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#### A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON FRANKENSTEIN

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##### "Cooped Up":

##### Feminine Domesticity in *Frankenstein*

It is important to note that *Frankenstein* was published anonymously, that its woman author kept her identity hidden. Similarly, no women in the novel speak directly: everything we hear from and about them is filtered through the three masculine narrators. In addition, these women seldom venture far from home, while the narrators and most of the other men engage in quests and various public occupations. These facts exemplify the nineteenth century's emerging doctrine of "separate spheres," the ideology that split off the (woman's) domestic sphere from the (man's) public world and strictly defined the "feminine" and "masculine" traits appropriate to each sphere. My essay will analyze the operations of this ideology in the writing of *Frankenstein* and in the novel itself.

From the novel's women we may infer that Mary Shelley approved the separate-spheres doctrine; Elizabeth, for example, fully embodies the ideologically correct feminine qualities Victor — and the author — attribute to her. Yet it is equally clear that Elizabeth and the domestic sphere she represents fail signally in their *raison d'être*, which is to prepare young men like Victor to resist the temptations of the public sphere. *Frankenstein* shows that the private virtues inculcated through domestic affection cannot arm men against the public world unless men emulate these feminine and domestic qualities. Although Victor waxes eloquent on the domestic "lesson of patience, of charity, and of self-control" taught him as a child (40), his quest for scientific glory shows that none of this lesson took; and while he often reiterates his "warmest admiration" (129) for Elizabeth's qualities, he perceives them not as a model but as a "reward" and "consolation" for his trials (131). Through these contradictions the novel may be suggesting that domestic affection can achieve its educational aim only if it is "hardy enough to survive in the world outside the home" (Ellis, "Monsters" 140); but *Frankenstein* also dramatizes how all but impossible is that aim.

The problem is that the domestic ideology is bifurcated: the home is to provide not only a moral education for involvement in the public world but also a shelter against this world. Instead of a nursery of virtue, then, the home could become, as one of domesticity's stoutest ideologues put it, a "relief from the severer duties of life" (Ellis, *Women* 12); a man could thus "pursue the necessary avocation of the day" but also "keep as it were a separate soul for his family, his social duty, and his God" (Ellis, *Women* 20). Although written some twenty years after *Frankenstein*, this picture of a man with two separate souls perfectly represents a contradictory domestic ideology and its product, a Victor divided between his masculine "necessary avocation" of scientific glory and his admiration of Elizabeth's feminine domesticity.

Feminist criticism of *Frankenstein* has addressed the similar conflict between public and private that troubled Victor's creator. Mary Shelley's 1831 introduction states her desire for the public fame both her parents had achieved by writing, but she adds that her private, domestic role — "the cares of a family" — kept her from pursuing this goal (20). Even when she went public with *Frankenstein* in 1818, she remained to some extent private by publishing it anonymously. Several possible explanations of this desire for privacy suggest themselves. While Mary claimed that she withheld her name out of respect for those "from whom I bear it" (*Letters* 1.71), she may also have feared a repetition of the public contumely directed at both of her parents as well as their

writings. The experience of her husband Percy and their friend Byron, two published poets whose work and unconventional lives had been vilified by critics, must have intensified these fears. And, although by 1818 she was legally married, her experience of publicity after eloping—she knew the rumors that her father had sold her to Percy (*Letters* 1.4)—may have made her especially wary of inviting public attention. Finally, Mary's caution could well have been gender-specific: she may have wanted to prevent critics from dismissing her as a woman writer.

Several elements of this last possibility—the terms of such a critical judgment, Mary Shelley's own view of women's writing, the difficulty of writing her way out of the woman's private into the man's public sphere—are well illustrated by the peregrinations of a letter she wrote to Percy. On September 30, 1817, the letter's date, *Frankenstein* was at the publisher, halfway between a private and a public state; Percy Shelley, not Mary, was in London editing the proofs. In her letter Mary alluded to at some length on the politics of a pamphlet by the radical William Cobbett. Percy apparently showed these private comments on public affairs to their mutual friend Leigh Hunt, editor of the *Examiner*. Without informing Mary, Hunt published her comments in the October 15 *Examiner*; he did not name her but did note her gender, describing her as "a lady of what is called a masculine understanding, that is to say, of great natural abilities not obstructed by a *bad* education" (*Letters* 1.54, fn. 2). Mary's letter reads somewhat breathlessly—like much of the manuscript *Frankenstein*, for instance, it is punctuated only by dashes—and she felt it "cut a very foolish figure" in print (*Letters* 1.53). Had she known Hunt planned to make her comments public, she told Percy, she would have written with "more print-worthy dignity"; instead, the letter was "so femininely [sic] expressed that all men of letters will on reading it acquit me of having a *masculine* understanding."

