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Frankenstein
by Mary Shelley

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With an Introduction by
Diane Johnson

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TORONTO · NEW YORK · LONDON · SYDNEY

FRANKENSTEIN
A Bantam Book

PRINTING HISTORY
Frankenstein was first published in 1818
First Bantam edition / June 1967
Bantam Classic edition / October 1981

Cover painting, "Traveler Looking Over the Sea of Fog," by Caspar David Friedrich. Courtesy of the Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany.

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ISBN 0-553-21044-0

Published simultaneously in the United States and Canada

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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Introduction

by Diane Johnson

Mary Shelley was born in August 1797 to Mary Wollestonecraft, the great feminist, and William Godwin, the political philosopher, two lovers who were opposed in principle to marriage and occupied separate houses. They compromised their principles for the sake of their forthcoming child, but married happiness was shortlived; Mary Wollestonecraft died of puerperal fever eleven days after Mary's birth, and the baby was raised by Godwin, who soon took another wife, a Mrs. Clairmont. The Godwin household therefore consisted of the parents, the new Mrs. Godwin's two children Charles and Claire Clairmont, Mary's half-sister Fanny Imlay (Mary Wollestonecraft's daughter by an earlier liaison), her half-brother William, Godwin's child by the new wife, and Mary, the whole living modestly from Godwin's writings and a small publishing business.

In this large and ill-assorted family, Mary grew up, as her father described her, "singularly bold, somewhat imperious, and active of mind. Her desire of knowledge is great, and her perseverence in everything she undertakes almost invincible." He adds that she is also very pretty. It is not known which of these qualities most affected the poet Shelley, but the ensemble was irresistable.

Mary read much and eagerly as a child, and was allowed to read what she wanted. In addition she was enabled to observe the many famous literary men of the day who frequented her father's circle: Lamb and Coleridge were among them, and eventually the young Percy Bysshe Shelley, who admired her father. She was familiar of course with the writings and ideas of her parents, with the classics and the new Romantic poetry, and with the standard gothic novels. It is not surprising that she should make her own contribution, the

masterpiece of the genre, (or the cornerstone of another, science fiction), when she was not yet nineteen, at an age when her own sensibilities were responsive to scary stories, and when the actual events of her life were hardly less painful and shattering than the gruesome fancies she recounts.

In the summer of 1814, just before her seventeenth birthday, Shelley and his young wife Harriet made frequent visits to the Godwin household. He and Mary fell passionately in love and eloped, an action which, according to the principles of free love they all except Harriet believed in, was sanctified by a higher law, since Shelley no longer loved his wife; he found her far less interesting than the intellectual, serious, and beautiful child of two famous radicals.

Mary's first child by Shelley was born at seven months in February 1815 and died soon afterward. She was depressed by its death and brooded and dreamed about it. Her next child, William, was born eleven months later, in January 1816. It was the summer after William's birth, while they were staying in a villa near Lake Geneva, that she had the idea for *Frankenstein*. By the second anniversary of her alliance with Shelley she had been pregnant most of the time and given birth twice. In October, while she was writing the early parts of her novel, her half-sister, Fanny Imlay committed suicide, and in December Shelley's wife Harriet drowned herself in the Serpentine. And Mary at about the same time became pregnant for the third time. She was to lose both this child and William. These terrible events and apprehensions account for the preoccupation with the solemn terrors of giving birth which form a central motif of her novel.

In a preface to a later edition, Mary Shelley recollected how she "then a young girl came to think of and to dilate upon so very hideous an idea." It is a famous story. While staying at the Villa Diodati near Geneva, the Shelleys, and their neighbors Lord Byron and his doctor, Polidori were compelled by the "wet, ungenial" weather to spend a great deal of time indoors, time which they spent reading ghost stories and discussing "various philosophical doctrines," among others "the nature of the principle of life, and whether there was any probability of its ever being discovered and communicated." The party, comprised after all of talented writers, agreed that each would write a ghost story of his own. For some days Mary Shelley tried to think of hers, and each morning, upon being asked whether she had thought of one, was obliged to say no; but one night, after the company had been discussing galvanism and the reanimation of corpses, her night was fitfully disturbed, and "far

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beyond the usual bounds of reverie" the ideas and images came to her. Many artists have reported this experience of creative work in a state between sleep and waking, on a problem which has been worrying them, but hers is one of the most complete accounts of the emergence of a literary work from the unconscious into the conscious mind.

