A WOMAN'S SPACE: TENSIONS BETWEEN THE PUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE IN

MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN* AND *MATHILDA*

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
with a Major in Literature
August 2014

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my mother, without whose love and support I would not have learned to dream and succeed. I wish I could give a fraction to you what you have given to me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the dedication and guidance of my thesis director, Dr. Nancy Grayson. A special thank you to Dr. Kathryn Ledbetter who helped me focus my thesis in the early stages. Also, thank you to my committee members, Dr. Paul Cohen and Dr. Teya Rosenberg, for your time and support. And finally to the faculty and staff of the Texas State University English Department, your excellence and commitment to the students of Texas State create a dynamic community where ideas thrive. Thank you all so much.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
Percy	Percy Bysshe Shelley
LMWS	*Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*
JMS	*Journal of Mary Shelley*

CHAPTER I

Introduction

"There is nothing I shrink from more fearfully than publicity."
                                                     Mary Shelley, *LMWS* (1829)

Mary Shelley, like her first novel, was not born and made out of a "void." She

was born into a time of fluctuating ideas. Her birth (1797) took place only a year before

Thomas Malthus published his *Essay on Population*, a book Philip Connell describes as a

turning point in reconciling Christian ideals and the political climate that was producing

"ideological tensions" (13-14). Many of these "ideological tensions" grew from the

French Revolution, an event that questioned the God-ordained rights of the monarchy,

resulting in a catalyst that stretched across Europe. On the one hand, this revolutionary

period created a flourish of "radical" ideas; on the other, it spurred fear of unrest, causing

any individual with innovative ideas to be ridiculed and viewed with suspicion. William

Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, Shelley's parents, belonged to this latter, exceedingly

public group. As such, critic Stephen Behrendt points out, "In the case of Mary Shelley–

daughter of politically radical philosophers, wife of a particularly notorious radical artist,

and member of a glittering literary circle–the residue of this enculturated sense of

inferiority is startling" (136). In other words, as the daughter of two infamous writers and

radicals, Shelley felt pressured by high expectations from both the public and the private

spheres. How each group would expect her to fulfill these expectations was another

matter. It turned out to be a feat that left Shelley trapped between the public and private

spheres, never quite belonging entirely to one or the other.

In examining what constitutes the public and the private, I turn to Jean Bethke

Elshtain's *Public Man, Private Woman* (1993). Elshtain defines the public sphere as

anything "politicized," or able to effect change in government or society, while the private sphere concerns things of a domestic nature, "the household or family" (4). She makes it clear, however, that there exists "a rigid bifurcation between the two spheres with the private realm conceived instrumentally, treated as a necessary basis for public life but a less worthy form of human activity…" (4). In other words, while a vital cog in social organization, the private sphere is relegated to an inferior station. For a nineteenth-century man, this divide poses no problem. On the contrary, it benefits him to keep his public and private life separate, accepting that his public life is the more important of the two. For a woman of this same period, to enter into the public sphere means dragging the inferior private sphere with her, with all the accomplishments and failures that belong to it, onto a public stage.

Between the narrow space the public and private spheres provided women in the early nineteenth century, I will examine three of Mary Shelley's novels under a cultural and feminist lens: *Frankenstein* (1818), *Mathilda*[1] (1819), and the last edition of *Frankenstein* (1831). Furthermore, I will use the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* as a springboard to Shelley's later letters and journal entries to illustrate how much more pronounced her views on public attention become after the death of her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley. I will explore the clash between Mary Shelley's desire to be a published author, an indisputably public vocation by its nature, and her struggle to be a woman, a role that at this time is safest in the shadows. With no separation between the private and the public for a woman, Mary Shelley and her characters share a fear of *exposure* and a desire to flee society in order to protect themselves from the public's gaze. In turn, these

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[1] Spellings of *Mathilda* vary from edition to edition. It is sometimes spelled *Matilda*. I use the spelling most often found among critics and editions that includes the "h."

two recurring impulses stem from Shelley's aversion to the public spotlight and her

inability to ever escape the divergent roles the public and her parents laid out for her.

CHAPTER II

Frankenstein (1818):

Maintaining Reputation under a Masculine Moon

"Several hours passed, and I remained near my window gazing on the sea;
it was almost motionless, for the winds were hushed, and all nature
reposed under the eye of the quiet moon."
<div align="right">Victor Frankenstein, Frankenstein (1818)</div>

For Mary Shelley, even a small group of men seems to be enough to constitute a

"public" realm. Her reaction is only natural considering men dominated the public sphere

in the nineteenth century. In the presence of men the private becomes the public, a stage

on which the audience demands a performance. It was on this stage and amid an almost

entirely male audience that Lord Byron proposed a round of ghost stories to while away

the time. True, the birth of Shelley's idea for *Frankenstein* is familiar enough, but critics

have focused too much on the dream aspect alone and not on the significance of her

inability to concoct a story in the company of men. The pressure to perform in the

presence of a male audience is daunting and paralyzed Shelley's creativity to the point

that it took her three to six days to conceive and perform her own grisly tale (D. Olson,

M. Olson, Doescher, Pope, and Schnarr 73). In fact, her idea for "the pale student of

unhallowed arts" came days later in a "waking dream," a medium that is entirely private

(Shelley, Introduction[2] 8, 9).

According to her 1831 Author's Introduction, on the night of June 16, 1816, the

Moon streamed through the window of Shelley's room, waking her from the iconic

dream. But did it really happen this way and why is it important to determine the source

of Shelley's monster? Dr. Donald Olson, Dr. Marilynn Olson, Dr. Russell Doescher, and

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[2] Will always reference Mary Shelley's Author's Introduction in the 1831 edition.

their team from Texas State University used the dates in Shelley's and Polidori's journals, as well as astronomical clues to determine that the origins of *Frankenstein* most likely occurred "(between 2:00 and 3:00 a.m.) with light from a waning gibbous Moon struggling through the closed shutters" in the Maison Chappuis on the night of June 16 (74). Their discovery not only supports Shelley's account in her 1831 Introduction, but also points to the importance of the Moon in her novel. The Moon acts as an intruder into her personal space. Despite "the closed shutters," it watched her in her sleep, "with the moonlight struggling through," and witnessed her revelation (*Frankenstein* 1831: 9). In *Frankenstein*, Shelley pairs the Moon with her creature. Where one is, the other is usually not far away, constructing the feeling that someone is always watching, a feeling Shelley could most certainly relate to as a nineteenth-century woman.

Shelley's position in the group is also relevant to *Frankenstein's* origin. Among Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, and John Polidori, Mary Shelley served as attentive listener and apt student, not equal contributor. Shelley confirms this status in her *Journal*: "[I]ncapacity and timidity always prevented my mingling in the nightly conversations" (184). Shelley's attitude dominates her first novel through her characters' motivations. Victor, Walton, and the Monster all seek a teacher, because in the public realm of student/teacher relations, the student is inferior to the teacher on the hierarchal scale, just as Shelley was always the listener, hence the student. Furthermore, it is the duty of the teacher to observe and correct the student, lending the teacher a parental quality and furthering the reality of being watched, monitored. Although Shelley had a governess growing up, it is clear through her writing and her life that teachers were considered to be men many years older than Shelley. Thus, it is not surprising that in both *Frankenstein*

and *Mathilda* "instructor" becomes synonymous with "father," as I will explore later in the chapter.

As a woman relegated to the student role and intimidated by a masculine audience, Shelley found it easiest to write *Frankenstein* while Percy was away traveling, a fact Christopher Small corroborates when he points out that "[e]ntries in Mary's *Journal* show that she usually worked on the story when he was out of the house" (100). At one point, Percy goes so far as to refer to *Frankenstein* as the "fruits of my absence" in a letter to Mary Shelley (qtd. in Small 101). While his absence provided a space for Shelley to work, the other looming male presence in Shelley's life, William Godwin, most heavily influenced her text. Godwin, to whom *Frankenstein* is dedicated, casts his shadow across the entire novel. It is here, in the tensions between a father and a daughter, where the root of Shelley's public fears resides. What is the daughter of a radical to do when her father begins to sound so utterly analogous to the rest of society? She expected approval, praise even for her elopement with Percy. Instead, Godwin censured her and led her to believe that her actions were monstrous, outside the realm of respectability and normalcy. The voice of society was suddenly given much more weight than before. While the expectations for literary greatness remained, Shelley also had to struggle to fit within the contours of what Mary Poovey calls, "The Proper Lady" (3).

Poovey examines the burdens and paradoxes of being a "lady" in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century England. Women were replacing men as the moral centers in the domestic sphere; however, fear over uncontrollable aspects of their sexuality still presented a persistent anxiety among their male counterparts:

Given the voraciousness that female desire was assumed to have, the
surest safeguard against overindulgence was not to allow or admit to
appetites of any kind. Thus women were encouraged to display no vanity,
no passion, no assertive "self" at all. In keeping with this design, even
genuinely talented women were urged to avoid all behavior that would call
attention to themselves. (Poovey 21)

From an early age, Shelley fed on two contradicting stories. One told her she must carry
on the literary legacy of her parents regardless of her gender. The other urged modesty
and self-effacement with an emphasis on remembering one's place away from the public
eye. Shelley pursued the first narrative with reckless abandon until her father's
devastating change of mind. Without a doubt, Shelley's struggle with these issues are
apparent in her first novel's characters and their actions.

Robert Walton

Robert Walton is Mary Shelley's most public character. Although Shelley
privileges Frankenstein with the novel's title, Walton is the first character the reader
meets. Shelley arranges this order for a specific reason: Walton functions as the dress
rehearsal for Victor Frankenstein. While strangers at first, Walton has more claim as
Victor's heir than the Monster does. Both men seek to uncover the secrets of nature and
desire to be heralded by society for their discovery. While Victor usurps the role of God
and creates man without a garden, Walton searches for a Garden of Eden in the North
Pole. Egotism and curiosity pervade his language as Walton assures his sister, "[Y]ou
cannot contest the inestimable benefits which I shall confer on all mankind to the last
generation, by discovering a passage near the pole to those countries, to reach which at

present so many months are requisite; or by ascertaining the secret of the magnet, which, if at all possible, can only be effected by an undertaking such as mine" (*Frankenstein* 1818: 6). Like Victor, Walton too wishes to unearth secrets nature has kept from the human race.

Similarities between the two do not end there, however. Both are wealthy, upper-class men, and both are disappointed by their fathers' distaste for their areas of interest. Like Victor, Walton pores over books without guidance or instructor, therefore following his passion in solitary study: "These volumes were my study day and night, and my familiarity with them increased that regret which I had felt, as a child, on learning that my father's dying injunction had forbidden my uncle to allow me to embark in a sea-faring life" (6). Walton, however, gives up his "visions" of becoming an explorer for a time in order to pursue a career as a writer. This pursuit is important for his entering the public sphere. Behrendt stresses the public nature of writing when he notes, "Writing, especially for publication, is an act of society, of civilization: a surrender of the autonomous self and identity to, and ostensibly on behalf of, the collective public" (148). The fact that Walton attempts to become a writer, places the public sphere at the forefront of the reader's mind early in the novel. While Walton fails as a writer, he retains aspects of the writer, such as his desire for public recognition and his impulse to observe and document. Walton's roles as writer and explorer work for Shelley's structure of *Frankenstein* as an epistolary novel: On his journey to the north, Walton writes about his experiences in letters to his sister, Margaret Saville.

His letters to his sister are tangible objects, and in all likelihood, will return to the public sphere of London, where his sister resides. In her introduction to the 1831 edition

of *Frankenstein*, Karen Karbiener considers Walton's sister "a representation of Mary Shelley's most public persona…" because she lives among society whereas most of Shelley's other characters are far more isolated (xxviii). However, Margaret is merely the receptacle for Walton's words, not their creator or an author herself. He is male, and therefore by rights the voice of the public. Margaret on the other hand is at home, fulfilling the traditional female role of wife and mother within the domestic sphere. As such, she can only exist as a conduit for Walton's voice and his desires for glory.

Interestingly enough, within Walton's desire for recognition exists a paradox, the same paradox that will later be explored in Victor's motivations to create life from death. Walton travels to one of the most desolate regions in the world for the purpose of being recognized for his achievements in discovery. In other words, he must leave society in order to be lauded by society. This impulse is not so strange when compared to Walton's secondary desire of finding a friend–once again outside the boundaries of human civilization. Walton heartily feels this void in his life, lamenting, "I have no one near me, gentle yet courageous, possessed of a cultivated as well as a capacious mind, whose tastes are like my own, to approve or amend my plans. How would such a friend repair the faults of your poor brother!" (*Frankenstein* 1818: 9).

