**"They Will Prove the Truth of My Tale": Safie's Letters as the Feminist Core of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein***

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At the very center of the [concentric narratives](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Crit/struct.html) that form [Mary Shelley](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/MShelley/mshelley.html)'s *Frankenstein* is a set of letters recording the story of Safie, the "lovely Arabian" engaged to marry Felix DeLacey.[1](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#1) During his conversation in the Alps with Victor Frankenstein, the monster reports that, while living near the DeLacey family, he found and copied Safie's letters. Claiming that "they will prove the truth of my tale," the monster offers his transcription of them to his creator ([119](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v2/f2603.html)). Later, the same packet of copied letters brings a "conviction of the truth" of Victor's tale to Robert Walton, while he sails through the [Arctic Circle](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Places/artocean.html) ([207](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v3/fwal01.html)). Having made the journey from the geographical, psychological, and narrative center of Mary Shelley's novel out to its margins, the letters may now, enclosed in Robert Walton's missives to his sister, travel back into another center -- the warm domestic circle of Margaret Saville's home in England.

Safie's letters are the only tangible, independent evidence of the [truth](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Themes/truth.html) of Walton's tale: Victor Frankenstein is dead, and the monster has been lost in "darkness and distance" ([221](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v3/fwal17.html)). For Mrs. Saville, who has seen neither creature nor creator, the letters will carry all the burden of proof of her brother's fantastic report. Since the reader joins Mrs. Saville in receiving (or "intercepting") Walton's narrative, the packet of copied letters functions similarly for him or her.[2](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#2) Yet the reader must wonder why this tiny bit of flotsam, these letters never reproduced within the novel and apparently tangential to the main narrative, should be so carefully preserved from the maelstrom of Frankenstein's experience, what it is they prove, and indeed how they can prove anything at all.

Although Mary Shelley's "unusually evidentiary technique" in Frankenstein has been noted by numerous critics,[3](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#3) few have remarked the peculiarity of her twice having characters use an apparently irrelevant packet of copied letters to prove "truth." Marc Rubenstein is alone in pondering the truth claim associated with the monster's transfer of the letters to Frankenstein, though he calls it a "narrative flaw," revealing an unconscious conflict about her mother, [Mary Wollstonecraft](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Wollston/wollston.html), at the heart of Mary Shelley's text.[4](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#4) Partly because of his {171} psychoanalytic perspective and partly because he does not examine the second time the letters function as evidence of truth, Rubenstein does not consider if what he calls a flaw might not be part of a larger, purposeful design. Yet Rubenstein properly focuses the reader's attention on Safie's letters, reading them as the thematic and narrative center of the novel. I join Rubenstein in viewing the letters as central and in finding the "mother," Mary Wollstonecraft, at the heart of Mary Shelley's text; I differ from him, however, in taking Mary Wollstonecraft's presence to have literary and philosophical rather than psychological and personal meaning. Because I accept -- or at the very least seek to understand -- the characters' claims that Safie's letters can and do function as evidence for truth, I read *Frankenstein* as consciously [feminist](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Crit/gender.html) in content and form, rather than as unconsciously shaped by the contingencies of Mary Shelley's female existence.[5](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#5)

Safie's narrative, enclosed within the monster's tale to Frankenstein, is located at the physical, textual center of Mary Shelley's novel: it is recounted halfway through volume two of the three-volume text. It is also at the narrative center of this novel formed of concentric narrations: "Walton's tale enfolding Frankenstein's, which, in turn, enfolds that of the monster."[6](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#6) Yet this central narrative differs from the tales that enfold it because Safie never directly tells her tale within the text of the novel. She inscribes it in a set of letters whose "substance" ([119](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v2/f2603.html)) the monster reports to Victor Frankenstein. Frankenstein tells *his* tale to Captain Walton, who enfolds all the previous tales into his written narrative to his sister. At the center as well as at the margins, the story of *Frankenstein* is communicated in a packet of letters.[7](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#7) But while the novel's audience reads Walton's letters to Mrs. Saville, and though the monster, Victor Frankenstein, Captain Walton (and possibly Mrs. Saville) read Safie's letters, for the reader of *Frankenstein* Safie's letters remain opaque, a mysterious talisman of "truth" that passes from hand to hand within the text.

The unreproduced letters provide an elegant formal solution to a logical problem inherent in any novel built of concentric narratives: how to bring to a halt the potentially infinite regress of tales. Without violating the principle of first-person narrations on which the novel is built, the unreproduced letters serve as the last of such narrations, for one cannot discover within them any additional first-person narratives. Safie's letters constitute the novel's inaccessible center, the locus where Mary Shelley's narrative movement inward, occurring even as the frame narrator Walton is journeying outward to the North Pole, can come to a conclusion. They function as an inner pole resonating against [the outer pole](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Gifs/polarmap.html), marking the unreachable limit to the reader's movement into the text, just as the North Pole functions as an outer, unreachable limit for Walton's exploration.

