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A More Comprehensive and Commanding Delineation:**Mary Shelley's Narrative Strategy in *Frankenstein***

This thesis argues that the first edition of *Frankenstein* challenges conventional reading by employing what Simpson in *Irony and Authority in Romantic Poetry* calls Romantic irony, where the absence of a stable 'metacomment' precludes an authoritative reading. The novel hints at such readings but prevents them.

The insights offered by Tropp's *Mary Shelley's Monster*, Baldick's *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, Poovey's *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* and Swingle's, 'Frankenstein's Monster and its Relatives: Problems of Knowledge in English Romanticism' are considered, but none recognises the full implications of the instability deriving from multiple first-person narratives. Clemit's *The Godwinian Novel* acknowledges the novel's indeterminacy, but reads a specific ideological purpose in it.

Paradise Lost provides a language to describe the relationship between the monster and Frankenstein, but proves too unstable to fix identity or establish moral value. Similarly, Necessity ultimately fails to provide a stable explanation in terms of cause and effect. The status of nature shifts between foreground and background, never allowing final definition.

These uncertainties destabilise knowledge which is compromised by its provisional nature: no authoritative reading is possible, yet the novel has narrative coherence. The reader is encouraged to try to develop a reading the structure prevents.

The radical nature of the first edition is highlighted by comparison with the 1831 edition, which removes much of the ambivalence and gives the novel a clearer morality.

The novel challenges conventional methods of deriving authority by 'disturb(ing) the reader's orthodox orientation in the world around him' (Simpson) in order to afford 'a point of view to the imagination for the delineation of human passions more comprehensive and commanding than any which the ordinary relations of existing events can yield' (Mary Shelley).

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A more comprehensive and commanding delineation:

Mary Shelley's narrative strategy in *Frankenstein*

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'The event upon which the interest of the story depends is exempt from the disadvantages of a mere tale of spectres or enchantment. It was recommended by the novelty of the situations which it develops; and, however impossible as a physical fact, affords a point of view to the imagination for the delineation of human passions more comprehensive and commanding than any which the ordinary relations of existing events can yield.' [6]



10 MAY 1994

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I confirm that no part of the material offered has previously been submitted by me for a degree in this or in any other University.

Signed Simon Dunant

Date 25.11.93

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Note on the Text

References to the 1818 edition are to James Rieger's Chicago University Press edition (Chicago and London, 1982) and are given in the text in round brackets (x). References to the 1831 edition are to M.K. Joseph's Oxford edition (Oxford and New York, 1969) and are given in square brackets [x]. References to *Paradise Lost* in the Oxford Standard Authors edition, edited by Douglas Bush (London, 1966) are given in square brackets thus: [PL Y, l. xl].

Introduction

Frankenstein is a highly ambiguous and slippery text. The experience of reading the novel, particularly in the earlier 1818 edition, is an unsettling one for the novel throws up difficulties which leave the reader uncertain about what he has read.

There are a number of immediate problems produced by expectations raised by the novel's form. The structure of concentric narratives would lead the reader to expect that the narrator of the framing narrative, Walton, would have made some advance in understanding by the end of the novel. However, it is not clear whether he has or not. His reaction to his experience gives no indication one way or the other. There is moral advice offered, but it is ambiguous and inconclusive. This stems in part from the failure to fulfil another expectation. The reader would expect Frankenstein's narrative and the monster's contained within it to comment ironically upon each other, but there is insufficient common focus to allow for comparison. It is, moreover, difficult to identify a priority of authority of one over the other.

This indeterminacy extends to the area of moral evaluation. It is not clear whether the monster's self-justification is to be believed. Frankenstein asserts its malevolence, but his judgement is questioned. The moral value of his researches is also questionable. His motives initially seem laudable, but there is an egotistical motivation. Having once created the monster, it is not at all clear to the reader how Frankenstein should proceed. Similarly, it is not clear why he ignores the danger to Elizabeth after his marriage.

There are other questions which arise. *Paradise Lost* plays an important role in the novel, but its reading is ambiguous. Similarly, Necessity appears to explain the way in which characters develop, but does not answer all the questions raised by the various narratives. What is the connection between Frankenstein's education and his later acts? How far is the monster's violence an inevitable consequence of his early experiences? The conflicting first-person narratives could be self-justificatory; the reader is inclined to suspect as much, but he has no final proof.

Another question that arises in a novel dedicated to William Godwin has to do with the justice of the treatment of the monster. This brings consideration back to the question of the monster's moral value, which is unclear and apparently undiscoverable.

The structure of the novel seems deliberately misleading. There are three separate narratives, Walton's, Frankenstein's and the monster's, which do not corroborate each other. The ironic effect of one narrative providing a comment on the others, which might enable the development of a single clear reading, fails to do so. This thesis will investigate the reasons for and the implications of this apparent disfunction, seeing it as a source of strength. In a sense the word 'strategy' in the title is misleading in that it implies a single overt intention, as the word 'commanding' suggests a coherent and authoritative purpose, neither of which is the case. So far from having a clear ideological purpose, Mary Shelley's intention is to disable strategy.

The novel's complexity of form has a number of unstable ironic effects. There is a clear narrative but a thematic incoherence which is essential to its success and effectiveness. It appears to be developing towards a definite moral judgement - or 'metacomment' - but by indirect means; it then fails to allow any metacomment to be derived. This is similar to the strategy of some Romantic poets. A comparable pattern can also be seen in Godwin's *Caleb Williams*. Although many critics have recognised the instability inherent in the form of the novel, nearly all of them have ascribed it to some ideological purpose. I believe the novel is deliberately too polyvalent to conform adequately to any specific ideologically focussed reading, rather it calls into question and subverts ideology.

There are three texts of *Frankenstein*, excluding the second (1823) edition. The two major versions are the edition of 1818, and the 1831 edition. The implications of the changes made for the 1831 edition will be discussed in a separate chapter as they are extensive and involve a major shift of emphasis of a nature germane to this thesis. There is also a copy of the 1818 editions with autograph emendations given to Mrs Thomas in 1823, known as the 'Thomas Copy'. James Rieger's Chicago University Press edition (Chicago and London, 1974) includes both the

Thomas variants and the changes made for the 1831 edition. The Thomas variants mostly amplify or clarify the original, rather than change its emphasis. Where they are relevant they will be considered in the context of the discussion of the 1818 edition to which this thesis refers.

Romantic Irony

The sort of deliberately inconclusive ironic effect apparent in *Frankenstein* is described with reference to Romantic poetry by David Simpson in *Irony and Authority in Romantic Poetry*. Simpson's account of irony in Romantic poetry rests on the concept of the 'hermeneutic circle' which

operates on the paradox of past and present, part and whole, whereby each is seen only through the other. We 'read' a text, it suggests - and this 'text' can be an event in history - but the *order* which that text will compose is already latent within us as some kind of preconception. Because we only see this order as it is experienced, we can never see it from a critical distance, never comment upon it as an 'object'; thus we cannot ever achieve a theoretical command over its 'origins', which are posited simultaneously in past and present. The very idea of an origin, it must be noted, implies investment in the model of cause and effect (i.e. a historical sequence), a model which can only be applied to the experience of simultaneity by disrupting it with a conscious imposition of priorities.'

The pattern of *Frankenstein* appears to indicate an authoritative metacomment but simultaneously indicates the impossibility of constructing such a meaning in a number of ways. First of all, the trustworthiness of discourse itself is called into question: Frankenstein's warning against eloquence undermines all discourse: 'He is eloquent and persuasive; and once his words had even power over my heart: but trust him not' (206). This warning deconstructs any moral orientation because Walton describes Frankenstein as equally eloquent: 'His eloquence is forcible and touching; nor can I hear him, when he relates a pathetic incident, or endeavours to move the passions of pity or love, without tears' (208).

Secondly, the exact relationship between the monster and Frankenstein is not made unequivocally clear. *Paradise Lost* is used to define their relative positions, but the identification of Frankenstein

and the monster with particular characters in the poem shifts. Finally, the source which provides identification is unreliable: Frankenstein makes a number of judgements which do not take into account the monster's narrative, or which are shown to be absurd by the eventual outcome, for example, his insistence on the goodness of the spirits that he claims are guiding him towards his revenge (201), evidence for whose existence is the food provided by the monster. There are guides to judgement within the narrative, but there is no priority of credibility, so the reader is given no basis for trusting one narrative rather than another.

Simpson argues that 'Romantic poetry is organised to make us confront the question of authority, especially as it pertains to the contract between author and reader'.² *Frankenstein* is similarly concerned and both its structure and the allegory of Frankenstein's search for the nature of life warn against seeking an authoritative reading. The technique involved is a form of irony:

The situation as I see it is that, if a writer says 'X', then we question the meaning of what he says both as we receive it into our own codes and canons of significance and as it relates to the context of the rest of his utterances, their moods and voices. This double focus is likely to produce a paradox of the hermeneutic sort; how are we to be sure where one begins and the other ends? This is Romantic irony.³

In *Frankenstein* Mary Shelley stimulates this questioning in a number of ways. The most obvious of these is by the polysemous nature of the narrative: the novel purports to be a series of letters from Captain Walton to his sister, Mrs Saville; however, these letters turn into a journal, within which Walton includes the story that he is told by Frankenstein, who in turn repeats what the monster has told him of his story - Chapters XI - XVI. Furthermore, Chapter XIV consists of the history of the De Lacey family recounted by the monster. However, what is said in one narrative is not confirmed by corroborative details in another, but each narrative tends to call the others into question.

One detail implies a coherence and completeness in Frankenstein's story, with Frankenstein himself the only contact with the world inhabited by Walton (and by inference the reader):

Frankenstein discovered that I made notes concerning his history: he asked to see them, and then himself corrected and augmented them

in many places; but principally giving the life and spirit to the conversations he held with his enemy. "Since you have preserved my narration," said he, "I would not that a mutilated one should go down to posterity." (207)

However, this narrative integrity is illusory. The monster is seen by Walton at a distance shortly before Frankenstein himself appears (17). After the death of Frankenstein, the monster appears to Walton (216). The reader appears to have some basis for testing the truth of Frankenstein's narrative, but the boundaries between different levels of the narrative are blurred, making it easier, perhaps, for the reader to be drawn into the world of Walton, the voice of apparent normality, who is in fact as much of a fictional construct as Felix and Safie, the characters most distanced from the reader, but whose letters Walton claims to have seen (207).

There are other ways in which the reader's sense of security is disrupted. Walton's identification with Frankenstein and his uncritical acceptance of his reading of his story (217) imply an authority, which is clearly unreliable if the monster's point of view is considered. Walton's failure to apply Frankenstein's warning against eloquence to Frankenstein's own story, despite using it as a touchstone in his meeting with the monster (218), also calls his objectivity into question.

Percy Shelley's review of *Frankenstein* treats the overt moral stance as simply ironic, and draws out the straightforward moral, 'Treat a person ill and he will become wicked'.⁴ This reads the novel too simplistically. It also suggests a coherence in the monster's make-up, which he lacks, and a malice in Frankenstein which he clearly lacks. Frankenstein is both similar to and contrasted with Walton, of whom we know no ill, and who does finally give in to the demand of his crew to return. However, we cannot really tell if Walton's returning to England is a victory for good sense or frustration of selfish ambition.⁵

Frankenstein's position is equally ambiguous, as his attempt to justify himself when he is about to die shows:

In a fit of enthusiastic madness I created a rational creature and was bound towards him, to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being. This was my duty; but there was another still paramount to that. My duties towards the beings of my own

species had greater claims to my attention, because they included a greater proportion of happiness or misery. (214-5)

This is a convincing utilitarian argument. Frankenstein represents himself as being faced with a choice between two evils. The situation is one that does not permit a perfect solution; the ending of the novel leaves the situation nicely poised between the two alternatives. Even if Frankenstein's arguments are dismissed, this deathbed speech creates doubt. This doubt is emphasised in Frankenstein's final injunction to Walton - in which he explicitly places Walton in the same position with regard to his narration as Walton implicitly places the reader with regard to the whole novel:

But the consideration of these points, and the well balancing of what you may esteem your duties, I leave to you; my judgement and ideas are already disturbed by the near approach of death. I dare not ask you to do what I think right, for I may still be misled by passion. (215)

Just at the moment when Frankenstein appears to be establishing some sort of authoritative metacomment, he deconstructs the moral scheme he seemed to be creating and leaves Walton and the reader floating free. Simpson sees the same process in the relationship between the text and the notes in 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner':

One discourse offers or appears to act as a closural force upon the other - offering itself as a 'metacommentary' - but this gesture is not vindicated when we begin a closer survey and an attempted reconciliation of divergent meanings. The voice which is superficially authoritative is thus seen not to belong to the 'author' at all, because it does not meet the demands of interpretative coherence. The author, who at this point is a true 'ironist', has abdicated his habitual role and left an empty space which the reader must occupy (but only to leave free once more?) with his own triangulations.⁶

Frankenstein appears to be drawing out a moral which could be assessed in the light of Walton's reaction to it. However, because Frankenstein does not settle at either pole of the opposition he establishes between condemning his achievements and endorsing them, there is no stable position for Walton to respond to. The reader is 'looking for a voice which could speak for a coherent personality, one into which he could comfortably read himself',⁷ but finds there is none. Walton might act as another possible authorial voice, but he offers no

explicitly moral comment, only 'You have read this strange and terrific story, Margaret; and do you not feel your blood congeal with horror, like that which even now curdles mine? (206-7)', which is, if anything, a refusal to provide moral guidance. It evades the important questions thrown up in the novel and concentrates upon its affective qualities.

This issue is complicated by the question of eloquence raised earlier. Frankenstein's version of events conflicts with the monster's, but, apart from the final scene, the only source we have for the monster's point of view is Frankenstein because he tells the monster's story as part of his own. He has taken care to control the reception of his story by rewriting parts to make them more effective (207). Consequently, his warning against eloquence (206) and Walton's repetition of it (218) destabilise the whole novel by calling into question the trustworthiness of the medium of communication. This raises another issue highlighted in Simpson's argument.

Simpson considers the question of tonality in poetry and shows how the poets, and Wordsworth particularly, avoided providing a stable metacomment by making the language of their poetry ironic in itself: 'It is in fact exactly the intrusion of tonality, with the implied primacy of speech over writing, which renders the written form an 'ironic' one, supplying hints and half meanings which the written word alone cannot satisfy or bring to completion'.²

By casting doubt on eloquence Frankenstein unsettles the reader in the same way. Even purely narrative details are suspect because they might be misleading or loaded in some sense. Because the reader is told to suspect those elements in Frankenstein's history ascribed to the monster, and because the warning about the monster's eloquence applies equally to Frankenstein, he is left with no means of distinguishing between reliable and unreliable language; it is all merely language. The conflict between the desire to place confidence in the medium and the questioning of its probity creates the uncertainty Simpson suggests the Romantics used to avoid the imposition of an authoritative reading.

Another aspect of Frankenstein's narrative makes it difficult to establish a satisfactory basis for judgement. Simpson refers to 'Blake's polemic, shared ... by other Romantics, against the tyranny of the eye, imposing, as it tries to do, a single vision on the mind and

acting improperly as the chief among the senses'.² This suspicion of the visual, and its domineering among the senses, serves further to undermine the credibility of Frankenstein's tale. It is the mere sight of the monster that inspires Frankenstein's loathing for him (52-3), and his second glimpse of his creation convinces Frankenstein of his guilt and malevolence (71-2).

When he has finally completed his task, his enthusiasm for which has led Frankenstein to suspend normal moral judgement (50), his reaction is 'breathless horror and disgust (53). However, it is a horror based upon superficial visual judgements. Frankenstein describes what he has created in thrilling terms:

His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!- Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips.
(52)

The yellow skin suggests putrefaction, as does its transparency which allows the structures beneath to be seen. Is this a greater and offensive form of nakedness? The eyes are watery, and they contrast with the dun-white and, by implication, sunken sockets. The 'shrivelled complexion' suggests that the the face looks as if it has been dead for some time, as do the black and, one supposes, dry lips. The monster is portrayed as if dead, and yet is alive. Frankenstein's chief response is specifically to the appearance of his creation: 'Oh! no mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch' (53). However, all the reader or Walton has to respond to is a verbal description. Furthermore, these visual judgements involve a moral dimension: the monster looks revolting, and is created by 'filthy' means, therefore it is essentially evil. Only Walton, who is forewarned, is able to overcome his instinctive revulsion for long enough to hear the monster out (216). Various reasons are put forward by different critics to explain Frankenstein's revulsion towards his creation: the monster is ugly as the product of Frankenstein's botched imitation of God¹⁰ - a

reading supported by the monster's own attempts to fit itself into the scheme of *Paradise Lost*; it can be seen as monstrous because, having been created from elements from other bodies, it does not possess organic unity;¹¹ it can also be seen, as Percy Shelley saw it, as a creature initially off-putting, but possessing a potential for good until perverted by mistreatment by humanity;¹² or even as a representation of woman.¹³ However, these readings of the monster do not really reflect the way in which, by the employment of conflicting first-person narratives, the monster is presented as self-contradictory in what it signifies and in its moral value.

Although the possibility of making such judgements is questioned by the novel, the monster is rejected again and again regardless of its true worth and significance and despite his good intentions, when humans merely sight him.¹⁴ When he makes his bid to obtain the friendship of the De Lacey's, his gesture of entreaty and submission is interpreted by Felix as threatening his father's life (134). Yet De Lacey himself, unfettered by the tyranny of eyesight, shows no consciousness of any threat, but rather interests himself in the welfare of the lonely and indigent creature who has begged his aid (130).

This kind of one-dimensional judgement is analogous to the one Simpson suggests the Romantics were attempting to subvert, or at least call into question. In the same way that characters in the novel judge the monster on sight alone, so the reader is inclined to reach for an obvious and convenient metacomment and ignore or rationalise away those elements which contradict it.

For all these reasons any serious attempt to establish a stable reading of *Frankenstein* in terms of any specific ideological outlook will not succeed completely. The narrative strategy of *Frankenstein* conforms to Simpson's definition of 'English Romantic irony' which

broadly put, consists in the studied avoidance on the artist's part of determinate meanings, even at such times as he might wish to encourage his reader to *produce* such meanings for himself; it involves the refusal of closure, the incorporation of any potentially available 'metacomment' within the primary language of the text, the provision of a linguistic sign which moves towards or verges upon a 'free' status, and the consequent raising to self-consciousness of the authoritarian element of discourse, as it effects both the author-reader relation and the intentional

manipulation, from both sides, of the material through which they communicate.¹⁵

In *Frankenstein*, there is a clear intention to avoid 'determinate meanings'. The technique of irony is to imply metacommentary by showing the unreliability of the discourse presented. However, in *Frankenstein* the possible metacommentaries are clearly presented in other discourses in the novel, all of which are shown to be equally unreliable. Consequently, while the ironic nature of the original discourse is indisputable, the metacommentary shares its unreliable status. Mary Shelley creates a moral world whose orientation is far from clear, and quite resistant to the imposition of 'determinate meanings'. The ending of the novel does not provide any clarification either, with the monster disappearing into 'darkness and distance' (221) apparently to destroy himself. While Walton might be read returning home 'a sadder and a wiser man', his only comment on the matter is: 'The die is cast; I have consented to return, if we are not destroyed. Thus are my hopes blasted by cowardice and indecision; I come back ignorant and disappointed. It requires more philosophy than I possess, to bear this injustice with patience' (213). However, this is before he meets the monster. At the end of the novel he provides the reader with no guidance whatsoever.

The novel does not so much eschew metacommentary, as provide an excess of it within conflicting narratives derived from characters whose trustworthiness is genuinely ambiguous. The structure of *Frankenstein* parodies the conventionally ironic novel in which the pretensions of the narrator are exposed by the production of a metacomment that reveals his self-deception. The reader is conditioned by his experience to read what the monster says as an ironic commentary on Frankenstein's misguided over-reaching. However, what happens is that the two narratives prove equally unreliable. The normal strategy under such circumstances is to rely upon the framing narrative, but Walton seems unclear about what precisely is happening and disinclined to pursue the most important questions. What is more, Frankenstein's warning about the eloquence of the monster, entirely understandable in one sense in view of the Romantics' mistrust of language which attempts to impose an authoritative point of view, removes the absolute significance that one

might be tempted to attach to any particular point of view, and instead draws attention to the nature of utterance, rather than its content.

In order to explore these ideas more fully, I shall examine the novel in detail to show how this evasion of imposed meaning can be derived from the text. After looking at a number of critical views, I shall consider how *Paradise Lost* acts as a 'Romantic ironist' by destabilising the reader's awareness of the relative positions of Frankenstein and his monster. I shall then examine Mary Shelley's view of human development in the novel and the extent to which Godwinian Necessity is used to explain the motivation of the actions of the central figures. I shall look more briefly at the role of nature and characters' attitudes to it. In these three chapters I shall be examining the way in which elements which the reader is encouraged to try to use to clarify the issues in the novel turn out to be misleading guides because they do not allow detailed examination of themselves, but act as 'Romantic ironists'.¹⁵ I shall then look at attitudes to knowledge in the novel and their implications for the reader's knowledge of *Frankenstein*. Finally, I shall look at the changes made in the 1831 edition to examine what the change of emphasis for the second edition reveals about the first, particularly the way in which the the pattern of evasion of authority is an essential part of the meaning of the first edition of the novel.

Chapter 1: Critical Review

Four critical works have been particularly helpful in developing the response to *Frankenstein* advanced in this thesis. Both Martin Tropp in *Mary Shelley's Monster* and Chris Baldick in *In Frankenstein's Shadow* are concerned with the relationship of *Frankenstein* to the tradition stemming from it. Martin Tropp approaches the novel from a psychological angle, seeing it as an attack on technology and warning of the dangers of solitary study. Chris Baldick takes a less speculative and more stylistic approach in his consideration of the myth and the later literary manifestations he identifies. By contrast, Mary Poovey considers the novel from a feminist standpoint in her book, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*. Like Martin Tropp, she identifies the relationship between community and individual assertion as an important concern. Finally, in his essay 'Frankenstein's Monster and its Romantic Relatives: Problems of Knowledge in English Romanticism', L.J. Swingle considers knowledge in a way that also links with the ideas of David Simpson. In addition, Pamela Clemit's recent book *The Godwinian Novel* adopts a similar approach to this thesis, but comes to a different conclusion.

These works raise important questions about how the novel should be read. In particular, they differ about the way in which the monster should be viewed, and the way in which the ending should be interpreted. This disagreement is symptomatic of the complexity of structure of *Frankenstein*.

In *Mary Shelley's Monster*, Martin Tropp declares that the monster and Frankenstein are two sides of one personality [T 8]. He then identifies Walton's encounter with the monster as a form of test which Walton passes by correctly identifying the essentially evil nature of the monster [T 8]. Using the dream on the night of the monster's creation as his guide, Tropp tries to explain the relationship between Frankenstein and the monster in psychological terms. He suggests that the monster represents Frankenstein's unacknowledged desires. Thus the monster kills Elizabeth for ending Frankenstein's glorious childhood in which he was idolised by his parents and for being responsible for his

mother's death by infecting her with scarlet fever [T 22-3]. Tropp suggests that the reason William dies is also for having taken Frankenstein's mother's love, symbolised by his wearing of the locket, and that Justine also dies for replacing his mother [T 26].

Like Clemit, Tropp considers the relationship between the monster and Frankenstein as doubling. He points out that the monster destroys during periods when Frankenstein is, for one reason or another, not fully conscious [T 40], quoting from Locke to the effect that humans have the potential for two distinct personalities: the one the conscious and controlled person (Frankenstein), the other the secret desires masked by the social face (the monster) [T 38]. He suggests that this dual personality and the competition for love between them (Frankenstein destroys the monster's bride, so the monster destroys his) are common features of double tales [T 40]. He also links this to the important role of water, which he sees as symbolising the depths of Mary Shelley's own personality [T 41]. In contrast, Clemit considers the ways in which different doublings are used to develop critiques of different contemporary concerns [C 160].

The water symbol portrays the transfer of power from Frankenstein to the monster [T 44]: until Frankenstein casts himself adrift from Orkney, he becomes gradually more surrounded by water. Finally he drifts to Ireland to leave it a broken man [T 46]. Tropp reads the clarity of the lake on the wedding voyage as an image of the self-delusion which leads Frankenstein to mistake the true nature of the monster's threat to be with him on his wedding night; the clarity of the water suggesting that he can see everything as it really is, whereas he ignores obvious indications which are clear to the reader [T 46]. When Walton meets Frankenstein, he is floating on a raft of ice that is melting beneath him [T 47]. Tropp feels that this doppelganger myth of the self and double drawn to and reflected in water and ice is part of what contributes to the vitality of the Frankenstein myth [T 47]. For him the monster hangs suspended between the true self and the real world, neither fully imaginary nor tangibly concrete, not quite illusion nor fully real [T 48].

Tropp considers next the role of technology in the novel. He distinguishes between Percy Shelley's optimistic view of science as a

means of expressing man's unlimited potential, and Mary Shelley's horror of man's mockery of God in imitating His creation of man [T 54]. Tropp identifies the monster as 'a technological double', paralleling the dream self seen earlier [T 63]. He sees Frankenstein as the embodiment of the megalomaniac tendencies of modern science which lead to the abandonment of human contacts [T 63].

After technology, Tropp discusses the monster itself. He begins by seeing the monster as a projection of Mary Shelley's personal isolation and hatred [T 67]. He raises the question of whether the monster deserves to live or not. Percy Shelley sympathised with the monster in his review of *Frankenstein*, but for Tropp the question is how far the monster is to be seen as human [T 67]. If it is, then its treatment is evil; if not, then it is treated as it should be. Its horror for Tropp is underscored by the fact that it has no name and thus no place in the order of the universe [T 67].

Tropp explores the Miltonic parallels of *Frankenstein*. He compares the monster with Satan, seeing them both as projections of their creators, Lucifer and Frankenstein [T 68-9]. Both Milton and Mary Shelley have a sense of the necessary order of the universe which is disrupted by Satan/the monster [T 69]. The monster wishes to be good, to grow up according to Rousseau's doctrines, but his environment fails to support him [T 71]. The De Lacey episode, which parallels Satan's envy of Adam and Eve in Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, is crucial. The monster, unlike Satan who recognises his own evil nature, wishes to join the human world, but is repulsed [T 76]. Consequently, like Satan, he turns to destruction, either because his instincts for good have been thwarted, or because he now displays his true nature [T 76-7]. The monster has two possible strategies: overt destruction, or covert seduction. Like Milton's Satan, his eloquence is potentially dangerous, as Frankenstein warns, because of its capacity to make the reader sympathise with evil [T 78].

