

**A PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVE
ON *FRANKENSTEIN***

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**The Monster and the Imaginary Mother:
A Lacanian Reading of *Frankenstein***

It is all too easy for literary critics to apply their knowledge of psychoanalysis to literary texts by finding in those fictions the complexes

that Freud described. Such an approach assumes that psychoanalysis possesses a truth that reveals the meaning of literary texts, a meaning that they themselves did not recognize. But the more closely one examines Freud and psychoanalytic practice, generally, the more one realizes that psychoanalysis itself tells stories, invents scenarios of development, and guesses at meanings and events; it too deals in fictions and cannot entirely rise above the bewildering complexity of the unconscious. Similarly, the more one examines works of literature written before Freud, the more they seem to have been, in some strange way, already aware of psychoanalysis or of the unconscious.

It is best, then, to recognize that literature and psychoanalysis are on a continuum; it is as useful and interesting to interpret psychoanalysis as a form of literature as to interpret literature with the tools of psychoanalysis. Each thus profits from the other without becoming completely subject to the other's authority. Together they demonstrate that there is no discourse against which either must be measured, no final scientific or literary authority that reigns over all. Instead, they show that there is a history of the psyche that takes part in many histories, including those of the family, manners, sexuality, and the body. The works of Freud and Lacan thus arrive late in a long tradition of texts that trace the formation of what we call the unconscious, texts that might well challenge psychoanalysis to alter or expand its theories in many areas.

Psychoanalysis is vulnerable in its treatment of women: both Freud and Lacan are notoriously phallogocentric, interpreting the psyche with reference to male development, castration, and the phallus. Thus psychoanalysis and literature can interpret each other fruitfully with a literary text that explores the woman's place in the psyche—a text such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Lacan's theory of the Imaginary and Symbolic orders makes apparent a pattern within the novel that precludes Lacanian psychoanalytic readings missed: its persistent contrast between the world of the mirror-image, or double (the Imaginary), and that of kinship, language, and social life (the Symbolic). Yet the novel, in turn, demonstrates that the Symbolic order's insistence on denying the Imaginary comes at the enormous cost of excluding the maternal body. As Mary Shelley's novel suggests that the situation Lacan describes is neither inevitable nor necessary, it opens up new directions for psychoanalytic theory.

Frankenstein, the Monster, and the Imaginary Mother

Within *Frankenstein* the world is divided between the public realm and the private, almost delusional relation between Victor and the

monster: in Lacanian terms, between the Symbolic and Imaginary orders. On the one hand, there are Alphonse Frankenstein, dutiful father and judge; the families of the Frankensteins and the De Laceys; the possibility of Victor's marriage with Elizabeth; the responsible science of M. Krempe; and the operation of law in the trial of Justine and the imprisonment of Victor. All these exemplify, in varying degrees, a social order rooted in patriarchal marriage, legality, and genital (phallic) sexuality. On the other hand, there is the curious solitude of Victor and the monster, neither of which can ever belong to a family, their endless fascination with each other; and their utter incapacity to communicate their situation with anyone else, except of course Robert Walton, the novel's narrator. Victor's solitude is so profound that his obsession with the monster and paranoid fear of him would amount to madness were it not that another person, Walton, encounters the monster in the novel's final pages. Victor's obsession with this Imaginary double of the self, outside of society and language, compels him to resist or attack his father, friend, and potential wife whenever they threaten that self.

The Imaginary quality of Victor's solitude is made clear in the early pages of his story. As a young scholar, Victor studies "neither the structure of languages, nor the code of governments, nor the politics of various states," all subjects associated with the Symbolic order, but rather the "physical secrets of the world" (43). Moreover, within the physical sciences, Victor pursues an unmoderated, erroneous, semimagical science in defiance of his father's prohibition, as if replaying the oedipus complex in his intellectual pursuits. In an unofficial, magical nature Victor hopes to recover the mother that has been denied or forgotten in much the same way as the alchemy of Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Albertus Magnus has been dismissed by contemporary science. A similar oedipal drama is performed after Victor arrives at the university. The ugly, forbidding M. Krempe scoffs at the alchemists (49), but Waldman indirectly praises them and describes modern chemistry in terms resonant with maternal sexuality: the modern masters "penetrate into the recesses of nature, and show how she works in her hiding places" (51).

