
Frankenstein: Creation as Catastrophe

Author(s): Paul Sherwin

Source: *PMLA*, Vol. 96, No. 5 (Oct., 1981), pp. 883-903

Published by: [Modern Language Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/462130>

Accessed: 25/11/2013 17:29

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Modern Language Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *PMLA*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Frankenstein: Creation as Catastrophe

AS *FRANKENSTEIN* gets under way, we are lured by the promise of a new beginning: Walton's pathbreaking journey to the North Pole. Bound for Archangel to assemble a crew, Walton is inspired by the cold northern wind to envision a perpetually warm and radiant paradise at the summit of the globe. To be there would be to capture the heavens in a glance, to tap earth's central power source, and to stand within the magic circle of the poets he once sought to emulate but whose sublimity he could not match. Such extravagance is easier to credit if we keep in mind the uneasiness it is intended to dispel: "There is something at work in my soul, which I do not understand" (p. 21).¹ Perhaps for his own good, and certainly at the dramatically right moment, the quest founders somewhere in the frozen wastes between Archangel and the Pole, just where Walton is waylaid by Frankenstein, who is feverishly pursuing the path of the Creature's departure. It may be more accurate to say that the quest is deflected. For although Walton is relegated to the periphery of the fiction, ushering in and out a wondrous tale that preempts his own, he is profoundly implicated as well. The tale, of course, is a monitory example meant for him, but it is also a riddle of fate that means him: the mystery that he is and that becomes his by virtue of his fascinated participation in Frankenstein's story. In short, Walton is in the critical position, and nowhere is his situation better evidenced than at the end of the novel. Frankenstein, burdened by his tale's monstrous residue, concludes his narrative by enjoining Walton to slay the Creature after his death. Yet the climactic encounter with the Creature unsettles everything even more and leaves Walton powerless to act. The final word and deed belong to the Creature, who vows to undo the scene of his creation once he bounds from the ship: "I shall . . . seek the most northern extremity of the globe; I shall collect my funeral pile, and consume to ashes this miserable

frame, that its remains may afford no light . . . my ashes will be swept into the sea by the winds" (pp. 222–23). To Walton, however, belongs the burden of the mystery as he watches this self-destroying artifact vanish into darkness and distance and contemplates a catastrophe at the Pole.

I

Mary Shelley might well have titled her novel *One Catastrophe after Another*. For Frankenstein, who is dubiously in love with his own polymorphously disastrous history, the fateful event to which every other catastrophe is prelude or postscript is the creation. According to the archaic model implicit in his narrative, transcendence is equivalent to transgression, and his presumptuous deed is invested with the aura of a primal sin against nature that somehow justifies the ensuing retributive bother. Condemned by nature's gods to limitless suffering, the aspiring hero learns his properly limited human place. *Frankenstein*, however, knows differently. A reading alert to the anti-Gothic novel Mary Shelley inscribes within her Gothic tale will discover that nothing is simple or single. The critical event is impossible to localize, terms such as "justice" and "injustice" do not so much mean as undergo vicissitudes of meaning, and all the narrators are dispossessed of their authority over the text. As the central misreader, Frankenstein is the chief victim of the text's irony, the humor becoming particularly cruel whenever he thinks he is addressing the supernatural powers that oversee his destiny, for his invocatory ravings never fail to conjure up his own Creature. Indeed, the evacuation of spiritual presence from the world of the novel suggests that *Frankenstein* is more a house in ruins than the house divided that its best recent critics have shown it to be. The specter of deconstruction rises: doubtless future interpreters will describe a text

that compulsively subverts its own performance and that substitutes for its missing center the senseless power play of a catastrophic Gothic machine. Yet the Gothic is always already demystified, the ruin of an anterior world of large spiritual forces and transcendent desires that the most relentless of demystifiers cannot will away. *Frankenstein*, although arguably a Gothic fiction, remains a living novel because it is a haunted house, ensouled by the anxious spirit that perturbs all belated romances.

While the unconsummated spirit raised by *Frankenstein* cannot be put to rest, one might suppose that *das Unheimliche* can be contained within the spacious edifice of Freudian psychoanalysis. Freud's antithetical system provides an interpretive context for many of the anomalies disclosed by an ironic reading: the dissonance of overt and implicit meanings, the obscure sense of having trespassed on sacred ground, the appalling secret that craves expression yet must be protected as though it were a holy thing. In addition, the novel's catastrophic model functions in a way strikingly similar to the Freudian psychic apparatus. Instead of hubris, there is the drive's excess; instead of a downcast hero assaulted by phantasmagoria, there is the boundless anxiety occasioned by the proliferation of repressed desire; and instead of the restrictive gods, there is the exalted secondary process, intended to keep the apparatus stable by binding or incarcerating mobile energy. More telling, the catastrophic model is an almost exact duplicate of the oedipal scenario, the most privileged psychoanalytic thematic and the dynamic source of Freud's mature topography of the psyche. The way is opened for a recentering of the novel's unresolved intellectual and emotional turmoil.

Of course, the Freudian way has increasingly become, and always was, a wildly extravagant detour or series of detours, and staking out a position in the psychoanalytic field can be as agonizing as "choosing" a neurosis. Still, when one reads that Walton is about to enact the favorite dream of his youth, seeking a passage through the ice to the warm Pole, where he may "discover the wondrous power which attracts the needle" (p. 16), or that Frankenstein struggles "with a child's blindness" to break through "the fortifications and impediments that seemed to keep human beings from entering the citadel of

nature" (p. 40), it is hard not to translate such statements into the formulations of a recognizably classical psychoanalysis. I should acknowledge here that I am averse to reducing the questing drive in *Frankenstein* to a desire for primordial union with, or active possession of, the maternal body and that I think it is a dangerous critical error to conceive the novel as a tale told by an idiot, signifying. I do, however, consider the orthodox Freudian approach a formidable antagonist to the sort of psychoanalytic interpretation I venture in the second section of this essay; and I should like to sketch my own "Freudian" romancing of *Frankenstein*, before proceeding to unweave it, in part because none of the many analytic runs at the text in recent years seems to me as persuasive as it might be and in part because something in me is deeply responsive to such a reading.² Psychoanalysis, it may be said, is properly attuned to an important element in the life of the mind; its problem is that it fancies that part the whole.

A reading of the oedipal drama the novel reenacts can begin with a notice of the first overt catastrophe recorded in Frankenstein's narrative: his witnessing, at fifteen, the terrible power of a lightning bolt during a thunderstorm. When the adult Frankenstein describes the event, which occurred at a time when his enthusiasm for alchemy had redoubled the urgency of his endeavors to penetrate nature's secrets, his excited rhetoric betrays the insistent presence of a forgotten childhood scene. "I remained, while the storm lasted, watching its progress with curiosity and delight. As I stood at the door, on a sudden I beheld a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak . . . and so soon as the dazzling light vanished the oak had disappeared, and nothing remained but a blasted stump" (p. 41). In the original version of the text it is the father who discourses on the nature of lightning and who controls the symbolically castrating bolt that cripples desire: "he constructed a small electrical machine, and exhibited a few experiments . . . which drew down that fluid from the clouds."³ The son is, as it were, shocked into the latency stage; a sudden influx of self-revulsion impels him to denounce "natural history and all its progeny as a deformed and abortive creation . . . which could never even step within the threshold of real knowledge. . . . an unusual

tranquility and gladness of soul . . . followed the relinquishing of my ancient and latterly tormenting studies" (pp. 41–42).

The next critical event in Frankenstein's history is his mother's death, and a period of mourning delays his departure for the university. Once there, he abruptly resumes his former studies, reconverted by Professor Waldman's panegyric on modern chemists: "these philosophers . . . penetrate into the recesses of nature. . . . They ascend into the heavens . . . they can command the thunders of heaven" (pp. 47–48). The difficult work of mourning—the guilt-ridden withdrawal of attachment to the mother, a process allied to the transferal of Frankenstein's love to Elizabeth and his decision to leave home—is undone. Waldman's vision of the master who can refine the lost object and command limitless power has the characteristically unsettling impact of a pubescent irruption of libido, and the idea of the mother, set free by death for fantasy elaboration, becomes the focus of the regressive descent into phantasmagoria that constitutes Frankenstein's reanimation project. Within the secretive darkness of vaults and charnels, he dabbles in filth, his heart sickening at the work of his hands as he disturbs, "with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame" (pp. 54–55). The imagery has an unmistakably anal and masturbatory cast. At once feces and phallus, the filth is also the maternal presence he is assembling from phantasmal body parts and buried wishes. In sum, Frankenstein's descent is a grotesque act of lovemaking, the son stealing into the womb that bore him in order to implant his seed. Having fully remembered the form of his desire, the mother restored by a far more radical rescue than the one by which the father claimed her, he is ready to draw rebellious Promethean fire down from the heavens and realize his grandiose conception, the creation proper.

