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"I BECAME THE MAN WHOSE LIFE I READ": MARY SHELLEY, *FRANKENSTEIN*, AND LITERARY EDUCATION

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Introduction

Since the publication of the first edition of *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* in 1818, the novel, the character of Frankenstein, and Mary Shelley[1] have acquired an important place in literary history. In the 1831 edition of the novel Shelley tried to answer a question which was frequently addressed to her: "How I, then a young girl, came to think of and to dilate upon so very hideous an idea?"[2]. The aim of this thesis is to address this question, focusing on Shelley's life and her role as a reader, how her literary education enabled her to create the story of Victor Frankenstein and his Creature, and, most importantly, how it reflected on the main characters of the novel.

The full name of the author here discussed is Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley, a name which already shows us some of the notable connections that she had to important figures of the time. As Janet Todd argues: "more than most novels, *Frankenstein* seems to demand some biographical interpretation, owing to the extraordinary situation of Mary Shelley when she wrote it"[3]. At the same time, it seems difficult to understand where the biography ends and the novel starts because of the many direct and indirect connections between them, as we will see in the next chapters.

The primary sources used to analyze these connections are, firstly, her novel[4], and, secondly, Mary Shelley's journal[5]. In 1814 Percy Shelley and Mary Shelley, at the time still Wollstonecraft Godwin, eloped to France and decided to purchase a notebook that was to become their journal, in which they both would write their thoughts, and, most importantly for the purpose of this thesis, their reading lists. Thanks to this journal we are able to understand more about the pair's literary education after Shelley abandoned her father's house, and how these books and their authors shaped Mary Shelley's creativity and intellect. Additionally, the entries of this journal show how reading was an essential part of her life, it occupied her days during the period in which Percy and herself had to live separately because of his debts, during her multiples pregnancies that forced her to bed rest, but also during the happiest moments of her life, for example during the famous summer spent in Switzerland

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[1] To avoid confusion throughout this thesis the author of *Frankenstein* will be addressed with her married name – Shelley – and with both her name and her surname – Mary Shelley – when the latter can be confused with that of her husband Percy Shelley.

[2] M. Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*, Penguin, London, 2003, p. 5. Further page references to this edition will be given parenthetically, prefaced by *F*.

[3] J. Todd, "Frankenstein's Daughter: Mary Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft", *Women & Literature* 4 (1976): 18-27. In *Frankenstein: the Pennsylvania Electronic Edition*, ed. Stuart Curran, https://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/todd2.html

[4] Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus.*

[5] M. Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley: 1814-1844*, eds P. R. Feldman and D. Scott-Kilvert, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995.

with Percy, Lord Byron, doctor Polidori and her half-sister Claire. In this regard Gilbert and Gubar note that "for Shelley, the lines between real and literary life, the life of books and that of persons, must have been slippery. It was in books that Shelley explored her origins as a daughter and as a woman, and in books that she sustained and nurtured core relationships between herself, her parents, and her spouse"[6].

Consequently, *Frankenstein* is full of literary references, some of them incorporated directly and consciously in the novel, while others are more subtle. We can mention a few belonging to the first group: already in the first page we see a dedication to William Godwin, Mary Shelley's father, and the epigraph belonging to *Paradise Lost*; the subtitle refers to the myth of Prometheus; there are lines taken directly from Coleridge's *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner* and many more. As Botting argues, even the texts which appear or are cited and whose authors Shelley could not have known personally – such as John Milton or Goethe – are full of biographical importance because of the many re-readings that she pursued in the months prior to the writing of her first novel[7]. Therefore, "the distinctions between purely biographical and purely literary influence cannot be maintained in discussion of Frankenstein's many incorporations or allusions to other texts"[8]. However, despite all these influences:

> the book remains the product of Mary Shelley's own intuitive genius, even if biographical, literary and philosophical factors influencing her outlook were left indelibly 'fixed' in the story. It was her astonishing ability to synthetize these factors into a vital whole that makes the achievement so remarkable[9].

In conclusion, the aim of this thesis is to provide further details and evidence of Mary Shelley's role as a reader, and how this is replicated in the characters of *Frankenstein*, especially the Creature. To be able to do this, the first chapter will be dedicated to Shelley's early life and the influence that her parents – Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin – had on her and her education, and how their works evoke Shelley's novel. In the second chapter I will discuss her literary influences, starting from the works of the authors that appear on her reading list and who inspired her with their gothic novels like Charles Brockden Brown and Ann Radcliffe; in the next part I will introduce the Romantics, especially the contribution that her husband, Percy Shelley, may

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[6] Cit. in M. T. Sharp, "If It Be a Monster Birth: Reading and Literary Property in Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein"", *South Atlantic Review* 66 (2001): 79.

[7] F. Botting, *Making Monstrous: Frankenstein, Criticism, Theory*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1991, pp. 76-78.

[8] Botting, *Making Monstrous*, p. 78.

[9] M. Hindle, "Introduction" in M. Shelley *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*, Penguin Books, London, 2003, p. 13.

have had on the novel and the summer spent with Lord Byron; and, lastly, attention will be given to philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke, and how their ideas concerning education relate to the Creature. Chapter three will be fully dedicated to the myth of Prometheus, its origins with *Prometheus Bound*, the impact the story had on Shelley and why she chose to use it as a subtitle. Lastly, the fourth and final chapter will be devoted to the education, mainly literary, of the characters of *Frankenstein*, with a focus on the Creature and the books he finds and reads in the woods, but attention will also be given to Victor Frankenstein and his scientific education.

Chronology

1797: William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft marry on 29th March. Mary W. Godwin is born on 30th August; her mother dies ten days later.

1801: William Godwin and Mary Jane Clairmont marry on 21st December. Clairmont's son Charles and her daughter Jane, later called Claire, join young Mary and Fanny.

1812: Percy Bysshe Shelley, recently married to Harriet Westbrook, starts a correspondence with Godwin. He becomes a regular visitor to his house during Mary's absence.

1814: After a long stay with the Baxter family in Dundee, Mary returns home and starts a relationship with Percy Shelley. On 28th July they elope to the Continent, taking with them Claire Clairmont. They return to England in September. On 30th November Harriet Shelley gives birth to her second child.

1815: In February, Mary gives premature birth to a daughter who dies a few days later.

1816: In January, Mary gives birth to a son, William. The family, along with Claire, leave England for Geneva in May. They meet Byron and take up residence next to him at Montalègre. Mary begins to write *Frankenstein* in June. In July Mary and Percy visit and explore the Mer de Glace at Chamonix, a major inspiration for her novel. In September they return to England.

1816: On 9th October, Fanny commits suicide and two months later Harriet is found drowned. Mary and Percy marry in London on 30th December.

1817: On 14th May *Frankenstein* is completed. Mary gives birth to her daughter Clara in September. *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* is published in November.

1818: *Frankenstein* is published in January, anonymously. The whole family, and Claire, leave for Italy on March. Baby Clara dies in Venice.

1819: William dies in June. Mary gives birth to her son Percy in Florence, in November.

1821: They stay in Bagni di San Giuliano for the summer and in October move to Pisa, with Edward and Jane Williams and Lord Byron as near neighbours. Mary sends her novel *Valperga* to London for publication.

1822: In May, the Shelleys settle at Casa Magni, near Lerici, with the Williams. One month later, Mary almost dies from a miscarriage. In early July Percy and Edward sail to Leghorn to meet Leigh Hunt but are lost at sea in a storm.

1823: *Valperga* is published in February. The second edition of *Frankenstein* is published. In August Mary returns to London.

1824: Mary begins working on *The Last Man* in the spring. Byron dies in Greece.

1826: *The Last Man* is published in February.

1830: *Perkin Warbeck*, Mary's fourth novel, is published.

1835: In March *Lodore* is published.

1836: William Godwin dies on 7th April.

1837: *Falkner*, Mary's last novel is published.

1851: Mary dies on 1st February in London. She is buried between her mother and father in St. Peter's Churchyard, Bournemouth.

Chapter 1 – Early Life and Family Influence

One of the first observations that Mary Shelley makes in the Introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* is “It is not singular that, as the daughter of two persons of distinguished literary celebrity, I should very early in life have thought of writing” (*F* 5). This comment suggests that she was aware of the literary importance of her parents – Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin – and that they provided her with inspiration. As reported in her journal Shelley spent the years prior to the writing of her first novel reading and re-reading her parents’ works. Between 1814 and 1818 she read *Mary: a Fiction* (1788), *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796), *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798), *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (1794), *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), and *Posthumous Works* (1798), all written by her mother. On the other hand, from out her father’s works she read *Caleb Williams* (1794), *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), *St. Leon* (1799), *Essay on Sepulchres* (1809), *Life of Geoffrey Chaucer* (1804), *The Enquirer* (1797), *Fleetwood* (1805), and *Mandeville* (1817)[10].

In the next sections we will see that Mary Shelley had in mind some of her parents’ works when composing the tale of Victor Frankenstein and his Creature.

1.1 Mary Wollstonecraft

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759 – 1797) is considered as one of the first feminist writers, thanks to the publication, in 1792, of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*[11] which contributed to her success as an author. In this long essay she advocates for the rights of women, demanding social, political and educational equality with men, as well as equality in marriage and the custody of children[12]. Following her success, she moved to France and met her first lover Gilbert Imlay, with whom she had her first child Fanny; the relationship, however, did not end well as he grew tired of her and, as a result, she tried to commit suicide. After years of depression, she moved back to London and in 1796 she met the radical writer William Godwin. The two fell in love, put aside their ideas against marriage and a year later they married secretly. From this union, in 1797, was born Mary Godwin, but after a few days Wollstonecraft died due to labor complications, leaving her new-born infant and Fanny in

[10] Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley,* pp. 85-102.
[11] M. Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Strictures on Moral and Political Subjects,* ed. J. Bennett, 2017.
[12] R. Church, *Mary Shelley*, The Viking Press, New York, 1928, p. 20.

the hands of Godwin[13]. When the infant Mary grew up, she would spend her moments of solitude by her mother's grave while reading some of her works, as this was the only way to feel close to her.

The issues of education and social upbringing that Wollstonecraft had talked about in her writings had an influence on her daughter. One key issue of *Frankenstein* is clearly related to what is said in *A Vindication*, and that is the notion of the 'monstrous'. When the general public discovered, from Godwin's posthumous memoir of his late wife, that Mary Wollstonecraft had attempted suicide, she was soon considered a 'monstrous figure' and the result of an unorthodox lifestyle. She tried to defend her innovative theories from the attacks of her contemporaries by stating in her essay: "Everything new appears to them wrong; and not able to distinguish the possible from the monstrous, they fear when no fear should find a place, running from the light of reason, as if it were a firebrand; yet the limits of the possible have never been defined to stop the sturdy innovator's hand"[14]. As reported by Baldick[15], Mary Godwin related much to her mother while reading her work, as an unmarried mother herself, and, therefore, tried to sympathize with the category of the 'monstrous' and with social outcasts, so much so that they would find a major role in her novel *Frankenstein* in the character of the Creature.

In Wollstonecraft's essay we can find other issues that Mary Shelley inserted in her novel, and one of these concerns domestic affection. Wollstonecraft writes: "A great proportion of the misery that wanders, in hideous forms, around the world, is allowed to rise from the negligence of parents"[16], a quote that reminds us of the Creature who is instantly rejected by his creator/father and as a consequence of such negligence turns evil. On the other hand, Victor begins his downfall from the moment he alienates himself from his family and from domestic affection to reach his dream of scientific discovery. The Monster will complete his undoing by murdering his whole family and leaving him without any source of affection.

However, the main focus of *Vindication* is on the education of women, a topic which is also broached in Shelley's novel (even though the main characters are all men) through the brief descriptions of the education of female characters such as Elizabeth Lavenza, Victor's adopted sister. As Macdonald and Scherf[17] point out, the short account of Elizabeth's education recalls Wollstonecraft's ideas on the miseducation of women. Wollstonecraft writes that "In the education of

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[13] Church, *Mary Shelley*, pp. 22-23.
[14] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication,* p. 90.
[15] C. Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstruosity, and Nineteenth's Century Writing*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1987. In *Frankenstein: the Pennsylvania Electronic Edition*, ed. Stuart Curran, https://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/baldick3.html
[16] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication,* p. 92.
[17] D. L. Macdonald, K. Scherf, Introduction and appendix in M. Shelley *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*, Broadview Press., Peterborough, 2005, p. 16.

women, the cultivation of the understanding is always subordinate to the acquirement of some physical accomplishment”[18], and again, “In youth their faculties are not brought forward by emulation; and having no serious scientific study, if women have natural soundness of judgment, it is turned too soon on life and manners”[19]. This is echoed in what Victor describes in the first two chapters of his narrative, when he talks about Elizabeth contemplating the appearances of things with admiration and delight, without investigating their causes; and especially when, after their mother’s death, she had to supply her role for the younger children and, therefore, assumed the duties of a mother and wife (*F* 38-45).

Even more pronounced is *Frankenstein’*s resemblance to Wollstonecraft’s *Maria: or, the Wrongs of Woman*[20] (1798). When Wollstonecraft died, she was working on this novel which was left unfinished but with many notes on how the story was supposed to continue, making the job of finishing it easier for Godwin, who in 1798 published it. In this novel Maria, the protagonist and main narrator, recalls the injustices suffered in her life as a way to protect and warn her daughter of the dangers of a world full of evil[21]. Very similarly, in *Frankenstein*, Victor narrates his story to Captain Walton so as to warn him about the dangers of seeking knowledge. Consequently, we can describe these two stories as cautionary tales, aimed at informing about the consequences of wrong choices. Shelley probably had in mind the character of Jemima when creating her Monster, as there are many similarities between the two. Jemima is a prison matron who narrates the story of her life to Maria: born from a rejecting father and a mother who dies soon after giving birth to her, she is left alone to fend for herself[22]. As Todd[23] reports, Jemima has no choice but to behave like an adult, as she is put to work when just a baby, so she already “looked like a little old woman, or a hag shriveling into nothing” (*M* 34), just like the Creature of *Frankenstein* who is forced to fend for himself, abandoning his state as a “child”, whom he resembles by virtue of innocence. Additionally, both characters are orphans with a dead or non-existing mother and a father who rejects them, causing the beginning of their social discrimination. As Jemima says: “my father […] began to consider me as a curse entailed on him for his sins” (*M* 35), “I was despised from my birth” (*M* 37), and again, “I was described as a

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[18] Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication,* p. 15.
[19] *Ibidem*.
[20] M. Wollstonecraft, *Maria: or, the Wrongs of Woman*, Norton, New York, 1798. Further page references to this edition will be given parenthetically, prefaced by *M*.
[21] S. Bowerbank, “The Social Order vs the Wretch: Mary Shelley’s Contradictory-Mindedness in Frankenstein”, *ELH* 46 (1979): 418-431. In *Frankenstein: the Pennsylvania Electronic Edition*, ed. Stuart Curran, https://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/bower.html
[22] K. Hill-Miller, *“My Hideous Progeny”: Mary Shelley, William Godwin, and the Father-Daughter Relationship*, University of Delaware Press, Newark, 1995, p. 95.
[23] Todd, “Frankenstein’s Daughter”.

wretch" (*M* 36). These lines seem almost identical to those the Monster uses when describing himself: "I am solitary and abhorred" (*F* 133), and many times Victor uses the words "wretch" (*F* 59), "vile insect" (*F* 102), "fiend" (*F* 102) to express his disgust on his creation. Wollstonecraft explains that the reason for the sufferings inflicted on Jemima is her being a woman, and especially a motherless daughter, while Shelley decides to use physical appearance as the source of the wrongs suffered by the Creature. However, both characters suffer from not having a parental figure that protects or guides them. Jemima says, "I cannot help attributing the greater part of my misery, to the misfortune of having been thrown into the world without the grand support of life – a mother's affection" (*M* 37), while the Creature echoes her with the words: "But where were my friends and relations? No father had watched my infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses" (*F* 124), "But where was mine (Creator)? He had abandoned me" (*F* 134). Both Jemima and the Creature react to this issue in the same way, as they try to find some sort of family, a stepmother in the case of the female character, or an ideal family with the De Laceys in the case of the Creature, but in both cases their attempts end with more rejection.

Another similarity between *Frankenstein* and *Maria* regards the notion of literary education. Jemima lives for a couple of years with a gentleman who encourages her to read the books in his library and to have intellectual conversations with him, and this allows her to improve intellectually. After the death of this man, however, she is forced to return to the street and, as reported by Todd[24], the superiority that she acquired turns into a handicap, as it only serves as a reminder of the life she cannot have. In the same way, the Creature listens to the conversations of the De Lacey family and learns how to read, so when he finds the three books, which will be further discussed in chapter four, he is able to learn about geography, history, social institutions and the importance of a family, but all of this only serves to embitter him, as he is now conscious of being completely alone. As a result, they both turn to evil: Jemima steals from the drunkards who abuse her both physically and verbally, and convinces a man to get rid of the girl who lives in his house, who, as a consequence, commits suicide; at the same time, the Monster in *Frankenstein* begins his revenge on his creator by killing those close to him, leaving him completely alone. Throughout the novels, we are constantly reminded that it is social injustice that turns both individuals into social outcasts. Since they are not considered as fellow creatures, the only possibility for them is to become what people consider them to be: monstruous figures.

In conclusion, *Wrongs of Woman* and *Frankenstein* are novels "full of tyrannical fathers, dead or powerless mothers, and abandoned daughters/sons who become outcasts"[25]. Even though

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[24] *Ibidem*.
[25] Hill-Miller, *"My Hideous Progeny",* p. 96.

Wollstonecraft focuses her works on women and the injustices they have to endure, the fact that her daughter Mary decided to make the Creature a male "does not violate the spirit of Wollstonecraft, since it is clear […] that her arguments for women's rights and duties are for all humans and are a part of her commitment to a war against all forms of social tyranny"[26]. This makes the Creature a worthy descendant of Jemima.

1.2 William Godwin

William Godwin (1756-1836) was the seventh of thirteen children of John Godwin, a dissenting minister, and his wife Anne. Thanks to his father he started reading important works from a very young age and wished to become a minister, as he preached sermons in class and in his kitchen. In 1778 he set out to practice his vocation but in the course of few years his beliefs changed after reading works such as those of Rousseau, which convinced him to write for a living and start a career as an author[27]. From 1782 to 1784 he wrote three novels, political pamphlets, a work on education and critical reviews, but it is in 1791 that he began working on his most famous work: *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*[28], which was an immediate success, and still remains "the founding work of philosophical anarchism"[29]. Thanks to *Political Justice,* he associated himself with a wide range of writers such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Thomas Holcroft, and William Wordsworth and became an important figure in literary circles. In 1794 he published his most successful novel: *Things as They Are; or the Adventures of Caleb Williams*[30]. A year later he became acquainted with Mary Wollstonecraft, she became pregnant in 1796 and, despite their principles, they both decided to marry. However, Mary Wollstonecraft died a few days after giving birth to their first daughter, leaving Godwin distraught. He married a second time with Mary Jane Clairmont, a widow with two children. In the next years the success he encountered with his initial works dropped and he was met with a lot of criticism due to the increasing conservatorism that dominated the British political scene during the Napoleonic wars. As a consequence of this he and his wife decided to found a publishing house of

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[26] Bowerbank, "The Social Order vs the Wretch".
[27] M. Philp, "William Godwin", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, eds. Zalta, E., 2021. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/godwin/
[28] W. Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, G. G. and J. Robinson, London, 1793.
[29] Philp, "William Godwin".
[30] W. Godwin, *Things as They Are; or the Adventures of Caleb Williams*, B. Crosby, London, 1794. Further page references to this edition will be given parenthetically, prefaced by *CW*.

children's books and they opened an establishment for that purpose in Skinner Street, London[31]. After Wollstonecraft's death, Godwin's fortunes became rare and for the rest of his life he lived on the edge of ruin, surviving from the borrowings of his friends.

Godwin's relationship with his children and, in particular, with Mary Shelley was very peculiar. According to Powers[32], "the primary accomplishment he obviously hoped for in his relationship with the children was to make them feel loved and secure, to teach them to be industrious and responsible, to educate them, to inspire them with a concern for others and a positive attitude towards others, and to develop in them an inquiring mind". This is why Godwin supervised very carefully their reading. He thought education had to be less structured and formal, allowing children to approach learning with enthusiasm without forcing it on them. This meant that Fanny and Mary were educated in a less oppressive way than their contemporaries, and were freer to engage in adult activities, and to explore the country. As they grew up, they had access to Godwin's library and its wealth of knowledge[33]. Godwin's theories on the education of children, which he practiced on his own sons and daughters, can be summarized in the letter he sent to a friend:

> I make no difference between children male and female… I am most peremptorily of opinion against putting children extremely forward. If they desire it themselves, I would not baulk them, for I love to attend to these unsophisticated indications. But otherwise, Festina lente is my maxim in education. I think the worst consequences flow from overloading the faculties of children, and a forced maturity. We should always remember that the object of education is the future man or woman; and it is a miserable vanity that would sacrifice the wholesome and gradual development of the mind to the desire of exhibiting little monsters of curiosity. […] Without imagination there can be no genuine ardor in any pursuit, or for any acquisition, and without imagination there can be no genuine morality, no profound feeling of other men's sorrow, no ardent and persevering anxiety for their interests. […] I would undoubtedly introduce before twelve years of age some smattering of geography, history, and the other sciences; but it is the train of reading I have here mentioned which I should principally depend upon for generating an active mind and a warm heart[34].

Given the beliefs expressed in this letter, we cannot be surprised by the long list of books that Mary Shelley read and annotated in her journal. She clearly followed her father's ideals and theories regarding this issue and thought that books can shape one's education, something that she would investigate in her first novel.

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[31] Church, *Mary Shelley*, pp. 30.

[32] K. R. Powers, *The Influence of William Godwin on the Novels of Mary Shelley* [Doctoral Dissertation], University of Tennessee: Tennessee Research and Creative exchange, 1972, p. 18. https://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2982&context=utk_graddiss&httpsredir=1&referer=

[33] J. Dunn, *Moon in Eclipse: A Life of Mary Shelley*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1978, p. 21.

[34] C. K. Paul, *William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries*, *Vol. II*, Henry S. King & Co., London, 1876, pp. 118-120.

The relationship between Godwin's daughters and his second wife was very strained, as she was very unkind to both Mary and Fanny, and the younger daughter probably felt this marriage as pushing her away from her father, to whom she was very attached. Some critics see some kind of rivalry between Mary Shelley and Ms. Clairmont for the "dominant place in Godwin's affections"[35]. In this regard, Shelley herself declared in 1822 that, until she met Percy Shelley, her father "was [her] God" – and she admitted her childish "excess of attachment" for him[36]. Nevertheless, the father-daughter relationship took a turn for the worse when, in 1814, Mary Shelley met Percy Shelley, Godwin's disciple, and the two decided to elope in France the same year. This decision was met in a very hostile way by the Godwins: from that moment Mary and Percy were never welcomed again to her father's house, and communication between them was maintained via letters only because William Godwin continued to extort money from Percy. Since Godwin did not want to meet Shelley personally, various intermediaries were needed. However, Mary Shelley was to support and love her father for the rest of her and his life, showing her affection by naming her first son William and dedicating her first novel to him.

In the first page of the novel *Frankenstein* we read: "To William Godwin, author of *Political Justice, Caleb Williams*, &c.". Since the first edition of the novel was published anonymously, many readers at the time assumed that the writer was one of Godwin's disciples, probably Percy Shelley. Mary Shelley was not one of his disciples in the same sense, but she inherited some of his theories and was surely influenced by him. Moreover, as this was her first serious literary undertaking, she was probably eager for her father's support[37]. In the following paragraphs we will analyze how and in what way Godwin's works are reflected in his daughter's novel, starting from the ideas of *Political Justice* and focusing later on the story of *Caleb Williams*.

By writing *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) William Godwin tried to analyze and process the traditions, laws, and opinions that controlled men, and to awake the population of England to fight against the injustices of a system and a government which had remained unchanged for over a century. According to him, individuals allowed their institutions to become corrupt, so he advocated a philosophy dominated by reason that would allow men to become benevolent and just. As foundations of reason he saw knowledge and education, which would make individuals capable of not being misled by passion or emotion. This, he argued, would permit the real advancement of society[38]. Godwin's work became the most influential book of the 1790s among radicals like William

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[35] W. A. Walling, *Mary Shelley*, Twayne Publishers, New York, 1972, p.13.
[36] From an unpublished letter in Lord Abinger's collection, cited in Walling, *Mary Shelley*, p. 13.
[37] C. Small, *Ariel like a Harpy: Shelley, Mary and Frankenstein*, Victor Gollancz, London, 1972, p. 68.
[38] Powers, *The Influence of William Godwin,* p. 7.

Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Blake, and gave rise to a new form of political activism[39]. Of all her fathers' works, Mary Shelley probably engaged most with *Political Justice*, but opinions differ as to the nature of this engagement, some critics seeing it as influence, others as criticism[40]. Betty T. Bennett, in 1987, discovered several letters written by Mary Shelley to a relative, in which she mentions politics and how she did not share the radical views of her father[41]. According to Querino[42], Shelley used *Frankenstein* as a way to express, in a covert way, her political views and to warn radicals like her father and his disciples that their theories could have dire consequences. Just as the scientist Victor Frankenstein succeeded in his scientific enterprise, but produced terrible results, the radical poets who believed in revolution were blamed for the excesses of violence that were produced during the Reign of Terror. Indeed, in their need for social and political change poets and writers such as Godwin "had created a monster"[43], as the masses wanted freedom and equality and France found itself facing a period of tyranny and despotism. Shelley tried to distance herself from her father's ideas because she was not interested in revolution. In 1835 she reflected retrospectively:

> With regard to 'the good cause' – the cause of the advancement of freedom and knowledge, of the rights of women, &c. – I am not a person of opinions […] Some have a passion for reforming the world; others do not cling to particular opinions. That my parents and Shelley were of the former class makes me respect it […] I have argumentative powers; I see things pretty clearly, but cannot demonstrate them. Besides, I feel the counterarguments too strongly. I do not feel that I could say aught to support the cause efficiently[44].

Shelley uses her characters to warn about the dangers of ambition. Ambition is seen, primarily, in Victor Frankenstein: "my mind was filled with one thought, one conception, one purpose. So much has been done, […] more, far more, will I achieve: treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation" (*F* 49). This is similar to what Winwar[45] writes of Godwin: "The time would come, hailed Godwin, intoxicated with his dream of perfection, when there should be no ignorance, no inequality, no distinctions of sex, no death!". The two are "intoxicated by their quest to improve humanity through new theologies"[46]. In this sense Victor, in his attempt to generate life, echoes Godwin. As

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[39] M. Querino, "To William Godwin", *The Oswald Review: an International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Criticism in the Discipline of English* 6 (2004): 122-123.

[40] Macdonald and Scherf, Introduction and appendix in *Frankenstein,* p. 13.

[41] Querino, "To William Godwin", p. 103.

[42] *Ibidem*.

[43] *Ibidem*.

[44] Bowerbank, "The Social Order vs the Wretch".

[45] F. Winwar, *The Romantic Rebels*, Little, Brown, and Company, Boston, 1935, p. 4.

