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## Mary Shelley's Frankenstein: Prometheus liberated

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# Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*: Prometheus Liberated

A Thesis  
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The Faculty of the Graduate Division  
English  
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Master of Arts

By

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Chicago, IL

## Abstract

Prometheus Liberated: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

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This thesis investigates the influences of Mary Shelley and trace her construction of *Frankenstein*. While previous studies have researched Mary Shelley or her novel, little attention has been devoted to considering both. This study takes a close look at the life of Mary Shelley and her novel *Frankenstein* as a linchpin, reading it as a reflection of Mary's influences and as a document which itself serves as an influence to others. I examine in what ways the novel impacted English society and could have been read as an allegory for the human condition.

In the summer of 1816, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley, and their young son William, accompanied by Mary's step-sister Clare, traveled to Switzerland and rented a house near George Gordon, 6<sup>th</sup> Lord Byron. A testament to the strange environment in which Mary found herself can be seen in Percy's journal entry description of Lord Byron as "an exceedingly interesting person, and as such is it not to be regretted that he is a slave to the vilest and most vulgar prejudices, and as mad as the winds."<sup>1</sup> The Shelleys would take guided excursions touring the surrounding area to such places as Chamonix. Situated at the junction of France, Switzerland, and Italy, this small commune would leave an imprint on the couple, enchanting them, especially Mary. She would write in her journal "there is something so divine in all this scenery that you love & admire it even where its features are less magnificent than usual.... this is one of the loveliest scenes in the world.... As we mounted still higher...the most beautiful part of our journey."<sup>2</sup> Mary was enamored by the surrounding natural beauty of Switzerland. It would eventually serve as the backdrop for her gothic tale, where Frankenstein's creature would be "elevated by the enchanting appearance of nature."<sup>3</sup>

The fateful contest between Percy, Mary, Lord Byron and Byron's physician and travel companion John Polidori at la Villa Diodati, would take place on a rainy evening in July of 1816. Each of her companions would promptly draft a story or poem, but Mary wanted to labor over her contribution. She "busied herself *to think of a story*" that would be worthy of its name and possibly worthy of her parents.<sup>4</sup> Mary dedicated her novel to her father, William Godwin, even sending him the draft manuscripts to review.<sup>5</sup> Embedded within her novel, would be references to two of Godwin's most popular works, a political treatise, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) and a novel, *Things As They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794). Perhaps Mary's reading of her father's works gave her pause to consider the negotiations and

conflicts that existed between affluent society and the proletariat, such as religious doctrine. Religion painted an image of humanity that postulated man's free will and choice, but perpetuated a dogma which outlined a particular hierarchical structure that made Western theology—Protestant Christianity—an ideological baseline for all thought. William Godwin was a known Atheist and his beliefs were widely made public in his writings. Godwin argued against organized religion because of its bias and power within state affairs for “wherever the state sets apart a certain revenue for the support of religion, it will infallibly be given to the adherents of some particular opinions, and will operate, in the manner of prizes, to induce men to embrace and profess those opinions.”<sup>6</sup>

Ecclesiastical leaders in England held a considerable amount of power, particularly the Church of England which positioned the King as not only head of state, but also head of the church. How then could *Frankenstein* penetrate the minds of nineteenth-century England to convey an alternative path towards religious fulfillment? Mary Shelley would rattle the hearts and disturb the minds of Britons by writing a “supremely frightful,” novel. It would contain a moral and physical evil that “mock[ed] the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world” to not only question blind allegiance to religion, but also present man as a figure that challenged Christian doctrine by usurping it.<sup>7</sup>

This thesis investigates the influences of Mary Shelley and trace her construction of *Frankenstein*. While previous studies have researched Mary Shelley or her novel, little attention has been devoted to considering both. This study takes a close look at the life of Mary Shelley and her novel *Frankenstein* as a linchpin, reading it as a reflection of Mary's influences and as a document which itself serves as an influence to others. I examine in what ways the novel impacted English society and could have been read as an allegory for the human condition:

essentially, asking who could take advantage of human rights and who or ‘what’ counted as human. My argument is developed through a historicist reading of *Frankenstein* by first examining the relationships of Mary Shelley’s inner circle—William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Percy Shelley—who left their marks on Mary, shaping her views and how she lived her life.<sup>8</sup> Proof of their influence can be seen in the family units that she creates for Victor and his daemon.

Next, I consider the ways in which *Frankenstein* mirrored crucial aspects of the psychological, political, and social realities of England from the late eighteenth-century to the early and mid-nineteenth century. Mary Shelley speaks to the burden of national identity, the political shift to Imperialism, and the fear and excitement of the coming industrial age by conjuring the philosophical arguments of her father through her depiction of Victor Frankenstein and his belief systems. Victor’s narrow view of the world originates from a position of privilege and authority.

It is through the lens of entitlement that he gives himself permission to judge what was normal, acceptable, and beautiful. These same belief systems were perpetuated not only in England, but also throughout Europe. For example, the tide of modernity had strengthened the people of France, but had crippled her government; thus bolstering post-Restoration England, which had a new found self-confidence and interests in the world around them. According to Carol Margaret Davidson, Shelley’s gothic novel is “a unique battleground bearing traces—among other things—of a momentous confrontation between Enlightenment and pre-Enlightenment belief-systems, ideas and values.”<sup>9</sup> These two value systems collide in the novel, compelling the reader to consider the question of selfhood and the values of modernity.

Transitioning from Mary's inner circle and the influence of her novel, I conclude by exploring *Frankenstein* as a response to a fear of the "Other" that gripped Europe in the wake of the French Revolution. For the purpose of this thesis, the "other" includes those not belonging to a privileged group based on class, nationality, and race. A new Europe was emerging, one that witnessed an increase of migrants from Asia and Africa and a tightening grip on the traditional values observed by the ruling class. This ruling class would employ science to determine race and judge beauty.<sup>10</sup> Colonialism and slavery would become necessary evils which had to be controlled and kept out of sight. *Frankenstein* summed up the conscious and unconscious fears of a society that was eager to fulfill its destiny, but was still very afraid of what the future could bring. In essence, Shelley's depiction of the daemon creature serves as a cautionary tale about the evils of man. She continues a dialogue that functions as "an echo of radical dialogues that demanded universal human rights," a dialogue that would continue through dramatic portrayals of *Frankenstein*.<sup>11</sup>

Two hundred years after the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* (1818), readers and scholars are still fascinated and drawn to its tale of horror and its plea for humanity. Victor Frankenstein and his monster have been portrayed in multiple retellings beginning with the first cinematic *Frankenstein*, a 16-minute silent film screened in 1910 made by Edison Studios. Hundreds of adaptations have since followed from comedic renditions such as Gene Wilder's "Young Frankenstein" (1974) to Kenneth Branagh's 1994 near-faithful film adaptation "Mary Shelley's Frankenstein." Recently, made-for-tv series have reimagined the novel's protagonist, Victor Frankenstein, as a young, aloof, genius pathologist who can't get a date in "Penny Dreadful" or a sadistic serial killer copycat who dismembers and reassembles children in "The Frankenstein Chronicles." What is striking is that most of the

homages to the original *Frankenstein* fall short of what Shelley intended for her readers. David Pirie comments that “there is simply no way in which the kind of ‘noble savage’ monster which Mary Shelley envisaged, reading *Paradise Lost* and expounding moral principles to its creator, could be presented in the cinema without immediately becoming ludicrous.”<sup>12</sup>

However, what the films do get right is that within each adaptation in which Frankenstein’s creature appears is a world that is experiencing or suffering through great change. By the time *Frankenstein* was published, England was transitioning from the Georgian era to the Victorian age that saw rapid developments in almost every sphere including medicine, technology, and immigration. The nineteenth-century saw many advancements in science and medicine, such as the invention of Anesthesia in 1846. However, three years after the first publication of *Frankenstein* in 1821, English surgeon James Price recognizes the use of electricity on the body to cure illness. In a widely read essay, Price candidly wrote about electricity as “that subtle, elementary fluid, whose agency appears to be universally employed in producing the phenomena of nature, of unlimited extent: its importance in the system of the universe is beyond the comprehension of man.”<sup>13</sup>

Britain was certainly not on the decline, as it held control over more colonial territories than any other country, maintained a first-rate navy, and set an intentional agenda to position the United Kingdom as a global leader. Shelley personifies that hunger for power and prestige, as well as the fear of these changes, through her characters as they try to define themselves. However, “man is a machine,” wrote la Mettrie. He is “constructed in such a way that it is impossible first of all to have a clear idea of it and consequently to define it.”<sup>14</sup> Shelley offers an interpretation of what could happen when the benevolent nature of humanity falls apart in its



haste to dominate and frame man. This theme would present itself multiple times through slavery, ethnic cleansing, and religious wars.

## I

*Frankenstein* is a semi-epistolary novel told through the narratives of multiple characters. Each biography unfolds revealing the story of the next character and progresses deeper into the question of the human condition. The framework of the epistolary novel was made famous by Samuel Richardson author of novels *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740) and *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (1748). Readers were given an intimate look inside the mind of characters giving the fiction the appearance of a possible reality. Richardson thus evoked an empathetic response from his readers who saw the novels as portrayals of a variety of human experiences. Ian Watt conveys that the novel's "primary concern [is] truth to individual experience—individual experience which is always unique and therefore new."<sup>15</sup>

The popularity of such novels may have influenced Mary to choose this style, rather than an epic poem or nonfiction treatise, to debate the question of human rights. Mary Shelley was no stranger to letters used as a vehicle to convey deep emotion, as this was the dominant form of communication between her parents and between herself and Percy Shelley. The letters impressed upon her the transformative power of her parents and, if published, the backlash felt from public opinion. Mary Shelley and her characters were influenced by their surroundings in significant ways. Her parentage and lifestyle played a strong role in how she framed her novel and the drama that ensued between characters. This can be seen in the familial relationships of Walton, Victor, and even the creature.

