

was a "memorial" to him is indeed testified in Mary Shelley's own notes to *The Revolt of Islam*. Dr. Lind, "exactly what an old man ought to be Free, calm-spirited, full of benevolence and even of grateful ardour," as Shelley described him, according to Hogg, is also very like the elder Frankenstein, of "upright mind" and calm integrity, whom his son loves and reveres. He also enters into the person of Waldman, the second of Frankenstein's professors at Ingolstadt, of "mild and attractive" manners, dignity and kindness, who is chiefly responsible for engaging Frankenstein in the study of science.

At this point the parallel between Shelley and the young Frankenstein becomes even more evident. Shelley, like Victor Frankenstein, had an early passion to learn "the secrets of heaven and earth"; one may say that in both the drive was inherent (like Caleb Williams's "curiosity", and possibly of the same unconscious origins), although in Frankenstein's case the particular direction it takes is the result of small original accidents, "ignoble and almost forgotten sources". Oddly enough, and with a logic by no means immediately apparent, the first of these is a chance exchange between Victor and his father which confirms him, not in scientific pursuits but in his interest in magic and alchemy. It seems less odd when we remember that Shelley too had the same interest: when Frankenstein describes his compulsion to penetrate the "secrets" both of the material and immaterial worlds—"whether it was the outward substance of things, or the inner spirit of nature and the mysterious soul of man that occupied me, still my enquiries were directed to the metaphysical or, in its highest sense, the physical secrets of the world"—it might be Shelley speaking.

GEORGE LEVINE

Frankenstein and the Tradition of Realism

Frankenstein is one of the first in a long tradition of fictional overreachers, of characters who act out in various ways the myth of Faust, and transport it from the world of mystery and miracle to the commonplace. He is destroyed not by some metaphysical agency, some supernatural intervention—as God expelled Adam from Eden or Mephistopheles collected his share of the bargain (though echoes of these events are everywhere)—but by his own nature and the consequences of living in or rejecting human community. Frankenstein is in a way the indirect

¹ From *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 7, no. 1 (Fall 1973), 17-23. Reprinted with permission.

father of lesser, more humanly recognizable figures, like Becky Sharp or Pip or Lydgate, people who reject the conventional limits imposed upon them by society and who are punished for their troubles. *Frankenstein* embodies one of the central myths of realistic fiction in the nineteenth century, even in the contrast between its sensational style and its apparently explicit moral implications. It embodies characteristically a simultaneous awe and reverence toward greatness of ambition, and fear and distrust of those who act on such ambition. That ambivalence is almost always disguised in realistic fiction, where the manner itself seems to reject the possibility of greatness and the explicit subject is frequently the evil of aspiring to it: in gothic fiction the energies to be suppressed by the realist ideal, by the model of Flaubert pushing, by worldly wise compromise with the possible, are released. Gothic fiction, as Lowry Nelson has observed, "by its insistence on singularity and exotic setting . . . seems to have freed the minds of readers from direct involvement of their superegos and allowed them to pursue daydreams and wish fulfillment in regions where inhibitions and guilt could be suspended" (*Yale Review*, 1962-63, p. 236). The mythology of virtue rewarded, which was curiously central to English realism, is put to question in the gothic landscape where more powerful structures than social convention give shape to wish; and, as Nelson suggests, reader and writer alike were freed to pursue the possibilities of their own potential evil. It is striking how difficult it is to locate in realistic fiction any positive and active evil. The central realist mythology is spelled out in characters like George Eliot's Tito Melema, whose wickedness is merely a gradual sliding into the consequences of a natural egoism. In gothic fiction, but more particularly in *Frankenstein*, evil is both positively present and largely inexplicable. Although ostensibly based on the ideas of Godwin's rationalist ethics which see evil as a consequence of maltreatment or injustice, there is no such comfortable explanation for the evil of Frankenstein himself. Where did his decision to create the monster come from? Mere chance. Evil is a deadly and fascinating mystery originating in men's minds as an inexplicable but inescapable aspect of human goodness.

It is a commonplace of criticism of *Frankenstein*, as of Conrad's *The Secret Sharer*, that the hero and his antagonist are one. Leggitt is the other side of the captain; the monster and Frankenstein are doubles, two aspects of the same being. "It seems an entirely just reading given that Frankenstein creates the monster and that, as they pursue their separate lives, they increasingly resemble and depend upon each other so that by the end Frankenstein pursues his own monster; their positions reversed, and the monster plants clues to keep Frankenstein in pursuit. As Frankenstein's creation, the monster can be taken as an expression of an aspect of Frankenstein's self: the monster is a sort of New Critical art object, leading an apparently independent organic life of its own

and yet irremediably and subtly tied to its creator, re-emerging in mildly disguised ways, his creator's feelings and experiences. . . .

