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**FRANKENSTEIN: THE CREATION OF A MYTH**

**Faculdade de Letras**

**Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais**

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## **Abstract**

The present work proposes a study of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in relation to John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the myth of Prometheus, and aims to discuss their contribution to the establishment of *Frankenstein* as a myth on its own right. In her novel, Mary Shelley alludes to John Milton's *Paradise Lost*'s themes and characters while depicting a world without gods or any other divine being. Her two main characters, namely, Victor and the creature, assume different Miltonic archetypes throughout the novel. In addition, Shelley provides another way to understand the relationship between creator and creature, one that is not as harmonious as the one told in the myth of Prometheus. While re-interpreting these creation myths, Mary Shelley ends up creating the story of a scientist and his uncontrolled creature, a story that has been part of the popular culture and has become as famous as its mythological ancestries.

**KEY WORDS:** Frankenstein, Paradise Lost, Prometheus, myth.

## **Resumo**

Este trabalho propõe um estudo do romance *Frankenstein* de Mary Shelley em relação ao épico *Paraíso Perdido* de John Milton e o mito de Prometeu, e uma discussão sobre a contribuição destes dois mitos antigos para o estabelecimento de *Frankenstein* como mito. Em *Frankenstein* Mary Shelley alude aos temas e personagens do épico *Paraíso Perdido*, escrito por John Milton, enquanto descreve um mundo sem deuses ou qualquer outro ser divino. No romance, Victor e sua criatura assumem diferentes arquétipos Miltonianos. Além disso, Shelley propõe uma nova maneira de entender a relação entre criador e criatura, que nem sempre é tão harmoniosa como a descrita no mito do Prometeu. Ao reinterpretar estes mitos da criação, Mary Shelley acaba criando a história de um cientista e sua incontrolável criatura, uma história que faz parte da cultura popular e se tornou tão famosa quanto os seus ancestrais mitológicos.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Frankenstein, Paraíso Perdido, Prometeu, mito.

## 1. Introduction

First published in 1818, *Frankenstein* was not a huge success right after it was released. It caused a tension in the nineteenth-century society because its content offended religious beliefs and social practices of the time (Hitchcock 75). The novel had a second edition in 1823, but it is the 1831 edition that contains the most differences. Although this last edition is the publishers' standard version, only the 1818 contains the thoughts, expectations and fears of a nineteen-year-old girl. In contrast, the 1831 edition shows Mary Shelley's effort to tone down some elements that were controversial back then, especially the incestuous relationship between Victor and Elizabeth. She was no longer the same when she edited her novel for the last time. She had suffered the loss of her husband, Percy Shelley, and most of her children. She was then a grown-up woman. For this reason, the present work will quote from the 1818 edition that best imprints Mary Shelley's creativity.

An avid reader, Mary Shelley inserted in her works a great deal of references from her reading list.<sup>1</sup> As Carol Adams points out, *Frankenstein* is "a distillation of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's life and learning, an interweaving of biography and bibliography" (111). Indeed, Shelley's novel is filled with literary and philosophical allusions to other writers, namely Samuel Coleridge, John Milton, and Jean Jacques-Rousseau. In addition, Shelley makes clear references to the myth of Prometheus, Volney's *Ruins of Empire*, Goethe's *Sorrows of Werther*, and Plutarch's *Lives*. Nevertheless, there are two references that stand out among these works; they are the myth of Prometheus and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Mary Shelley adapts these two versions of creation myths to a society surrounded by the revolutionary ideas of the French Revolution and scientific discoveries about electricity and galvanism. By adapting these myths, Shelley offers a new interpretation of the issues concerning responsible creativity and the dichotomy between good and evil.

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<sup>1</sup> For Mary Shelley's reading list, see Stuart Curran.

According to Harold Bloom, *Frankenstein* is “one of the most vivid versions . . . of the Romantic mythology of the self” (Introduction 4). The mythology of the self, Collin Hughes and Michael Delahoyde affirm, concerns “the cult of individualism,” and it is composed of stories about heroes who defy the law of an oppressive society.<sup>2</sup> Bloom recognizes that Mary Shelley’s novel serves as “a unique introduction to the archetypal world of the Romantics” (Introduction 4), and he places it among the works of great poets, such as William Blake, Percy Shelley and Lord Byron. One of the main archetypes used by the Romantics is Prometheus. He is famous for stealing fire from the gods in benefit of mankind. This stolen fire guarantees man’s survival and represents “arts, science, language, imagination, [and] consciousness itself” (Shattuck 14). Harold Bloom argues that “no other traditional being has in him the full range of Romantic moral sensibility and the full Romantic capacity for creation and destruction” (Introduction 2). Despite being the creator and the benefactor of mankind, Prometheus is unwillingly responsible for man’s misery. It is through his brother, Epimetheus, that misery and death invade man’s world. For this reason, “Prometheus embodies the human condition with all its potential for brilliant innovation and for cruel suffering” (Dougherty 3). He represents creation, creativity, rebellion, suffering, and destruction. Writers who tell the story of Prometheus or allude to it usually choose “a particular theme or element of the myth to elaborate within a specific literary or cultural context” (Dougherty 8). Some authors who make use of the myth are Goethe, Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, and Mary Shelley.

In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley clearly associates Victor with the Titan Prometheus by titling her novel after the Titan. However, it is also possible to understand the creature as a Promethean figure. In “The Nightmare of Romantic Idealism,” Paul Cantor affirms that the creature resembles Prometheus, for he literally steals fire from a man, and he threatens to

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<sup>2</sup> See Collin Hughes and Michael Delahoyde’s “Mythology of Self” for more information.

destroy Victor's wedding night, but Victor, here a Zeus-figure, does not understand it. Cantor believes that this line of analysis is as possible as the analogies to *Paradise Lost*. In Cantor's point of view, *Frankenstein* is "a myth about Romanticism, a mythic dramatization of the dangers of an unbridled idealism" (108). Cantor proposes that Victor is "a metaphor for the poet" who aims for "the spiritual regeneration of man" (108). For the Romantics, the function of the creation myth was to criticize "the established order" and "the corrupt foundations of religious and political authority" (109). When Frankenstein seeks a way to overcome death, he becomes like Romantic thinkers, for he "[denies] the limits on human creative power" (115). He, like the Romantics, wants an "increase in consciousness despite all cost" (Bloom, Introduction 9). This urge is, Harold Bloom affirms, a symptom of Prometheanism, and in her novel Mary Shelley questions this Romantic value by showing its negative effects. Therefore, *Frankenstein* is a warning of the "pain and suffering" that "creative power" can cause to man (Cantor 124).