The incident of the letter and its author's response illuminate several of her difficulties as a woman writer. To begin with, she would come up against one element of the separation of spheres, namely a strict ideological distinction of "masculine" from "feminine" qualities. In Hunt's editorial note, for instance, "great natural abilities" are gendered; that is, they are equated with "a masculine understanding." If "obstructed" by the "bad" education most women could expect to receive, these abilities would be feminized—that is, obscured and weakened. For Mary Shelley to name herself as *Frankenstein's* author, then, would be to endanger her status as honorary man, to risk having her "masculine understanding" impugned as "femininely expressed." Writing a novel of "print-worthy dignity" had already presented its

author with similar problems. As I have noted (see p. 11), her domestic duties interfered with the time available for writing, and as editor her husband may have been a further impediment. Mary Poovey has cogently argued that Mary Shelley's own editing of the 1831 *Frankenstein* was meant to bring her younger, unorthodox self into line with the conventional image of a proper lady, and it seems to me that a similar image-making motivated Percy's revisions of his wife's manuscript. In some ways, of course, his idea of a proper lady diverged wildly from contemporary ideology; after he and Mary eloped, for instance, he suggested to his wife Harriet that she join them. Nonetheless, Percy Shelley shared his culture's desire to mold women according to a masculine idea of femininity, a narcissistic complement to masculine traits. Such narcissism colored his view of his relationship with Mary: they were so "united," he wrote, that in describing her "excellencies" he seemed to himself "an egoist exultating upon his own perfections" (qtd. in *Spark* 21). His editing displays the same self-satisfied desire to "unite" Mary's work to his, to see his perfections mirrored in her manuscript.

While some of Percy Shelley's changes are clarifications and others are grammatical, even these minimal alterations show his desire to control the text and shape it in his own image. As he consistently changes Mary's dashes to colons and semicolons, for instance, or her coordinating "that" to the subordinating "which," he is imposing his order on her ideas. More striking are his revisions of her language. Anne K. Mellor has exhaustively documented the extent to which Percy altered Mary's straightforward and colloquial diction into a more ponderous and latinate prose,<sup>1</sup> and my own examination of the rough-draft and fair-copy manuscripts confirms that he is largely responsible for what George Levine calls the novel's "inflexibly public and oratorical" style (4). This "public" style is masculine—the product of a public-school and university education, available only to men, which taught writing by using Latin prose as a model—and so it confers "print-worthy dignity" on what might otherwise seem "femininely expressed."

Where Percy Shelley's changes extended beyond clarification, grammar, and diction, Mellor charges that they "actually distorted the meaning of the text" (62). I will return to this questionable notion that any text has a single meaning, but certainly Percy's heavy editorial hand marks the novel throughout. He rewrote some sections extensively; his fair copy of the conclusion (from Victor's death on) significantly revises

<sup>1</sup>See Mellor 58–69 and Appendix. Murray 62–68 prints a useful side-by-side listing of the rough draft, fair copy, and 1831 revisions.

the rough draft; and his wife gave him "carte blanche to make what alterations you please" while he was editing certain sections of the proofs (*Letters* 1.42).

