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# **Gone Forth to Prosper: Mary Shelley's Global Novel, *Frankenstein***

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Doctoral Thesis

University College Cork

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*This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism*

## Abstract

For decades, Mary Shelley criticism has undergone steady expansion as she and her work have received recognition from the academic community writ large. In recent years Shelley's later works, novels, short stories, and encyclopaedia entries, have received critical attention, but the bulk of Shelley scholarship still centres on her first novel: *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818). That said, despite *Frankenstein* being only nominally set in Britain and its author's numerous international interests, most criticism of *Frankenstein* remains largely Anglocentric. This thesis seeks to broaden the scope of *Frankenstein* criticism beyond the limitations previously accepted by Shelley critics by examining such disparate topics as French and German fairytales, golem and automaton fiction, the placement of South America within the 19<sup>th</sup> century European consciousness, Italian anatomical wax figures, and the intermingling of life and death culturally and scientifically during Mary Shelley's lifetime.

Shelley critics have long leaned heavily on the specific records Shelley left behind in her *Journals*, and *Letters*. These documents serve as valuable tools, but they have also proven to be blinders for many scholars, curtailing the scope of what can be included in Shelley and *Frankenstein* criticism. By acknowledging them as an imperfect record, I am able to move beyond the explicit text of Shelley's life, to take a materialist approach to the world she lived in and apply that materialism to her first novel. By simultaneously broadening my understanding of what *Frankenstein* criticism can entail and narrowing my focus to just this novel rather than Shelley's entire oeuvre, this thesis describes a new *Frankenstein*, a global novel which serves as a lens for the interconnected world Mary Shelley knew.

*For the deBeils*

*You haven't always understood why I wanted to research dead things,  
but you've loved me all the same.*

*Thank you*

## Introduction

### Expansion and Creation: A Brief History of Shelley Scholarship

“My Goodness” he shouted “we are living in a bad time! Everything old goes to ground.... Do not come to me again with a ghost story.”

“Beware” we both answered “As soon as it is the end with the ghosts the right time starts for stories. Every story follows some sort of reality and the reader, with some luck, may discover the honest truth beneath.”

Jean Baptiste Benoît Eyriés, *La Chambre Noire*

Across the course of *Gone Forth to Prosper*, I will demonstrate how Mary Shelley’s first novel, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*, serves as a nexus point for multiple trans-national cultural and geopolitical “conversations”. At a glance, these conversations may seem disparate and unrelated yet one woman, Mary Shelley, saw fit not only to engage with all of them in her personal life, but to include them in one of the most original pieces of literature to come out of the long 19<sup>th</sup> century. By using *Frankenstein* and Shelley as entry points to these conversations, my research seeks a broader understanding of the world as Shelley knew it; one in which the exchange of ideas on such diverse topics as South America, wax figures, and fairytales, took place unhindered by national borders. Topics and conversations which Shelley then saw fit to weave into her novel, simultaneously entering and entangling these broader conversations. However, before we can explore where my research seeks to expand on the existing scholarship, we must first survey the history of Shelley scholarship, and where she sits in the canon today.

The story of scholarship on Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley is a tangled history of legacies, misconceptions, associations, and a continually evolving reclamation of her place in multiple canons: the overarching canon of British literature; the monolith of Romantic literature that Shelley herself helped establish, dominated by her late husband and other male poets rather than her own writings; and the still-nebulous canon of women’s literature that has been acknowledged only

in recent decades. As Ahlbrand points out, her very name carries connotations of this, containing in those four denominations “a history of both public and private writings that are inextricably woven into a pattern of success, scandal, and failure.” (Ahlbrand, 36) Indeed, in two of the most famous accounts of the Percy Shelley’s life by personal friends, Mary Shelley is first acknowledged in the narrative by her name as signifier of her parentage rather than as a denotation of her as a unique individual. When Thomas Medwin introduces her formally into the narrative of his *Life of Shelley* (1847), it is by her full name, and then an immediate account of how she came by that name, that she is made known:

During this year [1814] the Poet [Percy Shelley] became a frequent visitor at Godwin’s House, and there it was he saw Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin.

Godwin’s principles on the subject of matrimony had been fully promulgated when he *did* marry Mary Wollstonecraft... the ceremony [was] a sacrifice to the conventionalities of the World to which for the Lady’s sake he thought it right to accede. (Medwin, 121)

Here is the woman who would become Mary Shelley, Godwin’s daughter in Godwin’s house by Godwin’s wife who Godwin only married as a concession to society, in spite of vocal, published opposition to the institution of marriage. Thomas Love Peacock’s *Memoirs of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1858-1862) see her first appear in the narrative of Percy’s life via an exchange with Percy’s first wife, Harriet Shelley. Harriet tells Peacock she cannot describe Godwin’s daughter in detail, “but that her name was Mary, and not only Mary, but Mary Wollstonecraft.” (Peacock, 49) Again, Mary Shelley is not notable in her own right, but rather as the daughter of radical feminist Mary Wollstonecraft. Separate from Mary Godwin’s intellectual and physical attractions, her lineage attracted Percy Shelley’s interest and quickly his love. When she eloped with Percy in 1814 she would get yet another, impossible-to-ignore, name from him. Named after two radicals and married to a third, even within her own lifetime Mary Shelley seems to have sought to disappear into these formative identities, devoting her youth to worshiping the writings of her departed mother and soaking in the philosophies of her father. As an adult, she dedicated her married life to becoming a literary companion and intellectual equal to Percy Shelley, and her life post-Percy to exculpating his memory and enshrining his work in the rapidly changing tastes of Victorian literary consumers.

*Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*, has long dominated Shelley scholarship as her only production worthy of serious study<sup>1</sup> but even that process has been a series of battles to wrest authorial credit from Percy Shelley and William Godwin.<sup>2</sup> The world views of these two men undoubtedly dominated Mary Shelley's education for many years and both had hands in bringing *Frankenstein* to the public market and were also active and avid participants in many of the conversations that thread the novel, but early *Frankenstein* scholarship saw them over-credited for their work. As early as 1831 Mary Shelley seems to have anticipated this view, that *Frankenstein* was a production of someone other than herself. When writing her *Introduction* to the 1831 edition, before digressing into the (now) oft-repeated legend of the novel's conception, she states in the first paragraph that this brief history "will be confined to such topics as have connexion(sic) with *my authorship alone*." (Shelley, 1831, v, emphasis added) Though Shelley would express characteristic humility when speaking about her work throughout her life, she still carefully claimed the text in full again at the end of her *Introduction*, bidding "*my hideous progeny go forth and prosper*." (Shelley, 1831, xii, emphasis added) She does not claim it as the progeny of her husband or her father. Like Frankenstein himself, she has formed her offspring alone, for good or ill. *Frankenstein* is her production, informed by conversations with Byron, edited by Percy, and rent through with echoes of Godwinian philosophy, but indisputably the brainchild of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley.

The latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw critics steadily moving Mary Shelley into the canon of 'respectable' British authors. Stage and film adaptations of her work throughout the century meant that *Frankenstein* was well known, at least in concept, by the general public, but recognition of Mary Shelley as an author worthy of study was slow to develop. The *Keats-Shelley Journal* (est. 1952), produced by the Keats-Shelley Association of America, saw an article including Mary Shelley's name in the title in the second year of its publication; however, Lovell's "Byron and Mary Shelley" also credits the infamous Lord with "father[ing] the idea for her first novel" (Lovell, 39), a vexingly patriarchal characterization even given Byron's

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<sup>1</sup> This idea will be interrogated shortly

<sup>2</sup> See Phyllis Zimmerman's *Shelley's Fiction* (1998) and John Lauritsen's *The Man Who Wrote Frankenstein* (2007) for the most extreme versions of this argument, one in which Mary Shelley was merely the scribe for *Frankenstein* as Percy dictated it to her verbatim.

importance in spurring the ghost story competition in the first place. The *Keats-Shelley Journal*, despite its expressed purpose of “publish[ing] scholarship on Keats, [Percy] Shelley, and their immediate circles.” (<https://k-saa.org/about/>) would see Mary Shelley’s name appear in only a handful of articles from the ‘50s to the ‘80s, with a burst of recognition coming around the 1997 bicentenary of her birth, and a steady stream of articles thereafter. This is not to say, however, that Mary Shelley was not receiving scholarly recognition elsewhere.

Despite early ‘70s positing on the nature and magnitude of Percy Shelley’s contributions to Mary Shelley’s novel (Blumberg, 32), it was not until the end of the decade before one of the first, visible efforts to recognize *Frankenstein* as worthy of concentrated academic scholarship arrived with Levine and Knoepflemacher’s *The Endurance of Frankenstein* (1979). *Endurance* is a notable compendium of scholarship seeking to resist “the overly simple—sometimes simpleminded—adaptations” of the text found in popular culture (*Endurance*, xiii). That said, *Endurance* suffers from ongoing tropes in Mary Shelley scholarship, questioning “how much of [*Frankenstein*’s] complexity is actually the result of Mary Shelley’s self-conscious art and how much is merely the product of the happy circumstances of subject, moment, and milieu?” (*Endurance*, xii) In essence, this is a reference to *Frankenstein* as the conversational nexus point I will prove it to be, but also strips Shelley of agency in those conversations, and indeed, her own novel. She is not an active commentator on these topics and themes, instead frequently across the essays included in *Endurance*, Shelley becomes a distorted mouthpiece for her father or husband or is contextualized with later female authors like the Brontë sisters and George Eliot who, while likely influenced by Shelley herself, because of death and publication dates, would have had little or no significant impact on the Shelley oeuvre in general, or *Frankenstein* in particular. That Shelley is reduced to a critical conduit for masculine ideas is perhaps unsurprising considering the historically patriarchal nature of literary scholarship, but that she is contextualized with other women in *Endurance* is very interesting given another notable work of 1979. By placing her in the company of other women authors Mary Shelley becomes a part of the canon of female literature as Gilbert and Gubar defined it in their *Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), a foundational text for modern feminist criticism. Using Shelley and other women writers of the 19th century, Gilbert and Gubar established a theory of

influence and tradition for women writers, one that sees Shelley as one link in a chain spanning decades, rather than the anomaly she was frequently cast as. Similarly prescient in this newly realized canon of women's writing is Ellen Moers' "Female Gothic", first published in her *Literary Women* (1976) and then edited three years later for *Endurance*. Before the first appearance of Moers' essay, another milestone was reached in the history of American women, with the January 1973 decision of *Roe V. Wade* by the Supreme Court of the United States, legalizing abortion without excessive government interference. With the idea of the female body and its autonomy in the air, American academic Ellen Moers recognized the inherent Gothicism involved in being a woman, and names *Frankenstein* a feat in "mythmaking on the subject of birth", the first such myth published (Moers *Endurance*, 81). Even within the seminal *Endurance* and in the middle of a decade that indelibly changed the lives and rights of American women, Moers work marks a shift, an acknowledgment that despite its male protagonists and the powerful masculine voices that echo throughout Mary Shelley's life and writings, *Frankenstein* is intrinsically a female narrative.

Interestingly, 1979 saw the almost-publication of another important Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein* text, one aborted before it could go to print. In a subsequent account by Barbra Johnson<sup>3</sup> in her "Gender Theory and the Yale School", this text would have been a female driven response to the Yale School's *Deconstruction and Criticism* (1979). According to Johnson, *Deconstruction and Criticism* was "originally slated" to centre entirely on Percy Shelley's poem *The Triumph of Life*, a plan that did not come to complete fruition though De Man's "Shelley Disfigured", one of the essays included in the eventual publication of *Deconstruction and Criticism*, does explore the poet's last great work. Fittingly, Johnson and her colleagues' companion and response text would have been entitled *Bride of Deconstruction and Criticism* and be compiled of essays surrounding the *Frankenstein* text. Even the title of this text, *Bride*, is prophetic when taken in conjunction with the *Frankenstein* narrative. In Shelley's first novel there are three

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<sup>3</sup> Johnson is today remembered as a literary critic, though I find it interesting to note that 1979 was just two short years after she graduated with a doctorate in French, not critical literature, or theory. This concept of new and unique perspectives on Shelley scholarship coming from those who do not strictly study Shelley or British Romanticism will be a running theme implicit throughout this thesis.

young brides<sup>4</sup>, one whose construction is never complete, and two who are ill-fated and destined for early graves. Brides do not live long in *Frankenstein*, if they live at all, and similarly, the *Bride of Deconstruction and Criticism* never saw completion and public release. Even so, Johnson's account of this almost-text is a fascinating glimpse at this moment of Mary Shelley recognition in the late 1970s, a moment that would continue to grow, complicate, and expand in the ensuing decades.<sup>5</sup>

*Endurance*, *Madwoman*, and the unformed *Bride* were all published, or intended for publication, at the close of the 1970s, leaving the door open for the major works on Mary Shelley that would come with the 1980s, heralded at the opening of the decade with Betty T. Bennett's first volume of *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* (1980), followed by the second volume in 1983 and the third in 1988. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert's *The Journals of Mary Shelley* appeared in 1987 and between these works, these female scholars laid bare the private life and communications of a woman who devoted herself to the art and craft of literature. For comparison's sake, Oxford's three volume collection of William and Dorothy Wordsworth's letters came two decades before in the 1960s. Likewise, Percy Shelley's letters, which arguably should have generated interest in his wife as many of them were directed to her, appeared in two volumes in the mid-1960s. Lord Byron's letters and journals, a gigantic undertaking of twelve volumes, were published in succession from the early 1970s to 1982. This means that perhaps the last great unearthing and publication of male, Romantic primary material was completed two years *after* the first stage of the publication of Mary Shelley's private writing. Academics the world over had public access to the private correspondence and records of Shelley's male counterparts years, frequently decades, before her primary materials arrived on the public market, making it small wonder that secondary research and publication on her lagged behind that on her husband, friends, and peers.

Prior to the major Shelley publications in the '80s, the Mary Shelley documents remained closeted in private collections like that of Lord Arbingor or held

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<sup>4</sup> Caroline Beaufort, Elizabeth Lavenza, and the female creature

<sup>5</sup> Writing towards the end of her life, Johnson would explore intertextuality in *Frankenstein in Shelley and Her Circle*, posthumously published as part of *A Life with Mary Shelley* (2014). We will return to Johnson and intertextuality towards the end of this introduction.

in university archives, like the massive Shelley repository at Oxford's Bodleian Library. Researchers seem to widely agree that these materials were relatively readily available to those who could travel to private archive locations, primarily the Arbinger Collection<sup>6</sup> and ask for access. However, the fact remains that these vital texts were still geographically bound to specific locations, only available for restricted periods of time, and could only be quoted with specific permission from the archive holders who in turn were not necessarily wholly objective historians, limitations in availability that show in Shelley criticism. Though the published editions of the texts were punishingly expensive when first published, and remain so today, Bennett, Feldman, and Scott-Kilvert opened the *Letters and Journals* to scholars around the world who would not have previously had ready or regular access to them. In return, the late 1980s and 1990s saw a surge in Mary Shelley scholarship of heretofore unheard-of breadth and depth.

A part of that surge was Anne Mellor's *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (1988) which includes a chart that succinctly defines Percy Shelley's edits to the *Frankenstein* manuscript and argues that these changes can be categorized as "those that improve the novel and those that do not." (Mellor, 59). This alone was dramatic departure from previous criticism, when Percy's edits were thought to primarily enhance an inexperienced author's writing and smooth rough edges and philosophies into marketable prose. Whether a suggested edit improves or detracts from a manuscript is a subjective matter, one that all writers struggle with, but by categorizing the edits and showing those which Shelley accepted or rejected, Mellor does lay out plainly the *collaborative* nature of the relationship between Mary Shelley and her husband. Percy's suggestions were not blindly adhered to, but neither were they flatly rejected and for the first time, Mellor laid this out systematically in an easily digestible chart. Mellor also offers relatively sophisticated psychoanalysis of Shelley, taking evidence from her texts supported with biographical details to draw educated conjecture on her mental state. *Endurance* saw this as well, but where in that text Shelley was frequently simply sad over her dead babies or frustrated at an erratic husband, Mellor delves deeper into the psyche,

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<sup>6</sup> In the early 2000s Lord Arbinger, a descendent of Percy Florence Shelley and Lady Jane Shelley's adoptive daughter, sold the family collection to the Bodleian Library at Oxford. Prior to this, researchers had to write Lord Arbinger and request special permission to peruse his archives.

positing existential questions on Shelley's abilities as a mother and her excavations of personal "feelings of parental abandonment and forced exile from her father" while writing the creature's story in Vol. II of *Frankenstein* (Mellor, 46). Mina Alexander's *Women in Romanticism* (1989) contextualizes Mary Shelley with her mother and Dorothy Wordsworth, seeking to find a place for, and connections, between three women whose legacies were largely defined by the male writers in their lives, regardless of the merit those male writers should hold. Both Mellor and Alexander placed significance on the role of personal biography and light psychoanalysis in their work, primarily analysing these women as writers, rather than seeking to biographically detail their subject's lives from birth to death. Whatever supporting biographical details and evidence they incidentally included were dwarfed by the other major Shelley-related publication of the day. Almost concurrent with these two books, both monographs and testaments to critical analysis, William St. Clair's aptly titled *The Godwins and the Shelleys: A Biography of a Family* (1989) appeared on bookshelves and in the hands of researchers.

St. Clair's *Godwins and the Shelleys* was a titanic undertaking, and its coherence in the face of the tangled ties of philosophy, love, and loyalty woven between William Godwin and his famous daughter is a true feat of both scholarship and the craft of storytelling. *Godwins and the Shelleys* also marks a definitive biographical milestone in recognizing exactly how entwined these two households and their writings were. While William Godwin is the focal point of St. Clair's biography, the importance of Romantic sociability is brought to the fore through examination of the many and varied interpersonal relationships within the Godwin-Shelley circle. St. Clair was far from the first to point to the social and philosophical connections and influences between the primary first- and second-generation Romantics. Most criticism and biography defined these creative influences as running concurrently between two primary individuals; however, St. Clair laid bare how truly tangled those lines of inspiration were. There were primary two-person creative relationships: Mary Shelley and Godwin, Godwin and Holcroft, Percy Shelley and Mary Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley, Percy Shelley and Lord Byron, but St. Clair showed what seems today not only logical, but obvious: that none of these relationships occurred in a vacuum, that they were all small parts of a much larger narrative. If there is a drawback to *Godwins and the*

*Shelleys*, it is that Mary Shelley's life post-Percy is largely glossed over, with her return to England in August 1823 at the age of 26 occurring at the start of Chapter 38 of 40 total chapters. Her primary occupations in the succeeding two chapters are fighting with her father-in-law, failing to complete a biography of her father, and finally succeeding in producing her husband's *Complete Poetical Works* (1839), with editorial notes designed to soothe Percy's radicalism for the Victorian palate. Her work post-Percy as a novelist, short story writer, and author of multiple encyclopaedia entries goes largely unmentioned. This reduction of Shelley's life and work as a widow, to a woman struggling against or devoted to the men in her life, is characteristic of many biographies of her up to this point and will be discussed shortly.

Almost thirty years after St. Clair, Carlson's *England's First Family of Writers* (2007) delves into the writing of Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Shelley by investigating the "accentuated slippages between person and text" in these three writers' works (Carlson, 13). Like St. Clair's approach to biography as more of a web of interconnections than a linear story, Carlson describes the work of these three writers' as "neither... individual nor collaborative but instead as collective" (Carlson, 14). Thus, Wollstonecraft's work first influences Godwin's writing as their relationship grows, with Godwin adapting some, though not all, of Wollstonecraft's tenets after her death, and Shelley eventually accepting, rejecting, or incorporating the work of both of her parents throughout her career. Carlson focuses on portrayals of familial relationships across the two generations of writers, using the fictional families created in various works to analyse the writer's conception of, for instance, the ideal romantic relationship as depicted through shared reading, or the use of literature (both the creation of new literature in the form of *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798), or literary language as in *Mathilda* (1819)) to mourn effectively. Notably, Carlson devotes pages to Shelley's *Lives*, entries for *Lardner's Cabinet Cyclopaedia* (1829-1846) that are frequently danced around in Shelley scholarship for reasons that will be discussed later in this chapter. Carlson heralds her inclusion of women in a volume titled *Lives of Eminent Men*, and "Shelley's ability to make a (Wollstonecraftian) virtue out of (Godwinian) necessity", thus wedding the ideals of her mother to the pragmatism of her father through a small act of feminist rebellion in a writing job taken out of financial need

(Carlson, 201). Carlson focuses the entirety of her work on Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Shelley, with only a brief epilogue devoted to “the nightmare son-in-law... Percy Bysshe Shelley”, a refreshing take on the collective writings of the Godwin-Shelley circle, when so many scholars arguably grant the poet disproportionate attention (Carlson, 257).

The 1990s saw an upswing in the importance of specific biography, or biographism<sup>7</sup>, in Mary Shelley research and criticism. The *Letters* and *Journals* had been (comparatively) widely available for years by this point and the approaching bicentenary of her birth in 1997 gave wider recognition and financial incentives to publish on a woman long considered notable for a singular, first novel and a uniquely influential social circle. Emily Sunstein’s biography *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality* (1991) focused more on Shelley’s life both pre- and post-Percy than previous biographies, and as a result spotlighted Mary Shelley’s other novels, tales, and non-fiction writing, giving credence to her later life as a professional working author who earned a living by her pen. Percy Shelley’s life had been the subject of Richard Holmes’ *Shelley: The Pursuit* (1974), and Mary Shelley does feature prominently in that tome but prior to Sunstein her biography was largely reduced to her tragic birth, girlhood tutelage at Godwin’s knee, less than a decade connected with her lover and husband, and a quiet widowhood spent enshrining his memory. An exemplar of this is Jane Dunn’s *Moon in Eclipse* (1978), a biography of Mary Shelley whose very title is insidious in its usurpation of her prominence in her own life’s story. Scholars of Percy and Mary Shelley both will recognize that *moon* was Percy’s frequent epithet for Mary in poetry, with the moon’s apparent nearness, distance, or coldness at various times across their partnership emblemizing Percy’s emotions towards his wife. Thus, to title a biography of Mary Shelley *Moon in Eclipse*, or a moon mostly covered and most notable for that covering, is a gross disservice to the subject matter. As for the biography itself, it ends a chapter after Percy’s death with closing remarks on Mary Shelley’s remaining three decades as a devoted and grieving widow. Where previous biographers allowed Shelley to languish in the shadow of the men in her life, Sunstein brought her into the light as

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<sup>7</sup> For some scholars, biography can serve as a limiting factor rather than a useful framework when studying a piece of literature, see Graham Allen’s ‘Beyond Biographism: Mary Shelley’s ‘Matilda,’ Intertextuality and the Wandering Subject’ (1997) for more on the term he coined and why biographism can be a useful tool but only if used judiciously.

worthy and respectable enough to be the subject of her own, proper, biography with a life that extended far beyond her widowhood at age 25.

At the same time Sunstein published *Mary Shelley*, Betty T. Bennett coloured another facet of Mary Shelley's later life in an incredible feat of archival detective work with her *Mary Diana Dods; A Gentleman and a Scholar* (1991). Traditionally Mary Shelley was thought to have spent her life post-Percy struggling to edit his poems and preserve his memory and write her own work. However, Bennett showed a woman passionately loyal to her friends and willing to help them buck social mores and defy societal expectations to escape the increasingly restrictive Victorian society for more liberal France. Both Sunstein and Bennett display facets of Shelley as a fully realized woman, with her own work and private intrigues above, beyond, and possibly more radical than those of her husband, father, or late mother. In this case Shelley did so by actively assisting the titular Dods in their endeavours to begin living as a man, and to that end procured forged passports for Dods and their lover to escape England incognito and begin new lives in France. As with St. Clair's illustration of cross-pollination across the Shelley-Godwin circle, the concept that Mary Shelley was a multi-faceted human and should be represented as such seems redundant from the standpoint of today, but this does not mean that its importance should go unremarked.

Probably one of the most widely read pieces of Mary Shelley scholarship in existence is Marilyn Butler's 1993 "Introduction", bibliography, and explanatory notes for the Oxford World's Classics edition of the 1818 *Frankenstein* text. This 40-page essay lent more depth to the novel for the common reader by situating the text in contemporary philosophical and scientific debates. Butler highlights the Shelleys' connection with William Lawrence, a dashing young surgeon who learned under the preeminent anatomist John Abernathy and later went on to become his professional rival. This rivalry would culminate in series of lectures and publications on the merits of vitalism versus materialism in 1816 and 1819, with Lawrence squarely on the side of materialism and, Butler posits, likely discussing his points with the Shelleys while they lived near London in 1816. Butler goes on to point out the intertextuality of *Frankenstein*, drawing parallels with Southey's *Cornelius Agrippa*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and several other texts that Mary Shelley

was exposed to and likely drew inspiration from.<sup>8</sup> Butler's comprehensive "Introduction" and extensive notes would be used as the standard for scholarly editions of the text for years, and would serve as a first brush with *Frankenstein* scholarship for students the world over. That said, this introduction to the historical, scientific, and political context of *Frankenstein* focuses largely on British surgeons, experimentalists, authors, philosophers, and their debates, thus inherently limiting the conversations my work expands on. This British contextualization despite the titular, Swiss character being named after ancient German barons, the creature's second-hand education at the hands of French expatriates, and the entire narrative's frame resting on a ship in the midst of an arctic expedition. Mary Shelley spent the majority of her life with Percy outside the bounds of the British empire and by the end of her life was an impressive historian, linguist, and general literati with a command of the European continent. That research on her and her work has largely focused on her British context, or at most the context of the French Revolution which had enthralled her parents, does the woman a disservice.

However, it was not just through scholarly editions and biographies that *Frankenstein* stood to be recognized in the 1990s. Though never long neglected in cinema, 1994 saw Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* appear in theatres, this time freighted with a prestigious, Shakespearean director and leading man, a legendary producer in the form of Francis Ford Coppola, and heavyweight actors like Robert De Niro, Kenneth Branagh, and Helena Bonham Carter. Steven Earl Forry's 1990 *Hideous Progenies: Dramatizations of Frankenstein from Mary Shelley to Present* brought acknowledgement to the long history of visually adapting, with varying degrees of accuracy, the original text by printing the scripts of almost 10 different visual adaptations of *Frankenstein* from the 1820s to the 1930s. *Hideous Progenies* also included essays on the various uses of *Frankenstein* in visual adaptation across theatre history as the metaphor of the hubris ridden young doctor and the mute monster he creates evolved and shifted with the times.<sup>9</sup> The first play, Richard Brinsley Peake's 1823 *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein*, was

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<sup>8</sup> The intertextuality of *Frankenstein* is a driving force of this thesis and several of the texts mentioned by Butler will be returned to over the course of the following chapters.

<sup>9</sup> This theme of Frankensteinian metaphor in adaptation will be returned to shortly, when discussing one of the most recent additions to *Frankenstein* scholarship, Davidson and Munvey-Roberts' *Global Frankenstein* (2018).

viewed by Mary Shelley in August of that year, and includes many of the tropes now commonly associated with the *Frankenstein* mythos, as opposed to the *Frankenstein* text, containing a bumbling assistant/servant, and the non-verbal creature. (Godwin, *Diary*, Aug. 29 1823) As stated early on, in some form or another *Frankenstein*, regardless of accuracy, has been highly visible in the cultural zeitgeist almost since its publication. Because of this visibility, it is natural that Shelley's first novel would be the touchstone and starting point for academic research surrounding her.

That said, 1993 saw Jane Blumberg's *Mary Shelley's Early Novels* and Mellor, Fisch, and Schor's *The Other Mary Shelley*. Though *Frankenstein* is a major component of Blumberg's work and inescapable in *The Other Mary Shelley*, both texts focus significantly on Shelley's subsequent novels and short stories. Critical research on the later novels and works of Mary Shelley became easier in 1996, with the release of the Pickering Masters *The Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*, edited by Bennett, Crook, and Clemit. Though still expensive, like the *Letters and Journals*, this compendium saw the widest circulation of Mary Shelley's near-complete works since her lifetime. This series represented "the culmination of sustained scholarship over... two decades" and was "the first collected edition of the novels and a good deal of everything else—travel writings, reviews, dramas and important drafts." (Hamilton, 220) Hamilton's review, which appeared in the 1997 Mary Shelley Bicentenary Issue of *Romanticism*, extols the comparative nature of the collection, allowing readers to hold *History of a Six Weeks Tour* beside *Rambles in Italy* by placing them in the same volume, and thus permitting easy comparison between two travel logs written at opposite ends of a long and varied career.

The 1997 bicentenary of Mary Shelley's birth marked wider, published recognition of her work beyond *Frankenstein*. The release of her near-complete works the year before was followed by other noteworthy publications highlighting this expansion of critical reception. The *Keats-Shelley Review*<sup>10</sup>, featured a sprawling, near 40-page article by Naomi Hetherington as their tribute to the author of *Frankenstein*. *Romanticism* and the *Keats-Shelley Journal* both published special bicentenary issues entirely devoted to Mary Shelley, with articles leaning heavily towards Mary Shelley's later works, including her second long work *Mathilda*.

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<sup>10</sup> Published by the Keats-Shelley Memorial Association in the United Kingdom and not to be confused with the *Keats-Shelley Journal* produced by the Keats-Shelley Association of America.

*Mathilda*'s unique history, as an unpublished novella, thought lost in manuscript form and then rediscovered in fair copy and published by Elizabeth Nitchie in 1959, has lent mythos to this elusive text. Nitchie, herself, is also notable in Mary Shelley research on a smaller scale for writing the first article solely about Mary Shelley to appear in the *Keats-Shelley Review*, in 1961.<sup>11</sup> Coupled with the story of its composition in the dark months following the deaths of Shelley's young son and daughter, and the deeply intimate representations of herself, Godwin, and Percy Shelley in the three primary characters, this short work above all others has been interrogated for clues and held up as evidence of Mary Shelley's psyche. Since *Endurance*, in 1979, Shelley's work has been mined as material for psychoanalysis with varying skill in execution and to varying degrees of success. That said, *Mathilda*, as a story of loss and intimate betrayal, written in the wake of personal tragedy compounded by myriad human foibles, offers fertile ground for just such critical work and has rightly drawn scholarly attention in this manner.

Conger, Frank, and O'Dea's *Iconoclastic Departures: Mary Shelley after Frankenstein* also appeared in 1997, a work that "contributes to[the] ongoing re-evaluation of Mary Shelley" (*Departures*, 10) by "explor[ing] questions of authorship, revisionary mythmaking, and the "Cultural Provocation" of Mary Shelley's post-*Frankenstein* fictions"(Wortham, Bristow, 548). Like the bicentenary issues mentioned above, *Departures* focuses on work beyond *Frankenstein* to paint Shelley as an author "who reappropriates authority for herself, then redesigns genres, redefines gender, rewrites history and/or biography, revises aesthetic expectations, and protests cultural imperialism at home and abroad." (*Departures*, 12) *Departures* also, notably, includes a detailed, annotated bibliography, displaying the full breadth and depth of the growth of Shelley scholarship, particularly regarding her less-famous works. Again, with *Departures* we see the continuous growth of nuance in the conversation surrounding Mary Shelley and her writings throughout the 1990s.

Despite the growing critical acknowledgment of Shelley's work beyond *Frankenstein*, her other novels have not permeated the cultural zeitgeist in anything approaching the same degree. Indeed, Johanna Smith's *Mary Shelley* (1996), one of

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<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that, despite the temporal nearness to her discovery and publication of *Mathilda*, Nitchie's 1961 "Mary Shelley, Traveler" centers on Shelley's experiences traveling across Europe, rather than Nitchie's recent find.

the earlier readers' guides to Shelley to appear in the market, emblemizes this with the tokenistic approach in the second to last chapter. Though some of the short stories are mentioned in conjunction with other works, "Valarius" and "Roger Dodsworth" are inescapably paired with *Frankenstein*, for instance, a novella and two novels, *Mathilda*, *Lodore*, *Falkner*, and eight short stories are reduced and compiled to a single chapter entitled *Domestic-Sentimental Fiction*. The chapter is not even 30 pages long. The title alone is an over-simplification of a novella involving incestuous inclinations, the casual faking of the heroine's death and subsequent assumption of a new identity, and eventual pneumonia-assisted suicide, a novel that kills off the titular Lord Lodore at the conclusion of the first volume in favour of following his daughter and estranged wife's further adventures, and a novel in which a young woman successfully tames both her adoptive father's self-destructive tendencies, and her fiancé's more murderous impulses, and successfully stages a military rescue behind enemy lines in a Grecian war-zone. All three of these were radical topics in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the many-varied heroines Shelley created show a range of admirably adaptable traits under extreme circumstances. The incredible adventurousness of Shelley's female protagonists as early examples of radically feminist heroines has not been studied in detail to date, but to say that they are worthy of further, deep examination both individually and as a whole is a severe understatement.

Today these and other Shelley works worthy of study remain largely unknown, and two of Shelley's later novels, *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* (1830), and *Falkner* (1837) have not yet been published in critical scholarly editions. Individual articles and chapters can be found addressing both, but neither seem to have yet been regarded as worth the serious consideration of a full edited collection, doctoral monograph, or individual publication by one of the major academic publishing houses. As Blumberg puts it, the "uninteresting" nature of Shelley's three<sup>12</sup> later novels "suggest(s) that Shelley had perhaps solved some of her earlier philosophical questions" leaving her later works comparatively conventional<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Blumberg groups *Lodore* with *Perkin Warbeck* and *Falkner*

<sup>13</sup> Close reading of Shelley's later novels will find them anything but conventional, their female protagonists are incredibly adventurous and competent in their adventures, but for the purposes of this analysis these novels do contain the historic settings, romantic subplots, genteel characters, and 'realistic' situations that would mark them as more 'normal', compared to *Frankenstein* or *The Last Man*, for the time.

(Blumberg, 117). Blumberg seems to think that Shelley's life post-1826 and *The Last Man*, her last psychologically intriguing novel by this standard, did not provide enough interesting material or emotional fuel for authorial complexity. It should be noted again that Blumberg's study appeared in 1993, early in the wave of Mary Shelley recognition, and well before any of these texts were widely available as they are today through digital scans of the originals in online archives like Google Books, Archive.org or the Hathi Trust. Without these foundations to build on, and the practical tools of a scholarly edition with regular page numbers and even a modicum of foot or endnotes, secondary research into these texts becomes significantly more difficult and misconceptions about their relative value to Shelley scholarship compounded across the decade, until the advent of widely accessible internet and internet-based research tools in the early 2000s. That said, access has not necessarily equalled acknowledgement. As late as 2007, Carlson argued that outside of their explorations of family relationships, notably a daughter's relationship with her father and/or potential suitors, "*Mathilda* (1819), *Lodore* (1835), and *Falkner* (1837), arguably have no other thematic or plot interest." (Carlson, 92) Carlson's significant contributions to Shelley scholarship have already been explored in this chapter, but on her point that these novels are only interesting for the familial relations they explore, I must heartily disagree.

Shelley's *Tales*, frequently called the short stories, likewise remain largely unremarked on in the scholarship, reduced to scraped-together scribbles produced "out of a noble necessity" and appearing in illustrated anthologies that were "notoriously devoid of serious literary merit." (*Departures*, 63) O'Dea's reading of four of the tales in *Departures* is that Shelley was doing her best with a bad hand, when commissioned to write brief sketches featuring a scene depicted in the accompanying, pre-selected engraving. Four years before O'Dea, Hofkosh spoke to four different tales in the light of Shelley's economic reasoning to write them and came up with the slightly shrewder analysis found in *The Other Mary Shelley*. To Hofkosh, Shelley wove her own economic decision to take commission work for the annual *Keepsake* into her characters, most specifically her female characters, who act based on careful risk/reward calculations rather than with more 'feminine' emotional responses. Even with these two analyses in two widely regarded collections in the decade that saw Mary Shelley receiving more recognition than she had, likely since

her lifetime, the tales, like her three middle novels, have not received their due from the academic community.

Likewise, Shelley's numerous entries for *Lardner's Cabinet Cyclopaedia* have been largely overlooked in the scholarship. These short biographies of various notable Spanish, French, Italian, and Portuguese literary and historical figures were also included in the Pickering collection, but have not received wide recognition beyond that publication in 1996. As Campbell-Orr recognizes in her "Introduction" to the *French Lives*, before even beginning this undertaking, Shelley needed to marshal her technical skill and vast command of the literature and history of all these countries for the task. Campbell-Orr points to Shelley's time at the instruction of Percy Shelley as foundational to this capacity, and though it should never be forgotten that the Shelleys studied exhaustively together, Mary Shelley's youth cannot be discounted either. I would posit that instead of simple study as an adult, the actual foundation for Shelley's work for Lardner was arguably laid decades before, with reading Fénelon's *Dialogues of the Dead*, among other French texts, both in translation and the original as part of her early language studies under the tutelage of Mary Jane Godwin. This idea of Mary Shelley's early study in Godwin's home contributing vast, as-yet largely undefined, colour and texture to her writing as an adult will be explained in greater detail later in this chapter and explored thoroughly throughout the course of this thesis.

There are practical reasons why the *Lives* have been largely neglected in academia and one is a question of authorship. While we know that Shelley wrote the majority of the *Lives*, there are select entries written by largely unidentified collaborators. A letter to Maria Gisborne from June 1835 makes reference to a copy of the *Italian Lives* that Shelley arranged to be lent to Gisborne. In her letter, Shelley is careful to point out that "the lives of Dante & Ariosto are not mine" before instructing her friend to return the volume when she finishes with it (Shelley, *Letters* vol. III, 247). While Shelley's was the important name in this composition, indeed the Library of Congress entry for the *Lives* attributes authorship to "*Shelley (Mrs. M. W.) and others*" (1869, 124 italics in original), these unidentified others do pose a potential liability for scholars. The Pickering editors have identified the entries that they know were not written by Shelley and others that they believe were assembled by her collaborators, but the uncertainty of authorship is a challenge in a discipline

largely informed by, and built on, explicit authorial recognition. Indeed, Shelley scholarship is so intrinsically bound up in Shelley's identity and biography, to divorce her work completely from those implications is difficult and to make the usual biographical claims in relation to works that might not even have been authored by Shelley proves an understandable hurdle. This said, the *Lives* are an extensive, well-researched, and masterfully assembled discussion of European history and politics, serving as "a resounding testament to [Shelley's] belief in the need for social reform and her wariness of all forms of violence and totalizing modes of thinking and action." (Allen, *Mary Shelley*, 179). They serve as yet more evidence of Shelley's awareness of the entangled cultural conversations that pervaded her lifetime, unbound by geographical limitations. The question of authorship in regards to some of the *Lives*, and the scarcity of physical copies of the texts themselves, can be daunting, but despite the challenges they pose, they should not remain excluded or unstudied.

Other than *Mathilda* and *Frankenstein*, there are three other works that receive the bulk of attention in Shelley scholarship: *Valperga* (1823), *The Last Man* (1826), and *Lodore* (1835). Like *Mathilda*, all three of these texts offer veiled portraits of Shelley and her circle, including the idyllic picture of life at Marlow in 1817, as shown by the near prelapsarian bliss in the majority of the first volume of *The Last Man*. Harkening back to *Endurance* and the veiled misogyny of early Shelley scholarship, *Valperga* and *The Last Man* have attracted scholarly interest for their responses to, or documentation of the men in Mary Shelley's life. As Blumberg points out, Shelley's "son William died at the beginning of her composition of *Valperga* and [Percy Shelley] was drowned in July 1822, just after its conclusion", leaving it both a manuscript punctuated by grief and the only other novel Mary Shelley wrote during her husband's lifetime (Blumberg, 76). *Valperga* also stands as an early showcase of Shelley's considerable research capabilities when approaching historical fiction, skills that would come into focus in the texts *Perkin Warbeck* and *Falkner*, in addition to the obvious necessary research for the *Lives* later in her life. *Valperga* also represents a form of rebellion against her husband's guidance, as around the time Shelley conceived her version of Castruccio Castracani's history, Percy encouraged her to pursue a different Italian theme in the tragic history of Beatrice Cenci. A Beatrice does feature in Shelley's *Valperga*, but incestual rape and

subsequent patricide are not a part of her story. Rather than centring on a female victim, Shelley chose to write on a fourteenth century warlord and the two women alternately seduced and betrayed by his ambitions, leaving the rape and murder central to the Cenci history for her husband's pursuit.<sup>14</sup>

Like *Valperga*, *The Last Man* was a text punctuated by grief, this time following the death of Lord Byron in Greece, a death that left Mary Shelley literally the last (wo)man alive of the Diodati circle, John William Polidori having died by poison 1821, and Claire Clairmont being both abroad on the continent and more of a complication than an inclusion in Mary Shelley's social or writing life. Blumberg sees this isolation as freeing, leaving Shelley "independent and no longer need[ing] to define herself" in terms of her husband (Blumberg, 114). This has a ring of truth. *The Last Man* is a futuristic narrative of an apocalyptic, though not, like Defoe's 1722 *Journal of a Plague Year*, divinely wrought, plague. The concept of the end of days and the last of humanity had become a relatively common topic by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so-called Last Judgement poems having come into vogue during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but where earlier Last Judgement poems frequently positioned themselves in a vague future that strongly resembled the present until the Judgement began, and offered salvation in their final stanzas for those who repented, Shelley positions the opening of her novel at the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the narrative ending in the early years of the 22<sup>nd</sup>, thus simultaneously imagining the future of Europe, and its destruction without salvation. Shelley also included futuristic technology like flying machines, in a time when hot air balloons had become relatively common attractions, but mass transit via airships like the zeppelin was still decades away. Likewise, where the decimation of the human race to a literal last man without hope of rescue or restoration are common tropes in today's sweep of futuristic science fiction and post-apocalyptic genre fiction, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century this was a monumental and horrifying idea, bordering on the outlandish.

As scholars have pointed out, *The Last Man* marks the last time Shelley ventures this far from historical fact in her work. Her later novels would adhere closer to 'reality' than her two great works of science fiction, though the argument could be made that this was a market necessity rather than necessarily indicative of a

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<sup>14</sup> This, of course, became Percy Shelley's 1819 poem *The Cenci*

personal preference for what might be viewed as more conventional narratives. Though widely known, and permeating the cultural zeitgeist, *Frankenstein* had only sold well enough to make its author infamous, not to make her wealthy. Likewise, *The Last Man* was not looked on kindly by critics, with the *London Magazine* barely giving it a sentence, calling the novel “an elaborate piece of gloomy folly—bad enough to read—horrible to write” (LM, 422). The *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres* lamented it as a “strange misapplication of considerable talent” from “Mrs. Shelley [who is] a woman and a widow” (LG, 103). The review following *The Last Man* in the *Literary Gazette* is a few paragraphs on Alexander von Humboldt’s *Travels*, makes no mention of his marital status, or lack thereof, presumably meaning that a woman’s otherworldly descriptions could be contextualized by the absence of a man in her life while von Humboldt’s dramatic descriptions of the South American wilderness needed no such addendum.<sup>15</sup> These risks in subject matter in *The Last Man* were not rewarded with subsequent editions of the novel, and thus the author was not financially incentivized to continue in this vein, arguably forcing Shelley to return to historical fiction and romances that more closely resembled the drawing room novels favoured by readers, and female authors, of the day.

Despite some scholars’ misgivings about Shelley’s later three novels and the tales, *Lodore* has also received moderate academic attention, including the release of a scholarly edition in 1997, continuing the theme of the bicentenary of Mary Shelley’s birth heralding wider acknowledgement of her entire oeuvre. The biographical interest in the text is still present, as with all Mary Shelley’s work, particularly chapters detailing the Villiers’ troubles with debt in London. These passages are generally agreed to have been inspired by, and based on, the Shelleys’ own financial troubles in London in 1815, and depictions of the Villiers hiding during the week and emerging in public on Sundays when the bailiffs could not arrest debtors, are true to the *Shelley Journals* during October and November of 1814. That said, *Lodore* is also a female-driven narrative that explores Wollstonecraftian ideas of feminine education with weak-willed Ethel Villiers (nee Lodore), endowed “with more obviously feminine virtues” contrasted against her

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<sup>15</sup> You will notice that the *Literary Gazette* had no compunctions about following a review of *The Last Man* with one about von Humboldt and South America, serving as a physical embodiment of the way cultural and literary conversations could and did occur alongside scientific discoveries, not only for Shelley, but to all consumers of this magazine and others like it.

friend, the shrewd Fanny Derham, around whom “Shelley clusters the traits of unconventionality” (Moskal, 35). Likely because of these direct autobiographical details linking the text to an early and tumultuous time in the Shelleys’ partnership, and the open philosophical links to Wollstonecraft, *Lodore* has retained a broader academic appeal to both Shelley and Wollstonecraft scholars. *Perkin Warbeck* and *Falkner*, Shelley’s other two neglected novels, are not easily categorized as blatantly autobiographical or openly in conversation with the works of Wollstonecraft and Godwin. Coupled with the difficulty of obtaining copies, until the internet recently made various digital versions of *Complete Works of Mary Shelley* easy and inexpensive to obtain, and even with this caveat the lack of a scholarly edition, it is understandable why these texts have not received their full due.

Though *Perkin Warbeck* has remained largely neglected in Shelley scholarship, it too pushed 19<sup>th</sup> century societal norms in ways different from her other novels, namely with the character Monina. Monina is the adoptive sister of the outcast prince, and later a love interest, as well as a tireless campaigner for Perkin Warbeck’s cause, serving as a spy for him in England as he gathers troops and support in Scotland and in Ireland. Monina is also mixed race, being the daughter of a Moorish, Spaniard sea-captain, who comes to Warbeck’s rescue numerous times throughout the narrative, and a Flemish woman, the sister of the man who helps Warbeck flee England initially. Monina’s mixed race heritage is never written of as a detractor to her value as a character, despite the inherent racism of many texts including characters of mixed race throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. In a time when representation of Africans and of the descendants of Africans ranged from mute background characters, as seen in the barely-mentioned and unnamed black nursemaid of Ethel Lodore in Shelley’s own *Lodore*, to blindly faithful automatons to their good masters, as demonstrated by Hector in Godwin’s *St. Leon*, Monina and her father are actualized as characters loyal to the white protagonist out of love and belief in his cause, rather than because he is their owner or employer. That Monina and her father, Hernan de Faro, have agency and arcs outside that of the main, white protagonist was radical for the time and something that has gone unremarked on for far too long.

Like *Perkin Warbeck*, *Falkner*, Shelley’s final novel, remains broadly neglected in Shelley scholarship. Despite this, as with many of her other texts,

*Falkner* contains a remarkable female protagonist, the orphan Elizabeth Raby. As a child, Elizabeth stops the titular John Falkner from committing suicide, is subsequently adopted by him, and spends her formative years traversing the European continent with him as he seeks to escape his demons and forget his past. Over the course of this time, Elizabeth mounts and leads a successful military operation to rescue her adoptive father when Falkner is injured behind enemy lines while fighting for Greek independence. In her early twenties, Elizabeth makes plans to sail alone to America to search for evidence of his innocence in the crime that has haunted him since before she saved his life the first time. When Falkner is imprisoned for this crime, Elizabeth follows him into the prison, passing her days in his cell to cheer the only father she has ever known. Only in the final chapters, after Falkner's history is revealed to the court and he is released, does what could be dubbed the "romantic B plot" come to fruition, with only the final four paragraphs of the novel devoted to Elizabeth's marriage and life thereafter. After the far-ranging events of the novel, this ending, which seems tagged on as an appeal to the consumers of silver fork novels, reminds readers of Elizabeth's eventual social respectability, her settling down if you will. It also casts a glance back at Shelley's own past. By the time of its publication in 1837, Shelley had lived without her husband for a decade and a half, moulding herself and her son carefully into characters that would be deemed acceptable by increasingly conservative London society. In writing three volumes detailing the adventures of a girl who criss-crosses Europe, traverses warzones, saves the lives of both men in her life, willingly goes to prison, and still manages to make herself respectable in the end, Shelley seems to tell her readers that anyone could have an irreputable past, and that an irreputable past or radical youth could be forgiven under the right circumstances.<sup>16</sup>

Even with the bicentenary of her birth marking some scholarly recognition of Shelley's later works, works well worth that recognition, *Frankenstein* still comprises the bulk of Shelley research, but in recent years concentration on contextualization beyond biography moved into the fore. The Bodleian library published facsimiles of the *Frankenstein Notebooks* in 1996, again unbinding these

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<sup>16</sup> This idea of social redemption after youthful transgressions, or irregularities, was in the water at this time among the Shelley-Godwin circle. William Godwin suggested a similar redemptive arc to Edward Bulwer-Lytton for his *Eugene Aram* (1832), and before using a similar arc in his own *Deloraine* (1833).

vital documents from the geographic location of the originals. This allowed scholars, many for the first time, to see the marginalia inserted by Percy Shelley in drafts, and the subsequent, written negotiations over individual edits between Mary and Percy Shelley, edits that it should again be noted were succinctly charted by Mellor in the late 1980s. The marginal edits and negotiations between Percy and Mary Shelley do more than offer the strict comparisons between two writers as shown by Mellor's tables. Rather, scholars glimpse a coequal partnership between author and editor, in which a determined young novelist accepts partially, but not totally, the guidance of a comparatively older and more experienced writer. By 1817 the composition of the *Journals*, the diary started by Mary and Percy Shelley on the night of their elopement, had become almost entirely hers rather than a joint venture. Here, years after that fateful night in July 1814 and the ensuing hardships, we have another glimpse into the dynamic of the Shelley partnership through the private "conversations" held in the margins of Mary Shelley's first novel, possibly the last such private textual conversation extant. While we know that Percy's advice would have been sought throughout the composition of Shelley's other works during his lifetime, if edited drafts of *Mathilda* or *Valperga* exist in an archive, they have not been published.<sup>17</sup>

Returning to the domain of secondary, rather than primary, research, texts like Tim Marshall's *Murdering to Dissect* (1995) offered historical context for the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, framing the later version of the text around contemporary debates over grave robbing dissection, and the Anatomy Act of 1832. Marshall pairs detailed legal and social history with critical analysis of the 1831 *Frankenstein* to offer modern readers deeper historical context for the state of anatomical study in Britain during Mary Shelley's lifetime, an important distinction as much of the research on Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein* up to this point has been Anglocentric. I mention Anglocentricity here because, just as *Frankenstein* only nominally takes place in Britain, much of this thesis looks beyond the small island where Shelley was born and buried, instead encompassing all of Europe and

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<sup>17</sup> At the time of writing this, I have not yet personally visited the Bodleian Special Collections to study the Arbing Papers. There are several entries in the digital records that make me hopeful that there are at least early drafts and notes of *Valperga*, but a full, collaborative draft comparable to the *Frankenstein Notebooks* is not in evidence.

venturing beyond to South America in an effort to dissolve the notion of *Frankenstein* as a purely British text, divorced from its European contexts.