The daughter of famed authors William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary was born into a world of books, a contemplative life that both her mother and father held in high regard. Her mother's legacy was a great influence and most likely a primer for how young Mary would be raised. Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) was one of the first widely published feminist manifestoes of the eighteenth-century.<sup>16</sup> According to Barbara Johnson, Mary Wollstonecraft "was one of the first truly independent women.... She was a true child of the Enlightenment who thought that there were three faculties in mankind—reason, the senses, and the emotions."<sup>17</sup> These would suggest the "principles of human nature" that Shelley speaks of in her preface to the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein*.

William Godwin was a political philosopher and writer who became popular in Britain because of his anarchist views and supportive response to the French Revolution. Mary would have heard arguments between her father and his guests debating the rights of citizens and questioning the moral code of government. These two themes—morality and rights—along with her mother's Enlightened understanding of mankind would play an essential role in the construction and story of *Frankenstein*. Both of her parents were activists supporting the French Revolution and the proletariat's right to defend and govern themselves. While in France, Wollstonecraft witnessed the horrors of Robespierre, but held steadfastly to the charge of a free France. A compatriot of Mary's, Helen Maria Williams, captures the fear and unrest of Paris in her *Letters Written in France*, addressed to an unknown person in England.

In the sketch I have sent you of revolutionary government in France, too long have I been compelled to wound your feelings by the tale of successive calamities; too long have I been forced to dwell on images of dismay...But let me now attempt to communicate at least a portion of that exulting gladness with

which I turn from the crimes of tyrants, to recount the triumphs of liberty; to trace humanity pouring balm in the wounds of the oppressed; and justice stretching fourth her arm to shield the innocent.<sup>18</sup>

Williams's account of the Terror and downfall of the French Monarchy made British conservatives uneasy precipitating counteroffensives in the form of verbal and written responses to the war. These responses, such as Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolutions in France* (1790) were an affront to the ideals of Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and many others. Godwin's response to Burke's *Reflections* labeled him an anarchist because of his support of the revolution and his support of man's natural right to free will and an independent mind.

However, if a state does not allow its citizens a free will or an independent mind, is it not responsible for its welfare? Is the state not responsible for the condition of the people, a condition it created? The same logic underlies Victor's relationship with his creature. What right had Victor to interfere with the laws of nature? Was he not morally bound by duty to care for the being he created? Victor Frankenstein's *bildungsroman*-esque storyline forces these questions as he matures into a man who must own up to his responsibility. Even with the suspicion that the daemon had murdered his brother, Victor confesses "for the first time, also, I felt what the duties of a creator towards his creature were, and that I ought to render him happy before I complained of his wickedness."<sup>19</sup>

Similar to her characters, Mary's family unit was unconventional. By the time she was four years old her father had not only remarried, but was expecting a child with his new wife. Young Mary suddenly had to share her father, who was still mourning the loss of his first wife, with a "tactless, gossip-loving and habitually untruthful woman."<sup>20</sup> Within a short period of time she would eventually become one of five children with a step-mother who did not care for her.

Mary's only link to her mother would be through her letters and the regular visits to her mother's grave to wonder about a life that could have been. Her life was atypical as she was "shown off to visitors as a Mary Wollstonecraft in the making."<sup>21</sup>

Quick witted and attractive, Mary would be brought in to listen when her father would receive guests to discuss the political or scientific topics of the day. She was the daughter of two incessantly emotional people, possibly inheriting her mother's traits of depression and her father's unending state of mourning. Carving out an identity for herself would have been difficult, especially with an older sister who had fond memories of their mother and a step-sister who was constantly competing against her for attention.<sup>22</sup> Duality is a theme that presents itself in more than one way in Mary's life, as she is named after her mother, inherits her features, her emotional sensibilities, and her intellect. The uneasiness of trying to live her life in the shadow of another is present when she creates her characters in *Frankenstein*. It is possible to infer that through Victor and his creature, Mary creates her own doppelganger. The same distress present in Mary's life is also present in Victor's creature as he searches for a sense of himself. Although Mary had siblings, she was not looked upon favorably by her step-mother and felt somewhat rejected by her father who constantly sent her away to Scotland to be with her mother's relatives. Mary recognized early on in her life that she was different and often felt left alone to find her way in the world. In a similar manner, Victor's creature has a keen understanding of the world which makes him question his purpose and his destiny.

I found myself similar, yet at the same time strangely unlike the beings concerning who I read, and to whose conversation I was a listener. I sympathized with, and partly understood them, but I was unformed in mind; I was dependent on none and related to none. 'The path of my departure was free'; and there was

none to lament my annihilation. My person was hideous and my stature gigantic: what did this mean: Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?<sup>23</sup>

The answer to these questions for Mary would be just as difficult to discover as she was the third piece of a literary puzzle. In her biography of the Godwin-Wollstonecraft-Shelley family, Julie Carlson writes that Mary's life "was so intertwined with death and a love for it that her life/writings epitomize the interrelations" of the people within it.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, Mary could not "think of love, life, or writing apart from death" because she literally was in mourning her entire life.<sup>25</sup> In December 1834, Mary would write in her journal "loneliness has been the curse of my life—What should I have done if my Imagination had not been my companion? I must have groveled on the earth—I must have died—O but my dreams my darling sun bright dreams! They peopled the Churchyard I was doomed so young to wander in."<sup>26</sup> Mary's sense of abandonment may have been an echo of her parents: a mother who was consistently jilted by her love interests and a father who found life difficult after the death of his wife.

In 1796, William Godwin was smitten with Mary Wollstonecraft. Evidence of his romantic intentions is seen in one of his earliest letters to Mary where he wrote, "Alas, I have no talent, for I have no subject. Shall I write a love letter? ... No, when I make love, it shall be with the eloquent tones of my voice, with dying accents, with speaking glances...with all the witching of the irresistible, universal passion."<sup>27</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft would respond in kind, equally flirtatious with "the sentence I *liked* best was the concluding one, where you tell me, that you were coming home, to depart *no more*—But now I am out of humour I mean to bottle up my kindness, unless something in your countenance, when I do see you, should make the cork fly out."<sup>28</sup> The couple's sexual intimacy and the ease in which Mary would fall in love was clear in

her replies to Godwin when she says, “we must then woo philosophy *chez vous ce soir, nest-ce pas*; for I do not like to lose my Philosopher even in the lover.”<sup>29</sup>

Their correspondence also unveiled Mary’s anxieties about relationships. Mary Wollstonecraft was the subject of society gossip because of her previous failed relationships, especially to Gilbert Imlay, the father of her young daughter Fanny. Her relationship with Imlay nearly proved fatal as she twice attempted suicide because of his rejection. As a philosopher, Godwin shunned the romantic lifestyle and publicly spoke against marriage. In his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* he argued that mankind is a social animal and survives in a community, but maintains that individuality “is of the very essence of intellectual excellence.”<sup>30</sup> Godwin continues to speak against the “evils of marriage” as a method that observes “a thoughtless and romantic youth of each sex, to come together, to see each other, for a few times, under circumstances full of delusion, and then to vow to eternal attachment.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the consequence of marriage is the couple finding themselves deceived and “reduced to make the best of an irretrievable mistake.”<sup>32</sup> These are harsh and rather unrecognizable words from the married and soon-to-be father who wrote, “And now, my dear love, what do you think of me? Do not you find solitude infinitely superior to the company of a husband? Will you give me leave to return to you again, when I have finished my pilgrimage, & discharged the penance of absence? Take care of yourself, my love, & take care of William.”<sup>33</sup>

Sadly, Mary Wollstonecraft died a week after giving birth to their daughter and would suffer in love no more. Godwin’s affection for Wollstonecraft would be made public after the publication of his *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798) where he plainly, and to some extent explicitly, told the story of Mary Wollstonecraft and their courtship. Sharing such personal details about Mary’s life was meant to show how resilient she

was in love despite her independence. “I plead for my sex—not for myself,” she writes in *A Vindication*. “Independence I have long considered as the grand blessing of life, the basis of every virtue—and independence I will ever secure by contracting my wants, though I were to live on a barren heath.”<sup>34</sup>

True to their characters, Godwin and Wollstonecraft lived separately until very near the birth of Mary, several months after they were married. Hence, Mary Shelley was born to a couple who was incredibly self-assured, self-sufficient, and self-aware, and who loved each other greatly. Wollstonecraft’s death was a blow from which Godwin may not have recovered, even after marrying again a year later. He would later write that she was “a light lent to [him] for a very short period... now extinguished forever.”<sup>35</sup>

The absence of her mother resonates throughout her novel with her characters feeling the same loss and left inconsolable. Mary Shelley would have read about the tenderness and deep affection felt between her parents from their letters and her father’s memoir, giving her a glimpse of the “light” that was her mother. Similarities between Victor and Mary’s lives begin with their father. Like Mary’s father, Victor’s father marries a woman who is also very resourceful and very caring as seen when she is taking care of her dying father. Victor recounts her story “[my mother] attended him with greatest tenderness, but she saw with despair that their little fund was rapidly decreasing...Caroline Beaufort possessed a mind of an uncommon mold.”<sup>36</sup> Mary imagined a family unit that did not resemble her reality, but held similarities to the life that her parents could have had if tragedy had not struck. Mary and Victor’s well-being was of the utmost importance to their parents. Evidence of this is seen through the letters exchanged by William and Mary before the birth of their daughter. In *Frankenstein*, Victor speaks of his “improvement and health” as the “constant care” of his parents.<sup>37</sup>

Mary did not have the advantage of knowing her mother, but her description of Victor's mother's death indicates she may have felt the loss and seen its effect on her family, particularly her father. As Victor's mother lays dying he describes her as "calm" and with a "countenance [that] expressed affection even in death."<sup>38</sup> After her death, Victor recounts the mood in his home as an "irreparable evil, the void that presents itself to the soul, and the despair that is exhibited on the countenance."<sup>39</sup> Godwin speaks in a similar tone about Wollstonecraft in his memoir when he wrote, "she told me some time on Thursday, that she should have died the preceding night, but that she was determined not to leave me," as if to spare Godwin the same feeling of abandonment that she often felt.<sup>40</sup> Light becomes a metaphor for both mothers revealing their value and the darkness in which Victor and Mary found themselves when the light was extinguished. "It is so long before the mind can persuade itself that she, whom every day, and whose very existence appeared a part of our own can have departed for ever," recalls Victor. "That the brightness of a beloved eye can have been extinguished."<sup>41</sup>

Mary's father would speak of Wollstonecraft's "smile which so eminently illuminated her countenance," and continued to speak of her as a "light" that was "lent" to him for only a short time. Godwin would keep a portrait of Wollstonecraft in his home office for the remainder of his life.<sup>42</sup> The absence of a mother's guiding influence is also present in Safie, the raven-haired love interest of the cottager Felix. Safie's mother dies leaving behind books and journals as surrogates to teach her daughter to "aspire to higher powers of intellect, and [to be] an independent spirit."<sup>43</sup> This same sentiment was quite likely felt by Mary as she read her mother's books, journals, and her father's touching memoir. Reading was Mary's escape from the chaos of her life where she could imagine an alternative one.



