Frankenstein

MARY SHELLEY

FRANKENSTEIN

or

The Modern Prometheus

◆

Mary Shelley

Introduction and Notes by
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FRANKENSTEIN

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

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PUBLISHER'S INTRODUCTION

Background & Themes

For many people, the dominant image of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) has remained that of Boris Karloff in James Whale's 1931 film. It has been suggested by one critic that the novel – and particularly the Creature – has become 'a metaphor for our own cultural crises',[1] an idea reinforced by, for example, recent newspaper headlines about 'Frankenstein food'. Furthermore, varied reinterpretations of the novel, ranging from comic film versions such as Mel Brooks's *Young Frankenstein* and Richard O' Brien's *The Rocky Horror Show*, to the 1960s novelty record *The Monster Mash* by Bobby 'Boris' Pickett and the Crypt Kickers, confirm that *Frankenstein* is part of our social and cultural iconography. The details of Mary Shelley's background –

1 Levine, 1979, p. 3. For full details of this and other references, refer to the Bibliography at the end of the Introduction. Whenever possible, the surname and page number will follow after the quotation.

particularly the 'ghost story' contest which is supposed to have given 'birth' to the novel – have enhanced a 'Frankensteinian' mythology which has concentrated upon images of fear and monstrosity at the expense of other issues. This is a pity, because Mary Shelley deals with a range of significant ideas in her story. *Frankenstein* is not a simple battle between good and evil; it is not a ghost story, nor really a gothic novel. It defies a single interpretation, engaging instead with some of the crucial social and public questions of the period.

Much emphasis has been placed upon the importance of Mary Shelley's family history in shaping the story of *Frankenstein*. Although a 'literary heiress'[2] as the daughter of the famous radical thinkers Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, her upbringing was marred by loss. Her mother died ten days after her birth in 1797; and the effect of this maternal absence was compounded by her father's remarriage in 1801. His daughter struggled to accept her stepmother, and an increasing alienation from Godwin was confirmed when Mary eloped at the age of sixteen with Percy Bysshe Shelley, the Romantic poet, in 1814.[3] Shelley was still married, and the scandal was increased by the inclusion in the elopement of Mary's half-sister, Claire Clairmont, who reputedly became Shelley's mistress. Mary gave birth to a daughter in 1815; the child's death within two weeks of its birth has been perceived by some critics as crucial in understanding *Frankenstein*.[4] Certainly, a glance at Mary Shelley's journals from this period confirms her devastation. The entry for 20 March describes a dream in which the child was revived:

> Dreamt that my little baby came to life again; that it had only been cold, and that we rubbed it before the fire, and it lived. Awake and find no baby. I think about the little thing all day. Not in good spirits.   (*Journals*, p. 70)

While there is no doubt that this experience significantly influenced *Frankenstein*, it is misleading to see the novel as purely semi-autobiographical. It is, in fact, connected to a range of scientific, philosophical and political ideas of its time.

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2 Gilbert & Gubar, 1979, p. 227

3 Godwin refused any contact with his daughter until she and Shelley were able to marry in the wake of Harret Shelley's suicide in September 1816. They married in December 1816.

4 See, for example, Moers, 1978, Knoepflmacher 1979, Mellor 1989, Blumberg 1993. Mellor, in particular, has drawn attention not only to Mary Shelley's overwhelming sense of loss, but also to the failure of Percy Shelley to share her grief.