Yet the value of the unreproduced letters is more than merely formal. They are central thematically as well as structurally, a fact Mary Shelley signals not only through her characters' use of them as evidence, but also through their content, their form, and their peculiar silence -- their absence as text from the novel. In each of the ways one comes to regard them, the letters pointedly express a specific, fundamental feminist message identical to a key premise in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*: that women have rational souls. That Mary {172} Shelley had her mother's work in mind is, as I shall argue below, apparent not simply through her assertion of this idea so crucial to enlightenment liberal feminism,[8](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#8) but also through her use of a specific figure -- the rebellious "Arabian" woman -- that echoes a recurring motif in the *Vindication*. Mary Shelley, however, goes further than Mary Wollstonecraft in her critique of a ["gendered construction of the universe."](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/mellor6.html#par3)[9](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#9) Not only does she assert that what has been regarded as "body" is also "spirit," but she criticizes hierarchical dualism itself, insisting that Western culture's valuation of "spirit" over "body," "Man" over "Nature," "masculine" over "feminine" is a destructive philosophical commitment. In doing so, she approaches the perspective of contemporary ecofeminists, who assert not simply that women (and nature) have souls (and thus have "rights"), but that the devaluation of the body, inherent in Western culture, is itself problematic.[10](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#10) A careful examination of the content, form, and function of Safie's letters within *Frankenstein* enforces and deepens the reading of *Frankenstein*'s feminism proposed by such critics as Anne Mellor, Burton Hatlen, and Gerhard Joseph.[11](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#11)

Written to the young Felix DeLacey while Safie's father was imprisoned and Felix was plotting his escape, Safie's letters record her history previous to her joining the DeLaceys, the cottagers who unknowingly offer the monster his liberal education and whose life of "rational companionship" serves as the novel's moral center (Mellor [119](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/mellor6.html#par8)). "Often in the hands of Felix or [his sister] Agatha" (119), the letters appear to be sacred texts to the DeLaceys, and they join the other texts that form the basis of the monster's education. Anne Mellor aptly notes that "both the creature and Mary Shelley read the same books," and she identifies these books as "[Goethe](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Goethe/goethe.html)'s [*Werther*](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Goethe/wertertp.html), [Plutarch](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Plutarch/plutarch.html)'s [*Lives of the Noble Romans*](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Plutarch/lives.html), [Volney](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Volney/volney.html)'s [*Ruins or, . . . the Revolutions of Empire*](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Volney/volneytp.html) and [Milton](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Milton/milton.html)'s [*Paradise Lost*](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Milton/pl0.html), as well as the poets the creature occasionally quotes, [Coleridge](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Coleridg/coleridg.html) and [Byron](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Byron/byron.html)" ([45](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/mellor2.html#par17)). But if the monster were indeed sharing Mary Shelley's [reading list](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/MShelley/reading.html), among the books in the DeLacey cottage should be Mary Wollstonecraft's [*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Wollston/vindded1.html), a text Mary Shelley read and reread during her childhood and which she was reading again during the composition of *Frankenstein*.[12](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#12) In their role within the DeLacey household Safie's letters function similarly to Mary Wollstonecraft's writings within the Godwin household: treasured documents that cannot be read too often. In their content as well, Safie's letters encode a "truth" identical to that taught by Mary Wollstonecraft. The monster's reading list may be more like Mary Shelley's than is at first apparent.

The letters express Safie's gratitude for Felix's efforts on her father's behalf, while also "gently" deploring Safie's "own fate." They are the letters of a young woman who has been promised in marriage to a man she loves but barely knows. In order to make clear her hopes for her own marriage, they recount the story of her mother's unfortunate experience with men and with marriage:

Safie related, that her mother was a Christian Arab, seized and made a slave by the Turks; recommended by her beauty, she had won the heart of the father of Safie, who married her. The young girl spoke in high and enthusiastic terms of her mother, who, born in freedom spurned the bondage to which she was {173} now reduced. She instructed her daughter in the tenets of her religion, and taught her to aspire to higher powers of intellect, and an independence of spirit, forbidden to the female followers of Mahomet. This lady died; but her lessons were indelibly impressed on the mind of Safie, who sickened at the prospect of again returning to Asia, and the being immured within the walls of a haram allowed only to occupy herself with puerile amusements, ill suited to the temper of her soul, now accustomed to grand ideas and a noble emulation for virtue. The prospect of marrying a Christian and remaining in a country where women were allowed to take a rank in society was enchanting to her. ([119](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v2/f2603.html))

Both Marc Rubenstein and Anne Mellor, working from very different assumptions, have found in these letters an "incarnation" of Mary Wollstonecraft: Rubenstein sees Safie's mother, Mellor sees Safie herself as the representation of the notorious eighteenth-century feminist. Yet while Safie and her mother are certainly independent, rebellious women comparable to Mary Wollstonecraft, the details of Safie's characterization and history reveal a specific link not so much to [the life](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Wollston/bio.html) of Mary Wollstonecraft as to her work. In making *Frankenstein*'s central (though unrecorded) narrator a "lovely Arabian" who escapes the harem, Mary Shelley firmly binds her novel, philosophically and textually, to Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.[13](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#13)

"Mahometanism," for Mary Wollstonecraft, is a figure for an error she finds central to Western culture: the refusal to grant women full membership as rational beings in the human race. References to the harem, to "Mahometanism," to the seraglio and to "Egyptian bondage" form a persistent thread in her text.[14](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#14) Drawing on an eighteenth-century, European "Orientalist" construction of the East,[15](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#15) Wollstonecraft systematically deploys her Oriental figures to represent the philosophical foundation for the misogyny and the gendered assignment of power that she sees operating in the West as much as if not more so than in the East. Thus, early in the "Introduction," she explains that she will bring her attention to European texts which, "in the true style of Mahometanism," treat women "as a kind of subordinate beings, and not as a part of the human species" ([8](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Wollston/vindint2.html)). Her concern throughout the *Vindication* is to argue that if women are indeed part of the human species -- for whom "improvable reason" is the "dignified distinction" raising them "above the brute creation" ([8](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Wollston/vindint2.html)) -- then their treatment and position in Western society is utterly unjustifiable. She insists that women who have been raised only to please men are "mere animals," "children," "weak beings . . . only fit for a seraglio" ([10](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Wollston/vindint7.html)). She notes the "unphilosophical" behavior of men (such as [Rousseau](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Rousseau/rousseau.html)) who "to secure the good conduct of women . . . keep them always in a state of childhood" ([20](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Wollston/vind0203.html)). Women, she notes, are taught a "puerile kind of propriety" instead of being encouraged to develop the "strength of mind to acquire what really deserves the name of virtue" ([20](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Wollston/vind0201.html)). Unable to exercise their reason, the distinguishing human characteristic, such women have been made into nothing more than "domestic brutes" ([20](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Wollston/vind0203.html)), "immured in their families groping in the dark" ([5](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Wollston/vindded5.html)).