Accustomed as we are to regarding authorship as independent creation we may wonder why Mary Shelley allowed her husband to rewrite her novel in these fairly substantial ways. Every writer knows how dispiriting it is to have one's deathless prose altered, no matter how kindly—especially when, as in Mary's case, the alterations come from a more experienced and thus (presumably) authoritative writer. Yet most writers have also felt the benefits of what might be called a collaborative editing: one that does not "distort" a text's single meaning but rather teases out its several inchoate or chaotic possibilities. It is at least arguable, then, that Mary acceded to her husband's changes not simply out of "deference to his superior mind" (Mellor 69) but also because she viewed him as a collaborator. Moreover, if Percy's revisions were in some ways protective coloration, they were also empowering: his attentions must have encouraged her to believe that she "possessed the promise of better things hereafter" (Introduction 20) and to produce a substantial body of "better things" after his death.

But the issue of a man's influence on a woman writer remains complicated. Mary Shelley felt unable "to put [her]self forward unless led, cherished & supported," and she perceived this need for support as feminine, "the woman's love of looking up and being guided" (*Journal* 555). It might be, then, that this ideology of dependent femininity rendered her unable to write her own text without her husband's help. Moreover, collaboration forced by a more dominant writer on a less powerful and perhaps unwilling "partner" is a kind of rape; if *Frankenstein* is the product of such a union, then it evinces a debilitating femininity. But to perceive writing as noncollaborative, as a necessarily independent act, betokens a concept of masculinity that raises another set of problems. One has only to think of Victor as self-sufficient "author"<sup>2</sup>—of the monster (91), "unattractive evils" (84), and "[his] own speedy ruin" (92)—to see such authorship as a monstrous, masculine version of creativity. If Mary Shelley rejected this view of creation as autochthonous, of a work as wholly self-engendered, *Frankenstein* becomes "an incipient critique of the individualistic notion of

ordinary creativity" (Carson 436). By welcoming help, then, she challenged a destructive version of "masculine understanding." But even if her collaboration was willing, it could be seen as self-suppression, an acceptance of "feminine" weakness: as the journal entry cited above shows, a woman of her time was *conditional* to think she needed a man's help. From this perspective, her willingness to accept her husband's revisions is analogous to the novel's oppressively feminine women: all are efforts to straddle the line between public and private, to ensure that a masculine understanding is expressed without feminine obstructions but with feminine propriety.

This "but"-laden formulation leaves the question of Percy Shelley's influence open, and I have done so deliberately—partly because editing this book showed me the difficulty of distinguishing between encouragement and coercion, partly because we cannot ascertain Mary Shelley's motives with any certainty, but mainly because the problem of influence shows that the relations between prescribed femininity and women's actual experience are so convoluted as to resist single-answer formulations.

If we now turn from the author to her novel, we can see how domestic relationships in *Frankenstein* embody this complex and uneasy negotiation between ideology and experience.

The Frankenstein home seems a model of ideologically correct relationships. Not only are Alphonse and Caroline happily married, as parents they are "possessed by the very spirit of kindness and indulgence" (43). Together, we are told, they guide Victor with "a silken cord" (40); they are joint "agents and creators" of his childhood joys (43); and he derives as much pleasure from his father's "smile of benevolent pleasure" (40) as from his mother's "tender caresses." This shared parenting shows that men as well as women have an important domestic role; indeed, insofar as Alphonse is a Good Father, he is feminine. His nurturant qualities were commonly associated with femininity, and it is significant that he has "relinquished all his public functions," withdrawn from the man's sphere of government into the woman's domestic sphere. Yet he also fulfills the traditional masculine role of protector toward his wife, by rescuing her from want and "shelter[ing] her, as a fair exotic is sheltered by the gardener, from every rougher wind." In these ways Alphonse becomes a sort of feminine patriarch, and his gentle rule by "silken cord" is the reverse of paternal tyranny.

Also ideologically sound is the harmony produced among the household's children by their opposite yet complementary traits.

<sup>2</sup>Mellor 65 argues that Percy Shelley introduced all uses of the word "author." Granted I am not a handwriting expert, the manuscript evidence for this assertion does not seem to me conclusive; moreover, even if it were he who introduced the word, surely Mary Shelley would have had her own ideas of what it connoted.