[46] Querino, "To William Godwin", 2004, p. 107.

Sterrenburg[47] points out, Godwin, in his *Political Justice*, looks forward to the coming of a new human race:

> The men… who exist when the earth shall refuse itself to a more extended population, will cease to propagate, for they will no longer have any motive, either of error or duty, to induce them. In addition to this they will perhaps be immortal. The whole will be a race of men, and not of children. Generation will not succeed generation, nor will truth have in a certain degree to recommence her career at the end of every thirty years. There will be no war, no crimes, no administration of justice as it is called, and no government[48].

Shelley reflects this utopia in Frankenstein's quest for the cause of generation and life: "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. […] I thought that if I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter, I might in process of time renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption" (*F* 54-55). Godwin's ideal world, which sees the salvation of men and the beginning of anarchism, seems to be reproduced by Shelley in "Victor's self-centered creation of a new Adam of 'gigantic stature'"[49].

One point where the novel seems to coincide with Godwin's ideas regards the death of Justine Moritz, the servant girl of the Frankensteins. When the Creature kills William, Victor's little brother, and thus commits his first murder, he decides "to work mischief" (*F* 145) and places a cameo with the picture of William's mother in Justine's lap while she is sleeping. This picture serves as evidence of her having killed William, so that Justine is arrested and sent to trial for this crime even if she is innocent. In *Political Justice* Godwin criticizes the institution of government, describing it as corrupt, manipulative, and treating people according to social class. Justine is tried and accused of a murder she did not commit, but instead of pleading innocent, she is forced to confesses her crime:

> I did confess; but I confessed a lie. I confessed, that I might obtain absolution; but now that falsehood lies heavier at my heart than all my other sins. The God of heaven forgive me! Ever since I was condemned, my confessor has besieged me; he threatened and menaced, until I almost began to think that I was the monster he said I was. He threatened excommunication and hell fire in my last moments if I continued obdurate. Dear lady, I had none to support me; all looked on me as a wretch doomed to ignominy and perdition. What could I do? In an evil hour I subscribed to a lie; and now only am I truly miserable. (F. 88)

[47] L. Sterrenburg, "Mary Shelley's Monster: Politics and Psyche in Frankenstein" in Levine, G., Knoepflmacher, U. C. (ed.) *The Endurance of "Frankenstein": Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1979, pp. 143-171. In *Frankenstein: the Pennsylvania Electronic Edition*, ed. Stuart Curran, https://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/sterren.html

[48] *Ibidem*.

[49] *Ibidem*.

In this paragraph we see how the confessor can be representative of the whole system, which manipulates people of lower social classes. As Miralles[50] argues, Justine "is used as an example to show that people do not have the ability to acquire justice themselves, as she represents the sufferings of injustice".

Upon completing *Political Justice*, in order to support himself financially, William Godwin turned to fiction as a way of expressing his ideas with a different genre. With *Things as they are; or the adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794), he gave his theory a living embodiment by expressing the oppressions that he detected in his time[51]. This is his most famous novel and a work which Shelley mentions in her dedication to him at the beginning of *Frankenstein*. As reported in her Journal, Shelley read the novel many times in her life: twice in 1814, again in 1816, the year in which she started writing *Frankenstein*, and later in 1820 and 1821[52]. Therefore, we can say that, as a political statement, but even more as a psychological drama, it surely had an effect on her, but to appreciate and analyze this achievement it is necessary to look at the novel in some detail.

Caleb, the first-person narrator, is an orphan of humble origins employed by Ferdinando Falkland as a squire. His master is a talented, benevolent and generous man who is very popular with the local society, very different from Tyrell, who is a selfish, tyrannical and uncultured aristocrat and is described as Falkland's antithesis. Their rivalry culminates with Tyrell's murder, for which Falkland is accused, tried, and discharged because he is a gentleman[53]. However, he is tormented by the remorse of having committed the crime for which two innocent men were hung. He becomes a stranger even to himself and more importantly to Caleb, who, noticing a change in the character of his master, starts to investigate. Curiosity gains the best of him, and he is able to find important evidence which allows him to draw a confession directly from Falkland that he indeed was the murderer. However, Falkland will not stop at anything to maintain his reputation as an honorable man and, therefore, Caleb becomes his prisoner[54]. A story of flight and pursuit now begins: Caleb tries to escape, is captured, and imprisoned and brought to trial, but is able to escape again, joins a band of thieves and tries to disguise himself for years, but Falkland's emissaries follow him everywhere. The novel reaches its climax when, after years on the run, Caleb decides to challenge his previous master in court, but he is not believed. However, Falkland decides to free him as a way of convincing him to not reveal his secret, but, again, he refuses. The pursuit continues, by now Falkland is a ghost of his

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[50] M. Miralles, "The Injustice of Justine", *Foundations of Literary Studies: Reading Frankenstein Two Hundred Years Later*, University of California, 2023. https://foundationsofliterarystudies.wordpress.com/2023/02/23/the-injustice-of-justine/

[51] Powers, *The Influence of William Godwin,* p. 9.

[52] Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley,* pp. 26, 37, 94, 323, 383.

[53] F. Botting, *Gothic*, Routledge, London, 1996, p. 61.

[54] Small, *Ariel like a Harpy,* p. 77.

former self, physically broken, and Caleb "is both a victim and a villain who, in destroying his previously idealized master, destroys himself"[55]. Caleb finally obtains another hearing with a magistrate, but upon seeing Falkland as a ruined man, he changes his mind and praises his qualities and honor as a gentleman, and finally asks for forgiveness. The master falls into the arms of his squire, repents, and dies three days later[56].

Before turning to the analysis of the main theme of pursuit of *Caleb Williams*, I will pay some attention to the description of the main characters of the novel, as to show how Shelley reflected some of these characteristics on Victor Frankenstein and his Creature.

Firstly, the narrator of Godwin's novel is Caleb, and his actions are what set into motion the whole story. In the first chapter he admits that:

> The spring of action which, perhaps more than any other, characterized the whole train of my life, was curiosity. It was this that gave me my mechanical turn; I was desirous of tracing the variety of effects which might be produced from given causes. It was this that made me a sort of natural philosopher; I could not rest till I had acquainted myself with the solutions that had been invented for the phenomena of the universe. (*CW* 22-23)

These few lines instantly remind us of the scientist Victor Frankenstein who, with his thirst for knowledge, wants to achieve the creation of life; as he tells Walton "You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did" (*F* 31). It is exactly this curiosity that is the cause, and the antecedent of the inevitable tragedy that characterizes both novels[57]. Secondly, the character of Victor also resembles that of Falkland, who belongs to the upper class and acts according to principles of honour and benevolence, as the narrator informs us "They knew him (Falkland) only by the benevolence of his actions, and the principles of inflexible integrity by which he was ordinarily guided; […] they regarded him upon the whole with veneration, as a being of a superior order" (*CW* 26). Victor is also moved to action by "benevolence" and seeks to discover the secrets of life as to "banish disease from the human frame" (*F* 42) and, thus, be useful to the whole community[58].

Furthermore, another aspect which links the characters of *Caleb Williams* to those of *Frankenstein* is the notion of corruption and power. According to Kiely[59], each of Godwin's characters is corrupted by an unregulated passion: Falkland is ruled by his excessive pride and honor, Tyrell's passion is his insane jealousy, and Caleb's undoing is his curiosity; none of these men are

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[55] Botting, *Gothic,* p. 62.

[56] R. Kiely, *The Romantic Novel in England*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1972, p. 87.

[57] A. D. Harvey, "Frankenstein and Caleb Williams", *Keats-Shelley Journal* 29 (1980): 21-27. In *Frankenstein: the Pennsylvania Electronic Edition*, ed. Stuart Curran, https://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/harvey.html

[58] Hill-Miller, *"My Hideous Progeny"*, p. 69.

[59] Kiely, *The Romantic Novel,* p. 87.

inherently bad, but, instead, they have been corrupted by their environment and by society. Falkland is seen as the villain of the story, but he is presented as a figure worthy of respect, caught however between how society views him and what his real impulses are. It is this that transforms him into the suffering being that we see at the end of the novel. On the other hand, Caleb is constantly persecuted by Falkland or his agents, making it very hard for him to find a living place, "Here I was, without comfort, without shelter, and without food" (*CW* 125); he is isolated from any human contact and, therefore, his sufferings grow even more[60]. As Hill-Miller[61] points out, throughout the novel Caleb criticizes society for letting someone like Falkland, who belongs to the upper class, exert his power over his innocent servants, and, towards the end, he blames society for the injustices that he had to endure:

> Pursued by a train of ill fortune, I could no longer consider myself as a member of society. I was a solitary being, cut off from the expectation of sympathy, kindness, and the good-will of mankind. […] I cursed the whole system of human existence. I said, "Here I am, an outcast, destined to perish with hunger and cold. All men desert me. All men hate me. I am driven with mortal threats from the sources of comfort and existence. Accursed world! That hates without a cause, that overwhelms innocence with calamities which ought to be spared even to guilt! Accursed world! Dead to every manly sympathy; with eyes of horn, and hearts of steel! Why do I consent to live any longer? Why do I seek to drag on an existence, which, if protracted, must be protracted amidst the lairs of these human tigers?" (*CW* 119, 125-126)

It is clear that since Falkland is a wealthy landowner, the social order supports his rights, depriving Caleb of a necessary component of human civilization: sympathy. He is cut off from the friendship of mankind and, thus, sympathy is extinguished, turning him into "a monster with whom the very earth groaned!" (*CW* 121). These lines instantly remind us of the Creature of Frankenstein, who is forced to face injustice after injustice at the hands of society. As he tells Victor, "I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend", and again "I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind?" (*F* 103, 147). The descent into violence and malignity of the Creature is provoked by causes similar to those of Caleb, but Shelley focuses more on the origins of this condition, which is the rejection of a father towards his creation. In other words, while Godwin blames the social system that lies behind Falkland as the source of Caleb's sufferings, Shelley focuses more on the role of the rejecting father, having the monster blame one single individual, instead of society as a whole. Clearly, society plays a role in the sufferings and injustices inflicted on the Creature, but his ugliness, which is the source of his ordeal, is the fault of Frankenstein as his maker, who decided to make him of "gigantic stature" (*F* 54). According to the Creature, Victor is to

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[60] Hill-Miller, *"My Hideous Progeny",* p. 70.
[61] *Ibidem*.

blame for his deformity as he exclaims "Accursed creator! Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust? God, in pity, made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid even from the very resemblance. Satan had his companions, fellow-devils, to admire and encourage him; but I am solitary and abhorred" (*F* 133). Moreover, his ugliness is certainly part of the reason for his becoming an outcast, but the main cause is the rejection of his creator: "I remembered Adam's supplication to his Creator. But where was mine? He had abandoned me, and in the bitterness of my heart I cursed him" (*F* 134).

As Hill-Miller highlights[62], Shelley cleverly rewrites a scene taken form *Caleb Williams* to emphasize the major role that a paternal figure might have on his "child". In this way she is able to direct the reader's sympathies towards the Creature's feelings and, to stress that the cause for his violence is, indeed, rejection. The scene in question refers to the one where Caleb, during one of his escapes, meets and befriends an old man, who accepts to listen with interest and attention to his tale. This old benevolent man agrees to help the narrator flee from his pursuers and to become his benefactor, as he abhors these sorts of people, and feels very sorry for the situation Caleb is in, but first he wants to know his name. Upon knowing that the man he has been talking to is, in fact, Caleb Williams, his reaction is one of horror, as Caleb tells us: "He was sorry that fortune had been so unpropitious to him, as for him to ever have set eyes upon me! I was a monster with whom the very earth groaned!" (*CW* 121). This reception clearly saddens Williams, "I was inexpressibly affected at the abhorrence this good and benevolent creature expressed against me" (*CW* 122). Shelley seems to have taken inspiration from this scene when she has the Creature seek the assistance of the old man De Lacey. Most of the Creature's tale involves him hiding in a hovel and spying from a chink in the wall the actions of the family that lives in the cottage next to him, enabling him, for the first time, to feel "sensations of a peculiar and overpowering nature" (F. 111). As the days pass he becomes more and more involved in the lives of the members of this family: he learns their names, helps them stock the wood, clears the path from the snow, all the time while hiding. He becomes so close to them that he views the old, blind man as a paternal figure to himself, capable of substituting the one who rejected him, "the silver hair and benevolent countenance of the aged cottager won my reverence", (*F* 110); he wants to be accepted by him because, after reading *Paradise Lost*[63], he understands that what differentiates him from Adam is the lack of a paternal figure: "[Adam] had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with and acquire knowledge from beings of a superior nature: but I was wretched, helpless, and alone" (*F* 132). So, in the months spent in hiding, the Creature puts together

[62] Hill-Miller, *"My Hideous Progeny",* p. 71.
[63] J. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. R. Vaughan, Collier, New York, 1890.

his plan of entering the cottage of the De Laceys without creating turmoil, with the aim of trying to win the affection and sympathy of the old man. However, when young Felix enters the house and faces him, all his hopes for human sympathy vanish. This is a turning point for the Creature. Unlike Caleb, who suffers from the rejection but is still able to run from his pursuers, the rejection of the De Laceys has him turn for the first time to violence as he desires the destruction of the whole family[64]:

> I could with pleasure have destroyed the cottage and its inhabitants, and have gutted myself with their shrieks and misery. […] My protectors had departed, and had broken the link that held to the world. For the first time the feelings of revenge and hatred filled my bosom, and I did not strive to control them; but allowing myself to be borne away by the stream, I bent my mind towards injury and death. (*F* 138, 140)

This reaction differs greatly from that of Caleb, as he does not change his behavior after the encounter with the old man. However, as stated earlier, Mary decides to make it the emotional center of *Frankenstein* and the cause for the destruction of both the Creature and his creator[65].

As we have just seen, Mary Shelley took many elements from her father's novel and rewrote them in her tale. Nevertheless, there is one theme that stands out more than others, and that regards the roles of pursuer and pursued. As both Hill-Miller[66] and Harvey[67] argue, Shelley does not copy the structural setting of *Caleb Williams*, but she reverses it. In *Caleb Williams*, Caleb is the rejected "son" who is followed by Falkland and his accomplices for most of the novel. It is his curiosity that starts a series of escapes from his pursuers through many "improbable incidents and unlikely coincidences"[68], but the roles of pursuer and pursued are interchangeable, since, at the end, Caleb tired of fleeing, decides to find Falkland and reveal his secret to a magistrate. On the other hand, in *Frankenstein* the role of the rejected "son" belongs to the Creature, but he is not the one being followed, on the contrary, he is the one who pursues his creator for most of the novel. Relying once again on the words of Hill-Miller[69], Shelley creates two cycles of pursuit in her novel. In the first one, which dominates most of the story, the Creature hunts Victor. Thanks to the letters he found in his coat, he is able to learn the name of his creator, where he lives, and his tracking begins. The two finally meet at the foot of a glacier where the Creature demands a female companion from Victor; from there the "son" follows his "father" across Europe, carefully watching each one of his steps, up until Victor decides to destroy the female monster. At this point, the Creature is more determined in his hunting, since he is resolute

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[64] Hill-Miller, *"My Hideous Progeny",* p. 73.
[65] *Ibidem*.
[66] Hill-Miller, *"My Hideous Progeny",* p. 74.
[67] Harvey, "Frankenstein and Caleb Williams".
[68] Powers, *The Influence of William Godwin,* p. 107.
[69] Hill-Miller, *"My Hideous Progeny",* p. 74-75.

in killing each and every one of Victor's connections. In this first cycle of pursuit, therefore, we have a reversal of the structure of *Caleb Williams*, since here it's the rejected "son" who pursues his "father" and not the contrary. In the second cycle of pursuit, Victor, now alone in the world, wants to vindicate his relations and himself and hunts the Creature, thus the scheme is now reversed. However, it is clear from the words of Victor that it's still the monster who controls the situation: "Sometimes the peasants, scared by this horrid apparition, informed me of his path; sometimes he himself (the Creature), who feared that if I lost all trace of him, I should despair and die, left some mark to guide me. […] Sometimes, when nature, overcome by hunger, sunk under the exhaustion, a repast was prepared for me in the desert, that restored and inspirited me" (*F* 207). In other words, even though Victor wants to find the Creature and kill him, it is the latter who informs him of his location, keeps him alive by giving him food, or lets him know to prepare some warm clothes for the journey (*F* 207-208).

Another way in which Shelley reveres her father's novel is through the role of the narrator. In *Caleb Williams* it is Caleb, the rejected "son", who narrates the story, while in *Frankenstein* the role of narrator is reserved to Victor, the rejecting "father", even though six of the chapters belong to the Creature's tale[70]. "The point is that Shelley rewrites her father's plot to give power and authority to the rejected social outcast"[71]. In both cases, however, the characters blight each other's lives, and regard themselves persecuted.

If *Caleb Williams* is certainly the novel from which Shelley took most of her inspiration, there is another novel written by her father which has a few elements worth noticing. Shelley seems to have been inspired by the protagonist of *St. Leon*[72] (1799), when she created the character of Victor Frankenstein. Both Frankenstein and Reginald, "blinded by a flaw in their early education"[73], seek the secret of immortality, or the "elixir vitae", and they obtain it. This leads St. Leon to conduct scientific experiments in secret, so as to avoid suspicion, just like Victor, when he distances himself from family and friends in his scientific "euphoria"[74]. And lastly, the "secret" that is shared by these two characters eventually leads to the total annihilation of all their human ties, as also St. Leon's wife dies from it.

Both novels deal with the issue of "secret knowledge". Reginald and Victor endure an inner transformation, but the knowledge that causes the change on the psyche of these characters is different. St. Leon discovers the art of alchemy, while Frankenstein pursues the "new science" of

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[70] Harvey, "Frankenstein and Caleb Williams".
[71] Hill-Miller, *"My Hideous Progeny",* p. 75.
[72] W. Godwin, *St. Leon*, ed. Pamela Clemit, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994.
[73] Hill-Miller, *"My Hideous Progeny",* p. 62.
[74] Powers, *The Influence of William Godwin,* p. 52.

natural philosophy, however the result is very similar, as they are both plagued by illicit knowledge[75]. By following the Alchemist Zampieri's order to not reveal the secret of the elixir of life, Reginald does not help his wife with her illness and condemns himself to become a wanderer as the secret cannot be entrusted to no one[76]. In this way, the character is willing to jeopardize the relationship with the reader in order to protect his knowledge. In the following paragraph he tries to defend himself by saying:

> Some readers will perhaps ask me why, anxious as I was for the life of Marguerite, and visible as was the decline of her health, I did not administer to her the elixir of immortality which was one of my peculiar endowments. Such readers I have only to remind, that the pivot upon which the history I am composing turns, is a mystery. If they will not accept of my communication upon my own terms, they must lay aside my book. I am engaged in relating the incidents of my life; I have no intention to furnish the remotest hint respecting the science of which I am the depositary. That science affords abundant reasons which the elixir in question might not, or rather could not, be imbibed by any other that an adept[77].

Similarly, Victor becomes a "divine wonderer" (*F* 30) and while he tells his story to Walton he does not want to share the secret of the generation of life.

> I see by your eagerness and the wonder and hope which your eyes express, my friend, that you expect to be informed of the secret with which I am acquainted; that cannot be: listen patiently until the end of my story, and you will easily perceive why I am reserved upon that subject. I will not lead you on, unguarded and ardent as I then was, to your destruction and infallible misery. Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow (*F* 54).

According to Sage[78], "For Godwin and for Mary Shelley Alchemy is an ambivalent metaphor: on the one hand, it represents revolutionary vision as a form of intervention in the world; and on the other, for the isolation of the subject, a glass prison, a form of knowledge which is ultimately incommunicable". Furthermore, Victor's and Reginald's secret condemns them to social isolation and the only way to free themselves from this condition is by confessing their knowledge or by acts of unselfish caring. This does not happen, as Victor refuses to reveal his secret even when Justine is

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[75] G. Maertz, "Family Resemblances: Intertextual Dialogue Between Father and Daughter Novelists in Godwin's St. Leon and Shelley's Frankenstein", *Studies in English, New Series* 11 (1993): 306.
[76] V. Sage, "Frankenstein's Education: Towards a Gothic Archaeology of the "[Mad] Scientist", in Machinal H. (ed.) *Le Savant Fou*, Rennes University Press, Rennes, 2013.
[77] Godwin, *St. Leon*, p. 214.
[78] Sage, "Frankenstein's Education".

condemned to death and Reginald does the same by keeping the reader in the dark. In the end, they are both isolated beings lead to their destruction[79].

I would like to conclude this chapter with the words of Maria Vohl[80], who stresses not the similarities between William Godwin and Mary Shelley's works, but the differences:

> Nevertheless (despite similarities) I do not hesitate to rank *Frankenstein* as artistically superior to all of Godwin's novels. *Frankenstein* is more than an imitation of Godwin. The entire tone is different. In *Caleb Williams* and in *St. Leon* we are always conscious of the cold, clear-headed, matter-of-fact author, constantly passing judgment and drawing conclusions, all the while displaying the linking of the occurrences to relentless Necessity. *Frankenstein*, on the other hand, is permeated with strong emotion.

[79] *Ibidem*.

[80] Walling, *Mary Shelley*, p. 50.

Chapter 2 – Romantic Intertextuality

Mary Shelley lived in what is now called the English Romantic period and became acquainted with many of the works and figures that shaped and defined such movement. From Rousseau to Coleridge, the Lambs, and to her husband Percy Shelley, from their friend Lord Byron to Keats and Leigh Hunt, all had an influence in her writing and reading.

Out of this vast range of literary knowledge, she selected and incorporated in her works a body of previous or contemporary literature[1]. Roland Barthes' definition of "text" well describes the outcome of this process as:

> a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture. […] His [the author's] only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them"[2].

The ensuing notion of intertextuality implies not only the writing, but also the reading process, through which many works are integrated, altered, and updated in a new text. It is clear from this that intertextuality is part of the process of literary construction[3].

Frankenstein is a perfect example of intertextuality, since Shelley alludes to – and reports exact quotations of – the works of authors she had come to know either in person or through their works. In this chapter I will analyze the influence of the works of many Romantic authors on her novel, while briefly situating them in the context of the Gothic genre.

2.1 The Gothic Strain

Since Shelley's *Frankenstein* is considered as "one of the greatest practitioners of the Gothic novel"[4], it is important to give some information about this literary genre so as to understand to what extent this, and the Romantic movement in general, played a role in her life and her novel.

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[1] K. Setoda, *Intertextuality Within Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, [Undergraduate Thesis], University of California, Los Angeles: Department of English, 2013.
https://escholarship.org/content/qt2s6478nm/qt2s6478nm_noSplash_568b74baf1c37428bb31bbbffa666d92.pdf?t=mrmn3v

[2] R. Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, translated by Howard, R., Hill and Wang, New York, 1986, p. 53.

[3] J. B. Donada, *"Spontaneous Overflow of Powerful Feelings": Romantic Imagery in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, [Undergraduate Thesis], Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, 2006, pp. 90-93.

[4] J. Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelists: from Aphra Behn to Jane Austen*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, p. 182.

The Gothic novel is a sub-genre that began to appear in England slightly before the Romantic period and it is agreed that its birth corresponds to the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764. However, scholars contend that some features of this genre appeared in literature long before this date, for example we can find gothic elements in Shakespeare's plays or even in *Beowulf*[5]. According to Botting[6], the Gothic as a literary genre was criticized throughout the eighteenth century for promoting excessive emotions and igniting unbridled passions. It was also perceived as undermining the manners and the attitudes that served as the foundation for appropriate social behaviour. Moreover, in depicting uncivilized characters, Gothic fiction seemed to promote vice and violence, "giving free reign to selfish ambitions and sexual desires beyond the prescriptions or law of familial duty"[7]. This genre plays with supernatural elements, ghosts, demons, evil figures, and monks, to which characters such as scientists, criminals and madmen were added in the nineteenth century, symbolizing transgression. Such elements excited emotions that went from pleasure to horror, and this is why critics feared that readers would be provoked into decline and corruption[8]. Botting[9] highlights how in the nineteenth century the Gothic underwent a change: psychological factors replaced and became more important than the supernatural ones. Individuals who broke the norm became intriguing subjects of examination through scientific and social practices. Gothic subjects found themselves estranged, divided from themselves, and without control over their feelings, wants, and dreams, and thus, they became products of both reason and desire. Excess came from the inside out, from pathological, underlying motivations that reason could not control. The lexicon and the subjects of fear and anxiety were provided for nineteenth-century Gothic writing by scientific theory and technological advancement, which were frequently employed as symbols of human alienation. In this sense, criminal behavior was explained by categorized forms of deviance and abnormality as a pathological recurrence of instinctive, animalistic behaviors. Therefore, Gothic novels had less to do with feudalism and romanticism, and more with scientific discourses: mechanical laboratories, electrical instruments and chemical inventions became the new terrain where dark powers met, being now secular and animal rather than supernatural. Such characteristics instantly remind us of the "student of unhallowed arts" (*F* 9) who in his scientific laboratory creates a new human being.

If we look at the genesis of *Frankenstein,* we can perceive that the events that shaped the idea of the novel fully belong to the Gothic climate. In the Introduction to the 1831 edition of the novel

[5] Donada, *"Spontaneous Overflow of Powerful Feelings"*, p.49.
[6] Botting, *Gothic*, p.3.
[7] *Ibidem*.
[8] Botting, *Gothic,* p. 4.
[9] Botting, *Gothic*, p. 8.

Shelley gives a detailed account of the circumstances that led her to the creation of her story. In 1816 Percy, her half-sister Claire, and herself spent the summer on the lake of Geneva in the company of Lord Byron and his doctor William Polidori, who stayed at Villa Diodati, famous for having hosted in the past John Milton, a very important figure for Romantic writers. When the weather allowed it, they would spend their days on the lake surrounded by the beautiful scenery of the Alps. However, that summer proved to be very wet and stormy, hence their evenings confined in the Villa[10]. It is during one of these evenings that the Gothic entered their minds. They amused themselves with some German stories found in the volume *Fantasmagoriana*, and read about ghosts, sinners, and death. Years later Mary Shelley would say "I have not seen these stories since then; but their incidents are as fresh in my mind as if I had read them yesterday" (*F* 7), proving the notable impact they had on her. "We will each write a ghost story" are the words announced by Byron, which would change Mary Shelley's life. They all started working on their stories but Mary Sheelley was having difficulties in finding the subject; it was something that occupied her mind for the rest of the night as she wanted to write "[a story] which would speak to the mysterious fears of our nature and awaken thrilling horror – one to make the reader dread to look around, to curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart" (*F* 8). The ghost story was still in everyone's mind when one night Percy and Lord Byron started discussing the nature of the principle of life, and whether it would be possible to discover it. Mary Shelley did not participate in these conversations, she listened silently but very carefully to their talk of the experiments of Dr. Erasmus Darwin, of galvanism and of the idea of manufacturing a creature by bringing together parts of his body and animate it with vital warmth. That night she had a very vivid dream which she describes in detail in her Introduction:

> I saw – with shut eyes, but acute mental vision – I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half-vital motion. Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavor to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handywork, horror-stricken. He would hope that, left to itself, the slight spark of life which he had communicated would fade; that this thing, which had received such imperfect animation would subside into dead matter; and he might sleep in the belief that the silence of the grave would quench forever the transient existence of the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life. He sleeps; but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold, the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtain and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes.
> I opened mine in terror. The idea so possessed my mind, that a thrill of fear ran through me, and I wished to exchange the ghastly image of my fancy for the realities around. I see them still; the very room, the dark parquet, the closed shutters, with the moonlight

[10] Dunn, *Moon in Eclipse*, pp. 127-128.