Chief amongst these was scientific exploration, in which Erasmus Darwin, Humphry Davy and Luigi Galvani were some of the key names. Darwin was (like his more famous grandson) mainly interested in botany and the process of evolution; through his works *Zoonomia* (1793) and *Phytologia* (1800), he explored the creative and regenerative process of nature, but without seeking to intervene in or change this process. One experiment, where he reputedly animated a piece of vermicelli, seems particularly important as a source for *Frankenstein* and is referred to by Mary Shelley in the Introduction to the 1831 edition. Davy was a chemist: in his *Discourse* (1802), he argued for the power of chemistry as the underlying principle of all life. This enabled the chemist to interfere in the natural world to change and modify it.[5] However, Galvani's revivifying of dead tissue seems to have had the most obvious impact on *Frankenstein*: in 1791, he experimented on 'animal electricity' which was substantially produced from the brain and conducted to muscles and other organs through the nerves. Mary Shelley's knowledge of these ideas derived from several sources. Her father, a friend of Davy, was deeply interested in new scientific thinking; Percy Shelley was also very interested in radical science, and not only encouraged her to study the subject but accompanied her to lectures in London; and Mary Shelley herself investigated her father's and husband's libraries, reading a wide range of material in order to extend her awareness of contemporary scientific and philosophical debate. It is clear, therefore, as Anne Mellor has noted, that *Frankenstein* is rooted in authentic scientific ideas of the period (1989, p. 90); but Mary Shelley's attitude towards science remains ambiguous. Mellor argues that *Frankenstein* differentiates between what its creator saw as 'good' and 'bad' science: the novel implicitly approves the 'non-interventionist' approach of Darwin by showing the dire consequences of a science that sees itself as a 'master'.[6] Marilyn Butler, on the other hand, sees *Frankenstein* as engaging with two differing interpretations of 'life': the question as to whether life was some intangible essence or simply the sum of a collection of biological and physiological functions (1993, pp. xv–xxi).[7] For Mary Shelley, however, two of the most

5 These scientific ventures formed part of the 'vitalist' controversy which focused upon attempts to identify the principle of life. Darwin and Davy, in particular, occupy different positions within the debate. Darwin's non-interventionist approach is contrasted with Davy's language of control, where the chemist is 'a master, active with his own instruments' (quoted in Mellor, 1989, p. 93).

6 Quoted in Mellor, 1989, pp. 90–101

7 Macdonald and Scherf, however, point out, in their Introduction to the

important aspects of science centre upon the essential 'masculinity' of scientific thought, and the responsibility of the scientist in the aftermath of his experiments: it is with these elements that *Frankenstein* is particularly concerned.

This 'masculinity' is most evident in the removal of any feminine element from the Creature's 'birth'; the scientific process activated by Victor excludes any sense of the humanity of the Creature and defines life only on scientific terms. The attempt by Victor's 'masculine' science to appropriate the quintessentially feminine act of childbirth must eventually fail because he never thinks about what he will do with his creation once it is alive. The exclusion of femininity extends to the consistent marginalisation and destruction of women by Victor's 'progress'. Justine Moritz's execution is caused, initially, by Victor's actions and then his cowardice in refusing to tell the truth. Elizabeth Lavenza's relationship with Victor is sacrificed as he pursues his obsession, until she *literally* becomes a sacrifice on the altar of his ambitions; and this destructiveness extends also to Victor's treatment of the half-completed female Creature. All these deaths are violent, and all come about through male intrusion into a female process in which, in the 'natural' order of things, masculinity plays a much more peripheral role. The novel, therefore, articulates a confrontation between a scientific pursuit seen as masculine and a feminine 'nature' which is perverted or destroyed by masculinity.[8] As Mark Jancovich puts it:

> Mary Shelley's novel is a specific intervention within the social debates over the organisation of science and knowledge, and it calls for a democratisation and domestication of both science and society. It is a critique of the separation of spheres . . . The novel is concerned that subjective experience and domestic affection should not be separated from, and defined as irrelevant to, scientific activities.   (p. 33)

The marginalisation of Elizabeth, Justine and even the female Creature represents the exclusion of domestic and human concerns from the scientific process: and, the novel suggests, while such exclusion continues, experiments will ultimately fail.

Broadview edition of the novel, that Davy warned against the practices of 'speculative philosophers' and that while Victor Frankenstein may be an example of Davy's chemical 'master' he is also representative of the 'speculative philosopher' whom Davy derided (1994, p. 24).

8 These ideas have been explored by, amongst others, Samuel Holmes Vasbinder, Anne Mellor, Crosbie Smith (in Bann, 1994) and Mark Jancovich (see Bibliography).

