

Vassar College

Digital Window @ Vassar

Senior Capstone Projects

2019

Fashioning Frankenstein: a fundamentalist experiment in edenic after-tastes

Haley Hill

Vassar College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalwindow.vassar.edu/senior_capstone

Recommended Citation

Hill, Haley, "Fashioning Frankenstein: a fundamentalist experiment in edenic after-tastes" (2019). *Senior Capstone Projects*. 871.

https://digitalwindow.vassar.edu/senior_capstone/871

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Window @ Vassar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of Digital Window @ Vassar. For more information, please contact library_thesis@vassar.edu.

Fashioning Frankenstein:

A Fundamentalist Experiment in Edenic After-tastes

Haley Hill
Leslie Dunn
Fall Semester 2018

Introduction

In regards to Genesis, it can be said of Eve that: at the core of her story's overarching narrative lies the creation of man. Made in the mold of a set of ideals, he works, in isolation, to make sense of his environment. Yet: drawn from the rib of his own desires, he, himself, inadvertently creates corruption within his world, damning himself to an irreversible reality of death, despair, and, ultimately, the triumphant damnation of decay from which alone his soul may finally split off from his rotten form.

In regards to Mary Shelley's most infamous novel, it can be said that: at the core of her story's overarching chaos lies yet another creation of man. However, made in the mold of a set of ideals and then embodied and warped by his triumphant breach of the binary between life and death, the man behind the myth of *Frankenstein*, the true Adam of her book, remains shrouded in mystery as her readers, pre-equipped with the cut-and-dried Judeo-Christian notion that they should be able, with ease, to sever and define those who have sinned from those who remain innocent within the context of a moral dilemma, fight to determine who, truly, in her novel's clear-yet-constantly-coiled adaptation of the story of Adam and Eve, is the monster and who is the man.

As a true Gothic novel, *Frankenstein* relies upon the brand of horror, as explained by Sigmund Freud, which resonates with readers as their "repressed infantile complexes [are] revived" and as "the primitive beliefs" they believed to "have surmounted seem once more to [have been] confirmed" (17). Mary Shelley resurrects the earliest primitive beliefs found in the Judeo-Christian context of the human consciousness by setting her characters' sights on their lost proximity to Eden in her retelling of the Fall of Man. In doing so, she showcases the chaos which comes to men, operating within the postlapsarian reality where all post-Genesis perspectives are set, when they strive to revive the ideals which have been lost to the consequences of Adam and

Eve's actions. She sets her story off towards its Edenic resolution: the realization of a narrative's true boundaries. As the Creator of their curious dreams, Mary Shelley, a God herself with a story to tell, exacts limitations between the knowledge which she holds and the knowledge which she makes her characters earn through trial and error as they grope, in the darkness, for the Paradise they suspect they once lost.

God's punishment would prove futile to his children if Adam and Eve were to forget the Paradise to which they have foolishly relinquished their privilege to. Therefore, he forces them to eternally remember Eden by tying the life cycles of their human forms to reminiscent yet soiled versions of the earthly elements composing the Garden's grounds. "Because thou hast ... eaten of the tree ... cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field ... till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (The Book of Bereishit (Genesis) 3:17-3:19). Tied to their newly-prescribed mortality, Adam and Eve, in the ultimate "energetic denial of the power of death," populate their world as they try in vain to find divinity within their earthly realm before ultimately facing the unavoidable reality of their deaths (Freud 9). In doing so, they only exacerbate their conundrum, creating Cain and Abel. Having tainted the perfection of their own forms, they fail to create perfect children of their own. As the unpredictable nature of progeny exponentiates generationally, the images for the ideal man and for the ideal woman only fray further at their seams. As humanity continuously procreates, the exponential production of people equally increases the likelihood for uncanny resemblances between individuals as well as unholy deviations from the original pure template forms of Adam and Eve.

The most crucially “insurmountable” aspect of Genesis comes with Adam and Eve’s helplessness in the face of their expulsion out from Eden. Yet, Victor Frankenstein tries. By his hands alone, he, for the novel’s sake, expressly rejects procreation and fashions life without the help of any male or female counterpart: just the deceased flesh of humanity’s ancestors of the past.

He succeeds in his experiment and, in doing so, realizes his own failure. Like God, he channels his creative ideals into a man’s form, yet that man, in turn, cannot see the world that his Creator has bestowed upon him to be ideally-suited to his identity. Like Adam, the creature wishes for a wife, fashioned by flesh akin to his own form, to keep his ghastly frame company. Yet Victor knows -- or knows not -- the chaos that may possibly ensue should his new species of superhuman gain the ability to procreate and further populate the world which he has damaged by his own design. The creature’s desires, then, by reflecting Victor’s ideals define, truthfully, his Creator’s flaws. When denied a female companion, instead of playing the part of Adam, the creature takes on the role of Satan, channeling his lowly and lonesome despair into denying Victor either a happy marriage to his own Eve, Elizabeth, or a life itself. He vows to murder both Victor and his Eve, returning them to “dust” in order to right Victor’s initial wrong in digging up flesh from the ground and fashioning his creature’s ensured inevitable woes. Thus, Victor, by denying Elizabeth a part in any procreative act, plays Eve himself as he takes on her biblical narrative identity for being responsible for transgressing beyond the bounds that God sets for human forms.

Despite being a clear retelling of Genesis with direct references to Adam, Eve, and Paradise itself, *Frankenstein* still embeds thrills into its fated Fall as it divides its audiences’ sympathies between numerous, oscillating male narratives which aim to illuminate, yet instead

shroud further in ambiguity, the identities of the male protagonists and the antagonists: the Adams, the Gods, and the fallen angels. Each character works towards his own goal which aims to quell the chaos which has caused it to come to be. Therefore, each character, aiming to right the overarching wrongs of the situation, plays his own protagonist initially. He then sullies his life and his world in the process, and evolves into his own antagonist, bringing about his own personal Fall which detaches him morally from the origins of his pure ideals.

As ideals, by definition, aim towards a future which desires to perhaps make amends with its past, they may only ever be defined as intangible: out of reach. They exist as nothing more than a dot in the distance which darts away whenever one draws near. Thus, Shelley introduces Frankenstein's creature as an ideal. She explains that he was "a being ... of gigantic stature" which the crew aboard Walton's polar-bound ship "watched ... until he was lost among the distant inequalities of the ice"; while his size "seemed to denote that [he] was not, in reality, so distant as [was] supposed ... it was impossible to follow his track" (18-19). Thus, the creature, an ideal, remains anonymous, no matter what, to the "inequalities" of the world, despite the possible care and attention any faithful narrator, or Creator of his story, could try to fairly define him as otherwise.

Freud's theory further elaborates upon the qualities of Gothic uncanniness which lend themselves ultimately to the discrepancies in power which perhaps make the world so elusive yet hostile to the creature's identity as he stands as an unknowable ideal: "an optical delusion ... contrary to all experience," and, ultimately, unnameable (*Frankenstein* 18). He explains:

For the 'double' was originally an insurance against destruction to the ego, an 'energetic denial of the power of death' ... sprung from the soil of unbounded self-love, from the primary narcissism which holds sway in the mind of the child as in that of primitive man; and when this stage has been left behind the double takes on a different aspect. From having been an insurance of immortality, he becomes the ghastly harbinger of death. (9)

As the creature, by design, stands as a “ghastly harbinger of death,” he serves always as the negative underbelly of an act of “self-love,” ensuring him a lifetime of despair and, instead, self-hatred. He serves as an ideal, again, who can alone define the flaws in his Creator’s design. In turn, the narrative of the two characters’ relationship to one another makes exhibit of the creature's miserable existence in order to direct attention to the “primary narcissism” at the root of the Judeo-Christian God’s creation of Adam: a flaw which, in its own nature. The presence of this “primary narcissism” at the core of God’s divine, holy, plan corrupts the notion that The Lord innately stands free-of-sin.