> struggling through, and the sense I had that the glassy lake and white high Alps were beyond. I could not so easily get rid of my hideous phantom; still it haunted me. (*F* 8-9)

And so, the next day she decided to let her dream be the subject of her story, and on that June day of 1816 *Frankenstein* was born.

Aside from the specific events that contributed to the creation of her first novel, between 1814 and 1816 Shelley recorded in her journal her readings of several Gothic novels, such as *The Monk* by Matthew Gregory Lewis, *Edgar Huntly*, *Jane Talbot*, and *Wieland* by Charles Brockden Brown, *Vathek* by William Beckford, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian* by Ann Radcliffe, *Castle Rackrent* by Maria Edgeworth, to name a few[11]. From this it is clear that such works had an influence on her writing and on her approach towards this genre.

In his essay on the Gothic, Hume[12] argues that even though authors such as Ann Radcliffe or Horace Walpole influenced the writing of Shelley, her way of writing was more similar to William Beckford's and Mathew Lewis'. While the former were able to create terror in the reader using suspense and dread (Terror-Gothic), the latter captured the readers' attention by addressing situations and events that shocked them (Horror-Gothic). The difference lies in the change discussed above concerning the appearance of the psychological factor in the stories, which involves the audience more. In this shift the notions of good and evil are unclear and confused, thus we read of villain-heroes such as Victor Frankenstein, a morally ambiguous character of remarkable abilities who turns to evil purposes to satisfy his ego.

In the list of Shelley's Gothic readings, the name of Charles Brockden Brown appears a few times. He was an American writer who played an important role in the Godwin household as he was deeply affected by William Godwin's works and aspired to become a disciple or at least an imitator of him. His Gothic novels follow the same pattern used in *Frankenstein* of avoiding the supernatural element and explaining unusual occurrences as part of the mysteries of nature[13]. The impact of Brown on Shelley is visible both in the general form of *Frankenstein*, and in particular incidents and phrases. Small[14] goes into detail about the similarities between Brockden Brown's works and Shelley's novel, citing, for example, the passage in *Edgar Huntly* (1799) where Clithero laments the consequence of his actions and says "the demon that controlled me at first is still in the fruition of power; I am entangled in his fold and every effort that I make to escape only involves me in deeper ruins"[15] – a passage that may have contributed to shaping the reaction of Frankenstein to his creation. However,

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[11] Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley,* pp. 85-96.
[12] R. D. Hume, "Gothic versus Romantic: a Revaluation of the Gothic Novel", *PMLA* 84 (1969): 285.
[13] Small, *Ariel like Harpy*, p. 91.
[14] Small, *Ariel like Harpy*, p. 97.
[15] C. B. Brown, *Edgar Huntley; or, Memoirs of a Sleep-walker*, M. Polock, Philadelphia, 1857, p. 33.

there are more similarities with another work of Brown, *Wieland* (1798). It seems that Shelley took inspiration in describing the creature's appearance from Carwin, the villain of Brown's novel, as "his form was ungainly and disproportioned"[16] and "his cheeks were pallid and lank, his eyes sunken, his forehead overshadowed by coarse straggling hairs, his teeth large and irregular, though sound and brilliantly white, and his chin discolored by a tetter. His skin was of coarse grain and shallow hue. Every feature was wide of beauty"[17]. These words might as well have been uttered by Frankenstein when describing the appearance of his creation. Moreover, another trait shared by both characters regards their eloquence. In the passage where Clara, the narrator of *Wieland*, describes the words of Carwin, which she hears for the first time, she says "They were articulated with a distinctness that was unexampled in my experience. […] The voice was not only mellifluous and clear, but the emphasis was so just, and the modulation so impassioned, that it seemed as if a heart of stone could not fail of being moved by it"[18]. Eloquence and rhetoric are fundamental qualities of the Creature, which make him even more dangerous to the eyes of Victor and Walton as they feel compelled to listen to him and believe him innocent. After hearing the tale of the Creature, Victor says "His words had a strange effect upon me. I compassionated him and sometimes felt a wish to console him" (*F* 149). Similarly, Walton feels compassion when listening to his words: "I was at first touched by the expressions of his misery; yet, when I called to mind what Frankenstein had said of his powers of eloquence and persuasion, and when I again cast my eyes on the lifeless form of my friend, indignation was rekindled within me" (*F* 223). According to Small[19], aside from a few similarities, what Shelley took mostly from Brown was accepting what her imagination was capable of. Going even further than him, she was able to unite many strands into a single one, and "to give her creation a life outside and beyond herself in a way Brown never achieved or even approached"[20].

2.2 Varieties of Romanticism

We have discussed how the Gothic was something of a novelty in the literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, creating even a cultural transition. According to both Hume[21] and Donada[22], Gothic novels can be considered as forerunners of the Romantic movement in their concern with the discovery of passions, the rehabilitation of the extraordinary, the sublime, and the

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[16] C. B. Brown, *Wieland or the Transformation*, David Mckay Publisher, Philadelphia, 1887, p.70.
[17] Brown, *Wieland,* p. 73.
[18] Brown, *Wieland,* p. 72.
[19] Small, *Ariel like Harpy*, p. 99.
[20] *Ibidem*.
[21] Hume, "Gothic versus Romantic", p. 289.
[22] Donada, *"Spontaneous Overflow of Powerful Feelings",* p. 50.

involvement of the reader. *Frankenstein* uses Gothic conventions occasionally, bringing the novel into the sphere of Romanticism[23]. This is why in the following part of this chapter I will deal with *Frankenstein* as a Romantic construct rather than just a piece of Gothic literature. In other words, the Gothic traits that I have discussed so far are just one of its Romantic characteristics. Botting argues that the Introduction to the 1831 edition serves to "shift the significance of *Frankenstein* from a Gothic framework to one imbued with concerns that would come under the general heading of 'Romanticism'"[24]. Sunstein[25] regards Mary Shelley as a Romantic by definition and birthright. She argues that Wollstonecraft and Godwin played a major role in influencing the emerging Romantic sensibility, and Shelley was a key figure in the "second generation" and last bloom of the Movement, along with her husband Percy Shelley, John Keats and Lord Byron. Her idea of romance as something above and beyond normalcy encapsulates what Romanticism meant to many of her contemporaries during its heyday. Romanticism encompassed a number of essential meanings that have long since been lost or trivialized, including intensity – not just in love or sex, but in all the passions – expressiveness, imagination, risk-taking, exploration, glory, and exoticism[26].

2.2.1 Romantic anti-heroes

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the co-author of the *Lyrical Ballads*, wrote in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817)

> my endeavors should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith[27].

Coleridge's description of his task highlights how well *Frankenstein* relates and is connected to the tradition of Romanticism he embodies.

Schug[28] affirms that *Frankenstein* should be first analyzed through its most noticeable feature: the narrative structure. *Frankenstein* contains a series of frames: starting from the first frame we have the narration of Captain Walton who, with a series of letters, writes to his sister about his voyage to

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[23] Botting, *Gothic*, p. 66.
[24] Donada, *"Spontaneous Overflow of Powerful Feelings",* p. 41.
[25] E. Sunstein, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality*, Little Brown and Co., Boston, 1989, p. 3.
[26] *Ibidem*.
[27] S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1817, p. 207-208.
[28] C. Schug, "The Romantic Form of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein", *Studies in English Literature*, 17 (1977): 608.

the North Pole in search of glory and fame. His letters announce the rescue of Victor Frankenstein, who tells his story to Walton who then incorporates it in his letters. Here starts the narration of Victor which contains the story of yet another character, the Creature, who is abandoned and rejected by his creator. After the Creature shares his story for a few chapters, Victor regains the role of narrator, and the last chapters are dedicated once again to the letters of Walton. Even if we have a series of stories-within-stories, or as many like to describe it, Chinese boxes, most of what we read comes from Walton's transcription of two oral narratives. As highlighted by Schug, with this kind of narrative frame Shelley establishes "a sense of order, of logic, of rationality"[29]. Moreover, it seems that Shelley was influenced by Samuel Richardson, the founder of the novelistic structure, in framing the beginning and the end of the novel with the epistolary form[30]. Significantly, she records in her journal having read *Clarissa* (1747-8), Richardson's eight-volume novel, in 1815; in 1816 she read again its final volumes, along with other two works of the same author, *Pamela* (1741) and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1754)[31].

As seen earlier, Gothic traits are inherent in Romanticism and this is why the darker side of the Movement produced heroes in the Gothic prototype: outcasts, wanderers, rebels, isolated, who carry dark truths[32]. From this point of view we can argue that a writer like Lord Byron, who is often considered as "the most Romantic", possesses Gothic traits, strengthening the concept of ambivalence essential of the Movement. According to Botting[33] and Hume[34], heroes like Manfred, Cain and Childe Harold, and even Byron's own character represent the Gothic villain with their moral confusion and paradoxes. It seems likely that Mary Shelley was inspired by the persona of Byron and his characters during the summer spent together, explaining why Victor possesses some characteristics of the Byronic heroes, especially Manfred. In *Manfred* (1817) the protagonist of the poem is a man who lives in solitude, who feels superior to all other human beings but is unable to find peace. Driven by an unbearable guilt, he seeks and defies the powers of the natural and spiritual world in vain; his existence remains intolerable as his former lover is dead and lost. Firstly, we can notice how both Victor and Manfred believe themselves to be superior to other people and this arrogance is what leads them to their downfall. They both choose self-isolation: in the case of Victor his fascination with his scientific studies transforms him into an insensitive being and thus this obsession isolates him; Manfred, on the other hand, turns away from society because he feels superior and believes he has

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[29] Schug, "The Romantic Form of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein", p. 609.
[30] Hindle, M., Introduction in M. Shelley *Frankenstein,* p. 27.
[31] Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley,* p. 90, 96.
[32] Botting, *Gothic*, p. 63.
[33] *Ibidem*.
[34] Hume, "Gothic versus Romantic", p. 289.

obtained a level of knowledge that surpasses that of common men. In this way they cannot predict the consequences that their actions have on themselves, but most importantly on their beloved ones. Secondly, Victor and Manfred pursue some kind of achievement that is beyond the sphere of action of human beings. Manfred tries to erase his memory and succumb into oblivion but fails. As he confesses,

> And then I dived,
> In my lone wanderings, to the caves of death,
> Searching its cause in its effect; and drew
> From wither'd bones, and skulls, and heap's up dust,
> Conclusions most forbidden[35].

Victor, on the other hand, is able to accomplish his purpose of creating life, but has replaced and betrayed nature. As a consequence, the Creature becomes the embodiment of his punishment, who haunts him wherever he goes, similarly to the disembodied voice of Manfred. Both characters become desperate since they are incapable of undoing their actions and are powerless to control the consequences of their wrongdoings[36].

Manfred is just one of the many strange figures who appear in Romantic literature. In this context we meet symbolic and supernatural creatures such as William Blake's Tyger, Percy Shelley's Alastor, or John Keats' Belle Dame, or even human figures like Wordsworth's Old Soldier, Keats' Porphyro, or Coleridge's Ancient Mariner[37].

> ... An uncouth shape,
> Shown by a sudden turning of the road,
> […]
> He was of stature tall,
> A span above man's common measure, tall,
> Stiff, lank, and upright; a more meagre man
> Was never seen before by night or day.
> Long were his arms, pallid his hands; his mouth
> Looked ghastly in the moonlight.[38]

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[35] Lord Byron, *Manfred, a Dramatic Poem*, John Murray, London, 1817, p. 34.

[36] A. Green, "Frankenstein: Victor as a Byronic Hero (like Manfred) and Terror and Beauty Found in Nature", *British Romanticism at Georgia State University*, 2015. https://britishromanticism.wordpress.com/2015/02/08/frankenstein-victor-as-a-byronic-hero-like-manfred-and-terror-and-beauty-found-in-nature/

[37] L. J. Swingle, "Frankenstein's Monster and Its Romantic Relatives: Problems of Knowledge in English Romanticism", *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 16 (1973): 51-65. In *Frankenstein: the Pennsylvania Electronic Edition*, ed. Stuart Curran, https://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/swingle2.html

[38] W. Wordsworth, *The Prelude or Growth of a Poet's Mind*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1970, p. 64.

If we compare these lines taken from Wordsworth's *Prelude* in which he describes the encounter with his Old Soldier, we notice very strong similarities with the description of the Creature by Victor Frankenstein. In both cases we are introduced to characters who at first seem monstruous, but later prove to possess very human feelings, generating in the reader compassion and pity. The Old Soldier, Frankenstein, and the characters mentioned before all converge, despite their differences, in the figure of the Stranger. It is a figure who is external to human experience, who impacts the structure of universal human problems, values, and methods of thinking, and casts doubt on its validity and/or adequacy[39]. The Stranger, by questioning the mind's ability to know things, pushes the human intellect to either reject its accustomed structures or to accept a new vision of the world. The Romantics' fascination with this character can be explained by their desire to show the reader that reality is not what it seems and, more importantly, that it may be the opposite of what we think it is[40].

Belonging to the notion of the Stranger is Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, which is probably one of the most important of these Romantic influences. In a letter addressed to one of his friends Coleridge reflects on his childhood and, especially, on his early readings. He recalls having found the volume of *Arabian Nights' Entertainment* and reading it every time he had the chance. This book had such a profound impact on him that whenever he was in the dark he felt haunted by specters, and this is why his father decided to burn it once he discovered the effect it produced in him[41]. Such feelings of awe and terror were echoed in Shelley in 1806, when Coleridge himself visited the Godwin household and decided to recite his *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* in front of Mary and her sister Claire. The two girls were mesmerized by the poet's voice and the poem. Whether narrated by Coleridge or re-read throughout the years by Mary Shelley, it would have a lasting and powerful effect on her, so much so that it was cited in *Frankenstein*[42]. *The Rime* plays an important role in Shelley's novel, because of the many meanings it conveys. In the following paragraphs we will analyze the many links to the poem that appear in Shelley's novel.

Firstly, Coleridge believed that general benevolence was a necessary trait and thus professed love of the family which was supposed to be natural and inevitable[43]. By killing the albatross, the Ancient Mariner fails to achieve this universal quality which is the foundation of the whole poem. In the preface to the first edition of *Frankenstein* Percy Shelley writes that the author's main concern

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[39] Swingle, "Frankenstein's Monster and Its Romantic Relatives".
[40] *Ibidem*.
[41] S. T. Coleridge, *Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Coleridge, ed. E.H., Houghton, Mifflin and Co., Boston and New York, 1985, p. 12.
[42] Dunn, *Moon in Eclipse*, p. 27-28.
[43] M. Levy, "Discovery and the Domestic Affections in Coleridge and Shelley", *SEL Studies in English Literature* 44 (2004): 696.

was to “the exhibition of the amiableness of domestic affection, and the excellence pf universal virtue” (*F* 12), which is achieved in the novel through negative example, as the story shows the consequences of the disregard of domestic affections. Victor warns Walton about the dangers of pursuing fame and discovery instead of nurturing relationships:

> If the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections, and to destroy your taste for those simple pleasures in which no alloy can possibly mix, then that study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not befitting the human mind. If this rule were always observed; if no man allowed any pursuit whatsoever to interfere with the tranquility of his domestic affections, Greece had not been enslaved; Caesar would have spared his country; America would have been discovered more gradually; and the empires of Mexico and Peru had not been destroyed. (*F* 56)

Shelley explicitly shows the dangers of discovery as a threat to domestic affection, firstly with the character of Robert Walton who, like the Mariner, embarks to “the land of mist and snow”, but he assures that he “should kill no albatross” (*F* 21). Both Walton and Victor are aspiring discoverers, like the Ancient Mariner: the explorer hopes to be the first to find a passage through the North Pole, while the second hopes to be the first to discover the principle of life[44]. Coleridge argued that sympathetic identification is the main function of imagination, and therefore poetry, by allowing us to reflect on the sufferings of others, has the power to “domesticate with the heart”[45]. So, to limit the risks of the explorations of the unknown, both Shelley and Coleridge advocate “the cultivation of sympathetic identification both within and beyond the domestic sphere, urging the love of family, home, and even a gentle bird and deformed monster”[46]. Therefore, they assert that sympathy and kindness are the universal traits that can lessen the harm caused by the quest for knowledge.

Secondly, the whole theme of flight and pursuit that occupies great part of *Frankenstein* is introduced by a stanza taken from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*:

> Like one, on a lonesome road who,
> Doth walk in fear and dread,
> And, having once turned around, walks on,
> And turns no more his head;
> Because he knows a frightful fiend
> Doth close behind him tread[47]. (*F* 60)

[44] Levy, “Discovery and the Domestic Affections in Coleridge and Shelley”, p. 698.
[45] Levy, “Discovery and the Domestic Affections in Coleridge and Shelley”, p.707.
[46] *Ibidem*.
[47] S. T. Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Letteratura Universale Marsilio, Venezia, 2018, p. 84.

After the birth of his creature, Victor is so shaken that he feels the presence of the Creature still in the house, and these feelings of terror inspire him these verses, uttered by the Mariner after awakening from his dreamlike state. The whole purpose of Frankenstein's tale is to warn Walton about the dangers of new discoveries, which will only cause despair and bring "his own burdensome albatross"[48], in this way he hopes that the explorer will cease his own enterprise. Victor chooses to recite Coleridge's poem because he is in a situation very similar to the Mariner's: both characters act against nature. While the punishment for the Ancient Mariner is to live "under the curse of his consciousness of guilt"[49], Victor's torment is to live under the guilt of having created a creature who turned to crime because unable to bear his own solitude[50]. On the other hand, Frankenstein's creature differs from the Mariner. Once the Mariner blesses the water-snakes he progresses from his curse. Even though he cannot save himself, he, at least, can save others like the Wedding Guest by becoming a salutary warning. The Creature, instead, can win no release by telling his story, and therefore cannot help others, nor himself, "for he has no natural ground to which he can return"[51].

Thirdly, Shelley concludes her novel in a setting very similar to that of Coleridge's poem. As argued by Bloom[52], the Romantics returned very often to the imagery of the ocean, as water is a symbol for restoration and survival of consciousness, and both the Mariner and the three narrators of *Frankenstein* find themselves surrounded by water. Very striking is the reference to ice found at the end of the novel:

> Immense and rugged mountains of ice often barred up my passage, and I often heard the thunder of the ground sea, which threatened my destruction. But again the frost came, and made the paths of the sea secure. (*F* 210)

And again, "September 9th, the ice begun to move, and roarings like thunder were heard at distance, as the islands split and cracked in every direction" (*F* 218). These lines seem to be taken directly from *The Rime*, as the Mariner recites:

> And through the drifts and the snowy clifts
> Did send a dismal sheen:
> Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken-
> The ice was all between.
>
> The ice was here, the ice was there,

[48] M. Hindle, "Introduction" in M. Shelley *Frankenstein,* p. 37.
[49] H. Bloom, "Afterword" in M. Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*, Signet, New York, 1994, p. 219.
[50] *Ibidem*.
[51] Bloom, "Afterword" in M. Shelley, *Frankenstein,* p. 221.
[52] Bloom, "Afterword" in M. Shelley, *Frankenstein,* p. 222.

> The ice was all around:
> It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
> Like noises in a swound![53]

With these last comparisons we enter a very important context for the Romantics, which is nature. However, as highlighted by Donada[54], analyzing the notion of nature in a novel presents some difficulties, since most critics who studied this concept focused mainly eighteenth and nineteenth-century poetry. On the other hand, these critical studies can be relevant since the romantic poets wrote in the same artistic and philosophic framework in which Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*.

In English Romantic Literature, the term "nature" was commonly perceived as to refer both to the rural landscape, as opposed to the urban one, and to the environment of which man is an integral part. Connected to these settings is the notion of the sublime, which was associated with feelings of "grandeur and magnificence"[55]. The Alps, especially, with their rocky scenery, evoked strong feelings of amazement and horror in the spectator; their immense height produced a glimpse of infinity and of a terrifying power beyond human understanding. In this environment all kinds of fears could intensify "in a marvelous profusion of the supernatural and the ridiculous, the magical and the nightmarish, the fantastic and the absurd"[56]. Shelley uses it as a structural element which frames the whole narration, rather than just as mere background. Donada[57] analyzes how the different natural settings accompany each main sequence of the novel: as a frame for both the beginning and the end of the story we have the icy environment of the North Pole; inside the tale the rural scenes of Victor's childhood in Geneva; at the heart of the novel wild nature with its trees and woods.

> I write to you, encompassed by peril, and ignorant whether I am ever doomed to see again dear England, and the dearer friends that inhabit it. I am surrounded by mountains of ice, which admit of no escape, and threaten every moment to crush my vessel. (*F* 215)

These are some of Walton's last words, but they reflect the same thoughts and doubts that filled his mind at the beginning of the novel. His whole narrative is dominated by scenes of ice and desolation, and in this same environment the story starts and finishes and in this same atmosphere the two main characters – Victor and his Creature – appear for the first and last time[58].

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53 Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* p. 48.
54 Donada, *"Spontaneous Overflow of Powerful Feelings",* p.143.
55 Botting, *Gothic*, p. 2-3.
56 *Ibidem*.
57 Donada, *"Spontaneous Overflow of Powerful Feelings",* p. 149.
58 Donada, *"Spontaneous Overflow of Powerful Feelings",* p. 150.

It is important in this context to notice that every time the Creature appears and shows himself, nature reflects his brutality by showing itself as violent and threatening. For instance, the first time we are introduced to Victor's creation nature becomes hostile, Walton and his crew notice that they are surrounded by vast plains of ice and while they start to fear for their situation the figure of the monster appears out of the fog,

> Some of my comrades groaned, and my ow mind began to grow watchful with anxious thoughts, when a strange sight suddenly attracted our attention, and diverted our solicitude from our own situations. We perceived a low carriage, fixed on a sledge and drawn by dogs, pass on towards the north, at the distance of half a mile; a being which had the shape of a man, but apparently of gigantic stature, sat in the sledge, and guided the dogs. We watched the rapid progress of the traveler with our telescopes until he was lost among the distant inequalities of the ice. (*F* 25)

It seems that the clearing of the fog functions like the opening of the curtains in theater, to prepare the audience for a frightful element of nature[59]. Very similarly, when Victor sees the Creature for the first time since his birth, nature is again hostile. When he arrives in Geneva after his little brother's death, Victor is welcomed by a terrible storm and his feelings reflect those of nature as he perceives "a thousand nameless evils that made me tremble, although I was unable to define them" (*F* 76). As touched by the energetic force of the storm, Frankenstein addresses nature, and in particular his brother William. Once again, the natural forces respond with a flash of lighting that illuminates the figure of the Creature, thus revealing the real culprit.

> As I said these words, I perceived in the gloom a figure which stole from behind a clump of trees near me; I stood fixed, gazing intently; I could not be mistaken. A flash of lighting illuminated the object and discovered its shape plainly to me; its gigantic stature, and the deformity of its aspect, more hideous than belongs to humanity, instantly informed me that it was the wretch, the filthy daemon to whom I had given life. […] The figure passed me quickly and I lost it in the gloom. (*F* 77)

This extract, as well as the previous one, both show how nature contributes to revealing the Creature to other characters, and also serves to conceal it. In this way the Creature seems an integral part of nature and the natural forces seem to aid the monster escape from Victor. We can therefore assume that, contrary to the Creature's, Victor's relationship with nature is the opposite of harmonious. From the first chapter of Victor's narration we are introduced to his desire of "learning the hidden laws of nature" (*F* 38) and "discovering the cause of generation and life" (*F* 53). This craving for discovering nature's secrets and the subsequent creation of a human being is seen as a

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[59] Donada, *"Spontaneous Overflow of Powerful Feelings",* p. 151.

"violation of the laws of nature", and this is why he cannot live in harmony with it anymore[60]. Consequently, the Genevese environment which had always been so comforting to him up to the moment of the creation, has now become ambiguous, as much so that Victor feels mocked by it, as showed by the following sentences: "Dear Mountains! My own beautiful lake! How do you welcome your wanderer? Your summits are clear; the sky and lake are blue and placid. Is this to prognosticate peace, or to mock at my happiness?" (*F* 76). In *Frankenstein* the common view that nature is comforting and supports man is questioned. This dissent is clearly showed through the character of Henry Clerval, Victor's closest friend who is "a being formed in the very poetry of nature" (*F* 161). Henry is the example of a strong yet sensitive man who values friendship and puts on hold his own education to help his friend Victor with his illness. After the creation of the monster, to which Henry remains oblivious, he suggests that Frankenstein should take pleasure in the simpler things of life: the beauty of nature. In his narration Victor lets us know how Henry perceives nature, "The scenery of external nature, which others regard only with admiration, he loved with ardor" (*F* 161). In this regard Mary Shelley decides to quote a passage from Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* to illustrate better the character of Clerval and his relationship with nature:

> The sounding cataract
> Haunted him like a passion: the tall rock,
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
> Their colors and their forms, were then to him
> An appetite; a feeling, and a love,
> That had no need of a remoter charm,
> By thought supplied, or any interest
> Unborrow'd from the eye. (*F* 161)

Brooks[61] argues that these lines are used by Wordsworth to describe his immediate relation with nature, now lost to him but still present in his sister Dorothy. Clerval's relationship with nature is the same as that expressed by William Wordsworth in his poem; however, ironically Henry will succumb to the Creature in a setting that involves nature. When Victor wakes up in Ireland, he is confronted with the corpse of his friend Clerval thrown on shore by the waves: it is apparent here that nature did not protect Henry[62].

Returning to the character of Victor, as discussed earlier he goes from contemplating nature in his childhood days, to becoming a man of science who explores nature and consequently violates it. As a result, nature avenges itself and every time Victor summons the natural elements or its spirits,

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[60] Donada, *"Spontaneous Overflow of Powerful Feelings",* p. 153.
[61] Brooks, "Godlike Science/Unhallowed Arts", p. 601.
[62] *Ibidem*.

only monstrosity appears[63]. As Brooks points out, "it may be apparent that the call upon nature the Preserver – the moral support and guardian of man – produces instead the Destroyer, the monstruous, what Frankenstein calls "my own vampire""[64]. This concept of the active role of nature is very apparent in the passage where Victor ascends the mountain and reaches Mer de Glace. Once he arrives at the top he is awed by the view and the scenery, so much so that he invokes the spirits of nature: "Wandering spirits, if indeed ye wander, and do not rest in your narrow beds, allow me this faint happiness, or take me, as your companion, away from the joys of life" (*F* 101). Again, nature responds and does not grant him either happiness, or rest, as the Creature shows himself and his apparition, as well as his tale, are worse than death to Frankenstein. He is confronted with his sin against nature and his duty to take responsibility for it. In the Creature's narration we have a vivid example of the noble savage discussed by Rousseau, which will be analyzed in more detail later.