Walton recognises the monster's evil and rejects it again from the human paradise [T 81]. He learns from his experience the need to eschew 'the icy region this heart encircles' and turns away from polar/technological isolation towards the world of men [T 82-3].

The problem with Tropp's reading is that it relies on a contentious biographical interpretation of Mary Shelley's motivation for writing the novel. He describes the novel in terms of her personality, using as his key the comparison of Mary Shelley's personality to ice [T 14]: 'This layering [of the different levels of narrative] leads, step by step, through the concentric circles of Mary Shelley's complex personality - past the face she showed to the world and deep into the self she could 'hate and disguise' to the monster that only appeared in nightmare' [T 15]. He constructs an elaborate identification between elements in 'Mary Shelley's complex personality' and aspects of the novel. This is flawed partly by his use of the 1831 edition and by the unconvincing, and at times confusing, neatness of his argument. He identifies the monster as evil on the basis of this reading, but it is clearly more ambiguous. Finally, he does not discriminate clearly between the original text and other later accretions to the myth - a point Baldick picks him up on.

His consideration of the double theme is useful and he is aware of the complexity of the novel. He also sees the conflict between individual and community as important. However, he falls into the trap of attempting to force the novel into a pattern it does not fit, although the 1831 version, to which he refers exclusively, is more amenable to his reading. Nevertheless, he offers a clear and conventional reading, which acts as a touchstone, albeit limited in its own scope, against which other accounts can be judged. It might almost be suggested that, using, as he does, the 1831 edition, he, like Christopher Small in *Ariel Like a Harpy*, represents the popular response to the novel and the myth.

In his book, *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, Chris Baldick begins by considering the status of *Frankenstein* as a modern myth. He makes the important distinction between the myth itself, which is adapted to many different significations at different times and the literary text which gives rise to the myth, which, although polyvalent, is fixed in its own particular form [B 1-2]. He is careful to distinguish between readings of the novel itself and readings of the novel as seen in the light of subsequent developments of the myth [B 4-6]. For this reason he rejects

attempts to over-universalise the novel and also those readings which see the novel as a response to inhuman technological development, such as Tropp's, arguing that this is a subsequent development of the myth [B 6-8]. This is a valuable cautionary note.

Baldick considers the implications of the monster's monstrosity. He derives its horrific qualities from its lack of organic unity, and refers to Coleridge's description of the fancy [B 14]. He also links the monstrosity with the monstrous images used to describe the French Revolution [B 19]. He identifies the monster both with Burke's vision of the monstrous mob [B 21], and also with what Paine [B 21], Wollstonecraft [B 21] and Godwin [B 25] saw as the monstrous provocation for the mob - the aristocracy, primogeniture, government itself. Finally he considers the parallels between *Frankenstein* and *Caleb Williams* in the way they dissolve clear moral bearings and destabilise identities [B 26-7].

The final stage in his argument before he branches off onto a discussion of later versions of the myth is his consideration of the monster itself. He describes the novel as doubly self-referential: its writing is the creation of a monster, and also its subsequent cultural status has monstrous elements [B 30-31]. He develops the parallels between Mary Shelley and her monster: its originlessness; her motherless status; the many images of birth and pregnancy in the narrative and its structure [B 31]. He recognises 'an abundant excess of meanings which the novel cannot stably accommodate, a surplus of significance which overruns the enclosure of the novel's form to attract new and competing mythic revisions' [B 33]. This identification of the surplus of signification, which he shares with Clemit, is important. He recognises the extent to which problems of epistemology are highlighted, although he, like Clemit, does not see it as central to the novel.

Next he explores the reasons for the monster's ugliness by considering the elements from which the novel was constructed. He sees the monster's loathsome appearance deriving from Victor's 'tormented isolation and guilty secrecy' [B 35]. He points out Mary Shelley's admission of the book's patchwork nature [B 35]: names are drawn from Percy Shelley's and her own circles; passages from her own experience; characters from Percy Shelley's work; elements come from her own dreams.

He also identifies literary sources: *Caleb Williams* [B 37]; *St Leon* for the dangers of secret and isolated knowledge [B 38]. He sees Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* as a source for the importance of early influences on both Frankenstein and the monster, and for the questioning of heroic exertion [B 38]; *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* for the confessional mode and the structure [B 39]; Mme de Genlis's *Pygmalion and Galatee* for the technique of social criticism in the De Lacey episode [B 40]. Finally, he identifies *Paradise Lost* as the source of the connection between a myth of creation and one of transgression which Mary Shelley conflates [B 40]. She also uses the characters of God, Satan and Adam to provide identities for Frankenstein and the monster, but with the crucial proviso that her protagonists are not quite sure which of the characters they represent [B 40-1]. This shifting calls into question the stability of their identities [B 44]. This is an important point, and capable of further development.

Baldick discusses various readings of *Frankenstein*. He begins by dismissing suggestions that it is either a technological prophecy or a moral fable of blasphemous human presumption [B 44], preferring like Tropp to see *Frankenstein* as a dramatisation of doubts about the rewards of knowledge [B 45], and more particularly the dangers of knowledge in solitude [B 46]. His approach is conventional in that he reads the novel thematically, whereas, as Clemit realises, it needs to be read structurally. He points out that the 1831 edition is more of a fable of presumption, but that the conclusion is deliberately evasive [B 46]. He considers various psychological readings, particularly the Freudian idea of 'the return of the repressed' [B 48-9]. However, he also allows for sociological, feminist and political readings, concluding with an acceptance of the multiplicity of codes written into the novel and outlining the availability of the story to varied readings as the myth develops away from the original text [B 56].

In some respects Baldick's reading is no reading at all, but rather, he allows for a great many possibilities. He does not attempt to force the novel into any one pattern. However, his concern with later versions of the myth means that he does not follow this profitable line of enquiry to its logical conclusion. Consequently, although he sees the novel's availability to different readings, he does not consider the

implications of this in the light of his recognition of its overabundance of signification and so he fails to recognise fully the ironic nature of the novel.

In *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, Mary Poovey considers Mary Shelley's view of herself as an author in comparison with the self-images of her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Jane Austen.

She begins by distinguishing clearly between the 1818 edition and the 1831 version, which she sees as being compromised by a desire on the part of Mary Shelley to conform to conventional propriety [P 117-121]. She suggests the novel is intended less as a means of proving her worth to her husband, but rather as a criticism of the egotistical self-assertion involved in artistic creation [P 122]. For Poovey, Mary Shelley is less approving of Promethean desire than other Romantics [P 122] and sees the imagination as an appetite that must be regulated by social relations [P 123]. According to her, Mary Shelley saw nature as encouraging the sort of imaginative projection that the monster represents, which she sees as an evil [P 126]. Individuals mature by establishing a network of relationships rather than by the more conventional Romantic strategies of imaginative projection, confrontation and self-consciousness [P 126]. For her, the monster represents Frankenstein's liberated desire, which is destructive [P 127]. In this she differs from Tropp who suggests that Frankenstein's desires are perverted in his childhood; in Poovey's reading, Mary Shelley sees desire as destructive *per se*. By the end of the novel, Frankenstein has realised that fulfilment derives from self-denial, rather than self-assertion [P 125].

This is a more unequivocal reading than the text will actually permit. When Frankenstein addresses Walton's mutinous crew (212), he is adamant that his self-assertion and confrontation provide a model for all men to follow. His highly rhetorical address contains all the conventional urgings to single-minded bravery and penetration of the unknown. The crew are not convinced, although Walton still thinks it worth proceeding (213). Nevertheless, he submits to a majority decision, regretting the loss of the knowledge he might have gained. The conclusion is ambiguous. Is this the moment when Walton is

restrained within the boundaries of what is reasonable that Frankenstein, possibly enabled by the solitary nature of his exploit, transcended? Is this the moment when social pressures serve to prevent Walton from transgressing? Or is this the healthy thwarting of Walton's unregenerate desires? It is not clear.

Walton sets the mutiny and Frankenstein's death in context when he says, 'I have lost my hopes of utility and glory; - I have lost my friend' (213). He still believes that his enterprise was unselfish to some extent, and he sees Frankenstein's acquaintance as the satisfaction of the social want he expressed at the outset of his journey (13).

However, Frankenstein's attitude just before he dies makes a clear reading still more difficult. Initially he is condemnatory when he hears that Walton is to return: 'Do so, if you will; but I will not. You may give up your purpose; but mine is assigned to me by heaven, and I dare not' (214). He feels bound by a greater, personal imperative to complete his quest. However, shortly before he dies, Frankenstein explains himself thus:

In a fit of enthusiastic madness I created a rational creature, and was bound towards him, to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being. This was my duty; but there was another still paramount to that. My duties towards my fellow-creatures had higher claims to my attention, because they included a greater proportion of happiness or misery ...
When actuated by selfish and vicious motives, I asked you to undertake my unfinished work; and I renew this request now, when I am only induced by reason and virtue.' (214-5)

Apart from the difficulty a reader may have in knowing how far to trust Frankenstein's final argument, which smacks of the persuasive eloquence he warned Walton against (206), this speech unites his singleness of purpose and the social involvement Poovey sees opposed in the novel.

His final speech adds more contradiction: 'Farewell, Walton! Seek happiness in tranquillity, and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries. Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed' (215). The reader is left unsure whether Mary Shelley is advocating or eschewing self-assertion. He wants some authoritative voice to guide him, but the novel refuses to

provide this comfort. It encourages the reader to look for a metacomment in order to demonstrate its impossibility.

Poovey sees the novel in more moralistic terms. She sees the narrative structure of the novel as supporting her reading. The reader is encouraged to participate both in Frankenstein's offence (in Frankenstein's narrative) and in its product (the monster's narrative) [P 128]. The monster has no complete existence of its own; nor does Frankenstein [P 125]. The monster's appearance reveals its nature: it is incomplete and therefore isolated. Its rejection by the human community it aspires to releases the destruction it symbolises [P 128]. But because the monster tells its story, the reader is forced to identify with its anger and frustration. Poovey suggests that Mary Shelley 'identified most strongly with the product (and the victim) of Frankenstein's transgression: the objectified imagination, helpless and alone' [P 129].

By contrasting Mary Shelley's view of the imagination with that of her husband, Poovey shows how she sees the imagination as an arena for relationships, rather than as a moral guide [P 130]. For her, the social pressures within social relations develop an understanding of duty.

The narrative strategy of *Frankenstein* amplifies the importance of social contact. The different mouthpieces enable Mary Shelley both to express and efface herself simultaneously [P 131]. Poovey also identifies the way in which Walton follows Frankenstein's path: as his ship sails further from human habitation and social contact, his letters become more of a journal, a more self-assertive and isolated form [P 132]. His self-assertion also masquerades, as did Frankenstein's, as a desire to help mankind [P 132]. However, after the salutary experience of his meeting with Frankenstein and his decision to turn back, he returns to addressing his sister, rather than his future self [P 133]. As suggested above, this seems to be too neat a reading of the ending of the novel.

Like Tropp and Baldick, Poovey fails to appreciate the full implications of the structural complexity of the novel. However, her identification of it as being to some extent a critique of Romantic attitudes is extremely useful, as is her identification of the ambiguous

nature of the monster. Where her reading fails is in its attempt to tie the novel too precisely to one ideological concern. She reads the novel from a feminist standpoint, but fails to see the way in which the novel embodies a far more fundamentally feminist position in its indeterminacy and refusal of authoritative status.

There are similarities of approach between Poovey and L.J. Swingle in his essay 'Frankenstein's Monster and its Relatives: Problems of Knowledge in English Romanticism'. Swingle sees the novel as concerned with the limits of the human mind to know truthfully and completely [S 51]. He suggests that Mary Shelley develops this through multiple narration and what he calls a 'stranger' [S 57], what Simpson would call a 'Romantic ironist'. He resembles Baldick, who also suggests that the novel is about knowledge, but who is less concerned with the reader's grasp of the novel than the knowledge contained within the confines of the text.

Swingle begins by pointing out that the monster has no name, and that it is identified with both good and evil [S 51]. Although what the monster says of itself suggests benevolence, there is no corroboration from any other source [S 52]. Thus, although the monster appears completely innocent, we are not justified in assuming that Mary Shelley saw it as an authorial mouthpiece. This raises again the problem of eloquence and the question of tonality raised by Simpson. In Swingle's reading of the novel, Frankenstein's dilemma arises from his doubt about the monster's real nature, which he identifies as the central issue of the novel [S 53]. When he meets the monster at the end of the novel, Walton repeats Frankenstein's doubt; but the monster vanishes before he can solve the problem [S 55].

For Swingle, the question of the moral nature of the monster is crucial to any reading of the novel, but Mary Shelley ensures that the reader has an over-abundance of contradictory information on the subject, and insufficient guidance [S 55]. The pattern is again of an absence of reliable metacomment precluding any authoritative reading.

Swingle identifies the monster with a variety of figures in Romantic poetry, particularly with Porphyro in 'The Eve of St Agnes' [S 57]. He suggests that there is an ambiguity about Porphyro, as to his

benevolence or malignity [S 58]. Similarly, on the basis of the text alone we cannot be sure about the 'stranger' created by Frankenstein.

Finally, Swingle identifies an opposition between Elizabeth and Clerval, who remain within the boundaries of conventional belief, and Walton and Frankenstein, who attempt to transcend them [S 61-2]. Clerval and Elizabeth are happy until they are destroyed by the consequences of Frankenstein's transgression [S 62]. However, Frankenstein finds that his research leads to a kind of mental suicide as the harder he searches for certainties, the more he merely multiplies his uncertainties [S 63]. In the end, Frankenstein dies and passes his quest on to Walton, who reaches no more certain conclusion and who, furthermore, is forced back to the world of men [S 64]. In this respect, Swingle's reading differs from the other three readings considered, which see Walton as having learned from his experience and returning willingly. There is no conclusive evidence within the novel for any change of heart on Walton's part. This seems an attempt by these critics to impose a metacomment which the text will not support.

Swingle concludes by describing *Frankenstein* as a version of the myth of transgression for a god-less world where retribution comes from the mind itself [S 65].

Swingle's focussing on the epistemological is important and recognises the essential unknowableness of the monster and the text itself. The reader is challenged to develop a reading, but the attempt is thwarted every time it is made. Swingle's conclusion unfortunately falls into the same trap as the other works considered of narrowing its focus to derive a metacomment from a work that specifically precludes such determinacy.

These different and contradictory readings derive the central issue of the novel from two linked dilemmas. There is the question of whether Frankenstein's researches are good or evil, that is, whether such self-assertion can be sanctioned; and there is the question of the moral nature of the monster: if the monster is good, then Frankenstein should cherish it; but its effects are evil: if it is evil, then Frankenstein should destroy it; but it is his own child.

The relationship between the monster's appearance and its nature makes clear identification more difficult. Poovey suggests that its appearance symbolises its nature. However, our source for its appearance is Frankenstein's narrative, and we instinctively mistrust his immediate judgements, because they come too quickly and we are aware of his capacity for self-delusion. They also rely too much on uncorroborated visual evidence.

For example, when the monster comes into his bedchamber, Frankenstein runs in horror (53). However, it is far from clear what the monster's gestures mean. In fact, Frankenstein's immediate judgement ascribes too much capability to the monster so soon after his creation. The monster does not even mention this incident, but suggests he was incapable of behaving with any purpose at this stage (97). Frankenstein mistakes the monster's confusion for deliberate, rational action.

Associated with these dilemmas of moral evaluation are a number of other concerns. How far can knowledge ever be sure? Frankenstein is not sure about the nature of the monster; the reader is not sure about the relationship between different discourses in the novel; Walton is not sure about the nature of the monster which disappears before he can test it against Frankenstein's prejudice; the reader is not sure about what happens to Walton at the end of the novel.

The narrative succeeds in that there is a compelling and coherent sequence of events, but there is a gap between the clarity of the story and the overload of possible meanings that it carries with it. This is largely a consequence of the structure of the novel, which suggests that guidance is available about how to read it, but it fails to provide it. Swingle and Baldick are right to suggest that the subject of the novel is knowledge itself, but wrong in suggesting that it provides a clear answer.

In contrast, part of the reason for the endurance of the myth and its availability to a variety of readings is that in essence the myth is so simple and fundamental: creation and transgression as simultaneous acts. To see the myth as having a narrowly technological and prophetic meaning is to narrow its application and to make it too specific, but to deny the presence of this aspect in the novel, as Baldick does, is to

ignore part of the novel's moral overtones: Tropp's suggestion that the creation of a living creature from dead matter portrays an unreasonably mechanistic view of human nature [T 63] is convincing. The ambiguity of the ending, in which it is not clear what Walton has learned and what his attitude towards his experience is, is due to the slippery nature of the novel, as opposed to the myth. The myth presents the consequences of dabbling in forbidden knowledge; the novel seems to suggest such simple moralities, but ultimately prevents their formulation.

These four differing readings offer much that is valuable for an understanding of the novel, but all of them fail to recognise the essentially evasive nature of the novel as written by Mary Shelley. Baldick's distinction between the myth and the novel is a very helpful one in this respect, as is Swingle's highlighting of the instability of knowledge within the novel. However, the value of these different readings for this thesis lies in their varied, not to say incompatible, partial readings. All of them fail to realise that the novel precludes the final authoritative reading all four of them feel constrained to provide. No matter how much they recognise the difficulties of generating some final coherent statement, they all feel the need to derive such a metacomment. They each, in their different ways, follow the pattern of the novel up to the point where it insists upon its truly dynamic nature. Each of them identifies much that is illuminating about the issues raised in the novel, and the way in which they are discussed, but each of them insists upon the final outcome as product, rather than process. It is only in the light of Simpson's 'hermeneutic circle' that the true nature of the novel becomes apparent. It is not even so much knowledge, or its nature that is the subject of the novel, but the process of reading itself and the generation of knowledge as a result.

In contrast, in *The Godwinian Novel* Pamela Clemit recognises the full extent of the destabilisation of meaning in the novel and also the full extent of Mary Shelley's debt to and development of her father's ideas. However, her attempt to tie the structural uncertainty of the novel to a specific ideological concern seems too narrow a focus.

Clemit begins by identifying the extent to which the group of novels she identifies as 'Godwinian' take as their starting point Godwin's

belief in 'the sacred and indefeasible right of private judgement (PJ ii. 449)' [C 5]. She recognises the way in which 'the inbuilt unreliability of the first-person narrative throws the burden of interpretation and decision onto the reader, soliciting his or her active participation' in Godwin's novels [C 6] and she suggests that 'Mary Shelley's early analysis of the oppressed psyche gains its immense power because she is already writing within a genre discussing social issues and revolutionary change, but at the same time the novel's structural complexity brings to the fore the radical instability of meaning already latent in *Caleb Williams*' [C 8]. In this respect her analysis of the structure of the novel is more sophisticated than that of other critics who tend to stress the thematic dimensions appropriate to their particular ideological concerns. She emphasises Mary Shelley's intellectual involvement with the ideas of her father's circle and she particularly singles out feminist readings of the novel for their selective approach [C 141]. The Godwinian respect for private judgement has implications for the personal and individual nature of reading.

She suggests that 'Mary Shelley exploits the first-person narrative as a means of internalising public issues' [C 144]. This is true, but it is not all the first person-narrative achieves. She emphasises the way that 'Mary Shelley's scepticism is not confined to aesthetic and private concerns: instead she pursues this questioning of subjectivity into all categories of knowledge' [C 145]. Just as others have pursued the influence of *Paradise Lost* through the novel, Clemit highlights the importance of Volney's *Ruins; or, A Survey of the Revolutions of Empires* in Mary Shelley's thought, but stresses that 'unlike Percy, Mary Shelley remains profoundly sceptical about Volney's faith in the ultimate triumph of reason' [C 152]. Thus she sees *Frankenstein* very much as a critique of contemporary ideas [C 154-5]. By focussing on one of the many elements contributing to *Frankenstein*, Clemit upsets the delicate balance it embodies, in which the contribution of varied and conflicting elements, each providing its own particular strain of significance, serves to detach the novel from any unilateral reading and leaves it free to provide a critique of the act of reading and meaning generation at a more fundamental level.

For her, what Mary Shelley has done is to recast 'the Godwinian plot as a creation story, re-working both the Greek and Roman myth of Prometheus and the Judaeo-Christian myth as mediated by *Paradise Lost*, and adding a critical commentary on Godwin's rational account of social origins in *Political Justice* [C 155]. This emphasises the way in which she sees an ideological dimension to the novel. She sees the various doublings as critiques of other cultural and social themes; for example, she reads the Victor/Clerval relationship as a 'brief retrospect on the poetry of her Romantic contemporaries' [C 160]. In her reading, the psychological is revealing of the political [C 162]. This stresses too much the specific applications of the novel, but Clemit does at least recognise the way that meaning is permanently destabilised: 'Mary Shelley foregrounds the issue of unreliability in a highly sceptical manner that has more in common with Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* than with *Caleb Williams*' [C 159]. She also considers the way in which 'the occasion of the legal trial focusses larger epistemological issues' [C 172], but narrows her own focus to 'the radical scepticism at the heart of Mary Shelley's political analysis' [C 172].

Clemit summarises Mary Shelley's technique in the novel and partly explains its success when she says, 'Its multiple first-person narrative seeks to place the reader as true arbiter of political justice in Godwin's manner. But Mary Shelley lacks Godwin's optimistic faith in man's capacity for rational judgement' [C 173]. Nevertheless, this narrows the scope of the novel too much and, whilst the metacomment she draws from the structure and method of the novel is less unequivocal than in other readings, even this represents an authoritarian imposition of the kind that the novel eschews.

Clemit's response to the novel is much more respectful of the novel's radical complexity, but even she finds herself unable to accept the level of indeterminacy written into (or out of) the novel. In exploring the novel's rejection of authority fully, aspects from each of these readings will be incorporated into this thesis. What they have to say in specific areas is valuable and illuminating, even if they develop their own particular readings against the grain of the novel's overall structure.

Chapter 2: *Paradise Lost*

Mary Shelley's use of *Paradise Lost* in *Frankenstein* seems inconsistent, allowing for a variety of readings. Modern readings tend not to follow a Romantic view of the poem where Satan is seen as the hero for his indomitable refusal to succumb to the tyranny of God. However, this is a view recognised by Mary Shelley, even if the implicit criticism of Satanic adventuring and egotism in the novel' suggests that it was not the one she supported. In *The Godwinian Novel*, Pamela Clemit shows the way in which Volney's *Ruins* is used in a similarly equivocal way.

It is not immediately apparent how the reader of *Frankenstein* should read *Paradise Lost*. In a sense the text of *Paradise Lost*, like the monster himself, is acting as a 'Romantic ironist'. It is the monster who makes most use of Milton's poem to pattern his own experience. However, *Paradise Lost* is referred to throughout the novel. *Frankenstein* can be seen as a re-reading of the same myth for later times.²

Paradise Lost is most important in Volumes II and III. The occasions when there is a reference or echo in Volume I could as easily derive from unconscious verbal resemblance or from archetypal patternings too general in their nature to justify any specific identification with Milton.

This can be seen when Frankenstein first informs Walton of the nature of his discovery:

I see by your 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 on 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. (48)

This is a refusal to tempt on the part of Frankenstein. There are similarities with the Fall, but they are generic, rather than

specific: both works embody the same myth of transgression in different forms.

Frankenstein's next warning of the dangers of overreaching can similarly be seen to resemble the pattern of *Paradise Lost*:

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 tranquillity 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. (51)

Here again the warning is related to the long-term consequences of the Fall. Frankenstein compares his own failure to resist temptation to other similar failures. There is a similar pattern to *Paradise Lost*, but not a direct relationship. Temptation is seen as distraction from domestic contentment. This motif can be seen in Eve's departure from Adam in Book IX of *Paradise Lost*, but it is not necessarily referred to here.

The pattern of the Fall in *Paradise Lost* of desire, consummation and disgust is repeated in *Frankenstein*. When he has completed the monster, Frankenstein comments, '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' (52-3). His dreams 'were now become a hell to me' (54), a term reminiscent of Satan's description of his predicament in Book IV of *Paradise Lost*: 'Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell' [PL IV 1.75].

Although Frankenstein presents his history as comparable with Adam's, there is a verbal linking with Satan. The identification between the characters of *Frankenstein* and *Paradise Lost*, which is important in the ironic pattern of *Frankenstein*, is confused already. Frankenstein is like Adam in having fallen, like God in having created, and is implicitly aligned with Satan. His desire for revenge on his own creature makes him simultaneously a parody of God and also Satanic. When he meets the monster, their Miltonic roles overlap.

The monster's discovery of a cache of books develops his understanding beyond what he learns from experience and from the example of the De Laceys, but it also provides him with a model for his sense of personal identity. His learning begins with Goethe, who illustrates the psychology of the individual. The monster is excited in favour of simple virtue by Plutarch, but Milton is the most important.

But *Paradise Lost* excited different and far deeper emotions. I read it, as I had read the other volumes which had fallen into my hands, as a true history. It moved every feeling of wonder and awe, that the picture of an omnipotent God warring with his creatures was capable of exciting. I often referred the several situations, as their similarity struck me, to my own. Like Adam, I was created apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with, and acquire knowledge from beings of a superior nature: but I was wretched, helpless, and alone. Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition; for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me. (125)

The monster acknowledges his use of *Paradise Lost* to provide a set of categories to describe *Frankenstein*; but *Frankenstein* parodies Milton. There is conflict between created and creator, but beyond that principle identities are far from clear. Frankenstein is not omnipotent; physically the monster is the more powerful of the two. The monster shifts his own identification between Adam and Satan. This affects his view of his relationship with Frankenstein. In the third volume he is more like Satan as he destroys 'to find ease to (his) relentless thoughts' [PL IX ll. 129-30]. However, he is also God-like. Frankenstein can also be identified with Satan, in his desire for revenge, and with Adam, in that he might be said to have fallen, as well as with God. The relationship between the clear categories in *Paradise Lost* and *Frankenstein* is ambiguous and shifting.

The moral evaluation of the categories represented by God, Adam, Satan (and Eve) is itself a source of ambiguity. The Romantics identified with Satan as a Promethean hero in revolt against the tyrannical rule of God; they found Promethean energy more attractive

than self-righteous authority. However, Poovey reads *Frankenstein* as a critique of the egotistical self-projection shown by Satan (and Frankenstein), and an argument for domestic contentment.³ This morality is subverted by the shifting identifications between *Frankenstein* and *Paradise Lost*, but not denied. Because the relationship is not stable what appears to resolve ambiguity only deepens it.