"When I placed my head on my pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, lifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie." She awakes in terror, and tries to dispel the horrid vision of Dr. Frankenstein awaking to find the creature standing at his bedside. Only after a few moments does she realize that she had found her idea for a ghost story, and, ultimately, her husband urges her to expand this vision into a long tale.

The composition extended over several months, and was often interrupted by other activities and plans. In July Mary and Shelley traveled in the Alps; later, her work was interrupted by their grief over the deaths of first Fanny, and then Harriet. In December of 1816 she and Shelley married at the advice of his lawyers, who hoped their legal union would further his attempts to get custody of his two children by Harriet. In December she notes that she had just finished chapter four, but the entire work was finished by May, 1817, and corrected by Shelley, who wrote a short preface in the persona of the anonymous author, and sent it off, first to Byron's publisher, John Murray, who turned it down, then to his own publisher, Ollier, who also turned it down. It was finally taken by the third publisher Lakington, Allen and Co., after some negotiations, also undertaken by Shelley in behalf of his anonymous "friend." The work was not signed, but was dedicated to William Godwin, which made some people suppose that the author might be Shelley, whose admiration of Godwin was well known.

The reception was mixed. The *Edinburgh Review* proclaimed that "taste and judgement alike revolted at this kind of writing," and "the greater the ability with which it may be executed the worse it is—it inculcates no lesson of conduct, manner or morality; it cannot mend, and will not even amuse its readers unless their tastes have been deplorably vitiated." But the influential Sir Walter Scott, writing in *Blackwood's Edinburgh* magazine, says that the work impressed "with the high idea of the author's original genius and happy power of expression." Despite any unfavorable reviews, the book was a great success; Thomas Love Peacock reported to the Shelleys that it seemed to be universally known and talked of.

By the time she had finished writing *Frankenstein*, Mary had lost one child, but worse losses were to follow. A baby girl, Clara, was born in September 1817, and died the following September. The next spring William died. Another child, Percy Florence, was born in September. Mary next suffered a dangerous miscarriage. Finally, in the summer of 1822, while they were living in Pisa, Shelley himself, with two companions, was drowned in a storm while sailing on the Bay of Lerici. Eleven days after they were presumed to have perished, their badly decomposed bodies washed ashore, and were burned on a funeral pyre, except for Shelley's heart, which was snatched from the flames and eventually buried in Rome.

At the time of this ultimate tragedy Mary was not quite twenty-five and would live to be fifty-four. Her life was not to be happy. As her early years had been torn by difficulties and drama, her later years were, it must seem, oppressively calm. No further losses, but also no further adventures or successes awaited her. Percy Florence did not die; he grew up to inherit the estate and title that would have been his father's. But he did not prove literary or an intellectual and was perhaps a little disappointing to his earnest and intense mother. She did not marry again, although brief courtships, one with Washington Irving, are reported. She lived modestly by her pen, producing other novels, only one of which (*The Last Man*) retains any admirers, numerous stories, and some editions of Shelley's work, valuably annotated.

She was always thought of as the author of *Frankenstein*. During her lifetime and ever since, the work has been reprinted, translated, abridged, and dramatized, with stage performances beginning as early as 1823. There have been numerous film versions and elaborations, sequels and spoofs (*Bride of Frankenstein, Young Frankenstein*). The enduring fascination of the story is evidently not owing to the novel itself, which has only recently emerged from a long period of critical disdain, but to the story so expressive of the literary and emotional climate of its own day, and which retains expressive power in ours. As much as it comments on the inner life and education of its author, it seems also to touch upon modern archetypal anxieties—family conflicts, our mistrust of science, and our sympathy for mankind abandoned by its creator.