Once the Creature decides to destroy Victor and, most importantly, to kill everyone dear to him, his relationship with nature changes, and he too commits the crime of excess. As a consequence, he becomes unfit for the harmonious interaction with nature that he possessed up to that point. The Creature then realizes that "the labors I endured were no longer to be alleviated by the bright sun or gentle breezes of spring: all joy was but a mockery which insulted my desolate state and made me feel more plainly that I was not made for the enjoyment of pleasure" (*F* 143). From this point on the Creature, like his creator, chooses violence and the scenery returns to that of the beginning. However, Donada[65] highlights that the image of ice is different from the previous one, this time ice is in opposition to fire. The image of fire is alluded to other times throughout the novel. The most important one is when Victor is about to create his creature and infuses in him "a spark of being" (*F* 58), thus fire is here associated to the power of electricity. In the last scene the Creature, surrounded by ice, decides to die by fire. Thus, by using the same element which concurred in his birth, he closes a circle: the same element which gave him life is the same that terminates it[66]. "This last scene performs the reconciliation of the two images, […] and functions as a Romantic synthesis"[67].

Nonetheless, we do not see the scene where the Creature commits suicide, rather we are allowed only the image of him disappearing through the darkness, which is very similar to the way he appears for the first time in the novel.

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[63] Donada, *"Spontaneous Overflow of Powerful Feelings",* p. 155.
[64] Brooks, "Godlike Science/Unhallowed Arts", p. 601.
[65] Donada, *"Spontaneous Overflow of Powerful Feelings",* p. 165.
[66] Donada, *"Spontaneous Overflow of Powerful Feelings",* p. 166.
[67] *Ibidem*.

2.2.2 Percy Shelley: the dynamics of creature and creator

So far we have analyzed some of the most important influences that Mary Shelley had in the years prior to the writing of her first novel *Frankenstein*. However, one of the people who surely affected her writing, but most importantly, her life, was her husband Percy Bysshe Shelley. Many critics affirm that in her novel Mary Shelly expresses her criticism towards her father, as we have seen in the first chapter, but also of her husband's Romantic idealism[68]. In the next paragraphs we will discuss to what extent and how Percy Shelley played a role in the formation of the novel.

As Small[69] points out, the two people who were directly responsible for the writing of *Frankenstein* were Lord Byron and Percy Shelley. As we have seen it was Byron who proposed writing ghost stories, and it was a conversation between him and Percy about the principles of life which allowed Mary Shelley to conceive the subject for her story. However, Percy did not stop here: he encouraged her to develop her idea at greater length and provided her with the constant motivation that she needed. As Mary Shelley lets us know in her Introduction to the 1831 edition of the novel "I certainly did not owe the suggestion of one incident, nor scarcely of one train of feeling, to my husband, and yet but for his incitement it would never have taken the form in which it was presented to the world" (*F* 10). This is also because Percy helped her with the editing of the novel, as he added and corrected the style, grammar and spelling, as well as in finding a publisher. This editorial control is reflected in the characters of *Frankenstein*[70]. Victor exercises the final control over Walton's journal notes that give a detailed account of the scientist's story. As the Captain tells us:

> 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 conversation he held with is enemy. "Since you have preserved my narration," said he, "I would not that a mutilated one should go down to posterity". (*F* 213)

In 1818 *Frankenstein* was published anonymously and a few months after the publication Sir Walter Scott claimed that the author of the novel may have been Percy Bysshe Shelley, relying on Godwinian references that appear in the novel[71]. However, from Mary Shelley's journal we derive that the actual writing of *Frankenstein* was mainly done while Percy was distant from her, this is why

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[68] Hindle, "Introduction" in M. Shelley *Frankenstein,* p. 23.

[69] Small, *Ariel like a Harpy*, p. 100.

[70] A. K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, her Fiction, her Monsters*, Routledge, New York, 1989, p. 75.

[71] L. Suddaby, G. J., Ross, "Did Mary Shelley Write Frankenstein? A Stylometric Analysis", *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* 38 (2023): 750.

years later in a letter to Mary Shelley he addressed *Frankenstein* as "the fruits of my absence"[72]. Nevertheless, critics agree that even though he did not participate in the actual writing of the novel, he still had a major role since he provided the inspiration for the character of Victor Frankenstein[73].

First of all, the name Victor was the same that Percy took for himself on a number of occasions in his first years of a writer. For instance, the first volume of poems that he published with his sister was under the names of "Victor and Cazire", while the hero of another poem, *The Wandering Jew* (1810), produced in the same years, was Victorio. He would later abandon this name, but the term "victory" appears very frequently in all his poetry[74]. Secondly, Frankenstein is brought up with his adopted sister Elizabeth, with whom he has a very strong relationship that will result in marriage; at the same time, Percy had a favourite sister with the same name as his mother[75]. On the other hand, Victor's mild and benevolent father is the opposite of Percy's, who was a tyrannical paternal figure who tormented his son all his life. Regarding Victor's childhood and character, we have many passages in which we are described his restless mind and spirit, like the one in which he says, "My temper was sometimes violent, and my passions vehement; but by some law in my temperature they were turned not towards childish pursuits but to an eager desire to learn, and not to learn all things indiscriminately" (*F* 39). If we look at Thomas Jefferson Hogg's description of his friend Percy Shelley, we find very striking similarities to what Victor said about himself,

> From his earliest years, all his amusements and occupations were of a daring and, in one sense of the term, lawless nature. He delighted to exert his powers, not as a boy, but as a man. […] His understanding and the early development of imagination never permitted him to mingle in childish plays. […] But he was always actively employed; and although his endeavors were prosecuted with puerile precipitancy, yet his aim and thoughts were constantly directed to those great objects, which have employed the thoughts of the greatest among men[76].

Thirdly, Mary Shelley indicated Victor's affiliation with the radical ideas promoted by her husband in his poetry by sending him to the University of Ingolstadt. This city was famous for being the home of the Illuminati, a secret society founded in 1776 by Professor Adam Weishaupt, which advocated the downfall of established political and religious institutions, in order to achieve the perfection of humanity[77]. After reading Abbé Barruel's critique of the Illuminati in *Memoires pour servire à l'histoire du Jacobinisme* (1797), in 1814 Percy Shelley enthusiastically embraced

[72] Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley,* p. 224.
[73] Small, *Ariel like a Harpy*, p. 101.
[74] *Ibidem*.
[75] Mellor, *Mary Shelley*, p. 72.
[76] T. J. Hogg, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, George Routledge and Sons Limited, London, 1906, p. 38-39.
[77] Mellor, *Mary Shelley*, p. 73.

Weishaupt's objectives of releasing all people from the slavery imposed by "society, governments, the sciences, and false religion"[78].

The element which confirms, more than others, the similarities between Victor Frankenstein and Percy Shelley is their devotion to learn the secrets of heaven and earth. In Victor's case, the conversation he has with his father directs him to the study of magic and alchemy. Hogg in his biography of Percy Shelley gives plenty of information about his friend's interest in the occult:

> Amongst his other self-sought studies, he was passionately attached to the study of what used to be called the occult sciences, conjointly with that of the new wonders, which chemistry and natural philosophy have displayed to us. His pocket-money was spent in the purchase of books relative to these darling pursuits – of chemical apparatus and materials. The books consisted of treatises on magic and witchcraft, as well as those more modern ones detailing the miracles of electricity and galvanism. […] Field Place was the chief scene of his experiments. He there possessed an electrical machine, he contrived a galvanic battery, and amused himself by experiments, which might well excite delight and wonder in so ardent a mind.[79]

This interest in both magic and the natural sciences was surely brought up with Mary Shelley. When Frankenstein recollects that "whether it was the outward substance of things, or the inner spirit of nature and the mysterious soul of man that occupied me, still my enquiries were directed to the metaphysical, or in its highest sense, the physical secrets of the world" (F 39), it may have been Percy talking. His view on metaphysics as "the possible disclosure of the analyses of mind, and not of mere matter"[80] is put beside Victor's desire to penetrate both inner and outer secrets, the physical and the metaphysical. When Percy Shelley's interest in magic and the occult subsided, he became fully devoted to science[81], and we know that galvanism was one of the topics of conversation at Diodati between Percy Shelley, Lord Byron and Dr. Polidori, to which Mary Shelley was an ardent listener. Frankenstein's interest in electricity and galvanism is due to his having seen a beautiful oak being burned and destroyed by lighting during a thunderstorm. He lets us know that during the accident a "man of great research in natural philosophy" (*F* 42) was there and introduced him to the concept of galvanism. In other words, Frankenstein is not a true scientist any more than Percy Shelley was; rather, they both symbolize man's submission to the spirit of scientific investigation[82].

Both Frankenstein and Percy Shelley are enthralled with the notion that the principle of life can be discovered through what they view as nature's greatest mystery: death and decay[83]. In Mary

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[78] *Ibidem*.
[79] Hogg, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley,* p. 34-35, 39.
[80] Hogg, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley,* p. 51.
[81] Small, *Ariel like a Harpy*, p. 105.
[82] Small, *Ariel like a Harpy*, p. 112.
[83] Hindle, "Introduction" in M. Shelley *Frankenstein,* p. 26.

Shelley's novel Victor becomes interested in anatomy but, as he says, this is not enough, because "to examine the causes of life, we must first have recourse to death" (*F* 52). Therefore, he starts spending days in charnel-houses, vaults and churchyards to be able to "examine the cause and progress of the decay" (*F* 53). Following once again Hogg's words we find that Shelley in his juvenile years had very similar experiences:

> At his father house, where his influence was, of course, great among the dependants, he even planned how he might get admission to the vault, or charnel-house, at Warnham Church, and might sit there all night, harrowed by fear, yet trembling with expectation, to see one of the spiritualized owners of the bones piled around him[84].

Percy's early poetry is concerned with death, graveyards and tombs, as testified by the short prose romance *St. Irvyne* (1811) in which the character of Nampere-Ginotti is again interested in discovering the secrets of nature, i.e. death[85]. However, it is with his later poem *Alastor, or The Spirit of Solitude* (1815) that the main character expresses the same ambition of Victor Frankenstein. The narrator of the poem reflects Victor's desire to discover the principle of life, and as he addresses himself to nature he says:

> I have watched
> Thy shadow, and the darkness of thy steps
> And my heart ever gazes on the depth
> Of thy deep mysteries.[86]

As we have seen, Victor very similarly is interested in discovering the mysteries of nature. The poem continues,

> I have made my bed
> In charnels and on coffins, where black death
> Keeps record of the trophies won from thee,
> Hoping to still these obstinate questionings
> Of thee and thine, by forcing some long ghost
> Thy messenger, to render up the tale
> Of what we are[87].

These lines suggest that Percy's hero, in trying to discover the secret of life, has spent some time in graveyards surrounded by tombs. As we have mentioned earlier, Frankenstein too carries on

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[84] Hogg, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley,* p. 35.
[85] Small, *Ariel like a Harpy*, p. 114.
[86] P. B. Shelley, *Alastor; or, the Spirit of Solitude*, Reeves and Turner, London, 1885, p. 2-3.
[87] Shelley, *Alastor,* p. 3.

his research in graveyards and charnel-houses to examine the progress of decay in dead bodies, and how the form of men degrades: "I paused, examining and analyzing all the minutiae of causation, as exemplified in the change from life to death, and death to life" (*F* 53).

What happens next in both Mary Shelley's novel and Percy Shelley's poem is the downfall of the creators at the hands of their creations[88]. In *Frankenstein*, Victor spends several months in bed due to a high fever and sickness, after the birth of his Creature; while the body of Percy's hero starts fading,

> his listless hand
> Hung like dead bone within its withered skin;
> Life, and the lustre that consumed it, shone
> As in a furnace burning secretly
> From his dark eyes alone[89].

Moreover, as highlighted by Fleck[90], both characters are haunted by "glaring eyes". After the death of Henry Clerval, Victor feels persecuted by the monster, and feels the eyes of his dead friends and relatives, as well as those of the creature, on him all the time. This adds to the feeling of guilt that he bears since the act of creation:

> I saw around me nothing but a dense and frightful darkness, penetrated by no light but the glimmer of two eyes that glared upon me. Sometimes they were the expressive eyes of Henry, languishing in death, the dark orbs nearly covered by the lids, and the long black lashes that fringed them; sometimes it was the watery, clouded eyes of the monster, as I first saw them in my chamber at Ingolstadt. (*F* 186)

Similarly, the poet in *Alastor* is led to death by the fiend he creates, even if it has better physical characteristic than Victor's, but he too is haunted by two eyes[91],

> Two starry eyes, hung in the gloom of thought,
> And seemed with their serene and azure smiles
> To beckon him[92].

The difference between the two works lies in the ending. Mary Shelley is very critical of her character's choices and, in the end, makes Victor himself try to convince Walton to desist from his enterprise: "Seek happiness in tranquility, and avoid ambition" (*F* 220). The Captain then decides to

[88] P. D. Fleck, "Mary Shelley's Notes to Shelley's Poems and Frankenstein", *Studies in Romanticism* 6 (1967): 249.
[89] Shelley, *Alastor,* p. 18.
[90] Fleck, "Mary Shelley's Notes", p. 249.
[91] *Ibidem*.
[92] Shelley, *Alastor,* p. 34.

go back to England, concluding his voyage of discovery and knowledge. The moral in this case is that “a human being in perfection moderates his desire, takes his native village as the world, welcomes what is given and craves no more”[93], in other words, human beings need to nurture the relationship between body and soul, and to learn to live in communion accepting what is given to them without trying to achieve more than nature allows. Percy Shelley feels differently towards his hero, since he sympathizes with him and blames him only occasionally. He does not want the audience to criticize him too harshly, and describes him with gentle words:

> It is a woe too “deep for tears”, when all
> Is reft at once, when some surpassing Spirit,
> Whose light adorned the world around it, leaves
> Those who remain behind, not sobs or groans,[94]

According to him, most people are guilty of his sins without having the same strong desire that partially justifies them. In the words of Fleck: “The luminaries of the world are struck down because their desires are too intense and their perception too keen; the desires and perception of other men are blunted and they are struck down more slowly and ignominiously”[95].

Frankenstein addresses the conflict between man’s spiritual limitations as a creature and his imaginative abilities as a creator, which are concepts central to the Romantic understanding of man. The feelings of triumph and despair are characteristic of the Romantic poet and especially of Percy Shelley. On one hand, he thinks that “poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World”[96], but on the other hand he has a demoralizing sense of himself as a human being[97]. In creating the character of Victor and in portraying the figures of creator and creature, Mary Shelley was able to capture “the bright as well as the dark side, the violent as well as the benevolent impulses, the destructive as well as the creative urges”[98] of the Romantic soul.

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[93] Fleck, “Mary Shelley’s Notes”, p. 251.
[94] Shelley, *Alastor,* p. 49.
[95] Fleck, “Mary Shelley’s Notes”, p. 250.
[96] P. B. Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, The Bobbs-Merril Company, Indianapolis, 1904, p. 90.
[97] P. A. Cantor, *Creature and Creator: Myth-making and English Romanticism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984, p. 108.
[98] *Ibidem.*

2.3 The fascination of Rousseau and Locke

As we have seen in chapter 1, Mary Shelley was deeply influenced by her parents' works, but she did not limit herself to introducing their ideas in her first novel. Instead, she devoted much of her time to reading and studying the works of other important philosophers of her time, whose theories appeared in Wollstonecraft's and Godwin's works. When she was a young girl she observed and listened very carefully to the conversations that took place in her father's house among poets, artists, and political philosophers, just as her Creature observed through the chink in his hovel the conversations of the De Laceys. In this way she was introduced to many subjects, such as politics, government, laws, religion, and especially, philosophical enquiry. This topic would interest her even later in life. Her journal shows that she studied and owed much to Jean-Jacques Rousseau; between 1815 and 1817 she read and reread works such as *Les Confessions* (1782), *Émile; ou de l'éducation* (1762), and *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), and she also visited in 1816 the birthplace of Rousseau in Geneva, which was of great inspiration for her novel[99]. She also spent a great amount of time reading John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689). This was peculiar for her because her usual habit was to read books very rapidly and to go from one work to the other. In this case, instead, she spent almost every day of November and December of 1816 reading the *Essay*, finishing it in January of 1817[100]. In this section of my work I will focus on how Shelley developed the ideas of these two philosophers in *Frankenstein*, especially the concept of the "noble savage" theorized by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the "tabula rasa" theory of knowledge developed by John Locke.

The theme of the creator who rejects his creation is one the most prominent in *Frankenstein*. As discussed in chapter one, in her novel Shelley carries out a veiled critique of her father's ideas, but there is little biographical evidence to support the notion that she used her father as a prototype for the father figure who abandons his son. From the many biographies of Mary Shelley written by scholars such as Church[101], Dunn[102], or Mellor[103] we know that at the age of fourteen Shelley was sent to live with the Baxters, a radical family who were friends with her father, in Dundee, Scotland. This period away from her family seemed to be a very pleasant experience, as she recalls in the introduction of *Frankenstein* "[the northern shores of the Tay, near Dundee] were the eyry of freedom, and the pleasant region where unheeded I could commune with the creatures of my fancy" (*F* 6). So

[99] Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley,* pp. 88-92.
[100] Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley,* pp. 146-153.
[101] Church, *Mary Shelley*.
[102] Dunn, *Moon in Eclipse.*
[103] Mellor, *Mary Shelley.*

the issue of paternal neglect does not lead us to William Godwin but to Rousseau. Even though Shelley, like her mother, was very fond of Rousseau's works, she was also very critical of some aspects of his private life, such as his forsaking five of his children to the Parisian Foundling Hospital. In 1838 Shelley contributed to the writing of *Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of France*[104] for the *Cabinet Cyclopedia,* with a volume on Rousseau, in which she focused a lot of her attention on this issue. Even if she states that "it is insulting to the reader to dwell on the flagrancy of this act", she lingers on the subject for a couple of pages, which suggests her emotional involvement in the situation. This volume was written twenty years after *Frankenstein,* but it is hard not to find similarities between what she writes about Rousseau's forsaking of his children and the tone the Creature uses when blaming Victor for abandoning him. Shelley writes that "Even in his Confessions, where Rousseau discloses his secret errors, he by no means appreciates the real extent of his misconduct on this occasion"[105]. Similarly, Victor regrets the act of having created the Creature, but not the act of abandoning him. She furthers comments:

> Rousseau did not like to multiply ties between himself and his mistress and her family: he was needy: he had heard young men of rank and fortune allude vauntingly to the recourse they had had on such occasions to the Foundling Hospital. He followed their criminal example. […] Five of his children were thus sent to a receptacle where few survive; and those who do go through life are brutified by their situation, or depressed by the burden, ever weighing at the heart, that they have not inherited the commonest right of humanity, a parent's care.[106]

Such parent's care is what the Creature longs for and is what Victor, on the other hand, had, as he tells Walton when he describes his childhood with his parents: "Much as they were attached to each other, they seemed to draw inexhaustible stores of affection from a very mine of love to bestow them upon me" (*F* 35). Just like Rousseau, Victor spurns his child and the Creature becomes like the philosopher's children, depressed and brutified. In her final comment on the situation Shelley writes: "It is a lesson that ought to teach us humility. That a man as full of genius and aspiration after virtue as Rousseau, should have failed in the plainest dictates of nature and conscience, through the force of example and circumstances, show us how little we can rely on our own judgement"[107]. As

[104] M. Shelley, "Rousseau", in *Lives of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of France*, Longman, Orme, Brown, Green and John Taylor, London, 1838.
[105] Shelley, "Rousseau", p. 130.
[106] Shelley, "Rousseau", p. 131.
[107] *Ibidem*.

Marshall[108] highlights, Shelley might have said the same of Victor Frankenstein, as his greatest failure is his negligence as a parent, which is the cause of the Creature's misery and rage.

We have compared Victor's neglect to that of Rousseau, but Shelley further develops Rousseauian traits in her Creature's story. Shelley's "hideous progeny" can be compared to the natural man which Rousseau describes in his *Second Discourse*, who is attracted to civil society and his desire to join it only leads him to misery. The narrative illustrates how society transforms a gentle being into a demon. It shows a society founded on the desire for power, which as such rejects the sympathies of the natural man. The Creature is brutalized by the civilized world, which suppresses his need for love and instead awakens his thirst for dominance[109]. The Monster moves from the two stages identified by Rousseau, the natural and the socialized, but does not obtain a third stage which would allow him to move on from his rejection.

The first stage theorized by Rousseau is characterized by the natural man, a solitary being who lives surrounded by nature, just like the Creature. This solitary state allows him freedom "I was dependent on none, and related to none" (*F* 131), as the Creature recalls. At first the Creature only needs to fulfill his basic animal desires, "He feels pleasure at the sight of the moon, the warmth of the sun, the sounds of bird-song, the light and heat of fire; pain at the coldness of the snow, the burning sensation of fire, the pangs of hunger and thirst"[110]. In Rousseau's *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité* there is a long description of "monsters", who are very similar to men but are much bigger and taller, just like the Creature who resembles a human being, despite his ugliness, but is of "gigantic stature" (*F* 25, 54). According to the philosopher these giants are vegetarian. Once again we have examples of the Creature eating fruits or nuts instead of meat: "My food is not that of man; I do not destroy the lamb and the kid to glut my appetite; acorns and berries afford me sufficient nourishment" (*F* 148).

There are two traits which Rousseau attributes to man in a pre-civilized state: self-preservation and compassion[111]. He writes of "two principles prior to reason, one of them interesting us in our own welfare and preservation, and the other exciting a natural repugnance at seeing any other sensible being, and particularly any of our own species, suffer pain or death"[112], highlighting characteristics that can be found in Shelley's Creature. In the case of self-preservation the Monster's first reaction to

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[108] D. Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau, and Mary Shelley*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1988. In *Frankenstein: the Pennsylvania Electronic Edition*, ed. Stuart Curran, https://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/marshal2.html

[109] Cantor, *Creature and Creator,* p.120.

[110] Mellor, *Mary Shelley,* p. 47.

[111] J. O'Rourke, ""Nothing More Unnatural": Mary Shelley's Revision of Rousseau", *English Literary History* 56 (1989): 543-569. In *Frankenstein: the Pennsylvania Electronic Edition*, ed. Stuart Curran, https://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/orourke.html

[112] *Ibidem*.

light is that of shutting his eyes as an automatic physiological response, and as stated earlier, he is able to answer his physical needs such as hunger and thirst. On the other hand, Rousseau talks of compassion as a "natural sentiment, which, by moderating in every individual the activity of self-love, contributes to the mutual preservation of the whole species"[113], and he argues that this trait is stronger in the state of nature than in that of reason because "it is reason that makes man shrink into himself; it is reason that makes him keep aloof from everything that can trouble or afflict him"[114]. The Creature shows "fellow feeling for all living creatures"[115] and demonstrates his compassion when he refuses to take away the wood from the De Laceys for his wellbeing, once he realizes that by doing so he would cause them an inconvenience. O'Rourke[116] highlights that in this case the two traits highlighted by Rousseau collide, as the Creature chooses to exercise his compassion even if it clashes with his self-preservation.

However, as discussed by Cantor[117], there is one main difference between the natural man of Rousseau and the Creature. While the first lives in the state of nature, and everyone around him is equal to him, Victor's creation is a noble savage in the midst of civil society, so he stands out as different. Even worse, those around him treat him not as an individual with higher abilities, as he in fact is, but as an inferior being. He is forced to accept this opinion, of his grotesque ugliness, as he has no other individual to whom he can compare himself and therefore arrives at the same conclusion as those around him:

> I had admired the perfect forms of my cottagers – their grace, beauty, and delicate complexions: but how was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification. (*F* 116-117)

This is why the Creature demands a companion of his own species, and as ugly as he is: she will deny his ugliness because it will be equal to her own. The Creature's alienation from society does not allow him to be the natural man theorized by Rousseau, as Rousseau declares "the savage lives within himself, whereas social man, constantly outside himself, knows only how to live in the opinion

[113] J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract and the First and Second Discourses*, ed. S. Dunn, Yale University Press, New York, 2002, p. 107.
[114] Rousseau, *The Social Contract and the First and Second Discourses*, p. 106.
[115] Cantor, *Creature and Creator,* p. 124.
[116] O'Rourke, "Nothing More Unnatural".
[117] Cantor, *Creature and Creator,* p. 125.

of others; and it is […] merely from their judgement of him that he derives the consciousness of his own existence"[118].

As to the issue of nature, Frankenstein's creature at first is able to live in contentment in the natural environment, but this state of innocence has its limitations. Like Rousseau's natural man, the Creature lacks speech or the power of reasoning. At first everything is confused to him: "Sometimes I wished to express my sensations in my own mode, but the uncouth and inarticulate sounds which broke from me frightened me into silence again" (*F* 106). Rousseau tackled the issue of speech by observing that: "Although the organ of speech is natural to man, speech itself is not natural to him; and who knows how far his perfectibility may have raised civil man above his original state?" [119]. Furthermore, in his *Essay* the philosopher describes how in the earliest of times "the sparse human population had no language but that of gesture and some inarticulate sounds"[120], which follows Shelley's description of the first utterances of the Creature (*F* 59). Rousseau explains that these utterances proceed not from need but from passions, "for moving a young heart, or repelling an unjust aggressor, nature dictates accents, cries, lamentations. There we have the invention of the most ancient words; and that is why the first languages were singable and passionate before they became simple and methodical"[121]. Passion brings men together, as we see in the scenes where the De Laceys are united by their music.

As to the of acquisition of language, it seems that Shelley follows exactly Rousseau's notion of linguistic history. As analyzed by Bok[122], the Creature follows the four steps of linguistic initiation theorized by the philosopher: first, the Monster experiences the sounds of animal communication, "I was delighted when I first discovered that a pleasant sound […] proceeded form the throats of the little winged animals" (*F* 106), a sound which he is unable to replicate; second, he experiences the melodious sound of music "sweeter than the voice of the thrush or the nightingale" (*F* 110); third, he witnesses the first words of articulate speech "I found that these people (the De Laceys) possessed a method of communicating their experience and feelings to one another by articulate sounds" (*F* 115); fourth, the Creature experiences the written word, "the science of letters" (*F* 123).

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[118] Rousseau, *The Social Contract and the First and Second Discourses,* p. 138.
[119] Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy.*
[120] Rousseau, J., *Essay on the Origin of Languages,* p. 16. Available at: https://archive.org/details/rousseau-essay-on-the-origin-of-languages-gourevitch/Rousseau%20-%20Essay%20On%20the%20Origin%20of%20Languages%20%28Chicago%201986%29/page/27/mode/2up?q=inarticulate
[121] Rousseau, J., *Essay,* p.14.
[122] C. Bok, "The Monstrosity of Representation: Frankenstein and Rousseau", *English Studies in Canada* 18 (1992). In *Frankenstein: the Pennsylvania Electronic Edition*, ed. Stuart Curran, https://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/bok.html

From his hovel the Creature discovers language and, especially, the arbitrariness of language and of the linguistic sign. He laments not being able to connect the words uttered by the members of the family to their referent, or visible object, resulting in him describing language as a "godlike science" (*F* 115). From here he understands the importance of words as their very nature implies the "chain of existence and events" (*F* 150) in which he longs to join and from which he is excluded[123]. Once he is able to link words to meanings, he applies this new science to reading, as for Rousseau the written word is "precisely the supplementary and mediate state of language"[124]. However, the philosopher argues that the advent of writing changes the primitive state of man, and thus the original speech. Language becomes less passionate and more precise, it does not speak to the heart but to reason and as a result "it becomes more exact and clearer, but more prolix, duller and colder"[125]. Rousseau describes this development as a secularized Fall, and we notice that it is through the learning of the written word that the Creature moves from innocent ignorance to corrupted knowledge. This new knowledge does not gain him access into society, instead it highlights his difference and thus enhances his isolation, "Increase of knowledge only discovered to me more clearly what a wretched outcast I was" (*F* 133). We derive from this that the Creature's use of language has failed to gain him entry into the "chain of existence and events"; on the contrary, it has served to the knowledge of his "accursed origin" (*F* 132). This mental development renders him miserable and he longs for his original state: "[…] sorrow only increased with knowledge. Oh, that I had forever remained in my native wood, nor known or felt beyond the sensations of hunger, thirst and heat!" (*F* 123).