Victor's search for a substitute mother does not take the normative oedipal path. Typically, the son relinquishes his mother and desires a person who resembles her. Margaret Homans argues that in effect the son gives up the physical mother and desires a figurative representation of her, a substitute for her in the realm of language or social relations. Homans goes on to propose that Victor's development is quite typical, because he attempts to recreate his mother in his scientific, intellectual project and thus in the realm of language (Homans 9-10, 101-2, 107).

But the authorized figure for the mother is Elizabeth, not the monster; her personality and biography almost duplicate Caroline Frankenstein's, as if she is in fact the perfect person to complete the oedipal drama. Victor resists the seemingly inevitable marriage to Elizabeth, leaves home, and chooses another, forbidden erotic object: the mystery of how nature works in "her" hiding places—the mystery of the feminine body. That is, he chooses to take exactly the opposite of the typical path, spurning the social realm in favor of the Imaginary, bodily mother, whom he attempts to recover by creating the monster.

This relation between the mother and monster is made clear in the episodes surrounding Victor's going to the university. The break from the family represents Victor's entrance into the public world and his separation from his mother. Thus her death immediately before his leaving is highly appropriate; it represents Victor's separation from her and the loss consequent on accepting his place in the Symbolic order. Despite himself, Victor must leave her behind, tell himself not to grieve over his loss (47-48), and go on to begin a career. Yet, as we have seen, once he gets to the university he refuses to partake in authorized scientific activities and falls prey to his longing for forbidden knowledge. He identifies with his mother, recovering her body in his own body as he attempts to become pregnant himself, to labor in childbirth, and to watch the child awaken, gesture, and attempt to speak (see 55-59). He also attempts to recreate her by reassembling her dead body, as it were, from "bones from charnel-houses" (56), animating it, and-looking up at it (as would a child at its mother) as he lies in bed (58). As Ellen Moers has pointed out, this story of monstrous creation is thus a "birth myth" built around Mary Shelley's own experiences with pregnancy and childbirth (Moers 90-99). It might also describe her attempts to recover a relation to a mother who had always been for her a *dead* mother; perhaps she, like Victor, is compelled to reassemble that impossibly distant body.

In the midst of these depictions of the monster's infantile and maternal attributes comes Victor's dream:

I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. 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 graveworms crawling in the folds of the flannel. (58)

Here the normative shift from mother to lover is reversed: Elizabeth

transforms into the dead mother. For Victor, feminine sexuality can never be separated from the Imaginary mother he has lost; as soon as he imagines touching her and taking pleasure in her body, the figurative substitute for her turns back into her physical form. In effect, all women are for him the dead mother, the all-too-physical person he left when he went to the university. It would be impossible for Elizabeth to walk in Ingolstadt without seeming to be a visitor from the dead, a monstrously physical intruder in the world of masculine learning. Nor could the creature whom he created as a result of his rapturous discovery of "the cause of generation and life" (54) awaken without becoming a monster.

Clearly, the turn from erotic ideal to grotesque body horrifies Victor; in this respect he is a responsible citizen of the Symbolic realm, longing for Elizabeth rather than the mother. Yet this horror is so strong, and this dream so necessary, because of his unspeakable desire for the dead mother, for the secret of her body, for that element of her that has no (Symbolic) substitute. Perhaps the real horror is that Victor has learned to dread what he longs for; the only way to articulate his desire for the maternal body is in the very terms that exclude her, much as the only way of recreating her body is with the very tools acquired in the university at the cost of her life. And in these terms, with these tools, Victor cannot even recreate her as a female body: as if in retreat from his mother even on the most primal level, he creates a *male* monster who resembles his own mirror-image more than the mother he desires. As Luce Irigaray argues, from within the phallogocentric regime of the Symbolic order, a genuinely feminine body is inconceivable: a woman is either an inferior version of man, or she does not exist (Irigaray 11-129). Yet Victor is compelled to imagine this alien, Imaginary mother who no longer quite exists for him. Accordingly, conceiving of woman as both like and unlike "man," he produces a monster—a creature who is grotesque precisely because it is, and is not, a "man."

