

Pleasure into Pain, Pain into Pleasure (November 2001)

When I read the critiques of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and John Keats' odes, I feel as if I ought to ask myself if it is actually misleading to identify either of them as Romantic, that is, as possessed of immoderate energy, as moved by a desire to unsettle and change. Mary Shelley, wife of Percy Shelley, daughter—as she told Percy on their first meeting—“of Godwin and Mary [Wollstonecraft]” (37), is *surely* a definitive Romantic writer, isn't she? According to many scholars, perhaps not. Maurice Hindle, for instance, in the introduction to a Penguin Classics' edition of *Frankenstein*, confidently asserts that “its [*Frankenstein's*] moral lesson that pride must have its fall should be obvious to the most indifferent reader” (viii). He sees *Frankenstein* as a first work which evidences her commendable life-long preference for simple “domestic happiness and good friends,” of “moderate and peaceful ambitions” (xlvi), not *really* so much out of having herself known loss but out of respect for the “moderate needs of the community” (xxxviii) and disdain for the “‘sexy’ lure of scientific penetration” (xlvii). The proud, self-absorbed, over-reaching hero appeals to the Romantic spirit, a tale that subjugates him to the argument that it's best to remain in place—not so much. Hindle accepts as obvious (“[t]here seems little doubt that [—]”) a judgment by P. D. Fleck that *Frankenstein* “contains in an imaginative form her *criticism* of [Percy] Shelley” (iv; emphasis added). So *that's it*: Mary's last name mislead me into expecting her to focus on the Romantic *engagement* with the life of a great but doomed man, when she rightly belongs in my mind's catalogue of authors and their works with the Classic, with, say, Samuel Johnson and his “Vanity of Human Wishes,” that are primarily interested in *judging* such a life as immoderate. John Keats—now *he* must be a Romantic, for if not, who possibly?—just Bryon and Shelley? But doesn't Keats *also* provide a similar lesson to Johnson's “Vanity of Human Wishes”? Keats' “conclusion” to his “Ode to a Grecian Urn,” “Beauty is truth, truth beauty,’—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know” (50), even if to instruct us as to what we should stick to rather than show what follows from having let ourselves go, still shares with “Vanity” the concern to discourage waywardness. And though some critics dispute the claim that the last two moralizing lines truly represent Keats' judgment, and though some hold that the last two lines are out of sync with the rest of the poem, for many and perhaps most, it's

all Keats, all the way through. However, from *my own* explorations of *Frankenstein* and “Ode to a Grecian Urn,” I do not dispute that both authors moralize, nor that this moralizing can seem so obvious to appear the point of their works, but because I consider the central life conflict that between our right to pursue our own dreams—what we owe ourselves—and “the disapproval or condemnation of significant others, such as parents” (Branden 63)—what they think we still owe them—and that the guilt and fear this disapproval causes, because of its source, is overwhelming—to the point that it can still people in place for generations—it is really no surprise that the parents’ (elders’) moralizing voice often dominates these works, can appear *the point* in these works. It should, rather, be expected to, even in works whose overall impetus is *very much still* contest and revolt, and does not by itself disqualify either of them as Romantic. So long as there is a sense that the moralizing voice is present so the writer can engage with it, find a way, perhaps, to triumph over it, the work is a Romantic one. And Shelley and Keats *are* fighting, they are resisting parental demands for them to let go their dreams—with both in fact finding some solution to their parents’ claims upon them: Shelley, through embracing the monstrous; Keats, through further immersion into his pain.

From the very beginning of *Frankenstein* there are signs that Shelley is not simply about to *tell* us a moral tale, but rather is *trying on* a moralizing voice, as if looking to resolve feelings of uncertainty towards this voice, its message, while at the same time asking herself if it truly is her own. If we are not too hasty to assume that simply because Shelley is female (and thus cognizant, even at this early age, of the monstrous sort of over-ambition ostensibly peculiar to the male sex), and because the lesson we think she wants to impart regards the dangers of Promethean-style scientific overreach—still one of our own favorites—we might remind ourselves that this is what we might expect of a nineteen year old, who, through her elopement, her travels and distance from her father, her attempt to start her own family—but most pointedly for the sheer fact of her growing up—is constantly experiencing within herself a disapproving voice as she insecurely and uncertainly, nevertheless perseveres on.

There is something of this ambition in our early description of *Frankenstein*. Walton tells us first of a broken *Frankenstein*: “I have found a man who, before his spirit had been broken by misery, I should have been happy to have possessed as the brother of my heart” (26). Shortly thereafter we learn being broken does not exempt

Frankenstein from remaining someone of whom it can still be said: “no one can feel more deeply than he does the beauties of nature” (28). Walton asks—and I will later consider if it is in fact what constitutes his very “brokenness”—“what quality it is which he possesses, that elevates him so immeasurably above any other person” (28). Then we have a sign (if we haven’t already a couple of them, in knowing him to be so feeling and so elevated), not only that he still has spirit but that he has not learned, not internalized, the lessons he hopes to impart to Walton. Frankenstein tells Walton to:

[p]repare to hear of occurrences which are usually deemed marvellous. Were we among the tamer scenes of nature, I might fear to encounter your disbelief, perhaps your ridicule; but many things will appear possible in these wild and mysterious regions, which would provoke the laughter of those unacquainted with the ever-various powers of nature; —nor can I doubt but that my tale conveys in its series internal evidence of the truth of the events of which it is composed. (28)

And here he stops us short, if more out of befuddlement than wonder, for in the very effort of making his tale credible to Walton Frankenstein shows good reason to doubt the very wisdom he hopes to impart. Note that Frankenstein tells us the experience of the “ever-varied powers of nature” is empowering, enfranchising: he yet still knows what is and what is not possible “in these wild and mysterious regions” (29). More importantly, note that Frankenstein, knowing the magnitude of the tale *he* has to impart, shows signs of struggling with self-doubt, self-castigation, his fears of being ridiculed. Most importantly, we note the similarity of this passage to the one in which he articulates the hubris of thought and demonstrates the sort of self-belief he tells us got him into such dire straights in the first place. When Frankenstein discovers how to create life, he says:

I was surprised, that among so many men of genius who had directed their enquiries towards the same science, that I alone should be reserved to discover so astonishing a secret [. . .]. Remember, I am not recording the vision of a madman. The sun does not more certainly shine in the heavens, than that which I now affirm is true. Some miracle might have produced it, yet

the stages of the discovery were distinct and probable. (51)

In both cases he is offering an account of something important and true but also so hard to believe it strongly credits the person who can actually appreciate it, placing him enviably beyond the rest of man, in fact, and yet still insists on its truth, telling us in both cases *that he can prove it!*

There is another way that by the very means in which he introduces his tale to Walton, Frankenstein offers reasons for doubting, not his sincerity, but the degree to which Shelley, through Frankenstein, is using her work to just simply lay out her own already settled value system. Notice the modesty and respect for critical judgment Frankenstein shows Walton upon surmising that he seeks “for knowledge and wisdom, as [he] [...] once did” (28): “I do not know that the relation of my disasters will be useful to you; yet, when I reflect that you are pursuing the same course, exposing yourself to the same dangers which have rendered me what I am, I imagine that you may deduce an apt moral from my tale” (29). Notice, too, his concern that Walton deduce his own moral from the tale. It seems clear that Shelley is attempting to make Frankenstein credible through his very respect for the reasoning powers of man. Yet note the change in Frankenstein when he:

see[s] by [Walton’s] [...] eagerness and the wonder and hope which your eyes express, my friend, that you expect to be informed of the secret with which I am acquainted; that cannot be: listen patiently until the end of my story, and you will easily perceive why I am reserved upon that subject. I will not lead you on, unguarded and ardent as I then was, to your destruction and infallible misery. Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow. (52)

Frankenstein is now moralizing to Walton, telling him the lesson he *must* take from the tale. I will later discuss why I think for Shelley the very consideration of young Walton’s “eagerness of wonder and hope” (52) would summon this crushing declaration by Frankenstein (purportedly for Walton’s own good), but for now I will highlight signs of uncertainty in Frankenstein at the very moment he elucidates the

moral lesson many critics take to be the obvious moral, *to be the whole point*, of the book.

This lesson, incidentally and importantly, is not what many critics take it to be: despite its appearance, it is as much a spurring for further self-examination and self-exploration as it is a stop-sign in way of it. Frankenstein does not refer to the dangers of *man's* pride; instead, he refers to the dangers for those who seek to rise above what their own *particular* nature allows. This begs the question: "What, then, is my particular nature—how do *I* rank?" How do we think Shelley, daughter "of Godwin and Mary," thinks she compares with other people? Perhaps we see some indication of it in Walton's description of Frankenstein, whom he places beyond all other men. Certainly Frankenstein, when he discusses "our weak and faulty natures" (28), generalizes about a human condition. But again, this pronouncement is based on what he has learned through extraordinary life experiences; and this pronouncement, as with all those he makes, owing to his insistence in his ability to prove it, evidences an effectual will that clashes with any claim to its ineffectuality. It is difficult for me to believe that Shelley could present us such an extraordinary figure and really think that Frankenstein was deficient, limited. I believe that Shelley, through Frankenstein, is offering us a real sense that this—a desire to be great, coupled with a fear of the consequences of deeming himself so superior—is a source of considerable inner conflict for her. Frankenstein will at times devalue his own worth, but as I have shown there are also times where in bringing the possibility that he is ordinary to the fore, he struggles in making himself seem wholly credible, in convincing us he truly believes what he is arguing.