Education plays a major role in the lives of Mary and Victor. Mary conjures Rousseau, who wrote in *Émile, ou L'Éducation*, that “we are born sensitive and from our birth onwards we are affected in various ways by our environment.”<sup>44</sup> According to Rousseau three things are required to be educated: nature, man, and other things. However, these three methods need to be in accord with each other and not in conflict or “else the scholar is ill-educated, and will never be at peace with himself.”<sup>45</sup> Victor and his creature suffer from the same sense of restlessness because neither are educated in a manner derived from an accord between Rousseau’s three elements. Victor is surrounded by nature and has access to tutors and a community, yet he persists in solitude. On the other hand, the creature is also surrounded by nature and is never quite alone, yet he suffers from loneliness due to his lack of community. The absence of an individual that provides guidance or one that returns love was equally present in Mary’s life.

Mary Wollstonecraft began her treatise outlining “her affection for the whole human race” that made her write *A Vindication* to “see woman placed in a station in which she would advance, instead of retarding, the progress of those glorious principles that give a substance to morality.”<sup>46</sup> Mary was not an activist like her mother, but she contributed a piece of fiction that serves as an acute mental exercise in discerning the place and function of man. Yet, like Victor and his creature, her education was lacking because she too was alone or suffered from loneliness.

Victor shuts himself away from society and immerses into discovering the secrets of electricity through “natural philosophy, and particularly chemistry.”<sup>47</sup> In similar fashion, Mary would seek comfort in solitude and use nature as her classroom frolicking “beneath the trees of

the ground...or on the bleak sides of the woodless mountains,” in Scotland during her visits where the “airy flights of [her] imagination, were born and fostered.”<sup>48</sup> The desire to advance intellectually and to be devoted to a life of study was not lost on Mary Shelley. Entries in journals kept by Percy and Mary reveal long lists of books read during their travels, many in French, Spanish, and Italian.<sup>49</sup> During the summer of 1816, while vacationing in Geneva, Percy and Mary read books by Voltaire, Rousseau, Quintus Curtius, Plutarch, Milton, Cervantes, and more: all of them read and possibly consulted as she was writing her novel.

Mary was born into a highly literate family that believed intense study was a mandatory exercise. Education was such a sincere topic to both Wollstonecraft and Godwin that they devoted entire works to the subject. Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was a plea for women to stop their prancing and embrace an intellectual life that would see them as equals to men. “Whilst they are kept in ignorance,” wrote Wollstonecraft, “they become in the same proportion the slaves of pleasure as they are the slaves of man.”<sup>50</sup> Her Enlightenment philosophy went a step further to not only include women as equals to men, but to be seen as equals in *mankind*. In the first chapter of *A Vindication* she outlines her principles in support of speaking about the “sex in general” when she wrote,

Consequently the perfection of our nature and capability of happiness, must be estimated by the degree of reason, virtue, and knowledge, that distinguish the individual, and direct the laws which bind society: and that from the exercise of reason, knowledge and virtue naturally flow, is equally undeniable, if mankind be viewed collectively.<sup>51</sup>

Wollstonecraft understood that women needed to be included in the greater conversation rather than be viewed as an ‘other’.

Godwin also supported education, especially that of his daughters. However, his idea of education was in direct contrast to Rousseau's, as expressed in his novel *Fleetwood*. According to Gary Handwerk "*Fleetwood* serves as a detailed response to the system of education laid out in Rousseau's *Émile*, extending the critical analysis Godwin had begun eight years earlier in *The Enquirer*. Godwin admired Rousseau and his work, [but] he was deeply critical of the hypocrisy that he saw in the French apostle of social equality and highly suspicious of his claims about the fundamental goodness of human nature."<sup>52</sup> Godwin creates an overly sentimental protagonist with extreme sensibilities prone to anger and violence incapable of evoking sympathy towards others. I argue that Victor and his creature are Mary's responses to *Fleetwood* and *Émile*. Strikingly, Mary creates Victor as a character who is equally detached and unaware of others as he consistently seeks solitude in his lab or in the wilds of Geneva. Furthermore, the daemon monster is an overtly sensitive being who, like Fleetwood, is prone to violence and anger.

It is not surprising that her characters were also well-read and looked to books for answers and revelations about life. Frankenstein's creature would satiate his appetite for knowledge by reading Milton, Plutarch, and Goethe's *The Sorrows of Werther*. Goethe's novel was popular not only for the depth of his protagonist, but his emotional sensibilities that led to his suicidal tendencies sparking a rash of 'love' provoked suicides throughout England. The latter would serve as an epithet for Mary's mother, whom Godwin lovingly referred to as a "female Werther."<sup>53</sup> Mary created Victor as a character who saw no limit in his learning capacity nor in his attainment of success. The success he desired was the answer to "whence, ...did the principle of life proceed?"<sup>54</sup> But to answer this question, "we must first have recourse to death," remarks Victor.<sup>55</sup> In the months surrounding her writing and publishing *Frankenstein*, Mary had already buried one child and would soon bury a second. Life and death were too near, and

possibly dear, to her heart.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps she placed in Victor her desire to understand how death chooses some and not others or why life cannot be sustained in some as in others. The nightmare of her realities became the nightmare of her novel and, in the novel Victor does what Mary cannot, he is “capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter.”<sup>57</sup> The lifeless matter Mary would have concerned herself with would have been her children. Mary and Percy would have four children, but only one would survive to adulthood. Theirs was a relationship that suffered from society gossip, but through it all Percy would be the love of her life.

In her novel, the relationship between the cottager Felix and his young Arabian, Safie, is inspired by Mary and Percy. The creature witnesses their display of love, a human emotion that he had never experienced. He says to Victor “I shall relate events that impressed me with feelings which, from what I was, have made me what I am.”<sup>58</sup> Mary and Percy’s relationship was unconventional at best, but what remained was a love story similar to Mary’s parents, grounded in respect and adoration for one another.

Mary and Percy would spend considerable time apart, which strengthened their bond making them anxious for each other. In similar fashion, Felix and Safie were apart for a time, but when reunited “Felix seemed ravished with delight...every trait of sorrow vanished from his face, and it instantly expressed a degree of ecstatic joy...his eyes sparkled, as his cheek flushed with pleasure.”<sup>59</sup> By 1814, Percy and Mary’s letters were flush with the emotion kindled by a young couple in love.<sup>60</sup> Percy wrote, “this separation is a calamity not to be endured patiently; I cannot support your absence. I thought that it would be less painful to me; but I feel a solitariness and a desolation of heart where you have been accustomed to be.”<sup>61</sup>

Mary returns his words in kind to say “Good-night, my love; to-morrow I will seal this blessing on your lips. Dear, good creature, press me to you, and hug your own Mary to your

heart.”<sup>62</sup> A close friend of Percy’s would remark on his affection for Mary as “a sudden, violent, irresistible, uncontrollable passion,” to which he quotes Percy as having said “everyone who knows me must know that the partner of my life should be one who can feel poetry and understand philosophy. Harriet is a noble animal, but she can do neither.”<sup>63</sup> Percy was an idealist. He married the daughter of famed author William Godwin, and therefore expected a marriage of the mind just as much as a marriage of the body. Perhaps his expectation of Mary and of being married to Mary were two different things. Yet, Mary’s marriage to Percy encapsulated her literary life, providing artistic direction that would lead to the creation of *Frankenstein*.

Percy would encourage her to expand her short story into a novel which was not at first received very well by critics. John Crocker of the *Quarterly Review* wrote that the novel had “no less of conduct, manners, or morality; it cannot mend, and will not amuse its readers, unless their taste have been deplorably vitiated.”<sup>64</sup> He would go on to speak about Mary’s father as a cult leader whose followers are “a kind of *out-pensioners of Bedlam*, and, like ‘Mad Bess’ or ‘Mad Tom,’ are occasionally visited with paroxysms of genius and fits of expression.”<sup>65</sup> The politics surrounding Mary’s father could have played a part in his severe review of the novel. In contrast, Sir Walter Scott would call it a “romantic fiction” whose “work impresses us with a high idea of the author’s original genius and happy power of expression.”<sup>66</sup> Upon its publication *Frankenstein* provoked a conversation that began before its inception or that of its author. It’s impact on society was akin to holding up a mirror to humanity revealing something that “no mortal could support.”<sup>67</sup>

In her preface to the 1818 edition, Mary writes, “this fiction is founded ...by Dr. Darwin, and some of the physiological writers of Germany. ...preserving the truth of the elementary

principles of human nature.”<sup>68</sup> Mary would have had access to her mother’s library which may have contained an illustrated copy of Erasmus Darwin’s *Poetical Works: containing the Botanic Garden, in two parts, and the Temple of Nature* (1806).<sup>69</sup> In the preface to volume three of his poetical work, Dr. Darwin points to the Greeks and how they would use the literary device of allegory to tell the “philosophy of Nature, with the origin and progress of society.” The fixation on the philosophy of nature and the origin and progress of society would give rise to the Enlightenment period. Mary had access to texts written by German philosophers, such as Immanuel Kant and Johann Goethe, and other contributors of the Enlightenment. Young Mary would observe and possibly participate in conversation discussing the moral and political issues of the day that occurred in her father’s home. Mary Shelley’s tale of a perverse resurrection would call into conflict some of those same issues.

