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Frankenstein: Self, Body, Creation and Monstrosity

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the themes and concepts of self, body, creation and monstrosity inscribed in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. *it will approach these issues from a mainly posmodern point of view that takes gender as its central focus. Although gender is not an explicit theme in the novel, it plays an enormous part in ehıcidating the deeper meanings embedded at its heart, and is woven into its fabric in a multi-layered manner that can be roughly summarized as follows: 1) as a rewriting of* Paradise Lost *as a masculinist text and as a Romantic version of culturally central mytlıs such as the creation myth and the Promethean myth in ways that covertly question Romantic notions of şelf and creativity; 2) in connection with some of the most influential cultural and philosophical discourses of Shelley's time such as Godwinian rationalism, the Enlightenment belief in the beneficience of selence and human progress and Rousseau 's Romanticism, ali of which deal with "civilized" man's relationship to nature, to society and to himself; 3) in relation to the domestic ideology that constituted a majör cultural basis of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century middle-classs domination; 4) as an inseription of crucial aspects of Shelley's own life such as parental loss and ambivalence about her gender role in relation to her artistle şelf; 5) through the narrative marginalization of the female characters refleeting the sodalı'cultural marginalization ofwoman.*

Özet

Bu *çalışmanın amacı Mary Shelley'nin* Frankenstein *adlı yapıtında işlenen benlik, beden/madde, yaratı ve canavarlık tema ve kavramlarını incelemektir. Çalışma konuya özellikle cinsel kimliğe odaklanan, ağırlıklı olarak postmodern bir bakış açısıyla yaklaşır. Cinsel kimlik, romanda yalnızca örtük bir tema olmasına karşın romanın merkezindeki derin anlamların ortaya çıkarılmasında önemli bir rol oynar ve romanın dokusuna çok katmanlı bir biçimde örülmüştür. Bu örtük sorunsal*

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romanda 1) Paradise Lost'un *"yeniden yazılması" ve yaratılış miti, Prometheus miti gibi kültürel açıdan büyük önem taşıyan mitlerin Romantik bir versiyonu olarak, öz benlik ve yaratıcılıkla ilgili Romantik kavramların örtük bir sorgulanması biçiminde; 2) Godwin'in akılcılığı, bilimin iyicilliğine olan Aydınlanma Çağı inancı, Rousseau'nun Romantizmi gibi "uygar" insanın doğayla, toplumla ve kendisiyle ilişkisini irdeleyen kültürel ve düşünsel söylemlerle ilişkili olarak; 3) 18. ve 19. yüzyıl orta sınıf egemenliğinin en önemli kültürel temellerinden birini oluşturan domestik ideolojiyle ilintili olarak; 4) Shelley'nin ailevi geçmişinin ve sanatsal benliğiyle ilişkili olarak cinsel roller bağlamında yaşadığı belirsizliğin biçimlendirdiği örtük otobiyografik öğeler biçiminde; 5) kadının toplumsal/kültürel bakımdan marjinalleştirilmesini yansıtacak biçimde kadın karakterlerin anlatıda marjinal bir konuma yerleştirilmesinde anlatım bulur.*

The present study will engage with the ways in which *Frankenstein* reflects and challenges some of the most significant cultural conceptions of şelf, body, creation and monstrosity as they were embodied and embedded in the various discourses that went into the shaping of the novel. Its viewpoint will consist of an exploration of how certain modern/postmodern readings reconstruct these meanings within a framework of subjectivity and otherness articulated mainly in terms of the critical discourse of gender. For as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar write, "Though it has been disguised,...the gender definition of mothers and daughters, orphans and beggars, monsters and false creators [] is at the heart of this apparently masculine book" (1979: 232). Such a perspective will hopefully provide a glimpse of how the multiple and changing meanings attributed to the novel contribute to an ever-expanding body of critical intertextuality centered around the myth of Frankenstein. This is basically a reflection of the highly intertextual quality of the novel itself, which invites an essentially postmodern reading as it displays an implicit awareness of the dualities, multiplicity and indeterminacy inherent in notions of şelf, identity, reality, truth, creativity and language. This in turn is partly a necessary result of the fact that *Frankenstein* is "one of the most self-consciously literary 'novels' ever written" (Oates, 1987:68).

Probably no novel in the history of English literatüre has caused the proliferation of so many different readings as *Frankenstein,* written in the form of the epistolary Gothic. Its attraction of such diverse and often conflicting interpretations is perhaps the very quality that makes the novel a "myth about myths" in the words Fred Botting uses to characterize Frankenstein's monster itself (1991: 203). The creation of a "human" monster from fragments of dead bodies stolen from graves by Frankenstein, an ambitious student of science, is a reference to the Judeo-Christian myth of creation. As such it is at once a parody of divine creation (Mellor, 1998: 72)

and a critique of a conception of creation that dispenses with God. According to such a reading, creation outside divine prerogative would entail destruction and "It is, ultimately, this nightmare image that the Monster represents to our culture" (Levine, 1998: 36). However, at the same time, the novel offers a tribute to boundless human ambition that is necessarily a direct challenge to God, or to the idea of God. By creating life in its supreme form—human life—Frankenstein displaces God. Despite its tragic outcome, the endeavor itself to become God essentially embodies the humanistic assumption that man's realization of his limitless creative potential is the highest good. While the novel endorses this ideal in the discourses of Frankenstein and Walton, it subverts it in that of the monster and through the failure of Frankenstein's so-called humanitarian project. Such subversion implies an implicit criticism of the masculine tradition of Enlightenment humanism, whose privileged subject is European man.

Frankenstein's tale as a myth about myths has multiple, or rather ever-multiplying signification. Subtitled "the Modern Prometheus," the novel is, on the one hand, a Romantic version of the Promethean myth intertextually related to such works as Percy Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* and Byron's *Manfred:* it is "a Romantic novel about—among other things—Romanticism, as well as a book about books" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 221-222). On the other hand, it paradoxically constitutes an anti-Promethean myth that is highly relevant to the present age of advanced science and technology as a cautionary tale. Furthermore, as implied above, it is at once a counter-myth—a secular myth that subverts the divine myth of creation: "In her secularization of the creation myth [Shelley] invented a metaphor that was irresistible to the culture as a whole...the attempt to discover in matter what we had previously attributed to spirit, the bestowing *on* matter (or history, or society, or nature) the values once given to God" (Levine, 1998: 28). Despite his moral inability to cope with the result of his technical power, Victor's search to discover the secrets of life and death in matter is emphatically presented as heroic in the novel (Levine, 1981: 33). Therefore, as a celebration of the Promethean impulse in man, Victor's project cannot be seen as unequivocally evil (Levine, 1998: 28). Signifying outside the framework of a universe presided over by an absolute divine authority, Shelley's novel ultimately presents the issue of good and evil from the vantage point of a secular, Enlightenment worldview that leaves man with a bleak sense of absolute responsibility for his actions (Baldick, 1987: 5). Nevertheless, woven with the ambivalence at the heart of the Promethean myth—Prometheus is giver of both creation and destruction (Johnson, 1987: 61)—and with the contradictions in human nature and human society, *Frankenstein* calls for a double reading of the Monster "as evil incarnate [and] a social product that reflects evil back on the society that produced it"

(Botting, 1991: 155). Seeing how ugly and "hideous" his creation is once he has animated it, Victor abandons it in horror. Oddly enough, this is the only stated reason for Victor's rejection of his child. Thus the monster as an incarnation of evil is left unexplained although not presented as a supernatural mystery. Therefore it may be interpreted as a reflection of the inexplicable evil in Victor himself, which cannot be separated from his inner motivation to make the monster (Levine, 1981: 27). As such the monster is to be seen as Victor's double figuring, among other things, his inner division to be discussed later (Thornburg, 1987: 116; Oates, 1987: 71).