Or so Frankenstein dreams: the time never can be right for this obsessional neurotic:

With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. . . . my candle was nearly burnt out, when . . . I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open, and a convulsive motion agitated its

limbs. How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe . . . ?
(p. 57)

What is most strange here is that the Creature is a sleeping beauty until its orgasmic stirring rouses Frankenstein to recognize the monstrosity before him. We confront the antithetical aspects not only of the fantasy mother but of the son's desire. The Creature is thus a befouled version of the son who would usurp the father's prerogatives, the would-be transcendent father of himself who now beholds the squalor of his actual origins and wishes. But such an interpretation is still oversimplified. The scene scatters the self into every possible familial position; the Creature, on the contrary, is a massively overdetermined representation of the entire scene as well as of the related Oedipus complex. We can infer that the Creature also embodies the fantasy father because it is as much a ubiquitous gaze under which Frankenstein cowers as a nightmare image that bewilders his sight. The convulsive agitation of the aroused Creature suggests ejaculation; yet although this "filthy mass" (p. 147) represents a monstrously oversized phallus, its dread-provoking *corps morcelé* bears the stigma of castration, calling to mind the Lacanian castrated phallus. This difficulty can be resolved if the Creature is viewed as Frankenstein's renounced phallic self, the self he yields to the father, perhaps detached in the very achievement of orgasm, at once the moment of the organ's autonomy and a repetition of the father's act of begetting. Whatever the interpretation, when Frankenstein mimics the Creature's convulsions after his flight and subsequent nightmare, the appropriate description, given his regressed condition, is anal evacuation, which Freud claims is the child's typical response to the primal scene. Here we may note that Mary Shelley writes in the Introduction of "the working of some powerful engine" (p. 9), but Frankenstein has a spark, not a bolt, and as he begins to infuse life, his candle has dwindled. Already defeated by his own scene of origins, Frankenstein is barred from the compensatory replay he intends. Instead the creation precipitously repeats the occasion of his mental trouble, the traumatic fixation he is fated to suffer again and again.

It is not until several chapters later and some two years after the creation that the novel, ap-

proaching another dangerous crossing, is disturbed into strength. By now the abandoned or liberated Creature has embarked on its career of murderous inroads into Frankenstein's family romance, and the creator, increasingly abandoned to morbid anxiety, gravitates to the Alps, whose "savage and enduring scenes" (p. 94) become the stage for an attempted reworking of his defining scene. Alternately plunging and mounting for three days, he is at last urged to penetrate the mists rising like incense from the ravine of Arve toward the surrounding heights, coming to a halt in a spectacular setting where "a power mighty as Omnipotence" (p. 94) manifests itself. As in the lightning scene of his youth, he stands apart, gazing ecstatically. From the recess of a rock, he looks across the troubled surface of *La Mer de Glace*, the glacier poured down from the summits in an eternally solemn procession, and in the distance the stupendous bright dome of Mont Blanc rises "in awful majesty" (p. 98) before him. Power, throughout this section of the novel, is envisioned as the power to wound: "the . . . silence of this glorious presence-chamber of imperial Nature was broken . . . by . . . the cracking . . . of the accumulated ice, which, through the silent working of immutable laws, was ever and anon rent and torn, as if it had been but a plaything" (p. 96). To be where Power is would mean to be above the turmoil of desire, the desire of and for the mother (*la mère*) (Rubenstein, p. 176), whom the father controls and possesses by right. Restaging his primal-scene fantasy under the gaze of the terrific god of the Alps, Frankenstein has a dual aim. While he would seem to be propitiating the father, submitting to the law that freezes or castrates desire, he may also be seeking a way out of his oedipal impasse by identifying with a transcendent paternal principle that enables the son, in his turn, to put on the power of the father.

The scene dissipates when Frankenstein's call to the "wandering spirits" (p. 98) of his mountain god summons the Creature, his own errant spirit. Rising up to demand a mate from *his* father, the Creature forces Frankenstein into the unamiable role of a jealously restrictive frustrate father, a lame parody of his dread paternal imago. A possible explanation for this failed oedipal normalization is that the excessive harsh-

ness of the agency whose function is to suppress the complex actually reinforces Frankenstein's most primitive longings. But such an overweening superego is too deeply contaminated by unregenerate desire to be construed as autonomous. Rather, it is a phantasmic derivative of the complex, a shadowy type of that relentless internal danger which the Creature consummately represents. At least the Creature is almost a representation. Though actualized in the world of the fiction, out of narrative necessity, the Creature is so uncannily fearful that it cannot in fact be seen. Yet how is one to comprehend a representation that transcends representation, that is apparently the thing itself? Frankenstein's astonishing psychic achievement, in Freudian terms, is the construction of a primal repression, whose constitutive role in psychic development is to structure the unconscious as an articulate erotogenic zone. His sorrow is that this catastrophically global repression, or rerepression, is so radically alienated from the ego that it disqualifies any attempt at integration, insistently transmitting its full affective charge and thus preventing the institution of a firm psychic apparatus.

The developing plot of the novel elaborates the grim psychic consequences of Frankenstein's deepening subjugation to his dark double. The Creature is cast as the active partner in what amounts to a bizarre conspiracy, rehearsing in another register the scandalous history of the creator's desire, with Frankenstein bound to what Melanie Klein calls the "depressive position." As a recognizable human world recedes and the Creature becomes a progressively more enthralling superpower, Frankenstein joins in the frenetic dance of death that impels these mutually fascinated antagonists across the waste places of the earth. By now wholly the Creature's creature, he must be considered a florid psychotic, pursuing the naked form of his desire in a fantastic nowhere that is his own. Of course, the consummating thrust of the sword eludes Frankenstein, who is drained by his interminable quest, but the Creature, that monstrous embodiment of his unremitting parental nightmare, can say "I am satisfied" (p. 203).

I am not, nor in fact is the Creature, though admittedly the coherence and audacity of this psychoanalytic reading give it considerable au-

thority. While it is true that by the end of Frankenstein's narrative creator and Creature form a kind of symbiotic unit whose significance various orthodox analytic schools are well suited to explain, such pathological relatedness can be as cogently elucidated by Hegel's master-slave dialectic or by its derivatives in Lacan and Girard. This fearful symmetry, moreover, stems largely from a perverse misreading that Frankenstein sets in motion and that the traditional psychoanalytic critic refines on.

Consider a privileged psychoanalytic moment in the text, Frankenstein's nightmare after the creation and his subsequent response:

I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets. . . . Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. I started from my sleep with horror . . . every limb became convulsed: when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon . . . I beheld . . . the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear, one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped. . . . I took refuge in the courtyard . . . fearing each sound as if it were to announce the approach of the demoniacal corpse. . . . A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous. . . . (p. 58)

Restricting the interpretive game to a psychoanalytic strategy and overlooking those automatic signals (Elizabeth as streetwalker, the mummy-mommy pun) with which a prevalent mode of subcriticism clutters the mind, what can we deduce from the passage? Most simply, there is a treacherous wishing-dreading circuit that links Elizabeth and the Creature to the mother, the central term of the triad. As symbolic counter, Elizabeth is the mother's corpse, and in embracing this cousin-sister-bride Frankenstein reaches through her to take hold of the maternal body he intends to possess.⁴ The hungry phallic worms only faintly disguise his wish, and when it

comes too close to fulfillment he awakens excitedly on the bed of his desire, where he is confronted by the Creature as demoniacal corpse, its negativity a token of the repression that distorts the wish even in the dream. Once this basic fantasy material is unearthed, numerous variations on the dream scenario are possible: Elizabeth is killed off because she tempts Frankenstein to a sublimated version of his true desire; Frankenstein's lust is overwhelmed by his fear of being sucked into the cloaca of the vampirish mother; and the Creature is alternatively or simultaneously the accusatory phallic father, the rephallicized mother, and (in view of the multiplication of genital symbols in the dream) the castrated self.

At issue is where and how closely such a commentary touches the passage. Clearly a psychoanalytic reading is attuned to Frankenstein's anxious, conflict-ridden experience, but the bewilderment of his desire and his relationships is at most tangentially allied to sexuality and not at all to incest, which is a poor trope for the disturbing center of the dream. To reopen the text we must reverse the process by which the analyst translates the teasingly idiomatic world of the dream into a too familiar context of anticipated meanings. At the outset we need to recall that Frankenstein has devoted two years to his animation project; that, aside from a few detours into the abyss, he has been soaring in a rarefied atmosphere where it is impossible to breathe; and that now he is responding to the dissolution of his hopes as well as to the embarrassing fact of the Creature, a singular enormity for which there is no place in his experiential horizon. His response is revealing: first literal flight, then flight into sleep, and finally flight from both the dream and the Creature. The dream itself, the way it is lived, beautifully testifies to the disorienting shock of Frankenstein's reentry into reality. The dreamer does not know what is happening to him. He exists discontinuously, overwhelmed by sudden, appalling contrasts and baffled by the uncertain boundaries between the real and the phantasmal. When the imagery of the dream's core, derived from the creator's descent into the house of the dead, is brought together with the family world he bracketed during the creation, the most canny (*heimlich*) of worlds, the effect is peculiarly poignant. Eliza-

beth is present because she is a fit emblem of the dream of loveliness that has slipped away from him, and the mother is there mainly because she is the only dead person who matters to him. Waking, within the dream, into emptiness and worse, Frankenstein beholds the idealized form of his mother, preserved intact by his memory as by the shroud in the dream, falling prey to anonymous malforming powers. He has nothing to hold onto except the body of death, and as he awakens he spills out of one nightmare into another, finding himself face to face with the abomination he has created.

