

Reading Between the Lines:

An analysis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or, the Modern Prometheus*, using Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* as an example of male discourse about women



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English Almen, 10th semester

Master's Thesis

31-07-2012

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Abstract

The following thesis takes into consideration the sex of the author of *Frankenstein, or, the Modern Prometheus*, because it is important in the understanding of the novel's exclusion of female representation. The author, Mary Shelley, was the daughter of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. The latter wrote the radical work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, which has granted Wollstonecraft her status as one of the earliest feminists. Wollstonecraft died in childbirth and Mary Shelley grew up without her biological mother. Taking those circumstances into consideration, it is puzzling that *Frankenstein* focuses almost solely on male experience, and does not allow the women of the story voices, instead, most of them die. In the thesis, I have examined how Mary Shelley has presented the male and the female characters. This examination revealed that two of the male characters, Robert Walton and Victor Frankenstein, are described as very ambitious, egotistical, and preferring male friendship over a romantic relationship with a woman. Furthermore, Victor appears to be an embodiment of the qualities possessed by Mary Shelley's husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, which she did not approve of. The female characters of the story, on the other hand, are embodiments of the dominant expectations to, and images of, what a proper lady should be like, at the time Mary Shelley wrote her story. The examination of these representations has, therefore, also led to an examination of the motivation and reason behind Mary Shelley's choice.

To examine this, the socially constructed ideas on the different roles for men and women in society and in the family, needs to be presented. To do that, I have included Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's book, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, which introduces the term, "anxiety of authorship", as an obstacle for women, who wanted to be writers, had to overcome. In Mary Shelley's case, the anxiety she experienced was related to her literary parentage, and, whether or not, she could live up to her name. But the surrounding society, as well, inspired anxiety in women writers because they tried to enter a world dominated and defined by men. The male discourse in literature offered stereotyped images of women, and in that way, limited the female writers in their depiction of female experience. A limitation that is also evident in Horace Walpole's Gothic story, *The Castle of Otranto*, which is used in this thesis as a point of reference to how women typically were portrayed in the genre. Mary

Shelley's marginalization of female characters, and killing of the "angelic" women, is seen as a counter reaction and as a refusal to portray women in those limiting descriptions.

The analysis of *Frankenstein* also touches upon Mary Shelley's inclusion of contemporary science, which is presented as having dangerous consequences. Here, she warns against the science which tries to control nature by showing what Victor's experiment with reproduction without female intervention results in. The disastrous results can also suggest that men, as well as women, can create "monsters" which is a reaction to Erasmus Darwin who blamed the female for all "monstrous births". The analysis of *Frankenstein* will draw on Anne K. Mellor's book, *Mary Shelley, Her life, Her fiction, Her monsters*, which includes ideas on the importance of science, but also of the semi-biographical elements of the story. The thesis supports a feministic reading of the novel, and at the same time, recognizes that the circumstances under which it was written, created limited possibilities which can serve as an explanation as to why Mary Shelley excluded women from her story.

Introduction

Since its publication in 1818, by an “anonymous” author, *Frankenstein, or, the Modern Prometheus* has been re-published twice more. Reprinted in 1823, a revised edition was produced in 1831, with it an introduction written by Mary Shelley herself, acknowledging her authorship. *Frankenstein* has generated numerous replications, parodies, alternative versions, intentional, and unintentional misreadings in writings, as well as in films, which all accentuate the novel’s massive influence on popular media and across literary genres. The novel’s busy afterlife also proves its everlasting relevance and innovative ideas as being important to literature and, at the same time, rejects Mary Shelley’s own declaration of its purpose which she described in her introduction to the 1831 edition:

I busied myself *to think of a story* – a story to rival those [German horror stories] which had excited us to this task [a ghost story contest]. One which would speak to the mysterious fears of our nature, and awaken thrilling horror – one to make the reader dread to look round, to curdle the blood and quicken the beatings of the heart. (Shelley, 1993: 3)

Here, Mary Shelley reduces *Frankenstein* to a mere horror story and that does not do it justice because the story employs many literary and cultural themes such as religious controversy, science debates, possibilities of education and much more. However, at its first stages of coming into invention, the importance of ‘fear-factor’ is supported by Mary Shelley’s account of the circumstances in which it was conceived. The building stones of the story were formed during a stay in Switzerland, where Mary Shelley was accompanied by her husband Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron and Byron’s physician John Polidori. The settings were those of a Gothic¹ nature, and when Lord Byron suggested a ghost story contest, the scene seemed complete. In her introduction to the 1831 edition, Mary Shelley describes these circumstances and the difficulties that she had with writing and imagining a story. The inspiration to *Frankenstein*, she claims, was triggered by a conversation between Byron and Percy about the principles of life and the developments made in natural science.

¹ Referring to the aesthetic movement of the late 18th century where houses and castles were transformed into looking like ancient castles. An example of this is Horace Walpole’s transformation of a small villa in Twickenham into a gothic (here, gothic refers to the historical period from which the aesthetic movement was inspired by) castle in miniature (E. J. Clery’s Introduction to *The Castle of Otranto*, Oxford World’s Classic edition, 1998: vii)

Since it was a ghost story contest, it is reasonable to believe that Mary Shelley's initial purpose with the story was to scare and surprise, hence the horrifying descriptions of the creature and the violent deaths of his victims. In his article "Why did Mary Shelley Write *Frankenstein*?", Anthony F. Badalamenti comments on the pressure that Mary Shelley must have experienced in this situation: "Mary was being urged to create something worthy by two esteemed poets" (Badalamenti, 2006: 423). They were esteemed already and did not have to prove anything, but Mary Shelley did, and that explains her anxieties but also her efforts of trying to write a story that would shock and inspire fear. With the story of Victor's creation, she succeeded in both criteria, but as Badalamenti notes: "The idea of man-made life is so astonishing as to distract thought from what looms behind the story" (Badalamenti, 2006: 419). However, something does 'loom' behind the story. For example, why did she choose to write from the perspectives of male narrators? The story is almost exclusively centred on male experience, and even though women figure in *talk*, the same cannot be said about their involvement in *action*. The non-representation of women is a deliberate choice from Mary Shelley's part, but what does she mean to say? Is it merely an expression of how literature was dominated by men in this period and as a result, Mary Shelley wished to present *Frankenstein* within the expected conventions of novel writing? Or is it, in reality, a feminist message which tries to challenge and expose the uneven representation of the sexes in this area?

This assignment intends to support a semi-biographical reading of *Frankenstein* considering Mary Shelley's ambivalent relations with her father William Godwin and her husband Percy Shelley. In those terms her story appears to be an expression of frustration and a cry for love which she never really received, at least not to the extent that she felt necessary. Here, her disguise of authorship at first and her focus on male characters rather than female interprets Mary Shelley as endorsing the male literary discourse which confined women to stereotypes of either angels or monsters. However, her treatment of science and the possible consequences of high ambitions might suggest that *Frankenstein* does indeed criticize a male dominated world where men regarded themselves superiors to women and therefore tried to exclude women and downplay their importance.

The exclusion of women in *Frankenstein* is seen in Mary Shelley's choice of three male narrators. We get into the minds and thoughts of these narrators, but we only hear about women through their

experience and descriptions. The women that do appear in the story are either represented as the recipients of letters written by the narrators, or, merely as observed objects through the male gaze. On all occasions the reader is presented with the male narrator's representation of women and where the subjectivity of their accounts can be questioned. In this assignment, I would like to investigate possible reasons for Mary Shelley's choice of a minimum figuration of women in the story and ultimately the creation of living matter without female interference. I will also look at the ambiguity with which the characters are described (the creature is hideous but lovable), which resulted in shifting sympathies throughout the story, but also a confusion on what Mary Shelley intended to say with her story.

Furthermore, I wish to analyse her choice seen in context of the contemporary society and its attitude towards gender (roles) and thus come to an understanding of her ambition with *Frankenstein* and the limitations that she had to overcome. In the examination of this, I would like to look at another Gothic story (*Frankenstein* is generally seen as belonging to the Gothic genre). *The Castle of Otranto*, written by Horace Walpole in 1764, is viewed to be the inaugurator of the Gothic genre. There are some years between the two stories, which means that the societal images and conventions may differ, but what is interesting in this constellation is the notion of the Gothic genre as being a female genre (it was dominated by female authors and readers), and yet women figure in the male narration but not in the female. I do not wish to go into a discussion of Walpole's motivations for his representation of women, but I want to look at *how* women are described in his story. *Otranto* will therefore appear in this assignment strictly as a point of reference to how women were otherwise represented in Gothic novels. An actual analysis of *Otranto* is therefore not the main concern but rather, the focus will be on the female characters, how they are described in relation to each other but also in their interaction with the male characters.

I will read *Frankenstein* as having a close connection to Mary Shelley's own life experiences which can be seen in the representation of Walton and Victor who share characteristics with Mary Shelley's husband Percy Shelley. A reading which is also suggested by Badalamenti: "Victor is a gifted but self-centred person, preoccupied with his own interests, as shown for example, by his ignoring his family's plea for news on his well-being when away at Ingolstadt University", "This

suggests Victor as a narcissistic stand in for Percy” (Badalamenti, 2006: 430). This interpretation of the story employs an autobiographic analysis, and, ultimately, defines the story as Mary Shelley’s frustrations with, and critique of, Percy’s actions: “[...] Mary Shelley’s story was a substitute expression of deeply troubling feelings of hurt arising from Percy Shelley’s many violations of their relationship” (Badalamenti, 2006: 419). It, furthermore, sees Mary Shelley’s purpose with the story as a ‘wake-up call’ to Percy that he might start treating her differently: “This makes Shelley’s novel an effort to tell Percy something important about their relation” (Badalamenti, 2006: 438). Anne K. Mellor writes in her book, *Mary Shelley, Her life, Her fiction, Her monsters*, that with Victor, Mary Shelley represented sides of Percy that she did not necessarily approve of: “She would later represent Percy Shelley’s lack of parental concern for his offspring in the fictional form of Victor Frankenstein’s abandonment of his creature” (Mellor, 1989: 32). Mellor’s book and interpretation of *Frankenstein* will be used as the main point of reference in the analysis in this assignment. Even though Mellor’s book was published for the first time in 1988 and reprinted in 1989 it gives an extensive account of historical facts concerning Mary Shelley’s life along with interpretations of different aspects of the story. Besides reading *Frankenstein* as Mary Shelley’s personal critique of Percy, Mellor also draws parallels to the development of science in her contemporary society which had reached a highpoint. It is during this discussion that the theme of ‘monstrous births’ emerges and proves itself as a possible feminist message and warning against the prevailing exclusion of women from the public sphere.

That *Frankenstein* might have roots in Mary Shelley’s considerations about her contemporary society’s degradation of the female sex and the possibilities, or lack thereof, for women, will be discussed in relation to *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, written by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Mary Shelley’s consideration on this matter is generally deduced from the analysis of her representation of idealised female characters in *Frankenstein*. These women die taking care of others, or are killed, which suggests that Mary Shelley did not believe that the ‘angel in the house²’-role was suitable for women: “The absence from her novels of independent, self-fulfilled, nurturant women records Mary Shelley’s oblique recognition that such a woman does not survive in the world she knew” (Mellor, 1989: 210). Another aspect from Gilbert and Gubar is their theory on ‘anxiety of authorship’, which

² A term from Gilbert and Gubar which will be elaborated later in the assignment.

will help in the understanding of the difficulties which faced women writers, including Mary Shelley. In the context of establishing the circumstances for women writers in the late 18th and early 19th century, segments from Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* will also be included. Finally, Mary Shelley's mother Mary Wollstonecraft's book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, will provide examples of how a woman writer viewed the possibilities for women in 18th century. Indeed, she observed a similarity between the status and treatment of slaves and that of women: "Is there yet a slave class? Alas! The ancient slavery subsists; one half of the humankind is yet despoiled of its individuality, of its natural liberty and self-sovereignty" (Wollstonecraft quoted in Gleadle, 2002: 19).

Historical Context

It can be argued how much Mary Shelley's personal life and background should be considered in the reading and interpretation of *Frankenstein* which contains autobiographical references and experiences, and as Fred Botting states in his book, *Making monstrous: Frankenstein, criticism, theory*:

The combination of a complex novel and the mass of biographical information that circumscribes her life generates an plethora of possible feeling and intentions that the author may have possessed. *Frankenstein* is also presumed to reveal, or betray, many different and opposing attitudes she may have held towards those around her. [Sic] (Botting, 1991: 75)

But as Siv Jansson suggests in her introduction to the 1993 publication of *Frankenstein* from Wordsworth Classics, it should not be read entirely as a semi-autobiographical work (Jansson 1999 in Shelley, 1993: VIII) but at the same time these elements should not be ignored because they add different aspects to the story and to Mary Shelley's motivation and inspiration for writing the story. That she employed such direct parallels from her real life and the people surrounding her to the events and characters in her story indicate that the purpose of *Frankenstein* was more than just to shock and scare – but what a shock Victor Frankenstein's man-made creation was. The male scientist who created without a female was not only a warning against the rapidly developing science but also bespoke of an increasing marginalization of women in society and in literature. Just like Mary Shelley's own life was a source of inspiration for her novel so was her contemporary society and its treatment of women.

This section is therefore intended as an introduction to some of the views on women and their status and role in society as well as in the family. In connection to this, Gubar and Gilbert's distinction between women as "angels" and as "monsters" will be supported by statements from Mary Shelley's contemporary society but opposing ideas will also be presented. In addition to this, the notion of 'anxiety of authorship' will also be connected to the male domination of literature and of the discourse which limited female authors' possibilities of writing about women. Mary Shelley's familial background and the different impacts it produced will also be mentioned. Lastly, contemporary science will be discussed since it is a part of the story of *Frankenstein*. In connection

to science, the theory on monstrous births as depending on the woman, which was a prevalent scientific research study at the time, will be discussed as a contributing factor to Mary Shelley's choice to form her 'progeny' the way she did.

The View on Women and Their Expected Roles in the late 18th and 19th Century

- Mary Shelley disowns herself

The representation of women and female experience is scarce in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, first published in 1818. However, this was a time where female authors emerged and tried to take a stand against patriarchal society and its male dominated and oriented structure. The patriarchal structure defined both society and the family – public and private spheres. As Johanna M. Smith notes in her essay, "Cooped up': Feminine Domesticity in *Frankenstein*", it was a period in which a woman "was conditioned to think she needed a man's help"(Smith 275)³. In actuality, Mary Shelley conformed to this "norm" when she wrote her own Introduction to *Frankenstein* in the 1831 edition, where she tried to excuse and explain how she, then a young girl, could imagine such a 'hideous' story. Furthermore, she disclaimed her own writing by saying that she imitated others before her: "My dreams were at once more fantastic and agreeable than my writings. In the latter I was a close imitator – rather doing as others had done, than putting down the suggestion of my own mind" (Shelley, 1993: 1). She also described that Percy was "[...] very anxious that I should prove myself worthy of my parentage, and enrol myself on the page of fame" [Sic] (Shelley, 1993: 2). Which expresses Percy's admiration for Mary Shelley's parents (especially William Godwin) rather than for her, since he clearly doubted that she would be able to live up to their talents and legacy. That Percy wanted to control Mary Shelley's writing, so that she would not bring 'shame' to her name, can be seen in the lines following the former quote: "At this time he desired that I should write, not so much with the idea that I could produce anything worthy of notice, but that he might himself judge how far I possessed the promise of better things hereafter" (Shelley, 1993: 2). Not only does this establish his talent as above hers, it also makes him the rightful judge of her writings. Finally, Mary Shelley surrendered herself to the ideal of the proper lady, devoted to her family at the cost of own identity and aspirations, when she claimed that literary reputation, which she had once desired, was now "infinitely indifferent" to her since family had become her main concern (Shelley, 1993: 2). The only literary employment she engaged herself with hereafter was reading and "improving"

³ Retrieved from webpage <http://www.123helpme.com/view.asp?id=11845> 24-06-2012

her ideas in communication with Percy who had a “far more cultivated mind” (Shelley, 1993: 2). Thus, her Introduction can be seen as promoting Percy and his involvement in the creation of *Frankenstein*. At the same time, she reduces her own role by suggesting that the development of the story was almost out of her hands: “My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie” (Shelley, 1993: 4). In this context, it becomes problematic to advocate that *Frankenstein* has an underlying feministic message since Mary Shelley appears so apologetic and defensive (Mellor, 1989: 55): “I am very averse to bringing myself forward in print”; “I can scarcely accuse myself of a personal intrusion”; “Shelley [Percy] urged me to develop the idea at greater length”; “once again, I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper” (Shelley, 1993: 1, 5).