Most importantly, however, Victor fails as a 'parent'. The Creature is his 'child', and he fails to love and educate it.[9] This betrayal of responsibility is made clear in the Creature's narrative, which is told to Frankenstein and which lies at the heart of the novel.

The Creature is like a new-born baby when abandoned: completely helpless and ignorant, he is forced to discover his own basic needs and teach himself the skills necessary for his survival. He also learns that his hideous appearance will make him despised and rejected, in spite of his benevolent disposition and longing for human companionship. His isolation from humanity is marked by his namelessness, and by the epithets which dehumanise him: 'wretch', 'daemon', 'monster'. However, his narrative reveals his persistent hope that his loving nature might be recognised beneath the horrific exterior, and there-fore he attaches himself to the De Lacey family. His breadth of knowledge and his articulacy are explained by this association; he learns to read by overhearing Felix de Lacey's education of the Arabian Safie and then by finding some books which he tries to decipher. These books are important in understanding the novel. Plutarch's *Lives*, Volney's *Ruins of Empire*, Goethe's *The Sorrows of Werther* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* all represent ideas important in Romantic thinking and give the Creature points of reference. *Paradise Lost* is particularly significant: 'I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed' (p. 77–8). His reading registers the terrible recognition that his humanity is unheeded and that, like Milton's Satan, he is seen as 'evil' even though he is also tragically isolated and suffering. His attempts to make himself potentially acceptable to the De Lacey family are to no avail; in fact, they are the catalyst by which his nature turns from love to hate, and this relates the novel to some important theories concerning the formation of human nature in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, three of which seem especially relevant. David Hartley[10] believed that the early experience of the senses

9 This idea is introduced first in Victor's relationship with his own father, Alphonse. Although the elder Frankenstein is firmly established as a good and loving father, his dismissive attitude towards his son's request for guidance in his reading-matter is the first failure of parenting which occurs in the novel; it is the ideas of Cornelius Agrippa and Paracelsus who first inspire in Victor the desire to investigate the principle of life.

10 David Hartley (1705–57) published *Observations on Man, his Frame, Duty, and Expectations* in 1749; he rejected the idea that morality is innate, but saw it rather as a product of the association of ideas borne of the individual's experience.

shaped human identity; John Locke[11] suggested that humanity was neither naturally good nor evil, but a *tabula rasa* upon which experience would 'write'; Jean-Jacques Rousseau [12] put forward the idea of the 'natural man' who is constricted and corrupted by society. These ideas are examined via the effect upon the Creature of his treatment by humanity in general and Victor in particular, which constitutes some of the most poignant moments in the novel:

> ... what was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant; but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. I was, besides, endued with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; I was not even of the same nature as man ... When I looked around, I saw and heard of none like me. Was I then a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled, and whom all men disowned? (p. 93)

Mary Shelley demonstrates that creation does not stop at the moment of 'life'. Victor manufactures his Creature, but then literally 'creates' him as a monster by his rejection. The Creature's account of his continued attempts to make friendly contact with others, and the hostility with which he is constantly met, thus marks him as a tragic figure whose testimony is deeply moving.

Until this encounter with his creation, Victor's self-obsession is boundless. His primary concern with his own ambitions is reflected in his irresponsibility. Even he, however, cannot be unmoved by the Creature's story and agrees to make a female companion for him. None the less, he again abandons his responsibilities to the Creature by refusing to complete the female. He fears creating a monstrous 'other' race who might run riot over the earth; yet the Creature gives no indication that he intends to reproduce, and simply speaks of living in isolation with his companion until both should die. Frankenstein's fear of a 'multiplication' of Creatures has, in fact, roots in his own ambitions and his self-obsession: when he first conceives the idea for his experiment, he speaks of the 'variety of feelings which bore me onwards':

11 John Locke ((1632–1704) published *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in 1690. This was an examination of the nature of knowledge; Locke rejected the idea that understanding is innate and argued instead that knowledge is produced empirically, derived from individual experience.