Left utterly alone, and treated barbarically by the peasants of the village where he seeks food and shelter, the creature finds a home in a hovel adjecent to the house of a French family. However, having accidentally seen his own image in a pool, he does not dare to approach the family directly and contents himself with watching their movements constantly through a chink in the wall. After months of exertion to learn their speech, customs and even culture as recorded in some of the most important classics such as Plutarch's *Lives, Paradise Lost* and the *Sorrows of Werter,* he attempts to introduce himself to the family. The "inhuman" reaction he receives (on finding the creature with his father, the gentle Felix attacks him in horror) causes him to turn his back on human society in despair. On his way to Geneva to seek the sympathy he craves for in his creator, he saves a little girl from drowning. While trying to animate the girl on the shore of the river, a peasant sees him and shoots him on the spot. Wounded and realizing that his own goodness is bound always to meet with malevolence; expelled from Eden for no fault of his own except his physical deformity, for which only his creator could be held responsible, the Monster is driven to become Satan and "vowed eternal hatred and vengeance to all mankind" (101)—a metaphor he himself employs in allusion to *Paradise Lost.* After having killed Victor's brother, William, and caused the death of the innocent Justine, the "daemon" (10) tries touchingly to appeal to Victor's sense of justice and compassion with the hope of persuading him to create a female for him, who would give him the love and sympathy he argues that he deserves like all human beings. Significantly, "'Daemon' is the latinate transliteration of the Greek *daimon,* [meaning] *eros,* or love" (Wittman, 1998: 89). His justification of his transgressions evokes Godwin's radical critique of social injustice (Baldick, 1987: 58): "I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall be virtuous" (69). Influenced by her father's writings, Shelley puts into the monster's mouth the most convincing and human speech in the novel, which echoes in essence Godwin's materialistic understanding of human nature and morality. Godwin writes in the *Political Justice;* "We bring into the world with us no innate principles: consequently we are neither virtuous nor vicious as we first come into existence" (1993:

10). We are made "virtuous" or "vicious" by the material and psychological conditions that shape our lives, and moral labelling itself is an ideological act.

The creature is the product of reason, but becomes a monster in the moral sense because it is abandoned by an "irresponsible science" that neglects the consequences of its labor (Botting, 1991: 164). As Deleuze and Guttari observe, '"it is not the slumber of reason that engenders monsters, but a vigilant and insomniac rationality"' (qtd. in Botting, 1991: 161). In this sense the novel offers a metaphor for a monstrous technology that is more than relevant to our age, which has not only experienced holocausts made possible by scientific invention, but is also facing the threat of total destruction by nuclear technology, and has, in fulfilment of Shelley's prophetic tale, come to the threshold of duplicating human beings: "Announcing a breakthrough in genetic engineering, the *New York Times Magazine* proclaimed 'The Frankenstein Myth Becomes a Reality: We Have The Awful Knowledge to Make Exact Copies of Human Beings'" (Baldick, 1987: 7). Significantly, the word monster derives from "the latin 'monere', to warn, and 'demonstrare', to show or make visible" (Botting, 1991: 142). In this work considered the first science fiction, the monster can thus be seen as a warning against the monstrous consequences of rationality in the service of an overambitious science that can wreak destruction on humanity. Thus, on one level, *Frankenstein* embodies a critique of reason, or rather its wrong application instead of an unqualified critique of science itself (Jordanova, 1994: 74). This in turn involves a questioning of the Enlightenment belief, which goes back to Bacon, in the beneficience of scientific progress dependent on, and aiming at the mastery of nature (Botting, 1991: 165). The creation of the monster represents the projected power of the human mind over the physical world. Godwin as *the* representative of eighteenth-century rationalism quoted Franklin: '"mind will one day become omnipotent over matter"' (qtd. in Botting, 1991: 170). However, the failure of Victor—we should note the irony in Shelley's choice of name for her protagonist-signifies the ultimate failure of the human will to conquer nature in any absolute way.

Linked with this is an implicit criticism of Romantic desire, whose ultimate aim is not so much to appropppriate or merge with another body as to transcend the body, or matter. In Romantic literature we often come across protagonists fleeing their object of desire "like a man/ Flying from something that he dreads than one/ Who sought the thing he loved" (Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey"). Margaret Homans points out that "The novel was written when Percy Shelley had completed... *Alastor,* the archetypal poem of the doomed romantic quest, and it is to this poem that

Mary Shelley alludes" (1986: 105). Both Frankenstein and the hero of *Alastor* pursue their own image in the creature engendered by their visionary imagination. Hence the monster and the phantom maiden are the products of Romantic male narcissism, which ultimately seeks a specular image of its own creative power. After the trial for the murder of his friend Clerval, in which he testifies as suspect, Victor says, "I saw around me nothing but the glimmer of two eyes that glared upon me" (134). As Homans observes, this is an allusion to the lines in *Alastor* in which the hero, "who has quested in vain after an ideal female image of his own creation, sees 'two eyes, / Two starry eyes, hung in the gloom of thought, / And seemed with their serene and azure smiles/ To beckon him." (1986: 105-6). Offering a Freudian reading of Victor's dilemma, Homans argues that his desire to create a male human being expresses a hidden desire to circumvent the mother in reproduction and, as "oedipal" son, to substitute for the mother's powerful and forbidden body an object of desire that precludes fulfillment of desire (1986: 100). Homans bases her argument mainly on the fact that each mother in the novel dies soon after being introduced as a character. Significantly, Victor's own mother dies just before he leaves for Ingolstadt to study science at university, and his studies there leading to his project of creating a man appear from a psychoanalytical viewpoint as an oedipal substitute for the exploration of the maternal body: "it is despite his father's prohibition that the young boy devours the archaic books on natural philosophy that first raise his ambitions to discover the secret of life" (Homans, 1986: 101). Furthermore he learns at the university that modern scientists *"penetrate into* the *recesses* of nature and show how *she* works in *her hiding-places" {21;* my italics). His search for the secrets of Mother Nature to appropriate her powers has overtones of an oedipal violation that is necrophiliac, and "require that she be dead" (Homans, 1986: 102): "I have...always...been imbued with a fervent longing to penetrate the secrets of nature...To examine the causes of life, we must first have recourse to death" (21; 30). Thus both his mother's death and his investigation of a dead nature figured as female justify an interpretation of Victor's creation of the monster as symbolically requiring the death of the mother.

Significantly, the animation of the creature leads first: to the imagined, and finally to the actual death of Elizabeth, the potential mother of Victor's future children. After the animation of the creature Victor sees how hideous he is and after a while, exhausted with the effort and anxiety, he falls asleep to dream the following: "I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health...I embraced her, but as 1 imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death;...and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. I started from my sleep with

horror" (34). In his dream Victor identifies Elizabeth's death with his mother's, who was also Elizabeth's foster mother. Elizabeth had been the cause of his mother's death because she contracted Elizabeth's disease while nursing her. This must be one link in Victor's subconscious equation of mother and sister-fiance. The dream also foreshadows Elizabeth's death at the hands of the monster as Victor sees it just after the animation of the monster. Elizabeth is identified with the mother also in that she has replaced her in the family. Furthermore, as the potential mother of Victor's future children, "she too is vulnerable to whatever destroys mothers...just as the demon's creation has required both the death of Frankenstein's own mother and the death and violation of Mother Nature" (Homans, 1986: 103). Victor's creation of a child without Elizabeth's reproductive aid amounts to making her motherhood, hence motherhood itself unnecessary. Engendered by Romantic masculine imagination, the monster figures "the romantic object of desire... in vented to replace, in a less threatening form, the powerful mother who must be killed" (Homans, 1986: 104). Such a being, invented to satisfy the ego by eliminating any other creative power than the self would be an image of the self: "a being like myself...A new species would bless me as its creator and source...No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs" (32). Victor imitates thus God creating Adam in his own image (Homans, 1986: 104). The monster aptly expresses the analogy between God's creation of Adam and Victor's creation of himself: "I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel" (10). But it is also possible to identify the monster with Eve created from Adam's imagination (Homans, 1986: 104).

