

Mary Shelley
Frankenstein 1818 edition

by
Mary Shelley

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By
Mary Shelley



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Introduction

Being a woman in the patriarchal society of the early nineteenth century did not provide many options for women to experience themselves as individuals, to have their own self identity or feel their self importance. While some women were content with the roles of wives and mothers, others wanted more out of their existence. One of these women was Mary Wollstonecraft, a gifted writer, who wanted to advocate better social positions for women through her literary work. Mary Shelley, author of the infamous *Frankenstein* (1818), was her daughter. Shelley was only nineteen years old when she started writing her Gothic horror story *Frankenstein* and for such a young girl to imagine such a frightening story seems to depict how mature and complicated Mary Shelley must have been as an individual and a writer. Mary Shelley did however revise the novel and republish it in 1831 which has been considered as the final version of the novel by most scholars and educators. For the following discussion in this essay, the 1818 version of *Frankenstein* will be used to examine feminism within *Frankenstein* and some of its characters. In short the story is about a young student who discovers the secret of animating lifeless matter and, by assembling body parts, creates a monster who vows revenge on his creator after being rejected by his maker and from society. It is a classic tale of a man-made monster seeking acceptance from society despite his ghastly appearance and strange beginnings. The monster tries to find his place in the world by educating himself in the form of observing human behavior in hiding and learning how to read and write. With this achievement he is trying to feel a sense of belonging in society, even though in the end he gets rejected because of his monstrous deformities.

The purpose of this examination of *Frankenstein* is to explore the notion of feminism and female identity of such characters as the monster, Elizabeth Lavenza, Justine Moritz and Safie De Lacey. Furthermore the education of the monster, how he learns on his own, will be linked with the lack of education for women within Mary Shelley's society and how the monster represents women in a patriarchal society. The limits of women's education are demonstrated and what their role was in a patriarchal society. Furthermore it will be discussed in relation to Mary Shelley's life and her role

as a woman writer. In patriarchal society women were confined to the domestic sphere, which involved taking care of children and being good obedient wives. Meanwhile the men of society were active within the public sphere, which made being a writer and other intellectual employment difficult to gain for women.

Feminist texts ranging from Mary Shelley's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft to recent feminist writings from Sandra M. Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Anne K. Mellor, Simone de Beauvoir and others will be used to analyze the feminist issues within the novel. In addition, the intertextual relationship of such literary works as *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft and *Paradise Lost* (1667) by John Milton within *Frankenstein*, will determine a feminist point of view in the direction that women appeared to be entrapped within patriarchal society. Both of the aforementioned texts had a profound effect on Mary Shelley herself and in the instance of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* it gave her a great sense of independent thinking. *Paradise Lost* gave a better understanding of the ideals concerning the creation of mankind along with how women are fallen much like Eve. *Paradise Lost* depicts the story of creation and of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, which is originally from Genesis in the Bible.

By publishing the story of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley has permanently written her name in literary history as being the author of one of the most famous Gothic novel ever written. It can also be added that by creating this monster Mary Shelley may have assisted in making women and their place within in the public sphere more visible since female writers were not that accepted and common in the early nineteenth century.

Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein*

Her Life and Education

Mary Shelley¹ was born on August 30, 1797, in London to a middle class family which included some very respectable literary figures. In her Introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* she vigorously states: “It is not singular that, as a daughter of two persons of distinguished literary celebrity, I should very early have thought of writing” (353). This statement is not surprising since she was the daughter of renowned author Mary Wollstonecraft, who composed *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*² a piece of writing that has been hailed as a pivotal contribution to the social rights of women in the nineteenth century. In *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft demonstrated that women should be educated in the same manner as men, and be their companions, rather than merely their wives and servants. As Peter Barry states in his work *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (1995), it “diagnosed the problem of women’s inequality in society, and in some cases proposed solutions” (121). In addition renowned feminist writer Elaine Showalter has pointed out that before Wollstonecraft there had been “learned women ... but none as honest, courageous, or determined to live according to their theories of freedom” (*Inventing* 21). By examining these statements it can be determined that Wollstonecraft was trying to remove the restrictions that had been established on the rights of women.

Shelley’s father, William Godwin, who was also an author of prestigious reputation, wrote such works as *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness* (1793), which had a profound effect on society after its publication. In this work Godwin argued that society was largely controlled by the wealth, power and tradition of the upper hierarchy. He proposed that by removing such inequalities, with the use of reason, education and individual improvement, society could be much enhanced. It can therefore be concluded that it was no surprise that

¹ Mary Shelley will be referred to as Shelley from now on.

² *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* will be abbreviated to *Vindication* from now on.

Shelley would eventually aspire to become a writer herself, coming from such a profound literary background.

In a cruel twist of fate, Shelley's mother died only eleven days after giving birth to her daughter so it was up to Godwin to raise her. He remarried and wanted his new wife to educate his daughters. As it turned out Godwin's new wife was much more interested in educating her own daughter Jane, which might explain why Shelley did not get along with her stepmother. Anne K. Mellor, author of *Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (1989), mentions that while Shelley's mother was a "free thinker" and "an intellectual" her stepmother was "devious" and "manipulative" (12). It seems that Shelley was very protective of her mother and her legacy which was probably due to the fact that Shelley had no other way of communicating with her deceased mother than by reading her literary works.

Through her father's upbringing and his circle of radical thinkers, Shelley was exposed to some extreme and modern ideas which in all likelihood assisted her to create her own literary conventions. Godwin saw to it that she and her sister Fanny got a good education at home, both from himself and a Governess. Martin Garrett states in his book *Mary Shelley* (2002), that "the girls learned French, Italian, and drawing, amongst other subjects" (11). Garrett continues to note that "Godwin in particular encouraged the children to read and enquire widely, to learn where possible for themselves, and to use their imaginations" (11). Furthermore, Godwin felt, according to Mellor, that Shelley was "considerably superior in capacity" to her other siblings and that he "acknowledged her active mind, her great desire for knowledge" (8). This encouragement by Godwin seems to have benefitted Shelley because; she mentions in her Introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, that she was always scribbling stories: "My favorite pastime, during the hours given me for recreation, was to 'write stories'" (353) so it is no surprise she continued to write as she got older. According to Johanna M. Smith Wollstonecraft did contribute to her daughter's education as well since by the time Shelley was a teenager she was reading her mother's work which enhanced her education and strengthened her bond with her mother (Introduction 4). Consequently it would appear that Shelley was privileged in gaining the educational knowledge so many women were not accustomed to in the early nineteenth century. She accomplished this by reading and learning pivotal literary works to further enhance her intelligence and independence.