Not surprisingly, Wollstonecraft finds [Milton](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Milton/milton.html) to be guilty of writing "in the true Mahometan strain." For she explains that, "When he tells us that women are formed {174} for softness and sweet attractive grace," she cannot understand him, unless

he meant to deprive us of souls, and insinuate that we were beings only designed by sweet attractive grace, and docile blind obedience, to gratify the senses of man when he can no longer soar on the wing of contemplation. ([19](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Wollston/vind0202.html))

Wollstonecraft thus uses Milton's portrayal of [Eve](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Contexts/eve.html) as central evidence of a "Mahometan" tendency in Western culture.

In her deployment of the harem inmate as the type of a particular form of sensual/sexual oppression, Wollstonecraft extends and solidifies what was already a well-established figure in Enlightenment meditations on despotism, the status of women, and the nature of "rational" society.[16](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#16) And in her creation of Safie as a central figure within her own text, Mary Shelley gives imaginative life to her mother's philosophical critique. Safie, a woman who narrowly escapes being "immured" in a harem under her father's "Mahometan" law, is a woman escaped from patriarchy as it had been specifically defined and figured in the *Vindication*. Safie is a woman who insists on her own possession of a soul, rejecting "puerile amusements" and devoting herself to a "noble emulation for virtue." Safie's echoing of Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas (and words) identifies her, not as Mary Wollstonecraft herself, but as an exemplar of a woman claiming her rights as a rational being. The story inscribed in her letters, and made plain through the monster's account of them, is a story about individuals who insist on their status as souls, as rational beings worthy of full participation as free adults in an egalitarian, non-hierarchical social world.

This thematic content of the letters explains not only why the DeLaceys treasure them but also why the monster chooses to copy, preserve, and pass them on -- and why they can function as evidence of *his* story about his own moral development. Safie's story, an embodiment of Mary Wollstonecraft's philosophy, is equivalent to the monster's story, the story most readers take as the central focus of Mary Shelley's novel. Only if we accept an identity between Safie and the monster can we understand how her letters "prove the truth" of both the monster's and Frankenstein's tales. Otherwise, with Marc Rubenstein, we will have to call the truth claim associated with the letters a "narrative flaw." For, on the face of it, the letters can prove nothing. If the monster had offered Victor Frankenstein the originals, their existence as an artifact might have proved that he had passed some time with the DeLaceys. But he merely offers a copy; all that the copy, as artifact, can prove is that the monster has learned to read and write, perhaps even to forge a set of letters. This in itself is certainly significant, though the monster's tale has a more comprehensive point: to convince Victor Frankenstein to create for him a companion, a female creature. The plot contained in the letters -- Safie's narration of her destiny -- can prove nothing about the monster's tale. But the theme, communicated through characterization and imagery that evoke the *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, is deeply relevant to the monster's story. For he too tells a tale about a body's discovery of itself as spirit, and of that spirit's need for a congenial social world in which to function. Just as Safie fears being "immured" in a harem, {175} so the creature rebels against the prospect of a purely "brute" existence, devoid of "rational companionship." And just as Safie's story, through its link to Mary Wollstonecraft's text, is an implicit commentary on Milton's Eve, so the monster's tale asks readers to reexamine Milton's rendering of [gender roles](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Themes/gender.html) and the relationship between creature and creator.

Several critics have recently argued that the monster's gender is female.[17](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#17) In presenting Safie's story as evidence for his own, the monster certainly enforces such a reading, and helps clarify *Frankenstein*'s relationship to *Paradise Lost*. Recalling Mary Wollstonecraft's characterization of Milton as "Mahometan," we can see that Gilbert and Gubar may well be correct in reading the monster -- who identifies with Safie, the rebellious daughter of a "Mahometan" father -- as Eve. But Shelley's representation of Eve is not so much an unconscious manifestation, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, as a literary construction, drawing upon, and expanding into narrative, Mary Wollstonecraft's imaging of the fate of women denied the exercise of their reason and the cultivation of their souls.

In a scene that unmistakably echoes a crucial moment in *Paradise Lost*, Mary Shelley has her creature glimpse himself in a pool of water. As the monster reports:

"I had admired the perfect forms of my cottagers -- their grace, beauty, and delicate complexions: but how was I terrified when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification. Alas! I did not yet entirely know the fatal effects of this miserable deformity." ([109](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v2/f2405.html))[18](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#18)

Eve's experience had been more pleasant:

As I bent down to look, just opposite,
A Shape within the wat'ry gloom appear'd
Bending to look on me, I started back,
It started back, but pleas'd I soon return'd,
Pleased it return'd as soon with answering looks
Of sympathy and love, there I had fixt
Mine eyes till now, and pin'd with vain desire,
Had not a voice thus warn'd me. . . .[19](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#19)

Eve finds in herself the "sweet attractive grace" her maker, her mate, and her poet identify as her defining characteristic. The monster, on the other hand, sees himself as the "wretch," "the miserable monster," the "thing such as even Dante could not have conceived" that Victor Frankenstein sees him to be ([53](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v1/f1403.html)). Whether beautiful or ugly, each creature's physical characteristics determine how self and others respond. Eve's beauty wins her own and Adam's love; the monster's ugliness earns his own self-loathing and Frankenstein's abhorrence and abandonment: "No mortal could support the horror of that countenance" ([53](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v1/f1403.html)).

