unself-
conscious willingness to destroy other human beings whom she finds
distasteful: “our only wish was to absolutely annihilate such uncleanly
animals.”

Inherent in Mary Shelley’s ideology of the bourgeois family politic is
an affirmation of the power of parents over children, an affirmation
that endorses the preservation of a class system. In her view, parents
have the right, even the obligation, to punish as well as to nurture and
protect their children. When she voices through Frankenstein her belief
that America should “have been discovered more gradually,” (51) she
implicitly casts America in the role of a newborn child-continent that
should have been cautiously developed under the loving parental care
of its new explorer-rulers. She does not say that America should have
been left undiscovered, uncolonized, unexploited, but only that this
process of imperial conquest should have occurred more slowly,
perhaps less painfully.

Mary Shelley’s celebration of the loving and egalitarian bourgeois
family as the basis of political justice—embodied in Frankenstein by
the De Lacesys—fails to take into account the innate injustice of the
hierarchical structure of the bourgeois family. From the ideological
perspective provided by modern socialist-feminist theory, we can posit
an alternative model of family and class relationships to that presented
in Mary Shelley’s fiction. This is the model of the working-class family
in which children are raised to pass into adult responsibility and to
contribute to the financial resources of the household as quickly as
possible. In contrast to the bourgeois family in which paternal
authority based on property ownership and legal rights creates a static
hierarchy in which fathers govern their children (and even their wives),
the nineteenth-century British working-class family provides an
alternative paradigm for political relationships, namely, a dynamic
evolution of cooperation among shifting social groups or classes
working together for the good of the entire society. This socialist
alternative is powerfully represented in the industrial novels of
Elizabeth Gaskell, most notably Mary Barton (1848). From this
perspective, we can vividly see the glaring contradiction in Mary
Shelley’s political ideology: the conflict between an ethic of care and an
ethic of control, between a system of justice grounded on mutual rights
and responsibilities and a system of justice grounded on the authority
of the elders.

A Feminist Critique of Science

From a feminist perspective, the most significant dimension of the
relationship between literature and science is the degree to which both
enterprises are grounded on the use of metaphor and image. The
explanatory models of science, like the plots of literary works, depend
on linguistic structures which are shaped by metaphor and metonymy.
When Francis Bacon announced, “I am come in very truth leading to
you Nature with all her children to bind her to your service and make
her your slave,”1 he identified the pursuit of modern science with the
practice of sexual politics: the aggressive, virile male scientist
legitimately captures and enslaves a fertile but passive female nature.
Mary Shelley was one of the first to comprehend and illustrate the
dangers inherent in the use of such gendered metaphors in the
seventeenth-century scientific revolution.

Mary Shelley grounded her fiction of the scientist who creates a
monster he cannot control upon an extensive understanding of the
most recent scientific developments of her day. She thereby initiated a
new literary genre, what we now call science fiction. More important,
she used this knowledge both to analyze and to criticize the more
dangerous implications of the scientific method and its practical results.
Implicitly, she contrasted what she considered to be “good” science—
the detailed and reverent description of the workings of nature—to
what she considered “bad” science, the hubristic manipulation of the
 elemental forces of nature to serve man’s private ends. In Frankenstein,
or the Modern Prometheus, she illustrated the potential evils of
scientific hubris and at the same time challenged the cultural biases
inherent in any conception of science and the scientific method that
rested on a gendered definition of nature as female. To appreciate the
Revisiting Frankenstein: A Study in Reading and Education

Anthony Backes

All of our students are romantics. Grasping this point and the value of the contributions of romantic thinkers to education is a key to instilling a sense of wonder in our students.

**Romantic Characteristics**

The major ideas of the romantic rebellion are still held true in the popular mind. New movements in philosophy have either accepted the most basic romantic principles or have failed to capture the imagination with their alternatives the way the romantic thinkers did. Thus students believe in the primacy of the individual, as do writers and thinkers as different from one another as Rousseau, Wordsworth, Hemingway, and Vonnegut. Adolescents tend to use themselves as the measure of all things in moral questions and in simpler questions like the utility of knowledge. Most teachers have heard, "When am I ever going to use this?" more times than they care to remember. A classicist would ask such a question, trusting that all knowledge will eventually improve humanity. Adolescents sometimes exhibit a lack of social consciousness, a classical idea requiring that the happiness of the individual take second place to the welfare of the group. Other times students emotionally latch on to causes, like the environment, infatuating adults with their inconsistency. Adolescents also tend to be mixed in their own emotions and in attempts at expressing these emotions. They usually make decisions based on feelings more than logic. They respond to the world around them through the tinted glasses of their own emotions. The enrolling of these feelings is a great rallying cry of romantic thinkers, beginning with Rousseau and then trumpeted around the world by the romantic poets from Wordsworth to Shelley. As Kieran Egan has pointed out, even a much more formal poet like Baudelaire made feeling the focus of his definition of romanticism (1999, Romantic Understanding, New York: Routledge, 21). These are both principles of the Romantic Rebellion, already existing in embryonic form during the Renaissance, broadened in their application during the Enlightenment, and turned into those echoing cries during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Of course, since the rebellion is still going on, these characteristics are reflected by teachers as well. What we often have in a typical classroom is a more socialized and cautious romantic disposing with an unsexualized and restless one. The teacher takes Emerson or perhaps Paul Simon as his hero/model. The student follows Thoreau (often without knowing it) or, more purposely, Aid Rose.

If we're all romantics with regard to these two characteristics, adolescents seem more so when the word is considered in a third sense. Reciprocitains claim individuals, in their enculturation, repeat the history of the culture as a whole. Thus an individual must go through a rebellious, romantic stage before becoming a more sober realist (Egan, 6). While hardly a recapitulationist, Alfred North Whitehead noted that with regard to any new subject, an individual must go through a stage of romance before entering what he called a stage of precision (1954, The Aims of Education, New York: Mentor, 35-4). For most high school students, nearly every subject is new. They have only recently been asked to read fiction seriously and to make judgments about the ideas expressed in that fiction. As they have just been introduced to literature as a phenomenon with a history, one that develops from previous accomplishments and ideas, as do governments and peoples. In almost every instance, students are still in their stage of romance. They don't want precision. They want magic. The teacher who doesn't recognize that fact ends up talking to chalkboards.

**Frankenstein: A Romantic Novel**

These characteristics make the novel Frankenstein both a logical and a romantic choice for introduction to romantic literature. Its inclusion in a survey of British or world literature admits a work by a woman to what is usually an exclusive men's club. Furthermore, it introduces students to a writer who, in many ways, was like them. Mary Shelley was still a teenager when she wrote what became her best novel. Furthermore, she was the second wife of Percy Shelley, perhaps the most extreme and self-important of the romantic poets. Daughter of famous parents, Mary Wollstonecraft, an early pioneer for women's rights, and William Godwin, a political and economic reformer, Mary Shelley lost her mother a few days after her birth and was brought up by Godwin's ex-wife. An outsider from churches to place any restraint on him or any other scientist. These attitudes, to which students unknowingly subscribe, are further brought to life by the vitality of the characters in the novel. Both Victor and his creature have proven to be characters with whom students can identify. The novel has enough science to excite adolescents' romantic need for magic but requires no precise information. In fact, Shelley suppressed her own knowledge of galvanism, the belief that dead tissue could be reanimated with electricity, fearing the evil of the very experiments she was describing. In short, it is the perfect text for students still in their romantic adolescence.

**The Education of Victor Frankenstein and His Creature**

The doppleganger relationship of Victor and his creature allows adolescents to explore the romantic nature of their own learning. Victor and his creature are portrayed as complementary opposites in many ways, but none is so telling as their devoted educations. The first third of the novel is a discussion of the merits of two systems of education. Victor has the standard medical education of his time, mostly book-centered, the practical side of it concerned only with dead things. He does wander into unapproved sources of knowledge and is encouraged by one professor (1983, Frankenstein, New York: Signet, 48). The remainder of the novel shows how this forbidden knowledge leads him to disaster. Victor is educated according to the Lockean model. His mind is assumed to be the famous "blank slate," and he is educated first in simple things which are later built upon. Furthermore, his education is utterly lacking in any practical experience. He lacks any kind of family relationships, except a rather morbid one with his dead mother. He has no social relationships except with Clerval, his only friend, from whom he is separated for long periods of time, and with Elizabeth, an adopted daughter of the Frankenstein family. When he treats as a sister until he suddenly remembers her mother's death-bed wish that the two be married. As a student put it, "He's one of those guys who's good in school but doesn't really know anything."