At this point the Creature is forever changed and this is also clear from the reaction he has to rejection: when he is first rejected by the first people he encounters, he simply moves to another place to seek food and shelter, acting like Rousseau's natural man, who "seldom comes to blow before having first compared the difficulty of conquering with that of finding his subsistence elsewhere; and, as pride has no share in the squabble, it ends in a few cuffs; the victor eats, the vanquished retires to seeks his fortune, and all is quiet again"[126]. On the other hand, when he is rejected by the De Laceys, his reaction is totally different, as he has become a socialized being and demands revenge[127]. Freedom cannot be found, there are no means of "combining the happiness and unity of man's original state

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[123] P. Brooks, "Godlike Science/Unhallowed Arts": Language, Nature, and Monstrosity", *New Literary History* 9 (1978): 594.
[124] Brooks, "Godlike Science/Unhallowed Arts", p. 595.
[125] Rousseau, J., *Essay,* p. 18.
[126] Rousseau, *The Social Contract and the First and Second Discourses,* p. 140.
[127] O'Rourke, "Nothing More Unnatural".

with the consciousness and developed power of his civilize state"[128] and he condemns his creator, as the only solution is death.

Such death can be seen as a return to nature. In his final sentences the Creature tells Walton that his crimes are ended and that "I shall collect my funeral pile, and consume to ashes this miserable frame" (*F* 224). He expects his ashes to be dissolved by the waters so that he can return and be reunited once again to nature. As Cantor points out, "Death conceived as physical dissolution becomes a way of recapturing the primal unity man lost when he first departed from his natural state"[129]. The Romantic notion of the healing powers of nature is to be found also in Victor. After the death of his brother William, and the condemnation of Justine, he seeks refuge in the mountains above Chamonix,

> I remembered the effect that the view of the tremendous and ever-moving glacier had produced upon my mind when I first saw it. It had then filled me with a sublime ecstasy that gave wings to the soul, and allowed it to soar from the obscure world to light and joy. The sight of the awful and majestic in nature had indeed always the effect of solemnizing my mind, and causing me to forget the passing cares of life. (*F* 100)

In this way Victor is able to achieve some kind of unity with nature, which provides him momentarily peace of mind, but this peace is ephemeral, and, like his Creature, Frankenstein only finds eternal peace for his soul in death[130].

As we have seen, Shelley took inspiration from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but for the Creature's initial development she was mainly influenced by John Locke's theories.

The theory of the "tabula rasa" was first introduced by Aristotle, who affirmed that the mind acquires knowledge in a gradual way through environmental experience. John Locke further analyzes this concept with his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in which he explains that when we are born our mind is void of any ideas, and it generates the rules for processing information thanks to sensory input[131].

> Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas; how comes it to be furnished? […] To this I answer in one word, from experience; in that all our knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our observations employed either about external sensible objects, or about the

[128] Cantor, *Creature and Creator,* p. 122.
[129] Cantor, *Creature and Creator,* p. 123.
[130] *Ibidem*.
[131] N. Martinović, "Nature vs. Nurture in the Case of the Monster in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus", *Kick Students' Magazine* 2 (2019): 41.

> internal operations of our minds, perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understanding with all the materials of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring[132].

Locke further explains that since the mind is born blank, we are free to create our own characters. Shelley incorporated this notion in her novel when she addressed how the Creature spent his first days after being born. Victor Frankenstein describes the first moment in which his creation opens his eyes: "He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks" (*F* 59). In this regard some critics question the notion of the Creature's tabula rasa by pointing to these actions as being generated by innate ideas already existing in his mind. For example, the fact that the Creature tries to talk, looks at Victor and grins seems as if he already knows his creator, thus having inherent ideas, which would contradict the "Frankenstein-Lockean view"[133]. However, as Lopez[134] points out, the Creature's first actions can also be seen as first experiences, as he describes in the first chapter of his tale: "A strange multiplicity of sensations seized me" (*F* 105). Firstly, the act of holding up the curtain could be for blocking out the light that troubled him, as he later tells us, "By degrees, I remember, a stronger light pressed upon my nerves, so that I was obliged to shut my eyes" (*F* 105), and therefore this reaction can be seen as a way of protecting himself from a painful experience. Secondly, throughout the novel we are informed numerous times of the Creature's ugliness and thus his grin could just be a result of his deformity. Thirdly, the fact that he mutters some sounds and tries to reach out to Frankenstein can easily be explained as reactions to his presence. We can hypothesize that if the Creature had known that Victor was his creator he would have sought him from the beginning, instead the pursuit only begins when he finds Frankenstein's papers and decides to avenge himself. Moreover, it is from these papers that he discovers the identity of his creator, "I learned from your papers that you were my father" (*F* 141), so he advances towards Victor not because he intends to harm his "father", but because he reacts to the presence of a human being. If we consider these actions as first experiences, then we can regard them as evidence of Shelley's appropriate use of Locke's tabula rasa.

After the initial stage of the blank mind the Creature's mental and moral development follow another epistemological and pedagogical theory of Locke. The philosopher further develops the

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[132] J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Thomas Davison Whitefriars, London, 1825, p. 51.

[133] C. A. Lopez, *The Creature's Tabula Rasa: Confronting Popular Assumptions in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* [Undergraduate Thesis], University of Texas at San Antonio: College of Liberal Arts, 2014. https://www.academia.edu/32061792/The_Creature_s_Tabula_Rasa_Confronting_Popular_Assumptions_in_Mary_Shelley_s_Frankenstein_or_the_Modern_Prometheus

[134] *Ibidem*.

concept of the tabula rasa by stating that the natural man is neither inherently good nor evil and his first sensations develop into impressions which gradually become concepts or conscious experience[135]. In the first period of his infancy the Creature "saw, felt, heard, and smelt at the same time, […] no distinct ideas occupied my mind" (*F* 105-106): his first sensations are purely physical and he describes them as confused and indistinct. Following Locke's theory, these sensations turn with time into concepts: "My sensations had by this time become distinct, and my mind received every day additional ideas" (*F* 106), and so he is able to distinguish his senses, the objects around him, the causes of his pain or pleasure, and how to achieve what he desires: "I gradually saw plainly the clear stream that supplied me with drink, and the trees that shaded me with their foliage" (*F* 106). When he finds refuge in a hovel and from a chink assists to the lives of the De Laceys, his education is further extended thanks to the examples of moral and intellectual virtue that this family provides. Locke in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*[136] states that:

> But of all the ways whereby children are to be instructed, and their manners formed, the plainest, easiest, and most efficacious, is, to set before their eyes the examples of those things you would have them do, or avoid. […] Virtues and vices can by no words be so plainly set before their understandings as the actions of other men will show them. […] And the beauty or uncomeliness of many things will be better learnt, and make deeper impressions on them, in the examples of others, than from any rules or instructions can be given about them[137].

According to Mellor[138], the De Laceys represent the egalitarian family, so when the Creature looks at them through the chink in the wall of his hovel he is met with examples of benevolence, and affection. They unconsciously provide him with a lesson for perfect virtue in the realm of domestic affections. From them he learns to be kind and instead of stealing their food he satisfies his hunger with berries, nuts, and roots, and tries to assist their labors by collecting wood for their use.

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[135] Mellor, *Mary Shelley*, p. 48.

[136] J. Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, ed. P. Gay, Bureau of Publication, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, 1964.

[137] Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education,* p. 66.

[138] Mellor, *Mary Shelley*, p. 49.

Chapter 3 – The Promethean Myth

The character of Prometheus plays a crucial role in *Frankenstein*, as evidenced by the subtitle Shelley affixed to her novel: "The Modern Prometheus". Through her readings Shelley came to know the wealth of myths surrounding his figure, which will be here retraced for the contribution they give to the development of her novel. As the corpus of Western myths is very complex and variable, susceptible to changes in its oral transmission and even more so in its written form, in this chapter I will focus mainly on the myth of Prometheus according to Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, while also mentioning Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. I will provide a background on the character of Prometheus and the source of his punishment by relying on Hesiod's *Theogony*.

3.1 Prometheus in the classical tradition

Since Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* begins in media res with Prometheus' torture, it is important to first give a description of the Titan and explain the reason why he has to face such punishment.

Hesiod in his *Theogony* describes the genealogy and cosmology of the Greek gods, among which we find the Titan Prometheus. He is described as having three brothers: Atlas, Menoetius, and Epimetheus, all of whom are punished by Zeus who has just ascended the throne. Atlas is forced to hold the heavens upon his head and hands, Menoetius is struck by a lightning bolt and Epimetheus is given Pandora as a wife, but Prometheus' punishment is probably the worst of all:

> And Zeus bound crafty Prometheus in inescapable fetters, grievous bonds, driving them through the middle of a pillar. And he set a great winged eagle upon him, and it fed on his immortal liver, which grew the same amount each way at night as the great bird ate in the course of the day[1].

Only after describing the punishment, does Hesiod explain the cause for such rage on Zeus' part. At Mecone during a rite of sacrifice performed by mortals, Prometheus attempted to trick Zeus into picking bones concealed by shining fat from an ox, instead of the flesh and rich inner parts reserved for humans. The ruler of gods "whose designs do not fail"[2] recognized the trick and decided to punish the mortals by withholding the power of fire. However, Prometheus furthers deceived Zeus by stealing fire from him in the tube of a fennel and gave it to mankind. By stealing fire from his ruler

[1] Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988, p. 18.
[2] Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days,* p. 19.

and delivering it to humans, Prometheus commits an act of benevolence towards mortals at his own expenses. Immortal gods viewed mortals as insignificant and exploited them for their own needs, Zeus for example, seduced and abandoned many figures like Callisto, Europa and Antiope[3]. Therefore, the ruler of gods only accepts to be tricked by Prometheus so that he could have an excuse to harm humanity. As a consequence, Zeus creates Pandora who is given in marriage to Prometheus' brother Epimetheus and brings the final form of misery upon mankind:

> For formerly the tribes of men on earth lived remote from ills, without harsh toils and the grievous sicknesses that are deadly to men. But the woman unstopped the jar and let it all out, and brought grim cares upon mankind[4].

It is important to note that Hesiod negatively characterizes Prometheus, and this is evident from the way he refers to him, as he uses the epithet "crooked-schemer"[5], which depicts him as a deceiver and a trickster, the adversary to Hesiod's great Zeus.

Another epithet used for describing Prometheus and very relevant for how Mary Shelley viewed the god, is *plasticator*, present only in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Both Hesiod and Aeschylus omit the term, but in the transmission of the myth in Latin the god is perceived as the creator of humankind, the 'modeler':

> It was at this point that man was born: either the Creator, who was responsible for this better world, made him from divine seed, or else Prometheus, son of Iapetos, took the new-made earth which, only recently separated from the lofty aether, still retained some elements related to those of heaven and, mixing it with rainwater, fashioned it into the image of the all-governing gods[6].

Therefore, the main sources that treat Prometheus describe him as either providing humans with the means for technological development, i.e. fire, or contributing to their existence by creating them. In other words, Prometheus is seen as the protector of humankind.

Aeschylus' work mainly focuses on the torture inflicted on Prometheus for stealing fire from Zeus, allowing mortals to develop in technology and consciousness. Kratos and Bia, servants and personifications of Zeus' strength and violence, drag Prometheus to the region of Scythia, where the

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[3] A. H. Holden, *The Ancient and Modern Prometheus: A Re-evaluation of the Promethean Figure in Mary W. Shelley's Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus* [Undergraduate Thesis], University of Vermont: UVM College of Arts and Sciences College, 2023, p. 10.
[4] Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days,* p. 40.
[5] Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days,* p. 19.
[6] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Penguin Books, London, 1955, p. 31.

smith god Hephaistos nails him with unbreakable chains to a rocky cliff. The smith god, unlike the two other gods, is sympathetic to Prometheus' sufferings, but performs the act nonetheless:

> But I am scant of courage to bind down
> A like-born god on this storm-beaten peak.
> But yet I needs must nerve myself to do it.
> For to slight Zeus's words is a grave thing[7].

Throughout his scene Hephaistos hesitates between his sympathy and pity for Prometheus and his loyalty to Zeus, so much so that Kratos impatiently asks him: "Why dost thou not hate / This god most hateful to the other gods, / Betrayer of thy sovereignty to men?"[8]. Kratos describes Prometheus as 'betrayer' because Hephaistos is the god of blacksmithing and metalworking, he is a master of fire. Therefore, Prometheus also stole from him, thus becoming a traitor. After the three servants of Zeus leave the scene, other deities appear. Firstly, the chorus of Oceanids, startled by the noise of the hammer, approach Prometheus and ask him the cause of his plight, then complain against the cruelty of the new ruler of Olympus. This chorus serves to inform and expose Prometheus' crimes to the public, since the play begins in media res, as stated earlier.

In Aeschylus' commentary Prometheus stole fire in a fennel stalk, like in Hesiod's narrative. However, humanity does not receive only the physical fire, because here Prometheus says that the element is also "the teacher of all arts / and his chief riches"[9]. As Raggio points out,

> From its benefactor Prometheus mankind receives not only the physical fire in the fennel stalk, but also the subtler fire of reason and wisdom from which all aspects of human civilization are derived: divination, astrology, medicine, mathematics, the alphabet, agriculture – every science and every heart[10].

We can therefore notice how Aeschylus describes the actions of Prometheus in a more positive way than Hesiod did, by depicting him as a benefactor rather than a deceiver.

The second character that appears on the scene is Io, who was seduced by Zeus and as a consequence was transformed into a cow by Hera and eternally followed by a herd of gadflies. Being herself a victim of Zeus, she sympathizes with Prometheus and the latter, urged by a moment of violent passion, reveals to her the secret that Zeus so vehemently wishes to know. The secret regards Zeus' future: Prometheus knows from the prophecies of his mother, Themis, that Zeus will marry a

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[7] Aeschylus, *The Prometheus Bound*, ed. T. Webster, Macmillan and Co., London and Cambridge, 1866, p. 10.
[8] Aeschylus, *The Prometheus Bound*, Webster, p. 11.
[9] Aeschylus, *The Prometheus Bound*, Webster, p. 16-17.
[10] O. Raggio, "The Myth of Prometheus: Its Survival and Metamorphoses up to the Eighteenth Century", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 21 (1958): 45.

woman from whom a son will be born, and who will overthrow Zeus. Prometheus knows who the woman is but does not want to share the name with his ruler. Another prophecy that he reveals to Io regards her destiny, and when she will be free from her torture; she still has to wait a long time but one of her descendants will be the one to free Prometheus from his own torture[11]. The ability of Prometheus to foresee the future derives from his mother Themis, and it is also a characteristic that is reflected in his own name: "Prometheus' name can be translated as 'Forethought' (πρό [pró] "before" + μανθάνω [manthánō] "to learn, to know")[12]. Thus, Aeschylus adds an element that Hesiod did not use, the ability to foresee the future and hence to know who will overthrow Zeus, allows Prometheus to have power over his ruler.

After a long dialogue between Prometheus and Io regarding their fate, Hermes arrives. The god messenger and servant of Zeus gives one last opportunity to Prometheus to reveal Zeus' future. The god is dismissed with insults and mockery and therefore he threatens Prometheus with further torture:

> For first of all
> With thunder and the lighting's flame the father
> Will cleave this rugged precipice and hide
> Thy body, and the rocks shall gird thee in;
> And when thou hast fulfilled much length of time
> Thou shalt come back again to the day. But then
> Shall the winged hound of Zeus, the gory eagle,
> Fiercely tear greedy gobbets of thy flesh,
> And come, an uninvited banqueter,
> To gorge all day upon thy black-gnawed liver.
> And of such anguish look thou for no end[13]

Here we can notice how Aeschylus adds the torture of the eagle later in the play, while Hesiod implements it already at the beginning of Prometheus' punishment. In this way Zeus threatens him with a further element of torture, which increases the injustice inflicted upon him and adds further tension in the play[14]. As a consequence, Prometheus ends the play with the following words: "Oh mother mine, thou revered one, oh sky / That bear'st in due round light common to all, / Do you see me what wrong I endure?"[15]

Linda Lewis in *Promethean Politics* highlights how in Greek texts the condemnation of tyrants is a typical element since political instability was very common, and further analyzes how tyrants are

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[11] Holden, *The Ancient and Modern Prometheus,* p. 29.
[12] Holden, *The Ancient and Modern Prometheus,* p. 16.
[13] Aeschylus, *The Prometheus Bound*, Webster, p. 70.
[14] Holden, *The Ancient and Modern Prometheus,* p. 32.
[15] Aeschylus, *The Prometheus Bound*, Webster, p. 73.

described as "hard, merciless, arrogant, willful, acquisitive, and lustful" who "always punish without first convicting of wrong, and are always above the law"[16]. Therefore, *Prometheus Bound* can be interpreted as "a political drama with Olympian Zeus in the role of tyrant and Titan Prometheus as rebel against monarchy"[17]. In Aeschylus Zeus is seen as a ruler who abuses his power, punishing mortals and immortals indiscriminately with unjust suffering, thus keeping his power through violence and coercion, as opposed to Hesiod, who, as stated above, celebrates the Olympian ruler and praises his strength. Prometheus laments the tyranny of Zeus numerous times, especially when he recalls helping his ruler in the Titanomachy:

> Such the debt to me
> Owed by the despot of the gods, and this
> The evil price in which he quits the debt.
> For somehow despotism is ever sick
> Of this disease, to have no faith in friends[18].

Other characters view Zeus as a tyrant but are willing to adapt to the situation and to excuse Zeus' actions: Hephaistos, for example, says "So every one is harsh whose power is new"[19], while Oceanus tells Prometheus that "a stern monarch, owing count to none, bears sway"[20]. Whereas before *Prometheus Bound* the figure of Prometheus was treated as a warning against defying the gods, Aeschylus decided to use the fire-thief as the hero of his trilogy, describing him as noble, courageous, and clever.

As we have seen, the myth of Prometheus does not have any fixed form, which makes it a flexible story. Neither Hesiod, nor Aeschylus, nor Ovid describe the whole story of Prometheus, instead, they all pick a particular theme or element of the Titan which serve as the basis for developing their stories. However, certain elements are always present.

Firstly, the humane side of Prometheus is developed in most sources, as he is presented as an immortal god who cares for and loves humans, so much so that he goes against the orders of Zeus and meets punishment on their behalf. We are told about his affection for mortals numerous times. Prometheus, for instance, freely admits to it in a passage of Aeschylus' work: "Because I have loved mankind too well"[21], and even Hephaistos agrees that the fire-thief has given too much to humans

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[16] L. Lewis, *The Promethean Politics, of Milton, Blake, and Shelley*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia and London, 1992, p. 15.
[17] Lewis, *The Promethean Politics,* p. 13.
[18] Aeschylus, *The Prometheus Bound*, Webster, p. 23.
[19] Aeschylus, *The Prometheus Bound*, Webster, p. 11.
[20] Aeschylus, *The Prometheus Bound*, Webster, p. 29.
[21] Aeschylus, *The Prometheus Bound*, Webster, p. 17.

when he says, “For thou, a god, brunting the wrath of gods, / hast given a wrongful honour to mankind”[22]. The honour Hephaistos talks about is, of course, the gift of fire, which Prometheus thinks humans are worthy of receiving, enabling them to progress from their primordial state. Moreover, Prometheus is also the only one who thinks that humans should live, while the other gods, and mainly Zeus, did not view mortals as worthy of life[23]:

> He [Zeus] ruled their several honour to the gods,
> And ordered his dominion; but no thought
> Took he for toil-worn mortals, but desired
> To sweep the whole race off and plant a new
> And none withstood his wish save only me[24].

However, Prometheus’ affection for humankind proves fatal as, by stealing fire from Zeus, he condemns himself but also humanity, as he tells us:

> By helping men I gained myself these pangs.
> Yet thought I not by such a punishment
> To waste away amid these high-poised rocks,
> Doomed to this barren solitary peak[25].

As Dougherty argues: “Prometheus is the one responsible for the difficulties and miseries of mankind. […] His actions have consequences – not just for him, but also for mankind – and Prometheus is thus also implicated in the suffering that marks the human experience”[26].

Secondly, another recurring element of the Promethean myth regards the act of rebellion. In all versions of the myth, Prometheus rebels against the established ruler Zeus in various ways, which include the sacrificial ritual at Mekone where he tries to deceive Zeus, the stealing of fire for humanity, and the refusal to reveal Zeus his destiny. The secret that Zeus so vehemently wishes to extort from Prometheus regards Zeus’ future: Prometheus knows from the prophecies of his mother, Themis, that Zeus will marry a woman from whom a son will be born, who will overthrow Zeus. Prometheus knows who the woman is but does not want to share the name with his ruler. Prometheus dares to defy Zeus, the all-powerful ruler of the gods, because of his rebellious character. He wishes to defend humanity from the tyranny of Zeus (“But I was venturous, I saved mankind/ From being

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[22] Aeschylus, *The Prometheus Bound*, Webster, p. 10.
[23] Holden, *The Ancient and Modern Prometheus,* p. 40.
[24] Aeschylus, *The Prometheus Bound*, Webster, p. 23.
[25] Aeschylus, *The Prometheus Bound*, Webster, p. 26.
[26] C. Dougherty, *Prometheus*, Routledge, London and New York, 2006, p. 19.

dashed in shivers down to Hades"[27]) and disobeys his ruler in order to protect the human race from destruction.

Thirdly and lastly, the element of suffering is inherent to all works dealing with the figure of Prometheus. Aeschylus' work, for example, entirely deals with Prometheus' torture and his reaction towards it. He is aware that his actions would have led to some form of punishment, but he does not want to be alone or unpitied. For instance, his first lines are an evocation of the sky and mother earth as supreme witnesses to look upon him and behold his sufferings:

> Oh marvellous sky, and swiftly winging winds,
> And streams, and myriad laughter of sea-waves,
> And universal mother earth, I call ye
> And the all-seeing sun to look on me,
> What I, a god, endure from other gods[28].

He reacts in a similar way when, after Hephaistos leaves, the Oceanids arrive:

> Or art thou come
> To observe my fate and wail my woes with me?
> Behold a spectacle, the friend of Zeus
> Who helped to stablish his control, behold
> What sufferings must bow me to his will[29].

It is clear from these examples that Prometheus wants to be pitied for the unjust treatment reserved to him. However, even if most characters wish to help him, they fail empathizing with him as they regard his actions as foolish and are afraid of Zeus' anger. For most of the play Prometheus talks about his unjust punishment, looking for someone who is willing to help him and join his suffering, however none of the characters succeed in this: Hephaistos does not pity him enough to disobey Zeus' orders; the Oceanids are afraid of Zeus' wrath; Oceanus does not want to participate in this conflict; and Io, even if she wants to help him, has a different destiny[30].

In conclusion, this brief analysis of the myth of Prometheus, with the summary of the main themes and elements that characterizes the Titan, is fundamental to understand how Shelley perceived this myth and to what extend she decided to include it in her *magnum opus*.

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[27] Aeschylus, *The Prometheus Bound*, Webster, p. 24.
[28] Aeschylus, *The Prometheus Bound*, Webster, p. 15-16.
[29] Aeschylus, *The Prometheus Bound*, Webster, p. 28.
[30] Holden, *The Ancient and Modern Prometheus,* p. 45.

3.2 Prometheus for the Romantics

To fully grasp the importance of the myth of Prometheus for Shelley, we first need to position it in the context of Romanticism.

By the end of the eighteenth-century Greek mythology became highly popular, sparking a new enthusiasm for Greek tragedies. This favoured the increase of new translations of Greek works, which influenced the Romantic poets, especially those belonging to the second generation, such as Byron, Percy Shelley and Keats. According to García Gual Carlos[31], the character of Prometheus became, for Romantic poets and writers, the best example of the rebellion against tyrannical power, such as that exercised by Zeus in *Prometheus Bound*. The titanic impulse of the fire-thief appears as a symbol of the poet, or the revolutionary, blinded by his/her wild hopes and anxious for more freedom, more light, and more fraternity in a tormented world. Against the tyranny and the oppression of the society of the old regime, the Romantics yearned for a new era marked by human progress, which broke from the injustice of traditional power. As a consequence, Romantic poets emphasized individualism, imagination, and emotion as their guiding principles, and from this perspective the myth of Prometheus further reinforced the importance of the ego and of individuality[32]. Prometheus, as the fire-thief of Olympus, symbolized all human efforts to achieve political power and autonomy; as the bringer of light, he represented human freedom from political, moral, and religious oppression. As a saviour, he became the symbol of hope for humanity's progress, while, as a creator, he celebrated the power of man to create life and restore the world as a better place for everyone[33]. By ignoring the parts of the old traditions that painted Prometheus in a negative light – especially the ones that described him as a cunning trickster who brought Zeus' wrath upon mankind – the Romantics turned him into a hero. They converted him into a symbol of their own aspirations by focusing instead on those tales that portray the Titan as a valiant rebel against divine authority and as the potential benefactor of humanity[34].

As stated in the previous chapter, in 1816 Mary Shelley spent the summer with her husband and Lord Byron, and we can assume that one of the many topics of conversation between the trio was the myth of Prometheus. William Walling[35], for instance, highlights how Byron wrote his poem *Prometheus* in 1816 after asking Percy Shelley to translate Aeschylus' work from Greek; as a

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[31] C. García Guan, *Prometeo: Mito y Literatura, Fondo De Cultura Económica de España*, Madrid, 2009, p. 231.
[32] A. Fernandez, "Aeschylus and Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus, by Mary Shelley", in Kennedy, R. (ed.), *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Aeschylus*, Brill Academic Pub, Boston, 2017, p. 297.
[33] Dougherty, *Prometheus,* p.115.
[34] Cantor, *Creature and Creator*, p. 77.
[35] Walling, *Mary Shelley*, p. 44.

consequence, Percy Shelley was influenced by Byron's views on the myth and started working in the same year on what was to become his masterpiece *Prometheus Unbound*, published in 1818. During the same summer, Mary Shelley started writing her *Modern Prometheus,* which provides a transitional point between Byron's and Percy's rendering of the Titan. Regarding this point, Donada reports the words of M. K. Joseph, who argues that:

> Before 1816 [Percy] Shelley seems to have been unaware of the potent symbolic significance of the myth; it was Byron, to whom Prometheus had been a familiar figure ever since he translated a portion of Aeschylus while still a schoolboy at Harrow, who opened his eyes to its potentialities during that summer at Geneva. That it was discussed at the time can be inferred from the results: Byron's poem "Prometheus", written in July 1816; his Manfred, with its Promethean hero, begun in September; and Shelley's Prometheus Unbound, in part a reply to Manfred, begun later in 1818. But Mary Shelley was first in the field with her "Modern Prometheus", and she alone seized on the vital significance of making Prometheus the creator rather than, as in Byron and Shelley, the suffering champion of mankind[36].