- Mary Shelley's Background

Mary Shelley was the daughter of the revolutionary and underestimated Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97) who authored *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and who is, by today's critics, regarded as one of the earliest feminists. She was revolutionary because her book *A Vindication* argued for equal opportunities for all in education, which at this time was dominated by men. She was underestimated due to the fact that her contemporaries (not all of course) did not acknowledge her or her ideas. Horace Walpole actually called her “a hyena in petticoats” (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 31) which was the worst she was called, and many other female authors were exposed to misogynist attacks like that. In 1797, Mary Wollstonecraft married William Godwin, and on August 30, Mary Godwin was born. However, Wollstonecraft died only ten days after giving birth, and left unfinished works, some of which her husband published post-mortem. After her death, he began to write the story of her life, which was meant as a celebration and was published in January 1798, *Memoirs of the Author of the Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. He had a deep admiration for her political wisdom and personal courage, but that was not how the readers of this publication viewed her ‘eccentric’⁴ life. The publication was followed by public outrage, an outrage focused on her passionate love affairs, the birth of an illegitimate daughter and suicide attempts (Mellor, 1989: 2). The consequence of Godwin's publication was that Wollstonecraft's reputation, and influence as an advocate of women's rights, was undermined for almost a century. Upper-class women could no longer lean against her feminist claims because she was simply not respected as a

⁴ It was eccentric according to late 18th century standards.

spokeswoman any longer. It was no longer possible for a respectable English woman to openly associate herself with Wollstonecraft's feminist views (Mellor, 1989: 3).

William Godwin (1756-1836) was also a prominent literary figure who entertained radical ideas and his *Caleb Williams* was greatly accredited. Even though he had a profound respect for Wollstonecraft's intellect and radical ideas, he did not pass these ideals on to Mary Shelley after the death of Wollstonecraft. Actually, he fell into the category of the 'helpless male' who needed a wife so that he could focus on 'real life', meaning anything other than domestic chores and child-rearing. Mary Shelley never felt that Godwin loved her enough, and she was deeply devoted to him (almost on the verge of an Electra complex as described in psychoanalysis).

Women's Role in *Frankenstein*

It seems that the daughter of such distinct parents should follow in their footsteps or at least try to voice her mother's beliefs in women's rights to be treated as equals to men in society and their right to education. However in *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley chose to write from three different perspectives, using three narrators – all male. The women are represented, solely, through the male gaze and perception. They are described in little detail which inevitably reduces their importance in the story (not only the action but the meaning) and as such they function as tools, created to reflect the male characters. Johanna M. Smith states that the "women function not in their own right but rather as signals of and conduits for men's relations with other men"(283).⁵ This can be applied to the role that Walton's sister plays in the mediating of his admiration and affection towards Victor Frankenstein, a friendship that is described to the reader through the mail correspondence between Walton and his sister, but that is all she is in the story, a tool of communication.

Men's Role in *Frankenstein*

The contrast between the male and female characters in *Frankenstein* is tremendous and very clear; the male characters are described in great detail, the reader is even inaugurated into the mindset of the narrators and most importantly, they have *voices* they can use to tell their stories with. The men of the story are also given the privilege of traveling and exploring the world through actual travelling and through knowledge – something the women are excluded from due to their roles as

⁵ Retrieved from webpage <http://www.123helpme.com/view.asp?id=11845> 24-06-2012

passive tools in the representation of the male characters. That the male characters are described in greater detail resound Wollstonecraft's critique on the matter: "[...] virtuous male characters were allowed to be of many temperaments, choleric or sanguine, gay or grave, overbearing or submissive – but all women are to be leveled, by meekness and docility, into one character of yielding softness and gentle compliance" (Wollstonecraft quoted in Moers, 1978: 17).

The question that emerges is, then, why Mary Shelley excluded female experience, almost entirely, from her story, and, furthermore, why she chose a stereotyped version of women, created by male authors, to describe the few women that are presented in the story. In extension to this, the meaning and purpose of Mary Shelley's non/misrepresentation of women can be seen as an act of subduing to the patriarchal discourse of literature and societal ideals, or it can be interpreted as a critique of that system. The critique becomes evident with the ending of the story which presents the consequences of Victor's intrusion of nature by attempting procreation with no female interference. It can be argued that Mary Shelley chose not to describe female experience exactly because the already established literary discourse did not allow representation of real (as opposed to idealized or demonized) women. An example of a man describing female experience is Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* where women are fully represented and are also allowed voices. However, when they talk it is almost entirely with a 'male voice'. This means that they say what men expect them to say as the idealized, devoted daughters, wives, and mothers: they declare their obedience to their male 'protector', do as he pleases, and other than that they talk about love and family. So by minimizing the female characters in *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley made a silent protest against this stereotyped language about women in literature. As Gubar and Gilbert note on this 'subtle, hidden message'-strategy: "Mary Shelley [...] produced literary works that are in some sense palimpsestic, works whose surface conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning" [Sic], and as a result Mary Shelley and other female writers achieved "true female literary authority by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards" (Gubar and Gilbert, 2000: 73).

- Women in Society and Women as Writers

This section is intended as an introduction to the world of and possibilities for women and women writers in the late 18th and early 19th century. At the same time, it will uncover and discuss the public opinion of and expectations to women in general at this time with a focus on the different roles assigned to the sexes in the private and the public sphere. This will generate a greater level of understanding and appreciation of the limitations and impediments that a woman faced who wished to 'attempt the pen' and thus entering a world designed for and by men. That the literary field was dominated by men also raises the question of whether or not the female writers entered the male literary history and became a part of it, or, if they succeeded in creating a tradition and a language of their own.

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar make it clear in their book, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, that 19th century women *did* have a literature and culture of their own (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: XII). However, this was a time where large parts of society and everyday life aspects, including the world of literature, were dominated, controlled and defined by men. In the literary world a woman simply did not 'fit in' and was seen as "[...] anomalous, indefinable, alienated, a freakish outsider" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 48) in the context of literary history. In her, *Literary Women*, Ellen Moers even suggests that female literature was a product of feminine discontent (Moers, 1978: 18).

Science and education was intended for men only, whereas childbirth, childcare, and domestic life in general was reserved for the women who were perceived to be the weaker sex, inferior to men, and better suited for nursing the even weaker (sick people and children): "a woman of right feeling should devote herself to the good of others" and "all that would tend to draw away her thoughts from others and fix them on herself, ought to be avoided as an evil to her" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 24). These ideas and 'prescriptions' on female morals and manners were actually described by a woman, Mrs. Sarah Ellis, who tried to define the woman of England, how she ought to behave in relation to society and men (husbands). The first statement proves that women 'of right feeling' the proper ladies, were expected to take care of others before taking care of themselves.

Furthermore, the word 'devote' is a very strong term and emphasizes the seriousness of the utterance. 'Devotion' is, by definition, to cast aside one's own needs and desires, and ultimately, one's individuality, in order to, in this case, take care of others. The second statement supports the

notion that a proper lady should devote herself to the good of others, and, furthermore, it reinstates that if anything should draw her attention away from others and on to her-self, (like writing for example), it should be removed and, at best, avoided entirely. As a result, women were confined and isolated in their homes - the domestic sphere - where nothing from the outside could interfere or disrupt their devotion to nursing others and taking care of the home.

That women were better suited for a life within the four walls of the home is also seen in a statement made by John Ruskin in 1865 from "Of Queens' Gardens," *Sesame and Lilies*, where he makes clear that a woman's power "is not for rule, not for battle, and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet orderings" of domesticity" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 24). To break the statement into fractions will clarify the meaning of each individual term and what it meant for women and the resistance and prejudice which faced them. That a woman's power is not for 'rule' amplifies the general opinion at this time, that the female sex was the weaker sex both mentally and physically and therefore, women were not thought of as leaders. That they are not suited for battle is an extension of this; given their weak physical appearance they are not fit for fighting. The final insult is given when he states that a woman's intellect is not for 'invention or creation, but for sweet orderings'. 'Invention' is connected to the capability of thinking individually and thus also 'creating', for example, a text. That women are not capable, in Ruskin's opinion, to create is an insult to womankind because creation is so closely tied to the act of giving birth which, at the time, was the one thing that men could not control until Mary Shelley gave Victor Frankenstein the gift of creation (at which he failed), but that is something that I will discuss further in another section. By listing these characteristics as unsuitable for women, Ruskin, at the same time categorizes them as male qualities. Thus, he uses women's 'shortcomings' (the shortcomings are not factual knowledge, but Ruskin's opinion), to define men.

This is a strategy seen elsewhere in Orientalism where the definition of 'self' is drawn from what one is *not* by looking at the 'Other' and then distancing and differentiating oneself from that. Subsequently, the woman and womankind become the 'Other' which is unfortunate since it reduces half of humankind as inferior and alien to the 'sublimity' of men. Furthermore, it is mentioned by Judith Butler in her *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of Identity* in a discussion on

how gender works: “Hence, one is one’s gender to the extent that one is not the other gender, a formulation that presupposes and enforces the restriction of gender within that binary pair”⁶. This leads to the conclusion that women are how men perceive them, meaning that they are not anything in themselves but only come ‘to live’ and ‘in play’ when it suits men. And *how* men perceive the women is, according to Laura Riding, dependent on which ‘room’ they are in:

And the lady of the house was seen only as she appeared in each room, according to the nature of the lord of the room. None saw the whole of her, none but herself. For the light which she was was both her mirror and her body. None could tell the whole of her, none but herself [Sic] (Riding quoted in Gubar and Gilbert, 2000: 3)

In practice, this meant that if a woman appeared in the kitchen her role was to cook, in children’s room as a mother and in bedroom or living room as wife with the purpose of pleasing her husband. What Laura Riding also determines with this quote is the fact that a woman is described and defined by a man and how he perceives her accordingly to the given context. Simone de Beauvoir is famous for her observation that “a woman is made, not born” (de Beauvoir quoted in Gubar and Gilbert, 2000: XXV), and the ‘makers’ are both the men but also society. Here, society is referred to as the institutions of law enforcement, authoritative legislation, politicians, literature and other institutions that defined the social order.

In *Frankenstein*, the ‘creation’ of women is seen in the chosen representation of these women: through the male perception and description. The adjectives that are applied to the women’s persona (the goodness and idealization of Victor’s mother for example) are produced by the male narrators. Laura Riding also comments on the problem of the incomplete identities afforded to women. They were not perceived in their totality as individuals and as women but rather as fragmentations of the ideal, hence, the metaphor of ‘rooms’ and not as an entity and therefore not a complete person. Only the woman herself was able to perceive all of the qualities and nuances that she possessed. There is a possibility that Mary Shelley feared to represent women (including herself) as they really were,

⁶ Retrieved from webpage <http://autof.files.wordpress.com/2010/02/butler-judith-gender-trouble-feminism-and-the-subversion-of-identity-1990.pdf> 24-06-2012

rather than how men represented them, because the representations would deviate so entirely from the male authors' descriptions and thus endanger her authenticity.

Mary Shelley thus wrote in the manner expected of her, but “just as women have been repeatedly defined by male authors, they seem in reaction to have found it necessary to act out male metaphors in their own texts, as if trying to understand their implications” (Gubar and Gilbert, 2000: XII).

Mary Shelley used male generated descriptions of female stereotypes in her representations, and the result is that the women do not play a greater role, or, none at all, one is tempted to say. Thus, Mary Shelley endorsed the idea of women being of lesser value and importance than men – or did she?

- The Status of Women

Women's role and status in the contemporary society, or lack thereof, did not only affect women on a personal level, it restrained them from having a career other than that of a housewife as well. The female sex was believed to be weaker, less intelligent and inferior to the male sex, which had the natural consequence that women were thought less capable than men when it came to activities categorized as masculine. Writing was one of them: “writing, reading, and thinking are not only alien but also inimical to “female” characteristics” (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 8). By defining these characteristics as inimical to women, they naturally become male. It was simply believed that women were incapable of writing and nor were they supposed to, as exemplified earlier by John Ruskin's comment that a woman's power was not for invention or creation. If a woman did succeed in writing something worth reading (estimated by the male readers/authors) it was viewed as an abnormality, ‘freakish’, and unfeminine since it was, after all, a male characteristic (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 10). A woman who ‘attempted the pen’ was thus perceived as intrusive, presumptuous and unredeemable because she had crossed boundaries directed by nature (Gubar and Gilbert, 2000: 8). ‘Crossing’ boundaries leads to the natural conclusion that the boundaries are unwanted and viewed as unfair (otherwise, why cross them) and as such female authorship can be seen as a rebellion against the leading authority (men) and “[...] in patriarchal culture, female speech and female “presumption” – that is, angry revolt against male domination – are inextricably linked and inevitably daemonic” (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 35).

It is clear that the literary world was not ready for female writers; as Robert Southey formulated it: "Literature is not the business of a woman's life, and it cannot be" (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 8). And yet, Mary Shelley (and other women writers) proved them wrong by supporting themselves via their writings: "Mary Shelley's career demonstrates that it was possible for an intelligent woman in the early nineteenth century to support herself financially through writing" (Mellor, 1989: 182). This is important because it shows that despite the male critics women writers were indeed able to succeed in this male dominated world. Mary Shelley succeeded and her writings had an audience and as such achieved acknowledgement, but it can also be interpreted as an expression of a 'mellow' authorship (unlike her mother's) and lack of taking a stand for the female sex.

Like her mother, Mary Shelley was aware of the expectations held for women, and being an intellectual (an equal to men) and promoting oneself as such, was not one of them. This definition of the different roles and expectations to men and women, described by Wollstonecraft in her *A Vindication*, gives a clear picture of the contemporary society, its norms, and values:

Women are every where in this deplorable state; for, in order to preserve their innocence, as ignorance is courteously termed, truth is hidden from them, and they are made to assume an artificial character before their faculties have acquired any strength. Taught from their infancy that beauty is woman's sceptre, the mind shapes itself to the body, and, roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison. Men have various employments and pursuits which engage their attention, and give a character to the opening mind; but women, confined to one, and having their thoughts constantly directed to the most insignificant part of themselves, seldom extend their views beyond the triumph of the hour. [Sic] (Hardt, 1982: 103)

It was obvious to Wollstonecraft that the most important talent in a woman was her looks and demeanor and to keep the status of the proper lady knowledge was omitted. That men had 'various employments' and women were 'confined to one' indicate that women were of less value and use to society. Donna Heiland discusses the downplaying of women (especially in relation to procreation) in her *Gothic & Gender: An Introduction*: "In their view, men were no longer perpetuating a social

order through their sexual relations with women, but, rather, were producing it without the help of women at all” (Heiland, 2004: 10).

Gothic Novels Exclude Women from the Social Order

The representation of a society where women played a smaller part is also discussed in relation to Gothic novels in Carole Pateman’s analysis of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century debates about the nature of social and self-government, referred to by Heiland: “[...] a reader of Gothic novels cannot but notice her [Pateman] insistence on the fact that patriarchy persists – albeit with changes – from the seventeenth century to the eighteenth, and still more importantly, that it changes in ways that ever more effectively exclude women from participation from the social order” (Pateman in Heiland, 2004: 10). This ‘tendency’ was thus also employed in the Gothic genre and certainly women are excluded in more than one way in *Frankenstein*. Not only are they described in very little detail and omitted a voice in the storytelling they are also killed and at the end the social order persists of men. But the most significant exclusion of women in *Frankenstein* is when the creature is brought to life. This incident also has connections to Mary Shelley’s surrounding society and its ideas in science.

Good and Bad Science

Science was in development and had been for quite some time when Mary Shelley published *Frankenstein* in 1818. Ideas on procreation and the different roles of men and women in this act were also reflected on. As Mellor notes: “Mary Shelley grounded her fiction of the scientist who creates a monster he cannot control upon an extensive understanding of the most recent scientific developments of her day” and “More important, she used this knowledge both to analyze and to criticize the more dangerous implications of the scientific method and its practical results” (Mellor, 1989: 89). This is yet another way in which Mary Shelley used ‘male discourse’ which at first would seem as a submission but at a closer look appears, rather, to be a case of her using their own ‘language’ and ideas against them.

The treatment of science in *Frankenstein* is at great length formed as a warning against the rapidly changing science which tries to control nature and turn man into God. That the creature in the end

becomes a murderous monster is not just blamed on Victor's inabilities as a parent and the fact that the creature does not have a mother, it is also Mary Shelley's warning against science in general. The whole way through the novel the reader is told not to wish for too much knowledge because that will drive them to ambitions that will ultimately result in certain destruction.

Mary Shelley's understanding of science was inspired by three of the most famous scientists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century; Humphry Davy, Erasmus Darwin, and Luigi Galvani (Mellor, 1989: 90). In her novel, she distinguishes between the science which only tries to *describe* and that which tries to *control* or *change* through human intervention. They are valued as "good" and "bad" science, respectively. Victor chose to work within the newly established field of chemical physiology which might also explain why he failed – he chose the bad science. "Mary Shelley clearly heeded Davy's words, for she presents Victor Frankenstein as the embodiment of hubris, of that Satanic or Faustian presumption which blasphemously attempts to tear asunder the sacred mysteries of nature" (Mellor, 1989: 94). This disrespect for the powers and laws of nature will produce monsters. Other than distinguishing between good and bad science, Mary Shelley also touched upon the subject of procreation.