By giving her monster a vision so clearly an inversion of Eve's, Mary Shelley {176} conflates the two "creatures," demonstrating the moral equivalence of being judged ugly or beautiful and commenting on the power of the gaze as an objectification of the body, a denial of spirit and subjectivity. Frankenstein's creature is quite horribly trapped in his outsized, appalling body, unable to enact the virtue and benevolence he feels within his soul. "I was benevolent and good," he declares; "misery made me a fiend" ([95](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v2/f2205.html)). The agony of this entrapment, recounted in his narration to his creator, can certainly convince the reader (as it does, momentarily, Victor Frankenstein) how a moral monster can evolve from a physical deformity. But Mary Shelley's point is deeper, drawing as it does on her mother's lesson about Eve and her daughters: to be regarded as beautiful is also to be morally trapped. As Mary Wollstonecraft had argued, a lovely woman, valued only for her body, becomes "a more irrational monster than some of the Roman emperors" ([44](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Wollston/vind0311.html)). Because he is regarded as pure flesh, the monster's fate is comparable to that of women in patriarchal society: no matter how hard he tries, his status as "creature" blinds his creator (and all other humans who can see) to his status as "rational being." His fate is equivalent to that of women under "Mahometan" law. Indeed, he -- or any being regarded solely as object -- might as well be in a harem, and his appreciation of Safie's letters indicates that the point is not lost on him.

But the monster is biologically male, the first of his "race," and thus also in a position comparable to [Adam](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Contexts/adam.html)'s. And, like Adam, though from a solitude far greater, he asks of [his creator](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Contexts/god.html) a companion, a female with whom he can "live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being" ([140](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v2/f2901.html)). The creature uses language similar to that of Adam in *Paradise Lost*, when Adam requests a mate "fit to participate / All rational delight" ([*PL* 8.390-391](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Milton/pl8.html#390)). In the course of her argument about women's souls, Mary Wollstonecraft had cited Adam's speech to his maker, emphasizing his desire for "fellowship" and commenting on its strange incongruity with Milton's characterization of Eve as an unquestioningly obedient, perfectly beautiful child, made for "sweet attractive grace." Here "Milton seems to coincide with me," Wollstonecraft notes ([20](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Wollston/vind0202.html)). If Eve is truly to be Adam's "fit" companion, she must offer more than merely a pleasing physical appearance. She must have a soul, as, indeed, the monster explicitly hopes for in *his* mate. But Victor Frankenstein refuses his creature's request, largely because he cannot trust that either partner will be rational. He imagines that the female being "might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate"; he fears that she will not honor the "compact made before her creation"; and, most significantly, he dreads the "results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted" -- an uncontrollable brood of "devils" ([163](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v3/f3301.html)). In refusing the monster's request, Frankenstein repeats and intensifies the "Mahometan" error Mary Wollstonecraft had decried.

The belief that the flesh of the female -- and of Nature itself -- does not partake of spirit in the same way as the flesh of the male (and of a male God) is embedded not in Mahometan but in Western ideology, derived from the Church Fathers and intensified through the triumph of [Baconian](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/People/bacon.html) science. Victor Frankenstein, the male scientist seeking to control a "female" nature, is an embodiment of that ideology.[20](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#20) The true horror of Mary Shelley's story is the horror of twice witness- {177} ing that ideology at work in the violation of female identity -- in both the creation and the destruction of Frankenstein's two "creatures." The reader feels the pain of the first creature, a rational being condemned to solitude because of his physical appearance, and then the reader suffers the violent dismemberment of the female creature, whom Frankenstein, despite the lessons of the original creature's tale, insistently regards as pure flesh.

Frankenstein's destruction of the half-completed female creature, Anne Mellor has [argued](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/mellor6.html#par12), represents his fear of female sexuality. Yet the fear of female sexuality masks a deeper fear -- the fear of female spirituality, and its powerful challenge to patriarchal domination. This is the fear we see at work in Victor Frankenstein, for whom an acknowledgment of the "spirit" inherent in the female "flesh" of Nature would require an abandonment of his entire project of scientific mastery and control. He recognizes that the female creature will "in all probability . . . become a thinking and reasoning animal" ([163](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v3/f3301.html)), and he fears that such independence of spirit might lead to unexpected results. He destroys the female creature because he realizes he will not be able to control her. It is female spirituality, not materiality, that he denies and fears, for spirituality poses the greatest threat to him. If all women, like Safie, escaped from their harems, then patriarchy -- and men like Victor Frankenstein -- would be doomed.