For Frankenstein there is an inescapable connection between the intruding "graveworms" of the dream and the monster that invades his curtained bed. Only after the Creature's narrative cuts into his and compels us to reread the passage do we appreciate how mistaken Frankenstein is. He will not hear and cannot see. Reading a sinister intention into this newborn's clumsy gestures, he is terrified by a shadow of his own casting, a bad interpretation that climaxes all the traumatic events and that irrevocably determines the creation as The Bad Event. The process of misreading is most clearly exemplified when he next encounters the Creature, during a nocturnal storm in the Alps. The figure is suddenly illuminated by a bolt of lightning. A series of staccato flashes enables Frankenstein to make out the Creature's dizzying course as it leaps from crag to crag, and in the intervals of darkness, while his eye is recovering from each blinding glance, he reflects. None but this "devil" could have strangled his little brother or framed the saintly Justine for the murder. "No sooner did that idea cross my imagination, than I became convinced of its truth" (p. 76). Unlike those who convict Justine on the basis of mere appearance, Frankenstein has the facts right, but his imputation of diabolical designs to the Creature is a gross distortion, as is his summary judgment, which marks him as the prototypical psychoanalytic reader of his own text: "I conceived the being . . . in the light of my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to me" (p. 77). The proper analytic rejoinder is that Frankenstein is an overreacting, moralizing misreader, rather like the self-blinded ego that travesties the id. The analogy is admissible,

however, only if it is restricted to an illustrative function. Reading it literally, the critic perpetuates Frankenstein's interpretive error, violating the Creature's spiritual integrity and evading the aesthetic problem this figure poses.

The overriding ironies are that it is the psychoanalytic reader, not the Creature, who reenacts the history of Frankenstein's desire in another register and that what enables the analyst to articulate this desire so persuasively is what discredits the interpretation. Both protagonist and critic are family-obsessed (or, rather, preoccupied with that aspect of the familial which is an adjunct to the personal), backward-looking, fatalistic, fixated on a terrible secret. They exist within the same disturbed conceptual horizon, conceiving experience and the experiential universe in solipsistic terms. Once again the alchemist is reborn in the scientist: the projector would look or crash through the phenomenal to an occult, transcendent reality. An apparent difference is that while Frankenstein, who is by turns indifferent to and sickened by appearances, views reality as the elixir that will grant him power over things, the analyst sees appearances, no matter how superficially hideous, as a deceptively appealing screen and reality as a squalor. Yet that squalor is the critic's secret of secrets, the means of pouring the light of meaning into the dark world of desire and so of overpowering the text. For both, however, the act of knowledge is as devastating for knower and known as the attempt to "sieve the inmost Form" in Blake's "The Crystal Cabinet." The image—world or text—shatters, and one is left holding onto a corpse. That form of alienation, for the orthodox psychoanalytic critic, is the literal, dead letter of the Freudian corpus, the petrified formulations of an introjected mystery religion that are interposed as a barrier between reader and text. But such "repression" of the text results in a solution that merely replays an element in the text, its most conventional, superficial, or manifest dimension: that of Gothic melodrama. In this intense, simplistically dualistic world of obsessional neurosis, the analyst discovers truth.

One thinks of the novel's melodramatic climax, the Creature's ravishment of the bride on Frankenstein's wedding night: if any literary work can be opened up by a psychoanalytic approach, this incident suggests that *Frankenstein*

must be the text. Reflecting “how fearful the combat which I momentarily expected would be to my wife” (p. 195), Frankenstein bids Elizabeth retire to the bridal chamber while he paces restlessly through the house in anticipation of the Creature’s advent. Roused by a scream, he rushes in to find her limp body thrown across the bed, when, through the open casement, he beholds his monstrous rival: “he seemed to jeer as with his fiendish finger he pointed towards the corpse. . . . I rushed towards the window and, drawing a pistol from my bosom, fired; but he eluded me . . . and, running with the swiftness of lightning, plunged into the lake” (p. 196). However polymorphously perverse an analytic rendering of the incident, I would not seriously dispute its applicability to Frankenstein, whose evocation the reading is based on, though it could be claimed that an exposition of his sexual trouble merely brings one to the horizon of a larger spiritual problem. But how apposite is such a commentary to Elizabeth? Where the analyst would place sexuality, for her there is a void. As for the Creature, he is not, at this point, sexless, his desire having become eroticized because his hideousness limits him to spying on the women of the De Lacey household and to gazing on the loveliness of Frankenstein’s mother and Justine in the aesthetically distanced form of a portrait or a sleeping body. Unless Elizabeth somehow means these images, it is hard to understand why she should matter to the Creature. Frankenstein does matter to him, however—certainly not because of some repressed homosexual attachment and not because Frankenstein is the Lacanian or Girardian “other” who confers value on the object of (the other’s) desire. What, then, does the Creature want from Frankenstein? He seeks reparation for his sorrows, and to this end he attempts to engage Frankenstein in dialogue, again not because Frankenstein is the Lacanian “Other” whose recognition is all he really wants⁵ but because Frankenstein alone can provide a suitable mate with whom to share his enforced solitude. After Frankenstein breaks his word, mangling the half-finished monsteress in full view of the Creature, the Creature keeps his. The killing of Elizabeth is at once a way of establishing a relationship with the only human being to whom he can claim kinship and a desperately antierotic

act designed to teach his creator what he suffers. The Creature’s murderous career, an ingenious counterplot, compels Frankenstein to read what amounts to a Freudian text in reality.

The foregoing may seem not only naively overliteral but sentimental. Am I not resorting to “pernicious casuistry” (Shelley), excusing the Creature because he is an “exception,” and how can I justly argue that his truth is intersubjectivity when his only contacts are hypothetical? In dealing with the Creature one needs to exercise the hesitancy such questions induce; that is, the critic should, insofar as possible, respect the text. When J. M. Hill, a psychoanalytic adept, claims that the Creature “cannot fathom the depths of passion which urge vengeance” (p. 350) and when a generally skeptical George Levine remarks that the Creature “doesn’t fully understand the power of irrational energies which he himself enacts,”⁶ they are presumably thinking about the unconscious of the unconscious, whatever that means, but I am fairly sure these are not critical statements. Despite appearances, the Creature remains a scandal for analytic readers because he does not fit Freud’s specifications: his unrepresentable outside (only apparently idlike) balks (but not purposefully, as in Freudian repression) his unambiguously representable inside. Of course, given the sophisticated rhetorical techniques of the psychoanalytic arsenal, there is nothing to prevent critics from remaking the Creature in whatever image they wish, from transforming any presence into an absence or any absence into a presence, as they see fit. Critics can thereby preserve the coherence of a reading, but in so doing they sacrifice too much. For the Creature’s story is something finer than just another version of, or a sentimental recoil from, Frankenstein’s, and the Creature himself is *Frankenstein’s* great, original turn on tradition, a disturbingly uncanny literal figuration that ought to rouse the critical faculties to act.

An editor of a recent collection of essays on *Frankenstein* observes, “So pervasive has been the recognition that the Monster and Frankenstein are two aspects of the same being that the writers in this volume assume rather than argue it.”⁷ Among the powerful forces responsible for collapsing the two into one is the inertial drift of both reading and textuality, fostered here by the

mystifying allure of those grand figures of thought, doubling and monsterism. Within us there is also a need, perhaps a compulsion, to return things to an originative, determining source, especially when the human producer of an object or act is involved. This exigency is manifest in forms ranging from the ghoulish rage of Shelley's Count Cenci, who would reappropriate a "particle of my divided being" by raping his daughter, to the comparatively mild critical reduction of the Creature to the dark complement of Frankenstein's light or of creator and created to epiphenomena of some larger whole, be it Blake's inconceivable unfallen Albion, Mary Shelley's psyche, or the Freudian psychic apparatus.⁸ At this stage of *Frankenstein* criticism, the motif of the double can be useful only if it sharpens awareness of the irreducibly complex otherness intrinsic to the self or of the Creature as an autonomous "other self" duplicitously representing the traditional alter ego. Even supposing that the Creature owes his engenderment to Frankenstein's oedipal scene, he is no more reducible to it than any of us is to what our parents happened to be thinking when they conceived us. How different from Frankenstein's is the Creature's recurrent catastrophic scene of rejection and exclusion. The Creature's utmost desire is that another reciprocate his need for sympathetic relationship, and even after he becomes searingly conscious of his exclusion from the human community and begins to objectify the negativity he arouses in others, we recognize that his aggression is a by-product of disintegration, not an innate drive that has been cathartically unbound.⁹ If, with a reader's ideal blindness, we can hear the bereavement of the Creature's whole self, we recognize too that he looks back at us with "speculative eyes" (p. 9). Freed, by the end, from his creator's self-consuming rage, he makes his destiny his choice, emblazoning himself as a giant form of Solitude, an existence made absolute by its confinement to the hell of being itself.

Still, the Creature's fate is to be misread, and any thematic capture necessarily restricts, however much it restitutes. In a moment of remarkable self-awareness he reflects that if he had been introduced to humanity not by the patriarchal De Lacey's but "by a young soldier, burning for glory and slaughter," he would

"have been imbued with different sensations" (p. 129). His history, then, is only a possible actualization of his essence, which is to say that the Creature's principal virtue is virtuality. A kind of wandering signifier, the Creature proceeds through the text triggering various signifying effects. As the reader increasingly acknowledges the larger cultural and biographical context that constitutes the penumbra of the fiction, critical representations of what the Creature represents multiply endlessly. If, for the orthodox Freudian, he is a type of the unconscious, for the Jungian he is the shadow, for the Lacanian an *objet a*, for one Romanticist a Blakean "spectre," for another a Blakean "emanation"; he also has been or can be read as Rousseau's natural man, a Wordsworthian child of nature, the isolated Romantic rebel, the misunderstood revolutionary impulse, Mary Shelley's abandoned baby self, her abandoned babe, an aberrant signifier, *différance*, or as a hypostasis of godless presumption, the monstrosity of a godless nature, analytical reasoning, or alienating labor. Like the Creature's own mythic version of himself, a freakish hybrid of Milton's Adam and Satan, all these allegorizations are exploded by the text. The alert reader, at a given moment of interpretive breakdown, will resort to another signifying chain, and thence to another, and will be left wondering whether to receive this overload of signification as a mutually enriching profusion of possibilities or as an unmeaning chaos.