Conversations between Percy and Lord Byron, with Mary as an eager silent observer, would focus on topics of the human condition: morality, justice, and religion. Shelley was an admirer of Godwin, both he and Byron believed in the rights of the individual—regardless of class. Although *Frankenstein* is considered a gothic novel, it is a novel of the late romantic era containing hallmarks of the philosophical struggles that permeated within Blake and Wordsworth. It heralds “romantic individualism, the cult of the self as the independent and generative center of the work, and the Promethean claim to confer upon the human will absolute attributes reserved to divine categories of Being.”<sup>70</sup> Mary’s modern Prometheus defies not only God, but also his mortal creator. “All men hate the wretched,” says the creature to Victor, “[Y]ou, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us.”<sup>71</sup> He professes his right to life and makes demands that would possibly see his species multiply. A new species unblemished by the thousands of

years of strife and religious animosity that burdened mankind. Thus, the creature could choose, without bias, to be good and live well.

Mary Shelley responds to religious zealots who believe religion is necessary to survive. In fact, the creature represents a being not made by God, yet with the faculties to reason, feel, and act upon his *own* free will without religious interference or intervention. According to Vida Scudder, in an introduction to *Prometheus Unbound*, Mary would later write that “Shelley believed that mankind had only to will that there should be no evil, and there would be none.”<sup>72</sup> This is in direct opposition to the tenants of Christianity which thrives on its faithful not only desiring God, but needing God’s presence in their life.

*Frankenstein* appeared at a time when modernity and national identity were critical to the growth and expansion of the United Kingdom. Between the first and second publication of Shelley’s novel, Britain would undergo many political and social changes that caused more harm to the country than its time during the wars with France. The Cato Conspiracy of 1820 was a “clear-cut example of extreme, violent republicanism” in an attempt to kill King George IV and seize the Tower of London and the Bank of England.<sup>73</sup> In 1829 Britain granted Catholics full civil rights allowing them to sit in Parliament at Westminster. By the mid-1800s slavery would be abolished in the colonies and in England, making room for new discoveries in the East and the far North. The first Reform Act of 1832 helped to create labels like “working class” and “middle class” moving the aristocracy into the “upper class” which created boundaries that brought with it new rights and privileges, but also new forms of segregation for unskilled workers and immigrants. All of these happenings were known throughout Europe and Mary Shelley would have knowledge of them through her father and conversations with Percy and Lord Byron. Coupled with her previous exposure to the political writings of Burke and Paine as well as the

stories of Goethe and the theories of Rousseau and Kant, Mary would have been greatly influenced in her perspective and understanding of the trials of man and his fight for significance.



## II

Shelley begins her novel with a letter that speaks to that search for significance. Would-be explorer Robert Walton writes to his sister, where he conveys his passion to make a grand discovery for the “inestimable benefit ...[conferred] on all mankind,” and an occupation that has a “steady purpose, -- a point on which the soul may fix its intellectual eye.”<sup>74</sup> Walton is a man of wealth “whose life might have been passed in ease and luxury,” but he preferred “glory to every enticement that wealth placed in [his] path.”<sup>75</sup> Robert Walton represents an older more traditional England that sought to expand its footprint and inhabit all parts of the world in order to lay claim to it. He writes of a land “surpassing in wonders and in beauty every region hitherto discovered on the habitable globe.”<sup>76</sup> The pole symbolizes heaven on earth, “a country of eternal light” where he may “discover the wondrous power which attracts the needle.”<sup>77</sup> These sentiments resemble the old guard of Europe who presumed to be masters of all they discovered or happened upon during an exhibition. Success for Walton means becoming master of the earthly plain, but as the strength of Europe increased, this ideology evolved into a search for or an understanding of the heavens above and beyond. According to David Simpson, this occurs at a time when “British self-esteem, already considerable in itself, was further indulged by those foreign commentators who looked to England (and to its perceived commercial successes) as a model.”<sup>78</sup> Walton represents England at the moment it was poised for greatness set to embark on a grand adventure for glory and admiration.

Buried beneath his dream of exploration is the rising sensation of loneliness or rather the realization of what is absent from his life. Walton writes “I have one want which I have never yet been able to satisfy; and the absence of the object of which I now feel as a most severe evil. I have no friend.”<sup>79</sup> Such a friend is described as “the company of a man who could sympathize

with me; whose eyes would reply to mine.”<sup>80</sup> This suggests the overtly masculine perspective of England during the eighteenth century. Walton seems to have a perfectly healthy relationship with his sister, whom he admires, but feels inadequate without the companionship of a man. His desire for male companionship is how Mary introduces the reader to Victor Frankenstein. Ironically, Victor never feels the desire for male companionship, nor any companionship unless it suited a purpose. When Walton and Victor meet, he is following his creature through the treacherous north pole and is rescued by Walton and his crew. Walton’s narrative, as a metaphor for post-Restoration Britain, is put aside to tell a new story, that of an advanced and industrial continental Europe.

Victor is also in search of significance and discovery which he seeks by desiring “knowledge and wisdom”, but unfortunately his reward comes in the form of a “serpents sting” rather than a crown of glory.<sup>81</sup> Similar to Robert, Victor has high ambitions to achieve great things and be admired by mankind. He wants to go beyond the ability to claim nature, to having the ability to control nature and be its master. Victor’s voyage of exploration is accomplished through the sciences and he shares a memory of how his journey began as an eager, wide-eyed student. At university Victor found an apt mentor in M. Walden who encourages him and sets him on his destructive path.

The ancient teachers of this [modern chemistry] ...promised impossibilities, and performed nothing. The modern masters promise very little...But these philosophers, whose hands seem only made to dabble in dirt, and their eyes to pour over the microscope or crucible, have indeed performed miracles. They penetrate into the recesses of nature, and shew how she works in her hiding places. They ascend into the heavens; they have discovered how the blood

circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadow.<sup>82</sup>

The quest for the elixir of life is abandoned for a quest to create new forms of life made of metal or flesh. Walton's nature seeking England has now been surpassed by a modern technical Europe that seeks to do more than discovery.

In Victor, Shelley personifies the nineteenth century European as someone who wants to be in complete control over all things including mankind.<sup>83</sup> The evolution from nature to science was not unexpected and was publicly discussed and even shared in novels such as Francois-Felix Nogaret's tale of French automaton inventors in *Le Miroir Des événements Actuels, ou La Belle au plus offrant: Histoire à deux visages (The looking glass of actuality, or Beauty to the highest order: A two-faced tale 1790)*.<sup>84</sup> Victor is the embodiment of the modern man's charge to be master of all he surveys witnessed through his "variety of feelings which bore [him] onwards, like a hurricane, in the first enthusiasm of success."<sup>85</sup>

In contrast to Walton, Victor sees himself as a man who not only controls the universe "pour[ing] a torrent of light into our dark world," but who also creates life. "A new species would bless me as its creator and source," he says, "many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me."<sup>86</sup> Through Victor, Shelley's depiction of a modern man is at once grand and alluring and slowly morphs into madness and abject fear. Toiling in his lab, Victor shuts out the world he knows for the unknown and to his demise he succeeds. However, the point of Victor sharing his story with Walton is not to boast of his success. Shelley uses his narrative as a lesson when he says, "learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge, and how much happier that man is who believes his

native town to be the world, than he who aspires to be greater than his nature will allow.”<sup>87</sup>

Shelley suggests that the greatness which Walton, or Britain, seeks to obtain can only bring ruin not fame. Thus begins Victor’s recount of his failed expedition to discover the secrets of the universe.

The reader is introduced to Victor’s creation through the third narrative told from the daemon creature’s point of view. Shelley uses the creature’s narrative as a response to Victor’s arrogance and Walton’s naivety. He represents the people: working class, slaves, and those whose faith was not in line with the ruling powers. The creature can also be seen as a metaphor for the people of France demanding equal rights and dignity.<sup>88</sup> In *Frankenstein* we observe an Enlightened response to Robert and Victor with a new approach motivating the search for self and the establishment of personal identity.<sup>89</sup>

Dror Wahrman, speaks of “a new regime of identity: the characterization of self in terms of psychological depth; the emphasis on human difference and individuality; the rekindled interest in innate, intuitive, and instinctive traits or behaviors; the developmental perspective on human growth.”<sup>90</sup> This points to the psychological shifts that emerged near the end of the eighteenth-century which was a period of extreme change and growth. The pull to reconnect to nature and the living thing perhaps softened the onslaught of advances in technology and the oncoming industrial age. In opposition to Victor’s tenacious pursuit of self-aggrandizement is the creature’s commitment to self-preservation and self-care in partnership with nature and his fellow man.

The daemon’s origin narrative recalls Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*, hearkening back to nature where man develops his identity through a kinship with the environment rooted within the human soul. He “[begins] to inquire, to watch and question...the lonely roads were schools to [him] in which [he] daily read with most delight the passions of mankind, there saw into the

depths of human souls.”<sup>91</sup> The creature’s first encounter with nature affects him in a way that makes him seem human, an emotion he does not understand, but recognizes as something good.

I was a poor, helpless, miserable wretch; I knew, and could distinguish, nothing; but, feeling pain invade me on all sides, I sat down and wept. Soon a gentle light stole over the heavens, and gave me a sensation of pleasure. I started up, and beheld a radiant form rise from among the trees. I gazed with a kind of wonder. It moved slowly, but it enlightened my path.<sup>92</sup>

Similar to his creator, Rousseau’s Geneva is where the “daemon” autodidact experiences his own ‘human’ growth and turns to Milton, Plutarch, and Goethe.<sup>93</sup> The wisdom gained from these surrogate fathers generates a keenness of his ‘condition’ where “like Adam created, [he is] apparently united by no link to any other being in existence.”<sup>94</sup> Even though he is not God’s creation, he is molded from human parts which connect him to the Divine.

Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is referenced in Shelley’s preface and quoted on the cover of the novel, “Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay to mould me man? Did I solicit thee from darkness to promote me?”<sup>95</sup> Positing this question at the beginning of her novel calls into question who is responsible for the life of the creature. “I am thy creature,” says the daemon, “perform thy part, that which thou owest me. ... be not equitable to every other, and trample upon me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection, is most due.”<sup>96</sup> He insists on being heard by Victor, claiming the rights of man for “the guilty are allowed, by human laws, bloody as they may be, to speak in their own defence before they are condemned.”<sup>97</sup> The creature’s demand articulates his desire to be treated as a human man deserving of every right owed to him by his creator, including the right to love and be loved.

Shelley returns to Milton at the end of the daemon's narrative, presenting him as an Adam seeking his Eve. Confidently he says to Victor "I am alone, and miserable; man will not associate with me; but one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of the same species, and have the same defects. This being you must create."<sup>98</sup> In a reversal, the creature sets the terms of his relationship with his creator. "You must create a female for me, with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being. This alone you can do; and I demand it of you as a right which you must not refuse."<sup>99</sup> The thought of a community of creatures living among mankind alarms Victor, paralleling the xenophobic sentiments of the ruling classes of Europe which conveyed a desire to secure hereditary governments and maintain a clear line of distinction between the classes.

Interwoven through the narratives of Walton, Victor, and his creature are minor storylines of characters who may have resembled Shelley's middle-class readers. Connecting to these readers was important because of the many political and social changes which were occurring, thus making room for them to question the condition of their own lives.

Mary Shelley dedicates *Frankenstein* to her father William Godwin whose commentary and political writings greatly influenced the ongoing conversations that concerned the humanity and rights of man. In particular, conversations had among the elite and ruling classes of Britain regarding the causes and consequence of the French Revolution. Chief among these concerns were the consequences of allowing the working class to be seen as full citizens with access to every human right. Mary Shelley takes on this subject adopted from a similar scene in her father's novel, *Caleb Williams*, when Caleb is accused of a murder that he does not commit. Even though the evidence is insufficient to indict Caleb, he is found guilty and suffers in prison. Victor's youngest brother William is found dead in the hills of Geneva and the alleged murderer

is a former employee of the Frankenstein family. Justine is a member of the white working class who is marginalized and used as a scape goat for the murder of Victor's brother. Her entry into the Frankenstein home is detailed in a letter written to Victor by Elizabeth, his cousin and intended.

Justine is placed in the care and employment of the Frankenstein family as a result of the late Mrs. Frankenstein's concerns for her welfare. This show of humanitarianism is a characteristic that Elizabeth believes separates Switzerland from other countries in Europe as she writes, "the republican institutions of our country have produced simpler and happier manners than those which prevail in the great monarchies that surround it. Hence there is less distinction between the several classes of its inhabitants; and the lower orders being neither so poor nor so despised, their manners are more refined and moral."<sup>100</sup> She continues by outlining the differences in household staff where "a servant in Geneva does not mean the same thing as a servant in France and England. Justine, thus received in our family, learned the duties of a servant; a condition which, our fortunate country, does not include the idea of ignorance, and a sacrifice of the dignity of a human being."<sup>101</sup>

Here Shelley draws a line between the conservative antiquated regimes of France and Britain to the more broad-minded society of Switzerland. Nearly ten years before Mary Shelley was born, Edmund Burke offered a British response to the revolution in France, proclaiming that a hereditary government—one that was far less republican than Switzerland—is not only necessary, but natural and should remain unchanged.

This policy appears to me to be the result of profound reflection; or rather the happy effect of following nature, which is wisdom without reflection, and above it. A spirit of innovation is generally the result of a selfish temper and confined

views. People will not look forward to posterity, who never look backward to their ancestors.<sup>102</sup>

A year later, Mary's father, William Godwin, would respond.

Nothing can be more necessary for the general benefit, that that we should divest ourselves, as soon as the proper period arrives, of the shackles of infancy; that human life should not be one eternal childhood; but that men should judge for themselves, unfettered by the prejudices of education, or the institutions of their country.<sup>103</sup>

Justine's story line is essential to pointing out the hypocrisy of governments amid the fear of the privileged class losing their authority over the working class.

Upon hearing of his brother's death, Victor returns to Geneva and discovers that the accused is Justine. Evidence of her guilt is a trinket given to her by Elizabeth, not the "print of the murderer's finger," which was found on William's neck.<sup>104</sup> Nonetheless, Justine is imprisoned awaiting her trial. Given this news, Victor appears shocked despite the fact that he knows the identity of the murderer "you are all mistaken; I know the murderer. Justine, poor, good Justine, is innocent."<sup>105</sup> Victor categorizes his daemon as something other than human, "I was firmly convinced in my own mind that Justine, and indeed every human being, was guiltless of this murder. I had no fear."<sup>106</sup> However, Justine is pressured into a confession by the same benevolent citizens delegated to care for her. "Ever since I was condemned, my confessor has besieged me," she says to Elizabeth and Victor. "He threatened and menaced, until I almost began to think that I as the monster that he said I was. He threatened excommunication and hell fire in my last moments, If I continued obdurate. Dear lady, I had none to support me; all looked on me as a wretch doomed to ignominy and perdition. What could I do?"<sup>107</sup>



Although Justine is taken in by a family who treats her well and with respect, she is still not one of them. Her community turns its back on her because of her social rank and fails to extend the same legal protections afforded to the wealthy. Victor has it in his power to grant Justine her freedom, but he chooses to stay silent and protect himself. More importantly, naming his daemon creature as the offender labels him as human and grants him the rights afforded to humans. Franco Moretti observes that “like the proletariat, the monster is denied a name and an individuality.”<sup>108</sup> Coming forward places Victor in a precarious situation that would harm his social position and that of his family. Therefore, Victor regresses into a state of self-imposed mania burdened by his guilt, which is still not enough for him to come forward and confess. Justine dies and her story ends, while the anguish and despair of Victor is left as a twisted consolation prize.

Days later, Victor is face-to-face with his creation and is forced to reckon with what he has done or rather not done. It is then that the daemon makes his demand for another creature, one who is female, raising the stakes for Victor. The demand shifts the balance between creature and creator which places the daemon on the same evolutionary plane as humans and this frightens Victor. The horror of his creation was torture enough, but now he must contend with the idea of a race of such beings populating the world. Shelley moves the argument of humanity further into one that includes race and origin. Should human rights be extended to a people who do not fit within the parameters of what is acceptable?

### III

“The discourse of imperialism,” observes Gayatri Spivak, “surfaces in a curiously powerful way in Shelley’s novel.”<sup>109</sup> Mary Shelley uses her novel as a platform to engage in polemic, criticizing the Imperial regime and its attitude towards slavery and immigrant labor.<sup>110</sup> This premise sets up the concept of *Frankenstein* as a response to a fear of the “other” despite the imperialistic advances of Britain.<sup>111</sup> The American War of Independence and the Napoleonic Wars did not slow down the British machine, they merely moved their efforts East towards Asia. The loss of the American colonies was more of a blow to British pride rather than an economic setback. In fact, post the Canadian Seven Years War and conquests in India, the loss of the American colonies did little damage to Britain as the Caribbean slave trade was still lucrative until the 1830s.<sup>112</sup>

As previously mentioned, Walton symbolizes the old guard of the British Empire with a desire to discover and conquer the world. It is Walton who introduces Victor as simply the “European” who speaks English with a “foreign accent” when he describes him to his sister.<sup>113</sup> Two main points are made here: 1) the strange visitor is from the continent and white; and 2) Walton assigns the label “foreign” not because his strange visitor is from an undiscovered or unchartered land, but because he is not British and therefore his racial identity is placed in an arbitrary category.

Victor’s narrative is constructed to expose the racial bias of nineteenth-century Europe in relation to immigrants coming from Asia and recently freed slaves moving from the colonies to England. Rather than exploring new lands, Victor sets his sights on creating the perfect human. In his hubris to socially engineer a new species, he imagines a giant man, “I resolved, contrary to my first intention, to make the being of a gigantic stature; that is to say, about eight feet in

height, and proportionably large.”<sup>114</sup> His Promethean Titan would usher in a new civilization of mortals and have him as their “creator and source.”<sup>115</sup>

On that “dreary night of November” Victor reanimates the patchwork of human body parts to his horror and disbelief.

I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs. How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shriveled complexion, and straight black lips.<sup>116</sup>

God created man in his image and therefore Victor had certain expectations for his creation. This expectation was that he would be attractive, of enviable stature, and most importantly white. My contention is that the daemon’s demotion from “human being” to “creature” occurs precisely at the time of regeneration when “the beauty of the dream vanished.”<sup>117</sup> Hence, Frankenstein’s monster is now categorized as an “other” and must live as an outsider on the perimeter of society. His “yellow skin” reduces his value and therefore his status as citizen, but it his monstrosity as “unfinished” that reduces further to something non-human, something akin to an animal. Labeling humans as animals or chattel made it easy to dismiss them and engage in one of the worst crimes against humanity.

The slave question was a heavily debated topic in England primarily because it was a democratic society built upon Christian principles—how then could it perpetuate a trade of humans? According to Robert Johnson “the answer is to be found in the juxtaposition of liberal traditions and commerce in Britain’s history. Although Englishmen believed their rights were enshrined in Magna Carta, they acknowledged that this extended only to the king’s subjects. In the West Indies, slaves were not regarded as subjects: they were ‘commodities’.”<sup>118</sup>

These “commodities” were integral to producing a well-loved additive to the regular tea-time English ritual: sugar. The immense labor of harvesting sugar in the colonies was delegated to slaves specifically because they were acquired through transactions and were therefore seen as property. If slaves were seen as objects, then British citizens could deny them their basic human rights and turn a blind eye to their conditions, which were—at best—deplorable.