- Monstrous Births

In *Frankenstein* Victor creates, not only using dead matter, but also without a woman and that combined with his inability (as a single parent) to give his 'offspring' love and care results in a monster. Reproduction was a concept which underwent investigation and changes as result of new findings but there was a time where it was suggested by Erasmus Darwin, amongst others, that reproduction in plants depended more on the male than on the female which 'only' had to supply nourishment and oxygenation (Mellor, 1989: 98). Subsequently, he ascribed all monstrous births to the female, the argument being that deformities occurred because of failure at nourishing properly. This is yet another example of how men through the language and arguments of science tried to establish themselves as superior to women and justify the exclusion of women from various aspects and at the same time eliminating women's importance in society.

By assigning Victor Frankenstein with the ability to ‘give birth’ Mary Shelley embodied existing speculations in the field of science and she then showed her own opinion and anxiety of what that might result in. In the creating process of the creature Victor does not have the amount of patience that would have allowed the creature to be made in a correctly proportioned size. This lack of patience is also a lack of empathy since he would have been able to anticipate the consequences of his choice if he had had empathy. A quality often ascribed to women following the discourse of the period. That Mary Shelley used science to evince its inherent dangers and at the same time criticize male ambition and elimination of women will be discussed in the analysis of *Frankenstein*.

Anxiety of authorship

It is right for every woman writer of original creative talent to be outraged at the very thought that the ground needs to be broken especially for her, just because she is a woman; but it is wrong for the literary scholar and critic [...] to omit paying their humble toll of tribute to the great women of the past who did in fact break ground for literary women. (Moers, 1978: 63)

This quote underlines the difficult and constrained possibilities for female authors but it also stresses the importance of remembering the pioneers of female literature. Mary Shelley did break ground with her ‘hideous progeny’ not only because she incorporated ideas from contemporary science into her story but also the mere fact that she was *young* and a *girl* was astounding to the critics and readers.

In the search of an underlying feministic message in *Frankenstein* it is also important to establish why it was hidden. Due to the circumstances of the period concerning women and the expectations to them, writing was, as mentioned earlier, ‘an abnormality’ for women to attempt. The limitations that met women in studying and writing as opposed to the possibilities for men were quite different:

Male writers have always been able to study their craft in university or coffeehouse, group themselves into movements or coteries, search out predecessors for guidance or patronage, collaborate or fight with their contemporaries. But women through most of the nineteenth

century were barred from the universities, isolated in their own homes, chaperoned in travel, painfully restricted in friendship. The personal give-and-take of the literary life was closed to them. (Moers, 1978: 43)

This is not to victimize women because that would be to commit the same crime that male writers committed in stereotyping women in the first place. But the fact remains that women were limited in their possibilities at this period and the mere fact that they wrote should be considered an act of empowerment and as an opposition to the patriarchal society form that had created this imbalance between the possibilities of the sexes. The belief that women were less suitable and less feminine if they wrote (or if their mind inspired an intelligent thought) created anxiety and limitations for women who wanted to distinguish themselves in literature which then resulted in disguised authorships:

[...] the literary woman has always faced equally degrading options when she had to define her public presence in the world. If she did not suppress her work entirely or publish it pseudonymously or anonymously, she could modestly confess her female “limitations” and concentrate on the “lesser” subjects reserved for ladies as becoming to their inferior powers. (Gubar and Gilbert, 2000: 64)

This apologetic expectation to and nature of the literary woman reecho Mary Shelley’s defensive Introduction to the 1831 edition, and, furthermore, the fact that *Frankenstein* was published anonymously when it first appeared in 1818. Another example of Mary Shelley’s self-censoring and anxiety of authorship is Percy’s revision of her text.

- Percy Bysshe Shelley as the Editor of Mary Shelley

When Mary Shelley started writing *Frankenstein*, Percy was already an established poet in the literary field. As such, it seems logical that she turned to him for practical advice and assistance, but Mellor argues that her willingness to accept almost any revision from Percy defeats the purpose of her as a female author: “Mary Shelley’s willingness to accept virtually all of these revisions

strikingly reveals her own authorial insecurity, her deference to what she saw as Percy's more legitimate literary voice [...] and above all the hierarchical relationship that existed between her husband and herself" (Mellor, 1989: 59). The last notion is also seen in her Introduction when she made clear that he possessed a much 'more cultivated mind' which diminishes her own intellect. Therefore, in this context she does not come off as a female author with confidence and a desire to take a stand against patriarchal limitations. By accepting Percy's revisions she also accepted that he revised *her* because writing is personal and everybody has their own style:

The psychological significance of these final revisions⁷ cannot be overstressed. With the one exception I have just discussed, they do not radically alter the plot or the emotional nuances of the novel's conclusion, but they do change its diction and tone. In effect, Mary Shelley has substituted Percy's style for her own. She has thus enveloped her novel in a protective covering of borrowed speech, allowing Percy not only to write the Preface but also to dominate the conclusion⁸. Defensively, she has hidden her own voice behind his more public and impersonal linguistic persona. (Mellor, 1989: 68)

Mary Shelley's acceptance of Percy's revisions and subsequently, in Mellor's opinion, her concealment of own literary voice, by letting Percy's voice take over, can be read as a case of anxiety of authorship. Because of her parental heritage it is possible that she felt the pressure of achieving almost perfection in her own writing and as such did not have the confidence in own skills and therefore made Percy edit not only grammatical mistakes but also alter whole sentences and phrases even though they were written correctly. His interference had another unfortunate consequence.

- Percy as the Author of *Frankenstein*

James Rieger, the editor of the 1818 edition, has presented an account of Percy's changes in *Frankenstein*, an account which is very much in Percy's favor, according to Mellor. Rieger claimed

⁷ Mellor provides an extensive list of examples of extracts from Mary Shelley's original text, Percy's suggestions for revision and then the final outcome. Mellor, chapter 3 pp. 52-70

⁸ Mellor states that his revisions have changed the novel's chief concern into exhibiting "the amiableness of domestic affection, and the excellence of universal virtue" (Mellor, 1989: 68).

that Percy corrected Mary Shelley's "frequent grammatical solecisms, her spelling, and her awkward phrasing" and concludes that Percy's "assistance at every point in the book's manufacture was so extensive that one hardly knows whether to regard him as editor or minor collaborator" (Rieger quoted in Mellor, 1989: 58). Mellor notes that Mary Shelley had few grammatical errors or misspellings in the original manuscript and comments that Rieger's conclusion that Percy can be considered as a 'minor collaborator' does a disservice to Mary Shelley's talent (Mellor, 1989: 59).

But there is a contradiction in Mellor's argument here: If Mary Shelley hid her own voice behind Percy, and in that way let his writing style overshadow the novel, then how can he not be regarded as a minor collaborator? My understanding of Mellor's argument is that Percy's revisions were almost entirely textual and did not radically change the content⁹ of the novel. Anthony Badalamenti seconds this view: "There is no evidence that his editing altered the plot or the story overall" (Badalamenti, 2006: 425). The *invention* of *Frankenstein* still belonged to Mary Shelley and that is what Mellor recognizes as Mary Shelley's true genius. Badalamenti also comments that: "The literary device of the man-made creature expresses Mary Shelley's gifts and gives her a distinctive place in literature" (Badalamenti, 438). In view of that, Mary Shelley proved herself worthy not only as a female writer but also distinguished herself from her massive literary heritage and from her acknowledged husband. She might at times have operated with a male discourse in her stereotyped representations of women but only so that she could discreetly criticize that confining discourse. Even though a woman "was conditioned to think she needed a man's help", and Mary Shelley did in fact receive Percy's assistance in editing the novel, *Frankenstein* remains *her* creation and *her* mark on literary history.

⁹ Characters and plot.

Analysis of Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus

Frankenstein is not a simple battle between good and evil; it is not a ghost story, nor really a gothic novel. It defies a single interpretation, engaging instead with some of the crucial social and public questions of the period (Jansson 1999 in Shelley 1993: VIII)

Frankenstein was first published in 1818 by an anonymous author. It was reprinted in 1823, but it was not until the revised third edition in 1832 that Mary Shelley was acknowledged as the author. As the quotation above suggests, this is not a simple story with a straight-forward interpretation. It is a story with many aspects and layers, some more transparent than others. At first glance, *Frankenstein* is a story designed to scare and shock its readers, and as such, it fits into the description given by Mary Shelley of its origins in a ghost-story contest. But a closer look, and a second reading, reveals its deep roots in a mind frustrated with her egotistical husband, but also with a patriarchal society where women had limited possibilities in comparison to their, what was supposed to be, male equals. Already two different interpretations present themselves: one which reads *Frankenstein* as a personal insurrection and critique of the author's life and circumstance, with a focus on lack of parental love and egotistical male figures, and another which reads the novel as a public critique of the patriarchal society and its shortcomings with a focus on the roles assigned to men and women. That it can be read as a critique of society and perhaps even as feminist criticism is also seen in the novel's treatment of science; the different forms and its implications. The Industrial Revolution from the 18th century had promised new possibilities and groundbreaking technology which would lead mankind, and the world, to success. The novel's handling of science can thus be seen as a warning in general terms, but can also be read as "A Feminist Critique of Science", as a chapter is titled in Anne K. Mellor's book, *Mary Shelley: Her life, Her fiction, Her monsters*.

Before going into a short summary of the novel, another perspective of interpretation should be mentioned: narration and characters. It is so, that *Frankenstein*, despite of being authored by a

woman, does not employ any female narration, but only three male narrators. The views and observations are thus all from a male perspective and no omniscient narrator interferes in order to bring out other perspectives. Furthermore, female representation is almost excluded from the novel, and the women that do appear are in correspondence to the view on women held by male authors, and are therefore presented as reflections of their male counterparts as mothers, daughters, sisters, or wives (following the theory of women's identity as depending on which room of the house she is suited in). Mary Shelley's choice of using male narratives solely, and her misrepresentation of women, will be discussed at a greater length later in the thesis.

A summary of *Frankenstein*

Frankenstein has been assigned to the genres of Gothic and of science fiction, and it contains elements from both of these genres. The name Frankenstein is, unlike common belief¹⁰, the name of the protagonist of the story Victor Frankenstein, a young man interested in science and knowledge. The story takes its beginning with a series of letters written by Captain Robert Walton to his sister, Margaret Saville. From his letters, the reader is introduced to Victor Frankenstein who enters the story when Walton and his crew encounter him on their voyage to the North Pole. The narration now shifts to Victor and the reader, and Walton, gets an account of his life and the circumstances that have brought him in his current situation. We hear of his early life and family relations before entering the 'real' story of his creation of a living thing from dead matter, and the horrors it generated. Victor's rejection of his creation, of his 'child', is apparently the reason for the unfortunate and disastrous turn the story takes when Victor's younger brother is found in the woods, murdered. Victor, well-aware that it is his creation that is responsible for this death says nothing and is thus responsible for the imprisonment and death of an innocent woman, Justine Moritz (a close friend of the Frankenstein family). Victor is contacted by the creature and the narration shifts to the creature's perspective. This is the most empathic and emotional narrative, and the reader feels sympathy for the creature as 'he' unfolds his story of rejection and hatred inflicted upon him due to his abnormal and monstrous exterior. The reason for referring to the creature as 'he' is grounded in the fact that he is not a human being in the technical understanding since he was

¹⁰ The name has, instead, been associated with the 'monster', or, 'creature' as Mary Shelley has termed 'him'. The popular media, and movies in particular, can be seen as partly responsible for this misconception: "For many people, the dominant image of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) has remained that of Boris Karloff in James Whale's 1931 film" (Shelley, 1989: VII). The media is also responsible for the public's idea of the creature as monstrous and infantile when in fact he is eloquent and loveable in Mary Shelley's original story.

created and assembled by dead, human body parts. He is a product of a scientific experiment, and at the same time, the other characters refer to him as 'creature' and 'monster', which all point to a non-human existence. However, throughout the story he is also referred to as 'he' (without the apostrophes), and as it turns out, he is the character who proves most human(e). In this project, he will therefore also be referred to as "he".

The creature finds a hiding place in the woods, away from society, but not entirely excluded from human existence. He encounters the de Lacey family but he keeps his distance and does therefore not encounter them in the physical sense of the word. He observes them with a keen interest to learn about human nature and the trait that distinguishes man from animal: sensibility. He learns how to speak and feel, but with no human and emotional interaction, he at last turns to acting in accordance to his appearance and kills William, Victor's brother. The creature pleads Victor to 'make' him a mate, Victor agrees and the narration is once again from Victor's point of view. Victor abandons his promise of making a female creature because he feels that it would be too dangerous, and from that moment, the two become each other's mortal enemies. Victor devotes himself to killing the creature, but the creature kills everybody *around* Victor because he cannot kill his creator. It is in Victor's pursuit of the creature that the narration reaches its final destination, with Walton, who ends the story.

Narrative

Frankenstein has a symmetrical structure. As mentioned earlier, the story is told by the three male narrators which begins with Walton, then Victor, it then moves to the creature, then back to Victor, and at last, to Walton again. It comes full circle. This creates a multi-layered form, where the narratives are, at times, within other narratives. The narratives within narratives, and the untold perspectives suggest, that there is no possibility of closure, where the shifting narrative excludes stability. The epistolary form of the novel and the triangular narrative, as Jansson describes it, is important to the story because: "... each of the three main characters has important conversations with the two others, and this triangular pattern also marks the exclusion of all other characters from the story" (Jansson 1999 in Shelley 1993: XIV). This exclusion of all other characters also reinstates the importance of the three male narrators and their role in the story, since they are the only ones given the power of voice and privilege to tell their story. Jansson, furthermore, points out

Walton as the primary narrator. She sees his narrative as having several dimensions and functions: “He mediates the stories of Victor and the creature, and, at the beginning of the novel, Shelley also uses him to introduce some of the key themes” (Jansson 1999 in Shelley 1993: XV). This is also the triangular structure that was referred to earlier, where the narratives support and interfere with each other which create interdependency and express the relations between events of action, but also between the characters. The narrative form of the novel, furthermore, renders realism to the novel because it consists of letters, journals and notes which function as the different characters’ testimonies. The story then appears to be an account of actual events, thus, adding to the horror of Victor’s scientific experiment. The novel raises questions of the progress of science and Anne Mellor sees Mary Shelley’s treatment of science as an “[...] implicit warning against the possible dangers inherent in the technological developments of modern science” (Mellor, 1989: 114). And who better to warn against scientific progress than a male (though, fictive) scientist? This could serve as another reason why Mary Shelley chose male narrators: persuasive effect. Mary Shelley also used the narrative form as a tool to further her story and its concerns, and Jansson describes the creature’s narrative as the heart of the story and *at* its heart, and that it mediates the key themes of abandonment, responsibility and the effect of environment.

Since there is no omniscient narrator to guide the reader in the understanding and interpretation of the story, and of the different accounts offered, it is up to the reader to draw own conclusions. Beth Newman, in Jansson’s Introduction to the novel, sees this as “[...] a deliberate strategy to destabilise the text: each narrator is telling *a* version of the story, not *the* version, and the reader is therefore invited to question the accounts offered” (Beth Newman quoted in Jansson 1999 in Shelley 1993: XIV). This is also why the story has been, and can be interpreted, in so many ways with various perspectives; with no omniscient (objective) narrator, the ambiguity with which the story is told is vibrant and the narrators’ credibility is questioned. In this way, Mary Shelley concealed her own attitude towards the issues about science and exclusion of women that the novel inspired.

That Mary Shelley chose an all-male voice to tell her story creates a certain distance between author and narrator, and as Jansson states in her introduction to the text “[...] it conceals the author from

the reader” (Jansson 1999 in Shelley 1993: XIV). At the same time, it can have the effect of making it ‘easier’ for the male reader to identify with the story. Anne K. Mellor assigns Mary Shelley’s choice of narration to ‘anxiety of authorship’: “Yet despite this tradition of female authorship, Mary Shelley doubted the legitimacy of her own literary voice, a doubt that determined her decision to speak through three *male* narrators (Walton, Frankenstein, the creature), the structure of her novel, and the revisions of her text” (Mellor, 1989: 53). Saying this, is equivalent to saying that a male voice is more legitimate and estimated than a female; that the story will seem more credible if it is told with a male voice. Mary Shelley could thus: “[...] sidestep concerns about her ability – indeed her right – to produce a novel by concealing herself behind a range of narrators, all of whom are members of the sex ‘authorised’ to write and speak” (Jansson 1999 in Shelley 1993: XIV). Even though there was a female readership at this time, and Mary Shelley’s works were enjoyed by women, her choice of male narration appears to be an attempt at obtaining accept and acknowledgement from the male audience.

The male characters in *Frankenstein*

Mary Shelley’s portrayal of male characters is important in the understanding of the novel as an autobiographical critique of her father and husband’s treatment of her. In this relation, Percy’s resemblance to Victor supports that interpretation of the text. Badalamenti presents a chart which displays the similarities between real events from Mary Shelley’s life and those in her novel. Here, 10 out of the 20 examples refer to direct parallels between Percy and Victor. To name a few: Percy’s favourite pseudonym in early life was Victor; his favourite sister was named Elizabeth; where Victor experimented with science to discover the principles of life, Percy was fascinated by the secrets of death and tombs; Percy was not monogamous and in the novel Elizabeth asks Victor if he loves someone else (Badalamenti, 2006: 426-7). In this context, Victor’s treatment of the creature becomes symptomatic for Percy’s, at times, indifference to Mary Shelley, her feelings, and their children. On the other hand, her negative representation of the male scientist/seafarer and their ambitions for glory can be viewed as a comment on men in general, and subsequently, how women are needed to prevent the consequences of uncontrolled male ambition and egotism. The resemblance between Victor and Percy is less important in this reading. A closer look at the male and female characters will generate a better understanding of Mary Shelley’s intentions with her representation of the sexes.

