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“The Healing Balm of Sympathy Denied”: Moral Sense Philosophy, Patriarchy, and
Monstrosity in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*

by

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Introduction

In a letter to Jane William Hogg, Mary Shelley explains “[s]ociety is nothing as an end, but as a means it is much—the means of allowing one to know the existence of human beings with whom one can sympathize” (*Selected Letters* 199). The essential necessity of sympathy to both self and society not only pervades Shelley’s personal writings, but also remains the presiding concern of the novel she published a decade prior, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). Both in theme and structure, *Frankenstein* perceptibly draws on theories of moral sentiments delineated by Romantic thinkers such as her parents William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, and by philosophical sentimentalists such as the Scottish philosophers David Hume and Adam Smith. As Nancy Yousef explains, their writings, from which Mary Shelley draws profound inspiration, harmoniously “adduce sympathy as the self-evident ground of social virtues, and the effective root of ‘fellow feeling,’ ‘benevolence’ and ‘humanity’” (5). Though Shelley produces an ideology of sympathy which is consistent with the literary and philosophical aims of Romanticism, *Frankenstein* articulates an ideal of sympathetic community that, though coveted and pursued by its characters, is never effectively achieved. Insofar as this novel embodies Shelley’s participation in Romantic theories of moral sentiments, *Frankenstein* advocates sympathy’s interpersonal and ethical importance through its depiction of the modes of violence, dehumanization, and isolation produced by sympathy’s failure.

Throughout *Frankenstein*, sympathetic potential is facilitated by the conveyance of narrative, typified in oral and written exchange between characters. As Adam Smith argues in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), narrative exchange between sufferer and sympathizer obligates members of society to “place ourselves in [another’s] situation, [to] conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, [to] enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure

the same person” (3). Insofar as identification is the natural consequence of sympathetic connection, moral sense philosophers relied on sympathetic response to advocate humanitarian regard, broaden the scope of natural rights, and transform public sentiment in order to inspire social change. To this point, David Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) posits “public good is indifferent to us except so far as sympathy interests us in it” (394). Mary Shelley, for her part, embeds this belief as *Frankenstein*’s core principle. The novel’s framing narrations are attempts at persuasion rather than bare conveyance of fact; each narrator, believing themselves misunderstood, conveys their story because their listener’s potential sympathetic response is the reward of effective narrative exchange. Because sympathetic responses enact feelings of community, identification, and positive regard, sympathy represents to Shelley’s characters the only possible salvation from unremitting ostracism.

If sympathy in *Frankenstein* can be said to fail, it is important to acknowledge that Shelley embeds a single deterrent within each sympathetic opportunity in her novel. Namely, interpersonal sympathy in *Frankenstein* is thwarted by the power and influence of patriarchal ideology. As Mary Jacobus explains, Mary Shelley’s critique of “a male-dominated culture may be felt to bring with it alienation, repression, division, a silencing of the 'feminine', a loss of women's 'inheritance'” (10). Accordingly, the interplay between Captain Robert Walton, Victor Frankenstein, and his Creature reveals the violence simultaneously perpetuated and suffered by characters who embody and enact patriarchal order. *Frankenstein*’s narrators each seek the redemption of sympathetic community, but seemingly know no other way to advocate their worthiness for these things except through the demonization and scapegoating of other men. *Frankenstein*’s critique of patriarchy as the pivotal deterrent to sympathetic community and social progress is further demonstrated by the violence enacted by its male characters towards

women and the feminine sphere. Veronica Hollingne notes that *Frankenstein*'s characters "destroy precisely those realms of the domestic most closely associated with conventional femininity" (210), but their enactment of patriarchal power manifests itself in a more disturbing and tangible way: it is the catalyst of every woman's death in the novel. In its depiction of patriarchy, *Frankenstein* argues that a social order founded within patriarchal ideology is incongruent with sympathetic community, its moral merits, and the very perseverance of life.

The Romantic literary canon, from which Shelley perceptively drew extensive influence, often portrays narrative exchange as the primary mode by which characters experience sympathy and subsequently modify their ideologies. *Frankenstein* affirms sympathetic connection as a societal and interpersonal imperative, but nonetheless challenges the ease by which narrative exchange facilitates this radical emotional response between characters. Though Captain Walton, Frankenstein, and the Creature peer into the interiorities of those unlike themselves through narrative exchange, the opportunity to sympathize, identify, and thereby elicit a change in perception, behavior, or ideology almost unexceptionally culminates in failure. As *Frankenstein*'s critique of gender disparity makes evident, sympathetic failure is informed, bolstered, and weaponized by patriarchal ideology. Shelley's representation of the gendered fissure between the public and domestic sphere, the limited civil liberties of *Frankenstein*'s women characters, and rigid standards of idealized masculinity illustrate the myriad ways in which patriarchal institutions orchestrate the disenfranchisement of *Frankenstein*'s characters.

Patriarchal ideology also fosters the rejection of narrative between the privileged listener and speaking sufferer. When confronted by the anguished accounts of the most socially vulnerable, each respective narrator either maintains indifference or is only momentarily swayed by a swell of emotion before antipathy regains command of their emotions, thoughts, and

actions. *Frankenstein*'s narrators sympathize neither with women nor men they consider lesser than themselves and consequently those same narrators are elided from the sympathetic companionship they covet. The antipathy demonstrated in *Frankenstein* engenders monstrosity, typified in a patriarchal cycle of violence which lays claim to the lives, wellness, and endeavors of Walton, Frankenstein, the Creature, and all who surround them.

Insofar as *Frankenstein* formally embodies Mary Shelley's own moral sense philosophy, the aim of this essay is two-fold: first, to argue that recognition of *Frankenstein*'s participation in the Romantic tradition is necessary to best understand the pivotal role of sympathy in the novel. As this study will show, Shelley was cognizant of sympathy's social and ethical necessity, its potential to encourage benevolent behavior and catalyze social progress, but remained equally aware of its constraints. Whereas Adam Smith's model of sympathetic narrative exchange necessitated the presence of an impartial spectator who would function as a source of "reason, principle, conscience, the inhabitant of the breast, the man within, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct" (133), *Frankenstein* presents listeners who are unflinchingly prejudiced against those who beg for their understanding and consequently unwilling to sympathize. Second, it is to this end that I wish to show that Shelley's proto-feminist concerns necessitates our consideration, as I additionally argue that *Frankenstein* presents sympathetic failure as unambiguously symptomatic of patriarchal ideology. Because Walton, Frankenstein, and the Creature refuse to recant the ideologies which grant them patriarchal authority, they are each entirely unable to navigate the world with compassion, instead reigning violence and hatred upon their perceived social inferiors. Shelley's critique of patriarchy thus posits that though sympathetic companionship in *Frankenstein* is both necessary and coveted, it is categorically unattainable within a social order so marred by misogynist structures of power. The novel's depiction of

sexism, gendered violence, and toxic masculinity therefore represents for its readers a world in which sympathy fails to facilitate a fuller understanding of difference, to bridge the gap between self and Other, and to remedy the anguish of the most isolated members of society.

Scholarly Rationale

Academic interpretations of *Frankenstein* have broadly confirmed Mary Shelley's textual investment in moral sense philosophy and feminist critique, but too often in separate or too limited considerations, as the novel's core tragedy rests in its amalgamation of the social and moral necessity of sympathy and the patriarchal ideology used to ensure its agonizing failure. As we unearth the narrative differences between Frankenstein, Walton, and The Creature's convoluted accounts, it becomes clear, by virtue of their dueling statuses as patriarchal authorities, that none of them can be characterized as wholly innocent and unconditionally deserving of sympathetic regard. Shelley nevertheless goes to great lengths to incite both her characters' and her reader's sympathy towards her flawed narrators by recounting the agony of their unrelenting isolation and locating their respective monstrosity in their exclusion from sympathetic community. This is perhaps nowhere more obvious than in the Creature's continual barring from empathetic society, the calumny he suffers from Frankenstein and Walton, and human civilization's collective impulse to attempt his extermination upon sight. However, that the Creature commits indefensible transgressions of his own is beyond argument, so Victor and Walton—who are similarly humanized and villainized by the text in dual measure—both maintain a degree of justification in vilifying him. For Shelley, sympathetic regard is the vehicle by which the innate natural rights and human dignity of others is most readily affirmed and while individuals endowed with social privilege within England's misogynist hierarchy may suffer

tangible oppression, they remain simultaneously culpable of wrongdoing so long as they enact and uphold patriarchal power. Sympathetic failure, then, is congenitally intertwined with the perpetuation of patriarchal ideology. In order to best understand the sympathetic model delineated in *Frankenstein*, the textual function of sympathetic failure and patriarchal power cannot be properly understood without acknowledging the comorbidity between the two.

Mary Shelley tasks the reader as well as *Frankenstein's* characters with its central problem of sympathetic perception because, true to the Godwinian tradition to which it was dedicated, the novel was written with a clear, ethical purpose: it was designed, as William St. Clair explains, to “change the perceptions, the knowledge, the understanding, and therefore the behavior of those who read or otherwise encountered it” (248). Through its frame narrative, *Frankenstein* reveals the unresolved contradictions between Captain Walton, Frankenstein, and his Creature's perspectives. Privy to *Frankenstein's* dueling frame narratives, the reader maintains the power to either “abandon” or to “commiserate” (69) with Shelley's narrators as they relay their suffering and subsequent need for sympathetic regard. Such sympathetic commiseration for Shelley's oppressed characters encourages an ethics of compassion which exceeds the bounds of the novel and voyages into its interpretation. As each character details their respective pursuit of sympathetic connection, their antipathy and violence towards others is inadvertently revealed. By structuring the novel as such, the reader, like each of the narrative listeners, is encouraged to, however fleetingly, empathize with the harrowing depictions of anguish, loss, and suffering that each narrator is burdened with while perpetually being reminded of the harm they have inflicted on others. The reader is conscious both to the narrators' supplications of sympathy, their dueling claims of unjust persecution, and the contrary evidence which suggests they are not the innocent victims they each claim to be.

In this way, *Frankenstein* resists the unambiguous moral divide between sufferer and sympathizer, victim and villain, which so often concentrates the Romantic genre. To this point, L. J. Swingle explains that *Frankenstein's* ambiguity and structure “encourages the reader to leave behind his own world of known truths and falsehoods and to experience the world as the novel’s characters experience it” (54). Nonetheless, concerns over *Frankenstein's* ethical implications persisted amongst critics who have produced disparaging, if not misguided, interpretations of the text. Though entirely glorifying or vilifying any of *Frankenstein's* narrators is precisely what Mary Shelley avoids in her novel, literary criticism has, by and large, sought to superimpose a strict moral choice between these characters. A study of early nineteenth-century interpretations of *Frankenstein* reveals that even as Shelley’s contemporaries denigrated the novel, their interpretations of its guiding moral indiscriminately sided with Victor Frankenstein. Likely informed by the conservative values Shelley contested, these critics interpreted *Frankenstein's* titular character as the quintessential patriarch. Because Victor Frankenstein is father, creator, and sovereign, the Creature is inevitably characterized as a dissenting subject or spoiled child. The Creature’s monstrosity and his subsequent barring of the reader’s sympathetic perception remains attributed to his rejection of his naturally subservient position within a patriarchal hierarchy.