12 Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) is particularly important for his views on education, set out in his 1762 text *Emile* and in the *Discourses* of 1750 and 1754. Rousseau attributed evil to the effect of society which perverted the natural state of man: he believed that to avoid such effects, it was necessary to banish the artificial constrictions of society and listen, instead, to inner instinct.

A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs.   (p. 43)

Victor's 'variety of feelings' constitute, in fact, a form of blatant self-aggrandisement, and he presumes, therefore, that his own egotistic desire to create a 'race' must be in the Creature's mind. It is this same self-obsession which encourages him to believe that the Creature's threat concerning his wedding-night must be directed at him, when the reader guesses that the target is Elizabeth. Having found an outlet for his egotism in the 'birth' of the Creature, he perpetuates the suffering he has already caused by assuming the Creature will replicate his ambition.

The destruction of the female Creature is the catalyst for the deaths of Clerval and Elizabeth and the final pursuit across the northern ice. This episode is particularly interesting because it reveals a change in the balance of power between Victor and the Creature. During the latter's narrative, only his vulnerability and need of Frankenstein were evident: but by the time of this final chase, the Creature dominates the relationship, leading Victor across the wilderness, leaving food, markers and messages for him. This new dynamic also, however, reveals a mutual dependence. The Creature kills Frankenstein's family, not Victor himself: Frankenstein fails to destroy the Creature: and their deaths occur almost simultaneously, but not at each other's hands. Families – whether the Frankensteins or the De Laceys – are eliminated until just the two main protagonists remain. Isolated and bound by their obsessive desire for revenge, their interdependence becomes absolute:

> The ensuing, confused pursuit binds the two together and tears them apart in a dialectic of desire . . . Excluding all other relations, this polarisation of self and other is so absolute that it can only end in death.[13]

These final scenes also reveal the indissoluble bond of parent and child. The Creature's lament after Victor's death is a cry of pain, anguish and desertion, and also of remorse, a feeling that Frankenstein never betrays towards the Creature. Before his death, Victor speaks of 'another' who 'may succeed' (p. 166) where he has failed; it seems evident that he has learned little from the suffering he has caused. This lack of self-awareness is indicated in his address to the sailors on the

13 Fred Botting in Martin & Jarvis, *Reviewing Romanticism*, p. 55

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ship, whom he describes as faint-hearted for wishing to turn back from the voyage of discovery. His death is followed by the final appearance of the Creature, the product of Frankenstein's experiments: this juxtaposition of the survival of Frankenstein's ambition with its progeny maintains the ambiguity towards science that characterises the novel, as the desire for further progression is paralleled by the tragic results of such progression.

The balance of sympathy at the novel's conclusion is firmly in favour of the Creature, in spite of Walton's stern reprimand to him: it closes with a reminder of his need, his vulnerability, and his love for Frankenstein. Thus Mary Shelley leaves us with an image of Frankenstein's scientific 'success' but parental failure. Having created life, he failed in the most important part of the creative process, the nurturing and educating of his creation, and the acknowledgement of responsibility for it.

Narrative Form

The form of the novel is epistolary and multi-layered, enclosing narratives within narratives. Its structure is symmetrical: the story begins with Walton, moves to Frankenstein, then to the Creature, then back to Frankenstein and finally to Walton again. This narrative pattern can also be described as triangular: each of the three main characters has important conversations with the two others, and this triangular pattern also marks the exclusion of all other characters from the story.