II

Mary Shelley was born into a world wracked with political changes of the profoundest kind, accompanying the great revolutions of the

eighteenth century in France and America, and, more immediately, the nearly continuous upheavals of the Napoleonic wars, which had come to an end in 1815. Authority crumbled. God had been questioned for a century, tyrants more recently, and the romantics were beginning to look at parents too. The industrialization of Europe, and especially of England, resulted in a rapidly increasing middle class and a dramatic population shift from rural to urban living, with consequent dramatic changes in social stability. Questions of property and democracy were raised by Godwin in *Political Justice* and other works; and Mary Wollestonecraft raised, in the *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, fundamental questions of freedom and education for half the human race.

Everybody was interested in discovering the nature of man and of the social contract, matters which in feudal society of the previous century had barely been questioned. Where the hero of the eighteenth-century novel was usually, after some vicissitudes, reconciled to the manners and mores of his society, the romantic protagonist was at odds with his society, rejecting it, rejected by it. He was often, indeed, not a hero but a villain who deliberately ignored established precepts, rather as Mary, Shelley, Byron, and others of their circle did, much as Frankenstein and his monster do in her tale. Whether or not she was aware that her novel shared with other works of romantic literature an expressive power that enabled it to embody unconscious conflicts, it is certain that she saw it as a social novel, in the sense at least that it places natural man (the monster) in a society which rejects him. Dramatizations of alienation have continued to our day as a central theme of modern literature.

By 1818, the gothic novel, which is usually held to have begun with Hoarace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* in 1765, had passed the height of its enormous popularity but was by no means dead, and never has died. *Frankenstein*, however, was something of a departure. Its predecessors were usually set in far-off lands, in dark castles, monasteries, nunneries, and dungeons, all suitably removed from polite English life, appropriate places for investigating the darker passions of impiety, overreaching, inordinate pride and ambition, and, above all, sexual passions. The ghosts and apparitions were either supernatural or imaginary projections of distorted states of perception, hallucinations or madness, whereas Frankenstein's monster is a creation of science and his material existence. In the classic gothics, dark villains in subterranean places (so metaphorically appropriate as motifs of the unconscious) enact dreams of lust, incest, and rape with an explicitness not permitted in later novels of the Victorian period. There is nothing in *Frankenstein* as lurid as

scenes in Monk Lewis's *The Monk*, 1796, a work Mary had read. (Lewis in fact visited the party during the summer of 1817.) *Frankenstein* is, in fact, a curiously anti-sexual work, and the scenes of his daring experiment are conducted, appropriately, at the top of the house, in an attic, metaphor of derangement or misguided intellectual pursuit.

III

The work has numerous sources, some literary, some originating in ideas current at the time. Mary Shelley had read Mrs. Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*, Walpole's *Otranto*, and doubtless other gothic novels in 1814 and 1815. The influence of William Godwin is considerable—on Mary directly and through Shelley—not only his views concerning the innate goodness of man and the rational structure of ideal, that is, mildly communistic society, but also the idea of a hounded person, which derives from Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, a novel in which one man haunts another over an issue of participated guilt. *Frankenstein* mentions Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," which may have suggested the device of the obsessive teller of a tale. Christopher Small has pointed out the influence of Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland*, on both the form and the plot,[1] and other commentators have found traces of numerous other influences.

As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have shown,[2] *Paradise Lost*, which provides the epigraph for the work, was a conscious and major influence:

> Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
> To mould me Man, did I solicit thee
> From darkness to promote me?
>
> Book 10: 743–5

Shelley and the other romantics admired Milton's Satan, seeing in him the real hero of the poem and identifying his alienation from God and vengeful posture with the situation of nineteenth-century man. Gilbert and Gubar observe that *Frankenstein* is ultimately a female version, a mock *Paradise Lost* "in which Victor and his

[1]Christopher Small, *Mary Shelley's* Frankenstein: *Tracing the Myth*. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972), pp 96–100.
[2]Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 221–297.

monster, together with a number of secondary characters play all the neo-biblical parts." "I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed," the monster tells Victor. We will see the sense in which the Monster is Mary Shelley's Eve.