- Robert Walton

Walton is a seafarer and we hear of his struggles, the complications of assembling a crew and his difficulties with his father. He is telling his story through letters to his sister Margaret, whom he treasures very dearly (keep in mind that she is miles away from him). Like Victor, Walton is driven by ambition and aspirations for glory. He is on a voyage to the North Pole and he describes it as something that he desires to 'attain' (much like how Victor thinks of Elizabeth; as property). It is Walton's ambitions that have endangered him and his crew just like Victor's ambitions endangered (and indirectly killed) the people surrounding him. But with the prospective of mutiny, Walton chooses to accommodate to his crew's demands of aborting the dangerous mission that they have undertaken. Victor does not abandon his 'mission' and that seals his destiny. Other than this incident, Victor and Walton share traits of character and are very similar in their desires and ambitions. Walton is actually quite fascinated and infatuated with Victor, and he expresses these thoughts in the letters to his sister. Before meeting Victor, Walton had told her that he longed for a companion, not a female mate, but someone he could share his feelings and thoughts with. Victor is exactly what he wished for, and early on, it becomes clear that Walton feels a special bond towards Victor. In the following passage, Walton insinuates that the feeling is mutual:

The stranger [Victor] has gradually improved in health, but is very silent, and appears uneasy when anyone except myself enters his cabin. Yet his manners are so conciliating that the sailors are all interested in him, although they have had very little communication with him. For my own part, I begin to love him as a brother; and his constant and deep grief fills me with sympathy and compassion. He must have been a noble creature in his better days, being even now in wreck so attractive and amiable. (Shelley, 1993: 22)

There is an almost homosexual love between the two men, even though Walton describes it as a brotherly affection. The homosexual undertones are not only present between Walton and Victor, but also between Victor and his dear friend Clerval. This is yet another way that Mary Shelley excluded women. Even though there are women in the male characters' lives, they still prefer and treasure male company the most. The women in *Frankenstein* are thus excluded from all spheres; they are not given voices in telling their stories, and they do not figure in the male characters'

romantic lives either. The roles held by women in society have been taken away from them and instead men have substituted them. In this way, Victor can be seen as fulfilling Walton's expressed desire of a companion whom he can share his experiences and thoughts with; a wife.

- The dangers of ambition

That Walton and Victor get along and find each other interesting has to do with their similarities of ambition and egotistical way of thinking. They both share a dream and an ambition to discover something new and tread on unknown territory; Walton wishes to travel to the North Pole and discover a passage that will make seafaring easier, and Victor wants to create a new species that will have him as *the* creator/father. Walton's ambition of discovering unknown territory and his purpose of the voyage are expressed in his very first letter to his sister:

Its [The North Pole] productions and features may be without example, as the phenomena of the heavenly bodies undoubtedly are in those undiscovered solitudes. What may not be expected in a country of eternal light? I may there discover the wondrous power which attracts the needle; and may regulate a thousand celestial observations, that require only this voyage to render their seeming eccentricities consistent for ever. 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. (Shelley, 1993: 13)

Walton is clearly interested in undiscovered land, not only does it satisfy his curiosity, it will also offer him glory and reputation. Just like Victor, Walton refuses to consider the possible dangers and consequences of his actions, and he is willing to risk his own safety if it is necessary: "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 [...]" (Shelley, 1993: 13). Walton's desire and ambition for his voyage to the North Pole are so important to him that he discards all fears and even the danger of death. In fact, his expectations for the work that he will be undertaking are so great that he sees them as having consequences for future generations:

But, supposing all these conjectures to be false, you cannot contest the inestimable benefit which I shall confer on *all mankind* to the last generation, by discovering a passage near the pole to those countries, to reach which at present so many months are requisite; or by ascertaining the secret of the magnet, which, if at all possible, can only be effected by an undertaking such as *mine* [My Italics] (Shelley, 1993: 13-4)

That he wants to affect ‘all mankind’ seems tremendously ambitious and it is important in Mary Shelley’s description of male ambition and egotism which, in the case of science, can have fatal consequences. Victor also sees his experiment as affecting later generations and the future of science, but that will be discussed further in the section analysing Victor. This scientific inquisitiveness that both Walton and Victor possess is rooted in the curiosity and progress by experiments that dominated the science of Mary Shelley’s time. Jansson mentions that Tim Marshall relates the novel to the “‘bodysnatching’ era of the 1820’s” where medical practitioners used unclaimed paupers’ bodies for their experiments (Jansson 1999 in Shelley, 1993: XX). And it seems that Walton and Victor’s desire to possess and control nature and life is represented as a dangerous path to choose. But as mentioned before, Mary Shelley’s own attitude towards science remains ambiguous.

The other interesting aspect of this description of his aspirations is his emphasis on own ability and importance: ‘can only be effected by an undertaking such as mine’, implies that he is the only one who can succeed and that nothing else can have an influence. He also refers to the mission as being impossible and in that way stresses the importance and greatness of his achievement, if he succeeds, that is.

- Aspirations of Glory: Victor and Walton

Walton describes how Victor has a calming and reassuring effect on the sailors and with his eloquence he makes them forget the dangerous situation they are in, but as Walton is aware: “These feelings are transitory; each day of expectation delayed fills them with fear, and I almost dread a mutiny caused by this despair” (Shelley, 1993: 162). His fear of mutiny becomes a reality when he and Victor are interrupted by some of the sailors: “They insisted, therefore, that I should engage with a solemn promise that if the vessel should be freed I would instantly direct my course

southward” (Shelley, 1993: 163). The demand from the sailors, and the fact that Walton succumbs, is not appreciated by Victor who sees it as a desertion from his former ambitions and aspiration for glory:

Are you [addressing the sailors] then so easily turned from your design? Did you not call this a glorious expedition? And wherefore was it glorious? Not because the way was smooth and placid as a southern sea, but because it was full of dangers and terror [...] For this was it a glorious, for this was it an honourable undertaking. You were hereafter to be hailed as the benefactors of your species; your names adored as belonging to brave men who encountered death in honour and the benefit of mankind. [...] Oh! Be men, or be more than men. Be steady to your purposes and firm as a rock. [...] Do not return to your families with the stigma of disgrace marked on your brows. Return as heroes who have fought and conquered, and who know not what it is to turn their back on the foe. (Shelley, 1993: 163-4)

This speech is important in the understanding of Walton and Victor’s ambitions and motivation. Victor talks about stubbornness without realising that it is exactly his own stubbornness and pride that will end his life and that of his creature as well. When he talks about what makes the voyage glorious, he underlines his own priorities of achieving glory and recognition over own and others’ safety. He equals glory with danger and practically says that if it is not dangerous, it is not worth it; which is yet another sign of his deep self-absorption and egotistical way of thinking. And again, he refers to the ambition of affecting the whole of *mankind* which, at this point, makes him seem rather disillusioned or at least somewhat eccentric. In his speech, he reveals his own hopes of becoming a hero and to be more than man. ‘To be more than man’ is another way that Mary Shelley points to science and scientists attempt to control nature and, in a way, become Gods. Jansson argues that Mary Shelley’s own attitude towards science remains ambiguous, but Victor’s swan song can be interpreted with a certain amount of irony and almost pity for the ‘poor, failed scientist’ whose downfall can be assigned to his high ambitions. Victor is eloquent and powerful in his speech to the sailors, but in the end they are not affected by it and the speech becomes meaningless. The passage shows Victor and Walton’s personal aspirations but also proves that glory at the expense of personal safety is not worth attaining.

- Personal Relationships: Walton and Margaret

Before turning to Victor, it is important to discuss Walton's relationship to his sister Margaret. The reader is only introduced to Margaret through Walton's letters and never gets to hear her response to the letters. He seems very devoted and affectionate towards her and yet he addresses his letters to Mrs. Margaret Saville which, of course, could be the customary way of addressing letters at the time, but it appears very formal and impersonal. His devotion to her seems rather exaggerated especially because he presents it as though *he* is invaluable to *her* and he thus reveals a narcissistic character trait which is also evident in his belief in the glorious voyage.

His self-centredness is clear in his first letter when he writes: "[...] and when shall I return? Ah, dear sister, how can I answer this question?" (Shelley, 1993: 15). He presents it as Margaret's question when, in reality, it is a question *he* himself raises and tries to answer. Another passage reads: "Be assured that for my own sake, as well as yours, I will not rashly encounter danger" (Shelley, 1993: 19). That he will not 'rashly encounter danger' is a lie, because he will, and he will be well-aware that it may cost him his life and that that would inevitably bring sorrow to Margaret, but that is only a concern to Walton in his *writings* and not in his *actions*; a subtle way of proving that Walton is egotistical and cynical in his actions despite of his affectionate words to his sister.

Jansson suggests that because of the many similarities that Walton shares with both Victor and the creature, his function in the story is to mediate the story between Victor and the creature and that he, in himself, is not important: "His function is to suggest themes that become more concrete after the introduction of the main protagonists, and to convey their narratives. His personality is important only in so far as it reveals aspects of Victor or the Creature" (Jansson 1999 in Shelley 1993: XV). Walton thus becomes a tool in Mary Shelley's narrative.

Introducing Victor Frankenstein

Victor is first introduced to us by Walton who saves him from a dangerous, and potentially deadly, situation. In Walton's account to Margaret, on his meeting with Victor, he is very fascinated and enthusiastic because he has found the object of his desire. Since Walton is clearly infatuated with Victor, the reader is encouraged to question the credibility of Walton's overtly positive and flattering description of Victor's person. He is described as having a powerful charisma, and once

he has regained in health, Walton praises his eloquence and commanding way of acting and speaking. It is also clear that Victor's determination does not suffer under his unfortunate circumstances, since, the first he utters when he is brought on board is: "Before I come on board your vessel [...] will you have the kindness to inform me whither you are bound?" (Shelley, 1993: 21) and when Walton replies that they are on a voyage to the North Pole, Victor seems satisfied and consents to come on board (as if he had a choice).

Walton nurtures Victor, and through his actions and words of affection in his letters to Margaret, his love and admiration for Victor is evident: "[...] I have found a man who, before his spirit had been broken by misery, I should have been happy to have possessed as the brother of my heart" and "My affection for my guest increases every day. He excites at once my admiration and my pity to an astonishing degree." (Shelley, 1993: 22-3) Walton's fascination with Victor is also an expression of his self-admiration since the two are so similar, that they in fact, could have been brothers.

As mentioned earlier, Mary Shelley's attitude towards science appears to be ambiguous, but in relation to ambition she seems to have taken a stand and uses Victor and his fate to advocate against the ambitions that Victor and Walton share: "One man's life or death were but a small price to pay for the acquirement of the knowledge which I sought; for the dominion I should acquire and transmit over the elemental foes of our race", and Victor replies "Unhappy man! Do you share my madness? Have you drank also of the intoxicating draught? Hear me – let me reveal my tale, and you will dash the cup from your lips!" (Shelley, 1993: 23) Not only has Victor realised that his ambitions were 'madness', but he also intends to use his story as a cautionary tale. Victor lets Walton know that he had decided not to tell his story, but now that he knows that Walton is "pursuing the same course" as Victor, he hopes that Walton can "deduce an apt moral" from his tale (Shelley, 1993: 24).

The narration shifts to Victor who gives an account of his carefree and loving childhood in Geneva. With Victor and his family, Mary Shelley presented the perfect nuclear family that she so desired but never experienced. At the same time, she shows that even though Victor received much love

and affection from both of his parents, it did not prevent him from becoming egotistical and failing as a 'parent' to his creation.

- Egotism

That Victor is egotistical is not evident in the first reading of the novel. He seems to be very compassionate towards his family and friends, and his rejection and treatment of the creature appears to be the natural response to the creature's monstrous demeanour. But on a second reading, his affectionate words can be seen as superficial and false, the reason being that his actions do not correspond with his words; for instance, he expresses love and care for Elizabeth Lavenza, his 'cousin', but yet, he spends most of his time far away from her. His relationship with Elizabeth will be discussed later in the assignment. Victor's egotism is also connected to his failure at parental responsibility. Already in the thinking process of creating life from dead matter, it is clear that he does not think of the possible consequences for his creation, rather, he thinks of the glory he will achieve with his ground-breaking experiment:

I doubted at first whether I should attempt the creation of a being like myself, or one of simpler organisation; but my imagination was too much exalted by my first success to permit me to doubt of my ability to give life to an animal as complex and wonderful as man. The materials at present within my command hardly appeared adequate to so arduous an undertaking; but I doubted not that I should ultimately succeed (Shelley, 1993: 42)

And when he considers the possibility of failure, his conclusion is that: "[...] when I considered the improvement which every day takes place in science and mechanics, I was encouraged to hope my present attempts would at least lay the foundations of future success" (Shelley, 1993: 42). His only concerns are, therefore, whether or not he will succeed and to what degree. He is much occupied by his own feelings and perhaps overestimates his own abilities. He tells himself that he is aware that the materials available are not adequate for the task but yet he proceeds, and when he discovers that the minuteness of the materials slow his working process, he decides to make his creation in a monstrous size: "As the minuteness of the parts formed a great hindrance to my speed, I resolved, contrary to my first intention, to make the being of a gigantic stature" (Shelley, 1993: 43). Victor is

portrayed as an intellectual, and it is therefore hard to believe that he cannot predict that this decision will have fatal consequences for his creation – unless he is so self-absorbed that others are simply not a part of his considerations and thoughts. Jansson also observes Victor's self-adoration: "Until this encounter with his creation, Victor's self-obsession is boundless. His primary concern with his own ambitions is reflected in his irresponsibility" (Jansson 1999 in Shelley 1993: XII). His decision to make the creature of 'gigantic stature', only because it will be an advantage to him and his working process, is very irresponsible, careless and unsympathetic. Victor 'designed' the creature to be 'beautiful', but the size and condition (dead and in deterioration) of the materials that seems to be a farfetched illusion; an illusion created by Victor's self-obsession and self-esteem.

- Victor and His Creature

Generally, it is through Victor's relationship with, and treatment of, the creature that his egotistical and callous sides are evident. He is very insensitive towards the creature's situation, and at first, he is not even interested in hearing the creature's story; until, of course, he can see a personal interest (Victor does not know for sure at this point whether it was the creature who murdered William, and he wants to get his suspicions affirmed or refuted – he wants to know if he is right). Until this situation, Victor has spent every minute of his account to describe how wretched the creature was and how much he loathed even the sight of him from the very beginning: "How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form?", "[...] breathless horror and disgust filled my heart" (Shelley, 1993: 45). Unable to comprehend his actions and his own creation, Victor flees like a coward; a recurrent reaction pattern. That Victor flees when he observes the creature is also an expression of his narcissistic personality; several critics (Jansson, Mellor) have analysed the creature to be Victor's 'double', so when Victor sees the monstrosity of his 'double', it does not correspond with his expectations and self-perception, and he must escape. Joseph Kestner in *Frankenstein*, edited by Fred Botting, suggests that it is, in fact, Victor's self-absorption that has led him to create the creature: "Victor Frankenstein's evident longing for another, despite his close friendship with Henry Clerval and his betrothal to Elizabeth, leads to a creation of a being who becomes the Inadequate Other which is in reality Victor himself" (Kestner quoted in Botting, 1995: 69). The 'Inadequate Other' reflects the narcissist's flaws, but at the same time, it also reinforces self-esteem by denying the flaws and instead projecting them onto the Other. Kestner also brings into question

Victor's self-renounced affection towards Clerval and Elizabeth, which supports the idea of Victor saying one thing and doing a complete different thing.

But to return to his reaction when the creature is brought to life, it is apparent that the 'beautiful features' that Victor had selected have been lost in the process, and the creature, therefore, does not live up to Victor's ambitions and expectations. The creature is a 'catastrophe' in Victor's own words, and even though it is Victor who is the creator, he seems to blame the creature for this dreadful outcome. Furthermore, Victor only focuses on his own emotions without taking the creature into consideration, and he thus excludes the creature from his own "birth" and refuses him an opinion. Victor's description of his painful labours of creation is a reference to the female act of giving birth and reinstates Victor as the creator and father of the creature. But that he should have used 'care' in the creating process is not entirely true, since he made decisions that were irresponsible, and which can be seen as partially accountable for the outcome.

After a while, Victor returns, and after a morbid dream about Elizabeth and his dead mother, he finds the creature in his room: "[...] as it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch – the miserable monster whom I had created" (Shelley, 1993: 46). The creature's behaviour is described as those of a child's: "He held up the curtain of the bed. [...] His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks" (Shelley, 1993: 46). The creature is clearly looking for affection and affirmation from Victor, as any child would on seeing its parent for the first time. Mary Shelley's description of the creature as innocent and infantile creates a feeling of sympathy for the creature, and Victor's rejection and uncaring treatment becomes evident. Furthermore, when the creature is seemingly trying to attain physical contact with Victor, most likely a hug, Victor perceives it as an act of violence towards him: "[...] one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped, and rushed downstairs" (Shelley, 1993: 46). Again, Victor displays his self-absorption and lack of empathy by misreading the creature's intentions and subsequently flees; abandoning the creature a second time.