We can therefore assume that Shelley's novel offers her views of the Romantic ideology as a whole, of the myth of Prometheus, and especially of the two promethean poets she knew best, Lord Byron and her husband Percy Shelley[37].

Lord Byron, in a letter to his publisher Mr. Murray, wrote: "Of the Prometheus of Aeschylus I was passionately fond as a boy. […] The Prometheus, if not exactly my plan, has always been so much in my head, that I can easily conceive its influence over all or any thing that I have written"[38]. Indeed, the Titan's influence is seen not only in his *Ode to Prometheus*, but also in characters like Manfred, who is bound to a Promethean suffering for his lost sister Astarte. In the poem dedicated to Prometheus, Lord Byron celebrates the God's rebellion towards Zeus and takes his side by condemning the unjust punishment and suffering inflicted by the hands of the "Thunderer"[39]. According to him the only crime that Prometheus committed was the act of kindness towards mankind, as he writes addressing the Titan: "Thy Godlike crime was to be kind, / To render with thy precepts less / The sum of human wretchedness, / And strengthen Man with his own mind"[40]. Anne Mellor[41] briefly analyzes the poem *Prometheus* and argues that Byron saw the Titan as "a symbol and a sign / to Mortals of their fate and force", but more importantly, in his portrayal of Prometheus,

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36 Donada, *"Spontaneous Overflow of Powerful Feelings",* p. 128.
37 Mellor, *Mary Shelley*, p. 70.
38 T. Moore, *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron 2 Vols*, John Murray, London, 1830. Available at: https://www.lordbyron.org/monograph.php?doc=ThMoore.1830&select=AD1817
39 Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works of Lord Byron*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1907, p. 470.
40 *Ibidem*.
41 Mellor, *Mary Shelley*, p. 235.

Byron incorporates his own anguish and misery over his divorce and the loss of his daughter by describing the fire-thief's suffering: "All that the proud can feel of pain, / The agony they do not show, / The suffocating sense of woe, / Which speaks but in its loneliness"[42].

Percy Shelley also contributed to the myth of Prometheus by writing *Prometheus Unbound*, a poem which has the same title as the lost drama written by Aeschylus. However, his aim was not to rewrite the lost tragedy, as he conveys in the preface of his poem:

> The "Prometheus Unbound" of Aeschylus supposed the reconciliation of Jupiter [Zeus] with his victim as the price of the disclosure of the danger threatened to his empire by the consummation of his marriage with Tethys. […] Had I framed my story on this model, I should have done no more than have attempted to restore the lost drama of Aeschylus. […] But, in truth, I was averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciliating the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind[43].

In other words, he rewrote the drama picturing Prometheus victorious, without reconciling him with Jupiter, creating therefore an alternate ending. Prometheus' decision to undo his curse on Jupiter is the subject of the entire first act, and the remainder of the piece essentially reveals the consequences of this action. As the piece opens, Prometheus is shown as having endured ages of agony by Jupiter, yet remaining resolute and refusing to bow to the rule of the Olympian god. However, during this time he has gained a sense of righteousness, and the fire-thief understands that his hate has subsided ("Though I am changed so that aught evil wish / Is dead within"[44]) and that he wants "no living thing to suffer pain"[45]. His friends and allies are perplexed by his change of mood, seeing it as a sign that Prometheus has finally given in to his divine adversary[46]. Nevertheless, Mercury and the Furies appear and the God threatens Prometheus with further torture, but the Titan is still resolute in not revealing the secret he knows about Jupiter's future. In a later section of the drama, Jupiter is celebrating his power when the character of the Demogorgon appears. He is the son of the Olympian ruler, and being stronger than his father, he is able to defeat and overthrow Jupiter. Prometheus, on the other hand, once the reign of Jupiter is put to an end, is freed by Hercules.

The Prometheus myth in Percy Shelley's drama is described as a story determined by the Titan's interiority and internal struggle rather than by an outside conflict. So, as Carol Dougherty

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[42] Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works of Lord Byron,* p. 470.

[43] P. B. Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound; A Lyrical Drama*, C. and J. Ollier, London, 1820, p. VII-VIII.

[44] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound,* p. 22.

[45] Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound,* p. 34.

[46] Cantor, *Creature and Creator*, p. 79.

summarizes: "Shelley's Prometheus is more about imagining an escape from the institution of tyranny than a lament on its limitations"[47].

Shelley was influenced by the works and thoughts of these two poets while writing *Frankenstein*, but she decided to approach the Promethean theme with a more intellectual and philosophical interest, as we will see in the next section of the chapter[48].

3.3 *Frankenstein* and "the Modern Prometheus"

As stated above, Mary Shelley was deeply influenced by the views that Lord Byron and her husband Percy Shelley had on the myth of Prometheus, but the figure of the Titan as a fire stealer was not unknown to her. The first time she encountered the myth of Prometheus was probably through the reading of her father's *The Pantheon*, a book for children which dealt with Greek mythology. In this volume Godwin linked the image of Prometheus as *plasticator* with that of *pyrophoros* (fire-bearer):

> Prometheus, who surpassed the whole universe in mechanical skill and contrivance, formed a man of clay of such exquisite workmanship, that he wanted nothing but a living soul to cause him to be acknowledged the paragon of creation: Minerva, the Goddess of arts, beheld the performance of Prometheus with approbation, and offered him any assistance in her power to complete his work: she conducted him to Heaven, where he watched his opportunity to carry off at the tip of his wand a portion of celestial fire, from the chariot of the sun: with this he animated his image: and the man of Prometheus immediately moved, and thought, and spoke, and became everything that the fondest wishes of his creator could ask[49].

Her journal shows that before the summer of 1816 she was already familiar with classical texts. She began taking Greek lessons in September 1814, just a few months after her elopement with Percy Shelley; while she started studying Latin in March of 1815, with the help of Percy's friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg[50]. Given Percy Shelley's superficial involvement with Greek, Mary Shelley's decision to pursue classical studies is noteworthy. It suggests that she wanted to "hold her own in an area where Percy has as yet little advantage"[51]. To prove her involvement with the literature of ancient Greece, her journal lists several works which she read and translate. For example, regarding the myth

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[47] Dougherty, *Prometheus,* p. 101.

[48] Walling, *Mary Shelley*, p. 45.

[49] W. Godwin, (under the penname of Edward Baldwin), *The Pantheon, or, the Ancient History of the Gods of Greece and Rome*, Thomas Hodgkins, London, 1814, p. 76-77.

[50] Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley,* p. 27, 73.

[51] E. Herson Wittmann, "Mary Shelley's Daemon", in Lowe-Evans, M. (ed.), *Critical Essays on Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, G. K. Hall and Co, New York, 1998, p. 90.

of Prometheus she lists having read Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which describes the Titan as *plasticator,* in April 1815[52]. Moreover, on July 13, 1817, she writes "S translates Promethes Desmotes and I write it"[53], the work mentioned is the original Greek title of *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus; she must have been familiar with the piece even before this date, since Percy Shelley included a quote of the drama in a letter to Mary Shelley before their marriage, dated October 25th, 1814[54].

As her reading list suggests, there are many possible Prometheus that Mary Shelley could have been considering while creating *Frankenstein*. The two main sources that she possibly had in mind were: Prometheus *pyrphoros,* the protagonist of Aeschylus' drama *Prometheus Bound*, the rebellious fire-stealer who defied Zeus, and Prometheus *plasticator,* who created man from clay, best known from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, even though, by the third century A.D. the two versions were fused together ("the fire stolen by Prometheus became the fire of life with which he animated his man of clay"[55]). On the other hand, according to several scholars *Frankenstein* can be read in terms of either Prometheus *pyrphoros* or *plasticator*, or in other words, "as a tale of Ovidian *plasticator* (in the form of Victor Frankenstein) pitted against Aeschylean *pyrphoros* (in the form of the Creature)"[56]. Even though Shelley indicated with her subtitle that the reference to Prometheus is linked to Frankenstein, both the scientist and the Creature show Promethean qualities. Therefore, Victor Frankenstein and his Creature can be both seen as Prometheus, based on which version of the myth one chooses, such phenomenon being described by Brett Rogers as "Polyprometheism"[57]. By evoking the different Prometheus, Shelley's characters shift identities and prove deeply complex. As Dougherty writes:

> It should come as no surprise that both Frankenstein and the monster exhibit Promethean qualities given the tension at the heart of the Promethean myth itself. The complexity of Prometheus' persona – both creator and savior of mankind and symbol of its suffering – enables a kind of moral ambiguity that distinguishes Mary Shelley's novel from the work of other Romantic authors who celebrate Prometheus' creative powers[58].

In the following paragraphs I will analyze how Victor Frankenstein and the Creature both identify with Prometheus, showing Promethean characteristics according to the various interpretation of the myth previously described.

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[52] Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley,* p. 74.
[53] Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley,* p. 177.
[54] Holden, *The Ancient and Modern Prometheus,* p. 79.
[55] Mellor, *Mary Shelley*, p. 71.
[56] B. M. Rogers, "The Postmodern Prometheus and Posthuman Reproductions in Science Fiction", in Weiner, J., Stevens, B. E., and Rogers, B. M. (ed.) *Frankenstein and Its Classics*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 2018, p. 208.
[57] *Ibidem*.
[58] Dougherty, *Prometheus,* p. 113.

As to Victor Frankenstein, scholars generally agree that the subtitle of the novel, "The Modern Prometheus" is about the scientist. Some of the sources analyzed in section 3.1 align with the character of Victor and how he is rendered. The subtitle conveys the myth of Prometheus as *plasticator*: Frankenstein, through his scientific experiments, creates a being, just as the Titan molded men from clay in Ovid's tale[59]. However, the scientist also corresponds to Prometheus as *pyrphoros*: in Aeschylus' work the Titan stole fire from the gods and gave it to mankind, violating a divine order and establishing a world where men defy gods; similarly, when Frankenstein steals "a spark of being" (*F* 58) from nature and infuses it into the lifeless entity that lies before him, he produces a creature that can do great good or tremendous evil[60]. In *Frankenstein* the Creature describes his first perceptions and feelings after his "birth":

> It is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original era of my being: all the events of that period appear confused and indistinct. A strange multiplicity of sensations seized me, and I saw, felt, heard, and smelt at the same time; and it was, indeed, a long time before I learned to distinguish between the operations of my various senses. (*F* 105)

These emotions are very similar to the description that Aeschylus' Prometheus gives of mankind before giving them the gift of fire, strengthening the parallel of Prometheus and Frankenstein as creators:

> But rather hear
> Men's evil plight – how, child-brained at the first,
> I made them shrewd and of a reasoning mind.
> […] For, first of all, they seeing saw amiss,
> And hearing knew not what they heard; but, like
> The forms seen in a dream, through that long time
> Confused all things in medley[61].

Another factor that links Victor to Prometheus is the element of transgression. The central theme of transgression, in Greek's tragedy, was heavily stressed throughout the Romantic era, and blended in nicely with both the libertarian ideals of the time and the Gothic fascination with an irrational universe[62]. As pointed out by Daniel Shea, the narrative structure of Shelley's novel is similar to the Greek tragedy of fatality: "with Walton as the chorus and Victor as the great man who

[59] Holden, *The Ancient and Modern Prometheus,* p. 57.
[60] Mellor, *Mary Shelley*, p. 78.
[61] Aeschylus, *The Prometheus Bound*, Webster, p. 35.
[62] Fernandez, "Aeschylus and Frankenstein", p. 306.

falls by means of forces too powerful to withstand; Victor himself blames fate for his downfall" [63]. As a consequence, the element of transgression, as in Greek tragedies, arises in *Frankenstein* from man's act of arrogance towards the gods. In Promethean myths this act takes the form of either the stealing of knowledge from the gods – in Aeschylus' drama fire allowed mankind to develop reason and wisdom – or the self-presentation as the creator of life – as in Ovid's tale[64]. Likewise, in *Frankenstein* Victor discovers "the cause of generation and life" (*F* 53), a kind of knowledge inaccessible to anyone before him, and pictures himself as a new creator by saying "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me" (*F* 55).

Following the sequence of events in the Greek tragedy, to the act of arrogance committed corresponds a punishment, sometimes eternal, just like in Prometheus' case, who is eternally chained to a mountain. Shelley echoes this concept in her novel trough the punishment and suffering of Dr. Frankenstein: after he abandons it, the Creature starts persecuting him; he kills his little brother William, plants evidence against Justine which leads to her death, kills Clerval and Elizabeth and, as a consequence, Victor's father dies of grief. This brings Victor to the realization that he can no longer live with this burden and the only solution is to kill his Creature, "Some destiny of the most horrible kind hangs over me, and I must live to fulfill it" (*F* 185).

The parallel between Frankenstein and Prometheus is even more evident when we compare the choices the two characters make. On the one hand Prometheus, after his first violation of divine rules, is punished by being chained to a rocky mountain by Zeus; the Olympian ruler offers his forgiveness in exchange for the secret concerning his future, but Prometheus refuses. At this point Zeus decides to further punish Prometheus, by having an eagle eat the liver of the Titan every day for eternity. At the same time, Frankenstein is firstly punished by the Creature with the killing of William and Justine; the monster offers to disappear from his creator's life once he creates a female being similar to him; Victor accepts, but on the point of bestowing life to the individual he changes his mind and destroys the female creature. This act unleashes the Creature's fury who threatens Frankenstein of further suffering and proceeds to kill his closest friends and family. These events show how both characters are offered a chance to redeem themselves and to end their despair, but they both refuse to succumb to their castigators.

Portraying Victor Frankenstein and the Prometheus of Aeschylus as tragic heroes, Fernandez gives a detailed description of the traits that are shared by both characters, dividing them in five main

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[63] D. Shea, "Prometheus the Modern Matricide: Justice and the Furies in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein", *English Language Notes* 39 (2001): 41.
[64] Fernandez, "Aeschylus and Frankenstein", p. 307.

classes[65]. He labels the first "the rebel hero": the fight against the tyrant is symbolized by both Victor and Prometheus. The despot is portrayed as a divine power that both individuals defy by either daring to create life or stealing fire. The Titan and Frankenstein wish to demonstrate through their act of rebellion that man is sovereign and does not require the existence of God. While Aeschylus sees a reconciliation between Zeus and Prometheus, Shelley sees this act of rebellion in a more pessimistic way, as she ends the novel with death and destruction[66].

The second trait shared by both characters is classified as "hero of progress". In Aeschylus' tragedy the "live blaze of all-working fire"[67] is given to mankind by Prometheus, allowing them to progress and evolve. In a section of the drama Prometheus explains the technological progress that man has been able to pursue thanks to his gift:

> Nor had they certain sign
> Either of winter or of flowery spring
> Or fruitful summer, but in all they did
> Were without rule, until I shewed the risings
> And the perplexing settings of the stars
> And the chief among inventions, numbers, too
> I found them, and the art of joining letters
> [...] These the devices
> I made for mortals[68]

Similarly, Frankenstein perceives his experiments as fundamental for scientific progress: "and soon my mind was filled with one thought, one conception, one purpose. So much has been done, [...], more, far more, will I achieve: treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation" (*F* 49). Therefore, both characters regard their knowledge essential for the evolution of humanity, but in both texts the notion of progress is seen as an act of rebellion which will consequently be punished[69].

The third trait singled out by Fernandez[70] is called "the hero-villain". At first the objectives of Prometheus and Frankenstein seem audacious but legitimate; their uprising against divine orders or nature reflects the independence that is necessary to allow development and progress. Nonetheless, the consequences of their actions are the opposite of what they expected them to be. In Prometheus' case he has to endure punishment, but he is not the only one to suffer, since humanity has to endure the despair caused by the release of Pandora and the evils from her jar. In the same way Victor, after

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[65] Fernandez, "Aeschylus and Frankenstein", p. 310.
[66] *Ibidem*.
[67] Aeschylus, *The Prometheus Bound*, Webster, p. 9.
[68] Aeschylus, *The Prometheus Bound*, Webster, p. 35.
[69] Fernandez, "Aeschylus and Frankenstein", p. 311.
[70] *Ibidem*.

forsaking his creature, suffers continuous punishment, but also innocent lives are threatened and killed by the wrath of the monster. The appearance of evil draws attention to the conflicted feelings the audience might have regarding the characters of Prometheus and Frankenstein, since they initially seem to be the benefactors of mankind, but ultimately end up destroying it, therefore becoming tragic heroes[71].

The last characteristic shared by both characters described by Fernandez[72] is the "Romantic hero", which is also linked to the concept discussed above. The Romantic or Byronic hero is described as: "an idealized but flawed character whose external attributes include: rebellion, great passion, great talent, lacking of respect for rank and privilege, an unsavory secret past, arrogance, overconfidence or lack of foresight and ultimately a self-destructive manner"[73]. These traits remind us of the two characters so far analyzed, as they are both portrayed as conflictive and ambivalent individuals who share the role of both the hero and the villain. Moreover, the Romantic hero has to endure punishment in solitude. In Prometheus Bound a few characters visit the Titan, but none of them can share Prometheus' suffering or his punishment. Similarly, Victor Frankenstein feels so ashamed and guilty for having created such a deformed being, that he is not able to reveal to anyone his real actions and the truth behind the first murder; consequently, his isolation does not allow him to share his pain and suffering, which leads the scientist to bear the punishment completely alone[74].

As we have seen, the characters of Prometheus and Frankenstein share similarities, but there are also some important differences that is essential to highlight. Firstly, both individuals are punished for their rebellious actions, but Prometheus "never succumbs to his punishment"[75]. It was precisely this tremendous spirit of rebelliousness that made him so admired by the Romantics. The Titan was characterized by the purest and noblest motives, he was courageous, majestic, enemy to omnipotent force, but, most importantly, free from any desire of revenge, ambition, and personal exaltation[76]. These traits cannot be applied to Frankenstein, since, in Ziolkowski's words, he is a "Prometheus manqué"[77]: he creates a human being, but it is a flawed man. Therefore, instead of aiding humanity he eventually endangers it, by having created an individual who might destroy society. Secondly, Victor's sentiments towards humanity are not as pure as those of Prometheus, as he turns out to be an egocentric character who wishes to be more powerful than the other mortals. Additionally, his

[71] Fernandez, "Aeschylus and Frankenstein", p. 312.
[72] *Ibidem*.
[73] W. Zhao, "Byronic Hero and the Comparison with Other Heroes", *Studies in Literature and Language* 10 (2015): 30.
[74] Fernandez, "Aeschylus and Frankenstein", p. 312.
[75] T. Ziolkowski, "Science, Frankenstein, and Myth", *The Sewanee Review* 89 (1981): 45.
[76] *Ibidem*.
[77] *Ibidem*.

statement that “a churchyard was to me merely the receptacle of bodies deprived of life which [...] had become food for the worm” (*F* 52) shows a lack of respect for human life and summarize his inconsiderate and disregardful attitude during the months he spent on his scientific experiments[78].

So far “the Modern Prometheus” seems to be Victor Frankenstein; however, the Creature also shares some Promethean qualities. This is because Shelley’s characters are deeply fluid and “indefinable by a single aspect of Prometheus”[79], thus characterized by provisional and shifting identities. This concept has been analyzed by many scholars, and, once again, by Fernandez, who argues that Mary Shelley used in her novel a new resource which she calls “duplication”[80]. She argues that in *Frankenstein* Shelley develops the motif of the *doppelgänger* in the very process of creation, since Victor Frankenstein creates an individual in his image and likeness. As the scientist unconsciously projects himself onto his creature, the monster takes on the Promethean characteristics of his maker. As Muriel Spark points out:

> for though at first Frankenstein is himself the Modern Prometheus, the vital fire-endowing protagonist, the Monster, as soon as he is created, takes on the role. His solitary plight [...] and more especially his revolt against his creator establish his Promethean features. So, the title implies, the Monster is an alternative Frankenstein[81].

Therefore, in the course of the novel both characters swap their role of tyrant and rebel, and “some identifications to the role of Prometheus may shift or stop working when others are activated”[82]. For example, we have mentioned how Frankenstein’s relationship with society and man in general is different from that of Prometheus; while the latter wishes to help humanity, the former acts for personal satisfaction. On the other hand, the Creature shares Prometheus’ love for humans. Through his narration we learn of his initial feelings for mankind, as he tries to help whenever he can. For instance, while hiding from the De Lacey family the Creature collects wood at night for their fire, so that they will not need to chop it themselves, thus allowing them to attend to other household chores. Even though he does not give them the element of fire, he allows them to assist to other matters, thus providing better living conditions[83]. His empathy for people reveals his humane side, even if it also contributes to his internal conflict.

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[78] M. Storm, *Promethean Romanticism: a Study of the Shelley’s Prometheus Figures*, [Undergraduate Thesis], University of Vermont, 2024, pp. 59, 63. https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/graddis/1873/
[79] Holden, *The Ancient and Modern Prometheus,* p. 60.
[80] Fernandez, “Aeschylus and Frankenstein”, p. 313.
[81] M. Spark, *Mary Shelley*, New York: E. P. Dutton, New York, 1987, p. 161.
[82] Rogers, “The Postmodern Prometheus”, p. 211.
[83] Holden, *The Ancient and Modern Prometheus,* p. 60.

In addition, as previously mentioned, one of the key features of the Prometheus myth regards his suffering, something that the Creature deeply shares. Both characters are doomed to suffer even though their actions are benevolent. "This was then the reward of my benevolence! I had saved a human being from destruction, and as a recompense I now writhed under the miserable pain of a wound which shattered the flesh and bone" (*F* 143), says the Creature, with words which are very similar to those employed by Aeschylus' Prometheus:

> But I was venturous, I saved mankind
> From being dashed in shivers down to Hades.
> And 'tis for this I am brought low by pain
> Dreadful to bear and piteous to behold.
> I, who took mortals in compassion, earned
> No like compassion, but thus ruthlessly
> Am tuned to obedience, a sight shaming Zeus[84].

Another element shared by the monster and the Titan is their constant seeking of sympathy. As demonstrated by Frankenstein's narration, when his Creature met him at the top of the Alps, he asked for his patience: "Be calm! I entreat you to hear me, before you give vent to your hatred on my devoted head. Have I not suffered enough that you seek to increase my misery?" (*F* 102). Once Frankenstein refuses to listen to the Creature, the latter once again implores him:

> How can I move thee? Will no intreaties cause thee to turn a favourable eye upon thy creature, who implores thy goodness and compassion? Believe me, Frankenstein: I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity; but I am not alone, miserably alone? You, my creator, abhor me; what hope can I gather from your fellow-creatures, who owe me nothing? They spurn and hate me. (*F* 103)

The Creature knows that what he has done – the killing of little William – is wrong, and does not deny that, but he still wants Frankenstein to listen to his tale before condemning him. Similarly, Prometheus is aware that his actions against Zeus were wrong but he implores the chorus of Oceanids to share his fate:

> An easy tale for one who has his foot
> Without the toils to teach and lecture him
> Who feels the actual ill. But I indeed
> Was well prepared for all befallen me.
> With intent I sinned, with intent – I hide it not.
> [...] Yield to my asking, yield;
> Bear so much part with the sufferer[85].

[84] Aeschylus, *The Prometheus Bound*, Webster, pp. 23-24.
[85] Aeschylus, *The Prometheus Bound*, Webster, p. 26.

These lines seem similar to those expressed by the Creature, who seeks Frankenstein because he thinks he is the only one who can understand him and wishes him to "join his fate to the troubled one of the Creation"[86].

Lastly, Prometheus and the Creature also share the desire to rebel against authority; in the Creature's case the only one responsible for his suffering is Victor Frankenstein. Up until William's murder, the Creature had no intention to kill, as he loved humans and wished to become friends with the little boy: "an idea seized me that this little creature was unprejudiced, and had lived too short a time to have imbibed a horror of deformity. If, therefore, I could seize him and educate him as my companion and friend, I should not be so desolate in this peopled earth" (*F* 144). But fate does not allow the Creature to be happy. William expresses his disgust in seeing the monster and the Creature bursts into a fit of rage and kills him: "You belong then to my enemy – to him towards whom I have sworn eternal revenge; you shall be my first victim" (*F* 144). With this first murder the Creature realizes that his action has successfully grieved Frankenstein, and thus uses this new knowledge to make him do what he wants the most. This situation parallels the one where Prometheus withholds from Zeus the secret concerning his future and fate. As Holden points out, both figures are "willing to harm their authority figure for the unjust manner in which they have been treated"[87].

In conclusion, Mary Shelley in her novel transforms and updates the myth of Prometheus according to Aeschylus, but as we have seen her interpretation is influenced by a variety of factors: the fusion of myths from various traditions, including those not explicitly mentioned by Aeschylus (such as the theme of Prometheus *plasticator*), as well as other literary texts and interpretations of the tragedy of *Prometheus Bound* by contemporary writers close to her[88].

[86] Holden, *The Ancient and Modern Prometheus,* p. 63.
[87] Holden, *The Ancient and Modern Prometheus,* p. 64.
[88] Fernandez, "Aeschylus and Frankenstein", p. 315.

Chapter 4 – Literary Education in *Frankenstein*

So far I have analyzed Mary Shelley's literary education and how this played a role in the writing of her magnus opus *Frankenstein*. Books were fundamental in Shelley's life and consequently they figure prominently in the characterization of the three main characters of her novel. Shelley details the three narrators' different educational experiences, giving explicit examples of the texts each character read. For instance, Robert Walton embarks on his journey to the North Pole after being exposed for all his childhood to the collection of exploration and travel narratives of his uncle; the writings of the alchemists have a lasting influence on Victor Frankenstein's monster-making; and lastly, the Creature's destructive power and thirst for revenge is indelibly tied to the books he finds and reads.

These three characters are all eager to acquire knowledge through experience, but mostly through literacy, thus they become self-educated; however, how this knowledge is interpreted and applied is what puts all these individuals in their precarious situations. Their education and, therefore, what they learn from it have major negative effects on their attitude, perception and decisions, leading to the tragedy of knowledge[1]. Although education grants the Creature survival and Victor power, Shelley's narrative demonstrates to her audience that in their case pursuing knowledge "does not lead to self-improvement but to self-destruction"[2].

This section analyzes this facet of intertextuality in the novel, focusing on the importance of literary education for the three main characters, starting with the Creature.

4.1 The Creature's Education

In the years prior to the writing of *Frankenstein* Mary Shelley recorded in her journal having read the same books that the Creature would find in an abandoned leathern portmanteau and which would form his education. *The Sorrows of Young Werther* by Goethe, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and Plutarch's *Lives* are all listed in the readings of the year 1815[3]. It is important to note that the Creature's education follows, in part, that of Shelley, since the chapters that belong to the monster's

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[1] I. M. Gillerstedt, *A Character Analyses of the Tragedy of Knowledge in Frankenstein and Northanger Abbey*, [Master Thesis], University of Oslo: Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages, 2022, p. 3

[2] S. Chao, "Education as a Pharmakon in Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein"", *The Explicator* 68 (2010): 223.