First published in 1667, *Paradise Lost* was a recurrent source during the Romantic period. William Blake, Wordsworth and Percy Shelley are some examples of writers who allude to *Paradise Lost*'s archetypes and themes. The Romantic writers usually focused their attention on the characters of *Paradise Lost* – Satan, Adam, Eve, and God. They based on these Miltonic archetypes to build their characters even though most of the Romantic writers did not agree with Milton's point of view. Indeed they "felt that the plot of *Paradise Lost* could (and should) have turned out differently" (Sage 314). They used, for instance, the figure of God to question power and oppression in their society (Sage 314). The Gothic novels started to portray man as "too grand, too evil, or too good to be measured by the standards of 'propriety', 'manners' or even common sense" (Sage 315). Gothic novelists, such as Ann Radcliffe and Mary Shelley, used Satan as archetype to discuss the relationship between good and evil (Sage 316). In the end of *Frankenstein*, for instance, both Victor and

the creature become Satan-like figures. Bluntly speaking, the novel is a story about these characters' journey into hell.

In *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader*, Lucy Newlyn explains that Milton's ability to imitate the style of classical epics "contributed to the promotion of *Paradise Lost* as an honorary . . . classic" (42). After the rise of the novel, the epic was often used as a reference in "discussions of morality" (42); the works of Fielding, Richardson, and Mary Shelley are some examples. Newlyn even affirms that *Paradise Lost* is more important to *Frankenstein* than the Greek myth of Prometheus since Shelley's narrative relies on "Miltonic lines" and "a dense network of allusions" (43). Newlyn affirms that the Romantics widened "the notion of a 'fortunate fall'" (64), a term also used to interpret *Paradise Lost*. The fortunate fall<sup>3</sup> gives the readers the opportunity to fall and redeem themselves without serious consequences. The Romantic writers invite the reader to become "aware of the coexistence of moral opposites" (86). In *Frankenstein*, for example, the creature finds in *Paradise Lost* the figures of Adam and Satan, and he defines himself through these characters. Lucy Newlyn points out that allusions to Satan always imply "an invitation to transgress" (226), but it also shows "the antisocial effects of liberation" (227). The archetype of Satan represents an apparent success brought about by transgression, but it finally reveals to be a terrible mistake.

In "Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Milton's Monstrous Myth," John B. Lamb claims that *Frankenstein* is not a "reenactment of the fall of Milton's Satan" (303). He proposes to read the novel as the creature's "'fall' into culture and language" (303). The creature believes that he could "shape and control the self he would become" (312) by acquiring language, but, as Lamb affirms, language limits the creature who sees only Adam

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<sup>3</sup> The term fortunate fall comes from the Latin expression *felix culpa*. It is used to explain "the emergence of evil as part of the larger good toward which (in accordance with God's plans) man is tending" (Newlyn 97). In this sense, the Fall is a necessary evil, but it does not preclude man's responsibility from taking place in relation to his acts and choices.

and Satan as possible alternatives to explain himself. For Lamb, Mary Shelley questions Milton's epic by portraying a creature that cannot define his own identity. Lamb claims that *Paradise Lost* makes it impossible for the creature to understand himself for it gives him a few possible patterns, leaving no room for other possibilities. What Lamb seems not to have seen is that *Paradise Lost* teaches the creature that he is free to choose whoever he wants to be, and that those patterns, albeit few, match the creature's situation.

Before reading *Paradise Lost*, the creature does not understand his nature and how he is related to the others around him. Milton's epic gives the creature the chance to comprehend his position in the world. In "The Monster," Martin Tropp points out that *Paradise Lost* provides Mary Shelley with "a pattern which could give form to her fears and mythic shape to her understanding of what technology threatened for the future" (15). Indeed, Milton's epic is an important text to the characters and to the author of *Frankenstein*. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have noticed, *Frankenstein* is "a mock *Paradise Lost* in which both Victor and his monster . . . play all the neo-biblical parts over and over again" (230). Many readings of *Frankenstein* in relation to *Paradise Lost* focus on the parallel between their characters. It is possible, for instance, to compare Frankenstein with Adam, Eve, God, and Satan. Likewise, the creature can be compared to Adam, Eve, and Satan. Gilbert and Gubar suggest that Mary Shelley writes *Frankenstein* in order to explain *Paradise Lost*'s meaning to its female audience (220). Their analysis of the characters is mainly based on the parallel between Eve and *Frankenstein*'s characters. They see Victor as a mother-figure for he "has a baby" (232). In *Frankenstein*, as George Levine has noticed, God and woman are excluded "from the acts of conception and birth" (8). As for the creature, Gilbert and Gubar understand him as a revision of Eve. She is portrayed as an angel in *Paradise Lost*, but in the novel she is a monster.

When discussing the Frankenstein myth, Chris Baldick proposes to understand the myth as composed of Mary Shelley's novel and all the subsequent versions of the story. Baldick avoids analyzing the Frankenstein adaptations and allusions based on their faithfulness to the novel. Instead, he affirms that all the adaptations and other references to Victor Frankenstein and his monster, as Baldick usually calls the creature, contribute to the understanding of the myth. Being a myth, the story of Frankenstein is "[open] to new combinations of meaning" (*In Frankenstein's Shadow* 4), but Baldick recognizes that it is "also susceptible to 'closure'" (4). As an example, Baldick cites Boris Karloff's portrayal of the creature in the 1931 movie *Frankenstein*. Since then, the audience tends to picture the creature with bolted neck and a squared face, as it was shown in the 1931 movie. It shows that the manifestations of the myth have impacted upon the audience's imagination as much as Mary Shelley's novel.

In *Frankenstein: a Cultural History*, Susan Hitchcock tracks the Frankenstein myth in popular culture up to the twenty-first century. She claims, "The myth of Frankenstein has accumulated meanings since its birth and has proliferated in the number and ways in which it has been told and retold, in the twists and turns that its plot has taken, and in the transformations through which its characters, especially the monster, have traveled" (7). Generally speaking, Mary Shelley's story has been adapted to cinema, television, and theatre. It has been published as graphic novels, audio books, and children's books. Around the mid-twentieth century, Frankenstein and his creature were characters of comic books and newspaper's cartoons. The myth has developed with the cinematic industry, and it has changed with history and science. During World War II the creature was used to represent Nazism (Hitchcock 194-97). In 1964 Frankenstein met the aliens (Hitchcock 240-41). As for science, the name Frankenstein came up to designate genetically modified food, or the Frankenfood (288). The story was also remembered in critiques against cloning techniques

(291-92). The myth of Frankenstein is still up-to-date for it has been constantly reinterpreted so as to fit new contexts and audiences.