While the most sensible response may be a benign ecumenical acceptance of difference, certain problems remain: for instance, how can the same text sustain divergent critical representations and what authorizes or disqualifies any representation at a particular moment? Moreover, such negative capability is likely to mask mere incapacity or a failure of will and is rarely conducive to interesting readings. Exemplary of a potentially stronger critical position are the psychoanalytic readers who would compound with the world of the text's imaginings by penetrating to its center of mystery. Entering the circle of the text and operating Freud's ingenious meaning-making machine, they will discover that an oedipal focus limits only the range of interpretive options, and if they are open to the possibility that the oedipal material they uncover may defend against other types of psychic conflict,

their critical anxieties will mount. To salvage their integrity they must found a reading by arbitrarily limiting it, restricting at the same time their own cognitive, erotic, and imaginative capabilities. To construct a plausible narrative they will resort to such tactics of secondary revision as lacunae, decontextualization, distortion, and rationalized contradiction, and to persuade us that their story is not simply another revocable text they will enlist the aid of some extratextual model to underwrite both the fiction and the critical discourse. Ultimately, however, the authorizing model relies on an interpretation of how things are (or, for the growing number of the novel's psychobiographers, how things were), and whether or not the representation is privileged depends on the particular analyst's rhetorical skill and our willingness to be lied to.

A possible way out of or around this hermeneutic circle is to stop viewing the Creature as a thing apart. We might consider "meaning" as a constantly shifting relational event, asking what the Creature means, at a certain point in the novel, to himself, Frankenstein, Elizabeth, or such and such a reader. The danger here is hazy relativism, an openness akin to the indifferent free trafficking that deconstructionists tend to elevate to a principle of principles. Even misreading has its map. Why one interpretive pathway should be preferred to another may be impossible to determine, but we must not forget that all must pass through the Creature, that something is there to solicit us. That something demands careful scrutiny because of its unsettling effect on our habitual ideas about what signs may be up to. Luckily barred from the overwhelming presence of the Creature, in the face of which interpretation becomes mute, we must dream our dreams of the Creature not only as a signifier in search of its proper signification but as a literal being that means only itself. The literal Creature, in other words, is as much a figuration as the figurative Creature, and in reflecting on what the letter of the text allows us to surmise about the Creature, whose "reality" we know is but a textual effect, we are always in an indeterminate borderline situation. Frankenstein never speaks more truly than when he calls the Creature his "daemon." A marginal or boundary being, the daemon is a powerful representation of our uncertain lot, suspended as we are be-

tween knowledge and power, nature and super-nature, objectivity and subjectivity.¹⁰ Conceiving the Creature as a genius of liminality, a type of art's duplicitous interplay of revelation and concealment, restores his virtuality, which is betrayed as soon as he comes to signify something determinate. An emphasis on meaning as process also encourages the interpreter to participate in the work of the work, a dreamwork more efficacious than that of the mind abandoned to sleep. The literalizing power of Frankenstein is, of course, only a dream that haunts literature. But "labour is blossoming" (Yeats) within this marginal ontological zone, where letter and spirit forge a meaning that can never be anything more than a dreaming to signify, to become significant, to touch reality. We are touched by the passion of the signifier, a perpetually renewed *dreaming to* that no dream of satisfaction can satisfy.

Who, in our century, understood or exemplified the insistence of the dream of signification better than Freud? Psychoanalysis, for him, was always a stopgap until the real thing (biochemistry) would come along, but his inventive genius transformed the analytic field into an ample domain of spirit, an autonomous power that his system goes on calling by false names. Decentered or detraumatized, the Freudian corpus becomes an indispensable guide to the intentional play of forces that keeps meaning wandering restlessly through the mind. From Freud we can gather many enabling fictions, forms of the spirit's cunning and resourcefulness, and he can instruct us in the virtues of hovering attention, the need to look at something again and again until it begins to declare itself, and of alertness to the heterogeneous. Seeking to mediate the discrepancy between two suggestively dissimilar stories, *Frankenstein* and the orthodox psychoanalytic rendering I venture above, I now want to enter what I understand to be the true Freudian space—a place where Freud joins the company of such alienists as Blake, Milton, and Kierkegaard—as I attempt a sustained reimagining of Frankenstein's scene of creation.

II

Writing on the occasion of *Frankenstein's* canonization, its inclusion in a "standard nov-

els" series, Mary Shelley begins the Introduction as if discharging a grim obligation to a text that should long ago have been consigned to her buried past. She is roused again, however, when she returns to the moment of the novel's origin, her waking dream of Frankenstein's emergence as a creator. Focusing on the creator's terror, she evokes the disturbing thrill of being there, in the midst of the traumatic scene, her prose mounting in intensity and shifting to the present tense as she recounts the successive stages of her vision: the powerful engine stirring to life the "hideous phantom"; Frankenstein's hysterical flight; the "horrid thing" opening the bed curtains and fixing its eyes on him, an experience of ultimate dread that shatters the vision, leaving her breathless on her "midnight pillow" (pp. 9–10). What does it mean to be there, in the midst? It is to be swept up into a sublime dimension and to be faced by a dizzying void, to be at once an excited witness, the terrified artist, and the aroused form of chaos that gazes back at both creator and dreamer. Invention, Mary Shelley reflects, consists in creating "out of chaos" (p. 8). Once her imagination asserts itself, presenting her with the dream vision, we may associate the engine (*ingenium, genius*) with the usurping imagination, the animated Creature with the scene itself, and the chaotic mass to be set in motion with the writer's own chaos, the panic at the center of her authorial consciousness. Creator, creation, and creative agency are varying manifestations of the same anxiety that elaborates itself to compose the scene of authorship.

The novel's monstrous heart of darkness is the creation, and the creative self that inaugurates the drama resembles the "self-closed, all-repelling . . . Demon" encountered at the opening of *The Book of Urizen*. Frankenstein's founding gesture, like that of Blake's fearful demiurge, is a stepping aside, but while Urizen secedes from Eternity, Frankenstein absents himself from our world of ordinary awareness and relatedness, which recedes from him in much the manner that a dream fades at the instant of awakening. Severing all contact with his family, other beings, and familiar nature, he is intent on hollowing out a zone in reality where he can be utterly alone. This ingressive movement is attended by self-loss, a radical shrinkage

of his empirical self, and self-aggrandizement, a heightening of his isolate selfhood to daemonic status. He becomes a force instead of a person as all the energy of his being concentrates on his grand project: "My mind was filled with one thought, one conception, one purpose" (p. 48); "a resistless, and almost frantic, impulse urged me forward; I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit" (p. 54). The animation project, like the object intended by the Freudian libido, is a secondary affair. What matters is that it enkindles in the projector a lust for self-presence so intense that it drives out of consciousness everything except itself. Reality must yield if the self is to appear, and Frankenstein's primary creative act is to originate his own creative self.

The vertiginous upward fall that founds the creative self coincides with a rupture between daemonic mind and all that is not mind. What may loosely be termed consciousness (of self, an extravagantly augmented self so full of itself as to allow neither time nor space for self-awareness) and unconsciousness (of the normative world from which the self has detached itself) are twin-born, factoring out as discrete loci that mark the decisiveness of Frankenstein's psychic dislocation. Only in the catastrophic nature of this birth is there any significant point of contact with the repressive process that institutes ego and id as opposing agencies in the Freudian economy. Narcissism and, probably closer, psychosis are the appropriate psychoanalytic analogues, though the usefulness of these nosological entities here is questionable. I see no need, for example, to posit a specific libidinal stage or fixation point to which Frankenstein is regressing. But everything would resolve itself into a structural conflict anyway: Frankenstein's oedipal trouble impels his defensive "episode," which signals a victory of the forces of repression; and with the creation he spills back into the domain of assured analytic knowledge, the Creature amounting to a bizarre symptomatic return of the repressed that can be interpreted in the same way as the dream of a neurotic. For the psychoanalyst, then, the Creature is a figure that redoubles Frankenstein's literal unconscious complex, which is already present as an a priori with a determinate constitution; in fact, however, he is an autonomous agent, not a psychic

agency, and Frankenstein's supposed unconscious is a figurative device, a critic's overhasty recourse designed to mediate or neutralize a puzzling discontinuity.

By what name shall we invoke discontinuity? For Milton in *Paradise Lost* it is Hell, a space carved out in the universe to receive the daemoniac selfhood of Satan, for whom everything is a universe of death. The depth of one's particular hell is an index of how far one has fallen away from what might be perceived or known. The unconscious, in other words, is a modality of subjective experience whose meaning is estrangement. What Frankenstein creates, in order to create, is distance between his daemonized self and a newly alienated reality, and it scarcely matters whether we conceive this space as interior or exterior since it is a fantastic medial zone where the boundaries between self and world are impossible to distinguish. Within this void, between two created "nothings," self-consciousness appears. It is the place into which the baffled residue of Frankenstein's ordinary self has been cast. From its vantage, somewhere in the corner of Frankenstein's mind, it takes notes, watching with horrified fascination the extravagant career of a stranger that is also an uncanny variation of the self.