While everything in his Garden sits before Adam as the culmination of a creative endeavor which strives towards nothing less than perfection, God sets his man loose in his world to explore and name the creatures and features of the land. When Adam concludes, after doing so, that he desires a female companion, God agrees to craft a wife for his creation yet he knows that she stands against his better judgment, for, she was not constructed as part of his original, perfect plan. Still, he sets his two children off into the Garden, allowing them to explore. He tempts them with boundaries, naming the forbidden fruit as unknowable: unnameable. In doing so, he sparks their wonder in a way which he knows shall lead them to cave the walls down around the world which he has created intentionally to only mold to Adam’s frame. To prove that his intentions were for the best: he sets Adam’s wife off to taste the fruit herself and thus teaches Adam his own lesson in disobedience, for, even while sitting passively in the Garden, he remains responsible for Eve, the fruit of his own desire, and thus responsible for the destruction of his own Paradise.

Therefore, adapting the original Fall of Man: Shelley keeps her characters' sights set on the ideals which they should never know by name and she only ever showcases the painful consequences of their desires as they glance back on the reality which they have created, indirectly, for themselves. To do so, she structures her novel as a series of retrospective accounts, all narrated to Robert Walton, the polar explorer, who, ultimately, writes of his experiences in his letters home to his sister, Mrs. Saville. Yet, even while writing back to her, he admits, his focus remain on his goal ahead of him: the North Pole, the darting dot on his map, his distant destination. Therefore, as all of her driving characters coil around the template forms of the male characters in the story of the creation of man -- playing Adam, God, and Satan in overlapping, world-collapsing ways at each other's expense -- they all highlight the ways in which female characters, to fit the ideal forms of Genesis, must only be regarded, against men's better judgments, as afterthoughts.

Springing off from Victor's ultimate denial of a mother's role and, later, his refusal to fashion his creature a companion, Mary Shelley keeps Eve figures absent in order to fit Victor's design. Aside from the creature's mother and wife, they are either pushed aside in the name of male ambition (Elizabeth or Mrs. Saville), used as scapegoats for men's wrongdoings (Justine), deceased (Frankenstein and Walton's mothers), speechless (Safie, the Arab woman who has not yet learned the regional language), or simply nothing more than a wife and daughter (Agatha). Therefore, when thinking of *Frankenstein*, a book written by a woman, while it may seem shocking that the female characters within the novel, finally being provided an outlet to share their voices from a genuine source, resonate faintly if at all. Yet it becomes increasingly apparent that, when they play the understudies in a text which calls for female actors, male agents take their own parts, performing the corruption which has truly been hidden within their roles all

along. All afterthoughts, the female characters, in whichever way they serve the men in the text, provide pivot points around which the male characters coil, like the serpents in their own Garden, turning themselves into the antagonists of their own accounts.

As Eve's identity as a woman stands in relation to her services for Adam as his wife and the mother of their children: to deny her the agency of the power she holds in relation to humanity deprives her of her identity itself. Yet Shelley shows that to take Eve's part away from her and cast the catalyzing components -- the inherently corrupt ones -- back into the palms of the men in *Frankenstein* gets deeper under their skin than any female voice could ever do. Any active woman in the novel, it seems, would likely be silenced as either a subservient or sinful creature; she might likely even be silenced as both of those traits, likening her wholly to Satan and thus a direct opponent to God's power who must, at even more dire stakes, be quelled immediately. As they all, besides the creature, turn away from women in their ambitious pursuits, they highlight the ultimate folly of man: denying the legitimacy of female authority as they search for the missing part of their soul which shall piece them back together with the Paradise that they assume they must have lost somewhere down the road: the one which shall "benefit ... all mankind" (*Frankenstein* 10).

In order to benefit all of mankind, these men must account, too, for the livelihoods of the women whom they have created, or requested their Creator to create, in order to provide them, initially, with solely the innocent and fundamentally-equal pleasures of companionship. The answer to their questions of how to resurrect Paradise sits in front of their faces, yet when they look at their mirror images of themselves, they fail to see beyond their male egos which compare and contrast them only to their fellow men. Their answer rests at the tip of their tongues, yet they fail to see the traps which they have laid for themselves. These traps undo the progress they may

make, for these traps consistently try to name, pursue, and tie down the unnameable: the next ideal. The male characters in *Frankenstein* always, in their hopes of finding the next greatest truth hidden before their eyes, like scripture's apple, within the natural landscape of their world, play Eve as they seek to tie down intangible objects. They remain eternally unable to see that they must shift their sights from desiring to find the hidden truth within the naturally-occurring wonders of their worlds. They must acknowledge instead the true nature of ideals which always render the prototypes of past perfection as inherently flawed and forgettable once the appetite for ambition sets its sights on a new seed for hidden knowledge.

Once God's soil has been labeled and defined as soiled, men must seek to find new ground for the perfection which has been lost somewhere over the course of history's narrative. In her novel, Shelley refuses to name her creature in order to shift her novel's discussions off of definitions of perfection and onto definitions for the innate chaos which accompanies ambition itself. Once Frankenstein's creature takes on the identity of an Adam-turned-Satan after making sense of his world through his reading of *Paradise Lost*, his flaws in their contesting relationship to the ideals embedded within his immaculate conception grow increasingly apparent. As the world turns to chaos for both Victor as well as his creature after the creature's realization of his flawed experimental form, Shelley raises a new question which challenges readers' perceptions of who faces the more direct consequences from the failure of the creature's identity to satisfy its narrative form as an Adamic figure; is it Victor or the creature? Is it the subject being discussed or the subject doing the discussing? Thus, in refusing to name her creature, Shelley reveals the narrative agency which she herself may hold as the Creator of the entire *Frankenstein* universe in maintaining ambiguities around her construction of her characters' identities.

As a woman, maintaining an ambiguity around one's identity places one's self in passive yet powerful opposition to the structure of the patriarchal system on a whole, for, to do so is to refuse to submit one's self to the structure which submits one, in return, to the chaotic, corrupt flaws of recycled male egos. Stemming from the legacy which Adam sets in Eden, males hold the roles to define all that they can control, yet the one thing which Adam cannot define remains the truth behind the forbidden fruit. When Eve defines it for him, she faces not only the consequences of her expulsion out from Eden but also Adam's consequential ability to forever scapegoat her -- despite having been prompted towards the apple by the serpent's male voice and her Father's teasing warning -- for the chaos which ensues in their postlapsarian realities which divide, much to their descendants' despair, the living from the dead.

Popular culture's takeaway of *Frankenstein's* moral message reduces the myth of the novel down to its immortalized form: a tale which tells of a monstrous conception of life fashioned through death. Charlotte Gordon, author of *Romantic Outlaws: a double biography* for both Mary Shelley and her mother Mary Wollstonecraft, equally tethers the qualities of Shelley's life eternally to the particularities of her birth to tether her authorial narrative to the culmination of her creative career. When examining *Frankenstein* and *Romantic Outlaws* back to back, it grows increasingly clear that Charlotte Gordon constructs, for her own narrative purposes, a recycling of literary references between her text and the pinnacle text of Shelley's life. Yet, as Shelley says herself in her "Third Introduction" to this defining novel in her career, ethical ambiguities will eternally surround confident declarations of an author's inserted yet unadmitted autobiographical ties to her work. *Romantic Outlaws* nonetheless exemplifies the narrative powers that intertextuality still effectively serves writers as they work towards realizing the goals of their own creative endeavors. Thus, Gordon's double biography, while still providing the

basic, recognizable template for the plot points of Mary Shelley's corresponding relationship with her mother, dances the dance between fictionalizing a narrative for its own adapting aims and the truth behind the identities at stake in its construction.

Furthermore, Shelley expressly desires to preserve some of her particular narratives in secrecy, especially the one which she holds with her parents -- a fact which she asserts in her "Third Introduction" to *Frankenstein* in direct opposition to her husband's desired sights for tethering her career to her parents' legacies. Warning against such an act which would make example of making sense of the world through pre-defined stories and labels, Shelley, in her novel, draws her readers' constant attention back to writers' pre-existing artistic adaptations to highlight the ways in which literary pieces may stand in conversation with each other without, sometimes, even naming names; these references stem from allusions such as her quiet reference to *Prometheus*, a mythic figure she never refers to any further by name beyond her book's title.

