JACQUES LACAN AND MARY SHELLEY: REPRESSED ABANDONMENT IN FRANKENSTEIN

A Paper
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
North Dakota State University
of Agriculture and Applied Science

By

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Major Department:
English

April 2010

Fargo, North Dakota

North Dakota State University
Graduate School

Title

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The Supervisory Committee certifies that this ***disquisition*** complies with North Dakota State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

ABSTRACT

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Mary Shelley's early life was fraught with developmental problems. Like Victor Frankenstein's Creation, she lacked a genuine chance to experience what Jacques Lacan calls the Real with her mother. While some readings of Frankenstein point to Mary's early development as being successful and properly supported by William Godwin's love, thus making her upbringing parallel to Victor's, Mary nonetheless experienced many of the same deprivations the Creation in Frankenstein did.

In this paper, the author maintains that, based on a Lacanian analysis of Frankenstein, Victor Frankenstein's emotional detachment from his Creation and others reflects Mary Shelley's psychological sense that she had been abandoned and betrayed by the principal people in her life, including William Godwin, Mary Jane Godwin, Percy Shelley, and her dead mother, Mary Wollstonecraft.

The feeling of being an outcast that the Creation expresses so eloquently in his Lacanian Symbolic phase coincides, in Mary's life, with the repressed abandonment issues that were coming to the forefront of her consciousness at the time she wrote her famous novel. Mary's chain of signifiers, indicating her repressed feelings, came out during her "session on the couch" in Lake Geneva and became metaphorically embodied in her seminal novel. In a Lacanian sense, the Creation was Mary's alter ego. Mary used the written word to express her

feelings and was destined for such a creative expression of her inner life by being born into a literary family. Mary Shelley used Frankenstein as a vehicle to deal with the pain and the injustices she experienced during the first two decades of her life.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"Nothing malfunctions more than human reality" - Jacques Lacan (Seminar III 82)

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is fundamentally a work about the responsibility of nurturing a child from birth; it is a work, too, that reveals insights into its author's early life, formative years blighted by both physical and emotional abandonment and the lack of a nurturing paternal relationship. Mary's[1] early family life was tumultuous, and according to Anne K. Mellor, "We can never forget how much her desperate desire for a loving and supportive parent defined her character, shaped her fantasies, and produced her fictional idealizations of the bourgeois family" (1).

Using Jacques Lacan's ideas, chiefly the theory he put forward regarding a child's stages of development, I will argue that Frankenstein was the product of Mary's unconscious desire to address the physical and emotional vacuum caused by the death of her mother, by the emotional disconnection she felt from her father, by the horrid relationship with her stepmother, and by the frequent physical and emotional absence of her husband. The life of Victor Frankenstein is an objective summation of the miscellaneous relationships of Mary's formative years, while the life of the Creation is a despairing metaphor for the subjective feelings of abandonment that Mary dealt with during that formative period. Mary's feelings of abandonment had been successfully repressed and can only be gleaned from a

[1]Mary and Percy Shelley are referred to by their first names to distinguish between each particular Shelley.

close comparison of her characterizations of Victor and Victor's creation in Frankenstein.

As the daughter of two of the most forward-thinking authors of the eighteenth century, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley had a remarkable heritage of accomplishment to live up to. Eileen Bigland claims that William Godwin's An Enquiry into Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness (1793) was seen as a "Bible by the English Jacobins" (1) and would go on to have a profound impact on the young poet Percy Shelley. Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) was one of the premiere feminist works of the eighteenth century. The published words of her parents gave Mary an obvious inclination toward a literary career, but it was her unconscious feelings of abandonment in early life that would have the greatest influence on what form her imaginative life and her seminal work, Frankenstein, would take.

CHAPTER TWO: MARY'S FAMILY

Mary's Family and Early Life

Mary Shelley's troubles seem foreshadowed in the difficult lives of her illustrious parents. William Godwin was born in 1756 in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, to strict Calvinists. By the time Godwin was eleven, his upbringing was based "more on strictness than love, on learning than play, [and] on duty...than pleasure" (Marshall 16), and this pragmatic, unemotional rearing would be replicated in the rearing of his daughter.

Godwin, in his mid-twenties, was "a sanctimonious prig" (Bigland 2), and his arrogant, opinionated nature showed itself throughout his life, as is evident in his eventual haughty disapproval of Percy and Mary's relationship. By the time his fortieth birthday approached, he realized that something was lacking in his life, chiefly the stability of having a wife. It was ironic that he was contemplating marriage, "an institution he had violently condemned on several occasions, [but] he strongly disapproved of promiscuous relationships" (Bigland 5). Eventually he succumbed to the pressure of his loneliness, began courting various women, and found it "hard...to resist the blandishments of the bevy of young and not so young women who fawned upon him at every opportunity" (Bigland 5). After courting many of these women, he found an attractive, fiery spirit whom he fell passionately in love with in Mary Wollstonecraft.

Mary Wollstonecraft was born in 1759 in Spitalfields, London, and spent a miserable childhood in Hoxton, "her father being a drunken bully who beat his Irish wife with distressing regularity and never attempted to help in his children's

upbringing" (Bigland 7). Wollstonecraft witnessed many households like her own, and as a child she decided to "do her utmost to right such wrongs" (Bigland 7). Janet Todd says that Wollstonecraft "assumed a mother's role for the children...especially the girls" (11). At the age of twenty-one, she decided that she and her two younger sisters would become teachers in order to earn their own independent living. However, the failure of their school and the death of her close childhood friend Fanny Blood during child birth would mark Wollstonecraft's early life as fairly unhappy.

Wollstonecraft returned to London and, in 1790, wrote A Vindication of the Rights of Men. Her first Vindication brought her moderate success, and she followed this with A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, which was to be her most famous and influential work. Although at this time she possessed some wealth and considerable fame (or infamy), her personal life continued to be troubled. She had multiple failed relationships that produced a child out of wedlock, Fanny Imlay, and two suicide attempts. Gilbert Imlay, an American adventurer whom Bigland described as a "born philanderer" (11), and who fathered Wollstonecraft's daughter, lacked affection for Wollstonecraft and constantly needed to be surrounded by other women. Later, Percy Shelley's attitude as husband and father during Mary and Percy's relationship would parallel Imlay's neglectful attitude toward Mary Wollstonecraft and young Fanny.

In time, Godwin and Wollstonecraft found themselves rubbing elbows with the London intellectual elite. Godwin and Wollstonecraft initially did not fall madly

in love, although their respect for one another was obvious. Soon, however, they began a courtship.

Within five months of their sexual relationship beginning, Wollstonecraft became pregnant. This obviously posed a problem for both. For Godwin, a staunch foe of the institution of marriage and a man who detested promiscuity, this was ammunition that his opponents might use against him. And Wollstonecraft, a woman of high, if unusual, moral principles, felt that "two illegitimate children with different fathers could not be explained to the conventional" (Todd 408). Godwin had stated in Political Justice that moral rules sometimes need to give way to special circumstances, and as Godwin told one of his correspondents, "every day of his life he was obliged to comply with institutions and customs which he wished to see abolished" (Marshall 186). A marriage inconsistent with his own moral code would become one of those special circumstances, and with little fanfare and hardly anyone knowing of their situation, Godwin and Wollstonecraft were married on March 29, 1797. They, along with Fanny, resided in a compound called The Polygon, each with separate apartments to better accommodate their independent personalities, though in time their "growing love and comradeship" (Marshall 188) would bring them tremendously close.

Eventually, on August 30, 1797, Godwin received the good news that their daughter, Mary, had been born. However, Wollstonecraft began suffering from septicemia (a condition of bacteria in the bloodstream) due to the pieces of placenta that had been left in her womb, and she was "rotting internally" (Todd 452). Because of her illness, she had to stop feeding young Mary (Marshall 189).

The physical and emotional pain took its toll on Wollstonecraft's body, and she died on September 10, 1797.

According to Lacanian theory, losing the mother/child connection during the early part of a child's life, the Real stage in Laconian development, has detrimental effects on the child's development. In Mary's case, losing her biological mother at such an early stage in her development and thus being unable to have the ultimate feeling of the Real, the pre-natal connection with the mother that continues into the first days of perfectly nurtured life, served to foster feelings of insecurity that Mary would unconsciously express in Frankenstein.

Godwin was heartbroken at his wife's death but vowed to raise both Mary and Fanny, treating Fanny as his own child. According to most accounts, Godwin was a doting and attentive parent early in the girls' lives: "To give Godwin his due, he was a conscientious and devoted father" (Bigland 25); while he was pursuing potential new wives, "Godwin became quite close to the children" (Mellor 5); "he became a playful, affectionate and caring father" (Marshall 195). The early years of Mary's life, after the death of her biological mother and before the introduction of her stepmother Mary Jane Clairmont, would prove to be the most affectionate and attentive time with her father.

Young Mary loved the attention from Godwin and "became intensely attached to her father, her only parent, whom she worshipped" (Mellor 6). For the first four years of her life, Mary lived in bliss, with the companionship of her stepsister Fanny and the full attention (when he was not writing) of her father. But

this ideal life was to change dramatically when her father began courting and, shortly after, marrying Mary Jane Clairmont in December of 1801.

