

“Tell the Truth but Tell it Slant”: Locating the Covert Feminist and Anti-Romantic Stance in *Frankenstein*

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This paper is an attempt at re-examining Mary Shelley’s evocation of specific socio-cultural and historical spaces in *Frankenstein* and the precarious lack of emotive foresight in the pursuit of an egotistical masculine ideal. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* portrays an eighteenth-century Genevan society segregated on the basis of rigid sex roles. Even the physical landscape seems to be demarcated by this masculine and feminine dichotomy: the world of the laboratory, the frozen Arctic and the spaces inhabited by Frankenstein are stark, barren, isolated and sublime and symbolise the inner landscape of the protagonist and a space which a female cannot aspire to. The space reserved for the female is the confined domestic sphere of the household and the ideals to live by are emotion, affection and self-sacrifice. Victor Frankenstein and Captain Walton are the embodiment of the Romantic masculine ideal – adventurer, intellectual, adventurous and obdurately determined. Frankenstein is a man of science in relentless pursuit of the absolute – the creation of life itself. In this masculine preserve, Frankenstein’s attempt to usurp the female’s role of procreation ends in a literal success but with disastrous consequences due to the lack of insightful foresight and emotive sensibility on the part of the protagonist.

Mary Shelley’s text is a covert space for her to articulate her feelings and exercise her reason. In *Frankenstein*, the authorial voice is submerged in an apparently conventional script; she creates a three-part narrative arrangement whereby all three are male narrators, thus, enabling her to express and efface herself at the same time.

Keywords: Frankenstein, anti-romantic, feminist, modern Prometheus, Imaginative Ideal

Introduction

The name “Frankenstein”, in the twentieth and twenty-first century, has become an implied metaphor for blowback consequences of creating monsters based on ruthless ambition. Written more than two hundred years ago, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is about the creation of a monster from assembled pieces of corpses and given life, who ultimately rebels against his creator Victor Frankenstein. In the two hundred years since its creation, the name “Frankenstein” has come to signify both monster and the monster-maker. These are the main strands of the Frankenstein imagery that has captured the popular imagination and this was propelled mainly by the theatrical and cinematic adaptations of this novel. These theatrical and cinematic adaptations focused mainly on its physical horror and Gothic aspect. The rich layers of meaning inherent in Mary Shelley’s book was never fully captured by these versions. At the very outset, the Preface to the 1818 first edition states:

I have not considered myself as merely weaving a series of supernatural terrors. The event on which the interest of the story depends is exempt from the disadvantages of a mere tale of spectres or enchantment. It was recommended by the novelty of the situations which it develops; and, however impossible as a physical fact, affords a point of view to the imagination for the delineating of human passions more comprehensive and commanding than any which the ordinary relations of existing events can yield.

I have thus endeavoured to preserve the truth of the elementary principles of human nature, while I have not scrupled to innovate upon their combination.’ (p.5)

The late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century was a period which imbued Europe with revolutionary energies and ideals as Adam Zamoyski describes this era as one of ‘holy madness’(p. 305)He elaborates further that ‘the Romantic passion for all things scientific is bound up with the wild energies of the time.’ (p.305) Benjamin Franklin’s experiments with electricity was feted by poets as a ‘spectacular expression of intellectual-political liberation.’(Goodall, p.117) Joseph Priestley, an English chemist, natural philosopher and classical liberal political theorist was a zealous proponent of the potential of electricity as he declared that it was ‘no local or occasional agent in the theatre of the world...(but) a principal part in the grandest and most interesting scenes of nature.’ (p.xi) According to Jane Goodall, ‘Priestley stressed repeatedly that electricity was a vast terrain of discovery so far barely encroached on, and his visions of its future potential reflect the Promethean spirit, demonstrating a readiness to breach long-established boundaries, and set foot on hitherto untrodden ground.’ (p.117) It is pertinent to note that Mary Shelley had subtitled her novel *The Modern Prometheus* implying the Romantic and revolutionary potential inherent in her