Paradise Lost serves two functions within the monster's account of himself. He uses it to pattern his experience and as a key for his relationship with Frankenstein: both Frankenstein and the monster attempt to define their roles in Milton's terms. At various times they are more or less conscious of their identification with God, Adam and Satan.⁴ The monster especially tries to define his experience by exact identification with *Paradise Lost*. However, he is trying to give a more rigid reading of Milton than the role of the poem in *Frankenstein* will allow. If *Frankenstein* does function by encouraging, but preventing, authoritative readings, then the monster's attempt to enforce his particular reading of *Paradise Lost* is a representation of the strategy the reader is encouraged to adopt, but prevented from carrying out. The conflict between the conventional Romantic reading of the poem, which highlights Satan's heroic struggle against the arbitrary tyranny of God, and the sympathies of Mary Shelley in favour of 'the amiableness of domestic affection' (7) produces too great an ironic gap to be ignored in any one-sided reading without other indication of priority. There is no guidance given. The unstable nature of the text used as foundation destabilises any constructions built upon it.

When Frankenstein and the monster meet on the Mer de Glace, the monster attempts to explain the relationship between creator and created:

I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king, if thou wilt also perform thy part, the which thou owest me. Oh, Frankenstein, be not equitable to every other, and trample upon me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency and affection, is most due. Remember, that I am thy creature: I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous. (95)

This is the first occasion when terms specifically drawn from *Paradise Lost* are used. The monster refers to his relationship with Frankenstein as a 'natural' one, but also represents the creator-created relationship as involving mutual responsibilities. The creature should be 'mild and docile'; while the 'lord' ought to show even-handed justice, clemency and affection. The monster, by his explicit reference to characters in *Paradise Lost* and the echoes of Satan's soliloquies in Books IV and IX,⁵ shows where these ideas come from.

The monster behaves similarly to the the adult speaker in Wordsworth's 'We are Seven' or 'Anecdote for Fathers', who attempts unsuccessfully to impose his interpretation of circumstances upon a child who either resists or who complies with the adult request without understanding.⁶ Here the monster is trying to impose upon Frankenstein a view of their relationship derived from his particular reading of *Paradise Lost*. Regardless of the excellence of the monster's education, this is an act of tyranny. Because the monster's precise relationship to Frankenstein is unclear to him, he attempts to define it in terms familiar to him, which he treats as absolutely stable. However, this view of the responsibilities of 'lord' and 'creature', which he believes self-evident, is not shared by Frankenstein.

The monster's account uses *Paradise Lost* as a template for his own experience. Sometimes this is overt and at others implicit. This has already been seen in the pattern of desire and guilt in the first volume, but these echoes are more pronounced in 'Volume Two'. However, as *Paradise Lost* is not an unambiguous source of reference, rather than clarifying, as they appear to do, these borrowings make clear reading more difficult and add to the uncertain nature of the text's significance.

The monster's account of his first sensations is not drawn from *Paradise Lost*, but, as his discourse develops, the reader gradually becomes aware of the way Milton's work is used to structure his view of the world. This is a case of quite consciously using subsequent experience - his reading of Milton - to give a form to his experience, but more specifically it casts experience in a literary form. When the monster first encounters a human being, he uses a simile derived from

Milton to describe the comfort of the shepherd's shack: 'It presented to me then as exquisite and divine a retreat as Pandaemonium appeared to the daemons of hell after their sufferings in the lake of fire' (101).

The monster identifies himself with Satan, rather than Adam by his use of the comparison with Pandaemonium to convey his pleasure. This suggests that at this stage in his story-telling he identifies Frankenstein as the cruel God, author of his misfortunes; it implies a favourable and sympathetic view of Satan. This is of course a retrospective view, a subsequent ordering of experience in the light of later events. The monster is applying the pattern drawn from *Paradise Lost*, which he has yet to read, to this experience when he recounts it to Frankenstein. However, he has already identified himself with Adam in his initial address to Frankenstein and suggested his confusion about his role.

The monster's use of *Paradise Lost* as his template for understanding the world presents problems. His effusive comments upon the poem when he describes its discovery show how far it convinced him, but also indicate the difficulties it presents as a source of self-definition:

I often referred the several situations, as their similarity struck me, to my own. Like Adam, I was created apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God, a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his creator; he was allowed to converse with, and acquire knowledge from beings of a superior nature: but I was wretched, helpless, and alone. Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition; for often, like him, ... the bitter gall of envy rose within me. (125).

This difficulty affects not only the monster, but has significant implications for the reader also.

The monster's identification with Satan is deepened by his reaction to Felix and Safie. In *Paradise Lost*, Book IV, Satan bemoans the bliss from which he realises he is excluded when he sees Adam and Eve, 'enjoy their fill/Of bliss on bliss, while I to hell am thrust' [PL IV ll. 507-81]. The monster wishes to be Adam rather than Satan. He is Adam in his innocence, but as his experience grows he becomes more Satanic in his envy and frustration. The monster is presenting an *apologia*, which explains and justifies his nature at the time of utterance, when he has

been embittered by his complete rejection. Any account of his own innocence must necessarily be distorted in the lens of his experience. The past is unrecoverable except as an aspect of the present.

After his rejection by the De Lacey's, the monster's response takes the form of Satan's self-tormenting fury in Book IV of *Paradise Lost* [ll. 73-5]:⁷ 'All, save I, were at rest or in enjoyment: I, like the arch fiend, bore a hell within me; and, finding myself unsympathized with, wished to tear up the trees, spread havoc and destruction around me, and then to have sat down and enjoyed the ruin' (132). Like Satan in the Garden, the monster is frustrated because his surroundings do not correspond with his mood.

The monster's precise identification with Satan is continued by his torching of the De Lacey's abandoned cottage: 'only in destroying I find ease/To my relentless thoughts' [PL IX ll. 129-30]. Incidents on his journey confirm his misanthropy. After being shot by the peasant when rescuing the girl from the river, he no longer believes in the possibility of contentment (138). The monster represents himself as cut off from God and from all possibility of fulfilment like Satan.

His murder of William also identifies him with Satan. Like Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*, the child is not his opponent. His first response is triumph, and a recognition of the possibilities of revenge: 'I gazed on my victim, and my heart swelled with exultation and hellish triumph: clapping my hands, I exclaimed, 'I, too, can create desolation; my enemy is not impregnable; this death will carry despair to him, and a thousand other miseries shall torment and destroy him'' (139).

The monster's identification with Satan is developed further when he discovers the miniature of Frankenstein's mother. His immediate reaction is reminiscent of Satan's first reaction to seeing Eve in *Paradise Lost* Book IX [ll. 455-466].

In spite of my malignity, it softened and attracted me. For a few moments I gazed with delight on her dark eyes, fringed by deep lashes, and her lovely lips; but presently my rage returned: I remembered that I was for ever deprived of the delights that such beautiful creatures could bestow; and that she whose resemblance I contemplated would, in regarding me, have changed that air of divine benignity to one expressive of disgust and affright. (139)

As in *Paradise Lost*, the sight of goodness and beauty personified initially inspires an inclination towards good, but subsequently results in an augmented anguish by reminding the monster what he is deprived of: 'the more I see/Pleasures about me, so much the more I feel/Torment within me [PL IX ll. 119-21]. However, his recognition of his Satanic qualities conflicts with his explicit identification with Adam, which he uses to try to persuade Frankenstein of his responsibilities towards him: 'I ought to be thy Adam' (95).

Before testing his social acceptability by revealing himself to De Lacey, the monster fantasises about what might happen if he were to gain social acceptance. He uses the imagery of *Paradise Lost* to define his vision:

Sometimes I allowed my thoughts, unchecked by reason, to ramble in the fields of Paradise, and dared to fancy amiable and lovely creatures sympathizing with my feelings and cheering my gloom; their angelic countenances breathed smiles of consolation. But it was all a dream: no Eve soothed my sorrows, or shared my thoughts; I was alone. I remembered Adam's supplication to his Creator; but where was mine? he had abandoned me, and, in the bitterness of my heart, I cursed him. (127)

The reference to *Paradise Lost* emphasises Frankenstein's neglect by comparison with God's sympathetic response to Adam. Like Adam, the monster craves companionship; but he has no benevolent creator to provide it. Once again, the monster's identification is split between Adam and Satan. This raises the question of the nature of God in *Paradise Lost*, and whether he is to be seen as benevolent, as Milton intended, or tyrannical, as the Romantics often read him. The reader is also reminded of Frankenstein and the monster's differing views of their relationship and mutual responsibilities.

The monster's desire for a companion is inspired by his envy of Adam, as well as his recognition that Satan too had fellows (126). He suggests that companionship would reform him: 'If I have no ties and no affections, hatred and vice must be my portion; the love of another will destroy the cause of my crimes, and I shall become a thing, of whose existence every one will be ignorant' (143). With another, he suggests his identity would stabilise, and he would cease to be Satan and remain only Adam.

This is a persuasive argument, but there is no proof, because it never happens in the novel. It can only remain a likely possibility. The monster's concern is specifically to alleviate his loneliness and to allow himself to reform. He sees companionship as a necessary precondition for virtue; he appears to have no thought of sex or procreation. The idea of the monster's breeding, which Frankenstein uses to justify his final decision to destroy the female monster comes from Frankenstein himself (163).

The monster's isolation is emphasised after his destruction of the cottage by his presentation of himself in parody of Adam and Eve at the end of *Paradise Lost*: 'And now, with the world before me, whither should I bend my steps? I resolved to fly far from the scene of my misfortunes; but to me, hated and despised, every country must be equally horrible' (135). This echoes Milton's

The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:
They hand in hand, with wand'ring steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way. [*PL XII ll. 646-91*]^a

Unlike Adam and Eve, the monster is alone and unguided by Providence. He sets out with ambiguous identification and ambiguous intentions towards his creator. His situation is like Adam and Eve's, but his mood and outlook are more like Satan's.

The monster's recognition of his own deformity adds another layer to his multiple identification with characters in *Paradise Lost*:

How was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondency and mortification. Alas! I did not entirely know the fatal effects of this miserable deformity.
(109)

This echoes the passage in *Paradise Lost* Book IV in which Eve describes her reaction to catching sight of her newly created self in a pool:

As I bent down to look, just opposite
A shape within the wat'ry gleam appeared
Bending to look on me: I started back,
It started back, but pleased I soon returned,
Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks
Of sympathy and love; there I had fixed

Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,
Had not a voice thus warned me: 'What thou seest,
What there thou seest, fair creature, is thyself,
With thee it came and goes; but follow me,
And I will bring thee where no shadow stays
Thy coming, and thy soft embraces, he
Whose image thou art, him thou shalt enjoy
Inseparably thine; to him shalt bear
Multitudes like thyself, and thence be called
Mother of human race. [PL IV ll. 460-75]

Here *Paradise Lost* enables the monster to order his experience. The lines associate the monster with Eve, rather than with either Adam or Satan, his two usual comparisons and support Poovey's identification of the monster with the female.²⁹ There is also a strong narcissistic suggestion, although the effect on the monster of catching sight of himself is quite the opposite of the effect on Eve. However, the contrast between Eve's experience and the monster's is strengthened by what happens next. Eve meets an Adam who will care for her and dote on her; but the monster's recognition of his own deformity only emphasises the unlikelihood of his gaining social acceptance.

The comparison between the monster and Eve also raises the important question of personal identity and the extent to which it arises from social recognition. Poovey discusses this in connection with the death of Frankenstein's mother: 'Shelley therefore ties the formation of personal identity to self-denial rather than self-assertion; personal identity for her entails defining oneself in terms of relationships - (not one, but many) - not as Wollstonecraft and Wordsworth would have it, in terms of self-assertion, confrontation, freedom, and faith in the individualistic imaginative act.'³⁰ The monster wishes to define himself in relation to others, but is not able to because he cannot discover his own social context. Narcissism is the only possibility for him, but his reflection is loathsome to him.

The discovery of the details of his own creation increase his self-disgust:

Cursed creator! Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust? God in pity made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of your's, more horrid from its very resemblance. Satan had his companions, fellow-devils, to admire and encourage him; but I am solitary and detested. (126)

In this passage the reference to *Paradise Lost* defines the monster's misery more sharply. His physical appearance is stable, but his self-identity shifts between Adam and Satan. The reader's doubts about the monster are shared by the monster himself. There is a conflict between the stability of his appearance and the uncertainty of his identity that is akin to the relationship between text and reading generated by the novel.

The monster's encounters with human beings ought to provide the key to his real nature. However, these encounters are ambiguous, both for the reader and for the monster at first. He presents himself as a guiltless Adam: inclined to virtue and corrupted by external influence. If the monster is Adam, then he is redeemable; however, if he is really Satan, the logic of *Paradise Lost* suggests that he is eternally damned. This raises the question of who is God. Frankenstein appears to be God since he creates; but he fails to take responsibility for his creation and appears powerless over it, as if he regrets, or had failed to anticipate its free will.

The monster's lack of acceptance by either the De Lacey's, the peasant who shoots him or William emphasises his isolation and lack of self-definition. This failure of externally defined identity means that he is truly the 'Other' described by Mary Poovey,¹¹ providing a means of definition for other creatures by contrast, but provided with no basis for self-definition. Consequently, his identity slips from character to character. In the absence of a social context to define him, *Paradise Lost* provides the monster with identity to read himself into. What it does not provide is stability.

III

Frankenstein can be read as a pessimistic version of *Paradise Lost*. In *Paradise Lost*, Adam is accused by God of placing Eve above God: 'Was she thy God, that her thou didst obey/Before his voice...?' [PL X ll. 145-6]. Frankenstein goes further than Adam. He substitutes not another and inferior human for God, but emulates Satan by presenting himself as sufficient in himself by procreating by himself. He can be seen as Adam, Satan and God.

He is Adam-like in his relationship with Elizabeth which is presented as apparently equal and mutually beneficial (30-1). However, he fails to see any analogy between his relationship with Elizabeth and the monster's situation. Thus, no thoughts of Elizabeth affect his decision to destroy the female monster. His reasoning smacks rather more of jealousy. Were the monster to be able to procreate, then Frankenstein's role would be finished. In his desire to create 'a new species (which) would bless me (him) as its creator and source' (49), Frankenstein wanted to limit the possibility of free will. In contrast, in Book III of *Paradise Lost* God stresses the importance of free will:

Not free, what proof could they [the ethereal Powers and
Spirits] have giv'n sincere
Of true allegiance, constant faith or love,
Where only what they needs must do, appeared,
Not what they would? [PL III ll. 103-6]

Because he is afraid that being able to procreate might lead the monsters to become fully independent, Frankenstein abandons the chance of receiving blessing by turning from his creation. When the monster describes Frankenstein as 'generous and self-devoted' (217) at the end of the novel, he draws attention to the egotism that denies true freedom. This has implications for the discussion of Necessity.¹²

When creating the second monster Frankenstein is worried by scruples which did not concern him before:

I was now about to form another being, of whose dispositions I was alike ignorant; she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate, and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness. He had sworn to quit the neighbourhood of man, and hide himself in deserts; but she had not; and she, who in all probability was to become a thinking and reasoning animal, might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation. (163)

What Frankenstein fears is that, in creating a companion for his Adam, he might be creating another Eve, who would not observe a prohibition imposed before her birth. He fears a character similar to his own who will not accept the tyranny of a pre-existing convention, but will challenge it. In this sense, Frankenstein can be identified with Eve. At different times Frankenstein can be read into each of the four central characters in *Paradise Lost*.

After the destruction of the female monster, the relationship between the monster and Frankenstein changes. When Frankenstein attempts to dismiss the monster, the monster replies, 'Slave, before I reasoned with you, but you have proved yourself unworthy of my condescension. Remember that I have power; you believe yourself miserable, but I can make you so wretched that the light of day will be hateful to you. You are my creator, but I am your master;- obey!' (165). Previously the monster has always identified himself as one of the subsidiary roles in *Paradise Lost*: Satan, Adam, Eve. Now he is assuming a God-like role. Furthermore, the sort of god represented by the monster is a harsh punitive god who gives commands and expects obedience. The monster's final comment - 'You are my creator, but I am your master' - distinguishes between two different aspects of God.

At the same time there is also a change in Frankenstein's perception of the relationship. There is a reversal of roles similar to that in *Caleb Williams*. Frankenstein becomes more Satanic: 'The hour of my weakness is past, and the period of your power is arrived. Your threats cannot move me to do an act of wickedness; but they confirm me in a resolution of not creating you a companion in vice' (165). At the same time as recognising the monster's superior strength, like Satan reluctantly recognising God's omnipotence in *Paradise Lost* [IV ll. 84-5], Frankenstein begins to demonstrate some of Satan's frustrated energy and commitment to futile and self-defeating action. This is another manifestation of the instability of roles as defined by *Paradise Lost*. Just as there is no easily identifiable primacy of one narrative over another, now this relationship between creator and created is unbalanced as the created begins to assert authority over its creator.

The monster has referred to himself as Frankenstein's master, yet he next refers to Frankenstein as his 'tyrant and tormentor' (165). He presents himself as a Promethean hero like Satan, Promethean in the rebellious sense, rather than Prometheus plasticator.¹³ On the one hand the monster is demanding a female of right: all other creatures have a companion, why should the monster be deprived of such a source of happiness? On the other hand, the monster is presenting a moral justification in opposition to tyranny. These two considerations can coincide, but they make it harder for the reader to find a basis for his

moral judgement. He is faced with alternatives which demand a response, but which do not permit one.

The monster's identification with Satan is strengthened by the slightly heavy-handed image he uses in the exchange just referred to: 'I will watch with the wiliness of a snake, that I may sting with its venom' (165). This encapsulates the ambiguity of the serpent symbol. The unspoken reference to the garden of Eden is unmistakable, but it is not clear whether the reference is to the pre- or post-lapsarian Serpent. The monster's snake is more equivocal than Milton's.

After the death of Elizabeth, Frankenstein completes his identification with Satan. Referring to his release from the madhouse, he says:

But liberty had been a useless gift to me had I not, as I awakened to reason, at the same time awakened to revenge. As the memory of past misfortunes pressed upon me, I began to reflect on their cause - the monster whom I had created, the miserable daemon whom I had sent abroad into the world for my destruction. I was possessed by a maddening rage when I thought of him, and desired and ardently prayed that I might have him within my grasp to wreak a great and signal revenge on his cursed head. (196)

There is something manic in Frankenstein's enthusiasm for revenge. Like the monster, his whole existence is now devoted to his ultimately self-defeating rage. He is truly Satanic, displaying great and heroic misapplied energy (198-9). But the consequence is to increase his identification with Adam and Eve: 'My first resolution was to quit Geneva for ever; my country, which, when I was happy and beloved, was dear to me, now, in my adversity became hateful. ... 'And now my wanderings began, which are to cease but with life' (199).

Here Frankenstein is portrayed in the same way as the monster is earlier in the novel (135). As they devote themselves to Satanic revenge, both Frankenstein and his monster discover the emptiness of loss following the Fall when they set out to wander the earth. Unlike Milton's characters, securely embedded within the ideological context of Christianity, which gives a purpose to their suffering and offers an ultimately optimistic outcome, Frankenstein and his monster, enthralled by their egotistic obsession with each other and their mutually pointless revenge, have no future ahead of them but annihilation.

Their similarity is emphasised by Frankenstein's comment during his wanderings, 'I was cursed by some devil, and carried about with me my eternal hell' (201), which echoes the monster's 'I, like the arch fiend, bore a hell within me' (132),¹⁴ which in its turn echoes Satan's 'Me miserable! which way shall I fly/Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?/Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell ...' [PL IV ll. 73-5]. Both Frankenstein and the monster demonstrate their complementarity of nature by their identification with Satan. Yet within their similar identities, they are opposed. At the end of the novel the clear oppositions between characters in *Frankenstein*, derived from *Paradise Lost* are shown to be delusions. Mary Shelley uses Milton's characters outside their theological framework. Without this context their moral evaluations are nullified and they react upon each other without the over-arching sense of Providence that gives Milton's epic its cohesion. Whereas in *Paradise Lost* the characters exist in a known time-frame reiterated by God in Book IV [ll. 80-342], in *Frankenstein* the characters seem at the end almost to be trying to cheat time by their chase. In the event, time catches up with them and their pursuit is left unfinished so that there is no final outcome that points any clear moral. As their futile chase alone gives them any meaning, Frankenstein's death dissolves both their opposition and their resemblance.

Paradise Lost's ultimate indeterminacy makes it function in *Frankenstein* as a 'Romantic ironist' in Simpson's terms. It seems to be a means of defining and fixing identity to provide an authoritative reading, but in fact its inscrutability prevents such a reading. It appears to provide a means of defining the relationship between Frankenstein and his monster in moral terms, but it proves too unstable to be reliable. Because the reading of *Paradise Lost* assumed by the novel is ambiguous, an authoritative reading is further precluded. This double variability of irony means that the reader cannot settle comfortably on any single reading of the text, but is forced to acknowledge it as a dynamic, rather than a fixed artefact.

Chapter 3: Necessity and Intellectual Development

Frankenstein incorporates the life histories of two beings, Victor Frankenstein and the monster. Their educations are very different, and result in quite different personalities. If Mary Shelley believed in her father's doctrine of Necessity, - and Percy Shelley thought she did in his review of *Frankenstein*' - then the details of a character's upbringing are of crucial importance in evaluating the adult.

However, there are too many variables in *Frankenstein*. The reader wants to establish the moral value of the monster and Frankenstein and hopes that Godwin's theory will enable him to draw some conclusions from their life histories. The structure of the novel suggests this is possible, but actually prevents it and in doing so questions the theory itself.

Godwin defined Necessity thus in *Political Justice*: 'He who affirms that all actions are necessary means that the man who is acquainted with all the circumstances under which a living or intelligent being is placed upon any given occasion is qualified to predict the conduct he will hold, with as much certainty as he can predict any of the phenomena of inanimate nature'.² This definition denies the possibility of freewill because all human actions are seen to be necessary as the inevitable consequence of the influences on the individual. If the novel were to operate according to Necessity, then all the actions of Frankenstein and the monster should stem directly from their experience and the influences operating upon them. Although in reality it is not possible to describe all the influences, nor to assess their relative importance, the narrative of *Frankenstein* appears to give adequate justification for the characters' actions.

Both Frankenstein and the monster give detailed descriptions of their earliest influences and the novel begins with an account of Captain Walton's early years. Walton's development is dominated by his father's prohibition against going to sea (11). His interest is stimulated by his Uncle's books: 'These volumes were my study day and night, and my familiarity with them increased that regret which I had felt, as a child, on learning that my father's dying injunction had forbidden my uncle to allow me to embark in a sea-faring life' (11).

This apparently arbitrary prohibition seems to contain the implicit incitement to transgression that Godwin noted in *Caleb Williams*: 'To do what is forbidden always has its charms, because we have an indistinct apprehension of something arbitrary and tyrannical in the prohibition'.³

Walton's determination seems to stem from this thwarted purpose. This explicit prohibition is like the one implicit in Frankenstein's father's off-hand dismissal of Cornelius Agrippa (32/33).

The books read by each of the central characters in the novel are listed by Mary Shelley. Walton reads the accounts of voyages of exploration and wishes to emulate the explorers. Frankenstein, by chance, reads the works of alchemists; he aspires to develop alternative forms of science. The creation of a man without aid of woman is, if not the discovery of the philosopher's stone or the elixir of life, well within the scope of alchemy. In contrast, the monster's education, based upon Volney, Plutarch, Goethe and Milton, is more balanced, dealing with man's relationship with himself and others, and emphasising his social responsibilities. However, his reading develops a desire to do good that his physical repulsiveness denies. In *Caleb Williams* the source of Falkland's unhappiness is specifically identified by Caleb as his excessive reading of chivalric romances in his youth,⁴ which gives rise to his sense of social responsibility and his quickness to take offence at slights.

For all Walton's aspirations, he is aware of his own limitations:

You may deem me romantic, my dear sister, but I bitterly feel the want of a friend. I have no one near me, gentle yet courageous, possessed of a cultivated as well as a capacious mind, whose tastes are like my own, to approve or amend my plans. How would such a friend repair the faults of your poor brother! I am too ardent in execution, and too impatient of difficulties. But it is a still greater evil to me that I am self-educated: ... Now I am twenty-eight, and am in reality more illiterate than many school-boys of fifteen. It is true that I have thought more, and that my day dreams are more extended and magnificent; but they want (as the painters call it) *keeping*; and I greatly need a friend who would have sense enough not to despise me as romantic, and affection enough for me to endeavour to regulate my mind. (13/4)

Walton connects two considerations here: his lack of formal education and his want of a friend. He asks for a mentor who would 'repair the faults' he suggests he possesses. He contrasts his more

magnificent imagination with his lack of formal learning and suggests that the function of a friend would be to keep his thoughts in proportion ('*keeping*').

Consequently, Walton views Frankenstein's arrival as fortunate. What his final judgement on his encounter with Frankenstein and his monster is is not made clear at the end of the novel. His encounter with Frankenstein could be seen as one more in a series of disappointments: his father's prohibition; his literary failure; his crew's mutiny; Frankenstein's equivocal judgement on his own exploit.

Walton is happy to have found a companion; he hopes that Frankenstein will guide him. Like the monster, Walton feels friendless, although not rejected. However, the difference between the monster and the two human characters is that they have friends of the same sex, whereas the monster desires a mate. There appears to be in Walton the same apparent self-sufficiency that is symbolised in Frankenstein by his creation of offspring without female assistance. He characterises himself as of a different nature to his sister, whom he pictures as embedded in her domestic environment (210).

Nevertheless, Walton makes a connection between his lack of formal education and his need for a friend:

One day I mentioned to him the desire I had always felt of finding a friend who might sympathise with me, and direct me by his counsel. I said, I did not belong to that class of men who are offended by advice. "I am self-educated, and perhaps I hardly rely sufficiently upon my own powers. I wish therefore that my companion should be wiser and more experienced than myself, to confirm and support me; nor have I believed it impossible to find a true friend."

"I agree with you," replied the stranger, "in believing that friendship is not only a desirable, but a possible acquisition. I once had a friend, the most noble of human creatures, and am entitled, therefore, to judge respecting friendship. (23)

Walton feels underconfident and therefore looks for someone whom he respects to endorse his decisions, whereas Frankenstein keeps his exploits completely secret; but Walton's adventure is of a far less shocking nature than Frankenstein's. Indeed, the novel purports to be Walton's account for his sister of his voyage as it is happening. It is true, as Mary Poovey points out,⁵ that what begins as a series of letters becomes the much more "self-devoted" form of the journal, but

Frankenstein's account of the monster's creation, which the monster finds in his pocket, seems to be intended for no-one, whereas Walton does acknowledge that his intended audience is someone else - 'This manuscript will doubtless afford you the greatest pleasure' (25). Furthermore, his voyage is not a solitary venture. He is eventually persuaded to return by the mutiny of his crew who remind him of his social responsibilities.