The world of *Frankenstein* has a kind of objective existence which only partially disguises—much less convincingly than a realistic novel would—its quality as projection of a subjective state. The laws governing this world are almost the laws of dream in which the control of action is only partially, if at all, ordinary causation. Characters and actions move around central emotional preoccupations. Clearly, for example, Walton is an incipient Frankenstein, in his lesser way preoccupied in Frankenstein's position: ambitious for glory, embarked on a voyage of scientific discovery, putting others to risk for his work, isolated from the rest of mankind by his ambition, and desperately lonely. Frankenstein becomes his one true friend, and he is a friend who dies just at the point when their friendship is becoming solidified. And, of course, he is the man to whom Frankenstein tells his story, partly, like the Ancient Mariner, to keep him from the same fate. Moreover, the lesson he learns is not merely the explicit one, that he must sacrifice his ambition to others, but that he must also reject the vengeance that Frankenstein wishes upon him. Frankenstein's last wish is that Walton promise to destroy the monster, yet when the monster appears, Walton does not kill him but rather listens to his story and is moved to compassion which he tries to force himself to reject. He cannot kill the monster, who speaks in a way that echoes Frankenstein's own ideas and sentiments; and, though this is not stated, in rejecting the vengeance which consumed Frankenstein, he is finally freed into a better (and perhaps a lesser) life—but one to which he returns in bitterness and dejection.

Clevala, too, Frankenstein's friend from boyhood, echoes an aspect of Frankenstein's self. Clevala is, surely, Frankenstein without the monster. Frankenstein describes himself as having been committed from his youth to the "metaphysical, or, in its highest sense, the physical secret of the world." Meanwhile, Clevala occupied himself, so to speak, "with the moral relations of things. The busy stage of life, the virtues of heroes, and actions of men, were his theme; and his hope and his dream was to become one among those whose names are recorded in story, as the gallant and adventurous benefactors of our species" (pp. 37-38). Except, of course, for the emphasis on political action, this description would serve for Frankenstein as well. Moreover, as Frankenstein himself notes, both he and Clevala were softened into gentleness and generosity by the influence of Elizabeth: "I might have become sulken in my study, rough through the ardour of my nature, but that she was there to subdue me to a semblance of her own gentleness. And Clevala . . . might not have been so perfectly humane . . . so full of kindness

1. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. James Kinley and M. K. Joseph (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996).

and tenderness amidst his passion for adventurous exploit, had she not unfolded to him the real loveliness of beneficence, and made the doing good the end and aim of his soaring ambition" (p. 38). Clevala, whose father denies him a university education, feels, like Frankenstein, himself, a repugnance to the meanness of business. On the night Frankenstein is to depart for Ingolstadt and the university, he reads in Clevala's "kindling eye and in his animated glance a firm but restrained resolve, not to be chained to the miserable details of commerce" (p. 44). Both men reject the occupations of ordinary life, both are consumed with great ambitions; both are kept humane by the influence of the same woman, and, in the end, both are destroyed by Frankenstein's own creation, by the aspect of Frankenstein which ignores "the moral relations of things." Moreover, when Clevala dies, Frankenstein is not only accused of the murder (and seems unwilling to exculpate himself though he knows he has evidence that will do so), but he falls almost mortally ill—as though he himself has been the victim.

These kinds of redoublings are characteristic of the whole novel. Not only all the major characters, but the minor characters as well seem to be echoes of each other. Every story seems a variation on every other. Both Elizabeth and Justine are found by the Frankenstein family and rescued from poverty, and both accuse themselves, in different ways, of the murder of Frankenstein's youngest brother. When she hears of his death, Elizabeth exclaims, "O God, I have murdered my darling child" (p. 72). Justine, too, is a kind of sister of Frankenstein. She so adored Madame Frankenstein that she "endeavoured to imitate her phraseology and manners, so that even now," Elizabeth writes, "she often reminds me of her" (p. 65). And after she is convicted, Justine "confesses" to the murder.