In the very introduction of the tale, Shelley shows signs she is exploring the possibility that moralizing is a consequence of self-surrender, of failure. Note that Frankenstein tells Walton that his own tale "may direct you if you succeed in your undertaking, and *console* you in case of failure" (29; emphasis added). Reading this, surely we should ask ourselves whether at some level Shelley is aware that the very act of writing a moral lesson concerning the sad consequence of selfish pride is *exactly* the kind of thing one might do to console yourself if you sensed you'd been compromised. I expect this is why Shelley introduces Frankenstein by attending to his greatness, even though it calls her text's overt moral lesson into question. Shelley is fighting; she is resisting inviting upon herself the self-assessment as a failure she knows would follow from telling a wholly convincing moral tale. This is why she at

times resists generalizing about man's nature, having Frankenstein say, "Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed" (210). At nineteen, and with a childhood and adolescence of a kind I will explore later, she might be asking herself if she might be this "another," this someone else, this exception. Nevertheless, she seems uncertain of life's outcome, and thus consoles herself throughout much of the text—with note, what amounts to a kind of pride—with the idea that "the man who imagines his native town to be the world" (52) is greater than those not similarly enlightened.

Shelley, through Frankenstein, is exploring the self-satisfaction, the self-pride that follows from being a member of a remarkable family—what she has most closely in mind, I think, when she writes of belonging to a "native town." Chapter one begins with a statement by Frankenstein of the superior nature of his own parents. He tells us that:

[m]y mother's tender caresses and my father's smile of benevolent pleasure while regarding me, are my first recollections. I was their plaything and their idol, and something better—their child, the innocent and helpless creature bestowed on them by Heaven, whom to bring up to good, and whose future lot it was in their hands to direct to happiness or misery, according as they fulfilled their duties towards me. With this deep consciousness of what they owed towards the being to which they had given life, added to the active spirit of tenderness that animated both, it may be imagined that while during every hour of my infant life I received a lesson of patience, of charity, and of self-control, I was so guided by a silken cord that all seemed but one train of enjoyment to me. (33)

Frankenstein is likewise conscious of "how peculiarly fortunate [his] [...] lot was" (37), and notes that this gratitude—arising from a comparison with those less fortunate as them—"assisted the development of filial love" (37; emphasis added). Frankenstein provides an example of this downward comparison when he describes Clerval's parents for us: "His father was a narrow-minded trader, and saw idleness and ruin in the aspiration and ambition of his son. Henry [Clerval] deeply felt the misfortune of being debarred from a liberal education. He said little; but when he spoke, I read in his kindling eye and in his animated glance a restrained but firm

resolve, not to be chained to the miserable details of commerce.” (44)

We find another example at Justine’s trial, where Justine, Frankenstein’s father, and especially Elizabeth, distinguish themselves as apart from the rest of the town. Frankenstein’s poor regard for his fellow townsmen is clear: “My passionate and indignant appeals were lost upon them. And when I received their cold answers and heard the harsh, unfeeling reasoning of these men, my purposed avowal died away on my lips” (86). It is important that we note that what is especially repugnant about these men is their harshness and lack of feeling, because here too is evidence that Shelley, through Frankenstein, may be confronting feelings of anger, feelings of betrayal, she at some level feels towards her own family.

Justine is not betrayed by her family—but she does suffer *self*-betrayal for confessing to a crime she did not commit. She explains she was besieged by a “confessor” who “threatened and menaced [. . .] until I almost began to think that I was the monster that he said I was” (84). But after confessing, she experiences overwhelming feelings of shame, telling us “[i]n an evil hour I subscribed to a lie; and now only am I truly miserable” (84). Elizabeth tries to console her, to give her strength, saying she “will prove [her] [. . .] innocence” (84), but Justine shakes “her head mournfully” (84) and says:

‘I do not fear to die,’ [. . .] that pang is past. God raises my weakness and gives me courage to endure the worst. I leave a sad and bitter world; and if you remember me and think of me as of one unjustly condemned, I am resigned to the fate awaiting me. Learn from me, dear lady, to submit in patience to the will of heaven!’ (84)

This surely reminds the reader of Frankenstein’s reply to Walton, when Walton felt “the greatest eagerness [. . .] to ameliorate his [i.e., Frankenstein’s] fate” (29):

‘I thank you,’ he replied, ‘for your sympathy, but it is useless; my fate is nearly fulfilled. I wait but for one event, and then I shall repose in peace. I understand your feeling,’ continued he, perceiving that I wished to interrupt him: ‘but you are mistaken, my friend, if thus you will allow me to name you; nothing can alter my destiny; listen to my history, and you will perceive how irrevocably it is determined. (29)

Justine, like Frankenstein, is singled out and faces condemnation, not only from “the public” but from those friends she most values. She asks them: “And do you also believe that I am so very, very wicked? Do you also join with my enemies to crush me, to condemn me?” (83). Frankenstein, too, fears his new friend’s judgment, speculating that Clerval might ridicule his own tale if they were in “the tamer scenes of nature” (29). But in Justine’s case, she is innocent—she is no monster, she is only made to feel as if she is. But if the unfairness of her self-conviction is meant to distinguish her from the truly guilty, the truly fallen and monstrous Frankenstein, then why present such strong parallels between these two scenes so that each seems a duplicate of the other, with one featuring a false confession and the other, a true one? Is it means to emphasize Frankenstein’s guilt? Or is it, rather, means for Shelley to explore her own? That is, is she offering herself a variety of versions of a similar experience with judgments of culpability to help her decide whether she deserves to feel guilty, whether virtue lies through accepting or rejecting the guilt, and through which choice—to aim to be good, or accept being bad—will follow the truest freedom?

My own opinion is that Shelley, through a variety of characters and in a variety of scenes throughout the text, is meditating on the difficulties involved in maintaining her own convictions before intimidation from elders—or rather, from a *specific* elder, her father. Acquiescence means suffering disappointment, owing to inconstancy to oneself. We note that Justine’s family is surprised and disappointed that she, unlike courageous Elizabeth, who braves those who’d hem her in, kowtows to public authority. But Shelley surely would not do so; one senses throughout *Frankenstein* such pride in her family we would expect it to bully through prescriptions from public norms. But Frankenstein and Justine—and thus surely Shelley as well—are vulnerable to the opinion of her closest friends and family. And it is when she experiences conflict between her own desires, her own needs, her own beliefs and those of her family’s, that Shelley encounters a blasting force that brings to mind considerations of what it might be like to live by the standards of others, to accept their voice, their judgments, as her own. A sad *what if?* she ends up exploring through Frankenstein and Justine.

Justine experiences a moment when she “subscribed to a lie” that lead immediately to misery and self-condemnation. Justine, we note, who was twelve years

old when Frankenstein's family took her in, is entering adolescence, is growing up, when her transformation from one with promise to one newly doomed occurs. The precise age is noteworthy because it amounts to, if not further evidence, at least further impetus to consider *as* evidence that the actual moment which dooms and haunts Frankenstein is not when he awakens the monster but rather one much earlier in his life, occurring when he too was entering that stage where he began to see before him "the moment when [he] [...] should put them [i.e., benevolent intentions] in practice and make [...] [himself] useful to [...] [his] fellow beings" (87). He reflects on this moment when—and once again it is important again to pay attention to the wording:

all [became] blasted: instead of that serenity of conscience which allowed me to look back upon the past with self-satisfaction, and from thence to gather promise of new hopes, I was seized by remorse and the sense of guilt, which hurried me away to a hell of intense tortures, such as no language can describe. (87)

Frankenstein's monster experiences a similarly painful transformation after working his way to his climactic meeting with his "friends," in particular, the fatherly De Lacey. "Finding [himself] [...] unsympathised with, [he] wished to tear up the trees, spread havoc and destruction around [him]" (132). And it seems clear that this is the moment which haunts Frankenstein, and which haunts Shelley herself, a key moment in her life when her hopes were dashed by the lack of sympathy, by the disregard, of fathers.

Frankenstein tells us that when he was thirteen years old, after reading through a volume of books "[a] new light seemed to dawn upon [his] [...] mind, and, bounding with joy, [he] [...] communicated [his] [...] discovery to [his] [...] father" (38). Frankenstein notes that "[his] father looked carelessly at the titlepage of [his] [i.e., Frankenstein's] [...] book and said, 'Ah! Cornelius Agrippa! My dear Victor, do not waste your time upon this; it is sad trash'" (38). Frankenstein tells us that this moment was crucial *only* because, owing to his father's carelessness, he continued to explore studies that would count against him in life. We should not believe him in this, for this is in fact a remembrance for Shelley's consideration of the crucial moment of Frankenstein's life, and it is a moment which is a certain simulacrum for

an experience Shelley had with her own father at the same age (twelve to thirteen). There are several reasons why I believe this is the case. The text itself, independent of any biographical knowledge of Shelley's life, certainly points in this direction, but in addition there are scholars that have explored Shelley's life, have examined Shelley's letters, as well as her father's letters to her, and believe there was a dramatic change in how Shelley's father treated her around this age. And when one keeps Shelley in mind, what was going on, that *had gone on* in her life while reading *Frankenstein*, we cannot miss the similarities between her upbringing and Frankenstein's (and Frankenstein's monster's as well) own. And finally, though Shelley is nearly keen to it without of course any recourse to its like, psychoanalytic explorations of the schism that develops between parents and children when their needs and desires begin to match especially poorly—i.e., during adolescence—show how children almost always end up blaming themselves for the rejection they suffer for pursuing their life goals. Hoping not to tax my reader's patience too much, I will explore each piece of evidence in turn in hopes of offering as powerful, as convincing a case possible, that Shelley's trial of Frankenstein is best understood as a trial of her own self for daring to resist and resent her father's judgments of her.