It was not common for young girls to be educated in such a manner as Shelley was. As June Purvis points out in *A History of Women's Education in England* (1991), young middle class girls, such as Shelley, were educated within the home to further enhance the prospect of them becoming “a ladylike wife and mother” (65), which was the purpose of girls' education during the early nineteenth century. In examining how girls and women were educated in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, it becomes apparent that women were treated as inferior when it came to education and social position. As Wollstonecraft states in *Vindication* in relation to education of women, they in general received only a “disorderly kind of education” (88). John Stuart Mill, author of *The Subjection of Women* (1869) declares that women were, according to patriarchal society, supposed to be “not a forced slave but a willing one, not a slave merely but a favorite” (132). He furthermore notes that men “turned the whole force of education to effect their purpose” (132) meaning that women and their education should service the needs of men. According to Purvis, in concern with the education of women, men were educated in the fields of politics and business, which was suited for the public sphere, while women were educated to become wives and mothers, which was identified with the domestic sphere (2). In addition June Hannam states in her book *Feminism* (2007) that “men were seen as rational, aggressive and competitive, and therefore fitted for the world of work and public activity, whereas women were emotional, nurturing and passive, and therefore most suited to look after the family within the domestic setting” (24). Additionally Purvis states that women and their education was usually “invisible” (Introduction xiv) and that “women in the past were mainly found in unpaid work, such as housework and childcare” (Introduction xiii). They did not appear to be anything more than faceless people that were not recognized as parts of society.

As a result Shelley was privileged in her education, compared to other women in society. She had the freedom to expand her mind by reading other literary works and find knowledge where she could. By learning from her father and being exposed to such a variety of literary works such as John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and of course her mother's *Vindication*, perhaps prepared her to compose, what later became the novel *Frankenstein*. Shelley's learning on her own, as her father had suggested, appears to echo the way the monster in *Frankenstein* educates himself on his own.

In 1814, much to her fathers' disapproval, she met and fell in love with a young poet named Percy Bysshe Shelley.³ He was a radical free thinker much like her father and by falling in love with Percy, Shelley was perhaps defying not only her father, but social conventions as well. Percy was already married so it was a troublesome relationship. It would seem that Shelley had found in Percy everything she desired. According to Mellor he was someone "who shared her passion for both her parents' love and to create the supportive family she craved" (20). Both Shelley and Percy were lovers of literature and they would spend much of their time together discussing literature and philosophy, so therefore their union was not only a romantic one but also literary. In 1816 Percy's pregnant wife committed suicide, by drowning herself. This caused quite a scandal yet only a few weeks later Percy and Shelley were married.

In 1818 Shelley's most famous work, *Frankenstein*, was published to some favorable reviews and success. D. L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf note that "*Frankenstein* enjoyed enormous success, not only because of its timely scientific theme, but also as a result of its eerie gothic motif and its unsettling characterization" (35). Despite Shelley's early success, it soon became overshadowed by tragic events. She and Percy had numerous children in their lifetime, most of whom died in infancy, and these tragic events had a profound effect on Shelley and put a lot of strain on them both and their marriage. Feminist writer Ellen Moers comments in her work *Literary Women* (1976) that Shelley was "pregnant at sixteen, and almost constantly pregnant throughout the following five years" (92). In addition Moers suggests that she was not a secure mother because she lost most of her children during this five year period. Unfortunately, Shelley and Percy's marriage would come to an abrupt end when Percy drowned off the shore of Tuscany in 1822. After his death she continued to write and even began to edit his poetry and prose and publish the results. In 1831 she published a new edition of *Frankenstein* which included some changes to the original story. Shelley was a productive writer until her dying day. In 1839 her health began to decline which would ultimately lead to her death in February 1851.

³ Percy Pysshe Shelley will be recognized as Percy from now on.

The Plot of *Frankenstein*

The novel's narrative plot is that of a student of natural philosophy by the name of Victor Frankenstein and his horrendous creation. It begins with Victor being found by Robert Walton, a captain of a ship trapped in ice, heading for the North Pole. Victor has been pursuing his creation on the ice but is weakened by the cold. Walton takes him aboard and helps nurse him back to health. Here Victor starts to tell the tale to Walton of the monster Victor had created.

First Victor describes his joyful childhood in Geneva which was spent in the company of his cousin Elizabeth Lavenza. Then he describes how he entered the University of Ingolstadt to study natural philosophy and chemistry. There, Victor becomes consumed by the desire to discover the secrets of life, which after a period of research and study he believes he has found. Possessed with this knowledge of creating life, he spends many months eagerly creating a being out of old body parts. One night he brings his creation to life and when Victor looks at his monstrous creation the sight horrifies him. He exits the room, leaving the monster alone and defenseless. After abandoning the monster Victor goes to his apartment to sleep, but has a horrific nightmare. He wakes up in terror but realizes that the monster he has created is looming over him so he runs out of the room and roams the streets of Ingolstadt, wandering in remorse.

After this he prepares to go back home to Geneva, to his family. Just before leaving he receives a letter from his father, who says that Victor's younger brother, William, has been murdered. Grief stricken he hurries home but on his way through the woods where William was murdered he sees his monster and becomes convinced that he is responsible for his brother's murder. When he arrives home, Victor finds that Justine Moritz, a kind girl in the service of the Frankenstein household, has been accused of the murder. She is in the end charged, tried and executed for it.