Here, Mary Shelley's biography becomes all too relevant. Estranged from Godwin, Shelley confuses her desires by not quite wanting to admit her excessive need for her father. Both Shelley and Walton want someone to teach them and discipline them while they are in their mostly self-imposed exile. Shelley writes in a letter to Percy, "[P]erhaps she will one day have a father till then be everything to me love–& indeed I will be a good girl and never vex you any more. I will learn Greek and–but when shall we

meet when I may tell you all this & you will so sweetly reward me" (*LMWS* 1:3). The language, combining the tone of child with lover, reveals the depth of seventeen-year-old Mary's grief over her lost relationship with her father. It also reveals how intricately her identity was tied to his.

In developing Walton, Shelley denies him any outward grief over his father's death. Yet the duties he ascribes to a much-needed friend are also those that Shelley seeks in a father. Walton wants his friend to "be wiser and more experienced than myself, to confirm and support me…" (*Frankenstein* 1818: 16). What's more, he finds these qualities in Victor Frankenstein. Shortly after his arrival, Victor begins to instruct Walton from the elevated position of his education and experience. Walton immediately recognizes Victor's potential to fulfill the mentor/father role and divulges his plans to him. Unlike his real father, Victor takes immediate interest in Walton's goals: "He appeared pleased with the confidence, and suggested several alterations in my plan, which I shall find exceedingly useful" (16). In addition, Victor provides the guidance Walton lacked in his youth.

Thus the two men enter into a mutually agreed upon relationship. Walton assigns Victor the father role, and Victor readily accepts. In fact, he takes up the paternal mantle to the point where he finally reveals his dark secret to Walton in an effort to deter him from his present course, one that Victor believes will be detrimental. Victor explains his decision to Walton, "I had determined, once, that the memory of these evils should die with me; but you have won me to alter my determination. You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did; and I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine has been" (17). Thus, Victor's story becomes part

confessional, part moral for his audience of one. In trying to correct Walton's course, Victor, for the first time, legitimately welcomes the role of father and teacher.

Victor Frankenstein

Victor Frankenstein's original audience expands upon learning that Walton is writing down his tale: "Frankenstein discovered that I made notes concerning his history; he asked to see them, and then himself corrected and augmented them in many places; but principally in giving the life and spirit to the conversations he held with his enemy" (*Frankenstein* 1818: 179). Regardless, Victor is aware from the beginning that his private thoughts and secret deeds are in danger of becoming public domain through the act of telling. For this reason, he tells his story chronologically, beginning before he was born to establish his credibility. The first sentence of his tale, which begins Chapter 1, is "I am by birth a Genevese; and my family is one of the most distinguished of that republic" (18). The word "distinguished" automatically places Victor in a public position. His family name is *known* across that region. From birth, high expectations exist that at once buoy him and weigh him down.

Shelley was no stranger to the potent mixture of these expectations. As the daughter of two literary figures and the lover of a third, she was most certainly aware of the burden of a famous last name. Reflecting on her upbringing, Shelley wrote in 1838, "I was nursed and fed with a love of glory. To be something great and good was the precept given me by my father: [Percy] reiterated it" (*JMS* 554). Women did not generally bear these expectations of legacy; the fact that respectable women published was a fairly recent phenomenon, however, still unusual in Shelley's time. Thus, the pressure of legacy was left to their husbands and sons to pursue. Even as forward-thinking members of their time, Godwin and Wollstonecraft expected their first child to be born a boy and to name

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him after his father. As a male, this child would have been better able to bear these expectations of legacy. Validated by the value of his property, not the quality of his virtue, a man's worth tended to be more stable since it was based on something tangible and public (Poovey 5). Thus, protected and elevated by his gender, this imagined son could have either embraced societal expectations or scorned them, as Percy did.

As a woman writer, however, the burden of both social and family history forced Mary Shelley to navigate the rough waters of publicity and propriety with little or no guidance. Author of *The Contours of Masculine Desire* (1990), Marlon B. Ross, points out this prevalent problem for women writers of the nineteenth century: "Women poets are so sensitive to the potential conflict between domesticity and the wider world of public fame because the conflict is so palpable in their private lives and in their poetic careers" (289). For Shelley, the tension between the public and the private intensifies considering the weight of her famous and infamous family names: Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and Shelley. While Anne K. Mellor posits that Shelley identified with the Monster for being born "without a history," I argue that at the time of writing *Frankenstein* Shelley was drowning in it (45). She was neither her mother's eldest nor male; nevertheless, the men in her life and the wider public pressured her to carry on her parents' work.

In the patriarchal society, these loaded names, never quite stable, are an additional source of confusion for Shelley. Critic Bernard Duyfhuizen examines the pivotal role a name plays when he writes, "The family name places the individual–especially the male– into a progressive history, a family romance that underwrites a process of transmission that provides the individual with a context and a story, what we conventionally call

identity" (480). Therefore, it makes sense that Shelley would insert a portion of her mother's last name into the well-respected and enduring name of Frankenstein (enduring because three sons exist to carry on the family name at the start of the novel). As Christine Berthin points out, by deriving Franken*stein* from Woll*stone*craft, Shelley gives her mother the glory-aspiring son who was willing and able to advocate the public policy change she herself desired (106).

Thus, it is no coincidence that Shelley assigns Victor the same responsibilities of legacy, but within the traditional parameters of primogeniture. First, Victor's father, Alphonse, is landed gentry with money and a position in public office to pass on to his son. In establishing his credence and heritage, Victor explains to Walton: "My ancestors had been for many years counsellors and syndics, and my father had filled several public situations with honour and reputation. He was respected by all who knew him for his integrity and indefatigable attention to public business" (*Frankenstein* 1818: 18). Unquestionably, both Victor and his father belong to the male-dominated public sphere from which Shelley was forever barred as a participant. In an 1828 letter, she expressed the undeniable fact that "my sex has precluded all idea of my fulfilling public employments" (*LMWS* II: 22).

The uncertainty and instability of her position flow into her portrayal of Victor's Edenic childhood. The domestic sphere swallows the respectable father, pulling on his time and reducing his effectiveness as both father and teacher. Victor's father shrinks from his public duties and intrudes in what is by the early nineteenth century, traditionally the mother's domain (Broughton and Rogers 7). In two sentences, Victor tells how his father substitutes the public for the private, while at the same time,

upholding the tradition of primogeniture: "When my father became a husband and a parent, he found his time so occupied by the duties of his new situation, that he relinquished many of his public employments, and devoted himself to the education of his children. Of these I was the eldest, and the destined successor to all his labours and utility" (*Frankenstein* 1818: 19). In attempting to uphold public office and be a devoted father, Alphonse drags the public with him into the inner sanctum of the family home, diluting his effectiveness and exposing the private to the public's corruption. In writing this outcome, Shelley questions the effectiveness of any parent who exists in the public and the private spheres simultaneously. In allowing Alphonse this flexibility, she at once demonstrates the male's privileged position in society and exposes his failures to succeed in both arenas.

In the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein*, Victor places most of the responsibility for his downfall on his father's poor direction of his son's education. In a passage that graces Shelley's early draft notebooks from 1816, Victor pursues his reckless studies because of his father's carelessness: "I cannot help here remarking the many opportunities *parents have* of directing the attention of their pupils to useful knowledge, which they utterly neglect. My father looked carelessly at the title-page of my book–and said Ah! Cornelius Agrippa! My dear Victor, do not waste your time upon this–it is sad trash" ("Draft Notebook A" c. 56, fol. 1r; emphasis added). Percy Shelley largely left the scene untouched save for two words. He crossed out her original phrasing "parents have" and above it wrote, "instructors possess." Percy's change made it into the final draft. This change supports what I have suggested earlier, that for Mary at least, "father" becomes synonymous with "teacher," causing the two identities to merge. Given her outcast state,

it is no wonder that the characters search for a father throughout the novel, all desperate for approval. Furthermore, their searching within the novel suggests that a father's approval stands in for society's approval.

At the same time, fathers rarely meet their children's expectations. Alphonse's trespass on gender roles, moving from full-time respectable public official to homemaker-father, a mirror of Shelley's transformation from "Proper Lady" to woman writer, turns out to be devastating for the child Victor. Shelley reveals the turmoil in Victor's strained emphasis on felicity when recalling his childhood. For a man who has been so secretive in his life up until this point, his revelations to Walton must be terrifying. Therefore, Victor stresses every detail with an emphasis on happiness and allure. Of Elizabeth, his rescued cousin, he describes, "We were strangers to any species of disunion and dispute; for although there was a great dissimilitude in our characters, there was an harmony in that very dissimilitude" (*Frankenstein* 1818: 21). He then describes the entire family in even more generous terms: "Neither of us possessed the slightest pre-eminence over the other; the voice of command was never heard amongst us; but mutual affection engaged us all to comply with and obey the slightest desire of each other" (25-26). When exposing his family's private life to Walton (and by extension to Walton's audience, i.e. eventually the public), Victor idealizes his family for reputation's sake. This utopian representation, however, is unrealistic; even in the closest families, family members do fight with one another. For the public's benefit, however, Victor dons a mask while pulling back the curtain on the private so that nothing is out of place.

Despite Victor's saccharine depiction of his family, cracks show through during his narration. The burden of primogeniture, of having to fill his father's vacated public appointments, urges Victor toward egotism and overreaching. At the same time, because Alphonse neither accepts nor supports his son's interests, Victor learns from an early age to pursue his studies in secret: "[A]lthough I wished to communicate these secret stores of knowledge to my father, yet his indefinite censure of my favourite Agrippa always withheld me" (23). His fear of censure forces him to pursue his greatest passion in secret and solitude. Other than revealing his early studies to Elizabeth when they were children (for which she expresses no interest), Victor keeps his secret to a degree bordering on obsession. His need for secrecy consumes him, driving him from society, first from his home and family and then from his peers and responsibilities. Victor's flight from society, his fear of a father's censure, and his secret pleasures all mirror Shelley's journey after her elopement with Percy. The hurt and blame involving her own father that she carried with her across Europe eventually found a home in the mind of Victor Frankenstein.

On his path to "pursu[ing] nature to her hiding places," Victor's choices are not entirely his own (36). Again, Shelley indicates Alphonse's responsibility for his son's departure from the path of responsibility and a respectable public career. He sends Victor to the University, away from a home that is now without a mother. Here, Victor meets the man who makes the Monster possible, M. Waldman. Waldman is a teacher and replacement father for Victor, representing all the characteristics that are appealing to this society (people and things that look and sound beautiful). Unlike his description of M. Krempe, a possible alternate mentor, Victor describes Waldman in positive terms: "His

person was short, but remarkably erect; and his voice the sweetest I had ever heard" (30).

Through Victor's description, Shelley emphasizes Waldman's siren-like abilities in the

sweetness of his voice. Language is the medium of navigating the public sphere, and as

such, Shelley portrays it in a negative light. People use language to gossip, spread

rumors, and manipulate others. If anything, language is the elusive monster of the novel.

Waldman's allure originates in the temptations of his language and ideas.

Unintentionally, Waldman uses his words to steer Victor away from society and toward

his destruction. In fact, Victor describes the day he met Waldman as the day that

"decided my future destiny" (32).

Waldman's encouraging words send Victor to places absent any other living

human being. In another paradox that parallels his desire of wringing fame from solitude,

Victor determines that "[t]o examine the causes of life, we must first have recourse to

death" (33). This conclusion leads him to graveyards and slaughterhouses in his pursuit

of life and death. Furthermore, not only is he cut off from his family during this period,

he also requires complete solitude for his newfound work: "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…" (36). Amid darkness and

death, Victor creates his monster in absolute secret. Only the Moon witnesses his

trespasses: "One secret which I alone possessed was the hope to which I had dedicated

myself; and the moon gazed on my midnight labours…" (36). Shelley personifies the

Moon in employing the verb "gazed"; the Moon actively watches Victor through a single

yellow lens and will continue to silently observe him throughout the Monster's life span,

just as the Moon intruded on Shelley's "waking dream" at *Frankenstein's* birth.

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Given the secretive nature of his activities, it is no wonder that Victor is bothered most by the Monster's eyes. This moment marks the first occasion that another being witnesses Victor's "workshop of filthy creation," and the unspoken fear of being discovered in the midst of his passion is incomprehensible. Victor describes the Monster's "yellow skin" and "teeth" as "luxuriances" when compared to "his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set" (39). Victor flees. He runs from the Monster's gaze not once, but twice in the span of a single night. The second time, after his anxiety dream where his blooming bride morphs into his dead, decaying mother, Victor wakes to discover the Monster watching him: "[H]is eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me" (40). The Monster's gaze disturbs Victor to such a degree that he cannot fully recognize the power in that gaze. His impulse to dismiss the Monster's eyes as true vehicles of sight is an effort to diminish their unacknowledged power over him. At this point, his eyes and body are the only means of communication the Monster possesses. He does not yet have the ability to speak, and thus his wants and needs are primal and disturbing. Yet again, Victor rushes from the room.