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Where the original manuscript focused on diversity, the final version was revised to focus on harmony. In the rough draft, for instance, an electrical storm produced "a very different effect" on each child: Victor wanted "to analyze its causes," Henry "said that the fairies and giants were at war," and Elizabeth "attempted a picture of it" (Abinger Dep.c.477/1, p. 45). Although the 1831 *Frankenstein* retains such differences between Elizabeth and Victor, the focus shifts to how "diversity and contrast . . . drew us nearer together" (42). Elizabeth accepts "with a serious and satisfied spirit the appearance of things" while Victor "delight[s] in investigating their causes," but no "disunion or dispute" mars this gender difference between feminine passivity and masculine activity. Here as throughout the novel, gender opposites are represented as complements. The young Victor Frankenstein and his friend Henry Clerval actively prepare for public futures while Elizabeth simply exists as a domestic icon, but what might seem an *opposition* between separate spheres is rewritten as complementary *difference*. In other words, while Elizabeth is little more than "the living spirit of love" (43), as such she has feminine functions. Her "sympathy," smile, etc. are "ever there to bless and animate" Henry and Victor; she teaches Henry "the real loveliness of beneficence" (43), and she keeps Victor from becoming "sullen" and "rough" by "subdu[ing him] to a semblance of her own gentleness" (43).

In Henry, moreover, Victor has a paradigm for the successful complementarity of masculine and feminine traits within himself. While Henry wants to be one of "the gallant and adventurous benefactors of our species" (43), he is also a domestic benefactor: as Victor's "kind and attentive nurse" (61) at Ingolstadt, he fulfills the role Elizabeth wished for herself (63). In addition, he tempers his masculine "passion for adventurous exploit" (43) with Elizabeth's feminine desire that he make "doing good the end and aim of his soaring ambition." Unlike Victor's "mad enthusiasm" (154), Henry's "wild and enthusiastic imagination was chastened by the sensibility of his heart" (133). Clearly, Victor's "eager desire" to learn "the *physical* secrets of the world" should have been balanced by Henry's preoccupation with "the *moral* relations of things" (43; emphasis added).

Why, then, does this domestic enclave of virtue not protect Victor? Why does he not remain within the boundaries marked off by the "silken cord" of domestic affection? Why does he not profit from the "lesson of patience, of charity, of self-control" taught by his parents and embodied in his friends, Elizabeth and Henry? The answers lie in

Victor's complicated relations to nature, feminized domesticity, and masculine science.

For Victor, nature is "maternal" (87), and its life-giving and "kindly influence" has a domestic equivalent in Elizabeth's feminine fosterage. Just as Elizabeth "subdued Victor to a semblance of her own gentleness," so a "cloudless blue sky" can bestow "a tranquility to which [he] had long been a stranger" (132); just as Elizabeth can "inspire [him] with human feelings" (159), so a "divine spring" can "revive" in him "sentiments of joy and affection" (62). In these moods of openness to nature, Victor is feminized into passive tranquility and domestic affection. In other moods, however, he thrills to a more masculine nature; when he experiences a storm in the Alps, for instance, "This noble war in the sky elevated my spirits" (72). It is this idea of war, of attempted conquest or domination, that most frequently informs Victor's masculine attitude toward nature. It is no accident, then, that he chooses the masculine realm of science as a means of discovering and thereby mastering the secrets of feminine nature. From childhood Victor had regarded the world as "a secret which I desired to divine"; repeatedly he tells us of his obsessive curiosity about "the hidden laws of nature" (42), his "eager desire" to learn "the secrets of heaven and earth" (43), his "fervent longing to penetrate the secrets of nature" (44). Because "her immortal lineaments were still a wonder and a mystery" to him (45), this unknown nature offers a field for the masculine mastery promised by scientific knowledge.<sup>3</sup> At Ingolstadt M. Waldman assures him that modern scientists can "penetrate into the recesses of nature and show how she works in her hiding-places" (51), and so Victor determines to "pursue nature to her hiding-places" (56).

Now, this language describing masculine penetration of feminine nature may be scientific, but it also sounds insistently sexual; to post-Freudian ears, it may suggest a woman writer's uneasiness with masculine sexuality.<sup>4</sup> But another explanation may lie in Mary Shelley's conflicted desire both to achieve public fame by writing and to escape the consequent publicity by remaining in the private sphere. If Percy Shel-

<sup>3</sup>Mellor's Chapter 5 fully documents the masculinist language of domination used by the scientists Mary consulted while writing *Frankenstein*; on more recent uses of such language, see Kranzler.