Although Frankenstein and Walton are implicitly presented as being comparable, the similarity cannot be developed too far. There is nothing shameful or secret in the books of voyages read by Walton any more than there is anything for Walton to feel ashamed of in his attempt to sail to the North Pole. In contrast, the alchemists were engaged upon secret and forbidden studies to acquire selfish power. Walton's exploit and its motivation seem to derive logically from the details he reveals of his upbringing. There is nothing inconsistent with Necessity in the framing narrative, although the relationship between Walton's decision to return and Frankenstein's narrative is not entirely clear.

II

Doubts about the reliability of the personal accounts in the novel are inevitably raised by the use of the first-person, with its potential for ironic effects in the way the narrator shapes his own story. However, there is a double ironic focus in *Frankenstein* in that, not only is the reliability of the narrator's account being offered for critical scrutiny, but also the principle, Necessity, upon which it is constructed. The uncertainty produced by this double instability contributes to the epistemological problems that are the central issue in the novel.

Frankenstein begins his account of himself with a detailed explanation of his origins, commencing with his father. For subsequent events to be justified in terms of Necessity, the detailed description of the character and circumstances of Frankenstein's parents is important. It is given in detail, and their virtues are spelt out.

The effect of marriage on Frankenstein's father is to cause him to withdraw from public life. However, the passage describing this is one

of the passages most altered by Mary Shelley. It exists in three different forms: the original 1818 version, the emended form in the Thomas copy and completely recast in fundamental details in the 1831 edition.⁶

The first published version reads, 'When my father became a husband and parent, he found his time so occupied by the duties of his new situation, that he relinquished many of his public employments, and devoted himself to the education of his children' (29). This presents Alphonse Frankenstein's retirement from public office as a practical response to growing calls upon his time. It is also represented as not complete. However, in 1823, in the Thomas copy, Mary Shelley has altered the reasons: 'As my father's age encreased he became more attached to the quiet of a domestic life, and he gradually relinquished his public employments, and devoted himself with ardour to the education of his children' (29). Whilst still intending to devote himself to his children's education, Alphonse has abandoned his public role completely because of his desire for retirement. It seems that in emphasising the original edition, which is what the Thomas emendations do primarily, Mary Shelley has chosen to make Frankenstein's father appear more guilty of self-centred desire and less concerned with his public responsibility in his foreshadowing of Frankenstein's withdrawal from society to construct the monster. His focussing exclusively on his own family can be viewed as an abandonment of a wider responsibility.

The beneficiary of M. Frankenstein's retirement is Victor: 'Of these [children] I was the eldest, and the destined successor to all his labours and utility. No creature could have more tender parents than mine. My improvement and health were their constant care, especially as I remained for several years their only child' (29). There is an irony in the first comment here. Victor is intended to succeed to his father's 'labours and utility'; but his father has just retired from public office. Victor becomes the sole object of his parents' attention, at least for the four years until Elizabeth Lavenza is adopted. This could be a poor preparation for public service, but a likely basis for the development of egotism. As Tropp points out, Frankenstein's jealous attitude towards Elizabeth stems from the destruction of this cosy and Victor-centred relationship.⁷ In praising

Elizabeth, Frankenstein lets slip the comment, 'I have often heard my mother say, that she was at that time the most beautiful child she had ever seen' (29), revealing how he saw the arrival of Elizabeth as destroying his infant paradise because she usurped his position as the centre of attention. Nevertheless, Frankenstein sees Elizabeth and himself as complementary characters:

I was more calm and philosophical than my companion; yet my temper was not so yielding. My application was of longer endurance; but it was not so severe whilst it endured. I delighted in investigating the facts relative to the actual world; she busied herself in following the aërial creations of the poets. The world was to me a secret, which I desired to discover; to her it was a vacancy, which she sought to people with imaginations of her own. (30)

Frankenstein reveals here a number of details that pre-figure his adult self. Read less sympathetically, this passage reveals a child of cold emotions - 'more calm and philosophical', inflexible and obstinate - 'my temper was not so yielding' - and quite obsessive - 'my application was of longer endurance'. Frankenstein further characterises himself as lacking in imagination in comparison to Elizabeth. However, there creeps in again an element of potential jealousy in the comment that the world was 'to her a vacancy, which she sought to people with imaginations of her own.' This suggests Victor's desire to emulate Elizabeth's fecundity in his clumsy and earthy creation.

The actual education offered to Victor and Elizabeth and their siblings seems to conform to Godwin's principles as expressed in *The Enquirer*.⁸ However, The Thomas copy alters this section significantly. The original published edition reads:

No youth could have passed more happily than mine. My parents were indulgent, and my companions amiable. Our studies were never forced; and by some means we always had an end placed in view, which excited us to ardour in the prosecution of them. It was by this method, and not by emulation, that we were urged to application. Elizabeth was not incited to apply herself to drawing, that her companions might not outstrip her; but through the desire of pleasing her aunt, by the representation of some favourite scene done by her own hand. We learned Latin and English, that we might read the writings in those languages; and so far from study being made odious to us through punishment, we loved application, and our amusements would have been the labours of other children. Perhaps we did not read so many books, or learn languages so quickly, as

those who are disciplined according to the ordinary methods; but what we learned was impressed the more deeply on our memories. (31)

Rieger argues convincingly in a footnote concerned with the Thomas emendations (31) that this was intended to be cancelled and the following inserted:

With what delight do I even now remember the details of our domestic circle, and the happy years of my childhood. Joy attended on my steps - and the ardent affection that attached me to my excellent parents, my beloved Elizabeth, and Henry, the brother of my soul, has given almost a religious and sacred feeling to the recollection of a period passed beneath their eyes, and in their society. (31)

In the first edition Frankenstein's childhood is idyllic because of the nature of his education; in the emended version, that detail has been removed. This suggests that by 1823, Mary Shelley did not wish Frankenstein to seem so well brought up. This suggests either a shift in her conception of the basis for Frankenstein's crime, or, more likely a feeling that one so well prepared for adult life would be more likely to overcome his egotism. Thus the non-competitive and rational scheme of education that she described in the original version is omitted and replaced by a generalised assertion of childhood innocence which conflicts less with the later picture given of Frankenstein.

Frankenstein presents the sequence of events leading to his desire to create the monster as entirely logical and necessary (32). However, the connection that seems so clear to Frankenstein appears far less so to the reader. He suggests that minor details (ignoble and almost forgotten sources (32)) combine to produce an irresistible force driving him towards a certain course of action (the torrent which, in its course, has swept away all my hopes and joys (32)). He claims that he intends to account for his interest in Natural Philosophy, yet the sequence of events he relates does not seem to cohere into what the reader can easily identify as cause and effect:

I chanced to find a volume of the works of Cornelius Agrippa. I opened it with apathy; the theory which he attempts to demonstrate, and the wonderful facts which he relates, soon changed this feeling into enthusiasm. A new light seemed to dawn upon my mind; and, bounding with joy, I communicated my discovery to my father ... My father looked carelessly at the title-page of my book, and said, "Ah! Cornelius Agrippa! My dear Victor, do not waste your time upon this; it is sad trash." (32)

Alphonse Frankenstein's dismissive comment is presented as highly significant, as Frankenstein goes on to suggest:

If, instead of this remark, my father had taken the pains to explain to me, that the principles of Agrippa had been entirely exploded, and that a modern system of science had been introduced, which possessed much greater powers than the ancient, because the powers of the latter were chimerical, while those of the former were real and practical; under such circumstances, I should certainly have thrown Agrippa aside, and, with my imagination warmed as it was, should probably have applied myself to the more rational theory of chemistry which has resulted from modern discoveries. It is even possible that the train of my ideas would never have received the fatal impulse that led to my ruin. (34)

Frankenstein suggests that his father's failure to explain was responsible for his infatuation with alchemy. His obsession gives rise to his later ambition to stretch the boundaries of science. This process has some analogies with Walton's father's prohibition of his sea-going which, with his uncle's books, inspires his desire to explore. A timely explanation would have diverted Frankenstein's attention from alchemy to chemistry. The point has been laboured, but it throws light upon the causal effect Frankenstein sees this incident having in the process of directing him towards his later purpose.

In terms of his intellectual progress, the effect of his studies seems to have had little real effect. His study of the alchemists is in conformity with the principles of his education: he is encouraged to read for himself and thus the content of his reading matter 'was impressed the more deeply on our memories' (31). There seems to be some sort of implicit criticism here of the freedom allowed young Frankenstein in his reading matter. This is a point made by Anne Mellor:

While Alphonse Frankenstein initially followed Godwin's pedagogic precepts - he inspired his children to learn in a non-competitive atmosphere by encouraging their voluntary desire to please others and by giving them practical goals ... - he failed to monitor sufficiently closely the books that Victor Frankenstein ... read. Instead of *The Bible*, Aesop, and *Robinson Crusoe*, recommended by Godwin, Locke and Rousseau, Victor devoured the misleading alchemical treatises of Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Albertus Magnus, books which encouraged, not an awareness of human folly and injustice, but rather a hubristic desire for human omnipotence, for the gaining of the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life.³

By allowing himself to be interested in the alchemists, Frankenstein sows in his mind the seed that will grow later when he possesses the power to proceed further than the alchemists ever could by employing the knowledge of modern chemistry to their ends. At this stage their importance is transient. Before passing on, Frankenstein makes an interestingly ambivalent comment on his interest. Referring to the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life, he says, 'But the latter obtained my most undivided attention: wealth was an inferior object; but what glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!' (34). This intention will be echoed in his justification for his creation of an artificial man, when he again masks his egotism under the guise of altruism (49).

He loses faith in the alchemists when he discovers that they are unable to explain certain phenomena, and Alphonse introduces his son to the principles of electricity. Frankenstein presents their defeat as incomplete:

This last stroke completed the overthrow of Cornelius Agrippa, Albertus Magnus, and Paracelsus, who had so long reigned the lords of my imagination. But by some fatality I did not feel inclined to commence the study of any modern system; and this disinclination was influenced by the following circumstance.

My father expressed a wish that I should attend a course of lectures upon natural philosophy, to which I cheerfully consented. Some accident prevented my attending these lectures until the course was nearly finished. The lecture, being therefore one of the last, was entirely incomprehensible to me. ... I became disgusted with the science of natural philosophy' (35/6).

Frankenstein presents the circumstances of his failure to develop a real understanding of natural philosophy as a sort of tragic accident - 'by some fatality' - as a result of which the ideas of the alchemists remain dormant in his memory. This implies that he is not responsible for what he does in later life. His logic appears to run thus: because his father merely suggested carelessly that Cornelius Agrippa, with whose theories and aims Victor had already become fascinated, was not worth the reading, and did not explain the extent to which his ideas had been shown up by subsequent developments, the aims of the alchemists still remain with him when he discovers the inadequacy of their

principles, particularly as he does not at this stage develop a satisfactory understanding of modern natural philosophy. Frankenstein's explanation for his incomplete understanding reads like an exercise in self-exculpation on a grand scale. Rather than accept personal responsibility for his own actions, even when he is portraying himself to Walton as a ruined man, Frankenstein seems unwilling or unable to conceive of his own guilt.

This rather evasive argument can be justified by reference to Necessity. If all human actions are necessary, then no one should be held accountable for his actions, because there is ultimately no free will in the decision to act or not to act. Here we begin to see the ironic ambivalence in the treatment of Godwinian ideas in the novel. If, as Shelley suggests in his review,¹¹ the novel does embody the concept of Necessity, then Frankenstein's self-flagellation is not justified. However, although he identifies a train of consequence that leads to the conclusions he is outlining to Walton, this is overlaid with so clear a basis for condemning him for his egotism and lack of responsibility that a conflict is generated between conventional moral judgement on the one hand and an evasion of accountability that can be derived from Necessity on the other. It is, in any case, difficult to see quite how the details of Frankenstein's upbringing result in his adult personality. He asserts their causal influence, but the logic of the connection is not so clear as he suggests.

In addition to the elements derived from formal education, Frankenstein identifies certain other factors that determine his future career. Like the De Lacey household in the monster's account, the Frankenstein household is portrayed as a perfect Godwinian society where all live in harmony and where the less attractive aspects of human nature are subordinated to the general welfare (37). However, *Frankenstein* can be seen as a study in egotism produced by a model Godwinian community. The question is raised whether Frankenstein's subsequent fall from grace in his isolation in Ingolstadt represents a deep-seated criticism of Godwin's philosophy, suggesting that human nature cannot demonstrate consistently the selflessness required - that is, that Mary Shelley believed in some kind of original sin - or whether

it was the isolation from the support of the rest of his family that allowed Victor to engage in such dangerous activities.

His departure from his family is described in portentous terms: 'My departure was therefore fixed at an early date; but, before the day resolved upon could arrive, the first misfortune of my life occurred - an omen, as it were, of my future misery' (37). It is not made clear in what sense the death of his mother is seen as ominous. Frankenstein laments the death of his mother and appears to get over it. He is also aware of the role played by Elizabeth from whom his mother contracted scarlet fever. Frankenstein suggests that his grief is eventually sublimated (38). However, when he is at Ingoldstadt his justification for his studies suggests it is not completely assuaged: 'I thought, that if I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter, I might in process of time (although I now found it impossible) renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption' (49). His ultimate aim seems to be to develop some means of restoring his mother to life, as he restores life to the elements of other corpses in his creation of the monster. In both cases the impulse is egotistic, not to say necrophiliac.

Frankenstein presents his life at university as a choice between human contact and the acquisition of knowledge (39-40). Having been brought up under such secluded circumstances by a father who has eschewed his public responsibilities, Frankenstein feels disinclined to develop new ties, and this in part explains his retreat into the solitary search for knowledge. His scientific studies are exclusive to himself. Thus he feels no compulsion to share his knowledge but treats it as secret and is reluctant to reveal what he knows about the monster. This can be read as a consequence of his education.

Frankenstein's university teachers are suggested as the final factors influencing Frankenstein's development. M. Krempe's abrupt response upon learning what Frankenstein had studied in his field, echoes Alphonse Frankenstein's dismissal of Cornelius Agrippa:

The teacher, therefore, did not prepossess me in favour of his doctrine. Besides, I had a contempt for the uses of modern natural philosophy. It was very different, when the masters of the science sought immortality and power; such views, although futile, were grand: but now the scene was changed. The ambition of the inquirer

seemed to limit itself to the annihilation of those visions on which my interest in science was chiefly founded. I was required to exchange chimeras of boundless grandeur for realities of little worth. (41)

Frankenstein's hubris is apparent here. Rather than his research being seen as an effort to illuminate a small part of the world for others, he desires grand and transcendent discoveries. The result of his visit to M. Krempe is a contempt for the modesty of contemporary science and a strengthened desire for extra-ordinary leaps into the future. Although M. Waldman redresses the balance somewhat by acknowledging the valuable contributions made by the alchemists to the development of modern chemistry, his own justification for his interest in his subject attracts Frankenstein's attention for the same extravagant reasons: 'Chemistry is that branch of natural philosophy in which the greatest improvements have been and may be made; it is on that account that I have made it my particular study' (43). M. Waldman's advertising of his subject in this way appeals to Frankenstein because it opens up the possibility of great achievement. In contrast to the surly Krempe, Waldman is encouraging.

In the Thomas copy there is a note, quoted and illustrated in the Rieger edition (44), by Mary Shelley at the end of the second chapter: 'If there were to be another edition of this book, I should re-write these two first chapters. The incidents are tame and ill-arranged - the language sometimes childish. - They are unworthy of the rest of the ... narration' (43). Clearly by 1823 Mary Shelley felt unhappy about the way these first two chapters prepared for the action to follow. Her comments refer specifically to the manner of writing - the arrangement and the maturity of the language. In 1831 she changed a great deal, radically altering the whole nature of the novel.¹¹

Frankenstein's unorthodox and potentially dangerous interest in his subject is emphasised in the third chapter which narrates how he succeeded at university: 'A mind of moderate capacity, which closely pursues one study, must infallibly arrive at great proficiency in that subject; and I, who continually sought the attainment of one object of pursuit, and was solely wrapped up in this ... (46). Frankenstein reveals here, what he has not explicitly stated before, that his

interest in modern natural philosophy is not to advance the knowledge of natural phenomena for the general good, but to seek to emulate the alchemists. Although the authors of his earlier reading have been shown to be misguided, he still clings to their aims. However, it is not clear whether this outcome is the result of the factors that have come to bear upon him (Necessity), or of an innate predisposition to solitary searching after grand effects, or of freewill.

III

The problems of determining the causes of the monster's actions are as difficult as they are in Frankenstein's case. Once again the major source of evidence is a first-person narrative. This fact gives rise to difficulties identified by Simpson:

We can never be sure of the degree to which we are the generous transcribers of fact, and of how far we remain the architects of personally and socially determined patterns. The awareness of the unconscious has only compounded this problem, for its very theorisation presupposes a reservoir of inarticulable determining influences within and around the conscious mind; the 'will' or ethical faculty can thus only tentatively define one 'self' out of an indefinite number of possibles. We do not possess the fixed self-availability necessary to construct a past from a stable 'moment' in our own time, so that the prospect of an articulable mediation between now and then becomes even more remote.¹²

What is being said here applies as much to the monster's reading of his own past as it does to the reader's reading of the monster's discourse. The monster describes his education and ascribes causes to his later actions in the same way that Frankenstein did, but in neither case can the reader be entirely convinced by the explanation. As Anne Mellor suggests, the education which the monster receives is complete where Frankenstein's is faulty.¹³ The monster is influenced by the example of the De Lacey's, and learns other lessons from his reading:

From Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Romans* he learns the nature of heroism, public virtue and civic justice; from Volney's *Ruins, or A Survey of the Revolutions of Empires*, he learns the contrasting nature of political corruption and the causes of the decline of civilizations; from Milton's *Paradise Lost* he learns the origins of human good and evil and the roles of the sexes; and from Goethe's *Werther* he learns the range of human emotions, from domestic love to

suicidal despair, as well as the rhetoric in which to articulate not only ideas but feelings.¹⁴

This lays great stress on the development of social responsibility. However, as is shown in the previous chapter with regard to *Paradise Lost*, and as Clemit demonstrates in *The Godwinian Novel* with reference to Volney's *Ruins*, Mary Shelley's readings of these works were far from unequivocal.

In *Scientific Attitudes in Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein'*, Samuel Holmes Vasbinder shows how Mary Shelley used Locke's *tabula rasa* as developed by Condillac in his *Treatise on the Sensations* and Hartley's seven progressive categories of development from *Man, his Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations*.¹⁵ The monster shows a gradual development from the natural state as he develops through the first few of Hartley's categories. However, he recognises the need to go beyond the merely natural state when he observes the cottagers.

The monster's first experience of humanity is discouraging. He encounters a shepherd who flees from him (100). Then he comes across a village whose attractions are apparent to him. However, the villagers react more aggressively than the shepherd and drive him off (101). The monster learns to identify his loneliness later on, but this its first manifestation. He learns of the attractions of companionship from his discovery of its absence.

Having been driven out of the village, and deprived of the fine housing and good food he saw there, the monster finds alternative accommodation (101-2). He presents himself as learning wretchedness as he loses his innocence. Knowledge comes from bitter experience. He has learnt the desirability of shelter, but also that his mere appearance rouses humanity against him. As a result he realises that discomfort is an inevitable consequence of his appearance.

The monster stresses his simplicity and sensitivity. The pattern of attraction and rejection seen in his visit to the village has been outlined previously in his attempt to imitate birdsong (99). His initial descriptions of the De Lacey's (102/3) present him as a creature of pronounced feeling. This could be a product of his later reading of *Werther*, that is that his representation of them is shaped by his reading of Goethe. His response to the scene in which Agatha plays the

guitar for her father, which he observes through the crack in the wall is touching (103/4). This is quite consistent with the character presented thus far. He has responded to his sensations in recognising the beauty of the moon (98) and the pleasure he derives from it, and the birds.

In contrast to his response to music, he initially shows an insensitivity to language: 'The youth began, not to play, but to utter sounds that were monotonous, and neither resembling the harmony of the old man's instrument or the songs of the birds; I since found that he read aloud, but at that time I knew nothing of the science of words or letters' (105). The monster refers here to his later discovery of language and the sense it enables him to make of his earlier experience. There is a simple irony in his comment on the medium he is using to express his apologia, and in Mary Shelley's self-conscious comment upon her medium. As with Frankenstein's account, the reader is made aware of the way in which the past is presented at a later time. Here the monster uses a medium, spoken language, to describe his lack of understanding of the same medium at an earlier stage. The past is presented as only having existence in terms of the present. As has been seen with the monster's use of *Paradise Lost* to structure parts of his discourse, his account is consciously patterned to provide structure and significance. At this stage the monster is stressing his innocence, ignorance and the hardships he is suffering as a consequence of his creation.

By observing the De Lacey's the monster learns how he ought to behave, but at the same time the reciprocal nature of the relationship he craves. He wishes to have the reward that he sees De Lacey *pere* give to his children (106). However, the monster is initially confused by the fact that despite seeming to have all the necessities for happiness, the two younger De Lacey's are not content. The monster assumes that Felix and Agatha ought to be happy, possessing as they do all that he deems necessary for happiness (106). However, this is both the perfection and the limitation of his purely natural state at this stage. As Anne Mellor points out, the civilisation that fascinates him in the De Lacey's, and the speech he develops 'entails a loss of freedom, a

frustration of desire, and an enclosure within the prisonhouse of language or what Lacan has called the symbolic order'.¹⁶

As he acquires language, which might enable him to function socially, his developing sense of his responsibilities restricts his free will (106-7): ' I found that these people possessed a means of communicating their experience and feelings to one another by articulate sounds. I perceived that the words they spoke sometimes produced pleasure or pain, smiles or sadness, in the minds and countenances of the hearers. This was indeed a godlike science, and I ardently desired to become acquainted with it' (107). Previously all he desired were the means of preventing discomfort. Now he desires to speak and to have friends. He is developing beyond the natural state in which his desires are regulated by bodily comfort. He wishes to learn language, with all its implications of freedom and restraint.

The monster's first linguistic experience is neutral, but soon he acquires the means of making himself unhappy. First he learns the names of the members of the close-knit family, both their personal names and their relationships (107-8). The monster has neither name nor relations. Even his creator, whilst his father in some respects, is also his mother, and by his actions like neither parent, for, instead of demonstrating the sort of family love and loyalty the monster observes amongst the De Lacey's, Victor Frankenstein has abandoned his creation in horror.

The monster hopes that language will be the means of overcoming the antagonistic response he has experienced thus far from humanity:

I applied my whole mind to the endeavour [of learning to speak]: for I easily perceived that, although I eagerly longed to discover myself to the cottagers, I ought not to make the attempt until I had become master of their language; which knowledge might enable me to make them overlook the deformity of my figure; for with this also the contrast perpetually presented to my eyes had made me acquainted. (109)

He has a touching faith in the efficacy of language to create relationships and to overcome difficulties. As yet he has no real understanding of the true nature of language. This is of course one of the central concerns of the whole novel. The monster thinks of language as a simple means of communication; however, the questioning of the

influence of rhetoric and the warning that Frankenstein issues to Walton (206) make it very hard for the reader not to question the medium of communication itself. The monster hopes that language will serve to dissolve his difficulties, whereas in fact it represents his difficulties. He hopes to explain the reasons for his development by identifying the causes, regarding language as a transparent medium of communication. However, what he sees as necessary development does not inevitably appear so to Frankenstein or the reader. He does not realise the subjective nature of his perceptions. The conflict between the narratives derives from the impossibility of complete communication: Frankenstein can only see matters from the monster's point of view by inhabiting the monster's viewpoint; but he cannot abandon the prejudices and experiences that make him what he is. No matter how clearly the monster outlines his argument, Frankenstein will not be able to accept it fully because that would involve abandoning self and stepping outside the hermeneutic circle, which he cannot do, any more than can the reader, apparently detached though he may think himself to be.

The monster's response to Felix's joy on the arrival of Safie is of a more sophisticated kind than his response has hitherto been (112). He is now deriving pleasure from the pleasure of others. In terms of the character the monster wishes to portray himself as, this is an important stage in his development. Not only does he respond to the joy of others, but his formal education, which starts at this stage, develops his understanding and response. Felix teaches Safie French from Volney's *Ruins of Empires*. This meditation on the decline of various forms of tyranny enables the monster to develop further that feeling of sympathy he demonstrated so clearly on Safie's arrival (115). It means also that for him language is inextricably bound up with ideas of social justice.

At this stage two elements combine in the monster's development. On the one hand he begins to develop towards the next of Hartley's categories, but at the same time he is used as a kind of holy fool to expose the vices of mankind: 'Was man, indeed, at once so powerful, so virtuous, and magnificent, yet so vicious and base? ... For a long time I could not conceive how one man could go forth to murder his fellow, or even why there were laws and governments; but when I heard details of

vice and bloodshed, my wonder ceased, and I turned away with disgust and loathing' (115). His moral sense derives from his sense of sympathy, as Hartley suggests it should.¹⁷ However, he is also being presented ironically, because the reader is already aware of the way in which the monster has been responsible for bloodshed. The monster presents his response as a naive and innocent one - who would do evil if he could do good? - but he is aware of the way that experience imposes suffering. Although presenting himself disingenuously, the monster is controlling the reader/listener's response very skilfully.

This is one of the key passages for the consideration of the monster as benevolent and good. The monster responds sympathetically to the account of the ill treatment of the American Indians (115), and finds it hard to credit that man would voluntarily debase himself to vice. However, the monster is not completely developed. In an odd way his process of learning has been remarkably smooth. True, he has been driven from the village, but apart from that he has learnt in isolation and almost vicariously. His den in the hovel has distanced him from actual human contact so that his learning has been theoretical. In a sense this detachment resembles the way the reader receives the monster's story embedded in other narratives that isolate it and keep it at a distance.

The monster's education continues with his application of the lessons he learns to himself. He soon realises that he possesses none of the gifts of fortune that would enable him to attain any sort of standing in human society (115/6). Just as when he saw himself in the pool, so now, when he sees himself in his imagination, the monster finds himself unable to cope with his own image: 'I cannot describe to you the agony that these reflections inflicted upon me; I tried to dispel them, but sorrow only increased with knowledge. Oh, that I had for ever remained in my native wood, nor known or felt beyond the sensations of hunger, thirst and, heat!' (116). The monster realises that knowledge is a painful acquisition, but irrevocable. Necessity means that what he has learned will have an inescapable influence on him in his later life, but it will not necessarily be beneficial. The difficulty of analysing the necessary effect is the problem of priority: all actions and events have an effect, but the influence of some is greater than others. Not

only does the monster's acquisition of bitter experience have an influence, but so too does the despair it provokes. The great problem with any first person narrative of necessary influences is that no-one can list all the influences operating upon them, one of which must be the process of listing itself. Necessity must inevitably remain an unprovable theory because of the impossibility of establishing any external vantage point and the difficulty of absolute comprehensiveness.