Victor takes a vacation in the mountains to try to ease his grief, but one day as he is out for a walk he is approached by the monster. The monster admits to the murder of William and the framing of Justine but begs for understanding. He only killed William to injure Victor, his cruel creator. The monster tells Victor his tale of travels after Victor had abandoned him. Since the monster is endowed with unnatural strength and has a horrific appearance, the monster brings terror and fright to those who see him,

but he only wants to feel accepted and loved. He finds an abandoned cottage which he makes his home. In a nearby cottage a small family of four people, by the name of De Lacey, become his mentors. Without them knowing, the monster watches and observes from afar their daily routines and human behavior. He slowly learns the way of how humans interact and communicate with each other which in the end teaches him how to speak their language and read written words. He later finds literary texts that have profound effects on him, such as *Paradise Lost*, and these texts help him to understand the ways of man. When he feels confident enough to approach the De Lacey's and make his presence known, they turn him down. They react with fright and terror, in the same manner as most people did when they met the monster. After being rejected by this family and others, he decides to find his creator.

After telling Victor his story the monster wants him to make him a bride, a companion so that the monster does not feel so alone. At first Victor refuses, horrified of the thought of creating another monster but in the end the monster manages to persuade Victor to create a bride for him. When he was almost finished, Victor destroys the female, because he has serious doubts of releasing another monster into the world. The monster enraged with this development vows revenge on Victor and swears he will be with him on his wedding night.

When returning home to Geneva Victor marries his bride, Elizabeth Lavenza, who the monster murders on their wedding night. Victor pursues the monster all the way to the arctic, vowing to destroy his creation but in the end dies which leaves the monster abandoned and more alone after succeeding in killing his creator.

Creating a Monster: The Evolution of *Frankenstein*

“I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion” (Shelley 357). What came to Shelley in a nightmare that fateful night in the Alps, where she was staying with her lover Percy and their friend Lord Byron eventually became the story of *Frankenstein*. It has been suggested by feminist writer Ellen Moers, that there lay the memory of another dream. On 6 March 1815, Shelley lost her first child, a daughter, who much like Victor's monster, had no name. Moers states that Shelley had written in her journal on 19 March 1815 that she had dreamt about her little girl. “Dream [sic] that

my little baby came to life” (qtd. in Moers 96). Her baby had not come back to life since it was only a dream which is very reminiscent of the monstrous birth of the monster himself. Moers furthermore suggests that *Frankenstein* is a “birth myth, and one that was lodged in the novelist’s imagination” (92) due to the fact that she was a mother who had lost one of her children, prior to the writing of *Frankenstein*. So it does not seem out of the ordinary that Shelley would conjure up such a horrific story considering what she had experienced in her short lifetime.

When Shelley began writing *Frankenstein* in 1816, Percy assisted her, by editing her manuscript and writing the Preface to the 1818 edition of the story. He seems to have had quite an influence on her and she, being a very young woman, revered him and his intellect with the highest respect. Anne K. Mellor suggests the following interesting notion: “Defensively, she had hidden her own voice behind his more public and impersonal linguistic persona” (68). Hiding her own voice strongly suggests that Shelley was trying to find her own secure identity within the literary world, through Percy and his intellectual knowledge of literature and the world. It is not at all surprising that she would arrange it so, considering that she was very young when she began writing the novel and was a woman author in a patriarchal society. It should also be mentioned that when *Frankenstein* was published in 1818 it was published anonymously, which further supports the idea that she was maybe a bit frightened to put her own name forward as an author. Even though it appears Shelley was insecure she did have her own identity as William Garrett claims in *Mary Shelley*, when examining what Percy felt about his wife: “She seemed almost to embody the excitement of her parents’ ideas, but without losing her own strong identity” (19). Even though Percy appears to have had such influence on Shelley, Barbara Johnson, a feminist writer who has written about *Frankenstein* notes that because of Shelley’s own literary parentage, such as her mother’s *Vindication*, “Mary Shelley would have no reason to believe that writing was not proper for a woman” (8). Johnson also claims that Shelley gives “birth to *herself* on paper” (8) which strongly suggests that Shelley was in control over the narrative itself with some assistance from Percy. As pointed out earlier by Mellor that Shelley was perhaps hiding her own voice behind Percy, it seems that she was not so much relying on Percy as she was displaying a typical behavior of an early nineteenth century woman. Being a woman in a patriarchal society in the early nineteenth century

was difficult since there were not many options for them within the public sphere and in regards to education.

Despite these difficulties Ellen Moers has noted that Shelley managed to write a novel which includes a birth, a very female oriented action which was something that was not written about in the early nineteenth century (92). Moers furthermore states that “Mary Shelley was a unique case, in literature as in life. She brought birth to fiction not as realism but as Gothic fantasy, and thus contributed to Romanticism a myth of genuine originality” (93).

Recreating the Monster

After Percy’s death Shelley republished *Frankenstein* in 1831. She states in her Introduction to this new edition that she did not change much of the story itself, mostly style and language where it was appropriate, and most of the changes occurred in the beginning of the first volume (358). Scholars, such as Mary Poovey, do not agree with Shelley. Poovey argues that Shelley was trying to “bring her younger, unorthodox self into line with the conventional image of a proper lady” (qt. in Smith 273) by editing this version herself. In addition Anne K. Mellor suggests that Shelley’s personal tragedies and the circumstances of her life convinced her that “human beings are ... mere puppets in the hands of destiny” (173) causing her to rearrange her novel. Mary Poovey also states that “Frankenstein is merely the passive victim of powerful external forces” (341) in the new version. By doing this Shelley seems to have incorporated her own life tragedies into the 1831 edition, reasoning that it must be out of her own control to have lost most of her children in infancy and therefore connects it with Victor’s inability to have complete control of his fate. Some other changes are also visible, such as the incestuous relationship of Victor and Elizabeth which is minimized; they are no longer related; it goes from cousin to adopted sister. D. L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf furthermore believe that “the 1818 edition is closer to the imaginative act and atmosphere that spawned this influential novel” (40). It would appear that the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein* is much more revealing of the radical viewpoints of Shelley’s youth, such as eloping with a married man and defying social conventions. These are, some of the reasons, why the 1818 edition is being used here to study feminism within *Frankenstein*.