In *Frankenstein*, Shelley crosses paths with the texts of the other writers who functioned in her social and literary circles through both her direct, cited references to their works as well as through her more ambiguous allusions. In doing so, she highlights the divide between the masculine and feminine qualities of her intertextual devises, showcasing her own authorial agency to address the perspectives of both male and female literary figures. As *Frankenstein's* male narrators perceive and define the text's setting, her creation -- her novel -- functions with the male-driven authority which allows her to play God and make a man, a monster, and, ultimately, a myth to be revered by the Western canon extensively into the foreseeable future as it continues to be passed on, generation by generation. And still, on the other hand, as she shrouds its narrative conventions and Edenic templates in their veiled, uncanny parallels, Shelley maintains her female perspective, and the accompanying gravity of its silent commentary on the

chaotic nature of male ambition and patriarchal power structures. By this silent commentary, she recasts Adam as at least the equal to Eve at the least, as an agent of corruption and chaos.

In its final form, then, as a work of literature aware that it functions in an ancestral line of adaptations, *Frankenstein* looks back upon the scriptural values which texts may hold in fundamentally orienting individuals' identities to the characters and perspectives which they read about and through which they find their sense of self -- as shown by the creature's relationship with *Paradise Lost*. On one hand, in the process, she orients herself as a wife by directly referencing her husband's poems. On the other, as she alludes to her mother's works, she additionally perhaps addresses herself as she sees fit to her own relationship with serving her overlapping roles as being both a young mother as well as, always, a daughter to Wollstonecraft. Therefore, Mary Shelley, through her references and allusions, shares her omniscient perspective as the Creator of her novel, as, innately an Eve figure.

Thus, looking at *Frankenstein*, *Romantic Outlaws*, and the works which Shelley bumps elbows with in her work, this thesis begins, in its first chapter, like Adam. "Getting Here" looks at the defined mechanics which work explicitly to shroud and warp the story of the Garden of Eden into its uncanny webs of chaos which come to fruition by the male characters' hands who define the realities of their narrative courses. In the second chapter, "Leaving Here," then, like Eve, this thesis strives to illuminate the unsaid, scriptural misgroundings which underlie the spoken truth of the novel. In doing so, "Fashioning Frankenstein: A Fundamental Experiment in Edenic After-tastes" attempts to illuminate the flawed framework of Judeo-Christian notions as it influences the direct descendents of Adam and Eve -- all identities functioning within a Judeo-Christian context -- in navigating the power structures set in place by the primordial

family values of Genesis which, ultimately, render Eve absent -- chaotically and, perhaps creatively so.

Chapter I: Getting Here

Origin Stories, The Baseline Text, and language as a “godlike” science

The origins of Genesis persist in the self-reflective undertow of perspectives in Judeo-Christian narratives as, from its ribs, splits the concept of human consciousness which allows for individuals to draw lines and distinguish the qualities of the self from the outside world. Through their exploration of their landscape, Eden: Adam and Eve learn, respectively, his and her own differences from the world as a man and as a wife, as humans not Gods, and as humans who bear a distinction from the rest of nature, as revealed to them by their own realized nudity. Their coming of age trajectory masks its childlike qualities beneath their bodies' adult frames; still, their discovery of their perceptions of right from wrong innately holds its connections to the sole,

universal aspect of the experience of childhood: learning through trials and errors which later define the aftertastes of certain experiences and memories.

In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Victor's creature, like Adam and Eve: born with the body of a man yet the brain of a child, recounts to Robert Walton the route by which he learns how to take in knowledge and reflect upon the ways in which it sullies his mind into its eventual monstrous and murderous form. He begins by taking in the charms of nature, finding himself, as he cites the beauty of bird calls and the wonders of the seasons, enamored by his landscape. He is all alone but not yet lonely because he has not yet learned of the possibilities of interpersonal relationships. The creature's accounts of nature recreate an untouched Eden for the reader's eyes. Isolated nature is all he knows.

However, as he explores the world and finds its community structures which have been set in place, according to fundamentalist readings of scripture, by Adam and Eve's resounding acts of procreation, he sees the pleasures of companionship as well as the mutual caring bonds exchanged between parents and their children while looking in at a nuclear family occupying a cabin that he finds in the woods. Desiring to reach out to them, he slowly, like a child, begins to comprehend language, learning their names and their biographies as he is able to perceive of them. Eventually, the creature even acquires the ability to read by listening to the language lessons that a visiting Arab woman receives in order to learn to speak the regional tongue. Still, despite taking the measures necessary to mature himself into his human mindset, the creature finds, when he does finally attempt to communicate with the inhabitants of the cabin, or with any other humans later on in the course of the novel, that they all respond by striking back at him in fear of his ghastly appearance: pieced together by the resurrected flesh of the dead. Born with the mind of a child but the body of a man, once the creature gains the mind of a man to match his

body, he finds that he cannot overcome the limitations of his corporeal frame, condemning him forever to be defined by the markers of his monstrous conception.

The creature builds his identity upon the foundations of text. He marries his ability to read with his rage for the world, exhibiting the ways in which he can use his new-found information to gain agency: a phenomenon God anticipates shall occur if his children taste the fruit from the tree he has marked as the Tree of Knowledge. As he finds a copy of *Paradise Lost* and makes sense of his own identity alongside its paralleling features with Milton's depictions of Adam and Eve, the creature finds that he, the first-created son of a new form of constructed life, deserves a female companion whose form could match his own ghastly frame. When denied his request, he tells Victor: "I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed" (95). Finding himself anew as Satan: the "fallen angel," the creature makes it his mission to become a deconstructive force in Frankenstein's life. To be a child, then, perhaps means to be destructive: a trait which ties back to Eve's first bite of the apple, the bite which caves down the protective walls of the Paradise surrounding her. With that Edenic plot parallel in mind, then, it may be said -- as well as confirmed by the creature's own logic which foils Adam with Satan rather than with Eve -- that to be a daughter, in the context of Shelley's novel, may in fact be a devilish business.

Yet, to be a daughter is to be defined by society, for, alone only with Adam in the Garden, Eve is simply just a child. In Eden, she does not hold the knowledge to know that she is either nude or fundamentally different from Adam in her body's connotations. By extension, too, she neither holds the drive to procreate nor the power she may derive from its products. Therefore, in order to challenge the definitive notion that an individual's isolated, innate identity corresponds to the characteristics which society projects upon them, Shelley first provides the

creature's unbiased accounts of his pure delight in the face of nature to provide a stark divide between his original, untainted soul and his later demonic persona which he acquires as a result of humanity's rejection of his frame. In other words: by juxtaposing her characters' objective perspectives on solely the natural features of their settings with their charged, subjective emotions which they aim towards one another, Shelley provides a grounding framework to critique the cultural notion that Eve's true characteristics lie with corruption. By recognizing the catalyzing chaos of community structures and their needs to orient individuals against individuals, she de-contextualizes the female form outside of the stories which relate her frame to the rest of humanity's family structures and thus pulls Eve's frame away from its defining quality as the woman whose single-handed action leads to humanity's expulsion out from Paradise.

The Western Canon's Origin Myth and its Uncanny Resemblances

i.: Intertextuality

Charlotte Gordon, too, de-contextualizes the biographies of Mary Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft by recontextualizing them out of their settings and into side-by-side, alternating chapters in order to examine the way the myth of Wollstonecraft's legacy perhaps influences Shelley. In her biographical endeavor to explore the possible role that having an absent mother might have played on Shelley's life leading up to her construction of *Frankenstein*, Gordon, in a rhetorical tactic aimed at swaying her readers' trust towards her own exacted conclusions, poeticizes Shelley's life with language that bears an uncanny resemblance to Victor's creature's upbringing. She begins: the then "Mary Godwin had been born ... at the end of a month when a comet had burned through the London skies. People all over London had speculated about its meaning. A happy omen, her parents had thought. They could not know that Wollstonecraft

would die of childbed fever ten days later, leaving behind a daughter so small and weak it seemed likely she would soon join her mother” (3-4). Thus, Gordon births the beginning of Shelley’s biography in the rhetoric of an origin story, shrouding it in cosmic, wondrous flame and setting her life’s legacy on its narrative course towards becoming, in her own way, a falling spark bestowed from some greater force: perhaps, by some sort of *Modern Prometheus*.