<sup>4</sup>There is some biographical evidence for this view. In 1815 Percy was apparently urging Mary toward an affair with his friend T. J. Hogg, who was nothing loath; this combined sexual pressure may have been at least unsettling for Mary, at worst the same kind of masculine domination that Victor wants to impose on nature. See *Letters* 1.6-14; the most even-handed treatment of this episode is Spark 40-46.

ley's "incitement" (23) reinforced her "persistent association of writing with an aggressive quest for public notice" (Poovey 121), then writing *Frankenstein* must have seemed to *imitate* the consequent invasions by publicity. The novel's language of penetration, that is, may have less to do with sexuality per se than with a woman writer's fear that walled-off domesticity cannot guarantee the privacy it promises. More troubling would be the possibility that, if writing masculinizes, then it might make a woman Victor-like, aggressive, a scientific violator of domesticity's secrets.

But if domesticity can be penetrated, especially from within, does this not suggest that it was never inviolable, that its apparent strengths were in fact its weaknesses or even its immanent destruction? This question moves back toward the problem of feminized domesticity, and here we need to look again at Alphonse's role as feminine patriarch. While Victor says that Waldman's promises of scientific prowess were "enounced to destroy me" (51), he blames not Waldman but his father. Instead of offhandedly dismissing Cornelius Agrippa as "sad trash" (44), Victor complains, Alphonse should have explained that modern science "possessed much greater powers" than Agrippa's outmoded alchemical methods; Victor would then have bowed to the authority of paternal knowledge and "possibly" escaped "the fatal impulse that led to my ruin" (44). Well, maybe. But if the revelation of modern science's "new and almost unlimited powers" (51) is an "evil influence" when it comes from M. Waldman (49), it would be no less evil coming from the elder Frankenstein. Significant here are the author's revisions rendering Alphonse "not scientific" (45). She omitted from the rough draft both his scientific experiments and his wish that Victor attend lectures in natural philosophy, and she altered the decision to send Victor to university, originally made by "my father," to the wish of "my parents" (Abinger Dep.c.477/1, pp. 6, 47). All these changes suggest that the author intended to reduce Alphonse's culpability for Victor's skewed science.

Yet Alphonse *does* contribute to Victor's ruin, not because he is a bad scientist but because he is a good father. What I am suggesting is a destructive domesticity enforced by the feminized patriarch. Despite Victor's insistence on his perfect childhood, his relation to his "remarkably secluded and domestic" upbringing (48) is in fact conflicted. On the one hand, he is "reluctant" to leave home for Ingolstadt, where he must become "[his] own protector"; on the other, he has "longed to enter the world," to no longer be "cooped up" by domesticity and its protections. In a novel ostensibly written to exhibit "the amiableness

of domestic affection" (Preface 25),<sup>5</sup> Victor's admission jars: can it be that his home is too domestic, his feminized father too protective?

Although Victor insists on his "gratitude" for his parents' care (43), we may speculate that this very gratitude has made him feel "cooped up." Gratitude, no matter how heartfelt, implies obligation, which in turn implies the power of the person to whom one is grateful or obligated. The insistence on gratitude and obligation induces a bookkeeping mentality that permeates all the relations in this novel. Victor acknowledges Henry Clerval's nursing by asking "How shall I ever repay you?" (62); Felix De Lacey views Safie as "a treasure which would fully reward his toil and hazard" in rescuing her father (108); when shot by the peasant, the monster fumes that "the reward of [his] benevolence" is "ingratitude" (122). This emotional quid pro quo is most evident, however, in the novel's domestic relations. In these terms the Frankenstein family is "a paradigm of the social contract based on economic terms" (Dussinger 52), for kinship and domestic affection are "secondary to the indebtedness incurred by promises exchanged for gifts." That is, in this family what seems freely given in fact requires something in exchange, so that the relation between parents and children is one of "unpayable debt."