The creature also begins life as the blank slate, but there the similarity ends. At his abandonment, he is plunged into the complexities of the world, willy-nilly forced to grasp the world whole, he
quickly learns to draw conclusions from his observations, even though he does not have language. He wanders without destination, learning to find food and water from sheer deduction until he reaches a secluded mountain valley where some political refugees, the DeLacey family, are living in a rustic hut. He then applies his observational skills to human society, and in the course of the year, learns not only language and literacy but also a sense of obligation to his fellow creatures and a feeling of concern for their welfare (Shelley, 103-12). In short, he has become a new being, showing

VICTOR IS EDUCATED ACCORDING TO THE LOCKEAN MODEL. HIS MIND IS ASSUMED TO BE THE FAMOUS "BLANK SLATE."

the Rousseauian principle of fundamental human goodness which will blossom with self-induction if only it is not tainted with evil. Ultimately, the creature performs anomalous acts of kindness for the cottagers, including gathering wood and shoveling snow. Having learned by this time that his appearance terrifies others, the creature wisely keeps out of sight, venturing only to converse with the blind elder DeLacey when the rest are absent.

Discussion of these episodes and comparison of Victor's education and his creature's raises issues of the students' own education. They usually agree with the novel, which finds the creature's education superior, but almost always admit their own education, at least the part of it in school, has been more like Victor's. Many are hearing the word education applied more broadly to all experience for the first time. Perhaps the realization that school can provide only a small part of the education needed to function in the complex world is the most important benefit of reading the novel. Almost all admit they would have a difficult time doing what the creature did, drawing such sound conclusions from pure observation. Rousseau and Shelley would probably say their natural inclination to learn has been destroyed by schools which have made them dependent on teachers. At the least, students realize that they must become active learners if they are to be educated at all and that they alone are ultimately responsible for the kind of education they receive. The realization that they have become passively dependent upon schools is

often the first step toward becoming more independent learners.

Books and Their Influence

At this point in the novel and the classroom, civilization rears its ugly head. In chapters fourteen through sixteen the creature describes his experience with four books, which become part of his experiences with the cottagers (117-37). The books Mary Shelley chose were widely available and read in her time. With the exception of Milton's Paradise Lost, they are books unknown to students. The other three are Volney's Ruins, Plutarch's Lives, and Goethe's The Sorrows of Young Werther. True to her Rousseauian thesis, Shelley has the creature explain how each of these books led to his later violent behavior and ultimately his downfall. Reading Milton makes him swear to avenge his miseries by killing his creator, a great example of a romantic revisionist: reading of an older text. The original villain, in this case Satan, becomes a hero for romantic readers. Plutarch's Lives and Volney's Ruins show the creature what can be gained through the ruthless use of power. Volney, once a popular world-historical text, has all but disappeared because of its racism and dogmatic Christian bias. Goethe's novel, Werther, shows the creature he has a right to express his emotions, even in a self-destructive way. Shelley is at once attacking the extremes of her husband and his romantic Prometheus friends and exploring

the way books can influence and shape people. The specter of suicide, raised by Werther, prompts discussion of the power of music and the ways in which music can influence people. Reading such books as these, the reader is reminded that the creature's violent behavior is not caused by the books he reads to vent his anger, but that the anger is already there. The books provide only an outlet for his rage.

The anger directed at the books that led to the creature's murder of the cottagers is transferred to the author, Mary Shelley. In her novel, the creature's anger is transferred to the creature himself, who tries to destroy her. In the classroom, the anger is directed at the author, who is made to suffer. Shelley is frequently decried as a poor writer, a bad prophet, and a poor teacher. Shelley is treated with tremendous recognition and respect, yet her work continues to be criticized and dismissed.

Frankenstein gives students some experience with the first and perhaps the only modern myth: the way reading can change their lives and influence their future. The novel is about reading, not just any reading, but the kind of reading that changes the reader's life. Reading gives the reader a voice, a place in the world, a way to influence the world. Reading gives the reader power, a power that can be used for good or evil.

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Teaching *Frankenstein* from the Creature’s Perspective

Paul A. Cantor and Michael Valdez Moses

*Frankenstein* has worked well for us in a wide variety of courses: in a basic undergraduate survey course in British literature, where it helped to chart the transition between Romantic poetry and Victorian fiction; in both undergraduate and graduate survey courses on Romanticism; in a course on tragedy as a genre, as an example of how tragic action can be transposed into a novel, and in a course on myths of creation as a genre.

Whatever the context, we often encounter difficulties at first because of the story’s prominent place in popular culture and the consequent temptation for students to think that they are familiar with the contents of the book without having read it. Many telltale signs alert teachers that they are dealing with a student of James Whale (director of the 1931 film version of the novel) rather than of Mary Shelley. A comment in class on the poignancy of the Creature’s inability to speak is a sure clue, and we know we are in trouble when we pick up a paper entitled “The Role of the Hunchback in *Frankenstein*.” Having once made it clear to students that they must leave Boris Karloff and Colin Clive behind and read Mary Shelley’s text, though, teachers can make the popularity of the *Frankenstein* story work to their advantage. The story could never have enjoyed the success it has had in the form of horror films if it did not somehow tap into a variety of adolescent fears and fantasies. Bearing in mind that Mary Shelley was the same age as many college students when she wrote the book, teachers ought to be able to make it speak with particular force to them. We have found that *Frankenstein* comes alive for students when we ask them about the ways in which they can sympathize and even identify with the Creature.

What Mary Shelley wrote is, after all, a grotesque variant of the bildungsroman. Literally at the center of *Frankenstein* is an account of the Creature’s education, and the Creature’s fundamental problem is the one with which many heroes and heroines of nineteenth-century novels grapple: how to find a respectable place in society. While the Creature’s situation is certainly extraordinary, its troubles mirror basic human concerns and anxieties. The questions that torment the Creature have a familiar ring to the ears of college students: Why do I appear to be different from everyone else (even though I seem to share the same feelings inside)? How do I fit into society? Why have I been rejected by someone who should have taken care of me? How do I find a mate? Is there anyone to share my misery? By getting students to approach the Creature’s experience in terms of such questions, a teacher can quickly break down their initial
tendency to see the Creature’s story as fantastic and remote from their own interests and concerns.

But the point of this pedagogical exercise is not to reduce the Creature’s story to the level of undergraduate angst; rather, once students begin to view the Creature sympathetically as an outcast, they can begin to explore Mary Shelley’s specifically Romantic concerns in the novel. The Creature takes its place in a long line of Cain figures in English Romanticism, beginning with Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner (to whom Walton refers in his second letter). Like its creator, Frankenstein, the Creature has much in common with the self-image of Romantic artists. Isolated from ordinary humanity, the Creature is simultaneously cursed and blessed: cursed with an inability to participate in the normal joys of humanity but blessed with special insights into the human condition precisely as a result of its isolation. Teachers can talk about the Creature’s feeling for nature, in particular its affinity for sublime landscapes. In a Romantic or a general survey course teachers can ask students to compare the Creature’s sensibility with that of particular Romantic poets, such as Wordsworth, Byron, and Percy Shelley.

We have found it especially helpful to discuss *Frankenstein* in terms of Rousseau’s philosophy (in her journal Mary Shelley indicates that she was reading Rousseau’s *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* while working on *Frankenstein*). In particular, we assign Rousseau’s *Second Discourse* or at least explain the central ideas of the work. In many ways, Mary Shelley’s Creature corresponds to Rousseau’s “natural man,” having roughly the same combination of virtues and defects. In some ways the Creature—even in its own eyes—seems uncivilized and hence inferior to the citizens of society. Like Rousseau’s “natural man,” the Creature at first lacks the ability to speak and reason. But by the same token, in some ways the Creature seems superior to so-called civilized people. Again like Rousseau’s “natural man,” the Creature is stronger and more vigorous than the citizens of modern society. It can survive in circumstances that would kill the pampered products of civilization. The Creature possesses the virtues Rousseau attributes to “natural man”—in particular, independence and a natural sense of pity. In telling the story of the Creature’s turn to crime, Mary Shelley re-creates Rousseau’s chronicle of the fall of “natural man” into civil society, with all the attendant psychic strains and distortions.