- Victor's Resemblance to Percy

This section makes use of an autobiographical method to analyse Victor as a personification of Mary Shelley's feelings of hurt and frustration with Percy's treatment of her. The similarities have already been pointed to by Badalamenti's chart but Anne Mellor also have relevant observations.

Victor's rejection of his own creation, and thus his failure at parenting, is one of the key arguments why *Frankenstein* can be interpreted as a feminist protest against patriarchal family structures, but at the same time, it also advocates the suggestion that Mary Shelley used *Frankenstein* to bring out her frustrations over Percy's deficient parenting and his seeming indifference to their children's deaths – and lives, for that matter. And as Anne Mellor remarks: "She would later represent Percy Shelley's lack of parental concern for his offspring in the fictional form of Victor Frankenstein's abandonment of his creature" (Mellor, 1989: 32). Mary Shelley emphasizes the importance of a loving parent, but also, implicitly, that both a mother and a father is needed in this process, and if not, a monster is created: "Mary Shelley would have us see that only a culture that mothers all its members, a behavior traditionally embodied in but not necessarily limited to the work of women, can prevent the making of monsters capable of destroying us all" (Mellor, 1989: 216). Here, Mellor implies that Mary Shelley is trying to express a more general idea that can be applied to the society and that goes beyond her own personal desires. However, at the same time, it seems impossible not to draw parallels to her own childhood where her mother died in childbed, and a father who neglected his responsibility towards Mary, and instead, did what was best for him and his new wife. An example of this is when Godwin agreed with his new wife that Mary did not need a formal education, and he thus conformed to the conservative and patriarchal norms of society despite his radical and liberal ideas (Mellor, 1989: 8). Both Godwin and Percy failed as fathers and, it seems, did not take their parenting responsibility seriously. Mellor points to the fact that Mary Shelley blamed Percy for the deaths of their daughter Clara Everina, who died on September 24, 1818, and their son William, who died of malaria in Rome, on June 7, 1819. According to Mellor, Percy can be partly blamed:

[...] [Percy] insisted that Mary travel across northern Italy to Este in the August heat in less than five days. Despite the fact that the one-year-old Clara was ill when Percy met them in Este, he consistently failed to get reliable medical advice on her behalf [...] When Clara arrived at the end of the five-hour journey from Este with diarrhea, dehydrated and suffering

mild convulsions, Percy – who was eager to continue his stimulating conversations with Byron – refused to leave her in the care of the Paduan doctor, insisting they proceed directly to Venice where they could consult Byron’s physician. (Mellor, 1989: 141)

Here, Mary Shelley’s representation of Victor as a reflection on Percy becomes clear; it is all about Percy and what he says, goes. That Percy does not even take into consideration what consequences the heat and exhaustion of travel will implicate for a sick child is a true act of self-absorption and egotism. Even when Clara’s condition is worsened, he is still more interested in his ‘stimulating conversations’, thus also emphasising a contrast between knowledge and family – Percy downgrades the latter. Even Percy’s biographer, Richard Holmes, adds Percy’s recklessness as the contributing reason for Clara’s death; “the death of little Clara, to which Shelley’s carelessness and unconcern had distinctly contributed” (Holmes quoted in Mellor, 1989: 142). Furthermore, Holmes introduces the notion that Percy was unconcerned about his children, and Mary’s emotions. The result was that Mary withdrew and isolated herself in her sorrow. She repressed her anger towards Percy, which can help support the interpretation of *Frankenstein* as Mary Shelley’s personal insurrection and critique of her self-centred, insensitive husband, and father of her children.

- Victor, Clerval, and Elizabeth

Another point, in which Victor can be seen as reflecting Percy, is the difference between his relationships to the men and women in his life. Victor has formed a very close and intimate bond to his childhood friend Henry Clerval, and his love for him is very clear and genuine: “[...] I united myself in the bonds of the closest friendship” (Shelley, 1993: 30) and: “[...] I loved him with a mixture of affection and reverence that knew no bounds” (Shelley, 1993: 54). Victor also expresses warm feelings and loving thoughts about Elizabeth, but his actions tell the reader that he would rather spend his time with Clerval than Elizabeth. Taking into consideration Anne Mellor’s notion that Percy set aside the well-being of Clara in favour of his ‘stimulating conversation with Byron’, indicates that Victor and Percy share yet another disagreeable character trait. That Victor treasures Clerval more than Elizabeth is also clear when they are killed; he is sad that Elizabeth is dead, but here he also obsesses about the creature and what actions to proceed with, whereas Clerval’s death is a devastating blow to him: “I gasped for breath; and; throwing myself on the body, I exclaimed. ‘Have my murderous machinations deprived you also, my dearest Henry, of life?’”, and his physical

reaction is equally passionate; “The human frame could no longer support the agonies that I endured, and I was carried out of the room in strong convulsions” (Shelley, 1993: 135). He falls ill and lies for two months ‘on the point of death’, before he is somewhat restored in health. When Elizabeth is killed on their wedding night (Victor had sent her into a room because he believed that *he* was the creature’s target), he expresses great sorrow and embraces her dead body (for the first time): “I rushed towards her, and embraced her with ardour” (Shelley, 1993: 149). But, instead of falling into deep despair, like when Clerval died, Victor takes action in following the creature, and even though this might imply that he eagerly seeks revenge, it can also mean that he does not need time to grieve. Joseph Kestner even suggests that the creature, by killing Elizabeth, is acting out what Victor, subconsciously, desires to do; kill Elizabeth and thus avoiding sexual intimacy:

[...] Elizabeth is killed by her Narcissus. The whole truth of this episode is that, fearing sexual contact, Frankenstein wanted the woman dead, desiring only to love himself, latently homosexual. [...] through the narcissistic Other [the creature], Frankenstein is himself grinning. (Kestner quoted in Botting, 1995: 77)

Kestner states that Victor wanted Elizabeth dead at the cost of his own self-adoration, and this supports Mary Shelley’s representation of Victor (as well as Walton, since they are so similar) as a narcissist. Moreover, the sadness of Elizabeth’s death is expressed through everyone other than Victor; the people at the inn express a ‘breathless horror’; in the room, where the dead Elizabeth lies, are weeping women, and Victor’s father has lost his ‘more than daughter’ which ultimately leads to his death, and first then, does Victor fall into this sort of shock state where he is paralyzed (Shelley, 1993: 151).

Following Kestner’s statement that the creature’s killing of Elizabeth is actually an act of Victor’s unconsciousness also underlines the complex relationship that Victor entertains with the women in his life. He is indirectly to blame for Elizabeth’s death, but he is directly to blame for Justine Moritz’s fate, who is falsely accused and convicted for the murder of Victor’s younger brother William. The creature has killed William in a moment of desperation and placed an artefact, belonging to William, in the pocket of the sleeping Justine. This, of course, incriminates Justine,

and as she acts very frantic and unable to account for the object which is in her possession, she is accused, and after a trial, sentenced to death. To the villagers it seems impossible that a young woman could have committed such a horrible act of crime, but since the evidence against her is strong, not even a testimony from Elizabeth (described as a mother figure to William), in favour of Justine's character, can save her. Victor, however, knows that it is the creature that is behind the murder, but because he fears that people will think him insane if he tells about his creation, he chooses not to say anything, and Justine is thus executed on the expense of Victor's pride. This is yet an example of the falseness of Victor's words since they are not backed up by action: "A thousand times rather would I have confessed myself guilty of the crime ascribed to Justine", exclaims he, but yet, he does not act upon it because "[...] such a declaration would have been considered as the ravings of a madman" (Shelley, 1993: 64).

Moreover, when Justine is found guilty, Victor fails to feel sympathy for her and instead turns it inwards and is convinced that *he* is suffering more than she is:

I could not sustain the horror of *my* situation; and when I perceived that the popular voice, and the countenances of the judges, had already condemned *my* unhappy victim, I rushed out of the court in agony. The tortures of the accused did not equal *mine* [my italics] (Shelley, 1993: 66)

Victor's intentions and feelings, especially towards the women, are presented quite ambiguously throughout his narrative, but in this phrase his self-absorption and lack of empathy is very clear. Not only does he make the situation revolve around him, he also flees, once again, proving his cowardice, and that he does not want to help Justine despite the fact that he has uttered that 'a thousand time' would he confess his guilt to save her.

Mary Shelley's choice of representing two of the main male characters as extremely ambitious (enough to lead them to their own and others' destruction), and at the same time very egotistical serves as a valid point in the argumentation that *Frankenstein* is indeed Mary Shelley's personal

frustrations with the men in her life (Percy and Godwin in particular). And in that context the negative representation of Victor and Walton can be interpreted as a critique of Godwin and Percy's treatment of her. Moreover, Victor's failure at parenting and his unwillingness to even try is difficult not to parallel to Godwin's neglect of Mary when he remarried, and again when he broke off contact when Mary and Percy declared their love. Also Percy's careless dealings with their children, and his seemingly indifference with their deaths, and subsequently Mary's grief, can be paralleled to Victor's rejection of his creation.

The Creature

The narrative at the centre of the novel belongs to the creature. This is his chance to explain himself and his actions to Victor and the reader. He does so with such eloquence and sympathy that it is impossible not to feel sorry for him, and his criminal actions become somewhat excusable. He has trouble remembering his creation, and this is described as a metaphorical vehicle used deliberately by Mary Shelley to symbolize the lack of female writers in the history of literature: "[...] what all these characters and their authors really fear they have forgotten is precisely that aspect of their lives which has been kept from them by patriarchal poetics: their matrilineal heritage of literary strength, their "female power"" (Gubar and Gilbert, 2000: 59). So, unlike Victor and Walton, the creature, or at least aspects of his narration, can be read as identifying with Mary Shelley and female experience. Besides from not remembering much from the 'original era of his being', the creature does not know language or how to make use of his senses. He has to start from 'scratch', just like female writers had to; searching for someone to lean up against and to learn from.

Another aspect of the creature's life that can be paralleled to female experience is the prejudice that he encounters by society based solely on his appearance, and not his eloquence or benevolence. He is never allowed to speak because he is met with fear, disgust and expectations of an evil mind. Women at this time were, perhaps, not met with disgust but most certainly fear. The male society and male authors feared intellectual women, who were seen as devilish (like the creature), because they feared they would riot and subsequently seize power (the same fear that drove Victor to destroy his half-created female creature (Shelley, 1993: 126)). The fear of intellectual women is expressed by Wendy Martin, quoted in Gilbert and Gubar:

In the nineteenth century this fear of the intellectual woman became so intense that the phenomenon ... was recorded in medical annals. A thinking woman was considered such a breach of nature that a Harvard doctor reported during his autopsy on a Radcliff graduate he discovered that the uterus had shrivelled to the size of a pea. (Martin quoted in Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 56)

Besides saying something about the fear of intellectual women this quote furthermore reveals something about science and politics of gender. The note on the shrivelled uterus tells that femininity and the loss thereof were interdependent and that 'thinking' was the reason. But where the creature was judged as dangerous and evil due to his monstrous form, women were viewed as weak and less intelligent due to their physical appearances. It was expected from a proper lady that she acted like the 'angel in the house' if she wanted to be accepted as a woman and yet, this behaviour was exactly what was used as proof that women did not 'fit into' the world of intellectuals and literature. As expressed by Mary Wollstonecraft in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*:

Men complain, and with reason, of the follies and caprices of our sex, when they do not keenly satirize our headstrong passions and grovelling vices. Behold, I should answer, the natural effect of ignorance! The mind will ever be unstable that has only prejudices to rest on, and the current will run with destructive fury when there are no barriers to break its force.¹¹

Here, Wollstonecraft establishes and displays the vicious circle that is created by men's prejudice and low expectations to women. The creature and women, therefore, were forced to conform to the prejudice and expectations formed by society if they wanted to be accepted; not before the creature 'lives up' to his monstrous exterior is he heard by another human being, Victor and Walton. He is, of course, also heard by the old De Lacy, but he is blind and does not possess the same prejudice against the creature's appearance.

¹¹ Retrieved from web page <http://www.bartleby.com/144/2.html> 2012-05-28

Even though the creature can be read as expressing female experience, and thus working on behalf of Mary Shelley's potentially latent feministic protest, he is explicitly categorized as *male*. Mary Shelley could have just used 'it' in her description but using 'him' makes him male; and, more importantly – it makes him human. Moreover, when he desires a companion, he explicitly 'requests' for a *female* creature so that he can get a 'mate' and not just a friend like Victor and Walton desired. The creature's ardent desire for a mate underlines Victor's mistake; to exclude female intervention in the creating and parenting process. The creature's monstrosity is another way to illustrate that women should not be excluded from reproduction. At the same time it stresses the importance of having a life partner to share feelings and thoughts with. It is after all, as Kestner suggests, Victor's longing for another than Henry and Elizabeth that initiates his ideas of creation.

- The Creature and the de Lacey family

The creature tells that he did not know anything when he was 'born' and his (in)-abilities makes him infantile. He learns quickly though, and becomes capable of surviving the physical obstacles but the psychological challenges are much harder for him to figure out and to handle. He soon discovers that he is not accepted by other humans and, therefore, cannot attain the love and affection that he so desires. He is much distressed and seeks isolation. When he meets the De Laceys he keeps his distance and from there, he learns language and feelings. He is much empathetic towards the family and their trials, and this is yet another way that Mary Shelley makes the reader feel sympathy for him. He even tries to help them out by doing some minor good deeds: "I often took his [Felix] tools, the use of which I quickly discovered, and brought home firing sufficient for the consumption of several days" (Shelley, 1993: 86).

- Human Nature

From observing the family, he also learns that humans may be powerful and intelligent, but they can also be vile (as he has experienced on own body). Mary Shelley thus challenges the good of human nature:

These wonderful narrations inspired me with strange feelings. Was man, indeed, at once so powerful, so virtuous and magnificent, yet so vicious and base? He appeared at one time a mere scion of the evil principle, and at another as all that can be conceived of noble and godlike. (Mary Shelley, 1993: 92)

In this context, he also ponders on the act of ‘killing’: “For a long time I could not conceive how one man could go forth to murder his fellow” (Shelley, 1993: 92). This informs the reader of his innocence, but also of the murderous fate that is to come. Despite his gigantic and fear-inducing stature he is good by nature, and he goes through a lot of rejection and hatred before turning to violence. Even when he is attacked violently by Felix he abstains from defending himself: “I could have torn him limb from limb, as the lion rends the antelope. But my heart sunk within me as with bitter sickness, and I refrained” (Shelley, 1993: 104). The creature is very sensitive and the reason why he attains much sympathy from the reader is exactly because all he seems to desire is love and recognition from another human being. But slowly he realises that this is impossible, and concludes, that if he is treated idly then that is how he will treat others:

There was none among the myriads of men that existed who would pity or assist me; and should I feel kindness towards my enemies? No: from that moment I declared everlasting war against the species, and, more than all, against him who had formed me, and sent me forth to this insupportable misery. (Shelley, 1993: 105)

While declaring war against the human species, he also separates himself from this category. At the same time, he also proclaims Victor as the sole reason for his misery and now his enemy number one. Rejection and loneliness has finally made him into what his appearance presents him as; a monstrous animal: “[...] I gave vent to my anguish in fearful howlings. I was like a wild beast that had broken the toils; destroying the objects that obstructed me, and ranging through the wood with a stag-like swiftness” (Shelley, 1993: 104). It is in his search for Victor that he encounters William, and getting rejected by an assumingly unprejudiced child who is, furthermore, related to Victor makes the creature snap and he kills for the first time: “I gazed on my victim, and my heart swelled with exultation and hellish triumph: clapping my hands, I exclaimed, “I, too, can create desolation;

my enemy is not invulnerable; this death will carry despair to him, and a thousand other miseries shall torment and destroy him”” (Shelley, 1993: 110). The killing of William has brought with it a kind of relief and satisfaction for the creature, and he is no longer as innocent and good as he once was.

The creature does not, at the beginning, entertain the same ambitions as Victor. Instead of desiring power and glory he longs for recognition and the comfort of a loving family (with parents), and where Victor prioritises himself first, setting others aside, the creature on more than one occasion acts unselfish in the hopes of helping others. But the rejection from his fellow humans, and the deprivation of a companion, make him become just as egotistical and careless as Victor. He kills innocent people solely to ‘get to’ Victor. His killing of those who are dear to Victor is also an expression of his envy of something he can never attain. Victor’s destruction of the female creature was the creature’s only chance for normality and happiness so when that is shattered he becomes everything that is expected of him and acts from own desires and without thinking about the consequences. The creature thus embodies the dangers of over-reaching in science but is also the product of inadequate parenting caused by female exclusion, lack of affection and male egotism.