That Victor senses the threat the monster (an "inspirited" body) poses to his world-view is apparent in his initial flight after the monster's awakening. Not surprisingly, after having fled from the monster, Victor Frankenstein seeks "consolation in the works of the orientalists" ([64](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v1/f1507.html)). His friend Clerval has been studying Oriental languages and literature; Victor reads the tales in translation, finding in them that "life appears to consist in a warm sun and a garden of roses, in the smiles and frowns of a fair enemy, and the fire that consumes your own heart" ([64](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v1/f1507.html)). In presenting Victor's attraction to Oriental tales of languor and sexual paradise, Mary Shelley shows that Victor, like Milton, is more "Mahometan" than he knows. Perhaps Victor later preserves the copies of Safie's letters because, as far as he can see, they too present an "Oriental" tale, though he fails to grasp how their message challenges his fantasies of sensuous bliss in "a garden of roses." In fact, [the *Arabian Nights*](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/EtAlia/sinbad.html), the most popular of Oriental tales in nineteenth-century England, also pose a challenge to Victor Frankenstein's fantasies of male, "spiritual" dominance over a female, "bodily" nature.[22](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#22) For the *Arabian Nights*, a frame narrative that may have provided a model for Mary Shelley's structure in *Frankenstein*, is ultimately the story of a woman who uses her spirit to resist being treated as pure flesh.[22](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#22) Scheherazade tells her tales for a thousand and one nights in order to prevent the Sultan Schahriar from killing her and every other young woman in the land. The Sultan, unlike Victor Frankenstein, learns finally to respect (and love) the spiritual freedom and integrity of beings he initially regards purely as physical creatures to be controlled and possessed.

Safie's letters, in their thematic content, encapsulate a comparable message, inherent in the monster's tale and in Mary Shelley's novel as a whole: that an animated human body is spirit as well as flesh and will demand treatment as such. This theme, and its specific expression by means of Oriental figures Mary Shelley de- {178} rived from the work of her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft. By placing Safie's letters so prominently in the center of her text, she firmly links her own imaginative work to her mother's philosophical analysis of patriarchy. And by having the letters twice offered and accepted as evidence of truth, she points to the moral message that underlies her fantastic plot.

Yet this message, within the text, is fully appreciated only by Captain Walton. Victor Frankenstein, who hears the monster out and who accepts the letters as "proof," nevertheless betrays the monster when he destroys the female creature and refuses to acknowledge the monster as a rational being, driving him even further into monstrousness. Captain Walton, on the other hand, does appear to grasp the truth the monster intends. Victor, when he begins his narration to Walton, claims that, while seeming "impossible," his tale nevertheless "conveys in its series internal evidence of the truth of the events of which it is composed" ([24](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v1/flet48.html)). The "internal evidence" of Victor's narrative fails to convince Walton, who writes to Mrs. Saville:

His tale is connected, and told with an appearance of the simplest truth; yet I own to you that the levers of Felix and Safie, which he showed me, and the apparition of the monster, seen from our ship, brought to me a greater conviction of the truth of his narrative than his asseverations, however earnest and connected. ([207](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v3/fwal01.html))

Glimpsing the monster -- "Such a monster has then really existence" ([207](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v3/fwal01.html)) -- convinces Walton of the physical reality of Frankenstein's experiments. The letters teach him the moral of that trial. For Walton, unlike Frankenstein, struggles to overcome his physical revulsion toward the monster; he speaks to it and gives a sympathetic report of its last words. Most significantly, he does not fulfill Frankenstein's request to destroy the creature, and he gives up, albeit reluctantly, his [Promethean](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Contexts/prometh.html) quest to conquer the North Pole. Walton takes to heart the message inscribed in Safie's letters.

But Safie's letters communicate meaning through more than simply their content, and Mary Shelley's use of them goes beyond an inscription of her indebtedness to her mother's thought. In this novel composed of [first-person narratives](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Themes/narrate.html), Safie's letters have a special status, a shape and a rhetorical context (or pre-text) that distinguish them from the others. The three main narrators of *Frankenstein* are a set of single males, with Walton and Frankenstein in particular engaged in quests of domination and control over what they themselves figure as a female Nature. Walton and Frankenstein are, like the monster, deeply lonely beings, who in their narratives and their actions reach out for the sympathy and understanding of another. Early in his letters to his sister Walton declares, "I bitterly feel the want of a friend" ([13](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v1/flet22.html)); Victor Frankenstein lives in lonely "remorse and . . . guilt" ([86](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v2/f2101.html)) knowing that his creature has killed his young brother; the monster experiences himself as "irrevocably excluded" from the "bliss" of human fellowship he sees around him ([95](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v2/f2205.html)). Each speaker's tale is a monologue, and though each listener is at first sympathetic, each listener also ultimately betrays the implicit or explicit {179} promise of his faithful listening: Victor Frankenstein refuses to create the female creature, and Captain Walton fails to annihilate the original monster. One does not know how Mrs. Saville (or the reader) will respond to Walton's written narrative.

The central narrative, comprised of Safie's letters, has a quite different formal structure, arising in a context that contrasts with the desperate, urgent narrations of the monster, Victor, and Captain Walton. For Safie is writing to her lover Felix, an already sympathetic audience who will, the reader knows, respond to her desire for "rational companionship" and love. Their relationship, as observed by the monster, is a domestic idyll, a circle of mutuality and fulfillment in opposition to the isolation and frustration of the monster, Frankenstein, and Walton. Safie's arrival at the DeLacey cottage coincides with the arrival of a beautiful spring; she is always "gay and happy" in a home where "joy had taken the place of sadness" ([113](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v2/f2503.html)). And in keeping with the sense of fulfillment associated with Safie's presence, Mary Shelley suggests that the letters copied by the monster may be a complete correspondence, not simply the letters of one writer. Walton describes the documents Frankenstein shows him as "the letters of Felix and Safie" ([207](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v3/fwal01.html)), implying that Safie's letters were answered by Felix, and that these answering letters are part of the packet that gets passed from hand to hand. If this is the case, then the "letters of Felix and Safie" constitute the only example in the novel's narrative structure of [completed and fulfilled dialogue](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Themes/writing.html). At the center is a circle, a relationship of completion that finds its expression in the occasion of the letters their reception, and their form as a complete correspondence. Safie and Felix share a relationship of mutual respect and pleasure, a relationship embodied in the formal structure of the letters, and one that eludes the other speakers.