With the introduction of her stepmother, the new Mrs. Godwin, Mary's closeness to her father was dashed. As much as he loved both his biological daughter and his stepdaughter Fanny, Godwin withdrew from much of the rearing of the children when he married Mary Jane Clairmont. According to Maurice Hindle, Godwin "felt an urgent concern about providing life proposals and solutions in the abstract, but shrank from getting too involved in the tiring and emotionally challenging (as well as hazardous) occupations of child rearing at close quarters" (xv).

Godwin, for the first time since the death of Mary Wollstonecraft, was able to devote a majority of his time to writing, and this would prove to have an adverse impact on Mary. In fact, Godwin "had deliberately distanced himself from his daughter [and] gratefully withdrew into his study and left the care of the children and the running of the household almost entirely to Mrs. Godwin" (Mellor 13). The precious moments Mary had shared with her father were reduced considerably with the introduction of the new family member.

Mary's relationship with her father and stepmother was tense. On one hand, Mary's affection for her father never waned, but on the other, her stepmother's constant put downs and ill treatment were a regular strain on the young girl. Mrs. Godwin spent much of her time trying to drive a wedge between Mary and her father. Because of Mary's devotion to her father and the fact that Mrs. Godwin resented the close relationship between the two, Mrs. Godwin

tormented Mary mercilessly. After her stepmother found out about the strength of the attachment Mary felt toward her only surviving biological parent, Mrs. Godwin treated her as wholly secondary to her own children:

> A potentially explosive situation developed between them. This was all the more dangerous since Mrs. Godwin always gave preference to her own daughter Jane but was forced to admit that she did not have 'such first-rate abilities' and that Mary always considered her stupid. The rivalry became so intense between stepmother and daughter that later Mary invariably referred to her as "an odious woman." (Marshall 294)

While the struggle between Mary and Mrs. Godwin occurred, her father seemed oblivious to the happenings. He appeared to take great care in removing himself from any sort of parenting duties and was content to let Mrs. Godwin handle the day-to-day running of the house. Mellor claims that, "although Godwin admired Mary, he does not seem to have favored or felt any special affection for his only biological daughter" (13).

Other scholars seem to debate this, as in the case of Marshall's description of the father/daughter relationship: "Mary was clearly Godwin's favorite, although he tried not to show it. For her part, Mary considered him her 'God' and remembered 'many childish instances of the excess of attachment' she bore him" (294). While there are differing opinions of how Godwin actually felt towards Mary during this time, it should be noted that Godwin was not as involved in his daughter's life, emotionally or physically, as he had been before he married Mrs. Godwin, and both Mellor and Marshall feel that there was no special attention paid

to Mary by Godwin. This was yet another cause for Mary's feeling of abandonment.

In the summer of 1812, Mary was sent to Dundee, Scotland, where William Baxter (an acquaintance of Godwin) and his family lived. Marshall explains that "the ostensible reason [for the visit] was her health, but the growing tension with Mrs. Godwin was probably the real cause" (294). Mary would spend the next two years of her life, except for short visits back to London, living and reveling in her life with her ideal family. As Mellor explains it, because of the Baxters Mary "came to idealize the bourgeois family as the source of emotional sustenance and of ethical value. They inspired her later fictional representations of the nuclear family..." (16). In Frankenstein, the De Laceys were to become Mary's representation of the Baxters.

Another important person entered Mary's life in 1812. It was during a visit to London in November of 1812 that Mary met Percy Shelley for the first time. Other than a brief encounter, nothing particular came of this first meeting. It was not until they met again in May of 1814, two months after Mary had returned to the Godwin home, that the two began any sort of relationship. Percy was twenty-one and Mary sixteen at the time, and as Marshall explained, "they rapidly fell in love" (306).

Mary, Percy, and Frankenstein

Percy Shelley was born August 4, 1792, near Sussex, England, to Sir Timothy Shelley, a wealthy baron who owned land and was a Member of Parliament. Percy received his education at Syon House preparatory school, Eton, and, for a brief time, Oxford. While at Eton, Percy read Godwin's Political Justice

and became an avowed atheist, which resulted in his being expelled twice from Eton, returning temporarily after the first time due to the influence of his father (Bigland 34). After returning to school once again, this time at Oxford, Percy wrote and published a pamphlet entitled The Necessity of Atheism, which resulted in his once more being expelled, this time with his best friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg, who would play a part in Percy's marriage to Mary Shelley later in their lives. This expulsion from Oxford was permanent, and afterward, Percy's relationship with his father worsened. Due to Percy's infatuation with Godwin's ideas and his refusal to renounce atheism, his wealthy father "refused to correspond with him and reduced his allowance to 200 pounds a year" (Marshall 295).

In 1811 he married sixteen-year-old Harriet Westbrook, with whom he had a daughter named Ianthe two years later. By most accounts his marriage to Harriet was more out of Romantic ideals than love; Bigland explains that Percy "swore he had married [Harriet] out of chivalry so that she might be saved from persecution" (43), though Bigland claims this may be an exaggeration from Percy (43). Unhappy after three years of marriage, Percy, caught up in his endless pursuit of intellectual stimulation, spent long stretches away from his wife and young daughter. Mellor explains that in addition to his scholarly quests, Percy also "felt a powerful psychological need to be surrounded by sympathetic and supportive women, a need fully met during his favored youth as the oldest son of a wealthy baronet by his young mother and four adoring younger sisters" (18-19). This need to be constantly surrounded by women would later have unpleasant effects in his relationship with Mary.

By the time he met Mary in 1812, Percy and Mary's father had begun their erratic relationship. While Percy was attracted to the fiery political activist's theories and principles, Godwin, who had for years been unable to handle monetary matters, was not only interested in the adoration Percy bestowed upon an author largely forgotten by 1812, but was also enamored of the enormous amount of money that Percy stood to inherit upon Sir Timothy Shelley's death. Thus, Percy and Godwin struck up a symbiotic friendship, with Percy gaining the intellectual stimulation he required and with Godwin gaining the economic support he needed to maintain his lifestyle (Marshall 304-05).

When he saw Mary again in May of 1814, Percy was drawn to her. She was no longer the little girl he remembered from their first meeting. Mellor writes, "Her beauty, intellectual interests, evident sympathy for him, and perhaps above all her name immediately attracted him" (19). Mary was also drawn to the young poet: "She was fascinated by the young idealist who was on such intimate terms with her beloved father and was helping the family so generously" (Marshall 306). It did not take long for Mary and Percy to declare their love for one another. A few months later, in July of 1814, Percy abandoned his daughter and pregnant wife and ran away with Mary and her stepsister Jane, who, according to Bigland, had followed the two lovers for a number of reasons (48-49).

For a man who wrote that "marriage was the most odious of all monopolies and that lovers should remain together only as long as both wanted to" (Marshall 307), Godwin was absolutely livid when he discovered that Mary and Percy, along with Jane, had disappeared. Part of his reaction stemmed from the attachment he

had developed late in his life to this "odious monopoly," but a majority of it was because he was now financially dependent on Percy. Mellor writes that, "Although he [Godwin] continued to demand that Shelley give him money, he refused to see or write to Mary for the next three-and-a-half years" (22). Mary was crushed at her father's newest abandonment and, after a time, became convinced that it was "money, not Shelley, [that] was the poison corroding her father's soul" (Bigland 70). Mary would never abandon her father, while it seems that Godwin would sell his only daughter off for the cost of his debts. While Godwin's feelings would change later in Mary's life, this was a defining perception in Mary's early life.

Mary, Percy, and Jane travelled Europe for six weeks. While it was a trying time for the three, particularly from lack of funds, Mary and Percy cherished the time they spent with each other. They returned to England broke, with much of Mary's family refusing to speak to her. Mary and Percy lived in London after this period but did not enjoy a particularly happy time. Percy was busy dodging creditors, a problem caused by his financial obligations to both Harriet and Mary's father, and the time the two spent with one another was severely limited. However, by October, Mary was pregnant (Bigland 58-66).

During this period Jane would become another thorn in Mary's side, with her constant presence and constant need for attention. Percy "developed a habit of taking long walks alone with Jane, which made Mary increasingly uneasy as her pregnancy developed" (Mellor 28-29). Mellor goes on to say that "Jane was more than ready to flout convention and become Percy's lover" (29). This was a blow to the pregnant Mary, who only wished for Percy's attention and love. When Mary

gave birth two months prematurely in February 1815 to a daughter, Percy continued his relationship with Jane, who by that time had taken to calling herself Claire. In March, Mary and Percy's child died. Mellor notes that the very next day, after finding out about the death, Percy still went out with Jane/Claire, according to Mary's personal journal (32).

While Mary was heartbroken, Mellor writes that Percy "clearly did not share Mary's grief at the death of this baby girl and was glad to leave the work of consoling Mary to Hogg" (32), who at this point had moved into their household at the urging of Percy. Mellor has argued that Percy went to such lengths as to encourage Mary to take Hogg as a lover.[2] Percy, meanwhile, took this particular time to be with Claire, causing further heartache for Mary. Eventually, to Mary's relief, Claire left for eight months, and Mary and Percy spent this time madly in love. By the spring of 1815, Mary was pregnant again (Mellor 33).