Rather than Victor's picture of a gentle patriarch guiding by "silken cord," what then emerges is a cord or bond of constricting domestic relations. Among the Frankensteins, a gift requires gratitude and so produces a sense of obligation that can be discharged only by endless repetition of this pattern. Victor's parents had "a deep consciousness of what they *owed* towards the being to which they had *given* life" (40). To them the child was

the innocent and helpless creature *bestowed* on them by Heaven, . . . whose future lot it was in their hands to direct to happiness or misery, according as they fulfilled their duties towards me. (40; emphases added)

Caroline and Alphonse pay off their debt of gratitude to "heaven" by fulfilling the duties they owe their child. Victor in turn owes gratitude for the life "given" him and for his parents' care, but their power and

<sup>5</sup>In her 1831 introduction Mary Shelley claims that Percy Shelley wrote this Preface, but an 1817 journal entry suggests otherwise. On May 14 she writes "S. [i.e., Percy] reads History of F[rench] Rev[olution] and corrects F[rankenstein]. write Preface. — Finis" (*Journal* 169). The verb "write" indicates that the omitted subject of this sentence is not Percy but "P"; this may be a slip of the pen, but if not it is interesting to speculate why Mary remembered Percy and not herself as the author of the Preface.

his consequent obligations form the cord that, no matter how silken, confines and encloses him within the family. Hence he repeats this domestic pattern when he contemplates creating a new species, and his view of the parent-child relation revealingly focuses on himself as patriarch. The members of his new species "would owe their being to me," he gleats, and so "[n]o father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs" (55; emphases added). Alphonse may have seemed a gentle patriarch, but Victor's words suggest there was an iron hand in this velvet glove: a father can claim gratitude from the child who owes existence to him.

Judged simply from this paternal point of view, there is a certain logic in Victor's abandonment of the "child" he created: if the sheer bestowal of existence is a sufficient claim to gratitude, why be an Alphonse-like Good Father? Of course, in abandoning the monster Victor forgets the distinction he had earlier made between merely claiming gratitude and really deserving it. To deserve gratitude, parents must "fulfill their duties" toward their child; because Victor does not do so, he is a Bad Father and his child is not embodied filial gratitude but "my own vampire, my own spirit . . . forced to destroy all that was dear to me" (73). But if a bad father produces a bad child, and Victor like the monster is a bad child, does this not suggest that Alphonse too was a bad father, that he somehow failed to fulfill his duties toward his child? Or was it *fulfilling* those duties that made him a bad father? In other words, can the ideologically correct Good Father be so nurturant that he becomes a Bad Father? If so, then Alphonse's paternal protection is as damaging to his child as Victor's paternal indifference is to his. In other words, while the monster becomes monstrous in part because he has been denied parental care, Victor becomes monstrous in part because he has been *given* this care and made subject to the attendant obligations. In this reading, the "spirit" that Victor releases through the monster is the masculinity so "cooped up" by Alphonse's feminized domesticity that it breaks out as "the male principle in its extreme, monstrous form" (Veeder 190). Hence Victor can enter the masculine sphere of science only by destroying the feminine sphere, and that includes his feminized father. Victor's kinship to the monster reveals the dark side of the Frankenstein family's oppressive domesticity and too-nurturant patriarch.

But Victor is not the only victim of this pattern of domestic indebtedness: it is the novel's women who are literally destroyed by it. In the relations of Caroline, Elizabeth, and Justine to the Frankenstein

family, we can again see something excessive, something too enveloping in Frankensteinian domesticity. Certainly the image of Caroline as Alphonse's "fair exotic" (39) suggests a hot-house atmosphere, and when she transplants the "garden rose" Elizabeth (41) to the Frankenstein home as Victor's "more than sister" (42), "the amiableness of domestic affection" comes precariously close to incest. Of course Elizabeth is not literally Victor's sister, and he later assures his father that he loves her not as a brother but as a husband (129). But pursuing the hint of incest will clarify how blood kinship among the Frankensteins is secondary to familial indebtedness; we can then see how the resulting insistent domesticity kills off the novel's women.