The idea of a violated contract between God and man comes also from the legend of Prometheus. Byron was writing his poem by that name in the summer of 1816, and Shelley was reading the legend in Aeschylus—Mary entitles her work *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus*. The monster tells Victor "I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king if thou wilt also perform thy part, the which thou owest me." "Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind." The idea of treacherous or neglectful gods has its origins in the general romantic resentment against authorities but, as Noel Carrol points out, in Mary's case the sentiment may have arisen from her particular feeling of rejection by her father, who disapproved of her irregular elopement.[3]

Frankenstein has its origins also in matters of the day. Mario Praz, in his introduction to *Three Gothic Novels*, (Penguin English Library, 1968) points out that there were a number of scientific attempts in the eighteenth century to create artificial men and automatons and, as accounts of these experiments had been published, it is conceivable that someone at Villa Diodati might have mentioned them. Certainly the theories of Erasmus Darwin, Charles Darwin's grandfather, and experiments with galvanism were, according to Mary Shelley's account, topics of discussion the evening of her nightmare. Radu Florescu reports a Castle Frankenstein which Mary may have seen, and a trove of legends associated with it which she may have heard.[4]

From Godwin, Mary had taken the notion that man in his wild state is a social being, capable of living, like the charming cottagers in her story, in affectionate cooperation. Yet society, after Rousseau's idea of it, is also the corrupting force. The rudimentary and ideal society of the cottagers is blighted by the monster, who, like Rouseau's natural man, is naturally good until he is embittered by his contact with human society and by learning. As he is educated to self-awareness, his resentment increases; he becomes a serpent in the cottagers' Eden. The cottagers pursue knowledge for the sake of

[3] Noel Carrol, "Nightmare and the Horror Film: the Symbolic Biology of Fantastic Beings," *Film Quarterly* (Spring 1981) p. 21.
[4] Radu Florescu, *In Search of Frankenstein* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975).

cultivation, to refine and improve the sensibilities, and this relatively innocent pursuit is contrasted to Frankenstein's quest for knowledge, which has the object of tampering with or altering nature. Science, especially, is suspect; this idea, which descends from alchemist stories, develops into the science fiction/horror story of our day, in which knowledge or mad knower destroys mankind or himself rather than helps it.

"The hearts of men, when unprejudiced by any obvious self-interest, are full of brotherly love and charity," Mary has the old man of the cottage say in the voice of Godwin. But self-interest is the problem. The pessimistic Elizabeth sees that the world is not full of brotherly love and charity.

> "When I reflect, my dear cousin," said she, "on the miserable death of Justine Moritz, I no longer see the world and its works as they before appeared to me. Before, I looked upon the concepts of vice and injustice that I read in books or heard from others as tales of ancient days or imaginary evils . . . but now misery has come home, and men appear to me as monsters thirsting for each other's blood . . . When falsehood can look so like the truth, who can assure themselves of certain happiness? . . .William and Justine were assassinated, and the murderer escapes; he walks about the world free, and perhaps respected."

It is striking that in the intellectual world of the monster, of Frankenstein, and, of course, of Mary, wife and child of nonbelievers, the traditional God has no place at all. The work contains only the most perfuntory and rhetorical references to Him, and mostly forgets these.

Her style has never been particularly admired, but it is relatively straightforward. The commonplaces of romantic description—the grandeur of the mountains, simple beauty of cottage life—are informed by Mary Shelley's own immediate impressions of the Swiss Alps. The nostalgia of her description of Scotland, where Frankenstein creates the female monster, reminds us that this is where Mary Shelley herself first experienced freedom from the Godwin-Clairmont menage, on an extended visit away from home at fifteen.