In January of 1816, Mary gave birth to William. Percy was ecstatic over the birth of a boy, but seemingly unwilling to give up his relationship with Claire, he implored Mary to travel to Switzerland, where Claire had gone in pursuit of the poet Lord Byron. Mary recalled how much enjoyment she got from her travels with Percy and was interested in meeting Lord Byron, so Mary, Percy, and their son William made the trip to Lake Geneva to spend the summer of 1816 with Claire, Lord Byron, and his physician Dr. William Polidori (Bigland 84).

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[2]In Mellor's book, Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters, she argues that Percy urged Mary into a sexual relationship with Hogg, which she says "lends further support to the suggestion that Percy was...trying to negotiate a sexual quid pro quo with Mary, her affair with Hogg for his affair with Claire" (30). Mellor goes on to say that nine separate sections were removed from Mary's journal from January-May of 1814. While this removal is not necessarily proof, it certainly is provocative.

During this period Mary, while in the company of Byron, Polidori, and Percy, felt happy, albeit anxious. Mellor explains what kind of mental state Mary was in at this point:

> Her troubled girlhood had left her with a deep need to belong to a stable family, to be passionately and unconditionally loved, with a love that would substitute for the nurturant parental love she had never received. This need was rendered acute by Mary's recent estrangement from the father whom she had idolized and who had now abandoned her. (36)

One evening, Byron suggested they all write a horror story to occupy their time. Percy, Byron, Dr. Polidori, and Mary all began an original composition that night. Of the four, Dr. Polidori later took Byron's story, developed and published it, but it was only Mary who actually finished and published her own work (Hindle xx).

With her father all but abandoning her, Percy and Claire's relationship still close and possibly sexual, and the recent death of her daughter, Mary still felt vulnerable, and her feelings of abandonment were still fresh. The presence of her son William alleviated some of these feelings, and being amongst friends, particularly one of such intellectual prowess as Lord Byron, helped improve her temperament.

However, Mary's repressed feelings were soon to express themselves metaphorically through her creation of one of literature's most striking characters. Within the gothic horror story she began on Lake Geneva during the summer of 1816, the story that would eventually become her most famous work,

Frankenstein, she placed a creature whose spurned existence summoned up the loneliness she herself had so intensely known.

CHAPTER THREE: LACAN AND REPRESSED ABANDONMENT

Criticism

There have been many works devoted to defining the principal meaning of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. Several, such as Laura P. Claridge's essay, touch on the "nature versus nurture" debate, the debate over whether the Creation is evil due to society or due to the way the Creation was raised. Others are psychoanalytical readings, as is Dean Franco's work. Still others, exemplified by U.C. Knoepflmacher's study, look for elements of Mary's life in her novel. There are too many sources detailing Mary Shelley's life, her works, and the influences on her fiction to cover in this disquisition, but a few especially important recently published secondary sources will be addressed here to show current issues being dealt with in analyses of Frankenstein.

The "nature versus nurture" debate has been an ongoing topic among scholars regarding Mary Shelley's work. A 2002 publication by Laura P. Claridge contributes to this debate by way of discussion of relationships in Frankenstein. Claridge notes that scholars tend to disregard what she feels as the most important facet of the novel, "the failure of human beings to 'parent' their offspring in such a way that they will be able to take part in society rather than retreat into themselves" (14). In her essay "Parent-Child Tensions in *Frankenstein*: The Search for Communion," Claridge asserts that Mary Shelley "concern[s] herself with 'domestic affection' – but more precisely, the lack of it, and how such a lack *undermines* 'universal virtue'...Shelley insists that man can live only through communion with others; solitude, for her, represents death" (15). Claridge spends a majority of her

essay discussing the relationships between Victor and his father, the Creation and Victor, and Captain Walton and several characters, particularly Victor, Walton's sister, and the Creation. To explain Mary Shelley's interest in inadequate emotional ties, Claridge mentions specific examples from Mary Shelley's life of failed nurturance, including William Godwin's rejection of Mary and her relationship with her husband Percy. Though Claridge points to these specific real life instances of Mary's experience that coincide with examples from Frankenstein, the connections she makes only *illustrate* her premise without exploring it in detail. Claridge shows the similarities between Mary's situation and the situation of her characters, and though Claridge analyzes the emotional lives of the characters in Mary's novel, she does not delve deeply into Mary's reasons for incorporating elements of her own psychological life into her characters' lives. Claridge's essay is an effective analysis of the "nature versus nurture" debate regarding the characters in Frankenstein, but it only touches superficially on factors in Mary's life that pertain to this debate, never attempting to answer how extensively Mary's life affected her work.

Multiple psychoanalytical readings of Frankenstein have been published over the years. One of them, a work by Dean Franco, shows some slight similarity to my paper. In 1998's "Mirror Images and Otherness in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein," Franco applies Lacan's theories of Mirror image and Otherness to the novel. Franco says that "Lacan's theory and structural schemes show us that the *characters* in Frankenstein are...constructed by the gaze and ordered by signifiers" (80, italics mine). The word "characters" denotes the major difference

between my argument and Franco's. Franco argues, "At times...[Victor] does not see his creations for the symbols that they are, symbols of desire for lost unity. At other times, Victor catches sight of himself in the gaze. In the gaze Victor sees himself being seen and recoils in horror at his own monstrosity" (94). Using Lacanian terms that will be utilized more thoroughly in my analysis of Frankenstein, terms such as "symbolic," "repression," and "desire," Franco's essay provides a *character* analysis of Victor and the Creation, but neglects to give attention to factors in Mary's life that cause her to portray the characters as she does. Franco explains that "the inconsistencies of Victor's reaction [to the Creation's awakening] are not due to Mary Shelley's turbulent writing, but to the turbulent nature of the novel's subjects" (80-81). Again, the term "subjects" is important: Franco is alerting the reader to the fact that an analysis will be performed on the characters in Frankenstein independent of their relationship to her life.

U.C. Knoepflmacher is also of some note in regards to the argument I make in this disquisition. In his 1979 essay "Thoughts on the Aggression of Daughters," Knoepflmacher notes that Mary Shelley was "fearful of releasing hostilities which – without a maternal model – she regarded (or wanted to regard) as exclusively male attributes – Mary Shelley could resort only to passitivity as a safer mode of resistance" (95). He stresses that Mary's conflicts over her deceased mother and over her erratic relationship with her father prefigure Victor and the Creation's eventual confrontation. As evidence, Knoepflmacher points to Mary's constant longing for respect from and a close relationship with Godwin. Knoepflmacher argues that instead of forcing any sort of direct confrontation in real life with

Godwin and Mary Jane Clairmont, Mary attempts to resolve her feelings of rejection by her father, her stepmother, and her stepsister through inclusion of parallel difficulties in the lives of her characters. However, Knoepflmacher makes no use of Lacanian theory in defending his claims.

Without fully anticipating the argument of this paper, these works reinforce its central thesis. Frankenstein is indeed a work on nature versus nurture, a reaction by its author to her own psychological development, and a covert fictionalization of Mary's rearing. This essay maintains that *all* of the factors mentioned by the aforementioned critics contributed to producing the novel. However, my contention is that applying Lacan to Mary's own *life*, not just analyzing the *characters* in her work provides the most productive approach to a commentary on Frankenstein. The most notable aspect of the novel is its reflection of Mary's sense of abandonment, and Lacanian analysis best reveals this suppressed problem.

Lacan and Abandonment

When Mary finished the work, she gave it to Percy to elicit his thoughts and advice and also to have him proofread it. She felt that, as the published author of their small family, he obviously had more experience and wisdom when it came to writing. Percy ended up rewriting large parts of the work in his own language, however, and Mary's intention was perhaps removed from a lot of the words and phrases she had chosen in earlier drafts[3]. So any slips of the tongue or

[3] Maurice Hindle notes in the Penguin Books revised edition of Frankenstein (1992) that there were "significant revisions made by Percy Shelley" (227) and that there were substantial variations between the 1818 publication and 1831 revised edition.

misspellings or chosen phrases were inevitably edited, changed, or taken out altogether. Nevertheless, based on the subject matter of Frankenstein alone, it is clear that abandonment is a key issue in the work, and it is not at all strange that this topic was chosen by Mary since her whole young life dealt with abandonment. The effect of this abandonment is best understood using theories developed from the work of Sigmund Freud by Jacques Lacan.

Jacques Lacan was a French psychoanalyst whose interest in the childhood "self" led him to develop his own theoretical frame in which to understand the development of the individual. Of greatest note, and the set of ideas which will be applied to Frankenstein, is Lacan's theory of the Three Orders. This theory, which describes three stages of development, the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic, is used by Lacan and his followers to explain the maturing process from infancy to adulthood. To Lacan, the unconscious is structured like a language, and metaphor plays a large part in Lacan's theory of language and the unconscious, and it is in metaphor that one can locate Mary Shelley's unconscious voice in the character of the Creation.

The main argument of this work implies that the Creation represents Mary and becomes a metaphor for her repressed feelings of abandonment. The signifiers of her unconscious are expressed in her work through the Creation. If one looks at the adult figures in Mary's life, one can see clearly where her feelings of abandonment originated.

