> RANDOM HOUSE NEW YORK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Roszak. Theodore
The memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein / Theodore Roszak.
p. cm.

ISBN 0-679-43732-0 I. Title.

PS3568.08495M46 1995 813'.54-dc20 94-43985

Manufactured in the United States of America on acid-free paper Book design by J. K. Lambert

2 4 6 8 9 7 5 3 First Edition



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**FICTION** 

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Bugs

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Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room and continued a long time traversing my bedchamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep. At length lassitude succeeded to the tumult I had before endured; and I threw myself on the bed in my clothes, endeavouring to seek a few moments of forgetfulness. But it was in vain: I slept, indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed: when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created.

MARY SHELLEY
Frankenstein: Or The Modern Prometheus

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE

The original version of Frankenstein, Mary Shelley used herself as the model for Elizabeth, the tragic fiancée of Victor Frankenstein. Yet it was not to Elizabeth that she entrusted the telling of the tale; for this she chose the Arctic explorer Robert Walton. Male voices—the voices of Walton, Victor, and the monster—dominate the story. Elizabeth is allowed to speak only through a few scattered letters. Even when it came to publishing the book, Mary proved to be self-effacing. Although she was as liberated a woman as her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, the Western world's first feminist, Mary agreed to remove her name from the title page. Her publisher considered the novel too shocking to be attributed to a female author. Published anonymously in 1818, Frankenstein was thought by many readers to have been written not by Mary, but by her husband, Percy.

I have long felt that the Frankenstein Mary most wanted to offer the world lies hidden in an under-story that only Elizabeth could have written. This retelling of the tale parallels the original version, but views the events as only Elizabeth could have known them. In placing an alchemical romance at the center of the novel, Mary Shelley was delving deeper into the psychological foundations of Western science than she may consciously have realized. In her own time, she could not have known the more exotic sources of alchemy; but her intuitive insight into what

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alchemy reveals about the sexual politics of science has proven to be astonishingly correct. I hope that, speaking here as the bride of Frankenstein, she will at last find the voice she was not free to adopt in her own day.

THEODORE ROSZAK Berkeley, California, 1994

# PREFACE TO THE MEMOIRS OF ELIZABETH FRANKENSTEIN

by Sir Robert Walton, F.R.S., O.B.E.

# London, 1843

Many readers will know me solely as the man responsible for introducing Dr. Victor Frankenstein to the world. In the fall of 1799, while serving as ship's naturalist on a voyage of exploration to the Arctic regions, I participated in rescuing a stranded traveller who had lost his way in the polar seas. Adrift for days upon an ice floe, the poor wretch was nearly dead from hunger and exhaustion when we brought him aboard our ship. This was Victor Frankenstein—who, upon being revived from his comatose condition, proceeded to recount the macabre chain of circumstances that had brought him to this lamentable pass. Desperate to have the record of his misadventures preserved, he pressed me to take notes as he spoke, a request I could hardly deny to one so close to death.

Thus, by an unaccountable turn of fortune, it fell to me to chronicle Frankenstein's story from his own lips. I alone in all the world learnt of his crimes against nature from the man himself; I alone knew the suffering they had wrought upon him; I alone witnessed the remorse etched upon his features. His was indeed the aspect of a condemned soul crying out for a redemption that could never be his. It was as an act of charity that I did what Frankenstein begged me to do in his final hours. Still, all the while I sat at his bedside, my scientist's mind struggled with a single question. Where was the tangible proof for anything he

reported? How could I be certain these were not the ravings of a broken mind?

And then, when Frankenstein finally lay dead, I found myself confronting the unnatural being he had fashioned with his own hands; I spoke to it face to face; I heard the low, bestial rasping that was its voice; I felt the dread menace of its presence; and at last I watched in amazement as it took up its maker's corpse and carried it out across the ice-bound wilderness for cremation.

Only then did I believe.

I will frankly admit that I rue the day that fate saddled me with the reputation I now must bear. For I believe I can say without risk of immodesty that my own researches into the natural history of the polar regions represent a substantial contribution to modern science. I therefore have not easily resigned myself to the fact that my identity in the eyes of the world turns upon this single fortuitous circumstance in which it was my rôle to function as amanuensis to one who will be remembered always as a madman and a criminal, if not an enemy of God.

