Alman Dili ve Edebiyatı Dergisi
Studien zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur
**SDSL** 2024, 51 : 24–36
DOI: 10.26650/sdsl2023-1446598

Research Article

# Let the Bodies Hit the Floor: a Comparison of Corporal Morphology in Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Buchner's *Lenz* (1836)

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## ABSTRACT

This article compares representations of corporal morphology in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) with Georg Büchner's *Lenz* (1836). Focusing on anecdotes where corpses are the focus reveals a diverging literary style in representing the emerging science of morphology, or the study of the shape and form of natural objects. When read through Immanuel Kant's 'Critique of Teleological Judgment' from his *Critique of Judgement* and Johan Wolfgang von Goethe's essay 'On Morphology', I argue that Shelley's and Büchner's works contain the seeds of critique of two very different effects of idealism, teleology, and the purposiveness of nature. Whereas idealist scientists and doctors proposed a distance between the observer and the object of study, in Kant's words to perceive and act 'as if' the object has a purpose from a human-centered point of view, Goethe suggested a study of the morphology of living objects, which simultaneously affects the object and observer. A comparative methodology, where the focus is short anecdotes, follows close reading methods proposed by Erich Auerbach, Stephen Greenblatt, and Catherine Gallagher. The scenes where corpses are highlighted in Büchner's *Lenz* and Merry Shelley's *Frankenstein* reveals extreme examples of neutral descriptions of an 'object' and the observer's intimate link with that which is observed. The goal of objectivity developing in eighteenth century scientific practices, when read through the chiastic structure of these two literary works-animation and failed animation of a material body-reveals unique critiques of Enlightenment Idealism: the failure of success in *Frankenstein*, and the success of failure in *Lenz*.

**Keywords:** Georg Büchner, Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, *Lenz*, comparative literature

**Submitted** : 03.03.2024
**Accepted** : 16.04.2024

## 1. Shaping the Dead

Using yet moving beyond the Auerbachian tradition of unpacking an anecdote—e.g., 'Odysseus' Scar' in Homer's *Odyssey* and 'The Brown Stocking' in Virginia Woolf's *To the Light House*—this article compares representations of corporeal morphology in Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein; Or, a Modern Prometheus* (1818) and Georg Büchner's unfinished novella *Lenz* (1836). Both narratives present and critique Enlightenment intellectuals—the fictional Victor Frankenstein and historical figure Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz—who travel and work in Germanic lands, desire recognition of their creations from their peers, and eventually succumb to madness. The anecdotes where corpses play a central role, however, show a diverging literary style in representing the emerging science of morphology, or the study of the form of natural objects.

The first anecdote appears in chapter seven of *Frankenstein*, where the reader encounters a description of Victor Frankenstein's long-desired goal, which was to transform an inanimate object into a living thing:

> It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld my man completed; with an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected instruments of life around me that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning, the rain pattered dismally against the window panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open. It breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs. (Shelley, 2008, p. 118)

The dreary night appears as a culmination of two years of work, countless years of study in central Germany, and leads to a moment of transformation: the creature is alive, having received "a spark of being". Immediately after this darkly ecstatic scene, Victor calls his creation "beautiful" (Shelley, 2008, p. 118). However, even before the creature receives "the spark", the narrator describes the "lifeless" thing as already in the shape of a "man". This detail has remained unnoticed in criticism of the novel, possibly because setting and emotion indicators overwhelm the description of the shape of the thing. Setting terms such as 'night', 'November', 'rain', 'instruments', and 'nearly burnt-out candle' are contrasted with emotive terms of 'dreary', 'agony', and 'dismal'. In addition to the setting, however, two men are presented in this short scene; but they are not both men. The shape of the creation is called 'man' and the doctor Victor Frankenstein is a 'man', yet these two men do not live up to, or understand, the purpose their shape or the shape of their purpose.

Comparing this passage with an anecdote of a dead body from Büchner's *Lenz* (1836)[1], the reader will certainly see threads that lead to larger critiques of teleology and idealism occurring in Enlightenment and Romantic representations of science, literature, medicine, and religion occurring at the turn of the nineteenth century. The following anecdote represents a young girl's corpse through lost purposiveness (die Zweckmäßigkeit)—and failed attempt at reanimation, which I argue is important to understanding a difference in English and German, Shelley's and Büchner's scientific and artistic approach to aesthetic representations of morphology:

> He [Lenz] entered the house where the child lay. People were calmly going about their business; they showed him a room, the child lay in a shift on a bed of straw on a wooden table.
>
> Lenz shuddered when he touched the cold limbs and saw the half-open glassy eyes. The child seemed so forsaken and he himself so alone and isolated; he threw himself on the corpse; death terrified him, raw pain shot through him, these features, this quiet face were soon to rot away, he fell to his knees, he prayed with the full misery of despair that God send him a sign and bring the child back to life, he being so weak and wretched; then he burrowed deep into