Lacan explains that, "the forms that repression takes on...are...[what] Freud...calls the original traumatic experience" (Seminar I 44). The original

traumatic experience is typically the separation from the mother. However, the separation that normally occurs between a child and its mother occurs when the child begins to sense the difference between the presence of the mother and her absence, and this occurs while the mother is tending to the needs of the child in what Lacan calls the Real stage. Mary's traumatic experience, though, occurs before she is even aware of this presence/absence dichotomy, since Mary Wollstonecraft died shortly after Mary was born. Mary only had a brief time with her, and then her mother was gone. Mary did not know her mother or really have that mother/daughter connection, except indirectly by way of various wet nurses and female assistants.

Lacan explains that "repression only occurs to the extent that the events of the early years of the subject are historically sufficiently turbulent" (Seminar I 190). As one can see, the death of Mary's mother, the introduction of a stepmother who took every opportunity to distance Mary from her father William, William's withdrawal from his only biological daughter's life into his writing, his disgust at Mary and Percy's relationship, Percy's lack of warmth during the stillbirth of their child, and his apparent affair with Claire all constitute reasons for Mary's feelings of abandonment. These years were indeed very trying times for Mary, and it is easy to see how these feelings might require repression.

Feelings are repressed in the unconscious, and since, according to Lacan, one can never explain the unconscious but only talk about what is in the unconscious using chains of signifiers that represent metaphorically or metonymically what is repressed, repression is impossible to discuss directly and

is likely unknown to the consciousness of the child. Lacan says that, "In itself repression stems from the impossibility of granting discourse to a certain past of the subject's speech which is linked...to the specific world of his infantile relations. It's precisely this past speech that continues to function in the primitive language" (Seminar III 60). The primitive language is the language of the unconscious.

An important notion about repression is that the person is not aware of anything that is repressed until later in life. Lacan discusses the sense in which repression is located in the future:

> Freud initially explains repression as a fixation. But at the moment of the fixation, there is nothing which could be called repression...How then should one explain the return of the repressed? As paradoxical as it may seem, there is only one way to do it – it doesn't come from the past, but from the future. (Seminar I 158)

Here, Lacan says that the feelings that are repressed are unknown to the person. It is only in the future that chains of signifiers that the person has collected throughout their life come to a sort of completion and begin to appear in language. Once these chains of signifiers are spoken, the repressed feelings are being shared.

If repression does come into our awareness only in the future, it is plausible that Mary had no intention of writing of her repressed issues of abandonment in Frankenstein; in fact, she was probably unaware that they even existed if what Lacan and Freud determined about repression is true. Mary began Frankenstein as a gothic horror story with the intention of merely entertaining her husband and

her friends, but the result of her writing actually became a way to express her repressed feelings through language common to her and her peers, through the written word.

Writing has often been described as therapeutic, and what the writer does in solitude is paralleled by what a patient and a doctor do in a therapeutic appointment. A typical psychoanalytical session with Lacan involved sitting in his office anywhere from five minutes to an hour or more, discussing what the analysand believes is bothering him or her. Lacan would listen closely for any signifying chain that might represent, through language, what the patient was repressing. Sometimes, he was able to detect the significant chain of signifiers in his patient's words quickly and was able to give the patient a nudge in the direction of what the problem was. In Mary Shelley's case, the writing of Frankenstein was her session on the couch, and the signifiers that the Creation uses in discussing with Victor his attempts to become a part of society can be read as Mary's own expression of her need for someone who would not abandon her.

Lacan explains that what is repressed is directly indescribable because language can never adequately describe what a person is feeling. Language can only touch emotion at its edges and can only give a faint idea of the affective content the person is trying to describe. By applying Lacan's theory of the Three Orders to Victor and the Creation, it will be easier to see how the emotional issues that are at the heart of these characters through their various stages of development are also the emotional issues that have plagued Mary throughout her young life. But it is only through examining the chains of signifiers that emerge

from the unconscious that one can detect what is truly the center of an individual's problem, and Mary's chains of signifiers are represented by the story the Creation tells about itself. That story encodes Mary Shelley's own sense of abandonment by way of the abandonment the Creation narrates.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE REAL AND FRANKENSTEIN

Lacan's stage of the Real takes place from the womb to roughly six months of age for the child. It is during this period that the child is in a state of ignorant bliss. The connection of the child to its mother, which is both physical and psychological, is vital to the earliest development of the child. Lacan explains that "relations between human beings are really established before one gets to the domain of consciousness" (Seminar II 224). It is in pre-consciousness that the Real is established. If one does not fully experience the pre-conscious connection with one's mother, one's integration into society can be catastrophic.

According to Lacan, "There is no absence in the real. There is only absence if you suggest that there may be a presence there when there isn't one" (Seminar II 313). What Lacan essentially means is that since a child is unaware of any sort of absence (i.e., the absence of its mother), it is in a state of being or nothing (Seminar III 271). Once the child becomes aware of an absence, however, the child begins to understand that there is such a dichotomy as presence/absence, and once the child becomes aware of this notion, it enters the Imaginary stage. But until the child begins to differentiate between presence and absence, it stays in this state of secure continuity known as the Real.

During one of his early seminars (sometime in the period from 1953 to 1954), Lacan drew from Alice Balint's article "Mother's Love and Love for the Mother." Lacan explains that, according to Balint, "what is specific to the infant's relation to the mother is that the mother as such satisfies all the needs of the infant. This doesn't mean, obviously, that that's how things always turn out. But it

is a structural feature of the human infant's situation" (Seminar I 209). These weeks of complete dependence on the mother constitute a defining period in the rearing of a child.

In the Real, the child is driven by needs; it needs food, warmth, comfort, and almost constant care. The child is not capable of understanding why or how these caring actions by the mother take place; as these are needed, they simply take place. When a child in the Real needs feeding, it does not distinguish between the bottle and the breast; the child does not separate any part from the whole: "There is no distinction between it and anyone or anything else; there are only needs and things that satisfy those needs" (Klages 77).

There is no way to describe in words what the Real is, according to Lacan. He explains that "the Real, or what is perceived as such, is what resists symbolization absolutely" (Seminar I 66). The Real is unexplainable, nor can one return to the Real after entering the Imaginary phase. Later on, when language appears, signifying the emergence from the Imaginary stage into the Symbolic stage, the Real becomes even more remote and inexpressible. Language is used to convey the absence of something, and since there is no absence in the Real, there is no language that can convey what the Real stage is. Nevertheless, experiencing this stage of life, according to Lacan, is an absolute necessity if the child is to integrate into society successfully.

When analyzing Victor and his Creation in Frankenstein, it is reasonable to assume, based on their use of signifiers in the Symbolic stage, that each of the

characters has some memory of the Real stage. Each, however, has passed through the Real stage in a drastically different way.

Victor describes his early childhood as follows:

> [I] was...[my parents']...plaything and their idol, and something better – their child, the innocent and helpless creature bestowed on them by Heaven, whom to bring up to good, and whose future lot it was in their hands to direct to happiness or misery, according as they fulfilled their duties towards me. (Shelley 35)

Since his parents recognized that Victor was "innocent and helpless," he was supplied with everything he needed from birth, whether it was food, water, warmth, or care. Lacan says that the experience of the Real is only something one can acknowledge during the Symbolic stage, so Victor was unaware of being in the Real stage at the point when his parents satisfied his needs, but given that Victor tells us that his mother and father "fulfilled their duties" to him by satisfying his needs, it is logical to assume that Victor's development through the Real stage, so clearly described by him during the Symbolic stage, progressed normally. He experienced the Real as a part of his mother; he knew of no distinction between himself and his mother. All that was needed at that time was for his needs to be met, which, according to Victor, they were.

Another indication of Victor's awareness of the Real is detected during his conversations with Walton. As a young child, Victor was studious and interested in the mysteries of science. As he explains to Walton, "the world was a secret to me, a secret which I desired to divine. Curiosity, earnest research to learn the hidden

laws of nature, gladness akin to rapture, as they were unfolded to me, are among the earliest sensations I can remember" (Shelley 38). Lacan explains that the Real is something that is always in our unconscious, always being pursued by every person as an ultimate goal, but since one is not consciously aware of its existence until the Symbolic stage (and even then the Real is impossible to explain), our grasp of it lies dormant. The elusiveness of the Real, of which Victor's yearning is a manifestation, is described by Lacan as follows:

> The meaning which man has always given to the real is the following – it is something one always finds in the same place, whether or not one has been there. This real may have moved, but if it has moved, one looks for it elsewhere, one looks for why it has been disturbed, one also tells oneself that sometimes it moves under its own steam. But it is always well and truly in its place, whether or not we are there. (Seminar II 297)

Victor's Creation was unable to develop in this stage and thus has no sense, "akin to rapture," of the Real's existence. This is the result of Victor's abandonment of the being he has brought into the world. From the instant that the Creation opened his eyes, Victor was appalled: "I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room" (Shelley 58). Harkening back to Balint's concept of a mother's love being a structural feature of the infant's life, Victor's abandonment of the Creation during the Creation's Real

stage, when the Creation's needs ought to have been satisfied continuously, is of dire consequences.

Victor has given life, typically a feminine occupation, but unable to endure his Creation, he bolts from his responsibilities of satisfying the needs of his "child." As Victor explains, "I had gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then, but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived" (Shelley 59). Victor once described the Creation's form and features as "beautiful," (Shelley 58), but after he became aware of how wretched his Creation looked, with its patchwork of body parts and gigantic stature, Victor became disillusioned enough with his conquest over science to terminate any connection with the offspring of that triumph.