Recent criticism has broadened its considerations of *Frankenstein's* theme and core message, but modern interpretations of the novel’s narrators have notably shifted to the opposite extreme. Believing the Creature to be *Frankenstein's* ultimate victim, J. Paul Hunter describes the Creature as “essentially benevolent” (xi). Elizabeth Bear presupposes this sentiment, imagining Victor Frankenstein as “an incredible narcissist” (232) and “hypocrite [who] has no excuse for his own monstrosity” (234) in sharp comparison to the Creature whom she

characterizes as “a benevolent spirit [who] wishes only to help, to be accepted by human society, to find companionship” (244). While these interpretations better acknowledge the Creature’s complexity as a character, analyses which define the Creature’s crimes as little more than the unfortunate consequence of his rejection inadvertently exonerate the character from blame and exclude him from Shelley’s core critiques. Neither approach effectively acknowledges the nuance of *Frankenstein*’s core message: while each narrator cites their suffering as the basis by which they are deserving of sympathetic regard, neither Captain Walton, Frankenstein, nor his Creature function as the novel’s unjust victim. None of *Frankenstein*’s three narrators are entirely deserving of the redemption found within an affirmative sympathetic gaze, but neither are they deserving of the gratuitous misfortune visited upon them by other figures in the text. Though *Frankenstein*’s three narrators can at once be hateful and vindictive characters in their own right, the reader is nonetheless invited to pity each character in respective turns. As the reader navigates the novel’s complex scaffolding, the complex fluidity of sympathetic perception for more than one narrator is not only possible, but textually encouraged.

I. Contemporary Criticism: 1818 -1824

Despite Shelley’s aims to illustrate the necessity of sympathy, contemporary reception of the novel revealed a societal bias which both resisted *Frankenstein*’s call to sympathetic experience and upheld the very patriarchal infrastructure the novel disparages. Though some remained reluctant to find the Creature entirely unworthy of redemption, early interpretations sweepingly identified Frankenstein as the novel’s central patriarch, consequently exonerating the character of any wrongdoing, and failing to recognize Shelley’s characterization of Frankenstein as an antagonist. These considerations subsequently dismissed the Creature as Frankenstein’s

disobedient subordinate, his suffering rationalized by his lesser and inhuman nature. Unlike her contemporaries, Shelley resisted the notion that those favored within patriarchal hierarchy were unerring, exempt from moral criticism, or deserving of unconditional sympathetic regard.

Shelley instead recognized that patriarchal power afforded the privileged produced unchecked dominance over the socially vulnerable and hindered their ability to sympathize with those unlike themselves; each of *Frankenstein's* narrators are similarly allotted unbridled power over individuals who rest at their mercy and Shelley carefully demonstrates that this authority does not motivate them to behave like noble sovereigns, but tyrants instead. In failing to disavow the philosophy which would absolve characters who signify patriarchal authority of all guilt, contemporary criticism failed to recognize both the novel's gender critiques and its dedication to sympathetic failure.

Percy Shelley was the first to critically engage with *Frankenstein*, as his essay "On Frankenstein" (1817) was written a year before the text's public circulation. Though it remained unpublished until 1832, the essay was formulated to counter anticipated criticism of the novel by clearly defining *Frankenstein's* "direct moral" (214). Within this analysis, Shelley's own bias towards Victor reveals itself and the issue of the Creature's monstrosity rises as a predominant analytical concern. Percy Shelley posits that "the Being in 'Frankenstein' is, no doubt, a tremendous creature" (218), but nonetheless identifies the character as "an abortion and an anomaly" (214). Somewhat reluctant to completely demonize the character, he grants that the Creature is "not the offspring of an unaccountable propensity to evil" (214) but instead rendered such through the suffering he endures upon birth. True to the principles exhibited by Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and Mary Shelley, Percy Shelley describes *Frankenstein's* philosophy as such:

Treat a person ill, and he will become wicked. Requite affection with scorn; —let one being be selected, for whatever cause, as the refuse of his kind— divide him, a social being, from society, and you impose upon him the irresistible obligations— malevolence and selfishness. It is thus that, too often in society, those who are best qualified to be its benefactors and its ornaments, are branded by some accident with scorn, and changed, by neglect and solitude of heart, into a scourge and a curse. (214)

This interpretation defines the Creature’s monstrosity as the ramification of his expulsion from a larger communal order, a societal rejection tantamount to abuse which distorts his “original goodness” (214) into “inextinguishable misanthropy” (214). In characterizing the Creature’s wrongdoing as “the children. . .of necessity and human nature” (214), Percy Shelley humanizes the monster but fails to acknowledge or expand on Victor Frankenstein’s responsibility as his maker. Though Shelley expounds on the nature of the Creature’s antagonism in the text, nothing is said of Mary Shelley’s careful construction of Victor’s function as an antagonist. His misdeeds against the Creature and his failed responsibility towards his family, friends, and larger human society, rest completely unaddressed. In proposing that “necessity” and “human nature” (214) catalyzed the Creature’s crimes, Percy Shelley elides Frankenstein from any portion of blame though he alone is the parent and creator of the character this analysis so diligently attempts to humanize.

John Wilson Croker’s criticism of *Frankenstein* in *The Quarterly Review* (1818) similarly idolizes Victor and consequently misconstrues the novel’s core disavowal of patriarchy and antipathy. Easily the most damning amongst Shelley’s contemporaries, Croker condemned the novel’s morbid depiction of reanimation and scientific enterprise, but more pointedly the

Creature's role as the focal character in the text. Insofar as the novel sympathizes with Frankenstein's creature, he argues it "inculcates no lesson of conduct, manners, or morality; it cannot mend, and will not even amuse its readers, unless their taste have been deplorably vitiated" (218). It is worth acknowledging that the periodical for which Croker was writing, *The Quarterly Review*, was famously conservative; Croker was, by all accounts, a reverent Tory who openly rejected the political radicalism of the Romantic movement and took significant issue with the "horrible and disgusting absurdity" (218) of the Godwinian tradition to which *Frankenstein* was dedicated. Croker's demonization of the Creature significantly contrasts his characterization of Frankenstein's role in the novel and belies a fundamental difference in his ethical approach to the novel's ideological aims. His review exclusively refers to Frankenstein's creature as a 'monster' and 'demon' (216), for example, and while he finds the Creature's eloquence laughable, Croker sarcastically applauds that the Creature's "education has given him so good a taste as to detest himself" (216). In comparison, Victor Frankenstein remains the "kind-hearted parent" (217) to an "ungracious child" (217). His subsequent decision to reject and destroy his creation is rendered entirely justified. Croker infamously had little tolerance for Godwin's ideology and his firm preservation of late 18th century institutions loads the parent/child relationship he ascribes to Frankenstein and the Creature with added meaning. Unlike the Romantics and their company, Croker advocated for the preservation of monarchy and, by extension, the preservation of male-dominated power structures. Within such a world view, the father justly serves as sovereign over his household and if Victor Frankenstein is, as Croker would argue, a benevolent father, the attempted destruction of his own creation is neither a crime nor transgression, but the rectification of rebellious son.

Sir Walter Scott's review of *Frankenstein* in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (March 1818) offers a balanced mix of praise and criticism for the novel. Despite a measure of praise for Mary Shelley as an effective writer, Scott joins other contemporary reviewers in his total condemnation of the Creature as a character. He finds fault in Shelley's decision to briefly use the Creature as a narrator, for example, explaining that the Creature's eloquent speech is "not only highly improbable, it is injudicious as its unnecessary minuteness tends rather too much to familiarize us with this being whom . . . loses, by the lengthy oration, some part of the mysterious sublimity annexed to his first appearance" (227). Overall, Scott reads the character as little more than an "animated monster" (226) and "material demon" (227) with "malignant and blood thirsty" (228) desires. As he retells the Creature's desire for a companion, Scott speaks nothing of the character's professed loneliness or exclusion from civilization, though these motivations are expounded upon at length in the text. Scott instead locates the Creature's plea for a partner as "the means of propagating a hideous race. . .which might render the very existence of the present human race a condition precarious and full of horror" (228). In dismissing the Creature's anguish, Scott prescribes malice where, interestingly, even the character of Victor Frankenstein, who receives this request in text, does not.

Akin to Croker, Scott's analysis absolves Frankenstein from any responsibility for the death and destruction that results from the animation of the creature. Victor has, within this reading, "[paid] the penalty of his rash researches into the arcana of human nature in a long illness" (226) and the subsequent slaughter of Frankenstein's loved ones by the creature's hand is consequently interpreted as both gratuitous and undeserved. Speaking nothing of Frankenstein's abandonment of the Creature, the cruelty by which he regards him, or the callousness Frankenstein repeatedly directs towards his family's well-being, he is instead characterized as

the victim of “a wretch who murdered the lovely and helpless” (229). Excluding any mention of The Creature’s good will towards the De Lacey family or his moments of pity towards his maker, Scott reduces the Creature’s actions as “acts of horror and depravity” (227), motivated exclusively by the “irremediable ruin [of] his creator” (229). Within the confines of this interpretation, Frankenstein neither ruins himself nor his family prospects; Scott believes Frankenstein to be a prototypically tragic figure unfairly saddled with tribulation. Despite his trespassing natural laws of life and creation, Frankenstein is, in Scott’s own words, “an unhappy victim. . .exhausted by his sufferings” (229), ultimately free of flaw or misdeed, and Robert Walton, who is scarcely mentioned in any contemporary review, is the sole witness to his mournful demise.