And then there are the parents. Frankenstein himself is a father, the creator of the monster, and the novel is in part an examination of the responsibility of the father to the son. The monster asks Frankenstein for the gift of a bride to alleviate his solitude. Frankenstein's father in effect gives Frankenstein a bride, and a sister. The night before Elizabeth is brought into the Frankenstein house, his mother "had said playfully, —'I have a pretty present for my Victor—tomorrow he shall have it.' And when, on the morrow, she presented Elizabeth to me as her promised gift, I, with childish seriousness, interpreted her words literally, and looked upon Elizabeth as mine—mine to protect, love, and cherish. All praises bestowed on her, I received as made to a possession of my own. We called each other familiarly by the name of cousin. No word, no expression could body forth the kind of relation in which she stood to me—my more than sister, since till death she was to be mine only" (pp. 35-36). Frankenstein's father, in bestowing the gift and in caring for him, behaves to his son as the monster would have Frankenstein behave. Interestingly, in this extraordinary novel of

intricate relations, when Frankenstein's father arrives after Clerval's death to help his son, Frankenstein at first assumes that his visitor is to be the murderer: "Oh take him away! I cannot see him," he cries. "For God's sake, do not let him enter." This strange hallucination focuses again on the bond that connects all the characters in the novel, and suggests how deeply incestuous and Oedipal the relationships are. It suggests, too, how close to the surface of this world are motives derived not from external experience, but from emotional and psychic energies beneath the surface of things.

Despite the potentially easy patterning, there is no simple way to define the relation between parents and offspring in this novel. Frankenstein's father is loved and generous, and marries the daughter of an unsuccessful merchant who, in his pride, almost brings his whole family down. The father of Sabe betrays his daughter and her lover and is the cause of the fall of the Delacey family. Felix Delacey, in order to save Sabe, brings his whole family to the brink of ruin. Frankenstein ignores his creation and, in effect, destroys his family as a consequence. Father and sons are almost equally responsible and irresponsible: what is consistent is only the focal concern on the relationship itself.

Within the novel, almost all relations have the texture of blood kinship. Percy Shelley's notorious preoccupation with incest is manifested in Mary's work. The model is Eden, where Eve is an actual physical part of Adam, and the monster's situation is caused precisely because he has no blood relations, no kinship. Frankenstein, on his death bed, makes clear why there is such an intense, reduplicative obsession throughout the novel on the ties of kinship:

I thank you Walton . . . for your kind intentions towards so miserable a wretch; but when you speak of new ties, and fresh affections, think you that any can replace those who are gone? Can any man be to me as Clerval was; or any woman another Elizabeth? Even where the affections are not strongly moved by any superior excellence, the comparisons of our childhood always possess a certain power over our minds, which hardly any later friend can obtain. They know our infantine dispositions, which, however they may be afterwards modified, are never eradicated; and they can judge of our actions with more certain conclusions as to the integrity of our motives. A sister or a brother can never, unless indeed such symptoms have been shown early, suspect the other of fraud or false dealing, when another friend, however strongly he may be attached, may, in spite of himself, be contemplated with suspicion. (pp. 211-212)

In the original version of the novel, Elizabeth was, as the Oxford editor M. K. Joseph points out, Frankenstein's cousin, "the daughter of his father's sister" (p. 236n), and throughout the revised version, Frank-

enstein continues to refer to her as cousin. Every death in the novel is a death in the family, literal or figurative: what Frankenstein's ambition costs him is the family connection which makes life humanly possible. William is his brother. Justine looks like his mother, and is another kind of sister, though a subservient one. Clerval is a "brother." Elizabeth is both bride and sister (and cousin). And as a consequence of these losses, his father dies as well. Frankenstein kills his family, and he, in his attempt to obliterate his own creation, his own victim. As he dies, he severs the monster's last link with life so that, appropriately, the monster then moves out across the frozen wastes to annihilate himself. The family is an aspect of the self and the self cannot survive bereft of its family.

Thus, even while it wanders across the Alps, to the northern islands of Scotland, to the frozen wastes of the Arctic, *Frankenstein* is a claustrophobic novel. It presents us not with the landscape of the world but of a single mind, and its extraordinary power, despite its grotesqueness and the awkwardness of so much of its prose, resides in its mythic exploration of that mind, and of the consequences of its choices, the mysteries of its impulses. Strangely, the only figure who stands outside of that mind is Walton, who is nevertheless, as I have already argued, another "double" of Frankenstein. Walton provides the frame which allows us to glimpse Frankenstein's story. He is the "wedding guest," who can hear the story only because he is so similar to Frankenstein, and who can engage us because while he is outside the story he is still, like us, implicated in it. He is the link between our world and Frankenstein's, and he is saved by Frankenstein and by his difference from him, to return to his country and, significantly, his sister — his one connection with the human community.

The apparent simplicity and order of Mary Shelley's story only intensifies its extraordinary emotional energy and complexity. Although, for example, it is not unreasonable to argue, as Shelley did, that it aims at exhibiting "the amiableness of domestic affection, and the excellence of universal virtue," we can see that the strongly ordering hand of the novelist has allowed the expression of powerful tensions and energies which realistic techniques would tend to repress and, which, having their source in the irrational, will not resolve themselves into any simple meanings. * * *

Frankenstein, like other great romances, notably *Wuthering Heights*, is a more shapely and orderly book than most realistic novels, but the order is the means by which Mary's "readiness to accept what her imagination offered" is expressed. As Northrop Frye has suggested, the freer the imagination is allowed to roam, the more formally shaped will be the structure of the work. Imagination is structural power. Or at least it is that in *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights* which, freed

from the initial commitment to plausibility and to reason, like the shape of the writers' most potent imaginations and desires.