The Imaginary nature of his relation to the monster is further reinforced in the visual imagery of the passage: when Victor awakens, he sees, "by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as if forced its way through the window shutters," the monster, who fixes on Victor "his eyes, if eyes they may be called. . . ." A peculiar and intense sight dominates in this passage: a haunting light cast on a ghastly figure, framed by the window, who gazes back with inhuman eyes. This seems to be the return of a deeply repressed mirror stage, in which the monster is the Victor's own reflection in the window/mirror. As if to emphasize the prelinguistic nature of this moment, Shelley goes on to write: "His jaws

opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks" (58). The truly mirror-like quality of Victor's encounters with the monster is clearer elsewhere in the novel where the nearly hallucinatory image recurs: at the destruction of the female monster ("I trembled, and my heart failed within me; when, on looking up, I saw, by the light of the moon, the daemon at the casement" [141]) and, most clearly, at the death of Elizabeth (164). In all these passages, the window represents the mirror, a framed surface on which always appears the nonspeaking face of the other, of the self's demonic double. And each time the monster only grins, even though in the later instances he is quite capable of speech.

All this is complicated by Mary Shelley's account of the moment when she conceived the novel:

When I placed my head on my pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie. I saw — with shut eyes, but acute mental vision, — I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together.

... I opened [my eyes] in terror. ... I wished to exchange the ghastly image of my fancy for the realities around. I see them still, the very room, the dark *parquet*, the closed shutters, with the moonlight struggling through, and the sense I had that the glassy lake and white high Alps were beyond. (Introduction 22–23)

Shelley's emphasis on the haunting "vividness" of this "acute mental vision" locates it outside of ordinary, waking sight in the Imaginary realm. And even her reference to "the realities around" leads her to further mental images, "sense[d]" through the closed shutters, of the lake and Alps, or perhaps of the Alps reflected in the lake, another kind of mirror, the intense seeing of the original vision (emphasized through the repetition of the words "I saw") is repeated late in the passage ("I see them still").

It is important that this visual imagery is most intense in moments both of creating (the novel, the monster) and of killing (the female monster, Elizabeth): by tying together these apparently opposite motifs, this imagery points to the fundamental Imaginary coherence of the novel. Clearly, for both Shelley and her character Victor Frankenstein, creation takes place neither in the Symbolic moment of uttering words (as in *Genesis*) nor even of writing them but in the moment of an astonishing visual literalization when what they "see" comes to life. Mellor has quite justifiably discussed Victor's creation of the monster as a mas-

culine attempt to circumvent the maternal, to usurp and destroy the life-giving power of feminine sexuality (Mellor 220–32). But the strong parallels of the two creation scenes suggest that Victor circumvents Symbolic, married, genital sexuality with an Imaginary sexuality in which the son or daughter can recreate the dead mother in a prelinguistic, visual mode.

Such a reading of the creation scenes would also explain the murder scenes. The female monster and Elizabeth represent not simply feminine sexuality but its function within the Symbolic order: Elizabeth as a married sexual partner blessed by the patriarch Alphonse Frankenstein, and the female monster as someone who will join the monster in creating a new society in South America — a new "chain of existence" (127) which, as Peter Brooks points out, would be a new "systematic network of relation" akin to the Symbolic order (Brooks 593). If we apply this reading to Mary Shelley as author, it suggests that literary creation is for her a form of matricide, of killing the Symbolic mother subordinated to father or husband. Perhaps it is even a way to kill herself as such a mother. Barbara Johnson argues this point, emphasizing the subtle link between the italics in the passages on the creating of the book ("*to think of a story*" [22, 23]) and the killing of Elizabeth ("*I will be with you on your waking-night*" [143, 158]) (Johnson 8–9). One way to understand this point is to say that for Shelley, creating in language threatened her role as a woman expected to create by means of her genital sexuality. To take on the masculine role of author threatened her femininity. But these passages might also suggest that creating in an Imaginary and thus prelinguistic mode threatens the whole language of marriage, filiation, and sexuality defined as the reproduction of the social structure. It threatens not femininity but the patriarchal, Symbolic order that negates and excludes the feminine body.

We do not have to distort the text to arrive at this interpretation. In fact, in both of the passages to which Johnson refers, the italics culminate in a moment of hallucinatory creation or murder, a moment of Imaginary intensity. It is not female authorship as intrusion upon a male domain that kills Elizabeth but Imaginary authorship, a nonlinguistic and nongenital creativity. Victor/Mary murders the woman capable of genital sexuality in order to look up and see the desired mother in the window/mirror. It is almost as if simply by looking in the window/mirror, he/she murders the mother-wife: in this novel, looking in the mirror can kill. The Imaginary pair — Victor Frankenstein and his monster, Mary Shelley and her story — kill all third parties and all systems (like the father's Law) built on the third party. If the Symbolic order

excludes and indeed kills the Imaginary mother (Caroline), these children will gain revenge by murdering the Symbolic mother in their turn.