Scarcely six years after its publication, critical reception of *Frankenstein* and its characters began to shift in the Creature’s favor, seemingly at the detriment of an honest reflection of his primary function as one of the novel’s antagonists. An anonymous review of Shelley’s novel in *The Knight’s Quarterly* (August 1824) argued, as no other critique had done before, that the novel’s sympathetic investments rested not in Victor Frankenstein, but his progeny. As many critics would later suggest, this writer argued Frankenstein “ought to have reflected on the means of giving happiness to the being of his own creation,” instead of abusing his creation for “crimes which his [own] negligence gave rise” (240). It is worth noting that this contemporary review, which stands alone in its pity towards the monster, rightfully situates *Frankenstein* within a Romantic tradition, applauding the text for “the best instance of natural passions applied to supernatural events that [the reader] ever met with” (240). Though the reviewer posits that “the most unskillful thing in the book is the extreme ugliness of the being whom Frankenstein creates” (240), they nonetheless empathize deeply with Victor’s creature

with whom they believe “justice is indisputably on his side” (240). In contrast to the readings provided by Croker and Scott, this analysis heavily praises the Creature’s narration; the writer confesses their “interest in the book is entirely on the side of the monster. His eloquence and persuasion, of which Frankenstein complains, are so because they are truth” (240) and dedicates pointed investment in the Creature’s plot above that of Victor Frankenstein and Robert Walton.

II. Modern Criticism: 1970 - Present

Just as Shelley’s contemporaries allied too readily with Victor Frankenstein, renewed interest in the novel broadly demonstrates that modern critical approaches to *Frankenstein* have shifted to the opposite extreme. Present-day approaches to the text now emphasize the Creature’s sympathetic worthiness, often at the disservice of the Shelley’s nuanced characterization of the character as equal parts sympathetic victim and inexcusable assailant. Critics who discuss *Frankenstein*’s feminist implications generally recognize the novel’s critique of patriarchal power. However, uncritical sympathy for the Creature surrenders adequate recognition of his function within Shelley’s critique of sympathetic failure, as his animosity and subsequent violence towards Frankenstein, Walton, and the novel’s female characters illustrates the relationship between patriarchy and antipathy in the text. In *A Critical History of Frankenstein*, Johanna M. Smith explains that scholastic acknowledgement of Mary Shelley prior to the late twentieth century was both scarce and significantly biographical in nature. Scholars were considerably more interested in Mary Shelley’s status as Percy Shelley’s wife and editor, eliding her from his literary circle, and dismissing *Frankenstein* as “a subset of a more significant category such as Romanticism. . .a minor incident in some major and predominantly masculine literary tradition” (237). As feminist criticism rose into prominence throughout the 1970’s,

scholars interrogated Mary Shelley's exclusion from the Romantic canon and reevaluated *Frankenstein* as a proto-feminist project. Since then, post-1990 criticism has only broadened its considerations of previously unexamined elements in the text, effectively extending the allegorical applicability of *Frankenstein*'s archetype of the monster to issues of race, class, disability, and sexual identity.

Recent criticism has gone to great lengths to locate, in strikingly diverse ways, a critique of patriarchal institutions at *Frankenstein*'s core. In their seminal work, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar posit that *Frankenstein* depicts "woman's helpless alienation in a male society" (247) through its depiction of the Creature, whose powerlessness effectively renders him "female in disguise" (237). Devon Hodges similarly genders the Creature's articulation of "the misery of being neither fully inside nor outside culture" (200) as an exclusively feminine experience, while Ellen Moers's analysis describes *Frankenstein* as a semi-autobiographical "horror story of maternity" (82). In associating the Creature's function in the text to the feminine experience, these interpretations usually identify Frankenstein and Walton as antagonists who model patriarchal authority. These readings rightfully recognize the ways in which both characters destroy, trespass against, and eroticize the feminine sphere, but are seldom consistent in their articulation of the Creature's own participation in similar behaviors.

Though the Creature's status as Other may indeed be reminiscent to women's ranking within patriarchal hierarchies of power, it cannot be forgotten that the Creature is explicitly gendered as male in the text and socialized as such by the characters. Gilbert and Gubar's feminist critique of *Frankenstein* rightfully unearths an inherent "femaleness...at the heart of this apparently masculine book" (232), but by gendering Shelley's narrators as "Eve and Eve all

along” (246), the novel’s investment in patriarchal violence, which is in fact enacted most violently by these male characters specifically, is obscured. Shelley’s decision to identify the Creature as male cannot be overlooked or understated: his persecution in the text is not rooted in the belief that he is not masculine, but in the perception that he performs masculinity *incorrectly*. Both in life and fiction, as Judith Butler explains, failed gender performance “initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all” (528). It is therefore imperative to recognize the manner in which the Creature is rendered unable to conform to the masculine mode most elevated within patriarchal ideology: Shelley writes that the Creature “possesse[s] no money, no friends, no kind of property” and is “endued with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome” (86). Significantly, if Walton’s description of the Creature as a non-European “savage” (14) is to be believed, the Creature’s countenance even bars him from the ethnic ideals of colonial England. The Creature’s exclusion from communal and sympathetic circles is thus rooted in a failure to perform a masculine figure of humanity.

In examining Shelley’s use of gendered language, Victor’s experiment, which incites the totality of *Frankenstein*’s plot, is revealed to be patriarchal by design. Without the masculine privilege of a formal scientific education, Frankenstein would not have had the means of effectively executing the mysterious alchemy that animated the Creature from the dead. In successfully creating life, Frankenstein effectively usurps the necessity of women in the reproductive process and potentially eliminates the only power afforded singularly to womankind within patriarchy. It is to this effect that Anne Mellor argues Victor Frankenstein functions as a vehicle for patriarchal institutions which “use the technologies of science and the laws of the polis to manipulate, control, and repress women” (10). In appropriating the forces of

a thunderstorm towards his craft, Frankenstein's scientific enterprise effectively functions as a masculine pursuit against a natural world which Shelley consistently represents as feminine. Insofar as his actions serve as an appropriation of the feminine world, Mellor observes that Frankenstein's experiment is the locus in which violence and gender anxiety overlap: "a rape of nature, a violent penetration and usurpation of the female's hiding places of the womb" (10). To the detriment of this analysis, Mellor's condemnation of patriarchal action does not extend beyond *Frankenstein's* titular character. Scant critical discussion has been made in respect to Captain Walton's expedition, for example, and the myriad ways in which the expedition in *Frankenstein* is implicitly entangled with patriarchal notions of empire. Furthermore, because Justine and Elizabeth's violent deaths are "directly attributable to Victor Frankenstein's self-devoted concern for his own suffering. . .and his own reputation" (4), the Creature is made exempt from any accountability.

Because the Creature's social ostracism is so often paralleled to the feminine experience, feminist considerations which attempt to redeem the Creature as a sympathetic figure often do so at the expense of recognizing his intentionally problematic function in the text. While the Creature is undoubtedly a tragic figure in the novel, *Frankenstein's* unflinching depiction of his capacity for murderous violence obligates a tension between feelings of mutual pity and horror one may feel for him as the plot progresses. In arguing, as Peter Brooks does in *Godlike Science/Unhallowed Arts: Language and Monstrosity in Frankenstein*, that "it must be Frankenstein's bride who will be sacrificed to the bride denied to the Monster" because "the other represents for each the lack or gap within him" (599), the serial murders committed by the Creature are dismissed as the inevitable consequence of some broader equilibrium of loss. The notion that the Creature is a passive participant in the crimes committed by his own hands fails to

account for Shelley's careful characterization of the Creature as a profoundly methodical and intellectual being. This is, after all, the very character who masterfully pursues Frankenstein to the ends of the Earth, effectively frames Justine and Victor for crimes they did not commit, and whose very capacity for language and literacy is realized simply through imitation of the De Lacey family's modeled behaviors. The Creature's intellectual capacity is of critical importance precisely because the murders of William, Elizabeth, Justine, and Henry Clerval are framed as means to a deliberate and sadistic end. In destroying Frankenstein's familial system, the Creature is conscientiously enacting vengeance for the pain he himself has been made to suffer since birth.

Regardless of his redemptive qualities, Shelley's characterization of the Creature as an antagonist cannot be dismissed as it most obviously demonstrates the moral corruption borne from his expulsion from sympathetic community. Though Tang Soo Ping's critical interpretation of *Frankenstein* argues that "even [the Creature's] relentless killing of innocent victims never obscures his Edenistic qualities of loving and caring" (257), such a reading directly contradicts the Creature's own profession: "I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend" (68). Ping's assertion that the Creature "dies for love" (239) and effectively "brings to Walton the promise of redemption" is nowhere supported in the text, as the "depth of sympathy and sorrow that [Captain Walton] has not felt before" (239) is neither demonstrated in his actions nor his account as the last narrator of the novel. Just as hatefulness informs Frankenstein's characterization of his creation even to his dying breath, Walton, too, is frightened and disturbed by the Creature's visage. Shelley reveals Walton's immediate impulse at the sight of the Creature is not to listen to his tale, but instead to attack him as he believes himself "justified in desiring the death of [his] adversary" (146). The volatile nature of this relationship demonstrates that both the Creature and Walton are as culpable of intentional cruelty as Frankenstein himself; their

actions necessitate antipathy towards the characters they feel justified in harming and this antipathy is consistently attributed to the influence of patriarchal institutions.

Modern interpretations of the novel which exonerate the Creature too readily of his crimes consequently perpetuate previous modes of disregarding *Frankenstein's* resistance of an easy moral divide between its characters. The Creature is no doubt an ostracized and orphaned Other, who is “driven from the society and sympathy of [his] fellow creatures” (94), but he is nonetheless responsible for at least five major deaths in the novel. If we are to suppose that *Frankenstein* is, as feminist criticism is wont to argue, invested in the moral wrongs of patriarchal power structures, this cannot be overlooked. Though the Creature is denied humanization and natural rights just as the women in the novel are, he is nevertheless recognized and socialized as male throughout the text. Significantly, the violence he enacts is almost exclusively directed towards women and those who exist within the margins of a domestic or otherwise feminine sphere. While Elizabeth Lavenza and Justine Mortiz undoubtedly remain the most obvious examples of patriarchal violence which seemingly lurks in *Frankenstein's* every corner, even the aborted companion Frankenstein destroys before the Creature's very eyes is female in form and gendered feminine. The annihilation of *Frankenstein's* lineage serves as yet another manifestation of gendered violence, for even when the Creature's victims are men, their deaths enact the destruction of what is conventionally considered the feminine domain.

III. Romanticism & Moral Sense Philosophy

If *Frankenstein* is indeed, as this study will argue, the site of Shelley's engagement with moral sense philosophy, it is important to detail the model of sympathy demonstrated in the novel so that we may best understand its depiction of sympathetic failure. First, sympathy as it

occurs in *Frankenstein* is elevated as the primary means by which a subject may be understood in truth by those around them and allowed dignity and rank in larger society. Through the relaying of narrative, characters allow each other free access into their interiorities; their secret histories, desires, and struggles are at once made bare to the listener and, by consequence, identification between individuals is possible via feelings of sympathy. Moral sense philosophy, and subsequently Romanticism, believed, as David Hume explains in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, that sympathetic connection between individuals allowed “all affections [to] readily pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature” (576). In this vein, intimate knowledge of another person renders possible universality between individuals and, by consequence, problematizes the socially constructed and systematically enforced delineations between oppressors and the oppressed. This facet of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century approaches to sympathy – that is, the perception and potential assimilation of societal Others into radically accepting communities – is especially pertinent to *Frankenstein*’s now iconic reliance on the monster archetype, whose status as Other invokes parallels to various disenfranchised identities.