Born of almost supernatural stakes, Gordon continues: “she had entered the world in such a tragic fashion that sorrow trailed behind her like the train of a wedding dress” (8). Unearthly and tragic by a happenstance of birth and genetics, her earliest memories, as Gordon presents them, lie with her creation and “[trail] behind her” as she grows into a young woman functioning in a society that places its heaviest focus for women on their domestic lives. As a result, she draws increasingly nearer to her sorrow as she comes to terms with her own womanhood, consummating her woes by losing her virginity under the cover of night atop her mother’s grave (78). There, on Wollstonecraft’s tomb, “she began by tracing each letter” of her mother’s posthumous fame; “Mary Godwin. One dead. One alive,” Gordon assumes she must have mentally articulated, for there she officially becomes the woman whom the modern Western literary canon still reveres to this day (3). “One dead. One alive,” Shelley, as Gordon infers, must have translated into the pinnacle text of her career in order to fuel the drive for her creature to pursue his Creator in the name of his yearning to feel love in the wake of his monstrous birth.

Gordon draws further parallels to the features which she sees to have possibly consummated the author’s career. Mary Shelley, as a woman living in a society which makes her well aware of its perceptions of the right role for women under its regulations and restrictions upon marriage, like Victor’s creature, advocates for her desires to build a family in accordance with her own terms, an act which also results in her father twisting her behavior out of its mold

as an expectant mother into the form instead of a sinner. Shelly falls illegitimately pregnant with Percy Shelley's child which the two conceived by an act which both breeds premarital sexual misconduct as well as extramarital escapades behind the back of Shelley's lawful wife. Still, despite the sinful nature of her situation, according to *Romantic Outlaws*: the couple seeks William Godwin's blessings over their child nonetheless. Percy Shelley "wrote Godwin a letter ... demanding a reason for [his] cruel treatment. He and Mary had done nothing wrong, he said," explaining "they had only attempted to abide by Godwin's own philosophy of freedom and free love"; Godwin replied that he "wanted nothing more to do with Mary and had ordered his family and friends to shut her out of their lives" (125-126). Like the creature in her novel, Gordon proposes, the young couple were denied their request by their ruling father figure: a denial which they define as a display of Godwin's own hypocrisy. Thus, Charlotte Gordon, writing from her own female perspective, lifts the elements of the creature's rage at his Creator from her own (clearly passionate) reading of *Frankenstein* to make exhibit out of Shelley's father's patriarchal control over his daughter's illegitimate situation, speaking to the the way in which male perspectives guard the rights to female identities and their narratives.

Mary Shelley herself employs the same narrative device, intertextuality, to serve her own authorial endeavor in her novel, tethering for some purpose of her own, like Gordon's double biography tethers, her book to the writings of her late mother. Additionally, she makes even more direct references in her novel than she does with her allusions to her mother's works to the texts of Percy Shelley, Samuel T. Coleridge, *Paradise Lost*, and, fundamentally: the Book of Genesis, to draw attention to exactly which dominant voices her male characters' openly heed and which they indirectly feel a removed influence from.

Mary Shelley, despite speaking through the literary works of individuals who closely influenced her own social life and career, still, refuses to disclose her own biography too closely, despite the ways in which these quotes seem to shed light -- and likely truly do -- on her interpersonal relationships. She states in her "Introduction to the Third Edition" of *Frankenstein*, written in 1831 from an increasingly matured perspective, that "as the daughter of two persons of distinguished literary celebrity, I should very early in life have thought of writing ... but as my account ... will be confined to such topics as have connection with my authorship alone, I can scarcely accuse myself of a personal intrusion" (*Frankenstein* 222). Thus, with her allusions: she drives home the stagnant fact that beneath these groundbreaking, confident male declarations of their own perceived truths, there remains a greater truth to which they shall never gain access to when female knowledge shrouds itself in autobiographical ambiguity. As male characters ambitiously strive to compete with one another in order to find the ultimate seed of knowledge at the base of society's structure, women, who have been silenced due to the system, allow them all to self-destruct around her pivotal identity, all the while getting under their skin with their silent ability to provide measured reflections for these men's inherent moral sanctity.

ii. Ambiguous Allusions, Inferred Touchstones

In her essay "On Poetry, and Our Relish for the Beauties of Nature," Mary Wollstonecraft writes: "The effusions of a vigorous mind will, nevertheless, ever inform us how far the faculties have been enlarged by thought, and stored with knowledge ... The poet, the man of strong feelings, only gives us a picture of his mind [from] when he was actually alone, conversing with himself, and marking the impressions which nature made on his own heart" (*Women's Writing of the Romantic Period* 49). This quote, then, applies to the creature's honest

ability to make sense of his world as he constructs a clothesline for his thought processes while he peacefully matures in the woods, isolated, yet still unaware of solitude as it stands as a construct. While Shelley seems to be alluding to her mother's work, however, she draws upon the themes which her mother deems to be universal in order to distance herself from their proximity to her own life, guarding her right, again, to her authorial ambiguity. Based solely upon a writer's abilities to articulate the "strong feelings" which have been further enriched by his or her community contexts, Shelley tethers the universal ambiguity of nature's capacity -- an inspiring canvas which draws out emotions, as her mother once declared -- to reflect an individual's internal emotions back at them.

When reflecting upon the process of contemplating in a landscape, individuals may retrospectively gain insight into the emotions that they have experienced and further relate them to their larger relationship with communities, society, and the world on a whole; this process, too, shall allow them to construct an image of their identity as defined and objectified by its subjectivity, grounding them in the reality of the limitations which others place upon them in their shared interactions.

Speaking to this effect: the creature's perspective in the novel, as he remains openly at odds with society due to the prejudice that he faces on account of his ghastly appearance, remains limited itself. He can neither fathom for himself nor reiterate any sense of truth concerning the foundational reality which maternal roles can play in individuals' lives, especially the lives of female daughters as they mature into their own identities. Victor never teaches his creature a mother's value by his experiment's design; additionally: by the examples which the creature's sees before him as he skirts society: God is the only parent in *Paradise Lost* and there is no mother amongst the family living in the cabin in the woods. Therefore, he cannot tether his

imagination to any fleshed-out image of a woman bearing explicitly maternal features; Shelley, too, remains limited in her own bodily perceptions of her mother, only feeling out the truth of her identity through her mother's legacy and late primary texts.

Still, the creature knows that his life, as illuminated to him through his processing of knowledge on the outskirts of society, lacks lustre due to the corrupt nature of his origins: Victor's single-handed fabrication of his form. Furthermore, he only becomes aware that his life lacks lustre after his joyous experience in nature in comparison to the despair he faces in society which dulls the shining state of the land permanently as he experiences it, makes him question the compassionate absences which Victor has embedded within his abandoned, solitary experience. Thus, when taking a backwards glance at his own life, the creature realizes -- as Shelley perhaps must do when acknowledging that her mother's presence remains trapped forever as a blurry "memory" contained only within the first ten days of her buried consciousness --that he derives his notions of pure joy from his life's earliest memories of the wonders of nature, linking his perspective for readers considering both Shelley and Wollstonecraft's respective works, with that of the nature-loving poet in his contemplative seclusion.

Whereas before, the creature, encouraged only by nature, he was able to find his own words and ways for building upon his prior knowledge, by listening to the father in the cabin as he teaches the young Arab woman the regions' native tongue -- the region's norms -- he now comes to see language as a construct of society and structure. By looking on at the woman and observing her beauty as well as by learning how to read and learning -- still, not about maternal roles -- but about Eve by way of Milton's *Paradise Lost*: the creature learns --perhaps not consciously and perhaps even as his first subconscious experience whereas all of his sensations

have up until this point been sharpened by their foreign nature -- how to apply his male gaze as ingrained within him by Victor's experimental design. Thus, here, where the creature realizes that he "ought to be [Victor's] Adam," he still finds himself condemned to holding Adam's limited notion of who a female is, seeing her as a wife or a sibling, a companion, or any other role other than that of a mother.