As Chris Baldick notices, Frankenstein has “escape[d] Mary Shelley’s textual frame and acquire[d] its independent life outside it, as a myth” (*In Frankenstein’s Shadow* 30). In the same way Mary Shelley uses the ancient myths of creation to build her story, other writers have turned to *Frankenstein* for inspiration offering responses to or reinterpretations of Shelley’s most famous story. Therefore, I will discuss the extent to which Shelley’s novel is a reinterpretation of the Prometheus myth and John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* with a view to considering that her re-vision of these creation myths granted *Frankenstein* a place in the literary and mythic tradition and contributed to its establishment as a myth on its own right.

### 1.1. Critical Legacy

In *Frankenstein: a Cultural Myth*, Susan Hitchcock observes that in the beginning of the 1970s Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* was not part of the syllabus of many English literature courses (272). It was already famous in popular culture, but it had not entered the literary canon yet. From the second half of the century on, *Frankenstein* started to conquer more space in academic readings and analyses (279). Hitchcock associates this change with the rise of feminist criticism that gives special attention to the works of female writers (280). Nowadays, Shelley’s novel is as important in literature as it is in popular culture. The present section aims to provide a general overview of the critical legacy of the novel.

In “My Monster/ My Self,” Barbara Johnson associates parenthood to monstrosity (2). She claims that the novel illustrates two contrasting parent-child relationships (3): on the one hand, Frankenstein and his loving parents, and, on the other hand, Frankenstein and his creature. She believes that the novel shows “the impossibility of finding an adequate model for what a parent should be” (3) because both Victor and his creature have similar kinds of

disturbed lives even though Victor has a quiet childhood. In “*Frankenstein, Invisibility, and Nameless Dread*,” Lee Zimmerman analyzes Victor’s relationship with his parents. He claims that Victor “suffers from parentlessness” like the monster<sup>4</sup> (213), which differs from Johnson’s ideas. He believes that Victor’s failure to parent the creature is the result of his own abandon as a child (215). Zimmerman uses Victor’s portrayal of his father, Alphonse, “as a public man, without a private self, and defined utterly by his position in the social order” (215) to affirm that Alphonse teaches Victor to be a rational man such as he is, a man not driven by feelings, giving little space for Victor to build up his identity. Zimmerman claims that Alphonse marries Caroline out of responsibility, for he feels compelled to protect her and to honor his friend (215). Furthermore, Alphonse teaches Victor not to fear superstitions, and to repress his feelings. When Alphonse consoles his son after William’s death, he says: “excessive sorrow prevents improvement or enjoyment” (Shelley 70). Alphonse tells Victor that it is a man’s duty to repress his grief (216). Zimmerman interprets Victor’s description of his childhood as illusory. He believes that Victor misunderstands his parents’ love. To confirm his idea, he takes Victor’s statement: “every hour of my infant life I received a lesson of patience, of charity, and of self-control” (Shelley 205). Victor does not have the chance to be a playful child. Instead Victor is overloaded with lessons (217). Victor is taught to repress his self in order to fit in society, and his enthusiasm in natural philosophy and his decision to create a new being are his ways to escape his parents’ repression.

In “Problems of Perception,” Anne Mellor suggests that in *Frankenstein* “identity is a process not so much of knowing (re-cognition) as of seeing” (128). The creature, for instance, is seen “as the sign of the unfamiliar, the unknown” (128). He is judged by his appearance, which Mellor relates to the theories of Johann Caspar Lavater and Franz Gale on physiognomy. Frankenstein and all the other characters that see the creature take for granted

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<sup>4</sup> The word monster is used by Lee Zimmerman to designate the creature.

that the creature is evil because of his monstrous features. Some examples are the old man in the hut, and the De Lacey family. Only the old De Lacey and the reader are not influenced by the monster's appearance since they just have access to his words. Mellor points out that the monster exemplifies Edmund Burke's definition of the sublime: something that "seems to threaten the viewer's life" (131) while moving his emotions. The creature is gigantic and strong, he lives in mountains and glaciers, his "existence seems to constitute a threat to human life" (132). In addition, he excites extreme feelings and reactions in the characters that see him. All these elements lead Mellor to the premise that "The creature himself embodies the human sublime" (132). The sublime excites "the instinct of self-preservation" that rises "a lust for power domination and continuing control" (137). This is the feeling that the creature causes on its viewers. According to Mellor, the novel shows that man usually sees the unknown as evil (134) and criticizes the Romantic idea that imagination is "the final arbiter of truth" (136) by portraying a monster that becomes evil because he is constantly seen as such.

Like Mellor, Mark Mossman believes that the creature becomes a monster as a result of his frustrated attempts to be part of the society. In "Acts of Becoming: Autobiography, *Frankenstein*, and the Postmodern Body," Mossman claims that "the creature experiences . . . a continued repetition of scorn, hatred, and fear, a constant construction of monstrosity" (175). As the creature cannot resist the other characters' definition of himself, he becomes the monster they say he is (175). When the creature approaches the blind De Lacey and when he asks for a mate like him, he is trying to overcome his hideousness (176). If the creature had a female companion, he would lose the feeling of isolation and abnormality. For Mossman, "The creature's body, its ugliness and abnormality, and the resulting exclusion and disability, become the ultimate symbols of practices of discrimination" (178). Thus, the creature becomes the representative of those that are excluded from society because they do not fit in

a “culture dominated by repressive patriarchy” (178). By acquiring literacy, the creature attempts to enter “rhetorical normalcy” and, then, be accepted in society (178). He guarantees his right to speak and he defines himself through his narrative, but he fails “to construct a new, more ‘human’ identity” (180). As the creature’s physical deformity surpasses his intellectual capacity, he resorts to “the violence associated with physical abnormality” (179). Mossman explains that the creature fails because he is not inserted in a postmodernist society in which the creature would have more tools to present himself. To exemplify this, Mossman suggests that current technology would allow the creature to have a plastic surgery and decrease the effects of his deformity (181). Besides the advances of medicine, the creature could count on the postmodern practice of deconstructing stereotypes. “Postmodernism,” affirms Mossman, “has unhinged the hegemony of culture and stereotype, and has allowed for the development and availability of liberatory constructs and discursive practices that lead to freedom” (181). In other words, a postmodern society is more open to discuss the definitions of what is normalcy and abnormality than the creature’s society, and, consequently, a postmodern society would be likely to ignore the creature’s physical deformity in order to listen to him. It is important to highlight that it is not possible to determine if the creature would be as well welcome in a postmodern society as Mossman claims. However, the creature would probably have more opportunities to speak for himself and show that his appearance does not match his personality.