The Monster's Protest

By itself, however, this Imaginary revolt against the Symbolic does not necessarily liberate such children; if anything, it would confine them within the Imaginary order, which could be at least equally oppressive. Shelley makes the horror of this Imaginary entrapment vivid in her account of the monster's experience. By creating an Imaginary figure, Victor gives birth to someone who does not, and cannot, belong in the Symbolic realm. Wherever the monster goes, people reject him immediately because of his monstrous appearance. It seems he will never be anything but this horrible apparition from another psychic space, this embodiment of what everyone represses in order to enter society: the archaic, physical, nameless mother.

That he is this repressed body becomes clear in his version of the mirror stage. Like Milton's Eve, who looks into the pool when she should be gazing at Adam and who is soon taught to set aside her love of her own beauty in favor of the superior, manly strength of her mate (see Gilbert and Gubar 240), the monster looks in the pool and sees there an image that is already monstrous in comparison with "the perfect forms of my cottagers" (101). The monster is an Eve who is never given the chance merely to enjoy his/her own beauty; it is as if s/he has already been taught to love Adam before s/he looks in the pool. As a result, the monster's mirror image is alien to him the first time he sees it: "At first I started back," he says, "unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror. . ." (101). Even worse, he will soon discover that he is nothing more than what appears in the mirror, as if he is the Eve that God and Adam reject, the image she leaves behind on the water.

Of course, the monster does not accept his exclusively Imaginary status; he longs to enter the social world, to belong to a family, to converse, and to have a sexual partner. He wishes, in short, to enter the Symbolic order. If Victor creates the monster in order to revolt against the Symbolic, the monster protests against being caught in the Imaginary. He understands his condition well: as Peter Brooks points out, early in their conversation high in the Alps when Victor cries out, "'Begone! relieve me from the sight of your detested form,'" the monster replies by placing his hands over Victor's eyes (91), mocking Victor's Imaginary fixation on the *sight* of his form (Brooks 592). In the narrative that follows, the monster attempts to replace his appearance

with his words (Brooks 593), just as he attempts to cut across the obsessively dual relation between Victor and himself with his demands for a female partner who could offer him a social and sexual relation. In the end, of course, the monster's appeal fails; although he can speak, he has not truly entered into language, never having received the name of his father Victor, and thus he remains poised on the margins of language.

The story that the monster tells Victor, primarily about his acquisition of language from the De Lacey family, dramatizes this marginal position in language. Crouching there in the lean-to next to the family's cottage, he can listen to everything that people say but cannot participate in their conversations. He can learn the words, but he cannot share in the social exchange of words and must remain a silent, invisible presence unknown to the family. It is no surprise that the monster learns the language along with Safie, as if he, too, is both foreign and a woman. Critics have remarked that he is thus placed in the position of the woman who, like Eve or Mary Shelley, eavesdrops on the conversations of men (see, for example, Gilbert and Gubar 238, Moers 94). As a result, his condition is similar to that of woman in Lacanian theory. As Jacqueline Rose puts it, "woman is excluded by the nature of words" but not "from the nature of words" (Mitchell and Rose 49), on the one hand being given a sexual and gender identity through the Symbolic processes of language and on the other being excluded from language as it is based in the *father's* name. Oddly enough, he becomes defined by language without receiving the name-of-the-father, in effect dramatizing the condition of women in Western culture, whose names come from men and who thus remain in one sense nameless.

Yet Safie and the monster are not entirely alike. She is accepted into the cottage, after all, while he must remain outside. If Safie represents woman as she is accepted into language and the family, the monster represents what they exclude. He is even more foreign than she, perhaps what will always remain foreign, nameless, and threateningly feminine in her.

Shelley emphasizes the disembodied quality of Symbolic language when she renders the elder De Lacey blind. This father seems to have forgotten about the Imaginary and to live entirely within the world of words. Hardly moving from his place in the cottage, he only speaks, listens to someone read, and teaches people words: like Safie and the monster, he too is a consummate listener, but because he is already the master of the language and need not see the objects to which words refer. In effect, he represents the blindness of language, its apparent

indifference to the body and to sight. This old man verges on being the Lacanian father because he has almost ceased to be an actual father and become the name-of-the-father, the father as nothing but names.