Throughout the text moments of pleasure are raised and subsequently crushed. It is Walton's (child-like) look of "wonder" and "hope" and his eagerness "to be informed of the secret with which [Frankenstein] [. . .] is acquainted" (51), that has Frankenstein not only refuse to comply but to commence his lecturing of him. No surprise, this, since Frankenstein once had his own eager hopes similarly crushed, and so is familiar with the perverse allowances allotted the defeated. This moment for Frankenstein was *the* crucial moment life moment for him, the moment where he told himself, "I am a blasted tree; the bolt has entered my soul" (155), and proof lies in the nature of the passages where the key word "blasted" appears in the text and in its absence in the passages involving the creation of the monster—that is, at the moment most critics believe where all pleasure actually turned to pain for Frankenstein.

Frankenstein describes this moment as one where "all was blasted" (87). Critics who believe the moment he is obsessing over is his creation of life, attend to how the creature is brought to life by a spark of electricity: they believe this is the scene foreshadowed earlier with the image of an oak tree being "utterly destroyed" by a bolt of lightning. But a lightning bolt that leaves nothing behind but a "blasted stump" (40) matches poorly with an awakening by a mere spark of electricity. *But it is*, however, a

perfect match for the passage where Frankenstein decides he “should put [benevolent intentions] [...] into practice,” a decision which follows with him subsequently concluding that “all is blasted” (87). The moment where the lightning bolt blasted the oak was not written to foreshadow Frankenstein’s fateful decision to create life; it was, instead, a description of what it felt like at the very moment of bringing, in the form of a book, his own ambitions, his own path for making a distinctive contribution to the world, to his father for consideration, and having him attend to it with a cursory glance, before dismissing it entirely.

Though two years pass between his writing of his father’s dismissal and of how all is blasted, textually, the blasting of the oak follows *immediately* from Frankenstein’s description of his father’s reaction to his studies. Following learning of his father’s disapproval, we hear of Frankenstein encountering a “man of great research in natural philosophy” (40) who ostensibly inspires a complete “overthrow[ing] [...] of [the lords of his (i.e., Frankenstein’s) imagination which] [...] disinclined [him] [...] to pursue [his] [...] accustomed studies. It seemed to [him] as if nothing would or could ever be known. All that had so long engaged [his] [...] attention suddenly grew despicable” (40). He tells us he dismisses every one of the sciences, deciding only mathematics, “being [the only branch of study] built upon secure foundations” (41), worth studying. To inform us of an encounter which lead him to abandon all his studies, all the lords of the imagination of his childhood, only a few passages after telling us that the reason he relates to us the moment of his father’s dismissal is because it encouraged him to keep *at* reading, is very odd. He explains the change in course, from eager interest in studies to sudden disavowal of most of them, as result of a last-ditch attempt by a “spirit of preservation” to save him. But considering that the voice throughout the book that keeps appealing to Frankenstein’s better nature, telling him “not [to] [...] brood [on] [...] thoughts of vengeance [...] but with feelings of peace and gentleness, that will heal [...] the wounds of our minds” (70), that attempts to dissipate the “gloom which appears to have taken so strong a hold of [...] [his] mind” (142), which warns him of the effects of whatever current behavior/inclination—it festers current wounds (70), it “prevents improvement or enjoyment” (88)—this mysterious spirit of preservation, no doubt, is but the already abundant and familiar voice of his father. No, Frankenstein does not continue his childhood studies because his father *failed* to have a notable impact upon him; rather, the impact of his cursory glance could not have had a more reverberating and long-

lasting effect on him. Frankenstein persists not *in* spite of his father, but instead *to* spite him, for his “harsh, unfeeling” (86) reaction to his developing interests and hopes for the future.

I believe the reason a fatherly scientist appears in the text soon after the devastating blow to his own (i.e., Frankenstein’s) explorations and self-confidence, is that Shelley, imagining a similar confrontation with her own father, must soon engage with the feelings that arose from this near recall of her own experience. I argue mostly through an appeal to common sense, but Shelley is clearly aware of the pain involved in attempting to repress feelings: “Even in my own heart I could give no expression to my sensations—they weighed on me with a mountain’s weight, and their excess destroyed my agony beneath them” (144). Frankenstein is enraged by his father’s inattention. It brings to mind one of the few instances where Frankenstein considers the possibility that his father is not perfect, is not right. And it is followed by the introduction into his tale of M. Krempe and M. Waldman, who offer Frankenstein all that his father failed to offer him.

M. Krempe and M. Waldman are not to be imagined devils-in-the-guise-of-angels who lead Frankenstein on into sin. It is important that Shelley establishes that they both share with Frankenstein’s father a preference for thinkers other than Frankenstein’s previous lords of his imagination. What Frankenstein had hoped from his father, supposedly, was merely for him to “take the pains to explain to [him] [...] that the principles of Agrippa had been entirely exploded” (38). M. Krempe shares Frankenstein’s father’s belief that his (i.e., Frankenstein’s) studies have been a waste, but *substantiates* Frankenstein’s feeling that his father was still somehow in error. In fact, he makes it a crime:

‘Every minute,’ continued M. Krempe with warmth, ‘every instant that you have wasted on those books is utterly and entirely lost. You have burdened your memory with exploded systems and useless names. Good God! In what desert land have you lived, where no one was kind enough to inform you that these fancies which you have so greedily imbibed are a thousand years old and as musty as they are ancient? I little expected, in this enlightened and scientific age, to find a disciple of Albertus Magnus and Paracelsus. My dear sir, you must begin your studies entirely anew.’ (45)

We hear here not only an accusation that his father must have been neglectful, but that the native land he came from must have been a desert island. Note, too, that M. Krempe speaks here in a *warm* voice, a marked contrast to Frankenstein's father's cold dismissal.

M. Waldman does M. Krempe one better in that “[h]e heard with attention the little narration concerning my studies, and smiled at the names of Cornelius Agrippa and Paracelsus, but without the contempt that M. Krempe had exhibited” (47). He substantiates the feeling Frankenstein once had as a child that these old philosophers had something significant to offer him: “He said that ‘these were men to whose indefatigable zeal modern philosophers were indebted for most of the foundations of their knowledge’” (47). He comes across as an ideal father-figure, one who gives lie to Frankenstein’s claim that all he wanted from his father was to show that “the powers of the [these early philosophers] [...] were chimerical” (38). Not so: the thirteen-year-old Frankenstein who came to his father with “[a] new light [...] dawn[ing] on his mind [...] [,] bounding with joy [...] [,] [and who] communicated [his] [...] discovery to [his] [...] father” (38), was hoping for what every child wants—validation for his/her own life pursuits. M. Waldman appears in the text because at some level Shelley is aware that she was mistreated, was aware she deserved better, and it is no coincidence that in M. Waldman, who is “[h]appy [...] to have gained a disciple” (48), Frankenstein has “found a true friend” (49)—or rather, an ideal father-figure—and one who doesn’t *just happen to* show up his own.

It is no accident that Waldman is described as smiling at Frankenstein: Frankenstein’s own father, with a “smile of benevolent pleasure while regarding” him, was Frankenstein’s first recollection of him. But around adolescence Shelley stopped receiving those smiles, and desperately in further need of them, creates for herself M. Waldman. And from Frankenstein’s subsequent description of him, we know we have here a man compared to whom even his own father suffers from steep downward comparison:

His gentleness was never tinged by dogmatism, and his instructions were given with an air of frankness and good nature, that banished every idea of pedantry. In a thousand ways he smoothed for me the path of knowledge, and made the most abstruse enquiries clear and facile to my apprehension. (49)

Buoyed by the love from this good man, Frankenstein will begin to engage in the laboratory experiments that will have him discover the purportedly chimerical ability to create life. Some critics attend to M. Waldman's declaration that science "penetrate[s] into the recesses of nature, and show how she works in her hiding-places" (49), and argue it as proof that Shelley herself disapproves of him. But if such a man as M. Waldman is in for a hard time from critics, I am fearful to know whom they would praise, for he is a near ideal father, only one, though we might imagine him, pretend play at having him, most of us still have trouble convincing ourselves we actually deserve.

Shelley, in imagining this perfect father, one far superior to her own, surely felt considerable guilt (sacrilege!), and this explains why she has Frankenstein accuse himself of neglecting his family, saying:

I knew my silence disquieted them; and I well remembered the words of my father: 'I know that while you are pleased with yourself, you will think of us with affection, and we shall hear regularly from you. You must pardon me if I regard any interruption in your correspondence as a proof that your other duties are equally neglected.' (54)

We note the discord, the inconsistency, between how his father is made to seem here and how Frankenstein described his father at the beginning of the text. His father had been described as someone who was "deeply conscious [...] of what [he] [...] owed towards [...] the being to which they had given life," and who "fulfilled [his] [...] duties towards [...] him" (33). With his failure to attend to his son, we have already seen signs of his neglect, and in this passage we have a father who seems mostly focused on what his son owes him. Frankenstein does not accuse his father of inconstancy, but it is one of things his characters notice as a significant fault in others. The monster says to Frankenstein, for example: "How inconstant are your feelings! [B]ut a moment ago you were moved by my representations and why do you again harden yourself to my complaints?" (142). Elizabeth writes of Justine's mother that "[t]he poor woman was very vacillating in her repentance. She sometimes begged Justine to forgive her unkindness but much oftener accused her of having caused the deaths of her brothers and sister" (64).