This choice of narrative form occasions a variety of effects. The different narratives are offered as testimonies: there is no omniscient narrator to comment or to guide understanding. The reader has to absorb the narratives and draw their own conclusions. Secondly, it conceals the author from the reader. Anne Mellor has identified this as evidence of Mary Shelley's 'anxiety of authorship': 'Mary Shelley doubted the legitimacy of her own literary voice, a doubt that determined her decision to speak through three male narrators' (1989, p. 53). This suggests that the author could sidestep concerns about her ability – indeed her right – to produce a novel by concealing herself behind a range of narrators, all of whom are members of the sex 'authorised' to write and speak. Beth Newman, on the other hand, sees these differing narratives as a deliberate strategy to destabilise the text: each narrator is telling *a* version of the story, not *the* version, and the reader is therefore invited to question the accounts offered (p. 169). The narrative form also brilliantly enfolds the concerns of the story. The Creature's narrative, which is the heart and centre of the text, lies

literally at its heart, expressing the key themes of abandonment, responsibility and the effect of environment.

Walton's role as the primary narrator has several dimensions. He mediates the stories of Victor and the Creature, and, at the beginning of the novel, Shelley also uses him to introduce some of the key themes. Walton is on a voyage of discovery to the North Pole, which he describes as 'those shores which I so ardently desire to attain' (p. 19), and his motivation for his ambitions foregrounds that of Victor Frankenstein:

> I may there discover the wondrous power which attracts the needle; and may regulate a thousand celestial observations, that require only this voyage to render their seeming eccentricities consistent for ever.   (p. 13)

The nature of Walton's ambitions is made even clearer when he says, 'I preferred glory to every enticement that wealth placed in my path.' Walton's yearning for a friend and companion with whom to share his aspirations and ambitions is answered by the finding of Frankenstein. Although their friendship is short-lived, it is marked by Walton's emphasis on Victor's 'benevolence', 'sweetness', and 'nobility' (pp. 21 and 23), and this anticipates the description of Victor's friendship with Clerval. However, Walton is also linked with the Creature: he speaks of his 'neglected' education, but that he was 'passionately fond of reading' (p. 14), and this foregrounds the Creature's self-education through reading. His friendship with Victor also parallels the Creature's desire for a like-minded companion to alleviate his loneliness. This similarity shows the normality of the Creature's desires and his understandable rage and pain at their denial.

The framing narrative of Walton's letters allows Mary Shelley to find a reason for the story to be told and to characterise him in a way that prepares us for the appearance of Frankenstein. His function is to suggest themes that become more concrete after the introduction of the main protagonists, and to convey their narratives. His personality is important only in so far as it reveals aspects of Victor or the Creature.

The Ghost-Story Contest

The story of the creation of *Frankenstein* is almost as well known as the novel itself. It emerged from the notorious 'ghost-story' contest involving Mary and Percy Shelley, Lord Byron and Dr John Polidori at the Villa Diodati in Switzerland in June 1816, described in Polidori's diary entries for June 1816 and confirmed by Mary Shelley herself in the 1831 Introduction. Byron challenged the group to tell a

ghost story for their mutual entertainment. According to Mary
Shelley's account, a conversation between Percy Shelley and Byron
concerning the 'principle of life' gave rise to the 'acute mental vision'
(p. 4) from which the novel emerged. Mary Shelley continued to work
on the story after returning to England in September 1816, and it was
eventually published in 1818. This first edition was accompanied by a
Preface written by Percy Shelley in the guise of the author, in which
he sought to contextualise some of its ideas. His involvement in the
writing of the novel has been a subject of speculation for some critics,
including Christopher Small (1972) and James Rieger (1974); Rieger,
in particular, suggested that he could almost be described as co-author.
This has been refuted by more recent work by Anne Mellor (1989)
and Jane Blumberg (1993). Mellor, in particular, has closely re-
searched the alterations made by Percy Shelley to his wife's manuscript[14]
and has concluded that, while Shelley's influence upon Mary Shelley
was immense and while she virtually gave him *carte blanche* with her
text, the changes he made are not necessarily improvements, and that
Mary Shelley's assertion in 1831 that she 'did not owe the suggestion
of one incident, nor scarcely of one train of feeling, to my husband' is
justified (p. 5).