In “The Monstrous Body of Knowledge in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*,” Alan Rauch discusses the characters’ inconsistencies in terms of reliability. Frankenstein, for instance, destroys the female monster in order to avoid the monsters’ reproduction, but it is Victor’s first desire to create “a new species” (230). Another example is Frankenstein’s cleaning his equipment after he disposes of the female creature’s body. His care of his equipment shows that Victor has not given up his experiments completely. Otherwise, he would get rid of his

equipment together with the body (233). Rauch claims that Victor does not fulfill the role of scientist for he refuses to share his discoveries with others (234). As Victor is influenced by natural philosophers, namely Paracelsus, Cornelius Agrippa, and Albertus Magnus, he seeks ways to generate a product. He is not worried about what benefits his discovery may bring to scientific research: “The creation of life is thus, for Frankenstein, a purely intellectual challenge that is completely disconnected from the academic and the social worlds in which he exists” (236). Victor’s discovery would help humankind understand how the human body works. It would perhaps bring recently deceased people back to life. However, Victor insists on hiding it. Rauch explains, “New and unfamiliar knowledge, however ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ can only be troubling to those who are unacquainted with its origins. The scientist needs to recognize that all knowledge has a monstrous quality and the only way to introduce knowledge is to de-monstrate it, that is, to display it and in doing so, to demystify it” (237). Had Victor shared his knowledge with the world, the creature would not be seen as a monster. Instead the creature would be considered as the first phase of a scientific research, a discovery that would benefit humankind in the future.

In “Frankenstein’s Vegetarian Monster,” Carol Adams analyzes the creature’s vegetarianism. She claims that vegetarianism emphasizes his “difference and separation from [his] creator” (110), making him more sympathetic. As the creature includes animals in his moral code, he does not consider them food. He echoes the practice of Romantic vegetarians who lived by the same rule (111). Adams affirms that Mary Shelley was aware of the concepts of Romantic vegetarianism, especially because her husband Percy Shelley defended this practice. The creature’s vegetarianism resembles the first couple’s diet that consists of fruits and herbs and men’s primary food in the myth of Prometheus. The Romantic vegetarians believed that meat eating was the cause of the Fall and, therefore, the cause of man’s premature death in the Greek myth. The Romantic vegetarians consider Prometheus

“the meat bringer” since meat becomes part of men’s diet just after they are given fire. Adams notices that the creature is a vegetarian by choice. He has tasted the meat left by some travelers. He learns to cook his food, but he does not include meat in his diet. She also highlights the fact that the creature himself is made out of animal parts found in slaughterhouses. It may explain the monster’s preference for vegetables and fruits over meat (116). According to Adams, the creature’s vegetarianism represents this “feminist as well as pacifist overtones” (117): “Women were excluded from the closed circle of patriarchy” (118). Feminism and vegetarianism confront the patriarchal society that insists on silencing them.

Although the novel is told by three male narrators, all of them interrupt their personal accounts “to present the story of a woman” (Davis 308). James Davis claims that the voices of the male narrators “reflect cultural, literary, and historical reality” (314). Women’s voices are kept hidden behind men’s. In addition, Davis affirms that “the text addresses a female reader” (308) since Walton’s letters are directed to his sister Mrs. Margaret Saville. The novel concerns mainly the role of women in a household and the challenges women face in society. It portrays a monster who desires female companionship, but it also shows Victor who fears women’s sexual power. According to Davis, Victor’s experiment destroys “the erotic and reproductive potential of women” (311). Eventually, Victor destroys the female creature because he imagines that she may become more evil than the monster, or have many other uncontrolled creatures like her. Besides the female creature, the novel contains “embedded [and] paraphrased stories of women” (Davis 314). They are the Russian woman who struggles to marry her lover, and also Caroline, Elizabeth, Justine, Felix’s sister, and Safie. They are all victimized women who face “economic circumstances, marriage customs, dissolution of their families, social prejudice, and powerlessness” (214). The Russian woman, for instance, is the victim of a society that prevents women from marrying whoever they want. Her father manages her marriage as if his daughter were “a sort of commodity” (Davis

315). She just marries her loved one because the intended husband helps her. Something similar happens with Caroline and Elizabeth. They are luckily saved by Alphonse, Victor's father, after they become orphans and helpless. Finally, Safie is oppressed by her father who imposes on her his religious and cultural practices. *Frankenstein* may seem at a first glance a novel about man, but, according to James Davis, it is in fact a story about women.

Following this same line of analysis, Ellen Moers sees *Frankenstein* as "a birth myth" (92), since it deals with "the motif of revulsion against newborn life, and the drama of guilt, dread, and flight surrounding birth and its consequences" (93). For Moers, in the novel, "Birth is a hideous thing" because the process of creation is closely related to death (95). Victor starts studying corpses in order to understand life. He also uses parts of bodies found in cemeteries to build his creature. After the creature comes to life, Victor flees from him, which illustrates "the trauma of the afterbirth" (93) suffered by many women. In "My Monster/ My Self," Barbara Johnson reads the novel "as a representation of maternal rejection of a newborn infant" (6). It shows the ambivalent aspect of mother's love. A woman expects a child for a long time, but when it is born she may reject him; something similar happens with Victor, who abandons his creature right after birth.

In "My Hideous Progeny: The Lady and the Monster," Mary Poovey proposes that Frankenstein's discovery "[denies] relationships (and women) any role in the conception of children and . . . [reduces] all domestic ties" (273). She points out that the novel's main concern is "the antisocial dimension" of Victor's ambition that is "a monstrous urge, alien and threatening to all human intercourse" (273). Victor cuts all his ties with his family so that he would not be distracted by them. He wants to concentrate all his attention on his research. When it is concluded, Victor reassumes his role in his household, and the monster continues his tasks. However, the monster causes a definite rupture between Victor and his family when he kills most of them (274).