The (non)-representation of Women in *Frankenstein*

“Mary Shelley’s first novel both endorses and challenges the traditional gender roles of its late-eighteenth-century time period” (Morrison in Fisher and Silber, 2003: 112). Lucy Morrison underlines the different interpretations available for *Frankenstein* and its representation of gender. It is an ambivalence that is difficult to decode, and as with everything else in the novel, Mary Shelley succeeds at disguising her own attitude towards the subject. Looking at the male characters, their ambition, relationships and actions revealed a connection between scientific ambition and egotism resulting in inadequate love relations including that of irresponsible parenting. That Mary Shelley excluded female voicing in her novel by choosing three male narrators and furthermore presented women as idealized objects confined to the private sphere are examples where she endorsed the traditional gender roles of the time. But when the novel presents unmarried men as egotistical over-reachers whose exclusion of women makes monsters that can be read as Mary Shelley’s challenge of those gender norms. It is therefore important to look at how women are represented in *Frankenstein*, scarcely or not, because it says something about Mary Shelley’s intentions with the

novel, and can help decode why she chose male narratives over female. This section, therefore, is trying to detect the women of the text and identify their roles: “*Frankenstein* depicts women firmly entrenched in the domestic sphere, their focus conventionally invested in children and household, while men are more active, more powerful, and encouraged to study and explore the world” (Morrison in Fisher and Silber, 2003: 112).

Margaret Saville

The first woman introduced to the reader is Margaret Saville, Robert Walton’s sister. But we only hear of her through the voice of Walton, and since she is not allowed to voice back, it is his portrayal of her that we are left with. That there is no characterization of Margaret is not a problem because it is her lack of voice which is interesting. On the surface of the text, she is not represented because we do not get to read her letters and as such Mary Shelley follows the refrain that only ‘the male sex is authorised to speak’. Looking at Walton’s addresses to Margaret, however, reveals her indirect voice. That Mary Shelley allows Margaret a voice in a very subtle and cunning manner can be proof that she made use of a silent protest in order not to provoke too much. Finally, it should be mentioned that even though Margaret’s sceptical voice is somewhat audible she is still defined by stereotypical conventions: Walton’s praise of her idealizes her to the extent that she becomes the ‘angel in the house’ which is exactly the place she seems to be confined to. Where Walton is actively exploring the world she is situated in London, England, passively expecting to hear from her brother (this is how it is presented by Walton). The gender roles between Walton and Margaret are therefore very clear and as such also very typical.

- Margaret’s Voice

Finally, it should be mentioned that even though we do not hear from Margaret, in Walton’s addresses to her, signs of dispute can be traced: “You will rejoice to hear that no disaster has accompanied the commencement of an enterprise which you have regarded with such evil forebodings” and a bit further down: “[...] you cannot contest the inestimable benefit which I shall confer on all mankind to the last generation” (Shelley, 1993: 13). In the first sentence, it is clear that Margaret has expressed concerns and doubts about the voyage and Walton is keen to prove her wrong. The second, ‘you cannot’, implies that she has questioned the importance of his mission. In

that way, we indirectly hear her voice. This is a very subtle way on Mary Shelley's part to criticize the overreaching male ambition of glory and discovery.

Caroline Beaufort

“Caroline Beaufort, Elizabeth Lavenza, Justine Moritz, and Agatha De Lacey are fixed in roles expected of women at this time – wife, mother, daughter – and are somewhat idealized” (Morrison in Fisher and Silber, 2003: 112). Caroline Beaufort, Victor's mother, fulfils the roles of wife, mother, and daughter, and does so with an angelic grace. These were the typical and expected roles for women to play, and Mary Shelley, in this context, can therefore be seen as endorsing those norms, but Anne Mellor suggests that: “[...] Shelley presents these rather passive characters as if, through their secondary status, she could express her frustration with and resentment of the bourgeois, patriarchal family model so prevalent in her own day” (Mellor quoted in Morrison in Fisher and Silber, 2003: 112). That these women are not significant to the developments of the story and, furthermore, do not figure in the story for long before they are killed off or otherwise removed, supports Mellor's argument. When Mary Shelley kills Caroline she ‘sets her free’ from her stereotyped role and thus proving that this ‘woman-type’ is not needed any longer nor can she persist in modern society. Following Mellor's argumentation, Mary Shelley's representation of the passive, domesticated women is not only a mirror of contemporary society but also a critique of it. Caroline is presented to the reader through Victor's narrative and it is therefore *his* image of her that we get, and not an objective description. He tells the story of how she and his father met. The story portrays her as a devoted daughter, and a ‘proper lady’ (referring to the definition mentioned earlier by Mrs Sarah Ellis) because she takes care of her sick father setting herself aside completely: “Her father grew worse; her time was more entirely occupied in attending him; her means of subsistence decreased” and when he dies she falls into deep grief, but luckily Alphonse Frankenstein comes to her rescue: “He came like a protecting spirit to the poor girl, who committed herself to his care” (Shelley, 1993: 27). She is thus reduced to an object that needs saving – the damsel in distress. Her role as a ‘caretaker’ is further empowered in Italy where she becomes a ‘guardian angel’ to the poor (Shelley, 1993: 28). But her goodness to others is also what kills her. Elizabeth catches the scarlet fever and Caroline disobeys the entreaties of not attending her: “She attended her sick bed – her watchful attentions triumphed over the malignity of distemper – Elizabeth was saved, but the consequences of this imprudence were fatal to her preserver” (Shelley, 1993: 34). Since Elizabeth is

at times referred to as a kind of daughter to the Frankensteins and on several occasions as a sister/cousin to Victor, Caroline's death can be read as yet another example of childbirth death. It furthermore proves that she is willing to die for those she loves, which is something Victor is not. He is not even willing to risk his reputation to save Justine who he claims to care deeply for. His mother's loving parenting is not carried on by Victor.

Elizabeth Lavenza

Elizabeth is 'found' by Caroline Beaufort on one of her walks among the poor in Italy. Elizabeth is one out of five children 'belonging' (she is an orphan and therefore is not their biological child (actually, her biological mother had died giving birth)) to some hard working peasants. She is different than the other children: "She appeared of a different stock. [...] her face so expressive of sensibility and sweetness, that none could behold her without looking on her as of a distinct species, a being heaven-sent, and bearing a celestial stamp in all her features" (Shelley, 1993: 28).

- Victor's property

Elizabeth is 'given' to Victor as a 'present' as if she was an object:

On the evening previous to her being *brought* to my home, my mother had said playfully – 'I have a *pretty present* for my Victor – tomorrow he *shall have it*.' And when on the morrow, she presented Elizabeth to me as her promised *gift*, I, with childish seriousness, interpreted her words literally, and looked upon Elizabeth as *mine* – *mine* to protect, love, and cherish. All praises bestowed on her, *I received as made to a possession of my own*. [My italics] (Shelley, 1993: 29)

It is clear that Victor really does view Elizabeth as a present and as his possession. She is, as a result, reduced to an object, a thing that can be traded with¹², and a tool to please and entertain Victor. Furthermore, his statement 'all praises bestowed on her, I received as made to a possession

¹² That women could be 'traded' with was actually an element often used in the Gothic genre also by Horace Walpole in *The Castle of Otranto*.

of my own', resounds those of a creator. He seems to believe that he can take credit for any commendation she might receive and that she in that way reflects him, and thus, once again revealing his deep, narcissistic nature.

- Women's Virtues

Much emphasis is also put on Elizabeth's angelic beauty and motion. Those traits can therefore be seen as the most important to girls and women to possess at this time. Wollstonecraft exemplifies the vices taught to women:

Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, *outward* obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man; and should they be beautiful, every thing else is needless, for, at least, twenty years of their lives.¹³ [Sic]

Unlike Mary Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft is not so subtle in her critique and it is obvious from the above that she was fully aware of how to 'play' men and society in order to achieve what she wanted. In doing so also makes men appear impressionable and most certainly not superior to women. By emphasising that women should learn *outward* obedience suggests that she entices women to disobey in other respects. Mary Shelley, on the other hand, shows what happens to women who obeys men blindly – they die. But she does so in a very subtle and ambiguous manner. The description of Elizabeth, and Victor's view and treatment of her indicate that Mary Shelley tried to accommodate the prevailing image of women in literature, but Elizabeth's death may direct the interpretation in a different direction; what is the use of being a devoted and perfect wife if the husband is controlled by his ambitions and egotism.

¹³ Retrieved from web page <http://www.bartleby.com/144/2.html> 2012-05-28

- Elizabeth's Voice

Finally, Elizabeth is the only woman who is actually given a voice in the story. It is, though, mediated through Victor and as such it does not stand alone as Elizabeth's individual voice. In her letter to Victor she lives up to the expectations to a proper lady and devoted wife who sets aside herself in order to please her husband (they are not married at this time but it does seem the most fitting description of their relation). She cares more about Victor's desires and feelings than her own and when Caroline dies Elizabeth makes sure to comfort the grieving (even though she herself is in sorrow):

She indeed veiled her grief, and strove to act the comforter to us all. [...] She devoted herself to those whom she had been taught to call her uncle and cousins. Never was she so enchanting as at this time when she recalled the sunshine of her smiles and spent them on us. She forgot even her own regret in her endeavours to make us forget. (Shelley, 1993: 35)

It is also in connection to Caroline's death that Elizabeth is announced as the new 'mother' of the household. By letting Elizabeth take over where Caroline left, and furthermore, denying her the opportunity of travelling (like Victor) Mary Shelley draws a biting image of the idealized but passive 'angel in the house'- female stereotype. At the end she becomes victim of Victor's self-adoration and that can be interpreted as a punishment for her passiveness and obedience.

Justine Moritz

It is through the letter of Elizabeth that we are introduced to Justine. She was taken into the family as a servant because she was treated with injustice and cruelty by her biological mother. In this connection Mary Shelley succeeds in presenting a point of critique targeting classes of society when she describes the duties Justine learned as a servant of their household: "[...] a condition which, in our fortunate country, does not include the idea of ignorance, and a sacrifice of the dignity of a human being" (Shelley, 1993: 51). This seems to be a general critique of aspects of society and not just women's status, but it does confirm that *Frankenstein* contains critical comments and that Mary Shelley was not always expressing it ambiguously. Justine is, like the other women, an idealized 'pretty creature', domesticated, virtuous, passive and devoted to others. When Caroline fell sick

Justine attended her with ‘anxious affection’ and as a result she herself became sick of sorrow. She also attended her own mother on her sickbed and when Elizabeth attempts to speak her case at the trial, where she is accused of the murder of William Frankenstein, Elizabeth describes Justine’s attachment to William as that of a mother’s. In that way she fulfils two female roles; the mother and daughter. Even though Victor claims great affection towards Justine it is apparently not enough to make him save her. She is thus sacrificed at the ‘altar’ of male pride and egotism and the executor is society and its law enforcement.

Agatha De Lacey

Agatha is one of the cottagers that the creature ‘befriends’ (he does not actually befriend them because he observes them from a distance but he sees them as his friends). That she is a devoted daughter is seen in her (and Felix)’s unselfishness when they divide the little food that they have among them; they give their blind father more food than they allow themselves to have. The creature describes her: “The girl was young, and of gentle demeanour” (Shelley, 1993: 84). The creature often observes her in the kitchen or engaging in other domestic affairs but at times she is out in the field with Felix: “[...] the young girl was also busied, sometimes in the house, sometimes in the yard” (Shelley, 1993: 83). Felix and Agatha seem to be equals and help each other when needed but this distribution of chores can be the result of necessity. Before misfortune befell on the De Laceys the roles were thus divided: “His son [Felix] was bred in the service of his country, and Agatha had ranked with ladies of the highest distinction” (Shelley, 1993: 94). She is, though, more active than the four other women and as a result, perhaps, she does not end up dead.

Safie, the Arabian

The creature has observed that the family is suffering emotionally but he cannot find the reason until the day when Arabian Safie arrives and everybody is cheerful. It is obvious from the creature’s description of her that she is different from the De Laceys in both language and looks: “Her hair of a shining raven black, and curiously braided; her eyes were dark, but gentle, although animated” [Sic] (Shelley, 1993: 90). This is in contrast to the description of Agatha: “Yet she was meanly dressed, a coarse blue petticoat and a linen jacket being her only garb; her fair hair was plaited, but not adorned: she looked patient, yet sad” (Shelley, 1993: 83). Safie’s physical appearance thus

makes her stand out just like the creature. The difference being that hers does not scare people and she can therefore 'win' them over and break down whatever prejudice there might be with her friendly personality. Besides having an exotic appearance the creature also describes her as having a "countenance of angelic beauty and expression" (Shelley, 1993: 90), which labels her as an angel but hearing her life story changes that image and she becomes everything other than ordinary and 'angel in the house'. Safie, like the creature, has a punishing and selfish father and she is therefore 'forced' to disobey and revolt against him. With Safie, Mary Shelley breaks free from the conventions and presents an independent, strong, passionate, and courageous female character and as Morrison states: "Only with Arabian Safie does Shelley step outside those societal boundaries which ensured female submission to parental direction and to dutiful, retiring domesticity" (Morrison in Fisher and Silber, 2003: 112). Mary Shelley mediates some feminist thought and critique through the character of Safie and her mother who also revolted against patriarchal society:

She [Safie's mother] instructed her daughter in the tenets of her religion and taught her to aspire to higher powers of intellect and an independence of spirit forbidden to the female followers of Muhammad. This lady died, 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 harem, allowed only to occupy herself with infantile amusements, ill-suited to the temper of her soul, now accustomed to grand ideas and a noble emulation for virtue. The prospect of marrying a Christian and remaining in a country where women were allowed to take a rank in society was enchanting to her. (Shelley, 1993: 95-6)

There is nothing ambiguous about this statement and Safie is thus Mary Shelley's feministic argument and critique of the patriarchal society and the roles ascribed to women. But the fact that she is such a small part of the story and soon forgotten questions Mary Shelley's intentions with her. One thing is for sure, it proves that Mary Shelley is aware of the inequalities between the sexes even though she relates it to a foreign continent (Asia).

Her representation of women as confined and content in stereotyped female roles as mothers, daughters, and wives may reflect aspects of society but is also an attempt to illustrate where the

problem lies. That the women are not allowed a voice in the story is a direct parallel to the real world, where the male sex was authorised to speak and women were not, especially in the public sphere. Her feministic critique can therefore be seen as a non-verbal critique since it is the women's *lack* of voice that is essential.

The Science in *Frankenstein*

So far, the analysis has concerned itself with the male and female characters, and their different relations resulting in different meanings. It has been advocated that the sexes are represented in stereotypical roles where the males are active and the women passive. Added to the males' freedom to travel and to acquire knowledge is the prevailing and ever persistent 'ambition'; an ambition that sealed the fate of Victor Frankenstein and ended in his destruction. The ambition shared by both Victor and Walton is scientific and it re-echoes the ambitions that followed the progress of science and the Industrial Revolution from Mary Shelley's contemporary society. Mary Shelley's treatment and critique of science is unique and important in the understanding of the novel: "*Frankenstein* is notable both for its grasp of the nature of the seventeenth-century scientific revolution and for its perspicacious analysis of the dangers inherent in that enterprise" (Mellor, 1989: 107). This section will therefore take a look at the science in *Frankenstein* and examine its relevance in a feministic reading of the text but also as Mary Shelley's personal critique of science *if* her opinion can be determined. But first, I will take a closer look at the ambition which is a recurring theme of the story and crucial in the understanding of Victor and Walton.

- Warning against Ambition

Victor warns Walton not to excite the same ambition that has led to his ruin on three occasions; the first is when Walton has told Victor about his ambitious voyage, and how death is not a factor to be considered, Victor bursts: "Unhappy man! Do you share my madness? Have you drank also of the intoxicating draught? Hear me – let me reveal the tale, and you will dash the cup from you lips" [Sic] (Shelley, 1993: 23). The next warning falls when Walton inquires information on the particulars of the creature's formation: "'Are you mad, my friend?' said he; 'or whither does your senseless curiosity lead you? Would you also create for yourself and the world a demonical enemy? Peace, peace! learn my miseries, and do not seek to increase your own'" (Shelley, 1993: 160). Whereas the first warning seems to be about ambition the next one appears to focus on uncontrolled

scientific curiosity. At the same time, it serves as Mary Shelley's warning against creation without any female intervention which is an act that should not be repeated. Finally, on his deathbed, Victor advises Walton to avoid ambition and instead to live a serene life: "Farewell, Walton! Seek happiness in tranquillity and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries" (Shelley, 1993: 166). Here, Victor warns Walton against ambition, but earlier he advocated for pursuing one's dreams and aspirations of glory which can be interpreted as Mary Shelley's disguise of her own opinion of the matter. Even though I agree with her critics (Mellor, Jansson) that her representation of science stays ambiguous there is reason to argue that it is her voice we hear when Victor warns against ambition. The reason for this is that his state of mind seems more at ease and sane than when he rambles about glory and ambition (Shelley, 1993: 163-4). In this context *Frankenstein* appears to take a critical stand towards science.