### **The Circle Opening: The Limits of Anglocentricity and *Frankenstein***

Terry Hale's *Tales of the Dead* (1992) suffers from this Anglocentricity as well. In the 1818 "Preface" to *Frankenstein*, Percy Shelley told readers that the eponymous tale was inspired after the Diodati circle "amused [themselves] with some German stories of ghosts" (Shelley 4). In the 1831 *Introduction*, Mary Shelley offers more detail about this text, revealing that they read "some volumes of ghost stories, translated from German into French" (Shelley, 1831, vii). With this additional detail, plus Shelley's descriptions of two of the stories contained in these volumes, the text in question could be distinguished among the handful of German ghost and folktale collections circulating Europe at the time. The French translations read by the Shelley circle have been identified as the *Fantasmagoriana* (1812), a selection of tales taken from "the first two of the five volume *Gespenterbuch*" (1811-1815), or the original German collection (Hale, 10). An incomplete version of the *Fantasmagoriana* was translated to English as the *Tales of the Dead* (1813) by a Mrs. Utterson, though we have no record of Mary Shelley ever reading the English version of the stories. It is the 1813 *Tales* that Hale chose to edit and publish in 1992, the first reprint of these ghost stories since 1813 to his knowledge, rather than a translation of the complete French *Fantasmagoriana* which Shelley and company actually read, thus helping to further remove these stories from their continental origins. The complete *Fantasmagoriana* would not be published in English until the Day and Vorwerk translation in 2005, when it appeared under the same name. Day's afterword, "Searching for the Muse", draws important lines between the *Gespenterbuch*, later *Fantasmagoriana*, as collections of "folklore and adult fairytales" finally recorded in print in the early nineteenth century after years, possibly centuries, of being passed generation to generation through oral tradition (Day, 147). Day also makes important points about Johann Conrad Dippel, a 17<sup>th</sup>

century alchemist who lived in burg Frankenstein, pointing to him and his experiments as possible inspiration for Mary Shelley's tale.<sup>18</sup>

That said, the academic rigor of Day's afterward, or lack thereof, is perhaps titillating for general audiences, but the primary critical use of the 2005 *Fantasmagoriana* is as a translation. The afterword essay leans heavily on Walter Scheele's *Burg Frankenstein* (2001), a history of the Frankenstein family and lands near Darmstadt in modern day Germany, that claims to contain excerpts from a Shelley journal thought lost. The excerpt of this 'lost journal', quoted by Scheele and translated and reprinted by Day claims to be from the Shelleys' 1814 tour through Europe in general, and specifically gives a description of a moonlit walk through Castle Frankenstein taken by Mary and Percy Shelley as they passed near it while leaving Europe having run out of money over the course of their elopement and honeymoon. Without a doubt there are gaps in the chronology of the *Shelley Journal*, but the timing of those gaps does not line up with the 'lost journal' Scheele claims to have read. The *Shelley Journal Book I* encompasses July 1814 to May 1815, is held in near-completion at the Bodleian Library and seems to contain the entirety of the Shelley's continental trip intact, with no mention of a moonlit stroll through the ruins of Castle Frankenstein. There is a so-called Missing Journal, begun in May 1815 and maintained until July 1816, that has either been lost to time or deliberately destroyed, but we know that during this time the Shelleys were primarily in England, before their June departure for the continent and eventually Geneva. Even beyond the 1814-15 *Journal*, the movements of the couple's elopement/honeymoon are well documented through Shelley's *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* (1817). Castles are mentioned and admired throughout the History, but the possibility that one is Castle Frankenstein and that the Shelleys visited it without making note in either the published account or the private *Journal*, is suspect. The likelihood of a full text existing for two centuries in the hands of a reticent Swedish family without being known by the wider community of Shelley scholars, particularly after the high point of Shelley visibility, and therefore monetization<sup>18</sup> at the 1997 bicentenary of her

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<sup>18</sup> For more on Dippel, see the first chapter of this thesis.

<sup>18</sup> For comparison's sake, a set of six Mary Shelley letters sold for £12,500 at Christie's in 2019. An authentic journal, one that has been never been seen, could easily be worth hundreds of thousands, if not more, to the right collector or archive.

birth or the Frankenstein-mania that was the bicentenary of its first publication (1818-2018), is slim.

Anglocentricity and the removal of Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein* from their transnational contexts is alleviated in part by Radu Florescu's *In Search of Frankenstein* (1997), a text that begins, fittingly, in Geneva. Florescu approached his *Search* as a historian rather than a literary scholar because that is what he was, a professor of Eastern European History at Boston College, better known for his work on *Dracula*, rather than a professor of English literature. Part oral history, part history detective, Florescu explored the locations in question on foot and through documentation, sifting through the legends of the Frankenstein barons and eastern European folklore to find kernels of inspiration as they could have struck Mary Shelley. Florescu does solid work on the history of the Frankenstein family and landholdings, including an extensive chapter on Conrad Dippel and his experimentation, however Florescu also interviews people still living in the shadow of Castle Frankenstein, as well as visiting the castle itself and giving tactile accounts of the crumbling structure and family tombs it still houses. The concept of in-depth historical context for literary works gained popularity and the work of literary scholar, began to encompass not just biographism, but wider historical contextualization as well. Florescu does not claim to be a literary scholar, but that his text can today be used as a source for literary scholars speaks to the grey area forming between historians and literary critics.

Perhaps one of the most easily recognizable hallmarks of a text and an author evolving out of niche research and entering the common canon is the number of 'reader's companions' printed to serve as guides for young scholars in the field, presumably undergraduate students. My university library holds roughly ten different such companion texts, their publication dates ranging from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s. The most recent of these is Graham Allen's *Shelley's Frankenstein* (2008), Bloomsbury Publishing's contribution to the canon of *Frankenstein* handbooks, and one of the most widely regarded to date. If free market capitalism dictates that supply rises to meet demand, then sometime in the late 1990s, perhaps due to the increased exposure from the bicentenary of her birth, or the fact that a decade had passed since the publication of her *Letters* and *Journals* and with them the tacit acknowledgment of the validity of studying Shelley

holistically and at all levels of academia, a demand for these readers' guides was created and publishers rose to fill the gap. Whatever the reason, Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein* entered common undergraduate reading lists, and a generation of academics settled in to condense the *Frankenstein* scholarship of the 1980s and 1990s into these slim, digestible volumes for students' easy consumption.

The new millennia saw the evolution of *Frankenstein* research continue to complicate. Miranda Seymour published another comprehensive biography on Shelley, succinctly titled *Mary Shelley*, in 2002, and while Percy Shelley is an active character for roughly half of the page count, significant weight is still given to Mary Shelley's life before and after him. This includes fairly detailed reconstructions of Mary Shelley's social life post-Percy, her struggles to attain respectability in increasingly conservative London, to raise and educate her son, to publish her work and earn a living therein, and to find a social circle that would either accept or ignore her radical youth, like the society found by Elizabeth Raby in *Falkner*. Partially intended for general readers rather than critics, Seymour still makes a point to include as much of Shelley's bibliography as possible, further raising the profile of her later life and works.

The recognition of Romantic sociability that St. Clair heralded with *Godwins and the Shelleys* in 1989, and the psychoanalytical and feminist readings favoured in the '80s and '90s gave way to contextualization of *Frankenstein* and its inclusion in cultural histories outside the literary canon in the 2000s. St. Clair is once again noteworthy in this endeavour, with his history of literacy and publishing *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* coming to print in 2004. This cultural history spans the length and breadth of Romantic literature, examining why the British Romantics at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had higher levels of literacy than any previous generation. It also dissects the importance of publishing, including regular newspapers and subscription magazines as well as publishing culture in London in particular and to the reading culture of the British in general, and why certain works captured the public so completely. Folded into this text is a chapter on *Frankenstein*, its conception and reception by a British public that Mary Shelley would not meet until 1823, when she returned to London after Percy's death.

Similarly Richard Holmes, whose *Shelley: The Pursuit* has already been mentioned, published his *Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science* in 2008. Like St. Clair's *Reading Nation*, *Age of Wonder* is a sweeping survey of the state of the world as the British Romantics viewed it. With an eye towards the science of the day, Holmes traces both first and second generation Romantics as they variously pursued and shied away from the rapidly developing fields of chemistry, biology, anatomy, and mechanical engineering in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Like St. Clair, Holmes devotes an entire chapter to *Frankenstein*, detailing Lawrence and Abernathy's duelling vitalism/materialism lectures from 1816 to 1819, and Shelley's connections to Lawrence. Despite the chapter's name, more weight is perhaps given to the first-generation Romantics like Coleridge and Wordsworth than Shelley herself, but the light Holmes casts on the broader scientific debates of the day is invaluable.

These two monolithic surveys were not alone in broadening the *Frankenstein* conversation, the first decade of the 2000s saw multiple other cultural histories on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century British fascination with odd bodies and medical marvels, a topic that inevitably leads back to *Frankenstein*. Youngquist's *Monstrosities: Bodies and British Romanticism* (2003), explores the longstanding fascination with anatomical anomalies, tracing it to the voyeuristic sideshow culture that would fully bloom in the Victorian era. In a chapter fittingly titled *Mother Flesh*, Youngquist delves into Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and contextualizes the politicization of the female body and Wollstonecraft's struggle to reclaim womanhood in general and motherhood in particular by refuting "the dependence presumed and perpetuated by political and medical theorists alike" in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Youngquist, 152). No account of Wollstonecraft and motherhood is complete without retelling her brutal end, following the birth of the baby that would become Mary Shelley, and the novel that has been recognized for decades as a myth of motherhood and birth perverted.

Other cultural histories that appear throughout this decade, and which play a part in this thesis, include King's *The Dying Game: A Curious History of Death* (2008), Roach's *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers* (2003), MacDonald's *Human Remains: Dissection and Its Histories* (2006), and Cody's *Birthing the Nation: Sex, Science, and Conception in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century* (2008) all of which touch

on Shelley and *Frankenstein* both explicitly and implicitly. Texts like these have proven vital to my research, opening avenues away from the explicit text of the novel and into the realm of what remains unsaid, filling in details of the wider conversation into which *Frankenstein* was born and which Shelley sought to engage with. In my endeavours to widen the contextualization of *Frankenstein*, to “go beyond the work... [to] say what it does not and could not say”, I have widened my scope of reading beyond purely literary analysis or histories of Shelley and her circle (Macherey, 87). The early 2000s offered several texts for that expansion.

Remaining within this decade, interesting developments in scholarship on the international nature of *Frankenstein* came from Julia Douthwaite in 2009 with her article “The Frankenstein of the French Revolution: Nogaret’s automaton tale of 1790” in the *European Romantic Review*. This was followed by her *The Frankenstein of 1790 and Other Lost Chapters from Revolutionary France* (2012). Douthwaite does not study English literature exclusively like the majority of Shelley scholars, but is rather, like Barbara Johnson when she first began engaging with Shelley in the ‘70s, a professor of French and Francophone studies at the University of Notre Dame and thus grounds her work “in an epistemological framework carefully constructed to appreciate period terminology, social expectations, vernaculars, and the chronology of a time wracked by rapid and sometimes drastic changes” (Douthwaite, 2012, 3). That she appears to be the first to have published in English on François-Félix Nogaret’s *Le Miroir*, a novella featuring an inventor named Frankéstein who constructs and presents a beautiful automaton to win the hand of a maiden, speaks again to the Anglocentricity of *Frankenstein* studies. *Frankenstein* has long been associated with the French Revolution, whether as the spirit of heedless forward momentum and enthusiasm leading to devastating, unforeseen consequences, or simply because of the implicit inclusion of the Terror through the De Lacey’s exile from Paris. However, this novella with such seemingly obvious connective tissue to *Frankenstein* has been largely ignored, possibly because it has never been published in English.<sup>20</sup>

Closing the decade, Daisy Hay’s *Young Romantics* (2010) is another text that, like St Clair, offers the biography of a group rather than an individual. Focused

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<sup>20</sup> The next chapter of this thesis expands on *Le Miroir* and the ways Shelley may have come into contact with this novella despite its absence from her reading lists.

on the Hunt brothers and the society of writers and creative types they attracted and circulated with throughout their lives, *Young Romantics* looks at an insular society crafted in large part by choice and talent, rather than by dint of birth or marriage, as is the case with the principals of *The Godwins and the Shelleys*. Once again, Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein* are part of the mix, rather than a standalone actor in the narrative, but in Hay's text her life and work are, once again, given their due in another notable text specifically intended to display the sociability of the second generation of British Romantics.

Since the earliest days of Mary Shelley research scholars have, rightly so, found difficulty extracting the woman as an individual from her circle. The preoccupation of Shelley herself, and most of the people she associated with, with her illustrious parentage has led to myriad studies on her writing and the way it reflects or answers the philosophies of Wollstonecraft and Godwin. Buss, Macdonald, and McWhir's *Writing Lives* (2001), a collection of essays focusing on Shelley and Wollstonecraft, is one such study. Intended to demonstrate "the relationship between a mother and a daughter, between two writing lives, and—more broadly—between two generations of writers", the contributors to *Writing Lives* are many of the acknowledged greats within Shelley scholarship (*Writing Lives*, 7). Included among them are Anne Mellor, Betty T. Bennett, and Sydney M. Conger, whose contributions to broader Shelley scholarship have already been discussed. In *Writing Lives*, Charles Robinson, notable for editing *The Shelley Notebooks* (1996) and constructing *The Original Frankenstein* (2009), writes of Shelley and Wollstonecraft that "there is a book begging to be written on mother and daughter, a study of the ways in which Mary Wollstonecraft and her literary texts play out in the lights and shadows of Mary Shelley's life and works." (Robinson, 128) Over a decade later, as the bicentenary of *Frankenstein* approached, Charlotte Gordon answered that call with her *Romantic Outlaws: The Extraordinary Lives of Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley* (2015).

Excellent biographies of both Shelley and Wollstonecraft abound<sup>21</sup> but Gordon is the first to approach both women simultaneously, taking up Robinson's challenge and "allowing readers to hear the echo of Wollstonecraft in Shelley's

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<sup>21</sup> Several of Shelley have already been discussed in this chapter, for a comprehensive biography of Wollstonecraft I recommend Janet Todd's *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life* (2000).

letters, journals, and novels, and demonstrating how often Wollstonecraft addressed herself to the future, to the daughter she planned to raise.”(Gordon, xvii) In alternating chapters, Gordon lays the lives of these two women alongside each other in a cross-generational conversation best appreciated with the distance and hindsight a biography such as this affords. For example: allowing readers an intimate view of Shelley’s mourning after her beloved son William died in the summer of 1819, and Wollstonecraft’s post-partum depression and heartbreak over Imlay leading to her first attempted suicide in 1795. Thus, when Gordon explains how Godwin wrote to Shelley in the aftermath of little William’s death warning her to “guard against the Wollstonecraft tendency to despair”, readers can immediately see how deep that despair could run, and the self-destruction it could portend (Gordon, 306). Mary Shelley lived her life guided by the writings of a mother she never met, a fact that can never be understated or overanalysed. By writing these two women together in a single biography Gordon explicitly acknowledges that and offers both lay-people and scholars yet another tool to examine these women simultaneously.

The lead up to the 2018 bicentenary of *Frankenstein’s* original publication saw a rash of new books celebrating the anniversary and capitalizing on the increased visibility. Roseanne Montillo’s *The Lady and Her Monsters: A Tale of Dissections, Real-Life Dr Frankensteins, and the Creation of Mary Shelley’s Masterpiece* (2013) was geared towards a general audience, offering contextualization of Frankenstein through storytelling, re-creating scenes from Mary Shelley’s childhood and the labours of various ‘mad’ scientists across Britain and Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century based on documented history. For a researcher, it offers interesting glimpses, but is more of a starting point for deeper research than a text to be considered as a solid source, as much of the text reads more like dramatic re-creation than hardened fact. Katheryn Harkup’s *Making the Monster: The Science Behind Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* (2019) still catered to general readers but offers firmer research and fewer dramatic re-creations in its effort to dissect how exactly one would go about creating a Frankensteinian creature in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. From material procurement, to scientists to consult, Harkup offers more ‘practical’ responses to the question “How to build a human?”, and also contextualizes *Frankenstein* as a solidly European endeavour, importantly singling out the Prussian savant Alexander von Humboldt as vital to understanding science

and philosophy at this time.<sup>22</sup> Harkup's work provides another step away from Anglocentricism, opening numerous avenues for further study away from the typical, purely British context given to the text.

At the other end of the Shelley scholarship spectrum, sandwiched between the two previously mentioned texts is Smith's *Cambridge Companion to Frankenstein* (2016), a collection of sixteen new essays on *Frankenstein* and its Romantic contexts, definitively written for critics rather than those in search of light reading. Framed similarly to the previously mentioned spate of handbooks published in the '90s and 2000s, the *Companion* is broken up into sections for easy navigation by young scholars: "Historical and Literary Contexts", "Theories and Forms", and "Adaptations". In the words of its editor, the *Companion* is intended as "both a guide to the novel and an act of cultural analysis... a starting point for students wishing to explore the novel" beyond its explicit text, and serves as a sixteen-essay distillation of *Frankenstein* scholarship, timed to coincide with the uptick of *Frankenstein* exposure that came with the bicentenary (Smith, 9).

The bicentenary also saw Oxford World Classics issue a new edition of the 1818 *Frankenstein*, including entirely new notes and a new introduction by Nick Groom, notable as the first new introduction to the Oxford edition since Marilyn Butler's seminal work became the standard in 1993. The "Introduction" provided by Groom offers another interesting look at contextualization, particularly surgical contextualization and early 19<sup>th</sup> century efforts to perform rhinoplasties, or nose reconstructions. However, I am more interested in the endnotes and the way Groom's work further contextualizes *Frankenstein* with the European conversation of Mary Shelley's day, specifically eastern Europe and the vampire mythos. John William Polidori's *The Vampyre*, also a product of the wintery summer of 1816, has long been considered a likely candidate for the first vampire story published in English. The permeation of vampiric myth throughout popular culture, and *Frankenstein*'s long association with Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, makes imagining a time when vampires were not a common part of popular and scholarly discourse, difficult. However, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century this particular folktale was still largely

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<sup>22</sup> Von Humboldt's name did not appear in any of my research on Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein* prior to Harkup's inclusion and as will be seen, he plays no small part in the third chapter of this thesis.

regionalized, confined to eastern Europe, making the vampiric elements of *Frankenstein*, as pointed out by Groom, all the more striking. Polidori's *Vampyre* might be the first book published in London by that name, but Groom seems to argue that in vampiric essence it is a close second behind *Frankenstein*. The fact that both novels were born from the same social circle and ghost story competition makes this cross pollination of ideas obvious in hindsight, but once again the explicit statement of this line of intertextuality has been largely absent from the scholarship.

The 2018 bicentenary of *Frankenstein's* publication saw engagement above and beyond a few books published to capitalize on the occasion. Indeed, even for a text as visible in the cultural zeitgeist, 2018 saw an unprecedented, globally scaled year of events celebrating *Frankenstein* the world over through Frankenreads. Funded in partnership with the Keats-Shelley Association, the stated goal of Frankenreads was to foster a global conversation surrounding the text and its modern implications for "issues such as ethics in science and the human tendency to demonize the unfamiliar." (<https://frankenreads.org/about/faq/>) *The Endurance of Frankenstein* came about when "a playful conversation at a party" lead to the discovery that the contributors "were all closet aficionados of Mary Shelley's novel" (1979, xi). This shy admittance that a group of scholars took interest in a book still torn somewhere between gothic curiosity and Romantic non-sequitur rather than a work of true literary merit, lead to many of the weaknesses in *Endurance* that have already been explored. Four decades later, *Frankenstein* scholarship has long since come out of the closet, so to speak. Readings, interpretations, and research surrounding the text have proliferated and permeated Romantic scholarship, and if Frankenreads has proven anything, it is that *Frankenstein* does not just endure in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it thrives.

Frankenreads events were initially intended to cluster around the end of October and Halloween, a fitting season for the celebration if inaccurate (the novel was originally published in January 1818), but 2018 saw over 600 officially registered events dispersed across the calendar and scattered across six continents, and likely hundreds more unregistered events (<https://frankenreads.org/events/>). Frankenreads events were designed to engage as wide an audience as possible, both from academia and the public, from Hamburg to Hong Kong to my own university in Cork where we hosted lectures, a film screening, and a staged reading of Richard

Brinsley Peake's *Presumption: Fate of Frankenstein* (1823). The Bodleian Library, which houses most of the Shelley papers, hosted an entire day of Frankenreads events, while the American Library of Congress hosted an entire day of *Frankenstein*, with the novel being read out loud cover to cover by a series of volunteers in the Library rotunda. This was just one of several all-day, or all-night reads of *Frankenstein* organised through Frankenreads and separately, on Halloween. Perhaps most evocative of all with Frankensteinian mystique, the Mary Shelley gravesite in Bournemouth hosted the *Frankenstein Unbound International Conference* on October 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>. The gothic revival St. Peter's Church offered a fitting venue for paper presentations, round tables, an art exhibit, the launch of an interactive Mary Shelley app, and a podcast recording all focusing on the role *Frankenstein* has and continues to play in scholarship and society.

It remains to be seen exactly what impact Frankenreads will ultimately have on Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein* scholarship as a whole. It is the nature of academia that the major publications first sparked by Frankenreads will still be in their gestation for months and years to come. I was included in *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein 1818-2018* (2020) by Cambridge Scholars Publishing, a collection of essays born out of presentations at the International Bicentenary Conference on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, hosted by Università di Venezia Ca' Foscari in February 2018. Other texts were more timely with the bicentennial, like Carol Margaret Davidson and Marie Mulvey-Roberts' *Global Frankenstein* (2018), a collection of essays surveying the state of modern Frankenstein descendants.<sup>23</sup> The specificity and universality of the *Frankenstein* myth continues to amaze as it is analysed and reassessed across Shelley scholarship and the connections made through the global Frankenreads initiative will continue to bear fruit for years to come.

### **Beyond the Novel: *Frankenstein* in Popular Culture**

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<sup>23</sup> We will return to *Global Frankenstein* at the end of this chapter, for now I would like you to bear in mind that like *Frankenstein* itself, *Global Frankenstein* was not conceived or born in a conversational vacuum.

Since the 1823 stage production by Richard Brinsley Peake, *Frankenstein* has been recognized as a work that can be visually stunning when adapted for stage or screen. One of the first ‘feature’ films ever made was Edison Studios’ 1910 *Frankenstein*, a visual interpretation that clocks in at just under fifteen minutes. In the century since the Edison film, *Frankenstein* in all its permutations has been a favourite reoccurring theme in Hollywood and beyond. From iconic parodies in the 1970s (*Young Frankenstein* (1974), *Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975)) to attempts to turn the creature into a superhero, (*I, Frankenstein* (2014)), and earnest attempts at gothic drama (*Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* (1994), *Victor Frankenstein* (2015)). In the past decade, versions of Victor Frankenstein or his creature have appeared on British and American televisions in *Once Upon A Time* (2011-2018), *Grimm* (2011-2017), *Supernatural* (2005-2020), *The Frankenstein Chronicles* (2015-2017), and *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016), and on the boards in Liam Scarlett’s ballet (2016), Mark Gray’s opera (2019), and Danny Boyle’s stage play (2011), to name a very few of the dozens if not hundreds of examples.

As with the longstanding tradition of visual adaptations, there is an equally storied history of direct and indirect literary mutations of the *Frankenstein* narrative. Jane Loudon’s *The Mummy! A Tale of the Twenty Second Century* (1827) is one of the earliest, in which a scientist and his student galvanically wake a massive being, a pharaoh, from the distant past who goes on to manipulate and terrorize the political elite of England. H. G. Wells’ *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) sees a heedless doctor create a new race by vivisecting animals into beings resembling humans, beings who rebel against their maker and destroy him. More recently, Ahmed Saadawi has transplanted the *Frankenstein* myth to war-torn Iraq with his *Frankenstein in Baghdad: A Novel* (2018), a story which bears little resemblance to the original text beyond its inclusion of a re-animated, patchwork corpse, and yet still it is inextricably Frankensteinian. The following year, Jeanette Winterson thoroughly queered *Frankenstein* in her *Frankkissstein: A Love Story* (2019), in a modern retelling in which Mary Shelley herself takes part as the transgender character Ry.

Since 1818, Mary Shelley’s novel and her creature have been associated with the plight of the Other, in whatever form the Other takes. In George Canning’s 1824 speech to parliament, the subject was abolition and the Others were slaves in the

West Indies, beings in “the manhood of [their] physical strength, in the maturity of [their] physical passions, but in the infancy of [their] uninstructed reason,” meaning that sudden freedom would be akin to “to rais[ing] up a creature resembling the splendid fiction of a recent romance” whose minds would be corrupted and capacity for destruction would be great (Canning, 1103). Canning’s stance on gradual emancipation is abhorrent today, but his use of Shelley’s creature as an analogy for a systematically Othered population shows that even within her lifetime the creature was recognized as a representation of those outside legitimate society. Depending on the decade and the scholar, the Other represented by the creature is black, female, queer, some combination of the three, or something else entirely. The fact that modern novels like those by Saadawi and Winterson are catching up with scholarship by casting the creature, Frankenstein, or even Shelley herself as Others in some capacity, is a mark of the permeation of different readings of the text, as well as how far society has come in the intervening two centuries. Almost fifty years ago, *Rocky Horror Picture Show* and its transexual Transylvanians was relegated to midnight showings and emblematic of a rebellious counterculture. Today, *Frankissstein*, with its queer characters and explorations of the nuance of sex, gender, and sexuality, was considered for the Man Booker Prize, one of the most prestigious literary awards in the world. *Frankenstein* has passed from storyteller to storyteller as a foundational myth, like a legend from the Greek pantheon or a parable from the New Testament, and the surge of Frankensteinian creative energy surrounding 2018 pays tribute to that.

That Mary Shelley, or a version of her, becomes a character in Winterson’s novel draws attention to the fact that Shelley is frequently Othered within conversations surrounding her own novel. As a female intellectual, Shelley was a relatively rare specimen during her lifetime, though certainly not unique. Yet, Shelley did not choose to surround herself with other women, instead her circle primarily consisted of male writers, philosophers, and intellectuals, and it is in the light of these men that *Frankenstein* is most frequently studied. An astute scholar will analyse the Wollstonecraftian themes in Frankenstein’s childhood and early education at home, but this analysis is almost always followed by an examination of Godwinian themes as well. Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, Luigi Galvani, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Dr William Lawrence, among many others, have all been

given some form of credit for Mary Shelley's novel. My work seeks to demonstrate the singularity of *Frankenstein* as a lens through which Shelley channelled the world as she knew it, a novel perhaps informed by the cultural conversations surrounding her but that could only be written by a woman like Shelley with her unique education, experiences, and perspective. By expanding what we can know about Mary Shelley through research like mine, unbound to many of the limits which other scholars have accepted, we push her further into the realm of the known rather than the unknown, disencumbering her from the 'monstrous other' she has borne for centuries and thus embracing the truly global nature of her novel.

### **Expansion: *Frankenstein*, Intertextuality, and the Unsaid**

The story of Mary Shelley scholarship in general, and *Frankenstein* scholarship in particular is, one of expansion, complication, and reclamation. Even within her own lifetime, Mary Shelley saw the need to assert her authorship over her work, as she did in the 1831 *Introduction*. Almost a century and a half later, when *The Endurance of Frankenstein* was published, her authorial legitimacy was still in question. The subsequent decades have seen great strides in *Frankenstein* and Shelley research, with trends in critical scholarship rising and falling throughout. Biographism, psychoanalysis, feminist critiques, and queer readings have all cycled through, and filter in some form or another, into most modern scholarship, mine included. Likewise, social contextualization has long been a part of the Shelley literature with more nuanced portrayals of the interpersonal relationships slowly being drawn as different facets of the lives of Shelley and her circle come to life. Intertextuality within the Shelley-Godwin circle has proven fertile ground for many scholars in recent decades, and rightly so. When looking at titles alone, namely the Promethean myth utilized by Shelley, Percy, and Byron, or the subtitle of Polidori's *Ernestus Berchtold, or The Modern Oedipus*, Johnson reminds us that these titles simultaneously make the respective authors' education explicit, and assume a level of classical understanding in the prospective audiences of these works (Johnson, 92-93). Thus, making what might have been implicit intertextuality without these

specific titles<sup>24</sup> becomes explicit, blatant from the title pages of these works both at the time of publication and today.

The 2018 bicentenary of *Frankenstein*'s first publication heralded what is perhaps the biggest surge in *Frankenstein* scholarship in decades. Because of the added and understandable publicity involved in celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a creature and story that have transcended the literary canon and entered modern mythology, scholars and publishers capitalized with a flood of publications about Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein*, many of which have already been mentioned in this Introduction. One of these dozens of essay collections, biographies, special editions of academic journals and more is Carol Margaret Davidson and Marie Mulvey-Roberts' *Global Frankenstein* (2018). As astute and conscientious readers will note, there are certain similarities between the title of the collection of essays edited by Davidson and Mulvey-Roberts and the subtitle of my own thesis: *Mary Shelley's Global Novel, Frankenstein*. This is not a coincidence, though there is a certain inversion between my thinking and that of the creators of *Global Frankenstein*.

The purpose of Davidson and Mulvey-Roberts's collection is to examine the *subsequent* global impact of *Frankenstein* in the intervening two centuries between its first publication and today. The contributors to *Global Frankenstein* were asked to "grant some sense of the novel's enormous influence across eras, genres, and artistic forms", and "approach *Frankenstein* as a rich, socio-historically grounded, conceptual matrix out of which were spawned innumerable cultural offspring." (Davidson & Mulvey-Roberts, 8, 9) To do this, the contributors did necessarily mine some of the contexts of *Frankenstein*'s creation, but that is not the primary focus of the collection. Arguably, this publication could be titled more accurately: *Frankenstein's Global Descendants*, because that is what the focus is, the "cultural offspring" of Shelley's hideous progeny, her grandcreatures, if you will.

Where Davidson and Mulvey-Roberts et. al., sought to gauge and celebrate these far flung and many-varied grandcreatures, my focus is on the global nature of *Frankenstein* by contextualizing it within the time of its publication. There has been an Anglocentricity to the historical contextualization of *Frankenstein* for decades, understandable given that it is a novel written by a British woman and was originally

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<sup>24</sup> *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus; Prometheus Unbound; "Prometheus"*

published in London, but I believe Shelley's novel exists beyond national boundaries as part of an ongoing, many varied cultural conversation. More than the subsequent global impact of the characters and story permutations that have proliferated in the past 202 years, *Frankenstein* was written as an inherently international text, with references to everything from French and German fairytales to South American colonialism, to Italian wax figures tucked between the pages. If we accept with Marx and Engels that language and art are "as deeply rooted in material conditions as any other [social] practice" of the culture that produced them, then the international influences, the conversational threads if you will, that Mary Shelley fed into the creation of *Frankenstein* speaks volumes to her understanding of wider Europe and the globe writ large (Habib, 210). Across the course of this thesis I will examine *Frankenstein* with this in mind, not as a British text, but a global one, therefore unfettered by certain limitations that *Frankenstein* scholars to date have largely (and possibly unconsciously) accepted.

Beyond the largely Anglocentric nature of *Frankenstein* scholarship up until recent years, there are certain primary Shelley resources that, while a boon to Shelley scholars, can also serve as inhibitors in certain lights. The most significant of these resources are the *Shelley Journals*, already much discussed in this in this Introduction for their importance in unbinding Mary Shelley materials from the physical archives in which they are housed. The *Journals* are a valuable and important text to any Shelley scholar, but they should also be acknowledged as incomplete. There is a missing *Journal*, first and foremost, an entire year of documentation (1815-1816) that has either been lost to time or was destroyed by Shelley's notoriously protective daughter-in-law and subsequent generations when they sought to cleanse the family legacy before allowing admirers and scholars to study the Shelley papers. On top of that, it should be remembered that the *Shelley Journals* only begin after Mary Shelley eloped with Percy in 1814. Completely absent are her childhood reading both in Godwin's home, and in Scotland when she left London for over a year to live with the Baxters near Dundee in a place where her "true compositions, the airy flights of [her] imagination, were born and fostered." (Shelley, 1831, vi) We have few to no records from this time in Shelley's life including, to my knowledge, no letters home that might give insight into what a teenaged Mary Shelley was reading, or what shape these flights of imagination might

be taking. Furthermore, even within the periods contained within the *Journals* there are known absences, notably the absence of the *Fantasmagoriana*, the collection of German ghost stories translated into French that the Shelleys, Byron, Claire Clairmont, and Dr John Polidori read together in Geneva that inspired the ghost story contest that gave birth to *Frankenstein* in the first place. Because of absences like this, blind adherence to the reading lists without allowing for expanded sources and intertexts beyond what Shelley strictly recorded becomes reductive and it should be the nature of literary research to broaden horizons, not shrink them.

It is through these noticeable cracks in the *Frankenstein* primary materials, and through the *Frankenstein* text itself, that I am able to examine Shelley's text as a global novel. My work deals with the explicit in Shelley's work, like her obvious references to Spanish abuses in modern day South America through references to the conquest of the Aztec and the Inca peoples, but also the implicit, such as her allusions to Italian wax figures through the destruction and rending of the incomplete female creature, or the comparisons that can be made between the character of Frankenstein and a description of the late French anatomist Legallois in the 1815 *London Medical and Physical Journal*. By dealing in both the explicit and implicit in the *Frankenstein* text, I am able to approach Shelley's work as a global novel that showcases the depth and breadth of Shelley's wide-reaching interests, and thus expand the circle of known influences she drew on when creating her first masterpiece.

My thesis engages with this explicit intertextuality throughout, but I do not limit myself to only the explicit kind. Rather, using cultural materialism, my work seeks to take granular details from the *Frankenstein* text, with supporting evidence from Shelley's other works, and indicate the very specific contexts under which such details become relevant. To contextualize *Frankenstein* as only a product of British Romanticism does disservice to both the text and the author, both of which are inexorably linked to the wider European continent and the world at large. No one but Shelley could say whether she defined herself as 'British' or 'English' as we might define national identity today, but I can say that she read and travelled widely; she preferred living in Italy to living in England; she preferred reading widely to reading narrowly; and that when she wrote, even 'conventionally', her writing reflected all of this and more. Shelley wrote and thought outside the boundaries of British

Romanticism, even as she lived and wrote with the men who shaped the canon as we know it today. To limit a definition of her or *Frankenstein* should be unthinkable, and yet to this point research surrounding Shelley and *Frankenstein* has largely been Anglocentric.

To that end, my research sits in the space where literature and history meet. Broadly, my approach is Marxist, in that I reject the idea that any piece of literature can exist or be understood completely independently of the person, place, time and other art and literary works that surrounded its production, as well as the idea that language can exist independently. Rather, that language and art are “as deeply rooted in material conditions as any other [social] practice” of the culture that produced them (Habib, 210). This said, my research only incidentally touches on the economic and class stratification that so preoccupied Marx and Engels at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Much of my philosophy comes from the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century theorists, leaning heavily on what Macherey termed ‘the unsaid’, the idea that a text is “furrowed by the allusive presence of those other books against which it is elaborated;... [circling] the absence of that which it cannot say, haunted by the absence of certain repressed words” (Macherey, 89). I find it fitting that a text like *Frankenstein*, a narrative indeed haunted by dangerous secrets left unspoken until it is too late, is in turn haunted by the echoes of intertextuality. I use the term intertextuality here, and throughout this thesis, knowing that, at least for some critics, it is nearly as loaded a term as Marxism, in that it evokes a complicated web of theorists and contrasting treatises written by those theorists across the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Rather than delve into the history of intertextuality<sup>25</sup> I will say, with Allen, that “Sometimes even the scholarly community forgets important hypotexts, long buried in forgotten tradition” or neglected by the passage of time and history (Allen, *Intertextuality*, 108). I have used *Frankenstein* as a hypertext, not only for British culture and literature in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but for European culture writ large, thus my work can also just as easily be said to be both an exercise in association studies, and an example of cultural materialism. All of these theories overlap on some level and contribute towards what is simply this: I use *Frankenstein* as a lens through which to see, not only the Europe Shelley knew, but also the world her

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<sup>25</sup> For a proper history and discussion on the state of the theory today, I encourage you to read Graham Allen’s *Intertextuality* (2008)

readers would have understood and recognized, a world that is today not so obvious. Scholars have worked for decades to piece together Shelley's life and literary influences but have largely limited themselves geographically and linguistically in ways that Shelley and her peers were not.

My work seeks to expand the scope of *Frankenstein* beyond the exclusively British, or English canon through association studies and in doing so uncover both the 'real' *Frankenstein* and the 'real' Mary Shelley and the global conversations she engaged in. There is a wonderful nest of paradoxes and ironies in my research: I have vastly broadened my scope of study on *Frankenstein* in order to zero in on a truer portrait of both it and Mary Shelley. In order to better understand Mary Shelley, I must focus not on her later productions in all of their studied construction, but rather her earliest novel. To get closer to the novel I must decentralize it from the metaphorical 'geography' where it has long rested and move it away from British literary 'soil'. To get closer to the woman I must narrow my focus to one work in dozens, and a work that has been extensively studied, at that. To open Mary Shelley as an author, I must return to *Frankenstein* and re-read it in a materialist manner, laying bare its global dimensions. This approach, both a narrowing and expansion of scope, not only brings new connections to the fore, but makes the novel itself 'new' through a richer, more textured understanding of both the narrative and the woman who crafted it.

I am hardly the first to take this materialist approach to *Frankenstein* as a text bound both to its time and the texts surrounding it. However, what many of my predecessors have ignored is that *Frankenstein* is an inherently international text. The novel was written by a woman who spent her adolescence in Scotland and would have remained a British expatriate in Italy were it financially feasible. It is peopled by a Swiss protagonist with a nominally half-Italian fiancé, Parisian exiles, an Arabian woman who embarks on cross-continent journeys multiple times, an English explorer surrounded by a crew of Russian seamen, and a creature with no homeland at all. To examine this text as a purely English production, and to treat it as largely isolated from contemporary Europe, is to be partially blind to the incredible life and work of the woman who wrote it, and to the lives of those who surrounded her. To that end, this thesis will broaden the international frame of reference surrounding *Frankenstein* by exploring both the text, and Mary Shelley's

relationships to such disparate themes as Italian wax figures, the European cult of South American literature, French and German literature and folktales, and the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century entanglement of life, death, sex, and resuscitation, and I begin by not limiting myself to the explicit record.

During his life, Mary Shelley's father, William Godwin, kept an extensive, if bare-bones, *Diary* of daily reading and meetings. Similarly, during her life with Percy, Mary Shelley tracked their progress geographically, academically, and socially in a series of *Journals*. The *Journals* do occasionally delve into more description of scenes or scenarios than the Godwin *Diary*, and serve as a more textured reference because they also served as notebooks for the family, containing lists of linens to buy or recipes for the pharmacist. However even with these caveats, they are imperfect records. Despite beginning the *Diary* well before Shelley's birth Godwin recorded only his personal reading, not the studies of the passel of children living under his roof. Nor does he make much mention of his second wife who was fluent in French, served as the children's primary instructor, and earned money as a translator. Nor does he offer detailed descriptions of the discussions held in his office when the London literati came to greet one of the greatest philosophers living at the time.

Similarly, Mary Shelley's *Journals* begin on the night of her elopement with Percy Shelley and her step-sister, Claire Clairmont, at age fifteen. Despite living the greater part to the preceding two years away from her family, first at the seaside for her health, and later in Scotland with the Baxter family, to my knowledge we have no letters from Shelley to her family during this time. I find it difficult to believe a thirteen year old left home by herself for the first time without writing to her beloved father, siblings, or even her odious stepmother, meaning that likely these letters are no longer extant. Because of this dearth of records from before her time with Percy, there is a certain futility to wedding oneself solely to the Shelley *Journals* or the three volumes of *Letters* edited by Bennett, comprehensive as they are for the time periods contained.<sup>26</sup> Even allowing that Shelley did not start engaging with heavy, more-complicated texts until after she was ten or twelve years old, that is still three years to half a decade of reading and potentially hundreds of books read, discussions

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<sup>26</sup> You will recall, there is a missing journal spanning May 1815 to July 1816.

listened to, essays and newspapers analysed, plays, exhibitions, and lectures attended, and life lived before the records contained in the published *Letters* and *Journals* begin.<sup>27</sup> Because of this staggering gap in the knowledge, it becomes not only prudent, but imperative that we look beyond the established lists, demonstrably incomplete kept for an arguably brief segment of a full life, to broaden the cultural conversations surrounding both Shelley and *Frankenstein* and encompass the entire globe.

### The Chapters:

*Frankenstein* is perhaps unique in that Mary Shelley acknowledged, in her 1831 *Introduction* to the text, that she was inspired to write it after reading a specific collection of German ghost stories. In the first chapter, “Fairytale *Frankenstein*: French and German Precursors”, I unpack not only the collection she read, *Gespenserbuch* translated to French as *Fantasmagoriana*, but a plethora of other German and French texts that can be connected to Shelley and her novel. The final section of this chapter examines the previously mentioned French novella, *Le Miroir*, which serves as a case study for one of the core threads of my research, that despite the extensive documentation of a portion of her life, there are unplumbed depths to Mary Shelley’s reading and knowledge that can only be explored through a certain amount of conjecture.

My second chapter, “Handmade: Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, and European Waxworks”, requires a further stretch into the ‘unsaid’, if you will, in that what I explore, the relationship between *Frankenstein* and European wax figures, is never

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<sup>27</sup> For comparison’s sake, before writing this section I asked my mother for a rough estimate of the number of books I read between ages 10 and 15 (2003-2008) and she laughed for two minutes straight, and then got out a pencil and paper to calculate. Between the school and city libraries, books bought, gifted, or assigned for class, borrowed from friends, or stolen from either my parents or my older sister, she put the number conservatively at two a week, or just over 200 a year, or roughly 1,000 in 5 years. This excludes shorter texts like short stories, poetry, newspapers and magazines, as well as other cultural engagements like travel, museums, plays, concerts, and films. While Shelley obviously did not have access to nearly the same amount of material as a girl in the aughts, she lived in a literary and social household, and travelled both to the coast of England and to Scotland alone as a young teenager. Disregarding the voracious reader we know she was in her youth and the cultural conversations she bore witness to is a disservice to the woman she became.

explicitly stated in the *Frankenstein* text<sup>28</sup>. Instead, subtext must be read in the descriptions of putrefying corpses, the staging of the two prison scenes, and the destruction of the incomplete female creature, as well as by contextualizing *Frankenstein* within the European travels of Shelley and her circle by examining the religious heritage of wax figures in *ex votos* and *memento mori* practice, studying the advent of wax, anatomical models, and exploring the history of Madame Tussaud's wax exhibits. A close examination of the extant Shelley reading lists and evidence from the Godwin *Diary* leads to dozens of connections between Shelley and wax figures, not the least of which is that ceroplasticians and *Frankenstein* both treat the human body as a craftwork to be assembled and disassembled as the scientist requires.

The third chapter, "A Tale of Continental Proportions: The Creature and South America", returns to explicit textual evidence taken from *Frankenstein* and explores seemingly off-hand references to South America in fuller 19<sup>th</sup> century context. Through a handful of single, or partial sentence references to the continent as a whole, or specific portions like Mexico, Peru, and the Andes, Shelley simultaneously draws attention to the romantic perception of South America as an Eden rich in natural resources, empty of native inhabitants, and rightfully belonging to Europeans. She also makes explicit reference to *la Leyenda Negra*, the Black Legend, or dramatization of the decimation of native populations by Spanish conquistadors in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. In this chapter I unpack where the South American continent, and European colonialism therein, sat in the European consciousness and what texts, themes, and literature likely informed Shelley when she chose it as her creature's desired destination.

My fourth chapter, "*Frankenstein*: Life, Death, and the In-Between", explores the hazy lines drawn between life and death in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Perhaps because of her explicit reference to it in the 1831 *Introduction*, galvanism has long been the focus of scientific contextualization of *Frankenstein*. This chapter touches on electrical stimulation as a proof of the permeability of death, but it also delves into the formation of organizations intended to rescue drowning victims, their revival techniques, and Shelley's knowledge of these techniques. In

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<sup>28</sup> Though wax figures as religious icons and substitutions for human flesh make appearances in subsequent Shelley texts.

French, *petite mort*, little death, is a euphemism for orgasm, and likewise, during Mary Shelley's lifetime, sex and death were inextricably bound together. From the perceived dangers in vital fluid depletion through masturbation, to the inuendo laced creation passage in the *Frankenstein* text, and the recurrence of necrophilic themes across literature, this chapter also explores the dark spaces where sex, death, and *Frankenstein* entwine.

Cultural materialism holds that no literary production, no human production, can be created in a vacuum. Mary Shelley was an exceptional individual and no text in history has had quite the same impact on world literature as *Frankenstein*, thus making her novel just one window through which a discerning reader can glimpse everything that Shelley left unsaid. *Frankenstein* serves as a cross-continent conversational nexus point, making space within its narrative for craftwork bodies, South American colonies, galvanic experiments to 'wake the dead' and collections of foreign fairytales. The teleologic value of my research is that by narrowing my focus to *Frankenstein* in this manner I have uncovered one small piece of a massive web that spans continents and crosses oceans. For decades, Shelley has been contextualized as British and thereby contained within that limited context. My research looks through and beyond the limitations of where she was born and died, to see the wider context as she did, thus better understanding both the woman and the work. If the history of *Frankenstein* scholarship is a steady expansion, then my expansion, beyond the borders of British Romanticism, or even British literature in general, to define *Frankenstein* as a global novel, is the next logical step.

## **A note on names and omissions:**

As you may have already noted, throughout this thesis I will primarily refer to Mary Shelley either by her full name, or as ‘Shelley’, and refer to her husband as either ‘Percy’ or ‘Percy Shelley’. This is a reversal of traditional nomenclature when referring to these two titans of nineteenth century literature, but as Mary Shelley held the name longer and my research centres on her, I will defer to her as the “primary Shelley”, if you will.

Similarly, throughout this thesis I will primarily refer to Frankenstein’s monster as his “creature”. As with calling Mary Shelley simply ‘Shelley’, this is a personal choice. Dubbing the creature a ‘monster’, ‘demon’, ‘fiend’, or any one of the other epithets given to him by his maker seems reductive to me, and as he was *created* piece by piece in Victor Frankenstein’s laboratory, calling him a ‘creature’ seems both the most neutral, and accurate description.

Finally, my research primarily concerns the original, 1818 *Frankenstein*. The text used is the 2008 Oxford World’s Classics publication of the text, and when referencing page numbers this is the text intended unless otherwise indicated. Thus, when referencing page 36 in the 1818 text, the parenthetical citation will appear as (Shelley, 36), whereas referencing the same page in the 1831 edition would be denoted as (Shelley, 1831, 36).

Given the chapter descriptions immediately preceding this, some scholars may wonder at a sizable omission to this thesis—the French Revolution. My counter argument to that would be that *Frankenstein* and Mary Shelley have both long been contextualized in the light of the French Revolution and the ensuing Napoleonic Wars, and that for me to do so properly would have meant devoting a full chapter to a topic that has already been covered by much more astute scholars than myself. I chose to give preference to neglected areas of *Frankenstein* research, rather than to re-tread old ground.

## Chapter One

### Fairytale *Frankenstein*: French and German Precursors

My Dear Lucy, I wrote this story for you, but when I began it I had not realized that girls grow quicker than books. As a result you are already too old for fairy tales, and by the time it is printed and bound you will be older still. But some day you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again. You can then take it down from some upper shelf, dust it, and tell me what you think of it.

—*The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, C. S. Lewis

As I said in the Introduction, *Frankenstein* is a text that exists beyond national boundaries and comments on numerous cultural and geopolitical conversations that were taking place during Shelley's lifetime. These commentaries can be as explicit as Shelley's numerous references to South America across the text, or as implicit as the craftwork anatomy of Madam Tussaud, which will be explored in the second and third chapters of this thesis respectively. That said, I am going to begin this thesis with an explicit piece of intertextuality acknowledged first by Percy Shelley in his "Preface" to the first edition in 1818 and elaborated on by Mary Shelley in her "Introduction" to the 1831 edition. The author's public acknowledgement of a single, specific inspiring text in her 1831 *Introduction* of "Some volumes of ghost stories translated from German to French" that "fell into [the] hands" of the Geneva circle at Diodati that wintery summer is explicit and unique acknowledgement of not only an inspiration, but a thoroughly European one (Shelley, 1831, vi). This 1831 description is an expansion on a detail given by her husband in the Preface to the 1818 publication, in which the competition-inspiring text is described by Percy Shelley as merely "some German stories of ghosts" (Shelley, 4). With the expanded specifics given in 1831, this text could be positively identified as the first two volumes of Johann Apel and Friedrich Laun's *Gespenserbuch* translated by Jean Baptiste Benoît Eyriés into the

*Fantasmagoriana*<sup>29</sup>, published as such in 1812 and read by the Shelleys and Byron in 1816. In her *Introduction*, Shelley relays the specifics of two of the stories included in the *Fantasmagoriana*, “The Death-Bride” and “The Family Portraits”, both notable for *Frankenstein* scholars in their subject matter of doomed lineages, tall figures, and ill-fated couplings. By Shelley’s own admission, though she had “not seen these stories since [1816]; ... their incidents are as fresh in my mind as if I had read them yesterday” thus making their inclusion imperative to a well-rounded investigation of Shelley’s intertextuality and engagement with international cultural exchanges (Shelley, 1831, viii). Every story contained in the *Fantasmagoriana* will be examined in this chapter and though overarching parallels are difficult to draw between the *Fantasmagoriana* and *Frankenstein*, there are multiple narrative elements that have heretofore remained largely undescribed, and thematic resemblances to unpack.

Shelley proved time and again throughout her adult life that she was a scholar of European history, language, culture, and literature. Taking our cue from the *Fantasmagoriana*, this first chapter will also examine some of the myriad German and French fairytales, ghost stories, and novels that passed through Shelley’s hands on the road to writing *Frankenstein*. Even before her elopement with Percy and subsequent intensive study of classical literature under his tutelage, Mary Shelley was raised in a thoroughly internationalist household where her exposure to many variations and permutations of the European conversations, as I have been terming them, was potentially massive. Long before the *Fantasmagoriana* episode in the summer of 1816, a different set of German folktales likely fell into young Mary Godwin’s hands in the form of Johann Musäus’ *Popular Tales of the Germans* (trans. William Beckford), which appears on her father’s reading list in 1804 when Shelley was six or seven. Other German texts which had not yet been published in English translation would have been topics of discussion in the Godwin household, as several of William Godwin’s friends spent time in Germany and were conversant in the language and literature. Included among these are Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Henry Crabb Robinson, men who were jointly considered the preeminent

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<sup>29</sup> For a detailed account of this text and its variations, see van Woudenberg’s “The Variants and Transformations of *Fantasmagoriana*: Tracing a Travelling Text to the Byron–Shelley Circle” in *Romanticism*, vol 20.3 (2014) 306-320.

English scholars of German literature at the time, and actively imported and disseminated German texts and ideas on a regular basis. Also a part of the Godwin circle, though less recognized today, are Anne and Bell Plumptre, a pair of sisters who worked extensively as German to English translators, notably publishing translations of the plays of August von Kotzebue<sup>30</sup> and August Wilhelm Iffland in 1799.

Similarly, children's literature in both the original French and in English translation would have been common in the Godwin home, particularly after William Godwin's 1801 marriage to his second wife, Mary Jane Clairmont. Mary Shelley's relationship with her stepmother was fraught throughout the two women's lives, but the fact remains that the second Mrs. Godwin oversaw the education of her and her husband's joint brood of children, in addition to being the public name of M. J. Godwin & Co., publishing children's literature by Godwin and others. Although war with France meant that trade was legally forbidden between the two countries, "Mary Jane found ways of importing children's books using American and other friends as intermediaries and the list of French books on offer [in the shop] was almost as long as that of the English." (St. Clair, 284) This access to French literature and the émigré community will become more important when discussing Francois Felix Nogaret's *Le Miroir*, a text dubbed by Julie Douthwaite as 'the French Frankenstein', towards the end of this chapter.

Mary Shelley's lifelong familiarity with both French and German stories, tales, and literature of all sorts, opens myriad, heretofore largely unexplored, avenues of possibility in the origins and structure of *Frankenstein*. This chapter will explore several of these, seemingly disparate avenues, beginning with the striking, fairytale-esque nomenclature, equivocation between beauty and goodness, and structural similarities in the creature's approach to wife-getting, all story elements scavenged from fairytales and the *Fantasmagoriana*. This is followed by an exploration of the golem mythos and its emergence outside the Jewish community through Jacob Grimm's 1808 abbreviation of the tale and von Arnim's 1812 expansion of it through the feminization and sexualization of the golem, and Hoffman's 1814 and 1816 explorations of the interactions between automata and people. The final section

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<sup>30</sup> August von Kotzebue's plays set in South America will be explored in the third chapter of this thesis.

of this chapter is a discussion of Nogaret's little-recognized French novella, which pre-dates *Frankenstein* by almost thirty years, yet shares a character name and hobby of human-construction, among other telling elements. Even with Shelley's international education and numerous, obvious interests and long exposure to European literature, including the books listed in her *Journals* and her explicit references to the *Fantasmagoriana* in 1831, the conversation surrounding *Frankenstein* has largely remained Anglocentric, confined to English-language influences, and historical contextualization has remained largely British. This chapter seeks to begin rectifying that.

Before going further into specific Germanic texts from the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, I must take a moment to speak more generally about regional tales at this time. The region of Europe now known as Germany led the field in collecting and transcribing tales and stories of this sort, collecting and curating an oral tradition passed down, in some cases, since the Middle Ages. Transcribers, like the Grimm Brothers, used these tales to build a sense of nationalism in a region that would not solidify as a single country for another century. Oral tradition and regionalized folktales helped in this nation building because "the nation was predicated on the idea that a people had shared a particular language, culture, and territory since time immemorial." (Gelbin, 18) As such, the Jewish population in Germany, and elsewhere, were perceived as incapable of belonging to a nation, or claiming inherited allegiance to the country in which they were born or lived because Jewish language, culture, and customs were believed to supplant those of the geographic location. The inherent antisemitism of these views and the implications of them on emerging portrayals of the golem figure from Jewish folklore, will be discussed later in this chapter. For the moment, this concept of the Jewish people, and their oral traditions, as Other and outside the German community, was pervasive. Jakob Grimm's late in life, *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835), his sweeping attempt to catalogue and trace the origins of all Germanic myths to their classical, or Indo-European roots, completely excludes Jewish folklore, this despite his early familiarity with at least some portions of it, as evidenced by the short golem tale he published in 1808. It is in this climate of cementing oral tradition through transcription as a way to form a national identity, an identity in need of reaffirmation in the wake of the devastation

wrought by the Napoleonic Wars, that the Grimm Brothers and other antiquarians of the day set out to capture their history in the voice of the common folk.