The form is complex: The story is told in letters by an adventurous Englishman, to his sister. In the letters he recounts what Victor Frankenstein has told him; Frankenstein, in turn, recounts to Walton what the monster has told him. This structure parallels one of the themes of the book by taking us below the surface of reality, layer

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by layer, deeper and deeper into guilt. Captain Walton is himself a mild version of overreacher, travelling in the polar regions hoping that he may there discover "the wondrous power which attracts the needle," a lesser force, to be sure than the secret of life itself which Victor hoped to discover, and to "satiate my ardent curiosity." The power of this desire is "sufficient to conquer all fear of danger or death." His amateur dabbling in science resembles Percy Shelley's; like Shelley he has hoped at one time to find a niche among the immortal poets, and like Mary herself, is mostly self-educated and anxious about it. The character of Victor Frankenstein is also probably drawn from Shelley in some superficial respects.

The frame device, by which the tale is told to us by someone who reads it or hears it from someone else, was common in the novels of the day; it functioned to confer credibility on otherwise implausible events or to absolve the narrator and/or author from responsibility for them.

There are a number of thematic elements in this complicated structure. First, the theme of corruption, as we are led from the relative innocent aspirations of Walton into the heart, as it were, of darkness, to participate in the complicated and qualified guilt of the monster, whose own history mirrors that of the progress from innocence to guilt of the whole human race. The structure implies that the monster's (man's) guilt is finally greatest, but the explicitly moral terms specify that the greatest guilt is the Creator's (Frankenstein's).

As in Promethean legend, the creator has abandoned his creation, and has incurred his wrath; man is embittered and has turned away from God. Like God, Victor creates the monster in a mood of mad pride, and will not meet his commitments to him, will not fulfill his duty. Similarly the monster attempts to create a friend in little William: "An idea seized me that this little creature was unprejudiced and had lived too short a time to have imbibed a horror of deformity. If, therefore, I could seize him and educate him as my companion and friend, I should not be so desolate in this peopled earth." When William resists, the furious monster kills him. The monster is the agent of Victor, the creator/destroyer. A general perception of God as destroyer perhaps accounts for the maturing social concerns of the period, which we see, for instance, in Mary's comments on the poverty of the cottage family. If God has abandoned man, man must do for himself.

The monster, a creature of id, yields instantly to his disappointment and murders William; after this he is committed to murdering. Victor, who is more rational, has, like a tragic hero, a moment of choice when he could have averted these ensuing tragedies; he has,

indeed, several chances, but the first (assuming he could not have aborted his creation) is when he fails to tell Henry Clerval about the monster. Instead he falls into one of several lifeless trances or deep sleeps which serve to liberate the monster to work his will. On other occasions Victor lies to conceal the monster and his own connection with it, thus deepening the complicity between them and his own guilt, always rationalizing his actions as attempts to save others from fear or anxiety. From the first misstep, the tragedy is inevitable, as in drama, but it must run its course.

Until his final confession, Victor's inability to reveal the existence of the monster forces him to keep secrets, and with the secrets comes an increasing sense of his own isolation, a parallel of the isolation felt by the monster. The moral ugliness of Victor's lies is expressed in the monster by his hideous countenance; what is inside Victor is exteriorized, and of course excites universal antipathy among the other characters in the novel, though it strangely invites the affection of readers, who are usually agreed that the monster is sympathetic however horrendous his deeds. Victor sees himself as the tragic hero of his story, broken by romantic guilt, but we are not so likely to, for the pain and isolation of the monster are more elementary and more immediate. All three narrators are quintessentially typical of the heroes of romantic literature in that they are extremely self-conscious; their introspective isolation contrasts to the cheerful conviviality of the cottage family and indeed of Victor's original family.

IV

The monster acts as Victor's agent in the sense that the two are doubles. We know from Freud that monsters and the creatures of horror tales are embodiments of the id. In a general way one can see the whole class of expressive literature in the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries as expressions of the collective unconscious (though it had as yet no name) and of a fascination with human potentiality for dark wishes and deeds. The main characters are the allegorical figures of the human psyche, and a way of dramatizing concepts which had no official description, although today the language of psychoanalysis would seem the appropriate language for discussing them.