Using Rousseau as background for teaching *Frankenstein* helps students to think about the novel in broader, philosophic terms. His revolutionary reconception of human nature can suggest ways for students to break out of their conventional responses to the Creature and to understand that its monstrousness is in part a social construction. In a sense Mary Shelley is portraying the distorted world of society, in which Rousseau’s “natural man” appears as monstrous—a creature with all the natural impulses of humanity—indeed a being in whom the creatureliness of humanity is heightened to a new extreme—is rejected by society as inhuman for its failure to fit into its conventional molds. Viewed in these terms, the Creature’s story becomes a case study in alienation, in precisely the sense of the term that Hegel and Marx inherited from Rousseau. The Creature’s tragedy is that, forced to see itself through the eyes of others, it ultimately accepts their view of it as monstrous. Because of this development, the Creature gets locked into a life-and-death struggle with Victor Frankenstein, in which it can succeed in rivaling its creator only by matching his destructive power.

Once we have our students thinking about the Creature as a pole of sympathy in *Frankenstein*, we ask them to press further and consider whether there are ways in which Mary Shelley might have identified with her “hideous progeny” or, alternatively phrased, ways in which *Frankenstein* might reflect the concerns of a nineteenth-century woman. At first, these questions may puzzle students. How can the story of a decidedly male Creature—it is, after all, questing for a female throughout much of the book—embody a woman’s concerns? But when we remind students of the centrality of education as a theme in *Frankenstein*, a light begins to dawn. Denied access to any normal means of education, the Creature is forced to educate itself. Moreover, the Creature must do so on the sly, learning to speak and read by eavesdropping on the education the De Lacey family gives to the Turkish girl, Safie. The Creature thus appropriates for itself an education that was meant for another. Many a woman in the nineteenth century, barred from the educational opportunities available to men and forced to improvise an education for herself, faced similar circumstances.

From a formal perspective, this reading of *Frankenstein* has the advantage of justifying the long De Lacey episode at the center of the novel or at least of explaining its role in Mary Shelley’s overarching plan. These chapters, which deal with the De Lacey family and the Creature’s education, may strike students as tame by comparison with those describing Frankenstein’s creative labors and the Creature’s revenge on its creator. It may be that Mary Shelley was seeking in the De Lacey episode a plot device to explain how her Creature became so articulate. Significantly, the film versions of *Frankenstein* always drastically reduce this segment of the story or omit it altogether, their producers and directors well aware that audiences are looking for something more sensational than an elementary lesson in French.

Looking at the De Lacey episode in the light of Mary Shelley’s concerns as a nineteenth-century woman may not make the story any more gripping at this point, but it does give students a sense of how the book coheres
thematically. At the center of her novel, Mary Shelley places a story of the education of a woman, a woman who is also a foreigner, an alien. Her status as an alien links her with the Creature, and indeed the way its education runs parallel with hers establishes a firm association between the two characters. That Safie comes from Turkey highlights the issue of the status of women. The Turks were of course proverbial for their low evaluation and mistreatment of women, and Mary Shelley uses the occasion of Safie's education to draw a contrast between proper and improper conceptions of the place of women in the world:

[Safie aspired] to higher powers of intellect and an independence of spirit forbidden to the female followers of Muhammad. ... [She] sickened at the prospect of again returning to Asia and being immured within the walls of a harem, allowed only to occupy herself with infantile amusements, ill-suited to the temper of her soul, now accustomed to grand ideas and a noble emulation of virtue. The prospect of marrying a Christian and remaining in a country where women were allowed to take a rank in society was enchanting to her. (119)

In her fear that society will not accommodate her aspirations to virtue and nobility, Safie reveals her similarity to the Creature. And Mary Shelley does seem to be holding up Safie's case as an ideal of equality in education. That Felix instructs her in a scientific and historical book like Volney's *Ruins of Empires* suggests that he is trying to give her the same education he would give a man.

When one of us was teaching *Frankenstein* in a graduate course at the University of Virginia, a graduate student named Rosemary Graham wrote a paper that gives a remarkable new perspective on the issue of women and education in the novel. Graham argued that *Frankenstein* should be read in the light of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), which Mary Shelley was rereading while working on *Frankenstein*. This work passionately advocates equality of education for women; much of its argument is directed against Rousseau's view of women and his idea that they should be educated differently from men (a view that Wollstonecraft associates with the followers of Muhammad). Rousseau developed his ideas on education in *Emile*, where the woman who is raised to be Emile's companion is named Sophie. As Graham pointed out, it is a brief step from *Sophie* to *Safie*. Thus by portraying Safie's education as radically different from that of Rousseau's Sophie and especially by having Safie educated in conjunction with the "male child" in her work, Mary Shelley may be continuing her mother's polemic against the French philosopher.

Having established the link between the Creature and Safie, we go on to explore the larger issues of gender raised in *Frankenstein*. In particular, we use the novel to raise the question of the extent to which gender is socially constituted. To be sure, the Creature is created as a male, and on one level of interpretation it might even be said to embody—and eventually to act out—the masculine aggressiveness of its creator. But from another point of view, throughout the novel the Creature may be said to be genderless or at least searching to establish a gender for itself. That desire of course is the point of the Creature's urging Frankenstein to create a suitable mate. It realizes that it can be truly male only in binary opposition to a female of its own kind.

In the absence of a mate, the Creature is forced to lead an existence that in terms of gender is profoundly indeterminate. As masculine as it may appear to be, at many points it is cast in a role that in the nineteenth century would have been viewed as feminine. The Creature, after all, in a curious way ends up speaking for the value of domestic life in opposition to Frankenstein, who, in his heroic quest as a creator, rejects the ties that would bind him to a conventional family. The Creature longs for precisely the warmth of hearth and home that its creator fails to appreciate. For all its strength, the Creature finds itself fixed in an essentially passive, reactive role, in which it is crucially dependent on the powers of its masculine creator to make it happy. The more one considers this aspect of the novel, the more one recognizes Mary Shelley's wisdom in associating the Creature with a poor, abandoned, persecuted female (the archetypal role assigned to the heroine in gothic fiction).

Discussion of Rousseau and Mary Wollstonecraft and of the issues of education and gender may seem at first to lead us away from the central concerns of *Frankenstein*. But as we have shown, the marginal becomes central in chapters 12–14 of *Frankenstein*. Mary Shelley brings together a strange group of liminal characters: the De Lacey family, exiled from their homeland for trying to help a foreigner; Safie, an Oriental in Europe, who is the daughter of "a Christian Arab, seized and made a slave by the Turks" (118); and finally of course the Creature, whose existence cuts across many boundaries and calls them into question. Is the Creature human or inhuman, animate or inanimate? In view of its hideousness conjoined with great power, is it a beast or a god? In view of the way it eventually turns the tables on Frankenstein, is it creature or creator? When students realize how persistently the Creature's existence works to subvert many of the conventional distinctions on which society rests, they can appreciate why in the deepest sense it appears monstrous to ordinary humanity. Thus the
issue of marginalization is ultimately what ties together the diverse group of characters Mary Shelley juxtaposes in the middle of her novel and, more important, provides the most profound basis on which Mary Shelley, as a woman in the nineteenth century, could identify with her "hideous progeny," the Creature. In the end, by approaching Frankenstein from the Creature's perspective, teachers and students can connect the book with the most significant social and political issues of Mary Shelley's time, as well as raise some of the most pressing theoretical concerns of our own.

Teaching Frankenstein in a General-Studies Literature Class:
A Structural Approach

Mary K. Thornburg

The first time I assigned Frankenstein to a class, I decided to give each student a brief chapter outline, which would help us keep the novel's events and characters straight during our discussion. I had no special teaching approach planned, but the book's length, number of characters, relative complexity of plot and setting, and especially its deviation from chronological order in the narrative recounting of events seemed to warrant a practical approach. When I looked at the outline I had prepared, however, I made a surprising observation. I could see patterns of movement, of balance among characters and events, in the architectonic design of the novel that not only clarified my previous understanding of relations, ideas, and key concepts but also suggested new ways of exploring the novel's significance. I recommend this approach (or some modification of it) to anyone preparing to use this book in the classroom.

Although I drew up the structural outline myself the first time, I later realized that an outline is much more valuable to students if they prepare it and discover its patterns themselves. Individuals (or small groups, depending on class size) can be assigned one or more chapters for summary. The summary of each chapter should be very brief and should be worded so as to mention every separate significant event, including the specific participants. (Example: "Chapter 1—Victor tells of his parents' history and their marriage; he describes the adoption of Elizabeth." My own outline is appended to this essay. Although every class's outline will be slightly different in wording and perhaps even in the significant events it includes, these differences should not affect the usefulness of the outline, so long as discussion continues to refer closely to the book so that judgments of what is significant can remain flexible.) When the summaries are finished, the class as a group can examine and discuss them, modify them as desired (probably by paring extraneous words), and finally combine them in a finished version, which should be arranged so that the symmetry of the novel's five sections (Walton's opening and closing narratives and Victor's two-part narrative surrounding the Creature's story) is clear. The structural outline can be duplicated for student use (copies are especially helpful if students will write or make oral reports on the book) as well as projected on a screen or written on a chalkboard. The outline's effect is at least partly visual, so it is better to have it all on one page if possible.