"[W]hen you are pleased with yourself, you will think of us" (33), is not one of

the more appealing nuggets of life advice I've encountered in literature, and it surely smacks of exactly the kind of moralizing his father ostensibly disapproved of. I think that Shelley is aware of this, is aware that her own father did not practice what he preached, and buoyed by her creation of an ideal father who validates her own needs has Frankenstein doubt his father's advice: "I then thought that my father would be unjust if he ascribed my neglect to vice, or faultiness" (54). But he follows this by informing us he no longer thinks this way:

but I am now convinced that he was justified in conceiving that I should not be altogether free from blame. A human being in perfection ought always to preserve a calm and peaceful mind, and never to allow passion or a transitory desire to disturb his tranquility. I do not think that the pursuit of knowledge is an exception to this rule. If the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections, and to destroy your taste for those simple pleasures in which no alloy can possibly mix, then that study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not befitting the human mind. If this rule were always observed; if no man allowed any pursuit whatsoever to interfere with the tranquility of his domestic affections, Greece had not been enslaved; Caesar would have spared his country; America would have been discovered more gradually; and the empires of Mexico and Peru had not been destroyed. (54)

He interrupts himself to offer excuse for what he prefers to see as his moralizing, but which owing to its striking length is best understood as evidence of the profound ripple effect, the profound resulting affect—*shock*—writing Frankenstein's fathers' words has upon *Shelley* immediately after writing them. Shelley, through Frankenstein, is attempting to process, make surer sense of the moralizing, commanding tone of Frankenstein's father—a simulacra of her own—whose immediate effect is but to disturb her so profoundly it shocks her into assuming an older philosophic address. Such sober dressings protect her some from accusation, buy her time to process all that just went on in her fictional re-encounter with her own father, something that requires a significant pause because at some level Shelley is aware that a father who writes of a child's duties is not likely simply being attendant to the *child's* best interest, but rather more to his own. This is why we encounter here talk in praise of simple, of moderated (read: compromised) pleasures: the pressure to acquiesce, to accept being

owned by others' demands and to make it seem for the best, is crushing.

But how much respect is due such a father, really? Shelley, through Frankenstein, has already criticized Clerval's father for attempting to determine his career path. Moreover, we read that Clerval was not a fool to the true nature of his father's intent; instead, he "*deeply felt his* [i.e., Clerval's] misfortune" (44). Fortunately, Clerval possessed a "firm resolve, not to be chained" (44). So Shelley, again through Frankenstein, is not only cognizant of fathers' inclination to dominate their children, she shows she thinks the child who resists the one worthy of salute. Clerval's father saw "idleness and ruin in the aspirations and ambition of his son," and this too was worthy of a harsh judgment from Frankenstein: "his father was a narrow-minded trader" (44). Shelley, now imagining for herself a father—Frankenstein's—who, unlike Clerval's trader, comes closer to being a reproduction of her own, is not simply trying to rationalize Frankenstein's father's words. She is also *testing* them, to see if she can permit herself to judge her father in the same way Frankenstein judges Clerval for perpetration of the same crime.

If Shelley let Frankenstein be fully aware of just how wrong his father was to "ascrib[e] [Frankenstein's] [...] neglect to vice, or faultiness" (54), she would likely understand this as weighing toward a harsh critique of her own father as well. She would understand that the reason Clerval *is* behaving heroically while resisting his father, is because this isn't the easiest of things to do, especially in previous eras where "do as you're-told!" not "what color is your parachute?," principally moved the adolescent-parent dynamic. Making such a judgment alienates you from your family; you are not like them, making hopes of claiming your father's love something to be abandoned, once and for all. But if, after praising Clerval for his determination, she has Frankenstein surrender to his father's judgment, this would amount to self-surrender, to capitulation for Shelley, one near obvious to her, which would make every attempt to make it seem all for the best, equally obvious rationalizing. The anxieties arising from her two conflicting desires—to never betray herself, but also to prove her father always in the right—lead to the re-doubling of her effort to wipe out all doubts Frankenstein has towards his father. Thus we read: "My father made no reproach in his letters, and only took notice of my silence by enquiring into my occupations more particularly than before" (54).

When Clerval enters the tale, again we hear Frankenstein maintain that freedom lies in terminating his [i.e., Frankenstein's] explorations: "I hope, I sincerely hope,

that all these employments are now at an end, and that I am at length free" (59). But what does such "freedom" open up for Frankenstein? Only the god-awful, it would seem. When Frankenstein returns home, Shelley has Elizabeth "express a sorrowful delight to see me" (75). He had returned late: "Ah! I wish you had come three months ago, and then you would have found us all joyous and delighted" (75). For the hubris of ignoring his family, for not thinking of his family when he experienced pleasure, *for disobeying his father*, Shelley imagines for him a situation (the death of his brother) that could only substantiate his sense of guilt, his inclination toward self-reproach. But experiencing guilt—a confession to knowing yourself in the wrong—offers no respite, no rescue, for his father chastises his son for his brooding (though Frankenstein describes it as an attempt "to inspire [him] [...] with fortitude, and awaken in [him] [...] the courage to dispel the dark cloud which brooded over [...] [him]" [87]):

'Do you think, Victor,' said he, 'that I do not suffer also? No one could love a child more than I loved your brother'—tears came into his eyes as he spoke—'but is it not a duty to the survivors that we should refrain from augmenting their unhappiness by an appearance of immoderate grief? It is also a duty owed to yourself; for excessive sorrow prevents improvement or enjoyment, or even the discharge of daily usefulness, without which no man is fit for society.' (88)

Yet saintly, "heroic[,] and suffering" (88) Elizabeth was "sad and desponding; she no longer took delight in her ordinary occupations; all pleasure seemed to her sacrilege toward the dead" (89). Frankenstein will have a tough time finding a way out, for if happy, he is being disrespectful to the newly dead, and if he grieves, he shows immoderacy. He is in fact brought tight-walk-close to the kind of double bind situation where no solution would end up proving available to him, that the psychiatrist R.D. Laing believes is related to the development of schizophrenic symptoms. I suspect this is why Shelley introduces into the tale the consideration that "[t]here was always scope for fear, so long as anything I loved remained behind" (89): Shelley, presenting herself with a facsimile of her own self-conflicted state, is imagining for her own consideration the respite to be found in the most terrible of available solutions—namely, leaving loved ones *permanently* behind by becoming

unknown and unlovable.

I mentioned that there are several reasons why I suspect Shelley had once experienced a terrifying moment of parental abandonment that thereafter weighed heavily upon her. I have discussed evidence in the text that *Frankenstein*, though having difficulty admitting it to himself, was crushed by a sudden change in his father's reaction to him around the age of thirteen—that is, at the age where he most sought approval for his own chosen life course—which inspired a subsequent effort to individuate anyway, to imagine something better for himself, better father, better surroundings, as well as the very creation of life from knowledge of the kind his father had previously dismissed as a waste of time, but followed by collapsing into self-hatred, by rejoining a family that put him down, and by initiating a desperate, swirling search for just what it would take for him to be free from the dictates of others'. But before exploring where these desperate imaginings took him, an exploration which follows one of a “serene” moment protected from a “disastrous” future that compares rather well with Keats’ own explorations of the same in “Ode to a Grecian Urn,” I would like to offer biographical proof that *Frankenstein* is itself such a frozen moment for Shelley, one she is using to help sort out *just what the hell happened?* in adolescence after having known a much less debilitating, and perhaps even mostly pleasing, childhood.

Concerning Shelley’s difficulties with her father upon emerging into adulthood, Hill-Miller writes:

Mary Godwin passed through childhood, she satisfied her passionate attachment to William Godwin by living up to his literary expectations, by identifying herself with his hopes for her, and by modeling herself after him [. . .] [.] as [she] [. . .] entered adolescence, William Godwin’s aloof demeanor seemed to turn to outright rejection. In fact, the beginning of Mary’s adolescence marked a long period of alienation from her father, an alienation that only ended when she married Percy Bysshe Shelley at age nineteen. This parental rejection is central to Mary Shelley and her career: it haunted her all of her life and became emblematic of the many other types of rejection she encountered. It shaped her response to her burgeoning femininity and gave birth to her vision of the precarious nature of daughter-hood; it provided part of the creative impulse for her first two novels—*Frankenstein* and *Mathilda*—

both of which tell the story of the daughter's painful induction into adult womanhood. (31)

She believes that “[a]s Mary Godwin grew older and entered adolescence, her need for emotional support from her father increased” (31). She refers to the work of Nancy Chodorow and “the psychic currents of the oedipal nuclear family” (31) to explain Shelley's rejection by her father, telling us that “[f]rom a father's point of view [...] the daughter's passage through adolescence often creates an anxious—and even threatening—moment. As the daughter passes out of the sexual latency of childhood and begins to develop into a mature woman, the father often rejects her. As Lynda Boose explains, the daughter's new physical maturity invites incestuous desire” (31-32).