I might at least have hoped that, upon publishing my conversations with Frankenstein, I would be rid of the man and free to resume my own career. But this was not to be. Instead, having gone to such lengths to preserve his memory, I found myself the reluctant trustee of a terrible but inescapable burden. I felt impelled to do all that lay within my power to make certain the moral of his story should be made indisputably clear. For there are lessons in this matter that I would not see lost on my colleagues in the scientific fraternity. Prisoner to my own conscience, I felt that every detail of Frankenstein's work must be preserved—not least of all the story of the man himself. I found myself asking how so gifted a mind had lost its way and debased its genius. Along what paths and under what influences had he been drawn to his tragic vocation? If I could answer these questions, the credibility of Frankenstein's tale and the moral horror of his deeds might be greatly enhanced.

But was there more to be told than the man had himself revealed to me?

It was not until the late summer of 1806 that political conditions on

the continent of Europe once again became peaceful enough to permit an extended enquiry into the background of Frankenstein's narrative. In that year, during the brief interval of peace in southern Europe that followed Napoleon's triumph at Austerlitz, I was free to travel extensively in the region of Geneva, the Frankenstein family seat. During those unsettled years Geneva and the entire Vaud had been freshly annexed to the Napoleonic empire. But alas! the revolutionary forces unleashed by the invasion of the Emperor's Grand Army had made short work of the city's municipal records, as they had of its aristocratic families. The Swiss merchant dynasties had been driven into exile and their properties roughly expropriated, with little concern for historical materials. The few distant members of the Frankenstein clan I located in the region proved reluctant in the extreme to discuss their relative; he was seen by one and all as a blot on the family's honour best expunged from memory. Similarly, at the University of Ingolstadt, Frankenstein's alma mater—not far from the battlefield at Jena where Napoleon's forces were already gathering for their epic confrontation with the armies of King Frederick—I discovered that his principal mentors had died or departed; the school itself had been closed, a casualty of the troubled times. I was on the point of giving up all hope when I uncovered the whereabouts of Ernest Frankenstein. This, the last surviving member of the family, was then living in a remote village high in the Jura; reluctantly he admitted to possessing certain papers relevant to his brother's history. A slow-witted man, now deeply embittered by the loss of his family estates, Ernest would part with the documents only for a price. In his suspicion, he would not permit me to so much as handle the material until I had first placed money in his hands—and even then he would reveal only the first few pages, holding the remainder tightly in his grip as a miser might clutch his last coin. But what he showed me was enough; I needed to do no more than translate the first several lines, and I was eager to pay what the man asked-which was but a small fraction of their worth to me.

Following the sale, Ernest displayed a smug amusement at what he took to be my gullibility. "It's just the Gipsy bastard's rubbish, that's all you've bought for your money. Much good may it do you, Mr. Busy-

body!" I permitted the man his ignorant satisfaction and quickly departed, almost giddy with my sense of triumph. For what this poor simpleton had delivered over to me were the writings and papers of Elizabeth Lavenza, Frankenstein's adopted sister and later fiancée. I could not have hoped for a more precious find.

Readers of my original account will recall that this most unfortunate of women, Victor Frankenstein's life-long love and fond companion, met her death on her wedding night, murdered by the very fiend her husband had created. Clearly Ernest Frankenstein had no idea of the value these papers might have. I realised as soon as I laid eyes upon them that here might lie the key to Frankenstein's tragedy. For there are three voices that must be heard if we are to understand this extraordinary history accurately. The first is that of Frankenstein himself; this we have, in the man's own words as I took them down verbatim. The second is that of his monstrous creation, both as the fiend's words were quoted by Frankenstein and as then spoken to me by the creature itself while it confronted me over its creator's corpse. But here at last was the voice of one who knew Frankenstein more intimately than any other: Elizabeth, the third and (so I thought at the time) only innocent member of the unholy trinity.

Thus, with the exuberance of true discovery, I returned to England to complete the story of this remarkable man—just as the fragile peace of Europe was again shattered by the clash of great armies.

I soon learnt my task would be far from easy. After several readings, I realised that Elizabeth Frankenstein's memoirs provided more insight than I had at first recognised, possibly more than I would ever have invited. For this was no mere supplement to Frankenstein's accounts; her testimony was of the tale's essence. Indeed, I soon had reason to fear that these pages might conceal greater depths of meaning than I had the capacity to elicit.