Victor's reaction is rooted in Shelley's fears. The presence of dominating eyes comes up again in *Mathilda* and for good reason. Given her fragile position in society, Shelley understood all too well the pressure of prying eyes. From 1816 to July 7, 1822, the journal Shelley shared with Percy is filled with the quotidian. She described their travels to some extent, but for the most part its pages contain lists of books she read, people she talked with, and lessons she had with Percy. The safely normal was

catalogued in page after page. She fiercely guarded her private life up until this point, securing herself against further scandal.

This changed when Percy dies on July 8, 1822. There was no entry for that day, just the date followed by 226 blank pages. When Shelley returned to the *Journal* on October 2, 1822, the entries changed in scope and purpose. They are typically longer, more detailed, and often go into depth about how she was feeling and what she was thinking. The change from external public to internal private is remarkable. Shelley exposed herself on paper in a way she had never done before. For example, she wrote in one entry, "White paper–wilt thou be my confident [sic]? I will trust thee fully, for none shall see what I write. But can I express all I feel? Have I the talent to give words to thoughts & feelings that as a tempest hurry me along?" (*JMS* 429). For the first time, Shelley employed the *Journal* to its full extent, beyond what the public would deem appropriate. This act is necessary and acceptable because, as memoirist Patricia Hampl concludes on the act of journal writing, "There is no more private kind of writing. The journal teeters on the edge of literature. It plays the game of having its cake and eating it too: writing which is not meant to be read" (216). Due to Percy's untimely death, Shelley was forced to trust in the privacy of the *Journal* as an outlet for her grief in order to conceal what thoughts or feelings might be deemed "monstrous."

Before this breaking point in 1822, however, Shelley was still greatly concerned with reputation, and as such, places a strained emphasis on reputation in *Frankenstein*. Victor repeats several times how respected his father was and how much integrity he had. His anxiety haunts the entire novel, ultimately pushing Victor to flee society and condemn himself before the public ever gets the opportunity to judge him. Something

tells him he does not belong despite his birthright, an unspoken fear that stems from the writer behind the writer, a young woman author burdened by her own ambivalent history, who could not afford to trust her early journal entries not to betray her.

Like Shelley, Victor has an obsessive need to protect his reputation that forces him into a similar silence, a repression even. For Victor, it means the cost of someone's life. Although the Monster plants the damning evidence that condemns Justine Moritz, he is not the one who kills her. Justine's reputation is destroyed when she is accused of killing Victor's youngest brother William. Victor does nothing to intervene because it might damage his reputation. He consoles himself, thinking, "A thousand times rather would I have confessed myself guilty of the crime ascribed to Justine; but I was absent when it was committed, and such a declaration would have been considered as the ravings of a madman, and would not have exculpated her who suffered through me" (*Frankenstein* 1818: 61). As the son of a wealthy landowner and public servant, Victor understands the importance of a good reputation. He tells himself rescuing her is impossible, that he would only be destroying himself in the process.

The reader might accept his reasoning if not for two red flags. First, when the Monster is attempting to impress upon Victor his responsibilities as a creator, he relays Felix's history to him. Felix is a member of the De Lacey family whom the Monster watches and learns from during his time alone. Felix breaks an unjustly condemned man out of prison at great cost to himself and his family. Given Felix's story, it seems highly unlikely that Victor had neither the influence nor any other option but to watch Justine be put to death. As a result, Felix's example undermines Victor's reasoning and exposes his urgent need for protecting his reputation over the life of Justine.

Second, the differences between Victor and Justine are striking. Justine has no family to protect her. She is from a lower class than he is, and her "place" is clearly in the home as opposed to abroad at a university. In fact, Justine has much more in common with Victor's mother, Caroline Beaufort, than any other character in the novel. Shelley even uses Elizabeth to recreate Victor's mother in Justine. In a letter to Victor, Elizabeth writes, "[Justine] thought [Caroline] the model of all excellence, and endeavoured to imitate her phraseology and manners, so that even now she often reminds me of her" (46). Elizabeth concludes of Justine, "She is very clever and gentle, and extremely pretty; as I mentioned before, her mien and her expressions continually remind me of my dear aunt" (47). In addition, Justine, not Elizabeth, seems to have taken over the role of mothering Victor's youngest brother after Caroline's death: "She was warmly attached to the child who is now dead, and acted towards him like a most affectionate mother" (64). Given these similarities, Justine's execution is like a second death for Caroline Beaufort, whose miniature acts as the damning evidence in Justine's trial. Both women, at some point in their lives, are in danger of destruction. Poverty threatens Caroline's life after her father's death, just as Justine faces the executioner.

The problem is that Justine has no man to come to her rescue. She is cut off and alone. Elizabeth is the only one who believes in her innocence, while the rest of the family and community abandon her out of fear. Elizabeth explains to Victor, "[E]very one believes in her guilt, and that made me wretched; for I knew that it was impossible: and to see every one [sic] else prejudiced in so deadly a manner, rendered me hopeless and despairing" (60). Once again, the community's low opinion of her seals her fate, not the Monster's actions. Other than Elizabeth, friends and acquaintances refuse to testify on

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her behalf out of "fear, and hatred of the crime of which they supposed her guilty" (63). But despite Elizabeth's positive testimony, "the public indignation was turned with renewed violence, charging [Justine] with the blackest ingratitude" (64).

For Justine has broken the cardinal rule. She is a woman who has drawn the public's attention, and she suffers gravely for it. In *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1792), Dr. John Gregory outlines the thinking of the eighteenth century, putting in context Justine's error in her trespass into the public sphere, when he comments on proper female behavior: "One of the chief beauties in a female character, is that modest reserve, that retiring delicacy, which avoids the public eye, and is disconcerted even at the gaze of admiration" (57). In staying out all night to look for the child, Justine places her reputation in jeopardy. This decision puts her in a vulnerable position, first to the Monster's gaze and then to public scrutiny. Both seal her fate. Furthermore, one could argue that Elizabeth also endangers her reputation when she speaks publicly in support of Justine, therefore condemning her to death by the Monster's hands later in the novel. Without a doubt, Shelley's ambivalent feelings about a woman entering the public sphere are relevant here. Neither Justine nor Elizabeth left the domestic sphere because they desired to but because they felt it was a moral imperative: Justine to save a child and Elizabeth to save Justine.

Similarly, Shelley did not simply want to write, she felt compelled to write. Her parents' legacy forced her to enter the public world, a world of publication where she felt further pressure for greatness. All the while as a cautionary tale, she lived with the daily reminder of her mother: A woman could dance along the line of propriety, but some boundaries could not be crossed. Shelley knew the expectations were high, but as a

woman of the nineteenth-century, she could not imagine how limited the rewards were.

There would always be rooms she could not enter, glass ceilings she could never break

through. She felt the expectant eyes of the world upon her while bound by the shackles of

womanhood. It is little wonder that she created a universe where the mechanisms of

society punish ambitious men and kill the women who step outside the domestic sphere.

The injustice of her situation plays out in her characters' lives. She poured all her

motivations, desires, fears, and failures into Victor, Walton, Justine, Elizabeth, and even

the Monster.

The Monster

Victor Frankenstein's monster is a being created without woman. As such, for

decades critics have discussed the meaning of a man giving birth. Marc A. Rubenstein

asserts that "*Frankenstein*, for all its exclusion of women, *is*–among other things–a

parable of motherhood" (165). Furthermore, Rubenstein insists that in a novel in which

one narrative envelopes the other "story-telling becomes a vicarious pregnancy," an

experiment to allay the fears and anxieties that amalgamate when Shelley's experiences

of pregnancy insisted that birth and death were but a hair's breadth apart (173). But the

novel's structure is not the only fuel for a narrow feminist reading of *Frankenstein*:

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar highlight the fact that Mary Shelley was a young woman

"caught up in such a maelstrom of sexuality at the time she wrote the novel," and these

strong undercurrents of female sexuality carry over into *Frankenstein*, particularly with

the *Paradise Lost* themes (222). While these readings of *Frankenstein* can be convincing

at times, they fail to give Shelley her full due. The interpretations above paint Shelley as

a young woman at the mercy of her hormones, instead of a woman writer struggling

against real forces that oppressed her, some of which I have already explored in this chapter. Indeed, the reader would be hard pressed to find a critical argument claiming that a male author's unbridled hormones were the impetus of his writing.

Critics cannot ignore the fact that Victor alone creates the Monster, however. More interesting still, the Monster comes into the world wide-eyed and childlike. In addition to discovering his five senses and the natural elements, such as the Moon and the Sun, he acquires language much as a child does for the first time, not as an adult learning a second language: "I improved more rapidly than the Arabian, who understood very little and conversed in broken accents, whilst I comprehended and could imitate almost every word that was spoken" (*Frankenstein* 1818: 106-107). Shelley ascribes these traits to the Monster to highlight his connection to man, his belonging as an invention of man. While not born in the traditional sense, the Monster nevertheless begins his life with the same promise as any child and the same susceptibility to corruption.

Shelley reveals the Monster's double nature early in Volume II, long before the rejection of his adopted family. Here, the Monster discovers the principles of fire, a discovery that foreshadows his entire existence. At first, the warmth that the fire provides delights the Monster, but his pleasure quickly transforms: "In my joy I thrust my hand into the live embers, but quickly drew it out again with a cry of pain. How strange, I thought, that the same cause should produce such opposite effects!" (92). Thus, early in the Monster's narrative, Shelley stresses the hidden nature of the being. His spirit exudes the warmth and joy of a child but equally possesses the nature of fire to burn with an "inextinguishable hatred" (119).

In directly comparing the Monster to fire, Shelley seems to answer the question of whether the Monster ever could have been good. Left unattended, the Monster cannot help that "[e]vil thenceforth became [his] good" (188). There is a real anxiety about the Monster's two sides that cannot be explained by a fear of death. Critic Ellen Moers in *Literary Women* makes a good case for it, however. She emphasizes how Shelley's position as a mother in a realm of authors, where very few women existed and fewer still had given birth, provided her with a unique perspective, one that came at a price (79). Shelley also experienced loss as a mother, losing a two-week-old unnamed daughter before she began writing the novel. Thus, the creation of a monster who is intricately entangled within the folds of life and death was, Moers concludes, surely born from "the anxieties of a woman who, as daughter, mistress, and mother, was a bearer of death" (86).

Shelley also had other anxieties, however, more closely related to writing, harbored for far longer than her sadly brief motherhood. The chase for glory, her legacy was an avenue that could be pursued in one of two ways: fame or infamy. Fame and infamy are two sides of the same coin with similar results: either way society would be talking about her. Nevertheless, how society talked about her and what they said were important. Thus, Shelley's tale is not about what happens when a man tries to give birth nor is it about a young woman's unbridled sexuality. *Frankenstein* explores what happens when an innovator pursues fame and through ill use becomes infamous instead. Blinded by ambition, instead of achieving a selfishly desired fame, Victor designs a project that does not turn out the way he had envisioned but instead of taking responsibility for his blunder, he runs away, ultimately creating an uncontrollable monster–rumors and scandal–capable of destroying his entire family.

Therefore, because of Victor's deficiencies as father and creator, the Monster is driven to exert the most destructive element of his nature. Even the Monster reaches this understanding as he stands over the body of his creator: "I had no choice but to adapt my nature to an element which I had willingly chosen" (*Frankenstein* 1818: 188). The Monster embodies a creature born from death with "bones from charnel-houses" and nursed on rejection, "the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart" (36, 39). Nevertheless, like fame, the Monster is an invention of man. He is large, powerful, and once created nearly unstoppable. Like language, he was made to be an asset to society but instead becomes a destroyer of lives.

Although isolated as he is, the Monster joins the rest of the cast of characters in his motherless status, which, no doubt, includes Shelley herself. The remainder of the novel assumes the struggle between a father and child who are continuously at odds with one another with little hope of resolution. The direction the novel takes is not surprising. At the time, Shelley was out of favor with her own father, as well as polite society, and tried to garner the attention (fame) needed to get back into his good graces. She was also in a state of self-imposed exile, reading and learning much like the Monster.