I admit I look to other theorists for the whys behind paternal rejection (by which I mean, I don't think it owes mostly to incestuous desires), but I find what Hill-Miller has to say about the rejection—that it “meant the end of a childhood full of wide horizons and possibility” (32)—along with her documentation of the sort of distancing from her father Shelley experienced during her adolescence, important to note:

In the spring of 1811, when she [Shelley] was thirteen and a half years old, she was sent away [...] in the hope that the sea air would cure her. [...] Though Godwin had good medical reason to send Mary away, and though the separation was intended to calm Mary's feelings as well as preserve the peace of the whole household, Mary could not help but read the separation from her father as an abandonment—and an abandonment directly connected to the fact that she was becoming a woman. [...] Godwin wrote to his daughter only four times, and failed to visit her for her fourteenth birthday, though he was vacationing in the area. (34)

Shelley experiences distance *from* her father as his rejection *of* her. She is sent away because she is “bad,” because she is growing up, and therefore apart from him. Little wonder, perhaps, that Frankenstein gets up to no good while away at university, for it proves her father was right about her, would work to demonstrate her the repentant who had come to accept the full wisdom of his ways. And little wonder,

perhaps, that when Frankenstein leaves for university it is described as something beyond his control: “it [i.e., earlier desires to take his place amongst men] would have been folly to repent” (44), though he was “unwilling to quit the sight of those that remained” (43).

When Shelley returns home “family conflict resumed with a vengeance” (Hill-Miller 34), and she is sent away once again, this time to Scotland. Hill-Miller’s discussion of the implications of this event for Shelley’s life, need also be considered:

Mary Godwin’s stay in Scotland became the event that marked and engulfed her adolescence. When she wore a new introduction for the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley reflected that she had “lived principally in the country as a girl, and passed a considerable time in Scotland” (*Frankenstein* 223). This description of her early years must have come as a surprise to her father, because Mary principally lived in Godwin’s home during her childhood, and she spent time in the country and Scotland only when Godwin sent her there to restore her health and the family peace. The point is that Mary’s absences from Godwin’s house—absences she read as acts of banishment and paternal rejection—became the events that defined her adolescence, overshadowing all else. (35)

Shelley never forgot her early childhood, but her obsession to make right, to make sense of her own adolescence, so occupied her subsequent attention the constant sorting and re-sorting of memories associated with her adolescence in a search for answers made them the memories most available for recall.

When the sixteen-year-old Mary eloped with Percy Shelley to the Continent, Godwin was horrified; “[h]e felt robbed of his favorite daughter, cheated of his literary heir, and deprived of the material link to his cherished past with Mary Wollstonecraft” (Hill-Miller 38):

There followed a long period of even more intense estrangement between Godwin and his daughter, an estrangement that formed the specific background against which Mary Shelley conceived and began *Frankenstein*. As Godwin commented in August 1814, before Mary, Percy, and Jane returned from the Continent, ‘Jane has been guilty of indiscretion only [.] [,] Mary has

been *guilty of a crime.*’ [. . .] Godwin cut himself off from his daughter completely. He refused to communicate with Mary at all and forbade Fanny Imlay to see or talk to her half-sister. Godwin did not write or speak to Mary when she lost her first child in February 1815, or when she bore a son, named William in honor of Godwin himself, on 24 January 1816.” (Hill-Miller 39; emphasis added)

Godwin abandoned Shelley at the moment of the birth of her own son, the same astonishingly cruel act that Frankenstein inflicts upon his own creation. This was revenge for Shelley’s crime of self-individuation on the Continent and for creating a family that would claim attention away from him. Mimicking Frankenstein, I will insist that I am not telling falsehoods here. In a letter written to Shelley after her writing *Frankenstein*, and after the death of another child, Godwin belittles Shelley’s mourning and tells her in a truly terrifying passage very reminiscent of the passage in *Frankenstein* where his father instructs Frankenstein to moderate his grief, to “[r]emember, too, that though at first your nearest connections may pity you in this state, yet that, when they see you fixed in selfishness and ill-humour, and regardless of the happiness of everyone else, they will finally cease to love you, and scarcely learn to endure you” (Hill-Miller 48).

She gives us good reason to suspect that Frankenstein does not really represent *Percy* Shelley, as critics such as Hindle insist is the case, but rather *Mary* Shelley. Hill-Miller reminds us that Mary was raised by her father to be his son, to be his literary heir:

In the years leading up to her adolescence, Mary Godwin emerged as her father’s potential intellectual heir, the child most suited to carry on his work as a writer and thinker [. . .]. He entertained great hopes for her. He proudly described her to a correspondent as “singularly bold, somewhat imperious, and active of mind.” [. . .] As Mary Shelley herself put it many years later, speaking of her father’s expectations for her, “I was nursed and fed with a love of glory. To be something great and good was the precept given me by my father.” [. . .] Young Mary Godwin took her father’s hopes entirely to heart; she learned to measure herself against her parents and to envision herself inheriting their intellectual legacy. As she wrote a correspondent in

1827, “her greatness of soul [Mary Wollstonecraft’s] & my father[’s] high talents have perpetually reminded me that I ought to degenerate as little as I could from those from whom I derived my being [. . .]. [M]y chief merit must always be derived, first from the glory these wonderful beings have shed [around] me, & then for the enthusiasm I have for excellence” (25)

Shelley had an “education and a childhood that in today’s vocabulary might be described as non-gendered—that is, an education that made the least possible differentiation between males and females, that encouraged daughters to develop professional aspirations, and that allowed daughters to envision themselves in many roles, including those reserved for sons” (Hill-Miller 30). She was singled out as singularly great, and evidently still had in mind to evidence her greatness, to demonstrate it to the literary world, well past her writing of *Frankenstein*. Mary aimed to be victorious—*Frankenstein*’s pride is surely also her own.

And of what results from *Frankenstein*’s pride, is there any evidence in Mary’s life to shed light on why the monster appears in the novel? Hill-Miller continues:

[But] [t]o say that William Godwin gave his oldest natural daughter the aspiration and training necessary to make her a writer—that is, all the expectations of literary inheritance and sonship—is not to say that their relationship was always warm and affectionate. Quite the contrary: Godwin was emotionally withdrawn and often cold; he knew, and his children saw, that effusive displays of tender feeling were generally beyond his emotional grasp. [. . .] Mary Shelley eventually attributed her father’s emotional distance to his shyness and to inability to grasp his children’s feelings quickly. (25)

We find here the best evidence for understanding Shelley as creating *Frankenstein*’s monster to explore her childhood, perhaps to see if her troubles in adolescence owed to something that went wrong earlier, perhaps something she did, or *was*, that made her worthy of being disowned. We recall the monster asking himself, “Was I, then, a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled and whom all men disowned?” (Shelley 117).

We mustn’t be over-hasty, though, to assume the monster as best understood as a *single* entity, because there is evidence for understanding the monster as embodying

different identities, different people—sometimes Mary Shelley, sometimes her father—at different times in the text. Note the passage in which the monster chastises Frankenstein, telling him to “[b]e calm I intreat you to hear me” (96), and asking him:

[h]ave I not suffered enough, that you seek to increase my misery? Life, although it may only be an accumulation of anguish, is dear to me, and I will defend it. [. . .] I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous” (96-97).

There are similarities between this passage, I think, and a passage from a letter written from Frankenstein’s father to his son:

Come dearest Victor; you alone can console Elizabeth. She weeps continually and accuses herself unjustly as the cause of his death; her words pierce my heart. We are all unhappy, but will not that be an additional motive for you, my son, to return and be our comforter? (70)

Both the father and the monster are making appeals to Frankenstein to satisfy them with a deed only he can accomplish for them. Both explain they are suffering, and hold their suffering as dwarfing the importance of whatever Frankenstein is himself experiencing, the significance of his own concerns, and thus the fatherly appeal to family duties, to common decency, as well as the fatherly address of “Come Victor” and “be calm I entreat you to hear me,” we hear from both father and monster. (The same address, we note, often encountered in Shelley’s father’s letters to her.)

There is psychological evidence for understanding children who believe they possess lords of the imagination somehow actually as friends, and that *do* in a sense in fact possess them (and are not yet so much malignantly possessed *by* them), which *do* function to help them feel protected, safe, and empowered, as coming to experience them as castigating monsters upon adolescence. The psychohistorian Lloyd DeMause informs us that:

[C]hildren usually feel guilty about being traumatized. “I must have been too

“noisy, because mommy left me” was my sincere belief when my mother left my father. I also believed I deserved my father’s strappings because I wasn’t obedient enough. This is why children set up a separate, internal self as a “protector” to try to stop themselves from ever being noisy, pushy, sexual, demanding, in fact, to stop them from growing and thus re-experiencing trauma. At first, these internal “protectors” are friendly; sometimes they are represented as imaginary playmates or even as protective alters [. . .]. Later, particularly when adolescence brings on opportunities for greater exploration and especially dating [important to note in regards to Keats’ “Ode to a Grecian Urn”], these protective selves become persecutory selves that “have had it” with the host self and actually try to harm it. Their persecutory self says, “It’s not happening to me, it’s happening to her, and she deserves it! (6)

While Frankenstein’s lords of the imagination encourage hubris, the monster reads and contemplates powerful voices that try to caution him away from over-ambition. These include Volney’s *Ruins of Empires*, with its moral lessons skimmed from the collapse of once-great empires; Plutarch’s *Lives*, which led him “to admire peaceable lawgivers, Numa, Solon, and Lycurgus in preference to Romulus and Theseus” (125); and Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, which has him reflect that he had “allowed [his] [. . .] thoughts, unchecked by reason, to ramble in the fields of Paradise, and dared to fancy amiable and lovely creatures sympathising with my feelings and cheering my gloom” (127). Many readers end up sympathizing with the monster and almost to hate Frankenstein: Mightn’t this owe to that while the monster attends to voices which tell of his fallibility, Frankenstein listens to those which encourage further ambition? That is, to their also being under orders from old lords of the imagination, gone monster?