### **The Fairytale Basics: Settings, Structure, and Stepmothers**

Before we delve into a deeper, structural argument, on the surface there are several associations that can be made between characterizations in fairytales<sup>31</sup> and characterizations in *Frankenstein*.<sup>32</sup> Broadly speaking, in individual and collections of fairytales we will be examining (Perrault, de Villeneuve, Beaumont, Grimm), specific character names are uncommon. In classic fairytales, characters are named for their physical attributes (Snow White, Rose Red, Belle/Beauty), or their occupations (princess, woodcutter, tailor, prince), they are not generally given recognizable forenames like Victor, Elizabeth, or Henry. Similarly, the creature is never given, nor does he take for himself, a specific name. He is a ‘wretch’, ‘demon’, ‘monster’, and ‘creature’, among many other epithets, arguably named thus for his physical attributes of inhuman ugliness, like the villain of any good fairytale. Likewise, physical beauty in fairytales frequently denotes goodness. When Sleeping Beauty is given many magical gifts at her christening, the first ordained that the, yet nameless, princess “would be the loveliest person in the world” (Perrault, 84). When the miller’s youngest son, who inherited nothing but a clever cat in “Puss and Boots” is ‘rescued’ from drowning by a king that the titular feline has been schmoozing on his behalf, the king’s daughter falls instantly in love with the lad, “for he was handsome and well built” (Perrault, 120). In tales like Cinderella (Perrault), All-Kinds-of-Fur (Grimm), and The Bearskin (Grimm), in which the hero/heroine’s attractiveness is purposefully obscured as a means of hiding their identity or winning a wager, the finale sees the protagonist’s true form revealed, rendering them therefore desirable as a mate to an appropriately attractive and wealthy suitor. Even Perrault’s deviation from this pattern in the form of ‘Ricky the Tuft’, who is born ugly but so clever and charismatic that no one minds his ugliness, is transformed at the end by a bride blessed with the power to make the man she loves as attractive as

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<sup>31</sup> Throughout this chapter, I will be examining several ‘fairytales’ as opposed to ‘folktales’. Folktales, as defined by Murphy, exist primarily in oral tradition, while fairytales are transmitted through the written word. As I will be examining published works, they will be, by definition, fairytales.

<sup>32</sup> One fairytale trope, the frequent resurrection of a dead protagonist, will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

herself. Likewise, the Beast from *Beauty and the Beast*, though not as articulate as Ricky, still earns the love of a beautiful woman through a combination of kindness, monetary wealth, and near-death experiences, and is eventually transformed back into a handsome prince to match his Belle.

When Elizabeth is first introduced to the *Frankenstein* narrative as “the most beautiful child [Frankenstein’s mother] had ever seen”, it naturally follows that the conclusion of that sentence is that she “shewed signs...of a gentle and affectionate disposition”, because fairytale logic dictates that beauty equals virtue (Shelley, 20). Likewise, the De Lacey family are beautiful compared to other villagers, whose “harsh manners and rude gait[s]” serve only to enhance by comparison the creature’s chosen surrogate-family (Shelley, 89). The De Laceys’ “grace, beauty, and delicate complexions” signify that they are fairytale protagonist material (Shelley, 90). Further adding to their fairytale qualities, as they will be defined shortly in the structuralist section, the De Laceys are a wealthy family fallen on hard times, being the descendants of “a good family in France, where [they] lived for many years in affluence” before their political fortunes changed, forcing them to flee in penury (Shelley, 98). In contrast, the fact that the creature is near-indescribably horrific to look at proves, by fairytale logic, that he is most likely an antagonist of some stripe. Whether he is a justified antagonist or not is not determined by the fairytale structure, but there is no curse to strip away and render him human and handsome again, there is only his blackened ledger and a hideous visage that outwardly shows his malice.

Another common fairytale trope used by Shelley both in *Frankenstein* and elsewhere is that of the ‘evil stepmother’. Given her distaste for her own stepmother, it is perhaps unsurprising that Shelley would attach herself to this particular trope and give nods to it in multiple novels. In *Frankenstein*, this comes with Elizabeth’s backstory. In the 1818 text her mother, sister to Victor Frankenstein’s father, has died and as Elizabeth’s Italian father is in the process of remarrying he writes to the Frankenstein family to ask if they will take Elizabeth in as their own. His letter, after assuring his late wife’s family that the girl has a fortune of her own legally secured with documents, asks whether they “would prefer educating [their] niece [themselves] to her being brought up by a stepmother.” (Shelley, 20) Thus, Elizabeth is whisked away from her father and the potential perils of an evil stepmother, saving

her from untold fairytale tortures at the hands of the woman who has usurped her mother's place in her father's home while conveniently excusing the absence of her Italian family from the rest of the narrative. In her second novel, *Valperga*, Shelley's use of the evil stepmother trope becomes even more explicit. Rather than the implicit threat of Elizabeth's stepmother in *Frankenstein*, the maternal ocean in *Valperga* becomes not merely threatening, but deadly to another beautiful young woman. Euthanasia, the mistress of the Valperga city-state and beloved enemy of Castruccio's ambitions, dies in a shipwreck, a victim "of the sea, which, as an evil step-mother, deceives and betrays all committed to her care." (Shelley, *Valperga*, 376)

Perhaps chagrined by the incestuous nature of Elizabeth and Victor's romantic relationship in the original text, the 1831 edition changes them from first cousins to foster siblings while utilizing yet another fairytale trope: that of the noble orphan. In this version of the story, Frankenstein's mother is attracted to Elizabeth's appearance in a peasant's cot in Italy. Drawn by the "brightest living gold" of the child's hair, her "cloudless" blue eyes, and "her face so expressive of sensibility and sweetness that none could behold her without looking on her as of a distinct species", Caroline Beaufort instantly knows that Elizabeth is not of the same line as the "dark-eyed, hardy little vagrants" surrounding her (Shelley, 1831, 21). Learning that Elizabeth is the daughter of a virtuous Italian noble who has either died or been imprisoned for his exertions "to obtain liberty for his country", Caroline decides that the child must come home with the Frankensteins where she can be raised surrounded by the luxuries of her birth right (Shelley, 1831, 22). Thus, once again beauty and physical attributes become proof of worth, and Elizabeth becomes not the escaped victim of an evil stepmother, but the rescued orphan of a noble but fallen family, like the De Laceys, Belle, or Cinderella.

From these more general fairytale tropes, we will move on to a examine Frankenstein's encounter with the creature on the Mer de Glace, the bargain struck there between creature and creator, and subsequent events culminating in the destruction of the female creature. Structurally, the events I will outline parallel the plots of two fairytales, one from German tradition and one from the French. The first is "The Tale of the Three Sisters" and comes from William Beckford's translation of Johann Carl Musäus' *Popular Tales of the Germans* (1791), a two-

volume text read by William Godwin in June 1804. Supplementing this is Madame de Villeneuve's *The Story of the Beauty and the Beast*, a longer tale originally published in 1740 as *La Belle et la Bête*, and subsequently shortened in various English translations. In an 1802 letter to William Cole on "the books I think best adapted for the education of female children" Godwin included *Beauty and the Beast* (quoted in Mellor, 9). Though *Beauty and the Beast* only appears once in the *Godwin Diary*, in February 1802, it is a story we know he maintained a long-running interest in, soliciting William Wordsworth as late as 1811 "to write three hundred verses for a new edition" of the tale (St. Clair, 294).<sup>33</sup> Godwin does not specify which version of *Beauty and the Beast* he means in either the letter to Cole, or the Diary entry, and therefore I will be using both J. R. Plaché's 1858 translation of the original, de Villeneuve novella, and the shorter version from *The Polite Academy, or a School of Behaviour for young gentlemen and ladies: intended as a foundation for good manners and polite address, in masters and misses* (1768), generally attributed to Beaumont. It is the second version that the caretakers of the *Godwin Diary Online* speculate as Godwin's source for *Beauty and the Beast*.

The opening act of the two fairytales and the portion of *Frankenstein* examined here can be summarized into five distinct narrative steps:

- 1.) A man loses something important to himself and his family.
- 2.) Because of this loss, the man leaves his family and ventures into a wild or enchanted place.
- 3.) In that place the man encounters a monster.
- 4.) The monster threatens to destroy the man unless the man delivers a bride to the monster within a relatively short time period.
- 5.) Man agrees to bargain and returns to family.

In the fairytale versions of this structure, the sixth step would involve delivering the agreed upon bride, and at the climax of the story, the monster transforming into a handsome and suitable husband for the bride promised to him, followed by all living happily ever after, as the cliché goes. As stated before, there is no curse on the

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<sup>33</sup> Wordsworth and Godwin's relationship had been rocky for years by this point and the poet declined to retell the children's story for his one-time friend's publishing company.

creature that can be lifted to transform him, and when the fairytale pattern is abruptly broken, the creature follows through on the murder and mayhem to Victor and his family that is promised in step four.

The first two steps in all the narratives considered see a paternal figure fallen on difficult times, financial in the tales and emotional in *Frankenstein*, and because of their loss, traveling alone to or through a desolate landscape. In the *Beautys*, this figure is a merchant<sup>34</sup> who has lost his fortune and is returning to his family through a night-darkened forest filled with roaring wild beasts “that were constantly passing by him”, and which in the light of day is “so covered with snow... no track was to be seen” after a last chance at restoring his fortune does not pan out (de Villeneuve, 230-231). In both versions of *Beauty and the Beast*, this forest leads to an empty, enchanted castle where the merchant is placed in preparation for the second phase. In *Three Sisters* this paternal figure is a Baron who has “squandered away his money and estates” in the first line of the tale, thus rapidly reducing his family to life in an old castle bordering an ‘enchanted’ forest (Musäus, 74). The Baron, dissatisfied with the meagre fare his reduced circumstances force him to subsist on, goes hunting in an enchanted forest where people are known to disappear “having either been strangled by malignant gnomes, or torn to pieces by wild beasts.” (Musäus, 76)

With these examples in mind, we turn to the second chapter of the second volume of *Frankenstein* and Victor’s ascent “to the summit of Montanvert” (Shelley, 74). This alpine retreat from family, friends, and home does not come on the heels of financial ruin, as in the case of the examples, but the overwhelming misery brought on by the murder of William Frankenstein and Justine’s subsequent trial and execution. In the wake of these tragedies, Frankenstein is left empty:

Remorse extinguished every hope. I had been the author of unalterable evils; and I lived in daily fear, lest the monster whom I had created should perpetrate some new wickedness. (Shelley, 70)

It is with Victor in this mindset, “a hell of intense tortures, such as no language can describe”, that Alphonse Frankenstein takes his remaining sons and adoptive daughter to Chamonix as a distraction from their recent tragedies (Shelley, 69).

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<sup>34</sup> In de Villeneuve’s version the merchant is Beauty’s foster-father, raising a disguised princess away from her royal father’s court to keep her safe. In the Polite Academy version he is birth father.

While touring the valley, Victor, wishing to hide his renewed depression from his companions, leaves them one morning in their hotel and “determin[es] to go alone” up the mountain (Shelley, 75).

Frankenstein’s retreat from society is not into an enchanted forest, but rather an ascent into the “awful and majestic” destruction of a snowy, alpine peak (Shelley, 75). This is a place “where trees lie broken and strewed on the ground” from avalanches, which in turn can be brought down by “the slightest sound... even speaking in a loud voice” (Shelley, 75). The Shelleys and Claire Clairmont made this same ascent in July of 1816 and we find it described thus in *History of a Six Weeks Tour*:

The summits are sharp and naked pinnacles, whose overhanging steepness will not even permit snow to rest upon them. Lines of dazzling ice occupy here and there their perpendicular rifts and shine through the driving vapours with inexpressible brilliance: they pierce the clouds like things not belonging to this earth. (Shelley, *History*, 165-166)

Even Frankenstein, a scientist who describes himself and other living things as ‘mechanisms’ to be constructed or deconstructed, is moved beyond logic by the sublimity of the ice fields, crying out to the “wandering spirits...take me, as your companion, away from the joys of life” (Shelley, 76). The summit of Montanvert and the Sea of Ice below Mount Blanc are not expressly enchanted like the Baron’s neighbouring forest, nor will they lead Frankenstein to an enchanted castle as in the case of the merchant in *Beauty and the Beast*, but there is an otherworldly quality to them nonetheless, not the least because of the creature that dwells there.



Figure 1 Turner, Mer de Glace 1812, MET Museum

Following our fairytale formula, what comes after the separation from society by entering an enchanted, or remote, location is an encounter with some sort of monstrous creature. In *Three Sisters*, the Baron sees “a monstrous bear stalking towards him” (Masäus, 76). In *Beauty and the Beast*, this is the entrance of the titular Beast, though the shortened, Beaumont version of the story offers no detail as proof of his monstrosity. For a full description, we must instead turn to the original, de Villeneuve, where the father perceives “a horrible beast, which... laid upon his neck a kind of trunk resembling an elephant’s” and proceeds to shout at him for stealing roses (de Villeneuve, 233). Later the Beast’s approach is announced by the sound “caused by the enormous weight of his body, by the terrible clank of his scales.” (de Villeneuve, 242) These descriptions of the piecemeal assemblage of the Beast will be examined more thoroughly, shortly. For now, in both tales and all three versions of these encounters, they are spurred by the paternal figure committing some transgression against the monstrous party while in the monster’s territory. In the case of the Baron this is the encroachment into the enchanted forest and the perceived theft of the Bear’s honey, in the case of the Beast it is the actual theft of a rose from

the gardens of the enchanted castle that appears in the forest after the merchant loses his way in the storm.

With these, again, in mind, we turn to our main narrative as Frankenstein looks across the icefield and beholds “the figure of a man, at some distance, advancing towards [him] with superhuman speed” (Shelley, 76). More than his fairytale precursors, Frankenstein has committed multiple mortal sins against the approaching creature, not the least of which is a desire to destroy his creation. From the first realization of who is approaching him so rapidly across the glacier, Frankenstein resolves “to wait his approach, and then close with him in mortal combat.” (Shelley, 76) Frankenstein allows no space for empathy, his immediate instincts are revulsion and murder. When confronted with his creator’s hatred, the creature cries “How dare you sport thus with life?”, implying that both in creating life and desiring to destroy it, Frankenstein is a twofold trespasser.

What follows in all three narratives is a bargain in which a daughter is eventually pledged by the paternal figure exchange for a safe return to society. In the *Three Sisters*, the Bear tells the Baron to “promise... thy eldest daughter, Wulfilda, to wife this instant, else I will eat thee up” (Musäus, 77). In the *Beautys*, the proposition of matrimony is not immediately apparent, in the original the Beast will only allow the merchant to go if “thou wilt give me one of thy daughters” (emphasis added), in the Beaumont version the father is only released if a daughter “comes [to the castle] voluntarily and suffers for” her father (Villeneuve, 234, Beaumont, 79). In the Baron’s case this is a pattern that repeats itself twice more, as he continues returning to the enchanted forest and upsetting two other monstrous animals in need of wives. In the *Beautys* case, the daughter given is not specified, though from the outset of both versions of the story we are told that the merchant has multiple bad daughters who remain nameless, and the titular Beauty who is kind and good and will obviously be the one to volunteer to save her father’s life. In all three cases, material compensation is either offered to the father or the proffered daughter, in exchange for her attendance on the monster.

After being approached by the creature and the initial confrontation there engendered, Frankenstein is told that resistance is futile. The creature was created larger and stronger than the average man and isolation from society has made him

desperate. Frankenstein must “comply with [the creature’s] conditions” in order to protect his friends and family, if he refuses, the creature “will glut the maw of death until it is satiated with the blood of [Frankenstein’s] remaining friends.” (Shelley, 77) These conditions are that Frankenstein first listens to the creature’s plight in its entirety, and then that afterwards the scientist agrees to “create a female... with whom [the creature] can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary to [his] being.” (Shelley, 118) To call the desired female creature Frankenstein’s daughter, we must hearken back to his thoughts while constructing the initial creature. In the first throes of creation, when “Life and death appeared... the ideal bounds” against which to test himself, Frankenstein envisions “A new species [that] would bless [him] as its creator and source... no father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely” as Frankenstein after the success of his experiments (Shelley, 36). Later the creature tells his maker “I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy” (Shelley, 77). Neither Adam, nor Lucifer are precisely the sons of their god and maker, but they are cast into a category like son-hood. Likewise, Frankenstein envisions himself as more of a god, than a father, to his new ‘race of beings’, a god deserving of worship and praise. As such, any female creature formed by Frankenstein’s hand, an Eve creature if you will, will not be his daughter precisely, but she would be functionally similar to one. Though Frankenstein must create a ‘daughter’ before he can give her to the creature, the bargain is still struck, safety for the paternal figure in exchange for the daughter/bride. The further compensation offered is the creature’s pledge to take his new wife and hide away in South America, an Edenic paradise<sup>35</sup>, perhaps not on par with Beauty’s palace from *Beauty and the Beast*, but certainly many times more luxurious than the ice caves the creature has inhabited since coming to Switzerland.

Thus far Frankenstein and his creature have followed, roughly, a fairytale formula: separation from society, encounter with a monstrous figure, a bargain is struck up with the exchange of a wife for guaranteed safe passage back to society. Even the creature’s nature, as something both bestial and human at once is evocative of a fairytale. Both the Beast and the Bear, and the subsequent Eagle and Whale that the Baron also meets in the enchanted forest and trades his other two daughters to, are princes transformed by curses. Indeed, you will recall that the Beast is even

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<sup>35</sup> The Edenic promise will be discussed fully in the third chapter of this thesis.

composed of more than one animal, in appearance at least, like the creature who is made of oversized human corpses and what offal Frankenstein could scavenge from slaughterhouses. Furthermore, while the human interiors of the transformed princes do not match their bestial exteriors, they cannot express this inner humanity while their exteriors remain inhuman. In the de Villeneuve *Beauty*, where in the waking world the Beast is reduced to a good natured if imbecilic monster, he is able to visit Beauty as a man in her dreams and therein fully employ his intelligence and appearance to woo her. The monstrous sons-in-law of the Baron are stupid and cruel as beasts but transform to men for a certain length of time every month, showing their wives periodic humanity though their animality must be endured the majority of the time. Conversely, though the creature appears monstrous, his mind is cultivated through reading and observation of the De Laceys. He is eloquent, and as cultured as he can be under the circumstances, and compared to his fairytale forefathers, seems as deserving of companionship as any other monster who has bartered a man's life for a wife.

However, as we will discuss at length in a later chapter, the female creature is never brought to life, and any fairytale dreams the creature nursed are abruptly destroyed. Frankenstein rends the incomplete female to pieces, and the creature lets out "a howl of devilish despair and revenge" before withdrawing to gather himself for yet another confrontation with his maker (Shelley, 139). When they do again speak, the creature threatens that he "can make [Frankenstein] so wretched that the light of day will be hateful" to him (Shelley, 140). The destruction of the female, and therefore of the possibility of fairytale bliss in a South American jungle, leads the creature to spiral destructively through the remainder of Frankenstein's loved ones, a passionate reaction to disappointed affections reminiscent of Gothic antagonists across the canon.

### **The *Fantasmagoriana* and *Frankenstein***

We have already examined a few examples of folktales transcribed into fairytale and used to establish a national voice in the structuralist argument, and before going further, I will take some time to examine the *Fantasmagoriana*, or the infamous French translation of the German ghost stories read by the Shelley-Byron

circle in the summer of 1816.<sup>36</sup> As previously mentioned, the layers of translation and cross-language publication of this text are complicated to say the least. The abbreviated version of that tangle is that tales taken from the first two volumes of Apel and Laun's *Gespenssterbuch* (1811) were translated to French by Eyriés in the *Fantasmagoriana* (1812). An English edition containing some, but not all, of the *Fantasmagoriana* tales, was translated by Utterson and appeared in London under the title *Tales of the Dead* (1813). The rapid conversion of this text from its original German to an English edition by way of a French edition is just one example of how quickly transnational cultural exchanges occurred. Exchanges in which Shelley was an active part. As Shelley only read the *Fantasmagoriana* that is the text that I will be analysing.

Though it is difficult to make the sweeping argument that Shelley's overarching plot was greatly influenced by this collection, there are individual, thematic elements from the stories that appear in *Frankenstein* in various ways: *The Spectre Barber*, or *L'Amour Muet*, features a castle haunted by "a tall thin figure with a black beard, whose appearance was indicative of chagrin and melancholy." (Day, 24) This spectre, the ghost of a barber who once shaved a holy man against his will, was cursed to "wander through this castle... until some man, without being invited or constrained, shall do to [him], what [he has] so long done to others." (Day, 26) In essence, the ghost cannot rest until someone has the courage to be shaved by the spectre, and then shave the spectre in turn. The spectre cannot rest until he is treated with reciprocal humanity, and spends centuries roaming his castle-prison, terrorizing hapless mortals, until his curse is lifted. Setting aside a glancing physical similarity, both the creature and the spectre are tall and black haired and, judging by the creature's "ragged locks" at the end of the novel, in need of grooming, the true desire of both figures is human interaction (Shelley, 187). Like the creature, who only wants to be acknowledged humanely, who would live with mankind "in the interchange of kindness" if he could, but is instead spurned for his hideous appearance, the spectre exists in a state of limbo waiting for someone brave enough

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<sup>36</sup> For this analysis, I will be referring exclusively to the 2005 English translation of the *Fantasmagoriana*, edited by A.J. Day, giving both the English titles as they appear in this edition as well as the French titles as they appeared in the *Fantasmagoriana* (1812) read by the Shelleys and Byron in 1816.

to withstand his presence (Shelley, 119). However, unlike the spectre, the creature can, and does, take his fate into his own hands.

Several stories in the *Fantasmagoriana*, *The Family Portraits*, or *Les Portraits de Famille*, *The Fated Hour*, or *L'Heure Fatale*, and *The Death-Bride*, or *La Morte Fiancée*, feature doomed marriages. The first two of these include the deaths of young women immediately before their weddings, and in both these deaths are foreseen. Frankenstein's dream in which Elizabeth transforms into his dead mother seems to echo these circumscriptive premonitions of ill-fated lovers and the abbreviation of their marriages through death. The third story, *The Death-Bride*, features a scene strongly reminiscent of Elizabeth's death, only in reverse in that it is the groom who is found dead on his wedding night. Where Elizabeth is discovered in her bridal chamber, "lifeless and inanimate, thrown across the bed, her head hanging down, and her pale and distorted features half covered by her hair.", the Duke Marino of *The Death-Bride* is found "extended on the floor. There did not appear the slightest signs of life in him; and his features were distorted in the most frightful manner." (Shelley, 165, Day, 110) In this light, Shelley's murdered bride becomes more than a literary rendition of Fuseli's painting, 'The Nightmare', it becomes a gender-swapped re-telling of a German ghost story, made the more poignant by the story behind the murder in the original.



Figure 2 Fuseli, *The Nightmare*, Detroit Institute of Arts

The Duke in *The Death-Bride* is murdered because he did not remain faithful to his first fiancé, a woman with whom he took a blood oath “that whichever of the lovers should prove faithful...should haunt the perjured one, and force the inconstant party to come amongst the dead.” (Day, 99) The Duke is killed for infidelity to an oath of marriage, having left his first fiancé in order to marry a more attractive prospect. The first fiancé subsequently dies of heartbreak and returns on the inconstant Duke’s wedding night to fulfil the oath they shared. Likewise, Elizabeth is murdered because of a broken oath to the creature, the difference in Shelley’s case being that the victim is an innocent who had no power over the making, keeping, or breaking of the promise that gets her killed.

Another running theme throughout the *Fantasmagoriana* lies in reanimated corpses, or the fears they engender. *The Death-Bride* sees a family delay entombing their daughter to “prevent... running any risk of burying her too soon” and risk her

waking in her crypt, buried alive and trapped (Day, 96).<sup>37</sup> *The Ghost of the Departed*, or *Le Revenant*, features a return from the grave in the form of a husband who faked his own death to escape a marriage grown stale. Later, the husband regrets his decision and returns to ‘haunt’ his widow by sneaking into her bedchamber at night, a decision that in turn causes the ‘widow’ to “fear she could have disturbed her husband from his deathly peace by wishing for him to return.” (Day, 119) The story ends with the widow discovering her husband’s deception and repentance, and choosing to disappear with him rather than explain to the neighbourhood exactly what has happened, in a far more light-hearted twist on fears of the walking dead than either *The Death-Bride*, or *Frankenstein*.

The travelling entertainer Calzolaro, in *The Death’s Head*, or *Le Tête de Mort*, performs a ventriloquist’s act with a skull at the bequest of Colonel Kielholm. The act sees Calzolaro disguise himself in a beard and foreign costume, to call “the exalted spirits...from the silence of the vault and the grave... [to] speak to the living in a voice no less formidable than true” for his audience’s entertainment (Day, 83). Had the illusion been performed as expected, this would have been a simple trick of ventriloquism to thrill the colonel’s guests, however as Calzolaro raised the skull, procured from the sexton earlier that day, the bare bone changed to his “father’s features; and... [he] heard it say ‘Tremble, parricide, whom nothing can convert, and who wilt not turn to the path thou hast abandoned!’” (Day, 84) The audience sees nothing but Calzolaro standing with the silent skull upraised, but the performer is sufficiently shaken that the performance is left unfinished. Later, when returning the skull to the sexton and learning that the skull truly did belong to Calzolaro’s father, his experience is explained as the result of a common belief “that when a child speaks to the head of its deceased parent at the midnight hour, the head comes to life again.” (Day, 86) Unlike *Frankenstein*, when the raising of a corpse is a purely scientific endeavour, in these two stories we have the dead speaking because of the magic of the midnight hour or returning to their loved ones because they were never truly dead to begin with. However, under the right conditions, the dead rise and speak in both of these stories and interactions with them are not always pleasant.

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<sup>37</sup> Fear of live burial was a relatively common across Europe at the time, for a detailed history of the phenomena see see Bondeson’s *Buried Alive: The Terrifying History of Our Most Primal Fear* (2002).

The final two stories in the *Fantasmagoriana*, *The Grey Room* (*La Chambre Grise*), and *The Black Chamber* (*La Chambre Noire*), are interesting in their narrative structures, if not content, in relation to *Frankenstein*. Both stories contain ‘haunted’ bedrooms in old castles; one haunted by the ghost of a girl who committed suicide after rape kept her from joining a convent, the other haunted by the ghost of a mad aunt who hid jewels in the chamber before her passing. However, unlike some of the other *Fantasmagoriana* stories, both of these ‘hauntings’ are concluded with logical explanations, the first is the result of a prank pulled by the host’s children, the other was achieved by accident through the inadvertent activation of a secret panel and an overactive imagination. More interesting than this is that *The Grey Room* is a topic of conversation by the characters in *The Black Chamber*, making it a nesting narrative similar to the structure of *Frankenstein*. *The Black Chamber* opens with a meeting between three old friends who regularly gather to “read the newest from literature and [comment] upon it” (Day, 137). The fact that these three friends are discussing *The Grey Room* as part of their book club leads to the possibility that every story in the *Fantasmagoriana* has been read by these three. By retroactively framing the entire *Fantasmagoriana* collection as a series of stories read and discussed between an actuary, to comment on the “intellectual pages”, a physician to unpack the “cultural pages”, and the narrator who comments on topics “neither intellectual not cultural or both together” makes for an interesting juxtaposition with the *Frankenstein* framing device (Day, 137). *Frankenstein*, of course, is a narrative shared by Victor Frankenstein with Walton and contains within it the creature’s own first-person account of his months alone, making it a triply-nested narrative, rather than a series of stand-alone stories retroactively tied together. Though the structures of these respective frames are different, the fact remains that neither the collection, nor *Frankenstein* can exist alone, they are stories that must be shared and discussed between intimates. The *Frankenstein* narrative and *Fantasmagoriana* must be verbally told as part of a conversation, even as they are read, following the realities of the worlds created by these texts.

### **The Golem and *Frankenstein***

From the nesting realities of the narrative worlds created by *Frankenstein* and the *Fantasmagoriana*, we turn now to what is perhaps best-known legend to come out of Jewish tradition, and the one most frequently discussed in conjunction with the *Frankenstein* text: the golem. The golem is a powerful and ever-growing humanoid creature that emerged from “late antique rabbinic literature” and found new life in an audience outside the Jewish community in the nineteenth century (Dekel, Gurley, 241). One of the keystones to this expanded awareness came in 1808 with the publication of a truncated version of the golem myth by Jakob Grimm in the *Zeitung für Einsiedler*, or *Journal for Hermits*, edited by the Grimms’ friend and a golem author who will be discussed presently, Achim von Arnim. Versions of Grimm’s story have been found in evidence throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but this excerpt from the *Journal* is largely considered to be the first to be widely published and publicised outside the Jewish community. It also marks the entrance of blatant antisemitism into the mythos, with the golem become the “symbol of [Jewish] spiritual and physical corruption, as well as their flawed mode of discourse.” (Gelbin, 23) Jakob Grimm and his brother, Wilhelm, were not yet famous in 1808. The first volume of the eponymous *Grimms’ Fairytales* would not be published for another four years, and Jakob’s *Deutch Mythologies* was decades from publication. For now, it is worth quoting Jakob’s 1808 golem tale in full:

The Polish Jews, after speaking certain prayers and observing fast days, made the figure of a man out of clay or loam, and when they speak the miracle-working *Schemhamphoras* over it, the figure comes alive. It is true that he cannot speak, but he understands reasonably well what anyone says to him and commands him to do. They call him *Golem* and use him as a servant to do all sorts of housework, but he may never leave the house alone. On his forehead is written *Aemaeth* (Truth; God). However, he increases in size daily and easily becomes larger and stronger than all his housemates, regardless of how small he was at first. Therefore, fearing him, they rub out the first letter, so that nothing remains but *Maeth* (he is dead), whereupon he collapses and is dissolved again into clay.

But once, out of carelessness, someone allowed his Golem to become so tall that he could no longer reach his forehead. Then, out of fear, the master ordered the servant to take off his boots, thinking that he would bend down

and that then the master could reach his forehead. This is what happened, and the first letter was successfully erased, but the whole load of clay fell on the Jew and crushed him. (quoted from Derkel, Gurly, 242-243)

Taken as a whole, Grimm's story of a hubristic man who creates a 'living', man-shaped creature, that grows more powerful by the day and eventually destroys the creator when the creator seeks to destroy the creation, reads as an abbreviation of the *Frankenstein* narrative.

To my knowledge Mary Shelley never read this Grimm text while writing *Frankenstein* but this does not negate the possibility that she knew about it. Perhaps because of the extensive and detailed reading list she maintained throughout her years with Percy, Mary Shelley's childhood education in Godwin's household does not seem to have been given the formative weight it deserves. This is a topic that we will return to in more detail later in this chapter, for now, among the many visitors to the Godwin home, was Henry Crabb Robinson, a journalist and diarist who William Godwin appears to have met in 1799. Because of his years spent studying at German universities, where Crabb Robinson established "connections with literary and philosophical circles when Goethe and Schiller were at their zenith", in 1807 he was sent to Altona by John Walter II, editor of *The Times* (Durán de Porras, 73). At a time when British periodicals generally re-published news from continental newspapers, Walter chose to send his own journalist to Germany to send regular reports on the Napoleonic campaigns, among other things. When sending his pieces back to London, Crabb Robinson "wrote as if he were foreign, specifically as if he were German" (Durán de Porras, 74). In short, Crabb Robinson was comfortably keyed into the German language and literature and had the connections within the German literary community to import German texts even after returning to London. After 1799, Godwin and Crabb Robinson continued moving in the same circles and would meet infrequently over the next several years, finally becoming intimate in 1809, with the journalist frequently calling on the Godwin household for tea or meals. This, of course, was after Crabb Robinson's time on the European continent as what could possibly be described as the first foreign correspondent for the British press.

By 1808 Europe was destabilized and dangerous enough that Crabb Robinson was called home to England, however his engagement with German literature and philosophy did not end at the border. Rather, once back in England he was introduced to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, another member of the Godwin circle, and “the most influential disseminator of German Romanticism in Britain” at the time (Hunnekuhl, 51). As early as 1796 Coleridge held ambitions of travelling to Germany to live in “Jena, a cheap German University where Schiller resides.... I should there study Chemistry & Anatomy” and the German metaphysicians (quoted by Levere, 16). In 1798 Coleridge spent ten months in Germany, where he “show[ed] the liveliest interest in German manners and folk customs, and [engaged in] voracious reading (and translating) of German poetry and newspapers.” (Holmes, 205) As previously mentioned, the interest in oral traditions and language of the common folk, language championed by Coleridge’s long-time friend and collaborator William Wordsworth in his poetry about the English countryside, was in vogue in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Wordsworth and Coleridge and Wordsworth’s sister Dorothy visited Germany in 1798, and while the Wordsworths were less than enthused by the country and culture, Coleridge was enamoured, relishing “sharing in the intellectual life of Europe,... being part of a broad community of world-renowned scholars” (Holmes, 221). The turn of the century was too early for the Englishman to have come into contact with the Grimm brothers, but Coleridge likely knew many of their predecessors in the quest to document the German nation.

Crabb Robinson and Coleridge remained part of Godwin’s social circle, and thus carried on the German culture conversational thread almost until Godwin’s death, their last recorded meetings are 1834 and 1835 respectively with Godwin dying in 1836, but a third person from Godwin’s history must also be mentioned here: Thomas Holcroft. Holcroft and Godwin had a falling out around 1805, when Mary Shelley was a child, but before that their years of friendship and near weekly meetings were interrupted only by Holcroft’s attempted emigration from England to the continent in 1799 following the financial strains of his 1794 trial for high treason. Holcroft would spend almost three years abroad with his family, returning in 1802 after an “unsuccessful stay in Germany and France” that he would later chronicle in his *Travels from Hamburg through Westphalia, Holland and the Netherlands to*

*Paris* (1804) (St Clair, 271). Holcroft seems to have highly anticipated landing on the continent, writing of his arrival in Hamburg that “Germany is one the grand divisions of Europe... [achieving] a high rank in every department of science and belles lettres.” (Holcroft, 240-241) Holcroft’s interests in European literary accomplishments were not purely admiration, they were professional as well. Thomas Holcroft was an accomplished translator, translating scores of French, German and Italian texts throughout his lifetime, including the version of Goethe’s *Herman und Dorothea* (1797, trans. 1801), which Godwin read in 1801. Through Holcroft we have the early introduction of German literature into the intimate discourse of the Godwin circle, and a strong continuation of that vein with Crabb Robinson and Coleridge. Godwin and Shelley might not explicitly record reading many of the texts that will be discussed throughout this chapter, including Grimm’s golem tale, but that does not preclude Mary Shelley from engaging in this particular cultural exchange.

The men of the Godwin circle were not the only ones to take an interest in Germany and its literature. As was briefly mentioned earlier, the Plumptre sisters were accomplished translators with several French and German texts published apiece. Anne Plumptre was particularly distinguished, notable for her discovery, translation, and publication of a rare, eyewitness account of the 1720 plague outbreak in Marseille, and for her work translating von Kotzebue’s South American plays, as well as the playwright’s *Life and Literary Career* (1805). Both women were also friends with Helen Maria Williams, another member of Godwin’s circle who would go on to collaborate with the noted naturalist Alexander von Humbolt in translating his naturalist notes and travel journals from Prussian to English. In an intellectual environment that was not always welcoming for educated women, translation work offered an outlet for those with language skills and a need to earn money by their pens, as Mary Jane Godwin well knew from materially supplementing the Godwin household with her own translation work for other publishers as well as M.J. Godwin & Co. William Godwin and his friends, as radicals who had learned to embrace Wollstonecraft as an intellectual equal, were likely a more open community for women like Williams and the Plumptre sisters to discuss the continental literature they knew and worked with on a regular basis.

Returning to the golem, the nature of a golem's creation and animation stands at intriguing perpendiculars with the animation of the creature in *Frankenstein*. A golem, at its most basic level, is a show of divine devotion. Golem are brought to life through the power of prayer, fasting, and sacred scripture. A golem's 'life' is maintained by the preservation of the word *Aemaeth* on its head or, in other versions, inscribed in its mouth. A golem is raised with *God* and *Truth* literally carved into its flesh and can only be destroyed when *God* and *Truth* are perverted, changed to *Maeth*, or death, through the erasure of a letter. Yet, despite the scripture required to animate the golem, and the 'truth' inscribed on its skull, a golem does not learn or grow. They have reasonable understanding, and in von Arnim's story, a version of intelligence, but they do not intellectually expand the way Frankenstein's creature does.

The creature, rather than being the product of religious devotion and animated, elemental clay, is a patchwork of death raised through scientific means. This is explicit in the original text, but Shelley seems to have felt the need to further enunciate the scientific basis for her tale in the 1831 *Introduction*, saying that "galvanism had given token of such things" as the reanimation of corpses (Shelley, 1831, X). Indeed, Frankenstein "dabble[s] among the unhallowed damp of the grave, [and] torture[s] the living animal to animate the [metaphorical] clay", rather than the literal earth (Shelley, 36). The process of bringing his creation to life does have a wasting effect on Frankenstein, much like an extended fast, leaving his "eyeballs...starting from their sockets" and his nights "oppressed by a slow fever" that made him "nervous to a most painful degree" (Shelley, 36-37, 38). As with the golem animation, Frankenstein's process of creation takes a physical toll on the creator, but the end product is very different. The creature does not awaken with full possession of the 'reasonable' understanding that his golem predecessors own, rather the creature must progress through an adult-infanthood during which he is forced to learn how "to distinguish between the operations of [his] various senses" without any outside help (Shelley, 80). The golem cannot leave his master's house, he is a domestic servant, whereas the creature cannot enter a house without driving the occupants from it. The creature must learn about 'truth' and his creator-god through the laboratory notes and interviews with the creator himself. The golem, as Grimm

writes it, has no such curiosities, he is ‘born’ with all he needs to know already inscribed on him. The rest are just details.

Grimm’s limited tale leaves space for interesting and important expansion by his friend and mentor Achim von Arnim in the form of a female golem. If the creature in *Frankenstein* is indeed a flesh golem, moulded and stitched together from the clay of human and animal corpses, then his bride would be likewise considered a golem. The female creature will be subject to much examination and speculation throughout the course of this thesis and we begin specifically with Victor Frankenstein’s fears about her temperament once awoken. When nearing completion on the female creature, Frankenstein states that he “was now about to form another being ... [who] might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate, and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness.” (Shelley, 138) Furthermore, above his fears of a cruel temperament, Frankenstein fears that the female creature will be sexually aggressive, turning “with disgust from [the creature] to the superior beauty of man” and potentially forcing her affections on an unwilling human (Shelley, 138).

The initial creature is already known to be vastly stronger than his creator, taller in stature and armed with “joints more supple” than most men, and, in the 1831 edition the creature is sexually menacing towards the sleeping Justine on the night of William’s murder (Shelley, 77). In the 1818 version of *Frankenstein*, the creature plants the portrait of Caroline Beaufort as Justine passes him unwittingly in the dark, leaving the maid without arousing her suspicions. However, in the 1831, the creature, finds Justine, exhausted from searching for William, sleeping on some straw and approaches her to whisper “Awake, fairest, thy lover is near—... my beloved awake!” (Shelley, 1831, 125) As Justine stirs, “a thrill of terror” overtakes the creature, and he becomes sure that her reaction to seeing him will be the immediate denunciation of him as the murderer of a child that Justine does not yet know is dead (Shelley, 1831, 125). Determined that this innocent should pay for a rejection she has not committed, and by that rejection “robb[ing him] of all that she could give”, presumably a future warmed by companionship and eventual children, the creature plants the portrait and flees before the woman wakes, leaving her to the mercy of “the sanguinary laws of man” (Shelley, 1831, 125).

Even in the 1818 version of this encounter, in which the creature does not attempt contact beyond planting the portrait, there is the thrill of sexual jealousy against “one of those whose smiles are bestowed on all but” the creature (Shelley, 118). In both versions of the *Frankenstein* narrative, this encounter is included in the creature’s autobiography on the ice sheet below Montanvert, meaning that in both the 1818 and 1831, Frankenstein knows that his creation is capable of lashing out based on sexual jealousy before he commences constructing the female creature. Therefore, when Frankenstein fears that the female creature might turn from the mate she was created for and pursue a human man instead, he has in-text precedent, to worry over her malice in the face of potential rejection. Her male counterpart has already shown a propensity for such malice, and the intelligence to use the judicial system to carry out his revenge against perceived slights. If Frankenstein truly fears that a female could be “ten thousand times more malignant” than his first creation, then he is implicitly admitting to believing that she would be more direct when doling out her ire.

However, there are other contemporary textual examples of female creations leading men, human men, to ruin that could also serve as justificatory evidence for Frankenstein’s fears. The first of the two examples examined here come from Achim von Arnim’s *Isabella von Ägypten* (1812), or *Isabella of Egypt*. *Isabella of Egypt* has a convoluted plot, but for purposes of the moment we will focus on the female golem created to take the titular Bella’s place so that human-Bella may escape her mandrake fiancé and spend the night with the handsome archduke Charles. The golem is created to be an exact simulacrum of the original Bella in appearance, a feat achieved by having the original look into a magic mirror, and the actions of “a learned Jew from Poland” recruited by the archduke’s friend (von Arnim, 52). Folded into the introduction of this magical Jew is a version of Grimm’s golem story, understandable intertextuality given the prevalence of the myth and the close ties between the two authors. However, von Arnim’s version varies in that the golem created is not an entirely empty vessel, where Grimm’s version of the golem gives the clay man ‘reasonable’ comprehension but no thoughts of his own, the von Arnim golem possesses “knowledge of everything Bella had experienced up to [the] point”, of looking in the magic mirror, “but desired... only that which existed in the mind of her Jewish creator, namely pride, lust, and greed... the perversion of fine and

spiritual inclinations.” (von Arnim, 54) This description by von Arnim follows a pattern of increasing antisemitism in portrayals of golem, “linking the Jews to sorcery and spiritual corruption.” (Gelbin, 8) The antisemitism involved in non-Jewish retellings of the golem story are inescapable and unsettling, but they also offer fascinating insight into the 19<sup>th</sup> century opinions on creators and the created. As Gelbin indicates, there was a pervasive idea that Jewish people could “only imitate the creative spirit” of Christians, cut off as they were from the Christian divinity (Gelbin, 24). Golem-Bella in this 19<sup>th</sup> century narrative inherits the worst intrinsic flaws of her creator, unoriginality, greed, and self-preservation to the extreme, all perverting the fine thoughts and emotions that she simultaneously inherited from the original Bella. Frankenstein is an atheistic creator, who casts himself as a new god, should his experiments succeed. Thus, the creature inherits Frankenstein’s worst vices; narcissism, paranoia, and single-minded determination when it comes to his goals (i.e. revenge).

Because of the combination of her original’s knowledge and her creator’s bad qualities, von Arnim’s golem-Bella becomes a twisted lens. She has “the few thoughts that the mirror had transferred...which were...just memorized forms, [and] carried on her body a real Jewish heart” (von Arnim, 64). The golem has memories to give her purpose, but none of the human inhibitions or graces of her original. This leads the golem to extreme licentiousness towards both her mandrake husband and archduke lover, indiscriminate just as Frankenstein fears the female creature will be, and violence to the point of attempted homicide towards the original Bella. On first encountering the original, golem-Bella does not even realise which Bella is the derivative and which is the genuine article, thinking only of “scratch[ing the other Bella’s] false, lying face to ribbons with her nails” as the hapless original cowers in a doorway and begs food from her nursemaid, mandrake husband, and the doppelganger she did not know existed (von Arnim, 64). Furthermore, of the two present who have known Bella longest, the nursemaid, Braka, who has known Bella all her life, and the mandrake Bella brought to life as a companion for her heartbreak following her father’s execution, neither can tell the difference between the original and the double. Similarly, the archduke, who had the golem created so that he could spirit the original Bella away without her caretakers realising, who therefore *knows* that there are two identical Bellas running around, still speaks, and sleeps, with the

golem while “never suspect[ing] that she herself might be this doll,” (von Arnim, 66). It is only in the cold light of morning and the reality of an empty bed that the archduke wonders if “a different being had slept beside him”, but these worries are brushed aside as “the archduke felt an irrepressible desire for the golem.” (von Arnim, 67, 70) Only the Bearskeeper, an undead servant raised by the original Bella “immediately recognized that [the original] had been deposed by a false imitation figure”, but remains mum on the subject for fear of being dismissed from service before receiving full payment (von Arnim, 70).

### **Uncanny Seduction: Hoffman’s Automaton**

Von Arnim’s version of the golem myth sees a potential version of the female creature in which she is driven almost entirely by her id: impulsive, aggressive, sexually assertive, and violent. Not only that, golem-Bella *is* seductive. She is convincingly human enough that both a man and a mandrake, a creature wakened by magic who should arguably recognize another being formed through magic, take the facsimile for the original, even after carnal inspection. If Frankenstein fears that a female creature will be worse than her mate, he has precedence for those fears in von Arnim’s female golem. Moreover, he has literary precedence for a female creature to ‘pass’ as human, leading to the potential atrocity of her being accepted into human society. However, this is not the only version of a female craftwork as temptress to good men, a second comes in the form of E.T.A. Hoffman’s Olympia from his 1816 tale *Der Sandmann*, or *The Sandman*.

Olympia is not a golem endowed with something approaching human intelligence or motivations, rather she is an automaton, barely capable of producing sound much less intelligent vocalizations, yet she seduces a student in a matter of days and subsequently drives him insane. Unlike golem, automatons in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century were real and had served as intriguing entertainments for royal courts and common people across Europe and Britain for decades. In British literature they became common parlance in descriptions of mindless but hardworking servants or

slaves<sup>38</sup>, or passing references for the initiated novel readers who recognized the names of real museums or makers of these marvels.<sup>39</sup> Notable automata of the day included the chess playing Turk, which Hoffman would ape with a mechanical, oriental fortune teller in his *Der Automate* (1814), various musical automatons, and a clockwork duck that could ‘eat’ and ‘poop’.<sup>40</sup> Nogaret’s *Le Miroir*, a Frankensteinian tale that predates Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* by almost thirty years, pivots around the invention of these fantastical machines and what such inventions say about their inventors; however, Hoffman’s take on the machines was not so benign.

Hoffman saw human-shaped automata as a distortion, or perversion, of true humanity with terms similar to ‘the uncanny’ as it would be defined by Sigmund Freud a century later. In *Der Automate*, or *The Automaton*, Hoffman treats specifically on the topic through the two main characters who are aware and pursuing answers to the inner workings of a mysterious, and seemingly omniscient, fortune telling automaton, as opposed to *The Sandman* where the main character is not aware of his ladylove’s mechanical status until she is literally torn to pieces in front of him. In *The Automaton* machines do not “counterfeit humanity so much as [they] travesty it—mere images of living death or inanimate life” (Hoffman, *Automaton*, 355). They are imitations, but imitations formed by mechanics, not alchemists and imitations that do not mimic humanity to the point that the facsimile is indistinguishable from the real. However, the fortune teller is male, and like Frankenstein’s creature, obviously inhuman, where Hoffman’s female automaton in *The Sandman* is a more convincing imitation. From the time the main characters of *The Automaton* set about attempting to discern the secret of the fortune-telling automaton, they do not suggest that it is the work of magic, or anything other than an unsettling piece of mechanical trickery.

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<sup>38</sup> As in William Godwin’s *St. Leon*, in which the titular character dubs his servant “a pure, passive machine in the hands of his employer, only with this singular difference from the lifeless machine of the engineer... that he was susceptible of attachment and affection” (Godwin, 259).

<sup>39</sup> As in Fanny Burney’s *Evelina*, wherein the titular character and her entourage visit Cox’s Museum and marvel at beautiful, but ultimately useless objects such as “a pine-apple; which, suddenly opening, discovered a nest of birds which immediately began to sing” (Burney, 89).

<sup>40</sup> For a full description of the chess playing Turk, see Cook’s “From the Age of Reason to the Age of Barnum: The Great Automaton Chess-Player and the Emergence of Victorian Cultural Illusionism” *Winterthur Portfolio*, 1995

Like the real-life Turk and the fictional fortune teller, Olympia from *The Sandman* is a work of clockwork, as opposed to an alchemist's trick, but as has been previously mentioned, she is not merely passably human, she is ideally so. Though a shadow is cast across her purely scientific origins when she is stolen by Coppélius, the unsettling alchemist whose experiments killed Nathaniel's father in an explosion resembling a Faustian rising gone wrong, the fact remains that she is never a confirmed piece of magic. Olympia dances with a "peculiar rhythmical steadiness" and does not speak beyond monosyllables and occasional gasps (Hoffman, *Sandman*, 158). Olympia's attention, when fixed on Nathaniel, is unwavering, her eyes staring "immovably in his face" as the hapless student pours out his passion. When Olympia performs for her 'father's' guests, entertaining them as a good hostess should, she sings "with a voice, like the sound of a glass bell, clear, and almost cutting." (Hoffman, *Sandman*, 158) Automata playing musical instruments were common by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and even 'singing' automata were not unheard of by this time, though as even Nathaniel testifies, the tonal depth or nuance of the human voice still escaped the machinists who built artificial people. Yet, despite these forays into the uncanny valley, the unblinking and cold-skinned Olympia still seduces Nathaniel to the point that he prefers her to the human fiancé he has known for years, and eventually kills himself in his madness over the automata's true, mechanical nature and his loss of her.

In the light of Olympia and golem-Bella's textual existences, if there is redemption in the physical appearance of Frankenstein's first creature, it lies in the fact that he will never be mistaken as wholly human. The creature may have the strength and intelligence to kill dozens, but he will never seduce a human woman with looks alone or infiltrate society at large. Female creatures on the other hand, according to contemporary German fiction, are seductive, insidious and can pass as human. Close examination of a mechanical gait or a tell-tale inscription on the forehead will reveal their true nature to the astute, but as Nathaniel, Cornelius the mandrake, and the archduke attest, even the closest and most passionate observers can be blind to the artificial female's true nature, and thus fall prey to her.

### ***Le Miroir: The French Frankenstein***

Of course, E.T.A. Hoffman did begin the cultural conversation surrounding fictional automata, nor did he have the monopoly on automaton fiction. Rather, though Hoffman pioneered techniques of suspense and articulated aspects of *unheimlich*, the uncanny, that would not be psychologically defined for decades, his use of automata as a pivotal plot point was foreshadowed over twenty years before in a very different, much lighter genre of fiction: the fantasy romance. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is widely considered the first modern science fiction. Her work, even given all of the themes and pieces that she seems to have pulled from the dozens of literary and cultural sources I have gathered and will explore across the course of this thesis, remains breathtakingly original. There can be no doubt about that, and yet Julia Douthwaite has unearthed a second, earlier 'Frankenstein', an inventor of automata and courter of maiden-countries in Francois Felix Nogaret's extended allegory *Le Miroir de événemens actuels, ou La Belle au plus Offrant: Histoire à deux Visages* (1790)<sup>41</sup>, hereafter called *Le Miroir*. The plot of *Le Miroir* is relatively simple, a beautiful Syracusan orphan decides "to encourage and motivate... great inventors" by pledging to marry the "inventor of some machine, which would prove not only his ability, but also that he was familiar with women's hearts." (Nogaret, 2, 4-5) This frame sets the heroine, Aglaonice, up to meet a series of potential suitors, examine their offerings, and thus critique the utility of different mechanical inventions that would have been familiar to Parisian readers in the golden year of 1790, when demonstrations of hot-air balloons rising on their tethers could be found across the city, telescopes were widely available in shops, chemistry courses were advertised to the public, and automatons of all stripes could be seen at an array of museums and exhibitions. By the end of 1792, the seemingly limitless possibility, fraternity, and liberty would turn dark and a second edition of *Le Miroir* (1795) would cease to be about establishing a meritocracy based in intellectual achievement, and instead be watered down into a fanciful romance that would not upset Hebert and his ever-vigilant Terror Court censors.