During the Monster's "education" away from "home," he learns more than to read and speak the language. Peering into the private realm, he observes family dynamics and begins to understand the names and roles of "*father*," "*brother*," "*son*," and "*sister*" (89). As U.C. Knoepflmacher points out, the titles of mother and daughter, however, are notably missing from the list (101). Yet while the Monster is able to observe the role that the dutiful daughter Agatha plays, his model of a nuclear family, however quaint, is noticeably absent a mother. This absence, though, does not prevent the Monster from

yearning for one all the same. His first priority is to win over the blind father De Lacey. Like Shelley, he hopes that by impressing the father, he can ingratiate himself into the rest of society. He perceives De Lacey as the mouthpiece of society and as his protector against prejudice. His hopes are dashed, however, when his plea to De Lacey is interrupted by the rest of the family: "Felix darted forward, and with supernatural force tore me from his father, to whose knees I clung…" (*Frankenstein* 1818: 110). The Monster is driven from their presence and once more into solitude. Outcast, the Monster's watchful eye turns malicious.

If the Monster receives an education in family dynamics through his study, it is unclear what the De Lacey family gets out of being the subjects of the Monster's social experiment. I expect that if the story were told from the family's point of view, the reader's perception of the Monster would vastly differ. The Monster stalks them, intruding into the most private location, the family home and hearth. The Monster lives in a hovel attached to the family cottage. From there he finds "a small and almost imperceptible chink, through which the eye could just penetrate" (85). Shelley's use of language is disturbing in this instance. First, although the Monster is narrating at this point in the novel, she does not give him the possessive pronoun "my" when referring to "the eye." Instead, the language is detached, giving the reader the ominous impression that "the eye" could belong to anyone.

Furthermore, the verb "penetrate" is expressly masculine and active, and it is the same word Victor learns from M. Waldman leading to his experiment: "They penetrate into the recesses of nature, and shew how she works in her hiding places" (30). By the 1831 edition, the possessive language is even more aggressive and belongs explicitly to

Victor: "I have described myself as always having been embued [sic] with a fervent longing to penetrate the secrets of nature" (35). Through Victor, Alphonse, and now the Monster, Shelley expresses her doubts that the public sphere and the domestic sphere can ever be entirely separated. Indeed, Shelley seems to suggest that even the privacy of the family home is not safe from the masculine gaze, which will eventually impose its will, as we see in the destruction of the family's cabin. Like the Moon's radiance, there is no escaping the masculine gaze.

Since burning the De Lacey's cottage, the Monster has learned to respond to rejection in only one way–through destruction. Thus the Monster's conflicting emotions, as he longs for something he cannot understand, come to a head in the presence of little William, who carries a relic of his dead mother around his neck, along with the threats of a powerful father on his tongue: "Hideous monster! let me go; My papa is a Syndic–he is M. Frankenstein–he would punish you. You dare not keep me" (*Frankenstein* 1818: 117). The Monster destroys the voice by strangling his first victim. He later strangles Henry Clerval and Elizabeth as well. His actions to stop the voice reveal his desire to cut off both the father's influence and society's power to laud or destroy.

Hence, having given himself over "to hellish rage," the Monster stops the air from the child's lungs, essentially cutting off the medium of the father, but the locket remains a silent symbol of what the Monster can never have, the idealized mother, and it stirs ambivalent feelings within him: "I gazed with delight on her dark eyes fringed by deep lashes, and her lovely lips; but presently my rage returned: I remembered that I was for ever deprived of the delights that such beautiful creatures could bestow" (117). Therefore, the Monster uses the medium of a mother's love as a tool of destruction in

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implicating Justine. After the Monster's final attempt at human connection has failed, he resolves once more to seek out his creator, his father, as the Monster is "consumed by a burning passion which [Victor] alone can gratify" (118).

Despite the Monster's extreme reaction, he certainly is not alone in the novel as a motherless child with an oppressive father. Rather the opposite, as Knoepflmacher notes:

> This contest between males divorced from female nurturance is framed by a series of forbidding fathers–the father whose "dying injunction" forbade Walton to embark on a sea-faring life; Henry Clerval's father, who insists that his son be a merchant rather than a poet; the "inexorable" Russian father who tries to force his daughter into a union she abhors; the treacherous Turkish father who uses Safie to obtain freedom yet issues the "tyrannical mandate" that she betray Felix. (104)

Once again, the father's voice stands in for society's voice because in a patriarchal society the man's opinion is valued and implements law. For this reason, even the presumed kindness of Alphonse must be examined closely against the backdrop of these oppressive and demanding fathers. To be sure, Victor boasts of his father's tolerant nature, "for a more indulgent and less dictatorial parent did not exist upon earth"; however, as mentioned before, Victor clearly blames him for his own straying departure from respectable society (*Frankenstein* 1818: 126). More interesting still, Alphonse's attitude is in sharp contrast to the ideals of good and responsible fatherhood in the early nineteenth century.

Megan Doolittle, author of "Fatherhood, Religious Belief and the Protection of Children in Nineteenth-Century English Families," writes, "[An] important dimension to

protective parenting relat[ed] to the spiritual and moral dangers faced by the young" (32).

Therefore, perhaps Alphonse's laxity hinders his son's learning of these imperative

lessons, "without which a child could face social ostracism" (32-33). In Victor's case,

however, the social ostracism seems self-imposed, while Victor forces the Monster to

inherit his outcast status. Still, Victor cannot completely banish his sense of duty to his

offspring. On some level, Victor agrees with society's standards of what makes a good

father, that "fathering included a protective caring *about* children while they were

growing up" (Doolittle 32). His fleeting thoughts of concern for his offspring illustrate a

man who does in fact know better, yet he cannot bring himself to act upon them: "For the

first time, also, I felt what duties of a creator towards his creature were, and that I ought

to render him happy before I complained of his wickedness" (*Frankenstein* 1818: 79).

However, the moment does not last. It cannot last because Victor and the rest of

society abuse this new invention, the Monster, therefore perverting his function. The

Monster is Shelley's microcosm for language misused, a human tool used to destroy

lives. Moreover, Victor never learns how to be a father in a society where everyone must

play his or her role and be of some use. How could he, when he exists in a universe

where the only fathers are failed role models? Instead, as Rose Lucas notes, Victor

spends "the rest of his short life…running and denying, always trying to shift blame and

consistently refusing to mourn" (64). Indeed, Victor is fundamentally broken. As a result,

just after the Monster's creation, Victor begins to lose all warmth, and he assumes

Godwin's guise, echoing sentiments of dissatisfaction, "I felt the bitterness of

disappointment…the change was so rapid, the overthrow so complete" (*Frankenstein*

1818: 40). More baffling still, only a page before Victor had stated that he had "desired

[the Monster] with an ardour that far exceeded moderation" (39). These contrasting emotions illustrate the rapid change Victor undergoes as he dismisses all responsibility in order to chase an inflated reputation. When he begins to lose the people whose opinions matter the most, he cements himself in the frozen solitude of the Artic where only the Monster and Victor exist together in exile.

Shelley's worldview, too, gets turned on its head with Godwin's "Do what I say, not what I do" parenting. Her indignation against this hypocrisy can be heard in the Monster's speech to Walton after Victor's death:

> But when I discovered that he, the author at once of my existence and of
> its unspeakable torments, dared to hope for happiness; that while he
> accumulated wretchedness and despair upon me, he sought his own
> enjoyments in feelings and passions from the indulgence of which I was
> for ever barred, then impotent envy and bitter indignation filled me with
> an insatiable thirst for vengeance. (188)

Likewise, Shelley's gender bars her from taking the same actions as her father both in her private and public life. Godwin can live outside the bounds of marriage and voice his radical opinions, but his daughter must place restrictions on her life and writings, on how she goes about wresting fame from the public. Undoubtedly, this would have led Shelley to feel, like the Monster, "impotent envy and bitter indignation."

Thus, frustrations and injustice pervade her first novel where the only place a child can act as he will is in complete isolation away from family and society. Shelley's tone is pessimistic, and she seems to suggest that her endeavors will not be much more successful than those of her mother. Moreover, Victor utters the same ambivalence in his

advice to Walton as Godwin does to Shelley: "Seek happiness in tranquility, and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself….Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed" (186). The hypocrisy lives on and ambition seems to win out in Victor's final act as surrogate father. Shelley would have to make a name for herself while walking the precarious line of double standards. She could only hope to attain fame, not infamy.

CHAPTER III

From *Frankenstein* to *Mathilda*: The Failed Experiment

"I am a thought, a tragedy, a character that he comes to see act: now and then he gives me my cue that I may make a speech more to his purpose; perhaps he is already planning a poem in which I am to figure. I am a farce and a play to him, but to me this is all dreary reality: he rakes all the profit and I bear all the burthen."

Mathilda, *Mathilda* (1819)

Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* (1819) is an even more painful response to the disappointments of the dominant ideology of the nineteenth century. Born out of failure and death, the novella rests at the crossroads of the public and private in Shelley's life. She wrote *Mathilda* after the death of her three-year-old son, William, who died of malaria while the family was in Rome. Given the timing and lack of entries in Shelley's *Journal*, critics agree that William's death was the trigger for writing *Mathilda*. Without a doubt, it was a highly emotional period during which Shelley felt Percy was less than comforting. At the same time, she was still in the process of winning back her father's approval. The son she had named after not her husband but her father was gone, and she needed an uncensored and unbiased outlet. Therefore, her present circumstance may have been the impetus for putting pen to paper, but the emotions that permeate *Mathilda* were from a much older wound.

Many critics, such as Anne Mellor and Mary Poovey, have remarked how Shelley had no role model early in her life. This consensus is not necessarily true, however. Godwin and Percy both served as highly influential role models; unfortunately they were the wrong role models. They had a power and access that Shelley could never attain as a nineteenth-century woman writer, and as such, this disparity further proved her inadequacies in the public realm of business and publication. When compared with their

success, Shelley's letters leave little doubt from which parent she looked to in successfully navigating the public realm: "[My mother's] greatness of soul & my father['s] high talents have perpetually reminded me that I ought to degenerate as little as I could from those whom I derived my being" (*LMWS* II:4). She may have admired her mother's spirit, but she hoped to inherit her father's "talents," to make her entry into the public sphere that much more attainable.

Unsurprisingly, Shelley's second mentor was initially in close competition with her for her father's favor and a place in Godwin's circle. Pamela Clemit confirms that "Percy Bysshe Shelley also sought to fashion his life in terms of Godwin's early theories," and "in January 1812 he wrote to introduce himself to Godwin as his intellectual heir," a position from which Mary Shelley was excluded based on her gender (29). While both men may have held similar philosophies (both were considered radical), Percy and Godwin could voice their views in the relative safety of their position as white middle to upper-class males. While they were not altogether safe from public reprisals (for example, Percy in 1817 lost custody of his children from his first marriage because of his atheist beliefs), they were better protected from scandal, and their dealings in the public sphere (ability to publish works, hold office, etc.) were rarely affected.

Consequently, it was easier for Godwin and Percy to, at worst, view the public as more of an obstacle rather than a malignant force and, at best, to see it as a vehicle for recognition and praise. The latter view led Godwin to write *The Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* shortly after Wollstonecraft's death. In the Preface he included, "It has always appeared to me, that to give the public some account of the life of a person of eminent merit deceased, is a duty incumbent on survivors" (Godwin

43). From these words, we can see that Godwin clearly intended to honor both his wife's memory and her cause in writing *Memoirs*. He perceived it not only as a privilege, but a "duty" to deliver private material to the public.

On the other hand, he could not have been ignorant of the public's likely reaction to her unorthodox lifestyle. After all, Godwin and Wollstonecraft both bowed to social convention and married two years earlier, just after Wollstonecraft became pregnant with Mary Shelley. Furthermore, Godwin's approach to Wollstonecraft's biography differed from his contemporaries. Pamela Clemit and Gina Luria Walker describe *Memoirs* as "a work of unprecedented biographical frankness…. From Godwin's point of view, such directness was an attempt to enact in the public sphere the revolutionary doctrine of sincerity he had advocated in *An Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (1793)…" (11). In this light, *Memoirs* took on an exploitive tone that sat uneasily with Shelley and the public alike. Presumably, Godwin's view of biography along with the public's response to *Memoirs* were further reasons for Shelley's discomfort and aversion to the public eye.