The monster presents the De Lacey's story of disinterested benevolence as a crucial element in his education. They act as parents to him in that it is from them that he learns the higher qualities of intellectual activity. They are better parents to him than Alphonse Frankenstein appears to have been to Victor. They are honourable and unselfish, providing the monster with a model of behaviour that he at first attempts to follow, crowned as it is in the De Laceys' case with a fitting reward for their virtue in the form of companionship.

The example of the De Laceys is re-inforced by the monster's discovery of the cache of books: *Paradise Lost*, *Plutarch's Lives* and *The Sorrows of Werther* (123). Between them, Plutarch and Goethe develop the monster's ability to understand the feelings and responsibilities of human beings on a wider scale. By living next to the De Laceys the monster has learned gradually so that by the time he finds these books he is capable of appreciating the teaching they have to offer. Even so, although the monster's emphasis on what he has learnt from Goethe and Plutarch supports his argument with Frankenstein well, it is harder to identify what he is saying in his references to *Paradise Lost*. It is not clear which aspects of *Paradise Lost* are influencing him. *Paradise Lost* appears once again to clarify, but serves instead to destabilise. The monster asserts that it influenced him greatly, but even he is unsure whether it is Adam or Satan's role he is most impressed by (125).

In his simplest role as conventional ironist the monster identifies virtue with pleasure and vice with pain. Why therefore should man do evil if it is so little attractive? The monster also recognises the importance of the order in which he developed his understanding: 'The patriarchal lives of my protectors caused these impressions to take a firm hold on my mind; perhaps, if my first introduction to humanity had

been made by a young soldier, burning for glory and slaughter, I should have been imbued with different sensations' (125).

However, the monster's developing awareness of the possibilities of benevolence is destroyed by the failure of his attempt to establish relations with the De Lacey's. He explains his moral degeneration as a consequence of his thwarted impulse to good which his appearance militates against.

His cynicism develops on his journey towards Geneva when he is shot by the peasant. His gloomy mood has lightened somewhat in empathy with the coming spring (137), but he presents himself as very much afraid of his emotions. His use of expressions like 'allowed myself' and 'dared to be happy' suggests that he is afraid of the consequences of feeling freely. He usually only travels by night, but on this occasion he has ventured out by day and feels pleasure in the sun. However, being shot by the peasant as recompense for saving the life of the girl evokes a bitter and sarcastic retreat into his former implacable state: 'The feelings of kindness and gentleness, which I had entertained but a few moments before, gave place to hellish rage and gnashing of teeth. Inflamed by pain, I vowed eternal hatred and vengeance to all mankind' (138).

The monster attributes his malevolence to human actions throughout his account. However, this is too simple an explanation of cause and effect. It has its origins in the detailed account of the monster's psychological development, but if the novel is specifically about anything it is about the dangers of identifying cause and effect too closely. As Swingle points out, in *Frankenstein* we have possibilities of meaning without the necessary confirmatory proof.¹⁸ The monster asserts, but we have only his word for it.

The monster suggests this confirms him in his misanthropy. He represents himself as cut off from God and from all possibility of fulfilment (138). His attempt to befriend William is presented as a last attempt to avoid complete despair (138). He hopes that the innocent William might not respond adversely towards him. William's response (139) suggests one of two possibilities. The monster might be wrong in his assumption of William's innocence; William might be old enough and experienced enough to recognise the monster with the sort of

adult perception that will instinctively react antagonistically. Alternatively, the appearance of the monster is so horrific, in the ways Chris Baldick suggests,¹⁹ that William reacts instinctively, lacking the sort of conditioned adult curiosity that Walton shows at the end of the novel.

William's reaction quite cures the monster of his benevolence. However, the final stage of his degradation is quite self-induced, and in response to no action of anyone else. His destruction of Justine is his first cold-blooded and purely malicious act. It is appropriate, given the role of *Paradise Lost* in the novel that, like Satan using Adam for his revenge on God, the monster operates through the medium of others to conduct his vengeance on Frankenstein: 'Here, I thought, is one of those whose smiles are bestowed on all but me; she shall not escape: thanks to the lessons of Felix, and the sanguinary laws of man, I have learned how to work mischief' (140). The monster presents his treatment of Justine as deriving from what he has learnt. He asserts his lack of responsibility and in effect the necessary basis for his development.

IV

After hearing the monster's account of his development, Frankenstein suggests to the monster that the malice already displayed by him is grounds enough to mistrust him. The monster's reply presents in concise form the argument developed in this section of the book, the argument that Percy Shelley identified as being the moral of the novel as a whole in his review:

'Nor are the crimes and malevolence of the single Being, though indeed withering and tremendous, the offspring of any unaccountable propensity to evil, but flow irresistibly from certain causes fully adequate to their production. They are the children, as it were, of Necessity and Human Nature. In this the direct moral of the book consists, and it is perhaps the most important and of the most universal application of any moral that can be enforced by example - Treat a person ill and he will become wicked. Requite affection with scorn; let one being be selected for whatever cause as the refuse of his kind - divide him, a social being, from society, and you impose upon him the irresistable obligations - malevolence and selfishness.'²⁰

Percy Shelley here presents the novel as if it embodies a straightforward morality. However, this over-simplified view of the novel greatly misrepresents it.

The monster outlines his position, emphasising the necessary consequences of it.

I thought I had moved your compassion, and yet you still refuse to bestow on me the only benefit that can soften my heart, and render me harmless. If I have no ties and no affections, hatred and vice must be my portion; the love of another will destroy the cause of my crimes, and I shall become a thing, of whose existence everyone will be ignorant. My vices are the children of a forced solitude that I abhor; and my virtues will necessarily arise when I live in communion with an equal. I shall feel the affections of a sensitive being, and become linked to the chain of existence and events, from which I am now excluded. (143)

In many senses it is this self-defining statement that the monster's discourse leads up to. His account of his development follows a step-by-step progression exemplifying a similar necessitarian inevitability to the account of Frankenstein's development in Book I. However, in his demand for companionship, the monster seeks to use Necessity for his own purposes as a predictive mechanism. He asserts that companionship would reverse his moral depravity and that happiness would make him good. Frankenstein's justification for his destruction of the female monster questions this by offering an alternative necessary outcome (163).

Taken on their own these biographies exemplify Godwin's principle; but the effect of the book as a whole is to cast doubt on the effectiveness of the theory of Necessity as an explanation for human actions.

Chapter 4: Nature

In *Frankenstein*, nature is seen from several different viewpoints which ascribe to it different functions and significance. It is seen both as a neutral background and as a participant in the narrative. Its treatment is dependent upon the narrator and is associated with questions of personal identity. At times it echoes the narrator's mood and status, and at other times it contrasts with them. In addition to this contextual function, with its importance in relation to the idea of the pathetic fallacy and to Godwinian necessity, nature is also presented as a resource to be plundered, or raped. There are times when both the monster and Frankenstein seem almost driven to action by nature. It is as if their disharmony with nature can only be resolved by some form of violent self-projective action.

The most obvious example of self-projection is Frankenstein's creation of the monster. This is represented as 'penetrat[ing] into the recesses of nature, [to] shew how she works in her hiding places' (42). However, if one accepts Simpson's reading of Romantic intentions (described below), what Frankenstein is attempting to do is not possible because he cannot separate himself from the object of his study.

In *Irony and Authority in Romantic Poetry*, Simpson points out that for the Romantics, 'there is no ... perspective outside, which is not in fact within'.¹ In order for there to be any form of authority that can provide a metacomment, it is necessary to be able to stand outside the field of discourse and observe. However, the peculiarity of Romantic irony, as he defines it, is that because the field is not complete, but requires the hermeneutic circle to be completed by the reader, it is not possible for the reader to stand back and observe the process.² Thus the reader is perpetually engaged in the two mutually contradictory exercises of advancing to complete the circle and withdrawing to observe what is produced.

He describes the process of apparent discrimination as 'Mind in nature becomes mind **with** nature'.³ As the mind attempts to distinguish itself from its context, so it becomes part of that context itself. Any attempt to define in opposition to nature produces difficulties because 'As soon as the mind finds itself describing nature as an object in the

reflexive recognition of itself, then it risks internment in a discourse whose terms allow only for perpetual moving between opposite poles'.⁴

In *Frankenstein* both Frankenstein and the monster try to use nature as a background against which certain elements are foregrounded. In *Ariel like a Harpy*, Christopher Small suggests there is a reversed version of the pathetic fallacy in operation, using Godwinian necessity as his justification:

Man, a "necessary being" - that is to say one in the grip of necessity - is dependent even for the state of his emotions on the circumstances of the time; just because, unlike the beasts, he cannot live by bread alone but is sensitive to more than physical effects, he is the helpless victim of "every wind that blows". The conviction thus borne in upon Frankenstein is of great importance in the moral scheme of the novel; the pathetic fallacy here turned upside down is, ... a way of thinking upon which the novel as a whole makes profound comment. But it supplies nevertheless the mode in which, as a work of art, it is written: man, the landscape and the vagaries of weather, and their interaction in the metaphorical language of the work, is not to be seen in terms of cause and effect.⁵

Small's reading of Necessity suggests that, rather than nature echoing human emotions, as in the conventional version of the pathetic fallacy, it creates them. This idea is amplified in Simpson:

We do not have a cognitive grasp on the things that make us what we are ... precisely because we have already defined these things as undiscoverable. We cannot proceed in ignorance of the hermeneutic circle, but we cannot solve the questions it raises. I shall try to argue that the poets themselves thought and created within the shadow of this problem, and that their awareness of it led them to fashion artefacts wherein the issue is repeated and transferred, in a finer tone, rather than definitively solved.⁶

Because of our involvement in the context, and our consequent inability to see objectively from outside it, we cannot know all the factors that determine our actions, and thus cannot explain their causes effectively. According to Simpson, any attempt to explain our origins is impossible; so Frankenstein, in attempting to discover the 'causes of life' (46), is engaged in that which is against nature. He wishes to identify cause and effect, but he only succeeds in refining the problem: it is 'repeated and transferred', but what he produces is not an improvement. He is bound to produce a monster if he thinks he is revealing the cause.

Simpson makes further suggestions which explain the deficient form of what Frankenstein discovers: 'The primary experience ... is threatened and reduced by secondary discourse, and the level of closure, of 'metacomment', which that discourse might be thought to provide, is in fact only a faded version of the events which made it possible.'⁷ In *Frankenstein* the primary experience is very often another secondary discourse. Frankenstein's act of creation does not actually create, but repeats in debased form. He says he wants to restore life, but can only copy female reproduction, and not particularly successfully. The novel seems to be questioning the very possibility of creation. Even normal biological creation does not occur in Frankenstein's generation.

In this same area, Small suggests that, 'To know a thing previously unknown is to bring it into existence and at the same time to dominate it as creator does creature'.⁸ However, this contradicts the idea of the reversed pathetic fallacy contained within Necessity because it suggests that man can dominate at least part of his context. This in many respects is the key issue in considering the function of nature in *Frankenstein*. There are two possible readings, each mutually exclusive. In one, man is dominated by his environment, in the other he is able to impose some control over it. This pattern is analogous to Simpson's explanation of the hermeneutic circle. The paradox is neatly explained by Muriel Spark:

Shelley ... would see Frankenstein, in his role of creator, as the perpetrator of human misery and therefore an object of hatred. And, Mary added, he is the sufferer of human misery and therefore an object of pity. But, she also added, he is an amoral product of nature, on whom no responsibility can be attached, towards whom no passion can logically be entertained.⁹

She recognises the readiness with which characters in the novel can simultaneously represent mutually exclusive ideas. The monster can be both characterised as Satan and Adam, as well as at times performing the role of God; Frankenstein can also function as both God and Satan.

This apparent contradiction can be seen clearly in the monster's relationship with nature: Christopher Small refers to the monster's 'inbuilt affinity with the natural world',¹⁰ suggesting he is the ideal Rousseau/Godwinian child; but he is a monster. When he considers Percy Shelley's judgement in his review of *Frankenstein*, Small identifies the

weakness in his argument: "'Treat a person ill and he will become wicked." Shelley did not inquire why it should be necessary to invent a monster to demonstrate this.''' Small implies that Percy Shelley's sympathies were too much engaged on the side of the monster, to allow him to see other readings of the novel. Logically, there are too many variables. To prove Percy Shelley's moral, it should be enough to show the way in which a child of nature, pure in outlook as a result of the innocence of its education, could be perverted by adversity. However, the child of nature in this novel is an unnatural creature. The simple moral is subverted by the doubtful nature of its vehicle, suggesting the impossibility of extricating a clear and unequivocal morality from the conflicting mass of detail. This on a simple level is another way in which Mary Shelley avoided the imposition of a clear metacomment. However, it also raises the more complex question of Mary Shelley's motivation for her own creation of the novel, which is curiously analogous to Frankenstein's action, and of the moral value of nature itself.

This can be examined by considering the relationship between the monster and his surroundings after his rejection by the De Lacey's. He bursts out in borrowed rhetoric after he has described his rejection. He sees himself as mocked by nature around him - 'the cold stars shone in mockery' (132) - and he casts his thoughts in the form of Satan's fury in Book IX of *Paradise Lost*:¹² 'All, save I, were at rest or in enjoyment: I like the arch fiend, bore a hell within me; and, finding myself unsympathised with, wished to tear up the trees, spread havoc and destruction around me, and then to have sat down and enjoyed the ruin' (132). The monster's frustration derives from his inability to cause his surroundings to respond in sympathy with his mood. He is bewailing the failure of the pathetic fallacy, regretting his own individuality. If the sort of egotistical self-projection exemplified in Satan is being condemned in the novel, as Poovey suggests, then this is where the monster exchanges hopes of domestic contentment for destructive self-assertion.¹³

However, when the monster begins to become active, nature seems in tune with him once more. Inspired by a violence in nature that imitates and inflames his thoughts - 'As the night advanced, a fierce wind arose

from the woods, and quickly dispersed the clouds that had loitered in the heavens: the blast tore along like a mighty avalanche, and produced a kind of insanity in my spirits, that burst all bounds of reason and reflection' (135) - , the monster destroys the site of his attempted cooperation with and rejection by humanity and sets out to attempt to forge his own destiny, as Rieger points out, like Adam and Eve at the end of *Paradise Lost* (135). He seems now impelled towards action by the influence of nature.

This section of the novel appears to suggest that nature is in sympathy with self-assertion. However, there are inconsistencies: the monster wishes initially to create havoc, but it is not until 'the blast ... produced a kind of insanity in my spirits ...' that he acts. Nature does not function in sympathy until he wishes to assert himself. Any attempt to identify cause and effect here must fail. The monster's inner turmoil comes before and might be seen to inspire the tempest, but he blames nature for bursting 'the bounds of reason and reflection'. Alternatively, the monster might have seized upon coincidental factors to provide some form of self-justification.

II

Frankenstein cannot be seen as a child of nature. His attitude towards nature appears more objective: he studies natural philosophy. His teacher M. Waldman contrasts modern science with the alchemists read by Frankenstein in his childhood in ambiguous terms:

The ancient teachers of this science ...promised impossibilities, and performed nothing. The modern masters promise very little; they know that metals cannot be transmuted, and that the elixir of life is a chimera. But these philosophers, whose hands seem only made to dabble in dirt, and their eyes to pour over the microscope or crucible, have indeed performed miracles. They penetrate into the recesses of nature, and shew how she works in her hiding places. They ascend into the heavens; they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows. (42)

This presents the achievements of modern chemistry as both lesser and greater than the alchemists could manage. It contains the paradox

between the source of knowledge ('to dabble in dirt') and its outcome ('new and almost unlimited powers') that Frankenstein will later make more explicit ('to examine the causes of life, we must first have recourse to death' (46)). It also presents the gathering of that knowledge in sexual terms ('penetrate into the recesses of nature'). Nature is presented as female and capable of being raped. However, what M. Waldman does not suggest, but what Frankenstein develops, is the possibility of turning this sterile penetration into some sort of reproduction.

The other image for the acquisition of knowledge in the novel is pursuit. Frankenstein is 'in pursuit of some discoveries' (45) prior to his rape of nature, from which the offspring is the monster. His human sexual partner, Elizabeth needs no winning, but represents the ultimate domesticity of near incest, so he directs his assertive energies towards nature. Nature's representation in two apparently distinct forms is clear: it is a resource which Frankenstein plunders, and a backdrop against which the action is played out. Just as the monster is frustrated by his initial inability to persuade nature to sympathise with him, so Frankenstein finds himself out of sympathy with nature when engaged in his act of creation/violation: 'Winter, spring, and summer, passed away during my labours; but I did not watch the blossom or the expanding leaves - sights which before always yielded me supreme delight, so deeply was I engrossed in my occupation. The leaves of that year had withered before my work drew near to a close' (51). In contrast, he focuses on the secret penetrative aspects of his occupation. He 'appeared rather like one doomed by slavery to toil in the mines' (51). He sees his activity as being a mining into the depths of the earth.

Associated with this penetration image there is an aspect of illness. In the 1818 version it is merely 'a slow fever' (51); the Thomas copy develops this idea rather further: 'My voice became broken, my trembling hands almost refused to accomplish their task; I became as timid as a love-sick girl, and alternate tremor and passionate ardour took the place of wholesome sensation and regulated ambition' (51). The more precise reference to the 'love-sick girl' emphasises the sexual connotations of his labour.

If this activity represents a rape of nature by Frankenstein, he portrays nature in its other guise when he is recovered from his sickness. In his narrative he seems to be attempting to separate the two aspects of nature: the divine background from which he is capable of deriving a sort of Wordsworthian uplift, and the dark and secret inner recesses where he conducts his 'filthy' creation.

When he recovers from his sickness he recognises that spring has arrived:

I remember the first time I became capable of observing outward objects with any kind of pleasure, I perceived that the fallen leaves had disappeared, and that the young buds were shooting forth from the trees that shaded my window. It was a divine spring; and the season contributed greatly to my convalescence. I felt also sentiments of joy and affection revive in my bosom; my gloom disappeared, and in a short time I became as cheerful as before I was attacked by that fatal passion. (57)

It is possible to see a natural cycle in his creation of the monster: the previous year has been devoted to the slow growth of his creation culminating in his, rather late, harvest of the monster. Frankenstein has been dormant for the winter and now that the spring has come he is ready to begin the world again as if his previous year's labours had not occurred. This natural cycle contrasts with the unnatural quality of what Frankenstein was doing. In this passage he represses his memory of the monster and suggests that the nature he had seen the previous year as a dark object for penetration is now something else completely. He even suggests that nature has a beneficial effect - 'the season contributed greatly to my convalescence.' However, it is still the same nature. He seems to be attempting to conceal from Walton that he has penetrated well beneath the petticoats of the seemingly nature that he describes now.

Frankenstein rejects his earlier studies ('I wished to fly from reflection, and hated my former studies' (64)) and pretends that he is quite free. However, it is not until the following year that he actually prepares to return to his family in Geneva. Prior to this he takes a walking tour with Clerval during May which he presents as concluding his complete recovery. He contrasts his relationship with Clerval with his solitude whilst studying to create the monster - 'A

selfish pursuit had cramped and narrowed me, until your gentleness and affection warmed and opened my senses' (65), and he shows himself in tune with nature and soothed and gladdened by it. He is attempting to lose himself in nature in a superficial way, as opposed to his previous delving into her secrets - 'A serene sky and verdant fields filled me with ecstasy' (65). He even claims, in his attempt to repress his traumatic memory of what he has brought into being, that he is able to return to the innocence of his childhood - 'I became the same happy creature who, a few years ago, loving and beloved, had no sorrow or care' (65).

After the deaths of William and Justine, Frankenstein attempts to recreate this mood to repress his knowledge and his recognition of the monster's responsibility for them:

Often ... I took the boat, and passed many hours upon the water. Sometimes ... I was carried by the wind; and sometimes ... I left the boat to pursue its own course, and gave way to my own miserable reflections. I was often tempted, when all was at peace around me, and I the only unquiet thing that wandered restless in a scene so beautiful and heavenly, if I except some bat, or the frogs, whose harsh and interrupted croaking was heard only when I approached the shore - often, I say, I was tempted to plunge into the silent lake, that the waters might close over me and my calamities for ever. (86-7)

Frankenstein attempts to allow nature to absorb him as it seemed it had on his walking tour. However, it is no longer possible for him to force nature to fit the mould he chooses. Previously, he was able to repress his memory of the creation of the monster, but he is not able to repress his memory of the consequences of that repression for which he accepts some limited responsibility (88). However, abandoning himself to nature emphasises his individuality. He suggests that he is tempted by his isolation literally to immerse himself in his natural surroundings. Just as Frankenstein's attempt to explore causes from within the context cannot succeed, so too his attempt to submerge himself totally is impossible. The terms of the hermeneutic circle prevent both complete absorption into and complete separation from context. Frankenstein pushes at the boundaries, but is inevitably doomed to oscillate between the two poles.¹⁴

After destroying the female monster, Frankenstein again casts himself adrift at the mercy of nature. When he is drifting on the lake, he is unsure and miserable. He is tempted by suicide, but he is essentially ignorant of what he has created. When he casts off from Orkney he has made a deliberate choice that he does not wish to be changed - 'I banished from my mind every thought that could lead to a different conclusion' (168); however, he presents his abandonment to the wind and waves as a luxury, almost the deliberate abandonment to pleasure of the fallen : 'it (the breeze) refreshed me, and filled me with such agreeable sensations, that I resolved to prolong my stay on the water...' (168). Whereas on Lac Lemman, Frankenstein sought comfort in drifting on the lake, but failed to achieve it, now, having found contentment, by abandoning what he had previously thought of as his duty, Frankenstein now finds the sympathy in nature he sought before. As in the case of the monster, the relationship between speaker and nature can be read in various ways.

For Frankenstein, nature is both a resource and a background. As the narrative proceeds he loses his taste for the former and fails to disappear into the latter. This can be seen in the two sections drawn from Mary Shelley's journal, the trip to Chamonix and the journey down the Rhine.¹⁵ In each case Frankenstein finds a conflict between the conventional response to nature which ought to inspire sublime feelings and his own miserable thoughts. His egotism will not allow him to abandon his own identity and lose himself completely. This dramatises the paradox of the hermeneutic circle: Frankenstein both wishes to be separate from, but also part of nature. He attempts to satisfy his desire for individuality by setting free some part of himself in the form of the monster. The creation of the monster is thus an attempt to maintain a degree of what might be seen as masculine separateness. The monster's inability to gain acceptance in human society can almost be seen as its *raison d'être*. Acceptance would represent a loss of distinct identity on Frankenstein's behalf. The monster wishes to be part of a family circle, yet is denied the opportunity by his hideous appearance. Frankenstein is greatly beloved yet clings fast to his personal isolated identity, which is defined in terms of opposition to others. Frankenstein and the monster define themselves in terms of

their opposition to each other in a kind of solipsistic equilibrium. Mary Poovey, viewing the novel from a feminist perspective, correctly identifies the monster as a kind of 'other' against whom Frankenstein defines himself,¹⁶ but omits to mention the way in which Frankenstein operates as an 'other' against whom the monster's identity is defined. Both are defined in opposition to nature, and both together represent an attempt to establish a position between complete absorption in context and total isolation.

However, neither Frankenstein nor the monster has a consistent relationship with nature. They seem to be imposing different readings on it at different times. Nevertheless, the nature of nature remains unknowable despite their attempts to define it. In this respect its effect is as if it were a kind of 'Romantic ironist' like the child described by Simpson:¹⁷ it functions within the novel, but it lacks any form of 'stable identity', for it does not seem to function consistently in accordance with the principles of Necessity. It is available to Frankenstein for him to 'penetrate', or sympathise with, but it is not defined by either of these strategies. It eludes the clumsy attempt to ascribe a value to it. Similarly, it is presented by the monster as a necessary influence on his development, but it operates both with and against his desires.

The monster encounters nature as he begins to discriminate the objects surrounding him. He derives great and innocent pleasure from the sun which warms him and the songs of the birds: 'Sometimes I tried to imitate the pleasant songs of the birds, but was unable. Sometimes I wished to express my sensations in my own mode, but the uncouth and inarticulate sounds which broke from me frightened me into silence again' (99). Here the monster wishes to emulate nature, but finds himself excluded by his monstrosity. His deformity prevents him from becoming like the birds in the same way as it will prevent his acceptance by the De Laceys. Although the monster has been created by penetration of the inmost parts of nature, nature does not recognise him as its own, any more than does humankind. He is a hybrid of two elements, man and nature, that define themselves by opposition to each other. Frankenstein's objectification of nature determines his identity and nature can be seen as that which is not man. The monster is

composed of irreconcilable opposites, producing the lack of organic unity that Chris Baldick suggests is the hallmark of his monstrosity.¹² The monster's involuntary isolation is revealed by his experience with the birds and it mirrors the voluntary isolation of Frankenstein. Although Frankenstein is only conscious of his separation from humanity during his secret studies, his relationship with the rest of humanity is blighted by the consequences of his action. The effect of his return to the world of human relations is to bring death.

The crucial moment in the monster's relationship with nature is his rejection by the De Laceys. He becomes fully aware of his own individuality when his hopes of human companionship are disappointed. At this point he finally accepts that his personal identity is created by opposition to what he is surrounded by. Self-assertion is both destructive and inevitable.

The monster's initial lack of sympathy with nature and subsequent inspiration by the storm to destroy the cottage presents a problem for the reader to decide how far necessity explains his actions. Is it the monster's lack of sympathy with calm nature that makes him become violent, or is it his sympathy with the storm? His identity seems to be defined in two ways, as a function of his opposition to nature, i.e. it is derived from his individual nature, and as a consequence of his action. Both possibilities are reinforced by the monster's two responses. Does either his passive misery or his active destruction reinforce his individuality most? The other possibility that underlies all such speculation is that there is no actual causal connection between nature and the monster's personality. This is suggested by both Simpson and Small.¹³ Any attempt to identify causal patterns suffers from the impossibility of developing an objective distance from the text to see it from an authoritative standpoint.

And yet there is a sense in which nature's sympathy and the monster's mood are connected by the monster in his narrative (132; 135). Associated with this is the extent to which he is active or passive. Thus, his misery after rejection can be represented by the dissonance between his mood and the elements of nature he observes. At the same time he seems to be associated with certain seasons and weather patterns.