[1] All English translations, unless noted in the text, will come from Büchner, G. (2004). *Lenz* (R. Sieburth, Trans.). Archipelago Books.

himself and tunneled all his willpower toward a single point and sat there for a long time, rigid. Then he got up and took the child's hand and said loudly and firmly: Arise and walk! (Büchner, 2004, p. 77)

In this passage, the 'half-open' eyes might be the logical comparator to Frankenstein's monster. However, beyond this obvious description, is a more banal detail: the main character Lenz first glides harmlessly and unparticipating through the funeral ritual to his goal: the covered body of "the child". The description of the body of the child is repeated three times in quick succession—the child, the child, the child—until Lenz touches the corpse. This transformation of child-to-corpse represents death as an unaesthetic ugly object that holds its own future in the present moment: the corpse's face will eventually "rot away" (verwesen). Lenz is overcome with religious zeal to conquer death and restore to the girl to life as Jesus restored Lazarus from the dead. He shouts "Arise and walk!" yet fails and the body is buried on the next day. The mourners at the wake, however, move about "indifferent" (gleichgültig) in their duties.

By beginning with these two anecdotes of dead bodies, the reader can see the chiastic structure through comparison: Lenz cannot transform the dead into life, while Frankenstein succeeds in the same endeavor. Indeed, they both present dead objects as having a specific morphology: that of human. What is more, this article argues that a comparative approach to representations of morphology in Romantic literature connects each of these tales with larger uses and critiques of teleology in early nineteenth-century English and German literatures. When read through Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* and Johan Wolfgang von Goethe's essay on 'On Morphology', these two anecdotes contain the seeds of two very different effects of idealism, teleology, and the purposiveness of nature. Whereas Shelley represents Victor Frankenstein at a controlled distance from his object, Büchner represents Lenz as becoming one with the object of observation. The next section presents the historical context of Shelley's and Büchner's literary representations and, thereafter, the development of the science of form (morphology) and its effect on these two unique yet similar works. Comparing Büchner's Lenz with Merry Shelley's Frankenstein death scenes reveals an important difference between neutral descriptions of a thing and stylized or rhetorical description of a thing.

## 2. Situating *Frankenstein* and *Lenz* in Context

Before comparing Frankenstein and Lenz in relation to the topic of morphology, it is useful to situate contemporary literary criticism of these works in context. As two of the most well-known Romantic era prose writings of their respective languages, there is a vast collection of literature on both Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Büchner's *Lenz* separately. However, there are very few comparative studies outside tangential discussions of the literary form of realism and both novels having "no ending" (Coates, 1983, p. 4). Separately, critics have focused on the themes of madness, mental illness, and wandering (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, 1987) as well as post-Kantian representations of the sublime in nature and human perception (Ketterer, 1979; Neuhuher, 2009). There are topical discussions of science fiction, geographical expansion, and colonialism (Reider, 2008), idealism and fantasy literature (Bejan, 2020; Caldwell, 2004), gothic and horror (Gilbert & Gubar, 1984; Prikker-Thorn, 1978; Thornburg, 1984), and Enlightenment science and its forerunner in the Prometheus myth (Mellor, 1989). Critics have also separately explored themes of humanism and automatons (Bejan, 2020; Florin, 1991), the gendering of scientists, authors, and their objects (Gilbert & Gubar, 1984; Jordanova, 1994; Veeder, 1986), along with genre concerns of the novel, novella, or German "Die Erzählung" (telling, tale, story) developing in the early nineteenth century (Kiely, 1972). Bringing these two works together,

to read their representations of morphology through each other, offers a useful practice to elucidate nuances of early nineteenth-century critiques science and literature in the eighteenth-century.

As two well-known works, this article will only briefly mention the authors and narratives to point to the importance of the growing late eighteenth century science of morphology, or the comparator linking these works together. Mary Shelley, daughter of feminist writer and advocate Mary Wollstonecraft and her husband William Godwin, began writing *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* around the age of eighteen while on a tour of Europe with her poet-partner, Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822). While travelling in Switzerland, they lived in Geneva, where the titular character Victor Frankenstein was conceived and his family resided. Prior to her elopement with P. B. Shelley, Mary Shelley's education in arts and sciences came at her father's request, being a jurist and humanist who emphasized ancient classical works, English writers such as Shakespeare, Milton, and other poets (the monster learns about the world through reading Milton's *Paradise Lost*). Though not trained as a medical doctor like Georg Büchner, both Mary and P.B. Shelley shared an interest in the latest scientific discoveries of the time (Mellor, 1987, p. 287).[2]