Captain Robert Walton, Victor Frankenstein, and the Creature all rightfully yearn for sympathy because they are each destitute, misunderstood, and vulnerable to persecution. The acquisition of sympathetic connection is thus rendered the only means by which sense of self, companionship, and, by extension, integration into communal order becomes possible. Though the three narrators idealize sympathetic union, they each nonetheless fail to achieve it because *Frankenstein* locates both its horror and tragedy in, as Lowry Nelson explains, “the seeming impossibility of communicating deep feeling to someone who cares” (167). Sympathetic failure is, in fact, so prominent a concern in this novel that *Frankenstein*’s very structure contributes to

its importance, as the interplay between Shelley's three narrators demonstrates the various ways in which individuals are unable to accurately interpret one another's stories. Holding the philosophical ideals of the Romantic Era at a distance, *Frankenstein* questions the attainability of sympathetic community and posits that where sympathy fails, violence and monstrosity abound.

Mary Shelley's intellectual formation, from which she perceptively draws considerable literary and philosophical influence, reflects *Frankenstein's* adherence and subversion of broader Romantic and proto-feminist traditions. Evident in her recorded life-long scholarship of eighteenth-century texts, Shelley's understanding of sympathy and social ethics was due at least in part to her familial legacy. By the time of her birth, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft each achieved notoriety within England's literary and philosophical circles for their collective works. The ideological fingerprints of Anthony-Ashley Cooper, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith litter their work, embodied in Wollstonecraft's direct quotations of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) in *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798) and Godwin's repeated allusions to Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) throughout his philosophical career. As explained in R.S. White's *Natural Rights and the Birth of Romanticism*, while all Romantic writers may not have followed "the philosophical niceties of social thinkers like Hutcheson and Smith," their awareness of the pervasive ideological debates of their era made itself known regardless, for they "were reflecting them more or less consciously in their poems and novels" (49). *Frankenstein*, it can be said, is thematically, though not always explicitly, engaging with the moral philosophy of these thinkers.

The influence of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft on *Frankenstein's* philosophy of sympathy is evident in Shelley's word choices, literary allusions, and shared thematic investment in the plight of women and the socially ostracized. Mary Shelley frequently

recorded her studies of Godwin's and Wollstonecraft's works throughout her lifetime but appeared especially drawn to their texts in the years directly preceding the completion of her first novella. For example, Godwin's *St. Leon* (1799) relays the tragedies of a man obsessed with the secret arts of alchemy, the same occult science which Shelley's own Victor Frankenstein relies on to animate the dead. Godwin's later novel, *Lives of the Necromancers* (1834), catalogues eminent figures of science and mysticism throughout history, including the likes of Cornelius Agrippa, Albertus Magnus, and Paracelsus whom Frankenstein explicitly invokes in-text when he recounts his studies in Ingolstadt. Most obviously, *Frankenstein* is in itself dedicated to "William Godwin, author of Political Justice, Caleb Williams, etc" (4). This allusion to *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) is especially relevant to *Frankenstein* for it is in this novel specifically that Godwin posits that sympathy is "the magnetic virtue, the hidden essence of our life" (286). Reminiscent of the relationship between Frankenstein and his creation, *Caleb Williams* follows the misfortunes of its titular character, "a solitary being, cut off from the expectation of sympathy, kindness, and the good-will of mankind" (239) who is victimized by an abusive master. Emboldened by the belief that Caleb is "a monster of depravity" (169), Master Falkland subsequently abuses his charge, inciting a chain of events which lead to Caleb's unjust persecution, imprisonment, and near insanity. Like Shelley, Godwin, too, investigates the limits and shortcomings of sympathy, the insufficiency of testimony to effectively convey truth, and the persecution of the vulnerable at the hands of the powerful.

Though criticism has rightfully emphasized Godwin's influence on *Frankenstein* to great lengths, it is Mary Wollstonecraft's writings, which Mary Shelley studied with equal enthusiasm and care, that contain the sociopolitical and feminist philosophies most relevant to the novel.

Author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Wollstonecraft's literary career was conscientious of women's oppression and concentrated with political intent from its inception. Through the mediums of novel and essay, Wollstonecraft spoke in defense of gender equality and, in true Romantic fashion, appealed to her reader's sympathies through imagined, but honest depictions of women's experiences across socioeconomic classes. It is in her final and ultimately unfinished work, *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798), that Wollstonecraft's influence on *Frankenstein* is most apparent. The novella examines the unjust imprisonment of its titular protagonist, whose livelihood and sanity are threatened when, as Wollstonecraft explains, "the healing balm of sympathy is denied" (134) of her. Prison imagery remains a staple amongst Romantic literature – in fact both *Caleb Williams* and *Frankenstein* similarly depict characters being unjustly imprisoned for crimes they did not commit – but Wollstonecraft interpreted imprisonment as an apt metaphor for the totality of the feminine experience. Of the female condition within patriarchy, Maria asks: "was not the world a vast prison, and women born slaves?" (167). This sentiment is echoed almost verbatim by Shelley when the Creature identifies as "vagabond and a slave" (83) because he, like Maria and the women she represents, "possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property" (86). Just as Frankenstein's dominance of the Creature and Walton's mistreatment of his crew depict the breadth of abuse socially afforded to the powerful, Maria's forced institutionalization is only possible because her husband, by virtue of being a wealthy man in a patriarchal society, has total dominion over her civil rights.

It is in Wollstonecraft's aforementioned concern with patriarchal oppression that her particular sympathetic socio-political philosophy rests, an intellectual investment which will later notably parallel and frame *Frankenstein's* own feminist articulations. In consideration of Mary

Wollstonecraft's major writings, Barbara Johnson notes that, for the author, "the injustice of the marriage system for women inheres in the fact that men have total control and in the fact that women's feelings are irrelevant" (78). In what is perhaps the most pivotal scene in the text, Maria appeals to a judge in defense of another inmate, Henry Darnford. Having shared the full breadth of her history, Maria primarily relays the agony she suffered because of her abusive husband, but the judge turns a deaf ear. The trial is no doubt designed to reveal the corruption of the justice system but, just as importantly, it depicts the insufficiency of narrative to compel an unfeeling listener to sympathize and perceive the truth. Wollstonecraft makes clear that the judge is specifically intolerant of the supposed "fallacy of letting women plead their feelings" for "if women were allowed to plead their feelings, as an excuse or palliation of infidelity" English society would be plagued with "a flood-gate for immorality" (354). The judge dismisses Maria's story not because it is beyond the realm of plausibility, but because he specifically refuses to disengage with his personally held prejudice against her gender.

Maria is, like *Frankenstein*, profoundly invested in the ethical and moral costs of the sympathetic failure produced by patriarchy; the absence of sympathetic community facilitates Maria's captivity, bankrupts the efficiency of her testimony before an unfeeling audience, and devastates her sense of self. The only character with whom Maria successfully exchanges accounts is Jemima whose experiences as a sex worker and a member of the low working class have similarly deprived her of "any companions to alleviate [her suffering] by sympathy" (278). Just as *Frankenstein's* Creature describes himself as a "a monster, a blot upon the earth" (84) and "a wild beast" (95), Jemima's self-identification as "the filching cat, the ravenous dog, the dumb brute, who must bear all" (277) excludes her from the realm of human civilization. Jemima

laments that the absence of sympathetic company is directly responsible for the degradation of her innate human potential:

I cannot help attributing the greater part of my misery, to the misfortune of having been thrown into the world without the grand support of life. . .I had no one to love me; or to make me respected, to enable me to acquire respect. . .I was despised from my birth, and denied the chance of obtaining a footing for myself in society. Yes; I had not even the chance of being considered as a fellow-creature. . .I was, in fact, born a slave, and chained by infamy to slavery during the whole of existence, without having any companions to alleviate it by sympathy, or teach me how to rise above it by their example. (278)

This passage embodies Wollstonecraft's seminal argument in *Maria*: Sympathetic community is not only integral to emotional wellness, but necessary to the ethical conduct of the broader social order. Sympathy is thus the core matter from which subject formation, social belonging, and ethical conduct are formed. Societally enforced suffering and personal destruction thus exist in a continuum; denying individuals the right to community is thus depicted as detrimental to their sense of self.

In the footsteps of Wollstonecraft's legacy, Mary Shelley recreates a patriarchal doctrine in *Frankenstein* which favors the masculine over the feminine at every possible level of the social order. The world of *Frankenstein* is founded on a rigid division of gender roles: men populate the public spheres of education, expedition, and labor, while women are confined to the home without exception. Though raised in the same household, Elizabeth Lavenza is not permitted "the same opportunities of enlarging her experience and cultivating her understanding" (110) as Victor. Within the domestic realm, the women most associated to the Frankenstein

family are provided gender-specific responsibilities: they are wives, caretakers, and nurses. In the home, they are at once tended to “as [one] should on a favorite animal” (20) and simultaneously victimized by masculine violence, for it is in the marital bed and the servant’s quarters that Elizabeth and Justine meet their respective fates. The De Lacey family mentioned briefly in the Creature’s narrative may embody this pattern’s only exception, but it is worth noting that their idyllic family structure, in which men and women cohabit peacefully, exist *outside* the bounds of British civilization. Impoverished as they are, Felix, Agatha, and Safie each execute the duties of labor and the household with seemingly no recognition of a substantial social divide between the two. Notably, the De Lacey family is also one in which all members are literate and well-learned, as it is from their studies specifically that the Creature acquires a capacity for language and sophisticated thought. With this in mind, Agatha and Safie’s status as the only women left unscathed by the novel’s conclusion effectively confirms that the women most subjected to the Frankenstein family’s patriarchal ideology are consequently the least successful in traversing territories dominated by men or surviving their violence. Justine is executed for the murder of William, for example, and Elizabeth, though convinced of Justine’s innocence, is unable to save her: the testimony she presents the judge and jury is unable to save Justine, “on whom the public indignation was turned with renewed violence, charging her with the blackest ingratitude” (56). Later, when the Creature vows to seek vengeance against Frankenstein on the night of their wedding Elizabeth is left unguarded by Victor and violently murdered. It is to this end that any successful study of *Frankenstein*’s Romantic ideology must be considered in tandem with its feminist critique.