Psychologically, Victor never gave the Creation a chance to feel the Real stage of its own existence. If for the healthy individual the Real is something that is always there, how can the Creation, who had no unity with the mother and no pre-conscious nurturance, develop normally? The Creation did not feel the euphoria of the Real stage because none of its needs were ever satisfied except through its own groping efforts. Because Victor failed to supply the Creation with that euphoric feeling children unconsciously experience in the Real stage, it has no foundation on which to build a life. Furthermore, the Creation does not have the opportunity to experience the gradual separation from its mother that introduces the child safely to the Imaginary stage. The Creation experiences the fearfulness of absence, but fails to experience the reassurance of presence, specifically the presence of a nurturing source. Psychologically the Creation remains a fragment, since it never

experienced the original unity with its mother/creator/Victor and only knew the terrifying absence produced by abandonment. If the basis for human relations is established before consciousness, as Lacan asserts, then Victor failed to create any sort of relationship with the Creation that might have provided the Creation some chance of experiencing a relatively normal progression through the stages of development.

It is during Victor and the Creation's first confrontation on the mountain that the Creation discusses his earliest experiences. Using language, an aspect of the Symbolic, the only stage of development that the Creation has known fully, he explains to Victor that in his infancy, it was "a long time before I learned to distinguish between the operations of my various senses" (Shelley 105). The senses, and the ability to distinguish between them, are elements of the Imaginary stage. This will be discussed in the next section, but it is important to note that the Creation's Real stage and Imaginary stage happened simultaneously and with no guidance from a nurturing source.

It is during the Creation's Real stage that he had to teach himself to eat, drink, and provide his own protection. He tells Victor of his plight in the following speech:

> It was dark when I awoke; I felt cold also, and half frightened, as it were, instinctively, finding myself so desolate...I was a poor, helpless, miserable wretch; I knew, and could distinguish, nothing; but feeling pain invade me on all sides, I sat down and wept. (Shelley 105-06)

As he describes himself, the Creation was a blank slate: "No distinct ideas occupied my mind; all was confused...the only object that I could distinguish was the bright moon, and I fixed my eyes on that with pleasure" (Shelley 106). This pleasure, as much as it is in keeping with the Romantic view of the power of nature, is also a very disturbing aspect of the Creation's development. With no parent to bond with, the Creation takes more or less to worshipping the moon. The moon is also known as Luna, the Roman moon *goddess*, a feminine association common to many mythologies, and to find pleasure in a feminine object shows the attraction to the mother that the Real stage normally embodies. Since the Creation has no true mother, no nurturing agent to satisfy his needs, the moon is as good a substitute as he can find.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE IMAGINARY AND FRANKENSTEIN

The next stage of development is the Imaginary, which, according to Lacan, is inseparable from the Symbolic. Lacan explains that "the imaginary experience is inscribed in the register of the symbolic as early on as you can think it" (Seminar II 257). However, to eliminate confusion, this work will address the Imaginary separately, or as separately as possible.

In the Imaginary stage, as the child becomes more aware of needs being met, need shifts to demand. Unlike needs, "demands are not satisfiable with objects; a demand is always a demand for recognition from another, for love from another" (Klages 78). This is a period when the child may cry when it is not hungry in order to have its mother give it a hug or a kiss, to feel that presence of its protector. The feeling of its own separateness causes the child to demand attention. At this point, the desire to return to the Real, to have the feeling of completeness with the mother, is strong. But now that the child senses that there is not only a self but an "other," this return is impossible. Once the child becomes aware of the power of demands, it can seek love, but it cannot return to the Real stage. Despite this impossibility, it will spend the rest of its life *trying* to return to the Real.

The Imaginary stage takes place from six months until roughly two years of age. The Imaginary is dominated by what Lacan refers to as the Mirror Stage, although the Imaginary begins before this. In the beginning of the Imaginary phase of development, the child's senses, specifically sight, aid in the awareness of the "other." The "other" that has satisfied the child's needs in the Real stage comes

into sharper focus. This "other," most often the child's mother, is recognized by the child as being either present or absent. However, since the child has not yet developed sufficient awareness to comprehend the idea of presence/absence, the "other" is unexplainable to the child: it is not aware of why this "other" keeps appearing and reappearing. And although the "other," the mother, is unexplainable to the child, when the child senses the absence of the (m)other, this sense of loss causes anxiety in the child as it wishes for the (m)other's return, an anxiety that appears unexpectedly and returns repeatedly:

> Anxiety is always defined as appearing suddenly, as arising. To each of the objectal relations there corresponds a mode of identification of which anxiety is the signal. The identification in question here precede the ego-identification. But even when this latter will have been achieved, every new re-identification of the subject will cause anxiety to arise – anxiety in the sense of its being a temptation, a giddiness, a loss of the subject as he finds himself at extremely primitive levels. (Seminar I 68-69)

The sense of loss the child feels every time its (m)other appears and reappears, while traumatic, is necessary for the child to become aware of its "self." Lacan describes the process of realization of separation that the child is experiencing as follows: "Every imaginary relation comes about via a kind of you or me between the subject and the object. That is to say – *If it's you, I'm not. If it's me, it's you who isn't*" (Seminar II 169). This is how the binary of self/other begins to be developed. Self recognition, the awareness of separation from the (m)other, is important because it initiates the child's narcissism, its creation of a self-image,

the key component of the child's ego. A child's sense of sight is almost, if not fully, developed immediately after birth, and although the child cannot comprehend what it is that it is seeing, sight is the first sense that the child will utilize to understand what is going on in the world around itself and to realize its own existence.

Lionel Bailly explains that "it is by means of images that the baby recognizes its mother, who comes to be represented as the first signifier, and then itself as a whole object – in the mirror of her eyes, and then as a reflected image in the real mirror" (91). After narcissism is initiated by the (m)other's presence/absence, the mirror stage is the next significant event that takes place in the establishment of the child's ego. At some point, Lacan explains, a child will see itself in a mirror, and this experience will begin its development toward a sense of its own wholeness:

> The *mirror stage* is based on the relation between, on the one hand, a certain level of tendencies which are experienced – let us say, for the moment, at a certain point in life – as disconnected, discordant, in pieces – and there's always something of that that remains – and on the other hand, a unity with which it is merged and paired. It is in this unity that the subject for the first time knows himself as a unity. (Seminar II 50)

This particular passage points to the awareness of wholeness that typically takes place later in life, when the child has been exposed to the rules and regulations that govern language, that of the Symbolic stage, but it is important to note that, in the Mirror Stage of the Imaginary, the child sees no difference

between its own image and its actual body. It is only after using language as an adult that the child realizes that it is "whole." Again, the processes that are taking place in the Imaginary stage of the child's development occurs in the unconscious, and the child is unaware consciously that any of these associations between images and meanings are taking place.

The first time the child discovers that it is not fragmented, but in fact "whole," occurs when it sees itself in a mirror and becomes aware that the image in the mirror is somehow related to its own body. The child realizes that the thumb that it had sucked on or the foot that had now and then drifted into its field of view actually belongs to itself because, in the mirror, it can see the thumb it has been sucking on connected to the arm that brings the thumb to its mouth and the foot connected to the same body that includes the mouth. Usually the child is gleeful or frightened when that recognition occurs because this is the first time it becomes aware of the idea of "self," and this is a defining moment in its life. When the child sees itself in the mirror, this process of recognition is typically reinforced by another person, usually the child's mother. The child does not realize at the time that it is only seeing an *image* of itself, not its *real* self. The child assumes that the image of itself is what other people see, and it is in this image that it creates the "ideal ego," that is, the internalized, perfect image of itself, which is the ego that it builds its life around. This is what Lacan refers to as *meconnaissance*, or misrecognition.

Lacan explains, in another lengthy passage, how foundational this is to the child's life:

> The image of the ego – simply because it is an image, the ego is ideal ego – sums up the entire imaginary relation in man. By being produced at a time when the functions are not yet completed, it has a salutary value, expressed well enough in the jubilatory assumption of the mirror phenomenon, but it does not possess any the less of a connection with the vital pre-maturation and hence with an original deficit, with a gap to which it remains linked in its structure. The subject will rediscover over and over again that this image of self is the very framework of his categories. (Seminar I 282)

According to Lacan, attaining awareness of this "ideal ego," of a "whole" self, is compensation for losing the connection to the mother, or in Lacanian terms, undergoing the "loss."

In reality, people are not seeing the image of the child; they are seeing the actual, physical child, but the child is unaware of this at the time. This illusion, the illusion of the child in the mirror as the ideal ego, is the armor which protects the child's ego throughout its life. There is nothing wrong in the child's mind with the image reflected back in the mirror. Eventually, as the child becomes older and is inducted into the adult world of language, the realm of the Symbolic, this armor created in the Imaginary stage of development never changes even though the child's actual ego does.

The Mirror Stage reveals and solidifies the self/other concept for the child. The child knew of the (m)other, but not of the "self," until it saw itself in the mirror. When the child sees its image, it realizes that (m)others are like, but are not, "me."