   The 1831 Introduction which contains this assertion (and which is
reproduced elsewhere in this edition) has itself become as much a part
of the text as the actual body of the novel. As Fred Botting has observed:

> Regularly invoked in critical accounts of *Frankenstein*, the Introduc-
> tion is regarded as the place where a single authorial voice becomes
> identifiable and the text is, at last, provided with a unified meaning.
> But the Introduction is neither as unified nor as uncomplicated as
> many readings would have it.   (1991, p. 53)

   Botting argues that the 1831 Introduction has become an additional
text through which any reading of the novel must be mediated because
this is where the author 'speaks'; he suggests that the Introduction is
itself a 'fiction' which Mary Shelley used as a means of asserting her
own 'authority'.[15] He therefore alerts us to the dangers of accepting the
1831 Introduction as a necessarily 'truthful' account either of the
writing of the novel or the impulses behind it. Botting's argument is
particularly useful when one considers Mary Shelley's account of her

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14 Mellor, 1989, pp. 60–5

15 His argument connects with those outlined in the Note on the Text where I
refer to other critics who have examined Mary Shelley's reasons for the changes
she made to the novel and her reasons for writing the Introduction.

'envisioning' of the Creature's revivification: 'My imagination, unbid-
den, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose
in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie'
(p. 4). This description, while adding to the fantastical mythology of
Frankenstein, manages to detach Mary Shelley from her story. By
ascribing its creation to an imaginative impulse over which she had no
conscious control, Mary Shelley can offload responsibility: the story
becomes, not a deliberate creative act or choice, but the product of an
overactive imagination fuelled by German ghost stories and far-fetched
scientific ideas. Mary Shelley also uses the Introduction to explicitly
reject Frankenstein's scientific ambitions as 'supremely frightful'
because they 'mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the
world'. Such a gesture to religious belief is not made in the 1818 text or
Preface; clearly Mary Shelley saw the 1831 Introduction as a way to
frame and explain, and also perhaps to exonerate, her 'hideous phan-
tom' (p. 4). This supports the argument that Mary Shelley sought, in
1831, to make her novel acceptable to what she perceived as a more
conservative readership (see A Note on the Text elsewhere in this
edition).

Frankenstein *and Revolution*

Frankenstein has a significant relationship to revolutionary political
ideas of the time, particularly the Revolution in France and subsequent
conflict in Britain and Europe. The French Revolution produced
considerable anxiety in England about the possibility of parallel
uprisings, which translated into a paranoia about the 'masses' that
characterised them as fearful and 'monstrous'. However, although
Frankenstein engages with a range of radical ideas and philosophies, it
has an ambiguous attitude towards the idea of revolution.

  Jane Blumberg notes that the fact that *Paradise Lost* with its anti-
authoritarian themes has such an important role in the text, implies
support for revolutionary activity (p. 43); the novel's use of the myth of
Prometheus as an analogy for Victor Frankenstein also supports an
'anti-authoritarian' reading, as both versions of the Prometheus story –
Prometheus *plasticator* and Prometheus *pyrphorus* – narrate a challenge
to the gods for the right to create.[16] Mary Shelley's deliberate
invocation of this in her subtitle, 'The Modern Prometheus', suggests

16 The version in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is Prometheus *plasticator*, where
Prometheus attempts to animate a man of clay; Aeschylus's version tells of
Prometheus *pyrphorus*, who stole the secret of fire from the gods and was
subsequently punished by them for doing so.

not only awareness of the rebellious elements of her story but a desire to draw them to the attention of the reader. However, during the nineteenth century, it was the Creature, rather than Frankenstein, who became a metaphor for hostility to the authority of Church and State, as the following quotation from an 1830 edition of *Fraser's Magazine* illustrates:

> A State without religion is like a human body without a soul, or rather like a human body of the species of the Frankenstein Monster, without a pure and vivifying principle.[17]