Interestingly, then, Shelley turns to directly address Percy Shelley, the man who turned her into her role as a mother before he turned her legally into his wife -- an order of events which reverses both Genesis' prescribed plot as well as the premarital laws which dictates society, especially in the Nineteenth Century -- by referencing directly his poem "Mutability." Before quoting the poem, the creature first notes the outlet that he finds literature holds the capacity to provide for him. He explains, "As I read ... I applied much personally to my own feelings and condition. I found myself similar, yet at the same time strangely unlike the beings concerning whom I ... sympathized with, and partly understood them them, but I was unformed in mind; I was dependent on none, and related to none"; his next sentence holds Shelley's direct quote: "'The path of my departure was free;' and there was none to lament my annihilation" (124). However, his pleasure ends when he finds *Paradise Lost* and realizes that the "several situations" contained within its pages which "struck" him "[in] their similarity ... to [his] own" led him to desire an Eve figure only to be, ultimately denied and left in despair of his narrative's open wounds (125).

To make sense of the seemingly inconsequential of Mary Shelley's use of her quote from her husband's poem, which bears no effect itself on the creature, at least not in comparison to Milton's text, one must cross-examine her second reference to "Mutability" within her novel, contained this time within Victor's account. Frankenstein comes to this poem as he "[resolves] to

go alone to the summit of Montanvert,” concluding first, in his own words, which he finds, as Wollstonecraft promises he shall find, isolated in nature: “If our impulses were confined to hunger, thirst, and desire, we might be nearly free” (92-93). Instead of weaving Percy’s verses into his spoken account seamlessly like the creature does -- Mary Shelley merely marks his reference with a footnote -- Victor breaks his narrative to explicitly recite an entire verse of “Mutability.” Thus, the very form of the prose which Shelley employs to exercise her intertextual references -- which tie both Victor and his creature’s accounts into conversation with one another as well as her novel’s words with those of her husband -- reflects her narrative endeavor itself. As her narrative endeavor stands to reshape the Judeo-Christian origin of man: Victor, as the Creator in *Frankenstein* retains the ability to draw from literary source material in order to produce insight into his perspective and the creature merely holds the power to make sense of his Creator’s source materials in a way which helps him orient himself towards his own education into his adult mind. Thus, as Victor wishes to overcome the adversity which he has created in his life and revert back to an animalistic awareness which restricts his worldview to the sole drives of “hunger, thirst, and desire,” the very base drives which his creature has been working to refine into a cultivated mind: Victor, in his account of his own downfall, meets his creature as he conversely describes his uprising into his realized identity as an experimental prototype for the ideal man, with Percy Shelley’s quote uniting the two in a common nod of truth, in the middle of their story arcs.

Furthermore, Shelley’s reference to “Mutability” untangles itself further when glancing farther back at Victor’s preceding thought which he comes to in the midst of society before he takes his lonely flight up the mountain pass. Back in Chamounix he notes: “The affectionate smile with which Elizabeth welcomed [me] altered [my] mood ... I felt as I spoke long forgotten

sensations of pleasure arise in my mind” (91). Thus, in nature, as he reminisces upon the comforts which he derives from his future wife’s companionship, he reverses the creature’s request for a female companion himself. He wishes to rid himself of the memory of love which he leaves behind for the isolating natural world, for that world only reflects back to him the truth of his depraved soul which has sullied his ability to commit to his engagement with Elizabeth; to be alone in nature is to be alone with his wicked self which, to him, feels like punishment for his ambitious experiment. To reward, then, his progeny with what he feels he should deny himself the pleasure of experiencing, seems only to Victor like a further indulgence into his own corruption, trapping their two tales at an impasse which deprives both of them of the joys of nature as well as the love of a wife.

Their impasse, then, lies for both of them with their reflected realities as revealed to them through nature, articulated by their shared literary references, and dependent upon the absence of companionship and joy which they may derive from a wife. As the crux of her novel’s chaos falls between the rock and the hard place which unravels both Frankenstein and his creature’s understandings of their relationships to the word in regards to their limitations as they stand as men condemned to their template roles as Adamic figures, Mary Shelley reveals to Percy Shelley by directly corresponding with him by using his own poetry, that language “[is] indeed a godlike science” (107). By the creation of truth which male definitions provide as supported by example by Percy Shelley’s own poems, Mary Shelley teaches her husband, as a wife, that patriarchal structures which rest on extensive reserves of literature, scripture, and statutes frame the realities for the inhabitants of their worlds as fated, fallen, and frozen despite the passage of time.

Chapter II.: Leaving Here

Robert Walton, *The Modern Prometheus*, and his self-realizing allusions to the modern man

As Mary Shelley first reveals the ultimate conundrum of Victor and his creature's shared, flesh-eating disorder -- which consumes life at the expense of its own source -- through her recurring reference to Percy Shelley's poem "Mutability," she perhaps turns to the themes of her husband's texts again in order to direct *Frankenstein's* ultimate moral message towards illuminating the adaptable agency which female identities hold despite their apparent, muted realities. She suggests, perhaps, that women may reclaim the nature of their experiences as transcendent in the face of patriarchal limitations, allowing them to reframe their heightened awarenesses in the face of depravity as elevated vantage points which provide them with the perspectives from which the knowledge of knowing good from evil may be continuously redefined. Recasting, by her novel's male-directed hands, female-centric stories in their roots for following experimental conundrums, as Eve follows the male-gendered serpent towards the apple of truth, Mary Shelley further unites her female identity with Walton's male narrative as he hands back over his power to his corresponding Eve figure, his sister Margaret, a narrative act which may subtly remind readers of the first mother's essential role in providing, for all others, the origins for truth as it stands as a construct.

For, as the legacy of the myth of *Frankenstein* carries on in its course, eventually shallowing out into the green-skinned monster which contemporary culture regards today without further thought, it may seem from a distance as though Mary Shelley and Robert Walton's narrating tongues combine seamlessly and successfully to build one sole, objectively-

given narrative. However, by the very nature of the fact that Shelley's voice shadows Walton's narration and, in turn, his penning hand, too, silently records the first-person accounts of both Victor and his creature, *Frankenstein's* foundational structure innately constructs numerous subjectivities embedded within each character's identity, shading how they are depicted in the novel. Furthermore, as the book in itself adapts the Book of Genesis -- which, by way of fundamentalist teachings of scripture, preaches that all human individuals descend from the progeny of Adam and Eve -- the impregnated tongue of each of the novel's characters works to serve Shelley's authorial, subjective project as she tampers and skews the underlying traits of Adam and Eve's innate identities which objectively aim to regulate the baseline for normalcy for the whole of human condition and its family structures.

While the majority of *Frankenstein's* prose alluding to Genesis remains tucked quietly into the undercurrents of the recognizable, key facets of the Bible story's structure -- the novel throughout addresses themes of romantic counterparts, creative responsibilities, moral transgressions, and the subjective evil versus ethics driving both Satanic and Godly forces -- Walton's narrative provides the first reference to "Paradise" in a passage which refers to Walton as a writer at heart rather than a scientist and thus alludes, possibly, to Shelley's own relationship to writing itself. She explains that, for a brief stint in his childhood, Walton "lived in a Paradise of [his] own creation," one in which he became a poet and "[obtained] a niche in the temple where the names of Homer and Shakespeare [were] consecrated" (11). With her written references to recognizable authorial figures, as placed upon her page by Walton's transcribing hand busy at work in drafting his letters to his sister, Shelley draws the reader's attention out of the reality constructed within the universal walls of her novel and onto her own role outside of her book as the writer for the Western canon and its collaborative productions of knowledge.