Pertinent to my analysis of the intertextuality of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the final two inventors who come before Aglaonice present automatons as their contributions to the contest. The second automata inventor, Nicator, is Aglaonice's

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<sup>41</sup> *The Mirror of Current Events, or Beauty to the Highest Bidder: A Two-Faced Tale*

choice as a husband, the first, Wak-wik-vauk-an-son-Frankéstein<sup>42</sup>, is the runner-up and is rewarded by marrying her older and slightly less beautiful sister. This first automaton inventor, Frankéstein, as he is called after the initial introduction, bears two curious and important names to our discussion. The first, “vauk-an-saun”, is a play on the name of Jacques Vaucanson, arguably the greatest French automaton designer of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was Vaucanson who created the previously mentioned mechanical duck, which ‘ate’ grain and ‘defecated’ pellets when wound, to the delight of viewers. Other automata displayed by Vaucanson were meant to copy human feats: they played music, wrote, or danced, but the duck was an imitation of life in all its messy honesty. With Vaucanson’s duck we have an inventor attempting to mechanically recreate life processes, rather than only recreating beautiful accomplishments, the duck is an implicit acknowledgement that when there is consumption, there must also be defecation.

The other part of the name, Frankéstein, is important to my research for obvious reasons. Douthwaite, who appears to be the only English language scholar to extensively publish on this text, calls the name similarity “an intriguing coincidence”, which is admittedly a possibility (Douthwaite, 59). It is possible that both Nogaret and Shelley took name inspiration from the same legends surrounding Castle Frankenstein in Darmstadt, Germany, an ancient family holding used to house refugees during the Franco-Dutch wars in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. One of the refugee couples housed there in 1673 would give birth to a son, Johann Konrad Dippel, who would give the castle its darkest legends until Shelley herself. Dippel would take ‘Franckensteina’ as his surname when attending the University of Giessen and later at the Imperial University of Strasbourg. He then spent his early adult life as an alchemist attempting to create gold, successfully creating Prussic acid, and reportedly being run out of various communities for bodysnatching, including Strasbourg where even a comparatively liberal university could not protect an early resurrection man a century before the need for corpse dissection was widely acknowledged as necessary to anatomical study. Dippel even attempted to purchase Castle Frankenstein, as it was “the ideal location for secret alchemical experiments”

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<sup>42</sup> Throughout *Le Miroir*, the inventor is continually referred to as Frankéstein, with “Frankenstein” only appearing once, page 59, in what is likely a typo in the 1790 text. For the sake of clarity, when referring to Nogaret and Shelley’s respective characters I will maintain this difference in spelling (Frankéstein vs. Frankenstein).

but could not afford the ancient keep (Florescu, 80). Modern legend says Dippel attempted to resurrect the dead using alchemy, though whether that legend predates 1790, or indeed 1818, is difficult to ascertain. Regardless, by the time Nogaret published *Le Miroir*, Castle Frankenstein and the surrounding area had been associated with alchemic experimentation and eccentric scientists for nearly a century. By the time Mary Shelley passed near the crumbling castle in 1814 during her honeymoon boat trip up the Rhine to the sea, these legends were nearing 150 years old. As Douthwaite twice ascertains, it is possible that the name connection is a simple *coincidence* and that both Shelley and Nogaret were inspired by the same old legend with Shelley naming her eponymous experimentalist in complete ignorance of his literary predecessor.

This said, I do not believe that the similar names are pure coincidence. William Godwin and Mary Shelley both kept detailed lists of the texts read that have and will continue to be incredibly useful tools for critics intent on tracking the intellectual interests of these two great writers. I use these lists extensively across the course of this thesis, but it is important to remember that these lists are incomplete in that they do not encompass the readings of either Mary Jane Clairmont-Godwin, or Mary Wollstonecraft. Both women had close ties to France, Mary Wollstonecraft even arrived in Paris in 1792, just two years after Nogaret first published *Le Miroir*, as will be mentioned in the next chapter in relation to Madame Tussaud. Mary Jane had murky, but close ties to the French community in London, a community peopled by those who fled France because of the unrest caused by the French Revolution and ensuing Napoleonic wars. As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, Mary Jane was able to import French texts for the Godwin bookshop even during tight trade embargoes. She also earned money in London through translation work, being paid “a guinea a sheet” for her efforts, making her by necessity more familiar with French literature than many other British women at the same time (St. Clair, 259). It should also be remembered that Mary Jane was the person who supervised what formal education Mary Shelley received, including her early French studies. To my knowledge the only records we have of Mary Shelley’s youth come from William Godwin. We do not have outlines of lesson plans, or reading lists prepared by Mary Jane for the children. Nor do we have many records from Mary Shelley’s time apart from her family, when as a young teenager Shelley was sent to the Baxter family in

Scotland for months at a stretch. Letters back and forth between the girl and her family do not seem to have survived, even though she was separated from them for over a year in total, living in the place where her “true compositions, the airy flights of [her] imagination, were born and fostered.” (Shelley, 1831, VI) Douthwaite has found “no traces of *Le Miroir* in [Mary and Percy Shelley’s] journals,” but stresses the “ambitious readings undertaken... in the years 1814-17.” (Douthwaite, 91) I would extend that coda to include the reading undertaken by Shelley in her youth, before eloping with Percy, and the influences of both her mother and stepmother. The reading lists contained in the Godwin *Diary* and Shelley *Journals*, respectively, are excellent tools, but should not be used to exclude the possibility that Mary Shelley read *Le Miroir* at some point before sitting down to write her own inventor-Frankenstein.

Setting aside the education Shelley received from her stepmother, there was also the steady stream of French literature enthusiasts through the Godwin household in the form of Godwin’s friends. Thomas Holcroft, whose association with German literature has already been discussed, was also well-versed in French literature, being enmeshed “in the thick of the dense cultural and literary exchange between England and France, absorbing the energies of the twin Grub Streets of London and Paris” throughout the 1790s, the key decade of Nogaret’s publication (Karr, 331). Anne Plumptre spent three years in France in the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, carefully observing and recording Napoleon’s rule for her *Narrative of Three Years’ Residence in France* (1810). French emigres, like Charles Mercier and his family appear frequently in Godwin’s diary for decades spanning from before Mary Shelley’s birth to well after her elopement. Other notable continentals known by Godwin include Madame Germaine de Stael, who appears multiple times throughout 1813. Between her education at the hands of Mary-Jane Godwin, and the stream of literati welcomed into her father’s home, there is ample room for Shelley’s exposure to the conversation surrounding French literature in general and Nogaret’s novella in particular, even without its express appearance in the extant written records.

As for the text of *Le Miroir* itself, the parallels and divergences between it and Shelley’s *Frankenstein* are myriad and fascinating. To begin, names were just as important to Nogaret as they were to Shelley. Frankenstein’s murdered little brother, William, was given the name of both Mary Shelley’s beloved first son and her, at the

time, estranged but beloved father. The reasons for this naming has never been satisfactorily explained, and may never be, but the import of her choice in nomenclature cannot be overstated. Likewise, Victor Frankenstein's first name is a piece of irony at its finest: yes Frankenstein is victorious in creating his creature, but that 'victory' is ultimately his downfall. We have already spent some time parsing the two parts of the Frankenstein name in *Le Miroir*, we should look at the heroine, Aglaonice. As Douthwaite points out, her name combines "the Greek words agla (grace) and nice (victor)", boding well for her success in finding a suitably accomplished husband through the competition (Douthwaite, 73). That the heroine's name is formed of Greek words alone could have attracted Shelley's notice. We know from studying her *Letters* and *Journals* that she had a longstanding interest in the language, and began studying it as early as 1814.<sup>43</sup> Aglaonice is indeed graceful in her quest for a husband and victorious in the end. Where Frankenstein's 'victor' is irony, Aglaonice's is happy foreshadowing.

We also have the name of Aglaonice's eventual husband, the second automaton inventor, Nicator to examine. As Douthwaite says, Nicator is a fairly blatant allusion to Necker, Louis XVI's finance minister, whose expulsion from court and subsequent recalling due to public demand and revolt, was one of many steps leading to the eventual abolishment of the monarchy. Aglaonice as an allegory for a country, and as female character, has no marketable traits beyond her beauty, charm, and intelligence. Nicator woos her through a combination of graceful automata mechanics, and a shower of wealth, despite the disparity between the two: his obvious wealth, and her lack thereof. The French people thought of Necker in similar terms, as a bringer of wealth to the common people, despite his actual Swiss heritage. This makes him an apt 'character' for Nogaret's extended allegory, but I would also like to point out the similarities in spelling and pronunciation between *Nicator* and *Victor*. Nicator has Latin roots, referring to powerful warriors, but also translating as 'great', or 'conqueror'. Once again, we have allusions to victory in a name that is sincere, rather than ironic.

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<sup>43</sup> For a survey of Shelley's Greek studies, see Schoina's "Grubbing at 'Greek Roots': Mary Shelley's Greek Learning" *The Keats-Shelley Review*, 2019.

The name parallels are fascinating, but the most interesting communication between the two texts comes in the form of the automatons featured in them. The first of these is Frankéstein's;

His gift consisted of a life-sized statue, dressed as a Sicilian & seated in a moving chair with a flute in each hand, which [Frankéstein] announced the statue would play at will. This figure could play twenty-two melodies, a list of which he gave [Algaonice]... Algaonice was not convinced that the automaton could fulfil such a fantastic promise... [she] pointed out one of the twenty-two tunes... [and] ordered the statue to play it. This melody slowly gave voice to the agonies of a lovesick heart. The statue of the flautist, lifting the two flutes to its mouth & drawing various sounds from these instruments & marvellously performing both parts, greatly exceeded Aglaonice's expectations. This marvel caused her such strong emotions that she fell into a swoon,... & [they] only managed to revive her by ordering the flautist to play a livelier air. (Nogaret, 42-43)<sup>44</sup>

Frankéstein's gift is stunning, swoon worthy, and obviously more impressive than any of the gifts that have come before him, yet before the heroine can deliver her verdict, he cuts her off. Frankéstein, the second to last inventor in the competition for Algaonice's hand "was not vain enough to think that he could win her as his wife" and instead insists the young woman wait and reserve her judgement until after seeing the final entrant (Nogaret, 43).

The feat of creating a musical automaton is certainly impressive. As mentioned previously, musical automatons were not unheard of at this time, though a flautist certainly would be a rarer item. Furthermore, it is the automaton's nature as an immobile flautist that is of interest here. Shelley's creature is superhumanly strong, fast, and durable to the point of surviving the arctic pack ice with minimal supplies, he was built that way on purpose by Frankenstein, an idealized human in conception, but a monster in reality. The creature's dearest wish, and the reason that he continues to terrorize his maker after murdering William, is that he desires a mate of the same kind with whom he "can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for [his] being." (Shelley, 118) Simply put, the creature wants a sexual

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<sup>44</sup> All *Le Miroir* translations by Roisin Crowley

partner who will not be able to reject him for his physical deformities because she will also carry them. Frankenstein's later fears that a female creature would pursue a human mate, or that she might even pass as a human woman as her literary golem and automata predecessors is of no consequence here. This desire for sexual companionship is natural, human even. What makes the Frankenstein automaton so interesting in this regard is:

- a.) Its gender neutrality
- b.) How that neutrality is tied to its inability to stand or walk
- c.) The fact that it is playing a pair of flutes

To fully explain the dichotomy between these three points about the first, flute playing automaton, I must briefly deviate to the second automaton, the one produced by Nicator. This second automaton is explicitly gendered from her first appearance in the narrative, she is described as "a woman dressed like a vestal" capable of walking "without being supported by anyone", whereas Frankenstein's creation was wheeled in "like an invalid without the use of its legs" (Nogaret, 45-46). Even when described in the same sentence, the first automaton is a genderless *it* while the second is described as a female *she*. The implication of this is that by dint of being invalid, the first automaton is genderless, desexualized because it cannot walk or support itself like the second. This implied desexualisation, however, comes into direct conflict with the first automaton's design and proficiency as a musician, specifically a flautist.

The entirety of *Le Miroir* is steeped in classical allusion. From the names of the various characters at play with their combinations of Greek and Latin, to the setting itself (ancient Syracuse), and the trappings of the second automaton as a vestal virgin, complete with a cupid hiding coyly beneath her skirts. Besides the obvious phallic implications of a flautist, much less a double-fluted flautist, the instrument also provides allusions to Pan, one of the most sexually playful, and aggressive, gods in Greek pantheon. From representations in art, such as de Troy's *Pan and Syrinx* (1722-1724), to depictions in classical literature, as in his appearances in Ovid where he with "verse doth praise/ To tender Nymphs, and pipes to rurall layes(sic)", to Keats invocation of him as god of shepherds and flocks in *Endymion*, Pan was a ubiquitous figure and his nature as a patron god of nature and

breeding would have been easily recognized by 18<sup>th</sup> century French readers and 19<sup>th</sup> century English readers alike (Ovid, 175-176). Shelley's own *Midas* (1820), features Pan as a main character whose "sweet pipings" defeat Apollo in a musical contest (Shelley, *Midas*, 54). Pan's sexual exploits are softened somewhat, though still acknowledged through a line about how "down the vale of Menalus" Pan "pursued a maiden" (Shelley, *Midas*, 54-55). That the invalid, non-gendered automaton is the one wielding flutes, colloquially known as pan-pipes, and playing them with such dexterity that the woman present swoons in emotional ecstasy, is a contradiction to the characterization. Like the creature, who desires sexual intimacy and causes women to faint in horror at the sight of him, the automaton is sexually incongruous and is ultimately rejected as second-best.



Figure 3 de Troy, *Pan and Syrinx*, J. Paul Getty Museum

The final point I would like to make on *Le Miroir* is on the characterisation of Frankéstein throughout the novella. Shelley's *Frankenstein* seems calculated to be a rebuttal of the light tenor of Nogaret's work as a whole, and nowhere is that more obvious than in the characterisation of Frankenstein and Frankéstein. Shelley's Frankenstein is young, impulsive, obviously intelligent but driven to the point of being blinded to the consequences of achieving his goal. Nogaret's Frankéstein is older, "aged fifty,... an honest German... whose ancestors had lived on the banks of the Ister." (Nogaret, 41) Like Frankenstein he excels in the practical application of

his science, being a skilled inventor who, like Frankenstein, achieves near-perfection with his work. However, unlike Frankenstein, Frankéstein is modest. After Aglaonice's favourable judgement of the flute-playing automaton, Frankéstein turns down her proposal, "flattered to have interested [her], but... not vain enough to think that he could win her as his wife." (Nogaret, 43) It is because of this modesty, and honesty about his competitor in this branch of mechanics, that Frankéstein wins the hand of Aglaonice's sister and goes on to his fairytale happily ever after. Frankenstein, on the other hand, conceals the truth of his invention and delays its revelation until "the day after [his] marriage" to Elizabeth, a delay that costs his bride her life (Shelley, 160).

As the first published production of a woman who spent her life as a student of continental literature and culture, it is fitting that *Frankenstein* is a text that sits at the centre of a spiderweb of international, intertextual influences. From the fairytales recommended by her father in her youth, to the ghost stories read in 1816, the French and German literature read by Shelley and discussed around her is myriad. While overarching conclusions about influence are difficult to draw, thematic and elemental similarities between *Frankenstein* and the texts discussed in the chapter abound. For decades *Frankenstein* has been studied primarily through an Anglocentric lens; however, as this chapter in particular and this thesis in general will seek to demonstrate, the transnational influences felt and found in the novel's text are much richer and more complex than that. Mary Shelley was a student, linguist, and scholar of European cultural exchange, and her writing reflects that emphatically.

## Chapter Two

### Handmade: Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, and European Waxworks

“She’s been through the mill, my lad, she’s tasted our common bread.”

“And yet she’s beautiful,” Andy re-joined.

“A really opulent body!” Bazarov pursued “Just ripe for the dissecting table!”

Ivan Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons*

From the explicit and extratextual French and German references of the previous chapter, we move now to the implicit, continent-wide conversation surrounding wax figures, created humans, and *Frankenstein*. As I have mentioned several times already, *Frankenstein* serves as a meeting point for several broader cultural phenomena, and one of these is the numerous wax figures with myriad cultural and intellectual purposes that dotted both the European landscape, and Mary Shelley’s personal experiences. Since ancient Greece, wax in its texture, malleability, and purity, has been used as a representation of humanity on some level. For Aristotle, this was as an allegory for the human soul and body, as inextricable as “the wax and the imprint” (Aristotle, 51). For the Romans, this was as a representation of a deceased loved one in funerary rites. For medieval Catholics, this was in the form of waxen *ex-votos* offerings for health and healing. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the transmutation of malleable wax to human flesh became even more explicit, with the creation of complete wax cadavers, intended to replace human corpses for anatomical study, and Madame Tussaud’s wax exhibits giving visitors three dimensional portraits of both the famous and the infamous, the living and the dead, for popular consumption first in Paris, then across Britain. By the time Mary Shelley began writing *Frankenstein* in 1816, wax had been representing and replacing human flesh for centuries, literally turning ‘human’ bodies into the productions of skilled craftsmen and, notably, women. While still by far the minority among waxworkers, there were a few highly skilled and visible female ceroplasticians active during this time period, making Shelley far from the only

woman to be preoccupied by the idea of building bodies. Therefore, even though Shelley never explicitly compares the creature's flesh or formation to an assemblage of wax, it still behoves us to widen our scope and spend time on these particular craftworks and the conversations surrounding them.

If we widen our critical scope to this collective, social level then, as this chapter will show, the evidential basis for our discussion of *Frankenstein* and waxworks is dramatically intensified and enriched. Wax figures are never directly mentioned in the *Frankenstein* text, but contemporary British authors felt comfortable enough with their audience's familiarity with wax figures to reference them without extraneous explanation. Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*<sup>45</sup> and Lady Morgan's *Florence Macarthy: An Irish Tale*<sup>46</sup>, both published in 1818<sup>47</sup>, mention wax figures explicitly, demonstrating that the objects were readily recognized by the British reading public. These are only British examples, but I would be remiss if I did not again mention Hoffman's *Der Automate*<sup>48</sup>, which offers an explicit condemnation of the uncanny nature of wax figures, and that the *Fantasmagoriana* contains a passing reference to wax figures in *The Family Portraits*<sup>49</sup>, thus proving wax figures were far from a purely British interest and explicitly stretching the conversation surrounding them to encompass the entire continent. Through the course of this chapter I will detail the numerous, hitherto unacknowledged, points of contact between Mary Shelley and various forms of ceroplastics, their potential impact on the *Frankenstein* text, and the ways in which the idea of the human body as a craftwork was in the air in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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<sup>45</sup> "Catherine had read too much not to be perfectly aware of the ease with which a waxen figure might be introduced, and a suppositious funeral carried on." (Austen, 197)

<sup>46</sup> "Meantime the gentlewoman resembled, as she sat, one of those wax-work figures, which, at once grotesque and natural, are coloured to the life, yet inanimate as death; for she remained, for a considerable time after the strangers had entered the room, with her eyes riveted on their persons, and her pen suspended above the paper upon which she had been writing." (Owenson, 24)

<sup>47</sup> Though *Northanger Abbey* was actually written over a decade before and published posthumously.

<sup>48</sup> "When I was a little boy, I ran away crying from a waxwork exhibition I was taken to, and even to this day I never can enter a place of the sort without a horrible, eerie, shuddery feeling. When I see the staring, lifeless, glassy eyes of all the potentates, celebrated heroes, thieves, murderers, and so on, fixed upon me, I feel disposed to cry with Macbeth 'Thou hast no speculation in those eyes which thou dost glare with.'" (Hoffman, 355)

<sup>49</sup> "They say [portraits] become pale when the original expires; and the more faithful the likeness, the more they remind me of those waxen figures I cannot look at without aversion." (Day, 41)

Since the time of the Romans, wax has been equated with human flesh. Roman funerals frequently included the waxen deathmasks of ancestors, allowing actors to wear the faces of the dead and thus ‘resurrect’ them for the final celebration of life. This practice was noted and extolled by Roman writer, Pliny the Elder. In his *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder noted that wax funerary masks could be coloured to bear “extreme resemblance” to the living flesh of those they represented, thus better reflecting the original’s essence (quoted in Didi-Huberman, 69). Pliny the Younger wrote that a grieving father commissioned “statues and busts” of a recently dead son “by the dozens” (Pliny the Younger, 285). The Younger continues, writing that across Rome, “Colours, wax, bronze, silver, gold, ivory, marble, the young Regulus is depicted again and again” (Pliny the Younger, 285, emphasis added). Thus these figures, both the deathmasks and the commissioned images, take on an imperfect Pygmalion quality, resurrecting the dead in effigy, rather than bringing about completely new life as Ovid’s sculpture and Shelley’s scientist sought to do.

Pliny the Elder elaborates extensively on the healing and flesh-like qualities of wax, beyond its uses in funerary rites. In his *Natural History*, the Elder offers the substance as a sort of cure-all, remedying toothaches and stomach pains alike with pills of wax. He does not limit the healing to internal engines, noting that when applied as an external ointment “every kind of wax is emollient and warming, and tends to the formation of new flesh.” (Pliny the Elder, 438) For the Elder, wax could heal, cover, and even replace human flesh, a sentiment that was not lost into the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was this concept transmitted through time that led to instructions for making a “fine cosmetic” of “good white virgin wax” being included in Signor Pinetti’s *Physical Amusement and Diverting Experiments* (1784), a handbook of simple crafts and experiments to amuse the London drawing-room crowd (Pinetti, 52).

In Europe the tradition of wax as an aid to healing was also not lost, though the direct application of wax to the body—either internally or externally—was no longer the order of the day. In the years after the Black Death in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when health was as much a sign of divine favour as a result of medical practice, the tradition of leaving wax *ex-votos* offerings came into prominence across Europe, particularly in Catholic countries like Italy and France. *Ex-votos* tradition can be seen today in the lighting of votive candles, but for centuries these pleas for health

were more demonstrative than lighting a simple candle. Supplicants would purchase and leave as offerings wax replicas of afflicted limbs or organs in the chapel of their preferred saint of healing. As Didi-Huberman explains “the bourgeoisie Florentines of the Renaissance, still steeped in a profound Christian religiosity—but already readers of Pliny [the Elder]...gave themselves over to the extreme hyperrealist game of wax *ex-votos*...” (Didi-Huberman, 70) Didi-Huberman’s essay appears in the *Encyclopaedia Anatomica*, a complete photographic record of the anatomical waxes housed at *La Specola* in Florence, which will be examined in detail later in this chapter, but at this juncture I will diverge slightly to explain why Florentine waxwork is so important to the *ex-votos* trade.

When reoccurring outbreaks of the Black Plague in the 1630s ravaged Italy, Florence was struck particularly hard after, it is said, a single man violated the quarantine cordon by visiting the infected city of Bologna for business, thus damning the Tuscan city and surrounding countryside for his greed. The increase in illness caused an increased need for *ex-votos* offerings and Florence, bisected by the Arno River, was well positioned to receive shipments of wax and export offerings, in addition to supplying the local *ex-votos* demand. From the 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, skilled waxworks grew in the city, manned by craftsmen who spent generations honing their trade. These ceroplasticians, like the ambitious young doctor Frankenstein, used the morgue to gather the materials necessary to ply their macabre trade, either taking casts or sculpting the appendages by sight. It was because of these Florentine waxworkers and their skills accumulated over more than a century that Duke Leopold II and his court physician were able to create their “encyclopaedia of the human body in wax” in the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Ebenstein, 28). When the duke and his doctor set out to create a museum of wax cadavers for medical students to ‘dissect’ and the public to learn from, there were craftsmen already in place in Florence with the skills and experience to craft some of the most impressive and intricate wax figures ever created.

That said, wax was not the only option for those looking to make a demonstrative offering to the saints. For more immediate results, or a more ostentatious display, the same wax limbs or organs could be leafed or cast in precious metals, a practice that was noted by Doctor John Polidori, Lord Byron’s physician and traveling companion, in Antwerp in 1816. In his *Diary*, Polidori noted

that “in many parts of the chapel were frames containing silver representations, very small, of bad limbs etc., offered by the devout.” (Polidori, 49) Byron and Polidori would go on to meet the Shelleys later in the summer of 1816 at Geneva, where the impulsive Polidori spent a great deal of time trying to impress Mary and Claire, or “the two daughters of Godwin,” as he called them in his diary (Polidori, 102). Mary Shelley would later use these silvered *ex-votos* as a plot device in her 1830 novel *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck*, in which a “silver heart was suspended near the altar” in a chapel of Winchester Cathedral was used as a signal to co-conspirators (Shelley, *Perkin Warbeck*, 44). This active use of *ex-votos* in her later work shows an engagement with the conversation surrounding *ex-votos* practice that lends credence to my assertion that she was aware of it while composing *Frankenstein*.

*Ex-votos* practice was so wide-spread throughout Europe that Princess Elizabeth, younger sister of ill-fated King Louis XVI, kept a ceroplastician in her household for years to teach the royal ladies waxwork. The princess learned to model many objects, but in her instructor’s memoirs, her zeal for crafting *ex-votos* lends itself to a succinct description of the practice:

It was much the custom, if any person was afflicted in the arm or leg, to send a representation of the limb affected to some church... hoping that the saint to whom it might be dedicated would effect a cure, or intercede with a higher power to restore the member... Madame Elizabeth, therefore, with pious zeal, would often model in wax the legs and arms of decrepit persons... which were afterwards suspended at the churches of St. Genevieve, St. Sulpice, and des Capucins du Murché des enfans rouge. (Tussaud, 24)

The *ex-votos* crafted by the princess therefore bypassed the economy of body parts and corpses that will be discussed in the following paragraphs. Her instructor, a young woman then known as Mademoiselle Marie Curtius, is today remembered as Madame Tussaud, the most famous waxworker to ever live, and will be discussed in detail towards the end of this chapter.

It should also be noted that while *ex-votos* practice represents a kind of ‘good magic’ through divine healing or blessing, there was also at least some level of association between waxen representations and ‘bad magic’ in Shelley’s work. Shelley’s second novel, *Valperga*, set in medieval Italy, sees the question of curse

poppets put to a witch<sup>50</sup> by one of her acolytes. The witch is asked if she could effectively cast a curse on a rival through a “waxen image at the fire, or his heart stuck full of pins” (Shelley, *Valperga*, 263-264). This imagery, familiar today as a voodoo doll, is something of an equal and opposite of the *ex-votos* offering. Rather than appealing to a higher power, a possessor of magic, for healing by using a wax effigy, the appeal and wax figure are intended specifically for harm, yet the demonstrative properties, and the replacement of flesh with wax remain nearly identical, if oppositional to the religious purposes.

### **A Body in Pieces: *Frankenstein* and *Ex-Votos* Practice**

The commoditization and segmentation of idealized body parts as exemplified by *ex-votos* practice is implicitly acknowledged in the *Frankenstein* text through Victor Frankenstein’s hunt for raw materials when crafting the creature. As a student of surgery, Frankenstein would have been inherently engaged in the economy of bodies, purchasing whole and partial corpses from resurrection men, or body snatchers, for dissection and surgical study even before embarking on his great endeavour (Bride). By virtue of an inherently limited supply and great demand for fresh corpses, this was already a small and ferociously competitive market. When Frankenstein sets out to build his creature there are two explicitly stated, and one unstated, limitations to his purchase of raw materials. First he decides to “make the being of a gigantic stature, that is to say, about eight feet in height, and proportionally large.” (Shelley, 35) Frankenstein’s search for proportionally large body parts was not totally impossible in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. There were a number of people being shown as ‘giants’ across England and the Continent, and as unusual specimens of humanity their oversized corpses were much sought after by anatomists and surgeons post-mortem. Famously, Charles Byrne, the ‘Irish Giant’ who stood near Frankenstein’s preferred height of eight feet, hired men at the end of his life to protect his corpse and see it buried safely at sea where anatomists could not retrieve it. The Scottish surgeon and anatomist, John Hunter, paid these prospective guardians more, and to this day Byrne’s skeleton hangs in the Hunterian Museum

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<sup>50</sup> Shelley was careful to indicate that this woman, like all the supposedly supernatural women in *Valperga*, was not actually magical. All of the ‘magical’ women in the novel are varying degrees of innocently lucky, or blatantly fraudulent.

despite ongoing protests and petitions to repatriate the remains back to Ireland or see them buried at sea as was originally desired. Even when their original owners took express measures to remain outside the body economy, corpses of massive stature were on the market and available for purchase to those who could pay.

Within this limited pool of over-sized body parts, Frankenstein is searching for physically attractive corpses. Regardless of the haunting, final product, Frankenstein originally selects the creature's individual "features as beautiful," meaning that like wax sculptors who sought to create idealized *ex-votos* limbs for the devout to make themselves whole through prayer and offerings, Frankenstein's pool of potential raw material is further winnowed down (Shelley, 39). Later the crafters of the Anatomical Venuses would use similar techniques, seeking to offset the horrors of dissection by making the subjects serenely beautiful, as will be discussed later in this chapter. Frankenstein seeks perfection for his creature through segmentation and an assemblage of disparate parts in an inherently limited pool of resources.

The final factor limiting Frankenstein's search for raw materials lies in the creature's sex. As a male being made by a male physician who later became physically ill at the idea of shaping a female—the assumption that the male creature is formed entirely of male parts is reasonable. Even though the creature is not entirely human, remember that in addition to the dissection room, "the slaughterhouse furnished many of [Frankenstein's] materials," it stands to reason that any materials collected from the abattoir would have been internal rather than external (Shelley, 37). As it is the creature's external visage that is so horrifying to his creator, external representations are what we will primarily focus on here. Therefore, as we have established that Frankenstein was likely collecting raw materials from male corpses, whatever small potential pool of oversized, attractive corpses he was purchasing from would be statistically halved by virtue of their sex. *Ex-votos* offerings, both the terracotta precursors and the waxworks they evolved into, could also be sexed, though generally the opposite of Frankenstein's search—wombs or pregnant bellies were common offerings by those praying for fertility or safe delivery, understandable given the dangers historically associated with childbirth, dangers which will be explored more directly later in this chapter (Cilione et al, 1). Like those supplicants, Frankenstein desires fertility and safe delivery after

a fashion, and is also willing to engage in financial transactions to ensure that happens. The difference being, Frankenstein is looking for these outcomes without the intervention or necessity of female organs.

Wax limbs and organs were not the only ceroplastics to grace sacred ground, wax images of saints and noteworthy internees of the crypts were also frequently part of church and cathedral décor. One of the few instances where Shelley explicitly mentions a wax body is one such piece of religious iconography. While touring Lake Lucerne in 1814, she noted “a saint in wretched waxwork,” an object made more notable because it is not in the original *Shelley Journals*, instead being added in when an account of the tour was published as *A History of a Six Weeks Tour* (1817) (Shelley, 61). The fact that this detail stayed with Shelley, vivid enough to be added to a textual re-creation of Lake Lucerne three years after her visit there, like the inclusion of silver *ex-votos* in *Perkin Warbeck* decades later, shows not only an attention to finer detail in Shelley’s work, but that these were the kinds of things she noticed. Not just the sweeping vistas or the great galleries and museums, but the human details and their attached significance. Shelley was not just preoccupied by the sweeping vistas, she also noticed a waxen saint for protection or an offering for healing in a cathedral. Also lending credulity to my theory that wax figures played a role in the composition of *Frankenstein*, is the fact that *History of a Six Weeks Tour* and *Frankenstein* were edited for publication at roughly the same time. If waxworks were important enough to Shelley to include in *Six Weeks Tour* at the last minute, then it can be reasonably hypothesized that wax as a representation of, and substitute for, human flesh was also included in the *Frankenstein* subtext. However in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century cathedrals, there was another, form of ceroplastics besides *ex-votos*, waxen saints, or representations of royal dead. A subtler use of wax, and more direct example of wax embodying and replacing human flesh can be found in, or more specifically on, the bodies of incorruptible saints.

### **The Body Corruptible: Wax and the Preservation of the Dead**

When the Second Council of Nicaea declared in 787CE that new cathedrals could only be consecrated by the presence and display of a relic of a saint or Christ, trade in holy relics and relic forgeries exploded. Rather than engaging directly in the

trade, some congregations sought instead to certify one of their own as saintly, therefore obtaining the dual honour of having fostered a saint and becoming a shrine to an entirely unique, canonized relic. One of the surest ways for the church to recognize if one of their departed faithful had achieved sainthood was by confirming whether or not their corpse had begun to decompose after being interred for a period of time. As Ebenstein succinctly put it: “incorruptible saints, whose bodies, miraculously, do not decompose... are even sometimes reported to give off a sweet smell,” making these corpses not only certifiably sacred in the eyes of Rome, but also fit for public display (Ebenstein, 76). By the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, religious pilgrims and tourists alike had long since been flocking to the cathedrals of Europe to view the uncorrupted. Lord Byron was so impressed by a pair of corpses he saw during his tour of Italy that he wrote Thomas Moore about them in a letter dated 6 November, 1816: “There are also two dead bodies in fine preservation—one Saint Carlo Borneo at Milan; the other not a saint but a chief, named Visconti, at Monza—both which appeared agreeable.” (Byron, *Letters vol. V*, 125) In keeping with Nicaean council doctrine, both corpses were then and are still today displayed in or near cathedrals.

Mary Wollstonecraft was also susceptible to the morbid spectacle of unrotted corpses as entertainment, though her reaction in *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796) was not as enthusiastic as her daughter’s friend two decades later. Shrinking from the sight, she writes: “If this be not dissolution, it is something worse than natural decay—it is treason against humanity, thus to lift up the awful veil which would fain hide its weakness.” (Wollstonecraft, 90) What horrified Wollstonecraft about these bodies, so long entombed “that there is not even a tradition to lead to guess their names”, is the manner of their preservation. (Wollstonecraft, 89) She uses the word embalm to describe them, but it would not have been meant in the modern sense.<sup>51</sup> In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries there was experimentation in embalming by various surgeons across Europe. Notably, surgeon and anatomist brothers John and William Hunter had successes with arterial injections, but full body preservation, outside of

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<sup>51</sup> Modern embalming as an art, practice, and industry is a by-product of the American Civil War, and therefore was not commonly used until the 1860s.

suspending the corpse in honey or alcohol, was too costly for general use, and unwieldy for long-term preservation on an industrial scale.

The old corpses Mary Wollstonecraft was viewing were not the products of cutting-edge science, but rather much older preservation techniques: they had been mummified, their “noblest parts immediately sacrificed merely to save the muscles, skin, and bone from rotteness.” (Wollstonecraft, 90) Intentional mummification involves removing the viscera and brain, the heart and mind, and leaving the rest of the body to dry thoroughly. Herbs or honey and salt can be inserted into the vacated cavities, perhaps explaining the sweet smells attributed to the remains of some saints, to help with drying and to keep putrefaction at bay until the drying process has progressed far enough. Mummification rituals vary across continents and cultures, but the basic tenets remain the same and the incorruptibility of several saints across Europe is due to it, whether the corpse in question was mummified intentionally or not.

That said, as Wollstonecraft and many others attested, a lack of putrefaction did not necessarily mean a corpse was pleasant to look at. Frankenstein himself compared the creature to a “mummy... endowed with animation” as a mark of how hideous he was (Shelley, 40).<sup>52</sup> This sentiment would be echoed by Walton towards the end of the novel, when he described the creature’s “vast hand” as having the “colour and apparent texture... of a mummy.” (Shelley, 187) The shrunken features of dried out corpses were the frustration of saints’ caretakers and 19<sup>th</sup> century naturalists alike. In a time when animal specimens the world over were transported back to Europe as dried skins weeks, months, or even years after their initial collection, and often prepared by taxidermists who had never seen the creatures alive, naturalist Charles Waterton, whose contributions to South American exploration will be detailed in the next chapter, “concluded that the lips and noses [of wildlife specimens] ought to be cut off, and replaced with wax;...as they shrink to nothing” in the drying process (Waterton, 128). Frankenstein’s horror at the creature’s “shriveled complexion, and straight black lips” seems to confirm Waterton’s assertion that it was “impossible to make those parts appear lifelike.”

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<sup>52</sup> For more on *Frankenstein*, the creature, and the Egyptomania of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, see the final chapter of this thesis.

(Shelley, 40, Waterton, 128) The caretakers of saints' remains could be even more radical than Waterton with the wax, touching up their charges "with wax masks and hands", the only parts of the cadaver visible to the public when wrapped in voluminous robes or shrouds (Ebenstein, 77).

The Romans believed in the power of wax to heal the body and resurrect the dead in grief; post-Plague Europe believed that wax could become a conduit for divine healing, and the caretakers of incorruptible saints knew that wax was the best way to protect their public from the desiccated features that haunted Frankenstein. When wax is used to cover the flesh of an uncorrupted corpse, the "wax thus becomes an artifact of the flesh, an artifact whose symbolic power is precisely that of making people believe in the resurrection of the flesh". (Didi-Huberman, 70) When Frankenstein described his unholy pursuit as "restoring life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption," he set his creation in opposition to a long tradition of incorruptible corpses; a living mummy without the benefit of a kindly caretaker to hide shrunken features behind a wax mask (Shelley, 36).

### ***Memento Mori: Remember your Death***

The final religious aspect of wax imagery and the cultural significance therein, that I will discuss is the tradition of *memento mori*, literally to 'remember one's death.' *Memento mori* are images meant to frighten and inspire piety in the devout through representations of death's constant approach and the eternal rewards earned during life. In her *Rambles in Germany and Italy* (1844) Shelley documented a series of *memento mori* in Erfurt, paintings in which "Death is represented as coming upon men and women at all moments, during every occupation" (Shelley, *Rambles*, 210). Looking at these images of death stalking the beauty, the king, and the mother on her birthing bed with equal patience in the 1840s, Shelley would have been far more aware of her own mortality than any brushes with *memento mori* during her marriage. What would have been curiosities to a young woman in her teens and twenties, became potent warnings to a widow in her forties who had outlasted her husband, friends, and all but one of her children, making her explicit commentary on them in her second travel book more poignant, than if they had appeared in her first.

By design, *memento mori* images were intended to serve as fear motivators for good behaviour, demonstrating what punishments or rewards a soul could experience after death. A prime example of this is an unattributed trio of wax busts thought to originate in Lombardy, Italy, dating from the seventeenth-century, which depict a ‘Soul Condemned to Purgatory’ staring upward pleadingly, a ‘Damned Soul’ surrounded in its glass case by demons and hellfire, and lastly a ‘Blessed Soul’ crowned in light and looking up to grace. For centuries images like these served as visual reminders that death was always near and approaching and of the eternal punishments that awaited the souls of those who refused to live according to church doctrine. Other wax *memento mori* artifacts, such the eighteenth-century *Vanitas Figure*, seem to have sought to scare their viewers into piety through a reminder of what awaited their physical remains rather than their immortal souls. This piece, unattributed and housed now in the Wellcome Collection in London, depicts a head with hands resting on either side. One half of this waxen head is a woman in the blush of youth, on the other side of the seam splitting her forehead, nose, and lips is a skull crawling with insects, a reminder of the ultimate end of all vanity. This split face reflecting life and death was a popular image, found frequently in both paintings and sculpture as a reminder to young women that their youth, beauty, and indeed their earthly lives, would not last forever.

The *Frankenstein* text enters the *memento mori* conversation in several ways. Remembrance, as a word and theme, is vital to *Frankenstein*. The word is used almost fifty times in various forms throughout the novel, and the word “memory” accounts for another twenty. This is, in large part, necessary. The narrative is a series of nesting flashbacks within the frame of an epistolary novel, it is only natural for terms like “memory” and “remember” to occur frequently. What is, perhaps, less common for a novel of the time is how often remembrance and death occur together. In the 1831 edition, Justine implores from her jail cell that her mistress “*remember me... as one unjustly condemned... Learn from me, dear lady, to submit in patience to the will of heaven!*” (Shelley, 1831, 72, emphasis added) Threatened with hellfire by her confessor, Justine chooses the purgatory of false confession rather than the damnation of excommunication, with the understanding that she will see William, the child she is accused of murdering, “again in heaven” shortly thereafter (Shelley, 1831, 72). Through this, Justine metaphorically moves through the three souls

depicted in Lombardy, turning the story of her life and death into a tableaux of *memento mori*.

The creature, on the other hand, is a darker kind of *memento mori*. In their first, articulate meeting the creature implores his creator to “Remember thou hast made me... Remember, that I am thy creature.” (Shelley, 77) In spite of these pleas, recollections of creation are not what come to his scientist-father’s mind. Instead, the haunting features serve only to remind Frankenstein of “those victims who you have so diabolically murdered!” (Shelley, 77) While the creature begs that Frankenstein remember life created, the scientist only remembers death and as the text carries on the creature seems to embrace this role as a death-reminder. On witnessing the destruction of his incomplete mate, the creature threatens Frankenstein “Remember that I... can make you so wretched that the light of day will be hateful to you.” (Shelley, 140) Not content with this threat, as a parting shot the creature warns that “I shall be with you on your wedding night.” (Shelley, 140) These warnings of harm against Frankenstein and everyone he holds dear, and the threat to turn his wedding night into a funeral service all come to pass. The figure of the creature is a spectre of death throughout the text, reminding his creator of what has been lost and what the inevitable conclusion of their story will be.

Like the desiccated product of Frankenstein’s experiments, the *Donna Scandalosa* of Naples is a physically frightful *memento mori*, one that dovetails the religious and the scientific. Again unattributed, this wax bust depicts a young woman in the midst of decay. Maggots and mice feed on her flesh, creating a sense of terrible activity that is lacking in any of the previously described waxen figures. Where the *Vanitas* depicts clean bone and a single creeping spider the *Donna* works with worms from her eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. Where the ‘Damned Soul’ screams in frozen agony, the *Donna* sags in her grave, gleaming wetly as if actively decaying before her viewers’ eyes. The physical description of this bust bears an uncanny resemblance to Victor Frankenstein’s dream in which his living cousin, and fiancé, transforms into his dead mother. In the dream, Victor moves in to kiss his betrothed but as he does so her lips “became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms and... I saw the grave worms crawling in the folds” of the

shroud. (Shelley, 39) Turning back to *La Scandalosa* with the edges of her shroud folded down around her shoulders, her death-darkened skin, and her body working with “grave worms” of its own, the parallel is difficult to ignore.



Figure 4 *La Donna Scandalosa*, Ospedale degli Incurabili

These descriptions, both the *Donna* and that of Frankenstein's dream-mother fold back towards the scientist's researches into resurrection, when to study life he had recourse to death. During his studies, Frankenstein “beheld the corruption of death succeed to the blooming cheek of life... the worm inherited the wonders of the eye and brain.” (Shelley, 34) With maggots boiling around her ears and eye sockets, it is a small step between the *Donna* and Frankenstein's researches, but it is the phrase *blooming cheek* that is more intriguing in this case as it leads to more specific conjectures about exactly what kind of corpses Frankenstein watched decay. Women

certainly do not have the monopoly on rosy cheeks, but across Shelley's novels it is women, particularly young, sexually mature women, who are consistently described in floral terms. Even within the *Frankenstein* narrative, the creature would later describe Justine as "blooming in the loveliness of youth and health" thus continuing and cementing the word choice in Shelley's personal lexicon (Shelley, 118). This use and reuse of the term "blooming" to almost exclusively describe young women is hardly confined to *Frankenstein*. In Shelley's *Lodore* (1835), Lord Lodore's former lover is described as having "passed the bloom of youth", while still remaining beautiful into her middle-age (Shelley, *Lodore*, 137). Shelley's *The Last Man* (1823) sees the narrator's sister, Perdita, in "in the fresh bloom of youthful womanhood" when he returns to England after an absence of two years (Shelley, *TLM*, 33). In "The Evil Eye" (1829), a young mother is described as having lost her "bloom... her eyes lost their lustre, her limbs their round full beauty" in distress over her kidnapped son (Shelley, *Tales*, 110). Pivoting back to wax figures, the *Donna*, as with many *memento mori*, depicts the demise of a young woman, gone to her grave before her time. Her importance lies in her ability to capture the eyes of her audience, their voyeurism is what makes her meaningful. Like Frankenstein observing the slowly desiccating corpses of young 'blooming' women for his study, observers are invited to stare at the *Donna*, a gaze intended to provoke change in those who watch her.<sup>53</sup> The prevalence of female corpses in the *Frankenstein* text will be discussed at length in relation to the female creature, but for now it must be noted that while Frankenstein always seems to have intended to build a male creature first, the masculine dead were not necessarily the objects of his most intense study.

The *Donna* is not simply an exercise in the grotesque, she is also a relatively accurate study in anatomy. The animal activity on the bust's "corroded nose and left cheek... has effectively exposed the anatomical layers, allowing us to distinguish between the skull, muscle, tissue, and skin." (Deckers, 86) This suggests a level of anatomical study and attention to detail that echoes the joint efforts of anatomists and craftsmen that would be a hallmark in Florentine waxwork more than a century later. However, the attention to anatomical detail is unsurprising given the physical location of the bust. The *Donna Scandalosa* has been housed

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<sup>53</sup> Necrophiliac voyeurism in *Frankenstein* will be discussed again in the final chapter of this thesis.

in the *Ospedale degli Incurabili* since at least the latter half of the eighteenth century and was likely on display in the winter of 1818/19 while the Shelleys were staying in Naples. Percy Shelley was, by many accounts, either a hypochondriac or genuinely, frequently ill and spent a great deal of his adult life believing he was dying of syphilis or another “ancient infirmity” (Crook, Guiton, 7). We know that while in Naples he was under the care of a Dr Roskilly, likely another Englishman, and that his treatment at the hands of this good doctor was less than gentle. While no explicit trips to the *Ospedale* are mentioned in Shelley’s *Journals*, it is hard to believe that she, her hypochondriac husband, their two small children, and her omnipresent stepsister would spend the winter months in a single place without one trip to at least the pharmacy, housed on the *Ospedale* grounds and at the time one of the most modern in Europe. Likewise, it is easy to believe that even the rumour of this particular piece of art would have interested the Shelleys; after all, the *Donna* was intended as a cautionary tale against those who died of venereal disease.

The *Donna* and the *Vanitas* are not the only *memento mori* to tinge the sacred with scientific reminders of what awaits mortal remains. The Sicilian Friar Zumbo<sup>54</sup> crafted a series of “Theatres of Death,” miniature scenes of disease and destruction so vivid that in his novel *Juliette, or Vice Amply Rewarded* (1801) Donatien Alphonse François, the Marquis de Sade, stated that “even as you gaze at [the ‘Theatres’] your other senses are played upon... as if you could detect the evil odours of mortality” emanating from the frozen scenes. (de Sade, *Juliette*, 265) Sade’s description of these miniature tableaux grows even more detailed, describing:

a sepulcher overflowing cadavers severally exhibiting all the various stages of decay, from the moment of death’s advent to the total decomposition of the individual... executed in wax colored so subtly and modeled so cunningly, that the thing itself could be neither more expressive of Nature nor more authentic. (de Sade, *Juliette*, 266)

The works of the scandalous Marquis de Sade would not have been sold by the respectable M.J. Godwin & Co., but he would have been known by reputation and rumour, if nothing else, in the Godwin circle. The Marquis’ more salacious works,

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<sup>54</sup> Or “Zummo”, spellings vary depending on sources

even if unread in the Godwin household, were well known by Lord Byron. When Annabella Milbank, Lady Byron, discovered her husband's secret copy of *Justine, or the Misfortunes of Virtue* (1791), a companion novel to *Juliette*, it was taken to her lawyer as evidence of Lord Byron's insanity. *Justine* also contains descriptions of wax figures used in a typically Sadian subversion of religious iconography, a woman posed in sexualized mockery of a crucified saint "so lifelike" that the narrator "was for a long time deceived by it." (de Sade, *Justine*, 224) Given Byron's interest in, and likely possession of a copy of this novel in Geneva, the correlations in name between the novel *Justine* and the character Justine in *Frankenstein* do not seem accidental. Like the *Frankenstein* Justine, the heroine of de Sade's novel is the victim of men throughout her life, including a trial in which she is unable to adequately defend herself, resulting in a guilty verdict and a horrific public punishment.

The death tableaux mentioned in *Juliette* were meant to inspire piety by depicting ruin on a grander scale than most *memento mori*. Where all the previous examples discussed depict the ruin and result of a single soul's transgressions, the theatres of death show all of humanity, infants to elderly, ravaged by the divine punishments of plague, sin, and death.



Figure 5 G. Zumbo's Plague, La Specola, Florence

While making the female creature, Frankenstein enters this conversation and echoes these fears that a lone sinner's transgression could cause the downfall of humanity. Petrified at the idea that, for the sake of his own well-being, he might create the means through which "a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror" he eventually destroys the unfinished female (Shelley, 138). In a time when the spread of disease and the generation of human life were both still largely mysteries, Frankenstein fears breaking the proverbial quarantine cordon thus becoming guilty of unleashing an unstoppable tide of evil upon not just his home, but all of humanity. Frankenstein imagines the warning given in Zumbo's tableaux and chooses a different route.

### **The Wax Venuses of Florence and Bologna**

Zumbo's fearful *memento-mori* are today housed in *La Specola*, a science museum in Florence dating to the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. *La Specola* also houses Felice Fontana's "encyclopaedia of wax," one of the most impressive collections of wax anatomical figures in Europe, but far from the only such collection. By the mid-1700s there "was hardly any European university of standing" that could not boast its own collection of wax specimens (Simoni, 382). What sets the *Specola* collection apart is the incredible detail and accuracy of the models, which "demonstrate[d] anatomical structures that had yet to be named or described" when they were created (Ebenstein, 29). The anatomical Venuses, the crowning jewels of Fontana's endeavours, will be discussed at length shortly, but first we should examine the Bolognese waxes said to have inspired Fontana.

For centuries, surgical study across Europe was taught primarily through textual study, comparative anatomy<sup>55</sup>, and the occasional, clandestine human dissection. Within that limited field, the advent of anatomical waxes, created by artisans and surgeons working in concert, was a revolution. Waxes did not putrefy, the problem of all anatomical study pre-refrigeration, and were far more accurate than the classical anatomy texts used by barber-surgeons for centuries. Furthermore,

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<sup>55</sup> The study of animal dissections to hypothesize about human anatomy.

the three dimensionality of wax figures made demonstrating the placement of organs within the chest cavity far simpler and more exact than a limiting, two dimensional drawing. Waxes were tinted with brilliant colours, allowing students to study full scale reproductions of what living organs would look like while in a person, rather than the bloodless and bleached specimens preserved in jars, or the potentially damaged or degraded examples hacked out by an anatomist's assistant on the dissection table.

In these ways wax specimens were vital to medical schools across the European continent, but they were not examined by students alone. Travelers of all stripes “not infrequently including women, [were] attracted by the galleries that displayed anatomical preparations.” (Simoni, 382) Nineteenth century travel books described the attractions of Europe for those who made the Grand Tour and those who only wished they could. The traditional tour of the European continent taken by young gentlemen after completing university study had been disrupted, first by the unrest of the French Revolution and later by the Napoleonic Wars, making travel books in England exceedingly popular as fewer and fewer British travellers were able to cross the channel and see the artistic and intellectual marvels of Europe for themselves. Among these attractions were European universities as hubs of art, literature, and science. Dr John Moore extolled the University of Bologna in his *A View of Society and Manners in Italy: with Anecdotes Relating to some Eminent Characters* (1781), noting that in the “most valuable library...any person may study, and have use of the books, four hours every day.”(Moore, 301) Students, of course, had longer access to research materials at their universities, but in this public access the Enlightenment ideal of education for the masses persisted into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Moore described the University of Bologna's *Stanza della Anatomia*, or Anatomy Room, and its occupants in great detail. The university housed examples of *scorticati*, or flayed figures, beginning with the figures of a man and woman in their “natural state” (nude), and subsequent figures working down through the anatomical layers; depicting the external muscles, and removing layers until the final figures are a pair of human skeletons stripped of all external trappings (Moore, 303). Besides the flayed figures, Moore also notes “several viscera of the human body separately,” but is unimpressed by these figures, comparing them to “the preparations of real

parts” in the museum created by the Scottish surgeon John Hunter in London (Moore, 303). Moore tells his readers that if the two collections were compared side by side, “the Bologna waxworks...would appear as their best casts of the Vatican Apollo and Laccoon would if placed beside the originals.” (Moore, 304)

However, the Bolognese wax exhibit was not the same in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as it was when Dr Moore made his tour of Europe in the 1770s. When Lord Byron saw the exhibit in April of 1817 he at first described his visit to the university succinctly, telling John Cam Hobhouse in a letter dated April 22 that he spent a day in Bologna “seeing bottled children and ‘parts of shame’ in waxwork at the institute.” (Byron, *Letters vol. V*, 216) This visit to the waxes came after Byron read Moore’s description of the university gallery sometime before the wayward Lord’s self-imposed European exile.<sup>56</sup> This succinct description to Hobhouse was Byron’s first stab at describing what he saw in Bologna, but not his last. When writing his half-sister, Augusta Leigh, in June of that year Byron told her that Bologna was celebrated for many things, including being the birthplace of popes, the production of sausages, and “a female professor of anatomy—who has left [the university] many models of the art in waxwork—some of them not the most decent.” (Byron, *Letters vol. V*, 231) The female professor, Anna Morandi-Manzolini, was an 18<sup>th</sup> century ceroplastician who lectured in universities across Europe, including the university in her home city of Bologna where she was Chair of Anatomical Modelling. After her death in 1774, the university acquired several of her figures, including a set of obstetric models crafted by Morandi and her husband Giovanni Manzolini (d. 1755) for Giovanni Antonio Galli’s school for obstetrics. Morandi’s portrait hung in the hall near her figures and at least some form of written attribution was likely given to her, as Byron was not the only traveller to comment on the sex of the former anatomy instructor. Hester Piozzi was also impressed by “the specimens of the human figure in wax... the work of a woman... they are reckoned incomparable of their kind” (Piozzi, 260). Together, Morandi in anatomy and Madame Tussaud in her waxwork exhibits were two of the best known ceroplasticians of the century, highly skilled and visible both during their lifetimes and after their deaths, leaving the cultural

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<sup>56</sup> We know this because in a letter from February 1817, Byron wrote to John Murray, his publisher back in England, asking Murray to copy out an unrelated passage from what he called “Moore’s *Views of Italy*” and send it to the poet where he was living in Venice at the time (Byron, 174).

conversation surrounding women ‘building bodies’, metaphorically, textually, or literally, open to those who came after them, like Mary Shelley.