Another line of criticism involves the analyses of the novel on biographical grounds. Ellen Moers, for instance, links the deaths in the novel to the deaths of close acquaintances of Mary Shelley's. They are the premature deaths of her mother, her half-sister Fanny, and Percy Shelley's wife Harriet. In addition, Mary Shelley lost a child soon after it was born. Ellen Moers associates the monster's namelessness with this child, for she did not live enough to be given a name (96). Moers calls attention to the fact that Mary Shelley recorded a dream on her diary on March 19, 1815. She dreamt that her child came back to life after she rubbed it near the fire (96). For Moers, it was an important fact in Shelley's life, and, therefore, it should be considered in an analysis of the novel. Moreover, Chris Baldick notices that Shelley attributed many familiar names to her characters. Elizabeth, for instance, is the name of Percy Shelley's mother and his sister. Victor is a name used by Percy in his childhood. William is the name of her father and her half-brother. Baldick claims that "The killing of William Frankenstein dramatizes perhaps some hidden sibling rivalries" (36). The orphans represent Mary Shelley herself. There are many orphans in the novel, namely Caroline, Elizabeth, and Justine. Baldick compares Shelley with Safie, whose mother defended women's right and urged them to raise their intellect, like Wollstonecraft (36). However, it is also possible to relate Mary Shelley to Elizabeth, as James Davis does, since both their mothers die after giving birth (316).<sup>5</sup> Indeed, there are many elements of Mary Shelley's life that are mirrored, intentionally or not, in the novel. They surely help the reader interpret the novel, but they should not be considered in isolation. Compared to the great amount of available materials on *Frankenstein*, this section contains a very small portion of its criticism. However, it serves as an introduction to some of the novel's main lines of interpretation.

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<sup>5</sup> This version of the story appears in the 1831 edition of the novel (Shelley 206). In the first, Elizabeth is the daughter of Victor's aunt who dies when he is around four years old. Elizabeth is sent to Alphonse when her father decides to marry another woman (Shelley 20).

## 1.2. On Intertextuality

It is common knowledge that literary works are the product of the authors' imagination combined with other literary texts. Every work an author writes inherits something of his previous readings. Indeed, "Authors of literary works do not just select words from a language system, they select plots, generic features, aspects of character, images, ways of narrating, even phrases and sentences from previous literary texts and from the literary tradition" (Allen 11). This practice of borrowing from other literary works is called intertextuality, and it comprehends the relationship between and among texts. Intertextuality was first coined by Julia Kristeva, who, in "Word, Dialogue and Novel," develops Mikhail Bakhtin's idea on dialogism. For Bakhtin, "All utterances are *dialogic*, their meaning and logic dependent upon what has previously been said and on how they will be received by others" (Allen 19). That being the case, a text should not be read on its own, that is, without considering factors that are outside the written text.

As Kristeva explains, a text is "a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character) and the contemporary or earlier cultural context" (36). In other words, the meaning of a text relies not only on the text itself, but also on previous and current references to the same subject. For instance, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* should be analyzed together with previous texts, such as Hesiod's *Theogony*, and current ones, especially Shelley's contemporaries' writings on Prometheus, so that the meaning of the myth of Prometheus and its role in the novel are extensively understood. "Meaning . . . is always at one and the same time 'inside' and 'outside' the text" (Allen 37). Being part of a literary tradition, a text relies on other previous literary works to have its meaning grasped. As T. S. Eliot affirms, "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone" (538). Texts are dependent upon each other because meaning is "something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text

into a network of textual relations” (Allen 1). Thus, a text becomes “an intersection of word (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read” (Kristeva 37), in other words, an author always mixes, intentionally or not, his own words (text) with the words (text) of other authors. The text is “a mosaic of quotations . . . the absorption and transformation of another” text (Kristeva 37), the author’s response to the text he has read previously.

It is important to highlight that intertextuality, Luiz Sá explains, goes beyond the notion of influence. It concerns the relationship among texts without attributing different amounts of importance to them (Sá, “Intertextualidade” 120). In this sense, Jacques Derrida’s coining of the term *destinerrance* becomes pertinent to this discussion. *Destinerrance* expresses “a fatal possibility of erring by not reaching a predefined temporal goal” (Miller 893). J. Hillis Miller explains that “Destinerrance is connected to *différance*, that is, to a temporality of differing and deferring, without present or presence, without ascertainable origin or goal; to trace, iterability, signature, event, context, play” (894). It means that it is impossible to control the way a given utterance is going to reach its destination and how it is going to be received (896-97). Miller claims that an utterance “may be destined to err and to wander, even though it may sometimes, by a happy accident, reach the destination” (897), but it is also possible that “it may never reach its intended destination” (904). To put it in another way, *différance* implies the existence of the same and the other in a given text. It comprehends reinterpretations, the possibility to maintain a previous meaning while reinventing it. The important factor here is not the analogy between the texts: “What matters is the trajectory, the pathway, the crossing – in a word, the experience. The experience is . . . the pathway in the process of happening, breaking a way through” (Derrida, *Paper Machine* 137). The process of being reworked is the crucial point. Reinterpretation is a plus; it is a *countersignature*. According to Derrida, “a countersignature contributes something of its own, during and beyond the passive reading of a text that precedes us but which one

reinterprets, as faithfully as possible, leaving a mark behind” (*Paper Machine* 141). In this sense, the author who reinterprets a certain work adds a new layer of meaning to it. When Mary Shelley adapts John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* in *Frankenstein*, she offers another possible implication of creating a new being, and she shows an alternative way to comprehend man’s fall.

### 1.3. Mary Shelley’s Life

Although the present work is not based on biographical readings of the novel, it is useful to know some information on Mary Shelley’s life so as to understand the context in which she wrote her novel. In addition, Shelley’s motivation to write *Frankenstein* is closely related to events of her private life, as it will be shown later on. Thus, this section will present a brief account of her life. The information gathered here is mostly from Harold Bloom’s *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* (in Bloom’s Guide Ser). Other references will be signaled.