As a frame tale, Shelley structures *Frankenstein* in four parts: an arctic explorer Robert Walton writes letters to his sister Margaret Saville to begin and end the novel. This frame tale describes the strange and frightening encounter initially with the cold, wet, icy, and violent nature on the ship Archangel, and then Victor Frankenstein as he chases and is eventually killed by his monster. Part One describes the Frankenstein family in Geneva under the patriarchal guidance of Alphonse Frankenstein, young Victor's fascination with natural philosophy, medieval and renaissance alchemists like "Cornelius Agrippa, Albertus Magnus, and Paracelsus, who had so long reigned lords of my imagination", and family tragedies (Shelley, 2008, p. 96)".[3] After abandoning his melancholy reflections following the death of his mother, Victor travels to Ingolstadt to work under M. Krempe and M. Waldman, both professors of natural history and chemistry, respectively. With M. Krempe's 'modern' approach to science and knowledge combined with M. Waldman's knowledge of chemistry, Victor begins his experimentation with life, death, and "natural decay and corruption of the human body" through "analyzing all the minutia of causation as exemplified in the change from life to death, and death to life, until from the midst of this darkness a sudden light broke in upon me" (Shelley, 2008, p. 111). This 'light' is the Promethean fire, or the ability to "bestow animation upon lifeless matter" (p. 111).

This discovery leads to the 'body scene' mentioned in the introduction and the transformation of articulated human body parts into a living 'man'. In contrast to the scene of reanimation, there are six further scenes of de-animation, or death. Two characters die of natural causes and judicial punishment—Victor's mother Caroline dies of scarlet fever, and their servant Justine is condemned for the death of William, though it was the monster's doing. The creature kills four others—Victor's brother William (blamed on Justine), friend Henry Clerval, wife Elizabeth, and Victor himself. Though Victor's death and that of the uncreated 'female' will be discussed in the next section, it is important to notice that the structure of the novel itself is based on intimate deaths, which mirrors Shelley's own biography where she lost her mother soon after childbirth (Brennan, 1989, p. 33).

[2] Mellor counts her husband, P.B. Shelley, as well as Englishmen Humphry Davy (1778-1829) and Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802), and Italian Luigi Galvani (1737-1802) as major influences on Mary Shelley's views on biology, chemistry, mechanics, and medicine that would be the preoccupation of the main character, Victor Frankenstein (p. 90).

[3] Cornelius Agrippa (ca. 1486-1535) was German esoteric philosopher who wrote works on Occult Philosophy; Albertus Magnus (ca. 13th century), a German theologian, natural philosopher, and teacher of Thomas Aquinas; and Paracelsus (ca. 1494-1541), born Theophrastus von Hohenheim, was a radical anti-classicist in medicine and natural philosophy, rejecting inherited knowledge in favor of observation and experimentation.

Thereafter, the reader experiences the man-monster's escape, its own story of survival, and the beginning of its murderous rage against Victor and his family.

As Aeneas reported his epic trials and tribulations to Dido of Carthage in Book two of The Aeneid, part two of *Frankenstein* begins with the creature revealing to Victor its own journey of self-education. It lived in the woods and was educated by observation of innocent cottagers from the shadows. It learns language, love, deceit, and survival, as well as classical works, which "consisted of 'Paradise Lost, a volume of 'Plutarch's Lives', and the 'Sorrows of Werter'" (Shelley, 2008, p. 214). Finally, it learned of its own liminal place outside the hierarchy of nature, a figure of 'gigantic stature' and 'hideous', which led to the eventual decision to become, in its naïve imagination, complete through another being like itself. Part two then follows Victor's vein oscillations between delaying work on a 'female creature', running away, and the monster following him, leaving a pile of bodies in its wake.

As with Mary Shelley's husband, P. B. Shelley, Georg Büchner (1813-1837) would die at a young age. Yet, as a writer of the post-revolutionary period in France and pre-March period (der Vormärz) of German revolutionaries, his reputation as the first modern German poet is celebrated annually with the Georg Büchner Prize, which has been the most important literary prize in Germany since 1923. Büchner was a politically active medical student at universities in Strasbourg and Giessen, where he received his degree in Strasbourg in the spring of 1836 and a PhD from the University of Zürich in the fall of the same year. His thesis was on the nervous system of the Barbe fish (Müller-Sievers, 2003; Nielaba, 2001).