Out of this phantom place, in addition, the Creature emerges, as Blake's Enitharmon emanates from Los once Los "closes" with the death image of Urizen, thus embracing the world view of the solipsistically withdrawn creating mind. The ungraspable Enitharmon, Los's loss and shadowed gain, embodies the suddenly exterior, objectified space that has opened up between Los and Eternity, or Los's alienated potential. The Creature is similarly a token of loss, a complex representation of the estranged universe Frankenstein has summoned into being by pushing away reality. Yet does the Creature, strictly speaking, represent Frankenstein's alienated potential? I suppose he can be read as the responsive, sympathetic imagination Frankenstein suppresses in order to create. From the psychoanalytic perspective, such repression would be very odd: imagine the id repressing the sublimated ego. The repression hypothesis must be rejected in any event because the Creature is something radically new and different, no more a double or a part of Frankenstein than Enithar-

mon is of Los. Instead, these emanative beings "stand for" their creators in the sense that they are interpolations, "transitional objects" (Winnicott) or texts, intended to rectify a catastrophic disalignment of self and world.

The creation is at once a new departure for Frankenstein and the climax of a developmental process that, as Wordsworth says, "hath no beginning." Frankenstein's narrative begins with an idyll of domestic bliss: in the protected enclave of his household all are incomparably virtuous and lovable; affections go deep, and yet everyone lives on the surface. Of course, it is all a lie, but the reader should be troubled by this absurdity no more than by the newborn Creature's walking off with Frankenstein's coat as protection against the cold. Just as anyone who wishes can discover the source of an individual's troubles in the past, since so much happened "there," readers inclined to locate the cause of Frankenstein's aberration in his youth will see what they expect to see in his narrative or will find that what they seek is all the more confirmed by its absence from the account. His fall may have been occasioned by Elizabeth's admission into the family circle, by William's birth, by the sinister "silken cord" (p. 34) of parental constriction, or by a repressed primal-scene trauma. It doesn't matter: any psychotrauma is as true or as false as any other. Like all of us, Frankenstein begins fallen—or, better, falling. The brief idyll of his youth gives him something to fall away from; and the more remotely idealized the starting point, the more absolute or self-defining is his point of departure. Frankenstein simply announces that, as far back as he can remember, "the world was to me a secret which I desired to divine" (p. 36). That is, the fall from the wholeness of origins is rooted in his lust to overtake a hidden, receding presence, or a tantalizing absence, that lies behind appearances and disturbs his contact with things. This dualizing consciousness is a given of his temperament, the destiny-assigned identity theme that he lives out in the sphere of science but that he could have expressed as well in exploration or authorship. Can we improve on Frankenstein's version, or on Coleridge's characterization of Iago as "a motiveless malignity"? The aptly named Iago is the ego principle, the sublimely arbitrary human will that originates every-

thing, including all myths of a catastrophic or transcendental point of spiritual origination, and motive hunting no more explains his willfulness than it does Desdemona's love for Othello.

Motivation, like sequential logic, is a falsification the mind cannot do without. The signal importance Frankenstein ascribes to the death of his mother suggests that the reanimation project is a deferred reaction to this event, which he terms "the first misfortune of my life . . . an omen . . . of my future misery" (p. 42). He dwells on the "irreparable evil" brought about by the rending of ties and on the "void" created by death, which he raises to quasi-supernatural status as "the spoiler" (p. 43). Presumably her death reactivates an original anxiety of deprivation associated with the departure of the maternal body, and the irrevocable loss of the mother, the primary focus of the child's reality bondings, could help to explain the intensification of Frankenstein's temperamental dualism. But while psychoanalytic theory is suggestive here, it is too restrictively bound to a particular mythic version of the past, too fetishistically centered on one of many possible mythic representations of loss. Like the oak-shattering bolt, the death of the mother is preeminently a narcissistic insult for Frankenstein. Confronted by the fact of death, he is overtaken by a primordial anxiety, not an anxiety-provoking repressed wish; and although such anxiety is apt to recoil from any number of fancied antagonists, its proper object is the most inclusive and irreducible of forces: life, our human life, in relation to which death is not an external agency but an internal component. Yet, as Kierkegaard knew, consciousness of this radical fault in existence need not, or need not only, paralyze the spirit. Dread, and perhaps even the fear of being delivered over to it, can be a sublime energizer, arousing the infinite spirit that longs for a house as large as itself.

Seeking to undo the consequences of sexuality, the sin of being born of woman, Frankenstein engages in a pursuit at once regressive and projective, mobilizing old energies in an attempt to discover a new meaning for himself. Adrift for a time after his mother's death, he is eager, once he leaves for the university, to cast off his dependence and put his talents to work. All that remains is for Waldman's sermon, perhaps more

the sheer power of his voice than his overt message, to render an occasion for Frankenstein's restless drive for autonomy:

Such were the professor's words—rather let me say such the words of fate. . . . As he went on, I felt as if my soul were grappling with a palpable enemy; one by one the various keys were touched which formed the mechanism of my being. . . . So much has been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein—more, far more, will I achieve . . . I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation.

(p. 48)

This powerfully charged moment of conversion, or reconversion, founds Frankenstein as an artist. From the struggle of his second birth he emerges as a force of destiny, genius in a human form, first pronouncing the fateful name of the modern Prometheus: *franken Stein*, the free rock, the free-unfree man.

After two years of reviewing the current state of scientific knowledge, Frankenstein is abruptly halted by an audacious, yet for him inevitable, question: "Whence . . . did the principle of life proceed?" (p. 51). The way is opened for his first descent into the world of the tomb: "I beheld the corruption of death succeed to the blooming cheek of life; I saw how the worm inherited the wonders of the eye and brain." At this stage Frankenstein presents himself as a detached observer of death's work, and nature offers little resistance to his inquiries. "A sudden light" breaks "from the midst of this darkness" (p. 52), whereupon he is dazzled to discover himself the first of mortals capable of disentangling life from death. Modern criticism, generally empowered by demystifying reversals, has tended both to devalue Frankenstein's discovery, regarding his life principle as a type of natural energy rather than as a genuine first, and to view his enthusiasm as a mechanical operation of the spirit. Although the great Romantic faith in the omnipotence of thought is unquestionably allied to the scientist's baleful drive for manipulative control, they remain very distinct forms of the Cartesian legacy. To the extent that the artist in Frankenstein collapses into the technician he is a loser. But now, as he stands at the source, Frankenstein is a sublime quester who has found his muse, an answering subject to

inspire and direct the quest, and his delight is that of a man who has come to recognize the glory of his own inner source, his originaive *I am*.

Once Frankenstein begins to describe the lengthy creation process his hitherto sequential narrative becomes curiously perturbed. The style is spasmodic, juxtapositive, and repetitive, obscuring temporal relations yet underscoring how radically divided the creator is. We hear from a practical Frankenstein, who reasons that even an imperfect effort will lay the ground for future successes; a secretly selfish utopian idealist, who dreams of a new species blessing him “as its creator and source” (p. 54); and a domestic Frankenstein, who procrastinates “all that related to my feelings of affection until the great object, which swallowed up every habit of my nature, should be completed” (p. 55). Being swallowed up is the principal terror of the narrative consciousness dominating these pages, a depersonalized, though suffering, observer of the wreck Frankenstein is becoming. Little is heard from the daemonized Frankenstein, in part because his experience of sublime uplift is wordless and in part because this “hurricane” (p. 54) has no time for words, though for the troubled eye of the storm time is agonizingly slow. Complicating matters is the superimposition of the narrative present on an episode that the fallen Frankenstein can be relied on to misconstrue, so that the complex web of the account becomes virtually impossible to unweave. Then, we may surmise, a dialectic of the following sort was at work: driving out and driven in, the creative self is agonistic, aggressively excluding otherness, and hence agonized, defensively immuring itself in resistance to any foreign body that would encroach on its sublime solitude; the barrier keeps breaking, however, leading to disabling bouts of self-consciousness, which in turn provoke even more audacious sublime rushes that threaten to overwhelm the ordinary self, that residual under-consciousness which clings ever more desperately to its bewildered identity. How one interprets the meaning of the entire experience—whether from the point of view of the demonic self or from that of the ordinary self—probably tells more about the interpreter than about the experience itself, just as the Abyssinian maid of “Kulba Khan” emerges as the

muse of paradise or the voice of the abyss depending on whether one stands inside or outside the magic circle of the conclusion.

The breathlessly eager self that is in, or is, the enthusiasm soars above the body that is taking shape. Frankenstein’s workshop is located “in a solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house, and separated from all the other apartments” (p. 55). This is a masterful emblem of the mind that is its own place.¹¹ The windows are barred, at least for the enthusiast, whose eyes remain “insensible to the charms of nature” (p. 55). Those “charms” are an interpolation of Frankenstein the notetaker or narrator; the creator is an innerness—pure, unconditioned spirit—seeking innerness—the life or light in, but not of, things. Things themselves do not exist for him except as “lifeless matter” (p. 52) to be animated, the *fort* to his *da (sein)*,¹² and the more they are leveled to a deadening continuity the more discontinuous is the fiery spirit that would stamp its image on a world rendered pliable to its projects and projections.