Once the structural outline of Frankenstein is revealed, patterns will become apparent, and the class can begin to plot them grap...
them by his benevolent smiles” (106). They willingly starve themselves that their father may eat. Safie’s arrival particularly delighted Felix but also “diffused gladness through the cottage, dispelling their sorrow as the sun dissipates the morning mists” (112). In portraying the De Lacey’s as an archetype of the egalitarian, benevolent, and mutually loving bourgeois family, Mary Shelley clearly displayed her own moral purpose, which Percy Shelley rightly if somewhat vaguely described in his Preface as “the exhibition of the amiableness of domestic affection, and the excellence of universal virtue” (7).

Mary Shelley’s grounding of moral virtue in the preservation of familial bonds (against which Frankenstein, in his failure to parent his own child, entirely transgresses) entails an aesthetic credo as well. While such romantic descendants as Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde would later argue that aesthetics and morality, art and life, are distinct, Mary Shelley endorsed a neoclassical mimetic aesthetic that exchorted literature to imitate ideal nature and defined the role of the writer as a moral educator. Her novel purposefully identifies moral virtue, based on moderation, self-sacrifice, and domestic affection, with aesthetic beauty. Even in poverty, the blind old man listening to the sweetly singing Agatha is “a lovely sight, even to me, poor wretch! who had never beheld aught beautiful before” (103). In contrast, Frankenstein’s and Walton’s dream of breaking boundaries is explicitly identified as both evil and ugly. As Walton acknowledges, “my day dreams are . . . extended and magnificent; but they want (as the painters call it) keeping” (14). “Keeping,” in painting, is defined by the OED as “the maintenance of the proper relation between the representation of nearer and more distant objects in a picture; hence in a more general sense, ‘the proper subserviency of tone and colour in every part of a picture, so that the general effect is harmonious to the eye’.” Walton introduces Mary Shelley’s ethical norm as an aesthetic norm. Both in life and in art, her ideal is a balance, a golden mean between conflicting demands, specifically here between large and small objects. In ethical terms, this means that Walton must balance his dreams of geographical discovery and fame against the reality of an already existing set of obligations (to his family, his crew, and the sacredness of nature). Similarly Frankenstein should have better balanced the obligations of great and small, of parent and child, of creator and creature. Frankenstein’s failure to maintain proportion or keeping is thus at one with his failure to preserve “a calm and peaceful mind” (51). His mistake is thus in Mary Shelley’s eyes both a moral and an aesthetic failure, one that appropriately results in the creation of a monster both hideous and evil.

My discussion of the moral and aesthetic dimensions of Mary Shelley’s conceptions of nature and the family leads us back to an even more basic philosophical question. How does Mary Shelley conceive of nature as such? In other words, what is nature, both the external world and human nature? Frankenstein insistently raises this question. It is the question that Victor is trying to answer, namely, “whence . . . did the principle of life proceed?” (46). And it is the question that haunts his creature, who repeatedly asks “Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?” (124).

As the characters wrestle with this ontological problem, the novel presents diametrically opposed answers. The creature insists that his innate nature is innocent, benevolent, loving. He is Rousseau’s noble savage, born free but everywhere in chains, a Blakean man of innocent energy. Confronting Frankenstein for the first time, he asserts “I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend” (95). At the end of his autobiographical narration, the creature repeats that “My vices are the children of a forced solitude that I abhor; and my virtues will necessarily arise when I live in communion with an equal” (143). Frankenstein, in opposition, claims that his creature is innately evil, a vile insect, a devil: “Abhorred monster! fiend that thou art! the torments of hell are too mild a vengeance for thy crimes. Wretched devil!” (94). If the creature represents innate human nature, as Mary Shelley’s persistent authorial denomination of him as “creature” and Percy Shelley’s editorial revision of “creature” to “being” suggest, then is a human being innately good or innately evil, a romantic child of innocence or an Augustinian child of original sin?

The question is vividly focused in the symbolic scene when the
drawings of mountain torrents, stormy seas, Ben Arthur, and Ailsa Rock for his “Scottish Pencils” series done in 1801. The creature finally ends his existence among “the mountainous ices of the ocean” at the North Pole, in that frozen wasteland imaged in Caspar David Friedrich’s _The Wreck of the “Hope”_ (1821) as the ultimate apocalyptic sublime, where he is “lost in darkness and distance” (221).

The creature himself embodies the human sublime. His gigantic stature, his physical strength (as great as “the winds” or “a mountain stream,” acknowledges Frankenstein [74]), his predilection for desert mountains and dreary glaciers (where he alone finds “refuge” [95]), and above all his origin in the transgression of the boundary between life and death, all render him both “obscene” and “vast,” the touchstones of the sublime. Moreover, the creature’s very existence seems to constitute a threat to human life. His appearance throughout the novel rouses “the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling,” a Gothic _frisson_ of pure terror.

But Mary Shelley’s calculated association of the creature with Burke’s sublime is intended to do more than rouse a powerful aesthetic response in the reader. Thomas Weiskel has drawn our attention to the semiotic significance of sublime landscapes.\(^5\) Encountering such a landscape, the human mind attempts to determine the meaning of the image before it. Burke and Kant suggested that the meaning of such an immense landscape is the infinite and incomprehensible power of God or nature (the thing-in-itself). In this reading, what is signified (divine omnipotence or the _Ding-an-sich_) is greater than the signifier (the landscape and our linguistic descriptions of it). Weiskel has called this the “negative” sublime, since the human mind is finally overwhelmed or negated by a greater, even transcendent power. In contrast, Wordsworth in the Mount Snowdon episode of _The Prelude_ or Coleridge in “This Lime-tree Bower My Prison” suggested that the meaning of a sublime landscape may lie in its capacity to inspire the poetic imagination to a conception of its own power as a “mighty mind” or “almighty spirit.”\(^6\) In this reading, what is signified (the landscape) is less than the signifier (the poetic language produced by the creative imagination). Weiskel has called this the “positive” sublime, since the human mind finally confronts its own linguistic power.

With this distinction in mind, we can see that in semiotic terms, Frankenstein’s creature brilliantly represents both the negative and the positive modes of the sublime. On the one hand, he is a vast power beyond human linguistic control. Like the wrath of God on judgment day, his revenge is boundless, imageless. His physical appearance is only a metaphor for the havoc he can wreak on the entire human race. As he warns Frankenstein:

> Slave, I before reasoned with you, but you have proved yourself unworthy of my condescension. Remember that I have power; you believe yourself miserable, but I can make you so wretched that the light of day will be hateful to you. You are my creator, but I am your master;—obey! (165)

In this reading of the creature as the negative sublime, he signifies the power of universal human destruction, the unthinkable, unimaginable, unspeakable, experience of a deluge or a holocaust. He is the thing-in-itself, the elemental “chaos” of external nature, those “dark, shapeless substances” which preclude and annihilate the forms of life.\(^7\) As Mary Shelley reminded her readers in her Preface to the 1831 edition of _Frankenstein_: “Invention . . . does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place, be afforded: it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself.” (226) As the _Ding-an-sich_, the dark shapeless substance itself, the creature is forever displaced by the mind’s own “inventions,” its categorizing or structuring perceptual processes. In this sense, the creature represents the positive sublime, an arbitrary semantic system, that invented meaning which the human mind imposes on the chaos of nature. The creature is that which is “always already” linguistically structured in visual or verbal signs, its countenance both “bespoke” and “expressed.” Mary Shelley here relies on a Kantian anthropology even as she anticipates its most sophisticated modern revisions. Like Sapir, Whorf, Lévi-Strauss, and Derrida, she suggests that the basic Kantian categories which structure the mind’s phenomenological perceptions of nature are not space, time, unity, and causality, but rather the conventions of visual and verbal languages. Victor Frankenstein construes the unknown in linguistic terms: his creature’s countenance “bespoke bitter anguish, combined with disdain and malignity”; it “expressed the utmost extent of malice and treachery” (94, 164). In this novel, such linguistic readings become social realities. The interpretations of nature that human minds supply become ideologies, phenomenological constructions of their material existence.