Gilbert and Gubar describe *Frankenstein* as "a version of the misogynistic story implicit in *Paradise Lost"* (1979: 224). A product of Romantic male economy, the monster is created out of flesh by a man aspiring to divine creativity. Unlike Eve, who was made of male flesh, the monster is composed of bodily parts unearthed from a nature defined as female. "I collected bones from charnel-houses and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame," says Victor to Walton (33). Anne Mellor has argued that through such monstrous creation Shelley "challenged the cultural biases inherent in any conception of science and the scientific method that rested on a gendered definition of nature as female" (1998: 62). The other side of the coin is that woman is defined in the Western culture in terms associated with nature. Woman's being is conceived as rooted in the body, or matter, and her character is thought of as sharing the qualities attributed to nature. As Cixous, one of the most notable postmodern feminists, argued, patriarchal thought has for centuries constructed "woman" within a hierarchical framework of binary oppositions that privileges the terms associated with masculinity, while devaluing those

corresponding to femininity. Some of these binary oppositions, the first term of which always carries the superior attribute of masculinity, are as follows: Activity/Passivity, Culture/Nature, Father/Mother, Head/Emotions, Logos/Pathos (Moi, 1985: 104). Analogous to what nature is to "civilized" culture, woman is the alien Other of man, whose attributes have defined human identity in the Western discourses of philosophy, religion, science, politics and art: woman has been defined negatively, as that which is not man.

The monster is associated with femininity in the sense that it figures the "monstrous otherness" of woman (Botting, 1991: 102). It is not only created, but also defined as a sub-human creature by a man whose powerful subject position is representative of the dominant forces in society/Further, the monster shares the textual marginality of the female characters in the novel (Botting, 1991: 102). All "purposeful" activity is assigned to the male characters, hence the female characters are excluded from the main action (Behrendt, 1998: 133). Thus the culturally constructed otherness of woman finds a correlate in the novel through a narrative enactment of their actual alienation. The female characters are all shadows reflecting the ideal of domesticity from which Victor and Walton have departed (Levine, 1981: 26). Elizabeth represents this ideal for Victor and Mrs. Saville for Walton. They both embody the idea of family and domestic life as "the place where, in the end, / We find our happiness, or not at all" (Wordsworth, *Prelude* Book xi). "In his obsession, Frankenstein has cut himself off from the family in which he began. In his reaction to that obsession, he cuts himself from his creation" (Levine, 1981: 29). In a vicious circle this leads to Victor's further and further estrangement from family, friends and human community. It is as if the monster is the embodiment of a perpetual punishment for Victor's initial transgression of stepping outside the limits of normal communal life, whose basis is the family. Victor significantly describes the process of making the monster in terms that equate creation with transgression, emphasizing repeatedly the solitary and secretive nature of his labor: "In a solitary chamber, or rather cell...I kept my workshop of filthy creation" (33). "

In Victor's another transgression is reflected: that of the female author who undertakes a masculine activity in writing a book and thereby acts against the norm of proper femininity confined to the domestic sphere. In her introduction to the revised 1831 edition of the novel, Shelley writes with reference to the period before she started writing *Frankenstein* that "Travelling, and the cares of a family, occupied my time; and study, in the way of reading or improving my ideas in communication with his far more cultivated mind, was all of literary employment that engaged my attention."

Constantly urged by Percy Shelley to "enrol myself on the page of fame," and insistently encouraged to write a ghost story by both Percy and Byron (it was the latter's idea that each of them write one to spend the time enjoyably in Switzerland in the wet summer of 1816, when the Shelleys were "the neighbours of Lord Byron," and were forced to stay indoors most of the time), she commences the task under the influence of two immediate factors: the ghost stories which they had read together and the "long...conversations between Lord Byron and Shelley, to which I was a devout but nearly silent listener." In one of these conversations "the experiments of Dr. Darwin" and galvanism were discussed. Galvanism, named after the Italian scientist Galvani, referred to his discovery of what he called "animal electricity": an innate vital force contained in animal tissue (Mellor, 1998: 76). This discovery led to the hypothesis that a corpse could be re-animated (introduction, viii). Surrounded thus by a masculine aura of bright literary achievement and discursiveness, the "devout but nearly silent listener" of male interchange of ideas embarks upon a literary career herself with what started as a ghost story, and would turn into her first novel, generally considered her best. As Gilbert and Gubar observe, the monster assumes Shelley's role of mute but avid listener of refined conversation in relation to the de Lacey family (1979: 237). He acquires, for instance, "a cursory knowledge of history" from Volney's *Ruins of Empires,* which Felix reads to Safie by way of teaching her French (84). He also learns about human nature and society from Felix's instruction of "the Arabian." Hence the monster also shares the marginality of his female author in relation to masculine accumulation and self-confident exchange of knowledge.

With its tale of manufacturing a human from bodily fragments, *Frankenstein* "offers an appropriate metaphor for the writer's activity" because it is a rewriting, not only of many texts, but also of many discourses (both in the sense of speech or conversation and as articulated ideas or ideologies) into a new combination (Botting, 1991: 22). Shelley's significant characterization of the novel as "my hedious progeny" in her introduction equates text and monster with reference to the act of authoring (Bronfen, 1994: 29). Just as Victor cannot control his creation, which significantly turns into a monster the moment it comes to life, Shelley does not have authority over hers once she has authored it, and it comes to acquire the monstrosity involved in the unmanageability of literary meaning due to its plurality and indeterminacy. The novel thus reveals the inherently intertextual nature of all writing (James, 1994: 79) while raising questions of authority related to the multiplicity and indeterminacy of textual/discursive meaning. As Botting remarks, "Frankenstein seems to completely identify with an authorial ideal" that imagines an impossible control over one's creation (1991: 65). Just like the artist's, "Frankenstein's subject position is

constituted by a desire for transcendence" (Botting, 1991: 15). He confesses to Walton that "those visions on which my interest in science was chiefly founded...[were] chimeras of boundless grandeur" (26-27). Artistic transcendence entails an imaginary identification with the created thing whereas Victor is "confronted by the otherness of the monster" (Botting, 1991: 15), or with the monstrosity of the artistic object, which inevitably harbors a subjectivity, or rather subjectivities of its own.

The monster as an assemblage of fragments most fundamentally figures the fragmented nature of self and identity (Baldick, 1987: 146). As a product of Victor's imaginative projection, the monster immediately embodies the fragmentation of Victor's psyche as his "author." This in turn links with the underlying plurality of the authorial self arising from the divisions within consciousness which in turn stem from, and are embodied in the divisions of language and discourse. The fragmentation that marks Shelley's authorial self is doubly paradigmatic of the woman writer in virtue of her marginal position within patriarchal culture. The woman writer is always already divided since she can never fully identify with the powerful subject position reserved for men and male writers. In addition, Shelley's maternal origin provided her with a legacy that was in direct conflict with the tenets of that culture. Wollstonecraft, the pioneering feminist writer, was attacked as a "philosophical wanton" and a monster by some of the male critics of her writings (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 222). To identify with her mother and her writings publicly would therefore mean stigmatization for her too. On the other hand, Shelley's loss of her mother eleven days after her own birth was a deeper source of psychic fragmentation: she became literally motherless, and her major compensation for this loss seems to have been her habit of reading her writings beside her grave (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 223). The irreparable disjunction she must have experienced in her orphanage was heightened by Godwin's disowning her because of her elopement with Shelley, who was married and had children, at the age of 16. Motherless and rejected by her father, and alien to a society which stigmatized her mother and illegitimate children such as her half-sister, Fanny Imlay (who significantly erased her name from her suicide note), and illegitimate relationships such as her own with Percy (she had given birth to "a premature and illegitimate baby girl who died at the age of two weeks," and was again illegitimately pregnant when she wrote *Frankenstein),* and possibly suffering from a deep-rooted guilt-consciousness (feeling monstrous) for having caused the death of her mother, she would inevitably—consciously or subconsciously—identify with the monster in her own novel with no parents (doubly illegitimate) and totally alien to the society that engendered it through its valorization of masculine aspiration (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 241-42). Gilbert and Gubar suggest that books

functioned as Mary's surrogate parents (1979: 223). Significantly, the only nurture and guidance the monster receives is what he derives from the books he finds near the home of the de Lacey family.