The novella *Lenz* is an unfinished manuscript based on the life of a poet of a previous 'Sturm und Drang' generation, Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz (1751-1792). A contemporary and occasional acquaintance of Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832) and other Sturm und Drang writers, J. M. R. Lenz suffered from a series of debilitating physical and mental ailments, eventually finding refuge with the Alsatian pastor Johann Frederick Oberlin (1740-1826). Oberlin kept detailed notes on the treatment of Lenz between January 20$^{th}$ and February 8$^{th}$, 1778, and after Büchner discovered them, he wrote the following to his parents while in Strasbourg in the fall of 1835, "I have recently come into possession of some notes about a friend of Goethe's, an unfortunate poet named J. M. R. Lenz. He stayed with Goethe and at the same time went insane. I'm thinking of writing an essay for The Deutschen Revue" (Büchner, 1988).

Historical records have preserved letters from Lenz himself, his friends, and doctors, who diagnosed him with numerous social, psychological, and other physical ailments such as mania periodica, weak nerves, melancholy, gout, demon possession, and sin (Dedner et al., 1999; Gersch, 1998). After drawing a self-portrait as a silhouette in 1777, Lenz himself wrote to the well-known Swiss doctor, Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741-1801), to diagnose his illness by reading his silhouette. Lavater was well-known through physiognomy, or the study of the shape of one's external body figure as evidence of specific medical and moral conditions. Lavater, though he did not help Lenz medically except to prescribe "walks in fresh air", and per Lenz' own family and friends was more interested in financial support, included the silhouette from Lenz in his book, *Physiognomischen Fragmenten* (Dedner et al., 1999, p. 23). It is here we can transition to the study of form, shape, and its relation to the science of the morphology of bodies in *Frankenstein* and *Lenz*.

### 3. Adding Morphology to Critiques of late Eighteenth-Century Literature and Science

Morphology, or die Morphologie in German (morph- shape, figure; -ology, the study of) is a term and concept coined by Johan Wolfgang Goethe in his writings on natural sciences, written

first in letters as early as 1790 and published together in 1817.[4] Though Niccolini, Neuhuber, and Gersch mention 'morphology' in their analysis of language differences between Lenz's letters, Oberlin's notebooks, and Büchner's Lenz, they do not focus on the literary representation of corporal morphology. In volume four of twenty-one volumes, Goethe's fragments that introduce morphology attempt to correct generations of what he interprets to be scientific errors of idealism. First in his study of plants, though he mentions this method should work with insects and animals, he praises the recent work of Linneaus, Buffon and Daubenton, Camper, and Sömmering, and discusses the popular opinions of Lavater.[5] This praise, however, is blunted by a critique of their positions: "the observation of a natural body in its parts and as a whole, noting the correspondence and deviations among their nature and activity, we believe such knowledge can only be achieved by separating their parts" (Goethe, 1985, p. 200). Observing and describing a thing's morphology by separating it into its parts (anatomy) does not allow it to be "reconstituted and reanimated" (Goethe, 1985, p. 200). For Goethe, this Enlightenment project—of which he also took part—was possible because of the belief in a form, a specific 'truth,' 'function', or 'end cause' of the thing that experimentation simply confirms through division and destruction.

In contrast to this method of division based on what is dead or inanimate, Goethe's method of observation of morphology focuses on the living organism and the situatedness of a natural object as a complex shape (die Gestalt) in constant change. The historical study of an object's shape, what he called morphology, had simply functioned as a synonym for an "a priori" ideal, immaterial state that the observer already believed to exist. Though the same study could be done with insects and animals, Goethe's observation and experience of plants over time revealed a continual metamorphosis of observable features that are not identical in individual plants. As the observable object changes, "so we [scientist observers] have to keep ourselves as flexible and malleable as possible". For Goethe, this redefinition of morphology requires paying attention to a "higher maxim of an organism" that guides its changing parts (Goethe, 1985, p. 200).

The irony of focusing on Goethe's writings on morphology to compare two works of fiction is not lost in this article. Goethe's own autobiographical essay, *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (Poetry and Truth) (1811), reports his interaction with J. M. R. Lenz in Strasbourg before he, Kaufmann, Herder, Klinger,[6] and other Sturm und Drang poets separated, some of whom moved to Weimar. Goethe sounded the death knell for his contemporary J. M. R. Lenz's reception by writing him out of the 'genius period' of German literary history, calling Lenz "a transient meteor who passed but for a moment over the horizon of German literature and suddenly vanished without leaving any trace behind" (Büchner, 2004, p. 142). Not twenty years later, Büchner reintroduced Lenz to literary history, creating what many call the first modern narrative. Shelley's own inter-textual reference to Goethe's *Werter* as foundational for the monster's education reveals the close relationship between art, science, and human experience in the early eighteenth century. Goethe's writings on morphology echo this similarity, when he wrote of founding this new science, how close art and science are together: "In the course of art, knowledge, and science, one finds several attempts to establish and develop a doctrine which we would like to call morphology" (Goethe, 1985, p. 200).