Despite the crumbling of colonial slavery—witnessed by the uprising of Black Jacobins led by Toussaint L’Ouverture of Saint-Domingue and an increase in anti-slavery sentiment that led to the abolition of the slave trade in Britain in 1807 and the Emancipation Act of 1833—England’s way of life was still dependent upon not only the separation and classification of the races, but a fulfillment of the expansion of the British Empire.<sup>119</sup> Following the Emancipation Act, Britain recognized that the economic unfeasibility of slavery needed to be replaced with something else, and that ‘something else’ was “imperialist” free trade with other nations.<sup>120</sup> This kind of trade came in multiple forms which included the influx of migrants from East Asia to the colonies and mainland England. The increase of persons of color to England further increased the interest in their learning more about their origin. What began as anthropological curiosity later grew into a field of science and research that would lay the foundation for modern day racial classifications.

Racial science was a burgeoning field which sought to reinforce ideas of polygenesis and racial hierarchy and contribute to colonial ideology. Polygenist theory held that “held that human tribes had originated independently one from another and could be placed in clearly demarcated degrees along the great Chain of Being. The "missing link" between human beings and apes was filled, according to these writers, by black Africans, who constituted a distinct and different species.”<sup>121</sup>

By the late eighteenth century several papers were written attesting to the inferiority of the African to the European such as Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1783) and the Comte de Buffon’s *Histoire Naturelle* (1789). Naturally, special attention was paid to the body, measured against those of white Europeans to attest to European superiority. In Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*, color is the first difference cited as a natural distinction and determination for white supremacy:

Why not retain and incorporate the blacks into the state, and thus save the expence of supplying, by importation of white settlers, the vacancies they will leave? ...[M]any other circumstances, will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race. – To these objections, which are political, may be added others, which are physical and moral. The first difference which strikes us is that of colour. ...Whether the black of the negro resides in the reticular membrane between the skin and scarf-skin, or in the scarf-skin itself; whether it proceeds from the colour of the blood, the colour of the bile, or from that of some other secretion, the difference is fixed in nature, and is as real as if its seat and cause were better known to us.<sup>122</sup>

In 1799, Scottish physician Charles White would publish *An Account of the Regular Gradation in man, and in Different Animals and Vegetables* which included an illustrated human chart, identifying differences in race based on skull size, positing that white Europeans were the most advanced and beautiful of the human race. His text further advanced the polygenesis movement that not only supported slavery, but also outlined a distinction between the bourgeois and the proletariat. White identity in Victorian England would marginalize the working class creating a social status based on the hues and shades of white. Alastair Bonnett argues that “[c]oncerns[s] with ‘immigrant’ groups in nineteenth century British cities drew on an extensive and, in part, well established repertoire of xenophobic and racist categorisations of ‘other Europeans’ as, metaphorical or literally, less white than the natives.”<sup>123</sup> Hence, white was more than not-black, but a pale white that would correlate with the aristocracy or “blue-bloods”, derived from the myth that one could see their “blue” arterial blood veins due to the paleness of their skin.

Mary Shelley would have been familiar with the ideas of white beauty particularly from the works of Goethe who repeated Greek themes of beauty throughout his works, epitomizing Joachim Winckelmann’s Renaissance aesthetic of white beauty.<sup>124</sup> In *Frankenstein*, this aesthetic is featured in Victor’s cousin, Elizabeth Lavenza, whose “hazel eyes, although as lively as a bird’s, possessed an attractive softness. Her figure was light and airy...she appeared the most fragile creature in the world.”<sup>125</sup> She is his paternal cousin, therefore these “light and airy” features could be genetic and may present themselves in Victor, offering a glimpse of Victor’s portrait. However, in the 1831 edition, Shelley rewrites the parentage of Elizabeth Lavenza as Victor’s cousin to a foster child taken in by Victor’s mother. Shelley’s description of Elizabeth is a direct response to the white aesthetic ideology that was circulating throughout Europe,

especially in England. In the same humanitarian manner that ushered Justine—the house servant who was accused, convicted, and killed for the death of William, Victor’s youngest brother—into the Frankenstein home, Victor’s mother visits the home of a poor family.

She found a peasant and his wife, hard working, bent down by care and labour, distributing a scanty meal to five hungry babes. Among these there was one which attracted my mother far above the rest. She appeared of a different stock. The four others were dark-eyed, hardy little vagrants; this child was thin, and very fair. Her hair was the brightest living gold, and, despite the poverty of her clothing, seemed to set a crown of distinction on her head. Her brow was clear and ample, her blue eyes cloudless, and her lips and the moulding of her face so expressive of sensibility and sweetness, that none could behold her without looking on her as a of a distinct species, a being heaven-sent, and bearing a celestial stamp in all her features.<sup>126</sup>

She is seen as a ghostly figure, an “apparition” whose “form and motions were lighter than the chamois of the hills.”<sup>127</sup> Consequently, Elizabeth becomes the ultimate standard of beauty for Victor against which he measures everything, including his creature.<sup>128</sup> The “gift” of Elizabeth establishes Victor’s sense of ownership as he “looked upon Elizabeth as [his]—[his] to protect, love, and cherish.”<sup>129</sup>

This sense of ownership propels another line of thought within racism: the theory of the purity and sanctity of white women to be upheld or championed by white men. In fact, Elizabeth is the first and final death directly linked to the creature. The night the creature comes to life, Victor is “unable to endure the aspect of the being [he] created” and rushes out the room for peace and begins to dream of Elizabeth who he imagines “in the bloom of health, walking in the

streets of Ingolstadt. ...I embraced her, but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death.”<sup>130</sup> Elizabeth’s death in reality pushes Victor over the edge and moves him to chase and kill the creature. On their wedding night, an edgy Victor is “inspecting every corner” of their apartment in the inn when suddenly “[he] heard a shrill and dreadful scream. It came from the room into which Elizabeth had retired. As [he] heard it, ...[his] arms dropped, the motion of every muscle and fibre was suspended; [he] could feel the blood trickling in [his] veins, and tingling in the extremities of [his] limbs.”<sup>131</sup> The preservation and protection of white beauty is Victor’s highest priority which he sees as pardoning him from recognizing his creature as human thereby invalidating his creatures appeal to be “happy” and “again virtuous.”<sup>132</sup>

Underscoring the purity of white aestheticism are the different classifications of white that led to the creation of Caucasian as racial characteristic. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach developed the “analytical concepts of race” in order to classify groups and sub-groups of humans. A disciple of Blumenbach’s, William Lawrence, would add on to his mentor by assigning characteristics to each racial group assigning preeminence to the white race above all other races because “the inferiority of the dark to white races is much more general and strongly marked in the powers of knowledge and reflection, the intellectual faculties.”<sup>133</sup> Identifying within the Caucasian racial group came with privileges that increased with social class or status. The central issue addressed here is the relationship between race, behavior, and the rights afforded to them. Victor runs away in fear from his progeny and leaves it behind to fend for itself. Victor laments “Oh! no mortal could support the horror of that countenance ...I passed the night wretchedly. Sometimes my pulse beat so quickly and hardly, that I felt the palpitation of every artery; at others, I nearly sank to the ground through languor and extreme weakness” as he



suffers from anxiety and self-induced depression.<sup>134</sup> His conceptual response to a non-white figure played on the fear of Asian immigrants and African slaves. Shelley uses a rhetorical device to show “special and conceptual separation, often facilitated through unequal verbal substitutions that tend to omit and distance a subordinate class from realms of value and esteem” witnessed by the muttered grunts of the creature that further debases him as something less than human.<sup>135</sup>

Capitalizing on this fear is the addition of violence, specifically unnecessary violence brought upon the family of Victor. Nearly a year after his creation is brought to life, Victor loses his youngest brother William at the hands of his creature, and Justine suffers the consequences as the wrongfully accused. The image of this “yellow-skinned” creature is tainted by sin and animalistic characteristics, thereby stripping it of any human-like qualities. “Devil!” exclaims Victor, “do you dare approach me? and do not you fear the fierce vengeance of my arm wreaked on your miserable head? Begone, vile insect! Or rather stay, that I may trample you to dust! and, oh, that I could, with the extinction of your miserable existence, restore those victims whom you have so diabolically murdered.”<sup>136</sup> Victor’s response to his “yellow-skinned” daemon aligned with nineteenth-century professional terminology and practices that were created to dominate discourse about the Orient.<sup>137</sup> Justification of White hegemony over ‘other’ non-Europeans was propagated through a new interpretation of the world, one that was Euro-centric. In fact, “The whole European discourse about the rest of the world seemed to be demeaning and critical. Non-Europeans were ‘problematized’, their views were relegated or ignored. In some cases, they even lost their identity, being referred to by names the Europeans had themselves invented.”<sup>138</sup> The power of language unveiled new ‘truths’ about man and enabled a new construction of the human condition. Given this orientation, the creature’s only recourse to re-humanize himself is

to claim his humanity through language. Mary Shelley accomplishes this by giving the creature an origin that he uses to tell the story of his life from his perspective.