By first drawing readers' attentions out of the confines of the book through Walton's narrating letters to his sister through his meta-mechanic addresses to the activity of writing itself before again submerging them into the universe of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley establishes the looming presence of a set of female eyes which must receive -- and thus believe -- all of what the narrating male characters in the novel tell her is true. Starting with what Walton defines as a writer's "Paradise," Walton's sister observes her brother's dreams which do not strive towards any sense of sibling intimacy between the two of them, but rather a distancing act between the two of them which serves, instead, his supposedly-selfless desires to interact with humanity on a whole as he seeks to "benefit ... all mankind" (10). His definitions for "Paradise," then, may reflect Percy Shelley's ideal sights for Mary Shelley's career path, as his "anxious" desires that she "prove [her]self worthy of [her] parentage, and enrol herself on the page of fame" possibly serve his own benefit, as her husband, than they respect her own authorial aspirations (*Frankenstein* 222).

While Shelley discloses this fact about her husband's dreams in her "Introduction to the Third Edition" of *Frankenstein*, she, in contention to his desires, stresses that she wishes to reserve an intimacy between herself and her parents, an intimacy which he, in turn, fetishizes to benefit his own lasting legacy. Regarding her own perception of the foundations of her identity as a writer, she explains, as quoted before -- but who am I to not recycle Shelley's example in referencing a quote more than once in order to illuminate a text's self-serving intersections -- that "as the daughter of two persons of distinguished literary celebrity, I should very early in life have thought of writing ... but as my account ... will be confined to such topics as have connection with my authorship alone, I can scarcely accuse myself of a personal intrusion" (*Frankenstein* 222). Therefore, whereas her husband wishes she turns her intimate sentiments into claims to

fame, she desires to instead reserve her right to protect the personal vestiges of her own ties to her creative endeavors within her own mind's guarded memories which originate her stakes in her authorial enterprises. Thus, keeping Mrs. Saville in mind as a character who watches throughout the course of her novel as its characters continuously bears onwards towards their deaths, their ultimate moments of judgment, Shelley continues on, embarking on a tale which concerns Victor Frankenstein and his creature's personal disclosures of their horrific, co-dependent relationship to one another which, in conclusion, shocks Walton into disclosing their secrets in his letters back to his sister.

All that readers truly gather of her identity is that her name is "Mrs. Saville" -- a wife, though to whom it does not matter for, as the novel reveals: a wife's role is a wife's role to all men despite their own specified roles as male agents within society. Yet, to whom Mary Shelley plays the role of a wife to, Percy Shelley, her name means a great deal. Charlotte Gordon romanticizes: "He was already half in love before they met, fascinated by the idea that Godwin and Wollstonecraft, the two standard-bearers of political liberty whom he admired with an almost religious fervor, had a daughter. With such parents, Mary had to be exceptional" (76). His fervor for the capacities of her legacy presents itself in the introductory dedication of his own, lengthy ambitious poem published in 1816 entitled "from Laon and Cythna; or, The Revolution of the Golden City: A Vision of the Nineteenth Century," which he addresses solely "To Mary." Working to woo her before the consummation of their affair, he writes:

They say that thou wert lovely from thy birth,
Of glorious parents, thou aspiring Child.
I wonder not -- for One then left this earth,
Whose life was like a setting planet mild,
Which clothed thee in the radiance undefiled,
Of its departing glory; still her fame

Shines on thee, through the tempests dark and wild
 Which shake these latter days; and thou canst claim
 The shelter, from thy sire, of an immortal name. (lines 100-108)

He attempts to engage directly with with Mary Godwin's feelings of grief at the loss of her mother, promising her, as he works to win her company, that Wollstonecraft's "departing glory" still "shines on," likening her love to the warm, serene image of a "setting planet mild" (lines 103-106). This comparison aims to consolidate the divide between the human and heavenly realms by playing on the notion of the proximity of the planes on which the worlds of life and death separately rest; as Wollstonecraft's soul lingers on the land's horizon after death, her spirit remains present -- felt over the land -- while it occupies its place in the sky. Rather than reaching its aims, however, the poem perhaps instead, as Shelley interprets it: perpetuates male-defined notions of truth as they become embosomed by naturally-derived symbols which leave bitter after-tastes in the mouths of those who suffer as a result of the immortalizing legacy of patriarchal power structures and those structures' narratives as they delineate identities through the filtered rhetoric of metaphors which appeal to the rigidly-defined, supposedly-universal nature of the experiences which accompany the preservation of the dominant image for what a fully-fleshed family's structure looks like.

Mrs. Saville serves as Walton's corresponding female figure, lost in the blur of prelapsarian sibling bonds as Walton advances on his own morally-precarious, ambitious endeavor which likely, like it does for Frankenstein, shall lead him to experience yet another sweeping downfall like the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden. Her lack of identity beyond her marital status, as defined by Shelley's dedicated verse in "from Laon and Cythna..." to the legacy of Mary Shelley's parents, then, reflects the patriarchal obsession for delineating

“immortal [names]” to identities in order to show male forms of reverence which consequently casts female identities out into an absent abyss, unacknowledged (line 108). As social status, by male definitions, further equates to the “Paradise” of “[obtaining] a niche in the temple where the names of” writers such as “Homer and Shakespeare [were] consecrated,” obtaining the divinity which such a spot reserves for an individual requires naming a notion where previously only the absence of a concrete identity had before rested (11). To put that into its gendered terms: to “obtain a niche” in society, then, is to settle the supposedly barren spaces where female identities exist, and to fill the void of the atmospheric feminine services within a community -- services which render them present in their roles by being absent in their own non-autonomous ways -- by tethering their identities to male-granted nominals in order to legitimize their prospects for fortune.

Therefore, in order to examine the ever-elusive frontier which constructs cultural notions of influence and power -- like the one in which Shelley ensures Robert Walton shall never emotionally inhabit with any certainty -- for the purposes of this paper, we must revert our eyes back to the land from whence the paradisiacal notions of social delineation originate.

Adam and Eve: What’s in a Name?

Verses 2:19 through 2:24 of the Book of Genesis read:

And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every creature, that was the name thereof.

And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;

And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and cleave unto his wife: they shall be one flesh.

With this final verse originates the figure of the mother, yet, still: “they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (2:25). Thus, nude and thus unaware exactly of who they were, even before their own realizations of their personal differences, female entities, while being equal to man, remain nameless and ambiguous. Scripture speaks of leaving one’s “mother” without providing her character any exemplifying form; Adam has his wife, who exists in a peaceful union with him, but has no sense, with no name yet of her own, of her own identity.

Eve only gains her name after she interacts with numerous other male roles in addition to her husband’s own. Even in addition to Adam in his manly power to name the animals of his landscape, “the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden,” explaining to the male antagonist of the story her restrictions as she sees them (3:1-3:2). The elements of the land which she may interact with, she reveals, remain restricted to the grounds by which her husband has, up until this point in her plotline, cultivated. Still, as the serpent points out to her, she can physically see the fruit which grows from the trees rooted out of her reach; furthermore, he causes her to question whether or not that truly are out of her reach if they are not out of her sight. He even gets the woman herself to admit that the forbidden fruit itself sits on a branch which rests “in the midst of the garden”; he simply explains: “For God doth know that in the day ye eat” the forbidden fruit “your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (3:3-3:4).

When she tests the serpent's trick, the woman confirms both what her Lord warned her would be defined as the nature of any disobedient actions -- sin -- and what the serpent told her, for, the Lord, like the snake suggests, teaches her, as a result of her transgressive tasting of the fruit which she had then shared the glory of with her husband, which behavior He sees as both good and evil. The Lord sees her actions as corrupt, and he says in response, starting with verse 3:14, "Because thou hast done this ...":

I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.
 And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;
 Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;
 In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, til thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.
 And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living. (3:16-3:20)

Therefore, in one fell, fast-paced succession of events following the woman's action which dabbles with what has been defined as forbidden yet not defined in the truth that it holds -- in its nature itself -- does she, by her own hands, confirm the truth of the Lord's words as well as construct the role of both a mother and thus death as a reality for her and her husband which, in turn, enforces the necessity of a mother's role to be condemned to repopulating those who have been lost to dust. Furthermore, while Adam names her in response to her evolution into her new role as a maternal force, she constructs, still, her own identity as she remains the one who provided the male characters their needs to navigate the reality which has formed as a result of her own curiosity.