Morandi’s obstetric models could be the scandalous figures Byron references, and certainly the gravid uterus in Florence caused consternation that will be discussed soon, but another explanation for the ‘parts of shame’ that raised Byron’s eyebrows is suggested in a letter to Murray dated the same day. In it, after a dig at Morandi’s understanding of the “standard of dimensions” of male anatomy, Byron turns to her female depictions, telling his publisher that “the feminine display was a little in the other extreme” (Byron, *Letters* vol. V, 234). This other extreme could, again, be a gravid uterus and other obstetric displays, or Byron could be attributing credit to Morandi for the figure of the *Venerina*, a recent addition to the Bolognese collection at the time of Byron’s visit and a younger sister to the anatomical Venuses lying in state in Florence.

The *Venerina*, or little Venus, is a “demountable” anatomical specimen. Created by Clemente Susini and his assistants and modelled after the Medici Venus that was commissioned by Felice Fontana for his museum, the *Venerina* and the Medici Venus before her were designed in removable layers. Unlike the *scorticati*, these Venuses are not a series of figures showing a progression, but rather individual waxen female cadavers with sections of their chest and abdomen designed to lift off, revealing sculpted organs that could in turn be removed to display what lay beneath. The demountable Venus at the University of Milan was described elegantly in Stolberg’s *Travels through Germany Switzerland Italy and Sicily* (1802) translated by Thomas Holcroft:

“Under a glass cover... there is a beautiful female figure, in wax, of the size of life. Surprised as we were, at the workmanship of the external parts, how much more fearfully were we astonished... when, after removing successively the outward membranes of the body... the entire internal structure” was displayed. (Stolberg, 420)

In this way the demountable Venuses could be ‘dissected’ time and again by students and the curious public without the mess or danger that accompanied an exploratory dissection.



Figure 6 Demountable Venus, La Specola, Florence

This ‘dissection’ of the female frame finds echoes in Frankenstein’s destruction of the female creature he has been blackmailed into crafting. While contemplating his work and the inevitable devastation he believes a female creature will bring, Frankenstein goes into a sort of fugue state, he tells his listener that “trembling with passion, [I] tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged.” (Shelley, 139) Later, when returning to gather his instruments and dispose of the pieces, Frankenstein describes the scene thus: “The remains of the half-finished creature...lay scattered on the floor, and I *almost* felt as if I had mangled the living flesh of a human being.” (Shelley, 142, emphasis added) The female creature is made of human parts, presumably pieces of women gathered across England and Scotland as Frankenstein and Clerval travelled, yet when viewing her remains it is not those disparate, harvested, women that Frankenstein sees. Instead, these partial corpses that *almost* formed a living being, are reduced to a disassembled *thing*, thrown across the ground. Pivoting to the Italian examples, lying supine on their velvet cushions, the wax Venuses are not meant to appear entirely dead, but rather detached almost-living objects. Their lesson is that humans “are a modular collection of organs, muscles, ducts, cavities, and tissues, assimilable (*sic.*) to a self-operating organism,” divorced from the humanity they appear to embody. (Simoni, 382)

Instead of active figures, they wait, like the female creature, to be inevitably disassembled by the hands of men engaged in scientific study.

This is the first published example of Shelley writing about the exposure of a woman's internal organs, but it is hardly the last. *Valperga* sees Euthanasia's stress in nursing her dying brother "lay bare the vitals of [her] being" in the final weeks of his life (Shelley, *Valperga*, 96). *The Last Man*'s narrator, Lionel Verney, is ostensibly male, but has long been recognized as an allusion to Shelley herself. Throughout the harrowing novel, as the characters are whittled away by the mysterious plague, nerves are 'strung' or 'strained' or 'steeled' for action, both real and metaphorical, however it is in the final pages, once Lionel has become the titular last man, that he asks the universe why "each sensitive nerve was thus to be anatomized" by the deaths of his loved ones and the loss of all mankind (Shelley, *TLM*, 362). In both examples, Shelley describes acute pain, particularly mourning, in terms of dissection. In her later works, this metaphorical dissection is of the one in pain, in *Frankenstein*, it is the body on the dissecting table, the female creature, who is torn open in agony.

I will make one more point on the University of Bologna *Scala de Anotomia* before moving on to *La Specola* and that is to speak of its most famous, or infamous, pupil. The first to postulate that "the mechanism of muscular movements could be caused by something analogous, if not identical to electricity" was Fontana, the court physician to Duke Leopold II who first commissioned the Medici Venice from Susini (Simoni, 383). Fontana, however, did not test his theories of applying electrical stimulus to muscle extensively, nor did he demonstrate them widely. That honour goes to Luigi Galvani, who, as a student at the University of Bologna, carried out his experiments in animal electricity surrounded by Morandi's figures and guarded by the *scorticati*. By the time Mary Shelley was challenged to write a ghost story in 1816, galvanism<sup>57</sup> had become a popular public experiment, one that Shelley mentions in 1831 as a topic of discussion among the Diodati circle that wintery-summer that partially inspired *Frankenstein*. Throughout their travels, the Shelleys passed through Bologna several times, and while no visit to the university is recorded, the conversation surrounding galvanism, both in their group and beyond

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<sup>57</sup> See the fourth chapter for a more extensive discussion of galvanism and *Frankenstein*.

was animated and has long been commented on, as has *Frankenstein*'s relationship to galvanic experimentation.

As mentioned previously, the *Scala de Anotamia* was an impressive assemblage of wax specimens, it was also far from the only such gallery in Europe. Grand Duke Leopold II of Tuscany, older brother to the ill-fated Marie Antoinette, was an adherent to Enlightenment tenets, believing that educating his subjects would lead them to better lives. To this end, in the 1770s he gave his court physician, Felice Fontana, the task of creating a museum of natural history for the edification of Florence. Mineral and animal specimens were assembled from across the globe, but inspired by the Bolognese example, Fontana asked his Duke to go a step further. Fontana's "grand ambitious aim was to create an encyclopaedia of the human body in wax—one that would render human anatomy accessible and understandable" to all (Ebenstein, 28). The expense of attaching a ceroplastics workshop to the museum would be great, but after convincing Leopold II that a "complete collection of anatomical models would make cadaveric specimens superfluous," thus saving the dignity of the dead who had previously been resigned to the anatomical theatre, funding was secured (Riva, 214). By this time Florence had been a trading hub for *ex-votos* for well over a century, meaning that there were skilled wax workers, accustomed to modelling the segmented human form for religious purposes, nearby. Now their skills were turned from the sacred to the scientific, crafting the Venuses who are still on display today, encased behind rosewood and glass in "wax figure shrines" like nude, incorruptible saints (Poggesi, 14).

Wax Venuses come in two distinct kinds, for want of a better term. The first are the demountable Venuses who have already been described, the second are what Ebenstein calls "Dissected Graces," female figures frozen at various points in dissection to "demonstrate different internal systems on the body" through observation rather than tactile exploration (Ebenstein, 32).<sup>58</sup> This gallery of wax figures in Florence was considered "the first in number, beauty, and exact conformity to the human frame" and the "finest Museum existing with respect to the anatomical preparations in wax and wood" in Europe (Eustace, 255, Starke, 73).

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<sup>58</sup> The collection in Florence also includes moulages, or wax examples of typical organs or organ systems displayed entirely separate from the body, but for purposes of this research we will focus instead on the full figures, rather than the partial.

These descriptions, the first from Rev. Eustace's *A Tour through Italy* (1813), and the second from Starke's *Travels in Europe* (1833)<sup>59</sup>, were not indicative of universal admiration of the Venuses. Joseph Forsyth, whose *Remarks on Antiquities, Art, and Letters during an Excursion to Italy* (1816) Shelley read in April 1819, while "struck by the immensity of this collection, which occupied fourteen rooms;" was not as enthusiastic about educating the public as the museum's founders (Forsyth, 55). Of the anatomical models he decried that "this awful region, which should be sacred to men of science is open to all. Nay, the very apartment where the gravid uterus and its processes lie unveiled is a favourite lounge of the ladies, who critique aloud all the mysteries of sex." (Forsyth, 56)

Wax figures did not just give women an opportunity to enter a medical profession, as they had with Morandi in Bologna, they also gave women the opportunity to observe three dimensional representations of their own organs in public and thus the anatomical conversation for themselves. For British women, the feminine control over childbirth in the form of midwifery had been steadily usurped by man-midwives and hospital-trained surgeons. Childbirth, possibly the oldest medical procedure on earth, had become a taboo topic among the gently bred English women of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, thus making a public space where women could observe and critique the mechanics of their own bodies with strangers a rare thing indeed. Added to the mysteries of pregnancy and childbirth are the 19<sup>th</sup> century dangers of the process, a theme that will be touched on again later in this chapter. Suffice for now that throughout her life Mary Shelley suffered more than her share of fraught pregnancies. She, like many women of her day, had ample reason to be actively curious about her reproductive organs and to desire discussing them with other women in a space where typically taboo topics could be brought into the light.

Both species of Anatomical Venus bear certain physical resemblances to Frankenstein's creature. While at first glance they appear the antithesis of each other, the Venuses are beautiful and the creature is not, the similarities lie in their creation. I have already spoken of the difficulties in assembling the creature and the care that went into selecting the raw materials for his construction, but the Venuses likewise

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<sup>59</sup> In the early 1840s, Shelley used Starke's *Travels in Europe* (1833) as a reference text for her own *Rambles in Germany and Italy* (1844). The above quote is therefore temporally irrelevant to *Frankenstein* but provides valuable linkage between Shelley's early fiction and her late travel writing.

are the productions of plural construction. We do not know exactly how many corpses Frankenstein “disturbed, with profane fingers, [while probing] the tremendous secrets of the human frame” when assembling the creature, but we do know that the Venuses required “over two hundred [corpses] for a single figure” to accurately reproduce the human form (Shelley, 36, Poggesi, 13). The creature and the Venuses are two species of conglomerate beings meant for the betterment of mankind but the similarity of their makeup does not end at the fact that it took multiple bodies to produce them.

On first viewing his creature alive, when the creator half-believed he would never wake, Frankenstein is horrified by the features he tried to craft as beautiful. Specifically, the scientist notes that “his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of pearly whiteness.” This description is interesting because one of the most striking features shared by all Venuses is their hair. Simoni attributes these outward beauties to “Fontana’s intention ... to combine the demonstrative character of the anatomical collection, rigorous from the scientific perspective, with a marked aesthetic value considered an essential stimulus to observation and study.” (Simoni, 382) This belief, in short, that the people would not be able to stomach studying the Venuses if they were not outwardly beautiful was an idea inherited from their precursors in Renaissance anatomical illustrations. To that end, Fontana laid the Venuses on their cushions in classical poses reminiscent of the goddess they are named after and crafted them with an eye towards beauty that is obvious even when viewing them today. For all the care that went into crafting their internal organs, their outward beauty and in particular the flowing and lustrous nature of the real human hair coming from their heads makes the Venuses bizarre fraternal siblings to the grotesque, yet equally well-coifed creature<sup>60</sup>. The teeth, likewise, form a link between the creature and wax figures, though not the Venuses. I have been unable to verify the material makeup of Venuses’ teeth, but the waxworks of Madame Tussaud often featured “real teeth when a subject’s features made it desirable” even though by the time she was touring the British Isles between 1808 and 1834 “teeth could realistically be modelled in white wax.” (Chapman, 137-138) Frankenstein calls these features, beautiful hair and teeth, “luxuriences(*sic*) [that] only formed a more

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<sup>60</sup> Well coifed at ‘birth’, you will remember that by the end of the novel Walton describes “long locks of ragged hair” hiding the creature’s features (Shelley, 187).

horrid contrast” with the reality of the creature’s visage (Shelley, 39). In a time before modern dental hygiene and hair-care, these hallmarks of beauty were chosen by Frankenstein and ceroplasticians alike in a bid to make the horrible acceptable, but results varied.

We do not know if Mary Shelley viewed anatomical waxes before her 1820 journal entry recording a trip to the Florentine “Gabineto di Fisica”, what I have been calling by its modern nomenclature *La Specola*; but their presence in the cultural zeitgeist could not have been missed (Shelley, *Journals*, 306). Not only were they mentioned in most Italian guidebooks, but several of Shelley’s friends and acquaintances knew about them. Byron was so entranced by the Bolognese waxes that he mentioned them in three letters that we know of and described them extensively in two of those. After seeing the Bolognese waxes in April 1817, Byron travelled to Florence “for the sake of the Venus.” (Byron, *Letters* vol. V, 211) There were several notable Venuses in Florence at this time, including Canova’s statue of Paulina Bonaparte as *Venus Victrix*, as well as the marble *Venus de Medici*<sup>61</sup>, and Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus*, both housed in the Uffizi, however Byron also notes a visit to “the Pitti Palace Gallery.” (Byron, *Letters* vol. V, 218) The Pitti Palace stands mere steps from *La Specola*, and while it would be unusual for Byron to play coy, it is not impossible that he visited the wax Venuses and failed to mention them in his letters. His traveling companion, Dr John Polidori, also serves as a likely connection between Mary Shelley and anatomical waxes. Polidori, the son of an Italian father and an English mother, who graduated medical school a matter of months before an acquaintance recommended him to Byron as a traveling companion on the poet’s self-imposed European exile.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries Edinburgh was home to the best medical institutions in Europe. It is no coincidence that when touring Britain before building the female creature, Frankenstein and Clerval spend a week in the city. As a student in Edinburgh Polidori likely would not have had extensive first-hand experience with wax figures like those found on the continent, as wax anatomical figures were not

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<sup>61</sup> The Venus de Medici was described in Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* Canto IV, as “the Goddess loves in stone” (Byron, CH, Canto IV, line 433)

manufactured in significant numbers in Britain<sup>62</sup> until the 1830s and were only rarely imported, but they still likely would have been known and discussed by students and lecturers in the same way today that students and lecturers speak about the tools or materials available in other institutions. However, it is not only as a doctor that Polidori would have heard of these wax figures. His father, Gaetano Polidori, was a “Tuscan man of letters” and would have known about the famous natural history museum that was built well before he left the region to live in England (Rossetti, 2). The Shelley-Byron circle spent part of the summer of 1816 discussing medical oddities and experiments across the continent and it is reasonable to posit that wax figures would have come up on one of their many, late night discussions. After parting company with Byron, Polidori traversed Italy alone interviewing fellow doctors and learning where he could. While he does not explicitly mention viewing the waxes during his time in Florence in 1817, again it seems unlikely that he would have passed through the city without the conversation surrounding the gallery.

Finally, there is the fact that Mary Shelley viewed the Venuses for herself in January 1820. Ignoring the warnings of her countryman, Shelley wrote “go to Gabineto di Fisica” in her journal entry for January 21, but no further detail is given (Shelley, *Journals*, 306). Whether she admired the craftsmanship of the figures, discussed the collection with the directors who, according to both Eustace and Forsyth were available to answer curious travellers’ questions, or turned away from the wax cadavers in horror to admire the more socially acceptable “beautiful collection of flowers in wax” as Colston would suggest in her *Journal of a Tour in France, Switzerland, and Italy* (1823), is not recorded in Shelley’s known letters or journals (Colston, 115). Even if the latter was her choice that day, the fact remains that she knew of the waxes’ existence, that she read of the horrid anatomical processes rendered in wax and still chose to cross the threshold of the museum where they were housed. Like her father, Shelley could be notoriously cryptic in her *Journals*; that she was comfortable enough to still leave a written record of the

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<sup>62</sup> A few wax torsos from this time are displayed in the Surgeon’s Hall History of Surgery Museum in Edinburgh, but these are casts of exceptional wounds or dissections likely made by pouring plaster over a single cadaver, and then filling that cast with colored wax after the fact. In detail and elegance, they are comparable to the Italian waxes only as the extreme end of a very broad spectrum of moulage possibilities.

excursion is indicative that she did not find the gallery's contents overly objectionable.

### **Pregnant and Dangerous: Demountable Venuses and the Female Creature**

As I discussed previously the limiting factors involved in crafting the initial creature, we will now examine the factors impacting Frankenstein's search for raw materials while building the female. While the minutia of Frankenstein's timeline for assembling his first creature are debatable, we know that two years were spent on research, and that during the process of construction "the summer months passed" and the creature was finally completed "on a dreary night of November", meaning that almost half of a year came and went while Frankenstein was engrossed in sewing together corpses (Shelley, 37, 38). The female, on the other hand, is assembled in the "month or two" that Frankenstein absents himself from Clerval during their Scottish rambles (Shelley, 135)<sup>63</sup>. This can partially be attributed to practice; with the male Frankenstein was discovering an entirely new path of study, with the female he was improving on established technique. Another factor, however, is that the raw materials for the female were much more plentiful. Where the corpses comprising the male were limited by size, attractiveness, and sex, the female was presumably limited by age and sex alone and young female corpses were relatively common in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain. Even with the blossoming field of obstetrics devoted expressly to preventing such tragedies, as Mary Shelley's own origin story can attest, so-called 'man midwives', or male surgeons who integrated themselves into the traditionally female roles of midwife/obstetrician, were not always successful at keeping both mother and baby alive. Though Shelley's final draft was sent to printers before the tragedy and therefore could not have been impacted by this specific event, when *Frankenstein* was published in January 1818, the entire British Empire was still reeling from the death of Princess Charlotte in childbirth and the loss of her unborn son in November 1817, the royal losses jointly serving as reminders that no woman was immune to fatal complications during

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<sup>63</sup> Mary Shelley's chronology within the *Frankenstein* text was exacting, perhaps most notably in that the dates between Walton's first letter to his sister and his last map out nine months, or a full gestation period. See Robinson's *The Original Frankenstein* (2009) for his work on time within the *Frankenstein* narrative.

childbirth (Cody, 311). Young women dying frequently enough that while “most mothers survived... all of them would have known of other women who died in childbirth or soon after,” meant that Frankenstein had plenty of raw materials to utilize (Cody, 41). The fact that these materials would be gathered from unfortunate young mothers was, however, problematic from Frankenstein’s point of view. By virtue of having died in childbirth these female corpses were necessarily fertile and belonged to women who had previously been sexually active, therefore rationalizing Frankenstein’s greatest fears for his creature: reproduction.

We return now to the demountable Venuses and their inherent nature as feminine and pregnant, two things that Victor Frankenstein feared above all else. You will remember from the previous chapter that there was already literary precedent in golem and automaton fiction for sexually dangerous manufactured women, however neither golem-Bella, nor Olympia had reproductive capabilities. A female creature, made from pieces of fertile human women, would not be so limited. While contemplating the horror of his second creation, pieced together of the previously pregnant, the scientist is struck by the realization that his lonely, entirely masculine creature is determined to have a companion built for him for one primary reason. Frankenstein posits that when two sexually compatible creatures meet “the first results of those sympathies... would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth.” (Shelley, 138) This fear of the female and what she represents as the potential progenitor of an entire race of monsters that “might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror,” is the dark sister to Frankenstein’s early ambitions of fathering a race of grateful beings (Shelley, 138). When confronted by the nearly complete female form, and what she now represents, Frankenstein was given the choice we examined in the light of Zumbo’s work, and “trembling with passion, tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged.” (Shelley, 139) The rage this engenders in the creature and the spiral of effects this causes is well known and does not need to be discussed here, but I will touch on a final point regarding this episode. While cleaning his laboratory, Frankenstein views “the remains of the half-finished creature, whom I had destroyed, lay scattered on the floor, and I almost felt as if I had mangled the living flesh of a human being.” (Shelley, 142)

This image, of a once whole body now segmented and a female who could once bear life and no longer carries that promise, deconstructs the Italian Venuses. The image itself is biblical, coming from Judges 19 and the Levite who “took a knife, and laid hold on his concubine, and divided her, together with her bones, into twelve pieces...” (Judges, 19:29) This after the concubine dies as a result of a brutal night of “abuse” at the hands of a mob of men who asked to see her master and were given the woman instead. Thus the sexualization, violation, and segmentation of the female creature and the Venuses find their roots in scripture and their foremother in the story of a concubine sacrificed for the sake of a man. In the *Frankenstein* text, the image of these wax women, who lay eternally sliced open in the semblance of surgery like the female creature under construction, is reduced to mangled pieces “scattered on the floor” for the sake of a man’s peace of mind (Shelley, 142). This is notable because the demountable Venuses, despite their slim build and erotic appearance, always carry one secret coiled deep inside them. The final segment to be removed when conducting a “dissection” of these figures is the cover of their uteruses, and inside all of them is a curled foetus. The Venuses and the female creature together, the combined embodiments of the creation that science promises, are never given the chance to fulfil that promise, instead they become bodies segmented and fallen asunder.

Pregnancy is a painful and sometimes deadly process even today; in the Romantic era it was even more so as Mary Shelley’s personal history attested. Frankenstein’s fear of his creations reproducing on a massive scale externalized the fears of a young mother who had experienced the duality of bringing forth new life while flirting with death. However, this concept of Frankenstein as embodying and externalizing an essentially feminine struggle is complicated by his masculinity and position as a man of science. By taking away bodily autonomy and agency from a being that cannot make her own decisions, Frankenstein cements his place firmly with the students and tourists dissecting the anatomical Venuses, and the man-midwives who practiced early obstetrics on the bodies of poor women before ingratiating themselves into the lives of rich women and their families. In the rigidly stratified and gendered worlds of both surgery and British society, man-midwives gained social power through their medical control of pregnancy and childbirth, sometimes with disastrous results. Women, their internal organs, and their

reproductive capabilities can only be understood or controlled through the destruction of the female form.

### **The Other Waxworks: Madam Tussaud**

From the physical destruction of the female form to a woman of great agency, finally, we turn to Madame Tussaud, a woman still known the world over as possibly the most influential ceroplastician to ever live. Born Marie Grosholtz in 1760, Madame Tussaud was the daughter of a Swiss widow. Her mother, Madame Grosholtz entered the employ of Dr Philippe Curtius in 1763, taking her daughter with her into the doctor's household. Dr Curtius originally "took to moulding wax replicas of anatomical organs" for his medical practice (Chapman, Leslie, 17). By the time Madame Grosholtz came into the doctor's employ he had long since succumbed "to the fascination of modelling with warmed wax, [and] turned to portraiture" for which he gained fame across the city of Berne, where he and the Grosholtzs lived (Chapman, Leslie, 17). In 1765, when Curtius caught the eye of the Prince de Comte and was invited to live in Paris under the royal patronage, the doctor brought his maid and young Marie to the capital with him.

Marie Grosholtz's life in Paris bears some resemblance to Shelley's youth in Godwin's house. Under royal patronage to capture the living faces of Paris's most illustrious persons, Curtius's home, much like Godwin's, became a way-point for the city's powerful, influential, and enlightened. Curtius's table attracted the brightest "literati and artists," Tussaud's memoirs record Voltaire and Rousseau arguing over dinner "while the reflecting Dr [Benjamin] Franklin would calmly regard" the combatants and "the young La Fayette... full of fire and animation" listened to all, "his features, expressive of his ardent temperament." (Tussaud, 9) Marie, who at the tender age of six began acting as protégé to the man she would call 'uncle' for the rest of her life, was part and party to these discussions and allowed to listen to Curtius' guests just as Shelley and her clutch of siblings would be allowed and encouraged to interact with the men and women who came to philosophize with the author of *Political Justice*. Marie, like Mary, would learn from her youth the trade that would define her life and her place in history. Where Mary Shelley learned to

write and earn by her pen just as her father and mother before her, Marie learned to craft and copy the faces of the living and the dead in wax.

Because of the influential circles Curtius, and therefore Marie, moved in, the girl was given opportunities far beyond those typical to the daughter of a domestic servant. When Princess Elizabeth took a liking to Marie as a young teenager, the girl moved into the palace at Versailles and became the princess' instructor in waxwork. Marie Curtius, as she was then known, having taken her adoptive uncle's name, lived in the royal household eight years. It was during this time that she took the "life masks" of the royal family, little knowing that she was crafting the figures that would be put on display in Petit Trianon in 1790, showcasing the opulence of the royal family for the revolutionary public after the royals themselves had been banished or imprisoned. In 1789, with tensions in Paris rising and the revolution stirring, Dr Curtius called Marie back from Versailles for her own safety, prudently too as the dramatic commencement of the French Revolution was about to literally come shouting at his door. Mary Wollstonecraft arrived in France in late 1792 with "a tricolor in her bonnet and her head full of New Philosophy." (St. Claire, 158) She was there to record the French Revolution, eventually publishing her observations in the voluminous *Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (1795). That said, her arrival occurred three years after the events in question, and was published a further two years after that, meaning that Wollstonecraft wrote both without the perspective that comes from looking back from more time, or the advantage of having been there herself. The event of which I am speaking is the requisitioning of the busts of the Minister of Finance, Monsieur Necker, and the Duc d'Orleans by a protesting mob on July 12, 1789.

When Marie Curtius returned to her uncle's home in early 1789, it was to a city changed and a household charged with revolutionary fervour. Where previously debate had been welcomed and heated, but never dangerous, now "fanatic politicians, furious demagogues, and wild theorists [were] for ever thundering their anathemas against the monarchy" in Monsieur Curtius' home (Tussaud, 73). Curtius continued to mould the faces that defined Paris, but now the features he sculpted were those of the resistance. As the Terror progressed in the coming years, the visages of Robespierre, Marat and his assassin Charlotte Corday, Danton, and the

infamous Judge Hébert would all take their places in Curtius' *Salon de Cire*. However, in 1789 the majority of Curtius's figures were still members of the nobility and government officials, including the busts of Necker and the Duc d'Orleans. On July 12, 1789 the revolutionaries in Paris heard that King Louis XVI demanded the immediate removal and exile of his former finance minister, still popular with the citizens as being a non-noble holding a high government seat, and the Duc d'Orleans who was an early supporter of the Revolution. By the time the people heard and became outraged, both men had already left the city. The citizens took to the street, chanting the names of their heroes "and it was at last suggested that they should proceed to M. Curtius's museum of waxworks, and demand the busts of their two favourites." (Tussaud, 85) Adolphus' *Biographical Memoirs of the French Revolution* (1799), which Shelley read in 1814, continues the episode saying that the busts were then "carried about the streets" in an impromptu funeral service, the waxen images replacing the flesh of these two living men in a ceremony mourning the passing of their ideals rather than their lives (Adolphus, 231). Marie Tussaud, too, remembers a funeral service of sorts, reporting that the crowd "elevated [the busts] on small pedestals... and, covering them with crape, paraded them through the streets," peacefully (Tussaud, 86).

Mary Wollstonecraft differs from Adolphus and Tussaud, stating that "the citizens of Paris were burning in effigy the two obnoxious ministers" who had been expelled from the city and the country (Wollstonecraft, 56-57). In her telling the wax of the images again replaces the flesh in ancient ritual, but rather than the flesh being subsequently honoured with funerary rites, it is burned in place of the real thing, a punishment wrought on the image for the sins of its original. Like the creature, who is rudely modelled after Frankenstein's ideal of what man should look like and abhorred by everyone who sees him, in Wollstonecraft's version of this story, Curtius's busts were hated by the masses for their appearance, and the men they are modelled after. The idea of destruction of an image through fire is also interesting in relation to Frankenstein and his creation, as the only force that seems to truly harm the creature is fire. Wax is, of course, particularly vulnerable to heat and flame, the only notable weaknesses the creature seems to also have. When first discovering the embers of a vagabond's abandoned campfire, the creature seeks to touch the glowing coals "but quickly drew [his hand] out again with a cry of pain."

(Shelley, 81) Through this the creature learns to fear fire. When the creature is shot he says nothing of pain, only that the force of the bullet caused him to sink “to the ground,” and when he chooses to end his life it is not a pistol that he requests. Instead the creature chooses immolation<sup>64</sup>, to destroy his body on an ice floe and allow his ashes to “be swept into the sea by the winds.” (Shelley, 115, 191) These accounts of requisitioning the busts differ wildly in tone, but unmistakably describe the same event, making Mary Wollstonecraft possibly the first of the Godwin circle to write about Monsieur Curtius or the future Madame Tussaud.

Another woman in Godwin’s orbit, Anne Plumptre, also documented the Curtius exhibit in the course of her work as a translator. Plumptre and her sister, Annabella (called Bell), moved in the same social milieu and while her translation of the *Sketch of the Life and Literary Career of Augustus von Kotzebu* (1800) does not appear on either the Godwin or Shelley reading lists, it offers perhaps the fullest catalogue of the wax exhibit from the time:

Another man was no less vociferous in recommending to our notice a collection of wax figures as large as life, which, indeed, we found well worth seeing. There were, the King, the Queen, the Dauphin, with Madame Royale, La Fayette, Baillie, Voltaire, Rousseau, Dr Franklin, the two celebrated and interesting prisoners, Maseres(sic) de la Tude and Baron Trenck; the Indian Ambassadors, who were once here; Madame du Barre asleep, and scarcely half-clothed; Maria Theresa, Clermont Tonnerre, and a multitude besides, all dressed according to their proper costume, and all... extraordinary likenesses (von Kotzebu, 197-198)

Plumptre’s translation of this account was published in 1800, but the account itself comes from the end of 1790, just before the madness of the Revolution and subsequent Terror, when royalty and philosophical revolutionaries could be portrayed together without drawing ire or inciting violence.

From this flattering review of the Parisian waxes, we pivot now to Thomas Holcroft, one of William Godwin’s oldest friends, and his much more explicit

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<sup>64</sup> See the final chapter for a more in-depth discussion of the importance of the creature’s self-immolation

account of Curtuis' *Salon de Cire*. During their relationship, Holcroft and Godwin prized frankness and the free exchange of ideas in their communication, traits that drew them together and eventually, in 1805, tore them apart. Their friendship ended and the two men would not reconcile until 1809 in the last week of Holcroft's life. It is because of the unremitting honesty prized by Holcroft that we have one of the least favourable descriptions of Marie and Dr Curtius' wax museum in Paris. Where Madam Tussaud's memoirs insist on the consistent quality of the wax portraits she and her adoptive uncle created throughout their time in the French capital, Holcroft's *Travels from Hamburg through Westphalia, Holland, and the Netherlands to Paris*(1804) paints a different picture.<sup>65</sup>

Before reading this excerpt, it should be noted that Curtius maintained a two part exhibit in Paris, a tradition that Marie would continue when she and the waxes immigrated to the British Isles and began touring there in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Guests to the museum would pay a fee to enter the main exhibit, which displayed the glamorous and impressive: images of nobility, royals, philosophers and Revolutionary heroes dressed resplendently, often in clothing given to Curtius by the originals. For an additional fee, the curious could enter *las Caverne des Grande Voleurs*, or the Cave of Thieves, which was devoted to the gruesome and the fearful. This separate room was the origin of Madame Tussaud's modern Chamber of Horrors and is the space where Curtius and his protégé modelled thieves and murderers and the punishments they received for their crimes. It was a room full of *memento mori* without the religious implications; these were not the tortures of the soul but the flesh, the earthly punishments meted out by earthly judges for earthly transgressions. It was this second chamber, or cavern, that Holcroft described to his readers:

Of this exhibition I must stop to say a word... The showman and his thieves had but one apartment; but it was made darker than twilight and partitioned off to resemble cells. The malefactors were put in different attitudes; sitting, standing, and lying, each in straw, not the cleanest, and loaded with chains.

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<sup>65</sup> Mary Shelley read Holcroft's *Travels* in 1816 while in Bath with her family, waiting for her step-sister Claire to give birth to Byron's daughter.

...

The effect was more than theatrical, it was oppressive; and yet was produced by something like contemptible means: for these heroes were most of them nothing but manikins; stuffed dresses; surmounted some with painted barber's blocks, and others, that were more in the light, with wax rudely modelled. (Holcroft, 209)

The idea of a man "rudely modelled" and a poor craftsman's unsuccessful attempt at art will be familiar from Frankenstein's endeavours to make the creature beautiful. However, it is the nature of the settings where these crude "manikins" were displayed that is more intriguing in this instance: the jail cell. It is perhaps more indicative of the universality of 19<sup>th</sup> century prison conditions, but the malefactors in their straw and chains are evocative of the prison scenes depicted in *Frankenstein*, particularly the plight of Justine when Frankenstein and Elizabeth visit her after her sentencing. When the cousins visit Justine they find her "sitting on some straw at the further end [of the jail]; her hands were manacled, and her head rested on her knees." (Shelley, 65) Furthermore, to this scene, Frankenstein is almost entirely a spectator. While Elizabeth and Justine speak, Frankenstein "retired to a corner of the prison room" where he can observe them and hide his own emotions (Shelley, 67). It is not until Justine approaches him directly, that Frankenstein deigns to interact with the prisoner. The posture and plight of Justine echoes the Terror Court of the French Revolution, where even the suspicion of wrong could condemn a person to death, and further the tableaux arranged by Monsieur Curtius for the edification of his public. The posture of an imprisoned woman is also notable, as though she would not have been there when Holcroft visited Curtius' *Caverne* in the 1780s, in 1793 the visage of Charlotte Corday, assassin of Marat, would take her place in the Thieves' Cave, her likeness taken by Tussaud just days before her death.

The voyeurism of Frankenstein and Elizabeth's visit to Justine is multiplied during the imprisonment of Frankenstein himself in Ireland. Where Justine only requests the presence of her mistress and is visited by Frankenstein as well because Alphonse Frankenstein does not want the young woman meeting a convicted murderess alone, Frankenstein endures several visitors while imprisoned. During his months convalescing in the Irish prison, Frankenstein is attended by an old woman

and a physician, as well as visited by Mr. Kirwin, the magistrate, and eventually his father, who sees with despair “the barred windows, and wretched appearance of the room” where his son is being kept (Shelley, 149). This concept of a stream of visitors passing through the jail echoes the layout of Curtius’ exhibit. Frankenstein, and Justine before him, are cautionary tales in cages, destined to be viewed by the curious and despairing public. Curtius, and later Tussaud, argued often for the educational merits of their wax figures, both by showing examples of historical figures and by offering moral instruction in the Thieves’ Cave. Like tourists viewing the wax spectacle for edification, several of Frankenstein and Justine’s prison-house visitors search for answers. Elizabeth meets with Justine to ask why she killed William and receives the previously discussed moral argument on earthly punishment versus eternal torment. When Kirwin and Frankenstein’s father speak with the imprisoned man in search of answers to their own questions about Clerval’s death, each is each enlightened in different ways. Kirwin is given the most truthful account of Frankenstein’s life and work until Walton, whereas the elder Frankenstein seeks primarily to ascertain his son’s welfare. One final note on *Frankenstein* as a cautionary tableau comes from a confinement of a different sort: his final days on Walton’s ship. Before beginning his tale, Frankenstein tells the young explorer “I do not know that the relation of my disasters will be useful to you; yet... I imagine that you may deduce an apt moral from my tale, one that may direct you if you succeed in your undertaking and console you in case of failure.” (Shelley, 203) Thus, in confinements of all kinds the scientist holds true to Tussaud and Curtius’ ideal of striving to educate his audience.

Through texts, Mary Shelley could have learned about these Parisian incarnations of Madame Tussaud’s craftsmanship; however this is not the only exposure Shelley would have received to this particular form of waxwork. Through his wide circle of acquaintances, William Godwin serves as a direct link between his daughter and the early incarnation of the Chamber of Horrors. Marie Curtius cut her teeth during the Terror by waiting at the guillotine steps to mould deathmasks from the severed heads of royalty and other notable victims of the Revolution. However, after immigrating to London with her waxes and oldest son, the woman now named Madame Tussaud no longer needed that skill in her repertoire. The notable exception to this comes in the form of Colonel Edward Despard, convicted of attempting to

assassinate King George III. Despard was an acquaintance of William Godwin, and his was reportedly the last severed head Madame Tussaud ever handled.

Despard served from 1783-1790 as “Superintendent of His Majesty’s Affairs in Honduras,” until he was recalled to London in 1790 and relieved of his duties without pension (Chapman, 23). He first appears in the *Diary* in April 1794 as “D’Esparre jun<sup>r</sup>”, suggesting that Godwin may have known Despard’s father (Godwin, *Diary*, 29 April, 1794). From there he appears several more times in the philosopher’s *Diary*, under a variety of spellings, at meetings and dinners with Godwin. What the *Diary* does not record is that during this time Despard was spiralling deeper into bitterness with the government that would eventually culminate in an ill-conceived plot to “seize the Tower of London and the Bank of England and to assassinate” the king (Chapman, 25). Despard and his co-conspirators were captured, their attempt thwarted, in December of 1802. Godwin who had last recorded meeting the Colonel in October 1801, recorded on February 7, 1803 the “Trial of Despard” and again on the 21<sup>st</sup> of that month “Execution of Despard and six.” (Godwin, *Diary*, 7, 21 February, 1803). Despite a character witness by Lord Nelson himself on behalf of Despard, all seven conspirators were hung, drawn, and quartered in front of the crowd at Horsemonger Gaol, a little over two miles from the Godwin home on Skinner Street. Just as she had during the Terror a decade before, Madame Tussaud waited at the gallows to receive the would-be assassin’s severed head and to make a cast of his face.

Tantalizingly there are dozens of entries in Godwin’s *Diary* noting trips to an “exhibition”, as Madame Tussaud’s display of waxes in London were then known (Chapman, 31). Discouragingly, while a prolific and faithful diarist, Godwin was not an elaborate one and thus we may never know for certain if he took his young family to view the famous French waxes and the face of the man he once knew. We can only speculate that someone as socially active as William Godwin would have asked after the mortal remains of the man he once knew and therefore heard of, if not witnessed personally, the waxen displays of Madame Tussaud. Equally intriguing is Hay’s revelation that a decade later Leigh Hunt, radical publisher and friend to Godwin and the Shelleys, would be “allocated a cell previously occupied by Colonel Despard” for the first several weeks of his incarceration in Surrey Gaol for libelling

the Prince Regent (Hay, 4). Hunt and Percy Shelley became friends in 1813 during Hunt's incarceration. Though Hunt appears in Godwin's *Diary* before Percy enters the Godwin orbit, it is only after the Shelleys return to England in 1817, and Percy Shelley specifically returns to London that year that Hunt becomes a regular figure in Godwin's records. As Hunt's imprisonment for publishing material deemed politically libellous was a cornerstone of his identity as a radical figure, it is reasonable that he would have spoken about it with the older philosopher and the tyranny of equating a publisher with an attempted assassin through cell allocation.

The final potential connection between Mary Shelley and Madame Tussaud's exhibition comes in the much-abused form of Mary Jane Clairmont-Godwin, her stepmother. Mary Jane was a woman of white lies and many pasts whose life record before marrying William Godwin is disputed at best. One biography asserts that she was the daughter of a French merchant. Another source claims her father was a magistrate at Lausanne and that her mother hailed from Geneva. The truth could be either, or neither, even during her lifetime the second Mrs. Godwin was an acknowledged liar who would fabricate whatever truths she thought necessary to maintain her own respectability and that of her children. It appears that she never had qualms about attempting to maintain Mary Shelley's reputation, nor was any love lost on the part of her step-daughter. Whatever the truth of her origin, she was fluent in French, translating several texts for MJ Godwin & Co and, as St Clair put it: "had travelled widely in Europe... had close connections to the French émigré community." (St. Claire, 242) Madame Tussaud was a notable member of the London, French émigré community for years after her arrival in England, before she and her waxes began touring. It is very possible that during that time Mrs. Godwin could have heard tell of this impressive woman, who left Paris, a son, and a husband behind to further her career and show the public some of the most famous faces in Europe.

Unlike her sister authors, mentioned at the opening of this chapter, Mary Shelley never uses the words "wax figure" in the *Frankenstein* text. Instead, she enters the multifaceted conversation surrounding wax figures by describing the creature's body as a craftwork in visceral terms, in a time when waxwork bodies lay thick across Europe. She describes the creature's prospective mate as a female to be

disassembled, echoing the demountable Venuses whose lurid details had been splashed across Italian guidebooks for decades. She describes Frankenstein's nightmare in the decaying terms of the *Donna Scandalosa* and his imprisonment with the voyeuristic eye of a guest at a wax exhibition. Not only does her text echo the language of European wax figures, but the authoress herself has numerous, hitherto unremarked on, points of contact with wax figures and those who created, displayed, and described them. Europe was inundated with these figures and they lurk as echoes, described, but unacknowledged throughout the *Frankenstein* text. Moreover, wax figures offered women a certain level of control over the human frame, whether by granting them a space where frank discussions of anatomy could be held, or by giving certain women the power to physically mould the figures with their own two hands. In a time when knowledge of the human body, and access to the means of learning anatomy, was controlled by men, wax cadavers offered a modicum of power-reclamation, even while they exploited the feminine figure. Long before Shelley dreamed of her hideous progeny, men and women across the continent were making men and dissecting women for education, entertainment, and science.

## Chapter Three

### A Tale of Continental Proportions: The Creature and South America

In going hither and thither he observed in the outskirts of a small town a red-and-blue placard setting forth the great advantages of the Empire of Brazil as a field for the emigrating agriculturist. Land was offered there on exceptionally advantageous terms. Brazil somewhat attracted him as a new idea. Tess could eventually join him there, and perhaps in that country of contrasting scenes and notions and habits the conventions would not be so operative which made life with her seem impracticable to him here.

*Tess d'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman*, Thomas Hardy

Early in *Frankenstein*, the titular scientist enters the long-running European conversation surrounding South America by making a speech to his listener on the folly of human passion in the face of discovery. Rather than reckless abandon in the throes of exploration, he warns that the true philosopher must always “preserve a calm and peaceful mind and never... allow passion or transitory desire to disturb” that tranquillity (Shelley, 37). He continues that if such practice had been observed, “America would have been discovered more gradually and the empires of Mexico and Peru not been destroyed.” (Shelley, 38) This is the first of several overt references to South America that Shelley makes in the *Frankenstein* text, the others relating to the lengths Frankenstein would go in pursuit of his creation, or the creature’s desire to immigrate to South America with a female mate that Frankenstein will craft for him. The purpose of this chapter is to look beyond what appears at first to be a passing comment and unpack what is left unsaid about the literary and cultural space held by the South American continent in European consciousness as shown by the literature of the day in general, and within the Shelley/Godwin circle in particular.

While historically speaking it should be understood that Mexico and Peru are distinct countries with their own rich histories, at the time of *Frankenstein’s* writing

these were the names of Spanish viceroyalties, massive districts whose borders far exceed those of the modern countries of the same names. Likewise, while South and Central America, as well as the colonized islands of the Caribbean each have their own important borders, distinctions, and histories, for the sake of cohesion I will generally refer to all of the above under the umbrella of ‘South America’. As the creature makes no specifications when stating his desire to leave Europe and Frankenstein only names Mexico and Peru, neither of which were mapped in great detail at this time, and the Andes mountain range, which runs along the western edge of the South American continent, I likewise will make few distinctions. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century many of the territories today recognized as modern South American countries, were on the cusp of or in the process of rebelling against the European powers that had claimed and colonized them. This independence was often gained with the help of British recruits, who, after the Napoleonic wars, looked west for work on foreign battle fields and the promise of riches to be had in the New World. In this light, the creature’s vague encompassment of the entire continent is apt, given how rapidly countries could gain or lose their independence, names, and territories with the shifting tides of independence.

With that caveat, the integral question of this chapter is: Why South America? Judging from the reading list recorded in her *Journals*, Mary Shelley took an active interest in many corners of the globe that were then largely unexplored by Europeans. As has been previously mentioned, the reading lists, while extensive, are an imperfect guide to Mary Shelley’s interests, documenting only a handful of years in a lifelong reading career both before and after her relationship with Percy. That said, in this case the lists are a good indicator of Mary Shelley’s longstanding interest on travel beyond the European continent. Included in the reading list are histories of famous voyages circumnavigating the globe, travel narratives to Russia—consequently where the *Frankenstein* narrative begins, explorations of Africa, the region today known as the Middle East, India, the modern Korean peninsula, and China. Among the many, varied interests represented are at least a dozen texts on the history and conquest of South America, as well as fictions about South American subjects such as Madame de Graffigny’s *Lettres d’une Peruvienne* (*Letters of a Peruvian Princess*) (1747), which Shelley read in 1815, or the plays of Augustus von Kotzebue, mentioned in the previous chapter for his descriptions of

wax figures, *The Virgin in the Sun* and its sequel *the Death of Rolla*, plays originally in German published in translation in the first volume of Benjamin Thompson's *The German Theatre* (1805). In the case of *Virgin*, its mention in a letter from 1815 was likely not Shelley's first exposure to the story, as Godwin read Plumptre's translation of the text in 1799 and recorded attending a performance of the play at Covent Garden in July 1812. Both Plumptre sisters were active German to English translators and part of Godwin's social circle, appearing in his *Diary* a dozen times each between the 1790s and 1819.<sup>66</sup> Texts like *Virgin* and *Letters*, published in the authors' original language, German and French respectively, and then subsequently translated to English multiple times to fully reach the British market, demonstrate the exotic allure of the South American continent and her peoples on the European zeitgeist. In particular, the long-since decimated native population of South America, became objects of literary fascination and romanticization in Europe at this time. This interest in South America was not limited to the Shelleys' intimate circle of family and friends, nor with von Kotzebue and de Graffigny as literary evidence, can we limit it to a purely British concern. The fascination with South America, a place where men "were merely transitory inhabitants... passersby in a land where nonhuman denizens... possessed more permanent claims" was of continental proportions (Ackerman, 134). All of Europe was interested in, and speaking and writing about, the tropical continent across the ocean, not just Mary Shelley and her creature.

A survey of William Godwin's reading list and writing shows that Shelley's interests in the continent were fostered by her father, as much as they were fuelled by her reading after leaving his house. William Godwin's *Diary* is dotted with South American texts, both fiction and non-fiction. Besides the Plumptre translations mentioned above, there is Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *Pizarro*, which Godwin watched in the Drury Lane in 1803 and would record seeing or reading almost twenty times across the *Diary*. Godwin's interest was not only in fictional portrayals of the continent and its inhabitants, he also lists De Solis' *Historia de la Conquista de Mexico* (1684) a seminal text in the history of New Spain that Godwin read in 1801, which will be discussed later when I delve into what we today call the *Leyenda*

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<sup>66</sup> For details on the Plumptre sisters and Shelley's other connections to German literature see the first chapter.

*Negra*. For now, the *Leyenda Negra*, or the Black Legend, is a literary and historical theme demonizing Spanish cruelty and colonization in South America. Godwin's own *Of Population* (1819) contains two chapters expressly on the rapid depopulation of the South American continent, indulging heavily in the impassioned language of the Black Legend. In addition to these literary interests in the distant continent, Lord Byron and Doctor John Polidori, both had inclinations to emigrate to South America, and Matthew "Monk" Lewis, who briefly joined the Diodati circle at Geneva late in the summer of 1816, was then freshly returned to Europe from a time spent at his plantations in Jamaica. Like the creature, Byron and Polidori's respective relocation plans never came to fruition, and Monk Lewis died en route from Jamaica in 1818, following a final visit to his holdings there. The implications of the failures of emigration plans and the yellow fever that killed one of the early, great gothic novelists, will be examined later in this chapter.

### **Robinson Crusoe: The Original South American Story**

However, before delving into the broader European conversation surrounding South America and Mary Shelley's particular interests and connections to the continent, it is worthwhile spending time dissecting an oblique allusion made by the creature to Daniel Defoe's *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner* (1719). Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is the urtext of British South American fiction and was for many years one of the most popular and widely read texts in the world. The market for pirated copies of the novel, and the competition to find a suitable imitation/successor to the shipwreck story, was fierce. M.J. Godwin & Co's translation of *Der Schweizerische Robinson* (1812), or as it is known today, *The Swiss Family Robinson*, was perhaps the only of these potential literary successors to stand the test of time and the fact that the Godwins published the first English edition of the text on the British market in 1814<sup>67</sup> is a testament to how carefully they monitored the European market. As even the author's preface of *The Swiss Family Robinson* admits, Robinson Crusoe was admired across Europe as being "universally approved for the opening of the infant mind", a sentiment Godwin

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<sup>67</sup> Under the title *The Family Robinson Crusoe: or, Journal of a Father Shipwrecked, with his Wife and Children, on an Uninhabited Island* (1814), the title we know today, *The Swiss Family Robinson*, came with the second edition in 1818.

not only published, but personally endorsed in his 1802 letter to William Cole listing the best texts for children (Wyss, xi). Crusoe was held as exemplar of “human nature in its origin and in its weakness... [proving] what reflection and labor are capable of effecting in the most trying and perilous situation.” (Wyss, xi) That *The Swiss Family Robinson* came to the British market from a Swiss novelist who was first inspired by a quintessentially British text, speaks volumes for the exchange and intertextuality between Britain and the European continent across the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Because of this vast cultural impact on all readers, but young readers in particular, it becomes fitting that the creature, worldly in his experiences but young in years and literature, would make overt reference to the text when pleading his case for a mate.

When first making an appeal to his creator for a mate of his own kind, the creature tells Frankenstein that the creature couple will live in South America, as far from civilization as possible. In his argument, the creature tells Frankenstein that “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 nutrients.” (Shelley, 120) The use of the word *kid* here, meaning a young goat, as a food reserved exclusively for man and unnecessary for the creature, is pertinent because in Defoe’s novel, wild goats are a staple of Robinson Crusoe’s diet. Indeed, the first meat eaten by Crusoe after being shipwrecked on the island, the first thing he hunts, is goat, and one of his first acts in cultivating the island, effectively an attempt to colonize the wilderness surrounding him, is an effort to domesticate a young member of the herd of wild goats inhabiting his new home.

The first attempt at domestication is unsuccessful, but as the novel progresses, and years pass, Crusoe turns his island into a microcosm of British colonial life, cultivating crops, domesticating livestock, building multiple homes, and taking a native as servant and companion. When the creature actively rejects not only the *lamb*, a sacrifice to and symbol of God, but also the *kid*, the sustenance of man, he actively rejects the replication of European society through colonization and the moralizing Christian doctrine that Crusoe embodies. Rather, the creature and his mate will be sustained by the purer, vegetarian diet of acorns and berries, not

cultivated nuts or the fruit of Eden<sup>68</sup>, nor will they grow crops as Crusoe did after years of painstaking effort, but rather only what can be gathered in the wild. In this, the creature is proposing to embody the ‘natural diet’ espoused by Percy Shelley, who was primarily what we recognize today as vegetarian. Throughout *Frankenstein*, the creature only kills once for food<sup>69</sup>, and that is not food for himself, but rather a hare killed so that Frankenstein may “eat, and be refreshed”, before continuing his pursuit of the creature (Shelley, 174). By maintaining this vegetarian diet, the creature aligns himself with Percy’s ideal of what man in perfection could be<sup>70</sup>, in “a moment of alastorization... offer[ing] the plan of natural nurture, feeding on fruits with his mate in the jungles of the New World”, yet this offer is eventually, brutally spurned with the destruction of the female creature (Morton, 51).