“Be calm! I entreat you to hear me, before you give vent to your hatred on my devoted head,” says the creature to Victor. He continues to claim his place as a living being, “have I not suffered enough, that you seek to increase my misery? Life, although it may only be an accumulation of anguish, is dear to me, and I will defend it.”<sup>139</sup> Although the creature’s narrative is told to Walton by Victor, the reader experiences it in the first-person through the voice of the creature. As a result, Shelley creates a mechanism whereby the creature disrupts the social order and reclassifies itself/himself as human. His entry into the world is juxtaposed against that of a human child, whereby the reader is given context through a scene recalling the sensory overload felt by a newborn baby: “A strange multiplicity of sensations seized me, and I saw, felt, heard, and smelt, at the same time; and it was, indeed, a long time before I learned to distinguish between the operations of my various senses.”<sup>140</sup>

The creature slowly learns to communicate as his “days were spent in close attention, that [he] might more speedily master the language.”<sup>141</sup> He even boasts that he has surpassed Safie, the Arabian “who understood very little, and conversed in broken accents, whilst [he] comprehended and could imitate almost every word that was spoken.”<sup>142</sup> What is demonstrated is Shelley’s attempt to re-classify the creature as an intellectually superior being by displacing Safie, who according to Blumenbach and Lawrence is an Arab-European or Caucasian.<sup>143</sup>

In the final scene Frankenstein’s creature demonstrates his humanity as a moral and empathetic being with a free will and ownership of his body and soul. After Victor’s death, the creature weeps and laments over the body of his final victim “in his murder my crimes are consummated.”<sup>144</sup> Walton reproaches him, avoiding the creature’s eyes, and accuses him of his

dear friend's death. The creature replies comparing himself to the fallen Satan of *Paradise Lost* and claims "urged thus far, I had no choice but to adapt my nature to an element which I had *willingly chosen*." <sup>145</sup> Shelley returns the reader back to the philosophers of the Enlightenment, particularly Kant, who believed "all that is required for this enlightenment is *freedom*; and particularly the least harmful of all that may be called freedom, namely, the freedom for man to make *public use* of reason in all matters." <sup>146</sup>

Victor's death frees the creature from their bond and he is finally able to act on his own free will. Moreover, as a being created by man and not by God, he is not bound to the fifth commandment of "thou shalt not kill" and therefore his body and soul belong to him to do as he chooses, even deciding how and when to end his life. He rebuffs Walton and spurns man's claim over his life:

Neither yours nor any man's death is needed to consummate the series of my being, and accomplish which must be done; but it requires my own. Do not think I shall be slow to perform this sacrifice. I shall quit your vessel...I shall collect my funeral pile, and consume to ashes this miserable frame.... I shall die.... soon these burning miseries will be extinct. I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly...my ashes will be swept into the sea by the winds. My *spirit* will sleep in peace. <sup>147</sup>

Mary Shelley wanted this novel to be frightening and render her readers uncomfortable and shaken. Stripping away all material things, man is left with only himself and, if control of his body, mind, and soul is taken away from him, he is left with nothing. He becomes no more than a slave to man and to society. *Frankenstein* is "ostensibly about the origin and evolution of man in society." <sup>148</sup> Shelley remarks on man's origin by engaging in a dialectic with her audience,

who in the novel is Mrs. Saville, Robert Walton's sister. The demand for and access to fundamental human rights is placed before a white woman of means who in nineteenth-century England had very little to no rights. Yet, it is to her that Walton chronicles the story of Victor and his creature. His sister carries the burden of her brother's failed exploration, of Victor's failed human experiment, and of the creature's failed chance at joining the ranks of men.

Shelley raises a number of critical issues that fundamentally challenged the existing structure of nineteenth-century Britain. Margo Perkins argues that "through her depiction of the monster's marginalization, dehumanization and subsequent turn to violence, Shelley both portrays the impact of one's environment on determining ethical values *and* exposes the hypocrisy implicit in imposing on individuals values inconsistent with the reality of their material conditions."<sup>149</sup> Reframing the monster as a rational and thoughtful being with desires and emotions, she impresses upon her readers to consider the human condition and intercede when the rights of others are impeded. Furthermore, the deaths of Victor and the creature represent the correlative lives of the master and the slave; the oppressed and the oppressor.

The horror of *Frankenstein* is achieved through the use of the monster as a symbol for the working-class man. His struggle for significance, access to privileges, and desire to have a basic livelihood is constantly challenged until he has no other recourse but to die. Allowing Victor to be his creator rather than God removes the religious burdens of obedience and signals a possible alternative to how man's life can be governed. Shelley's epistolary style places the reader in the minds of her characters whereby her readers can experience their pain and suffering which enables the novel to be read as an allegory for the human condition.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Percy B. Shelley, *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck (London: Julian Editions by Ernest Benn Ltd., 1926), 181.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844*, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 138.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: the 1818 Text, Contents, Nineteenth-Century Responses, Modern Criticism*, ed. J.P. Hunter (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012), 80.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: Or the Modern Prometheus*, ed. Michael K. Joseph (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 8.

<sup>5</sup> Shelley, *Journals of Mary Shelley*. By June of 1817, Mary had a viable draft of *Frankenstein* that she sent to her father, William Godwin, for review and to arouse the interest of publishers. He is unsuccessful and writes a loving fatherly post-script to a letter of Mary's to a friend Marianne Hunt "Poor Mary's book came back with a refusal, which has put me in rather ill spirits."

<sup>6</sup> William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2000), 418, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>7</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: Or the Modern Prometheus*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> This thesis is based primarily on the 1818 text of *Frankenstein*. However, the 1831 edition was consulted regarding authorial changes to content; Mary Shelley's temperament was reserved, often portrayed as cold towards others. She also believed in strict privacy, choosing not to divulge intimate details about her personal. This may have been a lesson she learned from how society received her father's memoir of her mother. For more accounts of Mary and her relationship with her parents see Julie A. Carlson, *England's First Family of Writers: Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Mary Shelley* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Carol M. Davidson, *Gothic Literature 1764-1824*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, German anthropologist and physiologist, proposed one of the earliest classifications of the races of mankind. *On the Natural Varieties of Mankind* was published in 1776 describing five groups of man emphasizing physical morphology. For more accounts of these findings see Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, K. F. H. Marx, P. Flourens, Rudolph Wagner, and John Hunter *On the Natural Varieties of Mankind*, trans. and ed. by Thomas Bendyshe (New York: Bergman Publishers, 1969).

<sup>11</sup> Bill Hughes, "'A devout but nearly silent listener': Dialogue, Sociability, and Promethean Individualism in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818)" *Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies* 16, (Autumn 2017), 4.

<sup>12</sup> David Pirie, "Approaches to *Frankenstein* [in Film]," in *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text, Contents, Nineteenth-Century Responses, and Modern Criticism*, ed. J. Paul Hunter (New York: W.W. Norton 2012) 278.; In the spring of 2018 a new film adaptation will be released focusing on the relationship between Mary Shelley and Percy Shelley leading up to her writing *Frankenstein*.

<sup>13</sup> James Price, *An Essay on the Medical Application of Electricity and Galvanism: with A Concise Descriptive Account of Disease* (London: Fleetstreet and Patenoster Row, 1821), 1.

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<sup>14</sup> Julian Offray de La Mettrie was a physician and philosopher who wrote *L'Homme machine* or *Machine Man* in 1747. He was denounced for undermining morality for writing irreligious philosophical works. His metaphor of machine aligns with Shelley's work in that the creature is put together from parts. Like a machine he must learn to function, but also like a machine he functions as a man—human. Julien Offray La Mettrie, *Machine Man and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. by Ann Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5.

<sup>15</sup> Ian P. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 13.

<sup>16</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts Criticism*, ed. Deidre Lynch (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009). Mary Wollstonecraft's seminal text was written as a response to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. In it she expounds on the importance of women to be well educated and not concern themselves with a life that is not impactful.

<sup>17</sup> Barbara Johnson, *A Life with Mary Shelley* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 71.

<sup>18</sup> Helen M. Williams, *Letters Written in France: In the Summer 1790, to a Friend in England, Containing Various Anecdotes to the French Revolution*, ed. Neil Fraistat and Susan S. Lanser (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2001), 186.

<sup>19</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 70.

<sup>20</sup> Miranda Seymour, *Mary Shelley* (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 46.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>22</sup> Miranda Seymour writes in *Mary Shelley* that Mary's stepmother Mary Jane would constantly peg the Fanny and Jane against Mary. Fanny's docile manner would not allow her to fight back and Jane was encouraged to Mary's rival.

<sup>23</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 89

<sup>24</sup> Carlson, *England's First Family*, 131.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>26</sup> Shelley, *The Journals*, 543.

<sup>27</sup> William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, *Godwin & Mary: Letters of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Ralph M. Wardle (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1966), 8.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>30</sup> William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (Kitchner: Batoche Books, 2000), 572.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 574.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Godwin, *Godwin & Mary*, 54.

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<sup>34</sup> Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication*, 5.

<sup>35</sup> William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Printed for J. Johnson and G.G. and J. Robinson, 1798), 1078, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009706442/Home>

<sup>36</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 19.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Godwin, *Godwin & Mary*, 961.

<sup>41</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 26.

<sup>42</sup> Harriet Shelley, Percy's first wife writes in 1812 to a friend of her first visit to the Godwin home in which she details the features of Mary and makes a comparison to the "mostlovely woman" (Wollstonecraft) whose picture hung in Godwin's study. Shelley, *The Letters*.

<sup>43</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 86.

<sup>44</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile , ou L'Education/Emile, Or on Education*, ed. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 7.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication*, 5.

<sup>47</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 23.

<sup>48</sup> Shelley, *The Journals*, 6.

<sup>49</sup> In 1814 Percy and Mary bought a journal in France and began writing in it to chronicle their new life as a married couple. Over time Percy would stop writing, but Mary continued to write even beyond Percy's death. Shelley, *The Journals*.

<sup>50</sup> Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication*, 183.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>52</sup> Gary Handwerk, "Mapping Misogyny: Godwin's *Fleetwood* and the Staging of Rousseauvian Education" *Studies in Romanticism* 41, no. 3 (Fall): 377-8.

<sup>53</sup> Carlson, *England's First*, 42.

<sup>54</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 31.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>56</sup> Mary would lose her half-sister Fanny to suicide as well as Percy's first wife, Harriet within weeks of each other. She would also give birth to four children, burying three. Shelley, *The Journals*.

<sup>57</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 32.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>60</sup> Percy Shelley and Mary Godwin were actually married on December 30, 1816 at the consistent insistence of Mary's father, William Godwin. Percy was not in a rush to "legalize" his commitment to Mary because of the custody battle for his children with Eliza Westbrook, his late wife Harriet's sister. Percy and Mary had hopes that the children would be returned to Percy upon their union, but the Westbrooks showed no sign of sending them to their father, threatening legal action. The marriage of Percy and Mary was a happy one, nonetheless. In his letter to Mary's sister, Clare, Percy describes the "ceremony [as] magical in its effects." Shelley, *The Journals*.

<sup>61</sup> Shelley, *The Letters*, 428.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 435.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 424.; Thomas Love Peacock was a publisher friend of Percy who remained in contact with him until the end of his life. His account of Percy and Mary's courtship would help to add credibility and make some attempt to soften the blow the Percy endured after leaving his first wife Harriet.