Although the father's blindness might indicate that he is so alienated from the visual world he need no longer see it, the monster interprets that blindness differently. Perhaps the old man, unable to see the monster, will accept him simply because he speaks. Blindness to the Imaginary may allow some tolerance for it. Of course, in the crucial moment of the monster's attempt to be accepted, Felix rushes in and violently ejects the monster from the cottage, and in the following days the entire family, including the father, flees the scene. The monster's failure demonstrates that the father's blindness represents not indifference but hostility to the body, a determination to render the world blank, as if Victor's cry to the monster ("Begone!") were the Symbolic father's cry to the entire visible world.

The monster cannot escape this condemnation by turning from the De Laceys to books. Recognizing that he is "similar, yet at the same time strangely unlike to the beings concerning whom" he reads in Goethe, Plutarch, or Milton (112), he finds himself once again in an oblique relation to language. If we regard books as language preserved in print, then we can understand why the monster cannot find anyone like himself in them. In these books and this monster we are given two conflicting images of people: one that forgets their bodies and preserves only their words, and the other that despises their words and pieces together only their bodies. The monster embodies precisely what these books have forgotten and buried: everything in human life that cannot be put into words.

The stories that books tell also have a way of replacing the body with words: Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the myth of origins that the monster reads, attributes origins not to physical nature but to the disembodied Word of God at the creation. Milton's God is somewhat like a divine version of the Lacanian father, who lacks any direct physical link with the child and thus establishes his paternal authority through words, claiming that the child belongs to him. But the Miltonic God goes even further, dispensing with nature or any physical force and creating the world out of his own Word, as if no mother of the world were necessary. In this text, the Symbolic order substitutes the father's words for the mother's body as origin so radically that the latter almost disappears. The story that the monster finds in Victor's papers is, of course, very different: it tells of a bodily, maternal origin, as if the monster were

produced directly out of the mother's body without her even having sex, as if she could create life without the participation of a father. Here we find the opposite of Milton's myth of an exclusively patriarchal origin: a celibate, solitary, exclusively maternal creation. Thus the monster finds his origins in a kind of anti-Symbolic story, indeed an anti-story, which confusedly tells how bodies come from bodies without the need for sex, how no parent claims the child, in effect how the monster has no origin worthy of the name. With such an anti-story in his pocket, the monster must remain nameless, for a name depends upon the myth that one originates in social and sexual relations, in kinship, and thus in language.

It is inevitable, then, that the monster is ejected from the cottage. Safe is welcomed in part because she has a story to tell that establishes her identity. Even though her story depicts the wrongs done to women in a feminist manner reminiscent of the novels written by Mary Shelley's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, and therefore challenges sexist prejudice outright, it nevertheless remains coherent within broadly social and Symbolic norms. The monster, however, is denied even this form of protest; unaccountable, he has no parents or relations; only an unspoken secret can explain him. His anti-story would serve to expose him, even to the blind old man, as one who did not belong. Produced in defiance of sexuality and kinship, he was forever cast out of the family at the start. Thus his story, or rather this entire novel, challenges patriarchy on an even more fundamental level than Wollstonecraft does, exposing the prejudice inherent in the Symbolic order itself.

The monster's most obvious difference from Safe, of course, and the one that epitomizes all the rest, is that he is a monster and cannot sustain the invisibility of what the Symbolic order excludes. Simply by showing himself, he loses even his tenuous access to language, because people can see him only as an unspokeably alien figure. Excluded from all families, he begins his journey through the world by exacting revenge against the family. Little William taunts him with the words, "'My papa is a Syndic — he is M. Frankenstein — he will punish you'" (123) and displays his miniature portrait of his mother, in effect bragging about his possession of the father's name, the power of the Law, and the figurative mother. The monster responds as if he is the literal maternal body for which the portrait is the substitute, the prelinguistic mother returned, as it were, from the dead to gain her revenge. He kills William and then places the miniature on Justine, not merely in order to condemn her but unwittingly to demonstrate that she is already con-

demned by such a picture to silence and death. In this act the monster shows that he need not destroy the family, for it destroys itself; William's mother is already dead, cast out so that her son Victor could become a man. Excluded from the family, the monster condemns it to the condition of excluding him, of missing something he represents. Very well, he seems to say; if you wish to live without me, your Imaginary mother, you will forever lack precisely what you desire, and in place of your women you will have only pictures of the dead.