- Rhetoric

Anne Mellor argues that Mary Shelley also used science rhetoric to promote a feministic perspective: "Mary Shelley was one of the first to comprehend and illustrate the dangers inherent in the use of such gendered metaphors in the seventeenth-century scientific revolution" (Mellor, 1989: 89). Mellor refers to the way in which nature was described as a passive female which the 'aggressive, virile male scientist' could capture and enslave (Mellor, 1989: 89). Perhaps, in opposition to this, Mary Shelley chose male narratives solely; in that way they were accountable for both good and bad. The rhetoric also applies to Victor's creation. One of the main arguments that *Frankenstein* is a feministic critique of patriarchal society is Victor's creation of a 'human being' with no female intervention. Not only does this show that men looked down upon women and therefore strove to create a society where women were not needed, it also shows that breaking the laws of nature and the natural process of creation will end in disaster. At the same time it serves as a response to some of the theories that were prevalent at the time concerning the reason for 'monstrous' births.

- Monstrous Births in *Frankenstein*

It is certain that Mary Shelley was familiar with the ideas of Erasmus Darwin who in his *Zoonomia* (1801) states: "... that the mother does not contribute to the formation of the living ens in normal generation, but is necessary only for supplying its nutriment and oxygenation" [Sic] thus

concluding that all monstrous births were to be blamed on the female as results from either excessive or insufficient nourishment in the egg or uterus (Darwin in Mellor, 1989: 98). Mary Shelley shows that not only will the physical exclusion of women in the creation process have a monstrous outcome also the exclusion of the emotional nurturing that a mother provides will create a monster. The creature is, therefore, the product of overconfident, glory-based science, but he is also the result of bad, and insufficient parenting caused by the fact that there was only one parent (and he did not possess the 'inherent nurturing qualities usually accredited to women' wherefore he failed as a 'mother' (Morrison in Fisher and Silber, 2003: 113)).

Mary Shelley's inclusion of actual scientific ideas found in the literature of her time and her ability to comprehend its implications not only proves her intelligence but also indicates that she did indeed intend to do more than just scare people with her story. An incorporation of concrete scientific ideas from the contemporary society will undoubtedly give rise to discussion and Mary Shelley must have had reasons to do so. Other than that, her grasp of science and aptitude to transform it into fiction allows an assumption that she could do so in other areas as well; promoting feministic ideas for instance. In that context, Mary Shelley's choice of Victor's male 'pregnancy' and subsequent 'birth' of the creature can be interpreted as an example of what will happen without women and thus verifying their importance and status in society.

- The Different Sciences

Lastly, it should be mentioned that *Frankenstein* distinguishes between 'good' and 'bad' science and even though Jansson states that Mary Shelley stays ambiguous as to her own opinion about this it is my conviction that she does in fact take a stand. A distinction in itself functions as taking a stand since it implies that one is preferred over another. That she is able to distinct also shows that she had a sound grasp of the different concepts. Mellor describes the basic notion of the two sciences; the good science tries to describe accurately the functions of the physical universe whereas the bad science tries to control or change the physical universe through human intervention. "Implicitly she celebrates the former, which she associates most closely with the work of Erasmus Darwin, while she calls attention to the dangers inherent in the latter, found in the work of Davy and Galvani" (Mellor, 1989: 90).

Mary Shelley's novel implicitly invokes Darwin's theory of gradual evolutionary progress to suggest both the error and the evils of Victor Frankenstein's bad science. The genuine improvement of the species can result only from the conjunction of male and female sexuality. In trying to have a baby without a woman, Victor Frankenstein has failed to give his child the mothering and nurturing it requires (Mellor, 1989: 101)

When Victor creates the creature he chooses the bad science in trying to control and challenge nature wherefore he also fails, and that must be seen as Mary Shelley's personal opinion and as an argument that children need both parents in order to make it.

The Stereotyped Women in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*

Frankenstein is by most critics regarded as belonging to the literary genre of Gothic, and Mary Shelley's own introduction to the 1831 edition declared it a ghost story inaugurated by a ghost story competition (Botting, 1991: 36). In doing so, she also tried to downplay its true nature as a work of multiple layers and political comments and instead present it as a mere cautionary tale. As discussed throughout this assignment *Frankenstein* does not muster many female characters and the ones that do figure are stereotypes of traditional female roles as mothers, wives, and daughters. To examine the reason and meaning of this choice, I will now include a work from the same genre (the Gothic) to give an image of how women were conventionally presented in the genre.

The inclusion of *Otranto* will not only present how women were presented in the genre but also by a male author. In *Otranto*, the women's stereotyped and virtuous behaviour comes to express a male expectation and wish for idealised women. The female readers of Gothic who readily accepted the genre's premise of angelic and innocent but also helpless women who were persecuted by villains and rescued by heroes, also accepted the confinements which these stereotyped images resulted in. With *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley moved away from this representation by killing the stereotypes and show the consequences of eliminating women from society.

The Castle of Otranto, written by parliament member Horace Walpole in 1767 is considered as *the* originator of the Gothic genre which is also the reason for its appearance in this assignment. Mary Shelley made a conscious choice when she decided to write within this genre which makes the difference in time between the two works less important. Instead, the focus is pointed to the elements of Gothic that allowed her to promote her ideas and, furthermore, to the fact that Gothic had the largest amount of female readers than any other genre at the time. *Otranto* will only be used as a point of reference to the Gothic genre's representation of women and the focus will thus be on the female characters of the story.

In 1764, a translation of an ancient Italian manuscript of the medieval times was published as *The Castle of Otranto* – or so it seemed. In reality, it was the work of Horace Walpole, a man with a political status and reputation, who with this text started a new way of writing and the genre of Gothic fiction (Spector 1984: 83). The text created uproar in critical circles for its supernatural contents which stood in contrast to an age of reason and enlightenment. Walpole expected that his story would inspire negative publicity which was also the reason why he chose to disguise himself under the pseudonym of William Marshal, a translator. And just like Mary Shelley he also apologized for the audacity of his story when he revealed himself as the author. Where she had to explain how she – a young *girl* – could think such a 'hideous idea', Walpole apologized for his reinstatement of the supernatural elements that otherwise belonged to a feudal past. The supernatural was an element which later became defining for the Gothic genre.

Elements of Gothic

Since *Otranto* is viewed as the instigator of the Gothic genre, it is evaluated not only as a single work, but as the founder of a genre. To discuss elements of Gothic in *Otranto* can, however, pose a complex task, since elements necessitate recurrence before they can be defined as such. However, elements from *Otranto* can be distinguished as characteristic for the Gothic that we know today. "Gothic fictions of the Romantic period are constructed as curious compounds of the unknown and the too well-known" (Lynch in Maxwell and Trumpener, 2008: 47). The unknown refers to the diverse ways of surprising readers with twists, supernatural events, etc. whereas the 'too well-known' is a consequence of genre and the readers' expectations; the unexpected is expected. This was also part of the genre's success because readers knew what they were getting into. Some of the

elements from *Otranto* that have later come to be characteristic of the Gothic genre are the location, preferably an ancient castle¹⁴ with a gloomy atmosphere, and titles which include ‘castle’ or ‘romance’ or references to the past. The plot can also be stereotyped, as Donna Heiland describes the plot of a ‘classic gothic novel’ in her book *Gothic & Gender*: “[...] an innocent young woman trapped by one man and rescued by another” (Heiland, 2004: 1). This element is termed “the persecuted woman”, or, “the damsel in distress# and is often a central theme of a Gothic story but it was not an invention that Walpole made, more likely, he borrowed it from Samuel Richardson (*Pamela* (1740), *Clarissa* (1747)) and then refined it into a characteristic of Gothic. It is a characteristic that objectifies and victimizes women by detaining them in the role as weaker and inferior to men and perhaps the reason why Mary Shelley discarded this plot. In actuality, *Frankenstein* does not live up to any of these characteristics since it takes place in the recent past (Walton’s letters date 17--), there are no castles, and the title even uses the word ‘modern’ which is in contrast to the ‘conventional’ reference to the past. But it is not the intention of this section to discuss whether or not *Frankenstein* is a Gothic story. Instead, Walpole’s story is meant as a blueprint of how women were portrayed in the genre which will provide yet another argument into the discussion of the meaning of Mary Shelley’s minimalistic and stereotyped representation of women in her story.

The Castle of Otranto

Otranto follows the antagonistic prince of Otranto Manfred who has come to his title by the usurpation of his ancestors. He is desperate to keep the ownership of Otranto but as his only heir, his weak son Conrad, is crushed and killed in mysterious and supernatural circumstances, and a prophecy declaring that the real owner of Otranto will eventually take back what is his, Manfred is forced to take other measures in order to keep the power of Otranto. The story then concerns itself with unrightfully usurpation, almost incestuous alliances, mixed identities, a romance, and supernatural events which can be interpreted as being almost acts of cosmic intervention and judgement. Manfred meets resistance in the form of human interference such as the priest Jerome, the young and well-mannered peasant Theodore (who later turns out to be the son of Jerome and the rightful heir to Otranto) and finally by his object of passion; the young Isabella who was to marry

¹⁴ The element of castles also refer to the genre’s connection to the architectural style of Gothic as described in E. J. Clery’s introduction to the story in the 1998 edition edited by W. S. Lewis with Introduction and revised Notes by E. J. Clery. Here, Clery distinguishes between ‘gothic’ referring to the historical period and ‘Gothic’ referring to the 18th century aesthetic movement (Clery in *Otranto*: VII).

Conrad. The plot is thus concerned with male lineage and as Heiland suggests: “Early gothic novels make absolutely clear the genre’s concern with exploring, defining, and ultimately defending patriarchy” (Heiland, 2004: 8). This also falls into line with the representation of men as active, strong, and heroes/villains whereas the women are portrayed as passive, weak, submissive, but yet devoted wives/daughters/mothers in many gothic novels. Heiland elaborates her reading of gothic novels as promoters of patriarchy:

For gothic novels are all about patriarchies, about how they function, what threatens them, what keeps them going. And what becomes even clearer as one reads these novels is that patriarchy is not only the subject of gothic novels, but is itself a gothic structure. Patriarchy inevitably celebrates a male creative power that demands the suppression – and sometimes the outright sacrifice – of women. (Heiland, 2004: 10-11)

What Heiland says is that a patriarchal society structure is a Gothic structure, and as such the two terms merge and become each other’s reflection. Mary Shelley took the consequence of the gothic genre’s celebration of male creative power quite literally and excluded female intervention from the ‘pregnancy’ and ‘birth’ thus placing the entire responsibility onto the father; the man. As mentioned earlier the women in *Frankenstein* are all minor characters and even though none of them are ‘damsels in distress’ they are constrained and held ‘prisoner’ by the male narrators due to the fact that their voices are not expressed nor heard. The Gothic tradition allows the persecuted woman to be saved by a heroic prince as a reward of her virtues and submission but in *Frankenstein* the only reward/punishment for this angelic demeanour is death. In order to discuss whether this is a direct reaction to Walpole and Gothic’s representation of women, a closer look at the three women in *Otranto* will now be conducted.

The Women in *Otranto*

That women are valued as less important than men is made clear already from the first lines of *Otranto* when Manfred’s affections towards Conrad, his son, and Matilda, his daughter are described: “[...] he was the darling of his father, who never showed any symptoms of affection to Matilda” (Walpole, 2005: 10). Even though Conrad is described as a sickly youth with no

promising disposition Manfred values him more because he is his *son* and heir. There is no doubt that Manfred prefers Conrad over Matilda, which can be seen in his rude rejection of her attempt to console him after the death of Conrad: “Begone! I do not want a daughter” (Walpole, 2005: 17). Furthermore, his obsession with providing a male heir, after the death of Conrad, supports Heiland’s comment on the Gothic novel as concerned with patriarchy.

Another interesting point is put forth at the beginning of the novel: “... but she [Hippolita, Manfred’s wife] never received any other answer than her own sterility, who had given him but one heir” (Walpole, 2005: 10). Not only does this inform the reader that Matilda, a woman, will not do as a rightful heir it also blames the insufficiency of producing a male child on the woman. Later on in the story when Manfred has decided to marry Isabella himself he reflects that she, a young woman, will be able to give him a son. And of course, he does not even consider that the ‘fault’ may reside in *his* reproductive abilities.

Finally, the first phrase of *Otranto* makes clear that women are trading objects that can be used at their father’s disposal in contracting marriages: “Manfred had contracted a marriage for his son with the Marquis of Vicenza’s daughter, Isabella; and she had already been *delivered* by her guardians *into the hands of Manfred*” [My italics] (Walpole, 2005: 10). The words in italic emphasise Isabella’s status as an object that can be traded with, and is also a comment on all women’s status in society. In connection to this, it should be mentioned that Walpole tried to represent a reality from the Middle Ages which also had an influence on his representation of women but what is important is how women were represented in Gothic literature, regardless of when the story is supposed to take place. But as mentioned by Gubar and Gilbert: “[...] women in patriarchal societies have historically been reduced to *mere* properties, to characters and images imprisoned in male texts because generated solely [...] by male expectations and designs” (Gubar and Gilbert, 2000: 12).

Hippolita

Hippolita is the wife of Manfred and mother of Matilda and Conrad. Isabella also regards Hippolita as her mother since her own mother died in childbed (Walpole, 2005: 73). Hippolita is the archetype

of the devoted wife, and she *is* wife before she is mother: “he [Manfred] is dearer to me even than my children” (Walpole, 2005: 18). She is described as an amiable woman to be respected for her virtues and benevolence: “The dignity and patient firmness of Hippolita penetrated him [Isabella’s father Frederic] with respect” (Walpole, 2005: 99) and her “[...] beneficent soul ever melts for the distressed” (Walpole, 2005: 47). She acts like the proper lady in all aspects and even in her own grief of having lost a child she considers Manfred’s feelings over her own when she “amidst the transports of her own sorrow frequently demanded news of her lord” (Walpole, 2005: 16). Hippolita seems to represent the ideal woman and she is the character who gains most from the otherwise tragic events. She must endure a great many trials but throughout the story she remains faithfully obedient to Manfred and in her faith to the powers of heaven. She does lose her two children but as she herself utters: Manfred is more important to her than they are, so when he at the end resigns from the power of Otranto she gets what she has wished for all the time: “She had oft urged Manfred to resign the principality, which the delicacy of her conscience rendered an hourly burthen to her” (Walpole, 2005: 116). Both Hippolita and Manfred devote themselves to religion and enter convents.

- The Curse of the Obedient Wife

Throughout the novel, Hippolita is used by Walpole as an agent for informing the young female characters and thus also the readers about women’s duties towards their husbands and fathers: “remember thou [addressed to Isabella] dost not depend on thyself; thou hast a father” and addressing both Matilda and Isabella “It is not ours to make elections for ourselves: heaven, our fathers, and our husbands must decide for us” (Walpole, 2005: 112-3). In contrast to the women in *Frankenstein*, Hippolita is given plenty of ‘space’ to talk but all she talks about is her love and obedience to Manfred and that may be the reason why she is allowed to talk at all. Whenever a female character is about to say something negative she is silenced in one way or the other. For example when Isabella tries to uncover Manfred’s impious intentions of marrying her and divorcing Hippolita, the latter hushes her to silence. And when Matilda’s maid Bianca is revealing (unconsciously) to Frederic Manfred’s attempt at bribing her to obtain information about Isabella and Theodore Manfred continually interrupts her. Hippolita even silences herself in the situation where the priest Jerome in the presence of Manfred is attempting to tell why Isabella fled from the castle: “Hippolita’s countenance declared her astonishment and impatience to know where this

would end. Her silence more strongly spoke her observance of Manfred” (Walpole, 2005: 55). So, even though she is anxious to know more, she keeps her silence and as mentioned earlier ‘to be secret is to be secreted’ and in this case Hippolita is secreted by Manfred’s mere presence. He is letting her know, non-verbally, that it is not her place or right to speak at this moment and she obeys. Hippolita’s devotion and obedience to Manfred is total when she ‘sacrifices’ herself by approving of a divorce because she has “[...] no will but that of my Lord and the Church” and ultimately she believes that “Thy fate depends on thy father” (Walpole, 2005: 121 and 116).

Manfred, on the other hand, treats Hippolita poorly and with little sign of respect as is seen in his first attempt at persuading Isabella to marry him by exclaiming: “”Curse on Hippolita!” cried Manfred. “Forget her from this moment as I do”” and “Hippolita is no longer my wife; I divorce her from this hour. Too long has she cursed me by her unfruitfulness. My fate depends on having sons, and this night I trust will give a new date to my hopes” (Walpole, 2005: 20-21). Besides treating her badly, Manfred also takes her obedience for granted because it is after all expected from a wife: “Presuming on the unshaken submission of Hippolita, he flattered himself that she would not only acquiesce with patience to a divorce, but would obey, if it was his pleasure” (Walpole, 2005: 40).

Manfred is by far the most unfortunate and punished character of the story. It seems that he is not only deemed by the human agents surrounding him but also by his own consciousness which appears to be the motivating force behind some of the supernatural apparitions such as the walking and sighing picture in the gallery. Finally, an almost cosmic judge interferes with Manfred’s plans making sure that he does not succeed and in that way the supernatural element of *Otranto* takes on the role as the moral instructor of the story.