<sup>64</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 218.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>69</sup> Erasmus Darwin is the grandfather of Charles Darwin, author of *Origins of Species*, and Francis Galton, founder of the theory of Eugenics. Coincidentally, Henry Fuseli, Mary Wollstonecraft's former lover and/or love interest illustrated the 1808 publication of Erasmus' *Poetical Works*.

<sup>70</sup> Paul de Man examines René Girard's *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* to orient an understanding of narrative texts of this genre. The relationship between the characters, in particular the protagonist and their main antagonist, displays a particular etiquette that reveals "the central subject to be entirely dependent on another subject, who acts as a mediator and governs in fact all the decisions it proudly claims as its own." Paul de Man, *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism: The Gauss Seminar and Other Papers*, ed. E. S. Burt, Kevin Newmark, and Andrzej Warminski (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 6-7.

<sup>71</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 68.

<sup>72</sup> Percy Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound: A Lyrical Drama*, ed. Vida D. Scudder (Boston: D.C. Heath & Co., 1904), 3.

<sup>73</sup> "Riots, Disaffection, and Repression," The Victorian Web, accessed June 8, 2018, <http://www.victorianweb.org/history/riots/riots.html>



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<sup>74</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 8

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> David Simpson, *Romanticism, Nationalism, and The Revolt Against Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 40.

<sup>79</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 10.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> In this statement, Mary Shelley references the biblical tale of Eve and the serpent. The figurative sting of the serpent is felt after Eve takes fruit from the forbidden tree of knowledge. Victor too has taken knowledge that was not destined for him and must suffer the consequences. *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-9.

<sup>83</sup> The technical and industrial revolution had already taken off by the turn of the eighteenth century. Londoners would have seen mechanical machines or automatons at the Cox Museum, a private museum owned by mechanic James Cox. "Mr. Cox's Perpetual Motion, A Prize in the Museum Lottery," Romantic Circles Gallery, Accessed June 8, 2018, <https://www.rc.umd.edu/gallery/mr-coxs-perpetual-motion-prize-museum-lottery>.

<sup>84</sup> Julia Douthwaite's book examines the popularity of automatons and technology in late 1700s Britain and France. She sources several novels that tell stories of automatons or one that "promised to teach people how to harness their mental powers like an engine." Her particular speculation is of a Nogaret's novel about French inventors with one aptly named Wak-wik-vauk-on-son-frankenstein. According to Douthwaite, Nogaret was a self-proclaimed Jacobin working as the librarian for the king's sister. He writes his novel as a "comment on the current state of invention and technology and an appeal for French technicians to regenerate the national genius." It is possible the Mary Shelley may have read or heard of this book through her travels in France and Switzerland. Julia Douthwaite. *The Frankenstein of 1790 and Other Lost Chapters of Revolutionary France* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 68, 73.

<sup>85</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 33.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>88</sup> In 1790, Edmund Burke publishes his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* criticizing the rebellion, maintaining that "[The French have rebelled] against a mild and lawful monarch...their resistance was made to concession; their revolt was from protection. Their blow was aimed at an hand holding out graces, favours, and immunities." William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft responded to Burke endorsing not only Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*, but the rights of women and the individual. In *Frankenstein*, Shelley pens a narrative response to Burke demonstrating the symbiotic relationship between the privileged and the proletariat. Edmund Burke, "Reflections on the Revolution in France" in *Burke, Paine, Godwin, and The Revolution Controversy*. Ed. Marilyn Butler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 41.

<sup>89</sup> Charles Taylor recalls Paul Henri Holbach to underscore his point that "living beings have an inherent drive to preserve themselves." Taylor goes on to say that "the picture of man as striving by necessity to preserve and

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expand his happiness is not just the correct result of detached reflection; it is also the true basis of the moral life.” Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 325-6.

<sup>90</sup> Dror Wahman, *The Making of the Modern Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 290.

<sup>91</sup> William Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 12.161-6.

<sup>92</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 70.

<sup>93</sup> These novels were not only read by both Percy and Mary, but most likely discussed at length by the pair and with their companions including Lord Byron. Shelley, *The Journals*.

<sup>94</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 90.

<sup>95</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost, a Poem in Twelve Books* (London: Printed for J. Sharpe, 1827), 10.743-45.

<sup>96</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 68.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 41.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Butler, *Burke, Paine*, 39.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>104</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 47.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>108</sup> Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms* (London: Verso, 1997), 85.

<sup>109</sup> Gayatri C. Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1999), 133.

<sup>110</sup> Through her examination of Mary Shelley’s life, Miranda Seymour describes Mary as an ally to the abolitionist as she and Percy would be disgusted by the works of Mungo Park and the situation of African slaves. The Shelley’s would join a boycott of sugar based on a 1791 pamphlet written by abolitionist William Fox. Seymour, *Mary Shelley*.

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<sup>111</sup> Slavery in Britain was abolished in 1807, but it still ran rampant in the colonies. Word of the Haitian revolt not only embarrassed an already weak France, but pushed other European countries to bolster their slavery operations. Spain would kidnap the largest quantity of African natives sending them to South America and the Caribbean islands. Within the three years prior to *Frankenstein's* second publication, nearly 150,000 slaves would be sent to the port of Rio de Janeiro. Thomas Howell Buxton, *The African Slave Trade* (London: J. Murray, 1839).

<sup>112</sup> Johnson cites Vincent T. Harlow's idea of "two British Empires" to highlight that momentum post the war in the American colonies had not only increased, but conveyed a turning point for the British Empire. Sights were set to the East, beyond India, such as Egypt where British Indian forces were deployed in 1801. Robert Johnson, *British Imperialism*, (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2003).

<sup>113</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 140.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-6.

<sup>118</sup> Johnson, *British Imperialism*, 15.

<sup>119</sup> African slave population in Haiti doubled to nearly 250,000 during the three years prior to the Revolution. Just before the revolution, L'Ouverture, former slave and slave owner, appeared as part of a three-man delegation at the National Convention in Paris in 1794. Surrounded by French Jacobins, L'Ouverture would lose faith and respect for his Spanish superiors who sought to maintain slavery as rule of law on the Caribbean island of Haiti. L'Ouverture decisively went from being a royalist to a republican who would lead an army of black *sansculottes* to victory in 1795 against the Spanish. Louverture would write in 1797 "Let the sacred flame of liberty that we have won lead all our acts . . . Let us go forth to plant the tree of liberty, breaking the chains of our brothers still held captive under the shameful yoke of slavery. Let us bring them under the compass of our rights, the imprescriptible and inalienable rights of free men. [Let us overcome] the barriers that separate nations, and unite the human species into a single brotherhood. We seek only to bring to men the liberty that [God] has given them, and that other men have taken from them only by transgressing His immutable will." Haiti would gain its independence in 1804 sparking a myriad of similar revolts throughout the Caribbean—Barbados in 1816, Jamaica in 1832, and a rebellion uprising in Cuba in 1812. Britain's Emancipation Act of 1833 would free nearly 700,000 slaves, almost half of the human population in the Caribbean. Charles Forsdick and Christian Høgsbjerg, *Toussaint L'Ouverture: A Black Jacobin in the Age of Revolutions* (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 77.

<sup>120</sup> Johnson contends that Britain used its naval power to "seize and seizure" foreign slave ships which opened them up to new sailing routes and trade depots. "This extension, to uphold British paramountcy, was 'by informal means if possible, or by formal annexations when necessary'. By a combination of commercial penetration, investment and military force, China, South America, the Ottoman Empire and parts of tropical Africa were as much subject to British imperialism as Australia or India." Johnson, *British Imperialism*, 18.

<sup>121</sup> Anne K. Mellor, "Frankenstein, Racial Science, and the Yellow Peril," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 23, no. 1 (2001), 4.

<sup>122</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Richmond: J.W. Randolph, 1853), chp. 14.

<sup>123</sup> Bonnett, "British," 320.

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<sup>124</sup> Johann Joachim Winckelmann was the father of art history. He idealized Greek art and held their depictions of the body to be of the highest esteem. However, Winckelmann never made it to Greece and therefore only saw the Roman copies that were laid in white marble. These white copies were thus seen as “emblems of beauty and created a new white aesthetic.” Nell Painter, *History of White People* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 61.

<sup>125</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 20.

<sup>126</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: or The Modern Prometheus* ed. Lawrence Zillman (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 34.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>128</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary defines a chamois as “the only representatives of the antelope found wild in Europe; it inhabits the loftiest parts of the Alps, Pyrenees, Taurus and other mountain ranges of Europe and Asia.” This area is also known as the Caucasus’, the region attributed to the origin of the white race. Caucasians, according to Johann Blumenback, would be one of five varieties of humans outlined in his 1795 publication of *On the Natural Variety of Mankind*.

<sup>129</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 36.

<sup>130</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 36.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>133</sup> William Lawrence, *Lectures on Physiology, Zoology, and the Natural History of Man: Delivered at the Royal College of Surgeons* (London: Callow, 1819), 479.

<sup>134</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 36.

<sup>135</sup> Toni Morrison’s Africanism theory investigates the ways in which a nonwhite persona was created in the United States. For the purposes of this thesis I have taken the same theories and applied them to nonwhite persona created in England. She expertly cites James Snead’s *Figures of Division: William Faulkner’s Major Novels* as a resource for linguistic responses that serve to uphold racist ideology. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 67.

<sup>136</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 67.

<sup>137</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 156.

<sup>138</sup> Johnson, *British*, 91.

<sup>139</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 68.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> We are inclined to believe that the Arab-European [Caucasian] race possesses a greater flexibility of organization.” Lawrence, *Lectures*, 463.

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<sup>144</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 158.

<sup>145</sup>*Ibid.*, 159 (my italics).

<sup>146</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Philosophy of Kant: Immanuel Kant's Moral and Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Carl J. Friedrich (New York: Modern Library 1940), 147.

<sup>147</sup>Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text*, 161 (my italics).

<sup>148</sup>Spivak, *Critique*, 133.

<sup>149</sup>Margo Perkins "The Nature of Otherness: Class and Difference in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," *Studies in the Humanities* 19, no. 1 (June 1992): 40.

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