Class selection determines which women are worthy to enter the upper class Frankenstein family; as Anca Vlasopolos suggests, this criterion is "a form of aristocratic protectionism that encourages, in fact engineers, incest" (126) by closing the family off from otherness or difference. Although plunged into straw-plaiting poverty by her father's business failure, Caroline's lineage and beauty mark her as still deserving the "rank and magnificence" he once enjoyed (38); by marrying her, then, Alphonse is restoring the status quo, rescuing Caroline from the otherness of a working-class milieu and returning her to her proper place. This pattern is even more overt in the adoption of Elizabeth. Because Elizabeth is "of a different stock" from her rude guardians (40), Caroline rescues this nobleman's daughter from the lower orders and then uses the "powerful protection" (41) of the Frankenstein family to restore Elizabeth to her proper status. Difference is further excluded as Elizabeth takes on all the family's feminine roles; Victor's "more than sister" and destined to be his wife, she also becomes Caroline by "supply[ing] her] place" as mother after her death (47). Although Justine is brought less fully into the family, she is perhaps the most Frankensteinized: when Caroline rescues her from a Bad Mother, Justine so "imitat[es] her phrasology and manners" (64) as to become her clone. The Frankenstein family's incestuous pattern of reproducing itself by excluding difference could hardly be clearer. And although none of these women is a born Frankenstein, they all — unlike Victor — fully internalize the family pattern of gratitude that enforces obligation.

This insistent replication of the grateful icon of domesticity shows how completely the pattern of indebtedness permeates the Frankenstein definition of femininity. Caroline is an especially rich example of this definition. We first see her as a daughter; even though her father's culpably "proud and unbending disposition" (38) forces her into his (masculine) role of breadwinner, the daughterly "tenderness" that dis-

charges obligations to even a bad father (39) ensures her elevation to Frankenstein status. After Alphonse becomes her "protecting spirit," Caroline almost literally owes all she has to this marriage, and his oppressive benevolence constitutes another silken cord of enjoined gratitude. When she tries to discharge her obligations by "act[ing] in her turn the guardian angel to the afflicted?" (40) — that is, by becoming a Frankenstein — her benevolence takes the usual form of enforced gratitude and obligation. When she gives Justine an education, for instance, "this benefit was fully repaid?" (64) when Justine becomes "the most grateful little creature in the world." And when Caroline tries to discharge her debt to Alphonse by rescuing Elizabeth as she herself was rescued, she eventually pays with her life when she catches scarlet fever while nursing her protégée; unlike Victor, she has learned her own lesson "of patience, of charity?" only too well.

A similar sacrifice is Elizabeth. Indebted to Caroline for rescue from peasant life, she must discharge this debt by taking Caroline's place as the Frankenstein ideal of femininity. As "a shrine-dedicated lamp in our peaceful home" (43) and "the tie of our domestic comfort and the stay of [Alphonse's] declining years," she is embodied domesticity. She is also Victor's "possession?" (41), as he puts it: "my pride and my delight," "mine to protect, love, and cherish." But just as Alphonse's "protecting spirit" is ultimately responsible for Caroline's death, so Victor fails signally to "protect and cherish" his wife. His dream, that his kiss kills Elizabeth and turns her into his dead mother, is proleptic of the price she must pay for being Caroline's "pretty present?" to him (41): in the form of the monster, Victor's aggressive masculinity murders the domestic femininity that had tried to "subdue [him] to a semblance of her own gentleness."

Justine is perhaps the most pathetic victim of this pattern of replicated femininity. Exhausted by her Caroline-like maternal care in searching for William, she falls asleep and so becomes the monster's prey. Her likeness to Caroline reminds him that he is "forever robbed?" of any woman's "joy-imparting smiles" (123), so he determines that "she shall atone?" for all women's indifference. While Justine suffers here from being Caroline's stand-in, more generally her crime is being seductive; according to this masculine logic, women are "to blame for having been desired?" (Jacobus 133). To the townspeople, however, the crime for which Justine must "atone" is "blackest ingratitude?" toward her benefactors (79). Once again the portrait of Caroline seals Justine's fate: planted on her by the monster, it becomes circumstantial evidence of this ingratitude. Elizabeth's statement of her own and Caroline's kind-

ness to their servant backfires; Justine, like Caroline and Elizabeth, must pay her obligations to the Frankensteins with her life, and furthermore dies all but convinced "that I was the monster?" of ingratitude she is accused of being (80). These dramatic ironies, one victimized woman convicting another and that second victim convicting herself, in fact convict the Frankenstein family of omnivorous benevolence. Victor is right to call himself Justine's murderer (149), for it is the masculinity he represents that destroys its own creation of perfect femininity.