In the moment of pledging to leave Europe with his mate, the creature swears to do so “by the earth which I inhabit, and by you that made me”, deifying Frankenstein as the scientist once envisioned (Shelley, 121). The creature does not need a Bible or trust in an omnipotent God. He knows his fallible maker, and if Frankenstein will do this one thing then the creature’s “life will flow quietly away” in South America without further incident (Shelley, 121). By stating that the creature and his mate will live without any of these human comforts, or human belief in an all-powerful god, sustaining themselves on only what grows naturally, taking a “bed of dried leaves” as their resting place and without the overt religious dogma repeated throughout Defoe’s novel, the creature sets himself and his hypothetical mate in diametric opposition to Robinson Crusoe and everything he represents. The years will pass for the creatures in South America, but the creature pledges to never need or desire the trappings of human society, whether real or replicated, again.

The creature’s desire to have a female companion with him in South American seclusion also stands in opposition to Crusoe’s characterization in his novel. Crusoe wants companionship, but his ideal companion is a male servant. Crusoe literally dreams of this servant and the next year Friday is delivered to him, a

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<sup>68</sup> The Edenic promise of South America will be explored later in this chapter.

<sup>69</sup> Though he does also consume campfire-cooked offal early in his life, and through this experience begins experimenting on which of his gathered fruit, nuts, and roots are and are not improved through cooking.

<sup>70</sup> For a complete discussion of Percy Shelley’s vegetarianism, see Morton’s *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste* (1994).

prisoner that Crusoe rescues from the cannibals that occasionally venture onto the island to feast and perform sacrifices. Friday, Crusoe's lesser human companion, immediately swears loyalty to his saviour by literally placing himself beneath Crusoe's foot, and must then be taught language, religion, and European behaviours. Crusoe accomplishes this instructional feat without describing to his readers in the same painstaking detail needed when relating other, practical necessities of island life such as table and boat building. It is only after Friday has learned to speak that Crusoe begins "really to love the creature" and was loved "more than it was possible for [Friday] ever to love anything before" in return (Defoe, 213). By teaching Friday English<sup>71</sup>, Crusoe makes Friday more human than his previously cannibalistic lifestyle allowed, enabling him to speak with the master he has devoted himself to, and love more fully than his previous tribespeople still communicating in their original, 'primitive' language. He is a man that Crusoe 'creates', an ownership that transcends the boundaries of the island, as Friday follows his master back to England when they are given the opportunity to leave. In the novel, Friday is never described as desiring a wife, or female companion of any sort. When Crusoe leaves his island to be tended by another party of shipwrecked Europeans, he sends women to grow this island colony that he has built in his own image, but Friday travels with his master and such provisions are never made for, or seemingly desired, by the servant.

Unlike Friday, however, the mind of the creature in *Frankenstein* is not actively cultivated by a single presence. Instead the creature must gather his understanding of European society and knowledge of the world piecemeal, by observing the De Lacey family, reading books that he finds, and encounters with terrified and aggressive villagers. These limited contacts with European civilization are more varied than Friday's experiences with Crusoe, isolated on the island, but they are not directed specifically at the creature. The lessons he takes at the De Lacey cottage are incidental, the books were written with the cultivated reader who could bring experience and prior understanding to the text, rather than the tabula rasa represented by the creature, the attacks from villagers are instinctual reactions to the

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<sup>71</sup> It should be noted that long before Friday's appearance, Crusoe teaches a parrot, Poll, to speak "so articulately and plain, that it was very pleasant", with much the same level of detail paid to this education as to Friday's learning (Defoe, 180). That, to Defoe and Crusoe, it takes similar effort to instruct a parrot to repeat English as it does a native South American to understand the language, speaks to the author and narrator's views on the cognitive capabilities of non-Europeans.

visibly monstrous rather than targeted attacks at the creature's specific brand of potential terrorism. Until his conversation with his maker, the creature's only known conversation is held with a blind man and ends in arson. It is only after these formative experiences that Frankenstein meets his creation again, effectively after the creature has undergone the 'humanization' process that Friday underwent at the instruction of Crusoe. It is only then, after the realization of his profound singularity in comparison to humanity, the creature makes his plea for a mate.

Like Crusoe, the creature seems to desire a companion who owes him her life and a mind that, like Friday's, can be formed into the perfect helpmate for the creature's needs. Unlike Crusoe, who desired a male servant of a different race from his first inclinations towards companionship, the creature desires one of his own kind and a female. While the argument could be made that the female would owe her existence to Frankenstein rather than her companion, the creature's reasoning that a scientist who allowed his initial creation to disappear for years would want nothing to do with a second after her awakening, is sound. The creature, knowing that his mate will be formed through the same processes, tells Frankenstein that she "will be of the same nature as myself", a paradoxical statement given that the creature's mind and habits were crafted by a combination of isolation and fierce aggression from everyone who sees him, rather than the immediate and constant companionship the female creature would be subjected to upon awakening, yet he is confident that she "will be content" with the arrangements he has made for their future (Shelley, 120). The creature furthers his argument by saying that his "vices are the children of forced solitude that I abhor and my virtues will necessarily arise when I live in communion with an equal" despite the fact that seniority and language skills will make the creature inherently superior to his mate, at least until she develops enough to see beyond these (Shelley, 121).

Throughout the *Frankenstein* narrative, the best educators are described as friends engaged in educational partnerships, rather than strictly hierarchical relationships, an admirable endeavour, yet when the instructors are "unfashioned creatures, but half made up" (Shelley, 1831, 16) as the creature and Frankenstein both are, then "not one of them is in a position to enlighten the other", much less a

new being (Allen, *Shelley's Frankenstein*, 40).<sup>72</sup> The creature does not want a servant to share the physical burdens of life in the jungle, rather he wants a mate to alleviate his isolation and make him a better, kinder soul, but his education in empathy has been stilted by cruelty from the outside world, and is largely hypothetical rather than practical, leaving him hardly an ideal teacher for her. Meanwhile, a female creature, new to the world, would be as unprepared to instruct her mate in kindness or humanity as Friday would be to instruct Crusoe in the affairs of London society.

Despite this confidence expressed by his creation, Frankenstein's misgivings about the temperament of the second creature ultimately contribute to his destruction of the unfinished project. The creature seems confident that, like Friday, the female will be so grateful for her creation (rather than salvation) that she will be amenable to his tutelage as a friend and equal, and become, like Friday, the "aptest scholar that ever was; and ... so merry, so constantly diligent," (Defoe, 210) and thus become the perfect companion in seclusion. However, Frankenstein frets that "she might be ten thousand times more malignant than her mate, and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness." (Shelley, 138) Note that Frankenstein does not doubt that the creature will be an able educator of this new mate, despite the creature's experiences making him an imperfect candidate for instructor, but rather that she will be an unwilling and rebellious student. A student whose rebellion will lead her to rape and murder, or to produce scores of murderous, creature offspring. This fear, that the female will be as inherently destructive as the current creature's experiences have made him, stems perhaps from Frankenstein's horror at the creature's first living breath.

There is a parallel between the creation of the creature and the advent of Friday's entrance into Defoe's text. Frankenstein philosophically envisions himself creating new life and two years later, succeeds in doing so. Crusoe literally dreams of a servant who will be his companion and eventual source of his deliverance from the island, and over a year later is rewarded by the arrival of a savage in need of a saviour. However, the fulfilment of the dream is where these parallel plots become

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<sup>72</sup> For a detailed discussion of education in Frankenstein, see Allen's *Shelley's Frankenstein*, chapter 3 *Reading Frankenstein* (2008).

tangential, with Crusoe being delighted by how quickly Friday assimilates into island life, and Frankenstein's horror at the enormity of what he has done. At the first living convulsions of the form he has laboured to assemble, Frankenstein tells his listener that "the beauty of the dream<sup>73</sup> vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart", causing him to flee and abandon his creation to its own fate (Shelley, 39). Whether Frankenstein believes that his creature would do the same after the "birth" of a female, abandon her to be shaped into cruelty by experience, or a fear that the violence the creature has displayed in the past is more intrinsic than a reaction to negative external experiences, the scientist does not take the chance and the female creature is torn asunder in a passage that is much discussed throughout the course of this thesis.

The next line that I will draw between the *Frankenstein* text and *Robinson Crusoe* comes in the form of the physical descriptions of the creature and Friday. The creature's appearance has been discussed in a previous chapter, so I will not dwell on his initial description. Frankenstein's first observations of his living craftwork are that his creature has "yellow skin", later described as "dun", hair that is "lustrous black and flowing; [with] teeth of a pearly whiteness", "watery eyes" and a "shriveled complexion, and straight black lips." (Shelley, 39) This is the visage that breaks the scientist's creative fugue and terrifies villagers across Europe. This is the face that Frankenstein fears will cause a female to turn "to the superior beauty of man" rather than spend her life as a companion crafted solely to please such a physical monstrosity (Shelley, 138).

Contrast this appearance with that of Friday, a man whose skin colouring is "very tawny, and yet not of an ugly yellow nauseous tawny... but a bright kind of olive Colour." Friday's hair is "long and black, not curl'd(sic) like Wool" and his "fine Teeth [are] well set, and white as ivory." His eyes hold "great Vivacity and sparkling Sharpness," and are set into a face that is "round, and plump" and is also adorned by "a very good Mouth [with] thin lips." Given this description of Crusoe's "comely handsome Fellow", Frankenstein's creature becomes an awful caricature of the original (Defoe, 205-206). Clear eyes against watery, desiccated skin to plump cheeks, the creature's physical description seems to be patterned as Friday's equal

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<sup>73</sup> i.e the creation of new life

and opposite. Their features are just similar enough that a comparison between the original literary South American, his face polished by genetics and his mind carefully moulded by European teachings, and this second, hopeful immigrant to South America's forests, with his features crafted clumsily by European hands and his mind formed in isolation, can be established. The creature, with his independent thoughts and hideous features is the tarnished other side of the Friday coin, an equal and opposite to Defoe's forerunner.

Friday's nature as a reformed cannibal, and the presence of cannibals on the mainland across from Crusoe's island, leads to a presumed, if inaccurate, connection between the creature and native South Americans. Supposed cannibalistic tendencies among indigenous South Americans were well documented by European writers and travellers in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. John Constance Davie's *Letters from Paraguay* (1805), which Godwin may have read in 1819, notes with satisfaction that "human sacrifices [to false gods] are no longer known among" the native population, as opposed to their previous existence "waging eternal war... to sacrifice and eat each other." (Davie, 128, 129) Robert Southey, England's poet laureate included cannibalism multiple times in his *History of Brazil*, carefully describing the dire circumstances that would force European explorers to consume "human flesh from extreme hunger" during an expedition into the wilds, as opposed to the native cannibals who expressed "astonishment at learning that the Portugeuze (sic) killed [their enemies] and did not eat them. Human flesh, they said, was good,... so good that it gave them appetite. One man among them boasted that he had partaken of the bodies of three hundred corpses." (Southey, 71, 17) Even Voltaire, who both Godwin and the Shelleys read extensively, included cannibalism in his descriptions of the Americas. His reports, condensed from "the first travellers and missionaries" across North and South America, noted the practice in multiple tribes across both continents, including "people of the Brazils and Caribbean islands... [who] ate the prisoners whom they took in their wars" (Voltaire, 128). In all of these accounts, cannibals do not consume members of their own communities, but rather enemies and outsiders captured or killed in conflict.

The prevalence of this belief that indigenous South Americans took part in cannibalistic practices, whether as a part of religious ceremonies or in ritualized warfare, leads us to a telling encounter between the creature and Victor

Frankenstein's younger brother, William. The creature, longing for companionship and having not yet asked his creator for a mate of his own kind, captures William in an initial attempt to raise "and educate him as [the creature's] companion and friend" and is instead met with the child's struggles and cries that "you wish to eat me, and tear me to pieces." (Shelley, 117) As a prisoner of the creature, whose looks mark him as a caricature of Friday, the prototypical cannibalistic native South American, reformed or otherwise, William makes an immediate connection to the far-off continent and assumes he is destined to be consumed as the vanquished party in this exchange. The reality of the creature's vegetarianism, and the true prevalence, or lack thereof, of cannibalistic practices among South American natives is irrelevant in service to the *Frankenstein* text. The creature *looks* intrinsically and savagely South American to the European characters and, educated by myriad fiction and non-fiction texts about the inhabitants of the New World, they assume his behaviour will follow suit.

### **Divine Rights: The Creature's Ownership of South America**

Stepping away from the urtext of South America-based fiction, we return once again to the passage where the creature states his desire to retreat across the seas. The creature's statement that in South America "the sun will shine upon us as on man" works on multiple levels. The simplest is as a verbal separation and act of self-othering. By consciously denoting himself and his mate as separate from mankind, with *us* as opposed to *man*, rather than the sun perhaps *shining equally on all beneath it*, the creature embraces the fact that he and his mate will never be accepted into society, or welcomed as a part of humanity, and maintains that regardless of separation, the sun will enforce a kind of heavenly equality, regardless of differences in biology.

This said, self-othering is only the first and most obvious level of this phrase's multiple layers, the most interesting dissection of the creature's words requires a brief history of the first century of South American conquest. The discovery of vast uncharted land over the ocean at the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century caused immediate land disputes between the great European powers. A Papal Bull issued by Pope Alexander VI in 1493 divided the New World along a longitudinal line roughly

100 leagues west of the Azores, granting Spain the lions' share of what is today the South American continent and leaving Portugal with the eastern corner of modern Brazil and a scattering of islands. The next year the Treaty of Tordesillas moved the dividing longitudinal line to roughly 40°W, splitting Spanish and Portuguese claims more evenly according to what was then known about the mainland, South American continent.

This unilateral split of the yet-undiscovered resources of this new continent was not appreciated by the other European monarchies. France, having "derived no advantage from that partition, refused to admit it's validity," (Southey, 29) and Francois I, King of France, made the declaration that "The sun shines on me as for others... I should very much like to see the clause in Adam's will that excludes me from a share of the world." (quoted in Collier, 212) Mary Shelley could have easily been aware of this declaration through her own French researches, however, another possibility comes from Godwin's *St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century* (1799). A significant portion of the novel's narrative centres on the court of Francois I (anglicized to Francis I), leaving open the possibility of Godwin becoming aware of this quote while conducting his own historical research for the novel. This declaration by the King of France articulated a European king's 'divine right' to a newly discovered territory, regardless of its indigenous population. When making his statement protesting Papal interference in the expansion of empires, Francois I was referencing Matthew 5:45: "For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth the rain on the just and unjust." In invoking scripture, this earthly king counters an earthly representative of heaven with the words of heaven itself to prove that all Europeans, or at least European monarchs, had a right to whatever the New World could offer her invaders.

Therefore, when the creature implores Frankenstein by claiming equality under the sun, he is using the language of a monarch who invoked the Bible to counter the earthly mouthpiece of god. This is doubly appropriate because the creature is making his plea directly to his maker, to the man who viewed himself as a father-god while crafting his masterpiece in an attic laboratory years before this encounter takes place, and whom the creature will acknowledge as a demi-god in

less than a page<sup>74</sup>. Not only this, before even making his exhortation for a mate the creature names himself as the crowning achievement of the biblical god, telling the Frankenstein that as his first creation “I ought to be thy Adam” (Shelley, 77). In desiring to take his mate and go to South America, the creature takes the language of a king’s inheritance and the lineage of the first man as his reasoning. He is asking his fallible god to grant him a companion, to return to Eden and colonize what he finds there.

This promise of the sun shining as a heavenly blessing also draws an intriguing line between indigenous South Americans and the creature in regards to celestial worship. The creature repeatedly uses the sun and moon as guiding forces throughout his narrative to Frankenstein in the second volume, thereby aligning himself with the Incan people as they are described in von Kotzebue’s *Virgin in the Sun* and de Graffigny’s *Letters of a Peruvian Princess*, both of which appear on the Shelley’s 1817 reading list, this after the *Letters* previously appeared on the 1815 list. The historical introduction to de Graffigny’s *Letters* notes that native Peruvians had “a great veneration for the moon, which they regarded as wife and sister of the sun.” (de Graffigny, 35) The creature too, takes comfort in the moon on the very night of his awakening, noting that the first pleasant sensation he feels is the moon’s “gentle light [stealing] over the heavens.” (Shelley, 80) As his senses develop, the creature marks time by the moon, noting that by the time “the orb of night had greatly lessened” he had begun to “distinguish... sensations from each other.” (Shelley, 81) As the creature’s faculties sharpen, he moves away from the nurturing, mother-figure moon and instead the sun becomes his primary method of marking time and determining direction. When the creature walks, he faces himself westward “towards the setting sun”, and when he wakes it is because he was “allured by the warmth of the sun.” (Shelley, 82, 83) When the creature finally meets his maker, it is by the sun that he demands his story be heard and judgement handed down: “The sun is yet high in the heavens; before it descends to hide itself beyond yon snowy precipices, and illuminate another world, you will have heard my story and can decide” the creature’s fate (Shelley, 79).

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<sup>74</sup> By swearing to honor his word “by the earth which I inhabit, and by you that made me” (Shelley, 121)

This use of the sun as primary guide and passer of judgement also echoes the beliefs of the Incans in von Kotzebue's stage play. These Incans, Ynca in the text, call themselves collectively "the children of the Sun," and the main female protagonist, Cora, is a priestess of the sun, the titular "Virgin of the Sun" destined from infancy to devote her life to their god and marry his representative on earth, the next Ynca leader (von Kotzebue, 87, 88). When Cora falls in love with the Spaniard Alonzo, she instructs him that their union must be judged by the Sun. She tells her lover that at the first lights of dawn they will ascend a hill and embrace to "await the rising of the Sun... if I (Cora) have done wrong... the Sun will hide his face or his first beam will annihilate me. But if... my father and my God should mount in splendor... We are guiltless." (von Kotzebue, 101-102) Though the creature never describes the sun as a force actively intervening in his life, he does use it as a guide, as the warm presence that wakes him, and, like Cora, the time marker by which judgement should be rendered. He also actively worships the sun after a fashion, in one of the few bright passages in his bleak existence. After leaving the De Lacey home, the creature travels across the Swiss countryside and one day, "cheered... by the loveliness of the sunshine and the balminess of the air", continues his journey after daybreak, against his wonted custom of resting by day and traveling by night (Shelley, 115). This day, the creature "dared to be happy", and tells his creator that as "soft tears bedewed my cheeks... I raised my humid eyes with thankfulness towards the blessed sun which bestowed such joy upon me." (Shelley, 115) This simple worship of the celestial light is not so elaborate as the "certain dances" Voltaire describes the Inca performing to worship the sun, "a worship which appeared more reasonable than any other," among the native South American religious practices, "in a country which did not enjoy the light of revelation", or the elaborate call and response chants greeting "the Soul of the universe! Thou which... ceasest not to pour forth, in one great stream of light, the principles of warmth, of life, and of fertility" described by Marmontel in *Les Incas* (Voltaire, 336, 335, Marmontel, *Vol. I*, 4). However, the very idea of being explicitly *blessed* offers a glimpse into the creature's rudiments of sun worship, and his kinship with distant, supposedly, primitive peoples.

The Inca, as described by these European authors, were a natural people, born and blessed by the lights of the sun. They believed their very lives and

procreative abilities, came from the “awful majesty” of their celestial deity (Marmontel, 4). This naturalistic society with solar worship at its centre stands in direct opposition to Frankenstein’s inspiration, which he describes as a “sudden light... brilliant and wonderful...dizzy[ing] with the intensity of the prospect” (Shelley, 34). The inspiring light for Frankenstein is sudden and powerful, but also disorienting, like the blinding seconds after a lightning-strike. Just as quickly as inspiration strikes, Frankenstein “return[s] to [his] old habits”, pilfering graves and abattoirs for his raw materials (Shelley, 36). Frankenstein collects his materials under the cover of darkness and animates his creature “on a dreary night [in] November” (Shelley, 38). November nights in Ingolstadt fall early, and the “dreary” weather is frequently interpreted as meaning a storm-tossed night, or at least a rainy one, was chosen for the completion of his project. Thus, making both the scientist, who robs graves under cover of darkness and works ceaselessly in his laboratory, and his creation who was effectively ‘born’ on a dark and stormy night, both diametrically opposite to the sun-worshipping Inca, regardless of the creature’s attempts to align himself with the native South Americans.

Even the creature’s reference to the sun sinking beyond the mountains to “illuminate another world” echoes Marmontel’s account of the Incan ceremony to honour the recession of the sun after the summer solstice (Shelley, 79). The ceremony includes the Inca, or king, “prostrating himself before the Sun, his father” and saying “Beneficent God, thou art now receding from us to restore life and joy to the inhabitants of another hemisphere.” (Marmontel, *Vol. II*, 35) This alone is interesting, the creature’s seeming innate, Incan awareness of the sun’s illumination paths, but the ceremony continues with the Inca saying “thou [the Sun] wouldst not be just, didst thou confine thy *animating* presence to us alone.” (Marmontel, *Vol. II*, 35, emphasis added) The sun as an animating force in a novel about the nature and creation of humanity, is telling. Frankenstein, a man striving for godhood, attempts to animate a single organism and only succeeds in raising a monstrosity, whereas the Incan Sun, the great and original animator, is not only munificent towards his chosen Incas, but seasonally sinks in the sky to grant animating warmth to those residing on the other side of the world. If Frankenstein is a faulty, or false, god, then the sun is a good one.

## **Edge of the Earth: South America Uncharted**

European fascination with native South American cultures did not equate respect for, or preservation of, those peoples. Francois I's 16<sup>th</sup> century protests were just one voice among the many who wished to take hold of the continent and its Edenic promises. South America was "a place portrayed as prehistorical; indeed, a continent where... history [had] not even begun." (Madan, 50) Early Spanish reports brought back word of gold, silver, and gemstones. Later colonies found the climates of areas of South America and the Caribbean conducive to growing cash crops, like sugarcane, tobacco, indigo, and coffee. As explorers penetrated deeper into the unseen wilds, they brought back reports of vast landscapes and strange beasts unlike any documented before. Legendary natural philosopher, Alexander von Humboldt, offered to survey New Spain and was thus given unprecedented access to the vast Spanish holdings, travelling deeper into the interior of the continent than any European before him. Of the experience he wrote that a traveller:

Is sensible, at every step, that he is not on the borders but at the centre of the torrid zone; not one of the islands of the Antilles; but on a vast continent, where everything is gigantic,-- mountains, rivers, and the whole mass of vegetable creation... He is unable to distinguish that which most excites his wonder,-- whether the deep stillness of the wilderness, the individual beauty and contrast of the objects, or the freshness and grandeur of the vegetable life, which characterize tropical climates (von Humboldt, 17)

Von Humboldt was a naturalist and exacting experimentalist throughout his travels, climbing mountains with delicate glass instruments to measure barometric pressure at different elevations, and documenting and dissecting new animals with the precision of a trained surgeon, but when describing the landscape that surrounded him, his language became Romantic. His language encompassed "both poles, (scientific and poetic) a deliberate conjunction [was] reflected in his lexicon" when he wrote of the land he had witnessed (Pazos, 61). When speaking of retreating to "the vast wilds of South America", the creature invokes von Humboldt and other colossal South American naturalists of the day who wrote of the great scale and

natural mysteries of this new continent, even centuries after its discovery. Like the creature, who was designed and constructed on a “massive scale”, both Americas exist on a different geographic scale than Europe. What was then thought to be the tallest mountain on earth, Chimborazo, which von Humboldt attempted and failed to summit in 1802, stood in South America, just one of many mysteries and unconquered facets of the continent. The Orinoco river, and its estuaries, had yet to be mapped to its source. The Amazon river’s western headwaters had also proven elusive, and the search for them continued to be deadly for centuries. South America, despite the massive subjugation of her native peoples by colonizers, was still considered a land unconquered in the minds and literature of Europeans.

Like its vast, uncharted mountains and rivers, the South American landmass itself was unexplored, and so fantastic that it became the measure used by Frankenstein to describe how far he would travel to destroy his creation. Well before being told that the creature desired to retreat to South America, Frankenstein declared that he “would have made a pilgrimage to the highest peak of the Andes, could I... have precipitated him to their base.” (Shelley, 71) To race his creature not only to a mountain range on the far side of the globe, but specifically to unconquered Chimborazo, would have been no mean feat, but to call that journey a *pilgrimage* reiterates the religious implications of South America as an Edenic paradise. Implications that will be more fully contextualized by Byron’s *Cain* and Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* later in this chapter.

Edenic or not, the South American continent remained shrouded in a mixture of dark mythos and incredible legend. Disease, native attacks, dangerous animals, extended rainy seasons, and a lack of knowledge about what was and was not edible in the jungle made the process of mapping the interior of the continent dangerous to experienced explorers and deadly to the inexperienced or ill-prepared. Though the continent had been circumnavigated by sea well before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the wilds between the shores were still largely unknown. Historical accounts of the animals, like those given by Voltaire documenting oxen “somewhat between [European] camel and buffalo... a species of hogs in Mexico which have their navels at their backs, instead of their bellies... there are lions... but very small, and almost without hair”, made it difficult for Europeans to separate fact and fiction when it came to South American fauna (Voltaire, 227). Likely because of these fantastic descriptions,

Charles Waterton was able to pass taxidermy monstrosities cobbled together by grafting multiple animals onto one another, as genuine specimens for a time. Waterton and his contributions to South American exploration, and South American mythos, will be explored more fully later in this chapter. Suffice for now that if the creature was looking for a homeland that matched his stature and strangeness of composition, where Europeans would be physically unable to reach him then the deepest jungles of South America, as they were described by historians and naturalists alike, were a good fit.

The sense of primordial grandeur experienced by those who explored South America themselves is softened to Edenic imagery in the literature set on the continent. Helen Maria Williams, a friend of Godwin's, wrote in her *Peru*, of:

...lost Peruvia, rose thy cultur'd scene,  
The wave an emblem of thy joy serene:  
There nature ever in luxuriant showers  
Pours from her treasures, the perennial flowers; (Williams, Canto I, 3-6)

Thompson's translation of *The Virgin in the Sun* implores wondering Europeans to "Gaze all around, how hills and woods are bursting through the mist... Look! A thousand drops are sparkling on the grass; Hark! A thousand birds are warbling in the wood." (von Kotzebue, 107) Sheridan's *Pizarro* contains the following description by Alonzo, a Spaniard defected to the Incan cause, of "the lovely fields of Quito... the opening blossom, blade, or perfumed bud, sweet bashful pledges of delicious harvest, wafting their incense to the ripening sun." (Sheridan, 428) Southey's early South American explorers sum these sentiments up with their musings that "if the terrestrial Paradise were upon this round world, ...it could not be far from hence." (Southey, 16) These prelapsarian descriptions of South American natural beauty stand in stark contrast to descriptions given post-contact with Europeans. In these fictional histories of the lives and losses of the indigenous population, natural splendour of the South American landscape is subsequently mutilated by conquest in each of these narratives, as a visual representation of the Black Legend, or the historical and literary recounting of the destruction wrought by European, most prominently Spanish, arrival on the continent.

## *La Leyenda Negra*

When Frankenstein makes his speech on sobriety of emotion, and states that had mental tranquillity been observed “the empires of Mexico and Peru”, both Spanish viceroalties, would have “not been destroyed”, he is making direct reference to the Black Legend (Shelley, 38). Moreover, Frankenstein is echoing the language of Volney, and another, subtler reference to South America made by the creature. Volney’s *Ruins; or Meditations on the Revolution of Empires*, from which the creature receives a second hand history of the world when Felix reads the text to Safie as part of her instruction in French, asks readers if “it be gospel charity which has made you exterminate whole nations in America, to annihilate the empires of Mexico and Peru”, words that cause both Safie and the creature to weep “over the hapless fate” of the natives (Volney, 205, Shelley, 95). By acknowledging the destruction of these great South American empires, specifically the decimation of the Aztec in Mexico and Inca in Peru, *Frankenstein* evokes both the literary and historical documentation of that destruction, material that Mary Shelley and her circle were familiar with. Sheridan’s *Pizarro* contains an almost cartoonish portrayal of Spanish cruelty in conquest, with the character of Alamagro telling his commander that stagnation has left “our soldiers murmuring—Battle! Battle!—then death to the armed, and chains for the defenseless.” Following this vein, the character Davilla chimes in “Death to the whole Peruvian race!”, and thus the plan of a conquest is born (Sheridan, 408). Other fictional accounts follow this pattern, with de Graffigny’s titular Peruvian princess asking: “What people are there so savage as to be unmoved at the signs of human anguish?... O the barbarians, savage masters of thunder, and of the power to exterminate; cruelty is the sole guide of their actions”, while von Kotzebue’s Spaniards debate on the eve of battle whether to “spare the women and children” or if “it were better to annihilate the whole race” of Peruvians (de Graffigny, 49-51<sup>75</sup>, von Kotzwebue, 186).

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<sup>75</sup> *Letters of a Peruvian Princess* is printed with the original French text on the left leaf and the English translation on the right, thus pages 49-51 are consecutive pieces of text, despite the page between.

The reference to “thunder”, or Spanish cannons and muskets, and the Spanish certainty of victory in battle against the Inca, despite being considerably outnumbered, leads us to the historical consequences of this conquest: the vast depopulation of South and Central America. Though modern scholars largely agree that the spread of European diseases such as smallpox and measles among the native populations had devastating effects and drastic consequences, accounts mostly from the 19<sup>th</sup> century “emphasize political, economic, and social causes (exploitation, violence, uprooting, expropriation) over natural ones.” (Livi-Bacci 4) Therefore, while disease will be touched on briefly later, this chapter will primarily focus on the causes of depopulation as they were understood in Shelley’s time, rather than modern understanding. The two South American chapters in Godwin’s *Of Population* make use of numbers and accounts of population fluctuations from the most prominent resources of his day. By Godwin’s figures, “the population of the New World, when it first became known to Europeans, is put down... at four hundred millions at the lowest.” (Godwin, 58) If this is a true estimate of the indigenous population at the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, then Robertson’s 1777 estimates that Mexico and Peru’s native populations have dropped to 2 million and 2.5 million respectively are devastating. As stated early in this chapter, boundaries between territories were debatable on maps and near impossible to maintain across South American wildernesses. That said, Mexico and Peru covered much larger tracts of land than the modern countries retain, with the viceroyalty of Mexico extending into modern North America, and the viceroyalty of Peru encompassing modern “Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Chile.” (Livi-Bacci, 25) Allowing that, and tripling Robertson’s estimate to compensate for territories not mentioned, the resulting figure 13.5 million native South American’s is still a horrific fraction of the estimated 400 million population from 250 years before.

Modern estimates agree that the depopulation of South America was drastic, but seem to place original population numbers well below Godwin’s 400 million, an estimate he culled from “Montesquieu and Montaigne.” (Godwin, 58) However, regardless of the exact accuracy of any of these numbers, the fact remains that European perception of South America in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was that of a continent wiped clean of its native population. Godwin tells readers that “the depopulation was so rapid that human imagination finds itself incapable of keeping

pace with it.” (Godwin, 63) Not only was the original population wiped out, but the Spanish conquistadors’ conscious destruction of indigenous artifacts, monuments, and cities meant that South America was a cultural blank slate as well. As Godwin puts it, “all knowledge, all history, all antiquities sunk before [the Spaniards’] savage barbarities.” (57) When Frankenstein acknowledges the destruction of “the empires of Mexico and Peru”, he is referencing the Spanish conquest in the New World, and the tabula rasa that was left in the wake of that conquest. When the creature weeps for the “hapless fate of the [Americas’] original inhabitants”, and Frankenstein acknowledges this continent-wide emptiness further by speaking of the creatures “inhabiting the deserts of the new world” these are overt references to a landscape emptied, rather than a geographic desert (Shelley, 95, 138). Though the Atacama Desert, west of the Andes, is vast and stark, it is more likely that Frankenstein is referring to a people desert, a land stripped bare of its inhabitants. It is on this purged continent that the creature, like many Europeans, asks to remake his life, new and unburdened by the weight of his European past.

### **South America Repopulated: The Creature and Other Emigrants**

Several members of Mary Shelley’s extended circle made gestures towards South American immigration, or had prior connections to the continent, the most prominent of these being Lord Byron. Though Byron’s extant letters do not begin referencing his “South American project”, as he termed this prospective move, until late 1819, at least one acquaintance thought the exiled lord showed interest in an extended tour of the Americas, if not full immigration, as early as October of 1817. George Ticknor, a “young American writer who had not seen Byron since he and [Lady Byron] were newlyweds in the summer of 1815” renewed his friendship with the poet and John Cam Hobhouse while in Venice, where Byron was living in 1817 (McCarthy, 330). Hobhouse and Byron were then pondering touring the third man’s homeland, plans that Ticknor recorded in his diary:

Mr. Hobhouse had already told me about a plan formed by himself and Lord Byron to go to the United States, about a year hence if he (Hobhouse) should not get into Parliament;... Hobhouse, who is a true politician, talked only of seeing a people whose character and institutions are still in the freshness of

youth; while Lord Byron.... Was evidently thinking only of seeing our Indians and our forests; of standing in the spray of Niagara; even of climbing the Andes and ascending the Orinoco(sic). (Ticknor, 165)

Byron's desire to see these prominent landmarks show his early interest in exploring South America. Niagara Falls famously straddles the border between the United States and Canada, but two of the three landmarks listed, the Andes mountain range and the Orinoco river, lie firmly on South American soil, a spine up the western edge of the continent and a vein of river flowing through present-day Venezuela to the Atlantic, respectively. However, the tour with Hobhouse would never come to pass. Hobhouse went into politics when he returned to England, successfully entering Parliament in 1820 and effectively dashing their unformed plans.

The possibility exists that Ticknor himself helped stoke Byron's South American inclinations. The above excerpt was recorded after the two passed a few hours together at Byron's Venetian villa in October 1817, a meeting which ended in the promise that Byron "should see [Ticknor] in America in a couple of years." (Ticknor, 166) In April 1817 Ticknor met Alexander von Humboldt, celebrated Prussian polymath and the natural philosopher made famous by his extended expedition in New Spain, at the turn of the century. In a brilliant example of Parisian salon culture, Ticknor met von Humboldt in the company of Sir Humphry Davy and his wife, the poet Augustus Schlegel, and Madame Germaine de Stael, among others<sup>76</sup>. At this particular party "The conversation turned much to South America, of which everybody ha[d] been talking in Paris since the publication of Abbé de Pradt's book", *Des colonies, et de la revolution actuelle de l'Amerique*, earlier that year<sup>77</sup> (Ticknor, 128-129). Ticknor continued to socialize with this set throughout his time in Paris, before continuing his European tour, including spending the previously mentioned afternoon with Byron in Venice in October of that year. It is feasible that as Ticknor recounted highlights from his European tour to Byron becoming

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<sup>76</sup> Possibly Helen Maria Williams made a part of this company, her close friendship with von Humboldt will be explored later in this chapter, for now suffice to say that she was friendly with multiple members of this party, including Ticknor, and known to be in Paris at the time.

<sup>77</sup> Dominique-Georges-Frédéric Dufour de Pradt, former archbishop of Mechelen, wrote freely of his hopes for South American independence, a notion that was met by multiple response books and pamphlets in the coming years.

acquainted with the illustrious von Humboldt, who by now was famous across the continent, and discussing his travels in New Spain, would be natural conversation topics.

Whether Byron took his South American inclination from Ticknor in October 1817, or came upon it on his own, he was not secretive in his interest. The boat he commissioned in the summer of 1822 was christened the *Bolivar* in honour of Simon Bolivar, the great South American freedom fighter. However, by the end of 1822 Byron's ambitions to immigrate across the Atlantic had waned in favour of Greek independence, whereas in 1819, the South American project was in full flow. Unlike the eventual Grecian expedition, Byron never seems to have intended on joining the fight for South American independence on arriving in the country. Though he admired the cause of independence and the figures working to free South American territories from European control, going so far as to make plans for getting "letters [of introduction] to Bolivar and his government", Byron's emigration would be as a civilian, not a soldier. In October 1819 Byron told Hobhouse that he would live "as a landlord there [in Venezuela]—or at least a tenant—and if possible and legal—a Citizen." (Byron, *Letters vol. VI*, 225) Byron's South American plans show a level of domesticity missing from his bathetic end in Greece, or from the chaotic Venetian rooms, brimming with mistresses and pets, where he wrote this letter. His plans as a landlord are also at odds with those of many other Englishmen who travelled to South America in search of fortune, a trend which will be discussed later.

Byron did not plan to travel west alone. Rather, he would take Fletcher, a long-time servant and travelling companion, and "should go there with [his] natural daughter Allegra... and pitch [his] tent for good and all" in this new country (Byron, *Letters vol. VI*, 226). Though as of October, 1819 Byron wrote that he was "not tired of Italy", in August of that same year he expressed a general weariness with the entire European continent (Byron, *Letters vol. VI*, 226). He told Hobhouse that the continent had "grown decrepit—besides it is the same thing over again", as opposed to South America where the people were "as fresh as their world—and fierce as their earthquakes." (Byron, *Letters vol. VI*, 212) By 1819, Byron had stagnated into a self-indulgent existence in his Venetian accommodation, haemorrhaging money and mistresses while his reputation languished and his physique, once his pride, weakened. South America offered the chance at a fresh start, far from the scandals

that had dogged the poet since before his sudden departure from England just a year after his marriage and months after the birth of his first daughter.

Though Byron frequently showed a level of possessiveness for the people in his orbit, particularly servants and children, his plans to retreat to the distant continent with only one servant and his second, 'natural' daughter seems to show a willingness to simplify his life in the extreme.<sup>78</sup> The lord had traversed Europe with a menagerie of pets and coterie of attendants, collecting new people and pets with every border crossed. Now he intended to remake himself in the New World with as few reminders and encumbrances from the past as possible. Like the creature, who intended to take only his mate and make a monstrous family as far from human eyes as possible, Byron desired to take those closest to him and disappear into the wilds of South America. However, like the creature, Byron's South American plans were thwarted by the destruction of that potential family. Allegra Byron, daughter of Lord Byron and Claire Clairmont, sickened and died in late April 1822, at just five years old. With her death, Byron's nebulous ideas to one day be nursed by his daughter in his old age were crushed and any dreams of living in South America with her vanished. He would never be allowed to see Ada Byron, his daughter by the estranged Lady Byron back in England and had no other acknowledged children. The next year, 1823, he would travel east to Greece, instead of west to Edenic South America, and would die at Missolonghi in early 1824.

There is a prophetic note to Byron's 1821 stage play *Cain: A Mystery*. In Byron's retelling of the Old Testament tale, Adam and Eve have been cast from the Garden, but choose to live and raise their family near it. It is because of a familiarity with the denizens of heaven, the guardians of the Garden, that Cain does not fear Lucifer "more than other spirits/ Whom I see daily wave their fiery swords/ Before the gates" of Eden (Byron, *Cain*, 12). This misplaced comfort ultimately leads to Cain's downfall, but it is the proximity to the Garden that is important in this case. After committing the first murder, Cain is cast from his family to wander the world alone. When asked by his sister-wife where they will go, Cain tells her "Eastward from Eden... Tis' the most desolate" lands (Byron, *Cain*, 84). In this tale, exile, or

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<sup>78</sup> Or performatively planned to do so, John Cam Hobhouse dismissed the notion roundly as a "mad scheme", one that would see Byron miserable, ill, or dead (quoted in McCarthy, 364).

“the land of Nod” lies east and paradise remains behind, to the west (Genesis 4:3). This characterization of a desolate east, and conversely paradisaical west, could come from another, religious themed play, Christopher Marlowe’s *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (1592). In Marlowe’s version of this story, which when Faustus pledges his soul to the devil, he does so using the epithet “Lucifer, prince of the East,” making eastward not just a desolate place, as Byron writes, but a land forsaken by God and ruled by Satan (Marlowe, line 104). Byron, Cain, and the creature are all forced to turn their backs on west lying Eden, a place of “pleasant fruits and princely delicacies”, instead moving east, towards Greece, desolation, or Geneva to seal their fates (Marlowe, line 80). Greece and the desolate East are where Byron and Cain meet their deaths, and Geneva, technically east of the Orkneys where the creature’s South American hopes were dashed, is where his part in the fatal cat and mouse game between created and creator, is sealed.

With the decimation of the native population settlers flocked to the empty South American continent in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Some were drawn by the dream of riches, tales of South American gold, silver, and precious stones had circulated in Europe for centuries, to the point that riches accumulated by an “adventur[er] who had sailed with Pizarro in the conquest of Peru” was a plot point in Godwin’s *St. Leon* (Godwin, 454). However, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, native valuables and easily mined mineral resources had largely been stripped away by the Europeans, leading successive generations of colonists to literally grow their wealth from the earth, “in the sugar plantations of the Caribbean and Brazil.”(Livi Bacci, 9).

Matthew ‘Monk’ Lewis, a long-time friend of Byron’s, briefly joined the Shelley-Byron circle in Geneva in August 1816, having “recently returned [to Europe] from a visit to the sugar plantations he had inherited in Jamaica.” (MacCarthy, 305) We know that at least the Caribbean, if not the mainland, was a topic of discussion amongst the group that summer because while in Geneva “Lewis signed a codicil to his will providing for the future improvement of conditions for his slaves... Byron, Shelley and Polidori were witnesses to the codicil”(MacCarthy, 305). Lewis’ letters and *Journal* tell us that he was, or at least viewed himself as a relatively humane master of his plantations. Therefore a legal amendment preventing the sale of his slaves away from the plantation and maintaining that any inheritor of the Jamaican estates must pass three months on the island every three years,

personally overseeing the welfare of the slaves there, or forfeit the inheritance to the next heir, is not out of character. It was also apt, less than two years later Lewis would contract yellow fever at one of his Jamaican plantations and die on the return voyage to England, becoming just one of many European travellers to South America and the West Indies who found the air of the tropical paradise distinctly unhealthy, something we will discuss later in this chapter. Byron's admiration for Bolivar, *el libertador*, as he would come to be known, has already been touched on, and the codicil could be seen as Lewis' acknowledgment of his friend's interests in the South American revolutions.

African slaves were imported by the millions to work plantations across South America and the Caribbean, where there was little incentive for owners to maintain their slaves' long-term health. Modern estimates suggest "that two years of work repaid the initial outlay" or purchase cost of the individual slave "and that after five years the return on that initial investment was surely double." (Livi Bacci, 15) With the emphasis on replacing working slaves, rather than breeding new ones, there were huge amounts of maritime traffic between Africa, Europe, and South America, and a consistently mobile population within the region after disembarking. Smuggling themselves aboard a slave ship would not be ideal traveling conditions for two creatures attempting to escape Europe for South America, but with their death-darkened skin and physical strength, they could hide themselves among the slave cargo part of the way west, and escape overboard to swim once land came within sight. Even if the creature and his mate were forced to arrive on the mainland with the rest of the human cargo, there is a possibility that their physical differences would still pass relatively unremarked. As Blackburn points out, "slaves were especially susceptible to [deformative] outbreaks of elephantiasis, yaws and leprosy, which turned them into grotesque living corpses." (Blackburn, 29) In such company, even the monstrous face of the creature might pass as simply diseased, rather than mal-constructed, at least long enough for the monstrous pair to make good their escape.

This, of course, is pure speculation as to the creature's hypothetical travel plans. What can be analysed is the early 19<sup>th</sup> century perception of South America as a land of opportunity for those looking to fight for a worthy cause. The first two decades saw "Wars of Independence in Hispanic America,... represented as a heroic

adventure to complete the liberation of the whole American continent” to prospective recruits. (Brown, 49) Gregor McGregor, whose modern reputation belies him as a failed king in 19<sup>th</sup> century Central America, saw success between 1817 and 1820, recruiting from “Edinburgh and the Highlands... offer[ing] land and freedom to potential soldiers and colonists, selling them visions of a better life in the New World.” (Brown, 52) John D’Evereux, who was active at the same time, made a more imperialist argument to his Irish recruits, that they would “plant the banner of green on the summit of the Andes.” (Phillips, 6) Importantly, the visions these prospective colonizers were sold on and the realities they experienced were wildly different. One contemporary observer described “‘shoals’ of poor Scotsmen...hoping for sudden wealth” who, instead “lay on the beach and drank rum until they were all dead.” (quoted in Blackburn, 27) This reality is, however, not what is so important as the Edenic myth that was *believed* by Europeans before their arrival in South America. Hints at this belief’s emptiness, like the disillusionment, rebellion, and ultimate fate of Col. Edward Despard, whose severed head was discussed in the preceding chapter, did not do much to puncture this myth. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, new colonists and prospective revolutionaries knew they were arriving in a land that had proven fruitful for European empires for centuries, and believed that land which had enriched the conquistadors and plantation holders alike for generations, would prove similarly bountiful for the common man.

This myth was not only perpetuated by men hoping to recruit colonists and soldiers to tame the frontier, it was also repeated in the literature of the day. Godwin’s *St. Leon* with its intergenerational, inherited treasure, was a historical fiction, but Lady Sydney Morgan’s *Florence Macarthy* (1818), set in contemporary Ireland, included a character who has just returned from “the West Hindies,— or Spanish America.—It’s all one for that” and is described as “that brave Guerilla chief, whose life and fortune have been devoted to South American independence.” (Morgan, *Vol. I* 31, *Vol. III* 48) Even in this novel about a soldier who fought for South American independence returning to Ireland, Morgan could not escape the Edenic promise of the distant continent. One footnote from the original 1818 printing tells readers that “America [North and South] is considered as the land of Canaan by the lower ranks of the Irish.” (Morgan, *Vol. I* 82) Elsewhere, a character describes an elopement that almost took place, wherein he “proposed to carry my young novice to

South America; and in some of the Eden cliffs of the cloud-embosomed Cordelliras(sic) to lead with her a blessed life.” (Morgan, *Vol. I*, 116) Specific dates are elusive in *Florence Macarthy*, but the narrative is intended to take place in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and thus be reflective of the time, or reflective of Morgan’s perception of the time. For Mary Shelley’s contemporaries, the Edenic, or Canaanic as the case may be, promise of South America was not only a beautiful memory of the past or the legend of an innocent, native population lost, but a tangible possibility in the present. Even with the arduous crossing from Europe, the pall of slavery, and in the midst of a series of wars for independence, South America maintained its reputation as a place where people could escape and remake themselves, qualities that obviously interested both Byron and the creature.

### **Field Work: von Humboldt in South America**

Other than soldiers looking for adventure and profit, or colonists and plantation owners, there is another pertinent, if statistically miniscule, population in South America that could have interested the creature: natural philosophers. South America was the first international research destination of the man who would become the most famous natural philosopher of his time, second only to Napoleon in name recognition across Europe. Alexander von Humboldt would spend his lifetime studying the natural world and, towards the end of his life, would compile *Kosmos* (1845-1862) which sought to be the most comprehensive work of natural philosophy ever published. That was von Humboldt the old man, in 1799 von Humboldt was young, just come into his inheritance, and bound for discovery and adventure on the distant continent. Upon reading his *Travels* in 1821, Robert Southey described von Humboldt as:

—among travellers what Wordsworth is among poets. The extent of his knowledge and the perfect command which he has of it are truly surprising; and with this he unites a painter’s eye with a poet’s feeling. (Southey, 231)

Between 1799 and 1804 this natural philosopher with a poetic soul, and his small party of companions, would traverse hundreds of miles over terrain previously unseen by Europeans. They would catalogue and return with over 50,000 plant and

animal specimens, would come the nearest to summiting Mount Chimborazo, and would return to Europe famous for their pains. However, the Humboldt expedition was far from the only European exploration deep into the South American continent. At roughly the same time, another intrepid naturalist was making inroads across British Guiana, first arriving on the continent in 1805 and in 1812 making his most famous trek into the interior of the continent. This man, Squire Charles Waterton of Walton Hall, would not receive wide recognition for his explorations and discoveries until later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but together these two natural philosophers, with vastly different approaches to the discipline, offer another potential reason for the creature's desire to escape to South America.

Galvanism, and its uses as both an experiment and an entertainment in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is well documented in *Frankenstein* research. An earlier chapter of this thesis briefly mentioned Luigi Galvani's time at the University of Bologna and the next chapter will examine the use of electricity to stimulate health among other things in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, the experiments of Alexander von Humboldt, and his primary companion Amié Bonpland, are less well known. Inspired by Galvani's work on animal electricity, von Humboldt conducted some experiments on the subject in Germany, but was not fully able to indulge his curiosity in the field until his expedition crossed *los llanos*, the vast grasslands spanning modern day Venezuela and Colombia. While traversing the plain, von Humboldt's party came to the community of Calabozo, a trading town surrounded by shallow pools infested with electric eels. Given the chance to "examine one of these extraordinary fish" capable of "deliver[ing] electric shocks of more than 600 volts," von Humboldt and party delayed their travel, staying in Calabozo for several hours to conduct experiments (Wulf, 70, 71).

The travellers contrived to capture the eels by forcing them to use the majority of their electric defence mechanisms on horses driven into their pools to stir the fish from the mud they lurked in. Once the creature's wattage had been diminished to the point where they could be handled without fatal repercussions, the experimentalists fished them from the mud with sticks and set to work. After initial dissections of the animals, dissections made difficult by the electricity still retained by the animals and the shocks they continued to deliver to their dissectors after death, the men conducted a barrage of experiments. These included "holding an eel

with two hands, touching an eel with one hand and a bit of metal with the other, of [von] Humboldt touching an eel while holding Bonpland's hand (with Bonpland feeling the jolt)." (Wulf, 71-72) These experiments were repeated on dry and wet ground to test the differences surroundings made in electrical conduction. The animals were prodded with wax sticks and handled using "wet clay and fibre cords made from palms" as insulators (Wulf, 72).

Frankenstein's fascination with electricity is established as manifesting at a young age, after witnessing a lightning strike destroy a tree and fuelled by his father's<sup>79</sup> demonstrations with "a small electrical machine... also a kite, with a wire and string, which drew down [lightning] from the clouds", however, it is only mentioned explicitly in that lone episode of the novel (Shelley, 24). Rather, it is the "spark of being" that he seeks to infuse "into the lifeless thing" that awakens and becomes the creature not a specifically articulated electrical charge (Shelley, 38). Readers are not given detail beyond what exactly this spark would be, but we do know that the pursuit of that spark was vastly detrimental to Frankenstein's health. Over the course of his research, Frankenstein's face grew "pale with study, and [his] person had become emaciated with confinement." (Shelley, 36) Later, after awakening the creature, Frankenstein weighs its worth against the deprivation of his "rest and health" and retroactively finds the price too high (Shelley, 39). Like von Humboldt and Bonpland, who finished their day of experimenting with electric fish "exhausted and weakened by their efforts," Frankenstein has physically drained himself in the pursuit of the vital spark of life (Harkup, 59). Unlike von Humboldt, he does not think the effort was worth the final result.

Throughout his time in South America, von Humboldt proved himself near fearless, attempting to summit what was then thought to be the tallest mountain in the world and taking careful barometric readings throughout, dissecting and performing extensive experiments on electric eels, climbing every volcano he came across and in one instance going so far as to withstand earth-tremors to crawl "to the edge to peer over into Pichincha's deep crater" to see the flames that bloom from the

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<sup>79</sup> This passage is removed from the 1831 edition and instead Frankenstein's interest in electricity is fed when "a man of great research in natural philosophy... entered an explanation of a theory he had formed on the subject of electricity and galvanism, which was at once new and astonishing to me." (Shelley, 1831, 28)

belly of the earth (Wulf, 96). Of the experience, von Humboldt would later say “No imagination would be able to conjure up something as sinister, mournful, and deathly” as what he saw that day, a sentiment echoed by Frankenstein upon viewing his animated creature, “a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived.” (quoted in Wulf, 96, Shelley, 40) By this point von Humboldt had spent a great deal of time with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and was still in correspondence with the great author. Having spent months living in close concert and near-constant discussion with the author of *Werther* and *Faust*, von Humboldt knew something of the breadth and darker depths of the human imagination, to say that any part of South America escaped that scope was no mean statement. It took a certain kind of man to cross an ocean and brave the darkest heart of South America. If the creature was looking for a place where, despite his promises of self-enforced isolation, men might not be afraid of him for his appearance alone, South American explorers like Baron Alexander von Humboldt were as good a bet as any, a concept which we will explore more later in the chapter.

To my knowledge, Shelley never met von Humboldt, but like most every other scientifically and culturally engaged person on the continent, she would have been aware of his exploits. In 1819 Byron described a friend’s prowess as an adventurer and explorer as “on a level with von Humboldt,” high praise for any 19<sup>th</sup> century explorer (MacCarthy, 372). Returning to Ticknor as a link between Byron and von Humboldt, the American’s description of Byron’s posited American adventures: “climbing the Andes and ascending the Oronoco(sic)” were both cornerstone feats of von Humboldt’s five-year expedition to the Americas (Ticknor, 165). It could be a coincidence that these are also the landmarks chosen by Byron for exploration, but the fact that Ticknor claims these plans were told to him at a brief meeting with Byron where Ticknor could easily have boasted about his new acquaintance with the famous explorer, makes the coincidence seem unlikely.