The problem is that if the sublime artist is to “pour a torrent of light into our dark world” (p. 54) of mortal life, he must take a detour through reality. To wrest the spirit from things he must, for a second time, penetrate into the center of the earth, and to prepare a frame for the reception of life he must now not only see and know but also touch the body of death. Undertaking a shamanistic descent into chaos, a place of “filthy creation” (p. 55) where life and death conspire to breed monstrous shapes, Frankenstein is flooded with nausea: “Who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toil, as I dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave, or tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay?” (p. 54). Is Frankenstein speaking of vivisection, or is the tortured living body his own? His aggression, whether directed outward or against himself, recalls that of Blake’s Urizen:

Times on times he divided, & measur'd
Space by space in his ninefold darkness
Unseen, unknown! changes appear'd
In his desolate mountains rifted furious
By the black winds of perturbation

For he strove in battles dire
In unseen conflictions with shapes

Bred from his forsaken wilderness
(*The Book of Urizen* 1.2–3)

Frankenstein too is entrapped by his own phantasmagoria. The oppressively close, enveloping tomb world into which he descends is a self-engendered abyss that discloses what our finite bodily ground looks like from the heights to which the spirit has ascended. Transforming an evacuated reality into a grotesque naturalization and the denied natural passions into a perversely eroticized shadow life, the sublime artist's exaggerated distance from things has also transformed him into a graveyard poet. In short, Frankenstein has discovered, or invented, an inchoate version of the Freudian unconscious.

Frankenstein's aggression and perverse perception are inscribed in the Creature's appearance. The artist envisioned something quite different: "How can I . . . delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful" (p. 57). What *did* Frankenstein intend? Treading "heaven in my thoughts . . . exulting in my powers" (p. 211), he conceived the Creature as a representation of the transfigured creative self, a grandiose embodiment of the creator's mind. But it is also a desperate compromise, designed to mend an intolerable dualism. The beautiful Creature of Frankenstein's imaginings is analogous to Sin, the perfect narcissistic image of Satan, the interior paramour who explodes from his brain when heaven rolls away from him and with whom he proceeds to copulate; Frankenstein's dread monster corresponds to Sin's unrecognized "nether shape," but even more closely to Death, that chaotic "darkness visible," who is the ultimate issue of Satan's deranged spirit, his love of his own thought. The moving Creature, like Death, is unrepresentable. However, directly after the infusion of life, while the Creature is still dazed, Frankenstein ventures the novel's only description of this formless form:

Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with the watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the

dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips. (p. 57)

An "unearthly" figure (p. 219), the Creature bodies forth the horrid contrast between heaven and hell that Frankenstein experiences as a dizzying, instantaneous descent.

How is one to explain this catastrophic turn? The only way to fathom the Creature's appearance, which is more a rhetorical effect than a natural fact, is to comprehend how it was made. For Frankenstein, putting together and dismembering are one. The parts he chooses are beautiful, but they are monstrous in conjunction—or, rather, since the Creature lacks a phenomenological center, in their absolute disjunction. Frankenstein is similarly unbalanced, a confused collectivity. The daemonized self that initiates the project is a force inimical to form, and it cannot see or guide properly from the heights. The normative self, desperately in need of bridging back to reality, patches over the rift in the fabric of Frankenstein's existence as best it can. But although its eyeballs start "from their sockets in attending to the details" (p. 55), it cannot recollect the original inspiration. The result of all this frantic alienated labor is a being geared to self-torment. As such, the Creature is also a figure that reveals, with more startling accuracy and profundity than discursive reason can command, the existential condition of its progenitor: his relation-disrelation to his world, his thoughts, and himself. The incomplete Creature, unmated and unmatable, an inconceivably lonely free-standing unit whose inside is hopelessly divided from its outside, is indeed a "filthy type" (p. 130) of the modern Prometheus.

Any representation of the creative process, whether the novel's narrative or my analytic account, is bound to distort the experience of the whole self. Suspended between heaven and hell, those absolutely disjoined fictive polarities that are in fact mutually sustaining correlates, the creator is at once ravished and ravaged by sublimity. He is filled and swallowed up, but not entirely full or emptied out; for to be wholly abandoned to the sublime would amount to autism, and there would no longer be a self to experience the uplift or downfall. It is always, to modify Emerson slightly, a case of I *and* the abyss. Since he cannot be the thing itself and

cannot be nothing, Frankenstein is a spirit destined to “exult in the agony of the torturing flames” (p. 223). Another name for this giant agony is despair. “Despair,” writes Kierkegaard, cannot

consume the eternal thing, the self, which is the ground of despair, whose worm dieth not, and whose fire is not quenched. Yet despair is precisely *self-consuming*, but it is an impotent self-consumption. . . . This is the hot incitement, or the cold fire in despair, the gnawing canker whose movement is constantly inward, deeper and deeper. . . . This precisely is the reason why he despairs . . . because he cannot consume himself, cannot get rid of himself, cannot become nothing. This is the potentiated formula for despair, the rising of the fever in the sickness of the self.¹³

Kierkegaard, dangerously on the verge of becoming the dread itself, is a better guide here than Freud, the great analyst of the concept of dread. As Kierkegaard would have it, Frankenstein is a prisoner of despair because his volatile spirit desires only to augment itself, because the self is not “grounded transparently in the Power which posited it” (p. 19). That Power, which may simply be a potentiated form of the despairing spirit, exists beyond the purview of Mary Shelley’s fiction. But *Frankenstein* is empowered, and at times disabled, by a despair over the human condition, whose limits condemn the creator’s sublime quest to the status of an extravagant, desperate wish. The novel’s wisdom, not only imperfectly expressed by an advocacy of domestic bliss but in fact undercut by overt moralizing, is that we need “keeping” (p. 19), that we must be concrete in the same measure as we are abstract and that we must abide with the antinomies (life and death, ideality and actuality, will and fate) that constitute our ground. Frankenstein may be said to err in misreading both his own reality and the larger reality that circumscribes his existence. No matter how great the spirit within him, the universal life principle he thinks he has captured, although it is not merely a trick of spirit, can never become his instrument for correcting existence. It “was now within my grasp,” he says; he adds, however, that “the information I had obtained was of a nature rather to direct my endeavours so soon as I should point them towards the object of my

search. . . . I was like the Arabian who had been buried with the dead, and found a passage to life, aided only by one glimmering, and seemingly ineffectual, light” (pp. 52–53). Dazzled by an obscure revelation, he can only move toward the light, for the power source he taps is a constituent element in an ongoing process, a continuum of animation and deanimation according to whose subtle rhythm of recurrence we live and die every moment. Frankenstein is a thief of fire, and the utmost he can do is to transmit the power to a body capable of sustaining life.

His nervous symptoms become increasingly pathological as the time for the Creature’s inspiration nears, and once he is about to perform the deed, finding himself in a recognizably realistic setting, Frankenstein is less anxious than melancholic, as though calamity has already struck. What possible act or object could satisfy the aspirations of the uncreated soul? The dream of the sublime artist’s overflowing fullness is grotesquely parodied as Frankenstein sickens into creation: “the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open” (p. 57). What is bracketed here, at the decisive moment of Frankenstein’s reentry into reality, is the infusion of the spark of life. The creative act is a mindless reflex, an indication that the creator has fallen away from his desire into a void that nothing can fill but that somehow must be limited, as in *The Book of Urizen*, by a barrier of “solid obstruction.” The Creature, though not quite setting a limit to Frankenstein’s nightmare, is hell’s bottom. Landing there, Frankenstein sees his Creature for the first time when its eyes open, a negative epiphany revealing to him that he is not alone, that he too is now visible. The nightmare follows, with its horrific climactic emblem of the condition of corporeality, and he awakens to confront the self-impelled Creature, the living image of death this new Orpheus has brought back from the house of the dead. The creator’s terror attests to his lack of mastery, the grim fact of his own creatureliness, which is what set the creative process in motion. Beholding the Creature, Frankenstein is back at his original impasse, uncannily subject to the recurrence of his dread of time, space, and the body of death.

It is impossible to know what Frankenstein apprehends at the pivotal instant when his half-extinguished candle is eclipsed by the Creature's dull yellow eye, but the former seeker of the inner light almost immediately fixates on appearances. The overwhelming irony is that Frankenstein has opened up a space in reality for the emergence of something radically new, realizing the power to make literally present that the poets have always dreamed of. A presence so full that it is as unapproachable as light or an absence so great that it confounds the representational faculties, the Creature is the sublime or grotesque thing itself. Frankenstein's all too human failure of response is to petrify his living artifact into an otherness that cannot be restituted by mind. The Creature becomes a blocking agent, standing between Frankenstein and the normative world he longs to rejoin, and an uncanny reminder of the creator's alienated majesty, the sublime experience from which he is henceforth irremediably estranged. This unproductive misreading, though saving him from an encounter with Dread itself, condemns both Creature and creator to anguished incompleteness. Locked into an interminable pursuit of the shadow he has become, Frankenstein emerges as the man who cannot emerge, a prisoner of the passage arrested at the moment of his falling away from his own possible sublimity. The final irony is that his solitude is confirmed. Frankenstein achieves his own separate consciousness of himself as the most wretched of mortals. But even if his egotism is such that he glories in this doom as the token of a special destiny, he has become just another Gothic hero-villain, a tiresome neurotic whose presence impoverishes the larger portion of the novel that bears his name.

III

There is an intriguing relation between Frankenstein's history and the account of the novel's genesis in the Introduction. Although the vocation of protagonist and novelist is in a sense chosen by their temperaments and circumstances, the origin of the creative enterprise is supremely arbitrary: a spell of bad weather. Confined indoors, Frankenstein is set on the path toward creation after he "chanced to find a volume of the works of Cornelius Agrippa" (p.