novel at first glance but the content and denouement of the novel invites a re-examination of her take on the ideological climate of her time and the nuanced message she intended to get through to the readers at large. In the 'Author's Introduction' to the 1831, Third Edition, of the novel, Mary Shelley claims agency for her creative progeny which earlier was foreshadowed by the formidable creative reputation of her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley. She writes, 'I certainly did not owe the suggestion of one incident, nor scarcely of one train of feeling, to my husband, and yet but for his incitement, it would never have taken the form in which it was presented to the world. From this declaration I must except the preface. As far as I can recollect, it was entirely written by him.'(Shelley, 1831,p. xii)Here she lays bare the fact that the Preface to the 1818 edition of the novel tilted towards a majestic projection of the human imagination and aspiration, the Romantic Sublime, whose author was Percy Bysshe Shelley himself. The Introduction to the 1831, Third Edition, of the novel demonstrates a self-assured version of a woman claiming agency for her success and an identity of her own beyond those of her parents or spouse. The author in her own words traces her evolution into a successful author through the literary activities of her childhood and her patient apprenticeship of observing and listening to those more knowledgeable than her – her father, his scholar pupils , among whom was her future husband Percy Bysshe Shelley and his circle of Romantic Movement literary practitioners. In the process she carves out an individuated authorial self, one distinct from that of her husband, and a deliberate distancing from his radical Romanticism. The early part of the nineteenth century was an era of violent political and social upheavals in Europe brought forth by the first wave of revolutionary movement in France followed by a backlash of paranoid repression in other parts of Europe. In the words of Jane Goodall, 'It is the reactive combination of revolutionary Prometheism with residual Calvinism, I would suggest, that underlies the tensions in Frankenstein's science and determines the fatal cast of his enterprise.'(p.123) The Promethean spirit of revolution given wings by scientific developments conjured the persona of a scientist who was part experimenter, part explorer, part revolutionary, part loner, part poet, which ultimately led to the notion of the mad scientist. The characteristic of dynamic natural polarities discovered in the poles of electricity – positive and negative phases explained as 'attractive' and 'negative' powers - corresponded with the Romantic impulse of ecstatic highs and depressive lows and, thus, became symbolically attuned to the mood swings of Romanticism. (Goodall, p. 127) Mary Shelley captures this manic depressive mood swings in Victor Frankenstein, representative of the mad scientist of Romanticism, and brings to the fore the pitfalls of unstable Romantic spirit. Yet the narrative is framed within a sublime Romantic setting in the Alps evoking emotions of awe and grandeur and couched

within this landscape is a tale of caution whereby the revolutionary and impassioned Promethean spirit can be a double-edged sword.

Revolutionary Romantic Prometheanism

The novel opens with four letters written by Robert Walton to his sister, Mrs. Saville, in England and the world that Robert inhabits is the icy cold waste of the Arctic in pursuit of the North West passage that will take ships from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Walton is an extravagant, romantic dreamer in pursuit of glory through achieving the impossible. The physical space that the opening chapters enact arouses feelings of awe and fear. A space very few human beings had set their eyes on in the nineteenth century– the distant and the sublime – which was a constant fascination for the Romantics.:

I am already far north of London; as I walk in the streets of Petersburg, I feel a cold northern breeze play upon my cheeks, which braces my nerves, and fills me with delight. Do you understand this feeling? This breeze, which has travelled from the regions towards which I am advancing, gives me a foretaste of those icy climes. Inspirited by this wind of promise, my day dreams become more fervent and vivid. I try in vain to be persuaded that the pole is the seat of frost and desolation; it ever presents itself to my imagination as the region of beauty and delight.