Another crucial aspect of the letters' form is, of course, their absence as text from Mary Shelley's novel. Earlier I argued that Mary Shelley's choice not to reproduce Safie's letters (or Safie's and Felix's letters) within her text constitutes an elegant solution to a formal problem posed by a structure of embedded narratives. Yet this narrative silence has also a thematic value, deepening and extending the feminist ideology that informs the work. *Frankenstein* embodies not simply a feminist moral but a feminist poetic as well, and the silence at the center of the text is the core of that poetic.

To clearly understand the feminist poetic at work in *Frankenstein*, it may be helpful briefly to examine a contemporary short story that has come to be an important document in analyses of female creativity: Isak Dinesen's "The Blank Page." Dinesen's female narrator, who, like Scheherazade, has "told many tales one more than a thousand,"[23](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#23) tells a story about an order of Carmelite nuns that displays in a public gallery a series of framed, blood-stained sheets attesting to the virginity on their wedding-nights of women of noble birth. "In the midst" of the gallery writes Dinesen,

there hangs a canvas which differs from the others. The frame of it is as fine and as heavy as any, and as proudly as any carries the golden plate with the royal crown. But on this one plate no name is inscribed, and the linen within the frame is snow-white from corner to corner, a blank page. (104)

In her provocative analysis of the story, Susan Gubar describes the gallery as "a kind of paradigmatic women's studies department," with the sheets as texts that teach that, for a woman "the body is the only accessible medium for self-expression."[24](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#24) But the "blank page" is "radically subversive," a "mysterious but potent act of resistance" both to being written upon and to being read (89). That it hangs in the gallery at all indicates what Dinesen calls the nuns' "loyalty to the story" (104).

Dinesen writes:

It is in front of this piece of pure white linen that the old princesses of Portugal -- worldly wise, dutiful, long-suffering queens, wives, and mothers -- and their noble old playmates, bridesmaids and maids-of-honor have most often stood still.

It is in front of the blank page that old and young nuns, with the Mother Abbess herself. sink into deepest thought. (105)

As Dinesen's storyteller explains,

Where the story-teller is loyal, eternally and unswervingly loyal to the story, there, in the end, silence will speak. Where the story has been betrayed, silence is but emptiness. But we, the faithful, when we have spoken our last word, will hear the voice of silence. Whether a small snotty lass understands it or not. (100)

Gubar identifies the blank page with "a female inner space, . . . readiness for inspiration and creation, the self conceived and dedicated to its own potential divinity" (91), and she finds in the Dinesen tale a compelling image of female creativity and a "revisionary female theology" (93). Yet the tale, with its emphasis on the art of women storytellers, provides a potent image not only of female creativity but also of a structure that female narrative -- and specifically feminist narrative -- might take: an articulated frame surrounding a speaking silence. I urge this not because of any biological mimicry that such a shape might suggest (though, for example, *Frankenstein*'s enfolded, circular narrative structure has been compared, *ad nauseum* to the shape of the female body), but because of the cultural and ideological value of such a form. Silence becomes a significant component of texts by women because actively chosen and represented silence enacts women's resistance to acts of appropriation, as well as their assertion of the independent value of the body.[25](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#25) As Dinesen's narrator comments, "We, . . . the old women who tell stories, we know the story of the blank page. But we are somewhat averse to telling it, for it might well, among the uninitiated, weaken our own credit" (100). Silence at the center of a woman's text, while apparently weakening female authority, actually asserts the integrity of female experience. Such silence resists and baffles the act of appropriation which is reading, demanding of the audience a new form of understanding, on a level with the "deepest thought" of Dinesen's Abbess.

One cannot be certain whether the woman whose "blank page" hangs in the {181} gallery remained a virgin after her marriage or was not a virgin before it: her silence resists any absolute reading that seeks to define her in terms of her status as biological object. Her silence does affirm, however, her resistance, her defiance of patriarchal conventions. To inscribe silence within a speaking text is to insist on a truth that escapes the conventions of the narrative construction of meaning. It is also, simultaneously, elaborately and almost ostentatiously, to offer that truth up to the reader. The frame makes the invisible visible; what might otherwise have been ignored is now foregrounded, placed at the center and presented for contemplation.

Mary Shelley's refusal to print Safie's letters thus suggests that she deliberately chose to keep them inviolate, unpenetrated by the consciousness of the reader, who until reaching this center of the narrative unwittingly participates in a series of voyeuristic identifications with characters who seek to "know" or possess something outside of themselves. Victor unabashedly seeks to "penetrate into the recesses of nature, and shew how she works in her hiding places" ([42](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v1/f1206.html)); Captain Walton longs to "tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man" ([10](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v1/flet12.html)); even the monster spends months secretly observing and then planning on "introducing" his ungainly self "into the cottage of [his] protectors," the DeLaceys ([128](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v2/f2706.html)). Indeed, in his act of copying the letters and making them his own the monster carries the novel's pattern of voyeurism and appropriation to a terrible extreme. He seems, finally, to violate that which he claims to love,[26](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/zonana.html#26) though Shelley protects Safie from the monster's violation: the letters he copies are themselves not "originals." For Safie (the "Arabian"), before joining the DeLaceys, could neither speak nor write French. In order to communicate with Felix, she enlists "the aid of an old man, a servant of her father's, who understood French" and who enabled her to "express her thoughts in the language of her lover" ([119](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v2/f2602.html)). The letters the monster copies are translations of an "original" that has no written, material existence. Safie is safe.