- Hippolita’s role

Lastly, even though it can be argued that towards the end Hippolita is erected and rewarded for her firmness in obeying her husband and her religion, the distinction between men and women, their roles, and qualities throughout the novel is clear: the men are allowed to be heroes and the women victims. Here, we return to Gubar and Gilbert’s (and Mary Wollstonecraft for that matter) definition of the different roles expected of the two sexes where the man is strong, resourceful, and active and

the woman is frail, submissive, and passive. And as respected and virtuous Hippolita may be, she is still not regarded an equal to Manfred since he keeps certain knowledge from her because of her sex: "I do not use to let my wife be acquainted with the secret affairs of my state; they are not within a woman's province" (Walpole, 2005: 54). Later in the story Frederic makes use of a 'positive discrimination' when he ponders whether a woman's ear might not be too delicate to hear what he has to tell (Walpole, 2005: 99). In that respect, the lines between men and women are drawn and there is no room for transgressing the lines without punishment. Hippolita's daughter, Matilda, meets death at the hand of Manfred and that can be interpreted as Manfred inflicting pain and punishment onto himself but it can also be seen as Matilda's punishment for transgressing the boundaries.

Matilda

Matilda, an eighteenth year-old virgin, is described as beautiful and kind. Yet, as has been mentioned, she does not enjoy her father's love or interest simply because of her sex. It is also insinuated that Matilda, like her mother, is very religious and has oft considered taking the veil. Bianca, her maid, reveals that she is also a hopeless romantic engaged in daydreaming and gazing for hours at the portrait of the handsome prince Alfonso. These characteristics make her a meta-comment on the Gothic genre itself since these were viewed as the traits of the typical reader. Janice Radway's seminal sociological study of why women read romance fiction, *Reading the Romance* (1991), despite of it being a recent work concerning contemporary tendencies, re-echoes the view on female readers in Walpole and Mary Shelley's period:

Romance reading is valued ... because the experience is *different* from ordinary existence. Not only is it a relaxing release from the tension produced by daily problems and responsibilities, but it creates a time or space within which a woman can be entirely on her own, preoccupied with her own personal needs, desires and pleasure. (Radway quoted in Makinen, 2001: 11)

That a woman by reading can be 'entirely on her own' and thus attending her 'own personal needs' was exactly what was feared about women entering the world of literature as readers and writers.

The obvious reason being that they would no longer devote all of their attention to serving their husbands and taking care of the children. Following the 'directions' for a proper lady this would result in a disassociation from that category. Matilda's obsession with the picture of Alfonso and that she is intrigued with the fact that it is a 'mystery' why Hippolita has encouraged her to pray at the picture (Walpole, 2005: 43) are attempts at transgression because it diverts her attention away from her womanly duties and responsibilities. Matilda's fascination with Alfonso takes her away from the triviality and hardships of everyday life and into a romanticised fantasy world of desire and mysterious love. Her 'hobby' of staring at the picture for hours resembles the activity of reading and finding pleasure in Gothic stories which would scare and surprise. But Gothic plots also involved chivalric knights who saved the pretty princess. That kind of enjoyment for women was frowned upon because it would confront them with their own reality and instead inspire false hopes and expectations of a knight in shining armour who would come to their rescue and live a happily ever after. Matilda's transgression, therefore, lies in her activities of pleasuring herself with the fantasy of Alfonso, thus, setting other duties aside. In addition, Mary Shelley and other women writers also transgressed their boundaries by writing. Writing allowed them to imagine realities and fantasies of their own, and, other than that, it was an activity which did not have relations to domestic tasks. Therefore, women writers transgressed their natural roles in society just like Matilda transgressed her role as the virgin daughter by choosing a "lover" from her own desires. A decision otherwise reserved for Manfred, her master and father. In this context, choosing Alfonso is also choosing Theodore because Theodore is described as an embodiment of Alfonso.

- Matilda's obedience to her mother and father

Another 'crime' that Matilda 'commits' is that her affection and obedience towards Hippolita exceeds those of Manfred since "she [Hippolita] is the dearest thing I [Matilda] have on earth" (Walpole, 2005: 114). An example of her obedience towards Hippolita is found at the beginning of the story where Conrad is found dead and they all retire to each their rooms. Manfred has explicitly ordered that nobody should disturb him but yet "[...] solicitude for him, backed by the commands of her mother, encouraged her to venture disobeying the orders he had given" (Walpole, 2005: 17). In fact, her obedience towards Hippolita is what gets her killed; Manfred finds her and Theodore at the tomb of Alfonso and mistaking Matilda for Isabella he stabs her but the reason why Matilda is at the tomb is at Hippolita's command: "Indeed, I came not hither to meet Theodore. I found him

praying at this tomb, whither my mother sent me to intercede for thee” (Walpole, 2005: 137-8). And Matilda concludes that this situation is also the reason why she is punished with death “I vowed never to see Theodore more – perhaps that has drawn down this calamity – but it was not intentional – can you [addressing Hippolita] pardon me?” (Walpole, 2005: 141). It is thus implied that she has overstepped her boundaries and is punished for it.

- Matilda’s Last Words

Even though Matilda dies, she does so with grace and serenity and like a proper lady she focuses more on the feelings of others than on her own situation. Her last efforts are spent on trying to reunite and secure the bond between Hippolita and Manfred but the latter is too concerned with his own guilt to “[...] support this act of pathetic piety” (Walpole, 2005: 139). It is also insinuated that Matilda wishes Theodore and Isabella to be married but she expires before she can say it directly and thus leaving room for doubt. But Isabella and Theodore are married because Theodore concludes that it is better to be with a woman who knew Matilda so they can honour her memory. And to be married to a man who is in love with another (dead) woman is Isabella’s punishment.

Isabella

Isabella stands out in relation to Hippolita and Matilda who are both submissive and passive observers in the story. Isabella, on the other hand, tries to take her fate into own hands when she escapes from Manfred. The mere fact that she refuses to marry him is a breach on her expected duties and submission to male authority. Furthermore, her countenance towards the death and memory of Conrad shows that she is not as virtuous and innocent as Matilda is. This is insinuated by Bianca who reveals to Matilda that Isabella would let her “[...] talk to her of young men: and when a handsome cavalier has come to the castle, she has owned to me that she wished your brother Conrad resembled him” (Walpole, 2005: 45). Isabella is thus represented as a woman with lust and desire which is supported by her jealousy and vengefulness towards Matilda when she learns that she and Theodore like each other. Together with Bianca she presents the foul qualities ‘inherited’ in women.

Manfred's almost incestuous and most certainly inappropriate intention of marrying Isabella is one of the few incidents that arouse the reader's sympathy for her. She is not idealized like Hippolita and Matilda but she does possess some characteristics of the stereotyped 'angel in the house' and 'damsel in distress' (to use the terminology from the Gothic genre). She qualifies as the angel in the house because she is described as a very beautiful, virtuous, young girl with no autonomy since she is placed under the guardianship of Manfred and Hippolita. She is also objectified and used by both Manfred and Frederic as a commodity in transacting a marriage first to Conrad, then to Manfred, and at last Frederic "offers" her to the newly pronounced prince, Theodore. As for her role as the persecuted woman it is clear that she is 'haunted' by a 'villain' (these words should not be taken as seriously as they sound because Manfred is not a villain in the true meaning of the word; at times he is described with a comical and almost pathetic undertone and it is also stressed that it is circumstance which has led him to undertake such an improper conduct). Nonetheless, it is enough to make Isabella escape and even though she escapes on her own initiative she is helped by a man, Theodore, to accomplish her flight. When Theodore subsequently declares himself her protector he not only turns himself into a chivalric hero he also makes her the subject of his heroic conduct. Isabella is therefore somewhere in-between the role of a stereotyped woman and representing the kind of behaviour that was feared of women.

Bianca

Bianca is a maid to the other women, and is by no means the angel in the house, rather, she is the ears of the house; she is presented as being very officious and nosy. She even tries to trick Matilda into revealing a secret of Hippolita's by using 'feminine wiles' letting Matilda know that Isabella would have told her, which is a kind of reversed psychology but it does not work (Walpole, 2005: 45). Bianca loves gossip and does not possess the same pride that Hippolita and Matilda displays but this can be connected to the fact that she is not of noble blood but of the lower classes. This class discrimination was a conviction that Walpole uttered in his second preface¹⁵ to the story where he claimed authorship. This is also seen in *Frankenstein* and in Mary Shelley's personal convictions (as for Mary Wollstonecraft as well who believed in education for women – of a certain class). In this context, therefore, Bianca's inappropriate behaviour is not only ascribed to her sex but also her social status.

¹⁵ This second preface is included in the edition from Oxford World's Classics (Pp. 9-14)

Bianca is 'freed' from the confinements of being an angelic lady and, instead, she is a woman with a job. However, Walpole makes her regret her position as she sacrificed a life as a married woman in order to aspire in her career: "[...] would I had been content to wed Francesco! this comes of ambition!" [Sic] (Walpole, 2005: 128). Furthermore, earlier in the story when she and Matilda discuss husbands and marriage Bianca, rather than Matilda, promotes the importance of being married instead of a life in solitude (in a convent): "[...] a bad husband is better than no husband at all" and "There was no harm neither in what I said: it is no sin to talk of matrimony – and so, Madam, as I was saying, if my Lord Manfred should offer you a handsome young Prince for a bridegroom, you would drop him a curtsy, and tell him you would rather take the veil?" (Walpole, 2005: 43). And finally, Bianca concludes that she prays for a husband (Walpole, 2005: 44) which indicates that she is not content with her life without a husband after all.

Killing the Aesthetic Ideal

Following Gilbert and Gubar's terminology of "angels" and "monsters" as the "eternal types" which men have invented to describe women in literature (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 17), Walpole certainly does describe the "angel" but there is no actual "monster"; Bianca only shares characteristics with the "monster" woman. However, Walpole's representation of women offered a limited version for female authors to draw on in their own writings if they did not wish to 'step outside the norm'. Gilbert and Gubar include ideas from Virginia Woolf and describe the paradox:

[...] a woman writer must examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of "angel" and "monster" which male authors have generated for her. Before we women can write, declared Virginia Woolf, we must "kill" the "angel in the house". In other words, women must kill the aesthetic ideal through which they themselves have been "killed" into art. (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 17)

Male authors "killed" women by confining them in stereotyped roles in literature but in society as well and in order to achieve freedom women and women writers had to "kill" the role that had been

assigned to them. Mary Shelley examined the images of women through her exhaustive reading of various works in different genres, so, she was fully aware of how women were presented in literature. Perhaps more important, she was aware of the critique and infamous status that her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, had received posthumously: “Mary Wollstonecraft was attacked as a “philosophical wanton” and a monster, while her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) was called “A scripture, archly fram’d for propagating w[hore]s” [Sic] (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000: 222). Criticism like this must have had an impact on Mary Shelley and her future writing. The degradation of her outspoken, feminist mother and women in general together with the restraining images of women in literature and in science could serve as possible reasons why Mary Shelley tried to pass off the novel as mere entertainment. At the same time, these aspects point to an explanation of why she felt a need to write *Frankenstein*: “The present view is that the story she chose to write is the story she needed to write” (Badalamenti, 2006: 438). She had an opinion on society but certainly also about her own experiences in life which she tried to come to terms with by writing *Frankenstein*.

Conclusion

Frankenstein was first published in 1818, written by the 21-year-old, Mary Shelley, daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, and the wife of Percy Shelley. The novel has established itself in literary history which its vivid afterlife verifies. *Frankenstein* is still important because it bears witness of a time where authors were presumed to be men and women were assumed to be at home. Despite of this, Mary Shelley wrote her story, had it published, and ever since it has been scrutinized and analysed using various perspectives. Mellor states that modern feminists still can find useful insights in her work because: “[...] Shelley’s personal experiences inspired her to document the ways in which the traditional middle-class family can mutilate the lives of women” (Mellor, 1989: 217). But on the other hand, Mary Shelley’s obsessive preference for egotistical male protagonists at the expense of female representation evidence her fascination with masculine domination (Mellor, 1989: 217) and in that way underscores a feministic reading of the novel. However, the novel’s almost exclusion of women and the fact that it can still be interpreted as promoting a feministic message is what makes it interesting. As Ellen Moers comments: “*Frankenstein* brought a new sophistication to literary terror, and it did so without a heroine, without even an important female victim. Paradoxically, however, no other Gothic work by a woman writer, perhaps no other literary work of any kind by a woman, better repays examination in the light of the sex of its author.” (Moers, 1978: 91-2).

This assignment has tried to read between the lines in order to understand this minimalistic and stereotyped representation of women in the story, taking the author’s sex and literary background into consideration. The purpose being to comprehend *why* Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* with such ambiguity and *which* elements of the novel can be interpreted as a critical comment on, and resistance to, patriarchal control in literature as well as in the family.

The first obstacle that Mary Shelley had to face in her attempt to produce “anything worthy of notice” was her sex. She lived in a time where men and women were separated in the public and private spheres. A woman’s finest characteristics were described by Rousseau: “The first and most important qualification in a woman is good nature or sweetness of temper” (Rousseau quoted in Moers, 1978: 17). Women were not expected to write, and it was common belief that they did not even possess the talent of *creating* a text, in every meaning of the word. There was, therefore, an anticipation of a distinct female writing style and it was not meant as a compliment. The “female

style” was expected to be: “Breathless, disorganized, “artless” informality” (Moers, 1978: 64). Literary recognition was measured by male authors’ standards, and perhaps, therefore, did Mary Shelley choose to undertake a male oriented narration and use male generated images of women. To employ the images of women as “angels” or “monsters” she, at first glance, subdued to the conventions of writing, and in that way, avoided drawing negative attention to that aspect of the story. At the same time, it was the way in which she criticized those same conventions. She excluded women from the main narration, just like women were being marginalized in her contemporary society, and as a result, every catastrophe that happens in the story is caused by male actions. The images of idealized women that she duplicated in her story were all dead at the end; the character traits that had defined them as idealized women were the cause of their deaths. Thus proving that it is a restricting role for women and it cannot persist. Her minimalistic representation of women stands in contrast to her own sex, and in that way, turns into a parody and a paradox which illuminates the uneven representation of women in literature.

A marginalization of female representation also means a majority of male representation. This assignment has assumed a close connection between Mary Shelley’s own life and the events and characters of *Frankenstein*. Her semi-biographical style can be read as a way to make general comments on the tendencies in her contemporary society; for example, her depiction of the relationship between the egotistical, self-obsessed, ambitious, male scientist and the equally ambitious science which resulted in disastrous consequences. Through the callous Victor and the love craving creature, Mary Shelley advocates for greater involvement in the act of parenting on the father’s part which indicates that *Frankenstein* “[...] portrays the consequences of the failure of the family, the damage wrought when the mother – or a nurturant parental love – is absent” (Mellor, 1989: 39). But Victor and *Frankenstein* can also be read as Mary Shelley’s personal critique of Godwin and Percy’s treatment of her, and in that way, the novel presents itself as an expression of her frustrations and (hurt) feelings towards these two men. In that context, her exclusion of women, and promotion of male experience, is an expression of her fascination with dominating male figures, and the novel can therefore not be read as containing a feministic message. However, the death of Victor and the unsuccessful ending of the story imply that she did not endorse the version of Percy and Godwin that she had portrayed with Victor.

Mary Shelley's scarce representation of female characters stands in contrast to the general Gothic story where the "damsel in distress" was a recurrent and typical element of the plot, thus, women tended to be an integral part of the story. The example of *Otranto* showed how a male author represented women, which could be a contributing reason why Mary Shelley left main female characters out of the story. Walpole included women in his story, but at the same time he presented them using male generated images of stereotyped and idealised women which were inspired by male expectations of women. The women spoke in the story but their words were not their own. Instead, they belonged to Walpole who allowed them to talk about "typical" female interests which meant domestic related subjects and love. Perhaps, as a reaction to this, Mary Shelley chose all male narrators, eluding the typical version of women as "angels" and "monsters". Instead, she employed these women types in minor characters and then "set them free" by killing them.

Mary Shelley's choice of the Gothic genre is due to the character of the story but it is, however, interesting that the Gothic genre was dominated by female authors and readers. If Mary Shelley anticipated that a great part of *Frankenstein's* readers would be female then the argument that it promotes a feministic message and warning against exclusion of women is empowered. *Frankenstein* shows how science can be used to exclude women from society, and from reproduction even. Her treatment of science bears witness of her involvement in the developing philosophical considerations at the time. By letting Victor create all by his own, Mary Shelley suggests that men also can be the cause of "monstrous" births, and that it does not all rely on the female's reproduction abilities. This is both an expression of the tragic events she herself experienced with abortions and early deaths of children, but it also stresses the importance of both a male and female parent. In that context, the novel serves to warn against the emerging science and its implications of family life.

Despite the fact that neither Percy nor Mary Shelley herself believed that her literary talents could match up to his or of her parents', with *Frankenstein* she proved that she was able to write a story of great ambiguity and subtle critique of the surrounding society and people around her. So subtle that Percy did not even see the resemblance between himself and Victor. The ambiguity and multiple layers of the story is what make *Frankenstein* forever relevant and important.

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