I will now for the first time admit that Victor Frankenstein confided more to me than I have thus far revealed to the world. In his original narration, he had touched upon certain subjects that I did not see fit to include in my published accounts. He had, for example, talked at some length—often in an almost hallucinatory manner—about his early

alchemical studies and about the rôle his fiancée had played in these experiments; but his remarks were obscure and frequently too unsavoury for my taste. Much of this talk I attributed at the time to his feverish state of mind. Though I dutifully noted down his words, I had already decided, even as I sat at Frankenstein's bedside, that these outpourings, filled with rambling confessions of self-loathing and remorse, should never become public knowledge. They might, after all, be no more than the guilty rantings of a dying soul. I therefore elected mercifully to suppress what he told me of certain demeaning uses to which he had subjected the woman he claimed to love. I did so out of profound concern for this hapless lady's reputation. For even if what Frankenstein reported should be true, I had no wish to recount the aberrant acts that she, in her moral weakness, might have been forced to perform as partner to Frankenstein's so-called "chemical marriage." I took Frankenstein at his word when he averred that he and he alone was responsible for Elizabeth's corruption. He asserted not once but repeatedly and with the most ardent emphasis that she was but the passive recipient of the indecencies he inflicted upon her.

To this day, I have tried always to regard Elizabeth Frankenstein as the victim of her fiancé's twisted ambition. But gradually, as my studies of the strange lore that surrounds Elizabeth's life have deepened, I have grown steadily less certain of her moral character. I could never have guessed that I should discover this seemingly guileless young woman dabbling in rites that our Christian forefathers assumed were long since purged from memory. Nor could I have imagined her voluntarily delving into the erotic practices that constitute the dark side of alchemical philosophy. After a time, I could no longer tell which of these two-Victor or Elizabeth-had debauched the other. Was it possible, as certain passages in this text suggest, that Elizabeth, far from being a reluctant participant in her lover's unnatural pursuits, was to some degree their initiator? Given what I have learnt from her own accounts, I must conclude that what I would once have found unthinkable is indeed true. Frankenstein was not alone in perpetrating the obscenities he confessed to me; he had a willing accomplice, whose culpability is little short of his.

Most unsettling of all is the evidence one finds in these pages of the Baroness Caroline Frankenstein's rôle in the lives of both her son and her adopted daughter. If these memoirs are to be believed, this shadowy woman, whom Victor Frankenstein chose to leave all but anonymous in his original narrative, would surely rank as the most grotesque human phenomenon I have encountered in a lifetime of travels and uncommon adventures. If, I say, the words upon these pages can be believed. But can they? For as long as a reasonable doubt clouded the facts, I hesitated to accept the veracity of what Elizabeth Frankenstein reports of her foster mother; it was easier by far for me to label Elizabeth a shameless liar or to attribute what she says to the derangement of her faculties than to credit the possibility that there was ever so depraved a soul as the mother who gave Victor Frankenstein birth. Yet here, too, my research has yielded incontrovertible evidence that Lady Caroline Frankenstein was in fact guilty of all that these memoirs recount.

Thus, after forty years of scholarly toil, I am at last left to ask: Must it once again be my rôle to vex the mind of my fellow man with a story of unredeemed decadence? For as I ruminate among these documents, I see that Frankenstein's crimes—perhaps committed with the complicity of his bride—were more heinous than I had surmised. The monstrosity he fashioned in his profane pursuit of God-like power was but the final act in a succession of moral transgressions. Though I believed for a brief interval that Frankenstein merited compassion as a tragic soul, I have lived to realise that his memory deserves to be buried in obscurity—and even more so, the name of his bride. I confess that I was at several points sorely tempted to cover over her rôle in these matters, lest I should be responsible for bequeathing such an example of female degeneracy to posterity.

What was it that at last rescued me from this state of irresolution? One thing only. My steadfast allegiance to the ideal of scientific objectivity. This alone, the cherished habit of a life-time spent in the service of truth, strengthened me in an endeavour that moral revulsion might have persuaded me to abandon. In that spirit I lay this report before the world, confident that a candid public will not mistake my true purpose, which is the defence of Reason and the vindication of Moral Rectitude.

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