Feminism

The Female Gothic

Frankenstein has been hailed as the one of the “most powerful horror stories of Western civilization” (Mellor 38) along with being a very influential novel within the Romantic period. In examining what the Romantic period represents Duncan Wu notes in the Introduction to *Romanticism: An Anthology* (2006), that it was a time that was shaped by a multitude of political, social, and economic changes. “The Romantic period has an immediacy which earlier ones tend to lack” (xxxix). Many writers of the period were aware of an enveloping intellectual and imaginative climate which could be ruled by the unlimited use of the imagination and emotions on poetic and literary works. Romanticism emphasized individualism and self expression along with saying that reason cannot explain everything.

By composing *Frankenstein* Shelley may have established herself as a leading writer for what has been labeled Gothic Romance. Ellen Moers has suggested that female Gothic, as a literary mode, can be defined as what women writers have been writing since the eighteenth century (90). Moers likewise states that Shelley herself had wanted to compose a ghost story that would “curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart” (91) which further support the notion that *Frankenstein* is a Gothic story but at the same time a woman’s book. In support of this Lisa Vargo makes an interesting point: “Women’s Gothic romance performs the difficult maneuver of inscribing social roles for women while also affording an escape from those roles” (233). She continues to note that “Gothic romance is seen to perform a confinement for women equivalent to that which occurs within its pages” (234). For this reason Gothic romance can simultaneously be viewed as entertainment and as a way for women to escape their daily lives. It can also be seen as a way to break out of the traditional “romance plot of marriage and happily ever after” (234) and give the opportunity for women writers to expand beyond that. Since the Gothic romance was neither “predictable nor formulaic” (234) it would suggest the feeling of liberation and pleasure within the women writers’ community and would give them a sense of

independence. Furthermore, Anne K. Mellor points out that Shelley has “powerfully reinforced the tradition of the Gothic novel as a peculiarly female domain” (55) along with “satisfying a repressed female desire” (56). Mellor continues: “In a patriarchal culture which assigns linguistic and social authority to men, the very act of woman’s speaking in public is a trespass on male domains” (56). Since the novel was the only place for women writers, it is no wonder Shelley composed *Frankenstein* as it is. The uprising of the monster against patriarchal society is very powerful and a vital force to be reckoned with.

Feminist Criticism

As Ann E. Cudd and Robin O. Andreasen state in *Feminist Theory: A Philosophical Anthology* (2005) it is thought that the beginning of feminism can be dated back to Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication* since it portrays the ideals of “equal political rights and economic opportunities of women” (7). It is no wonder then that Shelley was so immersed in her mothers’ work since Wollstonecraft has been hailed as one of the first feminists to ever emerge on the literary scene. Cudd and Andreasen furthermore state: “Feminist theory is the attempt to make intellectual sense of, and then to critique, the subordination of women to men” (1). This is precisely what renowned feminist writer Elaine Showalter proposes feminist critics should try to accomplish. Critics should explore female writers and what they were really trying to accomplish through their works. Showalter further explains in her famous essay “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness” that this act is called Gynocriticism, a term that was used to describe “the study of women as *writers*, and its subjects are the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution and laws of female literary traditions” (248).

When feminists examine late eighteenth and early nineteenth century female writers, they notice the difficulties these women had to face in “a predominantly male tradition” (Richardson 13). The only place for these women within the literary world was the novel, since most of the public sphere was dominated by the “male hegemony” (Richardson 13). This is what feminist critics such as Ellen Moers, known for claiming that *Frankenstein* is a female birth myth and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, who

wrote that the book describes a “woman’s helpless alienation in a male society” (246) were trying to accomplish since they aimed to “recover not only a major (and neglected) female literature but a whole (neglected) female history” (Gilbert and Gubar xii). Other feminists such as Vanessa D. Dickerson and Anne K. Mellor have in addition contributed to the academic feminist angles that can be viewed within *Frankenstein*. What these feminists brought forth with their academic studies will be explored in relation to *Frankenstein* along with exploring the intertextual relationship of *Vindication* and *Paradise Lost*.

The Impact of *A Vindication of The Rights of Woman* and *Paradise Lost* within *Frankenstein*

In exploring such literary texts as *Vindication* and *Paradise Lost* in conjunction with *Frankenstein*, the sense of injustice towards women and the lack of education for them appear to be obvious. To support this observation, the examination of the submissive weak characteristics of such characters as Justine Moritz and Elizabeth Lavenza are necessary. Justine and Elizabeth will be depicted against the strong feminine character of Safie De Lacey and the monster. He represents the behavior of a submissive female that becomes a strong female figure. Safie and the monster become independent through the acquisition of language and education. In relation to this the views of various feminist writers will be explored along with the depiction of education for women and how the monster manages to survive after being abandoned by his creator.

These important literary texts, *Vindication* and *Paradise Lost*, appear to have contributed to help shape Shelley's literary knowledge. As stated by Ellen Moers "Mary Shelley is said – and rightly – to have absorbed into *Frankenstein* the ideas about education, society and morality held by her father and her mother" (94). By accomplishing this it seems that Shelley portrays within *Frankenstein* the importance of other literary texts she had both read and been influenced by. She does this by referencing a wide variety of literary works she feels are important, such as *Vindication* and *Paradise Lost*. Some have even mentioned that "she made a living book out of pieces of other books" (qtd. in Macdonald and Scherf 11-2). In some ways it is true, since Shelley was influenced by various literary works from that time period and earlier.

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: Submissive Behavior of the Female within Frankenstein

Coming from a great literary background Shelley was able to utilize to her advantage the knowledge that was at her disposal. In the inspection of *Vindication* within *Frankenstein* there is the sense that Shelley was trying to point out her mothers' view of injustice towards women in society and their lack of proper education by echoing

several passages from *Vindication*. Examples of such passages within *Frankenstein* are used to underline female education and blind obedience of women.