Patriarchal Logic and the Failure of Moral Sympathy in *Frankenstein*

Captain Robert Walton's ill-fated expedition to the North Pole not only begins the frame narrative of *Frankenstein*, but also establishes the preeminent importance of sympathy and the impossibility of sympathetic connection within a patriarchal framework of behavior and ideology. His pursuit of the Northern Passage, introduced as an appropriately "masculine" value, quickly develops into a feverish obsession, which eventually endangers not only himself, but also his entire crew – an arc which mirrors the overarching way Victor Frankenstein and society at large mistreat and betray the Creature, lead to sympathetic failure, and culminate in disaster. Walton's voyage reflects the interest in exploration that became rampant throughout the Enlightenment Era. While the expansion of globalization through the eighteenth century saw previously unknown lands explored, mapped, and colonized, the Arctic remained unclaimed. It is to this effect that Francis Spufford's study of fictional representations of polar exploration declares Walton the prototypical "daring, definitively *male* experimenter" (59), as men were the chief agents by which imperialist projects were most embodied, weaponized, and enacted. To this point, Walton's pursuit of the northwest passage is characterized as a quest for what Spufford refers to as a "fantasy [of] a literal polar paradise" (58) where, in Walton's own description, "snow and frost are banished, and sailing over a calm sea, we may be wafted to a land surpassing in wonders and beauty every region hitherto undiscovered on the hospitable globe" (7). It is worth noting, too, that Walton explicitly believes himself a participant in the project of colonization: He imagines his undertaking will work towards "the inestimable benefit [of] all mankind" by reconfiguring geographical borderlines and establishing passage to the "unexplored regions" (12) of the Earth still untethered to England. For Walton, knowledge of the magnetic pole is explicitly coded as an act of conquest on behalf of the British empire.

Walton's inability to recognize the innate human dignity of characters unlike himself

exemplifies on a very basic level the sympathetic failure which comes to dominate the novel's structure. Captain Walton's egocentrism and boundless ambition represents more than just the first indication of the novel's chief concerns with toxic masculinity; it is a behavior set in direct contradiction to Shelley's values of empathy and sympathy. Acting as a primer for the same insidious behaviors Victor Frankenstein will later demonstrate in his own narrative, Walton represents a single-minded pursuit of "Promethean science, the period's heady sense that the powers of nature might be appropriated for humanity" (59) which is, importantly, gendered. As Spufford explains, Frankenstein and Walton both "fail to ground their raptures in an emotional intelligence associated throughout the novel with women; in Walton's case, with his sensible sister, whose reservations about his enthusiasm for the polite. . .make up the unheard position against which he tries to justify himself" (60). Examination of the text would argue that Frankenstein and Walton do more than neglect the virtues that rest outside of the patriarchal domain, they explicitly participate in the destruction of it. Just as Victor neglects and ultimately eviscerates his familial circle, Walton's shipmates, who occupy a lower social rank than their captain, are killed by the harsh conditions engendered by his leadership.

To Walton, an undoubtedly unreliable narrator, his standing as a patriarchal figure is paramount; he rejects any inkling of sympathy for the characters surrounding him, deflecting the dangers fostered by his poor navigation, the polar seas, and the crew's critique of his mistakes. Instead, Walton locates blame in the men who are to him his social inferiors. Whereas he initially describes his crew as a unit "possessed of dauntless courage" (10) who share his desire to "conquer all fear of danger or death" (7), Walton's concluding passages at *Frankenstein's* end characterize the crew as brutish cowards. When Walton's expedition is effectively halted by the sailors, he regards their resistance as a "mutiny caused by despair" (182). However, the crew

members are not revolting out of the “cowardice and indecision” (155) Walton unfairly attributes to them; a collective study of his letters reveals that the revolt is instead borne from valid indignation felt towards Walton’s leadership. The mutiny is a form of self-preservation, for it is Walton’s captainship which has by then lead to the deaths of a significant portion of the crew scarcely nine months into their expedition.

Despite his outward clinging to the trappings of patriarchy, Walton’s letters to his sister, which serve as the rind of *Frankenstein’s* cascading narratives, introduce the issue of sympathy as a central concern in the novel via his desire for sympathetic community. Walton’s opening letter concludes, “Oh, that some encouraging voice would answer me in the affirmative!” (9). This deep-seated desire for sympathetic community is further expanded in the next letter, wherein Walton confesses:

I have one want which I have never yet been able to satisfy; and the absence of the object of which I now feel as a most severe evil. . . I desire the company of a man who could sympathize with me; . . . I bitterly feel the want of a friend. I have no one near me, gentle yet courageous, possessed of a cultivated as well as of a capacious mind, whose tastes are like my own, to approve or amend my plans. How would such a friend repair the faults of your poor brother!” (10)

The isolation of which Walton complains, however, is one of his own design. For instance, Walton believes his lieutenant to be “a man of wonderful courage and enterprise” (11), but ultimately decides against fostering any relationship with him on the basis of class, as the uneducated man has “has passed all his life on board a vessel, and has scarcely an idea beyond the rope and the shroud” (11). By his own admission, Walton sweepingly discounts the sailors as potential sympathetic partners because he implicitly does not believe them to be his equals nor

“possessed of a cultivated as well as of a capacious mind” (10). Cynthia Pon argues that this elitism finds its cornerstone in patriarchy, as “masculine humanity only recognizes its own image on the basis of gender, class and race. The female, the socially inferior, and the non-European are excluded from the ideal and practice” (36). The criteria for Walton’s friendship thus necessitates a privileged position within an exclusive order of class, wealth, and education to which his shipmates have no access.

Upon discovering Frankenstein on the ice-floes of the Arctic, Walton’s instantaneous affection for Victor appears to be rooted in recognition of their mutual investment in a form of privileged masculinity. Having dismissed his shipmates as his social inferiors and thus undeserving of his sympathetic consideration, Walton believes he has found a suitable companion in Victor: “attractive and amiable” (16), well-educated, and possessive of a nobility and elegance found nowhere else. In her seminal book, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes homosocial relationships as a mode of intense but nonsexual bonding between men in which women serve as the conduits through which their mutual and forbidden affections are expressed. Broadening the scope of Sedgwick’s theory, it can be argued that, in the absence of women, the triangular relationship from which Frankenstein and Walton form their bond is built at the expense of other men who, though not on the basis of gender, still represent to them their social inferiors on the level of class. Walton relies on Frankenstein to dissolve the mutiny, for example, delegating to him a measure of power over the crew which would otherwise rightfully belong to the unlearned lieutenant. In exchange for the authority Walton gives Frankenstein over his subordinates, Frankenstein offers Walton joint dominance over his creation. Frankenstein relays his history to Walton for a singular purpose: to secure an oath which signifies Walton’s commitment to Frankenstein’s murderous

campaign against the Creature. In the event of his untimely death, Walton is thus instructed to “hear [Frankenstein’s Creature] not” but instead “thrust [his] sword into his heart, for [Victor] will hover near, and direct the steel aright” (150).

As *Frankenstein*’s pattern of failed sympathetic relationships demonstrates, Walton understands that sympathy is contingent on identification and that the possibility of sympathetic connection rests primarily on narrative exchange. Nonetheless, his attempts at achieving sympathetic community are incessantly thwarted by the mistake of addressing himself to an unwilling listener. Walton argues that without “intimate sympathy with a fellow man,” he can “boast little happiness” (16), suggesting that personhood and emotional fulfillment are intrinsically relational by nature. Though Walton seeks a sympathizer “whose eyes would reply to [his own]” (10), Frankenstein disallows the mutual emotional access Walton yearns after. He concedes that men are “unfashioned creatures. . .half made up” (16) if they do not have suitable companions, but if sympathetic community is indeed the “the hidden essence of our life” (286) which Godwin understood it to be, Frankenstein resigns himself to the notion that he “cannot begin life anew” (15). In discrediting Walton’s ability to “replace those who are gone” (152), Frankenstein effectively refuses to answer Walton’s call, preferring isolation to solidarity with a lesser man. In voicing his narrative solely to secure Walton’s faithfulness in his vengeful campaign, Frankenstein disallows Walton the only opportunity he has granted himself to discover an idealized reflection of himself in another.

Though Frankenstein’s account reveals the ramifications of antipathy and patriarchal relationships, as his abuse of the Creature generates all of the novel’s subsequent horrors, Walton learns nothing from his narrative. Upon Frankenstein’s death, Walton’s failure to connect profoundly with Frankenstein and effectively achieve sympathetic connection manifests in

feelings of instantaneous animosity for the Creature. Despite knowledge of the violent end of the Frankenstein lineage and even demonstrated in the scientist's frame, as Walton observes that Frankenstein is physically "emaciated by fatigue and suffering" (14), laying eyes on the Creature, Walton is instantly overcome by the "first impulses . . . in destroying [Frankenstein's] enemy" (158). The Creature is consequently granted the opportunity to vocalize his "agony and remorse" (158), but his testimony, like Jemima's before it, fails to sufficiently inspire its intended sympathetic effect. Informed by the colonial ideology which has defined his captaincy from its inception, Walton deafens his ears to the Creature's lament at least partly because he perceives the Creature as a racial Other. Just as Frankenstein, the prototypical Anglo-Saxon, believes the Creature to be undeserving of natural rights and positive regard, Walton does not recognize the Creature as a member of humanity but "a being which had the shape of a man" (13), a "savage inhabitant of some undiscovered island" (14). Identifying the Creature as "monster" (158), "wretch" (159), and "fiend" (159), just as Frankenstein has done in his personal narrative, Walton's violent intent is only momentarily halted by a "mixture of curiosity and compassion" (158) at the sound of the Creature's weeping. The Creature is consequently granted the opportunity to relay his suffering, but his testimony is insufficient to inspire significant emotional effect. "It is not pity that you feel," argues Walton, immediately invalidating the nature of the Creature's testimony, but "lament only because the victim of your malignity is withdrawn from your power" (159). When Walton's sight returns to Frankenstein's form, from which the Creature's physical difference is rendered especially apparent, his "indignation is rekindled" (159) against him and the weight of the Creature's testimony is forgotten once and for all.