(Shelley,1818, p.7)

The fourth letter of Walton narrates the first glimpse of Frankenstein's Creature, which arouses feelings of "unqualified wonder", and also Victor Frankenstein, who conveys a sense of real desperation and mystery. A hint of the moral lesson is also introduced in this letter when Frankenstein learning of Walton's single-minded quest for the North West passage, irrespective of loss of lives, forewarns him of the consequences of unbridled ambition, 'You seek for Knowledge and wisdom, as I once did; and I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you!' (p. 17)

Chapter One of Volume 1 begins with Frankenstein's narration of his life-story as recorded by Walton. His childhood and youth were idyllic as he was born in a loving and enlightened family of Geneva. Also, the eighteenth century Genevese society based on rigid gender demarcation provided an ideal nurturing ground for Frankenstein to pursue an ambitious scientific life as it was in conformity with the masculine ideal. The societal context consisted of a separation of the masculine sphere and the feminine sphere whereby the masculine sphere denoted intellectual activity and public space and the feminine sphere denoted emotional activity and private space. Frankenstein's stay in the University of Ingolstadt in Bavaria initiated him to modern scientific practices and further ignited his desire to delve deep into its mysteries. In this temple of higher learning, an all- male preserve,

Frankenstein errs. His single-minded pursuit of the absolute – the creation of life itself – distanced him from Nature, his family, his betrothed Elizabeth and his friend Clerval. Deprived of the tempering wisdom of the feminine mind, Frankenstein is unable to weigh the pros and cons of creating a new life governed as he was by the egotistical principle of creating a new human race who would be beholden to him for their creation – transforming him into a godlike figure; finally, when he succeeds in his mission, he is repulsed by the reality of his own creation:

How can I describe my emotion at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! --- Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips.’ (p.35)

He fails to assume parental responsibility for his creature and runs away from it in a state of delirium, leaving the creature to his fate. Luckily, Henry Clerval, his childhood friend, meets him on the road as he too has come to Ingolstadt to pursue higher studies. Clerval’s caring ministrations restores his health and Frankenstein decides to return to the University. On his return, he receives a letter informing him of the death of William, his youngest brother. Tormented by the thought of neglecting his family members for the sake of scientific pursuit, he is filled with remorse and makes his journey back to Geneva to meet his bereaved family. On his way back home, he halts for a night in a village on the outskirts of Geneva and decides to explore on foot the mountainous region where William was murdered. The sublime settings of nature, with an approaching storm and lightning, stir feelings and thoughts within Frankenstein normally repressed in the human mind and he suddenly has a glimpse, for the second time, the Being that he brought to life : ‘A flash of lightning illuminated the object, and discovered its shape plainly to me; its gigantic stature, and the deformity of its aspect, more hideous than belongs to humanity, instantly informed me that it was the wretch, the filthy daemon to whom I had given life.’(p. 50) It is a brilliantly etched out scene with all the Gothic trappings of lightnings and lashings of rain; the storm outside seems to be a reflection of the storm within the mind of Frankenstein. It instantly strikes him that the Creature he created is the murderer and has come back to haunt him.

The trajectory of Victor Frankenstein’s experiments and the shockingly discomfiting consequences raises the following questions - should Victor be idolised as a transgressive

hero or denounced as an egotist? Mary Shelley's novel depicts genuine dilemmas without an easy way out and definitely conveys the message that idealism can be selfish and destructive as well as altruistic and creative. Thus, in the words of Lawrence Lipking, 'Whether in new literary histories or in courses on Romantic literature, Mary Shelley's novel functions as a useful counterstatement, exposing the dangers of individualism and an over-active imagination. Romantic titanism or Prometheanism here takes a fall, tripped up by a writer – often, in this context, the token woman or honorary Other – who perceives the exaltation of desire as a species of masculine arrogance, and recommends instead the “tranquillity” of “domestic affections”' (Lipking, 2012, p. 423)

The Masculine Ideal of Self-centred Egotism vs the Feminine Principle of Nurture

When Justine Moritz, an orphaned servant residing in the Frankenstein household, is accused of committing the murder due to circumstantial evidence, Elizabeth Lavenza, fully convinced of Justine's innocence, makes an impassioned plea before the judges but her plea is overruled on the grounds of emotional testimony which did not carry much weight against hardcore circumstantial evidence. Mary Shelley underlines the injustice that prevails in a nation when governed by masculine values of objective rationality. Placed against it, when Frankenstein is accused of committing a similar crime, the murder of his friend Clerval, he is given the benefit of doubt and set free. It is an emphatic political critique of a society founded on unequal distribution of power and status and of rigid and hierarchical gender bifurcations.