Henceforth the monster is fated to define himself in relation to Victor, becoming Victor's Imaginary double, the mirror-self that haunts his every step. If, as Lacan suggests, the I is an other, then on some level Victor is the monster, and the monster in turn is Victor. Indeed, in the eyes of the law (which represents the Law of the Symbolic) they are indistinguishable: witnesses in Ireland mistake the dark figure in the boat for Victor (148), and later when Victor tries to gain the law's help in tracking down the monster, the judge assumes he is mad (167). Caught in this relation to the double, each sees the other as his rival self, attacking the other and getting revenge in an endless spiral of violence, each revealing in this way what Lacan identifies as the aggressive, paranoid structure of the ego. Rivalry becomes a directly destructive force, reducing everything to the opposition between the Imaginary pair—an opposition that is never resolved by the intervention of a Symbolic Law but which expires at last only with their deaths.

This Imaginary process of identification and rivalry with the double takes over the novel, as if an anti-Symbolic tale must become an Imaginary one in which one narrator identifies with another, who introduces yet a third, in an endless regress of tale within tale, mirror within mirror. I have no space to repeat here what critics have already discussed: the many resemblances between the narrators Mary Shelley and Margaret Saville (the woman who receives Walton's letters, and whose initials are also M. S.), Mary Shelley and Walton, Walton and Victor, Victor and the monster, the monster and Safe, and Safe and Mary Shelley (see Brooks 603, Rubenstein 168–72). Nor can I review the ways in which characters in the novel are orphaned and motherless (see Gilbert and Gubar 227–28), with the result that they tend to create an identity through finding doubles of themselves in other orphans. I can only point to the psychoanalytic coherence of this duplication of narratives, which, like the monster's tale to Victor in the heart of the novel, follow from and return to Victor's horrified gaze into the monster's face. We read all the stories in the novel as if a hand is over our eyes, too, and

at any moment it will be lifted and the novel will transform from something read into someone seen—perhaps someone seen in the mirror.

Frankenstein's Implicit Critique of Lacan

In this essay I have argued that Victor Frankenstein desires the Imaginary mother and that the monster, caught in the Imaginary, wishes to join the Symbolic. Yet ironically, on a more general level, Victor and the monster want the same thing: the recognition by the Symbolic order of the Imaginary mother. The failure of the Symbolic to recognize the mother drives Victor to create a substitute for her and permanently excludes the monster from the society he wishes to join. The novel taken as a whole, then, challenges a very basic but powerful negation of women. It seems that neither the Imaginary, which relies entirely on a physical and/or visual relation to the mother, nor the Symbolic, which subordinates her to the father's Law, recognizes the woman on her own terms. Neither provides a space in which she can speak in her own right. Where might there be such a space? Shelley's novel suggests that it might appear where the Symbolic recognizes and accepts the Imaginary, where it allows the body to speak, the nameless monster to join the family, and the mirror image to be one element of the beloved's face. In such a space the mother would not have to die, even metaphorically, when one enters language, but would remain present in the elements of life that language cannot master and in the physical elements (sounds, disruptions, slippages) within language itself. One would never have to create a monster, a substitute Imaginary mother, because she would always remain accessible within the social realm.

Shelley's novel thus suggests a critique of Lacan's separation of Symbolic and Imaginary. Even though Lacan argues explicitly that the Imaginary remains important after the entrance into the Symbolic, so that they are both present throughout human experience, and that the Mirror stage prepares the subject for Symbolic identifications (see *Écrits* 22–25), his overall separation of the two realms tends to reinforce their differences and blinds him to the ways in which they are everywhere implicated in each other. Shelley exaggerates the way in which the Symbolic excludes the Imaginary in order to point out this problem, as if to suggest, long before Lacan, that the very terms of her novel and of our entire discussion are suspect.

With this critique of such a basic disjunction, the novel challenges many familiar dichotomies explored in this essay. For example, it opens

up the possibility of a story that attributes origins neither to the father's word alone nor to the mother's nameless body alone but to the father and the mother together, recognizing thereby the necessarily social *and* physical dimensions of sexuality. Such a tale would have to be written in a language that did not exclude the body but delighted in the body's nonsense: verbal excess, playfulness, even "babytalk." Moreover, this novel also disrupts psychoanalysis itself, the "talking cure," pointing out that in those private sessions the patient finds in the analyst an Imaginary double as well as a version of the Symbolic father. Such a disruption quite naturally extends to the psychoanalytic critic, who may find in this novel not merely another text to be analyzed but a curious rival, perhaps double, of psychoanalytic theory itself.

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