DeMause argues that the kind of wounds incurred from being aware at an early age that your parents may often be indifferent to or even actually at some level *hate* you, is ultimately far more severe than what might follow from their physical beatings. Most times, these emotional hurts *never* heal, and end up rattling on throughout your lifetime, for the most part determining its course:

Traumas are defined as injuries to the private self, rather than just painful experiences, since non-painful injuries to the self [. . .] are more traumatic to

the self than, say, more painful accidents. Without a well-developed, enduring private self, people feel threatened by all progress, all freedom, all new challenges, and then experience annihilation anxiety, fears that the fragile self is disintegrating, since situations that call for self-assertion trigger memories of [. . .] abandonment. Masterson calls this by the umbrella term “abandonment depressions,” beneath which he says, “ride the Six Horsemen of the Psychic Apocalypse: Depression, Panic, Rage, Guilt, Helplessness (hopelessness), and Emptiness (void) [that] wreak havoc across the psychic landscape leaving pain and terror in their wake.” Whether the early traumas or rejections were because the [parents] [. . .] were openly abandoning, over-controlling and abusive, clinging, or just threatened by the child’s emerging individuation, the results are much the same—the child learns to fear parts of his or her potential self that threatens the disapproval or loss of the [. . .] parent. (7)

I think we see here why Frankenstein rejects (he does this at least a couple of times) the very same philosophers his father so disapproves of, and why, after being subject to constant chiding from his father for their distance, he eventually leaves university for home.

But returning home, re-merging with the parent, itself has horrible consequences. DeMause tells us that according to Socarides:

fears of growth, individuation, and self assertion that carry threatening feelings of disintegration lead to desires to merge with the omnipotent mother, literally to crawl back into the womb, desires which immediately turn into fears of maternal engulfment, since the merging would involve total loss of the self. When Socarides’ patients make moves to individuate—like moving into their own apartment or getting a new job—they have dreams of being swallowed by whirlpools of devoured by monsters. The only salvation from these maternal engulfment wishes/fears is a “flight to external reality from internal reality.” (7)

The need to fly away to an external reality, to flee home, away from internal reality, may be what Frankenstein is doing when he leaves his family to wander through the valleys, and why this sublime landscape, though it “did not remove [his]

[. . .] grief, [. . .] subdued and tranquillised it" (93). He tells us as much himself: "Sometimes I could cope with the sullen despair that over-whelmed me; but sometimes the whirlwind passions of my soul drove me to seek, by bodily exercise and by change of place, some relief from my intolerable sensations" (91).

DeMause describes a patient of Masterson's who should remind us strongly of Frankenstein, of the feelings he felt before and after his act of hubris:

I was walking down the street and suddenly I was engulfed in a feeling of absolute freedom. I could taste it. I knew I was capable of doing whatever I wanted. When I looked at other people, I really saw them without being concerned about how they were looking at me [. . .]. I was just being myself and thought that I had *uncovered the secret of life*: being in touch with your own feelings and expressing them openly with others, not worrying so much about how others felt about you. Then just as suddenly as it came, it disappeared. I panicked and started thinking about the million things I had to do at the studio, of errands I needed to run after work. I began to feel nauseous and started sweating. I headed for my apartment, running most of the way. When I got in, I felt that I had been pursued. By what? Freedom, I guess [or maybe by a monster]. (8)

This moment of total awareness and complete happiness matches well with Frankenstein's own upon discovering the secret of life:

Whence, I often asked myself, did the principle of life proceed? It was a bold question, and one which has ever been considered as a mystery; yet with how many things are we upon the brink of becoming acquainted, if cowardice or carelessness did not restrain our enquiries. I revolved these circumstances in my mind, and determined thenceforth to apply myself [.] I became acquainted with the science of anatomy [.] I do not ever remember to have trembled [. . .] or to have feared [.] I was led to examine [;] I saw [. . .] the fine form of man [.] I beheld the corruption of death [.] I saw how the worm inherited the wonders of the eye and brain. I paused, examining and analysing all the minutiae of causation, as exemplified in the change from life to death, and death to life, until from the midst of this darkness a sudden light broke in

upon me—a light so brilliant and wondrous, yet so simple, that while I became dizzy with the immensity of the prospect which it illustrated, I was surprised, that among so many men of genius who had directed their enquiries towards the same science, that I alone should be reserved to discover so astonishing a secret. [...] The astonishment which I had at first experienced on this discovery soon gave place to delight and rapture. (55-6)

But after he beholds “the accomplishment of [his] [...] toils,” he experiences “an anxiety that almost amounted to agony” (56). And this switch from absolute bliss to absolute panic and misery is similar to that experienced by Masterson’s patient:

The different accidents are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature. I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room, and continued a long time traversing my bedchamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep. (56)

Pleasure arising from an accomplishment that distinguishes him from other people, leads to a flight to external reality.

Shelley, through Frankenstein, is to some extent realizing that addressing her inclination toward self-castigation requires figuring out a way to ignore her father’s commands, not in accepting them, without this amounting to the kind of scornful repudiation we saw Frankenstein and Clerval suffer upon Clerval’s father. This solution, I think, is something she is investigating *via* her vehicle Frankenstein, but *for* herself, because though Frankenstein is eternally damned, damnation blesses him with a wondrous new power. Late in the text, when Frankenstein is recovering from illness, his doctor, Mr. Kirwin, exclaims “in a rather severe tone”: “I should have thought, young man, that the presence of your father would have been welcome instead of inspiring such violent repugnance” (174). Frankenstein will now tell his father the real reason for his “madness” that previously he’d been unable to share with anyone. His father listens to him, and “with an expression of unbounded

wonder,” says, “My dearest Victor, what infatuation is this? My dear son, I entreat you never to make such an assertion again” (180). But Frankenstein does not acquiesce. Instead, he cries out, “I am not mad, [. . .] the sun and the heavens, who have viewed my operations, can bear witness of my truth. I am the assassin of those most innocent victims; they died by my machinations” (180). Shelley tells us that “[t]he conclusion of this speech convinced [Frankenstein’s] [. . .] father that [his] [. . .] ideas were deranged, and he [i.e., the father] instantly changed the subject of our conversation” (180). I think this is a replay of Frankenstein’s childhood encounter with his father where his own explorations were belittled as mere nonsense, but this time his father is not right but overhasty, this time he is just plain wrong. And this time Frankenstein does not belittle his beliefs as false imaginings because he knows he is right. It is an encounter between two minds where the father shows himself possessed of the smaller.

Moreover, we have a sense that when the father turns to other subjects, his son is no longer listening to him; a crucial moment has occurred, and Frankenstein is now freed from his father’s opinions and judgments of him. Shelley has Frankenstein understand that he knows himself better than his father does. Perhaps the significance of this moment is such that the deaths of his family members which soon follow, which now include both Elizabeth and his father, amount to external evidence that he has found a way free of torments—no further need to grapple with them required. Shelley needed to figure out a way in which Frankenstein’s father could still remain good—as it is too painful to imagine him otherwise—and where Frankenstein’s own independence makes him bad—thereby validating Shelley’s father’s judgment of her—but in a way which secretly proves mostly liberating. Shelley finds one in the Blakean assessment of goodness as innocence and badness as corruption through experience. Shelley no longer has Frankenstein listen to his reprimands to be happy, his encouragements to abandon his studies, or his requirement to turn away from happy thoughts towards servicing his family. He heeds no more of his father’s advice, because his father is in a sense the child: his father cannot appreciate the truths accessible to Frankenstein from Frankenstein’s more ranging experiencing of the world. Importantly, his father is still characterized as being well-intentioned; he is still to be distinguished from Clerval’s tyrant of a father. But he *cannot* also be right, because his very goodness precludes this possibility. Frankenstein, who once speculated that man’s “superior [sensibilities] [. . .]

to those apparent in the brute [. . .] only renders them more necessary beings" (94), and that "[i]f our impulses were confined to hunger, thirst, and desire, we might be nearly free" (94), has found a way to claim freedom without denying his superior intellectual capacities. For Shelley, I think that this amounts to a refusal to falsely confess the wrongness of her way of thinking.

In Frankenstein's last conversation with his father, he is attending to other voices. There is no exploration of, no engagement with, his father's lessons; instead, Frankenstein, mimicking, *claiming* the authority of his father, offers but a short cursory comment: "Such were the lessons of my father" (184). Frankenstein's mind is on his creation, on his monster. Because he can no longer be reached, is no longer to be understood by man, Frankenstein is alone. This to many critics is the consequence—the punishment—for Frankenstein's hubris, but it is in fact a state of exclusion, of being, Shelley was struggling toward—not to be apart from man, but to be able to tolerate and appreciate the aloneness of independent thinking. As the psychologist Nathaniel Branden remarks, "We are social animals [. . .] [;] [w]hile it may sometimes be necessary, we do not normally enjoy long periods of being alienated from the thinking and beliefs of those around us, especially those we respect and love. [Thus] [o]ne of the most important forms of heroism is the heroism of consciousness, the heroism of thought: the willingness to tolerate aloneness" (50). We see, through Frankenstein, that Shelley herself finds independence problematic because her father wants her to turn her thoughts to her family—*to him*—when she takes pleasure from her own activity, her own creations, her own thoughts, or when she attends to those outside the family circle. In imagining herself, through her creation Frankenstein, surrounded by a cloud of melancholy that purportedly makes pleasure impossible to experience, she is exploiting the logic of her father's commands: that is, whatever it may do to pleasure, mightn't it leave her free?