Therefore, with the illumination of these scriptural verses, the power which a name holds, or lack thereof, to warp reality for its surrounding community structures as they perceive of themselves -- an act which relies upon their own self-constructing reflections in relationship to the landscape surrounding them as it has already been cultivated in connotations and constructs - - grows increasingly clear. Thus, the abundance of absent Eve figures in *Frankenstein* too begins to make sense of itself, for, as scripture states: Eve never exists in Eden, she only comes to be in the act of the Fall of the Man which tethers humanity, by the “ground ... thorns and thistles ... herb of the field ... [and] dust,” to its relationship with the earthly plane (3:17-3:19).

Back to the Book

Mary Shelley, in order to reveal the universal truth of the absence of innate names for the workings of their world as their catalyzing forces, like nature’s cycles, play out without any Patriarch’s revelatory discovery to define their abstract actions as truth, titles her novel with an “immortal name” (Percy Shelley line 108). The name *Frankenstein*, which by her novel’s narrative design, conflates the antagonists with the protagonists of her book, as her male characters play the parts of each, creating the cultural confusion which often defines her novel surrounding who, exactly, is the monster and who is the man. Therefore, by her design, as the accounts of all of her characters refract and reflect the narrative notions which originate in the Judeo-Christian tradition from the Fall of Man as described in Genesis, her story’s mythic matters, which reference the infamous names of Adam and Eve, provide “shelter” for her female-written text, immortalizing the forms of numerous men. All of their identities grow twisted under one nominal, as still, the agency of a female voice’s omniscient presence floating above the text

silently breathes oxygen into the book to fan the flame of its possible course over the spread of the Western canon as it spurs off into unpredictable directions with time.

As Walton provides the narration which backs all of Victor's and the creature's tales, implicitly, to his sister who herself has no voice within the novel -- telling her of his refusal to comply with his father's orders and asking her, still, for her trust in his journey nonetheless -- he, in lieu of his sister's absence within the text, takes on the role of being the disobedient child, the Eve figure, who drives the narrative of his own Edenic endeavor's ship without regard for any one of his family member's objections towards the possible outcomes which may ensue as a result of his experiment. Therefore, resembling the way perhaps in which Percy Shelley anxiously regards Shelley's authorial quests by the success which they may yield towards sustaining her legacy which remains tethered to his enduring surname, Mary Shelley, by way of tampering with her novel's impregnated voices and their subsequent breaking of the binaries established by her book's baseline biblical tale, Genesis, blends her character's Adamic identities with their Eve-like actions which, in turn, renders female Eve figures absent in order to make space for the inflated ego of male senses for superiority. Equally, in the chaos that ensues, her blending of binaries reasserts the essential roles women hold in the maintenance of societies.

Furthermore, while the story of Adam and Eve remains recognizable to, likely, all individuals functioning within landscapes conquered and defined by Judeo-Christian offshoots of religion, the cold air which provides *Frankenstein* with the basis for its biting, cultural critique -- the realistic nature of overly-ambitious, overly-confident men who leave the women in their lives in the dark from participating in the illuminating nature of pursuing knowledge for the sake of truth -- grows increasingly clear as yet another narrative which in itself seemingly contains the seeds for knowledge which may be replanted in order to exclude women from gaining a grasp on

the ability to define good and bad. Walton carries on to explain to his sister what she shall never be able to understand, overlooking her experiences of emotion and ambition, despite her female role which tethers her to Eve: the woman who sets the precedent for curiosity and ambition in itself. He assumes:

It is impossible to communicate to you a conception of the trembling sensation, half pleasurable and half fearful, with which I am preparing to depart. I am going to unexplored regions, to “the land of mist and snow,” but I shall kill no albatross; therefore do not be alarmed for my safety or if I should come back to you as worn and woeful as the “Ancient Mariner.” You will smile at my allusion, but I will disclose a secret. I have often attributed my attachment to, my passionate enthusiasm for, the dangerous mysteries of ocean to that production of the most imaginative of modern poets. There is something at work in my soul which I do not understand. I am practically industrious—painstaking, a workman to execute with perseverance and labour—but besides this there is a love for the marvellous, a belief in the marvellous, intertwined in all my projects, which hurries me out of the common pathways of men, even to the wild sea and unvisited regions I am about to explore (15).

Walton’s sister may “smile” back passively, Walton assumes despite distancing himself from her visage, at his allusion to Coleridge, the man which supposedly, according to Charlotte Gordon, imparted to Mary Shelley her love for storytelling, but she seemingly shall never be able to understand the drive to flee to a landscape. However, in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” the drive to flee a landscape also comes with the drive which the title seafarer exudes in grasping his audience members to tell finally tell some listener, any listener, of his success in finally quitting the dreadful planes of the open ocean; unassuming guests at a wedding who cross his path exclaim: “By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,/ Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?” (lines 3-4). Thus, Robert Walton, who has been seized by both Victor and his creature as a helpless listener, bestows his tales upon the helpless eyes of his sister, assuming that she shall have no

cause to continue the trajectory of this tale as it snowballs in succession as a cautionary tale against ambition.

He assumes he shall “kill no Albatross,” yet neither did the seafarer in Coleridge’s poem, until, accidentally, his murder of said bird becomes the bane of his existence. As he bears the burden, carrying its frame around his “neck ... instead of the cross,” he realizes that his actions have stemmed from a source of mal-judgment, for “if it had been a Christian soul,/ We” would have “hailed it in God’s name” instead of striking it down with an arrow (lines). Because Walton reassures Mrs. Saville that he certainly shall not meet the same fate as he himself embarks upon his journey on the open seas, it grows clear, as revealed by Victor and the creature’s narratives -- they themselves never meaning to murder any innocent creatures -- that Walton simply has not yet placed a name upon the bird which carries his fate -- despite how many times, right in front of his eyes he marks: “To Mrs. Saville” (9).

Being absent in the text, Walton’s sister herself remains condemned, for *Frankenstein’s* purposes, to be *of* the landscape, outside of the named, embodied cast of characters apart from her omniscient, receptive eyes in the eyes of the audience of the novel. Thus, Shelley’s authority over the novel as well as over her authorial powers lies rooted, like nature, in experiences that forever thrive but almost seem passive without being bestowed an “immortal name” (Percy Shelley line 9). This narrative effect provides an undercurrent similar to that of the notion of whether or not a tree really falls in a forest if no one is around to hear it; however, somewhere in the text though rarely seen, the female identity remains ever-present to hear it. Walton refuses to name the “albatross,” yet her unnamed presence, looming over the all-male shipmates populating Coleridge’s fictional crew, follows the male identity as an omniscient moral guide. As he does, however, feel comfortable citing Coleridge’s name to his sister, he bestows upon the knowledge,

perhaps even better illuminated to her than it is to him of the grander reality as she reads his situation, like he reads the “Mariner’s” from a distanced perspective, she may gather by the definable quality of male legacies and their alluded-to truths, from her perspective of being *of* the landscape for the novel’s purposes, the true nature which underlies her brother’s voyage.

Conclusion

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, as it clearly relates itself back to the story of Adam and Eve, relies upon layers of ambiguity which serve to differentiate its characters fundamentally around the template traits of the identities that construct the narrative-skeleton of Genesis. In doing so, Shelley illuminates the strength of a name in defining the core traits embodied within an individual’s full, dynamic identity. As each of her characters form their identities around the pivotal plot points and symbols which compose her novel’s nods to the story of Adam and Eve, they flesh out, like Victor’s character, in ways which seem to stitch together the traits of their late ancestors, reviving them in monstrous ways which blur the readers’ notions of order and chaos: creation and destruction. In doing so, she creates a thrilling web of accounts which works to illuminate the perspectives of characters as they perform acts of sin which typically -- as no one but God’s eyes, ultimately, should judge any other man -- remain easily dismissed and defined as deplorable: a quality which cues an individual to take distance against the individual who poses a threat to the stable peace of a society’s structural statutes.