Before the formation of the Creature, the ideological blueprint fueling Victor

Frankenstein's misogyny, which informs his subsequent devaluation of women and the socially ostracized, is first presented as a masculine rite of passage within the Frankenstein household. The opening passage of Frankenstein's account establishes his familial legacy as a decidedly patriarchal one, in which the combined legacy of "ancestors [who] had been for many years counsellors and syndics" (18), and his father Alphonse, who "filled several public situations with honour and reputation" (18), establish the Frankenstein lineage as "one of the most distinguished of that republic" (18). That Shelley, the child of so notable a mother, would forgo any mention of a matriarchal presence within the Frankenstein clan is worth noting here; the occupation of the public sphere is at once a masculine tradition within Frankenstein's family and an indication of the continued absence of women from their consideration. The first and only matriarch in the Frankenstein family appears to be Caroline, who is first introduced as the daughter of Beaufort, a merchant and friend of Victor's father. Though a child, Caroline procures work and "contrives to earn a pittance scarcely sufficient to support life" (19) after Beaufort falls ill. Just as we observe of the Frankenstein lineage, no mention of Caroline's mother appears in the text. In effect, Caroline functions as both daughter and matriarch of her own household. Caroline exchanges one patriarchal authority figure for another. Her father becomes the sole focus of her thoughts, as "her time was entirely occupied in attending him," until she is joined to Alphonse in a marriage that is similarly defined by her "gratitude and worship" (19) of him.

This model of a young woman, originally played by Caroline and replicated a generation later in the characters Elizabeth Lavenza and Justine Mortiz, demonstrates a key component of the Frankenstein family unit: that it rejects difference by essentially replicating itself, and that it sees women, regardless of their roles, as interchangeable. Each woman in the text occupies the function of homemaker, pseudo-parent, and wife, playing all roles, yet also simultaneously none.

Elizabeth's relation to the Frankenstein family is notably reconfigured in the 1831 revision of *Frankenstein*, but whether she is Victor's cousin as she is in the original publication or the child of garish villagers adopted by a benevolent Caroline during an Italian vacation, Elizabeth has an unchanging purpose as a character—she is adopted into the family so that she may become Victor's "playfellow" (20), his "more than sister" (43), and "future wife" (20). When Caroline dies, her dying supplication is directly to Elizabeth who is now expected to "supply [Caroline's] place" for the Frankenstein children in her stead. When Justine Mortiz is similarly accepted into the Frankenstein household, Justine "so imitate[s] her phraseology and manners" (67) she effectively becomes Caroline's replica. Furthermore, it is Justine, not Alphonse or Victor, who parents William, a maternal function which would rightfully belong to Caroline had she survived. Examining the strict function of women in the Frankenstein household, Johanna M. Smith writes "the Frankenstein family's incestuous pattern of reproducing itself by excluding difference could hardly be clearer" (321). This exclusion of difference no doubt returns in full force as *Frankenstein* demonstrates the failures of sympathetic connection later in the text, but it is significant here that this pattern rests on the baseline assumption that women are effectively interchangeable.

Women in *Frankenstein* are measured not as individuals in their own right, but reduced to the service they perform for the men who surround them. They are, in effect, functions before they are people. Just as Frankenstein's parents reduce Elizabeth to the myriad domestic roles she could potentially fulfill for their son, Victor dehumanizes her in turn. In his account, Elizabeth's very existence is suspended in perpetual service to the Frankenstein family: "her sympathy was ours; her smile, her soft voice, the sweet glance of her celestial eyes, were ever there to bless and animate us" (45). He professes the "warmest admiration and affection" (108) for Elizabeth, but

repeatedly likens her to the non-human in a manner that is nowhere else seen except in the case of the Creature: because “the saintly soul of Elizabeth shone like a shrine-dedicated lamp in our peaceful home,” explains Frankenstein, his affection for her akin to what one would devote not to a confidante or lover but to a “a favorite animal” (20). In Frankenstein’s own words, Elizabeth exists perpetually outside of the public world, a caged bird whose chief function is “to subdue [Frankenstein] to a semblance of her own gentleness” (45). This language could not contrast more radically against the language which Frankenstein employs to describe Henry Clerval. Whereas Elizabeth is Frankenstein’s “reward” (135) and the “consolation for [his] unparalleled sufferings” (135), Henry is Victor’s “beloved friend” (111), “fellow pupil” (44), and “favourite companion” (45), and he felt “never completely happy when Clerval was absent” (21).

Frankenstein’s adverse relationship with the feminine is further illustrated in Shelley’s characterization of his scientific pursuits as a figurative act of encroachment upon devalued feminine spaces. In rationalizing the morbid obsession which led him to reanimate dead matter, Frankenstein describes his experiment as the “[pursuit of] nature to her hiding places” (33). Anne Mellor explains that *Frankenstein’s* depiction of masculine “scientific penetration and technological exploitation of female nature . . . is only one dimension of a more general cultural encoding of the female as passive and possessable, the willing receptacle of male desire” (1). If nature is recognized as a feminine force, it is important to recognize that the rewards of its exploitation are reaped by men in the greater interest of patriarchal institutions. Walton’s expedition is thus paralleled with Frankenstein’s scientific pursuits; just as Walton ventures into the North Pole so that he may, as Shelley writes, “tread a land never before imprinted” (7) at the behest of the British empire, Frankenstein’s experiment is chiefly motivated by the fantasy that “among so many men of genius...[he] alone should be reserved to discover so astonishing a

secret" (31). Frankenstein's aim in the creation of a new species is a strictly masculine endeavor from its commencement, as he imagines himself a pioneer within a discipline which precludes women participants. Frankenstein's aim is not only to distinguish himself from other men, who function as both his equals and rivals, but to fashion a form of life-bearing that would render women unnecessary. "No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely" (33) as his own creation, Frankenstein imagines, because he endeavors to serve as his progeny's only parent; in his imaginings, the necessity of a mother is nil.

It is the male-on-male violence, injustice, and sympathetic failure depicted in the novel that situates Frankenstein's disregard of femininity and the overarching ramifications of patriarchal doctrine as central concerns. In *Frankenstein*, as in the works of Mary Wollstonecraft, patriarchy is as insidious as it is omnipresent, making itself manifest within every dimension of the narrative and fueling every act of physical and emotional violence depicted therein. In what is perhaps the most direct homage to *Maria: or the Wrongs of Woman*, Frankenstein's narrative account exhibits a brief shift in setting which crucially presents a Swiss courthouse as a site of ethical injustice. By the thirteenth chapter in which these events unfold, Frankenstein has already successfully animated his progeny from the dead, disowned him, and become victim to the Creature's vengeance. Justine is promptly accused of the Creature's crime, as evidence implicating her in William Frankenstein's murder is forced on her person. When the case is brought to trial, Justine is granted the opportunity to plead innocent and thus provides an account in which "surprise, horror, and misery were strongly expressed" (55) in an attempt to inspire in the jury a profound emotional response to her case. Just as Wollstonecraft's Maria is her own defendant, Justine "collected her powers and spoke in an audible although variable voice" (55) before ultimately unfeeling listeners who, unconvinced of her innocence and resentful of her

demonstration of feeling, regard her narrative not with sympathy, but “public indignation,” “renewed violence,” and “the blackest ingratitude” (56).

Unlike *Maria*, where the protagonist is provided a single female sympathetic companion in whom she may find solace, *Frankenstein* further probes the alienation caused by patriarchal sympathetic failure by surrounding Justine Mortiz with male characters whose personal investments in patriarchal doctrine directly contribute to her torment and execution. Citing an alleged “depravity and ingratitude” (52) Justine never demonstrates in the text, Alphonse Frankenstein believes Justine guilty of William’s murder without hesitation, rendering Elizabeth the only character for whom Justine’s innocence cannot be doubted. Though she endeavors to “prove [Justine’s] innocence” through a testimony that will “melt the stony hearts of [Justine’s] enemies by [her] tears and prayers” (58), Elizabeth maintains the same social vulnerability as Justine by virtue of their shared womanhood, which consequently renders her testimony illegitimate before the court. Though Alphonse and Victor command more authority and remain better capable of halting Justine’s persecution, neither man chooses to do so. While the judge and jury fail to perceive the truth in Justine’s testimony and thus condemn her for a crime she did not commit, Frankenstein perceives her suffering only insofar as he can devalue its depth and relevance. Confronted by her anguished testimony, he remains convinced that his pain surpasses that of Justine’s: “The poor victim, who on the morrow was to pass the dreary boundary between life and death, felt not as I did, such deep and bitter agony” (108). Frankenstein further posits that “the tortures of the accused did not equal mine; she was sustained by innocence, but the fangs of remorse tore my bosom, and would not forgo their hold” (62). Significantly, Frankenstein’s rationalization for his dismissal of Justine’s testimony directly contradicts Justine’s confession: “threatened and menaced, I almost began to think that I was the monster

that he said I was. . . . I had none to support me; all looked on me as a wretch doomed to ignominy and perdition” (58). The text makes clear Justine’s emotional devastation. The suffering she experiences in the face of injustice and antipathy obliterates her sense of self. The consequence of her unremitting alienation is not only made manifest in her execution, but also in the preemptive torture of her problematic self-image, a sense that she is non-human, wicked, and thus deserving of the destruction she soon suffers.

Victor’s interactions with Justine demonstrate his failure as a sympathetic listener, taken to an extreme; he is egoistic, antipathetic toward others, and dismissive toward women. That Victor is only invested in Justine’s suffering insofar as he can appropriate ownership of it is evident in his failure to intervene in her execution. Though he identifies his involvement in the death of his younger brother, recognizing himself “not in deed, but in effect, the true murderer,” (59), his self-obsession steadies any impulse to act upon that knowledge. Because disclosing the true identity of William’s killer would implicate him and sully his reputation, he refuses to exonerate Justine for a crime she did not commit. In effect, Frankenstein values his legacy above Justine’s life. Furthermore, he acknowledges this pain so that it may further justify his continued campaign to murder the Creature and “extinguish that life which [he] had so thoughtlessly bestowed” (62). Notably, Shelley here demonstrates a shift in Frankenstein’s internal logic: Victor cites his responsibility in William’s murder as the basis by which he can dismiss earnestly sympathizing with Justine’s plight, but refuses the full connotations of culpability. Victor instead absolves himself of responsibility within a matter of passages, explaining “when I reflected on *his* crimes and malice, my hatred and revenge [for the Creature] burst all bounds of moderation” (62). No longer willing to acknowledge his pivotal role in Justine’s execution, Frankenstein instead commits himself to “wreck the utmost extent of abhorrence on his head and avenge the

deaths of William and Justine” (62), presenting himself as the vindicator of the very crimes he acknowledged his participation in.

The murder of Elizabeth Lavenza following the abortive destruction of the female creature who functions as her narrative foil serves to highlight the relationship whereby gendered violence often follows sympathetic failure within patriarchal culture. After the deaths of William and Justine, the novel undergoes a brief shift in narrators once the Creature confronts Victor with a singular plea. He requests that Frankenstein provide a companion with whom he can “live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for [his] being” (101). It is through his formative experiences as a spectator of the De Lacey family that the Creature develops both a sense of self and a sympathetic philosophy cohesive to Shelley’s own. The Creature’s account of his rejection from the “chain of existence and events” (104) of sympathetic community suggests the failure of those around him to properly recognize his “benevolent and good” (68) nature. Their subsequent inability to regard him with sympathy, dignity, and an awareness of his natural rights as a member of their relational tribe fosters a “misery [that] made [The Creature] a fiend” (68).