The silence and blankness of Safie's letters -- their failure actually to appear within the text -- resists the voyeuristic, culturally masculine appropriation of nature that the reader, along with the narrators, is engaged in. Through their silence as text the letters speak an even stronger feminist message of resistance, rebellion, and escape than that encoded in their (reported) content. Mary Shelley thus powerfully deploys her narrative structure in the service of her feminist theme.

In suggesting that Safie's letters serve as the best evidence for the truth of the monster's and Frankenstein's tales, Mary Shelley deliberately frames and offers them to the reader. Like the blank page in Dinesen's story, they may call forth our "deepest thought," but only if we stand still, looking at them with eyes that have abandoned the desire to appropriate and objectify. To stand before them long enough is to see their frame dissolve, and to discover that the "truth" they "prove," the tale they tell, is indeed the core of Mary Shelley's novel: the powerful identification of woman, nature, and spirit that challenges patriarchal law, theology, science -- and even narration.

**Notes**

1. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*, The 1818 Text, ed. James Rieger (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974) [120](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1818v2/f2605.html). All further citations will be documented parenthetically in the text. For his painstaking and thoughtful research assistance, I am indebted to Mark Kerr. Margaret Ruth Walker, Janis Paul, Nicholas Howe, Richard Barney and James Yoch each offered valuable and encouraging comments on early drafts of this paper, I am grateful for their assistance.

2. For an analysis of the reader's interception of Margaret Saville's "recipient-function," see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 243-261, [p. 259](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/spivak.html#par59).

3. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979) [224](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/gilbert.html#par27). Although [L. J. Swingle](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/swingle2.html) has written on *Frankenstein* and epistemology in "Frankenstein's Monster and Its Romantic Relatives: Problems of Knowledge in English Romanticism," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 15 (1973): 51-56, he does not consider the epistemological questions raised by the use of Safie's letters as evidence.

4. Marc A. Rubenstein, "'My Accursed Origin': The Search for the Mother in *Frankenstein," Studies in Romanticism* 15 (1976): 165-94, [p. 172](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/rubenst.html#par20).

5. As both Mary Jacobus, in "Is There a Woman in This Text?" *New Literary History* 14 (1982): 117-141, and Fred V. Randel, in "*Frankenstein*, Feminism, and the Intertextuality of Mountains," *Studies in Romanticism* 23 (1984): 515-532, note, *Frankenstein* has too often been treated, by even the most sympathetic critics, as a "monstrous symptom" (Jacobus [138](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/jacobus.html#par29)), rather than a "vigorously agonistic and synthesizing" literary creation (Randel [532](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/randel.html#par25)). Mary Shelley's self-deprecating account of the novel's origin in "a waking dream" ([228](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1831v1/fint11.html)) and her description of it as "my hideous progeny" ([229](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/1831v1/fint12.html)) have lent credibility to critics who prefer to "read" Mary Shelley rather than her novel. Feminist readings of *Frankenstein* do not necessarily read the novel as itself feminist. See, for example, [Ellen Moers](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/moers.html), "Female Gothic," in *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel*, eds. George Levine and U. C. Knoepflmacher (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1979), and [Barbara Johnson](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/johnson.html), "My Monster/My Self," *Diacritics* 12 (1982): 2-10.

6. George Levine, "*Frankenstein* and the Tradition of Realism," *Novel* 7 (Fall 1973): 14-30, [p. 22](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/levine3.html#par24).

7. [Beth Newman](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/newmanb.html), in "Narratives of Seduction and the Seductions of Narrative: The Frame Structure of *Frankenstein," ELH* 53 (1986): 141-163, offers a brilliant analysis of the novel's structure of oral narratives enclosed in Walton's written letters. She does not, however, note that there are letters at the center of the central oral narrative.

8. For a lucid account of the primary tenets of enlightenment liberal feminism, see Josephine Donovan, *Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions of American Feminism* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1985) 1-63.

9. See Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York: Methuen, 1988), for a sustained argument that *Frankenstein* represents Mary Shelley's critique of the "consequences of a social construction of gender that values the male over the female" ([115](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/mellor6.html#par4)). Further references to Mellor will he noted parenthetically in the text.

10. See Donovan, pages 132-36, for the contemporary ecofeminist position. Her recent article, "Animal Rights and Feminist Theory," *Signs* 15.2 (Winter 1990): 340-375, further explores the philosophical foundations of ecofeminism. See, esp., p. 369.

11. Burton Hatlen, in "Milton, Mary Shelley, and Patriarchy," in *Rhetoric, Literature, and Interpretation, Bucknell Review* 28.2 (1983): 19-47, argues cogently that *Frankenstein* offers a thorough critique of patriarchal values. Similarly, Gerhard Joseph, in a recent MLA paper, "Virginal Sex, Vaginal Text: The Folds of *Frankenstein*" (1989 MLA, Washington), argues that the novel criticizes the "psychic fragmentation" generated by the patriarchal "passion for spiritualized purity," the "attempt to transcend the body." See also [Kate Ellis](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/ellis1.html), "Monsters in the Garden: Mary Shelley and the Bourgeois Family," in *The Endurance of Frankenstein*. For additional, divergent feminist readings of the text, see [Mary Poovey](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/poovey.html), *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: Univ. Of Chicago Press, 1984); [William Veeder](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/veeder3.html), *Mary Shelley and Frankenstein: The Fate of Androgyny* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986); [Anca Vlasopolos](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/vlasopol.html), "*Frankenstein*'s Hidden Skeleton: The Psycho-Politics of Oppression," *Science-Fiction Studies* 10.2 (1983): 125-136; and [Judith Weissman](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/weissman.html), "A Reading of *Frankenstein* as the Complaint of a Political Wife," *Colby Library Quarterly* 12 (1976): 171-80.