Walton, in the silent, ambiguous ending of *Frankenstein*, is caught between the blurred forces of good and evil. He concludes the novel, left at a fork in the road by which he may follow in the footsteps of either the Creator or the creature, both of which have been shown to ultimately lead to paths of destruction for their respective interlopers. Furthermore, in choosing his path: he

may never know in which direction his careful hand shall spur the course of his story in its voyage through time as it is passed on continuously by each generation. Yet, to attempt to deny his tale the ability to be passed along, Walton would have to equally deny procreative acts the agency of their natural course. Furthermore, as a male perspective, he must work with the knowledge revealed to him by Victor and his creature's accounts which each make exhibit of males who stand without female counterparts to balance out their unchecked agency. Without their corresponding Eve figures, Frankenstein and his monster both prove that, despite happening perhaps each time on the basis of resounding accidents -- for the creature never means to murder until his hands have accidentally choked off William's lungs and Victor simply refuses to craft his creature a wife without anticipating that his decision indirectly offered Elizabeth up as a sacrifice for his cause -- neither man can prevent his path from condemning his identity to the embodied form of a failed display of helpless folly. Thus, holding this knowledge as the male narrator of the flame by which Victor and his creature bestow upon him and, furthermore, holding the torch of the pen which Shelley grants to him in order to record the narratives that he hears for the sake of her novel's pages, Robert Walton embodies the conundrum of *The Modern Prometheus*. He must somehow, through the power of his language as a male narrator, serve his rightful obligation to Mary Shelley by filling up his space on her pages with the words of Frankenstein and his creation while also illuminating, with his knowledge, the authority of the marginalized yet omniscient female voice of his physically absent correspondent, Mrs. Saville.

As Victor and his creature seize Robert Walton's attention at a moment in his own procession towards transgression, he represents, in relationship to their tale, a prelapsarian perspective, for he has not yet committed to his own condemnation. Walton still merely rides the ship which pulls his hand closer to the fruit he wishes to taste: the "point on which [his] soul

[fixes]” the apple of “its intellectual eye,” yet Frankenstein figures that, by this point of time in his own tale, his “apple was already eaten” (11/186). Still, he relays his account anxiously to Walton, never knowing where exactly his monster waits in the world until the moment he finds his fingers around his throat. While Victor knows that his outlook seems grave, not until the moment of his death can he experience the true intensity of his consequences, for the narrative of Adam and Eve’s Expulsion does not conclude simply with their new mortal lives on their new earthly human plane. In fact, the narrative of their expulsion, by the fundamentalist religious perspective which defines all living humans as descendents of their fleshen bodies, never ends at all. Their expulsion results in the birth of Cain and Abel, resulting in the construction of fully-fleshed societies, resulting, next, in the construction of the world from which Shelley writes her novel -- a critique of Western values and the patriarchal power structures which those values deem to be their eternal Creator. Furthermore, the reality of Mary Shelley’s world splits off into all of the exponential realities spurred by time, eventually delivering each of her readers into the setting in which he or she has flipped open the pages of her book. Thus, the force which keeps *Frankenstein* alive falls with the anxiety, rooted culturally in Genesis, defined by individuals’ inabilities to orient their lives and identities with certainty to any future relationship to the contexts in which humanity consistently resituates itself -- an anxiety which Shelley embodies with Walton’s foolish desires to acquaint himself with “a land never before imprinted by the foot of man” (10).

Furthermore, as Mary Shelley herself embarks upon her own literary expedition, her realization of Robert Walton’s character embodies her recognition of her need to construct a setting in which, no matter how much ground science had covered by the time any novel readers of her book opened its pages -- a fact she could never predict -- would always allude to a new,

undiscovered landscape still existing on the face of the Earth. Thus, to protect her novel's narrative from time, Shelley transcends her own age by refusing to give Robert Walton an ending of his own. Whether or not he turns his ship back around for home or continues on in his pursuit for the pole remains unknown. Furthermore, whether or not her original intentions include providing Walton with emotional fulfillment had she openly explored the latter choice of those two scenarios remains forever unknown. Whether or not Walton would have derived his emotional fulfillment from gaining pure knowledge rather than the fulfillment of his hopeful expectations, too, remains unknown. Answering none of those questions, Shelley's ending simply leaves her readers with their knowledge of the fact that Frankenstein's creature, the fleshen embodiment for experiments themselves, "was soon borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance" (221). Therefore, by keeping Walton's dreams forever dangling off of her page, Shelley immortalizes the ambiguity itself which falls around Walton's ambitions.

His identity as a dreamer, if Walton's words were to be translated to Shelley's intended tongue, provides her, as a writer, equally, with the "the wondrous power which attracts the needle" (10). This wondrous power lies not in the magnetism of the North Pole as a factual land but in the magnetism embedded in chasing knowledge which cannot yet be confirmed as fact -- the definition of ambition.

Yet, what remains even more ambiguous in the landscape of *Frankenstein's* universe is Shelley's refusal to even name ambition in relation to the fully-fleshed context of her novel. As the creature takes his flight, he makes it clear not where he goes besides the abyss; "torn by the bitterest remorse, where can I find rest but in death?" he shall ask everyday until the unknown moment of his demise shall finally remove the "bitter sting" of his life which, until then, certainly shall "not cease to rankle in [his] wounds" (220-221). Victor's ambitions, equally, are

shrouded in mystery for he, by his own definition, still holds success in his hands. Despite the chaos which ensued as a result, he was still able to create man by the spark of his scientific capacities alone.

Robert Walton, perhaps, shall proceed, or not, with his course, but how he carries on to define his own relationship to the folly of his desires remains equally as unclear to him as to why, with all of the information which Victor relays to Walton about the signs which forewarned him not to pursue his experiment, he still nonetheless carried on himself to knowingly reach his demise, for, in retrospect, Frankenstein's ability to provide a clear account suggests that the facts of his folly must have been obviously in front of him all along, just not yet realized. Thus, as *Frankenstein* exemplifies both Robert Walton and Victor Frankenstein as two ambitious men, it can be said that even while knowing that folly shrouds ambition, they each continue on to embrace their ambition. Therefore, as their accounts exemplify: ambitious men, by narrative design, except that they are ambitious fools.

Thus, the question comes: where are women in this equation when men horde ambition to their own canon of self-realizing tales, a phenomenon which directly contends with the fact that ambition, in the story of the Origin of Man itself, falls with Eve's curious -- later framed as corrupt -- hands which pluck the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge as a test of her own world's boundaries. Eve, in these men's exemplifying, recycling, and still, somehow, self-aggrandizing narratives -- for Victor Frankenstein (by his experiment's design) and Robert Walton (as the scribe shading Victor and his creature's tales with his own subjective voice), both in their ways play God -- is absent.

Works Cited

“The Book of Bereishit (Genesis): Full Text.” *Jewish Virtual Library a Project of Aice*,

Jewish Virtual Library, www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/bereishit-genesis-full-text.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. “The Time of the Ancient Mariner (text of 1834).”

www.poetryfoundation.org.

Freud, Sigmund. “The ‘Uncanny.’” 1919.

Gordon, Charlotte. *Romantic Outlaws the Extraordinary Lives of Mary Wollstonecraft and*

Mary Shelley. Hutchinson, 2015.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus: The 1818 Text*. Edited by James

Reiger, The University of Chicago Press, 1982.

Shelley, Percy. “Mutability [‘We are as clouds that veil the midnight moon’].” *The complete*

poetical works of Percy Bysshe Shelley: The text carefully revised by William Michael

Rossetti, Volume 3 (John Slark, 1885).

Theobald, Alice. "Nature Is the Nurse of Sentiment': Mary Wollstonecraft's Scandinavian Travelogue." *Bluestocking Online Journal for Women's History*, Bluestocking Oxford, 18 Mar. 2016, blue-stocking.org.uk/2014/09/10/nature-is-the-nurse-of-sentiment-mary-wollstonecrafts-scandinavian-travelogue/.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. "Mary Wollstonecraft: On Poetry and Our Relish for the Beauties of Nature." *Women's Writing of the Romantic Period 1789-1836: an Anthology*, edited by Harriet Devine Jump, Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2007, pp. 48–52.