The three books he reads are significantly representative of Western civilization and its patriarchal traditions—historical, political, religious, epic and sentimental, among others —within which he has no place: *Paradise Lost*, Plutarch's *Lives*, and the *Sorrows ofWerter*. Even the last, the staple work of the sentimental tradition, circumvents the feminine principle by denying its principal female character a voice—she is typically reduced to a passive recipient of masculine desire and acts only as a "silent bearer of ideology" just like the women in *Frankenstein.* In *Paradise Lost* the monster finds the epic-religious equivalent of his own situation in Satan rather that in Adam, which he expresses to Victor on their first encounter in terms that render the full extent of the latter's injustice: "Like Adam, 1 was apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but...I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition; for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me" (92). Reading this essentially patriarchal text in terms of a transaction between God and his male creatures, the monster naturally identifies himself with its male characters. However, as Gilbert and Gubar argue, the monster is akin to Eve in several ways: Firstly, he is composed of male body parts as Eve is made from Adam's rib. Secondly, the fall of the monster at his inception through his abandonment by Victor echoes Eve's "fall into gender" as female. This female fall resounding in the monster's expulsion from society reflects in turn Shelley's own anxiety about her own fall from a potentially bright literary career promised by both her parental heritage and her own talent for writing and zealous reading, that is, "from a lost paradise of art, speech, and autonomy into a hell of sexuality, silence, and filthy materiality" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 227). The illegitimate and premature motherhood/ pregnancy of Shelley, possibly complicated by fear of death (her own and her future baby's), which anchored her existence for a time in the body and domesticity finds an echo in *Paradise Lost* in terms that evoke the monstrous otherness embedded within the very definition of femininity and nature as the site of fecundity: '"A Universe of death,... Where all life dies, death lives, and Nature breeds, / Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things' " (qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 227). Thirdly, the monster, like Eve, is marginilized within the narrative, which privileges Victor's voice, thereby reflecting the cultural silencing of woman.

The monster's alienation and textual silencing through the narrative strategy of bracketing the monster's discourse within Victor's dominating one reflects his female author's alienation and silencing by the dominant

forces of her society which defined human identity in terms of masculinity, hence denied woman the right of imaginative or public self-assertion. In characterizing *Frankenstein* as "a version of the misogynistic story implicit in *Paradise Lost,"* Gilbert and Gubar draw in fact attention to the essentially feminist subtext of the novel, which constitutes a radical critique of male-dominated civilization (1979: 224). The erasure of the subjecthood of Eve (she is merely an adjunct to Adam and a passive instrument of God's design) and the reduction of her moral frailty to her materiality— she errs because she is female—find prismatic reflection in *Frankenstein's* symbolic scheme. The monster is a monster because of his size and ugliness, that is, his mere material being. This is a monstrous reduction of humanness. The first human to warp the potential humanity of the creature by rejecting him completely is ironically his own creator, who takes on the role of the Miltonic God in his creation of a "man" in his own image. Yet Victor is also Satan-like in his role of the Faustian overreacher who, like the old masters of natural philosophy, seeks "immortality" and, like its modern masters, has acquired "almost unlimited powers" (26-7). He is at once Eve-like in his pursuit of the secrets of nature "interlocked with the secrets of sex and death" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 230-33). His perverse curiosity parodies Eve's leading to her temptation by Satan, which in turn leads to Adam's by Eve and their consequent fall into mortality. The arbitrariness and sternness of Milton's God finds an echo in Victor's arbitrary abandonment, hence irrational punishment of his own creature as well as in his refusal to give a fair and satisfying response to his rational plea about a mate. The monster in the role of Adam comes to assume at the same time a Satanic part in that the sole energy that drives him is hellish revenge. From another angle, the monster is like both Adam and Eve in the sense that he shares their "orphan" state — rejected by an unsympathetic, unloving father and motherless. This in fact links the monster to almost all of the characters in the novel, who either begin life as orphans, or end up as orphans. This obsessive emphasis on orphanage is another strong echo from Shelley's own life: she was motherless and rejected by her stern father; she therefore always experienced a sense of alienation involving an exclusion from ordinary family ties (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 227). In his kinship with Eve, paralleled by his kinship with the woman writer, the monster offers an archetypal trope for woman's exclusion from the symbolic: he symbolizes Eve's moral deformity in his malformed figure and in so far as he is excluded from masculinity because he is denied human subjecthood (defined in terms of masculinity), his deformity functions as a token of his "fall into gender" —the feminine one—implicitly problematized in the novel (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979: 241; 225).

Linked with this is a feminine element in the symbolic configuration of Victor's characterization: he represents the externalization of Shelley's polarized attitude to authorship coming to expression in his simultaneous desire and subconscious fear of creation and motherhood/fatherhood manifesting itself in his post-animation dream that fuses life and love with death. Shelley's anxiety concerning motherhood, possibly mixed with her guilt consciousness about her illegitimate pregnancy, finds a correlate in her anxiety about her female transgression in authoring a book, expressed on at least two levels: first of all, discursively, in her apologetic introduction where she declares her aversion to "bringing [herself] forward in print," and refers to her book as her "hideous progeny"; secondly in Victor's creation presented as a transgression in terms of its catastrophic consequences. In a novel that is significantly full of allusions to and quotations from major Romantic works such as the *Ancient Mariner, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,* Percy Shelley's "Mutability," "Tintern Abbey," and abounding in lyric descriptions in the Romantic vein, Victor's excessive desire for "glory" incorporates not only Shelley's critique of masculine egotism inherent in Romantic notions of transcendence and its solipsistic effects, but also her own desire for self-assertion which she can neither openly state nor express through any of her female characters although her covert acknowledgement of proper feminine diffidence reveals a suppressed desire for public recognition. Thus, on the one hand, as Mary Poovey maintains, *"Frankenstein* calls into question...the egotism that Mary Shelley associates with the artist's monstrous self-assertion" (1987: 83). For what Victor insistently calls his " 'benevolent' scheme actually acts out the imagination's essential and deadly self-devotion" (Poovey, 1987: 85). Significantly, after having murdered Victor, the monster half eulogistically, half ironically apostrophizes him as "Frankenstein! generous and self-devoted being!" (163). On the other hand, Victor's desire for self-assertion, seen as masculine in essence, *is* the desire of the artist, male or female. In this sense, Shelley's need for self-assertion and her conviction that she must achieve literary success find an ambivalent expression in a novel that at once exults and condemns ambition for transcendence.

Frankenstein constructs the demands of transcendence in conflict with the domestic ideal. Victor's transgression is one committed against family ties and nature instead of against divine authority. According to Poovey, by killing Victor's family the monster literally realizes the murder figuratively perpetrated by Victor in turning his back on it (1987: 87). Victor himself expresses this in words that evoke the monster as his double: "I considered the being whom I had cast among mankind...nearly in the light of my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to me" (51). Moreover, Victor repeatedly acknowledges his

own crime as one that has done violence to domestic ties: "the evil influence, the Angel of destruction, [] asserted omnipotent sway over me from the moment I turned my reluctant steps from my father's door" (25). He goes so far as designating domestic peace as the condition of public peace and stability: "if no man allowed any pursuit whatsoever to interfere with the tranquility of his domestic affections, Greece had not been enslaved...and Peru had not been destroyed" (34). Poovey maintains that Mary "transforms Percy's version of the Romantic aesthetic in such a way as to create for herself a nonassertive, and hence, acceptable voice" by adopting that aspect of Percy's aesthetics which treats art as an arena for relationships in her valorization of the domestic ideal of bourgeois society, which we have come to identify as the basis of Victorian ideology (1987: 92-93). This enables her to make a compromise between her desire for artistic achievement and her need to conform to the conventional norm of "proper feminine identity and proper feminine self-assertion" (Poovey, 1987: 93). Her 1831 introduction, penned also to answer the question, "so very frequently asked me— 'How I, then a young girl, came to think of and dilate upon so very hideous an idea?'" is a consolidation of that compromise.