Born on August 30, 1797, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin was the daughter of William Godwin, author of *Caleb Williams* (1794), and Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), who died days after giving birth to her daughter Mary (10). Wollstonecraft also left Fanny Imlay, the daughter she had before marrying Godwin (10). Mary Godwin was educated by her father at home. He taught her history and literature, expecting her to become a writer as well (10-11). William Godwin even published a poem that she wrote when she was a child.<sup>6</sup>

Mary Godwin first met Percy Shelley when he and his wife Harriet visited William Godwin on November 11, 1812 (Butler x). After this brief meeting, Mary Godwin went to Scotland where she stayed for two years in the house of her friend Isabel Baxter (Butler x). When Mary returned, she met Percy Shelley again. They fell in love and eloped to France on

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<sup>6</sup> For further information on Mary Shelley’s first poem, see Harold Bloom’s *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* (in Bloom’s Guide) page 11.

July 28, 1814 (11). Mary Godwin was only seventeen back then. After France, they traveled around Switzerland. During this trip, Mary wrote *History of a Six Weeks' Tour*, published in 1817 (13). They returned to London in the same year. In 1815, Mary had her first daughter, but she died days after her birth (13).

In January, 1816, her second son, William, was born (14). In the same year, Mary, Percy, and Claire Clairmont, Mary's stepsister, went to Geneva to meet Lord Byron. At the time, Claire was having an affair with Lord Byron. In Geneva, Mary and Percy stayed in Maison Chapuis near Lord Byron's Villa Diodati, a house where John Milton had stayed in 1638 (Hitchcock 24). John Polidori, the doctor who Byron hired to accompany him, was also living in Villa Diodati (19). The group engaged on several discussions about galvanism, philosophy, and science during the summer of 1816. In one of many evenings of group discussion, they read *Phantasmagoriana*, a selection of German ghost stories.<sup>7</sup> Then Byron proposed that each one of them compose a horror story (18). Mary spent several days thinking about a possible story until the night of June 16 when she had a nightmare in which she saw Frankenstein for the first time. It is a strange coincidence that the only two stories that were completed became part of our monster's hall of fame; Mary wrote *Frankenstein*, and John Polidori wrote a short story "The Vampyre," which inspired Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897).<sup>8</sup>

On December 30, 1816 Mary became Mrs. Shelley. In 1817, Mary and Percy moved to Marlow, where she finished *Frankenstein* (Bloom, Chronology 236). Her child Clara was born in the same year. After *Frankenstein's* publication in 1818, they traveled to Italy where she lost her two children. Her daughter Clara died in Venice in 1818, and her son William died in Rome in 1819 (Bloom, Chronology 236). In November, her son Percy is born. He was the only child of hers who reached adulthood. In the same year, she wrote *Mathilda*, which

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<sup>7</sup> See Susan Hitchcock (pages 34-35) for more details on this collection.

<sup>8</sup> For further information on Polidori's story, see Susan Hitchcock (pages 36-37).

was published posthumously in 1959 (Bloom, Chronology 236-7). On July 8, 1822 Percy Shelley drowned during a boat trip (14). Then, in 1823, Mary Shelley returned to England with her son Percy Florence (Bloom, Chronology 236). In 1823 she published *Valperga*. She also published *Perkin Walberck* (1830), *Lodore* (1835), *Falkner* (1837), and *Rambles in Germany and Italy* (1844), among other works (Bloom, Chronology 236-37). Mary traveled abroad with her son between 1840 and 1843 (Butler lx). In 1844, Percy Shelley's father died, and her son Percy inherited his money (Bloom, Chronology 237). She lived with her son and his wife until 1851 when she died with a brain tumor (17).

## 2. Prometheus

### 2.1. An Overview of Myth as a Concept

The term myth is usually used to define ancient stories about gods or other divine beings. The most known myths come from the Greek and the Hebrew traditions, and, in both cases, myths were once, or still are, the basis of their religion. They were also considered to be science since some of the stories explained the creation of the world and many natural phenomena. The Bible and, mainly, Homer's and Hesiod's works compose the basic scope of the studies on myths in Western culture. Both classical and biblical myths "have alternatively been read literally, been read symbolically, been rearranged, and been outright recreated" (Segal 79). On myth criticism, Robert Segal explains that there are three main questions that lead the studies of myth; they are about the origin, the function, and the subject matter (*Myth* 2). If we take the myth of Prometheus as an example, we can study how it arose, how it has prolonged its life, and how it is read. Of course the answers for these issues vary according to each field of study.

Theories on myth diverge considerably since a lot of areas, such as literature, anthropology, and psychology, have their own approaches to myth. In psychology, for example, one of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories is based on the Oedipus myth. Another example is the anthropologist J. G. Frazer's *Golden Bough*, a collection of myths from different parts of the world which portrays the figure of the dying god as a symbol of renewal and fertility.<sup>9</sup> Thus, this section provides possible definitions of the term myth and presents some theories which will be useful for the analysis of the literary works dealt with in this research.

Myth comes from the Greek word *mythos* that means "oral language," as "opposed to physical reality" (Sá, *The Myth of Orpheus* 65). The word just started to be used to designate

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<sup>9</sup> See Segal (pages 23-25) for further explanation.

“a story” after Homer (Sá 65). For the Greeks, myths represented their history, a compendium of their culture: “Embodied in narratives, myths comprised the historical, the social, and the linguistically real: they constituted a verbal medium that referred to the relations inherent in the cultural system” (65). Myths were the bond that tied people together, making people feel part of a certain society. Another definition is given by Northrop Frye, who affirms that myths are stories “that tell a society what is important for it to know, whether about its gods, its history, its laws, or its class structure” (*The Great Code* 33). Both definitions highlight the importance of myths in the culture of primeval societies and are similar to the one provided by Carol Dougherty, who defines myths as “stories of the past, the quaint attempts of ancient or primitive cultures to explain the mysterious ways of their worlds” (*Prometheus* 11). Whether myths contain true accounts is not relevant for this research, what matters is the symbolic value of the events they portray.

*The Concise Oxford Dictionary* provides another definition: myth is “a kind of [traditional] story . . . through which a given culture ratifies its social customs or accounts for the origins of human and natural phenomena” (Baldick 163). Chris Baldick classifies myth as rationalist, “a false or unreliable story,” or romantic, “a superior intuitive mode of cosmic understanding,” and he attributes to the first the adjective mythical and to the second, mythic (163). In literature, the last one is used to interpret and recreate myths that are read “as fictional stories containing deeper truths . . . [about] fundamental matters of life, death, divinity, and existence” (163). Baldick also explains that myths differ from legends for they do not have any “historical basis” even though both seem to have their origins in oral tradition (164).