But in truth, is Frankenstein really no longer happy? We note that even when he suggests he has become such a vortex of misery that even praise has become but another source of pain, he isn't much averse to recounting examples of this ostensible, pain-inducing praise. He recounts, for instance:

why, M. Clerval, I assure you he [Frankenstein] has outstript us all. Ay, stare if you please; but it is nevertheless true. A youngster who but a few years ago, believed in Cornelius Agrippa as firmly as in the Gospel, has now set himself

at the head of the university and if he is not soon pulled down, we shall all be out of countenance. — Ay, ay, [.] Mr. Frankenstein is modest, an excellent quality in a young man. Young men should be diffident of themselves, you know, Mr. Clerval; I was myself when young, but that wears out in a very short time. (66)

Frankenstein would have us believe he experiences little pleasure in, not only such high praise, but high praise from one who does not believe great accomplishments are necessarily also immodest ones.

Frankenstein continues to astonish people until his death. We remember Walton’s “astonishment on hearing such a question addressed to [him] [.] from a man on the brink of destruction” (24). And though some doubt whether Walton is a trustworthy narrator, I think his assessment of Frankenstein on the mark when he concludes: “Such a man has a double existence: he may suffer misery and be overwhelmed by disappointments, yet, when he has retired into himself, he will be like a celestial spirit, that has a halo around him, within whose circle no grief or folly ventures” (28). Shelley, through Frankenstein, has offered herself a sort of self-acceptance for her own consideration, where, though it amounts to internalizing badness, also means to no longer be at war with oneself. It does not amount to stasis; in fact, just the opposite—it offers the potential to change, to evolve, precisely because it helps resolve inhibiting inner-conflicts. Frankenstein is not consistently at peace; he still suffers grief and experiences misery. But as Walton observes, he now has the ability to recover and continue on his way. Yes, I know—Frankenstein *perishes* along the way. But does this represent proof, for Shelley, of the trueness of the moral of the story? Or, having used Frankenstein to achieve for herself a kind of solution, does satisfaction from discovery now replace the energy of the inner-toil that drove the writing of the book, the telling of the tale, making it simply the appropriate time to leave her proxy behind and put down the pen?

Silly consideration? Consider how many people find strange the ending of *Huckleberry Finn* in which, after a confrontation with God we intuitively felt the book was leading to, Huck is more or less abandoned as the main protagonist as he but passively participates in what really amounts to the further adventures of Tom Sawyer. Both Twain and Shelley were using their characters for their own psychic explorations, and when they create a situation for their protagonists—for

themselves—that manifests a “solution,” a way out/through, it’s time to distance themselves from the creation, either by ending the book or through the insertion of some other protagonist (one who does not so closely resemble themselves) to carry out the remainder of the action. The mind primarily busies itself in its hoarding away of the discovery for subsequent picking-ats and unraveling.

Wendy Steiner, in an introduction to *Frankenstein*, newly released as one of the Modern Library Paperback Classics, believes Frankenstein’s polar adventure does not offer Frankenstein transcendence. She argues, instead, that the ending amounts to a critique by Mary Shelley of the sublime:

The sublime takes individuals out of their time and place and lifts them into what Mary Shelley portrays as a deathly, inhuman transcendence. Of course, in Kant and Burke, this liberation from the here and now is the supreme achievement of the imagination, but it is clear that Mary Shelley disagreed. Frankenstein spends most of his time in the Alps or on the polar ice cap, the archetypal landscapes of the sublime; by contrast the Rhine Valley, where he travels with Henry, is a romantic setting of gentler beauty. “The mountains of Switzerland,” he says, “are more majestic and strange, but there is a charm in the banks of this divine river that I never before saw equalled.” “Charm” is a term that Kant slightly associates with “the agreeable”—meretricious beauty, sentiment, the allure of surfaces. If Frankenstein’s pure taste craves the self-annihilating sublime, Mary Shelley’s belief in “the amiableness of domestic affection, and the excellence of universal virtue” finds its analogue in the aesthetic of Charm. (xix)

Frankenstein tries to make a firm distinction between the sublime and the picturesque, and perhaps this helped fool Steiner, because “the amiableness of domestic affection” most certainly *does* surface when Frankenstein is in the Alps! Traveling through the valley of Chamounix, Frankenstein observes that though “this valley is more wonderful and sublime, [it is] [. . .] no[t] so beautiful and picturesque, as that of Servox” (91); but of the entire journey of the Alps, including traveling through the “high and snowy mountains [. . .] and beholding the “supreme and magnificent Mont Blanc” (92), Frankenstein tells us:

A tingling log-lost sense of pleasure often came across me during this journey. Some turn in the road, some new object suddenly perceived and recognised, reminded me of days gone by, and were associated with the light-hearted gaiety of boyhood. The very winds whispered in soothing accents, and maternal nature bade me weep no more. [...] [W]atching the pallid lightnings that played above Mont Blanc, and listening to the rushing of the Arve [,] [...] the same lulling sounds acted as a lullaby to my too keen sensations. (92)

Mont Blanc is itself cuddled by the “vast river of ice [which] [...] wound among its dependent mountains” (95). I do not believe being reminded of the “light-hearted gaiety of boyhood” is what Steiner is alluding to in her argument that the sublime brings about thoughts of transcendence from the here and now, and I doubt that Shelley could imagine any landscape more soothing, more gentle, than Frankenstein’s description of the Alps allows. It certainly does not seem a deathly or inhuman sort of transcendence either. And indisputably, there is much more a sense of cocooning in this passage than any move toward self-annihilation. No, Shelley is not criticizing the sublime landscape here; and the key word is not “charm” but rather “joy”—joy in nature offering, after travels in *any* region, serenity and fulfillment.

Joy comes in his contemplations of nature, whether the Rhine, the Alps, or a sea of polar ice. About the northern ocean of ice, Frankenstein remarks:

The Greeks wept for joy when they beheld the Mediterranean from the hills of Asia, and hailed with rapture the boundary of their toils. I did not weep, but I knelt down, and, with a full heart, thanked my guiding spirit for conducting me in safety to the place where I hoped, notwithstanding my adversary’s give, to meet and grapple with him. (199)

This thanking of spirits for the chance to grapple with his creation is not evidence of his madness—instead, it is the very real pleasure Frankenstein is capable of feeling now that he has decided he will confront rather than be intimidated by the demands of his confessor. He dies before he has the chance, but the monster gives what amounts to a fair account of Frankenstein’s and Shelley’s strange but real triumph: “Yet when she died!—nay, then I was not miserable. I had cast off all feeling, subdued all anguish, to riot in the excess of my despair. Evil thenceforth

became my good" (212).

Steiner is right, though, to describe "the plot of *Frankenstein* [as] [...] a demonic parody of the epiphanic 'spots of time,' in Wordsworth's 'Prelude.' Every episode in the novel is the same trauma, nightmarishly repeated: the loss of a loved one" (xix). Where I differ with him is in believing that the purpose of the repetition is not to draw attention to, to emphasize, the consequences of hubris—to offer the same moral lesson over and over again—but rather to assist Shelley in a search for a solution to a traumatizing abandonment when for her all pleasure turned to pain. The solution is not readily grasped; it requires wide knowledge of the way people work along with the capacity to accept some unsettling truths. But it is a Romantic one (where "Evil thenceforth became my good" [212]) that rivals the oddity and remarkableness of Keats' own solution to a similar moment in his own life he too cannot but obsess over.

Before arriving at a better solution, Shelley has Frankenstein satisfy himself with moments where "a truce [is] [...] established between the present hour and the irresistible, disastrous future" (178). I believe this is the satisfaction Keats experiences from contemplating the urn. I mentioned earlier that the onset of dating often brings about parental rejection. The reason is because dating, like motherhood, means making someone other than your parents the primary focus of your concerns. In *Frankenstein*, the father tells Frankenstein to turn his attention to his family when he experiences self-pleasure, and we learn from Hill-Miller that Shelley's father was greatly displeased with her daughter's decision to elope with Percy Shelley. In "Ode to a Grecian Urn" we have two lovers "frozen" just as they are about to kiss ("[t]hough winning near the goal" [18]). This image is followed by one of townsfolk coming to sacrifice. Together, they constitute a before and after—or more aptly, an if/then: if you choose to embrace, then you can expect to be promptly punished for doing so. By being frozen in time, the lovers are saved, not simply from experiencing their own sure inconstancy in love and the slow effects of aging on young beauty, but from the community's hard judgment that was to follow their rapturous union.

The poem's structure pits the ideals and strivings of youth against the harsh judgments of parents. It begins with the narrator, excited by what he sees on the urn, eagerly asking questions: "What men or gods are these? What maidens loath? / What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape? What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?" (8-10). He, like Walton in *Frankenstein*, is "by [his] [...] eagerness and [...] wonder

and hope [...] express[ing] [...] that [he] expect[s] to be informed of the secret with which [the urn is] [...] acquainted" (51). We remember Frankenstein refusing to "lead [Walton] [...] on to [his] [...] destruction and infallible misery" (51-52), his lecturing him on "how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow" (52). Similarly, the urn, in a sense, attempts to stop the narrator's over-eager and perilous investigations, supposedly "out of friendship," as "a friend to man" (48), moralizing "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" (49-50).