Vindication by Wollstonecraft indicates that not many women in Wollstonecraft's time were able to get the education they deserved. They had to find it on their own if they wanted to succeed. Wollstonecraft believed that because both sexes shared an equal capacity for reason, women are to be considered as human, not solely as beings for the pleasure of men, and should thus benefit from the educational programs historically only afforded to men. This lack of education for women in Shelley and Wollstonecraft's society is depicted in such a manner that it cannot be ignored, and Shelley seems to be trying to emphasize this reality by echoing her mothers work within the narrative of *Frankenstein*. Shelley does this by characterizing Elizabeth Lavenza and Justine Moritz as weak, submissive female characters.

In *Frankenstein* when Victor talks about the education of women, more specifically about Elizabeth's education, it appears that he does not regard the education of women as something that should concern him greatly. He sees her as "docile and good tempered, yet gay and playful as a summer insect" (Shelley 65). There is a sense that he is referring to her as a person that is below him in social status by calling her an insect. He furthermore feels that while he "delighted in investigating the facts relative to the actual world; she busied herself in following the aerial creations of the poets" (Shelley 66). He implies that because she is a woman, she does not need the same education that is provided for him as is evident in the following example: "The world was to me a secret, which I desired to discover; to her it was a vacancy, which she sought to people with imaginations of her own" (Shelley 66). The vacancy which Victor speaks of, suggests that Shelley thought that women were not treated as equal to men. She makes a reference to this by alluding to this following passage in *Vindication*: "For the little knowledge which women of strong minds attain, is, from various circumstances, of a more desultory kind than the knowledge of men" (88). This means that women had to find education on their own because they were not privileged to the same education as men. Elizabeth does not appear to have a strong mind such as Wollstonecraft proposes, and therefore she does not pursue the same education as Victor does. The lack of education for women is unjust in Shelley's view and she suggests that fact by putting a reference on education in her mothers' text within the

previously mentioned section of *Frankenstein*. According to Wollstonecraft men were supposed to be educated in an academic way while women learned more by the way of life, watching their surroundings and learning from society. It appears that Shelley is trying to portray that women, like Elizabeth, are treated unjustly, but at the same time Shelley points out that this is what was socially expected of women to do. She is not allowed to educate herself in the same manner as Victor does, because she is a woman.

Presumably the submissive behavior of Elizabeth can be further explored when she regrets not having the same opportunities as Victor to travel around: “Elizabeth approved of the reasons of my departure, and only regretted that she had not the same opportunities of enlarging her experience, and cultivating her understanding” (179). This segment echoes how Wollstonecraft describes in *Vindication* how women learn by observing real life, since they are forbidden to educate themselves in the way men were. The restrictions of society are inhibiting Elizabeth from exploring the world in the same manner as Victor does and this is clearly criticized by Shelley.

Submissive behavior is not only seen in Elizabeth but also in Justine Moritz, a young servant girl of the Victor household. She gets blamed and convicted for the murder of Victor’s little brother, William. The monster is the one who is responsible, since he killed William out of revenge towards Victor: “To him towards whom I have sworn eternal revenge; you shall be my first victim” (Shelley 167) the monster speaks of William. The monster then frames Justine for the murder by putting on her dress the picture of William’s mother, which William had around his neck when the monster killed him. “I approached her unperceived, and placed the portrait securely in one of the folds of her dress” (Shelley 168). With this piece of evidence against her, Justine thus confesses to the murder of Victor’s little brother even though she did not commit it, therefore portraying a submissive obedient woman. The following example portrays how Justine was treated by the patriarchal justice system: “He threatened excommunication and hell fire in my last moments, if I continued obdurate” (Shelley 113). Here Justine is referring to her interrogator who is a man. This section echoes Wollstonecraft’s work in *Vindication* about blind obedience to the male authority figure, using religion as a point to threaten Justine into confession. The power of patriarchal society and religion appear to be taking advantage of Justine’s vulnerability: “I did confess; but I confessed a lie. I confessed that I might obtain absolution” (Shelley

113). She is afraid of what will happen to her if she does not confess. She shows weakness and obedience in the presence of men, and portrays a typical submissive behavior towards them. In exploring and referencing her mother's work in *Vindication* on blind obedience Shelley is challenging the male-dominated aspect of the public sphere and justice system. Wollstonecraft states that "as blind obedience is ever sought for by power, tyrants and sensualists are in the right when they endeavor to keep women in the dark, because the former only want slaves, and [the] latter a play-thing" (90). This strongly suggests that if women are constantly going to blindly obey the rules of patriarchal society, change will not occur, and the oppression of women will continue. Wollstonecraft furthermore reasons that women should "strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience" (90). In other words, women should find a way to educate themselves since the male patriarchal society does not allow them to. This is something that the monster does; he finds a way to educate himself.

Another example is when Elisabeth is writing a letter to Victor about their forthcoming marriage and what her thoughts are about it. She wishes not to "dictate happiness" or "interfere with any future plans" or that delay on his part would cause her "any serious uneasiness" (Shelley 176-7). Before she wrote the letter she had been assured by Victor that the marriage would take place and that gave her much joy. "The expression of your sentiments on this subject, my dear Victor, gives me more pleasure than I have for some time experienced" (Shelley 176). She is very submissive in her writing, almost saying that she will not be happy unless Victor is happy. "If you feel thus, we shall assuredly be happy; however present events may cast a gloom over us" (Shelley 176). She is behaving in a typical submissive behavior of a woman of her status, being imprisoned by society around her. She is letting Victor's feelings and well-being come before her own. She is according to Wollstonecraft portraying the typical behavior of a woman that has been told by her mother that "softness of temper, outward obedience" and a general model behavior "will obtain for them the protection of man" (84).

In examining these examples of weak females, it is not a surprise that both Elizabeth's and Justine's fates are that of death. Elizabeth gets murdered on her wedding night by the monster and Justine by the justice system. Both of them only

received a limited kind of education. Vanessa D. Dickerson points out in her essay “The Ghost of Self: Female Identity in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*” that “Justine, and Elizabeth are ... ultimately powerless outsiders made more crushingly powerless by their angelicalness” (85). She equally notes that “the selfless, ethereal and unscientific women in the novel are practically transparent if not invisible” (79-80). These statements from Dickerson further enhance the evidence examined earlier that both Justine and Elizabeth are invisible because they give into the domineering patriarchal society. They are weak and submissive females which ultimately is the cause of their deaths.