[4] Translations from Goethe's *Zur Morphologie* are my own.

[5] Scientists of particular interest to Goethe were Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) from Sweden, Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707-1778) from France, Louis-Jean-Marie Daubenton (1716-1800) from France, Petrus Camper (1772-1789) from the Netherlands, Samuel Thomas von Sömmerring (1755-1830) from Germany, and Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741-1801) from Switzerland.

[6] Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), a late eighteenth-century German philosopher influential for Sturm und Drang and Romantic poets; Christoph Kaufmann (1753-1795) was a Swiss philosopher known for creating the term "Sturm und Drang". He was an associate of both Lenz and Goethe in Strasbourg during the 1770s; Friedrich Maximilian Klinger (1752-1831) was German dramatist mentioned by Goethe as similar to Lenz in feeling, natural talent, yet limited historical influence.

In these two fictional characters, Victor Frankenstein and Lenz, and their contemporaries represented in the works of Shelley and Büchner, we can see examples of the two different approaches to art, science and knowledge proposed by Goethe in his morphology. In the anecdotes that started this essay, as well as close attention to details of other bodies in the next section, the reader can see first that Lenz is overwhelmed by feeling, emotion, and attraction to the dead body. The surrounding mourners, however, move about 'indifferent' and detached from the scene. In contrast, Frankenstein begins with a detached study of historical natural philosophy, modern sciences, anatomy, and human body parts until he recognizes a truth about life, death, and the transition between the two. However, he begins his entire investigation with an a priori definition of 'man', a stable thing with a specific morphology that does not change in life or death. Even before it is created, the creation has the shape of man.

This view of detached observation of both the object and one's biased observation based on a teleological judgment is also compatible with Immanuel Kant's 'Critiques of Aesthetic and Teleological Judgements' in his third critique that first appeared in 1790 (Kant, 1987). Kant, after grounding the possibility of aesthetic (sensible) judgments, went beyond the purely sensible to argue that the observer should live 'as if' objects and organisms in nature have a function and purpose that "by analogy relates to human forms of understanding" (Kant, 1987, pp. 260–261). To know an object through teleology, one must assume a function that is given under a determinative concept, even if that purpose can never really be known objectively. However, a growing cultural value toward this very practice of observation, data collection, and discipline to become as objective as possible. Galison and Daston's recent work on the history of 'objectivity' shows the turn of the century as a time of 'the endless work of observation' in a post-Kantian world, with the character Victor Frankenstein represented as "a once noble protagonist who destroy themselves and their loved ones through their addictive passion for science" (Galison & Daston, 2007, p. 47). As this article reveals in the next section, Büchner's critique of this hypothetical 'as if', as well as Shelley's representation of the observer Frankenstein being chased by his own creation, presents a subtle difference in their literary representations of scientific observations of morphology.

Büchner's focus on the indifference (Die Gleichgültigkeit) of nature contrasts sharply to opinions expressed in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* and Goethe's critique of eighteenth-century scientific practices, which from the first page develops momentum down the slippery slope toward teleological judgment. After swaying back and forth between the subjective and objective justifications for a judgment of purpose (Zweck) in nature, Kant states himself that, "Once we have discovered that nature is able to make products that can be thought of only in terms of the concept of final causes, we are then entitled to go further; we may thereupon judge products as belonging to a system of purposes" (Kant, 1987, p. 260). As we will see, this search for an end cause stands in direct contrast to Shelley's and Büchner's own aesthetic theories available to us as a dead child found in the *Lenz* narrative and the living 'man' found in *Frankenstein*. Teleology—that which British scientists saw as essential, Kant saw as valuable (yet never necessary)—Büchner and Shelley move one step further removed—as opposed to Kant's proposal to 'go further'—to deem final causes irrelevant, confining, and even dangerous.

Final causes (die Endursachen), for Büchner, confine the natural world to the limits of human thought, and the 'purposiveness' of a thing cannot be found or portrayed outside of the composition of the thing itself under observation. As Goethe writes, the observer is changed by that which it observes, so much so that Lenz cannot separate himself from the dead body, or all of nature. This

focus on one's inability to define function and purpose of objects leads Büchner and Shelley to offer distinct foci, where Büchner emphasizes descriptive morphology through Lenz and Shelley offers Frankenstein's mistaken assumption of a priori definitions. This distinction between Büchner's and Shelley's representations of shape in nature can also be found in other passages beyond the anecdote of the 'dead body'. But first a closer look at these anecdotes is in order.