In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes defines myth as “a type of speech,” “a system of communication,” or “a mode of signification, a form” (107). Barthes believes that “everything can be a myth provided that it is conveyed by a discourse” (107). Since “the

meaning [of myth] is *already* complete, it postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions” (116). Moreover,

Mythical speech is made of a material which has *already* been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication: it is because all the materials of myth . . . presuppose a signifying consciousness, that one can reason about them while discounting their substance. (108)

It is important to mention that, although myth is a kind of speech, it is not necessarily “confined to oral speech” (108). Myths can assume different forms of manifestation, such as writing, cinema, and photography. When myths are alluded to, they have the power to link a certain work of art to the previous information the audience may have on a certain story. For instance, readers of *Frankenstein* are told, since its subtitle, that the main character is a modern version of Prometheus. From that moment on, readers can count on the ancient myth to draw parallels with the novel in order to grasp its meaning.

Therefore, myths are “interactive”; they work as “a continual point of reference, or system of references” (Ken Dowden and Niall Livingstone, *A Companion to Greek Mythology* 4). They are “a poetic shorthand, making it possible to communicate and evoke a great deal in very few words” (Ken Dowden and Niall Livingstone 9). When a reader reads a work containing a certain character or a familiar plot line, s/he wonders if s/he has not seen it before. Sometimes this character or plot may refer to another literary work, but there is a great possibility that it alludes to a myth. According to Dowden and Livingstone, drama arises “from the performance of mythic song” (9), which may explain why most tragedies are based on myths.<sup>10</sup> Myths enable the audience to experience drama with intensity while maintaining some distance, and they help “playwrights to make highly significant choices and changes of emphasis, and to engage in constant dialogue with the tradition (including

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<sup>10</sup> See Dowden and Livingstone (page 9-10) for more details.

previous plays, as well as epic and other poetry) and with their audience members' expectations" (10). This characteristic is well explained by Lévi-Strauss and Chris Baldick.

In "The Structural Study of Myth," Lévi-Strauss compares poetry and myth affirming that the first "cannot be translated" without "distortions" while the meaning of a myth is not jeopardized by a poor translation: "Its substance does not lie in its style, its original music, or its syntax, but in the *story* which it tells" (430). Therefore, plot is an important part of myths for it sets a fixed message, a pattern which tends to echo myths even when they are not told entirely. This pattern enables a myth to be "everlasting: it explains the present and the past as well as the future" (Lévi-Strauss 430). In this sense, a myth is not confined to a distant past; it belongs to our contemporary world, and it will probably influence subsequent generations. Following Lévi-Strauss's point of view, Baldick compares myths to literary texts. He explains that a literary text is "fixed in its form but . . . complex and multi-vocal in its meaning" whereas myths accept many "kinds of adaptation" while maintaining "a basic stability of meaning" (*In Frankenstein's Shadow* 2). Baldick also relies on Aristotle's notion of *mythos* as a "basic action" to affirm that long stories can be reduced to simple "memorable patterns" and still be recognizable in different contexts (3). Thus, a myth can be adapted to drama, novels, movies, and visual arts without losing its message. The most frequent a myth is, the most apparent its pattern becomes (Lévi-Strauss 443).

The relation between myth and literature is extensively developed by Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism*, where he classifies narrative modes into five categories. One is a narrative mode of myth, and the others are narrative modes of literature. They are all separated according to the hero of the story (33). The first category is related to myths that are traditionally stories about divine beings, gods. These stories can be found outside the literary realm. The second category includes four literary modes. The first literary mode, romance, portrays a hero who is superior to other human beings and their environment (Frye

33). He is brave, and his deeds do not abide by “the ordinary laws of nature” (Coupe 151). He is the hero of legends and folk tales (Frye 33). The second literary mode is the *high mimetic* mode whose hero is superior to common human beings but not to their environment. In this case, the hero is a leader. He can be found in most epics and tragedies (Frye 34). When the hero is an ordinary human being, he is “the hero of the *low mimetic* mode” (Frye 34). He is portrayed in comedies and realistic fictions. The last one is the *ironic* mode whose hero is inferior to other men “in power or intelligence” (Frye 34). This kind of hero is often found in “modernist poetry and fiction, satirical fantasy and the theatre of the absurd” (Coupe 152). This classification can be used as a starting point since it helps us recognize the possible variations on the focus of the plot.

It’s important to highlight that, as Frye himself acknowledges, a certain category may trespass limits and reach the next step or retrace to a previous one (*Anatomy* 51-2). Thus, stories may be in a narrative mode, and, at the same time, have characteristics of another. Among these categories, myth and both mimetic modes stand out for they are closely related to the literary works dealt with in this research. The creation of man in Greek and Christian traditions, represented here by Hesiod’s *Theogony* and Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, are great examples of myths. *Frankenstein*, on the one hand, can be classified into the *low mimetic* mode for Victor is an ordinary human being, but, on the other hand, he resembles the hero of the *high mimetic* mode since he may be considered superior to other men for his incomparable scientific discovery.

Frye’s theory relies on the notion that myths have a fixed pattern. Myths provide us with archetypes through which we will recognize a previous plot. In literature, archetypal symbols can be divided into three categories (*Anatomy* 139). The first is called apocalyptic imagery and is part of the mythical mode. It represents the “undisplaced myth,” which tells stories of divine beings and the desirable world, heaven or paradise. It contrasts with the

undesirable world, hell or perpetual darkness, which is the second category, the demonic imagery. This category belongs to the mythical mode but it can also be expressed in the ironic mode. The last one is the analogical imagery which comprehends romance and both high and mimetic modes. Although the stories of these modes take place in the physical world, they may contain characters that resemble the gods in the mythical modes.

Therefore, mythology “is an important element of literature, and . . . literature is a means of extending mythology” (Coupe 4). In *Myth*, Laurence Coupe proposes that “literary works may be regarded as ‘mythopoeic,’ tending to create or re-create certain narratives which human beings take to be crucial to their understanding of their world” (4). He explains that theories on myth can be separated into two categories: one is realist, “translating narrative into the terms of truth, *mythos* into *logos*” (93). The other, non-realist, assumes that myth is open to many possibilities of interpretation. The realist theories use allegory to interpret myths whereas the non-realist theories use what Coupe calls “radical typology.” Allegory, which means *other* in Greek (Coupe 97), has the capacity to represent a message by using a different form or image. Based on this premise, “The narrative is not allowed to exceed the argument; the medium is not allowed to exceed the message” (97), that is, allegorical interpretations of myths focus on their hidden meaning which may be philosophical or theological.

