

in doing so they found that they had conjured up a monster that, once unleashed, could not be controlled. It was widely felt, even by those sympathetic to such experiments, that the mass mobilizations necessary to destroy the old order effectively blocked the creation of the new. Unleashing the power of the multitude had led to anarchy, and to the proliferation of innumerable demands that went far beyond what was rational or even "just" (according to the norms of middle-class revolutionaries). The dreams of progress toward a rational state faded in the face of what appeared to be the unpredictable, seemingly "irrational" character of the activity of the masses. The Enlightenment, far from having led to the reign of reason, had unloosed elemental forces deaf to the appeals of the morality that had liberated them in the first place. Accordingly, a general demoralization followed the close of the French Revolution, creating an atmosphere in which the Enlightenment was called radically into question and with it the notion of history conceived as progress toward a world organized on the basis of reason.

And the close of the French Revolution did little to resolve this dilemma. Instead, it was displaced to England which, following the Napoleonic wars, itself entered a period of social crisis the character of which only further underscored these questions. According to historian E. P. Thompson, "it is as if the English nation entered a crucible in the 1790s and emerged after the wars in a different form" (191). This crucible, often referred to as the industrial revolution, was anything but a period of smooth evolution. First, the era was marked by the sudden emergence of new technologies whose origins seemed inexplicable to contemporaries, appearing to herald a world utterly unlike what had gone before. As a contemporary commentator, Cooke Taylor, noted in 1843: "the steam engine had no precedent and the spinning-jenny is without ancestry . . . they sprang into sudden existence like Minerva from the brain of Jupiter" (qtd. in Thompson 190). Before the paradox of technologies created by human beings but whose nature seemed to defy human understanding, the mind sought refuge in the familiar language of mystery and miracle.

But these new technologies and the industrial systems they made possible were perhaps less disturbing than their effects on the lives of the laboring population. Increased unemployment, falling wages, rising prices for food and other necessities: these were the conditions that grew alongside the prosperity of the employing class. This contradictory development of capitalism meant that the peace and social harmony associated with a rural economy had been replaced by the apparently insurmountable conflict of the industrial order: "the cotton-mill is seen

as the agent not only of industrial but also social revolution, producing not only more goods but also the labor movement itself" (192). For Thompson, "the outstanding fact of the period between 1790 and 1830 is the formation of 'the working class'" (194), a social force conscious of its own interests as opposed to the interests of the dominant classes and which further began to act on the basis of these interests.

The English working class had entered the political stage, but in forms that could only appear monstrous to contemporary observers. The first wave of this movement, from 1811 to 1813, consisted of the mass action of workers bent on resisting the introduction of new technologies, particularly into the textile industry. By reducing the numbers of workers necessary to the production process, new industrial developments added to what was already a crisis of unemployment. This movement amounted to a clandestine army under the command of the mythical General Ludd (in fact no such leader existed). The "Luddites" sacked factories, and smashed the new "labor saving machines." As their movement receded in the face of violent repression on the part of the British state, it was quickly succeeded by a wave of popular agitation against high prices and rents. Mass demonstrations were common, violent confrontations with the state only slightly less so. It was a time when talk of the threat or hope of revolution (according to one's perspective) was common. At the very moment that *Frankenstein* was published, the British state suspended various civil rights (including that of habeas corpus) in order more effectively to counter the growing combativity of the unemployed and the working poor.