Victor's creation and destruction of the female monster is a kind of parody of these three women's fates. From watching the De Laceys and Safie, the monster learns to value the delights of domesticity they represent but also learns that he is "shut out?" from such intercourse (106); hence he asks Victor for a mate with whom to "interchange [the] sympathies necessary for my being?" (124). Given the failure of his exchange of sympathies with the De Laceys, it is more than a little ironic that the monster should make this request. And his desire for a female complement, a woman "as hideous as myself?" (125), parodies not only Victor's insistence on Elizabeth's complementary relationship to himself, but also Victor's bride-to-be as both the creation and the gift of his parents. This traffic in women via Frankensteinian quid pro quo is at its most overt in the murders of the monsterette and Elizabeth: deprived of a bride by Victor, the monster retaliates by killing Victor's bride. Victor, of course, assumes that he and not Elizabeth will be the monster's target, and in one sense he is correct: like the monsterette's, Elizabeth's creation and murder show that women function not in their own right but rather as signals of and conduits for men's relations with other men.

Against this dreary record of dead women we may place Safie. Her mother was rescued from slavery just as Caroline was rescued from poverty (Ellis, "Monsters" 141), but there the resemblance ends. From her mother Safie learns "to aspire to higher powers of intellect and an independence of spirit?" (108); hence she flouts her father's "tyrannical mandate?" (110) against marrying Felix and travels across Europe to rejoin him. Both her maternal inspiration and her active adventurousness contrast with Caroline's influence on her passive "daughters" Elizabeth and Justine. Unlike their iconic femininity, Safie is "subtly androgynous" (Rubinstein 189); we might see her as a female Henry, combining the standard feminine "angelic beauty?" (103) with a masculine energy and enterprise lacking in the novel's other women. But the challenge she might represent to conventional ideas of femininity is in effect "absorbed?" by various cultural norms (Vasopoulos 132). In the



first place, her desire to marry Felix has a class bias, for she is "enchanted" (109) by the prospect of "[raking] a place in society." In addition, unlike Henry or Walton she seeks adventure not for its own sake or to benefit humankind but to get a man. This is not to say that Walton's quest is unambiguously benevolent: like Victor's desire to "pioneer a new way" (51) and thus achieve "more, far more" than his predecessors, Walton's urge to "confer on all mankind" (26) an "inestimable benefit" is motivated at least as much by a self-absorbed itch for glory as by humanitarianism. It is nonetheless true that Safie, albeit much less drastically than the Frankenstein women, represents the view that women are "relative creatures" whose value derives from "promoting the happiness of others" (Ellis, *Women* 48, 16). It is thus apt that she joins the De Lacey family, for while their interactive domestic style stands in stark contrast to the rigid gift/debt structure of the Frankensteins, still it is a conventionally separate-spheres arrangement: Felix is "constantly employed out of doors" (98), for instance, while his sister Agatha's work consists of "arranging the cottage" (97). Moreover, just as Victor's family attempts to make a select few women into Frankensteins, so the De Lacey family circle opens only to admit the beautiful Safie. That Felix, like Victor, excludes the ugly monster indicates again how strictly men control where "the amiableness of domestic affection" is allowed to operate.

By using several feminist methodologies — studying one woman writer's experience of domestic and public roles, analyzing the cultural formation and literary representation of these gender roles — I have been reading *Frankenstein* as a woman's text concerned with women's issues. While Victor's story shows that the constraints of domesticity bear down hard on men, it is clear that the novel's women — who must not only create the familial sanctuary and sacrifice themselves to maintain it but also be punished for its failures — take the heavier share of the burden. If *Frankenstein* is about Victor, it is also about what his monstrous masculinity does to women, and even though none of these women speaks directly, Mary Shelley's novel speaks to us for them.

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