Such a pattern can be seen on the monster's road to Geneva. As the winter develops, so does his bitterness:

Nature decayed around me, and the sun became heatless; rain and snow poured around me; mighty rivers were frozen; the surface of the earth was hard, and chill, and bare, and I found no shelter. Oh, earth! how often did I imprecate curses on the cause of my being! The mildness of my nature had fled, and all within me was turned to gall and bitterness. The nearer I approached your habitation, the more deeply did I feel the spirit of revenge enkindled in my heart. Snow fell, and the waters were hardened, but I rested not. (136)

Although the monster is experiencing hardship, his mood of determination for revenge is in keeping with the coldness and harshness of the season. However, he does also reveal the potential for manipulation of apparent cause and effect in his narrative: 'The agony of my feelings allowed me no respite: no incident occurred from which my rage and misery could not exact its food' (136). His recognition of the way in which his subjective narrative imposes a reading on circumstances calls into question all such judgements and destabilises further any clear reading of the relationship between the monster and nature. This indeterminacy can be seen in the continuation of this passage. The monster appears to wish to destroy any possibility of losing the keen edge of his anger:²⁰

The day, which was one of the first of spring, cheered even me by the loveliness of its sunshine and the balminess of the air. I felt emotions of gentleness and pleasure, that had long appeared dead, revive within me. Half surprised by the novelty of these sensations, I allowed myself to be borne away by them; and, forgetting my solitude and deformity, dared to be happy. Soft tears again bedewed my cheeks, and I even raised my humid eyes with thankfulness towards the blessed sun which bestowed such joy upon me. (137)

Expressions like 'allowed myself' and 'dared to be happy' suggest that the monster is afraid of the consequences of feeling freely. He wishes to control his own response to his environment. His spontaneous response to the scene around him is soon corrected by the consequences of his humane act in saving the girl from the river. He seems deliberately to be preventing himself from feeling pleasure and optimism: 'The labours I endured were no longer to be alleviated by the bright sun or gentle breezes of spring; all joy was but a mockery, which

insulted my desolate state, and made me feel that I was not made for the enjoyment of pleasure' (138).

Abandoning his hopes of human acceptance, the monster attempts to compromise by demanding of Frankenstein a mate with whom he might depart for South America. However, Frankenstein identifies the apparent fallacy in the monster's plan: 'How can you, who long for the love and sympathy of man, persevere in this exile? You will return, and again seek their kindness, when you will meet with their detestation; your evil passions will be renewed, and you will have a companion to aid you in the task of destruction' (142-3). Here Frankenstein argues the case clearly for opposing the monster. However, in reply, the monster puts the other argument: 'My evil passions will have fled, for I shall meet with sympathy; my life will flow quietly away, and, in my dying moments, I shall not curse my maker' (143). Both these arguments are equally reasonable; they are central to the novel, but they are quite incompatible as arguments. Frankenstein suggests that the monster's environment will compel him to break his word, the monster that it will enable him to keep it. Each focusses on a different aspect of the monster's proposed exile and argues its primacy over the other; but there is no basis for the reader to discriminate between them. What is highlighted is the difficulty of using necessity as an explanation of behaviour.

The final section of the narrative is set in a world of snow and ice, which can be seen either as an absence of nature because of the white sterility, or as nature in its harshest guise. On the Mer de Glace the monster describes this as his inevitable dwelling-place in an identification that is akin to the pathetic fallacy: 'The desert mountains and dreary glaciers are my refuge. I have wandered here many days; the caves of ice, which I only do not fear, are a dwelling to me, and the only one which man does not grudge. These bleak skies I hail, for they are kinder to me than your fellow beings' (95). This landscape is appropriate for him as it expresses in its iciness the lack of human contact that has become his dominant concern. This adds another layer to the consideration of nature in the novel. Here the monster is self-conscious about the possibility of the pathetic fallacy. Just as he did after his rejection by the De Lacey's and after being shot by the

peasant, the monster appears to be manipulating nature, almost as if he were writing himself into a work of fiction. There is a tension between a narratively appropriate presentation of nature and an objective truth that the monster seems unwilling to misrepresent too far.

The Arctic setting for the novel symbolises an equally self-conscious separation from human contact. The monster has lured Frankenstein onto his territory, as he emphasises on one of the inscriptions he leaves for his creator: 'Follow me, I seek the everlasting ices of the north, where you will feel the misery of cold and frost, to which I am impassive' (202). The monster has habituated himself to the bleak conditions that symbolise his rejection by man and the anger he feels towards Frankenstein. He uses nature in a highly conscious way to punish Frankenstein, as he has been punished by mankind. Mankind and nature can here be seen both as opposites and as paralleling each other. They are opposed in that Frankenstein's misery is cast in the physical terms appropriate to nature, whereas the monster's unhappiness derives from his rejection by man. However, these two alternatives are representative of the same lack of human contact.

This can once more be related to the pathetic fallacy, or the inverted form Small sees the novel employing. Nature imposes an emotional response on Frankenstein and echoes it for the monster. However, these are merely aspects of the power wielded by each of the characters over the other one. The monster has chosen to associate himself with frost and ice because they most accurately reflect his emotions. He then inflicts them on Frankenstein in order to bring home to him more forcibly the state to which he is reduced, and to act as physical reminders of the sufferings the monster feels have been inflicted upon him by Frankenstein.

If nature acts apparently as 'a background against which certain elements are foregrounded',²¹ what the monster succeeds in doing at the end of the novel is to foreground the background. Nature no longer acts either as a moral guide, nor as a passive backdrop to be penetrated for the secrets it might hold, but becomes an instrument of revenge whilst still retaining its vastness and detachment. But nature can only be seen in ironic terms because of its unknowability. It is apparently manipulated by both Frankenstein and the monster, but it eludes their

control, and highlights their attempts to manipulate it because of their incomplete control over it.

Chapter 5: Knowledge

One of the ways in which a firm reading of *Frankenstein* is precluded is by calling into question the process of knowledge. The novel provides information and explanations of various kinds but the reader's mastery over this material is destabilised in a number of ways. The process of reading involves the acquisition of knowledge about the characters and situations portrayed. *Frankenstein* calls the validity of the knowledge into question in a variety of ways, some a consequence of the narrative structure, others by other forms of ironic effect. There are problems with the reliability of the perception on which assumptions are made and the reliability of the discourse itself. Often the reader recognises the unreliability of what a character claims, but has no means of establishing any authoritative alternative.

The monster's acquisition of knowledge contrasts with the way in which Frankenstein discovers. From his account of himself, the reader sees how the order of his intellectual activity develops as he learns to identify a wider range of sensation and to experience higher levels of mental activity. Each step of the monster's development shows a gradual and logical progression. In contrast, Frankenstein determines the moral depravity of his creation in instantaneous flashes of insight. The most prominent and explicit of these is when he sees the monster at some distance when he is returning to Geneva after the death of William:

A flash of lightning illuminated the object, and discovered its shape plainly to me; its gigantic stature, and the deformity of its aspect, more hideous than belongs to humanity, instantly informed me that it was the wretch, the filthy dæmon to whom I had given life. What did he there? Could he be ... the murderer of my brother? No sooner did that idea cross my imagination, than I became convinced of its truth; ... He was the murderer! I could not doubt it. The mere presence of the idea was an irresistible proof of the fact. (71)

The difficulty with this incident is that Frankenstein appears to arrive at the right conclusion, but for the wrong reasons, or rather without reasons at all. This has a Keatsian ring about it - 'What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth - whether it existed before or not; for I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love - they are all in their sublime creative of essential Beauty'. The uncritical

endorsement of the products of the imagination is being questioned here. Frankenstein jumps to his conclusion. The reader is not given any proof of the correctness of what appears a mere guess until Chapter VIII of the second volume. The novel's structure is a warning to the reader not to try to emulate Frankenstein. As Swingle demonstrates in 'Frankenstein's Monster and its Romantic Relations: Problems of Knowledge in English Romanticism', the reader is never given satisfactory proof to enable him to determine the answers to the central problems thrown up by the novel. The final stages of Frankenstein's narrative seem to contain a warning against this sort of rash judgement. Frankenstein ascribes the various clues to enable him to pursue the monster and the food to keep him alive to the operations of benevolent spirits, when it is clear that these have been left for him by the monster itself.

The trustworthiness of discourse and its relationship with visual evidence is also commented upon. This can almost be seen as a reworking of the Medieval debate about 'auctoritee' and 'pref'. When he is pondering his response to what the monster has told him about his development, Frankenstein identifies the difficulty the monster poses for those who come into contact with him: 'His words had a strange effect upon me. I compassionated him, and sometimes felt a wish to console him; but when I looked upon him, when I saw the filthy mass that moved and talked, my heart sickened, and my feelings were altered to those of horror and hatred' (143). There is a conflict between the visual and the intellectual here which repeats Frankenstein's original rejection of the monster. Although blinded during the process by his passion to create, Frankenstein is horrified by what he sees when he has finally formed the monster; and it is this that seems to lead him to abandon his creature. Here he 'compassionates' the monster in theory, but his sympathy is destroyed by the sight of him. When he is creating the female monster, it appears to be a visual stimulus that allows his disgust to get the better of his promise (164). He has previously overcome the objections that he now uses to justify his destruction of the female monster; but he has also previously revealed an irrational loathing of the monster that subverts the integrity of his logic.

This inconsistency is also indicated by Frankenstein's reference to the 'sophisms' of the monster when he questions his motives for beginning work on the female monster. The power of language is set against the visual, and the capacity of either to convey the truth is questioned. On the Mer de Glace Frankenstein is convinced by the monster's arguments, but his response is challenged by its appearance. His final judgement of the monster's probity is based on an assessment of the balance of the argument:

I paused some time to reflect on all he had related, and the various arguments which he had employed. I thought of the promise of virtues which he had displayed on the opening of his existence, and the subsequent blight of all kindly feeling by the loathing and scorn which his protectors had manifested towards him. His power and threats were not omitted in my calculations: a creature who could exist in the ice caves of the glaciers, and hide himself from pursuit among the ridges of inaccessible precipices, was a being possessing faculties it would be vain to cope with. After a long pause of reflection, I concluded, that the justice due both to him and my fellow-creatures demanded of me that I should comply with his request. (143-4)

This is clearly an intellectual evaluation of the arguments for and against complying with the monster's request. At this point Frankenstein responds to the content of the monster's argument rather than the form. However, he arrives at the opposite conclusion when disgusted by the method of creating the female monster and lacking the eloquence of the monster to reinforce his apparently intellectual judgement. At this stage he casts doubt on the reliability of the monster's discourse by finding the eloquence that convinced him sophistical. When he then catches sight of the monster, he responds only to the visual impression in the same way as he decided immediately that the monster was responsible for William's death: 'As I looked on him, his countenance expressed the utmost extent of malice and treachery. I thought with a sensation of madness on my promise of creating another like to him, and, trembling with passion, tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged' (164). It is Frankenstein's subjective visual judgement that leads him to abandon his task. The mere sight of the monster has been enough to convince him of its malice. On the Mer de Glace the persuasiveness of the monster's argument overcomes his physical repulsiveness, now his horrific appearance

precludes discussion. The murder of Clerval could be advanced as proof of the essentially malevolent nature of the monster. However, it could equally be argued that this was the inevitable consequence of another rejection.

In contrast to Frankenstein, the monster appears truthful. However, this simple opposition is more convenient than true. When attempting to win the support of Pere De Lacey, the monster does not lie, but he manipulates the information he reveals for his purpose in a way that might justify Frankenstein's suspicion of his eloquence.

De Lacey is initially convinced by him: 'I am blind, and cannot judge of your countenance, but there is something in your words which persuades me that you are sincere' (130). This highlights a central problem of knowledge in the novel: the reliability of language and its relationship with visual evidence. De Lacey's blindness evades the problems associated with what Blake referred to as the 'tyranny of the eye',² but the uncertainty he expresses due to his inability to see the monster's expression suggests that the visual is a necessary corroboration of the verbal for him. This suggests a need for some sort of authority to provide a metacomment. However, within the novel this can only be in the form of language, which is compromised by the subjective nature of first-person narrative. Walton is convinced by Frankenstein's eloquence, but Frankenstein warns Walton against the monster's persuasiveness; De Lacey is convinced by the monster's words: but he is blind and all who see the monster are convinced of his malevolence. Only Walton, who has been prepared in some measure for the shock, overcomes his repugnance for long, and his final judgement, as Swingle points out in his essay,³ is equivocal.

The visual is not only used to judge the monster. When Frankenstein is in prison in Ireland, accused of the murder of Clerval, the magistrate relies heavily on visual evidence. Frankenstein notes that he is observed keenly (173). This again suggests a reliance upon the eye to confirm the ear. When the monster presents his own case Frankenstein finds it convincing (144), but later ascribes its effectiveness to rhetorical trickery (206). Yet the power of oral persuasion is all that Frankenstein can muster in his own defence.

The conflict between the visual and the spoken as sources of knowledge represents one difficulty for the reader, but another derives from Frankenstein's self-deceit. Before he leaves for England, he contemplates the danger to his friends, but believes that the greater danger will be to him:

During my absence I should leave my friends unconscious of the existence of their enemy, and unprotected from his attacks, exasperated as he might be by my departure. ... Through the whole period during which I was the slave of my creature, I allowed myself to be governed by the impulses of the moment; and my present sensations strongly intimated that the fiend would follow me, and exempt my family from the danger of his machinations. (151)

There is a conflict here between the active and the passive like that between Frankenstein's desire to project himself into nature and to be absorbed by it which affects all levels of his consideration.⁴ He contemplates revealing what he has done, but decides to do nothing. It is unclear how far his recognition that the monster will follow him is a specious argument to justify his reluctance to reveal its existence. He might genuinely trust the monster's word or recognise its intimate attachment to him, although this seems unlikely because it operates at the level of those desires he is unwilling even to acknowledge to himself.

This concealment can also be seen in the way that Frankenstein's progressive justification for destroying the female has a logic about it, but it is the logic of a growing refusal to do what is forced upon him. He presents his decision as one based upon absolute moral considerations, but it is clear that it is influenced by his personal desires:

Had I a right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations? I had before been moved by the sophisms of the being I had created; I had been struck senseless by his fiendish threats: but now, for the first time, the wickedness of my promise burst upon me; I shuddered to think that future ages might curse me as their pest, whose selfishness had not hesitated to buy its own peace at the price perhaps of the existence of the whole human race. (163)

His manipulation of the moral argument is revealed when it is compared with Frankenstein's comments on the creation of the monster:

Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs. Pursuing these reflections, I thought, that if I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter, I might in process of time (although I now found it impossible) renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption. (49)

When he first creates a living being Frankenstein believes it will be good and will bless him; on this second occasion he fears the malevolence of the creature. He will not trust the words of the monster, yet he expects his own explanation to be trusted. In both cases he is concerned about the future effects of his actions, but uses the same considerations to come to opposite conclusions.

There is, then, a certain simple irony in Frankenstein's warning against the monster's eloquence. If Frankenstein cannot trust the rhetoric of the monster, should the reader trust his? The reader wants some form of authority to provide guidance. After the murder of Elizabeth, Frankenstein's language gives further difficulty:

I would have seized him, but he eluded me. ...

I burned with rage to pursue the murderer of my peace, and precipitate him into the ocean. I walked up and down my room hastily and perturbed, while my imagination conjured up a thousand images to torment and sting me. Why had I not followed him and closed with him in mortal strife? But I had suffered him to depart. (166)

There are echoes here of the opening of the scene on the Mer de Glace, particularly in the phrase used to describe the monster's avoidance of being caught: 'he eluded me' compared with 'he easily eluded me' (95). Frankenstein's language does not convince the reader of his absolute determination because of its pomposity - 'precipitate' into 'the ocean' and 'mortal strife'. Whether intentional or not, this effect suggests an unwillingness to act on his determination to destroy his creature. He makes speeches instead of acting. However, a judgement such as this is of the kind that the novel seems to be warning against, based as it is on stylistic grounds. The equivocal warnings against eloquence destabilise all such judgements.

Frankenstein's unwillingness to destroy his own creation becomes even more apparent towards the end of the novel when he sets off across Europe after the monster. It is clear to the reader that it is the monster who is keeping his creator alive, but Frankenstein believes it to be benevolent spirits. By the end of the novel, the chase has become almost the sole justification for the continued existence of either Frankenstein or the monster. When it ends with the death of Frankenstein, all there is left for the monster to do is to destroy himself. However, Frankenstein cannot admit to himself, nor to Walton, that he might not desire the destruction of his creation.

This kind of self-deception also affects Frankenstein's meditation on the monster's threat after he has destroyed the female monster:

"I will be with you on your wedding-night." That then was the period fixed for the fulfilment of my destiny. In that hour I should die, and at once satisfy and extinguish his malice. The prospect did not move me to fear; yet when I thought of my beloved Elizabeth, - of her tears and endless sorrow, when she should find her lover so barbarously snatched from her, - ... I resolved not to fall before my enemy without a bitter struggle. (166)

Frankenstein is immediately convinced that the monster intends to kill him, despite his unconscious recognition of the mutual interdependence of himself and his creation - 'I should ... at once satisfy and extinguish his malice.' Even though the monster's next murder follows the same pattern of killing those near to Frankenstein, Frankenstein's egocentrism is such that he reads the monster's threat in a quite different way to the way the monster intended it. He says he wishes to kill the monster, but his efforts to do so have been more rhetorical than actual. The monster appears rather more aware of the bond between himself and his creator, and seeks only to cause Frankenstein pain. By this stage the monster has abandoned any hope of persuading Frankenstein to give him the companionship he desires, and he has settled for the sterile and unsatisfying compulsion to revenge of a Satan.⁶

Frankenstein misreads the monster's threat, and so hopes to be able to defend himself against it. He sees the murder of Clerval as a sign of the monster's depravity, but it can equally be seen as a warning of the nature of the threat. The monster will attempt to make Frankenstein as friendless and unconnected as himself. Frankenstein's destruction of

the monster's bride-to-be will be emulated by the monster's murder of Elizabeth, but Frankenstein fails to make the connection which seems obvious from the monster's standpoint: 'He had vowed *to be with me on my wedding-night*, yet he did not consider that threat as binding him to peace in the mean time; for, as if to shew me that he was not yet satiated with blood, he had murdered Clerval immediately after the enunciation of his threats' (186).

Almost like Emma Woodhouse in Jane Austen's novel published two years before *Frankenstein*, Frankenstein seems deliberately to misread the situation he finds himself in. His misreading of the threat is due to his egotism. However, it can also be read as a failure to understand the monster's language. By this stage in the novel the only form of authority that gives any clear guidance is the sequence of events in time, but this is compromised by being contained within Frankenstein's narrative only. There is no corroborative source to confirm the relationship between cause and effect asserted by Frankenstein, whose unreliability is sustained to the end by his inability to draw a clear metacomment from his own narrative (215).

This absence of a secure authoritative version of events is central to the novel. It can best be explored by considering the function and status of the monster's narrative. By the time the monster begins to speak, the reader has already developed an interest in its nature, and a desire to find out how far Frankenstein's judgements about it are correct. He has on two significant occasions leapt to conclusions about the monster's malevolence. The first of these occasions is when the monster enters his bedroom when Frankenstein awakes from his dream after creating the creature, the second is on his return to Geneva after William's death.

However, the monster's first words disappoint:

It is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original æra of my being: all the events of that period appear confused and indistinct. A strange multiplicity of sensations seized me, and I saw, felt, heard, and smelt, at the same time; and it was, indeed, a long time before I learned to distinguish between the operations of my various senses. (97)

The ideas here are in conformity with the Lockean theories that Mary Shelley was interested in, but they also serve another purpose. It is

clear that the monster is neither capable of sensing, nor acting deliberately. Yet, Frankenstein flees when he sees the monster in the night. He believes the monster to have more intention than the monster suggests it was capable of:

I beheld the wretch - the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped, and rushed down stairs. (53)

This suggests that the monster is responding to what it sees; yet the monster claims to have been at that time unable to distinguish between senses. Frankenstein responds to the grin and the possibility of speech when subsequent events suggest the monster to be incapable of the rational processes he ascribes to it. The divergence between the monster's comment and Frankenstein's account of the scene is one of a number of occasions when one discourse conflicts with, or fails to reinforce, another one. This same pattern can be seen in Frankenstein's instinctive assumption of the monster's evil nature, in his misreading of the monster's threat to be with him on his wedding night, in his reading of the assistance the monster gives him during the chase at the end of the book as the assistance of benevolent spirits, and in the monster's departure before Walton can question him. An incident is presented, but its significance is shown to be ambiguous. No indication is given by a confirming narrative of any correct reading. The reader tries to interpret the text in the same way as Frankenstein tries to make sense of what happens, but the novel insists that any definitive reading is wrong. Thus all knowledge in the novel is presented ironically, calling into question the reliability of all knowledge. *Frankenstein* supports the idea of the hermeneutic circle proposed by Simpson,⁶ which suggests that knowledge is only complete with the reader's participation.

There are certain elements which span the different discourses that compose the novel. The most obvious example is Felix's and Safie's letters. These letters cross the different levels of the novel because they eventually come into the hands of Walton: 'His tale is connected, and told with an appearance of the simplest truth; yet I own to you that

the letters of Felix and Safie, which he shewed me, and the apparition of the monster, seen from our ship, brought to me a greater conviction of the truth of his narrative than his asseverations, however earnest and connected' (207). This highlights the question of epistemology so central to the novel. Walton presents himself as being concerned for the reliability of the story he is telling, but can provide no better evidence than the mere assertion common to all the narrators.

These letters appear to provide a kind of stability, but in fact they do not, because they do not allow the different levels of narration to float quite freely against each other. They appear to offer some pivot against which the rest of the novel can be levered into revealing some form of stable metacomment; but they are no more than an ironic trick that seems to offer illumination, but fails to do so. They do not appear on the surface of the novel: the monster and Walton talk about them, but the reader never reads them. They are a form of 'Romantic ironical device' in Simpson's sense, simultaneously offering the possibility of an authoritative voice and precluding it.

The other element that crosses the different levels of the novel is the monster himself, as Walton emphasises above. The monster is the 'Romantic ironist' ironised. The monster's moral nature is crucial to the novel, but the reader cannot determine it precisely, because of the layers of narrative separating him from the monster, which allow for the possibility of too many ironic reversals. However, the monster fails to maintain his position in the structure of the novel, breaking through at the end to appear in Walton's narrative and hinting at, but failing to provide a key to the novel. Walton cites two reasons for his believing the story offered to him: his sight of the letters and his sight of the monster. Both of these confirmatory details rely upon sight; but the letters are not revealed and the monster, as Swingle stresses,⁷ does not say anything to provide any other source of proof for Frankenstein's tale.

This opposition between the visual and the linguistic is compounded by the opposition between the spoken and the written in the structure of the novel. The reader is reading Walton's written record of Frankenstein's spoken discourse. Even Walton's account is in two forms: he begins by writing to his sister in a mode, the letter, that

identifies a specific audience, but lapses into the journal, a much more self-centred form, before returning ultimately to the letter.

Against this must be set the concept of the 'Unspeakable', identified by Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* as an important element in Gothic fiction:

"Unspeakable," for instance, is a favorite Gothic word, sometimes meaning no more than "dreadful," sometimes implying a range of reflections on language. The word appears regularly enough, in enough contexts, that it could be called a theme in itself, but it also works as a name for moments when it is not used: moments when, for instance, a character drops dead trying to utter a particular name. At another remove, it is possible to discern a play of the unspeakable in the narrative structure itself of a novel that ostensibly comprises transcriptions of manuscripts that are always illegible at revelatory moments.⁸

There are several levels of the 'unspeakable' in *Frankenstein*. The monster has no name, and therefore cannot be addressed directly; Frankenstein refers to it variously as 'the wretch', 'the fiend' and 'my enemy' and by other uncharitable terms. Frankenstein cannot, until after the death of Elizabeth, bring himself to admit publicly to having created the monster, and then, when he does confess to the magistrate (197-8), it is of no use. Finally, and structurally most importantly, the different narratives do not corroborate each other to produce an authoritative metacomment. At the end of the novel, when the monster might reconcile the differences between his and Frankenstein's narratives, he asserts his and Frankenstein's interdependence and his isolation and then disappears into the dark intending to kill himself and reach ultimate unspeakableness. The monster can also be read as the embodiment of Frankenstein's unacknowledged and therefore unspeakable desires.

If all knowledge in the novel is compromised by this dependence upon certain inarticulable, or unarticulated ideas, then all knowledge can be no more than a likely possibility. The proof of Walton's argument depends upon visual evidence, which is only communicable to the reader by assertion. As shown elsewhere,⁹ discourse is subverted by the questioning of its eloquence and by its necessarily secondary nature.

Martin Tropp reads the water symbolism in the novel as an image for this. He links it to the idea of the doppelgänger: 'There the hero is

often drawn, not to the water, but to a mirror, and threatened with absorption by his mirror image.¹⁰ Frankenstein's decision to travel across the lake, before he consummates his marriage is clearly significant in this context. However, the lake ceases to be a mirror and Elizabeth identifies the deceptive clarity of the water (190). Tropp comments, 'The water no longer reflects his self; its clarity seems to suggest that Frankenstein's unconscious hides nothing. This self-delusion allows the monster to strangle his bride'.¹¹

The emendations in the Thomas copy on this passage contain another more suggestive image of water:

Then gazing on the beloved face of Elizabeth on her graceful form and languid eyes, instead of feeling the exultation of a - lover - a husband - a sudden gush of tears blinded my sight, & as I turned away to hide the involuntary emotion fast drops fell in the wave below. Reason again awoke, and shaking off all unmanly - or more properly all natural thoughts of mischance, I smiled... (190)

The image of blindness is more appropriate than the image of clarity. Mary Shelley seems to have felt the aspect of delusion insufficiently clearly delineated and emphasised the point in the Thomas emendations. The tears that blind Frankenstein fall into the water just before Elizabeth comments on the clarity of it. Frankenstein's reference to his 'thoughts of mischance' as 'unmanly' is corrected to 'natural'. The word 'unmanly' emphasises his obsessive masculinism that seeks to exclude all female elements from his creation. This is why his unspoken desire is the destruction of Elizabeth. He wishes to evade the thought of mischance, which he then characterises as 'natural', but undesirable. In other words, at this stage he is seeking to evade the natural and to cling to the unnatural, ie. he wishes to replace Elizabeth with the monster. Interestingly, Elizabeth's final comment on the clarity of the water is, 'What a divine day! how happy and serene all nature appears!' (190). Like the lake, the novel appears clear, but its clarity is seductive. The reader is encouraged to make judgements, only to find that they are ironically subverted, without being replaced by anything else. Ultimately, the novel acts as a mirror reflecting back to the reader.