Mary Shelley's work is incontestably interwoven in this history: it bears witness to the birth of that monster, simultaneously the object of pity and fear, the industrial working class (Moretti). A dense network of resemblances appears to allow us to identify Frankenstein's monster with the emergent proletariat. The monster is monstrous by virtue of its being artificial rather than natural; lacking the unity of a natural organism, the monster is a factitious totality assembled from (the parts of) a multitude of different individuals, in particular, the "poor," the urban mass that, because it is a multitude rather than an individual, is itself as nameless as Frankenstein's "creation." It is also significant that the term "creation" is used at all to describe the origins of the monster. For the monster is a product rather than a creation, assembled and joined together not so much by a man (if such were the case the monster might be allotted a place in the order of things) as by science, technology, and industry, whose overarching logic subsumes and subjects even the greatest geniuses. In fact, Frankenstein the man struggles

against Frankenstein the practitioner of science and servant of technological progress only finally to prove no more than an unwitting instrument of this progress. In this way the very notion of progress, a central ideological representation of the perpetual revolutionizing of the means by which goods are produced necessary to the development of capitalism, becomes problematic. Technological and industrial progress has produced a monster, an artificial being as destructive as it is powerful. The very logic of capitalism has produced the means of its own destruction: the industrial working class, that fabricated collectivity whose interests are irreconcilable with those of capital and which is thus rendered monstrous in the eyes of its creators. The development of capitalism, then, does not correspond to a logic at all, except perhaps a dialectical logic capable of grasping the manner in which the production of wealth engenders terrible poverty, and in which the greater the intelligence of the machine the more stunted the mind of the worker.

But of course, Mary Shelley is not content to denounce "the hideous progeny" of the first phase of industrial capitalism. For the monster is no less contradictory than the process that created it. Far from being simply the object of horror, the monster, so eloquent in describing his suffering and solitude, also elicits pity, if not exactly sympathy. Shelley thus lends her voice to the voiceless, those who, bowed and numbed by oppression and poverty, cannot speak for themselves.

The same ambivalence, the same combination of pity and fear is to be found in "The Mask of Anarchy," a poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley for which Mary Shelley wrote an explanatory note. The poem was written in response to the Peterloo massacre of 1819 and describes the "slavery" of the "men of England." Starvation, poverty, injustice, and the violence of the ruling class and its state will cause the masses to "Reel revenge/Fiercely thirsting to exchange/Blood for blood—and wrong for wrong." Shelley concludes the stanza with the admonition, "Do not thus when ye are strong." Sympathy circumscribed by fear, finally conditional, an appeal to reason and law that is unconvincing even in the poem's own terms, "The Mask of Anarchy" with its refrain, "ye are many—they are few," fears nothing so much as the ever present possibility of the irrational (although objectively determined) violence of the "sleeping giant," the British working class and a repetition of the Terror of the French Revolution. Is not *Frankenstein* this very dilemma presented as a fable?

Considered in this way, the work assumes a kind of coherence that in turn derives from the "class location" of the author. *Frankenstein* seems to center on the emergence of the industrial working class as a

political and social force, seen in the light of the French and perhaps even British revolutions by the "progressive" artist: unable finally to identify with the proletariat and to adopt its point of view, even the radicals of Mary Shelley's milieu are constrained to regard it as a monster. If Marxist criticism worked this way it would resemble a kind of decoding. The critic replaces the apparent with the real and the mythological with the historical: the monster *is* the proletariat. History disguised as the novel remains only to be unmasked by the reader.

But such a reading is too simple; to stop here would be to reduce the literary work to a mere allegory structured by a set of symbolic equivalences: the monster equals the proletariat. Conceived in this way the work remains outside history, which is alluded to even as it is concealed. But a Marxist reading demands a more complex conception of the work. For Marxism is above all a materialism. All that exists, including art and culture, necessarily possesses a material existence. From a materialist point of view, the literary work cannot somehow exist outside of history and even less outside of reality. It cannot be collapsed into or reduced to something "more real" than itself, that is, history. When we say that literary works are historical by their very nature we mean that history is as present in them as outside of them, that we do not leave the work in search of its historical meaning but seek the meaning of its historical existence within it.

For Marxism, history is a struggle between antagonistic social forces. Further, this struggle is inescapable: it is present in every cultural artifact, every intellectual enterprise. But the struggle is not the same throughout history, it takes many forms and involves many actors. It follows no rules and obeys no logic. Literary works are not simply expressions of some invariable, essential contradiction, they are singular, specific realizations of a struggle whose character is perpetually transformed by its own activity.