39), and Mary Shelley is bestirred after "some volumes of ghost stories"—less threatening models for a literary aspirant than are her companions, Shelley and Byron—"fell into our hands" (p. 7). This archaic matter requires supplementation, and the means of carrying out the project is offered by Waldman's lecture on modern science and by Shelley and Byron's conversation about galvanism. At this juncture, however, two defensive reversals aim to differentiate the careers of active author and passive subject. The sudden light that breaks in upon Frankenstein impels him toward his catastrophic creation scene, but it is only after her waking dream that Mary Shelley experiences her vocational moment: "Swift as light and as cheering was the idea that broke in upon me. 'I have found it!' . . . On the morrow I announced that I had *thought of a story*." The vision of the would-be master's victimization is her means of mastery, as though the scene of authorship were already behind her. "And now, once again, I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper" (p. 10), she writes, as though the novel were the Creature and she had put on its power to overwhelm others. In the Introduction she passes over the actual writing of *Frankenstein*, and while her creative labor was doubtless less calamitous than Frankenstein's, the novel is necessarily another "imperfect animation" (p. 9). How much, one wonders, was lost in "translation" when the airy book imagination wrote in the mind became the novel we read? But the likelihood is that the ecstatic dream of the book, as represented in the Introduction, is an afterbirth, that now, once again, Mary Shelley is begetting it by replaying both Frankenstein's and *Frankenstein's* catastrophe of origination. Her mind, too, was the haunt of a terrible idea, which became her means of mastery insofar as it inspired the novel's transcendent or paradigmatic vision of the genesis of any sublime artwork, any uncanny reanimation project.

According to the novel's representation of the creative process, the work emanates from an authorial self whose decisive break with normative experience clears a space for the work to appear. The emergence of this authorizing agency necessitates such a massive withdrawal or sacrifice of the writer's identity that the work

is likely to be more estranged from writer than reader. To argue thus is not to deny that Mary Shelley, as mother and mourning mother, was ideally suited to preside over the account of Frankenstein's fearful literal creation. But even if we agree that the novel is informed by her personal experience and that the novel, had it been anonymously published, would be recognizably a woman's book, we cannot necessarily trace its creation back to her empirical self or conclude that its meaning is coextensive with its point of departure in personal experience. The role of the writer's biography and psychobiography in the work is analogous to that of what Freud calls the "day's residue" in the dreamwork. Once the author crosses from the empirical sphere to the transcendent dimension of art, the stuff of ordinary experience is reconstituted as an element in the work's fantastic scenario, and the empirical self, transformed for good or ill by the author's rite of passage, is simply along for the ride. Still, if it is the Real Man or Woman, the Blakean Imagination, that solicits our response in a literary text, we must be careful not to be carried away by Blake's sublime idealizations or capital letters. The authorial self must not be vaporized into an impersonal transcendental consciousness. The writer may be powerfully tempted to become a force refusing all form, but the constitutive subject I am positing has its own complex psychology, determined by its relations to the forms, images, and desires that compose the field of literature. That is to say, the authorial self, like the empirical self, is a living consciousness, not so much disembodied as differently embodied.

What does it mean for the Word to be incarnated, for the work to be written? "When composition begins," writes Shelley, "inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conception of the poet." We recall that when Frankenstein infuses the spark of being into the lifeless thing before him, his candle is "nearly burnt out." Shelley's version is that "the mind in creation is as a fading coal."¹⁴ Composition is at once the shattering of mind and the scattering of dead or dying thoughts, mere leavings, ashes and sparks that are the casual by-products of the "unextinguished hearth" of original inspiration.

Art is a betrayal of its source. Lapsing into discourse, the artist utters a dismembered Word. Alienated by the words intended to mediate it, the Word assumes the opacity of what stands for it and is evacuated by what stands in its place. To be represented by the text is thus to experience a bewildering effacement or defacement of the self; the authorial self, in other words, is as much estranged from the work as the empirical self. Of course, it can be argued that the authorial self is merely an effect of textuality, not an originitive presence: "Always already"—one hears the insistent murmur of Derrida, echoing Heidegger—textualized. That may be so. But I find it impossible to think about literature without retaining the notion of the creative imagination, if for no other reason than that some such mythic agency is needed to link the completed text to the self that paces about the room and chews pencils. Dr. Johnson, who greatly respected literary power, shows himself to be at least as advanced as the most modern demystifier when he terms imagination a "hunger . . . which preys incessantly upon life" (*Rasselas*, Ch. xxxii). Perhaps, then, it would be more accurate to say that the artist, instead of falling into textuality, falls back on the text to avoid becoming lost in his or her own void. Composing the work, the writer touches ground. Inasmuch as writing is always a reworking of the already written, of literary tradition, it is not the writer's own ground, but it is just as surely the true ground of his or her being, inasmuch as reanimating the dead is the self-alienating labor that constitutes authorship.

However universal Frankenstein's experience may be, his failure as an artist is also particular, a merely personal torment. He counsels Walton not to aspire to be greater than human nature will allow. How great is that? In flight from his catastrophic scene of authorship, Frankenstein seeks consolation in the Alps, declaring that the Power is there, elsewhere, invested in Mont Blanc. Here the human being is a dwarfed late-comer, the sole unquiet thing, and Frankenstein, with dubious ecstasy, yields up his spirit to the "solitary grandeur" (p. 97) presiding over this ancient desolation. But although vowing not "to bend before any being less almighty than that which had created and ruled the elements" (p. 94), he is surprised by his massive and all but

omnipotent Creature, the only presence amid this blankness and a fit emblem of his god of Power. Ultimately, the terrific god means "I am terrified"—whether by chaos or the space of absolute freedom remains for the interpreter to decide. Like the speaker of Blake's "Tyger," whose own estranged genius can be read in his distorted visions of a beast and of a beastly creator so fearsome he can be represented only by piecemeal images, Frankenstein is absurdly frightened out of his creative potential by his own creations.

Is it possible to put on power and yet avoid crippling anxiety? Shelley believed so, and his "Mont Blanc" is a serious parody of the "ceaseless ravings" of Coleridge's "Hymn before Sunrise," a poem Frankenstein might have written. Shelley himself is nearly overwhelmed by nature's power display and the spectral deity it represents. However, "one legion of wild thoughts," a saving remnant, wanders to "the still cave of the witch Poesy," and from within this zone of calm, carved out of the rock of nature, he recalls the power of his own adverting mind to image and give voice to "the secret Strength of things." In *Prometheus Unbound*, among other things a reply to *Frankenstein*, Shelley exemplifies his hope that an impotently self-consuming despairing man can be therapeutically re-membered as an artistic self whose strength derives from the embrace it gives. Bending reality to the shape of his desire, Shelley does not overlook that aspect of the self which cannot participate in a radiant world new-made by mind. Rather, he enjoins a heroic labor of self-creation, an unceasing struggle to redeem "from decay the visitations of the divinity in man" (III, 139) by converting man's spectral component into the medium through which imagination discovers and presents itself. I know that many nowadays regard the Shelleyan creative eros as a phantom. But this supreme fiction, barred from the power that would express it and perhaps coming to be recognized as imagination by virtue of its very inexpressibility, is no lie. The imagination is a real ghost haunting the ceaselessly active mind, and if it can rightly be called a "linguistic fiction," the reason is that this efficacious spirit is the voice that powers the shuttle of representative language.¹⁵ Representation is not only hounded by the curse of

mediacy; it can better an original "presence," subliming instead of merely sublimating it, even as Frankenstein engenders a being superior to, or at any rate sublimely other than, his creator.

It is at once peculiar and apt that when we begin reading *Frankenstein* the authoritative voice that addresses us in the Preface is not the author's but her husband's. That the author herself experienced some confusion between mine and thine seems likely. According to James Rieger, Shelley's "assistance at every point in the book's manufacture was so extensive that one hardly knows whether to regard him as editor or minor collaborator" (p. xviii). Is it coincidental that Frankenstein, discovering that Walton "made notes concerning his history . . . asked to see them, and then himself corrected and augmented them" (p. 210)? The Shelley–Frankenstein connection has been a frequent source of speculation among the novel's critics, and there is general agreement that Mary Shelley is either deeply divided in her response to Shelley and the entire Romantic enterprise or else downright hostile, using the novel as an instrument of revenge against her (supposedly over-idealistic, uncourageous, and insensitive) husband.¹⁶ But in the Introduction, as elsewhere, she deifies Shelley and Shelleyan poetry, writing of his "far more cultivated mind" (p. 6) and ascribing his failure to pursue the ghost-story competition to his annoyance with "the platitude of prose" (p. 8). In part, I suspect, she aggrandizes Shelley here because she wants him out of reach. When she says that "he was for ever inciting me to obtain literary reputation" (p. 6), it sounds like a complaint; and when she maintains that she was indebted to him only for his encouragement, she ignores the challenge that Shelley's literary efforts represented to her and their critical role in the genesis of her novel.

Although the banal note Mary Shelley was to append to *Alastor* belies the extraordinary generative power of that work, Shelley's first major poem, published a year before *Frankenstein*'s conception, exerted a more decisive influence than any of the traditional analogues the novel engages. I think it is safe to say that the focal enigma of *Alastor*, a poem that becomes more difficult to read the better one knows it, is the visionary maid who inspires the Poet's quest. Most obviously, she is an autoerotic projection

of the Poet, himself an autoerotic projection of Shelley's authorial self. Both narcissistic double and incestuous twin, she figures forth not only the imaginary other, text or muse, that is the Poet's perfect complement but whatever he lacks. Whether or not there is indeed an answering subject for the Poet to quest after is left unresolved. What is clear, however, is that so long as he remains mortal he can no more capture or merge with her than he can embrace the wind. Hopelessly divided between a historical narrative of disenchantment and a hysterical rage to cast out all that stands between the Poet and his desire, the poem is a kind of moving fixation. Bursting every natural limit that impedes his quest, the Poet keeps encountering new abysses, dangerous centers of power or vacancy that he is daemonically driven toward yet that his daemonic drive to be always ahead of himself keeps impelling him beyond, and in this perpetual self-rending movement the poem profoundly realizes the essence of the quest tradition.