A Strong Female Figure

Safie in *Frankenstein* displays characteristics of a strong female character. She does not display submissive behavior like Elizabeth and Justine do. Born to a Christian Arab mother and a Turkish father she is a foreign woman from Asia that was taught well by her mother to be independent in spirit and “aspire to higher powers of intellect” (Shelley 149). Her mother died, but not before imparting her wisdom to Safie:

But her lessons were indelibly impressed on the mind of Safie; who sickened at the prospect of again returning to Asia, and being immured within the walls of a haram, allowed only to occupy herself with puerile amusements, ill suited to the temper of her soul, now accustomed to grand ideas and noble emulation for virtue” (Shelley 149).

This strongly parallels the way Shelley’s life turned out. Both women lose their mothers, and both women strive to educate themselves. Safie conspires to flee from her tyrant father in a search of her lover Felix De Lacey, a man that Safie’s father betrayed. She would rather go out in the unknown world in search of her lover, than stay with her oppressive father. She goes alone in search of a better life in a country where she did not speak the language. “The Arabian was left alone, unacquainted with the language of the country, and utterly ignorant of the customs of the world” (Shelley 152). By departing on her own she displays immense courage and strength, something that is not revealed in Elizabeth or Justine. According to Anne K. Mellor Safie is appalled by her father’s betrayal of Felix and “by the Islamic oppression of women he endorses” (118). Vanessa D. Dickerson has in conjunction observed that Safie travels around like the male

characters of *Frankenstein* and becomes her own independent person: “She rebels against the bondage her paterfamilias would impose ... she is spirited, independent” (88). This evidence strongly suggests that Safie embodies characteristics a strong female should embody while Elizabeth and Justine portray a dependency for male patriarchy which John Stuart Mill has described as “the primitive state of slavery lasting on” (123). Safie displays courage and independence by leaving her father and going alone into the world. She educates herself with the help of the De Lacey family, by learning the language, and at the same time she is helping the monster, unknown to her, to learn the language and manners of humans as well. Safie thrives unlike Elizabeth and Justine “because she possesses the ethereal qualities that are substantial by independence, spirit, money and desire” (Dickerson 90). She has a voice that is completely her own, unlike Elizabeth and Justine which puts her in a similar position as the monster. He was also trying to stand on his own, educating himself and trying to become part of society by learning. The monster’s intellectual journey parallels a woman’s education and how she was excluded from society.

Paradise Lost: Impact and Influence on the Monster

In examining *Paradise Lost* in conjunction with *Frankenstein*, it is evident that John Milton’s poem was a great influence on Shelley when she wrote *Frankenstein*, since she references it and its passages numerous times throughout the narrative. *Paradise Lost* is one of the literary works the monster finds to further his education. Shelley also seems to have realized the misogynistic views Milton portrays in *Paradise Lost* because according to renowned feminist authors Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Shelley felt that Milton’s work embodied “lessons a female author (or monster) must learn about a male-dominated society” (237). They furthermore state that Milton was telling women that they were inferior to the male because of “the story of secondness, her otherness, and how that otherness leads inexorably to her demonic anger, her sin, her fall” (191). It is no wonder Shelley made the monster find and read *Paradise Lost*, since it could give him a sense of how women were perceived in a patriarchal society, and how women have always been perceived as weak and submissive, stemming from Eve.

Paradise Lost is an epic poem in blank verse written by seventeenth century poet John Milton. It tells the Christian story of the fall of mankind, the temptation of Adam

and Eve by the fallen angel Satan and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Milton has taken the story of Adam and Eve and made it more personal, building a relationship between Adam and Eve before their sin and fall from Eden. In examining *Paradise Lost* and *Frankenstein* it strongly points in the direction that the monster is, as Gilbert and Gubar mention, a “female in disguise” (237) trying to break the suppressive boundaries of patriarchal society.

When the monster finds *Paradise Lost* he also finds other works, such as a volume of *Plutarch’s Lives* and *The Sorrows of Werter* (1789). “I can hardly describe to you the effect of these books. They produced in me an infinity of new images and feelings, that sometimes raised me to ecstasy [sic], but more frequently sunk me into the lowest dejection” (Shelley 152-3) he explains to Victor. *The Sorrows of Werter* taught the monster “the gentle and domestic manners it described” (Shelley 153). *Plutarch’s Lives* taught him the “histories of the first founders of the ancient republics” (Shelley 153). The monster notes that he “learned from Werter’s imaginations despondency and gloom: but Plutarch taught me high thoughts; he elevated me above the wretched sphere of my own reflections, to admire and love the heroes of past ages” (Shelley 153). He also feels rage against these heroes of past age, how they were able to slaughter and massacre their own species. When reading about the slaughter it gave him a sense of virtue. The monster also makes a strong important note: “The patriarchal lives of my protectors caused these impressions to take a firm hold on my mind; perhaps, if my first introduction to humanity had been made by a young soldier, burning for glory and slaughter, I should have been imbued with different sensations” (Shelley 154). This gives a strong indication how the monster was eager to learn and be true to the ways of humanity. That he wants to portray his good nature, despite his horrible beginnings and being abandoned by his creator. But because he was alone he says that “I was dependent on none, and related to none” (Shelley 153). This is a very powerful statement made by the monster, perhaps to emphasize that he had only himself to rely on.

While both of these literary works had an effect on the monster, *Paradise Lost* seems to have had the greatest impact and “excited different and far deeper emotions” and he read it as “true history”:

It moved every feeling of wonder and awe, that the picture of an omnipotent God warring with his creatures was capable of exciting. I

often referred to the several situations, as the similarity struck me, to my own. Like Adam, I was created apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with, and acquire knowledge from beings of superior nature: but I was wretched, helpless and alone (Shelley 154).