In a way Victor's drama can be seen as a strategy of displacement that casts the autobiographical urge of the female artist as what Barbara Johnson terms "the *central* transgression" in the novel: autobiography involves the desire to create one's own image in words; likewise, Victor's project is prompted by a desire to create a being in his own image (1987: 58). According to Barbara Johnson, one of the crucially autobiographic elements in the novel is "the ambivalence of motherhood" (1987: 62) reflected by its association with death and monstrosity. Another central autobiographical motif, according to Johnson, is built up around the notion of the monstrosity involved in artistic creation. Shelley expressed the analogy between her own authoring of *Frankenstein* and Victor's creation of the monster not only by applying the epithet "hideous," used throughout the novel to qualify the monster, to the novel itself in her introduction, but also by describing the inspiration that gave her the germ of the story "in almost exactly the same words as Victor's discovery of the principle of life: 'Swift as light and as cheering was the idea that broke in upon me,' writes Mary in her introduction, while Frankenstein says: 'From the midst of this darkness a sudden light broke in upon me'" (Johnson, 1987: 62). Another concrete evidence for Shelley's identification with Victor is that she twice uses the word "artist" to qualify "the pale student of unhallowed arts" (Johnson, 1987: 63): "His success would terrify the artist," she writes in the introduction when describing the reverie that inspired the composition of the story. Victor himself describes his effort in the process of manufacturing the creature using the same analogy: "I appeared rather like one doomed by

slavery to toil in the mines, or any other unwholesome trade than an artist occupied by his favorite employment" (34). Autobiography emerges in the analogy between scientist and artist and the parallel analogy between male "motherhood" (of Victor) and female artisthood (of Shelley) as revealing the monstrosity of the ego, or selfhood.

Of course, monstrosity becomes doubly paradigmatic for the female artist/autobiographer in that human identity has always been couched within the terms of masculinity. Artistic creation is obliquely presented in the novel as monstrous irrespective of gender. How much more monstrous, by implication, would female artistic creation be within the frame of patriarchal culture? I would suggest that Shelley's book can in a sense be seen as a parody of masculine creation in a chain of parody: "Frankenstein 'is' a demonic parody (or extension) of Milton's God" (Oates, 1987: 69). Milton inadvertantly parodied the Judeo-Christian myth of creation in *Paradise Lost* because he subjected it to rational debate (Baldick, 1987: 41). Shelley in turn parodies *Paradise Lost* parodying the story of Genesis. Both in this last sense and in a wider sense *Frankenstein* parodies male authorship in that as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, it is only ostensibly a masculine book (1979: 232). In fact it hides female desire and anxiety within its folds of masculine desire and anxiety in addition to presenting its issues in terms that question the assumptions of the dominant culture and the institutions which form the basis of society such as the family and the law. The law offers only a travesty of justice in the trial of Justine, the innocent and "just" girl sacrified to its demand that someone, anyone must be punished for a crime.

The family as the spring of virtue ironically reveals itself as psychologically and symbolically based on incest. Betrothed to his adopted sister, whom he calls "my more than sister" (17), Victor has always been urged by his family to repeat the half-incestuous union of his parents: Caroline Beaufort was the daughter of one of Alfonse Frankenstein's closest friends, a well-to-do merchant who went bankrupt and died after a period of destitution. Frankenstein, who was old enough to be Caroline's father, saved the young orphan from poverty, became her guardian and after a while married her. In addition to allowing the moral hypocrisy implicit in such marriages, the family reveals itself to be blatantly inadequate in giving the kind of happiness and satisfaction that initially "virtuous" and ambitious men like Victor and Walton crave for, hence in preventing their transgression against itself. The contradiction at the root of bourgeois ideology is in this sense two-fold: 1) The family, providing a virtuous beginning in life, does not guarantee future happiness although the domestic ideology assumes that it would. 2) Virtue means suppression of desire and individuality for the sake of communal order; yet the domestic ideology

valorizes ambition for men in the public sphere as long as it serves the vested interests of the establishment.

Frankenstein is an ostensibly masculine book in the sense that Victor's discourse as the most dominating one voices two apparently conflicting ideals, both of which are fundamentally masculine in character, while the narrative itself voices the repression and inevitable return of the feminine. Ambition, essentially in conflict with the domestic ideal, *is* the driving force of bourgeois/capitalistic society based on accumulation of wealth, knowledge and power. The domestic ideal, in turn, basically serves to confine ambition within the limits that guarantee the "peaceful" maintenance of the established order, founded on what Lacan terms the symbolic order, or the Law of the Father. However, the violent exclusion of the monster from society disrupts the illusion of order Victor needs to prolong by prompting the monster's violence against it. In Lacanian terms, this signals the potential disruption of the symbolic and infuses the text with the dangerous anarchy of the imaginary suppressed by the Law of the Father. The monster learns the language of the symbolic, and becomes highly adept in using it but he is never accepted into human society, hence into the symbolic. He therefore remains, symbolically, in the solipsistic realm of the imaginary. In this sense Victor's irrational rejection of the monster can be seen as figuring a denial of the pre-Oedipal, imaginary aspect of his own psyche repressed in the Oedipal phase through initiation into language, which is the primary embodiment of the Law of the Father. According to Paul Sherwin, "the novel's catastrophic model functions in a way strikingly similar to the Freudian psychic apparatus...there is the drive's excess;...there is the boundless anxiety occasioned by the proliferation of repressed desire...More telling, the catastrophic model is an almost exact duplicate of the oedipal scenario" (1987: 29). In a Freudian-Lacanian frame of reference, the destruction of Victor's beloved ones by the monster, especially of the climactic murder of Elizabeth, can be interpreted as the threat of castration being symbolically carried out by an agent that is at once a figure for desire—repressed psychic material externalized in an uncontrollable, groteque body. Because what is repressed through entry into the symbolic is uninhibited enjoyment and unity with the maternal body, the repressed is the feminine principle in culture and the feminine aspect of the masculine psyche. The grotesque body of the monster embodies in this sense the devalued and hated feminine element in Victor's psyche while his murders figure the violent revenge of the violently rejected feminine in culture.

Another element that makes the novel an ostensibly masculine work is the fact that its main characters are all male and that its protagonist discursively represents the dominant, masculine ethos of Western civilization: the faith in human progress and perfectibility based on rational

appropriation of nature. Furthermore, not only Victor as the voice of this ethos, but also his creature as its innocent victim uses a discourse marked by masculine rationality. Indeed, it is ironically the monster's arguments that are truly rational and fully consistent but not Victor's. Victor's speech is full of rationalizations that are almost always far from convincing. The following vital questions are all left without an answer that is either rational or reflecting the truth: Why did he abandon his creature? (his answer is that he found him hediously ugly); why did he not tell the truth at any stage of the trial of Justine? (his answer is that he "knew" noone would believe him); why did he marry Elizabeth despite the monster's threat, "I shall be with you on your wedding-night"? (his answer is that he thought the monster would kill him and not Elizabeth, and that he would prefer death to losing Elizabeth).