When Frankenstein confronts the Creature in the sublime heights of Mont Blanc, the Creature responds eloquently: “Remember that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous.”(p.68) The sources of his eloquence are the three master-texts – Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Plutarch's *Lives*, and Goethe's *Werther* – which he imbibes as he stealthily watched the De Lacey family. The narration of his painful rejection by human beings because of his grotesque being arouses in Frankenstein an understanding sympathy for the Creature's accursed life and his own culpability behind it all. For the first time, an awareness dawns upon Frankenstein that he had failed in fulfilling a major obligation as he states, “For the first time...I felt what the duties of a creator towards his creation were” (p. 69-70) Later, after listening to the circumstances that transformed the Creature from a benevolent being to a vengeance seeking monster, Frankenstein comments, “His words had a strange effect upon me. I compassioned him.”(p.103) Shelley's deployment of the Creature's narrative is an ingenious device through which she provides a scathing critique of the masculine ideal of rationality, intellectualism, adventurous spirit and

determined pursuit of a goal devoid of empathy and moral principles. Mary Poovey states that ‘because Shelley realistically details the stages by which the creature is driven to act out its symbolic nature from its point of view, the reader is compelled to identify with its anguish and frustration. This narrative strategy precisely reproduces Mary Shelley’s profound ambivalence toward Frankenstein’s creative act; for by separating self-assertion from its consequences, she is able to dramatize both her conventional judgement of the evils of egotism and her emotional engagement in the imaginative act. Indeed, the pathos of the monster’s cry suggests that Shelley identified most strongly with the product (and the victim) of Frankenstein’s transgression: the objectified imagination, helpless and alone.’ (p. 131) Through the character of Victor Frankenstein, Mary Shelley created a representative figure of a whole generation of scientific men whose incipient curiosity turned to an indulgent egotism. Victor Frankenstein’s experiments in creating life led to the achievement of his goal but with disastrous consequences. This disaster rests solely on Frankenstein’s incapacity to assume parental responsibility and nurture his own creation, a flaw which is obvious considering the ideal that he lived by. The feminine principle which creates, preserves and nurtures life is basically non-egotistical, self-sacrificing and benevolent. All the women characters in the novel are representative of this principle – Caroline Frankenstein, mother of Victor Frankenstein endangers her own life to take care of Elizabeth when she was suffering from scarlet fever and in the process losing her own life to the disease, Elizabeth takes her place as the angel in the house and provides the soothing balm of maternal caring to the bereaved family, Justine Moritz sacrifices her life by admitting to a crime she never committed for the sake of family loyalty and religion. Mary Shelley depicts them as life affirming qualities. Victor Frankenstein himself admits that he and Clerval were induced to gentleness by the influence of Elizabeth, as he says “I might have become sullen in my study, rough through the ardour of my nature, but that she was there to subdue me to a semblance of her own gentleness. And Clerval...might not have been so perfectly humane.so full of kindness and tenderness amidst his passion for adventurous exploit, had she not unfolded to him the real loveliness of beneficence, and made the doing good the end and aim of his soaring ambition.”(p. 38) So, Frankenstein’s attempt to usurp the female’s role of procreation without the attending qualities of nurturing and parental responsibility is bound to end in disaster.

Imaginative Ideal vs Reality

In *Frankenstein* Mary Shelley adumbrates the awe inspiring determination and transgressive creativity of the Imaginative Ideal which lacked commonsensical foresight lost as it is in its

frantic search for the unseen and the unheard of and, thus, quintessentially egotistical. Her text hints at the antisocial dimension of this quest as Frankenstein himself admits later,

I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room, and continued a long time traversing my bed-chamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep. (pp. 35-36)

It is only after Victor achieves and liberates his egotistical desire does he realise the folly of his actions which was based on self-absorbed ambition devoid of forethought and social relationships. Victor Frankenstein abandons his creature in horror and disgust as it did not embody the sublimity of his imaginative ideal.