Although this comment misreads the novel in its perception of the Creature as soulless and thus inhuman, it reveals the anxiety about potential revolution that gripped the British establishment at this time, and suggests that *Frankenstein* had somehow become identified with this; Maurice Hindle points out that 'the 'Frankenstein Monster' image was appropriated repeatedly to signal the threat 'revolting mobs' posed to an increasingly affluent bourgeois class' (p. xl). Even fifty years after the novel's first publication, *Punch* printed an illustration called 'The Brummagem Frankenstein', which was a response to agitation for the Second Reform Bill of 1867 and portrayed the worker as an oversized 'monster' waiting to be given the franchise; while, in 1882, Irish nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell was portrayed as 'The Irish Frankenstein' in another *Punch* cartoon.[18] The novel was also used as a metaphor for insurrection in nineteenth-century fiction: Elizabeth Gaskell, for example, refers to the 'powerful monster' of working-class agitation in *Mary Barton* (1848).[19] However, the destruction of both Victor and the Creature implies that this anti-authoritarian position is doomed to failure. Victor's challenge to the gods is punished, and his 'revolutionary' project of determining the secret of life ultimately fails. The Creature, as the other potential 'insurgent', remains excluded, and eventually destroys himself. Neither of these fates suggest a positive reading of the protagonists' revolutionary potential; however, some critics have taken differing views of this. Both Lee Sterrenburg (1979) and Paul O'Flinn (1995)[20] explicitly connect the novel to issues of

17 Quoted by Sterrenburg in Levine, 1979, p. 166

18 These illustrations are reproduced in Baldick (1987) and Levine (1979). *Frankenstein*'s usage as a metaphor for revolution has been traced by, amongst others, Chris Baldick and Fred Botting.

19 Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life*, edited and with an Introduction by Stephen Gill, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1979, p. 220.

20 Both these essays are included in collections listed in the Bibliography: Sterrenburg in Levine (1979) and O'Flinn in Botting (1995).

working-class agitation and radical politics: but, whereas O'Flinn sees it as strongly sympathetic to revolution, Sterrenburg sees it as questioning such radicalism.

O'Flinn argues that 'much of the strength in the text that continues to be released derives from certain issues in the decade of its composition [that were] briefly the impact of technological development on people's lives and the possibility of working-class revolution' (p. 24). He refers to a distinct shift in the text's political position between its first edition in 1818 and its republication in 1831, and that the earlier text is particularly connected to the Luddite disturbances of 1811–17 and the Pentridge uprising in 1817.[21] He sees Mary Shelley's politics as 'shaped by a passion for reform' but also a 'nervousness about the chance of . . . revolutionary violence' (p. 25–6) that might also be part of that reform. O'Flinn's argument concludes that the earlier edition of the novel is imbued with the radical agitation of its era and that the later 'more conservative and religious' Mary Shelley 'slides' towards a more reactionary position (p. 32). However, comments made by Mary Shelley in her journals suggest that she was never a radical sympathiser: she states, 'I am not for violent extremes' and 'since I lost Shelley I have no wish to ally myself to the Radicals'.[22] Such comments may explain why the 'extremes' of both Frankenstein and his creation are doomed; Shelley's obvious reservations about violent political activity translate into the eventual failure and repression of the 'revolutionary' protagonists. Lee Sterrenburg focuses upon these reservations and argues that the novel was a riposte to the radical ideology of her father, William Godwin: he suggests that it 'surreptitiously criticizes Godwin in personal and autobiographical terms' (p. 148), by dramatising the 'self-doubt' of the Godwinian philosopher and that while 'Mary Shelley can imagine a positive side to radical hopes for reform, yet she also sees their degeneration into carnage and disaster' (p. 171).

Tim Marshall sees a different political dimension: he relates the

21 The Luddites were English mechanicals whose jobs were threatened by the introduction of machinery to replace manual work; they decided to take direct action against the machines by smashing them. Their name derived from one Ned Ludd, a resident of a Leicestershire village in 1779 who, in a fit of fury, smashed two frames in a stockinger's house. The Pentridge Uprising occurred in June 1817, when 300 men marched towards Nottingham on the assumption that they were taking part in a mass rebellion against the government. The march was broken up by soldiers and three of its leaders were executed.

22 Quoted by Hindle in his Introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of the novel, p. xli.