The novel's subversion of the ideal of empowered masculine selfhood finds its consummation in the fact that Victor, in contrast to his creature, represents only an abherrant rationality that disguises an unwholesome sensibility rejected by some writers of sensibility such as Ann Radcliffe, who in her *Udolpho* created a heroine brought up by her father always to resist the swooning impulse coming from within her, and instead to think and act rationally. Thus not only the failure of his humantarian project of ultimately eradicating death (he drops the project at its very beginning by abandoning his creature), but his failure to act in each critical situation requiring a rational, sound judgement together with the strength to carry out the imperatives of that judgment represents the ultimate failure of masculinity in the narrative. The monster, too, represents femininity and the sentimental tradition in his effusions of feeling and heart-rending eloquence. However Victor's sensibility is often on the side of the sickly and the unconscious. As becomes characteristic of him, he seeks oblivion in sleep or unconsciousness the moment he animates the monster (Oates, 1987: 78). All of his traumatic reactions point in this sense at death wish, which seeks the total resolution of all the tension of living. For instance, after the murder of Clerval, he "lay for two months on the point of death" (130); and when he sees Elizabeth lying dead on the bed, he "fell senseless on the ground" (144). Indeed, utterly unable to shoulder the responsibility of "creatorhood," he comes to trade life by sleep: "it was during sleep alone that I could taste joy. O blessed sleep! often, when most miserable, I sank to repose" (151). By contrast, all of the monster's initial actions and reactions to the world reveal a healthy, positive organism possessing the primal and hence immaculate innocence of Adam and Eve when they first enter the scene of their own creation. He describes to Victor the moment he first saw the moon: "I started up and beheld a radiant form rise from among the trees. I gazed with a kind of wonder" (71). As Behrendt points out, the monster

> [represents] the values and sensibilities typically assigned to women during the Romantic period...including an instinctive responsiveness to Nature, the impulse toward emotional human bonding (especially apparent in the de Lacey episode), and an experiential rather than an abstract empirical way of 'knowing'—all of which are the heritage of eighteenth-century sentimentalism. (1998: 141).

Behrendt further argues that we can even discern in the monster a reflection of "the history of the woman artist during the Romantic period-and during much of the history of Western culture," and that in this sense the monster represents the "ongoing radical marginalization of the unconventional" (1998: 145). The monster's sense of having no history is a type of the condition of the woman artist: "all my past life was [] a blot, a blind vacancy in which I distinguished nothing" (86).

The dramatic marginalization of the female characters in the novel, which reflects the social alienation that is the source of the woman artist's marginalization, can be seen as a silent dialogic comment on the cultural valorization of masculinity, whose first attribute is activity in hierarchical opposition to feminine passivity. However, in fact, as Levine describes him, Victor is ironically a passive hero from the moment of his animation of the monster—indeed from the beginning. Let us recall his words describing his first day at Ingolstadt University: "Chance—or rather the evil influence, the Angel of Destruction, [] asserted omnipotent sway over me from the moment I turned my reluctant steps from my father's door" (25). His tendency to experience his choices as the dictate of fate reaches a climax in his formulation of his pursuit of the monster as the result of a "mechanical impulse of some power of which I was unconscious" (152). However, "The passive hero [] is not neutral but committed to the ideals—the prudence and superiority—of civilized society" (Levine, 1981: 34).

According to Mary Thornburg, Victor is the typical sentimental hero of the "sentimental/Gothic myth," which arose in the eighteenth-century as part of the middle-class ideology inscribed in literature (1987: 2-6). Familial values as constructed around a capitalistic socio-economic order where inheritance of wealth became the major means of the reproduction of the system gained an unprecedented prominence in the early nineteenth century. The family being based on sexual difference, the determining values of bourgeois society, hence of the sentimental/Gothic myth are generated on the basis of gender differentiation. The conscious, sentimental aspect of the myth valorizes masculinity, yet warns against its excessiveness; "it idealizes but resists tamed masculinity, and refuses even to admit the existence of

feminine traits...in men" (Thornburg, 1987: 35). *Frankenstein* embodies all these contradictions: it valorizes the kind of masculinity Victor and Walton represent, and warns against the "violence, willfulness, sexual passion, gross physicality" bodied forth by the monster (Thornburg, 1987: 8). The monster represents the excessively masculine, Gothic elements of the myth, which are always in direct conflict with its sentimental, domesticating aspect (Thornburg, 1987: 77). However,

> While the Gothic elements are rejected by the sentimental tradition, whose purpose is to reflect and reinforce the rationality, morality and controlled emotion of its culture..; the Gothic does not reject the sentimental. The Gothic side of the myth represents an unconscious acknowledgement of the potency of these rejected elements, an unconscious need within the culture to deal with reality in its entirety, not merely with those parts of it that are consciously safe and acceptable (Thornburg, 1987:4).

Victor's rejection of the monster is to be seen from this angle as a rejection of the Gothic by the sentimental, of those elements in his own psyche which he must suppress and project onto another because they are morally unacceptable, despicable and fearsome (Thornburg, 1987: 6; 99). Furthermore, the novel idealizes the tamed masculinity of Clerval, but resists it by not giving him prominence in the narrative although it is Clerval who, among the male characters, represents most unequivocally the domestic ideal as a refined, temperate and virtuous middle-class gentleman functioning docilely in society. Compared with Clerval, Victor is a trouble-maker, a potential anarchist who undermines the natural order of life, reproduction and death, which ensures the normality of social order.

Walton is a combination of the traits of Victor and Clerval: he represents the Promethean impulse domesticated in the end, an image of Victor gained into society (Poovey, 1987: 94). If Victor is his bad angel, Mrs. Saville, to whom he addresses his epistolary journal, is his good angel, whose feminine influence seems to play an ambivalent part in calling him back from his potentially deadly undertaking of reaching the farthest point of the earth. For it is the same Walton who says, "If we are lost, my mad schemes are the cause. And what, Margaret, will be the state of your mind...Oh! My beloved sister, the sickening failing of your heart-felt expectations is, in prospect, more terrible to me than my own death," and the following: "I have consented to return...my hopes are blasted by cowardice and indecision: I come back ignorant and disappointed" (158; 160). Walton, then, is a potentially dangerous version of masculinity feminized—the

Romantic urge for self-assertion softened into consideration for others. Behrendt sees Mrs. Saville's role within Walton's narrative as similar to that of Dorothy in Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," where Wordsworth assigns to his sister the passive role of preserver of his own active image, which he thereby projects into the future (1998: 133). However, it seems possible to discern in Walton's sister a more "active" influence that is aided by Victor's cautionary tale and his tragic end: in his second letter to his sister, Walton writes, "A youth passed in solitude, my best years spent under your gentle and feminine fosterage, has so refined the groundwork of my character..." (5). Hence Mrs. Saville, the apparently silent and invisible auditor of Walton's story, emerges as playing a considerable part in shaping the ultimate tenor of the novel's ending. By contrast, although Victor's mother and Elizabeth also represent the domestic ideal set against the Promethean/ Faustian impulse, they are ghost-like and mute.

In the conflict between Promethean aspiration and bourgeois domesticity Victor becomes an embodiment of the entrapment to which society subjects the individual. The tragic aspect of his story lies in its acknowledgement of the necessity to remain within the boundaries, or else become subject to the hellish contradictions of civilized order in the face of all desire for transcendence: "like the archangel who aspired to omnipotence, I am chained in an eternal hell" (157). Although an anti-Promethean myth in this sense, *Frankenstein* also presents as sublime the Promethean impulse in man, which is behind all scientific, technological progress, which in turn is the foundation of modern Western civilization. Moreover, the novel illustrates that the Promethean spirit always carries within it the Faustian one. As already illustrated, the Faustian element in Frankenstein's project is all too real to be screened by the altruistic motive in his search for the ultimate principle of life that might one day end human mortality, "that most irreparable evil" (24). The potential evil involved in such a project reveals the monstrosity of civilized man that would know no bounds for its thirst for knowledge and will to power. Destructiveness is an attribute of civilized man because he has the technological *means* for destruction. This seems to be *the* paradox of civilization. I would suggest that *Frankenstein* is essentially about this paradox, which is at the heart of the scientific/ technological society's dilemma in an age when the very categories of "nature" and "civilization" had already begun to be highly problematized.