The double is one of the most familiar ways of dramatizing two aspects of the same character, usually his good and bad selves, as

with Frankenstein and his monster, James Hogg's justified sinner and his brother, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, to name a few. (Freud mentions Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, both bad, as aspects of the same character.) Victor Frankenstein says of his monster, that he is "my own spirit let loose from the grave and forced to destroy all that was dear to me." We send our monster to do our work—that which we wish or fear to wish to do ourselves. In a general way, one can say that on the level of plot, the monster kills the people Frankenstein loves, but at a deeper level, he kills those whom Frankenstein wants him to kill—the charming sibling, the successful and well-adjusted friend and the destined mate, rivals for the affection of his parents and for success. And at a still deeper level, the monster's actions express the emotional intention of the author herself. It is always possible to reduce a work of literature to its basic psychic components and flatten it; but in the case of this curious novel, psychological explanations work better than others to account for what would otherwise seem to be defects in the plot and construction. How else explain the deep sleeps and trances which prevent Frankenstein from impeding his monster at the moment he is killing, or his unbelievable stupidity in not protecting Elizabeth on the wedding he had been so explicitly warned about, except as the author's complicity in his crimes?

Mary Shelley's account of the origin of the tale in a nightmare is similar to Walpole's description of "receiving" *The Castle of Otranto*. Both stories have elements common to nightmares—a menacing figure; a feeling of dread arising from a wish and its inhibition; details found traceable to events of the preceding day or evening, and from earlier experiences. Strict Freudians would also say that the nightmare always relates to the sexual act. (If one had to explain Mary Shelley's nightmare strictly in these terms, one could speculate that the deformed monster who stands over the dreamer "opening his curtains and looking at him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes," might be a dream translation of the handsome, deformed Byron, with whom the Shelleys had spent the evening.[5])

Whereas the conscious artist makes the monster speak for her rational objections to human social arrangements and alienation from God, the characters all, also, as in any fiction, enact the more basic emotions of the artist. How this happens in Mary Shelley's novel is seen most clearly if one transposes the sexes of all the characters, for the sex of the literary characters, like the sex or even the species of characters in dreams, is a matter of indifference or even of deliberate

[5] See Ernest Jones, *On the Nightmare* (London: Liverwright, 1971).

disguise. "I did not make myself the heroine of my tales. Life seemed too commonplace an affair as regards myself," she wrote. It was necessary to become a hero, and Frankenstein and the monster, the dual protagonists, can be read as Mary herself. Although Victor has been thought to be drawn from Shelley, it is to Mary's own life that his life bears the greatest resemblance. Like hers, his mother is dead; the dream in which he embraces Elizabeth and finds the corpse of his mother reminds us of the long hours Mary spent at the tomb of her mother; Frankenstein's life, like Mary's is full of oddly acquired siblings; and so on.

Among the victims is, significantly, Clerval, the close friend. In real life, Mary's existence was plagued by her inescapable stepsister and ostensible friend Claire (of whom she said, in later years, she would not go to Paradise if Claire was along), who lived with them and whose absence she longed for fervently during all the years of her marriage to Shelley, and whose name is, after all, so very similar to Clerval. The somewhat mournful union Frankenstein contemplates with Elizabeth (the name of Shelley's sister) is chastely terminated before it is consumated, suggesting, perhaps, the wish of this burdened young woman to exchange for an uncomplicated, virginal state her present condition of continuous pregnancy, childbirth, and maternal concern.