12. See *The Journals of Mary Shelley 1814-1844*, 2 vols., vol. 1, eds. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (Oxford: The Clarendon Press. 1987) 97.

13. Anca Vlasopolos, Kate Ellis, and Burton Hatlen are among the handful of commentators who explicitly link the ideas in *Frankenstein* to the ideas in Mary Wollstonecraft's work. [Burton R. Pollin](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/pollin.html) makes no mention of Wollstonecraft in his study of "Philosophical and Literary Sources in *Frankenstein*," *Comparative Literature* 17.2 (Spring 1965): 97-108

14. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Carol H. Poston, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1988); see, for example, pages [7-10](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Wollston/vindint1.html), [19-22](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Wollston/vind0202.html), [29](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Wollston/vind0221.html), [41](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Wollston/vind0306.html), [47](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Wollston/vind0318.html), [73](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Wollston/vind0526.html), [117](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Wollston/vind0604.html). Further citations will be documented parenthetically in the text.

15. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), for an exploration of how European culture "gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (3). The irony of Mary Wollstonecraft's and Mary Shelley's use of the Oriental woman is of course the fact that, in asserting the subjectivity and spirituality of one group ("women"), they appropriate and deny the subjectivity of another group ("Orientals," and even more particularly, Oriental men). Still, the figure of the rebellious Oriental woman must be read as it was intended -- as a powerful commentary on the patriarchal construction of woman as "flesh."

16. See, for example, Montesquieu's use of the harem in his *Persian Letters* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973). At the conclusion of this work published in [1721](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Indexes/timeline.html#1721), a rebellious, dying harem-inmate declares to her master: "I may have lived in servitude, but I have always been free. I have amended your laws according to the laws of nature, and my mind has always remained independent" (280). Pauline Kra, in "The Role of the Harem in Imitations of Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth-Century* 182 (1979): 273-83, shows that "one of the functions of the harem theme" in eighteenth-century French literature "was to demonstrate the subordinate status of women" (274). In England, a similar critique was underway. For example, [Samuel Johnson](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/People/johnson.html), in *Rasselas*, in *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Frank Brady and W. K. Wimsatt (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1977), shows how a woman, with a "mind accustomed to stronger operations would be bored by the childish play" of women in the harem. Mary Shelley had read both Montesquieu and Johnson in the years preceding her composition of *Frankenstein* (*Journals*, v. 2, 672 and 655). Her use of the "Arabian" woman seems more specifically indebted to Mary Wollstonecraft, however for only in Wollstonecraft's work is the harem systematically depicted as a specific locus for the oppression of women.

17. See, e.g., Gordon D. Hirsch, "The Monster Was a Lady: On the Psychology of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," *Hartford Studies in Literature* 7 (1978): 116-53; [Barbara Johnson](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/johnson.html); and [Gilbert and Gubar](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/gilbert.html).

18. The scene also echoes a moment in [*Gulliver's Travels*](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/People/swift.html), a text on Mary Shelley's 1816 reading list (*Journals*, v. 1, 96). Gulliver has been living among, and absorbing the values of, the Houyhnhnms. He recognizes that his "Family," "Friends," "Countrymen," and "human Race in general" are "*Yahoos* in Shape and Disposition . . . making no other Use of Reason than to improve and multiply . . . Vices." And he reports, "When I happened to behold the Reflection of my own Form in a Lake or Fountain, I turned away my face in Horror and detestation of my self; and could better endure the Sight of a common *Yahoo* than of my own Person" (Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Herbert Davis [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965] 278). The monster's vision of himself as a purely physical being is surely related to Gulliver's recognition of himself as a Yahoo.

19. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), [Book 4, lines 460-467](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Milton/pl4.html#460). Further citations will be documented parenthetically within the text.

20. For the links between the development of science and the de-spiritualization of both nature and women, see Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982); and Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).

21. The [*New Arabian Nights*](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/EtAlia/sinbad.html) was on Mary Shelley's 1815 reading list (*Journals*, v. 1, 88), and she reports having read from it on June 25, 1817 (*Journals*, v. 1, 175).

22. As early as 1807 this feminist message of Scheherazade was recognized by [Mme de Staël](http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/People/stael.html) in *Corinne*. De Staël compares her Corinne, a poet and improviser, to the Sultana, "who told a thousand stories until the Charms of her mind stood victoriously over the man who threatened to destroy her body," *Corinne or Italy*, trans. Avriel H. Goldberger (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1987) 81. Mary Shelley read *Corinne* in 1815, and refers to is extensively in her journals (*Journals*, v. 2, 678).

23. Isak Dinesen, "The Blank Page," in her *Last Tales* (New York: Random House, 1957) 99-105, p. 99. Further citations will be documented in the text.

24. Susan Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity," in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, ed. Elizabeth Abel (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982) 73-94, D. 78-79. Further citations will be documented in the text.

25. See Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs* I (1976): 875-93, for further elaboration of this idea.

26. The reader may be reminded of Mr. B's disturbing appropriation of Pamela's letters in Richardson's novel, *Pamela* -- a text Mary Shelley read in 1816 (*Journals*, v. 1, 96).