Seen in this light, the framing problematic of the novel becomes the opposition between nature and civilization —an opposition that assumes increasing vitality in the concentrically related narratives of Walton, Victor and the monster as the text moves from Walton's to the monster's. Walton sees his journey to the pole to discover the secret of the magnet, among other

things, as an undertaking that would confer "inestimable benefit...on all mankind," should he succeed (2). Although shortly after writing this to his sister his language, like Victor's later on, reveals his ultimate motive to be the attainment of "glory," it is, of course, no ordinary fame he seeks, but a recognition of heroic transcendence that presupposes the antithetical relation of nature to civilization: "One man's life or death were but a small price to pay for the acquirement of the knowledge which I sought for the dominion I should acquire and transmit over the elemental foes of our race" (11). The primal struggle against nature formulated thus by Walton finds in Victor's narrative an expression that is far more radically concerned with knowledge-the forbidden fruit: "my enquiries were directed at the metaphysical, or in its highest sense, the physical secrets of the world" (19).

The monster's position within the dualism of nature/civilization is liminal and thus problematic in the most fundamental sense. He is the "problematic body" that is neither natural nor civilized, yet at the same time both (McLane, 1996: 959). He is created in human shape but is not born. He learns human language, yet he is not admitted into human society, initiation into which requires belonging to a family and a nation, or race. As McLane observes, acquiring a European language, and even considerable linguistic and rhetorical skill shown as a result of literary acquirement does not suffice for the monster to achieve human status. The monster constitutes thus an anthropological problem that unsettles the notion of humanness and casts the very category under critique (McLane, 1996: 963). He is at once an example of the discursive construction of human identity and an "aberrant signifier" which means so many conflicting and incomplete things that he never finds a place within a more or less stable set of signifying relations (McLane, 1996: 961). McLane points out that the relevant set of signifiers in defining humanness in the novel center around Europeanness (1996: 964). Walton significantly formulates the defining contrast between the monster and Victor as one of European versus non-European appearance: "He was not as the other traveller seemed to be, a savage inhabitant of some undiscovered island, but an European" (9). Human identity is thus narrowed down to Europeanness, which is implicitly presented by Walton and Victor as the criterion of civilization itself.

The novel offers a subversion of the definition and the valorization of civilization in the monster's relation to it. He tells Victor that he was appalled by the inhumanity/monstrosity of humanity when he read about the violence and injustice human beings and nations inflict on each other in Volney's *Ruins:* "For a long time I could not conceive how one man could go forth to murder his fellow, or even why there were laws and governments; but when I heard details of vice and bloodshed, my wonder

ceased, and I turned away with disgust and loathing" (84). Discursively, then, the monster holds a mirror to mankind to show its own barbarity as an alien newly acquainted with the horrors of civilization. His outcry against the injustice inflicted on him is a passionate voicing of the discontents of civilization. His violence, on the other hand, is only an answer to the violence done to him by humanity, and his physical deformity a specular image of the moral deformity of civilization itself.

From the vantage of Rousseauean Romanticism, the monster can be seen as a specimen of natural man originally uncorrupted by the conventions of civilization (O'Rourke, 1989: 543). Victor, by contrast, embodies the essential corruption of highly civilized man, who uses his mind and knowledge to manipulate nature and abuses rationality in order to justify his transgressions against nature and humanity. Paul Cantor argues that seen from this angle, the story would "show how civilization currupts an essentially benevolent being into a demon" (qtd in O'Rourke, 1989: 543). According to Judith Weissman, however, Shelley was "a better reader of Rousseau, one who realized that 'natural man is neither good nor bad' (qtd. in O'Rourke, 1989: 543). Perhaps a far more relevant connection with Rousseau is surprisingly a personal one: Shelley was acquainted with the fact that Rousseau abandoned his five children by a certain woman to the Parisian Founding Hospital. In an essay on Rousseau for an encyclopedia of French authors, she wrote indignantly about this: "He followed their [young men of rank and fortune] criminal example...Five of his children were [] sent to a receptacle where few survive; and those who do go through life are brutified by their situation, or depressed by the burden,..that they have not inherited the commonest right of humanity, a parent's care." One of the crucial lessons she deduced from this outrageous instance of irresponsibility is "that a father is not to be trusted for natural instincts towards his offspring" (qtd. in O'Rourke, 1989: 545-46). She even imagined that had he kept his children, they might have played a part in "forestall[ing] the excesses of the Revolution their father had inspired" (O'Rourke, 1989: 546).

Taking parental affection as the *sine qua non* of the formation of a healthy individual, Shelley generalizes affection as the distinguishing characteristic of man. Affection occupies a central position in Rousseau's primitivist scheme as well: in a precivilized state the human animal is distinguished from the rest of the animal world by the instincts of self-preservation and compassion. As O'Rourke points out, both traits can be observed in the monster in his so-called precivilized state—before he encounters human violence (1989: 549). His actions not only aim at survival, but are also prompted by sympathy for others. He stops eating from the de Laceys' food supply when he discovers that they are very poor; he even

actively contributes to their well-being by cutting wood from the forest nightly and bringing it to their yard for them to burn after seeing that Felix does this every day. By writing that "The most characteristic part of man's nature is his affections" (Shelley qtd. in O'Rourke, 1989: 548), and by exemplifying this in her precivilized human creature, Shelley "establishes a continuity between the state of nature and the state of civilization that is characteristic of Rousseauean Romanticism" (O'Rourke, 1989: 548-49). By the same token, she rejects her mother's acceptance of the classic Enlightenment premise that the distinguishing characteristic of human nature is innate reason (O'Rourke, 1989: 548).

An important problem remains, however, as to how the monster, civilized by the perfect example of the de Laceys, becomes barbarous. O'Rourke explains this by recourse to Rousseau's distinction between *amour de soi-meme* and *amour-propre.* The former is an attribute of natural man serving the purpose of self-preservation, whereas the latter is "a purely relative and factitious feeling, which arises in the state of society, leads each individual to make more of himself than any other, [and] causes all the mutual damage men inflict one on another" (1989: 550). It is the injury done to his *amour-propre,* claims O'Rourke, that instigates the monster to wreak vengeance on his creator. O'Rourke does not specifically account for how the monster comes to acquire that feeling but the apparent answer must be, that he imbibed it from his reading—chiefly of *Paradise Lost,* as a result of which he emphatically identifies himself with the pride-injured Satan—and from the conversations of the de Lacey family (mainly of Felix's instruction of Safie) as he had no other social experience or intercourse.

However, seeing the monster's violent revolt against man purely as a result of his injured *amour-propre* would amount to unequivocally locating his sense of self within a frame of human identity. This might somehow simplify what I have called his liminal situation, which entails a radical yet paradoxically fluid division between the social and pre-social states he simultaneously entertains. As Botting points out, the monster's position "manifests the disjunction of imaginary and symbolic orders" (1991: 15). In the imaginary state, the child sees his own image as an object among others. The monster encountering his own image in a pool for the first time enacts this radical gap between image and self-identity, which in fact never totally disappears from the human psyche: "At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification" (80). The self-image of the monster constitutes thus an otherness that is insurmountable. This in turn causes an unbridgeable gap between the monster's "imaginary

recognition of himself, a sutured and fragmented bodily collage, and his subjectivity, adopted in the symbolic order" (Botting, 1991: 15). The otherness of the monster's body in relation to his discursively constructed subjectivity figures also the other of human subjectivity particularized in Victor's relationship to him: it is the unnameable and dangerous other of his own self that Victor flees from the moment of the monster's inception.

Constructed within the symbolic order and in relation to the otherness of woman, human identity requires the repression of femininity in society and culture. In this sense, the violence of the monster "marks the return of a repressed 'female principle'" necessary for the humanization of civilization (Botting, 1991: 48). Within a frame of reference that locates the monstrous ego of the self-absorbed Romantic creator at the center of the novel, the monster pleading for love and sympathy can be seen as inviting his creator to negative capability, to a sympathy whose first condition is an acceptance of the otherness of another being: "How can I move thee?..I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity; but am I not alone, miserably alone?" (69). However, seeing perversely nothing but otherness in the monster, Victor is unable to recognize his common humanity. As a result Victor fails to become humanized because he rejects the awareness sympathy brings about. Gilbert and Gubar see the monster's desire for a mate as a "search for a maternal, female principle" that might compensate to some degree his rejection by a world of fathers (1979: 243). Rosi Jackson suggests that Frankenstein offers a "myth for women" in that the monster "returns to remind a narrowly masculine and secular ideology of what has been repressed: the mother, the body, the spirit, love" (qtd. in Botting, 1991: 103).