The simplicity of the structure, Walton's tale enfolding Frankenstein's, which, in turn, enfolds that of the monster, implies a clarity and firmness of moral ordering which is not present in the actual texture of the novel. Walton would seem the ultimate judge of the experience, as the outsider yet he explicitly accepts Frankenstein's judgment of it, and largely excuses him. The monster's own defense and explanation, lodged in the center of the story, is, however, by far the most convincing—though it is also a special—reading, and Frankenstein himself confesses that he has failed in his responsibility to his creature. In the end, however, we are not left with a judgment but with Walton's strangely uncolored report of the monster's last speech and last action. If anyone, the monster has the last word: and that word expresses a longing for self-destruction, for the pleasure which will come in the agony of self-immolation, and for an ultimate peace in extinction.

ELLEN MOJERS

Female Gothic: The Monster's Mother?

What I mean by Female Gothic is easily defined: the work that women writers have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic. But what I mean—or anyone else means—by "the Gothic" is not so easily stated except that it has to do with fear. In Gothic writings, fantasy predominates over reality, the strange over the commonplace, and the supernatural over the natural, with one definite anecdotal intent: to scare. Not, that is, to reach down into the depths of the soul and purge it with pity and terror (as we say tragically does), but to get to the body itself, its glands, epidermis, muscles, and circulatory system, quickly arousing and quickly allaying the physical reactions to fear.

Certainly the earliest tributes to the power of Gothic writers tended to emphasize the physiological. Jane Austen has Henry Tilney say, in *Northanger Abbey*, that he could not put down Mrs. Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*: "I remember finishing it in two days—in my hair standing on end the whole time." For Hazlitt Ann Radcliffe had mastered "the art of freezing the blood"; "harrowing up the soul with imaginary horrors, and making the flesh creep and the nerves thrill." Mary Shelley

¹ From the *New York Review of Books*. Reprinted with permission. Later incorporated in some what different form in *Mothers Later: Women* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976).

said she intended *Frankenstein* to be the kind of ghost story that would "curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart." Why such claims? Presumably, because readers enjoyed these sensations. For example, in Joanna Baillie's verse play on the theme of addiction to an artificial tear, the heroine prevails upon a handmaiden, against the best advice, to tell a horror story:

.... Tell it, I pray thee,

And let me cowering stand, and be my couch

The valley's lee; there is a pleasure in it

Yea, when the cold blood shoots through every vein

When every pore upon my shrunken skin

A knotted knoll becomes, and to mine ears

Strange inward sounds awake, and to mine eyes

Rash stranger tears, there is a joy in fear!

At the time when literary Gothic was born, religious fears were on the wane, giving way to that vague panorama of the modern spirit for which Gothic mechanisms seem to have provided welcome therapy. Walter Scott compared reading Mrs. Radcliffe to taking drugs, dangerous when habitual "but of most blessed power in those moments of pain and languor, when the whole head is sore, and the whole heart sick. If those who rail indiscriminately at this species of composition, were to consider the quantity of actual pleasure which it produces, and the much greater proportion of real sorrow and distress which it allays, their philanthropy ought to moderate their critical pride, or religious intolerance." A grateful public rewarded Mrs. Radcliffe, according to her most recent biographer,¹ by making her the most popular and best paid English novelist of the eighteenth century. Her pre-eminence among the "Terrorists," as they were called, was hardly challenged in her own day, and modern readers of *Udolpho* and *The Italian* continue to hail her as mistress of the pure Gothic form.

The secrets of Mrs. Radcliffe's power over the reader seem to be her incantatory prose style, her artful stretching of suspense over long periods of novelistic time, her pictorial and musical imagination which veils on the surreal. But the reasons for her own manipulation of that power remain mysterious, and there is no sign that any more will ever be known of her life and personality than the sparse facts we now have. She was married, childless, shy, sensitive to criticism of her respectability as woman and author, and addicted to travel—an addiction she

¹ *One: A Legend*, published in 1972 in the third volume of *Pages On the Page*, was one of the works read and reread by Mary and Peter Haskie Shelly in their early-year teaching, and author, an energetic moral and wishful mechanism, Scottish speaker, was then known and hyperbolically praised, especially in Scotland, as a Shakespearean tragedienne.

² E. B. Murray, *Ann Radcliffe* (Lewiston, 1972).