The Creature’s solicitation for a being like himself is problematized by the baseline presumption that she will function as his mate; despite eliciting the sympathy of his own creator, the Creature lacks an intrinsic sympathetic capacity for the companion he desires. Nowhere in the text does the Creature anticipate that his female counterpart would fail to meet his desires or that her intentions would deviate from his own. In fact, the Creature’s request parallels the Frankenstein family’s own domestic presumptions at the novel’s start. Just as Elizabeth was adopted with the explicit design that she would marry Victor, the Creature’s request necessitates not only the female creature’s existence, but her obedience, companionship, and affection, too: “I demand a creature of another sex, but as hideous as myself . . . we shall be monsters, cut off from

all the world; but on that account, we shall be more attached to one another" (102). Believing her to be the Eve to his status as Frankenstein's Adam, the Creature's presumptions towards his anticipated companion demonstrate the Creature's gendered socialization. Just as Frankenstein and the De Lacey family have taught the Creature literacy, speech, and social intelligence, they have also clearly modeled a gender ideology which he has completely absorbed. Insofar as these characters have internalized and participated in patriarchal culture, they have taught the Creature a social doctrine which asserts men's control over women, who are believed to solely exist, in some form or another, to their benefit.

Patriarchal thought inspires both the near-creation *and* subsequent dismemberment of the female creature in the novel; a sequence that seems to encapsulate virtually all other instances of violence, oppression, and domination of the novel's feminine figures. As Frankenstein gathers the materials necessary to construct the female creature, his anxieties regarding feminine autonomy and sexuality are at the forefront of his account:

I was now about to form another being, of whose dispositions I was alike ignorant; she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate, and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness. He had sworn to quit the neighborhood of man, and hide himself in deserts; but she had not; and she, who in all probability was to become a thinking and reasoning animal, might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation. . . . She also might turn with disgust from him to the superior beauty of man; she might quit him, and he be again alone, exasperated by the fresh provocation of being deserted by one of his own species. (118-119)

Demonstrating reluctance nowhere else exhibited in the novel, Frankenstein questions whether or not he possesses “the right . . . to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations” (118), having evidently surmised the female creature’s malignant nature. Frankenstein’s compassion for the Creature is utterly eradicated by the mere sight of the female body before him and, more significantly, all the terrifying possibilities her gender invokes. The Creature’s narrative demonstrated his innate potential for altruism and harmony, but Frankenstein nonetheless imagines, without evidence, that the feminine creation might be “ten thousand times” (118) more malicious than her counterpart. Though she has not so much as drawn breath, Frankenstein believes her capable of unparalleled evil surpassing that of his first progeny. He fears she will unleash “a race of devils [that] would be propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror” (119). He even believes her capable of a sexual trespass which is never once supposed of the male creature, despite the Creature’s repeated acknowledgement of Caroline, Agatha, and Justine’s beauty: that she may choose a human male as her sexual partner and thereby cross the natural boundaries which separate the living and undead.

Frankenstein’s decision to abort the female creation is rooted in a rejection of the feminine and in a belief that womanhood must be monitored and controlled at all times. His horror is directly traced to a deeply held revulsion at the prospect of feminine sexuality that cannot be controlled by him, the masculine Creature, or any human male. Mellor explains that the female creature “defies that sexist aesthetic that insists that women be small, delicate, modest, passive, and sexually pleasing—but available only to their lawful husbands” (7). This is no doubt confirmed by the knowledge that it is the female creature’s visage, not her actions, that inspire Frankenstein’s antipathy and consternation. Asserting his patriarchal control over all the

potential sexual transgressions the female creature signifies, Frankenstein describes the mutilation of her body as one would the destruction of an object: “trembling with passion, [I] tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged” (119). As he reflects on the subsequent carnage, Frankenstein reasserts this dehumanizing stance by confessing he “almost felt as if [he] had mangled the living flesh of a human being” (120). When Victor imagined the limitless gratitude of his first creation, he likened the male progeny to a child; when Victor considers the mangled form of the female creature, she is never recognized as a person. Though he regards neither of his creations with a substantially affirmative sympathetic gaze, the female creature is especially victimized by the lethal combination of her creator’s patriarchal ideology and antipathy: Frankenstein has by this point in the novel hesitated to destroy the Creature on several occasions and has even experienced a single moment of fleeting pity for him, but the female creature is provided no such compassion. Frankenstein’s unfounded beliefs regarding her wretched nature and subsequent unworthiness as a human being guarantees she is denied sympathetic regard so thoroughly that she is dehumanized, demonized, and denied the natural right of life before she has ever drawn breath.

The ease with which Frankenstein justifies the dismemberment of the female creature and the Creature’s subsequent victimization of Elizabeth as a vendetta against his creator are indicative of the broader patriarchal devaluation of feminine lives. In *Frankenstein and the Feminine Subversion of the Novel*, Devon Hodges explains, “like the monster, woman in a patriarchal society is defined as an absence, an enigma, mystery, or crime, or she is allowed to be a presence only so that she can be defined as a lack, a mutilated body that must be repressed to enable men to join the symbolic order and maintain their mastery” (162). Having witnessed Frankenstein’s mutilation of his anticipated companion, the Creature releases a “howl of devilish

despair and revenge” (119) and swears to “be with [Frankenstein] on his wedding night” (121). To this effect, Elizabeth’s murder on the night of her marriage to Victor is loaded with added significance: Frankenstein’s inability to perceive the obvious intent of the Creature’s threat reveals his considerations are exclusively tethered to the masculine. In assuming himself to be the Creature’s intended target, Frankenstein recognizes Elizabeth as nothing more than a spectator of his imagined death: “When I thought of my beloved Elizabeth. . .when she should find her lover so barbarously snatched from her— tears, the first I had shed for many months, streamed from my eyes” (121). Later, the discovery of Elizabeth’s death is articulated by Frankenstein first and foremost through his own physiology before any mention is made of her mangled corpse: “my arms dropped, the motion of every muscle and fibre was suspended; I could feel the blood trickling in my veins, and tingling in the extremities of my limbs” (121). In effect, Elizabeth’s murder is entwined with myriad manifestations of patriarchal ideology: Frankenstein’s repulsion of feminine sexuality, the Creature’s refusal to recognize women as individuals in their own right, untethered to the wickedness of the men around them, and their shared devaluation of women’s lives. As this murderous *quid pro quo* suggests, within both Frankenstein and the Creature’s respective points of view, Elizabeth and the female creature are effectively interchangeable. Their deaths serve as the vehicles by which Frankenstein and the creature may best one another, their lives effectively reduced to little more than collateral damage of an ongoing conflict.

The Creature physically enforces the patriarchal violence which Frankenstein only commits symbolically. He is borne from the appropriation of a natural world characterized as intrinsically feminine, his very existence threatens the necessity of the womb, and his murders make manifest the patriarchal fantasy to control, punish, and destroy women’s lives, their

sexuality, and their autonomy. Though the violence visited upon Justine, Elizabeth, and the female creature most obviously demonstrate *Frankenstein's* concerns with gender, antipathy, and violence, the deaths of the novel's male characters are also riddled with feminine connotations. Immediately after the Creature vows a vendetta against all who embody "the human form" (98), he encounters William Frankenstein who immediately perpetuates the hateful cycle enacted by Walton and Victor before him. Having spared the Creature little more than a single glance, William immediately berates him as a "monster," "ugly wretch," and "ogre" (100) and evokes Alphonse Frankenstein as a patriarchal authority who will subordinate the Creature: "My papa is a syndic—he is M. Frankenstein—he will punish you. You dare not keep me" (100). The subsequent murder of the only child in the Frankenstein household represents the first act of eradication against the family's domestic realm, as William's death subsequently prompts Justine's execution and nullifies Caroline's dying wish that her child be kept from harm. Overcome with grief after Elizabeth's murder, Alphonse's subsequent death signifies the end of the only other surviving patriarch in the Frankenstein lineage besides the protagonist. The creature's actions effectively eradicate the Frankenstein bloodline and decimate masculine characters who are each associated with the traditionally feminine and domestic sphere: children and elders.

Throughout Shelley's characterization of the toxic relationship of creation, sympathy, and destruction between Victor and the Creature, a caveat in *Frankenstein's* feminist concerns appears: that sympathetic failure, even between men, is not only born from patriarchal ideology but also weaponized by it. To this point, it is worth observing the pattern exhibited in the language which Victor and the Creature employ throughout the text: their dueling narration contains numerous allusions to masculine bonds which are notably defined by an imbalance of

power. Frankenstein's self-identification as patriarch, for instance, necessitates the identification of the Creature as his social inferior and so produces an expectation of obedience. For example, Frankenstein briefly identifies as the "father" (33) to the prospective "child" (33) that will be borne from his experiment. However, his complete unwillingness to express towards the Creature the same "bonds of devoted affection" (41) and "silken cord of guidance" (42) Frankenstein received from his own parents exposes the true nature of this assertion; Frankenstein does not claim fatherhood because he genuinely intends to parent his creation; on the contrary, Victor abandons the Creature moments after its 'birth,' at the precise moment in which he behaves most infantile: defenseless and totally unaware, arms outstretched as he stumbles towards Victor, babbling "some inarticulate sounds" (36). Instead, fatherhood is a matter of patriarchal status, a means by which Frankenstein's ego can "claim the gratitude of his child so completely" (33), lord over his offspring, and later justify his intended murder of the Creature because he is the one who "bestowed" (62) him with life.

Once the narrative frame shifts to the Creature's perspective, his repeated deferment to the very principles which Frankenstein and Walton previously invoked to disavow him reveals the Creature's own indoctrination into the patriarchal ideology that is a feature of English subjectivity. Though the Creature's identification of Frankenstein degrades from "father" (33) and "creator" (69) to "tyrant and tormentor" (121), each of these relationship models are definitively masculine and burdened with an imbalance of power which only emphasizes the Creature's vulnerability within the chain of patriarchal authority. That the Creature's defers to patriarchal models of relational power is evident in his pivotal supplication to Frankenstein:

I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king if thou wilt also perform thy part, which thou owest me. Oh, Frankenstein, be not

equitable to every other and trample upon me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection, is most due. Remember that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. (68)

The Creature's plea rests on an interior logic which imagines the bonds between sovereign and subject as benevolent in nature, whereby one's actions, sentiments, and sympathetic reception are perpetually informed by what is rightfully owed from one man to the other. This request is intertwined, too, with an understanding that sympathetic connection is contingent on effective narrative exchange, as the Creature begins his entreaty by requesting, "let your compassion be moved. . . Listen to my tale . . . hear me" (66-67). Sympathetic connection on behalf of the empowered towards the suffering, then, is imagined by the Creature not as an act of charity, but as an ethical obligation of the patriarchal position Frankenstein occupies. That this supplication not only fails, but also counterintuitively confirms Frankenstein's authority and subsequent liberty to further reject and destroy the Creature only exposes the injustice inherent to the patriarchal social contracts both characters invoke.