Chapter 6: The 1831 Changes

In the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein*, the text is preceded by a preface, written by Percy Shelley, which is included in the later edition. However, in 1831 the preface follows an introduction which apparently supersedes it. In the preface it is explained that *Frankenstein* will be an unconventional novel. At the same time as rather flippantly dismissing any serious purpose - 'It was commenced, partly as a source of amusement, and partly as an expedient for exercising any untried resources of mind' (7) - the preface gives a clear indication of Mary Shelley's aim:

I am by no means indifferent to the manner in which whatever moral tendencies exist in the sentiments or characters it contains shall affect the reader; yet my chief concern in this respect has been limited to the avoiding the enervating effects of the novels of the present day, and to the exhibition of the amiableness of domestic affection, and the excellence of universal virtue. The opinions which naturally spring from the character and situation of the hero are by no means to be conceived as existing always in my own conviction; nor is any inference to be drawn from the following pages as prejudicing any philosophical doctrine of whatever kind.
(7)

This is more than the customary authorial disclaimer. Much attention has been devoted to the 'exhibition of the amiableness of domestic affection, and the excellence of universal virtue'; but of equally great importance is the concern with 'avoiding the enervating effects of the novels of the present day.' This idea is not developed further. It could mean simply as a determination to avoid a narrow subject matter and over-sentimentality. On the other hand, it could equally well be an indication of the kind of narrative strategy Mary Shelley employs to afford 'a point of view to the imagination for the delineating of human passion more comprehensive and commanding than many which the ordinary relation of existing events can yield' (6). Such a strategy does not impose an authoritative reading: '[not] prejudicing any philosophical doctrine of any kind' (6).

The impact of this direct and concise assertion of intention in the first edition is dissipated by the 'Introduction' included in the second edition with its misleading account of how the novel came to be

written.² Whereas in 1818 the 'Preface' is concerned to emphasise the likelihood of the events of the novel - 'not of impossible occurrence' (6) - in 1831 the story itself was well known. There had been several stage presentations, including in 1823 *Presumption; or the Fate of Frankenstein* by Richard Brinsley Peake, which was often revived. Consequently, Mary Shelley's first concern is to answer a question that presents the novel in a wholly new light: 'How I, then a young girl, came to think of, and to dilate upon, so very hideous an idea?' [5]. This represents a major shift in the way in which the novel is presented to the reader. What was before considered more for its philosophical ideas, is now treated as a Gothic shocker. Also, although there is an acknowledgement of her earlier desire 'to obtain literary reputation', Mary Shelley casts doubt upon its desirability by saying 'though since then I have become infinitely indifferent to it' [6].

This shift is exemplified in the story of the dream. The terror of the novel lies not in the props and scenery, as in a conventional Gothic horror story - 'a mere tale of spectres or enchantment' (6), but in the inescapability of the consequences of Frankenstein's action. Albert J. Lavally discusses this when comparing films of the story with the novel itself: 'The book gives us a cryptic account of the Monster's "birth," so brief as to leave us wondering how it was done.'³

Like Godwin's fiction, Mary Shelley's novel disturbs because of the reader's recognition of the psychological horror of the protagonists' relations with each other. Her advance upon *Caleb Williams* is in presenting the story from both Caleb's and Falkland's points of view. The story of the genesis told in the 'Introduction', with its exculpatory dream, suggests falsely that the horror lies in action:

My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie. I saw - with shut eyes, but acute mental vision, - I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half-vital motion. Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handiwork, horror-stricken. He would hope that, left to itself, the slight spark of life which he had communicated would fade; that this thing, which had received

such imperfect animation, would subside into dead matter; and he might sleep in the belief that the silence of the grave would quench for ever the transient existence of the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life. He sleeps; but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtains, and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes. [9]

Not only does this misrepresent the source of the horror in the novel and suggest that its interest is more superficial than it actually is, but it makes moral judgements - 'unhallowed arts'; 'supremely frightful'; 'mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world'; 'odious handiwork' - of a kind deliberately eschewed in the earlier edition. Altogether the view of *Frankenstein* presented here is much more morally directed and conventional than the morally neutral 1818 version.

If the 'Introduction' is to be trusted, Mary Shelley's 'point of view to the imagination for the delineating of human passions more comprehensive and commanding' has altered. As Mary Poovey points out, the new edition is rather more of an apology for the first and, while its basic structure has not changed, there is an alteration in its effect.⁴ The view of the imagination presented in the Introduction suggests this. It is seen as detached - 'My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me' - thus excusing Mary Shelley from blame for her presumption in writing the novel and conceiving such horrific ideas at so young an age; and yet provides a more directive morality for the novel.

The majority of the changes made for the later edition are in word choice or to syntax. There are very few changes to the monster's account of himself. These are merely changes in word choice and an alteration of emphasis in the scene in which the monster shifts the responsibility for William's death onto Justine Moritz,⁵ which serves to make it more melodramatic, and alters the motivation a little, but which does not significantly alter the structure of the novel.

The first volume of the 1831 edition shows a substantial shift in emphasis. There are four main areas in which the two editions differ significantly. There is clear evidence of some sort of divinity. There

are also changes to the character of Frankenstein's parents and his upbringing and to the role and relationship of Elizabeth, who ceases to be Frankenstein's cousin. Finally, there is a greater sense of Frankenstein as an over-reacher, whose tragedy can be ascribed to a specific hubris on his part. The novel loses its finely balanced ambivalence.

The first reference to any sort of divine agent comes at the end of 'Chapter II' of the 1831 edition. This is equivalent to the end of the first chapter of the original edition. The final two paragraphs of the 1831 edition read,

Thus strangely are our souls constructed, and by such slight ligaments are we bound to prosperity or ruin. When I look back, it seems to me as if this almost miraculous change of inclination and will was the immediate suggestion of the guardian angel of my life - the last effort made by the spirit of preservation to avert the storm that was even then hanging in the stars, and ready to envelope me. Her victory was announced by an unusual tranquillity and gladness of soul, which followed the relinquishing of my ancient and latterly tormenting studies. It was thus that I was to be taught to associate evil with their prosecution, happiness with their disregard.

It was a strong effort of the spirit of good; but it was ineffectual. Destiny was too potent, and her immutable laws had decreed my utter and terrible destruction. [41-42]

This is radically different from the earlier version which accepted Necessity in all levels of its narration. Frankenstein's career is now presented as a tragedy of fate in a world in which moral good and evil are clearly defined.

This clear polarisation between the good and the evil, characterised by Frankenstein's description of William and Justine as 'the first hapless victims to my unhallowed arts' [89], is not present in the 1818 edition, where the possibility is allowed that Frankenstein's studies might be of benefit. There is a hardening of the morality in the later edition.

Frankenstein's progression towards his studies, which is seen as inevitable in both editions, is presented as supernaturally determined in 1831. Frankenstein's first calling upon M. Krempe is described in fatal terms: 'Chance - or rather the evil influence, the Angel of Destruction, which asserted omnipotent sway over me from the moment I

turned my reluctant steps from my father's door - led me first to M. Krempe ...' [45]. Not only is the language here more melodramatic (compare the restrained and matter of fact tone of 1818: 'The next morning I delivered my letters of introduction, and paid a visit to some of the principal professors, and among others to M. Krempe ...' (40)), but Frankenstein is treated as a puppet of divine influences, rather than being fully responsible for his own decisions. He is presented as both less to blame, in that his actions are influenced by supernatural forces over which he has no control, and more to blame, in that whereas Necessity ascribes no blame, but is morally neutral, recognising the inevitability of all actions, in this version he seems to have more control over his own career. The determinism of the 1818 edition has been replaced by a tragic inevitability which allows of some possibility of an alternative course of events.

The effect of M. Waldman's lecture, which turns Frankenstein back to the study of Natural Philosophy is presented differently in the two editions. It is restrained and un-moralistic in 1818: 'I departed highly pleased with the professor and his lecture, and paid him a visit the same evening' (42). Mary Shelley allows incidents to develop their own significance and seems to have more confidence in her plot. In 1831 there is a bombastic and portentous expansion at this point:

Such were the professor's words - rather let me say such the words of fate, enounced to destroy me. As he went on, I felt as if my soul were grappling with a palpable enemy; one by one the various keys were touched which formed the mechanism of my being: chord after chord was sounded, and soon my mind was filled with one thought, one conception, one purpose. So much has been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein, - more, far more, will I achieve: treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation.

I closed not my eyes that night. My internal being was in a state of insurrection and turmoil; I felt that order would thence arise, but I had no power to produce it. By degrees, after the morning's dawn, sleep came. I awoke, and my yesternight's thoughts were as a dream. There only remained a resolution to return to my ancient studies, and to devote myself to a science for which I believed myself to possess a natural talent. On the same day I paid M. Waldman a visit. [48]

Again there is reference to fate as part of the melodramatic development of Frankenstein's compulsion to evil. Frankenstein is presented as a

megalomaniac who is predestined to offend and whose subsequent history is just punishment for his hubris.

To emphasise Frankenstein's changed role, alterations have been made to other characters, chiefly to Elizabeth, to Frankenstein's parents and also to Frankenstein's early life: just over three pages in Rieger's edition are cancelled and completely re-written. Elizabeth ceases to be the abandoned daughter of Alphonse's younger sister and becomes the daughter of a Milanese nobleman, victim of Austrian domination [35]. Frankenstein's attitude to her changes also. In 1818 he treats her as an equal: 'From this time Elizabeth Lavenza became my playfellow, and as we grew older, my friend. ... While I admired her understanding and fancy, I loved to tend on her, as I should on a favourite animal; and I never saw so much grace both of person and mind united to so little pretension' (29-30). This respect for Elizabeth as an autonomous individual, whose faculties he admires, means that his later attitude to her, when he treats her more as object ('I possessed a treasure' (186)) before his marriage to her, is a corruption of his earlier respect. In 1831, by contrast, his attitude to his future wife is suspect from this early stage.

'Everyone loved Elizabeth. The passionate and almost reverential attachment with which all regarded her became, while I shared it, my pride and my delight. On the evening previous to her being brought to my home, my mother had said playfully, - 'I have a pretty present for my Victor - to-morrow he shall have it.' And when, on the morrow, she presented Elizabeth to me as her promised gift, I, with childish seriousness, interpreted her words literally, and looked upon Elizabeth as mine - mine to protect, love, and cherish. All praises bestowed upon her, I received as made to a possession of my own. We called each other familiarly by the name of cousin. No word, no expression could body forth the kind of relation in which she stood to me - my more than sister, since till death she was to be mine only. [35-36]

Elizabeth is introduced to Frankenstein as his possession and he continues to treat her as such. Consequently his possessive and selfish attitude towards her later in the novel is not so surprising as it might have been. In the later version, also, Elizabeth is presented as more responsible for Madame Frankenstein's death.

In 1818, Elizabeth is not seriously ill:

Elizabeth had caught the scarlet fever; but her illness was not severe, and she quickly recovered. During her illness, many arguments had been urged to persuade my mother to refrain from attending upon her. She had, at first, yielded to our entreaties; but when she heard that her favourite was recovering, she could no longer debar herself from her society, and entered her chamber long before the danger of infection was past. The consequences of this imprudence were fatal. (37)

It is significant that Elizabeth's illness was not dangerous and that Caroline Beaufort's death was the result of her own imprudence. Any resentment felt subconsciously by Frankenstein for the death of his mother would therefore be unreasonable. The 1831 changes make Victor's repressed resentment towards Elizabeth for the death of his mother more understandable:

Before the day resolved upon could arrive, the first misfortune of my life occurred - an omen, as it were, of my future misery.

Elizabeth had caught the scarlet fever; her illness was severe, and she was in the greatest danger. During her illness, many arguments had been urged to persuade my mother from attending upon her. She had, at first, yielded to our entreaties; but when she heard that the life of her favourite was menaced, she could no longer control her anxiety. She attended her sick bed, - her watchful attentions triumphed over the malignity of the distemper, - Elizabeth was saved, but the consequences of this imprudence were fatal to her preserver. [42]

Elizabeth's life is exchanged for that of her adoptive mother in this version. Furthermore, the Oedipal aspects of Frankenstein's relationship with his mother are emphasised when his mother's dying action is to express her hopes of their marriage [43]. In this later version Frankenstein's mother appears more noble, and Elizabeth's life is presented as being purchased by her demise.

However, the greatest alteration to the role of the other members of Frankenstein's family is the omission of Elizabeth's tirade against the injustice of Justine Moritz's death. Elizabeth becomes a much less important figure in the later edition. In the first edition she is presented as more active and as much more necessary for the Frankenstein family. In 1831, her efforts (38-39) to cheer the family after the death of the mother are omitted, and her reaction to Justine's death is also not included. The 1818 version reads,

Yet heaven bless thee, my dearest Justine, with resignation, and a confidence elevated beyond this world. Oh! how I hate its shews and

mockeries! when one creature is murdered, another is immediately deprived of life in a slow torturing manner; then the executioners, their hands yet reeking with the blood of innocence, believe that they have done a great deed. They call this *retribution*. Hateful name! When that word is pronounced, I know greater and more horrid punishments are going to be inflicted than the gloomiest tyrant has ever invented to satiate his utmost revenge. (82-83)

This is very bitter and to some extent more passionate than is consistent with the character of Elizabeth as she is presented. However, it gives her character definition and shows she possesses strong feelings. It also highlights the central theme of the difficulty of accurate judgement and acts as a warning to the reader not to emulate the Genevese judges. By 1831, Mary Shelley either felt that such anarchic views would not be approved of by her readers, or she no longer believed in them. It may also be that like other strongly expressed political assertions in the novel, this was very much influenced by Percy Shelley, if not actually written by him. In 1831, all that is said of Elizabeth's final reaction to Justine's condemnation is 'Elizabeth also wept and was unhappy; but hers also was the misery of innocence, which, like a cloud that passess over the fair moon, for a while hides but cannot tarnish its brightness' [88].

As with the death of Frankenstein's mother, the emphasis has been changed to focus more specifically upon Frankenstein himself. This is very much the pattern of the later edition. The clearest example of this shift is in the trip to Chamonix. In 1818 this was a family outing, primarily for the benefit of Elizabeth and Ernest, who had not been there before (89). However, in the later edition, it becomes a solitary trip embarked by Frankenstein to ease his guilt in the sublime landscape: 'I ... sought in the magnificence, the eternity of such scenes, to forget myself and my ephemeral, because human, sorrows' [94].

In the earlier version this trip is part of family life, taking a holiday to recover their spirits; now it becomes the restless wandering of the tormented Romantic hero. Instead of demonstrating 'the amiableness of domestic affection' (7), which is blighted by Frankenstein's encounter with the monster (who is ironically arguing in favour of the 'amiableness of domestic affection'), the trip to Chamonix



becomes part of the opposition to 'domestic affection', the solitary, haunted journeyings of a guilt-ridden soul.

The later edition alters the character of Frankenstein substantially. There are changes to his motivation for creating the monster and also to the way in which he is presented in the context of his story. In 1831, Mary Shelley emphasises the vehemence of Frankenstein's temper [37], and suggests that in his childhood the contrasting characters of Elizabeth and Clerval serve to restrain his tendency to excess: 'The saintly soul of Elizabeth shone like a shrine-dedicated lamp in our peaceful home. ... She was the living spirit of love to soften and attract: I might have become sullen in my study, rough through the ardour of my nature, but that she was there to subdue me to a semblance of her own gentleness' [38]. Frankenstein presents the antisociability that comes to the fore during his creation of the monster as an essential part of his nature, rather than as an attribute acquired during his obsession. Thus it is part of the environment which leads to his transgression. The difference between the two versions means that, whereas in 1818 Frankenstein is responsible for his actions within the confines of the necessity that constrains all men, in 1831 he appears a much more sympathetic figure struggling against the inescapable consequences of one misguided act.

In keeping with this, Frankenstein is portrayed as more carried away and less overtly secretive about his reading of the alchemists [39-40]. In the earlier edition he is calmer, but more aware of his reading as a forbidden pleasure (33-34). Consequently his attitude to his studies at university is altered. In 1818, Frankenstein rather falls into his desire to go beyond conventional boundaries, in 1831 it is present from the moment he re-discovers his interest in natural philosophy [48]. However, his awareness of its dangers is apparent in his conversation with M. Waldman: 'I expressed myself in measured terms, with the modesty and deference due from a youth to his instructor, without letting escape (inexperience in life would have made me ashamed) any of the enthusiasm which stimulated my intended labours' [49]. He is presented here as a youth carried away with unfortunate enthusiasm who prevents his elders, who might be able to restrain him, from knowing what he is doing.

This consciousness of youthful error blighting the adult's career, is repeated in the frequent comments the mature Frankenstein makes to Walton to point the moral. In 1818 these are not present. The story is introduced in remarkably neutral terms:

You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did; and I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine has been. I do not know that the relation of my misfortunes will be useful to you, yet, if you are inclined, listen to my tale. I believe that the strange incidents connected with it will afford a view of nature, which may enlarge your faculties and understanding. You will hear of powers and occurrences, such as you have been accustomed to believe impossible: but I do not doubt that my tale conveys in its series internal evidence of the truth of the events of which it is composed. (24)

There is no suggestion that Walton will inevitably suffer as Frankenstein has, nor does it insist that Frankenstein's tale is necessarily morally valuable. It suggests that it might be, but lays greatest stress on the apparent improbability of the events described and their actual truth.

In the second edition this passage begins in the same way but develops very differently:

You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did; and I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine has been. I do not know that the relation of my misfortunes 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; one that may direct you if you succeed in your undertaking, and console you in case of failure. Prepare to hear of occurrences which are usually deemed marvellous. Were we among the tamer scenes of nature, I might fear to encounter your unbelief, 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-varied powers of nature: - nor can I doubt that my tale conveys in its series internal evidence of the truth of the events of which it is composed. [29-30]

The balance of ideas in the passage is more or less similar, but there are two main changes. The second version amplifies the idea of the improbability of the events to be described, and introduces the concept that the improbable will be more readily believed in an exotic landscape of ice and snow. This seems an unnecessary sensitivity, and detracts

from the credibility of the story, which depends upon the normality of its setting. To suggest that sublime surroundings are needed to be able to accept the story stresses its incredibility, rather than its believability.

However, the major shift in the later edition is that now the story is presented in the expectation that a moral can be drawn from it. The identification between Walton and Frankenstein is made quite explicit; if anything, it is exaggerated: Walton's situation is not so exactly the same, nor fraught with precisely the same dangers as Frankenstein asserts. Frankenstein is offering an explicit warning to Walton, and by implication to the reader.

This warning can be identified at various points through Frankenstein's narration in addition to the earlier text. When discussing his nervous state during his creation of the monster, Frankenstein alludes to the forbidden nature of his activity by suggesting he 'shunned' his 'fellow-creatures as if ... guilty of a crime' [56]. When considering the unlikelihood of Justine's conviction for the murder of William, instead of the simple confidence of 1818 - 'I had no fear, therefore, that any circumstantial evidence could be brought forward strong enough to convict her, and in this assurance, I calmed myself, expecting the trial with eagerness, but without prognosticating an evil result' (75) - Frankenstein lays the ground for her conviction by recognising his own guilt and the impossibility of admitting it:

I had no fear, therefore, that any circumstantial evidence could be brought forward strong enough to convict her. My tale was not one to announce publicly; its astounding horror would be looked upon as madness by the vulgar. Did anyone indeed exist, except I, the creator, who would believe, unless his senses convinced him, in the existence of the living monument of presumption and rash ignorance which I had let loose upon the world? [80]

Justine's predicament, and her death, is recognised by Frankenstein as his fault. This stresses the moral offensiveness of what he has done in its reference to the monster as a 'living monument of presumption and rash ignorance'. The earlier edition eschews such clear authoritative statements.

Frankenstein's admission of his guilt and the less equivocal morality that stems from it makes the ending of the novel less ambiguous and more stable. His final comment, 'Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed (215)[218], becomes the final spark of an extinguished fire, rather than a powerful expression of passion. The frequent emphasis on his responsibility throughout his story implies that he no longer feels the same desires as he did when younger.

He reveals his consciousness of his guilt again when he makes the remark at the end of Chapter VIII previously referred to, describing 'William and Justine [as] the first hapless victims to my unhallowed arts' [89], and also on his return to mainland Europe from Ireland. In 1818 his reasons for avoiding London and the places he had been with Clerval were to prevent himself from suffering further hurt (181-2). In 1831 the details of their journey change in order to incorporate a slightly sententious note:

I abhorred the face of man. Oh, not abhorred! they were my brethren, my fellow beings, and I felt attracted even to the most repulsive among them, as to creatures of an angelic nature and celestial mechanism. But I felt I had no right to share their intercourse. I had unchained an enemy among them, whose joy it was to shed their blood, and to revel in their groans. How they would, each and all, abhor me, and hunt me from the world, did they know my unhallowed acts, and the crimes which had their source in me!
[184-5]

This is an example of Frankenstein's self-deception, but within a framework of admitted guilt. The monster does not wish to destroy all humanity, but to hurt Frankenstein. There are also inconsistencies: shortly after this Frankenstein is to wed Elizabeth, but his fears before marriage are connected with his guilt [189-192]. This revision is not well integrated into the text.

Even though Frankenstein becomes less sensitive about his guilt in both editions - 'As time passed away I became more calm: misery had her dwelling in my heart, but I no longer talked in the same incoherent manner of my own crimes; sufficient for me was the consciousness of them' (183)[186], the later version emphasises his recognition of his direct responsibility in a way that the earlier does not.

The other change in Frankenstein's attitude concerns his view of the creation of the female monster. In 1818 he determines to create a companion for the original to fulfil his word, which he subsequently breaks - 'The promise I had made to the dæmon weighed upon my mind' (145). In 1831, his resolve seems more repentent: 'I felt as if I were placed under a ban - as if I had no right to claim their sympathies - as if never more might I enjoy companionship with them. Yet even thus I loved them to adoration; and to save them, I resolved to dedicate myself to my most abhorred task' [149]. The task of creating the female is now necessary for the protection of his family. It can be seen as part of an attempt on Frankenstein's part to atone for transgressing. In 1818 the creation of the female is more due to the monster in justice. It is almost as if Mary Shelley's attitude towards the monster has been affected by the popular response to it, so that she represents it as more directly threatening to 'domestic affection'.

Frankenstein's journey to England is also subject to a changed motivation. In 1818 he went to England to resolve the matter with the monster so that he might return to his family free (150); in 1831 part of his motivation is so that he would not upset his family [152]. This is again in keeping with his heightened consciousness of the moral dimensions of what he has done.

This more overtly moral tone has its effect on Walton. In 1818 his response to Frankenstein's tale is to resolve to be more stoical:

The brave fellows, whom I have persuaded to be my companions, look towards me for aid; but I have none to bestow. There is something terribly appalling in our situation, yet my courage and hopes do not desert me. We may survive; and if we do not, I will repeat the lessons of my Seneca, and die with a good heart. (210)

Walton's response does not imply that he has read Frankenstein's history as an unambiguous warning against the dangers of over-reaching.

Frankenstein also merely suggested that his tale might be useful to Walton in the event of success or failure (24). Thus the alternative conclusions offered by Frankenstein, that he should 'seek happiness in tranquillity', but that 'yet another might succeed' (215) are consistent with the contradictory attitude offered throughout, which is the most important structural principle of the novel.

1831 presents Walton's view of his state of affairs on September 2d in a different light:

The brave fellows, whom I have persuaded to be my companions, look towards me for aid; but I have none to bestow. There is something terribly appalling in our situation, yet my courage and hopes do not desert me. Yet it is terrible to reflect that the lives of all these men are endangered through me. If we are lost, my mad schemes are the cause. [212]

Here Walton appears to have learned the moral that Frankenstein was trying to teach. The structural ambivalence is not so nearly well balanced and the novel must be read as more of a straight condemnation of aspiration. This agrees with Poovey's reading when she sees the second edition as an apology on Mary Shelley's part for having had the temerity to write such a novel, her hideous progeny.⁶

Obviously there is a difficulty in taking the morality of one level of narration in a polysemous novel and identifying that as the moral of the novel. This is particularly dangerous in a novel where the different levels clash with each other as they do in *Frankenstein*. This is also what Percy Shelley did in his review of the first edition.⁷ Nevertheless, the changes made for the 1831 edition shift the balance so much in favour of the rather more simple and explicit morality, highlighted by Frankenstein and echoed by Walton, that there is an inconsistency created between the structure of the novel which casts doubt upon each level of narration and the moral message embodied within it. It is ironic that it is the later, and less satisfactory edition that has been reprinted again and again until Rieger's edition was published in 1974. Yet it is not surprising. The 1831 edition is a much more comfortable book, suggesting that certain forms of endeavour step beyond the bounds of nature and result in retribution for the offence. The earlier version operates in a less morally absolute world and presents genuine difficulties that can only be resolved through the mechanism of the hermeneutic circle, which requires a greater participation from the reader.

The great difference between the 1818 and 1831 editions confirms the delicate and ambivalent structure of the novel. The second version is more of a hybrid, but its comforting message and simpler reading prevent its unsatisfactory nature from being too apparent. Because the reader

is less involved in the novel's more simplistic moral issues, he is happier to accept a more conventional morality. The earlier edition is the greater achievement, and it is only to that that the elaborate and delicate mechanisms of evasion outlined in this thesis apply. The later edition is more definite in its morality and more limited in its scope.

Conclusion

Frankenstein encourages the reader to try to do what it prevents him from doing. The structure of the narrative and the oppositions contained within it suggest that it is possible, by a process of ironic mathematics, to establish some sort of 'metacomment', some final knowledge derived from the novel. Other readers have attempted to infer such a reading from the novel. Their failure to agree is more than a simple academic difference of opinion, but symptomatic of what the novel as a whole is about. Tropp, Baldick, Mary Poovey and Swingle are guilty of attempting to impose a reading on the text.

Their failure is a warning about the dangers of over-concentration on what seem purely objective rational strategies of reading. Simpson suggests in the first chapter of *Irony and Authority in Romantic Poetry* that the first line of Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' - 'Thou still unravished bride of quietness' - refers not only to the composite urn Keats had imagined, but also to the poem that embodies that creation. The poem itself has not been 'ravished' by the attempt to impose meaning on it, because it has rejected any attempts to force it to be other than itself.¹ The attempt to draw from *Frankenstein* any precise or authoritative reading is similarly a form of rape. Or, to put it in terms more appropriate to the novel, it is an unlawful study.