It might seem that, although *Frankenstein* aspires to be a paradigmatic text of texts, *Alastor* is the paradigm defining the novel's vision and scope. Anticipating Frankenstein's career, the Poet renounces home and hearth to pursue "Nature's most secret steps" (l. 81); in the midst of the ruins of the past, he is startled by a sudden light, as meaning flashes "on his vacant mind / . . . like strong inspiration" (ll. 126–27); he is now ready to envision the form of his desire, whereupon his lust to body it forth precipitates him "beyond all human speed" (l. 361) while at the same time wasting his "frail . . . human form" (l. 350); finally his spirit is wasted too: pursuing the path of a departure to its inevitable terminus (see l. 368 and *Frankenstein*, pp. 98, 203), this frightful solitary has become a hollow voice, "Ruin call[ing] / His brother Death" (ll. 618–19). In one respect Mary Shelley exceeds the literalizing ferocity of her husband's poem. While the visionary maid is a teasingly elusive or illusive literalization of Wordsworth's visionary gleam and Coleridge's Abyssinian maid, the Creature is a figuration that is at once richer and more sublimely literal than its original. This transformation, moreover, suggests that *Frankenstein* may be viewed as a deidealizing critique or misreading of *Alastor*. Retaining the poem's fundamental desire, the

novel subverts it by altering the context in which it is lodged. The idealized quest for the epipsyche, or soul out of my soul, engenders the Creature, who is not only a "horrid thing" from which Frankenstein recoils in disgust but a voice of protest against his creator's lack of responsiveness. *Frankenstein*, then, would seem to oppose *Alastor*'s desperate sublime yearnings with a countermyth of continuity and reciprocity.

The main trouble with this reading is that it underestimates the strength, complexity, and sophistication of Shelley's poem, which subverts *Frankenstein* far more powerfully than the novel subverts the poem. What is most remarkable about *Alastor* is that the force of the Shelleyan sublime is great enough to withstand the rugged doubt to which it is always in danger of succumbing. Thomas Weiskel, a superb interpreter of the poem and of the Romantic sublime in general, argues that the energy of Shelley's high style "results almost entirely from what is being denied or suppressed."¹⁷ But I think Shelley neither ignores nor represses what Weiskel terms the "fictionality of desire"; he simply outstrips his own self-consciousness. If the light of sense were to go out in Shelley's moments of glory, he could not gauge how high he had risen or how fast he was going and he would have no limits to mock. Such mockery, which is the utmost the sublime mode can achieve for both writer and reader, applies to the Poet insofar as he affixes his desire to a single image and is in turn mocked, though not canceled, by all that checks the spirit's flight. As the Poet, an "elemental god" (l. 351), surges across the ocean in his rifted boat and the tormented element rages below, the self-division that characterizes the scene of writing is rendered more vividly and subtly than in *Frankenstein*. The continually felt presence of the Narrator, at once deeply attracted to and repelled by the Poet's solipsistic quest, is an additional enrichment. Like Mary Shelley's novel, *Alastor* can be reduced to a moral fable advocating human sympathy, but the poem embodies this theme in the Narrator's response and expresses it overtly only in the Preface.

While Shelley gives the overwhelming impression of being the voice of "Kubla Khan"'s chasm world and at the same time a consummately ironic outsider, Mary Shelley is neither inside

nor outside enough. Ultimately, *Frankenstein* is not a masterful representation of Frankenstein's failure, because the author is more bewildered by than secure in her liminal status. She is akin to the Narrator of *Alastor*, who knows the sublime only through the more relentlessly driven Poet, or her Walton, a failed poet who remains susceptible to the allure of the daemonic yet preserves his contacts with home and hopes to regulate his frightening desires. There is, however, no true domestication of desire in *Frankenstein*, and certainly the novel's praise of domestic affection opens no liberating verbal space. Perhaps Walton will be a wiser man when he returns home, but he will be embittered by all he has failed to achieve. The terrible truth haunting *Frankenstein* is that, despite its redundant melodramatic excess, "a voice / is wanting" (*Prometheus Unbound* II.iv.115–16). According to Walton, Frankenstein is a type of Milton's

Raphael: "he possesses . . . an intuitive discernment . . . unequalled for clearness and precision; add to this a facility of expression, and a voice whose varied intonations are soul-subduing music" (p. 29). But we never hear this music, and only the Creature's poignant farewell, a passage that Shelley seems to have been largely responsible for (Rieger, p. xviii), exemplifies the effortless control or grace that is the supreme mark of power. Except for the *idea* of the Creature, an instance of the critic's sublime rather than of the reader's, the novel does not achieve sublimity, which remains an alienated episode of Frankenstein's recollected history. Free to fall, the modern Prometheus discovers that on her tongue there is a stone.

City College
City University of New York
New York, New York

Notes

¹ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, ed. M. K. Joseph (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969); all page references to the novel, unless otherwise noted, are to this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text.

² See Morton Kaplan and Robert Kloss, *The Unspoken Motive: A Guide to Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism* (New York: Free Press, 1973), pp. 119–45; J. M. Hill, "Frankenstein and the Physiognomy of Desire," *American Imago*, 32 (1975), 335–58; Gordon D. Hirsch, "The Monster Was a Lady: On the Psychology of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," *Hartford Studies in Literature*, 7 (1975), 116–53; Gerhard Joseph, "Frankenstein's Dream: The Child as Father of the Monster," *Hartford Studies in Literature*, 7 (1975), 97–115; and Marc A. Rubenstein, "'My Accursed Origin': The Search for the Mother in *Frankenstein*," *Studies in Romanticism*, 15 (1976), 165–94. Interpretations largely or partly indebted to orthodox psychoanalysis include Masao Miyoshi, *The Divided Self: A Perspective on the Literature of the Victorians* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 79–89; William A. Walling, *Mary Shelley* (New York: Twayne, 1972); John A. Dussinger, "Kinship and Guilt in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," *Studies in the Novel*, 8 (1976), 38–55; and Martin Tropp, *Mary Shelley's Monster* (Boston: Houghton, 1976).

³ James Rieger, ed., *Frankenstein*, by Mary Shelley (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974), p. 35.

⁴ Both the mother and Elizabeth are orphans, one "adopted" by Frankenstein's father, the other by Frankenstein as his "more than sister" (p. 36). The

mother, on her deathbed, urges the Frankenstein-Elizabeth union, and after the mother's death Elizabeth assumes the maternal role in the household. It is noteworthy that the first Gothic tale mentioned in the Introduction is "the History of the Inconstant Lover, who, when he thought to clasp the bride to whom he had pledged his vows, found himself in the arms of the pale ghost of her whom he had deserted" (p. 7). If Elizabeth is the mother's corpse, Justine is a miniature of the mother, the incriminating object the Creature plants on Justine's person (see pp. 65, 143).

⁵ See Peter Brooks, "'Godlike Science/Unhallowed Arts': Language, Nature, and Monstrosity," in *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel*, ed. George Levine and U. C. Knoepfelmacher (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1979), p. 213.

⁶ Levine, "*Frankenstein* and the Tradition of Realism," *Novel*, 7 (1973), 25.

⁷ Levine, "The Ambiguous Heritage of *Frankenstein*," in *The Endurance of Frankenstein*, p. 15.

⁸ See Harold Bloom, "*Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*," in *The Ringers in the Tower: Studies in Romantic Tradition* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 121–22. On Mary Shelley's psyche see Hirsch; Rubenstein; Susan Harris Smith, "*Frankenstein*: Mary Shelley's Psychic Divisiveness," *Women and Literature*, 5 (1977), 42–53; Ellen Moers, "Female Gothic," in *The Endurance of Frankenstein*, pp. 77–87; and U. C. Knoepfelmacher, "Thoughts on the Aggression of Daughters," in *The Endurance of Frankenstein*, pp. 88–119.

⁹ Cf. Mary Poovey, "My Hideous Progeny: Mary

Shelley and the Feminization of Romanticism," *PMLA*, 95 (1980), 337.

¹⁰ On the traditional daemon see Paul Sherwin, *Precious Bane: Collins and the Miltonic Legacy* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1977), pp. 67–75. In Sec. 2 above I use the term "daemonic" in Harold Bloom's sense; see esp. *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 99–112.

¹¹ Rubenstein finds here a representation of the uterus (see p. 178).

¹² See the second section of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* for the *fort/da* (gone/here) interplay.

¹³ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1941), p. 26.

¹⁴ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, in *Shelley's Prose Works*, ed. Harry Buxton Forman, 4 vols. (London: Reeves and Turner, 1880), III, 137.

¹⁵ See Geoffrey Hartman, "The Voice of the Shuttle: Language from the Point of View of Literature," in *Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays 1958–1970* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 337–55.

¹⁶ See Christopher Small, *Ariel like a Harpy: Shelley, Mary and Frankenstein* (London: Gollancz, 1972); Richard Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1974); and Peter Dale Scott, "Vital Artifice: Mary, Percy, and the Psychopolitical Integrity of *Frankenstein*," in *The Endurance of Frankenstein*, pp. 172–202.

¹⁷ Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), p. 156.