As Klages writes, "the child encounters actual others – other people, its own image – and understands the idea of 'Otherness,' things that are not itself" (81).

The Imaginary stage is when signifiers begin to take shape. Since language has not yet been grasped by the child, signifiers take the form of images, representations of ideas, and this primitive form of language, which is part of the Symbolic stage, helps to create the world that the child lives in. Lacan explains how this primitive language helps create the framework of the complexity of life:

> Normally, the subject finds for those objects of his primitive identification a series of imaginary equivalents which diversify his world – he draws up identifications with certain objects, withdraws them, makes them up again with others, etc. Each time anxiety prevents a definitive identification, the fixation of reality. But these comings and goings will give its framework to that infinitely more complex real which is the human real. (Seminar I 69)

It is evident that anxiety is a distinguishing characteristic of both Victor and the Creation in Mary Shelley's novel. The Creation suffers bouts of anxiety constantly as its reality refuses to become stable and eventually comes to realize that its failure to be accepted into the complex world of the human is the cause of its troubles. The Creation realizes that there is hope and love for human beings, things he has witnessed firsthand with the De Lacey's, but to gain access to these, he must obey the rules and expectations of normal society, the society he is eternally alienated from.

His creator's situation is different. As Victor progresses from the Real stage (dominated by needs) and shifts into the Imaginary stage (defined by demands),

his early life, he explains, was wonderful. His "parents were possessed by the very spirit of kindness and indulgence" (Shelley 39). The term indulgence suggests an extravagance, something not needed but offered to satisfy the demand for love. As Victor describes the childhood he remembers, it becomes clear that before Victor was aware of his "self," he was doted upon by his parents, parents who would have responded lovingly whenever he cried or beckoned them to himself. By attending to Victor's assurances about his formative years to Captain Walton, the ambitious adventurer much like Victor, the reader can conclude with some certainty that Victor would have progressed smoothly through the Imaginary stage.

With equal certainty, the reader can conclude the reverse about the Creation. The Creation had no chance at all to go successfully through this stage in his life. During the rendezvous in the mountains outside Geneva, the Creation explains to Victor that it took "a long time before I learned to distinguish between the operations of my various senses" (Shelley 105), and this is merely one way in which the Creation's abandonment would have manifested itself.

Children typically have guidance to help them during the process of comprehending the world. For instance, because a child does not instinctively know the difference between hot and cold, a mother or caretaker will do everything she can to protect the child from a hot burner on a stove or the open flame of a candle. The Creation, however, who discovered an abandoned fire burning in the woods shortly after fleeing Victor's residence, was unaware that flames providing warmth might burn his body and had to find this out through harmful experience. When the Creation thrust his hands into the open flame, he discovered the searing

heat and pain associated with fire. If Victor had been there to care for his Creation and had shown the empathy most parents show towards their children, Victor would not have let the Creation go through this trial by fire. The Creation's slowness in learning the capacities of his senses could only have been accelerated by having a nurturing caretaker in his early life.

As the Creation travels from town to town, trying to sate both his bodily needs and his emotional demands, he goes through his Mirror Stage a short time after taking up residence in the shed attached to De Lacey's hovel. By the time he experiences this Mirror Stage, however, he has already skipped onto developmental stages that ought to have come later. He has observed and taught himself the uses of language, events that normally take place in Lacan's third stage, the Symbolic.

The Creation learns how to use language to communicate while squatting just outside the walls of the De Lacey's house. He vicariously experiences the loving family that he never directly had by eavesdropping on the De Laceys, an ideal representation of family modeled by Mary after her temporary foster family, the Baxters (Mellor 16). As the Creation grows in knowledge under the overheard tutelage of the De Laceys, he yearns more and more for the emotional fulfillment of being part of the family, but the De Laceys reject him for the same reason others do, because of his appearance. Even then, he holds out hope for love, but when he stumbles upon a reflection of himself and goes through his Mirror Stage, he realizes it is hopeless. As the Creation describes the impact of the incident, the "increase of knowledge only discovered to me more clearly what a wretched

outcast I was. I cherished hope, it is true; but it vanished when I beheld my person reflected in water, or my shadow in the moonshine" (Shelley 133).

The Creation's realization that he actually is a monster in the eyes of everyone causes him intense grief. He is willing to embrace everyone and everything but at every step along the way, he is rejected. The misidentification by the Creation of his ideal self with the monster in the water, instead of with the generous and loving person that he is willing and anxious to be, is disastrous to his development.

The Creation's Mirror Stage comes far too late in his development and is experienced after too much abandonment for him to mature properly, but he still has hope that one day someone will accept him. Unfortunately for the Creation, encountering his mirror image at this point, after he had been treated by society as an abomination, forces him to interpret his reflection as abominable, and this image is what he must base his ideal ego upon; after being run out of various towns, being pelted with rocks and spears, and being treated as a monster, his ideal ego inevitably becomes monstrous.

Lacan explains that the Imaginary and the Symbolic stages occur simultaneously. Most children have a sort of period within the Imaginary before they become a part of the Symbolic and enter society under the laws of language. The laws of language, of which the Creation was unaware in his early life, have created him a monster before he has had a chance to define himself in any other way. Naming has prepared an identity for the creation, and as Lacan explains, naming is the joint between the Imaginary and Symbolic:

> The name is the time of the object. Naming constitutes a pact, by which two subjects simultaneously come to an agreement to recognize the same object. If the human subject didn't name – as Genesis says it was done in earthly Paradise – the major species first, if the subjects do not come to an agreement over this recognition, no world, not even a perception, could be sustained for more than one instant. That is the joint, the emergence of the dimension of the symbolic in relation to the imaginary. (Seminar II 169-70)

When the various groups of people the Creation comes across during his initial travels, including his creator Victor, all agree in their perception of him as a monster and drive him from their view, homes, and presence, the language of rejection is strong, and when he sees his inhuman image reflected back to him in the water, his ideal ego is formed. The Creation is aware that this image is the problem, the barrier between himself and the species of which he wishes to be a part.

Lacan says that people lose the state of "nature" in the realm of the Real in order to enter culture and attain language but that people deceive themselves, via their ideal ego, into thinking they lack nothing. The Creation, on the other hand, has little chance to deceive himself into believing that society will even tolerate his existence. He experiences rejection by Victor immediately after gaining consciousness, and after that time, he is constantly aware of his lack, of his multiple deficiencies. The development of his ideal ego is deformed, and this, of course, is horrible news not only for the Creation, but for humans who encounter him as well.

The Imaginary is the stage during which the child projects its ideas of "self," with the help of its ideal ego, onto its Mirror Image. But the Creation, because he was never nurtured, never taught, never shown love, nor even provided the chance to go through the Real stage, has no stable ego, ideal or otherwise. When a child begins to become aware of its "wholeness," this awareness facilitates its move from the Imaginary to the Symbolic. By contrast, the Creation becomes aware of his lack of "wholeness," of his monstrous identity as a pastiche of fragments, but a pastiche capable of being more "human" than "monster."

During the exchange between the Creation and Victor in the mountains of Geneva, the Creation explains to Victor that the conversations between the De Lacey's and Safie caused him to think of his own place in society:

> And what was I? I was...endued with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; I was not even of the same nature as man. I was more agile than they and could subsist upon a courser diet; I bore the extremes of heat and cold with less injury to my frame; my stature far exceeded theirs. When I looked around I saw and heard of none like me. Was I, then, a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled and whom all men disowned? (Shelley 123)

This exchange is further proof that the Creation's entrance into society is unlikely, and with its hints of the superhuman, it suggests the potential danger the Creation poses to the mere humans unfortunate enough to get in the way of the Creation's rage. In a passage that seems to indicate the possibilities of the monstrous even as it addresses the emergence of the healthy, Lacan explains that

a child looks for confirmation of its wholeness through others and that this aids in the development of the ego:

> The body in pieces finds its unity in the image of the other, which is its own anticipated image – a dual situation in which a polar, but non-symmetrical relation, is sketched out. This asymmetry already tells us that the theory of the ego in psychoanalysis has nothing in common with the learned conception of the ego...the subject is no one. It is decomposed, in pieces. And it is jammed, sucked in by the image, the deceiving and realized image, of the other, or equally by its own specular image. That is where it finds its unity. (Seminar II 54)

The Creation, however, fails to find its unity and gropes with greater and greater anxiety toward some substitute of selfhood. As he tells Victor, "My person was hideous and my stature gigantic. What did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination? These questions continually recurred, but I was unable to solve them" (Shelley 131).

In contrast to his Creation's troubled development, Victor's introduction to the Imaginary appears to have been normal. His needs were fulfilled, his demands were sated, and there did not appear to be anything to impede his progression into the Symbolic. The Creation's development, on the other hand, was rife with inconsistency and heartbreak. Victor's emergence into the Symbolic was a normal process, while the Creation's lacked the guidance and support that directed Victor's. Thus, Victor seemed poised to become a successful member of society,

his life following a "normal" path. The Creation, however, had no chance to gain any normal position in society.