Regardless of Godwin's intentions, there were "intense public and private reactions" to *Memoirs* (32). Many disparaged Wollstonecraft's character and judged her under new light in regards to marriage, illegitimacy, and suicide. One critic in the *Anti-Jacobean Review* (1798) wrote, "Intended by [Godwin] for a beacon, it serves as a buoy; if it does not shew what it is wise to pursue, it manifests what it is wise to avoid" (qtd. in Godwin 173). This critic's dismissive comment clearly illustrates why Godwin, with his own public acceptance, was Shelley's safer choice after which to model her own public persona. Although Godwin was a featured character in *Memoirs*, Anne Mellor makes it

clear that Wollstonecraft's character was the target for most of the public's vitriol and with wide-ranging consequences:

> The widespread denunciation of Mary Wollstonecraft as a revolutionary, atheist, and whore after the publication of Godwin's ill-judged *Memoirs* made it socially impossible for a respectable, educated woman in the early nineteenth century to advocate Wollstonecraft's lifestyle or to celebrate her as a leader of the woman's movement. More personally, it eroded Mary Shelley's belief that her mother's life and career provided a viable alternative social role for women. (210)

Thus with one ill-timed action, Godwin inadvertently eliminated Wollstonecraft as a feasible mentor for Shelley and, in turn, gave her a lesson on how a man appropriates a woman for his own purposes. In terms of power, the message was clear: "In a society where the father or male is the dominant authority and wielder of power and the female is taught to love and obey, the father-daughter relationship becomes a paradigm for all male-female relationships" (Mellor 198). Godwin demonstrated to Shelley what the all-powerful male could do as both husband and father. She understood this dilemma and revealed the dominion she accorded to Godwin in an 1822 letter to Jane Williams: "Until I met Shelley I may justly say that he was my God–and I remember many childish instances of the excess of attachment I bore for him" (*LMWS* I: 296). Her words also reveal how these feelings, all first learned in the home under Godwin's care, could be applied to a husband.

While Wollstonecraft may have been celebrated within the Godwin circle, Shelley witnessed Godwin pilfer not only from Wollstonecraft's private life but also from her

life's work. When Mary Wollstonecraft died, she left not only two little girls and a husband behind, but an unfinished manuscript as well. *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* (1798) tells of a woman abused by her libertine husband, locked away in a mental facility, and separated from her daughter. Godwin published *Maria*, with his own preface, located before the Author's Preface, in which he explained, "[Wollstonecraft] was anxious to do justice to her conception, and recommended and revised the manuscript several different times. So much of it as is here given to the public, she was far from considering as finished…" (57). Although incomplete, *Maria* stands in as a fictionalized continuation of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and, as Barbara Taylor notes, was considered by many to be her most profoundly feminist text (242). Unfortunately, when paired with Godwin's *Memoirs*, *Maria* was read as "an exercise in sexual self-exoneration" (246). Worse, Taylor notes, "By the end of the century the chorus of condemnation was so loud that it reverberated through her intellectual reputation as well as her personal character, transforming her radical-feminist philosophy into libertine propaganda…" (247).

Despite Godwin's intentions and careful explanations, Wollstonecraft and her work would not be fully recognized until well into the twentieth century, not surprisingly, about the same time *Mathilda* was finally published (1959). For the nineteenth-century audience, Godwin's haste to get Wollstonecraft's creature into the world is all that would be remembered. In editing the text, Godwin admitted of the unfinished work, "[I]t was necessary for the editor, in some places, to connect the more finished parts with the pages of an older copy, and a line or two in addition sometimes appeared requisite for that purpose" (Preface 57). In other words, Wollstonecraft's manuscript was stitched together

from many pieces beyond the original author's hand, just as Victor appropriated various parts in creating the Monster. Under this light, it is hard not to see Godwin as Victor Frankenstein: He brought Shelley's mother back from the dead by patching together her unpublished works and her life for his own ambition and the eventual public consumption. Like Victor, Godwin ignored all warning signs and his special project backfired and got away from him.

In Search of an Audience

In the 1831 Introduction to *Frankenstein*, Shelley drew on childhood experience to provide a distinction between her dreams and her writing:

> My dreams were at once more fantastic and agreeable than my writings. In the latter I was a close imitator–rather doing as others had done than putting down the suggestions of my own mind. What I wrote was intended at least for one other eye–my childhood's companion and friend; but my dreams were all my own; I accounted for them to nobody; they were my refuge when annoyed–my dearest pleasure when free. (5)

Early on, Shelley's words established a reserve for audience, as when Byron tasked her with creating a ghost story, she balked at the thought of an audience. Conversely, she described the lack of an audience in positive terms, as her "refuge" and "dearest pleasure." Away from the public eye, especially the male eye, Shelley and her imagination were unregulated and unbound. Thus, she reached back to the private moments of her childhood and infused these same feelings into the early life of Mathilda as well, at a time in her life when the author herself would have felt little control over anything.

Mathilda is an epistolary novel in which the title character writes a letter to friend and potential lover, Woodville, explaining her tragic past. Mathilda is abandoned by her father after the death of her mother and forced to live with an unsympathetic aunt. In response, she turns to books and eventually her own imagination for solace and companionship. In words that are reminiscent of Shelley's later depiction of her own affinity for dreaming, Mathilda writes, "I was a solitary being, and from my infant years, ever since my dear nurse left me, I had been a dreamer…. [I] formed affections and intimacies with the aerial creatures of my own brain…" (*Mathilda* 159). Here, Mathilda discovers a type of power only available to her through dreamscape, a place of authorial control that is internal and private, a relatively safe place where she cannot be rejected or criticized. With an audience of one, her uncensored imagination is never in danger of being misinterpreted or found repulsive. However, even in the privacy of her mind, this control is not total. Mathilda admits that one character regularly invades her private landscape: "[B]ut the idea of my unhappy, wandering father was the idol of my imagination. I bestowed on him all my affections…I copied his last letter and read it again and again" (159). Her devotion to this absent father seems compulsive and beyond her control. Her behavior demonstrates his power over her, even in his absence. Author of "Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* and the Struggle for Female Narrative Subjectivity" Melina Moore points out how the father's control creates restrictions on Mathilda's imagination: "Shelley creates a vivid image of a woman engaged in the act of writing, but…Mathilda's early acts of writing remain confined to the strokes of her father's pen; she copies the words of the father in her own hand, writing herself into being according to his own vision and centering her fantasies around his return" (210).

Shelley also felt the siren call of her male protector, despite distance and a fractured relationship. She, too, re-read her father's works again and again, and many critics (Christopher Small, Betty T. Bennett, Anne K. Mellor, et al.) note the similarities between Godwin's and Shelley's novels, particularly *Caleb Williams* (1794) and *Frankenstein*. In a letter written to Percy in 1817, Shelley questioned the origins of her loyalties to Godwin: "I know not whether it is early habit or affection but the idea of his silent quiet disapprobation makes me weep as it did in the days of my childhood" (*LMWS* I: 57). Both in fiction and real life, the father figures have immeasurable power and influence over their charges, and it takes as much strength to go against their will, a will that seems to speak for the public at large, and in many ways, as Megan Doolittle makes clear, the father's voice did just that:

> Throughout the nineteenth century in England, fathers stood at the
> symbolic centre of family, home and household, and of relationships
> between families and other social and political worlds. This position was
> not just symbolic, as fathers were invested with considerable power and
> authority, invisibly built into many social structures. (31)

Therefore it makes sense that, as in the case of Shelley's father, even in his absence, Mathilda's father would continue to exert considerable influence over her, to be magnified later by his physical presence. For Mathilda, however, her father's return features a change from fatherly affection to incestuous desire.

Given Shelley's anger at both the men in her life in 1819, some critics interpret *Mathilda* as an empowering female gothic novella. After all, the father commits suicide from the guilt of his longings, never having touched Mathilda, and she is left alone to

voice her story. Kathleen A. Miller takes this reading further, arguing that "although [Mathilda] appears to be a passive victim to her father's desire, her submissiveness is staged" (298). Miller ultimately concludes that *Mathilda* is analogous with other female gothic texts in the empowerment of women through their apparent victimization. Miller calls Mathilda's letter to Woodville a "liberating narrative" because in writing it, Mathilda is free to tell her story only after her father's death and the suitor's withdrawal (301). At this point, she controls not only the narrative, but the audience as well, an important factor to consider when it comes to female authorship.

While Melina Moore disagrees that Mathilda exerts control over her father's actions, she argues that by choosing her manner of death instead of dying in childbirth, Mathilda exerts more power than critics have previously claimed:

> As she writes in an eerie farewell to the reader: "This was the drama of my life which I have now depicted upon paper…I close my work; the last I shall *perform*" (245, emphasis added). It comes at the cost of her father's life as well as her own, and it is shaped by her need for the license her status as a victim permits, but Mathilda finally tells her own story uninterrupted, right down to its tragic conclusion. (214)

Both readings, however, are based on a false premise. There is no control in being either a victim or dead. The first is an absence of power and the second an absence of life. Even if Mathilda is hoping to escape the conventional deaths of the women before her, she would have chosen a different method of suicide from the one most preferred by women. As Janet Todd points out, "Socio-historical studies always consider gender in suicide. While men chose to hang or shoot themselves, women overwhelmingly chose drowning

or poison, a slower method leaving the body intact" (xxiv). Shelley, of course, would have been familiar with both methods of suicide preferred by women because Wollstonecraft had twice attempted to kill herself, first by laudanum overdose and then by drowning. The laudanum was also the choice of Fanny, Shelley's half-sister, when she committed suicide on October 9, 1816, during the time Shelley was writing *Frankenstein*. Given the personal history, it is doubtful that *Mathilda* is a narrative about empowering a female victim.

If anything, Mathilda lacks an audience when writing. Whereas in *Frankenstein*, Walton writes to his sister in London, a well-populated venue ripe with audience, Mathilda leaves a letter behind for the absent Woodville in her exile. The reader has no promise that he will even return to find the letter, and given the desolate location, there is little hope that anyone else may find it. Furthermore, Mathilda begins to explain her sad condition with the ultimate goal of her death in mind. It is only by chance that she takes ill and dies before she is able to kill herself. Thus, Todd is correct in observing that "the whole story is a kind of lengthy suicide note, addressed to the absent poet [Woodville] who will be left to contemplate her suffering and her grave" (xxiv).

While it is left unclear whether Mathilda's character had a voice or an audience, we do know that Shelley's voice was muted in writing the novella: *Mathilda* was never published in her lifetime. Hence, Shelley ultimately failed in her efforts to provide a public audience for it. Her failed attempt at publication compounded with her private failure to keep her son alive makes *Mathilda* an important text to study because it was within this window of Shelley's life that both her public and private worlds collapsed on one another. First she had failed in a mother's duty to protect. She probably could not

help but wonder had the family remained in England, her son might still be alive. Infant mortality rate had decreased continuously in the last hundred years. In London, for example, the proportion of burials to baptisms in children two to five was only at 8.7% from 1810-1819, much lower than that of children under the age of two (Razzell and Spence 273). Statistically speaking, given his age and class, William would have been far less likely to die in England. While a loss of this magnitude would have been hard on any mother, it was especially tragic for Shelley who had already lost two children; the first was born prematurely and the second died from a fever also while the family was traveling in Italy.

With her private life in shambles, Shelley needed a win in her public one; she needed an audience. She sent her finished manuscript to Godwin for publication. Unfortunately, there is no proof of any effort on Godwin's part to publish it. Todd is correct in stressing Godwin's hypocrisy: "He did not send the work for publication, although he had been quick to send her mother's equally shocking work about adultery, *Maria*, and he did not return the manuscript to his daughter despite repeated requests" (xvii). While surviving letters between Godwin and Shelley and Maria Gisborne and Shelley detail Shelley's efforts to get her manuscript back and Godwin's refusal, it is unclear if she ever knew her father's express feelings about the work.

Gisborne, who seemed to act as a mediator between Godwin and Shelley, wrote in her journal describing Godwin's reaction to *Mathilda*: "The subject he says is disgusting and detestable, and there ought to be, at least if [it] is ever published, a preface to prepare the minds of the readers, and to prevent them from being tormented by the apprehension from moment to moment of the fall of the heroine" (qtd. in Lowe-Evans 108). Similar to

Percy with *Frankenstein*, the male impulse is to prepare the reader for the female imagination through a preface that explains and excuses. Stephen Behrendt, author of "Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, and the Woman Writer's Fate," notes that this was common practice for women writers in the nineteenth century, "[a]nd if the woman author failed to make the expected apologies, others stood ready to do it for her" (139). The work would need to clear the first hurtle, however, and find a man willing to help get it published, a feat *Mathilda* was unable to achieve in the nineteenth century.