## 4. Let the Bodies Hit the Floor

Let us return to the opening scene where Lenz encounters the body of the 'child' through a reading of this anecdote that, using Auerbach's words, "exists somewhere between the ancient anecdote of 'Odyssey's Scar' and the stream of consciousness of Virginia Wolf's 'Brown Stocking'" (Auerbach, 2003, pp. 3–24; 525–554). Ironically, though Auerbach mentions neither Mary Shelley or Georg Büchner in his writings on Western representational strategies, the focus on an enclosed representational fragment from a longer work—an anecdote—is a useful practice. As with G.E. Lessing's description of Laocoön, and the 'pregnant moment' of visual arts that appears differently in the temporality of poetic arts, the well-constructed anecdote offers both foreground and background, allowing the reader to imagine the space of the scene as if the words were dramatic (Wellbery, 1984, p. 123-128). The anecdote also allows for the listener or reader to imagine a temporality of before and after, linking the anecdote to not only the entire work, but also to discourses in which the work is situated to offer "a touch of the real" (Gallaghar & Greenblatt, 2000, p. 20).[7]

The fictional Lenz is described as living in the Alsace region and walking from Oberlin's home in Steintal to the girl's home in Fouday after hearing the young girl had died. Covered in a mourning sack and ashes, Lenz walks directly past the mourning family and friends to experience the body of the girl first hand. As the family, medical healers and pastors, as well as community members went about their mundane business of preparing the girl for burial, the all-but-insane Lenz performed the impossible for eighteenth-century idealists: he engaged the sensual experience of the corpse—touching it while imaging its decomposed state instead of the engaging in the ritual of mourning. For Lenz, the morphology of the body had changed, which raises the question for the reader: is the now-deceased-child an object closer to death, meaninglessness and pure objectification, or does she still possess qualities of life, spirit, and purpose?

For those preparing for the funeral after failed attempts to revive her through medical mysticism and religious prayer, the body of the child still plays a social function; the girl's body is purposive to the rituals of death and must be dealt with properly. The mourner's role is to perform the mundane business that occurs when one experiences a loss: cleaning and clothing the body in decorative dress, laying it on a table with comfortable straw, greeting visitors, telling stories about life, about the afterlife, and the girl's final resting place in heaven. For a time, they live 'as if' the child is alive.

Because the body is engaged in two very diverse ways, the study of morphology becomes helpful in understanding this odd occurrence. Through the funeral ritual, the town's people create an aesthetic object of the girl's body, decorate and frame it by placing the body on a display table in a special room. This decoration of the girl changes the shape of the body: no longer does 'she' (spirit? soul? mind? self?) end with her body. Through the superficial connections of the body with decorative items in the room, the shape of the corpse becomes entwined with everything around her—her

[7] For more on the discussion of mimesis and the anecdote's importance for critical analysis, see chapter one, "The Touch of the Real" and chapter two, "Counter History and the Anecdote" from Gallagher and Greenblatt (2000, p. 20-49; 49-74).

clothes, the straw, the table, the room, the viewers and audience—and transforms into a constructed image of life that alters the very shape of the body. As an artistic composition, the body becomes the focal point of the happenings of the funeral and receives a 'purpose' by remaining closer to the rituals of life than to death. The family has a desire to hold the girl to the promise of her purpose, her function as 'human', though that time has passed.

The corpse, however, immediately strikes Lenz as a corpse and he does not acknowledge the constructed body. The girl's body is spiritless, no longer functional except for Lenz' narcissistic memory of the role she had played in his fantasy. Rather than participate in the ritual of the living, Lenz connects the girl with death and changes the morphology of the girl yet again. The body's parts in relation to the whole become much different to Lenz than from the artistic presentation of those engaged in 'the mundane business' associated with burial. Lenz approaches her aesthetically, sensually, and thus has an immediate thought of death and decomposition.

Andreas Pilger describes Büchner's Lenz as a description of the contradictions inherent in idealism, a time from Winckelmann to the death of Hegel (Pilger, 1995, p. 104). However, Pilger sees Lenz in a conflict not with the trend of idealism, but with his own idealist desire to turn everything real into a functional fantasy. Lenz is caught in a fantasy world where his aesthetic intuitions about the sensible world do not match that which occurs in the world, precipitating his mental disturbances. Taking this point as valid, this article has argued that it is not so much his idealism as his extreme realism that causes Lenz to shudder at experience. The young girl of his fantasy does not get up and walk after vigorous prayers, incantations, or calls for miracles. Her body is no longer spirit filled, no longer has a purpose for Lenz. Whereas the townspeople can veil death through ritual, to give it a purpose in ritual and memory and continue as if it were alive, Lenz is caught in abject loss through the recognition that he cannot live as if the child has a purpose. She will decompose and there is nothing he can do.