Helen Maria Williams, whose 1786 *Peru* stands as a towering example of *la Leyenda Negra* and a testament to European fascination with South American well before von Humboldt’s expedition, was both a longstanding friend of the Godwin family and von Humboldt’s “friend and collaborator” in the English translations of his work (Leask, 266). Working together in Paris, von Humboldt and Williams produced translations of his work, meaning that French and English editions of the

travel narratives, observations on the remnants of ancient South American cultures, and descriptions of experiments appeared in rapid succession across almost fifteen years between von Humboldt's arrival in Paris, and Ticknor's meeting him there in 1817. As for Williams, though she emigrated to France in 1791, a letter between Godwin and Mary Jane Godwin in 1819 suggests that there was still relatively regular correspondence between the three.<sup>80</sup>

Another connection between the Shelley/Godwin circle and von Humboldt is Sir Joseph Banks, the president of the Royal Scientific Society in London, whose library was von Humboldt's reference for what constituted a proper scientist's library. At least as early as 1817 Godwin and Banks were on friendly enough terms that the political philosopher called on Sir Joseph at home, opening the possibility that the two men were more than passing acquaintances. Banks, in turn, likely met von Humboldt when the Prussian first came to London in 1814 following Napoleon's defeat. By 1817, von Humboldt's older brother, Wilhelm, had been appointed a diplomatic posting in London, and von Humboldt himself returned to the city to petition the British East India Trading Company. Both times the naturalist was met with great fanfare by the people of London and his presence was courted by the most fashionable and exemplary circles in the city. While von Humboldt never appears directly in Godwin's diary, multiple confirmed meetings between Godwin and Banks makes it possible that Godwin heard about the intrepid naturalist from one of the greatest British scientists of the day.

### **Inherently Unhealthy: South America and Colonial Mortality**

Banks was also a friend, and regular correspondent, of the other canonical South American explorer/naturalist that I will be discussing: Squire Charles Waterton of Walton Hall. Waterton's life in, and explorations of, New Guiana dovetail neatly with von Humboldt's, beginning in 1805, just after the Prussian left South America and returned to Europe. It is from Waterton that we have Sir Joseph Bank's immortal advice, given on first meeting the younger man in 1804, just before Waterton sailed to Demerara to oversee the family plantation. The president of the

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<sup>80</sup> See the Editorial Notes for H.M. Williams in the <http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/>.

Royal Society advised his young friend that a man “may stay in [tropical, South American climes], for three years or more, and not suffer much. After that period, fever and ague, and probably a liver disease, will attack you, and you will die at last, worn out...” (Waterton, xli) Sage advice, and not unrealistic, given the dangers associated with living and exploring on the tropical continent. Banks was in a position to know of the dangers first-hand, having been part of Captain Cook’s Pacific exploration of South America’s western coast from 1768 to 1771. Waterton would continue to hold Banks in high regard, despite the Squire’s blatant distaste for the Royal Society in later life, and the two would stay in contact until the older man’s death in 1820.

Banks was not alone in his estimation of South America as inherently unhealthy to Europeans. Matthew Lewis died of yellow fever, one of dozens insect and water-borne diseases that stalked transplanted Europeans in the tropics. Europeans, of course, were not the only transplants to the new world and as has previously been stated, the economic incentives to keep a slave population healthy versus simply replacing slaves as they died from overwork and illness after a few years, heavily favoured the second option. Over the course of Lewis’ letters and journals, the novelist devotes dozens of pages to accounts of ailments witnessed or avoided. The posthumously published *Journal of a West-Indian Proprietor* (1834) and *The Life and Correspondence of M.G. Lewis* (1839) both document the various maladies suffered by slaves in Jamaica, and securing doctors to treat them, with Lewis recounting everything from the dreadful “cocoa-bay,... [which] shows itself in large blotches and swellings, and which generally, by degrees, moulder away the joints of the toes and fingers, til they rot and drop off” to the profusion of “little fevers, or colds, or pains in the head or limbs” suffered by servants within his own house. (Lewis, *Journal*, 144, 331). As for his own health, Lewis’ letters offer a glimpse into the mind of a planter, with pleas not to be informed, should his mother in England fall ill, as the news would “affect [Lewis] too heavily, and might kill [him] in such a climate” as Jamaica (Lewis, *Correspondence vol. II*, 191). Mere weeks before his death, Lewis commented on the strangeness of his continued health, that he was “still alive, and... also still well, which is strange enough , for I have been doing every thing that makes other people die outright”, including staying outside sweating at night, and traversing dangerous terrain by day (Lewis,

*Correspondence vol. II*, 226 emphasis in original). Even into the early 1800s, miasma theory, or the idea that ‘bad air’ caused disease, was still prevalent among Europeans, making Lewis’ decisions to be out at night or to take a road “bordered by precipices and swamps”, when night air and stagnant, wet air<sup>81</sup> were considered prime collections of miasma, particularly hazardous (Lewis, *Correspondence*, 227).

Because of this inherent unhealthiness, European trained doctors were in short supply and high demand in South American and West Indies colonies. Dr John William Polidori, Byron’s ill-suited travelling companion, briefly considered a spell in Brazil in 1816, perhaps because the lack of trained doctors would make his dubious patient record (three known patient deaths, plus a less than amicable split with Byron), a moot point across the ocean. Polidori’s letter to Byron asking for a letter of introduction or “some means of getting recommended to some one of the English who have influence at the Portuguese (sic) court” who would help him enact his “Bresil (sic) plan” (quoted in Macdonald, 134). Byron, for all his influence as both a lord and a famous poet, gave the task of gathering recommendations for the young physician to his publisher rather than pulling strings himself. He wrote to Murray that Polidori had a notion:

—to go to the Brazils on a medical Speculation with the Danish Consul—as you (Murray) are in the favour of the powers that be—could you not get him some letters of recommendation from some of your Government friends—to some of the Portuguese settlers (Byron, *Letters vol. VI*, 165)

We have no records of Murray ever fulfilling this request, though given Byron’s wry assessment that Polidori would become “a useful member of society” in South America by “lop[ping] the diseased members”, perhaps this is unsurprising (Byron, *Letters vol. VI*, 166). Polidori’s ratio of patients treated to patients who died under his care in Italy was 4:3, a grim statistic even given the guesswork still involved in medicine at the time. To my knowledge, Polidori did not press forward with this plan much beyond attempting, and failing, to secure some form of recommendation from Byron, but the fact remains that we have here another piece of the pattern: there

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<sup>81</sup> We now know that it is not the air, but rather the mosquitoes that breed in stagnant water and flock at night, and carry diseases such as malaria and dengue, which made these times and places more dangerous.

were patients, both white and black, to be had in South America, and curious diseases to study in the tropical heat if one could survive it.

### **The Squire of Walton Hall: Taxidermist Extraordinaire**

When Sir Joseph Banks told young Charles Waterton that he could only survive the inherent unhealthiness of South America for a few years, he was not voicing a lone opinion. He was one of the most famous scientists in England offering a measured judgment that the continent was harmful for European constitutions, no matter how promising the potential for financial gain. It is from Banks, also, that Waterton received his mandate to spend his (preferably brief) time in the tropics acquiring samples of the poison he called ‘wourali’, the substance known today as *curare*. Waterton and his experimentation with wourali/curare will be explored in another chapter; however for now suffice to say that the poison serves as a paralytic, rapidly freezing the nervous system and therefore stopping the lungs from functioning. To this end, Waterton and others performed artificial respiration on various mammals that had been dosed with the substance, and posited its use as a rudimentary anaesthetic, and in treating rabies.<sup>82</sup> However, the other great, and secretive, result of Waterton’s time in New Guiana was his perfection of a taxidermy technique that rendered specimens more lifelike than other examples of the day, and the taxidermied chimeras he created using this technique.

In his account of his time in South America and discoveries therein, *Wanderings in South America* (1825), Waterton wrote that a taxidermist “must possess Promethean boldness, and bring down fire and animation... into your preserved specimen.” (Waterton, 322) This Promethean boldness, paired with admonishments that a taxidermist must pay as much attention to their preparations “as the sculptor does to the human frame” (Waterton, 321), leaves Waterton sounding distinctly Frankensteinian about his prized specimens. Further parallels between the real scientist and the fictional one are found in the specimens themselves; while it is true that Waterton produced hundreds of specimens faithful to their living incarnations, specimens that remain “pristine right up to the present day”,

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<sup>82</sup> See the next chapter for a fuller account of Waterton’s curare experiment.

he is better remembered now for the taxidermy chimeras he produced by grafting elements of multiple, exotic creatures onto each other (Bann, 10). These satirical creations, with titles like *John Bull and the National Debt*, a “preserved porcupine with human face and tortoise shell, assailed by preserved lizards and other creatures,” were not admired by all who viewed them (Bann, 11).



Figure 7 Waterton, *John Bull and the National Debt*, Wakefield Museum

As Blackburn puts it: “There is something peculiarly sinister about a composite creature that is recognizable in its parts but not in its entirety,” but they did make Waterton infamous (Blackburn, 195). The unsettling, even sinister, nature of Waterton’s creatures, fusions of human characteristics and animal attributes, links them intrinsically to the creature, whose internal makeup of human and animal organs was explored in a previous chapter. Perhaps Waterton’s most startling example of this fusion of animal materials and human appearances comes from the *Nondescript*, a creation formed by reshaping the skin of a howler monkey’s posterior

into the face of a near-human. Before the truth of the *Nondescript* was released publicly with the publication of Waterton's *Wanderings*, word spread that this was a new tribe of primitive man, discovered, killed, and preserved by the eccentric naturalist, a missing link between humans and primates decades before Darwin published his *Origin of Species* (1869). If the *Nondescript*'s features tended to resemble those of certain customs officer who harassed Waterton over import tax on the specimens he brought back from Demerara, the resemblance was coincidental.



Figure 8 Waterton, *The Nondescript*, Wakefield Museum

Waterton's taxidermical jokes would eventually be seen as charming, and his personal idiosyncrasies amusing, rather than vaguely menacing. In 1835, a decade after the publication of *Wanderings*, Ticknor was taken to Walton Hall, ostensibly to meet the eccentric squire. When Waterton proved unavailable, the American described his visit like so:

We were sorry not to find him at home; but we saw his curious collection in natural history, one of the most beautiful things I ever beheld. The birds, collected and prepared by himself, are exquisite.... There were other things too; the alligator he rode; the “nondescript,” with which he tried to mystify the naturalists, but which is only a red monkey, prepared by his consummate skill to look like a man, (Ticknor, 439)

In Waterton we have a South American naturalist, who braved dense forests and dangerous creatures, pioneered taxidermy techniques designed to preserve specimens in as life-like a posture as possible, played with species hybridity and audience expectations, and experimented in the foggy area between life and death. Though Waterton’s exploits were not made fully public until the publication of his *Wanderings*, his longstanding friendship with Banks could well have introduced word of his work, and eccentricities, to the Shelley-Godwin circle before this. Other possible discourse on Waterton could have come from Benjamin Brodie, his partner in the 1813 curare experiments. Godwin’s *Diary* notes correspondence between the philosopher and an as yet unidentified “Brodie” over forty times, with contact starting in 1810, the year Benjamin Brodie was inducted into the Royal Society. Another possible indication that Mary Shelley was aware of Waterton comes from the name of the first narrator in the *Frankenstein* text, Robert Walton. You will remember that Squire Waterton’s ancestral home, and the grounds which in his dotage he transformed into England’s first nature preserve, was named Walton Hall. If Alexander von Humboldt possessed the scientific fearlessness to approach the creature without the mind-killing fear and disgust experienced by almost every human the creature exposed himself to, then Waterton, a man who purposefully made monsters that he was proud to show off to visitors, serves as an even more likely human companion for Frankenstein’s creation.



*Figure 9 Cpt. E. Jones, Charles Waterton Capturing a Cayman, Stonyhurst College*

In passing, I have already touched on the fearlessness shown by both von Humboldt and Waterton during their South American explorations, however I will now take a moment to elaborate on that. Waterton, who leapt astride a ten foot cayman (sic)<sup>83</sup> to wrestle it ashore and slept with his limbs exposed in the hope of being fed on by vampire bats in his sleep, and von Humboldt who endured electric shock and extreme heat to dissect eels and peer into the bellies of volcanoes, are both very different in their approaches to natural philosophy from Frankenstein. Even Walton, whose quest for the North Pole aligns him more with South American explorers in practice, than Frankenstein, while revolted by the creature's actions, does not seem to be as paralyzed by his physical appearance as Frankenstein. Despite his instructor's exhortation to "apply [himself] to every branch of natural philosophy", Frankenstein is almost completely a laboratory experimentalist, rather than inuring himself to field work (Shelley, 31). Frankenstein has robbed the grave and braved the dissecting room but never needed to conduct field work on the scale of the other three. His explorations away from the laboratory, as shown in the novel, are to other European cities, or to 18<sup>th</sup> century tourist destinations like the Mer d'Glace, beautiful and dangerous certainly, but also known quantities and long since traversed by generations of sightseers. The nerve required to mount an expedition into the unknown and see it through to the end, or in the case of Walton, to see it to a

<sup>83</sup> 'caiman' is the modern spelling, a species of crocodile indigenous to South and Central America.

point beyond previous expeditions, is substantial to say the least. Frankenstein does eventually traverse the wilds, in pursuit of the creature, but he does not leave on this expedition willingly. Frankenstein leaves Europe as a means to an end, not by choice in order to gain knowledge or experience as an experimentalist or naturalist like the great explorers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. If the creature is searching for people brave enough to face him and see beyond his fearsome appearance, he is not going to find them in settled and civilized Europe. Instead he must search beyond the edges of western civilization and seek out the kind of men who might see past European preconceptions and fears, who would put their lives on the line to conduct research, achieve their goals, and maybe be brave enough to befriend a lonely creature.

### **West Meets East: Clerval's East India Trading Company Subplot**

My final analysis of the creature's desire to retreat to South America lies in the language of retroactive opposition, in the form of Clerval's East India Trading Company subplot from the 1831 edition. In the 1818 *Frankenstein* Clerval arrives in Ingolstadt to study at the university with Frankenstein immediately after the creature's animation and subsequent escape into the night. He arrives at the university to study languages, rather than the sciences, so that "by acquiring their elements, [he might] open a field of self-instruction on his return to Geneva. Persian, Arabic, and Hebrew, gained his attention, after he had made himself perfectly master of Greek and Latin." (Shelley, 49-50) Frankenstein joins his friend in this pursuit, seeking diversion from recent trials "in the works of the orientalists." (Shelley, 50) In this version of the text, Clerval is destined to return to their home in Geneva and join his father in trade there as a merchant, albeit a well-educated merchant, linguistically capable of indulging literary tastes outside his day to day work.

However, in the 1831 edition, Clerval's linguistic studies take on a different, more pointed cast. In this version, Clerval arrives in Ingolstadt:

with the design of making himself complete master of the oriental languages.... Resolved to pursue no inglorious career, he turned his eyes toward the East, as affording scope for his spirit of enterprise. The Persian,

Arabic, and Sanscrit(sic) languages engaged his attention... (Shelley, 1831, 54)

This small change to Clerval's university syllabus and elaboration on his motives builds an entire unsaid subplot for Clerval's future. This is further elaborated during Victor and Clerval's tour of the British Isles, where upon arriving in London we are told that Clerval's:

design was to visit India, in the belief that he had in his knowledge of its various languages... the means of materially assisting the progress of European colonization and trade. In Britain only could he further the execution of his plan. (Shelley, 1831, 139)

Here we have Clerval's expressed desire to be an active colonizer, to spend his future in the east communicating with as many people as possible and enriching himself materially through the British East India Trading Company.<sup>84</sup> Where the creature wants to travel west with his mate and there live in isolation and naturalistic simplicity, Clerval wants to travel east alone, to live in India for trade, however long that might take, and then presumably return to Europe to enjoy his spoils away from a land that could be just as deadly as South America to the European constitution.

India was a popular setting for British writers. It sold well to an audience with an "appetite for literary Orientalism whetted by William Jones, William Beckford, Elizabeth Hamilton, Robert Southey, Sydney Owenson, and others" (White, 5). By 1830, when Mary Shelley was revising her novel for the 1831 printing, and softening some of the more radical philosophical passages to make the text more palatable for readers, this inclusion becomes a telling nod to the popular literature and the conversation surrounding it during Shelley's lifetime. However, more than just a calculated amendment to the original story for the sake of conforming to what was popular in her time, the choice to have Clerval turn his ambitions eastward seems to foreshadow the inevitability of his death. Disease stalked the European population in India, to the point that whites "saw themselves as

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<sup>84</sup> By 1831, Shelley had long since returned to England and become far better acquainted with Thomas Love Peacock, who served as an executor of Percy's estate, advised her in legal matters, and worked for the British East India Company. Through Peacock, Shelley likely became more aware of the workings of the Company and the languages best suited to conducting Company business in India.

being pursued by death... subject to an almost unrelenting tide of mortality” (Arnold, 43). Just as the creature seems to be sold on the Edenic dream of living in the tropical paradise of South America, Clerval’s largely unarticulated desire is to become a part of the systematic colonialism of India, and profit from the wealth that could be garnered there. The comparisons, equal and opposite, between Clerval and the creature are myriad. One is the companion of Frankenstein’s youth, the other his quarry unto death. One travels openly and eagerly to the British Isles with the scientist, the other shadows the travellers in secret, hoping for a promise fulfilled. One pursues language in the daylight corridors of a university, the other must hide in deep forests, and beside a hovel, to scavenge language by listening to others. One dreams of travelling east to assist “the progress of European colonization” (Shelley, 1831, 139), and continue the subjugation of an entire people, the other wishes to travel west and “dwell in those wilds where the beasts of the field will be [his] only companions.” (Shelley, 120) One wished to go to the empty, untamed South American continent, the other would rather travel to a place that, as the *Asiatic Annual Register* put it, “has been explored in every direction, and by people of every description” (AAR, 493). With so many parallels, it is fitting then, that when Mary Shelley acknowledged the import of orientalism on British fiction, she also continued her motif of the distorted reflection between Clerval and the creature. Equally fitting is the fact that neither of these desired futures came to pass.

Into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a European perception of South America as an Edenic paradise for anyone who was willing to brave the crossing and make a name for themselves in the uncharted wilderness. It was a continent still largely uncharted, but known to be rich in mineral resources and fertile land for those who could afford to build plantations. It was a place where the sun had once been deity, where brave naturalists made great finds, revolution stirred for those who wished to fight, or where others, like Byron, could retire in peace. Even if Europeans faced dangers from disease born by bad water, mosquitoes, and their fellow humans, the hardier creature would not fall prey to such weaknesses.

However, the perception of this paradise was an illusion created by centuries of legends and thousands of pages of text but exploded by the realities of South American history. The prelapsarian Inca, and other more savage native tribes, had been driven to near extinction by invaders, the survivors driven as slaves beyond

endurance, and when that population dried up, African replacements were brought in to meet labour demands. Even the naturalists, whose curiosity and bravery might have made them sympathize with the creature, were also avid dissectors to a man. If the creature had approached them in the jungle, he could just have easily ended up under their scalpels as in their confidences. When Mary Shelley decided that her creature wanted to retire to South America, it was an apt choice, because like the creature, the beautiful dream of what the continent could be did not match with the reality of South America under European colonization. The creature's South American Eden had not existed for centuries, if it ever had to begin with, and his desire to return the Garden was destined to fail from the beginning.

## Chapter Four

### *Frankenstein: Life, Death, and the In-Between*

þe Wormes awnswers to þe Body:

þat power dures whils man has lyfe

In þis wrechid warld here ar þai þe apon

Now þi lyfe is gone with vs may þou not stryfe

þou art bot as erthe and as þinge to noght gone

The Worms answer the Body:

“That power lasts only while Man is alive;

Here in the grave, we have the last say.

Since your life is gone, you may no longer strive

Against us worms, for you’re nothing but clay,

—*A Disputacioun betwixt þe Body and Wormes*, trans. J. R. Rytting

Perhaps the most central, uniting theme of all *Frankenstein* criticism, and all adaptations or representations of the text since, lies in the way Shelley distorted the lines of life and death and the way the context surrounding her influenced those distortions. A great deal of research in this area has focused on galvanism, a relatively common experiment in the early nineteenth century mentioned by Shelley herself in 1831. In writing a chapter contextualizing what Shelley leaves unsaid in the grey areas between the living and the dead, as seen by 19<sup>th</sup> century Europeans, writing on galvanism was unavoidable. However, I will only focus on Aldini’s experiment briefly, preferring instead to detail other, lesser-known experiments, theories, texts, and so on. As with all of the chapters that came before this, Shelley’s *Frankenstein* was contributing to and commenting on a much broader, implicit cultural conversation. A conversation largely unhindered by the national borders that much of Shelley scholarship frames itself with. To that end, there seems to have been a near-universal fascination with, and anxiety over, the boundary between life and death, and transgressions therein. It is this melded fascination and anxiety on which the weight of the *Frankenstein* mythos hung for readers of the novel when it was first published, and upon which modern interest still hangs to this day.

This said, even today with two centuries of medical advancements separating modern doctors from *Frankenstein*, to say that life and death are entirely binary with a definitive boundary between the two is naïve at best, and obtuse or cruel at worst. Conditions like brain death, and comas, medical tools like transfusion, artificial respiration, or ventricular assistance devices, adrenalin administration and defibrillation, the seemingly miraculous reanimation of those who have been hypothermic for extended periods of time, all of these pose spiritual and ethical quandaries for families and doctors alike, while post-mortem procedures like cryogenics seek to reject “the tyranny of aging and death”, waiting for a medical advancement that may or may never arrive (More, 450). In the harsh light of the twenty-first century, life and death still exist in a tangle best dissected by philosophers and doctors. In the nineteenth century, they were a murky knot probed by many and fully understood by none. This chapter seeks to explore that knot, delving into such disparate topics as the discovery of cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and attendant rescue techniques, which Shelley seems to have had some knowledge of, socially sanctioned cannibalism in the form of medicinal consumption of mummia, and the entwining anxieties of sex and death as portrayed by medical texts like Tissot’s *Treatise of Onanism*(1766) and the necrophilic anxieties present throughout the *Frankenstein* text. If this chapter sounds less focused than those that came before it, that is because it is. The European conversation surrounding life, death, and in-between, is expansive and all-encompassing and Shelley’s decision to enter into that conversation in spectacular fashion, by writing and publishing *Frankenstein*, speaks both to her commitment to her work and her ingenuity as a storyteller by weaving all of these threads together in her narrative.

### **Galvanism and Mary Shelley**

First and foremost, I should address the elephant in the scholarship that is galvanism. In the 1831 *Introduction*, Shelley mentions galvanism directly as having “given token to such things” as the reanimation of a corpse (Shelley, 1831, X). Galvanism is an experiment whereby a complete or partial cadaver is attached to a

voltaic pile<sup>85</sup> and stimulated to reflexive motion through the completion of an electric circuit, for the shock, horror, and edification of those watching. As was mentioned in a previous chapter, what we now call galvanism was theorized by Luigi Galvani of the Bolognese *Scala de Anotomia* and demonstrated widely across Europe and Britain by his nephew Giovanni Aldini. Galvani and Aldini were far from the first to consider the medical applications of electricity. Among the more ludicrous experiments, James Graham created a ‘Grand Celestial Bed’ in the 1760s which was intended to cure impotence through the application of a low-level current running through the frame. However, where other experiments seemed to produce no or limited effects on the patient, Aldini’s demonstrations presented immediate and dramatic effects on the human and animal cadavers he utilized. Galvanism also had far greater, and more socially acceptable, theatrical potential for an audience still accustomed to public hangings as a form of entertainment than many of the other potential experimental uses for electricity at the time.

These demonstrations have been widely dissected in *Frankenstein* and medical scholarship, focusing most famously on the galvanic anatomization of hanged murderer, George Forrester, in January 1803. According to Aldini, the corpses of executed criminals worked better than those who died of natural causes:

because it is to be presumed, that the development of the principle which occasions death destroys the elasticity of the fibres and the humours are changed from their natural to a corrupted state. It was therefore necessary to obtain the human body while it still retained, after death, the vital powers in the highest degree of preservation; and hence I was obliged... to place myself underneath the scaffold, near the axe of justice, to receive the yet bleeding bodies of criminals, the only subjects proper for my experiments. (Aldini, 67)

Descriptions of a similar experiment performed by Scottish surgeon, Andrew Ure, in 1818, with *Frankenstein* released just a few months before, lends further ghoulishness to the demonstration, as the severed head of his subject, upon being galvanized had:

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<sup>85</sup> Voltaic piles were a more dependable source of electricity than the previously widely-used Leyden jar or flask which became unreliable in damp weather and were far more fragile than assembled disks of metallic conductors.

every muscle in his countenance... simultaneously thrown into fearful action; rage, horror, despair, anguish, and ghastly smiles united their hideous expression... surpassing far the wildest representations of a Fuseli or a Kean. (Ure, 481)

The appeal of such descriptions when laid alongside *Frankenstein* is easily observed, and the parallels that scholars have been drawing for decades between the seemingly otherworldly galvanic charge, the convulsions of Forrester and his ilk, and the pursuit, experimentation, and eventual convulsive, storm-backed animation of the creature are stark and valid points. That said, I would like to briefly look at the possibility that Mary Shelley, herself, was a candidate for galvanization.

In 1811, then fourteen-year-old Mary Godwin “developed a severe skin eruption on one hand”, a malady severe enough that William Godwin took his daughter to renowned surgeon and lecturer Henry Cline Sr (Sunstein, 54). William St. Clair posits that the outbreak on Shelley’s arm was a pox, either “chicken pox or possibly smallpox”, though Shelley’s inoculation as an infant, and the apparently localization of the pustules<sup>86</sup>, makes this seem unlikely (St. Clair, 310). Cline’s exact diagnosis has not appeared in any biography that I have seen, though he did order the girl to keep her arm in a sling, warned her family that surgery might be required, and then “prescribed six months of salt-water therapy”, thus sending Shelley to Ramsgate, southeast of London for sea-bathing and the daily opening and draining of the sores on her arm (Sunstein, 55). She would remain there eight months, before returning to London only to have the ailment flare up again and at least one more visit to Cline undertaken. Henry Cline Sr. was at the end of his career by this point, retiring from teaching in 1811 and resigning his patients in 1812, however treating a teenaged Mary Shelley is not what the illustrious Dr Cline is known for by medical historians today.

Dr Cline is instead remembered as the first modern surgeon to document and hypothesize on the treatment of a muscle disorder today known as Dupuytren’s contracture, wherein the fingers curl permanently against the palm in mimicry of ‘the hand of Benediction’, as seen in iconography of saints and other figures across

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<sup>86</sup> Both chicken and smallpox may present as localized pustules, but an outbreak that lasts months, as was the case in Shelley’s eruption, would have seen spots over her entire body rather than a single limb.

Christianity. The contracture is also characterized by hardened nodes on the palm and exteriors of fingers, and to this day is still largely treated by surgery because physical amendment to the tightened tendons is the best available option. In 1811, when Shelley first came under Dr Cline's care, the disorder was not yet recognized and the Parisian surgeon from which it gets its name would not take an interest in the disease for another twenty years. However, Cline had observed and dissected examples of the disease in the 1770s, proposing a palmer fasciotomy, or incision into the palm to release tension, in 1778.<sup>87</sup> Cline did not publish on the disorder, apparently preferring to put his efforts towards family and teaching, but "from the notes of his teachings recorded by his students... we know of his original description of a disease of the palmer fascia leading to finger contractures", meaning that among his students and social circle Dr Henry Cline Sr. was known as the man to see about mysterious hand maladies (Osterman et al., 198).

Besides being the hand man, Cline is also remembered as an early mentor to famed anatomist Sir Astley Cooper<sup>88</sup>, and a continuing partner to his pupil once Cooper completed his apprenticeship under Cline, a partnership that spanned over two decades. I mention this because Cooper, in addition to making his own discoveries and subsequent mark on anatomical research, also showed an interest in galvanism, attending Aldini's previously mentioned Forrester demonstration in 1803. If Cooper showed an interest in the Aldini experiments, then it is difficult to believe that Dr Cline, who came of age under Enlightenment era teachers, would not have been equally if not more interested. The latter half of the eighteenth century saw "the therapeutic virtues of electricity... debated... throughout the century, nonetheless patients were receptive towards the possibility that the newly discovered electric fire might also be a healing agent." (Bertucci, 89) Now, it is important to note that it is highly unlikely that Shelley had Dupuytren's contracture, if only because it typically presents itself in geriatric patients rather than teenagers, but it does beg the question that if electricity was known to illicit powerful reactions from muscles as in the case of Aldini's demonstrations, and was long thought to have

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<sup>87</sup> Two centuries after Cline hypothesis, French surgeons in the 1970s adapted his procedure, using needles to release tension in a procedure known as percutaneous needle fasciotomy, a procedure still standard today.

<sup>88</sup> Cline was the first to introduce Cooper to practical anatomy bringing an arm for dissection to the future royal surgeon when he was just fourteen and living with Cline as part of his apprenticeship.

potential as a healing agent in living patients, then would a surgeon like Cline who had been a member of the Royal Society since 1807, with access to the Society's wealth of knowledge and decades of experience, have attempted an electric therapy before banishing his young patient to several months' sojourn by the sea? It seems, at the very least, like a treatment that would have been discussed at the time. In 1831 Mary Shelley said that galvanism was a topic of conversation in Diodati fifteen years previous, understandable given the presence of the newly minted Dr Polidori and Percy Shelley's own medical interests, but given her health issues as a young teenager and the eminence of the surgeon her father took her to, the possibility exists that electric therapy could have been a part of her personal medical history well before then.

### **Legallois and the Seat of Life**

On the other end of the experimental spectrum, while other anatomists and experimentalists probed the murky borders between life and death with electrical stimuli, one French anatomist sought to concretely define it. Julien-Jean-César- Legallois believed life was produced and maintained "by an impression of the arterial blood made upon the brain and the medulla spinalis, or by the principle resulting from this impression." (Legallois, 142) In other words, that so long as blood circulation was maintained within a body, life could be preserved. Legallois took this hypothesis to the extremes of experimentation, proving through vivisection that the bare maintenance of life, as he defined it by the regular and maintained circulation of arterial blood, the majority of the mammalian brain was not necessary, making the spinal cord and the barest attached sliver of brainstem the true seat of life.

Legallois' experimentation, and theories on the possibility of reanimation, were revolutionary for the time, and will be discussed shortly, but first I would like to quote at length from the "*Expose on the State of Medicine in France 1814*" (1815), in which a brief account of Legallois' life and work was given as a tribute following his early death in February, 1814. Legallois' studies were interrupted in the 1790s by the French Revolution, a time when reports "of heads blinking and making facial expressions" well after decapitation, were not uncommon (King, 21).

His researches resumed when relative stability returned to Paris, and resulted in a thesis on the circulation of blood which “announced [him as] a man of science, who was determined to proceed in his studies by the *thorny, but otherwise fertile, road of experience*.” (Fothergill, 308, emphasis added) Meaning that Legallois was a man, determined from an early point in his career to spend his life as more than a bloodless philosopher in the sciences, but as an experimentalist actively proving and improving on his hypothesis. While publishing on whether or not Hippocrates actually existed<sup>89</sup>, Legallois had an epiphany which would define his researches for the rest of his life:

Suddenly, a grand idea struck Le Gallois and absorbed all the faculties of his mind. He sought for the solution of the boldest problem, — for he sought nothing less than the discovery of the principle of life!

The history of the sciences exhibits to us the first chemists as almost all occupied for centuries with the transmutation of the metals and the universal panacea. They could neither create gold nor prolong the life of men, and yet they enriched the arts with numerous useful processes, and medicine with several very powerful remedies.

Le Gallois did not succeed any more than they in determining in what life precisely consists, and, perhaps, it is not given to the feeble intelligence of man to discover the primordial laws of the great phenomena of our organization; but, in seeking for the solution of a question still undecided, Le Gallois threw great light on several very important points in physiology. (Fothergill, 309)

The language used in this description of Legallois’ inspiration, work, and place within the annals of medical history, is mirrored too closely by Mary Shelley for coincidence. Like Legallois, Frankenstein earns early esteem at his university for “some discoveries in the improvement of some chemical instruments”, and then rapidly makes a decision to ask himself “Whence... did the principle of life proceed?” (Shelley, 33) He goes on to frame this as “a bold question, and one which

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<sup>89</sup> According to a footnote provided the *London Medical and Physical Journal*, Legallois decided that the classical physician did, in fact, live at one time and was not a myth as had been proposed by B. Boulet.

has ever been considered a mystery” (Shelley, 33), very like Legallois’ “boldest problem” to which he sought “the solution of a question still undecided” (Fothergill, 309). In searching for his answers, Frankenstein spends days and nights in the charnel house, “examining and analysing the minutiae of causation... in the change from life to death and death to life, until from the midst of this darkness a sudden light broken in upon” him (Shelley, 34). The opening sentence of the above section on Legallois: “Suddenly, a grand idea struck Le Gallois and absorbed all of the faculties of his mind”, and the closing phrase that the Frenchman “threw great light on several very important points in physiology”, the science Frankenstein determined to take up when first posing his *bold question*, echoes astonishingly well. Finally, the comparison between Legallois and “the first chemists... occupied for centuries with the transmutation of metal and the universal panacea”, finds parallel in Frankenstein’s early enthusiasm for alchemists and their research, an interest which leads to his diligent search for “the philosophers stone”, which according to alchemical lore transmutes common metals into gold, “and the elixir of life”, also known as the panacea, with which Frankenstein “could banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death.” (Shelley, 23) These pursuits are first ridiculed by Frankenstein’s father, then dismissed by Monsieur Krempe as time wasted in “exploded systems, and useless names”, before finally finding Monsieur Waldman, who explains the progression of discovery since the time when “the ancient teachers of [chemistry]...promised impossibilities, and performed nothing.” (Shelley, 29, 30) It is only when modern discoveries, like those made by Legallois, are placed in context with their more fantastical predecessors that Frankenstein settles into his studies.

Similarly, by placing Legallois in league with the alchemists of old, the eulogy calls into question the utility of Legallois’ work. As Waldman explained to his new pupil in *Frankenstein*, modern sciences might have their roots in the pursuits of Albertus Magus or Paracelsus but had moved far beyond their grandiose claims by the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In this context, is Legallois, with his patently gruesome vivisections, simply another misguided alchemist repeating the same experiments and hoping for miraculous results? While extolling the enthusiasm Legallois showed in his experimentation, this memorial tempers its praise of his actual objectives, much like professor Waldman likely would have cautioned his pupil had

Frankenstein shared his theories and methodology rather than working in secret on the creature's construction. Legallois published the minutia of his work extensively, thus opening himself to the caution, criticism, and eventual censure of his peers. Shelley, learning from this, thus has her titular scientist at least while in experimental phases, remain mum on the topic of his research.

The primary difference between Legallois and Frankenstein is that the latter learned from the former, and in execution became his opposite. While Legallois publicizes his work and is censured for it, Frankenstein works in secret and thus evades the ire of his peers. Where Legallois pushes the edges of life unto death and is compared to the failed alchemists of old because of it, Frankenstein takes inspiration from those self-same ancients and breaks the bounds of death back into life. Legallois' eulogy questions the validity of his research, not only placing him within Kremp's litany of "useless names", but arguing that "perhaps it is not given to the feeble intelligence of man to discover the primordial laws of the great phenomena of our organization", where Frankenstein's passing is mourned by Walton as "the untimely extinction of [a] glorious spirit" (Shelley, 29, Fothergill, 309, Shelley, 187). Even the creature, alternately pursuer and pursued throughout the *Frankenstein* narrative, victim and cause of his creator's demise, mourns the loss of Frankenstein's "generous and self-devoted being" (Shelley, 187). The subjects Frankenstein and Legallois studied respectively bind these two together, but in composing her scientist, Shelley seems to have taken heed of the way Legallois was memorialized on his passing and sought in Frankenstein an inversion. Someone tied to alchemists in youth rather than death, who studied in secret rather than publishing, and who was memorialized by those closest to him rather than a foreign publication.

The practice of vivisection, or the dissection of a still-living animal, has roots in classical experimentation, with texts and theories on the topic attributed to Galen in circulation for centuries across Europe. By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, vivisection had advanced dramatically, and was used to test and practice surgical theories that would remain largely untried on human subjects until the invention of reliable anaesthesia. Taking his cue from Felice Fontana's<sup>90</sup> mid-eighteenth century experiments, wherein Fontana decapitated small mammals, "prevented haemorrhage by the ligature of the

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<sup>90</sup> See the second chapter for Fontana's contribution to Italian wax figerature

vessels in the neck... [and] maintained the life of those animals for a long space of time by blowing air into their lungs”, Legallois explored the theory that a headless body, or trunk as he called it, could survive so long as respiratory and circulatory functions were maintained (Legallois, 37). Through repeated experimentation in removing slivers of brain matter in still-living rabbits, Legallois determined that “the whole cerebrum, then all the cerebellum, and part of the medulla oblongata [may be removed] without stopping respiration.” (Legallois, 52) However, because he observed that breathing ceased as soon as the spinal nerves were severed, Legallois came to believe that the spine was more important to the preservation of life than the brain. The spine maintained the breath and pulse and was thus the seat of life, though even the organs that facilitate these functions, the heart and lungs, seem almost superfluous to the processes in Legallois’ eyes. To this end, Legallois claimed that:

it is easy to demonstrate that the source of sensation, and of all voluntary motions of the trunk, exclusively belongs to the spinal marrow, and that none of the viscera of the chest or abdomen have any immediate share in it. For if you open the thorax or abdomen of a rabbit, and tear out the heart, the lungs, the diaphragm, the intestines, all the viscera of these two cavities, it will continue alive after this cruel operation; and besides, if you cut off its head although then reduced to its skeleton, to its spinal marrow and muscles, it is still living; but if partially or entirely you destroy the spinal marrow, it is immediately struck with death (Legallois, 49).

This extreme take on the importance of the preserved spine over all other portions of the body seems borne out by his work, including one particular rabbit which, at eighteen minutes, “appear[d] more lively than before decapitation” (Legallois, 96). It should be remembered that despite Shelley’s recollections of Erasmus Darwin’s rumoured “preserved piece of vermicelli” that “by some extraordinary means” was induced “to move with voluntary motion”, or her musings that “galvanism had given token” to the possibility of resurrection, Frankenstein does not explicitly dabble in electricity in his descriptions of experiments leading up to the animation of his creature (Shelley, 1831, X). Frankenstein “tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay”: he did not galvanize the lifeless clay to induce life (Shelley, 36). Ergo, he engaged in vivisection, possibly along the lines of Legallois repeated, rabbit experiments.

Like Fontana, whose wax figures implied a modular view of the construction of the human frame, Legallois saw the body as a series of interchangeable and varyingly important sections. By stripping out what was unnecessary for survival, most of the brain and viscera, Legallois made animals “modular, ... organic pieces from different bodies [could] be attached to another to form a new ensemble.” (Cheung, 288) To this end, Legallois and his modular viewpoint actually foresaw a time when “organ replacemen[t] solely depend[ed] on anatomical skills”, in other words, organ transplant (Cheung, 288). Frankenstein enters into this conversation on modular humans with his creature assembled from charnel house offal and mortuary leavings, explicitly demonstrating life as an assemblage of parts and thus becoming a natural heir to both Fontana and Legallois, who theorised on organ transplant that:

It is beyond a doubt, that if both lungs and the heart could continue to perform their functions with any other portion, as they do with that of the breast, life might likewise be maintained in them. It is therefore demonstrated by a direct experiment, that the medulla spinalis of any portion whatever, may at once animate all the parts of that portion, and supply the heart with the power it requires to maintain the circulation in it; and that if life cannot be prolonged in any one portion taken at random, it is only because the anatomical arrangement of organs prevents it. But if the place of the heart could be supplied by injection, there could be furnished a quantity of arterial blood, whether natural, or artificially formed, supposing such a formation possible,-- then life might be indefinitely maintained in any portion; and consequently, after decapitation, even in the head itself, without destroying any of the functions particular in the brain. Not only life might thus be kept up both in the head and in any other portion separated from the body of an animal, but it might also be reproduced after its entire extinction. It might be restored likewise to the whole body, and thereby complete resurrection performed in the full extent of the word. (Legallois, 130- 131)

Unlike Aldini, with his crowds of spectators and excitingly electrocuted corpses, Legallois did not dabble with shock and awe experimentation and pseudo-resuscitation. Legallois performed systematic experiments based upon hypothesis which were then seemingly confirmed over the course of his research. Indeed, his hypothesis on the possibility of organ transplant so long as heart functions are

maintained through artificial means, stated above, have been borne out and successful organ transplantation of almost every organ has since been achieved. Following the successful transplant of limbs, recent years have seen the prospect of cranial transplantation raised, offering potential relief and bodily autonomy for patients the world over.<sup>91</sup> Legallois' theories foresaw what medicine has since made not only possible, but commonplace and unlike Frankenstein, Legallois never seems to have shied away from the possibilities engendered therein. With this we have the final inversion, Legallois to Frankenstein: where Frankenstein lived to see his experiment succeed and then run amok, Legallois died long before the fruits of his labours could be seen. Both men died young, but one in the disappointment of unfinished research, the other in the agony of research successful and terrible.

### **Stroke of Fate: Alphonse Frankenstein's Apoplexy**

As with other chapters in this thesis, even seemingly innocuous phrases become windows into the broader, European mindset when contextualized. For example, the death of Alphonse Frankenstein, a plot point required to untether Victor Frankenstein from Geneva and free him<sup>92</sup> to hunt his rogue creation across the arctic pack ice, offers an opportunity when, unable to "live under the horrors that were a accumulated around him; an apoplectic fit was brought on, and in a few days [Alphonse Frankenstein] died in [Victor's] arms." (Shelley, 168) Today the word apoplexy has largely fallen out of use in English, replaced with the more evocative term *stroke* in common parlance, and ischemic stroke or haemorrhagic stroke in more technical terms. Stroke, in this case, is shorthand for *stroke of god*. As Schiller helpfully points out: "It is the classical striking off or down. The Latin equivalent *morbus attonitus* and *sideratio*—literally 'being thunderstruck'—suggest both a classical force and an affliction of the mind." (Schiller, 115) By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, surgeons had some idea that the cause of stroke lay in the blood and the brain,

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<sup>91</sup> Though yet untested in human patients, this procedure has been attempted in animals to varying degrees of success or failure since the Soviet Union started experimenting with grafting puppy heads onto grown dogs in the 1950s. Today at least one expert thinks a successful head transplant will occur before 2030. (Gregory)

<sup>92</sup> Shelley is careful to remind readers in the same paragraph where she kills Alphonse, that a final Frankenstein brother, fittingly named Ernest, is still alive, physically unharmed and therefore able to assume the role of master of the Frankenstein household and presumably manage the Frankenstein estate.

specifically “a lack of spirits [oxygen?] in the blood contained in the arterial vessels of the cerebral cortex” (Schiller, 117). By the 1820s studies on the hardening of arteries, softening of brain tissue, and presence of clear “serous fluid” in the craniums of stroke victims had been published, leading physicians to a nearer understanding of the causes as they are known today, though as with Legallois’ theories on transplantation, leaving them far from any practicable relief for those who suffered attacks (Schiller, 122).

Pierre-Hubert Nysten’s 1814 *Dictionnaire de Médecine* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition), which will be referenced several times throughout this chapter, states that sudden death with no warning symptoms was “ordinarily determined to be from an apoplectic stroke” (Nysten, 392). It is worth noting here, in the light of Schiller’s remarks and the etymology of the term in English, that the French word I have translated as *stroke* is *foudroyante*, which also translates as *lightning*, again marking strokes as seemingly unpredictable and unstoppable forces of nature, rather than a malady within man’s power to cure or prevent. Elsewhere in the dictionary, symptoms of stroke are “characterized by the diminution or loss of sensation, the more or less complete cessation of movement and a state of stupor.” (Nysten, 60) Thus, Alphonse Frankenstein’s sudden fit after extreme emotional distress, and decline over the course of a few days becomes both a textbook case of apoplectic stroke, and a case of divine punishment wrought against Victor in the loss of his own father, for the scientist’s multitudinous transgressions against god and nature.

### **The Sexy Dead: *Frankenstein* and Necrophilia**

From the earliest modern criticism of *Frankenstein*, the text has been tied explicitly to birth and death. An earlier chapter of this thesis has already analysed the implications of high maternal mortality rates in this day on the rapid construction and sexualization of the female creature. Moers’ seminal “The Female Gothic” called the novel a “birth myth” in the mid-1970s, an exploration of “woman’s mythmaking.... [and] the trauma of afterbirth.” (Moers, 79, 81) Casting *Frankenstein* as a birth myth implicitly eroticizes the text, birth being the ultimate product of, and reason for, sexual intercourse in conservative western doctrine. Even Frankenstein’s negation of a female partner in the creation of his monstrous ‘son’, is

an eroticization in and of itself, making the formation of the creature a masturbatory experience, rather than the product of sexual intercourse. Indeed, I would argue that Frankenstein's observation of corpses with 'blooming' cheeks, and then creation of a male creature, indicates a purposeful obfuscation of the female body, in addition to a level of necrophilic voyeurism that will be explored later in this chapter.

Frankenstein can observe a female corpse closely, study her decay and learn to create life from it, but only name her as such euphemistically. Frankenstein is unable to explicitly state the need for female reproductive capabilities in his endeavours, instead naming his creature a purely masculine reproduction. As Sherwin indicates, when Frankenstein "disturb[s], with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame", his "imagery has an unmistakable anal and masturbatory cast", making the creation of the creature a sexual experience, though not of the sort that typically produces life (Shelley, 36, Sherwin, 885). The implications of this sexual creation process are twofold, the first being perhaps the more obvious and detestable in that it makes Frankenstein's experiment a form of necrophilia, the other is that it evokes 18<sup>th</sup> century publications on the perceived dangers of masturbation.

Carlson claims that most of Shelley's work contains necrophilic undertones, in that "the fiercest [romantic] attachments are those between the living and the dead", specifically in *Faulkner* and *Mathilda*, in which one man pines for his dead lover and the other for his dead wife (Carlson, 93). That said, neither expresses romantic interest in the corpse itself, rather the memory of the dead loved one. Thus, they engage in a kind of mental necrophilia rather than physical. Frankenstein is no Mathilda, "in love with death"'s release from this mortal coil, rather there are definite physical underpinnings to necrophilic situations throughout Shelley's first novel (Shelley, *Mathilda*, 112).

The term necrophilia, taken from the Greek *nekros* (corpse) and *-philia* (love), was not coined until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, but examples of the practice can be found across literature from antiquity, through the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For example, the climax of the Grimm brother's fairytale, Snow White involves a prince's necrophilic desire to own Snow White's corpse. In the story, the queen attempts four times to kill Snow White, and each time the girl faints "*as if dead*" (Grimm, 312, emphasis added). This pattern and language of *seeming* death rather than actual mortality, leaves the final, successful murder attempt in stark contrast to the prior attempts.

Snow White takes the infamous poison apple and “hardly had she a bit of it in her mouth than she fell down *dead*.” (Grimm, 316, emphasis added) The queen’s magic mirror confirms that its mistress is once again the fairest in the land, and the dwarves efforts to revive their friend prove futile, for “the poor child *was dead, and remained dead*.” (Grimm, 316, emphasis added) The storyteller, whether the Grimms or the unnamed person they collected this story from, has gone out of their way to confirm that Snow White is not *like the dead* after this final assassination attempt, she is truly deceased.

Therefore, when a king’s son sees Snow White in her glass coffin and asks to buy her corpse, he is not hoping to revive her, she is beyond revival. He wants the corpse of the beautiful girl as an art object, something he will gaze on every day and “will honour and prize as [his] dearest *possession*.” (Grimm, 317, emphasis added) This desire to own the female corpse as a passive love-object prefigures modern scholarship on necrophilia as a form of ownership and complete control of a partner who is both unresisting, and incapable of resistance. The prince does not desire to re-animate Snow White, but rather only wants to *look* at her, just as Frankenstein seems more comfortable observing female corpses than being in the company of living women. When Snow White revives because turbulence in transit dislodges the poison apple from her throat, the prince does not react with the same violence as Frankenstein; he is not afraid and does not try to flee or destroy his re-animated corpse, but the intimations of possession and necrophilic voyeurism remain. Both Frankenstein and this fairytale prince purchase dead bodies and, while one can only speculate on the prince’s intentions once he transports his pretty new toy home, we do know that through dissection and observation Frankenstein grows carnally familiar with all of the corpses he buys.

Other examples of necrophilia come from antiquity and classical literature. Boccaccio’s *Decameron* sees a girl disinter the head of her murdered lover, and “kis[s] it a thousand times in every part” before burying it in a basil pot in her bedroom (Boccaccio, 89). John Keats adapted *Isabel; and the Pot of Basil* in 1818, and retained the necrophilic elements:

If Love impersonate was ever dead,  
Pale Isabella kiss’d it, and low moan’d

‘Twas love; cold,--dead indeed, but not dethroned (Keats, 398-400)

That these less than savoury elements were preserved rather than being replaced with some more socially acceptable form of mourning, even among radical poets known for tying their publishers into knots with their unpolitic verses, indicates a level of understanding of necrophilic mourning among the Shelley circle, at least in the abstract. The Greek historian Herodotus wrote that Periander euphemistically “put bread into a cold oven”, after the death of his wife Melissa (Herodotus, 232).

Shakespeare sees tragic heroes and heroines like Juliet, Laertes, Othello, and Emilia engage in necrophilic activities or gestures to varying degrees, from explicit kissing of the deceased Romeo as in Juliet’s case, to Laertes leaping into Ophelia’s grave, or Othello and Emilia’s verbal sparring over the purity of Desdemona’s body after her murder. One of the first English novels to feature a female protagonist, Richardson’s *Clarissa Harlowe* (1748), features an extreme case of necrophilic voyeurism, with seemingly the entire town flocking to gawk at “the lovely corpse, and admiring the charming serenity of her noble aspect. The women declared they never saw death so lovely before” viewing the body of Clarissa (Richardson, 313). Far from a classical author at the time but certainly well known, de Sade, wrote a snippet of a Don Juan tale in *Aline et Valcour* in which the Spaniard kills his presumed half-sister<sup>93</sup> in the course of an attempted abduction, and then consummates his one-sided romance with her corpse. Given Byron’s obvious attachment to crafting his own version of the Don Juan story, his passion for his half-sister Augusta Leigh, and his interest in de Sade, it becomes likely that this passage was known to at least part of the Shelley circle. When one knows where and how to look, a wide range of literature across eras contains these necrophilic gestures. It should come as no surprise then that when Shelley engaged with the questions of life and death with *Frankenstein*, she did not shy away from the sexualized corpse.

The eroticization of the female corpse in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century art has already been discussed in this thesis. From Fuseli’s *The Nightmare* with its woman draped dramatically across her bed in sexualized fear, to the titillating anatomical Venuses in Florence, Edgar Allen Poe’s statement in the 1840s that “the death... of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world” becomes

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<sup>93</sup> It is later revealed that she is not his half sister and therefore the relationship was not incestuous, merely necrophilia.

less a radical declaration and more a statement of precedent across almost a century's worth of art and literature (Poe, 165). An interesting addendum to the eroticization of the female corpse is the plight of Mary Paterson in 1828. In life, Paterson was a teenaged prostitute in Edinburgh. In death, she became the last victim of Burke and Hare, and the last corpse the infamous duo sold to Robert Knox's anatomy school. Contemporary accounts vary: some say that one of the students was a customer of Paterson's and recognized the girl when she was unveiled for dissection. Other accounts say that her corpse was simply too suspicious, an obviously young woman with neither apparent injury nor illness to explain her death, and thus an investigation was started. Another account has it that Knox was so taken by her beauty that he called an artist and had his students lay her still-malleable corpse<sup>94</sup> in a manner reminiscent of the *Rokeby Venus* or the *Borghese Hermaphrodite*, with spine and buttocks prominently displayed rather than a frontal view.<sup>95</sup> Whichever version of Mary Paterson's experiences post-mortem is true, and any or none of these could be, the fact remains that what earned her money in life and made her notable in death was her beauty. Paterson's post-mortem sexualization, as an art object, an object of lurid fascination in the post-trial canonization of the Burke and Hare mythos, or simply as a corpse too pretty to cut, the objectification of the female corpse as something artistic rather than human is clear.

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<sup>94</sup> Rigor mortis does not typically set in until several hours after death.