The semiotic significance of _Frankenstein_ was recognized in the first dramatic production of the novel. H. M. Milner’s play bill for _Frankenstein: or, The Man and the Monster. A Romantic Melodrama, in Two Acts_, first performed at the Royal Cobourg Theatre in London on July 3, 1826, listed the monster in the dramatis personae thus: “*********** [played by] Mr. O. Smith.” Milner thus drew attention to the unknowability, the purely fictive semantic significance, of the creature. Mary Shelley commented approvingly when she saw
Thomas Cooke in the role on August 29 that “this nameless mode of naming the unnameable is rather good.” But Milner imposed his own reading upon the creature in his description of scene 2 as “Friendly Intentions of the Monster misinterpreted from his tremendous appearance, and met with Violence.” Like most readings of Mary Shelley’s text, this one radically simplifies the semiotic significance of the creature.

But Mary Shelley’s purposes are primarily ethical rather than epistemological or aesthetic. She wishes us to see that human beings typically interpret the unfamiliar, the abnormal, and the unique as evil. In other words, humans use language, their visual and verbal constructions of reality, to name or image the human and the nonhuman and thus to fix the boundaries between us and them. In so doing, as Foucault has pointed out in *Madness and Civilization* and *Discipline and Punish*, we use language as an instrument of power, to define the borderline between reason and madness, between the socially acceptable and the criminal, and thus to control the terrors of the unknown.

As Mary Shelley’s novel illustrates, this linguistic process of naming or imaging becomes a discourse of power that results in the domination of the ideology of a ruling class and leads directly to the creation of evil. By consistently seeing the creature’s countenance as evil, the characters in the novel force him to *become* evil. Whatever his innate nature might be, the creature becomes a monster because he, like Polyphemus before him, has been denied access to a human community, denied parental care, companionship, love. His violent rage and malignant murders—of William, Justine, Clerval, Elizabeth, and finally, in consequence, of Alphonse and Victor Frankenstein—are the result of a humanly engendered semiotic construction of the creature as terrifying and horrible. Mary Shelley strikingly shows us that when we see nature as evil, we make it evil. What is now proved was once only imagined, said Blake. The moment Victor Frankenstein sees his creature again, he conceives him to be the murderer of his brother: “No sooner did that idea cross my imagination, than I became convinced of its truth” (71). Having conceived his creature as a “devil” and his “enemy,” Frankenstein has made him so.

Moreover, because we can consciously know only the linguistic universes we have ourselves constructed, if we read or image the creature as evil, we write ourselves as the authors of evil. In Blake’s pithy phrase, “we become what we behold.” Victor Frankenstein becomes the monster he semiotically construes. As Victor confesses, “I considered the being whom I had cast among mankind ... nearly in the light of my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to me” (72). Frankenstein becomes the monster he names, just as in the popular imagination informed by the cinematic versions of Mary Shelley’s novel, his name “Frankenstein” becomes the monster.

Victor’s identification with his creature is underlined by the novel’s persistent association of both men with the fallen Adam and with Satan. Reading Elizabeth’s letter, Victor “dared to whisper paradisical dreams of love and joy; but the apple was already eaten, and the angel’s arm bare to drive me from all hope” (186); “like the archangel who aspired to omnipotence,” he confesses to Walton, “I am chained in an eternal hell” (208). The creature too is both Adam and Satan, as he explicitly reminds Victor: “I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed” (95). Increasingly, Victor resembles his creature: “When I thought of him, I gnashed my teeth, my eyes became inflamed” (87). Finally, the boundary between Victor and his creature is annihilated. In his nightmare, the creature literally enters his body. “I felt the fiend’s grasp in my neck, and could not free myself from it; groans and cries rung in my ears” (181; italics mine). Metaphorically, the creature becomes Frankenstein’s “own vampire” (72), cannibalistically devouring his creator.

During their final chase across the frozen Arctic wastes, Frankenstein and his creature are indistinguishable. Hunter and hunted blur into one consciousness, one spirit of revenge, one despair, one victim. Victor swears on the grave of William, Elizabeth, and his father to live in order “to execute this dear revenge”: “Let the cursed and hellish monster drink deep of agony; let him feel the despair that torments me.” He is immediately echoed by the loud and fiendish laugh of his creature: “I am satisfied: miserable wretch! you have determined to live, and I am satisfied” (200). Victor both pursues and is pursued by his creature. Not only does the monster leave marks to guide Frankenstein, but he enters Frankenstein’s very soul. As Victor says, “I was cursed by some devil, and carried about with me my eternal hell” (201). Even those “good spirits” who leave food for Frankenstein and whom he had “invoked to aid” him are in fact his own monster, equally bent on revenge. Finally, both Frankenstein and his creature are lost in darkness among the frozen Arctic wastes. By the end of the novel, we cannot separate the wretched, solitary Frankenstein from the wretched, solitary monster. Even Frankenstein’s passionate suffering, which has led at least one critic to hail him as a romantic hero, has been more than shared by his creature. As the monster addresses the corpse of Victor, in the original manuscript, “Blasted as you were, my agony is superior to yours; for remorse is the bitter sting that rankles in
my wounds and tortures me to madness” (220:34–221:2). The creature has become his creator, the creator has become his creature.

Many readers have noticed that the monster becomes an alter-ego or double for Victor Frankenstein, a pattern of psychological mirroring that Mary Shelley borrowed from her father’s doubles, Caleb Williams and Falkland. But to date these readings have focused on the monster as a manifestation of Frankenstein’s repressed desires, whether Oedipal, egotistical, narcissistic, or masochistic. It is true that the monster acts out Frankenstein’s subliminal hostility to women by killing his bride on his wedding night. But such psychological interpretations do not account for the larger philosophical questions centrally at issue in the novel. What, finally, is being? Whence did the principle of life proceed? By reading his creation as evil, Frankenstein constructs a monster. The novel itself however leaves open the question of what the creature essentially is. Clearly, this being has the capacity to do good; equally clearly, it has the capacity to do evil. But whether it was born good and corrupted by society, or born evil and justly subjected to the condemnation of society, or neither, the novel does not tell us.

Instead Frankenstein shows us that in the world that human beings phenomenologically construct, the unknown is imaged, read, and written as “malignant.” We thereby create the injustice and evil that we imagine. This is Mary Shelley’s final critique of the Romantic ideology. By empowering the imagination as the final arbiter of truth and the poet as the (unacknowledged) legislator of the world, this ideology frees the imagination to construct whatever reality it desires. But the human imagination, left to its own devices, as the rationalist Theseus warned in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, sees “more devils than vast hell can hold” or in the night, “imagining some fear,” supposes every bush a bear. As Frankenstein illustrates, the abnormal is more likely to be seen as monstrous than with Titania’s eyes of love which “can transpose to form and dignity . . . things base and vile, holding no quantity.”

Mary Shelley’s answer to the ontological and epistemological issues raised in Frankenstein, then, is a radical skepticism, a skepticism that she derived from David Hume and Immanuel Kant, whose ideas she had discussed with Percy Shelley. Since the human mind can never know the thing-in-itself, it can know only the constructs of its own imagination. As the creature says, “the human senses are insurmountable barriers to our union” (141). Because the mind is more likely to respond to the unknown with fear and hostility than with love and acceptance, an unfettered imagination is more likely to construct evil than good. Thus we can finally identify the monster with the poetic imagination itself, as Irving Massey has suggested: “the monster is the imagination, which reveals itself as a hideous construct of the dead parts of things that were once alive when it tries to realize itself, enter the world on the world’s terms.” The liberation of the imagination advocated by the Romantic poets was regarded by Mary Shelley as both promiscuous and potentially evil. For imaginative creation is not necessarily identical with moral responsibility, as Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde later demonstrated, or closer to home, as Byron and Percy Shelley illustrated. Mary Shelley firmly believed that the romantic imagination must be consciously controlled by love, specifically a mothering love that embraces even freaks. As Victor Frankenstein admits: “If the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections, and to destroy your taste for those simple pleasures in which no alley can possibly mix, then that study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not befitting the human mind.” (51)

In advocating this ideal of self-control, of moderation and domestic decorum, Mary Shelley is endorsing an ideology grounded on the trope of the loving and harmonious bourgeois family. She is taking a considered ethical, political, and aesthetic position, a position that is essentially conservative. Human nature may not be evil, but human beings are more likely to construe it as evil than as good. Since the imagination is motivated by fears, frustrated desires, and fantasies of power, it must be curbed by a strenuous commitment to the preservation of a moral society. In Mary Shelley’s view, that moral order traditionally based itself on a reading of nature as sacred. So long as human beings see nature as a loving mother, the source of life itself, they will preserve organic modes of production and reproduction within the nuclear family and will respect the inherent rights of every life-form. They will, moreover, protect and nurture all the products of nature—the old, the sick, the handicapped, the freaks—with love and compassion.