Thus, if we are to seek the signs of the historicity of the work within it, this historicity will inescapably be present in the form of a conflict. This conflict, however, is not merely or even primarily present in the content of the work, but rather in the very letter of the text. While literary works have, since Aristotle, been defined by their coherence, by their formal resolution of internal contradictions and antagonisms, Marxism asks us to understand them on the basis of the specific conflicts that have generated them and that every work, no matter how apparently coherent, embodies and perhaps transforms but cannot resolve. Most often these contradictions are not what the work is about at all; instead they constitute symptomatic antagonisms that disrupt the unity

that the text appears to display. From a Marxist point of view, an adequate reading of *Frankenstein* will therefore refrain from the enterprise of establishing correspondences between the apparently parallel worlds of literature and history and will instead seek to grasp the way in which history is present in the text as a force or motor ("class struggle is the motor of history," as Marx and Engels wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*). History sets the work against itself and splits it open, forcing it to reveal all that it sought to deny but cannot help revealing by the very fact of this denial. We will begin by posing the question the answer to which we have already begun to formulate: What are the contradictions, discrepancies, and inconsistencies that the work displays but does not address or attempt to resolve?

This question brings us immediately into conflict with the form of the work. For Frankenstein's life, at least as he narrates it from his deathbed, possesses an absolute coherence. His every thought, word, and deed are revealed to have been steps toward a destiny that awaited him from the very beginning. He is able to see that he has always lived according to laws of whose existence he had been unaware, seeking without knowing it an end that would mean his destruction: "Destiny was too potent, and her immutable laws had decreed my utter and terrible destruction" (46).

But his destiny is neither personal nor individual: Frankenstein has been the instrument of science. A seemingly chance encounter with the works of Cornelius Agrippa, his father's too casual dismissal of Agrippa, the reduction of a tree to splinters by lightning, the decision to attend the University of Ingolstadt: each of these moments was a ruse of scientific and technological progress, realizing itself through him but without his knowing it. His life as it is narrated assumes a nightmarish coherence; every experience, sensation, and feeling was a step on the road to his damnation. Although he once dreamed of creating a race that would worship him as master, he realizes as he lies dying that his relation to science ought rather to be described as a state of servitude. The ironic reversal of Frankenstein's position is perhaps clearest when his creation, far more powerful than he, calls him "slave."

Irony is natural to this dialectic of science, the essence of which is as manifest in violence as in peace, in destruction as in creation. Indifferent to human law and morality, science finally counterposes its own order to that of humankind. *Frankenstein* thus rejects the most fundamental myths of the Enlightenment, the notion that scientific and economic progress will continually improve the condition of humankind, the idea that once the barriers to knowledge are pushed aside, the con-

ditions for perpetual peace and a universal harmony will have been established. Once we have stepped away from the false supports, the dogmas and formulas that prevented us from thinking on our own, once we have taken as our creed the Kantian motto *sapere aude*, "dare to know" (Kant 1970), we will not have achieved the freedom we dreamed of but merely a new kind of servitude. For knowledge has a logic of its own, within which humankind may play only an instrumental role. There is no longer any such thing as progress in the singular; there is a plurality of progresses, some antithetical to others. No longer does the progress of science and, by extension, reason necessarily entail an improvement of the human conditions. Scientific and technological progress does not strengthen human institutions by reaffirming the community of free and rational individuals but instead introduces separation, division, and antagonism into the social world. From the moment Frankenstein surrenders to the "enticements of science" he is irrevocably divided from his family and friends. Even the University of Ingolstadt fails to provide anything like an academic community. It is a world of separate, solitary scientists. Kremppe and Waldman seem scarcely to know each other. Upon entering the portals of science, Frankenstein experiences a solitude matched only by that of his creation.