CHAPTER SIX: THE SYMBOLIC AND FRANKENSTEIN

Once the child recognizes the "otherness" in other people and its ideal ego in its own image, the child enters the Symbolic stage. Lacan says that "the essential part of human experience, that which is properly speaking the experience of the subject, that which causes the subject to exist, is to be located on the level of the emergence of the symbolic" (Seminar II 219). Lacan goes on to say that language is the "most fundamental of inter-human relations" (Seminar III 197). Here, in the Symbolic stage, the child begins to use language to negotiate the idea of absence and the idea of otherness as categories. Language creates the illusion of presence. For example, a child may repeat "mom" or "dad" while the parent is at work or away to make up for the lack of a parent in the child's vicinity. By substituting language for the parent, the child has entered the Symbolic.

Lacan says that "development only takes place in so far as the subject integrates himself into the symbolic system, acts within it, asserts himself in it through the use of genuine speech. It isn't even essential...that this speech be his own" (Seminar I 86). If the child refuses to "play the game" of language, development is stunted, not only early in development but throughout adult life. A lack of such linguistic interaction during the period of the Creation's construction will prove to be the beginning of Victor's downfall, and his refusal to speak about his problems before they become insoluble seals his destiny. And between these periods of silence, he refuses to heed the language that the Creation utilizes when requesting Victor's help in the creation of a bride, language that eloquently sums up a key part of the Law of the Father, that every man should take a mate.

The Lacanian explanation of the Creation's need is complex. Bailly explains that "as the Subject is molded by the discourse of the Other, it will fabricate, out of all these Others, its own version of the Other and its own authentic desire, and it is this above all that is the prize in its quest for self-determination" (111). The position of wanting to be the center produces the feeling of "desire." Desire, according to Lacan, "is the fundamental mechanism around which everything relating to the ego turns" (Seminar I 171). Desire is something that resides in the unconscious, and once again, since one can never describe what one truly wants with language, desire remains hidden. Love is one of the greatest psychological needs a child has, and the desire to be loved is of great importance in Lacan:

> The desire to be loved is the desire that the loving object should be taken as such, caught up, enslaved to the absolute particularity of oneself as object. The person who aspires to be loved is not at all satisfied, as is well known, with being loved for his attributes. He demands to be loved as far as the complete subversion of the subject into a particularity can go, and into whatever may be most opaque, most unthinkable in this particularity. One wants to be loved for everything – not only for one's ego, as Descartes says, but for the colour of one's hair, for one's idiosyncrasies, for one's weaknesses, for everything. (Seminar I 276)

The desire to be the center of the system, the center of the Symbolic order, is something that everyone wants, but it is a desire that can never be fulfilled. The center is, among other names, the Phallus. For Lacan the threat of castration is a metaphor for the whole idea of lack as a structural concept. And the idea of lack is

fundamental to the concept of language, which is the basis for the Symbolic. It is not the real father that threatens castration, but the idea of lack (which is needed for the structure of language), and so the father becomes a structuring principle of the Symbolic. And for Lacan, Freud's angry father becomes the Law of the Father, or just the Law.

To enter the Symbolic order, a child must submit to the rules of language, which essentially is the Law. Lacan states, "What is the symbolic connection? Dotting our i's and crossing our t's, it is the fact that socially we define ourselves with the law as go-between. It is through the exchange of symbols that we locate our different selves...in relation to one another" (Seminar I 140). Language is how a person builds a "self." Lacan's idea of the Law is explained by Klages:

> To become a speaking language-using subject, you have to be subjected to, you have to obey, the laws and rules of language. Lacan designates the idea of the structure of language and its rules as specifically paternal. He calls the rules of language the Law-of-the-Father in order to link the entry into the Symbolic, into the structure of language, to Freud's notion of the Oedipus and Castration Complexes. (84)

The Law is another name for the center of the Symbolic, the thing that governs the whole structure and determines how all elements in the system can move and form relationships. The Phallus (or the center) limits the movement of elements and gives the whole structure a sense of stability. The Phallus rules over the entire system because it is what everyone wants to be, or to own, but no one can achieve this, and this causes desire, the desire to be the center and to rule the

system, which of course can never be accomplished. The Phallus is constantly in turmoil with others that desire to be the center, and Lacan explains that, "the relativity of human desire in relation to the desire of the other is what we recognize in every reaction of rivalry, of competition, and even in the entire development of civilization" (Seminar I 147).

Victor's childhood was marked by openness between himself, family, and friends. He recalls that "no human being could have passed a happier childhood than myself" (Shelley 39). But if language creates an illusion of presence, language is what Victor most lacked. Victor does not often talk to people. A person failing to use language fails to create the illusion of presence, which is essential in the Symbolic stage. He was possessed of a passionate temperament, which he devoted to studying: "My temper was sometimes violent, and my passions vehement; but by some law in my temperature [footnoted as temperament] they were turned not towards childish pursuits but to an eager [sic] to learn" (Shelley 39).

Victor spent so much time wrapped up in books, in fact, that he "took their word for all that they averred, and I became their disciple" (Shelley 41). Written language helped to quell his passion, but this preference for written language as opposed to spoken language was also a staging ground for his inability to speak about, face, or deal with his problems later in life.

Victor's Symbolic stage is severely disrupted when his mother dies shortly before he is to go away to school. When his mother dies, Victor becomes withdrawn, and because language substitutes for lack (in this case, Victor's

feelings of grief for the loss of his mother), Victor should have spoken more, shared his feelings more, because by speaking of his loss Victor would have had the opportunity to let his repressed feelings flow out through a chain of signifiers that someone close to him, particularly the empathetic Elizabeth, might have understood. However, Victor represses his feeling to such an extent that he sometimes fails to speak even when his family member's lives are in danger.

Now that Victor is figuratively as far away as possible from his mother (in that she is physically no longer in his life and that he refuses to use language in an attempt to describe what he is lacking), he becomes permanently stunted in the Symbolic. This is evident during his first few years at school:

> The summer months passed while I was thus engaged, heart and soul, in one pursuit...I knew my silence disquieted them...my father made no reproach in his letters, and only took notice of my silence by enquiring into my occupations more particularly than before. Winter, spring, and summer passed away during my labors. (Shelley 56-57)

Soon, it becomes apparent that Victor's Other, his center, his desire, is to be God, to create a life to fill the void left by the death of his mother: "I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit" (Shelley 55). Instead of compensating for his lack with language, his experiment becomes his attempt to regain his unobtainable link to his mother, and thus to the Real.

When Victor produces the Creation, he has done the unthinkable, he has become the center. His impossible desire has turned into reality, and he has become God by creating life. But almost instantly his center shifts, and he regains

desire by wishing for the Creation to be dead; Victor wants to castrate the Creation from his life. From that moment on, Victor is under the illusion that he is the Law of the Father, the center of the universe.

Lacan says that "all human apprehension of reality is subject to this primordial condition – the subject seeks the object of his desire, but nothing leads him to it" (Seminar III 84). This is evident when Victor desires to re-create his mother's life, his Real stage, by vitalizing the Creation. Obviously, bringing life to the Creation did not lead Victor to his object of desire, returning to the Real, but alienated him from the Real as completely as possible. The man who wished to master the mysteries of life now wishes only to impose death. The irony is that the deaths he is complicit in are never the deaths he hoped to produce: "I ardently wished to extinguish that life which I had so thoughtlessly bestowed" (Shelley 95).

This first occurs when his adopted cousin Justine is found guilty and dies for the murder of Victor's brother, William, who was killed by the Creation. Victor refuses to say anything about his creation, the one piece of information most necessary for Justine's defense: "My tale was not one to announce publicly; its astounding horror would be looked upon as madness by the vulgar" (Shelley 81). Victor refuses to follow the Law of the Father, which, by means of language that he refuses to utter, governs the whole structure of the human world and determines how social elements move and how relationships form. For Victor, his center becomes his desire to return to the time before the Creation entered his life by ending the Creation's life, but the Creation has other plans.

The Creation, as fragmented from the Real and Imaginary as any being can be, enters the Symbolic before conquering the Real and Imaginary. By means of language, he is able to realize what he lacks, and therefore desires, which is to be a part of society. The Creation stumbles into the Symbolic, his Real and Imaginary stages in shambles, his ideal ego fragmented. He learns how to communicate by watching his "ideal" family, the De Laceys, converse and interact, but he does not become fluent until Felix De Lacey's love interest, Safie, enters their lives and indirectly reveals to the Creation the significance of love.

Safie is a Turk who fell in love with Felix after Felix helped her father flee a French jail. After Safie's father reneges on a promise to allow Felix to marry her, Felix is forced to move his family to Germany to escape persecution for his actions. When Safie finally locates Felix, she cannot speak the De Lacey's language, so she is given lessons, lessons that the Creation greedily devours while eavesdropping from his shed. After watching and absorbing his "family's" language for a period of time, the Creation develops the courage to use his language skills to tell Felix's blind father of his misfortunes and of his desire to be a part of their family. The Creation is sure he can convince the father of how valuable he can be to the De Lacey family, and using his skill with language, he begs the elder De Lacey to help him: "Save and protect me! You and your family are the friends whom I seek. Do not you desert me in the hour of trial!" (Shelley 137).

This, of course, concludes horribly, with the Creation being cast out by Felix, much as Victor cast him to the elements as soon as he awoke into life. The

Creation is now stuck part way through the most difficult stage, the Symbolic, and having lacked the proper growth period in the Real and Imaginary stages, he is even worse off than before. The Creation is now torn between need and demand – he wants both nurture and love, and he has been denied both several times. With society's laws stated in the Symbolic, the Creation has no chance to succeed within the human world because society has named him a monster.