These last two lines are as famous as almost any out of Shakespeare. They last out of poetry, but just as much for representing the ongoing human problem of inhibiting parental voices, the power, similar voiced statements in people's own lives had, to still their realizing their full potential. Some critics believe they represent Keats' firmly held conclusions, having arisen from his own investigations of truths for man (Lyon 45). Sidney Colvin says that "amidst the gropings of reason and the flux of things, [truth is beauty, beauty is truth] is to the poet and artist—at least to one of Keats' temper—an immutable law" (45). Others have an adverse reaction to them, believing they are jolting, poetically awry, or self-evidently false, or the voice of the urn rather than Keats' own. William Wilkinson believes that the "idea of 'truth' [is] [...] foisted in with violence" (49), and that it upsets both the beauty and believability of the poem. He proceeds to create a "better" ending where "[b]eauty is joy" (49). H. W. Garrod believes that "every reader [...] in some degree feels them, feels a certain uneasiness [in the last two lines]" (60). Royall Snow damns the message: "[t]hat is nonsense and instinctively we feel it. The poem is so well loved precisely because that appeal *is* valid and universal. Though we crave a solution of the questions *transiency* raises in our minds, we scarcely crave *this* solution once its implications become clear" (62). Snow investigates whether it is possible that "Keats never either meant nor made such a statement as 'Beauty is truth?'" (62). He concludes that he did not; the trouble is that the message has been taken out of context. Snow, though, believes there is a consistent single voice encountered throughout the poem. Like F.R. Leavis, he believes "[t]he proposition is strictly in keeping with the attitude concretely embodied in the poem" (78). Others find the riddle solved upon appreciating that they are "uttered by the urn without any interference on the part of the poet" (Lyon 111).

The mere fact that there are a variety of opinions here is refreshing compared with the near absence of mental-wrestling over whether or not Frankenstein's moralizing statement to Walton is in fact a component of Shelley's own world-view. The best we get there is the suggestion that Shelley's warning, "however reasoned and erudite [,] [. . .] has sounded timid next to the heroes challenge of Frankensteinian inquiry, and posterity has preferred horror over healing" (Steiner xx). In short, most critics do not explore as they do with Keats' "Ode to a Grecian Urn," whether the moralizing voice is *not* in fact the voice of the writer. However, *neither* work is simply the playing out of a conclusion regarding life either writer has already arrived at. Instead, both are active working-outs of a life experience that afflicts them enough for them to attempt to find a solution *through their writing of the work itself*.

In both works there is the staging of the warring elements—youthful ambition versus parental intimidation. Shelley uses the pursuit of youthful studies to taste success, Keats uses the young lovers to know love. Concerning Keats, Clarence Thorpe concurs:

[T]he symbols executed here, themselves a product of mind and soul, still contain within themselves a dynamic something that has power to kindle the imagination of a sympathetic observer, who [. . .] is able to re-create the particular bits of life[.] [T]he image [of the young lovers] comes to the mind of Keats in a pleasurable wave of recognition. It is pleasurable because he detects, starting out at him from the fair chiselled form, waves of intuitive whisperings that seize his imagination and set it aflame[.] (58-59)

I differ from Thorpe in believing that what the "kindl[ing] the imagination" (59) of a sympathetic observer amounts to is a merging *with* the image, not simply being stimulated *by* it, so to become a near participant in the scene, and that the pleasurable wave of recognition is not caught sight of a semblance to one's own experiences, but the result of a more direct re-experiencing of the past.

The critic I am in most sympathy with in regards to its meaning agrees that the poem represents, though disguised, a moment from Keats' own past. Albert Mordell believes that "emotions connected with Fanny Brawne [Keats' former lover] inspired his two most famous odes [,] [including] [. . .] 'to the Grecian Urn'" (199). "Keats saw a resemblance between himself and that youth. He, too, was winning and near the

goal, and he no more had her love than did the youth on the urn. [. . .] He had to accept his lot and pretend to see some advantage in it as he did in that of the youth on the urn" (205). Compromise owes to his sharing a fate akin to Frankenstein's, when, even when he "appeared almost within grasp of [his] [. . .] foe, [he had his] [. . .] hopes [. . .] suddenly extinguished" (201). Consummation, experience of any moment that would make one truly happy, is often one where pleasure turns into pain. Branden notes that "[he] had the opportunity to work with many thousands of people in a variety of professional contexts and settings[,] [and] [. . .] is absolutely persuaded that happiness anxiety is one of our most widespread and least understood problems" (91). He continues:

Many people feel they do not deserve happiness, are not entitled to happiness, have no right to the fulfillment of their emotional needs and wants. Often they feel that if they are happy, either their happiness will be taken away from them, or something terrible will happen to counterbalance it, some unspeakable punishment or tragedy. (97)

Branden notes that to stop and reflect on one's troubles, in an effort to properly identify and resolve them, is unusual, because most people fear that if they ever stop and look inside they may discover "there's nothing there" (93). Rather than reflect upon and attempt to resolve it, most often when feeling anxious, "[i]n order to make it more bearable, it is commonly converted into specific, tangible fears, which might seem to have some semblance of plausibility of the circumstances of one's life [but which amount to] [. . .] a smokescreen and defence against an anxiety whose roots lie in the core experience of self" (79). Keats is using the two lovers to engage his past. In this he is already somewhat less the coward than Mordell assesses him as.

It is true, though, that Keats, like Shelley, is imagining what it might feel like if he pretended it true that "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter" (11-12). He is trying the rationalization on, just as Shelley is trying on the idea that it is best to live modestly, quietly, amongst friends and family in her native town. Both, though, have too high a self-esteem to long content themselves with compromised offerings, for:

one of the characteristics of high self-esteem is an eagerness for the new and

the challenging, for that which will allow an individual to use his or her capacities to the fullest extent—just as a fondness for the familiar, the routine, and the unexacting coupled with a fear of the new and the difficult is a virtually unmistakable indication of low self-esteem. (Branden 90)

We have discussed Shelley's eventual solution, and we will soon discuss Keats' own, but first I will offer a brief explanation as to why we should imagine the image of the village sacrifice as *conjoined* to the image of the young lovers, not as separate and distinct from them.

The poem, of course, begins with talk of pursuits, struggles to escape, along with maidens and wild ecstasy. “Who are these coming to the sacrifice?” (31) follows but three lines after “All breathing human passion far above” (28), so they are, more or less, two images which flow into one another. From “Lead’s^t thou that heifer lowin at the skies” (33), we know that a heifer, a young cow, is to be sacrificed. The sacrifice of animals in antiquity was actually a change for the better in the history of the barbaric ritual of sacrifice; previously, sacrifices were human, healthy young men and women—representing our most promising selves—more often than not. All we require to understand that the heifer is in fact a metaphor for young lovers, and that the two images are linked for Keats’ consideration of the troubling moments in his past when pleasure turned to pain, is to understand that dating often leads to parental rejection. Children, who initially worship their parents as gods, and imagine their family as all the world, are left alone to contend with the wiles of the world—*are sacrificed*—by their parents, as they begin to focus more on themselves and life beyond the home.

Keats’ “Ode to Melancholy” represents his own Romantic solution to the terror and pain of parental rejection. Rather than acquiesce to parents’ demands, Keats offers a prescription for continuing on in the very teeth of pain, making a poem that begins with “death moths” (6) and “mournful Psyche” (7) rather than with a “flowery tale” (4) and a “wild ecstasy” (10), actually the more uplifting of the two. If all great pleasures turn into piercing pain, if “Joy [. . .] Turn[s] [. . .] to Poison while the bee-mouth sips” (24), there is another option available other than avoiding vivid experience in ostensible preference for “unheard melodies”: keep sipping. To prescribe feeding “deep, deep upon [the] [. . .] peerless eyes” (20) of melancholy amounts in my mind to an admission that “heard” melodies *are* in fact much sweeter

than “unheard” ones, they just come with the bitterest of after-tastes. Same thing, also, with unconsummated love. Keats concludes that it is better to suffer the pain because otherwise “For shade to shade will come too drowsily” (9): our experiences in life will be muted ones. As Morris Dickstein tells us, the “permanence that the [. . .] Grecian urn seemed to offer is forgotten [. . .]. Keats no longer seeks passive dissolution, freedom from the flux and tension of actuality; he dismisses that wish, demands passionate assault on the world of experience, with all its contrary sensations, with all its intimations of mortality” (231).

This is the declaration of a Romantic. In a sense, it is not dissimilar to what Frankenstein’s family had hoped Justine capable of. They believed it better to resist “confessors,” to resist being compliant, for, even if this leads to torture, to “let[ting] her [confessors] rave” (19), in addition to being both good and right it also affords a pleasing sense of self-regard that counts against the pain. Keats is choosing *not* to follow the path of least resistance, which would have him, not drink down terrors, but douse his anxieties with drugs in some effort to turn them off. Instead, he declares he will continue to imbibe them so he might enjoy a rich, resonate life.

John Keats died at an early age, and so we are used to hearing that “[n]o one can read Keats’ poems and letters without an undersense of immense waste of so extraordinary an intellect and genius cut off so early” (Abrams 504). One rarely encounters such regret for Frankenstein, for, for his hubris of self-attendance and transgressive exploits, he ostensibly deserved no better. But in coming to this conclusion, a conclusion I believe Mary Shelley herself did not subscribe to and was struggling the whole of her life to resist, are we rewarding ourselves with the sense of superiority that comes from being “good” at the expense of the genuine superiority that could follow from our being “bad”? Is it really true that happiness and self-respect lie in never forgetting all our parents are due, in moderating our pleasures in deference to all we have been told we still owe them? Or is this a deception we foist on ourselves, a “truth” we feel we must try to oblige, lest we slip into self-condemnation, self-hatred? Mightn’t it be, that is, that we just failed where others would have succeeded?

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