Frankenstein, however, is too consumed by those patriarchal ideas to allow his hatred toward the Creature to be checked; believing himself to be the Creature's social superior, he rejects any idea of responsibility or sympathetic obligation. In response to the Creature's petition, Frankenstein regards him with increasingly dehumanizing language: identifying the Creature not as a Miltonian Adam but instead a "vile insect" (67), "abhorred monster" (68), "fiend" (68), and "wretched devil" (68) within a single passage. This language is not merely injurious, it is also designed with the express purpose to exclude the Creature from any sense of community, identification, or likeness with his speaker. Because the designation of the character

as ‘monster’ is a direct rejection of the character’s self-identification as “thy Creature” (68), Frankenstein at once demonizes his creation and effectively disowns him once more, rejecting any implication of ethical obligation towards him. Reflecting the Creature’s understanding that narrative exchange is the means by which sympathy may be fostered between them, Frankenstein further declares, “I will not hear you. There can be no community between you and me” (68).

Compounding on the examples previously demonstrated by Shelley’s Justine and Wollstonecraft’s Jemima, the Creature’s denial of sympathetic regard and subsequent expulsion from compassionate community debases his self-image and begets further suffering. Having reflected on his expulsion from the Frankenstein household, the De Lacey family, and broader English society, the Creature returns to the language and logic of patriarchal bonds:

I heard of the division of property, of immense wealth and squalid poverty; of rank, descent, and noble blood. The words induced me to turn towards myself. I learned that the possessions most esteemed by your fellow-creatures were high and unsullied descent united with riches. A man might be respected with only one of these acquisitions, but without either he was considered . . . a vagabond and slave. Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant, but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. I was, besides, endued with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; . . . When I looked around I saw and heard of none like me. Was I, then, a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled and whom all men disowned? (83)

This scene illustrates the Creature’s anguish and, perhaps more significantly, demonstrates his internal reconfiguration of the patriarchal power structures he invoked throughout his previous sympathetic petition to Frankenstein. Identifying now as a ‘monster’ and ‘slave,’ the Creature

understands that his proverbial master will not meet him with benevolence and sympathy because, in the Creature's own words, "all men hate the wretched" (67) and he now assumes a complete failure of moral sympathy towards those of his station. If Frankenstein is indeed his patriarchal superior, then he has, by his own disclosure, no impulse, obligation, or "power to consider whether [he is] just to [the Creature], or not" (69). Though he has undoubtedly felt the brunt consequences of his inferior position within these relationship models, the Creature fails to renounce the toxic cycle of masculine bonds he has been made victim to. Subverting the delineated roles of oppressor and victim between Frankenstein and himself, the Creature only perpetuates patriarchal models of relational power by newly resolving to usurp Frankenstein's role as sovereign and embody these positions himself. Confronting him after the destruction of the female creature, the Creature rails against Frankenstein, exclaiming: "Slave, I before reasoned with you, but you have proved yourself unworthy of my condescension. Remember that I have power. . . . You are my creator, but I am your master; — obey!" (120). Forever denied sympathy, the Creature ultimately devotes himself to becoming the demon so many believed him to be; whereas Frankenstein's promise to create a companion for the Creature was ultimately proven fickle, he executes precisely what he threatens to Victor when he tells him, "you believe yourself miserable, but I can make you so wretched that the light of day will be hateful to you" (120). He murders all of Frankenstein's living relations, terrorizes him to such a degree that Frankenstein's sanity is effectively destroyed, has him unjustly imprisoned for Clerval's murder, and ultimately pursues him to the point of death.

With its protagonists unable to throw off the chains of patriarchal society and reach a greater ideal of sympathetic connection, the novel's final passages are thereafter concentrated with the dissolution of legacies, campaigns, and lifelines which permeate every level of

Frankenstein's framing structure. Upon Victor's death, the Frankenstein lineage, once illustrious and rooted in Geneva's history, is effectively terminated, as no member of the family survives the Creature's vengeful campaign. At the sight of Frankenstein's corpse, the Creature proclaims, "in his murder my crimes are consummated; the miserable series of my being is wound to its close" (158). In revealing his intent to commit suicide, the Creature's anticipated immolation would similarly render the "new species" (33) Frankenstein created extinct. As the narration returns to Walton, it is revealed that his crew has once more revolted against him, effectively forcing the Arctic expedition to an end. The termination of Walton's polar voyage represents to him the end of his "hopes of utility and glory" (155), but further signifies Shelley's overarching belief about social progress. Insofar as the Arctic world represents an unexplored utopian landscape, *Frankenstein* posits that those who are unable to reject the insidious institutions of the nineteenth century cannot be ushered into the promised land.

Conclusion

For Mary Shelley, as for her philosophical influences, sympathy is not only an ethical responsibility, but a relational necessity: it is an act of social recognition by which individuals concede the connatural human dignity of those unlike themselves. Insofar as *Frankenstein* is the formal embodiment of Shelley's contribution to moral sense philosophy, the novel does not simply affirm sympathy's importance, it dramatizes the intrinsic challenges of fostering sympathetic connection. Because *Frankenstein*'s characters forfeit their ability to interpret one another effectively, lest they surrender their patriarchal power, Shelley posits that narrative exchange is not enough to elicit interpersonal connection and, on a broader level, societal change. Against such gargantuan institutions, which rationalize the oppression of women and

cripple the relational modes men are allowed to foster with one another, individual narrative is simply too weak and patriarchal ideology too deafening.

The conglomeration of *Frankenstein's* framing narratives, wherein Robert Walton, Victor Frankenstein, and the Creature each devote their last words in the text to expressions of isolation and anguish, further demonstrates how even the most ardent attempts to secure sympathetic connection are challenged by insurmountable hurdles. Walton voices his desire for a partner who might "sympathize with and love [him]"; Victor clings to his isolation and rejects him, asking "when you speak of new ties and fresh affections, think you that any can replace those who are gone?" (152). Walton mourns Victor's death, professing, "I have lost my friend" (155), and the Creature frames his suicidal ideation with the simple acknowledgement: "I am alone" (160). Within the novel's closing passages, each narrator acknowledges their failure in securing sympathetic companionship but remains ultimately unwilling to acknowledge the actions and ideologies which sabotaged every sympathetic opportunity they encountered. Just as Hume wrote, "[t]he sentiments of others have little influence, when far remov'd from us, and require the relation of contiguity, to make them communicate themselves entirely" (318), *Frankenstein* contests sympathy's contingency upon similarity to self by presenting this prerequisite as a guarantee of sympathetic failure. In excluding the feminine, the socially inferior, and the Non-European from their communal ideal, each narrator neither earns the sympathetic regard they so covet nor remedies the abrasive solitude which cultivated their monstrosity; the expeditions, histories, and legacies embodied by each of these characters are consequently drawn to a premature and dissatisfying close.

In its conviction that sympathy enkindles ethical behavior, *Frankenstein* responds to the philosophical context provided by Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and the Enlightenment thinkers

through its exploration of the ideological hurdles which so often thwart sympathetic opportunities. In recognizing *Frankenstein's* influences as well as its participation within the Romantic tradition, this essay has proven the primacy of sympathy, the fatal ramifications of its absence, and the manner in which sympathetic pursuit informs the novel's characters, conflicts, and concluding tragedy. *Frankenstein's* representation of the virtues and limitations of sympathy, most notably though patriarchy's detrimental capacity to rupture and forbid interpersonal connection, demonstrates the complexity of sympathetic engagement and affirms Shelley's belief that a greater capacity for sympathetic regard is impossible without the disavowal of oppressive power structures. Without this ideological renunciation, *Frankenstein's* narrators remain bound to a patriarchal hierarchy which fails to recognize the individual personhood of its participants and instead restricts them to a binary function of either "master" or "slave" (120), omnipotent "creator" (229) and prelapsarian "Adam," or Satanic "fallen angel" (68). Though Thomas Hobbes characterized the relationship between a sovereign authority and their perceived inferior as a social contract scaffolded upon interpersonal obligation, Shelley resists the imagined "mutuall Relation between Protection and Obedience" (491) by characterizing *Frankenstein's* patriarchal relationships as categorically abusive, detrimental to social order, and ethically unjustifiable. This is where *Frankenstein's* investment in the plight of women, gendered violence, and the ostracization of the socially vulnerable lays the groundwork for sympathetic failure. Though Walton, Frankenstein, and the Creature uniformly desire to be received into sympathetic community, their refusal to renounce their measure of patriarchal power renders this self-extension impossible; though philosophers such as Hobbes and Burke imagined such relationships as instrumental to the social health of broader civilization, the power unevenly allotted to the privileged few within *Frankenstein's* patriarchal relationships is

characterized as corrupt without exception, inspiring the exploitation and dehumanization of the vulnerable by the powerful. Frankenstein, Walton, and the Creature's barring from sympathetic communion not only exacerbates the unrelenting isolation which concentrates their personal accounts, but also ignites unparalleled violence upon *Frankenstein's* female characters, the annihilation of the Frankenstein family, the deaths of countless innocents, and the destruction of the domestic sphere.

Frankenstein's thematic investment in sympathetic failure and patriarchal violence, as delineated in this essay, demonstrates that the inability to identify with those unlike ourselves not only has detrimental consequences for the marginalized, but mutually corrupts and destroys the individuals who oppress them. This failure, Shelley warns, results in the marginalization and persecution of the most vulnerable, potentially creating monsters out of those who were once teeming with noble and humane possibility. The difficulty in designating any unilateral guilt in *Frankenstein*, in spite of the myriad crimes and cruelty committed by each narrator, suggests sympathy is neither easily achieved nor unequivocally acquired; instead, sympathetic connection is a static force in an uninhabitable climate, fleetingly felt before it—like Frankenstein's Creature—is “borne away by the waves, and lost in the darkness and distance” (161). *Frankenstein's* conclusion, which halts Walton and Frankenstein's scientific enterprises, claims the lives of almost every character in the text, anticipates the extinction of the Creature's species, and confirms that sympathy for Shelley is not only an emotional and ethical necessity, but the very lifeblood of social progress.

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