But is there? Taking Goethe's study of morphology to the extreme—where proper study of the shape of an object requires the observer to be affected by the observed, a description in the change of form of the object, its metamorphosis from life to death, is also a description of the change in form of the observer. Unlike Frankenstein's success at reanimating a body, here the ritual of creation, decorating, giving gifts and prayer did not turn the aesthetic object into a living one. For Lenz, the inability to keep the girl connected to the ritual of life, to the artistic purposiveness of humanity—as the townspeople attempted through the funeral—forced him to observe her purposelessness. His prayer to the gods failed and the object, though once alive, will always be an object unless its entire morphology changes and becomes 'staged', a theatrical performance connected to things that were never related to the girl before. From the point of view of affective morphology, Lenz has become overwhelmed by the object of study, himself anatomized by that which he is trying to understand. For Lenz, a type of aesthetic sensation of distance, with the teleological presentation of the body rather than the corpse, is impossible. In contrast, without observational distance between the observer and that which is observed, the death of the body spreads to Lenz himself.

In Büchner's depiction of the artist Lenz and the dead object, there is no ideal, there is no spirit, and finally, no 'purpose' of the ritual of death. Lenz, unlike Kant, does not live as if the world's phenomenal order can be deduced and thus universal laws of judgment, understanding, and reason can be found and matched with the pleasure of one's ability to judge, understand and reason. There is very little pleasure in the character's misperception. Death is depicted here not as a "beautiful aesthetic idea" of the sublime that the viewer can experience pleasurably at a distance (Kant, 1987,

pp. 220–225). Büchner describes Lenz seeing a corpse as if it were a corpse, closer to meaningless matter than to spirit-filled life. The ritual of death, the aesthetization of death as ideal, is something not found in nature, and thus absent from Büchner's description. The town's people go about their business of idealizing the body, the business of creating an artificial end, purpose or function for the material that will decompose. Büchner, through Lenz, describes engaging the dead body 'as it is' rather than 'as if it were something else', which is the painful meaning of beautiful and places his work on the cusp of detached realism and the description of the grotesque found in later writers.

If we return to Shelley's representation of the creation of man, obvious Christian symbolism is apparent and of little interest here. It is the very teleological assumption that, prior to its being alive, Victor describes his creation as "man completed" (Shelley, 2008, p. 118). It is during this liminal period between the dark of night and the light of day, the lifeless "thing" and the "spark" of life, that Victor's idealism is revealed along with Shelley's critique. The creation was created with a plan, a purposiveness—"his limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful! Beautiful!—Great God!"—and the failure of the end product mattered little in the process of carrying it out (Shelley, 2008, p. 130). Whereas prior to this moment, Victor described his own limitations of observation and manual dexterity—he had to make the creature of "gigantic stature; that is about seven or eight feet in height, and proportionally large" (Shelley, 2008, p. 123)—because he couldn't see or touch so small of parts even as his "eyeballs were starting from their sockets" in strenuous work. His own limitations as a human to complete the task meant the monster's form was made from "charnel house bones" and parts from the "dissecting room and slaughter house" (Shelley, 2008, p. 124). The rest of this creation scene reveals Victor oscillating between before and after the moment of animation:

> I had worked hard for nearly two years for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate object [. . . ] but now that I had succeeded, these dreams vanished, and breathless horror filled my heart (Shelley, 2008, p. 129)

Or,

> I had gazed on him unfinished; he was ugly then. But when those muscles and joints were endued with motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could never have conceived. (Shelley, 2008, p. 130)

Unlike Lenz, who saw a human as a corpse, Shelley's Victor Frankenstein sees a collection of articulated body parts as human. However, Victor's attempts to maintain his observational distance from his object fail: the thing he created could in no way match the idea of its purpose in his mind. This failed desire for distance from a daemonic corpse is a summary of the remainder of the novel, where Victor runs and the creation chases, leaving more bodies in their wake until they are reunified in the final scene, as told by Robert Walton in the closing letters to his sister.

If we pause here, however, one can find moments of recognition in Victor Frankenstein towards the end of part two, where he sees he is becoming one with his creation and the tools of creation. In protest against the monster's desire to have a "female companion" and the potential consequences of a race of monsters, Victor realized he had to destroy his laboratory, his instruments and chemicals, and "the remains of the half-finished creature whom I had destroyed [that] lay scattered on the floor [. . . ] I almost felt as if I had mangled the living flesh of a human being" (Shelley, 2008, p. 300). Unlike his disgust toward the articulated living creature, his man with the spark of being, Victor felt empathy toward a pile of body parts that lay scattered on the floor. He looked at them, and reflected on them, and categorized them as if they were one and with a purpose. Here, the sensible

morphology of the body no longer matters: in one's imagination, anything in nature can be unified into a fictional purposiveness.