The fulfilment of the egotistical desire sets into motion the wheel of destruction in the form of the symbolic, figurative and realistic character of the humanoid creature. Mary Poovey fittingly describes it thus, ‘.. Frankenstein’s unregulated desire gathers strength until it erupts in the monster’s creation, then the creature actualizes, externalizes, the pattern of nature – Frankenstein’s nature and the natural world, now explicitly combined – with a power that destroys all society. In other words, the pattern inherent in the natural world and figuratively ascribed to the individual becomes, through the monster, Frankenstein’s literal “fate” or “destiny”.’ (p. 127) Through the monster’s narrative the author brings to the fore the ethical and moral concerns of her novel – the preservation of familial bonds, obligations, moderation, cooperation, mutual dependence, and self-sacrifice. The monster yearns for acceptance and companionship which he cannot have under the prevailing circumstances due to his hideous physical form; hence, he solicits the creation of a female companion for himself by Frankenstein, ‘ “You must create a female for me, with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being. This you alone can do; and I demand it of you as a right which you must not refuse.”’ (p.101) Assailed and abused by humans the creature reasons that ‘It is true, we shall be monsters, cut off from all the world; but on that account we shall be more attached to one another. Our lives will not be happy, but they will be harmless, and free from the misery I now feel.’ (p. 102) Observing the De Lacey family and human interactions as such the creature realises that a woman’s affections and compassion can mitigate many of the self-centred flaws in a man and provide succour and calm to him. At first Frankenstein agrees to this endeavour and starts afresh the project of creating a female companion for the creature, then, on further rationalization he reflected

on the realistic complications that it might pose for society at large which he had earlier not envisaged during the process of creating the creature. He is fearful that

she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate, and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness. He had sworn to quit the neighbourhood of man, and hide himself in deserts; but she had not; and she, who in all probability was to become a thinking and reasoning animal might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation. They might even hate each other; the creature who already lived loathed his own deformity, and might he not conceive a greater abhorrence for it when it came before his eyes in the female form? She also might with disgust from him to the superior beauty of man; she might quit him, and he be again alone, exasperated by the fresh provocation of being deserted by one of his own species. (pp. 118-119)

Frankenstein's expostulations reveal the male horror of an independent female will which cannot be controlled by the masculine will. Also, the fear that the female might not honour the contract agreed upon by the male creature stating that it was a contract agreed upon by another on her behalf even before she was birthed and, thus, demonstrate an independent spirit to decide her own existence. Frankenstein is also fearful of the reproductive capacity of the female which might spawn a whole race of monsters, 'Even if they were to leave Europe, and inhabit the deserts of the new world, yet one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and 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. (p. 119). Frankenstein's ruminations exposes the deep seated insecurities and fears of a sexist male aesthetic which abhors a liberated and free spirited female choosing her own life, her own sexual partner and claiming right over her reproductive powers. Such a female would definitely be a monster for the patriarchal order in society. These abhorrent imagined possibilities compels Frankenstein to destroy the female version of the creature, 'tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged. The wretch saw me destroy the creature on whose future existence he depended for happiness, and, with a howl of devilish despair and revenge, withdrew.' (p.119) This sets into motion the vindictive spree of the creature which turns him into a monstrous fiend – Frankenstein's bosom friend Clerval is murdered, his loyal servant Justine Moritz is tried and hanged for the murder of his brother William due to suspicious evidence left by the monster next to her, his grief-stricken father dies, his bride Elizabeth is killed on her wedding night – leaving Frankenstein entirely bereft of any family or friend just like the creature. Mary Shelley's concerns about the pitfalls of the scientific spirit is an oblique feminist critique of the