<sup>95</sup> The earliest account I can find of this portrait comes from Roughhead's *Burke and Hare* (1921) and the provenance of the image he displays between pages 24 and 25 is suspect, however whether this is the likeness of an actual murdered woman or merely an image that flirts with the similarity between a sleeper and a corpse, my argument stands.



Figure 10 Mary Paterson posed as the Venus, post-mortum, from Burke and Hare (1921)

Even Frankenstein himself cannot escape this trope. As mentioned previously, Frankenstein spends at least a portion of his nightly toils staring at “the blooming cheek of life” until it is inherited by “the corruption of death” (Shelley, 34). The first chapter explored examples of this, suffice for here that across the *Frankenstein* text and all of Shelley’s other works thereafter *blooming cheeks* are found almost exclusively on the faces of attractive, young women<sup>96</sup> who have reached sexual maturity. It is telling that the first example of this phrase in any of Shelley’s published works, a phrase which Shelley would recycle again and again across her oeuvre, occurs when a student stares at the freshly-dead female.<sup>97</sup> Some critics have theorized that as a student, Frankenstein’s “fascination and obsession with science... borders on the erotic and... far exceed the strength of his sexual feelings for his fiancé”, but this is in relation to his study under the chemist Waldman in general (Liggins, 135). However, we must remember that Frankenstein was not only studying in ‘public’, at the university and under the supervision of Waldmen, he also secreted himself away to conduct his research in private. When

<sup>96</sup> The exception to this rule is by and large pre-pubescent children of both sexes. Men are never described as *blooming* in *Frankenstein*, and rarely described as such in Shelley’s works, for more examples of the use of blooming in Shelley’s other works, see the second chapter of this thesis.

<sup>97</sup> To further support the feminization of ‘blooming’, I would remind readers that in Frankenstein’s dream, Elizabeth is seen “in the bloom of health” immediately before her transformation into the putrefying corpse of Caroline Beaufort, and that creature’s description of Justine sees her “blooming in the loveliness of youth and health” (Shelley, 39, 118).

this eroticization of scientific study is paired with extensive observation of the female corpse, the language used by Frankenstein seems to describe “near-madness... sexual compulsion, or an obsession with a form of necrophilia” (Haggerty, 121-122). When Frankenstein’s “profane fingers<sup>98</sup> [probe] the tremendous secrets of the human frame” during his “midnight labours” where “with unrelaxed and breathless eagerness, [Frankenstein] pursued nature to her hiding places”, scientific creation becomes an explicitly sexualized act (Shelley, 36).



*Figure 11 Oliphant, Mary Paterson post-mortem, from Neher (2011)*

Moreover, when encountering the corpses of his loved ones, Clerval and Elizabeth, at different points in the novel, Frankenstein clasps them ardently in his grief. Of this action, Liggins posits that he is able “to embrace dead bodies because they make no demands in his show of desire.” (Liggins, 142) Frankenstein experiments on corpses in secret, and seems to be more comfortable with physical contact with the corpses of his childhood friend and fiancé than he was when they were alive. Even his kiss, in the post-animation dream turns a vibrant, blooming young woman into the corpse of Caroline Beaufort, a transformation that horrifies Frankenstein in the moment though when taken in conjunction with the rest of the novel presents unconscious desire rather than pure revulsion. Liggins does not extend her argument beyond the concept that while a student in Geneva, Frankenstein replaced interpersonal relationships with experimentation with the dead because his studies could be conducted without meeting or failing to meet the expectations of others. However, I would extend this fear of inadequacy in professional performance and Frankenstein’s embrace of corpses, both those he experimented on and those belonging to people he formerly loved, and add that one

<sup>98</sup> Curious wording when Romeo, on first encountering his Juliet, “profane[s] with [his] unworhiest hand” the shrine of her lips.

of the modern, documented reasons for necrophilia is an inability to perform with living partners because of their expectations. The passive corpse, in short, can never reject a partner as intellectually, professionally, or sexually inadequate.

This said, in *Frankenstein*'s case corpses are not always passive. The creature is regularly described as the dead-alive. And not only the dead-alive, but the dead-alive, and virile, in search of first a human mate and companion, and when that fails, a mate of his own species, as has been explained in previous chapters. In fearing reproduction<sup>99</sup> between his two creatures, *Frankenstein* in essence, fears an act of necrophilia, and thus destroys the incomplete female creature in a scene that has already been analysed as reminiscent of a gruesome, biblical rape in a previous chapter. At the risk of becoming repetitive, in *Frankenstein*'s eyes, the female corpse, even while passive on his worktable and incapable of anything, becomes sexualized and therefore dangerous, and thus must be destroyed.

### **Hands On: *Frankenstein* and the Dangers of Masturbation**

*Frankenstein*'s necrophiliac intimations were not the only co-mingling of sex and death in Shelley's text, or in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century sexual parlance, you will remember that the French euphemism for orgasm, *la petite mort*, translates to *the little death*. Before moving on, I would like to touch on the dangers of masturbation at this time as laid out by Tissot in his *Treatise on the Crime of Onan* (1766). This text, which Nysten's *Dictionnaire* explicitly references as outlining "the dangerous effects of this shameful vice", was widely known in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, with English translations and abridgements appearing regularly, as well as reprints in the original French (Nysten, 372). Jordanova uses the text briefly for its description of masturbation as a "solitary vice... associated with selfish self-absorption", which by "its reclusive nature required hunting out and exterminating" before the hapless patient could be cured and become a full and productive member of society (Jordanova, 65). Jordanova ties this mid-18<sup>th</sup> century text to the solitary construction of the creature, and how it impedes *Frankenstein*'s adult relationships in general, and

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<sup>99</sup> It should be noted that *Frankenstein* has the power to create a female incapable of conceiving, seeing as he is a practiced anatomist and presumably aware of what organs she would and would not need to carry a pregnancy to term.

specifically his sexual relationship with his fiancé. I would extend this argument to point out that masturbation, as described in Tissot's *Treatise*, is not simply unhealthy to the patient's social interactions<sup>100</sup>, but is also wildly unhealthy and even deadly to the diagnosed practitioner.

Using the testimony of numerous physicians and his own experience as a doctor, Tissot describes the symptoms of prolonged masturbation in graphic detail, as rendering sufferers less than human. Of one patient, Tissot writes:

I went to him and found him less a living creature than a cadaverous figure, lying upon straw, meagre, pale, sallow, sending forth an infectious smell, and himself almost incapable of any motion. He bled at the nose a pale and watery blood, and was continually foaming at the mouth: attacked too with a diarrhea, his excrements came from him without him perceiving it; the flux of his seed was his eyes bleared, dim, or extinguished, had lost their faculty of motion; his pulse was extremely low, yet quick and frequent; his breathing very laborious, his leanness excessive, except just in his feet, which began to be oedematous(sic). The disorder of his mind was no less than that of his body, without any idea; without memory, without reflections, without anxiety about his fate, without any other sensation but that of a pain which returned with every fit, at least once in three days. A being much below a brute; a sight, of which there is no conception can be reach the horror. It was not easy to make out that he had ever belonged to the human species. (Tissot, 26-27)

According to Tissot, masturbation does not just wreck a practitioner's mind, it sickens their body to beyond the edge of humanity.<sup>101</sup> It leaves victims as cadaverous figures, less than brutes, and barely human. Though this frailty of body does not match with Frankenstein's creature, the physical deformity, and separation from the identifiably human certainly does. The creature is the product of Frankenstein's nightly necrophiliac and masturbatory labours, "unwholesome" labour that leaves the scientist "oppressed by a slow fever, and... nervous to a most painful degree"

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<sup>100</sup> Tissot writes that "a distaste for worthy pleasures, a dull melancholy, [and] an aversion to society" are common symptoms of the disease of onanism(Tissot, 192).

<sup>101</sup> It is perhaps pertinent here that the symptoms described sound more like someone suffering with a long-term venereal disease, like tertiary syphilis, than the complaints of a compulsive masturbator. It is telling of the medical community which Tissot was writing for that the latter was more comfortable for physicians to diagnose than the former.

(Shelley, 38). It is only when the object of Frankenstein's masturbatory enthusiasm is taken away, when the creature flees the workroom, that the scientist falls into fevered delusion and can be nursed back to health by painful degrees, much like the slow recovery of a former sufferer of onan. Frankenstein, the one who 'masturbated' through unholy creation suffers the physical side effects, while his creature's body, though powerful, is as disgusting as that of someone suffering from latter stage masturbation, as diagnosed by Tissot.

### **Skin of Your Teeth: *Frankenstein* and 19<sup>th</sup> century Dentistry**

Oddly enough, Shelley's tacit acknowledgement of dental practices in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century represents yet another thread of the life and death conversation being held both literally and figuratively in the mouths of those who could afford it. The birth of modern dentistry as a profession has its roots in early-eighteenth century France, when the new class of *dentistes* began tailoring their tooth pulling (previously sideshow sport for the masses at the cost of a toothache-sufferer's pain) and teeth whitening treatments to the mouths attending court at Versailles. By the time Mary Shelley was writing *Frankenstein*, this early dentistry, with its veneer of gentility, had migrated from the continent to London, bringing with it its own connotations and language. Thus, when teeth appear in three distinct connotations in *Frankenstein*, Shelley is invoking more than commonplace facial expressions associated with fear or anger, she is also calling up contemporary notions of dentistry and battlefields.

Before getting into teeth as expressive, I should first touch on the teeth residing in the mouth of the creature, teeth 'chosen' carefully by Frankenstein for their "pearly whiteness" (Shelley, 39). The use of teeth in waxworks was touched on briefly in a previous chapter, now I would like to explore teeth in the mouths of humans, specifically teeth transplanted from the mouths of corpses into the mouths of those who could afford replacements. As Barnett puts it, the Enlightenment, with its expanded global trade, saw an increased demand "for devices and techniques to remedy the stained, rotten teeth resulting from overindulgence in tea, coffee, chocolate, sugar, tobacco, or Turkish delight." (Barnett, 93) This demand saw a precipitous rise in demand for whitening agents like toothpowders, picks, and

brushes<sup>102</sup> and, in extreme cases, dentures to replace rotten or removed teeth, something Shelley herself was well aware of. Late in her life, she briefly mentions her teeth in a letter to Claire Clairmont, an obvious response to Clairmont's own dental complaints. Of toothaches, likely cavities, she claimed "the only cure I [ have] found was to lose my teeth till lately when creosote<sup>103</sup> has killed the nerve." (Shelley, *Letters Vol. III*, 107) After removing problem teeth, dentures could be carved from ivory, or moulded from porcelain, but, as Barnett succinctly puts it:

For those whose purses did not run to a set of hand-painted porcelain false teeth, other grislier possibilities presented themselves. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many denture wearers ate, smiled and spoke through mouths studded with the teeth of the dead. (Barnett, 96)

Prior to 1815, these replacement teeth were primarily scavenged from the corpses of the young and the poor, those who could not afford the imported, tooth-rotting luxuries of the rich, and had not yet gathered the daily wear and tear on their teeth associated with a long life. These teeth were collected by resurrection men, who "would often remove teeth from bodies and sell them on to dentists before handing over the corpses to anatomists", making body snatching, already lucrative, doubly so (King, 34). However, the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815, with its reported 50,000 casualties, primarily young men of an economic class that could not afford regular quantities of coffee, tea, and sugar, lead to a new moniker for dental supplements: *Waterloo teeth*. Teeth gathered from the mouths of dead soldiers flooded the English market and the phrase would have been common parlance by the time the Shelleys left for their second European tour in late spring of 1816. A tour which, of course, took them across a continent still reeling from the devastation of the Napoleonic wars, and an economic depression that would soon be compounded by the year without summer. That a bustling trade in human teeth, among other battlefield souvenirs, arose from the surplus of corpses left lying in a field in present-day Belgium under these circumstances is hardly surprising. Therefore, when Shelley has Frankenstein *choose* his creature's features carefully, and specifies that those choices

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<sup>102</sup> A market Lord Byron engaged in readily. Several letters from the poet to John Murray, his publisher in London, ask for shipments of his preferred toothpowder, a luxury John Cam Hobhouse believed his friend could not live without (McCarthy, 364).

<sup>103</sup> Creosote, derived from the sap of certain trees, can be used as an antiseptic.

were the astonishingly healthy teeth in the creature's mouth, it is likely not because these are the molars, incisors, and so on that came with the jaw Frankenstein fitted into his creation. Rather, this is a set of teeth purchased, or gathered, separately with a tacit acknowledgement of the healthy economy in teeth that thrived across Europe and Britain in her day.

Other than a tacit acknowledgement of the dental economy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, teeth in *Frankenstein* are used as indications of a character's emotional state of either fear or anger. In clichés that hold true to this day, anger causes either Frankenstein or the creature to 'gnash' their teeth five times in the text and fear causes Frankenstein's teeth to 'chatter' in a further two instances ('gnash': pp. 14, 67, 71, 116, 140 'chatter': pp. 39, 56). Both of these are longstanding literary tropes, but in 1816 when Mary Shelley started writing they could also be considered as medical indications of internal emotion as described by the artist and anatomist Charles Bell<sup>104</sup> in his *Essays on the Anatomy of Expression in Painting* (1806). In the *Essays* Bell never explicitly describes fear as inducing teeth chattering. However, he does describe fear, specifically horror, as inducing a deep cold that "seems to chill the blood" (Bell, 148). Fear in general renders a man pale and trembling, inducing "cold sweat on [the sufferer's] face" (Bell, 146). The confluence of these physiological reactions bears a striking resemblance to Frankenstein's reaction when he is jolted from sleep by the presence of the creature in his bedchamber just hours after the creature is brought to life. In this scene Frankenstein "started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb convulsed" at the horror of what he sees before him (Shelley, 39). An appropriate reaction, given Bell's instructions for conveying this mixture of fear and horror, even if the word 'chatter' does not explicitly show up in Bell's description. As for 'gnashing' teeth, the term is explicitly used by Bell when describing the masseter in the jaw, a muscle which "closes the teeth with great strength, and, in rage, with gnashing of the teeth it swells up very strongly." (Bell, 65) Across the *Frankenstein* text the masseter and its rage-induced flexion is invoked five times, as Frankenstein

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<sup>104</sup> Bell's older brother Dr John Bell would attend to Shelley during her pregnancy in Italy in 1819 though he was unable to attend the birth of Percy Florence due to his own illness in November of that year (Shelley, *Journals*, 254).

and his creature gnash their teeth at each other and the world in rage and frustration in a manner not only evocative on an emotional level, but also medically appropriate.

### **Waterton and Wouralia: Adventures in Reanimation**

As previously mentioned, when recounting the horrors of his early experimentation, Frankenstein dwells upon the unhallowed damp and dissecting room horrors, before skating comparatively abruptly over the fact that he “tortured the living animal” to achieve his ends (Shelley, 36). Experimentation on and with animals both living and dead has long been a necessary component of medical advancement, and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was no exception. Mary Shelley’s lifetime saw early transfusion experiments across animal species, as in the case of Harwood’s sheep to dog demonstrations, and eventually human treatment via transfusion, despite Nysten’s admonishments that it had been “recommended by some ancient physicians... but is today generally discouraged as contrary to the principles of physiology and as very dangerous.” (Nysten, 587)<sup>105</sup> However, there is one animal experiment performed by a natural philosopher whose contributions to South American explorations have already been explored: Charles Waterton and his ass.

Waterton’s foray into the murky area between life and death on English soil was not his first, he had conducted similar experiments during his time in South America when he first procured the curare<sup>106</sup>. The English experiments were described in his 1844 *Essays on Natural History* as part of a posthumous acknowledgement of the ass’s contribution to science. Her history begins in April 1814, when she was purchased from a London workman for purposes of experimentation and taken:

— to the Veterinary College in London, and having been inoculated with the Wourali poison which Mr. Waterton had brought from the wilds of Guiana, she sank in apparent death, at the expiration of ten minutes from that time that she received the poisoned spike in the fleshy part of her shoulder.

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<sup>105</sup> Fittingly, the first English accounts of successful human transfusions were published in September 1818, just nine months after the initial publication of *Frankenstein* and would be used successfully across the 1820s to save young women from deadly hemorrhage following difficult births.

<sup>106</sup> A poison, also known as wourali, among other terms, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Under the scientific superintendence of Mr. Sewell, she was restored by means of artificial respiration, which was effected with a pair of common bellows applied to an incision in her windpipe. The operation lasted four hours; after which she rose up and walked about, free from agitation, and apparently free from pain. (Waterton, 304)

Waterton then goes on to write that the ass, who he took home to his family estate after the experiment and named Wouralia after the drug she was dosed with, lived in ease and comfort for another twenty-five years, before dying of old age.

Though unmentioned in Waterton's account, a third scientist was in attendance that evening, Dr Benjamin Brodie, whose account of the experiment is more clinical (he substitutes *trachea* for *windpipe*) and dismissive. Brodie's account of Wouralia comes after a description of similar experiments conducted on a cat, making the apparent death and resurrection of the ass merely an extension and enlargement of something he has already described in detail in and would eventually publish in his *Physiological Researches* (1851). Though neither Waterton nor Sewell seem to have had direct contact with either Godwin or Mary Shelley, it is worth noting that Brodie was a relative frequent in Godwin's house, including three visits the April of the experiment, a time made more meaningful in retrospect, as Mary and Percy Shelley would elope in late July of that same year.

Waterton's experiment in death and revival was not merely an exercise of morbid curiosity; rather, in Waterton's own words, it was potentially a dramatic cure for two horrible diseases: lockjaw and hydrophobia, more commonly known today as tetanus and rabies. The narcotic effects of curare doses on test subjects were noted by both Brodie and Waterton in their accounts of the experiments, therefore as a "frightful spasm [was] the prominent symptom of those awful maladies [, and] complete quiescence [was] the effect of the administration of wourali[,] it seemed probable that this material, hitherto means of death, might save life where medical art was still powerless." (Moore, 48) Indeed, later experiments conducted by Sewell would seem to confirm the theory as at least half right when he "inoculated a horse suffering from tetanus with a dose of curare. For two hours the horse was given artificial respiration... [after which] all the symptoms of tetanus had disappeared."

(Blackburn, 67)<sup>107</sup> Waterton, himself remained willing to personally administer the dose to human and animal rabies patients, should the need arise, for decades after the initial experiments with Wouralia. Of a case in 1838 when six men were bitten by a mad dog in Nottingham, in a letter to George Ord, Waterton wrote that he had instructed the attending physician that “if any of the patients shall shew symptoms of decided hydrophobia and that if the attending scientific men declare the case to be quite hopeless, he must send me an express and I will be with him without loss of time.” (Waterton, *Letters*, 25) The express did arrive for Waterton with the call for such drastic measures in Nottingham, but the patient expired before Squire Waterton could arrive to attend him.

This example demonstrates why a person infected with rabies, or a physician attending such a person might consider such a desperate and arguably dangerous treatment option. Hydrophobia, or rabies, is not always transmitted when a person or animal is bitten by an infected individual, but in the nineteenth century transmission of the virus always ended in death after a litany of horrifying symptoms including a fear of water, throat constriction, foaming at the mouth, violent convulsions, and cravings to bite. As Nysten succinctly put it at the end of his lengthy entry on the virus, “at present, this disease is incurable.” (Nysten, 316) Frankenstein uses dead bodies and reanimation to create what he hopes will be a more perfect human, while Waterton seeks to preserve human life, to heal, through temporary death. One destroys the dead to create the living, the other would rather ‘kill’ the living to ultimately stave off painful death at the hands of two terrible disease, thus making this yet another example of Frankenstein doing nearly the opposite of what one of his real life counterparts suggests, or does. Waterton’s suggested ‘cure’ is outlandish, but ultimately the naturalist intends to heal those around him, not to seek fame for himself regardless of consequences.

## **Mummy Mania**

Shortly after the animation of the creature, in a passage that was touched on in the previous chapter, Frankenstein turns to studying language with Clerval as a

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<sup>107</sup> Whether this effect would have been lasting is unknown, reportedly the horse over-indulged in oats that evening and died as a result, just hours after the successful operation.

distraction from the horrors of his previous endeavours. In the original version of the text, these languages are “Persian, Arabic, and Hebrew”, indicating a linguistic interest in the modern-day Middle East. That said, Arabic is a language with many variations spoken across vast swaths of the globe, including in Egypt, as Miot helpfully pointed out when describing the cultural and physical exchanges between Napoleon’s forces in Cairo and the local women who entertained them.<sup>108</sup> Even before Napoleon’s 1798-1801 invasion of Egypt, a European interest in the ancient home of pharaohs and mummies existed, and the treasure-trove of antiquities appropriated by French explorers, including the Rosetta Stone, the key to deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics only intensified European conversation surrounding the country and its cultural artifacts.

This Egyptomania wormed its way into all facets of British and European society, finding outlet in Frankenstein and Clerval’s language studies, this after the creature’s living visage has been described as “a mummy again endued with animation” (Shelley, 40). This description of the creature as mummy-like is not confined to Frankenstein’s post-nightmare dramatics. In the last pages of the novel, when Walton finally encounters the creature he has heard so much about, his first impression is of a face “concealed by long locks of ragged hair; but one vast hand was extended, in colour and apparent texture like that of a mummy.” (Shelley, 187) That both Frankenstein and Walton, a Swiss national and an Englishman, could confidently assess what was and was not mummy-like is hardly unusual for the time. Importing mummies from Egypt for medicinal purposes and curiosity’s sake had been steady business in Europe for centuries by this point. Mummies could be viewed at public exhibitions or museums, like the one found in Bullock’s famed Egyptian Hall in London, which Shelley visited on March 18, 1815, the day before dreaming her baby back to life (Shelley, *Journals*, 20). Likewise, mummies could be seen more intimately in private homes, where mummy unwrapping parties came into vogue and guests left their host’s home carrying a piece of the winding rags or a charm that had been tucked into the folds of the mummy’s wrappings as a souvenir.

However, the consumption of mummies as curiosities to be observed in public or as gimmicks for adventurous hosts and private entertainments was not the

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<sup>108</sup> Miot, 175

only use they had in Europe. The literal consumption of mummies as a medicinal substance also had a long history in Europe, stretching back to the Middle Ages. Powdered Egyptian mummies, ‘mumia vera’ or any number of its related names<sup>109</sup>, came to be considered medicinal through a combination of mistranslation and confusion over the fact that the term ‘mumia’ can mean both powdered mummy, and refer to the ancient name for bitumen, a component of natural asphalt that was thought to have healing properties. By the time Paracelsus was compiling his medical treatise in the sixteenth century mumia had come to largely refer to the extract of Egyptian mummies rather than a naturally occurring tar, as mummies “were believed to have elements of life within them as long as the embalming preparations preserved them from corruption.” (Bondeson, 23). Paracelsian physicians would later take the necessity of Egyptian origin away, instead preferring the powder of corpses that had suffered violent deaths but were otherwise healthy, thus ensuring they had plenty of vital energy still transmittable to patients.<sup>110</sup> By the 19<sup>th</sup> century some physicians had begun to doubt the efficacy of this medicinal cannibalism, with the 1814 edition of Nysten’s *Dictionnaire* saying that their use was “once considered vulnerable, [but] today is unusual” with subsequent editions across the nineteenth century becoming more and more sceptical (Nysten, 389). Whether ingested as a medicine or viewed as museum-curiosities, Egypt, mummies, and all of their derivatives were part of both medical and popular culture in Mary Shelley’s lifetime. In the myriad ways the *Frankenstein* text folds life and death together, having Walton and Frankenstein, with their vastly different experiences and educations, acknowledge that the creature has a mummy-like appearance is an indication of just how ubiquitous mummy-mania had become across Britain and Europe.

### **The Royal Humane Society**

By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Royal London Humane Society and similar institutions had long since become yet another facet of the wide-ranging life and death conversation in Britain and Europe by disseminating information about the

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<sup>109</sup> Mumia, mumie, mumia vera aegyptiaca

<sup>110</sup> Much like Aldini preferring to use the corpses of criminals or those who had otherwise died from sudden, external causes, because such cadavers reportedly had more ‘oomph’.

resuscitation of drowning victims and practical implementation of that knowledge for decades. The year 1767 saw the creation of the first society for rescuing drowned persons, formed in Amsterdam by a board of ten directors. Included among their number was a Johann Goll van Frankenstein, who “on his death... was immediately succeeded in this office by his son and namesake” (Williams, 214). Frankenstein Sr. is listed with his nine compatriots in Thomas Cogan’s 1773, English translation of the *Memoirs* of that first resuscitation society. In 1774 Cogan founded the organization that would become the Royal Humane Society in London<sup>111</sup>, and in July of 1800 Cogan appeared in William Godwin’s *Diary* for the first of three times. This thesis has already offered other possible sources for Victor Frankenstein’s surname, including an alchemical legend and a Parisian novella, here is another in the form of a philanthropic father and son duo, who worked together to raise the dead for the good of their city, and by example, all of Europe.

The express purpose of the *Masstschappy Tot Reckling Van Drenkelingen* in Amsterdam, the Parisian *Société Humaine*, and Cogan’s Royal Humane Society, was to disseminate the information and tools necessary to recover and revive those who fell or jumped into the rivers bisecting their respective cities, and to reward those who performed these recoveries monetarily. In London, a recovery with revival could earn the resuscitator 5 guineas, and a recovery without revival still up to 3, making the rescue business lucrative for certain, vigilant river-watchers. As for the revival techniques themselves, as per the instructions described by Dr William Hawes, Cogan’s partner in founding the Royal Humane Society, they look very similar to instructions that might be found today:

- I.—Convey carefully the Body, with the Head raised, to the nearest Receiving House.
- 2.—Strip, dry the Body; clean the Mouth and Nostrils.
- 3.—YOUNG CHILDREN to be put between two persons in a warm Bed.
- 4.—AN ADULT—Lay the Body on a Bed, and in cold Weather near the Fire. In warm Seasons AIR would be freely admitted.

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<sup>111</sup> Originally the Society for the Recovery of Persons Apparently Drowned, King George III would change the name to Royal Humane Society in 1776.

5.—The body to be *gently rubbed* with Flannel, sprinkled with spirits or Flour of Mustard; and a heated Warming Pan, cove[re]d, may be lightly moved over the Back and Spine.

6.—the BREAST to be fomented with hot Spirits, hot Bricks or Tiles covered, to be applied to the Soles of the Feet, and Palms of the Hands. If no Signs of Life appear, the Body to be put into the warm Bath.

\*\*\* *Press the lower part of the Larynx* backwards upon the Gullet; the pressure should be only on the *cricoid cartilage*, by which the gullet may be straitened; while the passage *through the larynx* is not interrupted.

When the lungs are filled with air, press the breast and belly, that it may be again expelled; then blowing and expulsion should be repeated, so as to imitate the *alternate motions* of natural respiration. (Hawes, 71)

These instructions, which are prefaced with the mandate that “*What thou doest—Do quickly*”, have not changed a great deal in the intervening two hundred and twenty years since this list was published in the Royal Humane Society’s 1799 *Annual Report*. Clearing the airway, warming and drying the victim, inducing a gag reflex to purge water, and chest compressions are all techniques still used in rescuing drowning victims today, as is the ninth and final step:

9.—ELECTRICITY is recommended to be *early employed* by the Medical Assistants, or other judicious Practitioners. (Hawes, 72)

Even before Giovanni Aldini’s 1802 arrival in London, carrying his uncle Luigi Galvani’s philosophy and the tools necessary to demonstrate the wonders of galvanism to the masses, the use of judicious shocks delivered by trained professionals were being utilized to awaken the seemingly-expired.

As a woman born and raised in London in a house visited by Thomas Cogan himself, Mary Shelley had every reason to be aware of the Royal Humane Society. Snart’s *Thesaurus of Horror*, which advocated for the implementation of laws that would delay burial at least three days, to ensure that the seemingly dead were actually dead, described these measures as having been “instituted to avert the more obvious and apparent consequences of submersion”, while periodicals like the *Gentleman’s Magazine* regularly printed accounts of awards given, rescues made,

and correspondence with the Society, including a letter to the President of the Royal Humane Society from Emperor Alexander I of Russia in 1807 (Snart, 140). The Emperor was honoured by the Royal Humane Society for “by his own humane perseverance and personal exertion, restor[ing] to life a peasant of [Poland], who had been drowned a considerable time” while travelling there (quoted in Zorab and Coke, 257). The czar found the award subsequently bestowed a “very flattering compliment paid by [the] Society to an action, the notice of which must appear unimportant among the records... of the highest services rendered to Humanity” that were maintained by the Society (*Gentleman’s Mag*, 499). Through the art and practice of resuscitation London doctors, concerned citizens, and the Emperor of a vast country on the opposite side of Europe were united in purpose.

Even if the Royal Humane Society had not been not well known by the general public, Mary Shelley still had multiple, deeply personal reasons to familiarize herself with the organization and their practices due to tragedies that punctuated her life and the resuscitations, both successful and non, which they engendered. In 1795 Mary Wollstonecraft wrote explicitly to Imlay that she was going to “plunge into the Thames where there [was] the least chance of [her] being snatched from the death” she sought (quoted in Williams, 223). Her logic was solid, the receiving house built by the Society, with its equipment and specially trained doctors, was in Hyde Park on the Serpentine, but her leap from Putney bridge on the Thames was still seen by those who were ready and able to thwart such tragic endeavours. As Godwin wrote in his great tribute to his lost love, she “was recovered by the exertions of those by whom she was taken from the water”, and the author of *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) would live another three years (Godwin, *Memoirs*, 139). Accounts about Wollstonecraft’s recovery from the water vary, whether she lost consciousness upon hitting the surface, or from exertion after attempting to press air from her clothes, but the fact remains that she was pulled, dripping and shivering from the Thames in October and her life was saved from, if not suffocation, then at least hypothermia, and the methods used very likely resembled those laid out by Hawes, Cogan, and their organization. As with Wollstonecraft’s attempt in 1795, accounts of the successful suicides of Harriet Shelley and Fanny Imlay are both confused, long since muddled by familial gossip and a societal rejection of suicide and its victims, but likely both would have been

subjected to resuscitation attempts when the former was pulled from the Serpentine in December 1816<sup>112</sup> and the latter was found with a laudanum overdose in October of the same year.

Perhaps the concrete evidence that Shelley was aware of the Humane Society is the *Journal* entry she provides in March 1815, an account of a dream where her first child comes back to life. In this, oft-quoted passage, Shelley “dreamed that [her] little baby came to life again—that it had only been cold & that [they] rubbed it by the fire and it lived” (Shelley, *Journals*, 70). By the early 1800s the “resuscitation of babies was regular practice”, particularly those who were stillborn, making Shelley’s dream of saving her baby a very real possibility (Williams, 224). Moreover, warming a resuscitation candidate by fire and friction was established practice by Hawes, in the previously quoted instructions with drowning victims, and to “Restore Warmth, &c. by slow Degrees” was the injunction when dealing when hypothermia (Hawes, 72). Meaning, that when Mary Shelley dreamed that her first baby, a premature girl who lived less than two weeks, came back to life after being rubbed by the fire, she dreamed of administering the proven, lifesaving techniques of Thomas Cogan, William Hawes, and the Royal Humane Society.

This awareness of resuscitation methods is felt directly throughout the *Frankenstein* text, though their effectiveness is perhaps called into question. When the creature witnesses a young girl fall into a rapid stream, he

rushed from [his] hiding-place, and, with extreme labour from the force of the current, saved her, and dragged her to shore. She was senseless; and [he] endeavoured, by every means in [his] power, to restore animation (Shelley, 115).

However, we never see the result of the creature’s efforts. The girl’s companion arrives and snatches her away from the creature, running away with her before her recovery can be determined. The reader is never told if she awakens, and the creature

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<sup>112</sup> This is assuming that Claire Clairmont’s account from the 1870s is correct and Harriet Shelley was only in the water overnight, as opposed to the month that other accounts estimate, in which case resuscitation would have been deemed impossible, even by 19<sup>th</sup> century standards, though stories of successful rescues after days or even weeks submerged were occasionally published at the time.

is shot as she is carried off, “the miserable pain of a wound, which shattered the flesh and bone” is his only reward for this act of charity (Shelley, 116).

When William’s corpse is found by Alphonse Frankenstein, he is “stretched on the grass livid and motionless”, and we are not explicitly told if resuscitation is attempted. Instead he is taken home and laid out, presumably to be prepared for burial (Shelley, 52). Later, Frankenstein and the reader are told that the creature encountered, and subsequently strangled the boy in the evening, making the discovery of his body at five the next morning hours after death, well after he had ceased to be a viable candidate for recovery. Clerval, on the other hand, is found before his body has even cooled. His discoverers, on realizing this, “instantly carried [Clerval] to the cottage of an old woman near the spot, and endeavoured, but in vain, to restore [him] to life.” (Shelley, 147) This discovery by a group of fishermen, and attempted resuscitation in the house of an old woman

—is a particularly inspired touch: according to ‘Friendly Hints to the Directors of the Humane Society’ by ‘Observator Londiniensis’, ‘common people and old women’ are much more successful resuscitators than the Humane Society’s medical assistants. (Williams, 226)

Elizabeth is discovered just moments after her strangulation, yet readers are told of no attempts to revive her. Frankenstein, perhaps the only “Medical assistan[t], or other Judicious Practitione[r]” in the inn qualified to apply an electric shock as a restorative measure, faints at the sight of his new bride’s body, and does not wake until after “the deathly languor and coldness of limbs” cements her corpse-status. (Hawes, 72, Shelley, 166).<sup>113</sup>

This apparent scepticism of manual revival is not a universal truth in fiction from the time. Thomas Holcroft’s translation of Genlis’ *Les Veillées du Chateau* (*Tales of the Castle*, 1787) sees a pair of brothers revived from seeming death by hypothermia. The children, when discovered in the snow, are “quite stiff” and thought “past recovery”, but the good Madame de Clemire and her young son still insist that the hypothermic brothers be “put into the carriage,... and convey[ed] to

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<sup>113</sup> As Williams points out, Frankenstein seems prone to fainting throughout the novel, and is always revived, conveniently enough, while few of the other unconscious people in his orbit are so lucky. (Williams, 225-226)

the castle with all possible speed, continuing to rub them all the way”, again applying lifesaving warmth through friction (Genlis, 112, 113). The brothers, friends and companions of Clemire’s son, are revived by prompt and tireless action, showing what cheerful results may ensue when characters act promptly and are undeterred by seeming-death. The fact that there were not only examples of successful resuscitation in the real world, but literary examples as well, highlight’s Shelley’s deliberate choice to have all of her attempted resuscitations, or simply neglected attempts, fail. The loss of Clerval and Elizabeth, both of whom Frankenstein encounters soon after death, are particularly striking in that he, a man with greater anatomical knowledge and understanding of revival techniques than possibly anyone else in Europe, fails to even attempt resuscitation. Frankenstein, who studied “the structure of the human frame” for years, to the point that he arguably built a better, if uglier, species of man, who probed the questions of death and life so closely that he gained the ability to turn one into the other, who should know better than anyone how to wake a still-warm corpse, does not even make an attempt at resuscitation (Shelley, 33). Perhaps in this, Shelley is making the distinction between Frankenstein and the rest of the world. Fishermen, who find a body on the beach, or the creature who only wants acceptance and community, see death in abstract and spiritual terms and therefore a still-warm corpse as a source of hope for life revived, while Frankenstein, who is familiar with that void and has plumbed its depths, is powerless against it.

### ***One Thousand and One Arabian Nights and Ritual Suicide***

While probing the dual questions of life and death in his research, Frankenstein uses live burial as a metaphor for inspiration. When he first discovers “the cause of generation and life”, Frankenstein describes the process as the ascent of “the Arabian who had been buried with the dead, and found a passage to life aided only by one glimmering, and seemingly ineffectual light.” (Shelley, 34, 35) This specific instance is a simplistic retelling of Sinbad’s fourth voyage in Galland’s *Arabian Nights Entertainments*<sup>114</sup>, a set of tales known popularly today as *1001*

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<sup>114</sup> For purposes of this thesis I will be using the 1811 Scott translation which was published by Longman et. al, with whom Godwin and later Shelley had long working relationships. Other versions

*Arabian Nights*, which was incredibly popular with European audiences at this time with many translations, editions, and imitations appearing throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Mary Shelley herself includes the *Nights* on her 1815 reading list under the heading “New Arabian Nights [vol?] 3”, which Feldman and Scott-Kilvert conclude is the 1814 Dom Chaves translation, though their reasoning is unclear as many versions, including the Scott which I am using, include the word *New* within the title (Shelley, *Journals*, 88). As previously stated, the *Nights* were incredibly popular and that the publication of both licensed and pirated versions could be lucrative speaks to a European fascination with the exotic and oriental. As for Shelley herself, in 1817, after sending off the *Frankenstein* manuscript but before its publication, she took a few hours to “read the sleeper awakened in the Arabian nights”<sup>115</sup> a specific tale cycle found in the fourth volume of the Scott edition (Shelley, *Journals*, 175). This comfort with reading a portion of the *Nights*, as opposed to an entire volume of them, speaks to a level of familiarity with the text bred through long exposure.

The live burial portion of Scherazade’s (sic) tale is not an accidental entombment, as was feared by Europeans, but rather an intentional practice by the members of a secluded island kingdom wherein, an ancient law which “is always observed inviolably. The living husband is interred with the dead wife, and the living wife with the dead husband... every one must submit to this law.” (Scott, *Vol II*, 49) Sinbad learns of this custom when a friend’s wife dies and the friend subsequently “suffered himself to be put into [an] open coffin without resistance, with a pot of water, and seven small loaves” and be lowered with his wife’s corpse into a large cavern that serves as a communal tomb for the community and await his fate (Scott, *Vol II*, 49). In this, the remote kingdom in *Nights* replicates the outcome, if not the dramatic effect, of the *sati* practice of ritual self-immolation reported to occur in India, which we will return to shortly.

When the wife Sinbad has been gifted by the king for services rendered dies, the hero of Bagdad finds himself experiencing living entombment first-hand, when

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of the text and tales are myriad, but while the order of the tales may change between editions the content does not differ significantly.

<sup>115</sup> In a fittingly Frankensteinian coincidence, this tale concerns a husband and wife who seek to monetize death by first one, then the other pretending to die and seeking money from wealthy friends for funerary arrangements.

he and the meagre rations allotted to all living spouses are lowered into the mass grave. Sinbad survives an extended length of time there through a combination of judicious rationing, and murdering other spouses as they arrive in order to obtain their food, until he encounters an animal in the dark and follows it “till at last I perceived a light, resembling a star; I went on, sometimes lost sight of it, but always found it again, and at last discovered that it came through a hole in the rock, large enough to admit a man.” (Scott, *Vol II*, 56). Though he has found escape, Sinbad returns to the grave to purloin the jewels those interred there have been buried with, he becomes a graverobber and in doing so gathers enough wealth to ensure his happiness when he eventually flags down a passing vessel and returns to Bagdad.

Frankenstein, like Sinbad, seeks to cement his own place by robbing the dead, though the physical spoils he takes are cadavers and the mental riches are the knowledge he gains in the process. However, where Sinbad’s adventures range far, and contain many casualties, they end with him wealthy and beloved in his home in Bagdad. Scheherazade’s Sinbad cycle ends with the character paying a porter to quit his job and instead “come and dine every day with [Sinbad], that he might have reason to remember Sinbad the voyager” the rest of his days (Scott, *Vol II*, 97). Frankenstein’s narrative also begins and ends within the frame of relating his life’s adventures, but his only companions in his final moments are the creature he has sought to destroy and the homesick sailor who has hovered at his bedside on a ship bound in arctic ice, hundreds of miles from civilization. In appropriating the Sinbad story for her protagonist’s purposes, Shelley has doomed him to become a near-photo negative of the original.

As with the *Fantasmagoriana*, Shelley co-opted multiple pieces of the *Arabian Nights* for her purposes, including a nesting frame narrative, and the name of her lone Arabian character: Safie. Safie in *Frankenstein* is the beautiful Arabian betrothed to Felix, a resourceful and intelligent woman who escapes her father and crosses Europe to join her betrothed without knowing any European languages. When she does begin to formally learn French from the De Lacey family, she achieves mastery of the tongue in a matter of months, this after having been raised by a mother who “taught [Safie] to aspire to higher powers of intellect, and an independence of spirit” typically forbidden to the women of Turkey (Shelley, 99). The year before she finds the De Lacey cottage in a remote forest in Germany, Safie

leaves Constantinople to join her father in France, then flees Paris for Leghorn when he is imprisoned by revolutionary forces within the city. Most of her history revolves around the men in her life, yet she, like many of Shelley's female characters, as discussed briefly in the Introduction to this thesis, has an assumed competence that, while not elaborated on, ensures that she can actively pursue her own interests, namely crossing a continent with only a servant and her wits in search of the man she loves.

Likewise, her namesake in the *Nights* is one of "three unusually resourceful sisters" who are beautiful, wealthy, and live alone and in complete command of their household, to the surprise of the men they encounter and allow into their home (Nesvet, 375). Safie, whose name means "cleanser, or housemaid" according to the *Nights*' endnotes, is the only one of the sisters whose life seems untouched by personal trauma, outside of the death of the sisters' parents (Scott, *Vol I*, 352). One sister, Amene, has left an abusive husband, another, Zobeide, lost her beloved betrothed at sea, and a further two, unnamed sisters have been cursed to live as black dogs for envying Zobeide to the point of killing her lover and attempting to kill her. Only Safie lacks a tragic backstory of her own and, as the meaning of her name suggests, keeps the sisters' house comfortable. She answers the door, carries the instruments, and is rewarded for this faithfulness by, like Shelley's Safie<sup>116</sup>, marrying a good man at the end of her tale cycle.

The previously mentioned funerary ritual of *sati* involves a widow's self-immolation upon her husband's pyre, a practice that was the subject of consternation by members of the British East India Company. The British would eventually legally stop this practice in India in 1829, though even today ritualistic immolation is not unheard of and rarely punished. *Sati* also became a dramatic plot point in Lady Morgan's *The Missionary* (1811), a novel in which the heroine, Luxima, enters the narrative as a woman widowed before her wedding night who "would have ascended the funeral pile" but for the pleas of her influential grandfather (Owenson, *Vol I*, 101). Because of her place within the caste system, Luxima is able to choose an alternate route as a priestess, choosing to become a powerful spiritual leader and "lead a life of vestal purity" instead, thus sacrificing her life in spirit if not in practice

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<sup>116</sup> Or, at least partnering with a good man. Because the De Lacey family flees the creature we, the readers, do not see the marriage of Safie and Felix, but the assumption that it takes place is safe.

to the memory of a husband she never wedded (Owenson, *Vol I*, 102). The novel ends with a second attempted *sati* by Luxima when her lover, a Portuguese missionary, is sentenced to death by burning for his conversion efforts. Though Hilarion, the titular missionary, escapes, Luxima sustains injuries in the process that eventually kill her, causing her lover to live the rest of his life in isolation, mourning her memory.

Progression through the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century saw the act of mourning move from the privacy of familial circles to more performative, public displays, for good or ill. This would eventually culminate in the Victorian cult of mourning, which saw elaborate mourning jewellery, dress, and social rituals become the mode. During Mary Shelley's lifetime, rather than turning inward for mourning voyeurism, there was a British fascination with looking outward, to foreign death or mourning rituals, a fascination flavoured with a distinctly British preoccupation with 'self-murder' following over a century's debate on what had been dubbed 'the English Malady' by the greater European continent.<sup>117</sup> The presence of *sati* in Morgan's novel, the suicide of Alzira<sup>118</sup> following the capture and murder of her husband Ataliba in the second canto Helen Maria Williams *Peru*, even Shelley's *Mathilda*<sup>119</sup>, with her determination not to actively commit suicide but to feign death and live the remainder of her life in devoted isolation following her father's demise, all indicate a notion of love lost as life-threatening.

Because of this trend in suicidal literature, it becomes striking that Frankenstein compares himself to Sinbad, who so thoroughly rejects the idea of ritualized suicide after the death of a loved one. Sinbad does not just reject the idea of sacrificing himself to mourning, he murders multiple times to escape that fate, before finally, literally crawling his way to freedom. Similarly, though Frankenstein is frequently in despair, and even accepts that the creature is "determined to consummate his crimes" by killing Frankenstein on his wedding night, the scientist never considers actively committing suicide (Shelley, 159). Indeed, the murder of his

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<sup>117</sup> For more on suicide in the British consciousness, see Kelly McGuire's *Dying to be English* (2012)

<sup>118</sup> "Firmly her lifted hand the weapon press'd / and deep she plung'd it in her panting breast: / 'Tis but a few short moments that divide / Alzira from her love!" – she said—and died" (H M Williams, Canto II, 127-130)

<sup>119</sup> "My father, to be happy both now and when again we meet I must fly from all this life which is mockery to one like me. In solitude only shall I be myself; in solitude I shall be thine." (Shelley, *Mathilda*, 85)

brother, best friend, bride, and death of his father, are not the impetus for active suicide, but rather culminate in spurring Frankenstein to make a vow of self-preservation, not destruction. Like Sinbad, he vows to live by any means necessary until the completion of his task, a task that Frankenstein ultimately fails where his *Arabian Nights* counterpart succeeds.

In the end, it is the creature who must destroy himself, ascending a funeral pyre of his creator and partner at the top of the world, consigning “to ashes [the] miserable frame” he was given years before in a final act of devotion to his creator’s wishes (Shelley, 190). In this destruction of his body, the creature hopes to foil any “unhallowed wretch, who would create another” such as himself, thus laying to rest Frankenstein’s fears of a race of monsters that would overrun the earth (Shelley, 190). In destroying his body, Shelley implicitly likens the creature to a widow consigning her body to *sati* rather than live on and possibly take another man to her bed. The creature would rather burn alive beside the corpse of the only man who knows his form intimately, down to the literal bones, than allow another access to the secrets of his body. In the creature’s self-immolation, he is truly performing a *sati* for the ages.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, experimentalists like Legallois and Aldini sought to define its limits and break its bounds, while others like Waterton saw death and subsequent ‘resurrection’ as a cure to ailments that remained incurable in life. Early dentistry saw those wealthy enough to buy replacements literally living with pieces of corpses in their mouths, teeth chosen with care by either the dentists, or the new owners themselves. Curiosity about foreign cultures erupted in creative works set in exotic locales like the modern-day Middle East or India, while Egyptomania in particular found full furore with European consumers as Napoleon’s forces returned from their Egyptian campaigns with stories and spoils from beneath the pyramids. Closer to home, theories about the permeability of apparent death found practical application in the creation and standardization of techniques for resuscitating the drowned and the hypothermic, techniques that Shelley herself writes about both privately and publicly. Frankenstein’s obsession with the body leads to necrophiliac undertones during his experimentation, and masturbatory horrors in the body of the creature once he is assembled. A body that, after assemblage, is not explored by another living being as, bereft of companionship from both humanity and the mate

he was promised, the creature commits *sati* in a final act of devotion to his creator. From the opening chapters of her novel to the closing pages, Mary Shelley proved herself acutely aware of the conversation surrounding the myriad ways life and death were inextricably bound together both before and during her lifetime.

## Conclusion

The earlier novels were stories of events and studies of manners. Fanny Burney (1752-1840) takes us back to the world of Dr Johnson. Jane Austen (1775-1817), working within narrow limits, carried on the tradition of feminine observation finely expressed. From the restraints and limitations of this sort of tale about manners and feelings, we find the English novel gradually breaking bounds as the mind of the century broke bounds.

—*The Outline of History*, H.G. Wells

The history of Mary Shelley scholarship is one of expansion and recognition, a battle that has been fought in earnest for just over forty years now. The above excerpt represents the sum total of H.G. Wells' opinion on the female contribution to English literature at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a time when women arguably created the most popular fiction on the market. Wells' attitude is exhaustingly patriarchal, his implication is that women wrote best when they wrote on traditionally 'feminine' topics, the light intrigues of drawing room and silver fork novels, and yet, ironically, my thesis could be summed up as almost 200 pages explaining how *Frankenstein* is an example of "feminine observation finely expressed", if one were to say Shelley was *observing* the transnational cultural conversations surrounding her and *expressing* them through a novel that serves as a meeting ground for those conversations (Wells, 1032-1033). Mary Shelley was an observer and investigator of her world, from a childhood spent observing her father's circle as they discussed the world they wanted to change, to an adulthood spent investigating every aspect of literature and culture she could as she crisscrossed the European continent and spread her reading and research even further afield.

Because of her dedication to that research, Shelley left an extensive record of her work through her *Journals*, a record that has been a boon to scholars for years. Yet, at the same time, because of the extensiveness of that record, scholars have often failed to look beyond it, to mind the gaps left by the missing journal from 1815 to 1816, and the near-complete absence of records from her life before elopement and the beginning of those *Journals*. There is comfort in the *Journals*, in the concrete

evidence they provide about Shelley's life, but a scholar who is not solely wedded to this text can read the world beyond it and see the Europe in which the *Journals* were written and the woman who put pen to paper to write them in the first place.

Once a scholar has freed themselves to look beyond the explicit, the implicit in a text is allowed to surface given enough historical and literary context, thus freeing the researcher to study what goes unsaid in *Frankenstein*. The 'unsaid' in *Frankenstein* can encompass multitudes, from the explicit text of the creature's colonialist desires in his promise to disappear into the South American jungle, to the subtext of craftwork bodies that threads not only Shelley's novel, but multiple literary genres, waxen artworks, and clockwork automatons across Europe. Implicit throughout the *Frankenstein* text is 19<sup>th</sup> century anxiety surrounding life and death, aspects of the story that have enthralled scholars and filmmakers for decades. Shelley, herself, fuelled this interest by explicitly mentioning galvanism in 1831, thus sparking inspiration around the world, but also oddly blinding many Shelley scholars to the other in-between aspects and experiments in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. No thesis on *Frankenstein* would be complete without mentioning Galvani, Aldini, and the Forrester experiment, but looking beyond that one finds myriad other, equally lurid and far less known experiments and experimenters like those performed by Waterton and Legallois, the echoes of whose work can be found throughout Shelley's novel. Similarly, no *Frankenstein* scholar can ignore the importance of the *Fantasmagoriana*, and yet beyond its outline as the collection of German ghost stories translated to French that inspired Byron to challenge the Diodati circle to a competition, the scholarship analysing *Frankenstein* in conjunction with the *Fantasmagoriana* has been slim to non-existent. The creature's South American ambitions have been an explicit part of the *Frankenstein* text since its first publication, yet the seemingly obvious need to investigate his desired destination is largely absent from *Frankenstein* criticism. Likewise, in hindsight, Nogaret's *Le Miroir* with its automaton inventor named Frankéstein, seems an obvious precursor to Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and yet it too has been largely neglected by the scholarship. By broadening my research to encompass all this and more, I have been able to not only gain a fresh understanding of the *Frankenstein* text, but also of Mary Shelley herself and the world as she understood it: globally connected through literature, art, and ideas.

In the monolith that is *Frankenstein* criticism, several of the gaps I have investigated are, at first blush, surprising. However, when one takes into account the largely Anglocentric nature of Shelley scholarship up until recent years, the gaps become understandable. For decades scholars have primarily restrained themselves to British-based and English-language texts, despite growing evidence of global interconnectedness even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Shelley's own bona fides as a linguist and cultural connoisseur. I believe that many texts could serve as a lens into the literary transnationalism of the age, but *Frankenstein* and Mary Shelley are uniquely suited to a materialist reading and serving as windows to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Shelley was acutely aware of the world around her, and the currents of conversation that threaded the intellectual circles she moved in, and with aplomb she wove those conversational currents through her first novel, making *Frankenstein* both a lens into the world as she knew it. By both narrowing my focus to *Frankenstein*, and simultaneously widening my perceptions of what is encompassed in *Frankenstein* beyond purely British influences, my work has brought forth a new reading of the text, the woman, and the conversations she took part in.

Across the past two centuries, Shelley has grown in the scholarship from a woman notable only for the other names encompassed within her own, Wollstonecraft, Godwin, Shelley, to the authoress of multiple novels but only one of any real interest because of her company while writing it, to finally a prolific and varied writer and a figure worthy of study in her own right. This expansion began in earnest almost by happenstance, with the shy admission of interest in *Frankenstein* by a select group of scholars in the '70s, but as Shelley primary materials were published through the '80s, secondary materials multiplied and research on her flourished through the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Still, within the vast field of Shelley and *Frankenstein* criticism, there is space for a new reading and further expansion. My work, leaning on the scholars who came before me but not limited to the same bounds they imposed upon Shelley and her works, looks beyond national borders to the broader 19<sup>th</sup> century through my paradoxically narrowed and widened lens to gain a new and clearer understanding of both Shelley and her global novel, *Frankenstein*.

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