The monster in its turn is not so much the creation that Frankenstein constantly calls it, as a product, the product of reason. In fact, the frequent recourse to theological terminology (which places Frankenstein in the position of a tragic god who is the prisoner of providence) may once again be regarded as a symptom: it masks the extent to which Frankenstein has himself been created, hailed into existence in order to hasten the realization of a reason whose ends are unknowable to him. Reason is always in the process of becoming real and its realization may well involve the production of monsters or a displacing of the human other than history itself, humankind is in no way central. Humanity's greatest achievement may have been to hasten its own destruction. Frankenstein has thus been led inescapably to the threshold represented by "the workshop of filthy creation":

In a solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house, and separated from all the other apartments by a gallery and staircase, I kept my workshop of filthy creation: my eye-balls were starting in their sockets in attending to the details of my employment. The dissecting room and the slaughter-house furnished many of my materials, and often did my human nature turn with loathing from my occupation, whilst, still urged on by an eagerness which

perpetually increased, I brought my work near to a conclusion. (56)

The narrative pauses at this threshold; the reader is not conducted into the "workshop." At this point the narrative digresses into moral commentary until Frankenstein uncharacteristically refers to the presence of Walton, his listener: "Your looks remind me to proceed." But his narrative does not begin again from where it left off. Instead it begins with his work completed: "It was on a dreary night of November, that I beheld the accomplishment of all my toils" (57). Utterly absent from the narrative is any description or explanation of the process by which the monster was created. The sequences so central to the film versions of Shelley's tale, in which the mystery of technology is reaffirmed through iconic figures of electric arcs and bubbling chemicals, have no place at this point or any other of Mary Shelley's narrative. The process of production is evoked but never described, effectively presenting us a world of effects without causes. In this sense, Victor's capacity for denial, his ability to forget after the initial shock that his creation runs amok, resembles the movement of the text itself, which "turns away" at certain key points, omitting every description of the technology so central to the tragedy of Victor Frankenstein and his creation.

In no sense can this omission be regarded as mistake or failure on Mary Shelley's part. On the contrary, the omission recurs throughout the work with a regularity that renders it integral to the work as a whole. At the same time it should not be dismissed as an authorial choice, an intentional abbreviation of the narrative for the sake of brevity or coherence. For as was evident in the sequence described above, this omission appears as a gap in the narrative that is filled in or covered over by a digression that is marked as a deviation by the narrative itself. Technology and science, so central to the novel, are present only in their effects; their truth becomes visible only in the face of their hideous progeny and is written in the tragic lives of those who serve them.

If we now return to the passage above, we may see the way in which the systematic suppression of the scientific and the technological functions at an even more primary level. The passage begins by evoking the solitary separateness of Frankenstein's labor. He works in a "solitary chamber," a term of description that is replaced by the apparently more accurate "cell." The textual movement from chamber to cell is important. For if "cell" is a synonym for "solitary chamber," it adds certain associations that link Frankenstein's solitude to that of a monk in a monastery or a prisoner in prison. We understand the metaphor of the

prison cell: Frankenstein has always been a prisoner, and perhaps most when he believed himself to be free (of familial and social obligations), forced to labor on a project of whose ultimate meaning he remained ignorant. Thus, shortly after this passage, he compares himself to "one doomed by slavery to toil in the mines" (57).

But the idea of a monk's cell presents more difficulty insofar as it is incompatible with Frankenstein's scientific activity. The kind of discoveries made by monks in the closed world of their cells were precisely those of Cornelius Agrippa, the fantastic, exploded systems that were the empty creations of deluded minds. But this coupling of the religious and the scientific is far from unusual in the text as a whole. For just as the narrative cannot describe any scientific activity, so it cannot speak of the scientific without first clothing it in theological terms. The narrative thereby protects itself from the reality that it describes by casting a veil over that reality: it must continue to cover that which it reveals.