As fantastical as these metamorphoses of bodies seem in literary representations, they have correspondence in historical details of the same period. In 1792, then again in 1797, in a similar attempt to combine science and art, Samuel Thomas Soemmerring (1755-1830) believed he had recreated the "spirit of the Greeks" through anatomy and mathematics (Oehler-Klein, 1994, p. 190). Ironically, Büchner has Lenz and his friend Kaufmann discuss the same aesthetic beauty of classical art, where Lenz states, "Nowhere in reality would an ideal such as Apollo Belvedere be found" (Büchner, 2004, p. 70), which applies to the critique of a teleological approach to art and science of the previous generation.

Soemmerring's *On the Beauty of Ancient Heads of Children* (Über die Schönheit der antiken Kinderköpfe) from 1792 and his well-publicized construction of the ideal female skeleton in 1797, both attempted to use science to reconstruct the perfect form of man. By taking the skull of a Georgian woman and random bones measured to be of ideal size, Soemmerring sketched and distributed images of his skeletal Venus, an ideal created not by art but by science. This mathematically proportional woman thus had the same dimensions, and thus spirit, that "Nature gave to the Greeks" (Oehler-Klein, 1994, p. 205). The lecture also provides another example of the teleological trend in science used to justify eighteenth century German classicism and the search for perfection, i.e. purposefully determined objects in nature. Greek and Roman sculptures and paintings of women, children and men, per Soemmerring, were based on the anatomical perfection of their race and their art was simply a mimetic copy of themselves. By averaging measurements from eyes, ears, noses, mouths and foreheads of several beautiful children's heads, Soemmerring created what he thought to be a mathematical equivalent for ideal beauty, or the most perfect individual (Soemmerring, 1994, pp. 234-237).

As with the townspeople creating a funeral ritual for the child, a corpse, when repurposed, can be brought back to life through scientific rituals. Mathematics, anatomy, and physiology could recreate the ideal of man not available since antiquity. However, the object of study changes the very shape of the ritual and its participants. There is no ideal, neutral, and distant place by which to observe that which one studies. Büchner's and Shelley's death scenes both stand in stark contrast to the idealist approach in which the purpose of a thing is known beforehand and its form and beauty needs only be discovered as an external concept applied to, yet not inherent in, the object itself. Whereas Shelley represents the failure of success of an objective science based on "a priori" teleology, Büchner's *Lenz* represents the success of failure in describing the very limits of human powers of reason and detachment from nature. In the end, however, both main characters are represented as becoming one with their object of observation.

## 5. Conclusion

Through comparison, this article has shown that early nineteenth-century writers Büchner and Shelley offer unique critiques of the dangers and extreme positions of enlightenment idealism; human powers of reason and detachment from nature are represented in *Lenz* as impossible and *Frankenstein* as unescapable. In Lenz's failure to provide "a spark of being" to a corpse, Büchner succeeds in critiquing the idealist aesthetic-scientific project as a maddening process by which the observer and the observed meld into one. As Lenz loses himself in madness, to be touched by that which one touches, the reader sees him and nature as one with few discernable morphological

differences. In contrast, after Victor Frankenstein's successful animation of fragmented parts with the spark of life, his flight from his creation is never complete. Even after destroying his second creation, Shelley portrays Victor as becoming ever more caught in a loop of chasing the very thing that is chasing him. The creation, a creature represented as Frankenstein's foil, is never completely separate from the creator. The unity, which is represented as fragmented into two separate men in the body scene and continues as separate individuals for the rest of the novel, is recreated as one on the boat at the moment of Victor's death. Captain Robert Wilson's last letter to his sister recounts, though unknown to him, what can be described as the metamorphosis of observer and observed, and the monster learning well the errors of human reason, "I entered the cabin where lay the remains of my miserable guest. Over him hung a form which I cannot find words to describe, gigantic in stature, yet uncouth and distorted" (Shelley, 2008, p. 370). For a moment, the shape of creator and created are indistinguishable, and like Lenz, the observer is overwhelmed by that which he observers.

**Peer Review:** Externally peer-reviewed.

**Conflict of Interest:** The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

**Grant Support:** The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

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## How to cite this article

Kısmet Bell, J.B. (2024). Let the bodies hit the floor: a comparison of corporal morphology in Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Buchner's *Lenz* (1836). *Alman Dili ve Edebiyatı Dergisi- Studien zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur, 51*, 24-36. https://doi.org/10.26650/sdsl2023-1446598