Frankenstein, on the other hand, is a subtler novel, full of ambiguities that have enthralled critics for almost two hundred years. Its vagueness and contradictions also make it a less controversial book. Yet it, too, has a disparity between author and audience. While *Mathilda* lacks an audience, *Frankenstein* initially lacks an author. Commonplace for women writers of the time, Shelley first published *Frankenstein* anonymously. There were clues, however, to the author's identity, as Pamela Clemit notes, "Mary Shelley advertised her primary intellectual allegiance in the dedication of the first edition, 'To William Godwin, Author of Political Justice, Caleb Williams, &c.' Reviewers, piqued by the absence of the author's name, were quick to draw parallels with Godwin's writings, but could not agree on the nature of those parallels" (26-27). Many, like today, assumed that a man wrote *Frankenstein*, some even naming Percy as the author.

Given that they were Shelley's role models, it is not surprising to find Godwin and Percy within the pages of *Frankenstein*. It was the product of years of expectations. Moreover, Christopher Small writes, "*Frankenstein* must have had something of the quality of a declaration, to the world in general, and to some persons in particular: in it,

her first serious literary undertaking, Mary was possibly as eager for her father's approval as [Percy's]–the hope of both combining with her own exacting internal standards to drive her on" (72). But if, as Small notes, "*Frankenstein* was the first public attempt to live up to [the expectations of a famous father and husband]," then *Mathilda* is something else altogether (72).

A Woman's Price

Where the readers receive mere suggestions at the intense ambivalence between the private and the public in *Frankenstein*, Shelley inundates *Mathilda* with the explicit problems of public expectations and their disastrous results, especially for the women involved. Mathilda begins her own history with the history of her father and mother. However, given the emphasis on the father's past, the mother is only a prop in the story. Mathilda takes three and a half pages to describe her father's account and his status as a well-liked, aristocratic, and well-educated Englishman (*Mathilda* 152-55). She makes it clear that he only "appeared careless of censure," but in actuality "never dared express an opinion or a feeling until he was assured that it would meet with the approbation of his companions" (153). The father's reputation is so important to him that he keeps his love of the mother, who is of a lower rank, a secret from his friends. His behavior is quite different from that of Alphonse Frankenstein, where, through him, Shelley hints at the strained importance of reputation, but never pursues it obsessively. In *Frankenstein*, the obsession revolves around Victor and his secret.

As for the mother, Diana, her history is given only a cursory paragraph. Any further mention of her is always in glowing terms amounting to worship, and she is often described in relation to her husband, regarding what she was to *him* or how she made *him*

a better man: "Diana had torn the veil which had before kept him in his boyhood….She was his monitress as he learned what were the true end of life" (154-55). Through her, the father gains in notoriety until he becomes "a distinguished member of society" (155). Far from tarnishing his reputation, she seems to improve it behind the scenes, a remarkable feat considering "they were never separate and seldom admitted a third to their society" (155). These two facts are at odds with one another, for how could the father garner the public's respect while spending most of his time with his wife in private?

While the mother's life is given little significance beyond what she can do for her husband, her death is delivered in a single line: "Fifteen months after their marriage I was born, and my mother died a few days after my birth," and once again, the focus shifts to how it affected the father (155). In life and death, the mother is treated as an object of the father's desire culminating in the abandonment of the baby girl: "[H]e would never see me," Mathilda writes, "but if, as a trial to awaken his sensibility, my aunt brought me into the room he would instantly rush out with every symptom of fury and distraction" (155). This scene, more than any other, is reminiscent of *Frankenstein*: Victor covers his eyes at the sight of his newly brought-to-life Monster and rushes out of the room. From this point on, eyes and flight will dominate Mathilda's journey and continue to resonate with the telling similarities between Shelley's two works.

When Mathilda is sixteen, her father returns to her. She has no animosity toward him for abandoning her, just joy and hope for the father-daughter relationship to come. She does not blame him at all, dismissing their time apart as "long years of apparent forgetfulness" (161). Almost immediately, the pair establish a recognizable pattern, and Mathilda begins unknowingly appropriating her mother's role. Just as her mother before

her, she goes everywhere with her father and admits, "It was a subject of regret to me whenever we were joined by a third person…" (163). Thus the child becomes the mother, even before the father begins to see her in this way, because the mother herself was never treated in any other way than as a child.

Mary Wollstonecraft understood the problems with women being treated "as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone" (73). This practice not only belittled women, relegating them to their husbands' property, but was also a dangerous practice for a woman writer to adopt. Children do not have audiences, they *are* the audience, operating much in the same way as the student-teacher relationship discussed in Chapter II. For school children, the teacher speaks and the students listen, acting as the attentive audience. If they are never allowed even the belief that they could be a contributing party, then to be expected to take on an audience would be a daunting task. At some level, Shelley must have understood the paradox: to act like a lady yet be treated as a child, while being expected to take on the unfeasible task of maintaining an authorial voice fraught with conviction. In *Mathilda*, she explores the pressures of being asked to be something beyond the impossible. Mellor further stresses the problems that flare from these convoluted expectations, the result being a path that never launches a woman forward: "Mary Shelley's *Mathilda* shows us that a culture in which women can play no role but that of daughter, even in their marriages, denies its females the capacity for meaningful growth, since a woman's future self–even her daughter–can only replicate her present self. Procreation thus gives life, not to the future, but only to the past" (200).

Hence, in drawing the parallels between the limited actions of mother and daughter, Shelley also spells out the early dangers of following in the footsteps of an

idolized mother. For different reasons, Godwin's behavior also changed when she met Percy and eloped, an action that was clearly in keeping with Wollstonecraft's beliefs. For Mathilda, the father's change in behavior also happens when she meets a potential suitor. Mathilda does not yet realize it, but her father understands his dislike for her suitor is out of jealousy and that his love is corrupt. From this point on, his loving nature turns cold and unyielding, and Mathilda is constantly confronted with her father's gaze: "I chanced to cast my eyes on my father and met his: for the first time the expression of those beloved eyes displeased me…" (*Mathilda* 165). A few pages later, Mathilda encounters the same unnerving stare: "[O]nly now and then fixing his deep and liquid eyes upon me; there was something strange and awful in his look that overcame me, and in spite of myself I wept" (167). She is watched and pursued, without her knowledge, and adjusts her behavior accordingly.

Nevertheless, Mathilda blames herself for pushing her father until he reveals his secret love for her. In a scene reminiscent of the De Lacey family's rebuke of the Monster as he clings to the blind father's knees, Mathilda describes her ambivalent reaction to her father's monstrous proclamation: "I tore my hair; I raved aloud; at one moment in pity for his sufferings I would have clasped my father in my arms; and then starting back with horror I spurned him with my foot; I felt as if stung by a serpent…" (173). Todd, too, notes the injustice in Mathilda's taking responsibility for her father's iniquities, as she is "forgetful of her father's initiating part and of his blighting act of desertion" (xxi). But the father leaves shortly after revealing his true feelings and commits suicide before Mathilda can get any more answers. As a result, both events only confirm her suspicion that she is the one who needs to be punished.

Left alone, she faces the public's inquiries with little understanding and a terrible secret. At first, she attempts to live among society, painfully aware of the pressures of the public's gaze:

> I must shrink before the eye of man lest he should read my father's guilt in my glazed eyes: I must be silent lest my faltering voice should betray unimagined horrors. Over the deep grave of my secret I must heap an impenetrable heap of false smiles and words: cunning frauds, treacherous laughter and a mixture of all light deceits would form a mist to blind others…. (*Mathilda* 185)

Mathilda cannot live in a world where every gesture and look must be manufactured for the public's benefit; therefore, she flees society in an effort to avoid its gaze altogether.

She fakes her death and goes to live in the country away from prying eyes. For the first time in many pages, she finds a semblance of peace and happiness in her solitude: "Not the wild, raving and most miserable Matilda but a youthful Hermitess dedicated to seclusion and whose bosom she must strive to keep free from all tumult and unholy despair—The fanciful nunlike dress that I had adopted…the solitude to which I was hereafter destined nursed gentle thoughts in my wounded heart" (188). In isolation, Mathilda begins to heal, but at great personal cost. From the words "nunlike dress" and "solitude," it is clear that she has given up the part of her that once tempted her father; her sexuality. While extreme, this reaction could be considered as penance for Mathilda's failed duty as a daughter. As Poovey explains, "[T]he very translation of sexual control into 'duty' is perfectly in keeping with the tenets of individualism: a woman's social contribution was, in essence, self-control, just as her primary antagonist was herself"

(27). In other words, both Mathilda's self-blame and punishment were well within the dominant ideology of the nineteenth century. Thus, by the time the young poet, Woodville, enters Mathilda's life, she has nothing left to give him but misery and death. While Shelley herself did not go to the extremes of complete isolation and sexual denial, at least within Percy's lifetime, there is something to be said about how she ends Mathilda's story. By having Mathilda die in the end, she seems to be agreeing with society's consensus that the woman should harbor all the blame. If this is the case, it makes Godwin's insistence of a male-authored preface unnecessary. The cautionary tale is close enough to an excuse to make her writing "appropriate" for a public audience. Furthermore, Mary Poovey expounds on this tendency of Shelley's that characterized her entire literary career:

> [S]he repeatedly bowed to the conventional prejudice against aggressive women by apologizing for or punishing her self-assertion: she claimed that her writing was always undertaken to please or profit someone else, she dreaded exposing her name or personal feelings to public scrutiny, and she subjected her ambitious characters to pain and loneliness. (115)

The impulse to make excuses for her intrusions into the public sphere was ingrained in her from birth, and emphasized by Godwin and Percy. The social pressures for women to harbor the guilt of others would only become more apparent through the 1831 revisions of *Frankenstein*, reinforcing the difficulties a woman writer faced when navigating the public sphere.

CHAPTER IV

Exploring Conventions through *Frankenstein* (1831), Later Letters,

and Mary Shelley's *Journal*

"How they would, each and all, abhor me, and hunt me from the world,
did they know my unhallowed acts and the crimes which had their source
in me!"

Victor Frankenstein, *Frankenstein* (1831)

In 1819 Mary Shelley failed to launch *Mathilda* into the public sphere. Her next

upset would come with her subsequent, though published, novel written before Percy's

death, *Valperga* (1823). Before publication, it was "extensively altered by Godwin" and

featured adultery and "outspoken blasphemy" (Poovey 146). Needless to say, it was met

with criticism: a reviewer of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* wrote, "It is impossible

to read without sorrow that any English lady should be capable of clothing thoughts in

such words" (qtd. in Poovey 146). The horror, greater than Frankenstein's Monster, was

that a woman could even think up such things let alone put them into print. Despite

Godwin's heavy editing, Shelley continued to challenge the double standards of her time.

But the death of Percy Shelley in 1822, wedged between the failure to publish

Mathilda and the success of the first stage adaptation of *Frankenstein* in 1823, spurred

Shelley into rethinking the few safeguards that print might provide. In Percy's death, she

lost her companion and audience, and she would, once again, have only her father's

guidance. In this context, Karbiener observes, "The thirty-something Mary Shelley who

revised *Frankenstein* was sadder, wiser, more emotionally protective, and less politically

radical than the teenager who wrote the original story" (xxix). One way or the other, the

death of her husband certainly left Shelley vulnerable to outside misfortune. While she

held her later novels in some regard, it is clear that she wrote them in order to support

herself and her son, Percy Florence Shelley, and not to forward any political agenda. This excuse of financial dependence did little, however, to appease her anxieties about putting herself forward, and unfortunately, the pressures of obligation seemed to supplant the pleasures of writing.

Nevertheless, she felt the old burden of honoring the dead through publication, a duty her father had instilled in her. However, she would do it on her own terms. For one, Percy Bysshe Shelley, unlike her mother, was the perfect subject for biography. While his radical philosophy was not always popular, his status as an aristocratic male made his access to the public sphere legitimate. Shelley hoped to further legitimatize Percy's life by republishing his works replete with annotations that explained and humanized him: "I confess I am desirous to give to the world his own explanations & comments on those opinions…allied to the purest sentiments with regard to true religious feeling, & charity towards his fellows" ("Fourteen New Letters by Mary Shelley" 52).

One way she went about accomplishing her goal was to employ patience. Her father had immediately gone about publishing *Memoirs* and *Maria* shortly after his wife's death, a move that impinged on Wollstonecraft's reputation and her surviving family's as well. Shelley, on the other hand, did not plan to evoke Percy's memory for her own fame, but to stoke his own. She was dead set against appropriating another's life for her own gain, as she made clear in a letter to John Cam Hobhouse in 1824 on the subject of a biography on Percy: "In times past when a man died the worms eat him, now in addition viler insects feed on his more precious memory, wounding the survivors by their remorseless calumnies" (*LMWS* I: 455-56). Her views would become only more cemented with time. For example, twenty-two years later, she would contend that "[i]n

modern society there is no injury so great as dragging private names and private life before the world" (*LMWS* II: 284). Shelley believed that with time she could find a way to herald Percy's work with little or no damage to his reputation or hers. Part of her conviction originated from the belief that his works were more deserving than her own; despite the fact that "[b]y 1831…the popularity of her novel had far exceeded that of her husband's works and had rivaled and in some quarters even surpassed that of Byron's" (Behrendt 147). These facts, however, did little to dissuade Shelley from her startling sense of inferiority as a woman writer and fear of the hydra that was public opinion.