This powerful account of how *Paradise Lost* made the monster feel strongly supports the notion that the monster was indeed alone in the world. He had been abandoned by his creator and had no one to share his thoughts and feelings with. Adam had God to converse with, and later on Eve. It is no wonder that many aspects of the monster's experiences parallel with what happens in *Paradise Lost*.

Paradise Lost: The Monster's Education

To explore how the monster is perceived in his educational beginning it is good to view what Vanessa D. Dickerson has written: "Initially Frankenstein's creature is a passive, childish and helpless as the female figures in the novel. Orphaned himself, he too, is an outsider who wishes to become a member of a domestic circle" (88). His education is an intellectual journey that starts at a low point. Dickerson continues to note that the monster "takes control of his existence" and "ultimately shakes off the passivity of Elizabeth (and) Justine, seeks a mate, rejects his father, and these acts of independence are set in motion by his acquisition of language" (89-90). Through his self education the monster acquires more than just language and knowledge, he acquires the ability to understand and analyze his world. He does this by staying in hiding and watching the De Lacey family from afar, learning from them the ways of language: "My days were spent in close attention, that I might more speedily master the language (Shelley 144). "While I improved in speech, I also learned the science letters ... and this opened before me a wide field for wonder and delight" (Shelley 144). He observes from afar much like a woman did in the domestic sphere, she not being able to participate in the public sphere or educate herself unless she found the ingenuity to find it on her own. The monster does find it on his own and his desire to be educated could be viewed as the

outpouring of Shelley's own experiences, her own passions that drove her to educate herself. By learning how to read and write the monster was prepared to experience the impact *Paradise Lost* had on him when he read it. It taught him valuable lessons on his place in the world and portrayed that the monster is representing a female and her lack of education in society.

Paradise Lost: The Monster as the Other and as Eve

For another way to look at the marginal status of women in society it is good to examine the monster and his origin. To accomplish this it is good to explore what Simone de Beauvoir has stated in her revolutionary book *The Second Sex* (1952), a work which is regarded as a major work in feminist literature. She states that women are "the Other" (xxii) in regards to social status and being which is very similar to the monster.

Beauvoir continues to note that woman is "defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her" (xxii). What is probably most compelling and further supports the notion of the monster as other is the fact that he has no history, much like women: "They have no past, no history, no religion of their own" (xxv) and "in the past all history has been made by men" (xxvii). His origin of being is that he was created from body parts that were not his own to begin with. He wakes up after being created by Victor, not born like an infant, but fully grown, enlarged person with hideous deformities. Much like women he has no historical past on his own: "It is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original area of my being: all the events of that period appear confused and indistinct" (Shelley 128). This is a strong indication that Shelley appears to be symbolizing the monster as a "female in disguise" (Gilbert and Gubar 237) trapped in patriarchal society with no means to escape. He tries to educate himself on his own, by learning to read and write.

The monster's otherness can be linked with how Eve was created, as told in *Paradise Lost*. It can be recognized in the following example when Victor dreams seeing Elizabeth "in the bloom of health" (Shelley 85). In this dream, as he kissed her lips "they became livid with the hue of death" (Shelley 85) and in a single moment she changed into the corpse of his mother and in that instant Victor wakes up with horror (Shelley 85). The "wretch" is standing above him "the miserable monster which I had created" (Shelley 86). Here Victor is encountering his own creation up close. This

section in the story is very important as it echoes the dream Adam has in *Paradise Lost*, in which he wakes up and sees the shape of Eve which had been created from a rib from his body (Milton 8. 460-89). In both cases Victor and Adam are seeing their own creations. With Adam it is Eve and with Victor it is his hideous creation that is an abomination and a “wretch” (Shelley 87). In *Frankenstein* the wretch represents Eve in *Paradise Lost*. The monster is a female, an other, a being that was created from body parts much like Eve’s creation as is evident in the following example of how Eve was created from Adam’s rib by God “Who stooping opened my left side, and took / From thence a Rib, with cordial spirits warm” (Milton 8. 465-6). With this quote from *Paradise Lost*, Eve is presented as nothing more than a body part that symbolizes that she is an other much like the monster in *Frankenstein*. She does not appear to be worthy of having her own physical beginning, she has to be made from the body part of a man, much like the monster. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar write that the story of Eve “is the story of Eve’s discovery not that she must fall but that, having been created female, she is fallen, femaleness and fallenness being essentially synonymous” (234). This is much like women in Shelley’s society who were trapped within the domestic sphere and it echoes in the monster himself. He is fallen much like Eve, but manages to rise up against adversity and learn the ways of man. In the end he loses and falls when he gets rejected by the only human beings he felt connected to, the De Lacey family. “Who can describe their horror and consternation on beholding me?” (Shelley 160), the monster says when they see him because they all react with horrifying results. He curses mankind and “declares an everlasting war against the species” (Shelley 161). Instead of falling down and giving up the monster yells back at mankind. He wants to be heard and wants humanity to hear his plea of acceptance. He displays strength that is similar to what Wollstonecraft was trying to express in *Vindication*: “I wish to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body” (73). She declares that it is a positive and important to try to rise above your confined social position.

A good example of how the monster is a female in disguise and similar to Eve in *Paradise Lost* is of how both the monster and Eve catch a glimpse of their reflections for the first time in a pool.

It started back, but pleas’d I soon returnd,
Pleas’d it returnd as soon with answering looks

Of sympathie and love; there I had fixt

Mine eyes till now, and pin'd with vain desire (Milton 9. 464-7).