Consequently, *Frankenstein* can be seen as the quintessential Romantic novel because of the way that it challenges conventional forms of sense-making by disrupting the 'easy attribution of cause and effect'.² As this thesis demonstrates, it offers possible mechanisms for constructing authoritative readings but then compromises them by a variety of strategies.

Paradise Lost seems to offer itself as a key to the novel, but the monster's unilateral use and interpretation of it is not shared by Frankenstein, and the monster's reading alters as he changes his identification within it. Frankenstein, whom the monster identifies as God, can also be seen to shift his identification within the framework of the relationships in the poem. Ultimately all *Paradise Lost* supplies is a language to describe the relationship between the monster and Frankenstein, but with no fixed moral value attached to its signs.

The theory of Necessity might seem to provide some form of structure, predicated as it is upon the principle of cause and effect. All three central figures, Walton, Frankenstein and the monster, offer explanations for their actions based upon their education and early experiences. There are two difficulties: the first is that they cannot be comprehensive in their accounts of the influences bearing upon them, and the second is that it is not possible in a first-person narrative to establish a sufficiently detached standpoint from which to view one's own history because the act of review constitutes part of that history and has an influence upon the scheme of priority being outlined. Furthermore, the conflict between Frankenstein's education and the monster's gives rise to a clash of preconceptions and prejudices that results in their opposition throughout the novel.

Necessity presupposes a consistent relationship between influence and effect, but there are insufficient grounds for comparison. This creates a position like that warned against by Percy Shelley in his *Essay on Life*:

It is sufficiently easy, indeed, to form any proposition concerning which we are ignorant just not so absurd as not to be contradictory in itself, and defy refutation. The possibility of whatever enters into the wildest imagination to conceive is thus triumphantly vindicated. But it is enough that such assertions should be either contradictory to the known laws of nature, or exceed the limits of our experience, that their fallacy or irrelevancy to our consideration should be demonstrated. They persuade, indeed, only those who desire to be persuaded.³

In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley has both asserted the proposition of Necessity and demonstrated its irrefutability, aware of the conditional nature of that which can be neither proven nor disproven.

One of the more obvious differences between the monster and Frankenstein is in their responses to nature. Frankenstein's attitude is ambiguous: he sees it as a resource from which he can draw what he wants; but he also wishes it to be a background into which he can merge at will. His egotism oscillates between extreme self-assertion and extreme unobtrusiveness, neither of which offer a satisfactory strategy. The monster also struggles with his relationship to nature. An unnatural creation, he is not of nature and his attempts to become part

of it, by for example imitating the song of the birds (99), or looking at his reflection in a pool (109) only emphasise his individuality without defining his identity. However, he is also influenced greatly by the nature surrounding him, both by its sympathy with and antagonism to his feelings. Ultimately, nature is presented too ironically to be knowable in the novel.

All these processes have implications for knowledge. Both Frankenstein and the monster rely upon different and mutually contradictory explanations of their world. They each seek to read the other in terms of their own codes. So, for instance, when the monster comes into Frankenstein's room on the night of his creation (53), Frankenstein ascribes to him intentions and potentials that it is clear from the monster's account he cannot possess. Similarly, the monster ascribes to Frankenstein certain roles and responsibilities within the framework of *Paradise Lost* (95) that Frankenstein does not recognise. All knowledge in the novel is compromised by its provisional nature: a reading can only be generated by ignoring inconsistencies, yet the novel as a whole has the appearance of coherence. The reader is encouraged to try to impose an authoritative reading on it, but prevented from doing so.

The paradoxical nature of the 1818 version of the novel is highlighted by comparison with the 1831 edition which removes much of the ambivalence and gives the novel a far clearer moral edge. Frankenstein's early education is completely recast to suggest the possibility of a divine dimension controlling his fate, and he is made both more reprehensible and more sympathetic. He is made to conform more to the pattern of the conventional overreacher, but the influence of Necessity is down-played in order to apportion blame.

What Mary Shelley presents is a pattern which can be viewed from an infinite number of different positions, from each of which it looks different. The reader is forced therefore to question every causal assumption he has made and the whole principle of causality is thus called into question. One might well argue that the reason for the popularity of the second edition is because of its more comforting nature: it offers more of a coherent explanation and puts the reader in an easier position. The 1818 version has the effect of 'disturb(ing)

the reader's orthodox orientation in the world around him'⁴ in order to afford 'a point of view to the imagination for the delineation of human passions more comprehensive and commanding than any which the ordinary relations of existing events can yield' (6).

When the monster is describing his development he patterns his experience on *Paradise Lost*, a literary work he has not read at the time he is describing. However, there are two difficulties with the monster's strategy. First of all, the pattern he uses is not the stable pattern of relationships he believes it to be; but secondly, he, a fictional construct is self-consciously fictionalising his own experience. We begin to develop uncountable layers of narrative irony here: a character patterns his experience in terms of *Paradise Lost* in his discourse, which is contained within his creator's discourse, which is included as part of a journal, although checked by its speaker, which is included as part of a series of fictional letters sent to a fictional lady in England by her brother.

The whole process is so self-conscious, a judgement encouraged by the apparent corroborating details - Felix's and Safie's letters, Walton's meeting the monster - that the reader must be suspicious. The reliability of the first-person narrative is very much called into question, for the novel is entirely composed of characters giving accounts of their own experience. The novel itself specifically highlights the problems of rhetoric and of using fictional models. However, whilst there may appear to be a balance of probability against the truth of what the characters say and the reliability of the novel's discourse as a whole, it is always possible to read it at face value. There are two opposing forces held in balance by the very existence, and, one might also add, by the popularity of the book in whichever edition. On the one hand there are the substantial reasons for doubting everything in the book, but on the other hand there is equally strongly the fact of the narrative itself. A fictional narrative which calls into question the reliability of fictional narratives is nonetheless capable of sustaining interest in a sequence of events.

Whilst the various discourses held together in the novel clash with each other by their refusal to reinforce each other to establish any form of authority, they are held in equilibrium by the various

destabilising devices which subvert the complete reliability of any of them. *Paradise Lost*, nature and Necessity act as 'Romantic ironists' by appearing to provide clear explanations, but proving so unknowable and slippery that the possibility of knowing anything is severely compromised.

What is produced is a multiplicity of readings, none of which is complete in itself, all of which are subverted by others and their own internal inconsistency, which are reliant upon each other. Mary Shelley's ambiguous reference to 'my hideous progeny', which can refer both to the monster and the novel, has an appropriateness in terms that Baldick would recognise: just as the monster lacks organic unity because of the materials of which it is made, so does the novel lack a clear metacomment because it binds together a spectrum of conflicting codes.⁵ However, the monster's existence in the novel cannot be denied any more than the novel's coherence as a compelling fiction.

Ultimately, the novel emphasises the subjectivity of all apparently objective rational processes, but recognises the essentially subjective nature of the response to itself. Rather than advancing an ideology or presenting a critique of ideology, *Frankenstein* subverts all certainty and balances precariously a number of contradictions: it emphasises the dangers of solipsism, while demonstrating the impossibility of objective judgement, it balances its own narrative coherence against the arguments contained within it for the lack of any form of coherence. Its success is to dramatise the paradox of its own existence in the light of the disintegrative forces it contains, highlighting the fragile and provisional nature of all knowledge.

Notes.

Introduction:

References to the 1818 edition (ed. James Rieger (1974) are given in the text in round brackets (x) and to the 1831 edition (ed. M.K. Joseph (1969)) in square brackets [x]. References to *Paradise Lost* in the Oxford Standard Authors edition, edited by Douglas Bush (1966) are given in square brackets thus: [PL Y, l. x].

Romantic Irony:

1. David Simpson, *Irony and Authority in Romantic Poetry* (1979) p. ix.
2. Simpson op.cit. p. xi.
3. Simpson op.cit. p. xii.
4. Percy Shelley's 'Review of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*' in *Shelley's Prose* ed. David Lee Clark (1966) p. 307.
5. L.J. Swingle, 'Frankenstein and its Romantic Relatives: Problems of Knowledge in English Romanticism' in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 15 (Spring 1973) p. 64
6. Simpson op.cit. p. 102-3.
7. Simpson op.cit. p. 11.
8. Simpson op.cit. p. 65.
9. Simpson op.cit. p. 78.
10. Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow* (1987) p.43.
11. Baldick op.cit. p. 34-35.
12. Percy Shelley's 'Review of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*' in *Shelley's Prose* ed. David Lee Clark (1966) p. 307.
13. Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (1984) p. 128.
14. The monster's ambiguous and unstable status makes it difficult at times to find a consistently appropriate pronoun. Frankenstein himself changes his pronoun for the monster within the same sentence on one occasion (53 ll. 32-5). I have used 'he' and 'it' to refer to the monster as they have seemed appropriate.
15. Simpson op.cit. p. 190.

Chapter 1: Critical Reading

References to the works discussed in this chapter will be indicated by the use of square brackets and the initial letter of the author. Thus, Tropp will be [T x]; Baldick [B x]; Poovey [P x]; Swingle [S x]; Clemit [C x].

Chapter 2: *Paradise Lost*

1. Poovey op.cit. p. 126.
2. Baldick op.cit. p. 40.
3. Poovey op.cit. p. 126.
4. Baldick op.cit. p. 40-3.
5. *Paradise Lost* IV ll. 32-113; IX ll. 49-178.
6. Simpson op.cit. p. 39-40. In other respects, as a 'Romantic ironist', the monster is like the child.

7. quoted by Rieger (132).
8. quoted by Rieger (135).
9. Poovey op.cit. p. 139.
10. Poovey op.cit. p. 126.
11. Poovey op.cit. p. 139.
12. see Chapter 4.
13. Christopher Small, *Ariel like a Harpy* (1972) p. 48.
14. identified by Rieger (201)

Chapter 3: Necessity and Intellectual Development

1. Percy Shelley's 'Review of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*' in *Shelley's Prose* ed. David Lee Clark (1966) p. 307. See also note.
2. *Political Justice* ed. Kramnick (1976) p. 336/7.
3. *Caleb Williams* ed. Maurice Hindle (1988) p. 112.
4. *Caleb Williams* ed. Maurice Hindle (1988) p. 336/7.
5. Poovey op.cit. p. 132.
6. See Chapter 5.
7. Martin Tropp, *Mary Shelley's Monster* (1976) p. 17-21.
8. *The Enquirer*, quoted in *The Anarchist Reader* p.270-3. (Full details unobtainable, but see photocopy in Appendix.)
9. Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley, Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (1988) p. 50.
10. Percy Shelley's 'Review of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*' in *Shelley's Prose* ed. David Lee Clark (1966) p. 307.
11. See Chapter 6.
12. Simpson op.cit. p. 20.
13. Mellor op.cit. p. 50.
14. Mellor op.cit. p. 49.
15. The Monster's account of his development of perceptions and intellectual capacities is in accordance to Lockean theory as developed by Condillac. Samuel Holmes Vasbinder in *Scientific Attitudes in Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein'* summarises the process thus:

An analysis of chapter III [of Volume III] of *Frankenstein* shows that the sensationalist theory is the underlying principle beneath every thought and discovery of the artificial man's emerging consciousness. Mary has used the philosophy of Condillac and pinned it for complete exposition to the categories of Hartley. Condillac supplied the theory and Hartley the method whereby she explained the early mental life of the artificial man. (p. 45)

He identifies Mary Shelley's use of Locke's *tabula rasa* as developed by Condillac in his *Treatise on the Sensations*. However, he also recognises Mary Shelley's use of Hartley's categories from *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations*. Hartley identifies seven categories:

1. Impressions made on the external senses.
2. Natural or artificial beauty or deformity.
3. The opinions of others concerning us.
4. Our possession or want of the means of happiness, and security from, or subjection to hazards or misery.

5. The pleasures and pains of our fellow creatures.
6. The affections excited in us by the contemplation of the Deity or
7. Moral beauty or deformity.
(D. Hartley, *Observations on Man, his Frame, his Duty, and his Expectations* (1749) p. 3, quoted by Vasbinder p. 41)

These give rise progressively to the sensations, followed by the imagination, ambition, self-interest, sympathy, and theosophy and the moral sense.

16. Mellor op.cit. p. 50.
17. see note 14.
18. Swingle op.cit. p. 52.
19. Baldick op.cit. Chapter 2.
20. Percy Shelley's 'Review of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*' in *Shelley's Prose* ed. David Lee Clark (1966) p. 307-8.

Chapter 4: Nature

1. Simpson op.cit. p. 102.
2. Simpson op.cit. p. 98.
3. Simpson op.cit. p. 114.
4. Simpson op.cit. p. 116.
5. Small op.cit. p. 44.
6. Simpson op.cit. p. 21.
7. Simpson op.cit. p. 100-1.
8. Small op.cit. p. 255.
9. Muriel Spark, *Child of Light* (1951) p. 139.
10. Small op.cit. p. 62.
11. Small op.cit. p. 62.
12. quoted by Rieger (132).
13. Poovey op.cit. p. 126.
14. Tropp op.cit. p. 41-47 *passim*.
15. i) During this journey, I sometimes joined Elizabeth, and exerted myself to point out to her the various beauties of the scene. I often suffered my mule to lag behind, and indulged in the misery of reflection. At other times I spurred on the animal before my companions, that I might forget them, the world, and, more than all, myself. When at a distance, I alighted, and threw myself on the grass, weighed down by horror and despair. (90)
ii) On his journey to England he fails to respond to what he sees. This isolation from beauty and its influence is in marked contrast to Clerval's mood when the two friends join each other at Strasbourg: 'How great was the contrast between us! He was alive to every new scene; joyful when he saw the beauties of the setting sun, more happy when he beheld it rise, and recommence a new day. ... "This is what it is to live;" he cried, "now I enjoy existence."' (151-2).

Clerval responds to the natural beauty around him, whereas Frankenstein seems to attempt to impose his dark mood on his surroundings, yet, as narrator, he is aware of the beauty of the landscape through which they are passing: 'I was occupied by gloomy

thoughts, and neither saw the descent of the evening star, nor the golden sun-rise reflected in the Rhine' (152).

The mere natural landscape and the sublime in nature does not influence Frankenstein, but the presence of man in nature seems to be more forceful: 'We travelled at the time of the vintage, and heard the songs of the labourers, as we glided down the stream. Even I, depressed in mind, and my spirits continually agitated by gloomy feelings, even I was pleased' (152-3).

16. Poovey op.cit. p. 139.
17. Simpson op.cit. p. 33.
18. Baldick op.cit. p. 14.
19. Simpson op.cit. p. 113-37 *passim*; Small op.cit. p. 44.
20. cf.
Thoughts, whither have ye led me , with what sweet
Compulsion thus transported me to forget
What hither brought us? Hate, not love, nor hope
Of Paradise for hell, hope here to taste
Of pleasure, but all pleasure to destroy,
Save what is in destroying; other joy
To me is lost. (*Paradise Lost* Book IX, ll. 473-479)
21. see p. 69.

Chapter 5: Knowledge

1. Keats, Letter to Benjamin Bailey, 22nd November, 1817.
2. Referred to by Simpson op.cit. p. 78.
3. Swingle op.cit. p. 55.
4. see Chapter 4.
5. *Paradise Lost* Book IX, ll. 115 - 139.
6. Simpson op.cit. p. x-xi.
7. Swingle op.cit. p. 55.
8. Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* p. 4-5
9. see Introduction.
10. Tropp op.cit. p. 43.
11. Tropp op.cit. p. 46.

Chapter 6: The 1831 Changes

1. e.g. among others, Poovey, Spark.
2. see Rieger, *The Mutiny Within* (1967), Appendix p. 237-47, 'Dr Polidori and the Genesis of *Frankenstein*'.
3. 'The Stage and Film Children of *Frankenstein*: A Survey' in *The Endurance of Frankenstein* ed. Levine and Knoepfelmacher (1979) p. 243.
4. Poovey op.cit. p.132-42.
5. This incident occurs just after the monster has killed William and realised that he can retaliate: 'I, too, can create desolation; my enemy is not impregnable; this death will carry despair to him, and a thousand other miseries shall torment and destroy him' (139). In the 1831 edition, the word 'impregnable' is changed to 'invulnerable' [143], which suggests a more personal defensiveness on Frankenstein's part.

But there is a further alteration. The monster discovers the miniature of Frankenstein's mother which will lead to the death of Justine Moritz. His immediate reaction is reminiscent of Satan's first reaction to seeing Eve in *Paradise Lost* Book IX:

It was a portrait of a most lovely woman. In spite of my malignity, it softened and attracted me. For a few moments I gazed with delight on her dark eyes, fringed by deep lashes, and her lovely lips; but presently my rage returned: I remembered that I was for ever deprived of the delights that such beautiful creatures could bestow; and that she whose resemblance I contemplated would, in regarding me, have changed that air of divine benignity to one expressive of disgust and affright.

(139)

The sight of the picture of Caroline Beaufort, in one sense the monster's grandmother, almost has the effect of softening the monster's heart. One might argue that, in a sense, it was Caroline's death that precipitated the monster's creation by depriving Victor Frankenstein of the loving control of a mother, and by creating in him the resentment towards the female sex that led him to create offspring without maternal assistance and that later leads him, in his egotism, to ignore the threat to his wife - and potential mother to his children - from his creation.

As with Eve's effect on Satan (*PL IX*, ll.455-471), the sight of goodness and beauty initially inspires an inclination towards good, but subsequently results in an augmented anguish by reminding the monster what he is deprived of. Like Satan, the monster's response to this effect is a redoubling of his destructive thoughts. However, the final stage of his degradation is quite self-induced, and in response to no action of anyone else. The consequence of this is the monster's first cold-blooded and purely malicious act: his murder by proxy of Justine: 'Here, I thought, is one of those whose smiles are bestowed on all but me; she shall not escape: thanks to the lessons of Felix, and the sanguinary laws of man, I have learned how to work mischief' (140).

In 1831, instead of remaining content with the simple resonance of this understated incident, Mary Shelley developed the ironies and implications further. She inserted after 'she shall not escape' in the previous quotation

And then I bent over her, and whispered 'Awake, fairest, thy lover is near - he who would give his life but to obtain one look of affection from thine eyes: my beloved, awake!'

The sleeper stirred; a thrill of terror ran through me. Should she indeed awake, and see me, and curse me, and denounce the murderer? Thus would she assuredly act, if her darkened eyes opened, and she beheld me. The thought was madness; it stirred the fiend within me - not I, but she shall suffer: the murder I have committed because I am forever robbed of all that she could give me, she shall atone. The crime had its source in her: be hers the punishment! [143-144].

This complicates this scene, and makes the monster appear less rational than he has appeared thus far. The 1818 text presents a malevolent act which is the consequence of a rational progression;

the 1831 text gives us a warped psychology that exults in the exquisite cruelty of its action and that presents a specious argument to justify that action. In the earlier text Justine is killed because she is human and beautiful - and coincidentally a surrogate mother to the Frankenstein family; in the 1831 edition Justine is killed partly because of her beauty, but also because by some process of deformed logic the monster has come to see her as responsible for his plight. This must reduce the sympathy for the monster on the part of the reader.

6. Poovey op.cit. p.137.
7. Percy Shelley's 'Review of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*' in *Shelley's Prose* ed. David Lee Clark (1966) p. 307-8.

Conclusion

1. Simpson op.cit. p. 1-14.
2. Simpson op.cit. p. 113.
3. Percy Shelley 'Essay on Life' in *Shelley's Prose* ed. David Lee Clark (1966) p. 178.
4. Simpson op.cit. p. 113:
Simpson suggests that in Romantic poetry, 'Instead of cause and effect we have constant conjunction; not truth but probability, and epistemology in general is placed under strain as a viable way of producing meaning ... To upset the easy attribution of cause and effect is to disturb the reader's orthodox orientation in the world about him.
5. Baldick op.cit. (p. 14) suggests that the monster's creation is analogous to the operation of the Fancy in Coleridge's definition:
Fancy, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word Choice. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.
(*Biographia Literaria* p. 160)

Coleridge emphasises the static and empirical nature of the Fancy, in contrast to the secondary Imagination, of which he says, 'It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are' essentially fixed and dead' (*Biographia Literaria* p. 160).

The consequence of any attempt to impose a reading on the novel - an essentially intellectual activity - will be the creation of a monster, composed of bits of things that do not cohere. Any such imposed reading will be partial in both senses and incomplete.

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well what it is that we do. Government will not fail to employ it, to strengthen its hands, and perpetuate its institutions. If we could even suppose the agents of government not to propose to themselves an object, which will be apt to appear in their eyes, not merely innocent, but meritorious; the evil would not the less happen. Their views as instructors of a system of education, will not fail to be analogous to their views in their political capacity: the data upon which their conduct as statesmen, is vindicated, will be the data upon which their instructions are founded. It is not true that our youth ought to be instructed to venerate the constitution, however excellent; they should be led to venerate truth; and the constitution only so far as it corresponds with their uninfluenced deductions of truth. Had the scheme of a national education been adopted when despotism was most triumphant, it is not to be believed that it could have for ever stifled the voice of truth. But it would have been the most formidable and profound contrivance for that purpose, that imagination can suggest. Still, in the countries where liberty chiefly prevails, it is reasonably to be assumed that there are important errors, and a national education has the most direct tendency to perpetuate these errors, and to form all minds upon one model.

EDUCATION THROUGH DESIRE

WILLIAM GODWIN
(*The Enquirer*, 1797)

Liberty is one of the most desirable of all sublunary advantages. I would willingly therefore communicate knowledge without infringing, or with as little as possible violence to, the volition and individual judgment of the person to be instructed.

Again; I desire to excite a given individual to the acquisition of knowledge. The only possible method in which I can excite a sensitive being to the performance of a voluntary action is by the exhibition of motive.

Motives are of two sorts, intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motives are those which arise from the inherent nature of the thing recommended. Extrinsic motives are those which have no constant and unalterable connection with the thing recommended, but are combined with it by accident or at the pleasure of some individual.

Thus I may recommend some species of knowledge by a display of the advantages which will necessarily attend upon its acquisition or flow from its possession. Or, on the other hand, I may recommend it despotically, by allurements or menaces, by showing that the pursuit of it will be attended with my approbation, and that the neglect of it will be regarded by me with displeasure.

The first of these classes of motives is unquestionably the best. To be governed by such motives is the pure and genuine condition of a rational being. By exercise it strengthens the judgment. It elevates us with a sense of independence. It causes a man to stand alone and is the only method by which he can be rendered truly an individual, the creature not of implicit faith but of his own understanding.

If a thing be really good, it can be shown to be such. If you cannot demonstrate its excellence, it may well be suspected that you are no proper judge of it. Why should not I be admitted to decide upon that which is to be acquired by the application of my labour?

Is it necessary that a child should learn a thing before it can have any idea of its value? It is probable that there is no one thing that is of eminent importance for a child to learn. The true object of juvenile education is to provide against the age of five-and-twenty a mind well regulated, active and prepared to learn. Whatever will inspire habits of industry and observation will sufficiently answer this purpose. Is it not possible to find something that will fulfill these conditions, the benefit of which a child shall understand, and the acquisition of which he may be taught to desire? Study with desire is real activity; without desire it is but the semblance and mockery of activity. Let us not, in the eagerness of our haste to educate, forget all the ends of education.

The most desirable mode of education, therefore, in all instances where it shall be found sufficiently practicable, is

that which is careful that all the acquisitions of the pupil shall be preceded and accompanied by desire. The best motive to learn is a perception of the value of the thing learned. The worst motive, without deciding whether or not it be necessary to have recourse to it, may well be affirmed to be constraint and fear. There is a motive between these, less pure than the first but not so displeasing as the last, which is desire, not springing from the intrinsic excellence of the object, but from the accidental attractions which the teacher may have annexed to it. . . .

Nothing can be more happily adapted to remove the difficulties of instruction, than that the pupil should first be excited to desire knowledge, and next that his difficulties should be solved for him, and his path cleared, as often and as soon as he thinks proper to desire it.

This plan is calculated entirely to change the fact of education. The whole formidable apparatus which has hitherto attended it is swept away. Strictly speaking, no such characters are left upon the scene as either preceptor or pupil. The boy, like the man, studies because he desires it. He proceeds upon a plan of his own invention, or which, by adopting, he has made his own. Everything bespeaks independence and equality. The man, as well as the boy, would be glad in cases of difficulty to consult a person more informed than himself. That the boy is accustomed almost always to consult the man, and not the man the boy, is to be regarded rather as an accident than anything essential. Much even of this would be removed if we remembered that the most inferior judge may often, by the varieties of his apprehension, give valuable information to the most enlightened. The boy, however, should be consulted by the man unaffectedly, not according to any preconceived scheme, or for the purpose of persuading him that he is what he is not.

There are three considerable advantages that would attend upon this species of education.

First, liberty. Three-quarters of the slavery and restraint that are now imposed upon young persons would be annihilated at a stroke.

Secondly, the judgement would be strengthened by continual exercise. Boys would no longer learn their lessons after

the manner of parrots. No one would learn without a reason, satisfactory to himself, why he learned; and it would perhaps be well, if he were frequently prompted to assign his reasons. Boys would then consider for themselves whether they understood what they read. To know when and how to ask a question is no contemptible part of learning. Sometimes they would pass over difficulties and neglect essential preliminaries, but then the nature of the thing would speedily recall them and induce them to return to examine the tracts which before had been overlooked. For this purpose it would be well that the subjects of their juvenile studies should often be discussed, and that one boy should compare his progress and his competence to decide in certain points with those of another. There is nothing that more strongly excites our enquiries than this mode of detecting our ignorance.

Thirdly, to study for ourselves is the true method of acquiring habits of activity. The horse that goes round in a mill, and the boy that is anticipated and led by the hand in all his requirements, is not active. I do not call a wheel that turns around fifty times a minute active. Activity is a mental quality. If therefore you would generate habits of activity, turn the boy loose in the fields of science. Let him explore the path for himself. Without increasing his difficulties, you may venture to leave him for a moment and suffer him to ask the question before he receives the information. Far be it from the system here laid down to increase the difficulties of youth. No, it diminishes them a hundredfold. Its office is to produce inclination, and a willing temper makes every burden light.

Lastly, it is a tendency of this system to produce in the young, when they are grown up to the stature of men, a love of literature. The established modes of education produce the opposite effect, unless in a fortunate few, who, by the celerity of their progress, and the distinctions they obtain, perhaps escape from the general influence. But, in the majority of cases, the memory of our slavery becomes associated with the studies we pursued, and it is not till after repeated struggles, that those things can be rendered the objects of our choice, which were for so long a time the themes of compulsion.