In an 1829 letter to Edward John Trelawny, Shelley weighed the difficulties of honoring Percy against those of exposing herself to public scrutiny in the process, resulting in her ultimate decision to hold off publishing his biography:

> But even then I should be terrified at rouzing [sic] the slumbering voice of the public….I am alone in the world, have but the desire to wrap night and the obscurity of insignificance around me. This is weakness—but I cannot help it—to be in print—the subject of *men's* observations—of the bitter hard world's commentaries, to be attacked or defended!—this ill becomes one who knows how little she possesses worthy to attract attention—and whose chief merit—if it be one—is a love of that privacy which no woman can emerge from without regret—Shelley's life must be written—I hope one day to do it myself, but it must not be published now.
>
> (*LMWS* II: 72)

Shelley understood that the public would be far kinder to Percy even in death than they would be to her. Fame and glory were men's tools after all; the woman was allotted

infamy more often than not. When she did obtain a certain level of success, she would always be reminded how her female fame, always in second place, was inferior to male fame. For instance, upon learning that Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* and not her husband, one *Blackwood* reviewer wrote in 1823, "For a man it was excellent, but for a woman it is wonderful" (Mason 1120). Clearly, in the eyes of reviewers and readers, there were two separate standards for men and women, just as there were two separate spheres. For nineteenth-century women writers, the bar would always be lower when compared to what constituted a man's level of success.

While Shelley held off publishing Percy's essays and letters until their son was out of university and her father-in-law had passed away, she was vigilant in her efforts to collect Percy's letters from friends and family. Unfortunately, this proved troublesome, as critic Betty T. Bennett points out, "[L]etters had become a commodity, sold on the open market and in defiance of property rights….Mary Shelley and her son, Percy Florence Shelley, purchased family letters that came up for auction; on at least two occasions, several men used Percy Bysshe Shelley's and her own letters, legally her property, in attempts to extort money from her" (216). While a large part of her reasoning for collecting the letters was her future publications on Percy's life, there is little doubt that the notion of protecting the family's reputation was not far from her mind.

Furthermore, collecting Percy's letters had an added benefit; for once Shelley would control the narrative, and in doing so, would control what side of Percy the public would see. His eccentricities could be explained as misunderstandings and his religious peculiarities could be overturned. For instance, in an 1838 letter to Leigh Hunt, Shelley explained her reluctance to take out the incendiary passages of Percy Bysshe Shelley's

Queen Mab, "I don't like Atheism–nor does he *now*. Yet I hate mutilation…" (*LMWS* II: 304). In the end, she cut the passages to appease the publishing company, with whom she was then communicating directly. This access allowed her a power and a prestige that few women obtained in the nineteenth century. Despite this success, Shelley continued to defer to Percy's genius and promoted his name above her own. This pattern of Shelley has prompted Susan J. Wolfson in "Mary Shelley, Editor" to note:

> By 1838 Mary Shelley was convinced that "the greatest happiness of woman was to be the wife or mother of a distinguished man," and her editions announce this office: "*The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Edited by Mrs. Shelley*" reads the title page of each of the four volumes of 1839. In this linking of names, the affinity of privilege and privacy subtends a qualified editorial authority. (205)

This authority, however, came at great personal cost to Shelley's own identity. Editing Percy's works took up much of her time, energy, and emotions. She lost friends and acquaintances over who had the right to write about Percy's life, and she never remarried despite several proposals. Shelley remained true to her word when she told Trelawny in 1831, "Mary Shelley shall be written on my tomb…" (*LMWS* II: 139). It seems Percy was one of the few sources of pride she could admit to because the accomplishments were anchored in the preferred aristocratic male.

Revising the Past

After her youthful social experiment, when she lived on the fringes of society with Percy, ended in his death, Shelley began to question who was actually to blame for the couple's flagrant disregard for social norms. Beginning with her half-sister's suicide,

followed by the deaths of three of their four children, and culminating in Percy's untimely demise, death compacted death, seemingly from Shelley's breach of social contract in deciding to elope with a married man. Years later, Shelley would look back with regret on Percy's first wife, who committed suicide while pregnant with another man's child. In 1839, Shelley wrote, "Poor Harriet, to whose sad fate I attribute so many of my heavy sorrows, as the atonement claimed by fate for her death" (*JMS* 560). By this point, Shelley had outlived her husband, her father, and all her children except one. Yet the guilt from a twenty-three-year-old trespass haunted her like the ghosts of her dead loved ones. John A. Dussinger observes that "[g]uilt is a predominant reaction-formation in Western culture, to the extent of visiting the crimes of the parents on the children in the myth of Original Sin; the implication, as Freud argues, is that man conspires against his own nature and submits himself to relationships that compromise personal ambitions" (50). Shelley's guilt certainly appears to have tempered her own ambitions in her zeal to forward Percy's career over her own. Furthermore, his death seems to have solidified public opinion that wanton women eventually get their comeuppance. After the long line of family deaths, Percy's death would certainly have felt like a punishment. Her guilt is also, most likely, one source of the revisions of *Frankenstein* (1831).

If Shelley idealized the family in the 1818 text, she doubles her efforts in the third edition. Frankenstein's entire first chapter takes on a thick feeling of nostalgia, as Shelley writes in her newly minted Introduction, "I have an affection for [*Frankenstein*], for it was the offspring of happy days, when death and grief were but words which found no true echo in my heart" (9). Furthermore, no longer under the masculine gaze at home, Shelley shifts much of the blame from both Victor and his father to other sources. Of

Victor, Mellor notes, "In 1831 such choice is denied to him. He is the pawn of forces beyond his knowledge or control. Again and again, Mary Shelley reassigns human actions to chance or fate" (171).

While Victor admits that he "should not be altogether free from blame," these assurances fade away into a sea of fate (*Frankenstein* 1831: 49). Shelley removes some mention of Victor's guilt in the 1831 edition; for example, the scene in which a jailer observing Victor remarks, "He may be innocent of the murder, but he has certainly a bad conscience" (*Frankenstein* 1818: 154). Instead, far more commonly, Victor shifts the blame to others, most especially to forces outside of his control: "Such were the professor's words–rather let me say such the words of fate, enounced to destroy me" (*Frankenstein* 1831: 42). Without a doubt, Victor is indecisive about his guilt in the first edition. For example, about William's murder, Victor shifts his thinking from being "firmly convinced in my own mind that Justine, and indeed every human being, was guiltless of this murder" to "I, the true murderer, felt the never-dying worm alive in my bosom, which allowed of no hope or consolation" (*Frankenstein* 1818: 60, 68). Later in the novel, he will conclude, "I was guiltless, but I had indeed drawn down a horrible curse upon my head, as mortal as that of crime" (135). He is, however, much more consistent by the 1831 edition; readers are led to dismiss their worries, assured that he is not to blame, but is in fact an innocent victim in this whole endeavor: "Destiny was too potent, and her immutable laws had decreed my utter and terrible destruction" (*Frankenstein* 1831: 37).

Shelley reimages Victor as a victim in two ways in 1831. First, Walton's admiration for Victor now echoes Shelley's sentiments about her deceased husband.

Walton calls Victor a "divine wanderer" and wonders "what quality it is which he possesses that elevates him so immeasurably above any other person I ever knew" (25). Shelley combines the beatific and the tragic in Victor, making him a stand-in for the late Percy. Because he shares the qualities "that at once made [Percy] angelic & unfortunate," Shelley's grief will not allow her to cast any blame on Victor ("Fourteen New Letters" 48). So instead of perpetrator, he becomes the casualty of a monstrous heart, a heart that he himself created. This idealization is not so different from Shelley's fear that she treated Percy cruelly or unjustly in life. While there is no doubt that she loved Percy, their marriage was far from ideal; she had suspicions about his fidelity. At times, her jealousy and even her grief over their dead children led her to distance herself. Shelley was aware of this tendency, and in apostrophe, she wrote shortly after his death, "It is not true that this heart was cold to thee" (*JMS* 429-30).

Second, Victor's own descriptions of what the Monster's travesties have done to him paint a bleak picture of an unfortunate soul. After he has been imprisoned for the death of Clerval, Victor describes himself as "a shattered wreck–the shadow of a human being. My strength was gone. I was a mere skeleton; and fever night and day preyed upon my wasted frame" (*Frankenstein* 1831: 162). Not only is his physical form broken, but Shelley casts Victor into the role of object, as something or someone else consistently acts upon him. Here, a fever "prey[s]" upon him; elsewhere he is the object of fate: "Chance–or rather the evil influence, the Angel of Destruction, which asserted *omnipotent* sway over me from the moment I turned my *reluctant* steps from my father's door–led me first to M. Krempe, professor of natural philosophy" (40; emphasis added).

Seemingly against his will, Victor is helpless to alter the will of an all-powerful force bent on his ruin.

Victor's father, too, gets a pass in the revised *Frankenstein*. Alphonse gives up "all his public functions" so that he may devote all his time and energy to his family (29). With his withdrawing from public office, the space now seems more intimate and includes only the immediate family. Additionally, Victor's parents are careful to teach him "a lesson of patience, of charity, and of self-control" (29). While these were the tools any nineteenth-century woman would need to navigate English society, Shelley believed that these attributes should be practiced by every member of society, male and female alike: "I beleive [sic] we are sent here to educate ourselves & that self-denial & disappointment & self-controul [sic] are a part of our education…" (*JMS* 554). These words, written in 1839, seem to be speaking directly to the rash actions of her past and condemning them. For Shelley, the blame cannot fall on the parents because it is incumbent that we "educate ourselves," not rely on our parents to instill this discipline in us.

As such, little by little, Shelley draws the responsibility away from the men in her life and her novel and casts it on herself (as well as on her representation within *Frankenstein*), just as her female protagonist did in the unpublishable *Mathilda*. The impulse to protect the male characters from blame is so strong that Alphonse is no longer present for the iconic lightning bolt that destroys the oak tree. Instead, "a man of great research in natural philosophy" explains the nature of electricity and alters "the current of [Victor's] ideas" (*Frankenstein* 1831: 36). This change simultaneously removes Alphonse's responsibility for Victor's actions and once again paints Victor as the

unfortunate toy of fate, as there just happened to be an expert in natural philosophy present when the lightning desolates the tree.

The men are free to pursue their interests, whether public or private, and though unfortunate, they remain free of blame, but the women of *Frankenstein* meet a different fate. While Shelley removes the stain of incest from Elizabeth's relationship with Victor (Elizabeth is a rescued orphan, no longer Victor's cousin), Victor idealizes her more than ever before. She becomes a being of perfection, as far from an actual woman as she could possibly get. Interestingly enough, Shelley even changes Elizabeth's physical features so that she no longer resembles Shelley in the slightest. In the 1818 text, Elizabeth has hazel eyes, with no mention of hair color (20). But by 1831, Victor compares her to a celestial being on numerous occasions, with hair "the brightest living gold…her blue eyes cloudless" (30). Despite her angelic form and tempting beauty, or possibly because of it, Elizabeth is in danger of sharing in Shelley's uniquely woman's guilt.

Therefore, Shelley further mutes Elizabeth's voice–keeping her from drawing too much attention to herself by removing the two instances of Elizabeth's speaking out politically from the 1831 edition (*Frankenstein* 1818: 45, 67). This change strips Elizabeth of even a semblance of autonomy, and as Mellor notes, "Bound by the 'immutable laws of nature' and her dependence on the Frankenstein family, Elizabeth Lavenza has become a cypher, the woman as the silenced Other" (176). However, her silence does not buy her safety. Instead, she is even more the sacrificial lamb, this time to Shelley's past, innocence slain at a new location, "on the shores of Lake Como, the place where Mary and Percy Shelley had first sought a home when they returned to Italy in the spring of 1818" (Mellor 170). She too becomes a victim of the Monster's desire and

evidence of his ability to reach every corner of a person's life. While Elizabeth's silence and passivity free her from blame, they double the Monster's transgressions. He is singled out among the characters as the only character who refuses to accept his role in society, inferior and displaced. As such, his eloquence is an affront to polite society and is received with fear and mistrust, cementing his place as the horror in this tale.