While Eve falls in love with her beauty, the monster is frightened and repelled by his ugliness. “At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification” (Shelley 139). With this example the opposites are paralleled and used in an ironic way to portray the similarities within them. “Alas! I did not yet entirely know the fatal effects of this miserable deformity” (Shelley 139). The monster is aware of his ugliness and deformity much like Eve is aware of her beauty. Furthermore it would seem that Milton was pointing to the fact that Eve’s vanity was her flaw as Gilbert and Gubar point out: “As beautiful as the monster’s is ugly ... meant by Milton to be morally ugly” (240). Eve’s narcissistic view of herself in her reflection symbolizes the monster’s ugliness as Gilbert and Gubar have observed. “Just as Eve’s moral deformity is symbolized by the monster’s physical malformation, the monster’s physical ugliness represents his social illegitimacy, his bastardy, his namelessness” (241). This strongly suggests how abandoned and alone he must have felt at this moment. He does not have a place in the world, since he is an other much like a woman. His physical deformities are keeping him from being a member of society; much as, because of their sex, women were kept away from being a member in the patriarchal society. In further support of this Gilbert and Gubar continue by saying that “he himself as nameless as a woman is in patriarchal society, as nameless as unmarried, illegitimately pregnant Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin may have felt herself to be at the time she wrote *Frankenstein*” (241). This further indicates that the monster appears to be trying to find his place within society, but is unable to because of his deformities and him being an outcast. He tries his best to educate himself on his own much like Shelley did which links him more to the female than the male so he appears to be more like Eve than Adam in *Paradise Lost*. He starts out much like a submissive Eve but finds his way and becomes like a strong female, much like Safie De Lacey.

In further examination of the likeness of the monster to Eve and their similar nature, it is important to reveal the difference between them. To further support this is that in *Paradise Lost* Eve is later led on from her reflection by a voice in the air towards

Adam, while the monster has to be independent and learn how to survive on his own. Being created a submissive female, Eve appears to have no will of her own and is vain as she lets herself be whisked away by a mysterious voice in the air. Gilbert and Gubar propose: “It is Eve, after all, who languishes helpless and alone, while Adam converses with superior beings, and it is Eve in whom the Satanically bitter gall of envy rises, causing her to eat the apple in the secret hope, as she ultimately confesses, of adding “what wants/In Female Sex” (239). Here it appears that Eve is a mere puppet that Milton seems to be portraying throughout *Paradise Lost*, he does not give her a voice of her own, making her submissive in behavior much like Justine and Elizabeth. That is not the reality with the monster. The monster is perceived as a feminine creature that learns of his own accord. Shelley does this by making him a more willful and independent creature, much like Wollstonecraft was trying to showcase in *Vindication*, by giving women their own voice to speak out with. In the words of Devon Hodges: “Like the monster, woman in a patriarchal society is defined as an absence, an enigma, mystery, or crime, or she is allowed to be a presence only so that she can be defined as a lack, a mutilated body that must be repressed to enable men to join the symbolic order and maintain their mastery” (162). With these words the lack of women’s place within the public sphere is emphasized to a great extent and yet the monster finds himself learning and educating himself much like Shelley and her mother did. Shelley makes the monster more independent and self reliant by how it learns to read and write by watching his neighbors, the De Lacey family, interact and communicate with each other. “This was indeed a godlike science, and I ardently desired to become acquainted with it” (Shelley 137). After great effort and hard work he begins to understand a few words, learns the names of his fellow cottagers and begins to form sentences. This indicates his passion for learning and trying to become independent much like women were trying to become part of society on equalitarian terms.

Overcoming Society’s Limitations

What Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, amongst other things, seems to teach the monster is the fall of Eve and the female figure. Even though the monster is similar to Eve in origin, he does rebel against patriarchal society by educating himself instead of being submissive like her. In the end his self education and rebellion is what keeps him from ending up

like Elizabeth and Justine. His methods of survival may have been extreme since he murdered Elizabeth and made his maker's life a misery. But that is what can happen when an oppressed voice does not get heard in the proper way.

What Shelley seems to have been trying to accomplish by incorporating both *Vindication* and *Paradise Lost* within the narrative of *Frankenstein*, is to undermine society's stereotypical expectations of women through defiant self education. The goal for the monster and therefore Shelley appears to be that of overcoming society's limitations through education, rather than trying to forcibly destroy society's values.

Conclusion

Wollstonecraft had stated in *Vindication* that eighteenth century writers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who had written on the subject of female education and manners, render women “artificial, weak characters” and “more useless members of society” (87). Furthermore Rousseau’s misogynistic view of women’s education is established when Wollstonecraft opposes his view that “woman is expressly formed to please the man” (116). He further comments that “the education of women should be always relative to men. To please, to be useful to us ... these are the duties of women at all times (qtd. in Wollstonecraft 152). What Rousseau suggests here is appalling by today’s standards. Women and their education are not and should not be relative to men solely. It should be an equal position of both men and women learning from each other. Wollstonecraft forcefully opposed Rousseau’s view of women and very much doubted that women were created for man, to please him only. In examining everything that has been written during this essay I believe that in her novel Shelley was trying to reveal the weak status of women in society. She incorporates the notion that women’s position within patriarchal society is weak, by making some of the women in *Frankenstein* submissive and weak in behavior. By making the monster directly or inadvertently kill the weak female characters within *Frankenstein*, Shelley seems to be sending out a strong message that because they are weak, premature death is ultimately their demise. The monster appears to be in a parallel position with women in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. What is different in his situation is that he rises up against patriarchal society by trying to educate himself by watching and learning from the De Lacey family. He does this by taking care of himself after being abandoned by his maker and by reading works like *Paradise Lost* to further explain to him the ways of humanity. Consequently, it can be seen that the monster embodies the qualities of a strong female that takes control of her own destiny. Much like Safie De Lacey, as she goes out to find her love, Felix De Lacey, the monster goes out and tries to find his maker.

By analyzing *Frankenstein* in context with *Vindication* and *Paradise Lost* it seems that Shelley was trying to portray the weak position of women within the public sphere of society. She did this by making the monster symbolize a woman who wanted to rise against oppression. If patriarchy does not allow women to become a part of the public sphere they will symbolically end up like Elizabeth or Justine, dead. They could also end up like the monster, an outcast that ultimately kills because he was pushed to it by society. Clearly Shelley does not advocate killing as result of rising against the patriarchy but it would appear that Shelley was, along with other women in society such as her mother, expanding her mind and intelligence with education which in the end made women rise against the patriarchal control of men.

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