At the aesthetic level, this ideology entails the privileging of the beautiful over the sublime and a reversal of the eighteenth-century ordering of the arts. For as Burke wrote, the sublime appeals to the instinct of self-preservation and rouses feelings of terror that result in a lust for power, domination, and continuing control. But the beautiful appeals to the instinct of self-procreation and rouses sensations of both erotic and affectional love. Significantly, in Mary Shelley’s novel, the idealized figure of Clerval consistently prefers the gently undulating and brightly colored landscapes of the beautiful, as painted by Claude Lorraine and Richard Wilson, and the variegated picturesque landscapes celebrated by Uvedale Price and William Gilpin. In a moment of innocence regained, Frankenstein and Clerval find ecstasy in “a serene
sky and verdant fields” and “the flowers of spring” (65). Clerval explicitly rejects the landscapes of the sublime (as painted by Salvator Rosa or John Martin):

I have seen this lake agitated by a tempest, when the wind tore up whirlwinds of water, and gave you an idea of what the water-spout must be on the great ocean, and the waves dash with fury the base of the mountain, where the priest and his mistress were overwhelmed by an avalanche, and where their dying voices are still said to be heard amid the pauses of the nightly wind; I have seen the mountains of La Valais, and the Pays de Vaud: but this country, Victor, pleases me more than all these wonders. The mountains of Switzerland are more majestic and strange; but there is a charm in the banks of this divine river, that I never before saw equalled. Look at that castle which overhangs you precipice; and that also on the island, almost concealed amongst the foliage of those lovely trees; and now that group of labourers coming from among their vines; and that village half-hid in the recess of the mountain. Oh, surely, the spirit that inhabits and guards this place has a soul more in harmony with man, than those who pile the glacier, or retire to the inaccessible peaks of the mountains of our own country. (153)

By valuing the picturesque and the beautiful above the sublime, Clerval affirms an aesthetic grounded on the family and the community rather than on the individual. Images of cooperation (between human beings—the village; between man and nature—the laborers among the vines) are of a higher aesthetic order than images of isolation and destruction (the dying priest and his forbidden mistress; the inaccessible mountain peaks).

Clerval thus prefers an aesthetic grounded on the female rather than on the male. Isaac Kramnick has shown us that a gender division is imbedded in Burke’s descriptions of the sublime and the beautiful. The sublime is masculine, the beautiful is feminine. The sublime has the qualities Burke associated with his powerful, demanding, violent, unloving father. It is vast, dark, and gloomy; “great, rugged and negligent,” “solid and ever massive,” awesome in its infinite power; capable of arousing only fear, terror, and abject admiration. In contrast, the beautiful is associated with Burke’s gentle, shy, devoted mother. It is “small,” “smooth and polished,” “light and delicate,” gently undulating, regular. It produces in the beholder only feelings of affection and tenderness, a nurturant sense of well-being. Clerval’s aesthetic of the beautiful is thus grounded in a conscious sympathy between the human mind and a beneficent female nature.

When Mary Shelley first saw the Alps, an experience she recorded in her History of a Six Weeks Tour (1817), she responded to their grandeur, not with terror or a conviction of human finitude, but with a wholeness of vision that discovered the vital and life-giving among the frozen wastes, the beautiful within the sublime, the female within the male:

The scenery of this days journey was divine, exhibiting piny mountains barren rocks, and spots of verdure surpassing imagination. After descending for nearly a league between lofty rocks, covered with pines, and interspersed with green glades, where the grass is short, and soft, and beautifully verdant, we arrived at the village of St. Sulpice. (41)

And at the “desolate” summit of Montanvert, her eyes passed over the barren ice-fields to seek out the life which struggled to survive in their midst:

We went on the ice; it is traversed by irregular crevices, whose sides of ice appear blue, while the surface is of a dirty white. We dine on the mountain. The air is very cold, yet many flowers grow here, and, among others, the rhododendron, or Rose des Alpes, in great profusion.

Even among the most conventionally sublime landscapes, Mary Shelley typically sought out the elements of the beautiful, systematically construing nature not as a punishing or death-dealing force but as a maternal, nurturing, life-giving power, just as, in Frankenstein, she construed Mont Blanc and the attendant Alps as mighty images of female fertility. Clerval’s reading of mother nature is here, in 1818, her own.

Frankenstein promotes the belief that the moment we foreshorten an ecological reading of mother earth, the moment we construe nature as Frankenstein does, as the dead mother or as inert matter, at that moment we set in motion an ideology grounded on patriarchal values of individualism, competition, aggression, egoism, sexism, and racism. We set in motion the imperialist ideology that, as Mary Shelley reminds us, enslaved Greece and destroyed Mexico and Peru (51). We legislate a society capable both of developing and of exploding an atomic bomb, of annihilating itself in a nuclear holocaust. “You are my creator, but I am your master!”

Significantly, at the end of Mary Shelley’s novel, the monster is still alive. Victor Frankenstein has vowed to return his creature to the cemetery whence he came, but that vow is fulfilled by neither Frankenstein nor his double, Walton. We have only the monster’s word that he will destroy himself on a fiery pile at the North Pole. To
believe him may be to engage in a fantasy as deceptive as Walton’s vision of a coming together of fire and ice, a tropical paradise, at the North Pole. Mary Shelley left the ending of her novel open. The creature is “lost sight of... in the darkness and distance,” lost in the unnameable, yet still present as the power of the unknown. But she has taught us that if we do not consciously embrace the unknown with nurturing affection, we may unconsciously construe it as the Other—alien, threatening, sublime. The absence of a mothering love, as Frankenstein everywhere shows, can and does make monsters, both psychological and technological. Mary Shelley’s mythic vision of a manmade monster reverberates even more frighteningly today than it did in 1818.
Frankenstein Reimagined
by Kenneth Branagh

Adapting a literary work—making it live in another medium in an interesting way, rather than just recording it—is something I've spent a lot of my limited film experience doing, particularly with Shakespeare. With Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, we wanted to follow the events of the novel as closely as practicable, to include as much of the story as possible, while tying everything to an overriding response to the material—that is, our interpretation of it. For example, we wanted to use all the names correctly: in the 1931 film, Victor is called Henry Frankenstein, and they changed Henry's name to Victor. And we've brought in such characters as Mrs. Moritz and Justine, who were left out of earlier versions. So I hope we can justify the title Mary Shelley's Frankenstein by finding a legitimate marriage between a desire to use excellent things in the book that hadn't been seen before, and our contemporary response to the novel and its meaning.

A Different Dr. Frankenstein

The first crucial departure for us was to render the character of Victor Frankenstein less of an hysteric—we believe Victor Frankenstein is not a mad scientist but a dangerously sane one. He is also a very romantic figure—there does seem to be much of Mary's beloved, Percy Bysshe Shelley, there. It was the dawn of the scientific age; Victor is someone ferociously interested in things of that nature. This was, as some have said, the last point in history when educated people could know virtually everything; have read every classic text, be aware of every experiment in physics, aware of medical developments, and so on. Victor, like Goethe, wanted to know more than he did, which was everything. Unlike Goethe, he discovers his limits tragically.

For me the lasting power of the story lay in its ability to dramatize a number of moral dilemmas. The most obvious one is whether brilliant men of science should interfere in the matters of life and death. Today the newspapers are littered with such dilemmas—and they always bring up the word "Frankenstein"—for example, should parents choose the sex of their child? We can all see these developments taking place. It's now an imaginable step, to prevent people from dying. There's a place in the script where Victor says, "Listen, if we can replace one part of a person—a heart or a lung—then soon we will be able to replace every part. And if we can do that, we can design a life, a being that won't grow old, that won't sicken, a being that will be more intelligent than us, more civilized than us."

That element of Victor's philosophy is crucial. This is a sane, cultured, civilized man, one whose ambition, as he sees it, is to be a benefactor of mankind. Predominantly we wanted to depict a man who was trying to do the right thing. We hope audiences today may find parallels with Victor today in some amazing scientist who might be an inch away from curing AIDS or cancer, and needs to make some difficult decisions. Without this kind of investigative bravery, perhaps there wouldn't have been some of the advances we've had in the last hundred years—an argument Mary Shelley makes on Victor's behalf in the book.