patriarchal practices of science in general that compulsively avoids adjusting knowledge to contexts as against the feminine practice of situated knowledges which are about communities, not about isolated individuals. Alan Rauch very aptly states that, “ The monstrous creature, dwelling apart from a society that misunderstands it , is thus the perfect embodiment of Frankenstein’s knowledge and finally of the scientist himself.” (p. 253) Frankenstein’s narrative glorifies the idyllic sanctity of his natal family and also parallelly describes the demise of all his family members as a result of his actions. The text displays the disjunct between the imaginative ideal and reality; the creature intended to be the ultimate triumph of Frankenstein’s scientific goal, the creation of a spark of life itself, and designed to be beautiful turns out to be hideous, yellow-skinned with black straight black lips and colourless watery eyes; the faraway Arctic imagined as a country of “eternal light” unfolds into a place of icy imprisonment, desolation and death. In the words of Joyce Carol Oates, ‘Frankenstein’s demon is *natural* in origin: a manufactured nemesis. He is an abstract idea made flesh, a Platonic essence given a horrific (and certainly ludicrous) existence. Yet though he is meant to be Frankenstein’s ideal, a man-made miracle that would “pour a torrent of light into our dark world,” he is only a fragment of that ideal – which is to say, a mockery, a parody, a joke.’(p.550)

One needs to remember that the genesis of Mary’s novel took place during a time when Promethean ideals were suspiciously open to vivisection due to the tumult and turmoil caused by the French revolution in France. Her novel took shape nearly two decades after the Revolution and at a time when this revolutionary idealism faced a backlash, especially in England. It seems that Mary’s text insinuates these misgivings toward radical adventurism which creates havoc in society.

The Feminist Narrative Strategy

Mary Shelley’s references to *Paradise Lost* in *Frankenstein* emphasize ironic differences which penetrate the self-delusions delineated by the narrative points of view of Victor Frankenstein, Captain Walton and the Creature. The ironic allusion starts at the very beginning with the Epigraph taken from Milton’s Epic (Book X, p. 743-745) where Adam lamented his situation:

Did I request thee, Maker, from my Clay
To Mould me Man, did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me?

(Shelley, p. 3)

Paradise Lost is the most powerful literary adaptation of the Creation Myth of the Judeo-Christian faith and Shelley's novel further expands its connotation to conjoin three myths together – the Judeo-Christian Creation Myth of the fall of Satan and Man which relates to rebellion and disobedience; and the Greek myth of Icarus which implies that extreme ambition or recklessness leads to one's own downfall and the Promethean Myth which depicts the consequences of transgression and destabilising the social order.. The novel depicts the overarching ambition of Frankenstein and Walton as the nature of fallen consciousness with both men unaware of the fallen nature of their consciousness. (Tannenbaum,p.112) The authorial point of view can be inferred through the eventual failure of their endeavours and some lessons they learnt along the way regarding the nature of vaulting ambition and its anti-social characteristics.

Milton's *Paradise Lost* has been a significant reference point for all the male characters in the novel, especially the Creature. After acquiring language and knowledge by listening and observing the De Lacey family, the creature reflects upon his reading and sees parallels between his situation and Adam's and imagines himself to be another Adam but his rejection by his Creator and his experiential history with humans, even the most compassionate among them like the De Laceys, leads to disillusionment and anger and decides to transform into a rebellious Satan-like figure. Frankenstein's unnamed Creature is transformed into the Monster when even the loving and compassionate De Lacey family rejects him violently based on his revoltingly hideous physical characteristics. Shelley's narrative points to the frailty of human perception which has a tendency to judge and feel according to appearances and, thus, the superficiality of human feelings. The Creature narrates to Frankenstein his contemplation of his situation, "Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition; for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me." (p. 90) When the Creature stumbles out of Frankenstein's laboratory, he ventures out in a state of uncomprehending confusion and chaos but eventually reaches his temporary Eden near the home of the De Lacey family. He absorbs with childlike delight the idyllic Edenic state and determines for a happy familial setup like the De Laceys, for love and kinship are the source of joy and fulfillment in life. His fall is the result of him being the "hideous progeny" of an egotistical pursuit.