Manufactured Horror

In the famous Introduction to the 1831 edition, Shelley describes her aspirations for the story from its early conception. She wanted a tale "which would speak to the mysterious fears of our nature and awaken thrilling horror–one to make the reader dread to look round, to curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart" (*Frankenstein* 1831: 7). As I outlined in Chapter II, she found the source of terror in the Monster's gaze. The violence was only the fulfillment of a promise for retribution, but his eyes instilled a fear from the moment they opened, which occurs for the first time not in the novel's creation scene, but in Shelley's 1816 dream, recorded in the Introduction: "[The student] sleeps; but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold, the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtains and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes. I opened mine in terror…still it haunted me" (9).

In her nightmare, Shelley recognizes that "[w]hat terrified [her] would terrify others"; therefore she draws on her own darkest fears of the male-dominated power to constantly monitor and correct female behavior (9). Shelley appropriates the fear and anxiety she feels as a woman in the public sphere, a woman whose every thought and action is weighed and judged by the looming public eye. Michel Foucault introduces this control mechanism in his book *Discipline and Punishment* (1975), where he writes of the

Panopticon: "The perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly. A central point would be both the source of light illuminating everything, and a locus of convergence for everything that must be known: a perfect eye that nothing would escape and a centre towards which all gazes would be turned" (173). While the gaze could not possibly be ubiquitous, those observed would have no way of knowing when they were being watched, and thus they would act as if they were being monitored at all times.

Shelley turns this reality for her and most women on the creator male, Victor, and with it, the horror of that gaze following him into his most private moments as the Monster proclaims, "I shall be with you on your wedding-night" (*Frankenstein* 1831: 149). This threat remains constant from edition to edition, as Shelley projects her fears onto the male characters in the guise of horror. This decision does not indicate, however, that the emotions evoked by the masculine gaze convey that the Monster is male. Too many notable critics (U.C. Knoeflmacher, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Mary Poovey, et al.) have pointed out the undeniable connections between Shelley and the Monster. Behrendt, for example, makes a particularly insightful comparison: "Battling the powerful forces that everywhere reminded her of her cultural and intellectual marginality and the impropriety of her artistic aspirations–forces that fed (and rewarded) timidity and submissiveness–the woman writer was very like Mary Shelley's Creature" (145).

With these similarities, it is not surprising that Shelley would identify most notably with the Monster. Within a corseted universe, the desire to throw out conventions and exalt in the feeling of being out of control would have been all too tempting, which

might explain why the Monster's section has the fewest revisions to it. While Shelley lifts some if not all of the blame from Victor and Alphonse, the Monster maintains his guilt throughout every edition:

> But now crime has degraded me beneath the meanest animal. No guilt, no mischief, no malignity, no misery, can be found comparable to mine. When I run over the frightful catalogue of my sins, I cannot believe I am the same creature whose thoughts were once filled with sublime and transcendent visions of the beauty and the majesty of goodness.
>
> (*Frankenstein* 1831: 195)

Replacing "deeds" with "sins" is the only change to this passage from the 1831 text. This small change in editing reoccurs throughout Shelley's revisions to the Monster's narrative. In other words, the Monster's offences are emphasized, while Victor's are either nullified or explained.

Retreat into the Private: *Journal* and Letters

In the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, Shelley mirrors the divergent responses to men in the public spotlight compared with the responses to women. The male's actions are most often excused or explained, while the female must always take the responsibility for any public or private misstep. Her life and name will be dragged through the mud for all to see. This unfortunate truth led Shelley to choose anonymity over any fame the public might offer her. The price was just too high otherwise. Like Mathilda and the Monster, Shelley withdrew from public view as much as she was able. When the chance came in 1828 for a biography to be written about Mary Shelley, she quickly turned it down: "As to a Memoir, as my sex has precluded all idea of my fulfilling public

employments, I do not see what the public have to do with me…there would be no greater (misfortune) annoyance than in any way to be brought out of my proper sphere of private obscurity" (*LMWS* II: 22). Shelley remained reluctant to hand over her life to public consumption. At the same time there is a note of inadequacy when she mentioned her "proper sphere." Even after she had earned the prestige to negotiate directly with publishers, received good reviews, and became notable enough to garner a biography, she could not escape the sense that she would never be good enough.

Encouraged from a young age, Shelley seems to have enjoyed her wild imagination, and there is no doubt that she had the intelligence and talent to write. Her parents' profession only doubled the impulse to put pen to paper, "reiterated" by Percy. But the spark was all her own. Critics such as Betty Bennett and James Carson have sought to defend Shelley's choices and shoot down the critics who have labeled her as merely "conventional," especially concerning her later life. I agree that "conventional" is the wrong word.

Shelley published not only novels and short stories but travelogues, essays, biographies, and anthologies. She was a well-educated woman struggling upstream against society's current. It would be impossible, however, for her to have ever completely escaped that struggle. Her twin desires to please and write did not always align. Both Godwin and Percy enforced the notion that she could and should write, but only with their help and approval. Consequently, she could never shrug off the criticism from her family or the public at large. More importantly, to please meant following a well-written script outside of her authorial control, coded in every word and gesture and to be compared against an idealized version of herself. To polite society, this idealized

Mary Shelley looked like Poovey's "Proper Lady" and to Percy's circle of poets she looked like Wollstonecraft, the unrestrained, more radical woman living on the fringes of society. Both were masks, constructs, built on the expectations of others; Judith Butler points out in *Gender Trouble*:

> That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the "integrity" of the subject. (222)

These performances became her reality just as much as the reality of Percy's death, and they repeatedly enforced her sense of inferiority as a natural consequence of her womanhood. In adhering to her mother's philosophy early in life, Shelley followed her heart, not social conventions, and with disastrous consequences. As a result, her life, both private and public, must have felt like one gaping wound.

She could only work to defend herself as much as possible, a rather unmanageable feat for a nineteenth-century woman lacking the protection of a man, i.e. a husband or father. Not surprisingly, Shelley fully understood this harsh reality. In an 1839 *Journal* entry she wrote specifically of an insulting letter from James Hogg but opened up the conversation to include a woman's place compared to a man's in general: "I cannot forgive any man that insults any woman–she cannot call him out–she disdains words of retort–she must suf endure–but it is never to be forgiven–not indeed cherished as matter

of enmity–that I never feel–but of caution to shield oneself from the like again" (561). True, Shelley's words express retreat and silence, but there is a resistance in them as well. On behalf not only of herself but of "any woman," she would not forgive, and she would brace herself against future vulnerabilities amid a world of much more powerful men.

Within this male-dominated society, however, Shelley's voice was subdued but not stamped out. At her lowest, she wished "that never my name might be mentioned in a world that oppresses me" (*LMWS* III: 101). Yet, in writing these words she understood the paradox being asked of her: to bare her soul in writing. Had she not been the daughter of two renowned writers, Shelley might have written, but the manner in which she went about it would have been much altered. She would either have never published at all or published under a pseudonym as some of her female contemporaries did, for she noted, "I have an invincible objection to seeing my name in print" (*LMWS* I: 455). Either option would have given her the freedom to explore her imagination and express her opinions in a safely contained manner and would have most certainly solved her problem of audience, the fear of misinterpretations and misunderstandings. Knoepflmacher points out an interesting connection to Shelley's parentage and her impetus to publish:

> When Godwin died in April 1836 at the age of eighty, Mary Shelley was at work on her last piece of fiction, *Faulkner* (1837), a novel about remorse and redemption. The fact that she wrote no more novels or stories in the fifteen years after his death can be attributed to a variety of reasons, among them, no doubt, her greater financial independence. Still, the fact remains intriguing. (119)

Shelley could write without Percy who seemed to act as audience and editor, but not without Godwin, who was clearly her censor. Seemingly, she could not trust her work before the public eye without first passing his approval.

By this time, Shelley could no longer trust her words and actions; her voice had been challenged too many times to speak with conviction on its own merits. She was never allowed to believe she could write well without a man's help, a fact Mellor notes: "Unfortunately, Mary shared Percy's opinion of her inferior literary abilities. Her deference to his superior mind was intrinsic to the dynamics of their marriage, a marriage in which the husband played the dominant role" (69). Thus, Shelley played the woman and sacrificed her ambition for his words, yet with her abilities, Shelley succeeded in her goal of garnering the respect and recognition she believed Percy deserved. Bennett writes that "biographers and critics agree that Mary Shelley's commitment to bring [Percy] Shelley the notice she believed his works merited was the single, major force that established Shelley's reputation as a poet during a period when he almost certainly would have faded from public view" (127). Despite her best efforts to the contrary, Shelley's name and reputation have endured as long as Percy's throughout history, and even surpassed his in the realm of popular culture. Ironically, her fame rose from the most radical time in her life when she first wrote *Frankenstein* as a teenager in exile. Arguably, Shelley's best work sprang from her fight to examine and untangle the divergent roles that society and her parents had laid out for her.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

In 1829, Mary Shelley wrote, "I fear publicity" (*LMWS* II: 94). Neither the first

nor last time she expressed such sentiments, Shelley's later letters and *Journal* reveal the

source of terror from her first novel. Doubtless, for Shelley, an already heavily

scrutinized woman writer, fame meant having more eyes turned her way. It also meant

the end of privacy, and for a woman, it meant the end of respectability, without which she

risked being ostracized and unable to publish. Marlon Ross emphasizes the precarious

position of a woman writer when he writes:

> The slightest misstep could damage or eliminate her chances of
>
> succeeding on the market, for her career is not only left to the whim of that
>
> fickle monster, the reading public; it is also left to the resolute discretion
>
> of fathers, brothers, male publishers, and male reviewers, who might
>
> censure or censor her the moment she appeared to them as monstrous, the
>
> moment she appeared to them as too palpable a manifestation of that
>
> monstrously capricious readership that has given birth to her. (232)

Within this patriarchal society, it is no wonder that Shelley felt more comfortable, more

in the right, in promoting Percy's career over her own, although, she went about even this

endeavor with careful consideration for her and her family's reputation. Godwin used his

dead spouse's life and writings to further his own cause, while Shelley legitimately

believed Percy's work was the more deserving of the two.

Even this cause, however, brought her some anxiety. She admitted in a letter to

Horace Smith in 1839, "I think you are quite right in not standing as a mark for the ill

nature of the world—or injuring your children—If I had a girl I should be more timid than I am—& and as it is I was willing to hold back in publishing much of Shelley's [letters] (not that I could before) till [Percy Florence's] character should develope [sic]" ("Fourteen New Letters" 53). Through this admission, she recognized that as an aristocratic male, Percy Florence's reputation could better weather any storm. For the nineteenth-century woman, on the other hand, the safest course was working in the background, maintaining appearances, and retreating from society when necessary.

Despite her reservations about the public sphere, she could not stop her "hideous progeny" from, indeed, "prosper[ing]" (*Frankenstein* 1831: 9). While in her lifetime the public wanted little to do with Shelley, Frankenstein and his monster nevertheless captured the public's imagination. Even without recognizing a woman writer as its source, then and now, men and women have evoked the name of Frankenstein for entertainment, as well as for political purposes. In the past, for example, "Political cartoonists used Shelley's monster as the representation of the 'pure evil' of Irish nationalists, labor reformers, and other favored subjects of controversy; it was often depicted as an oversize, rough-and-ready, weapon-wielding hooligan" (Karbiener xv). Today the name Frankenstein is just as likely to be erroneously used in the debate surrounding genetically modified foods as it is to be found in a political cartoon (Tait 185). Needless to say, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* permeates the public sphere and has been a handy metaphor for politicians and journalists since its first stage success in 1823.

While Shelley's Monster may often be misappropriated or misrepresented, her voice rides out the cultural currents in a way that far surpasses the voice of her husband, father, or mother. Unfortunately, when it comes to publishing today–nearly two-hundred

years after Shelley first wrote *Frankenstein*– a woman writer's talent is still often met with surprise. Naomi Alderman, author of "Wild West Video," writes about the subtle sexism that persists today. Women writers of the twenty-first century still struggle against the same forces that Shelley had to outmaneuver–forces that compared her to male authors, though on a different scale, all the while insisting that her voice alone could never be as influential as a man's: "[M]en don't buy books written by women. Newspapers too, the statistics tell us, review fewer novels by women. Novels by women are less likely to be called 'important,' women writers less likely to be thought of as essential voices" (Alderman 1). Thus in a time where women still struggle to break through subtle discriminations in the public sphere, especially publishing, Mary Shelley remains an important female voice although others, including she herself at times, attempted to suppress that voice, but ultimately failed.

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