There are weaknesses in his character. He's driven by an unyielding resistance to the way the world seems to be ordered, a resistance to the apparently arbitrary reclamation of good and kind and important people. In Victor's case—and this is most resonant in the book—his mother, someone whom he clearly adores. In his anger and grief he resists the most irresistible fact of all—Death. He has a relationship with God that is annoyed and irritated. He says to Henry, "We're talking about research and work that may mean that people who love each other can be together forever." Victor is also tremendously romantic. He feels that the apparent natural balance—we all arrive and know we are going to die—is not necessarily a perfect one. The romantic idea of souls being together forever—and in the wake of this scientific knowledge, literally together forever—is something that appeals strongly to his visionary instincts.

This version also portrays Victor as someone a little more physical, earthy as well as intellectual. Rather than a neurotic aesthete, he's sort of a renaissance man, someone who could be anything he wanted to be. Someone whose future the audience can care about. If he's a powerful figure, he has more to lose. And Victor is far from perfect. He is an obsessive overreacher who falls out of what he believes to be the noblest of motives.

It's been said that, in part, the story of Frankenstein is an expression of the frustration men feel at being unable to have children on their own, and alongside that goes revulsion at the birthing process. For example, after the operatic fervor of the creation process, as this film depicts it, with the camera swinging and swooping across the lab and a great sense of power being embodied by Victor Franken-
remains to be seen. There have certainly been distressing cases in modern times, where mothers have found it difficult to hold or care for their offspring immediately after birth. We took some of these examples as our cue.

Reimagining the Creation...

The image I had in my mind for the birth sequence is of a child being born to parents who then walk out of the delivery room and leave this bloodstained, fluid-covered thing to just crawl around on its own. The whole issue of pregnancy and the birthing process is such an emotive one, and creates such powerful feelings in people. We tried to make it explicit in that sequence. Indeed, the entire conception/creation process is full of explicitly sexual imagery.

The Creature, once alive, is wiped down, and banged on the back and made to cough out the remaining fluid, taught how to stand and walk—far away from the old image of the pre-dressed, lumbering villain rising up from the slab. The birth image itself is one of the most striking in the film. There is a tremendously thrilling, sexual, musical sequence leading up to a moment that is without music—you hear just the shuffling of the fluid and this Thing, grunting and groaning. Suddenly, from the feverishly idealized imagination of Victor Frankenstein we go to the reality of a living thing—created in this abortive fashion, alive in this utterly confused way, with a set of different parts—born to a dysfunctional father.

Literary scholars often look to Mary Shelley's own life for the sources of all this: the horror of her own birth with her mother dying as a result, and Mary's own children dying in infancy.

The lack of specific information that Shelley provides about the creation process leaves filmmakers free to imagine it in all sorts of ways. It's fascinating in itself, and texturally it's a good thing to have in the middle of a story like this—this rhythm of the first section leading up to this climax of creation. In the earlier Frankenstein films, of course, you had that great gothic laboratory and the body being hauled up into the storm... It creates the sense of an epic struggle. Not unlike making a film, in fact. I sometimes feel there are uneasy parallels between Victor's obsessive desire to create his monster and what we've done in making a film of this size and scale. There is something compelling about watching a person in the grip of an obsession. People clearly enjoy watching other people go mad.

There is also a voyeuristic thrill to be had from watching the creation sequence. We feel as though we're behind closed doors. It's a secret. I hope the lonely and dangerous quality of this is something audiences will respond to.

...And the Creature

In portraying Frankenstein's Creature, we had the fundamental challenge of bringing to life in a different way a character that has already become universally familiar in another form. It began with certain decisions about the script—for example, that the Creature would learn to express himself eloquently, as he does in the book, rather than merely grunt. And of course Robert De Niro himself brought a great deal to the role.

Most people, let's face it, are really only aware of the Creature through comic books or the Mun-
sters or the Addams Family. I think that to overcome such preconceptions, we had to cast an actor of power and stature. There should be something in the very casting, the very mention of the person's name, that would intrigue people as to how this great actor would interpret this classic screen role.

It was crucial to conceive of a look for this Creature—through the combination of brilliant make-up and Robert's performance—that would be very different from Boris Karloff's memorable portrayal. It had to be striking and scary, yet allow Robert De Niro's face and expressions to be clearly read through the make-up. All the prosthetic details, while powerful in themselves, are really just supporting the internal performance. We wanted to show also, through the make-up, that the Creature, though patched together from a collection of people, is illuminated by a confused but significant intelligence.

We took as a departure point the ice cave scene in the book, where the Creature speaks so eloquently and articulately—using this to banish all comparison with the much less articulate Creature of earlier movies. (In the book, he and Frankenstein actually use a hut on the glacier, which we changed to a cave.) And again at the end, when speaking to Walton, the Creature reveals a level of sophistication, attained through the course of his education in the book, that we felt was important to achieve.

In the ice cave scene the Creature faces Victor Frankenstein with the questions that any such being might ask: What were you doing? What am I made of? Did you ever consider the consequences of your actions? You gave me emotions, you didn't tell me how to use them. Do I have a soul or is that a part you left out? The "son" questioning his father about being abandoned. That's certainly the meat of the role for an actor like De Niro, and he takes it with tremendous relish.

Another early decision was to not make the Creature an eight-foot tall giant as he is in the book. It should be clear that, for all the horror of his appearance, he is not in fact a monster, but a man. We wanted Robert, a man of medium height, to be neither smaller nor bigger than he is, We imply that the process of his creation endowed him with great physical strength, and perhaps an impression of a certain massiveness—but the idea of his being a giant has been seen too many times. It can also suggest the wrong sorts of comic possibilities, to do with his sexual longings and so on, which might be distracting. Mel Brooks's Young Frankenstein was such a brilliant parody that we wanted—without losing all humor in the film—to stay far away from "size gags."

The Creature's rage is the product of clearly articulated confusions about where he's come from and what he's made of. It's not simply the violence of a great big tall Thing. We wanted him to be much more like an ordinary man. But one without a name or an identity.

We wanted to concentrate a lot on De Niro's eyes—he has wonderful eyes—on trying to find the soul inside this collection of cuts and bruises and brain. That's what we want the audience to follow. There's a very strong image in Shelley's book of the Creature peering out between the boards of a pigsty, when he's crouched down and spying on the family. We reproduced that exactly, this image of the eyes as windows of his soul.

We felt that the physical silhouette of the Creature, altered by his costume, had to have a kind of mythic power. Something that conjured up images of Japanese warriors, or monks—that sort of dignified, noble, powerful type who represents something of what the Creature has achieved by the end of his very unsentimental education. An innocent, he learns very quickly that because of how he looks, he'll be rejected by mankind. As he says, "I think and speak and know the ways of man." We wanted him to have the tone of a philospher, someone who's found a strange peace even if he still is tormented and frustrated by not having the companionship that humans most often need to be happy.

It was the interior, the heart and soul of the Creature, that De Niro and I were most concerned with, and the exterior had to support that. We always thought of him as a naturally gentle soul whose rage is produced when he's crossed by Frankenstein. He achieves articulacy very early on. He's a swift learner, not lumbering or slow, and not without humor. It may be confusing to some people who like their monsters a bit more "monsters." The story and the Creature in this performance remain frightening and horrific, but we wanted at all times to sympathize with him or at least understand him.

Insofar as he is a man, he embodies both the
A Love of Equals

Victor has a particular example of what he wishes to protect from the arbitrariness of fate—his loving relationship with Elizabeth, though he risks it in the very act of trying to protect it. As we've created it, this relationship is of intensity and magnitude, one where the two equal partners are brought up together as brother and sister, and have all the joy of that, and then miraculously find themselves attracted to each other in a full-blown adult way.

There is a quality of certainty about it, of cosmic "rightness," that this is a love where it's the right man and the right woman. There are no other people or games-playing or coquetishness; it's not even an issue. It's perfect, it was meant to be. They can make each other laugh, stimulate each other intellectually, and find each other physically attractive. It's a passionate love affair that the audience should want to identify with. Part of Victor's obsession is a fierce desire to protect that.

He deceives himself into believing that his work will be a finite thing, that he will get this over with and then come home. It's one more expression of the extraordinary vanity that men can have in these situations, their powers of self-deception. But he truly loves Elizabeth and she him, and in a way that the audience will find invigorating and uplifting. They both have a lot to lose. It's the sort of dilemma that anyone can experience, pumped up to a very high level and very compelling.