Frankenstein and Walton are representative of the kind of transgressive heroism that the Romantics endorsed which might not be the position Mary Shelley expected her readers to conform to and which she herself had misgivings about. Shelley allocates a satanic parallel to Frankenstein's situation when Walton eulogistically praises him: 'Such a man has a double existence: he may suffer misery, and be overwhelmed by disappointments; yet when he has

retired into himself, he will be like a celestial spirit, that has a halo around him, within whose circle no grief or folly ventures.’ (p. 17) Frankenstein himself in his frenzied state alludes to himself and the creature as satanic figures. Describing his condition to Walton during his pursuit of the Creature in the Arctic he states, ‘All my speculations and hopes are as nothing; and, like the archangel who aspired to omnipotence, I am chained in an eternal hell.’ (p. 152) He describes the creature as, “His soul is as hellish as his form, full of treachery and fiend-like malice. Hear him not; call on the manes of William, Justine, Clerval, Elizabeth, my father, and of the wretched Victor, and thrust your sword into his heart.” (p.150) The letters by Captain Walton addressed to his sister Mrs. Saville in England conveys to the readers his grandiose dreams of being an explorer, “I shall satiate my ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of the world never before visited, and may tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man. These are my enticements, and they are sufficient to conquer all fear of danger or death, and to induce me to commence this laborious voyage with the joy a child feels when he embarks in a little boat with his holiday mates, on an expedition of discovery up his native river.” (pp. 7-8) Yet his father’s dying injunction to his uncle regarding his profession was: “forbidden [my] uncle to allow me to embark in a sea-faring life.” (p.8) Thus, Walton’s voyage to the Arctic started as a rebellious quester but his return was as a much chastened man; he lived to return and restate in his life and letters the lessons of the Miltonic myth.

The Female authorial voice in *Frankenstein* is couched in a covert feminist strategy of male dominated protagonist and a frame narrative involving male narrators. It starts with an epistolary narrative form wherein Captain Walton writes to his sister Mrs. Saville in England informing her of meeting Victor Frankenstein, within this frame is the narrative of Victor Frankenstein who recounts his lifestory to Walton and within it is embedded the narrative of the Creature. The narrative strategy of mediated narration is an apt tool for distancing exotic and far-fetched events and also making it convincing at the same time. Also, a parallel is drawn between the dreams and aspirations of Walton and Frankenstein. The two framed narratives embedded within Walton’s master narrative serves to accentuate the conflicting pulls of self-isolating egotistical ambition and a persistent yearning for love and relationship. But by the end of his narrative his hopes of both Promethean aspirations and deep bonding love lie “blasted” as his mutinous sailors voted to turn southward and return home.

Mary Shelley’s delineation of male and female characters conformed to the contemporary social milieu’s expectations of gender behaviour. But, couched behind this conformity is a subversive text detailing the failure of the masculine ideal. Shelley effaces her authorial voice through the introduction of three male narrators who project three subjective points of view with each story qualifying the other. Thus, the text becomes a

covert space for critiquing the ideals which confined women to the margins. Her own personal history might have been responsible for this covert radicalism as she was very much aware of the vilification that her mother Mary Wollstonecraft faced, even after her death, for her very public radical feminist ideas as did her husband Percy Bysshe Shelley for his atheism and the scandal they caused by eloping despite Percy being married to another woman. She understood the necessity of projecting her radical views in a judicious manner.

Shelley's *Frankenstein* had a political and ethical purpose influenced as she was by the Godwinian philosophy of her father, the romantic idealism of her husband (at that point lover) Percy Bysshe Shelley, the proto-feminism of her Mother Mary Wollstonecraft and the new scientific temper of the age. Despite her extreme youth, Mary Shelley has dexterously assimilated these ideas to produce a work bearing the stamp of her unique sensibility

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