[3] Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley,* pp. 88-91.

narrative and that explain the effect these books have on his character form the heart of the whole novel's narrative construction.

Thanks to the Creature's account of what happened to him in the months after being born, we learn that at first he did not have the power of speech. He explains to Frankenstein that he was able to learn how to speak by spying, through a chink in the wall of the little hut in which he found refuge, the actions of the De Lacey family. By paying close attention to their lives, the Creature discovers the power of sounds and words: "I found that these people possessed a method of communicating their experience and feelings to one another by articulate sounds. [...] This was indeed a godlike science, and I ardently desired to become acquainted with it" (*F* 114-115). The monster is aware of his deformity and ugliness, hence his eagerness to learn to communicate in the hope that the cottagers will overlook his physical appearance. Therefore, the acquisition of language becomes the only means through which he thinks he can establish a connection with other individuals.

In this way, by great application, he learns the name of some of the most common objects as well as those of the cottagers themselves. But it is not until the Arabian girl Safie arrives that his literary education begins. The arrival of the female guest presents a great opportunity for the Creature since she does not speak the same language as her hosts and therefore Felix De Lacey starts teaching her his language, unaware of the Creature in the hovel carefully listening to their lessons. While Safie slowly begins to learn the vocabulary, the monster, eager to learn and to master the language, seems to improve day by day. These teachings grant the Creature access to new areas of knowledge and provide him with new sources of joy[4].

Once Felix begins to read to Safie, the Creature experiences the written word: "This reading had puzzled me extremely at first; but, by degrees, I discovered that he uttered many of the same sounds when he read, as when he talked. I conjectured, therefore, that he found on the paper signs for speech which he understood, and I ardently longed to comprehend these also" (*F* 116). The text used by Felix to instruct Safie is *The Ruins, or, Meditation on the Revolutions of Empires* (1791) by Constantin-François de Chasseboeuf comte de Volney. In this work Volney imagines himself among the ruins of Palmyra and reflects on the fall of empires whose power seemed eternal while giving a summary of world history, terminating with the French Revolution, as well as an analysis of the main religions existing in the world[5]. Volney illustrates the ruin of empires to warn his contemporaries. The text appears as an atheist counterpoint to *Paradise Lost*: the end of empires is not caused by a natural

[4] Z. Paré, "Frankenstein's Lectures", *Remate de Males* 39 (2019): 485.
[5] Paré, "Frankenstein's Lectures", pp. 485, 488.

process, or by a divine fatality, but it is the result of the conduct of men driven by ambition, and the wish to acquire wealth and fame[6].

> The caprice of which man complains is not the caprice of destiny; the darkness that misleads his reason is not the darkness of God; the source of his calamities is not in the distant heavens; it is beside him on the earth; it is not concealed in the bosom of the divinity; it resides in man himself; he bears it in his own heart[7].

As the Creature informs us, while reading the text to Safie, Felix adds very detailed explanations to the events illustrated by Volney, which facilitates the Creature in the understanding of the world's history. From this book the narrator discovers "a view of the several empires at present existing in the world... the manners, governments, and religions of the different nations of the earth" (*F* 122). He discovers the history and geography of governments, but, most importantly, the greed of men once they lose sight of the essential and primordial law imposed by nature itself. According to Musselwhite[8], the Creature is thus exposed to a system of polar classifications: from gender classification, "I heard of the difference of sexes" (*F* 123), through racial classification "I heard of the slothful Asiatics; of the stupendous genius and mental activity of the Grecians" (*F* 122), to social classification "I heard of the division of property, of immense wealth and squalid poverty" (*F* 122). The reading of the vice and bloodshed which marked the falling of empires leave the Creature disgusted and loathing while also undergoing a gradual awakening. His thoughts on the intricacy of human nature, as well as the laws that govern societies, lead him to consider his own situation in a process of self-examination taking into account analogies and similarities. However, he soon discovers that what he has learned does not represent his own situation, leaving him with metaphysical questions which remain unanswered until the end of the novel.

> And what was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant, but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. I was, besides, endued with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; I was not even of the same nature as man. [...] When I looked around I saw and heard of none like me. Was I, then, a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled and whom all men disowned? (*F* 123)

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[6] J. Lamoreux, "Frankenstein et Les Ruines de Volney, l'Éducation Littéraire de la Créature", *Protée* 35 (2007): 67.

[7] Volney, *Ruins: or, Meditation on the Revolutions of Empires*, Josiah P. Mendum, Boston, 1869, p. 28.

[8] D. E. Musselwhite, *Partings Welded Together: Politics and Desire in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel*, Methuen, New York and London, 1987. In *Frankenstein: the Pennsylvania Electronic Edition*, ed. Stuart Curran, https://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/mussel.html

Through its title, Volney's work suggests the process of systematic devastation which will become the Creature's main objective and the leitmotif of the story. He is born benevolent but the evil he encounters converts him to a devilish figure, who deliberately spreads ruins upon his path[9].

If the acquisition of language "opened a wide field for wonder and delight" (*F* 122), reading allows him to establish a cognitive relationship to the world which transforms him[10]. When Victor Frankenstein meets his Creature for the first time after abandoning him, he is touched by the monster's eloquence, it is in fact of primary importance to note that Shelley decided to create a menacing and hideous creature who communicates with the highest eloquence and elegance, allowing him to establish, through the medium of language, his first relationship[11].

The Creature explains to Victor that one night, while collecting food in the wood, he found an abandoned portmanteau that contained three books: *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, Goethe's *Sorrows of Werther*, and Plutarch's *Lives*. As noted by Brooks, these three master texts that form his private library "cover the public, the private, and the cosmic realms, and the three modes of love; they indeed constitute a possible Romantic *cyclopedia universalis*"[12]. For example, *Lives* shows him the nature of heroism but also what can be gained through the use of power; from *Werther* he further learns the domestic affection to which he was introduced by the De Lacey family, and how to express his emotions even in a self-destructive way; while *Paradise Lost* introduces him to the difference between evil and good and the origins of man. In a way these texts, just like *Ruins*, insist "upon the limits of human goodness and achievement"[13]. Because he has no mother or father to help shape his identity, these books help him create a sense of who he is. However, this kind of education leads to the Creature's own destruction, because he reads all these texts as true stories, even though they offer contradictory perspectives on power and nature. Moreover, while reading the three books he realizes the extent of his loneliness and exclusion:

> As I read, however, I applied much personally to my own feelings and condition. I found myself similar, yet at the same time strangely unlike to the beings concerning whom I read, and to whose conversation I was a listener. I sympathized with and partly understood them, but I was unformed in mind; I was dependent on none, and related to none. (*F* 131)

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[9] Lamoreux, "Frankenstein et Les Ruines de Volney", p. 67.

[10] Paré, "Frankenstein's Lectures", p. 486.

[11] Brooks, P., "Godlike Science/Unhallowed Arts": Language, Nature, and Monstrosity", *New Literary History* 9 (1978): 592.

[12] Brooks, "Godlike Science/Unhallowed Arts", p. 595.

[13] Levy, "Discovery and the Domestic Affections in Coleridge and Shelley", p. 705.

Shelley provides the Creature with an education that has the power to transform him into a human being through socialization, but it may also bring about a false enlightenment that is worse than blindness, turning him into a monster by elevating his hopes and needs above what society and nature can fulfill. It goes without saying that society's acceptance of Frankenstein's Creation as a human being is a prerequisite for his education as one. Lacking acceptance, all he can learn from his education is the extent to which he is excluded and that the very society he aspires to join is denying him a social identity[14]. While the acquisition of language allowed him to be educated, the knowledge he acquires only introduces him to pain and awareness of his deformity. He is "trapped in the abyss between the ideology his education teaches him and his own experience of a rejecting world"[15].

In the next sections I will analyze the three texts that shape the Creature's education and the possible reason as to why Shelley chose them.

4.1.1 Goethe's *The Sorrows of Werther*

As noted in the introduction to the Creature's education, among the texts that he casually finds in the wood is Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*. The monster does not spend a lot of time in explaining the effect this book has on him, and critics generally analyze it with brevity, noting only that it constitutes part of his literary education[16]. The impact that *Sorrows of Werther* has on the character of Victor Frankenstein's Creature is best understood by considering the subtext that is subtly weaved throughout the novel.

Shelley's idea of the "hideous progeny" can be applied to both her novel and her own life, as her mother's passed away as a result of her birth. As illustrated in Chapter One of this thesis, her quest to discover her own roots inevitably brought her to her parents' writings, particularly her mother's, from which she was able to define her identity. Throughout her life Shelley read multiple times *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796) an epistolary narrative that testifies Wollstonecraft's suffering from an unrequited love. After his wife's death, William Godwin published *Memoirs* and *Posthumous Works*, which contained the letters Wollstonecraft wrote

[14] A. McWhir, "Teaching the Monster to Read: Mary Shelley, Education, and Frankenstein", in J. Willinksy (ed.), *The Educational Legacy of Romanticism*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Waterloo, 1990. In *Frankenstein: the Pennsylvania Electronic Edition*, ed. Stuart Curran, https://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/mcwhir.html

[15] *Ibidem*.

[16] R. Burwick, "Goethe's "Werther" and Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein"", *The Wordsworth Circle* 24 (1993): 47.

to her lover Gilbert Imlay. His aim was to show that Wollstonecraft was not the woman everyone thought she was:

> Those whom curiosity led to seek an opportunity of seeing her, expected to find a rude, pedantic, dictatorial virago; and they were not a little a surprised when, instead of all this, they found a woman, lovely in her person, and in the best and most engaging sense, feminine in her manners[17].

Through these letters Shelley was able to meet the more intense and passionate side of her mother's character, different from the one which arose in her intellectual works. For instance, her testimonies of the relationship with Imlay show the "sorrows" of a woman whose sensitivity and passions have overtaken her, and who is frantically trying to make sense of the inner suffering brought on by the conflict between reason and emotion, which in turn led her to attempt suicide twice[18]. Godwin's preface to his wife's *Posthumous Works* is full of themes concerning unrequited love, suicide, and multiple allusions to Goethe's Werther, which testify to his aim of comparing her to a "female Werther", as also noted in his preface[19]:

> The following letters may possibly be found to contain the finest examples of the language of sentiment and passion ever presented to the world. They bear a striking resemblance to the celebrated romance of Werther, though the incidents to which they relate are of a very different cast[20].

Therefore, according to Godwin, since the letters are authentic and the sufferings real rather than imagined, they are more valuable than Goethe's writing. Furthermore, Godwin makes reference to his "female Werther" just as Werther's friend Wilhelm did in his introduction, appealing to the respect, affection, and sympathy of his readers.

The Sorrows of Werther was not valued only by Mary Shelley's parents: she and Percy Shelley read the novel in 1815 and her journal illustrates how she went back and forth in reading Goethe's work and her mother's through the years 1815 and 1816[21], providing a pattern of the "female" and "male" Werther. As a consequence, to them Wollstonecraft's writings worked as a subtext for Goethe's novel, which left traces in Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*.

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[17] W. Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, J. Johnson, London, 1798, p. 83.
[18] Burwick, "Goethe's "Werther" and Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein"", p. 48.
[19] *Ibidem*.
[20] W. Godwin, *Posthumous Works of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, J. Johnson, London, 1798, p. 5.
[21] Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley*, p. 88.

Concerning the Creature's education, Paola Piacenza[22] argues that the reading of literature tends to link itself to the idea of development and it is usually a necessary step in the formation of the characters of the classic Bildungsroman, or novel of education. For this reason learning a language and having access to literature constitute the most important points in the Creature's biography, so much so that through the books he finds he is able to think about his self and reflect on his situation. The actions of the De Lacey family, which unconsciously teach the Creature the importance of domestic affections, complement the characters of Goethe's novel, and, together, they build a framework of comparison that the Creature uses as a reference for self-evaluation.

> In the Sorrows of Werther, besides the interest of its simple and affecting story, so many opinions are canvassed, and so many lights thrown upon what had hitherto been to me obscure objects, that I found in it a never-ending source of speculation and astonishment. The gentle and domestic manners it described, combined with lofty sentiments and feelings, which had for their object something out of self, accorded well with my experience among my protectors, and with the wants which were forever alive in my own bosom. (*F* 130-131)

Moreover, he highlights his fondness for the character of Werther, whom he defines as a "more divine being that I had ever beheld or imagined" (*F* 131), expressing his understanding of the point of view of the protagonist ("I inclined towards the opinions of the hero" *F* 131) and being touched by his death ("whose extinction I wept" *F* 131).

In this way Goethe functions as a sort of mentor for the Creature, making him realize the difficulty in defining his own identity, since he does not find an equal either in the real world or in fiction. As a consequence, the Creature enters an interior conflict which will manifest itself with four main questions that he asks himself: "Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?" (*F* 131). While the first one can be directed at his physical appearance, the others go beyond the exterior and focus on his identity, his origin and his future. However, he is not able to give an answer to these questions, which will only increase his state of anxiety.

Subsequently, when the Creature becomes aware of his deformity he understands that the only way to establish a relationship with his hosts is to become eloquent in language and to explain his sufferings to the old De Lacey, so as to win his favor and his love. In this way he introduces himself to the fatherly figure and tries to describe his fatal situation to him, the latter sympathizes with him, and the Creature further laments his condition:

[22] P. Piacenza, "La Vida Leída: la Representación Literaria de la Lectura Adolescente", *Traslaciones. Revista Latinoamericana de Lectura y Escritura* 6 (2019): 181.

> They are kind – they are the most excellent creatures in the world; but unfortunately, they are prejudiced against me. I have good dispositions; my life has been hitherto harmless and in some degree beneficial; but a fatal prejudice clouds their eyes, and where they ought to see a feeling and kind friend, they behold only a detestable monster. (*F* 136)

Through these words he transmits his wish to be freed from the incomprehension and to overcome the barriers of rejection to which he has been chained by the people who previously attacked him, both physically and verbally. In this sense there is a similarity with the protagonist of *The Sorrows of Werther*, who feels excluded from a society that he views as hostile. Instead, they both find a better company in nature, which becomes an object of contemplation able to awake the joy of the spectator[23]. Moreover, both characters' benevolent actions are received by society as scary and dangerous, as testified by the attack that the Creature receives after attempting to save a little girl from drowning ("when the man saw me draw near, he aimed a gun, which he carried, at my body, and fired" *F* 143), and the panic of a child after Werther's display of affection for her ("The affection and simplicity with which this was uttered so charmed me, that I sought to express my feelings by catching up the child and kissing her heartily. She was frightened, and began to cry"[24]).

Another similarity between Werther and the Creature rests on the fact that both long for love and a female companionship. The Creature demands a mate from his creator, "with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being" (*F* 147), arguing that sympathy and care are indispensable in life. Werther views love in a similar way, declaring in a letter to his friend Wilhelm:

> Wilhelm, what is the world to our hearts without love? What is a magic-lantern without light? You have but to kindle the flame within, and the brightest figures shine on the white wall; and, if love only show us fleeting shadows, we are yet happy, when like mere children, we behold them, and are transported with the splendid phantoms[25].

Werther's love for Lotte constitutes one of the most important themes of Goethe's novel: the many temporary illusions created by their conversations, Werther's despair after discovering Lotte and Albert's engagement, and the numerous descriptions of the virtues of Werther's lover most of the text. Even after they kiss each other passionately, after reading a translation of Ossian, their love cannot become true, and Werther decides that the only solution to this problem is to kill himself. In a similar way, the Creature, after seeing Victor dying, finds no other solution than his own

[23] A. Valeo, "Tras las Huellas de Werther: Intertextualidad y Educación Sentimental en Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus", *Revista Academica liLETRAd* 8 (2024): 396.
[24] J. W. Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Francis A. Nicolls & Co, London and Boston, 1891, p. 35.
[25] Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, p. 39.

annihilation[26]. As expressed by Werther in one of his letters: "And yet to be misunderstood is the fate of the like of us"[27].

As we have seen Goethe's novel plays an important part in the Creature's education, and the characters of Werther and the Creature present common features. Shelley was certainly inspired by the novel's story, although she decided to use a slightly different narrative structure to that used by Goethe. For instance, while Goethe uses the voice of Wilhelm to convey the story of Werther in a linear way, Shelley employs a circular structure: the Creature's story is part of Frankenstein's autobiography, which is told by Walton to his sister Margaret. Moreover, the genre of the epistolary novel used by Goethe is revisited by Shelley in a unique way, because the whole story is narrated by Walton in a series of letters addressed to Margaret[28]. One last element used by both authors, which is also one of the main themes of this thesis, is the integration of literary texts in the novel which have an intense effect on the readers. Werther mentions his readings many times throughout the novel and how these have an effect upon him, especially Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, James Macpherson's *Ossian* and Lessing's *Emilia Galotti*, but while Goethe emphasizes the one-dimensionality of Werther's interpretation of his reading, Shelley creates multidimensional frameworks and connects the texts with her characters.

4.1.2 Plutarch's *Lives*

In this section we will analyze the most important example – second only to the myth of Prometheus – of Greco-Roman influence in *Frankenstein*, and the only direct classical impact on the Creature itself. *Parallel Lives*, or more commonly *Lives*, was composed by the Greek Plutarch in the second century of the Roman Empire; it consists of twenty-three pairs of biographies of Greek and Roman statesmen, with a brief comparison of each pair[29]. The moral traits of the statesmen are highlighted, making Plutarch's text an important source for the concepts of virtue and vice in the Roman Empire. Nowadays *Lives* is not discussed much in literary circles, however, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century it was considered as one of the most important Greco-Roman

[26] Valeo, "Tras las Huellas de Werther", p. 400.
[27] Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, p. 8.
[28] Burwick, "Goethe's "Werther" and Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein"", p. 50.
[29] J. Weiner, B. E. Stevens, & B. M. Rogers, "Introduction: The Modern Prometheus Turns 200", *Frankenstein and Its Classics: the Modern Prometheus from Antiquity to Science Fiction*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2018, p. 5.

texts. As suggested by Lisa Vargo[30], Shelley probably encountered for the first time *Parallel Lives* in her father's works, such as *Of History and Romance* (1797), in which he advises writers that they should read Plutarch for his ability to portray the lives of individuals that might serve as models for their readers. Therefore, if *The Sorrows of Young Werther* connects Shelley to her mother, Plutarch's *Lives* is one of the key texts that form the education set by her father. Moreover, in Shelley's essay about Rousseau she cites a passage of his *Confessions* in which he talks about Plutarch and how *Lives* shaped his character, where he claims:

> Plutarch, above all, became my favorite reading, and the pleasure I took in it cured somewhat of my love for romances, and I soon learnt to prefer Agesilaus, Brutus, and Aristides to Oorondates, Artamenes, and Juba. These delightful books, and the conversations to which they gave rise between my father and me, formed that independent and republican spirit, that proud untamable character, impatient of yoke and servitude, which has tormented me through life. [...] I became the man whose life I read[31].

In Shelley's journal Plutarch is mentioned many times, as both she and her husband were avid readers of his biographies, which they read in the English translations, as well as in Italian and Greek[32]. In conclusion, it not a surprise that she chose this text to be part of her Creature's literary education.

It is unclear whether the Creature read all twenty-three pair of biographies, but he notes that he was "led to admire peaceful lawgivers, Numa, Solon, and Lycurgus, in preference to Romulus and Theseus" (*F* 132); the first pair of biographies is made up by Theseus and Romulus, Lycurgus and Numa the second, while in the third are described the lives of Solon and Roman Poplicola[33]. Therefore, we are certain that the Creature read at least the first five biographies of Plutarch's *Lives*. As Macdonald and Scherf rightly note, "It is appropriate that a being in search of his own origins should find himself reading these stories of the origins of society"[34]. It also noteworthy that the first pair of biographies he reads are those of Theseus and Romulus, two figures who meditate on the difficulty of finding their origin and in search of their own father ("It seemed to me, then, that many resemblances made Theseus a fit parallel to Romulus. For both were of uncertain and obscure parentage, and got the reputation of descent from gods"[35]). However, he finds Theseus and Romulus

[30] L. Vargo, "Contextualizing Sources", in Smith, A. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Frankenstein*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2016, p. 62.
[31] Shelley, "Rousseau", p. 112.
[32] Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley,* p. 91, 92, 97.
[33] Weiner, Stevens, & Rogers, "Introduction: The Modern Prometheus Turns 200", p. 6.
[34] Macdonald, Scherf, Introduction and appendix in *Frankenstein*, p. 27.
[35] Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1914, p. 5.

"unsatisfactory heroes"[36], probably because of their multiple rape perpetuated against hundreds of women, and for Theseus' fame of killer of monsters.

Aside from this, *Lives* is relevant to the mind of the Creature because by reading the various lives of these statesmen, he begins comparing them to the lives of the only individuals he has the chance to observe, the De Laceys, "The patriarchal lives of my protectors caused these impressions [i.e. what he read in Plutarch] to take a firm hold on my mind" (*F* 132). In his eyes, the peaceful actions of the De Laceys corroborate the theories of the "peaceful lawgivers Numa, Solon, and Lycurgus" (*F* 132). Therefore, he realizes the importance of being part of a community, perhaps conveyed through Lycurgus' educational policy:

> He trained his fellow-citizens to have neither the wish nor the ability to live for themselves; but like bees they were to make themselves always integral parts of the whole community, clustering together about their leader, almost beside themselves with enthusiasm and noble ambition, and to belong wholly to their country[37].

As highlighted by Macdonald and Scherf[38], Lycurgus' provides a foreshadowing of the rest of the Creature's story: if the lawgiver's care for his Spartan citizens brings forth obedient and gentle adults, Victor's abandonment of his Creature is likely to produce a rebellious outcast. Furthermore, even if the Creature appreciates the actions of the community-oriented figures just mentioned, he will imitate those of Theseus and Romulus through his murders.

The Creature narrates to Victor:

> Plutarch taught me high thoughts; he elevated me above the wretched sphere of my own reflections, to admire and love the heroes of past ages. [...] I read of men concerned in public affairs, governing or massacring their species. I felt the greatest ardor for virtue rise within me, and abhorrence for vice. (*F* 131-132)

Thus, *Lives* presents a picture of virtue that the Creature is tempted to follow but is forced to reject – first because of the rejection of the De Laceys, then due to Victor' refusal to create a female companion for him. Notably, the Creature uses Plutarch's moralizing language to try to convince Victor and explain the repercussions of his refusal: "If I have no ties and no affections, hatred and vice must be my portion. [...] My *vices* are the children of a forced solitude that I abhor; and my *virtues* will necessarily arise when I live in communion with an equal." (*F* 150, emphasis added). The Creature's use of words such as "ties", "affection", "solitude", "communion" directs us to the fact

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[36] Macdonald, Scherf, Introduction and appendix in *Frankenstein*, p. 27.
[37] Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, p.283.
[38] Macdonald, Scherf, Introduction and appendix in *Frankenstein,* p. 28.

that *Lives* is a study not only of individual virtue, but of virtue applied to kin, alliances and friendship. For example, Alexander the Great turns against his friends because of his ambitions; Cato the Younger refuses friendship with Pompey through a marriage pact and Plutarch treats this event as the source of the future civil wars that will destroy the Roman Republic[39]. Therefore, the relationship that one has with kin and friendship ultimately determine their success or failure.

This concept is mirrored in *Frankenstein*: the Creature becomes a prey to vice because he is denied friendship and companionship. On the other hand, Victor is offered love many times throughout the novel, especially from his father, Elizabeth, and Henry Clerval, but he refuses their care by not replying or reading in time their letters, by postponing his marriage to Elizabeth, and by leaving behind Clerval in their visit of Scotland, which ultimately leads to his death. In the 1818 edition of the novel, it is precisely Henry who mentions for the first time Plutarch's words, when he tries to console his friend Victor for the death of his little brother, by saying "Even Cato wept over the dead body of his brother" (*F* 233), alluding to the death of Cato's brother Caepio. Thus, Frankenstein struggles throughout the story to commit himself to the quality of virtue that Plutarch presents as fundamental for succeeding[40].

A final issue that ties *Lives* with *Frankenstein* regards Shelley's use of three narrators. Plutarch, by juxtaposing pairs of biographies, allows the readers to compare or contrast the lives of the individuals they read; similarly, *Frankenstein* alternates the narration or Robert Walton, Victor Frankenstein and the Creature so that the audience can compare their "parallel lives"[41]. For instance, Walton may have the same ambition and desire for scientific knowledge as Victor, but he behaves in ways that are not only fundamentally different from Victor's, but also shown before his story begins, allowing readers to anticipate Frankenstein's vices. Walton regularly writes to his sister Margaret and takes good care of Victor, anticipating Henry's care for his friend.

In conclusion, Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* not only has an influence on the Creature's view of political life and moral virtue, but it may also serve as a model for the greater narrative framework of *Frankenstein*, with recurring parallels or comparisons[42].

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[39] Weiner, Stevens, & Rogers, "Introduction: The Modern Prometheus Turns 200", p. 8.
[40] *Ibidem*.
[41] *Ibidem*.
[42] Weiner, Stevens, & Rogers, "Introduction: The Modern Prometheus Turns 200", p. 9.

4.1.3 Milton's *Paradise Lost*

One of the main ways Romantic myth-makers challenged the conventional origin story was through *Paradise Lost*. Milton enabled the particular reworking of the myth by providing a clear poetic form for the conventional interpretation of the fall[43]. It is no surprise, then, that Shelley decided to integrate Milton's text in her novel *Frankenstein*, through explicit and implicit references. *Paradise Lost* is mentioned many times in Shelley's journal: the first time in the reading list of 1815 together with *Paradise Regained*, the second part of the epic; in 1816 she mentions Percy Shelley reading *Paradise Lost* aloud to her while she was already working on her novel; the pair read the text again in 1817[44].

Milton's work forms part of the literary education of Frankenstein's Creature, being one of the three books he finds in the wood. According to Lamb, "the monster's autobiography is the history of his fall into language and into the meanings and values encoded in Milton's mythology"[45]. The Creature's concept of self and what makes him a living being is defined nearly entirely by *Paradise Lost*. As mentioned previously, to him all narratives are "histories" (*F* 132) and therefore true, but Milton's epic, unlike Volney's *Ruins*, is not just a history of civilization. He finds an answer to the question "What was I?" in the pages of *Paradise Lost*, which becomes his only sense of reality. In this sense, he compares the events and situations he reads about to his own ("I often referred the several situations, as their similarity struck me, to my own" (*F* 132)) just as he did with the other two books, but in this case the strong analogies cause him emotions that he is not able to control.

At first the Creature compares himself to Adam as he was too "apparently united by no link to any other being in existence" (*F* 132). His attempts at recollection when he begins his narrative ("It is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original era of my being" *F* 105) closely resemble those of Adam when he wakes up in Eden, in Book VIII: "For man to tell how human life began / Is hard; for who himself beginning knew?"[46]. Both Adam and the monster experience the same sensations of light and darkness, of nature, of sounds and of the presence of other creatures such as birds. Both figures ask some fundamental questions, such as Adam's "But who was I, or where, or from what cause, / Knew not"[47], and the Creature's "Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come?