In this way, the stark heterogeneity of the phrase "workshop of filthy creation" is placed clearly in relief. Here, the incompatible worlds of industry (workshop) and theology (creation) collide. The material activity associated with the workshop, the work of manufacture, is immediately supplanted by the immateriality of creation as the text itself turns with loathing from the images that it produces. Like the dissecting room and the slaughterhouse, the "details of his employment" are too frightening to reproduce. As Victor speaks, his "eyes swim with the remembrance" and he frequently turns away from the reality of his own activity. Thus the technology so central to the Promethean drama is in one sense utterly absent from the work.

If we have argued that this absence is neither a fault for which the author might be reproached (for example, Mary Shelley was ignorant of scientific procedure and the technologies of her time) nor simply a stylistic choice (for example, the descriptions are in no way "essential" to the narrative and would at best be superfluous) but highly symptomatic, it is not simply because the narrative "stumbles" and digresses at the threshold of the "workshop of filthy creation." For this absence is doubled by another: the world that this "modern Prometheus" inhabits is not modern at all. Frankenstein's world is a world without industry, a rural world dominated by scenes of a sublime natural beauty in which not a single trace of Blake's "dark satanic mills" is to be found. Although Frankenstein is reared in Geneva and educated at Ingolstadt, although he and Clerval visit London, Oxford, and Edinburgh, there are no significant descriptions of the urban world, none certainly to match the frequent portraits of natural vistas and rural scenes. London,

at a time of explosive growth and development (cf. Wordsworth's treatment of London in the *Prelude*), is not described at all although he and Clerval passed "some months" there (135). Further, there are no workers or work. The peasants who appear intermittently throughout the novel are either engaged in various forms of recreation or, as turns out to be the case with the De Lacey family, they are not peasants at all.

The effect of this suppression of the urban and the industrial is to render Frankenstein's labor as well as the product of that labor, the monster, all the more incongruous. He is the sole embodiment of the industrial in an otherwise rural world, and this is the source of his monstrousness. At one point, the monster makes explicit his identification with the working class:

I learned that the possessions most esteemed by your fellow-creatures were high and unsullied descent united with riches. A man might be respected with only one of these advantages; but, without either, he was considered, except in very rare instances, as a vagabond and a slave, doomed to waste his powers for the profits of the chosen few! And what was I? Of my creation and my creator I was absolutely ignorant; but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. . . . When I looked around, I saw and heard of none like me. Was I then a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled, and whom all men disowned? (106)

It is at this point that we see most clearly the associations that link the image of the monster to the industrial proletariat: an unnatural being, singular even in its collective identity, without a genealogy and belonging to no species. Its tragic fate is all the more pitiable in that it is necessary, and in the grand scheme of things, just and proper. If the proletariat speaks (like the monster always through an intermediary), the reader, like Frankenstein and Walton, must resist its eloquence: "hear him not" (174). At the same time, however, Frankenstein's monster is finally not identified with the working class of Mary Shelley's time but with its absence. For the narrative precisely suppresses all that is modern in order to render this being inexplicable and unprecedented. If a being for whom there is no place in the ordered world of nature. If the modern (the urban, the industrial, the proletarian) were allowed to appear, the monster would no longer be a monster; no longer alone but part of a "race of devils," his disappearance would change nothing. Instead, the mass is reduced to the absolute singularity of Frankenstein's creation, which is therefore not so much the sign of the proletariat as of its unrepresentability.

Written before the notion of a postcapitalist order (a society ruled by the workers themselves) could be articulated but at a time when the oppressive and dehumanizing effects of capitalism were all too obvious, the work can do no better than to turn backward toward a time of mutual (if unequal) obligation, to a time before the creation of monsters by the industrial order, a time when the human was regulated by the natural. But if a certain historical reality is inscribed within the work as a monster to be expelled into "darkness and distance" (just as Frankenstein himself "forgets" his "hideous progeny" immediately after bringing it into this world), the act of repression can only postpone its inevitable return.

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