The most striking evidence for the monster's metaphorical function as repressed femininity is the dream Victor has on the night of the monster's animation (Botting, 1991: 111). Elizabeth, an embodiment of perfect femininity, becomes ghost-like in Victor's arms and turns into his dead mother, the principal giver of love and protection in Victor's and his family's life. The monster's coming into being without being born of woman marks thus the return of femininity in Victor's subconscious representing the collective subconscious of his male-dominated culture. That the feminine principle returns in the shape of death can be interpreted, I think, as revealing the "deadly" extent of this repression: the dream signals no healing together of the masculine and feminine principles, no catharsis. What some critics see as the schizophrenic division of Victor's psyche, symbolically embodied by the split between Victor and his creature, remains irreparable within the terms of the dream, and is gradually extended to the whole novel in the death of all of Victor's beloved ones.

Levine writes that in *Frankenstein* "The devil and the angel of the morality play are replaced by a modern pre-Freudian psychology that removes the moral issue from the metaphysical context—the traditional concepts of good and evil—and places it within the self. Morality is...replaced by schizophrenia" (1998: 34). That there is no possibility for scizophrenic division to heal in the novel is due to the fact that "The feminine principle is passive, weak, and in fact ineffectual, despite the role assigned to it of beneficient influence upon or control over the masculine principle" (Thornburg, 1987: 68). The other side of the coin is that because masculinity is portrayed as too violent and destructive for a healthy fusion with femininity, "the endeavor of the monstrous part of the divided personality to achieve reintegration with Victor's conscious self fails (Thornburg, 1987: 87). Indeed, the most crucial sign of this failure is the monster's utter inability to evoke any lasting sympathy and understanding in his creator. As Thornburg observes, "Victor is never fully aware of the monster's meaning or of the monster's relation to his own identity. That awareness is left...to the monster" (1987: 7). So much so, that whereas Victor becomes more and more inhuman in his blind refusal to recognize the monster's, hence his own situation, the monster becomes more and more human in his achievement of increased understanding of human, hence of his own nature (Oates, 1987: 69). After Victor dies, he appeals to Walton's sense of justice: "You, who call Frankenstein your friend, seem to have a knowledge of my crimes and his misfortunes. But...while I destroyed his hopes, I did not satisfy my own desires...You hate me; but your abhorrence cannot equal that with which I regard myself (165). The fact that the final word in the novel is reserved for the monster erases to some extent the "blind vacancy" created by the failure of conscience enacted by Victor.

Such blindness is generically explicable to some degree in terms of the dynamics of the Gothic tending to evoke irrational response rather than rational understanding in both characters and the reader. Although *Frankenstein* is a serious and sophisticated example of the Gothic, and not simply a ghost story contrived to frighten the reader as Shelley describes it in her introduction, it conforms in a sense to the traditional Gothic format of the opposition between a villain utterly devoid of sympathy and kindness and an innocent victim. From such an angle Victor becomes the villain and the monster the innocent victim, and this reflects more truthfully the deeper meaning of the novel. However, of course, it is more correct to see that Victor as well as the monster are "both rational and irrational, victim and victimizer, innocent and evil" (Levine, 1981: 25). Levine places *Frankenstein* within a tradition of nineteenth-century literary realism, which based itself on the replacement of the transcendent realm of God and the spirit by the bourgeois household (1998: 33). In view of Thornburg's

analysis already discussed it can be claimed that the Gothic itself is essentially realistic in the sense that it allows the free play of the "shadow", the secular expression of the darker forces of human nature, while ultimately remaining within the confines of bourgeois ideology. What, in my view, makes *Frankenstein's* realism partial, or tentative, is the fact that the bourgeois home as the site of the ideal is created only discursively, and not through dramatic animation, or concrete detail. The home remains a lifeless entity waiting to be infused with life-precisely an ideal and not a reality at all.

It seems that *Frankenstein* more aptly falls into the category of fiction termed the modern fantastic by Rosemary Jackson: *"Frankenstein* is the first of many fantasies re-deploying a faustian tale on a fully *human* level...the other is no longer designated as supernatural, but is an externalization of part of the self (1981: 55). In a secularized society, instead of a transcendent other such as God one is confronted by one's own fragmented self as other. In such a world emptied of spiritual fullness or a unifying principle, the other of the self manifests itself in monstrous shape—"a mere travesty, parody, horror" (Jackson, 1981: 102). In the fantastic fiction from *Frankenstein* onwards we find a recognition of "the impotence of the mind to transcend matter" (Jackson, 1981: 102). When the subject recognizes the impossibility of transcending matter, it encounters the gap between self and spirit. It is this insurmountable gap that is depicted as the monstrous condition of the protagonist in *Frankenstein,* significantly externalized by him as his own creation. Hence the artist/scientist's relation to his work is depicted in terms of a radical alienation of the subject from himself and the consequent splitting of his self-identity (Jackson, 1981: 59). According to Jackson, fantasies of dualism "represent dissatisfaction with a cultural order which deflects and defeats desire," yet do not reinstate in its stead a transcendent world where unity of self is possible (1981: 180).

In Victor's relationship to his creature the self is revealed as other—a situation that entails "a radical open-endedness of being" (Bersani qtd. in Jackson, 1981: 100). This in turn signals a radical open-endedness of meaning. In Levine's words, "The novel has achieved its special place in modern consciousness through its extraordinary resistance to simple resolutions and its almost inexhaustable possibilities of signification" (1998: 36). On a fundamental level, the motif of double in *Frankenstein* signifies the dualism of mind and body, which is a form of cultural schizophrenia (Levine, 1998: 36). Although the antithetical terms of diverse but related dualisms, Victor and the monster unite in the sense that both "imply resistance to the established order" (Levine, 1998: 31). Both characters function to interrogate the origin and validity of the established truths of the

dominant culture. For instance, Victor's idealizing description of his earlier family life turns into a critique of the institution of family in the subtext of the novel, which, as we have noted, reveals the contradictions inherent in middle-class notions of virtue and in the gender ideology that constitutes the basis of the family. The monster's share in this interrogation is of course much more forceful, not only because he is the victim of human prejudice and injustice, but also because of his radical denial of human law arising from his radical exclusion from society.

The monster fundamentally enacts the denaturalization of language in his initiation into human language from outside the symbolic and in his discursive questioning of human institutions and conventions, which are all founded upon the authority of language. The norms of gender identity as the condition of the Law of the Father, which *is* the symbolic order incarnated by language in the Lacanian scheme, are also destabilized in the problematic body of the monster and in the complex symbolic configurations and prismatic shifting of gender roles created mainly in intertextual relationship with *Paradise Lost.* The self is thus revealed to be created through linguistic and cultural practices, and to be essentially political because constructed within an interaction of intricate power structures. The denaturalization of language and of the processes of gender differentiation entails in turn subversion of the very foundations of the symbolic order based on an asymmetric definition of gender identity ensured by the authority of the Father invested in language. Thus, the monster as Gothic agent implies a violence directed at the cultural order itself. Jackson writes that, "As Gothic undergoes transformations through the work of Ann Radcliffe, M. G. Lewis, Mary Shelley and Charles Maturin, it develops into a literary form capable of more radical interrogation of social contradictions, no longer simply making up for a society's lacks" (1981: 97). The subversion of the symbolic suggested by the technological and domestic violence caused by Frankenstein is also implied in the grotesque form of the monster as a "parody of the human longing for the more than human" (Jackson, 1981: 101). As such, *Frankenstein* embodies a radical critique of the Romantic myth of the self based upon the valorization of notions of transcendence and divine creation.

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