Many writers have a superstitious feeling that the fates they devise for literary characters would, if they refer to real people, have the power to predict or even cause things to happen, like voodoo. Because this is so, many critics have remarked on the peculiarity of Mary Shelley's having created a little boy character named William and then killing him off at a time when she was herself the mother of an infant William (the name of her father and her little half-brother, his son by Mrs. Clairmont.) Muriel Spark, dismissing Richard Church's idea that the death of William represents Mary's "miserable delight in self-torture" suggests instead that he symbolizes emotions in the struggle between the emotional and the intellectual Frankenstein.[6] More persuasively, Ellen Moers sees it as an aspect of the maternal resentment and terror women feel at becoming mothers.[7] Or the literary death of little William could express her anxiety over the real baby William, or a wish to dispose of her half-brother William, her own younger sibling, or her father. Most likely it reflects her anxiety and guilt over her earlier, dead child, a girl who lived but a few

[6] Muriel Spark, *Child of Light: A Reassessment of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* (Essex: Tower Bridge, 1951), p. 138.

[7] Ellen Moers, *Literary Women*, (New York: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 90–100.

days, and of whom she dreamed, later, that she could revive by warming the little corpse by the fire, bringing her back to life as Frankenstein animates his monster.

The birth motif is more explicitly treated in the episode of the female monster. Victor is asked by the monster and agrees to create a female companion for him. With extreme misgivings, Victor puts her together, but is then overcome with reluctance to animate her: "she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness." "One of the first results of those sympathies for which the daeomon thirsted would be children (as Mary herself had found out), and a race of evils would be propagated on the earth . . . Had I a right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations?" By refusing to animate his daughter, Victor expresses his fear of her fertility. His wish, as Judith Wilt points out,[8] is the gothic wish of the hero to be himself the source and the goal; the inanimate daughter in this Miltonic trio is to be equated with Sin in *Paradise Lost*. By refusing life to the female, Mary expresses her own fear of fertility, and her own anger.

The monster hunts Frankenstein, until, after the murder of Elizabeth, the tales are turned and Frankenstein hunts the monster. In a rationalist fable, reason must triumph over emotion, the superego over the id, and the death of both forces will leave the integrated individual, Walton, in their place. With Frankenstein dead, the monster intends his own destruction but we do not specifically see him die. The possibility of his survival, perhaps indestructability, suggests that emotions endure where reason dies. The creature of sentiment, passion, anger and love cannot be easily suppressed. His vitality surpasses that of intellect and conscience. He may return at any moment from his arctic isolation.

Return he does—in films, in editions of this novel, on television, on the stage, in comics, in allusion, in metaphor. The monster, curiously appropriating to himself the name of his master, becomes Frankenstein, and is immortal.

[8]Judith Wilt, *Ghosts of the Gothic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) pp. 68–69.

Author's Introduction

The publishers of the standard novels, in selecting *Frankenstein* for one of their series, expressed a wish that I should furnish them with some account of the origin of the story. I am the more willing to comply because I shall thus give a general answer to the question so very frequently asked me—how I, then a young girl, came to think of and to dilate upon so very hideous an idea. It is true that I am very averse to bringing myself forward in print, but as my account will only appear as an appendage to a former production, and as it will be confined to such topics as have connection with my authorship alone, I can scarcely accuse myself of a personal intrusion.

It is not singular that, as the daughter of two persons of distinguished literary celebrity, I should very early in life have thought of writing. As a child I scribbled, and my favourite pastime during the hours given me for recreation was to "write stories." Still, I had a dearer pleasure than this, which was the formation of castles in the air—the indulging in waking dreams—the following up trains of thought, which had for their subject the formation of a succession of imaginary incidents. My dreams were at once more fantastic and agreeable than my writings. In the latter I was a close imitator—rather doing as others had done than putting down the suggestions of my own mind. What I wrote was intended at least for one other eye—my childhood's companion and friend; but my dreams were all my own; I accounted for them to nobody; they were my refuge when annoyed—my dearest pleasure when free.

I lived principally in the country as a girl and passed a considerable time in Scotland. I made occasional visits to the more picturesque parts, but my habitual residence was on the blank and dreary northern shores of the Tay, near Dundee. Blank and dreary on retrospection I call them;

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