The film Dead Again, as people have pointed out, also looked at that notion of a great love across time, that the right souls will find each other. I think people are tremendously seduced by that idea. It's present in the Shelley novel, but again only in the conventional sense in which such relationships could be presented: the woman at home, doing little, depending on social class and status; the man off working and sending back his devotion in letters, and worshipping her. But it's an unequal relationship. We couldn't be strictly authentic to the period, because I wanted to say at every stage. These two people are equal. This woman is possessed of as large an intelligence, as large a capacity for compassion and understanding as he is.

Elizabeth's response to the family tragedies is much different than his, though. She isn't driven in the same way as Victor. She's obsessed about her family, is someone who understands the value of what it can mean to be head of a household, and indeed wants to replace the great gap caused by the loss of his mother. She's someone who has a capacity to enjoy, to live in the present, to appreciate the small details of life. And she knows that to be that way is not to somehow be less of a person, which is Victor's and many men's tragedy. Just because you...
can't climb an enormous mountain doesn't mean that your life is without meaning. Elizabeth has the ability to accept things as they are, not live in some mythical future that people like Victor create.

In some strange way they complement each other. She allows him to go off, because that's what he needs to do. But it's not what she needs—she wants to stay at home. Every choice she makes is not a reactive decision but a decision by someone who has her own mind. It's shown in subtle ways but in ways that will be seen by everyone. Her character and their relationship are among the things we felt most strongly about in the film.

We felt it was crucial in a modern movie—especially of a novel by a great woman writer and the daughter of a very important feminist—to make sure that she is represented by someone who isn't just a "love interest." It's not an attempt to be politically correct. It's just very much more interesting, and more accurate about the current evolutionary state of the relations between men and women.

We're also telling a story, a story where the narrative power is immense, and so I hope everything I'm talking about will be done in such a way as to be simply part of that story, and subtly enriching it as we go. We need to be thrilled by what happens next, and along the way hopefully be moved and affected by the romantic subplot.

The Erotic Edge Of Terror

Certainly there is something about the joining of romance and terror that's interesting and very effective cinematically. Human relationships seem to develop and deepen not in some sort of gentle, even gradient but as a result of traumatic shocks: divorce or bereavement or terrible situations that often force people to talk to each other. Something suddenly applies a flamethrower to chilly surfaces. So the fear of terrible events, or the actual execution of them, can be very effective means of compressing dramatically the journey of a relationship.

In this one we have Victor and Elizabeth truly growing up in the course of two hours, and I think that that can happen when terrible events enter into peoples' lives in a major way. It forces them to think about what is meaningful. When Elizabeth and the sick Victor reunite in his garret in the wake of the creature's birth, they do so with renewed vigor and intensity and depth. And, loving each other that much, the idea of losing the other becomes that much more painful.

The wedding night scene, where the final quite-consummation of Victor and Elizabeth's love takes place, is further charged by the lurking terror outside, and in the back of Victor's mind. It's also sharpened by the knowledge that after this night of love he will tell her what he's done. All this brings a sort of strange erotic thrill.

There is also a faintly incestuous side of the relationship which feels very right in relation to Mary Shelley and some of the events in her life. [See the preceding biographical note.]

Another moment with very strange, erotic, and no doubt grotesque overtones is the sequence in the film when Victor returns to the mansion and recreates Elizabeth and then dances with her. Dancing has been important all the way through the picture—it's part of the ritual of romance, a social expression of physical attraction, celebratory and tactile and intoxicating, akin to making love. It's a thrilling embodiment of a romantic idea. And this final dance is, I think, profoundly moving, as well as a grotesque perversion of their extraordinary love. The sequence is our most radical departure from Shelley's novel, but one of the most haunting images in the film.

Also, the introduction of Elizabeth as the Creature sets up a kind of sexual competition between Victor and the Creature. I think Mary Shelley was titillated in some way by the notion of the Creature and sex. When it occurs in the book that the Creature wants a friend, at first it's dressed up nobly in the idea of companionship—but she also makes clear it's sexual. And Victor Frankenstein sees it. He realizes that this could lead to a whole tribe of these things. He's worried that the Creature will have sex.

We haven't played it out particularly, but it is clear at the end that she might be better off with the Creature than she would be with Victor. It is weird to imagine two making love, or even Victor and the "new" Elizabeth—an incredible violation has taken place which contains great power to shock.

An Epic Fairy Tale

The dancing and the music and other elements of the film all fit into a particular style. We intended an epic sweep that takes us right outside ourselves. The subject matter, to begin with, is larger than life.
People encounter monsters, and the monsters are part of a bigger landscape, Switzerland itself, with huge mountains and evidence of the power of nature. We’ve made a lot of the sets oversized and played to the dynamic of small people against enormous forces, natural and manmade.

I had various images in mind, Hansel and Gretel figures going off into the dark woods—of little men screaming against the size of things, the scheme of things. The visual style of the film resembles a gothic fairy tale where we could be extreme.

We chose to represent the Frankenstein household, for example, as a bright, colorful house with huge rooms and lots of sunshine and light, and we took license with color. The family spends a lot of time in the huge blue ballroom, which has a magical quality and gothic size, but no real relationship to any particular architecture of the time—while not being so extremely at variance with the period as to distract.

In this visually heightened world, we wanted to have strong contrasts. When Victor goes to Ingolstadt, it looks as grimy and tough and real and disease-ridden as cities could be at that time. It’s meant to be a striking contrast to Geneva. Victor comes from the light and moves into the dark. He goes back to the sunshine of the Frankenstein mansion afterward but it begins to be tainted by that moment when he shook hands with the Devil.

In general, fidelity to the period seemed less important than getting the psychological and emotional elements of the story right, and its relevance to our own scientific age, which are so compelling. Once a film becomes an authentic period rendition, then you have to pay much closer attention to period manners than for me seems relevant to this tale. That’s a different kind of picture: I wanted this to be passionate and raw, sexy and fullblooded, and yet to be dressed as a fairy tale, a fairy tale where we are scared, where people die and have their heads chopped off.

The approach was, in a sense, part of an ongoing attitude to period that we’ve developed, about how to tell a story set in historical times. Where are the connections between now and what’s meaningful about that story? The idea is to create an impression of a period, if it is more useful to the story than a specific and authentic reconstruction.

Though I adored The Age of Innocence for its meticulous attention to detail and evocation of period, that style wouldn’t have been right for Frankenstein. It was Edith Wharton’s technique to build up all those heavily detailed layers, whereas it’s not Mary Shelley’s at all. She uses a much broader brush. She was writing, as she says, a story “to quicken the pulse, curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart...” I wanted to do that as well.

There are some images that may suggest the German Expressionist style—tricks of perspective and looming shadows and the fairy-tale quality of some of those films had.

I’m sure the style is influenced here and there by many different films. But I mostly used other pictures or styles as a means of conveying to colleagues what I didn’t want.

A Tale Within a Tale

For the script we borrowed from Shelley the story-telling device of a tale within a tale. In the Arctic scenes that bracket the main action, Walton narrates to us what was told to him by Victor Frankenstein. Then, in the middle of Victor’s tale, the Creature tells his. Like nesting boxes or a Faberge egg.

Walton is very much a mirror image of Victor; he’s another obsessive man at the beginning of his quest. Will this tale persuade him not to pursue it? Victor says to him: “Do you share my madness?”

And at the end, when they watch the,ier drift off in the mist, Grigor, the first mate, who had been voicing the crew’s mutinous disapproval of Captain Walton’s obsession, says: “Where to now, Captain?” Walton says, “Home.”

The sequence on the ice at the end has an elegiac quality, something very otherworldly about it. A culmination with wonderful Shelleyian images of fire and ice. We used a line at the end of the screenplay’s screen directions which is the last line in the novel. As Walton watches from the deck of the ship, the Creature is soon “borne away by the waves and lost in darkness and distance.” It’s very mysterious and haunting.

And in the middle of the story comes the other crucial scene which takes place on the ice, when the Creature confronts Victor on the glacier. It’s the central scene in the book, yet one that has strangely been avoided in every Frankenstein movie.

I wanted to make as many connections as I could between the entertaining surface and the underlying themes in the story. I wanted a film that people would be thrilled by, and also go out thinking, “What would we do?” There are great departure points for intelligent and lively debate. Not that that’s necessarily required from a movie, but it’s a wonderful thing when it happens. The richness of Mary Shelley’s novel certainly encouraged us to stretch ourselves as artists, even though we knew the interpretation of a genuine classic can never be definitive.

I hope Mary Shelley would at least approve of the attempt.