Another way of breaking from his entrapment in solitude may be available to the Creation, however. During his period near Geneva, the Creation negotiates with Victor for a companion. The Creation implores Victor, "Oh! My creator, make me happy; let me feel gratitude towards you for one benefit! Let me see that I excite the sympathy of some existing thing" (Shelley 148). The Creation desires to feel the love Victor has known and has taken for granted.

The Creation uses eloquent language – the Law, the fundamental principle of the Symbolic, created by society as the rule – to make his point further: "Instead of threatening, I am content to reason with you. I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind? You, my creator, would tear me to pieces and triumph; remember that, and tell me why I should pity man more than he pities me?" (Shelley 147).

When Victor is part way through the process of creating a companion for the Creation, he abruptly destroys the Creation's intended mate before it is completed, and in the process of dismantling the Creation's companion, Victor also destroys any hope of rectifying himself. At the instant when the Creation's potential mate is destroyed, the Creation's desire shifts from wanting to satisfy his need for love and

his demand for acceptance to desiring to be the Phallus, the center of his and Victor's world, and his main focus becomes destroying Victor's life.

The final stage of Frankenstein is the battle between Victor and the Creation. Both desire to be the Phallus, Victor to castrate his creation from the world and return to the Real (his connection with his mother) and the Creation because he never had anyone to love or to be loved by, to punish Victor by taking away Victor's loved ones. The steps toward this relationship of hatred have been linguistic in nature. Victor becomes stunted in his Symbolic phase when he loses his mother, and he shuts down, refusing to discuss his feelings with anyone. Language, which creates the illusion of presence, would have helped him through his mother's death and through his struggle with his creation and would have prevented the destruction of his loved ones. Victor refuses to speak to others about the Creation, whereas the Creation speaks during each attempt he makes to change his situation. The Creation speaks to the elder De Lacey of his wishes for a family to love him. Even after he is beaten, shot, and driven away, the Creation continues to negotiate with language. It is only after attempts at communication with Victor fail, the last chance that the Creation has of obtaining a family, that the Creation resorts to violence.

To locate the root of any problem the analyst needs to distinguish the chain of signifiers in the analysand's unconscious. Again, these signifiers are usually metaphors or metonymies that are formed unconsciously and are referred to obscurely. Once the analyst or the analyst's surrogate becomes aware of the chain, the analysand can be directed to the problem. But in the case of Victor,

since he refused to speak openly, no one was able to hear the chain of signifiers that might indicate what troubled him, and as a result, no one was able to help him cope.

The Creation, however, speaks, but no one, including his Creator, heeds what he says. The Creation makes it abundantly clear that all he desires is a family. That he is even human at all is debatable, but if the stages of development, facilitated by language, are the benevolent product of societal influences, then society failed at following its own law in regard to the Creation.

Victor's successful passage through the Real and Imaginary stages should have prepared him for social success, but because of Victor's temperament and his lust to conquer science, his Symbolic stage was stunted. The Creation, on the other hand, had little chance of developing normally because his Real and Imaginary stages were disjointed, fragmented, and/or nonexistent, a fragmentation Mary Shelley expresses by having him made from human body parts. Thrust prematurely into the Symbolic stage, his language use allows him to attempt to connect the fragments of his being into a semblance of order, but even at his most eloquent, he is cast out by humanity. Even at his most reasonable, he is unable to get the one thing he wished for: love.

Victor upsets the balance of his own and his Creation's universe by abandoning the Creation, refusing to negotiate with him, and refusing to discuss his feelings and fears with his family, and he suffers mightily for it. The Creation works to shift the Phallus from Victor to himself and does not care who gets in his way, as evidenced by the trail of bodies he leaves throughout their journey. He

and Victor become involved in a relationship of all-absorbing hatred that isolates them from everyone but each other.

Lacan says humans have language only because we all lack union with the maternal body. The Real is the mother and the Phallus, the position that rules the Symbolic, is the father. Victor's Real was taken from him as a teenager through the very literal loss of his mother, and (ignoring the fundamental element of the Symbolic, language, that might have helped him mature properly) he never recovered the Real. He proceeded directly to the Phallus, and, achieving ultimate potency, cast it away immediately by withdrawing into silent flight. Torn between his lack (the loss of mother) and his Phallus (his insistence on being the center) and with nothing to bridge the gap between the two (language), he causes the ruin of many lives. And the Creation, constantly harassed by trying to follow the laws of language in the Symbolic stage while having none of the nurturance needed to come to grips with the Real and the Imaginary, becomes a terror in the Phallus stage, eschewing the humanity and decency he originally possessed. Victor's failure to nurture the Creation results in countless atrocities, with neither the Creator nor Creation surviving his neglect.

CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY

Mary Shelley's early life was fraught with problems pertaining to her development. Like the Creation, she lacked a genuine chance to experience the Real with her mother. While a standard reading might point to Mary's early development as being relatively successful (William Godwin was a doting father, so it would appear she had a normal upbringing through and into the Symbolic), Mary nonetheless experiences many of the same feelings the Creation does in her novel Frankenstein.

In this paper, I maintain that, based on Lacanian analysis, Victor's emotional detachment reflects Mary Shelley's sense of isolation from William Godwin, Mary Jane Godwin, Percy Shelley, and, most importantly, Mary Wollstonecraft. Her sense of the absence, but not the presence, of her dead mother, was the earliest and most devastating of the traumas influencing her first novel. These views are based only on Mary's life through the writing and publication of Frankenstein and not thereafter.

The feelings of being an outcast that the Creation expresses so eloquently in his Symbolic phase coincide in Mary's life with the repressed abandonment issues that were coming to the forefront of her consciousness at the time. According to Lacan, since repression is produced in the future, Mary hypothetically had no idea that the multiple abandonments in her life (the death of her biological mother, her father who withdrew from her when Mrs. Godwin entered their lives, Mrs. Godwin's feeling of competition with Mary for William's attention, Percy's relationship with her stepsister Jane/Claire, and the death of her first child) would

be detailed in Frankenstein. But the chain of signifiers, dealing with abandonment from the Creation's point of view, all point to Mary's repressed feelings.

Godwin distanced himself from raising Mary as soon as Mary Jane Godwin entered their lives. Perhaps he had grown disillusioned with having a family; perhaps he had the utmost confidence that his new step-wife would provide the life he felt Mary needed; whatever the reason for his withdrawal from Mary's life, this withdrawal, coupled with Mary's never knowing or having a connection to her biological mother, had profound effects on Mary's early childhood. The added facts of the new Mrs. Godwin's disgust with Mary's attraction to her "God," William, and Mary's obvious inheritance of her parents' intellectual ability make it clear that Mrs. Godwin felt competitive with her stepdaughter in obtaining William's attention. In addition, being shipped off to Ireland to live with the Baxter's, despite her being exposed to a loving family and escaping her "odious" stepmother, could only have created an "unwanted" feeling in Mary's psyche.

While Mary's initial elopement with Percy occurred under the feeling of true love, bringing her half-sister Jane/Claire would prove to be a cause of resentment for Mary. Because of the closeness that Percy and Claire achieved, especially during and after Mary's first pregnancy, a time in which Percy showed little or no concern over Mary's and their child's health and the child's eventual death, the feeling of isolation and melancholy that Mary went through must have been intense. In addition, William's refusal to communicate with the two lovers, other than to demand money from Percy, would likely have left Mary's psyche in shambles.

Victor's detached relationships with others in Frankenstein express the detachment of Mary Shelley from the prominent people in her own life. Her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, was dead, available only to Mary through her writings. Her father, William Godwin, Mary's closeness with him a distant memory, communicated only through letters that demanded money from her married lover. And Percy, whose looks, passion, and poetry caused a young, naïve Mary to fall madly in love with him, but whose feelings of free love and whose constant need to be surrounded by sympathetic women was unable to empathize with Mary during her darkest moments and caused Mary multiple difficulties. These relationships became the base on which to build her characterization of Victor. Victor's reliance on the written and spoken word paralleled the interest in writing of Mary's biological mother, her father, and Percy. Her mother's inability to speak from the grave, her father's lifelong coldness and detachment from expressing his emotional feelings, and Percy's inability to respond to Mary's emotional needs were all reflected in Victor's detachment and failure to nurture his creation.

Mary's chain of signifiers, repressed until her "session on the couch" in Lake Geneva, surrounded by the beauty of nature and the musings of her brilliant lover and Lord Byron, was exposed through the metaphor of the Creation in her seminal work, Frankenstein. The Creation became Mary's alter ego; however, due to the ultimate respect she gave her father throughout her life, even during the tumultuous beginnings of her affair with Percy, and through her husband's difficulty in attending to her needs, Mary would never consider performing the violent actions she projects into her novel. But like her biological mother, her father, and

her husband, Mary embraced the written word to express her feelings; in fact, this was the destiny life had prepared for her. And much like her father when he was younger, who used the written word to express his feelings and attitudes, Mary Shelley used Frankenstein as a vehicle to deal with the perceived injustices that plagued her during a specific time in her life.

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