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[43] Cantor, *Creature and Creator,* p. 1.
[44] Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley,* p. 89, 146, 188.
[45] J. B. Lamb, "Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Milton's Monstrous Myth", *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 47 (1992): 312-313.
[46] J. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. R. Vaughan, Collier, New York, 1890, p. 189.
[47] *Ibidem*.

What was my destination?" (*F* 131). But whereas for Adam's "all things smiled; / With fragrance and with joy my heart o'erflowed"[48], the Creature's first emotions are not of bliss but "feeling pain invade me on all sides" (*F* 106). Moreover, while Adam instantly knows how to speak and communicate, "To speak I tried, and forthwith spake; / My tongue obeyed, and readily could name / Whatever I saw"[49], the Creature does not have the same gift, as he recounts: "Sometimes I tried to imitate the pleasant songs of the birds, but was unable. Sometimes I wished to express my sensations in my own mode, but the uncouth and inarticulate sounds which broke from me frightened me into silence again" (*F* 106). We are introduced here to the firsts contrasts between these two figures and of how their similarities will be overcome by their differences.

In the description of Eden, the Creature finds his ideal place, intensified by the portrait of Adam's Edenic life:

> Sometimes I allowed my thoughts, unchecked by reason, to ramble in the fields of Paradise, and dared to fancy amiable and lovely creatures sympathizing with my feelings and cheering my gloom; their angelic countenances breathed smiles of consolation. (*F* 134)

This description of his feelings expresses his sincere desire for a better life for himself, and his innocent amazement at and delight in the blissful Edenic state also allude to a genuine piety that results from a strong sense of divine love and care[50]. Furthermore, the Creature's interest in Paradise takes us back to the beginning of life and to the Prime Creator. As Ping[51] argues, since affection and the connection between individuals are the origins of joy and life itself, the Creature alludes to the sacredness of Edenic life by reinforcing the notion of the intimate relationship between God and humanity. Man, in fact, is seen to be "happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator" (*F* 132). This attraction to the condition of love and kinship also explains his attachment to the De Lacey family. When the old De Lacey promises to help him, the Creature alludes to the God of Milton's epic, who raises Adam and Eve from dust, by saying "You raise me from the dust by this kindness" (*F* 137). In contrast, the act of the young members of the family, who upon seeing his hideous form, flee their house and as a consequence reject him, is seen by the Creature like the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise, and represents the most important fall for him.

Additionally, after finding Victor Frankenstein's journal in which he described his creation, the constant rejection and the state of complete solitude that the Creature experiences become even

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[48] *Ibidem*.
[49] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, p. 190.
[50] T. S. Ping, "Frankenstein, Paradise Lost, and "the Majesty of Goodness"", *College Literature* 16 (1989): 256.
[51] *Ibidem*.

more apparent, and from this moment he becomes more similar to the figure of Satan: "I remembered Adam's supplication to his Creator. But where was mine? He had abandoned me, and in the bitterness of my heart I cursed him" (*F* 134). He then finds in the character of Satan the best name to represent him:

> [...] but I was wretched, helpless, and alone. Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition; for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me. (*F* 132)

The parallelism with Satan is rendered evident firstly by Victor and his decision not to give a name to his creation. As highlighted by Lamb[52], at the beginning of *Paradise Lost* Satan appears without a name and with a dubious identity. In Book 1 Milton wonders what caused the fall of Adam and Eve from Eden: "Who first seduced them to that foul revolt?"[53], and right after answers with "The infernal Serpent; he it was"[54]. In other words, Milton uses the analogy of the serpent to describe such figure, but Satan is not called in this way until later in *Paradise Lost*. Similarly, as Victor does not give a name to the Creature until later in the novel, when he addresses him first as an "object" (*F* 77), then as a "demon" (*F* 77), and finally as a "Devil" (*F* 78).

The Creature, then, accepts the identification with Satan and accepts the name as his own:

> All, save I, were at rest or in enjoyment: I, like the archfiend, bore a hell within me, and finding myself unsympathized with, wished to tear up the trees, spread havoc and destruction around me, and then to have sat down and enjoyed the ruin. (*F* 138)

In accepting *Paradise Lost* as his own true history, he has started a process of self-identification with the existential options that Milton's text encodes[55]. The Creature initially wishes for Adam's name, his identity, and the virtues that he believes such a figure possesses. However, he has to accept the inescapable consequences that the master narrative, which has become his only sense of reality, dictates. He is, instead, Satan and must act out as such: "From that moment I declared ever-lasting war against the species, and, more than all, against him who had formed me, and sent me forth to this insupportable misery" (*F* 138). We are introduced here to the moral of the story, according to Percy Shelley, who said in his review of *Frankenstein*:

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[52] Lamb, "Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Milton's Monstrous Myth", p. 311.
[53] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, p. 2.
[54] *Ibidem*.
[55] Lamb, "Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Milton's Monstrous Myth", p. 315.

> Treat a person ill, and he will become wicked. Requite affection with scorn; - let one being be selected, for whatever cause, as the refuse of his kind – divide him, a social being, from society, and you impose upon him the irresistible obligations – malevolence and selfishness[56].

Even if the Creature now identifies with Satan, he is also aware of one main difference between the two: "Satan had his companions, fellow-devils, to admire and encourage him; but I am solitary and abhorred" (*F* 133). Here the condition of the Creature is far worse than that of Satan, since he does not have any type of relationship with other individuals; his solitude and loneliness far exceed Satan's. Therefore, for the Creature hell is an internal condition which is intensified, or even produced, by loneliness. We can derive from this that the main contrast between Milton's Satan and Shelley's Creature is that "Satan's misery springs from his crime, the Monster's crime from his misery"[57].

The literary framework of *Frankenstein* foreshadows our encounter with Milton's patriarchal epic, even before *Paradise Lost* becomes one of the books found by the Creature[58]. This allusive pattern of *Frankenstein* is established from the beginning by the preface allegedly written by Percy Bysshe Shelley in which he praises *Paradise Lost,* among other works:

> I have thus endeavored to preserve the truth of the elementary principles of human nature, while I have not scrupled to innovate upon their combinations. The *Iliad*, the tragic poetry of Greece, - Shakespeare in *The Tempest* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*, - and most especially Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, conform to this rule. (*F* 11)

In other words, Percy Shelley argues that literature preserves the truths of human nature and uses references to great stories, such as those listed, in order to prove his point. Moreover, another reference to Milton's epic is placed right at the beginning of the novel, in the epigraph:

> Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
> To mould me man? Did I solicit thee
> From darkness to promote me?[59]

The epigraph foreshadows the whole theme of the book: the lament of Adam becomes that of the Creature. In *Paradise Lost* Man does not choose to be born Man, it is his Maker who possesses

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[56] P. Shelley, "On Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus", *Athenaeum* (1832): 730.
[57] M. A. Mays, "Frankenstein, Mary Shelley's Black Theodicy", *The Southern Humanities Review* 3 (1964): 146-153. In *Frankenstein: the Pennsylvania Electronic Edition*, ed. Stuart Curran, https://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/mays.html
[58] S. M. Gilbert, S. Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1979, p. 225.
[59] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, p. 257-258.

the power to create him as such. Similarly, the Creature becomes a monster through the rejection of his own Maker, in this case, Victor Frankenstein. Here the Creature admits the limitations imposed on him by Frankenstein, especially his forced seclusion. The monster has eaten the forbidden fruit, i.e. knowledge and language, which become his sins. As a consequence, he is able to face his creator after gaining an education in the literary arts[60].

As Shelley fills her whole novel with allusions to *Paradise Lost*, we can argue that the Creature is not the only character who possesses Adam's or Satan's qualities. Gilbert and Gubar highlight the fact that at first Victor seems more Adam than Satan[61]. Like Adam, he is protected by his loving father throughout his Edenic childhood and upbringing. When the heavenly Elizabeth Lavenza joins the household, she appears to be as much a gift from God as Milton's Eve, and Victor's property as much as Adam's rib is Adam's[62]. While Victor is narrating his story to Walton, he hints that on one occasion his father, just like Walton's and Adam's, forbade him to pursue the study of arcane knowledge, even though he was granting him entire freedom over his studies. As a consequence, he blames his own fall on this episode and thus on his father's restrictions: "If my father had taken the pains to explain to me that the principles of Agrippa had been entirely exploded, [...] it is even possible that the train of my ideas would never have received the fatal impulse that led to my ruin" (*F* 40-41).

However, as his feverish studies and the ambition to explore the secrets of life grow in intensity, he undergoes a metamorphosis from Adam to God and then to Satan. When Victor discovers the secrets of life, he claims that "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me" (*F* 55). In *Paradise Lost* Milton portrays God as being dissatisfied with his creation of Satan; rather than chastise him or handle his tendency toward arrogance, God banishes Satan from His realm for all eternity. Similarly, Frankenstein casts out his monster due to his dissatisfaction with his creation[63]. His pretension to Godliness is complemented by his other role as martyr. The scientist's attitude highlights his deceit and corruption in contrast to the Creature's simplicity and transparency. His role as a martyr is made clear when he expresses pain and believes that his punishment is even worse than that of Justine after she is wrongly

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[60] M. Gal, "The Epigraph: John Milton's Paradise Lost", *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein Unraveling Three Editions*, 2016. https://orange18mango.wixsite.com/frankenstein/the-epigraph-paradise-lost
[61] Gilbert, Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 230.
[62] *Ibidem*.
[63] D. Soyka, "Frankenstein and the Miltonic Creation of Evil", *Extrapolation* 33 (1992): 166-177. In *Frankenstein: the Pennsylvania Electronic Edition*, ed. Stuart Curran, https://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Articles/soyka.html

executed[64]. He believes that although Justine is dead, she is at peace while he is imprisoned in a "hell of intense tortures" (*F* 93).

Therefore, Frankenstein would like to think of himself as God-like, but his creation violates the "Edenic code of love"[65]. In this way he becomes a diabolical creator who let loose a monstruous individual, like Satan who produced Sin, the disgusting figure, and releases it upon the world. Leslie Tannembaum[66] gives a few examples of how the parallels between Victor and Satan are made clear by the description Walton makes of the young scientist. For example, the young explorer notes that Victor "seems to feel his own worth, and the greatness of his fall" (*F* 214), which reminds us of Satan at the council scene in hell "Satan, whom now transcendent glory raised / Above his fellows, with monarchal pride, / conscious of highest worth"[67]. Frankenstein himself uses some analogies in describing his own situation. For instance, when he reaches the Arctic Ocean in his pursuit of the Creature, he exclaims: "Oh! How unlike it was to the blue seasons of the south!" (*F* 209), which is a rhetorical eco of Milton's "Oh, how unlike the place from whence they fell!"[68]. Moreover, he clearly identifies with the figure of Satan as a Promethean rebel when he says "All my speculations and hopes are as nothing; and, like the archangel who aspired to omnipotence, I am chained in eternal hell" (*F* 214). Even though Frankenstein identifies himself with Satan on a few conscious occasions, he does not seem to be entirely aware of the moral consequences of this self-image. So much so that even when he compares his situation to that of Satan, he insists upon identifying the Creature with that role and claims divine approval for his desire of revenge[69]. As Ping[70] argues, Frankenstein's claim to be guiltless and not blamable and, therefore, the ignorance of the extent of his guilt, constitute his worse transgression.

Since God, Satan, and Adam are the three primary characters in *Paradise Lost*, it seems difficult to match exactly the characters of *Frankenstein* with their Miltonic prototypes. This is especially true of the two main characters, Frankenstein and the Creature. In this way Shelley effectively eliminated the middle term by cutting the number of characters from three to two. She also gave certain characteristics of Satan's role to her godlike figure Victor, and other components to her Adam-like figure, the Creature[71]. As a consequence, both Victor and the Creature seem to be

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[64] Ping, "Frankenstein, Paradise Lost, and "the Majesty of Goodness"", p. 258.
[65] Ping, "Frankenstein, Paradise Lost, and "the Majesty of Goodness"", p. 256.
[66] Tannenbaum, "From Filthy Type to Truth", p.103.
[67] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, p. 38.
[68] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, p. 4.
[69] Tannenbaum, "From Filthy Type to Truth", p. 104.
[70] Ping, "Frankenstein, Paradise Lost, and "the Majesty of Goodness"", p. 257.
[71] Cantor, *Creature and Creator*, p. 105.

attempting to make sense of their existence in a fallen world, however "unlike Adam, both characters seem to have fallen not merely from Eden, but from the earth, fallen directly into hell, like Satan"[72].

We can conclude this section by saying that *Paradise Lost* elaborates two kinds of myth, that of creation, and that of transgression. *Frankenstein* does the same, but eliminates the distinction between these two types of myths, making creation and transgression seem to be one and the same[73].

4.2 Victor's and Walton's Literary Education

As we have seen, the Creature's literary education forms an important part of Shelley's novel and development of the story. However, the monster is not the only character who undergoes a faulty education. Both Robert Walton and Victor Frankenstein are obsessed by modern science and have received their imprinting from improper books, belonging to a former, pre-scientific age. In this way Shelley demonstrates the dangers for children of reading stories of the unknown and how childhood reading habits form the adult man. In the most basic interpretation, unsupervised reading might cause a child to become mentally deformed because it can lead him into imaginative flights with unpredictable consequences, like the Creature[74]. This also explains Walton's story of how his early reading inspired him to embark on dangerous and impossible nautical adventures, just as Victor's miseducation is attributed to neglectful parents.

In this section we will analyze Shelley's knowledge of the scientific developments of her time, which allowed her to form Victor's and Walton's education.

Mary Shelley's scientific understanding was based on the works of three of the most famous scientists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: Humphry Davy, Erasmus Darwin, and Luigi Galvani. Even though she was not a scientist (her account of Victor Frankenstein's laboratory is ambiguous and simplistic) she nevertheless demonstrated a solid understanding of the ideas and ramifications of some of the most significant scientific discoveries of her day. As Mellor[75] points out, Shelley makes a distinction in her book between the scientific study that aims to define how the physical cosmos functions, and the research that seeks to manipulate or alter the universe through human involvement. Shelley draws attention to the risks associated with the latter, evident in the work

[72] Gilbert, Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 225.
[73] Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow.*
[74] A. B. Shuffelton, "The Monstrosity of Parental Involvement: Formation Through Reading in Shelley and Rousseau", *Philosophy of Education Yearbook* 1 (2018): 70.
[75] Mellor, *Mary Shelley*, p. 90.

of Davy and Galvani, while implicitly celebrating the former, which she most strongly links to the work of Erasmus Darwin. The works of these scientists are an implicit important part in Victor's scientific development, but we must take a step back and first investigate his childhood studies, to be able to fully understand the significance of such discoveries in his story.

In the first edition of the novel Shelley gives more details on the education that Victor and his adopted sister received from their parents:

> No youth could have passed more happily than mine. My parents were indulgent, and my companions amiable. Our studies were never forced; and by some means we always had an end placed in view, which excited us to ardour in the prosecution of them. It was by this method, and not by emulation, that we were urged to application. [...] and so far from study being made odious to us through punishment, we loved application, and our amusements would have been the labours of other children. (*F* 230)

Alphonse Frankenstein seems to have followed Godwin's pedagogical principles, as he inspired his children to learn in a noncompetitive environment. However, Victor reaches a pivotal point in his development when the household circle that had surrounded his study is suddenly disrupted, and his reading acquires a restricted and neglected tone.

At the age of thirteen Victor and his family stayed in an inn near Thonon, due to bad weather, and there he found a volume of the works of Cornelius Agrippa, "I opened it with apathy; the theory which he attempts to demonstrate, and the wonderful facts which he relates soon changed this feeling into enthusiasm" (*F* 40). As a book which promoted the desire for human omnipotence and the pursuit of the philosopher stone as well as the elixir of life, this source would give rise to Victor's descent into ruin. Nonetheless, Frankenstein does not blame the book for his downfall, but rather his father's dismissal of such work, (he labelled it "sad trash" *F* 40), which led the young boy into a secret and more enthusiastic reading. Victor's second excuse is that he was allowed to read unsupervised, insisting that "my dreams were undisturbed by reality" (*F* 231), and as a consequence, he procured the whole works of Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Albertus Magnus, "I took their word for all that they averred, and I became their disciple" (*F* 41).

Nevertheless, a couple years later Victor is forced to recognize the ignorance of these pseudo scientists when a nearby tree was struck by a lightning during a storm.

> When we visited it the next morning, we found the tree shattered in a singular manner. It was not splintered by the shock, but entirely reduced to thin ribbons of wood. I never beheld anything so utterly destroyed. Before this I was not unacquainted with the more obvious laws of electricity. On this occasion a man of great research in natural philosophy was with us, and, excited by this catastrophe, he entered on the explanation of a theory which he had formed on the subject of electricity and galvanism, which was

> at once new and astonishing to me. All that he said threw greatly into the shade Cornelius Agrippa, Albertus Magnus, and Paracelsus, the lords of my imagination. (*F* 42-43)

At this point, disillusioned by his previous studies, Victor goes to the University of Ingolstadt and enrolls in courses on chemistry and natural philosophy. There he meets Professor Krempe, who, upon hearing of Victor's studies of the alchemists' works exclaims: "Have you really spent your time in studying such nonsense?" (*F* 47), complaining that he has burdened his memory "with exploded systems and useless names" (*F* 47). Therefore, Krempe tries to guide more accurately Victor's reading, but it is too late since a particular notion of science has already entered the young scientist's mind. Frankenstein has clearly been influenced by the alchemists; instead of understanding science as a process-oriented endeavor, he now views it as a goal or product-oriented endeavor[76].

It is with the charismatic Professor Waldman that Victor's scientific development reaches an important point. Waldman's notions of nature and chemistry are based upon Humphry Davy's works. In fact, Shelley on the 28th of October 1816 lists in her journal "Read the Introduction to Sir H. Davy's Chemistry"[77]. Since she did not give the full title of the work she was reading, it is difficult to establish the exact work of Davy. Some critics believe that she read the "Introduction" to Davy's *Elements of Chemical Philosophy* (1812), while others suggest she read *A Discourse, Introductory to a Course of Lectures on Chemistry*, which was the publication of a lecture that Davy took at the Royal Institution in January 1802[78]. Even though the two works are similar, Professor Waldman's passion for chemistry and his explanation of the advantages of studying it, as well as Victor's theory that chemistry may hold the key to understanding life itself, appear to be more thoroughly reflected in the *Discourse* rather than in the *Elements*[79]. Davy creates a utopian picture of the modern scientist, who is informed by a science that

> Has given to him an acquaintance with the different relations of the parts of the external world; and more than that, it has bestowed upon him powers which may be almost called creative; which have enabled him to modify and change the beings surrounding him, and by his experiments to interrogate nature with power, sot simply as a scholar, passive and seeking only to understand her operations, but rather as a master, active with his own instruments[80].

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[76] A. Rauch, "The Monstruous Body of Knowledge in Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein"", *Studies in Romanticism* 34 (1995): 234.
[77] Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley,* p. 142.
[78] E. Crouch, "Davy's "A Discourse, Introductory to a Course on Lectures on Chemistry": a Possible Scientific Source of "Frankenstein"", *Keats-Shelley Journal* 27 (1978): 36.
[79] Mellor, *Mary Shelley*, p. 91.
[80] Davy, H., "A Discourse; Introductory to a Course of Lectures on Chemistry", in Davy, J. (ed.), The Collected Works of Sir Humphry Davy, Smith, Elder and Co., London, 1839. Available at: https://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Davy/davy2dis.html

Here Davy presents the same contrast that Shelley aims to highlight between the master-scientist who deliberately manipulates nature, and the scholar-scientist who merely aims to comprehend how it works. While Davy clearly favors the former, Shelley views his instrumental endeavors as extremely dangerous[81].

Moreover, Davy's contributions show that Frankenstein's theories were no more scientifically audacious that those of other nineteenth-century chemists. Davy thought that chemistry might explain a lot of enigmatic natural events, such as the organic transformation of dead matter into live one[82]. He, in fact, writes:

> The phenomena of combustion, of the solution of different substances in water, of the agencies of fire; the production of rain, hail, and snow, and the conversion of dead matter into living matter by vegetable organs, all belong to chemistry; and, in their various and apparently capricious appearances, can be accurately explained only by an acquaintance with the fundamental and general chemical principles[83].

Furthermore, he highlights how among man's greatest discoveries has been that of "a new influence, [...] which has enabled man to produce from combinations of dead matter effects which were formerly occasioned only by animal organs"[84]. It is highly probable that this new source is galvanic electricity. Luigi Galvani, in 1780, observed that when exposed to an electrical impulse, dead muscular tissue would contract. Based on his research, he postulated that animals' nerves and muscles contain a substance similar to an electric current. A large portion of Davy's early research was conducted in the field of galvanic chemistry, and it appears that he thought that this kind of research could lead to the discovery of the life force, which he perceived to be a chemical force stronger than heat and electricity[85].

Even though Shelley remains vague in her description of how the Creature is born, Victor's experiments seem very similar to Davy's ones on galvanic chemistry. For example, Frankenstein's interest in the study of the death bodies corresponds to Davy's claim that the principle of life could be discovered after one had researched the "simple and unvarying agencies of dead matter"[86]. Furthermore, Frankenstein remembers "I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet" (*F* 58), such "spark" could probably

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[81] Mellor, *Mary Shelley,* p. 93.
[82] Crouch, "Davy's "A Discourse"", p. 36.
[83] Davy, "A Discourse".
[84] *Ibidem*.
[85] Crouch, "Davy's "A Discourse"", p. 37.
[86] Davy, "A Discourse".

be a force similar to electricity. In the first edition of the novel there is no mention of galvanism. Nonetheless, in the Introduction to the 1831 edition Shelley writes: "Perhaps a corpse would be re-animated; galvanism had given token of such things: perhaps the component parts of a creature might be manufactured, brought together, and endued with vital warmth" (*F* 8), suggesting that she had in mind such experiments when she wrote those of Frankenstein. Therefore, the mood of enthusiasm that Davy conveyed to his London audience, was the same that inspired Victor to start his scientific career.

However, unlike Davy, Shelley questioned if chemistry itself – to the extent that it required a mastery of nature – produced exclusively beneficial results. She replaced Davy's conceited picture of the content scientist living in peace with himself and his community with the terrifying picture of the alienated scientist laboring in frantic seclusion, cut off from his friends, family, and society on both a physical and emotional level.

As we have seen, Victor Frankenstein's ruin begins with the wrong choice of books, but something similar happens to the first narrator of the novel, Robert Walton.

We soon discover, from the firsts letters he sends to his sister Margaret, that his thinking has been shaped by his extensive exploration of his uncle's library: "for the first fourteen years of my life I ran wild on a common, and read nothing but our uncle Thomas's books of voyages" (*F* 19), which led him to become an avid and hasty reader. He explains that his voyage of exploration is a consequence of a narrow but very intense literary education. As a result, he is "too ardent in execution, and too impatient of difficulties" (*F* 19). Walton lacks critical acumen as a result of his messy and inexperienced reading, which is evident from his inability to match what he desires and what he reads. He also reveals, "Now I am twenty-eight and am in reality more illiterate than many schoolboys of fifteen" (*F* 20). He continues to make irrational imaginative leaps from what he is familiar with to what he desires[87]. For instance, since the Pole is a place with constant light, he believes it "a region of beauty and delight" (*F* 15). Through his constant reading of the "accounts of the various voyages which have been made in the prospect of arriving at the North Pacific Ocean through the seas which surround the pole" (*F* 16), he organizes an expedition to be the first to discover such passage. However, the stories he read place him and his crew in a very dangerous situation. Due to his ambition and his search for glory, his ship is stuck in the middle of the frozen ocean. As argued by Small, Walton is a pre-figuration of Victor Frankenstein: "elevated by ambition and curiosity, discounting the prospect of frost and desolation [...] he dismisses all difficulties and declares his supreme self-confidence: '"what can stop the determined heart and resolved will of a man?"' (*F* 24)"[88].

[87] Sharp, "If It Be a Monster Birth", p. 73.
[88] Small, *Ariel like a Harpy,* p. 37.

In conclusion, Shelley provided multiple ways for obtaining the "science of education"[89] in her novel: the Creature's listening in on the language and history courses taught by the De Laceys; Victor's early education in Geneva, and his university studies in natural philosophy; Walton's lack of proper education and his study of exploration books. As McLane suggests, "These different educational modes and contents suggest that all knowledges are not equal, nor are they equally obtained"[90].

[89] M. N. McLane, "Literate Species: Populations, "Humanities", and Frankenstein", *ELH* 63 (1996): 969.
[90] McLane, "Literate Species", p. 970.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to investigate in what way Mary Shelley's education and her upbringing enabled her to write her first novel *Frankenstein*, and how this reflects upon the main characters of her story.

From this study it has emerged that the novel is not just a gothic story – rather, it is a profound reflection of the author's experiences, influences, and philosophical thoughts. Shelley's unique upbringing under the intellectual supervision of her parents, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, was deftly incorporated in her narrative. Bearing the imprint of multi-layered influences that span from her parents' works to well-known Romantic writers', the many facets of her narrative reveal the importance of education and family relationships. Surrounded by notable thinkers and writers, Shelley absorbed the diverse ideas that informed her creative vision.

Among the strands that make up *Frankenstein*'s rich tapestry of Romantic intertextuality, notable are the works of her husband Percy Shelley, together with those of Lord Byron, Coleridge, and Rousseau. The close examination of the novel demonstrates how Shelley skillfully traverses the emotional extremes of human experience while highlighting the complex relationship between the Gothic and Romantic traditions. Her extensive reading and engagement with contemporary works allowed Shelley to develop a distinctive voice, culminating in a novel that explores complex themes of humanity and morality. As McWhir points out, "if Frankenstein the self-deluded creator puts together his creature out of fragments salvaged from the grave, Mary Shelley forms her "hideous progeny" out of fragments of her reading as well as her experience"[1].

By using the intertextual lens, we can observe how her work tackles significant existential and ethical issues, such as creation, solitude, and the pursuit of knowledge, in addition to reflecting thematic concerns of her contemporaries. Ultimately, Shelley's novel presents the dual nature of education, showing how it may empower people while also emphasizing the moral obligations that come with knowledge. Thus, readers are encouraged to consider the nature of learning and its significant influence on the human experience in light of this tension. Shelley examines the transformational power of literature, showing how it changes perceptions and aspirations leading to ultimately tragic outcomes, through the different educational trajectories of the three principal characters: Robert Walton, Victor Frankenstein, and the Creature. The latter's literary education, shaped by texts such as Plutarch's *Lives*, Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost,* serves as both a blessing and a curse. His terrible transition from a benevolent being

[1] McWhir, "Teaching the Monster to Read".

to one who craves vengeance serves as an example of Shelley's caution about the destructive nature of knowledge when it is separated from empathy and social acceptance. At the same time, Walton and Victor represent the dangerous result of unbridled ambition and the quest of knowledge for its own sake. Their flawed educations, based on individualistic goals and outmoded values, cause them to ignore the moral obligations that come with scientific inquiry. Walton's goals and Victor's obsession highlight the perils of ambition without regard for morality, alerting us to the dire consequences that might arise from pursuing knowledge unwisely.

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