As for typology, Coupe explains two kinds: the first is “orthodox typology” which refers to the relation between a type (the first expression of a myth) and its anti-type, the fulfillment of the type. As an example, he quotes Paul, who in I Corinthians 15:22, compares Christ to Adam: “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (ESV).<sup>11</sup> Christ is the anti-type of Adam because he restores “the paradisaic bliss lost in the original fall from the Garden of Eden” (93). Coupe claims that “orthodox typology is a kind of

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<sup>11</sup> All biblical quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV).

demythologization” since it prevents narrative from developing; it interrupts or finishes the story. In this sense, orthodox typology becomes as limited as allegorical interpretations. To oppose to them, Coupe proposes a second kind of typology: the “radical typology” that consists in understanding myths and the relation between type and anti-type as an infinite cycle: “all myths presuppose a previous narrative, and in turn form the model for future narratives” (100). In radical typology, the dynamic between anti-type and type still exists, however, “the anti-type manages to go beyond the type” (101) creating a new anti-type. In this cycle, authors allude to previous myths to build up their stories that may become the basis for other myths. As an example, we can mention Mary Shelley, who relies on previous myths, *Theogony* and *Paradise Lost*, to create the story of a scientist and his creature, which in turn becomes a referential myth for the subsequent generations.

Another aspect of myths was presented by Marina Warner in a series of lectures to BBC Radio 4 in 1994. In her second lecture, she links myths and monsters by giving to the former a function that is often attributed to the latter. For her, “a myth shows something, it is a story spoken to a purpose, it issues a warning, it gives an account which advises and tells, often by bringing into play showings of fantastical shape and invention – monsters” (2).<sup>12</sup> She argues that the heroes of Greek myths

served as tragic warnings; their pride, their knowing and unknowing crimes, their matricides and infanticides, self-blinding and suicides, all the strife and horror they undergo and perpetrate did not make them exemplary, but cautionary. They provoked terror and pity, not emulation. The tragedies they inspired offered their heroes as objects of debate, not models. (6)

The myths of Oedipus and Narcissus, for instance, do not set an example to be followed; they are rather warnings. The same thing happens with Frankenstein. His story warns us of the

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<sup>12</sup> The quotations were taken from the lecture transcription available on BBC Radio 4 website.

dangers of an irresponsible creation. Victor fails to assist his creation with care and shelter, which leads him to his own destruction. Warner's point of view is quite similar to Northrop Frye's, who claims that "A myth is designed not to describe a specific situation but to contain it in a way that does not restrict its significance to that one situation" (*The Great Code* 46). Freud would probably agree on it since his theory on the Oedipus myth explains the conflicting relations between any parents and their children rather than focuses on Oedipus.

This relation between myth and reality is also developed by Benjamin Bennett in an article discussing Nietzsche's idea of myth. He claims that a myth is a "concentrated world image" that represents reality, not as an allegory, but as "a 'mediating world' placed between ourselves and existence for the specific purpose of concealing the true horror of our condition" (424). Hence, a myth becomes a "created, artificial symbol" of truth (423), "the product of a constantly renewed creative art on our part" (424). When readers understand myth as a constant creative action, they are free to judge and accept, or reject, its message. This process reenacts "the action of creation itself" (423), and it comprehends not only an author who alludes to a myth, but also the reader who recreates a myth every time s/he reads it.

Undoubtedly, myth is a recurrent element in literary works. Sometimes myths are the protagonist of the story, other times they are just a minor character. What really matters is how myths contribute to the readers' understanding of the work in question. Myths, ancient or modern (as opposed to old), have proved to be useful tools to condense the portrayal of a character since they can hold a great deal of meaning. When myths are alluded to, they bring into play all their characteristics: interactivity, power of warning, possibility of elevating the work to the status of myth, and assurance of belonging to a long and solid tradition.

## 2.2. Romantic Views on Prometheus

The written story of Prometheus first appears in Hesiod's *Theogony* around the eighth century B.C. In this poem, Hesiod describes the creation of heaven and earth and provides the genealogy of the gods. As for Prometheus, his story is introduced as follows:

Klymene, a slender-ankled maid of Okeanos, wed  
Iapetos: he took her and he led her to their bed.  
To him she bore stout Atlas, a strong souled and mighty son,  
Renowned Menoitios, brilliant Prometheus, the clever, shifty one,  
And Epimetheus, the mind that missed the mark – from whom,  
For men who labor for their bread, evil was first to come;  
For he received the molded girl from Zeus into his home.  
The violent Menoitios far-seeing Zeus flung down  
To darkness with a thunderbolt, by reason of his own  
Arrogance and insolence, virile presumption. (507-16)

Among the four brothers, Prometheus and Epimetheus stand out because of their close relation to mankind; the first brings fire to man, and the other brings misery. Epimetheus, whose story is told in Hesiod's *Works and Days*, may be considered the double of his brother Prometheus. Epimetheus, or “afterthought” in Greek, is naïve and imprudent. He accepts Zeus' present in spite of his brother's warning.

On the other hand, Prometheus, whose name in Greek means “forethought” or “he who thinks before,” is known for his cleverness and trickery. Another word that describes him is altruist. He puts man's well-being before his own. Indeed, Prometheus' actions reveal his preference for men over Zeus, who is twice deceived by him. As Hesiod tells, when gods and men are gathered at Mekone, Prometheus

AppORTIONED an enormous ox and laid it out so that

He would deceive the mind of Zeus. Flesh, entrails rich in fat,  
 He hid them in the ox's tripe, sewn up in a hide;  
 The white bones of the ox he set by contrast to the side,  
 Hidden within the glistening fat – such was his crafty scheme. (537-41)

Knowing that Zeus would choose the most generous portion, the Titan tricks him so that man could have the best part of the meat. Disrespected, Zeus deprives man of fire: “And ever recalling from that time the trick and his great ire, / He would not give to ash trees the unwearying force of fire / For death-born humans, they that dwell upon the earth; . . .”(562-64). Then, Prometheus decides to steal fire and give it to man:

When in a hollow fennel stalk he stole the far-seen glow  
 Of the unwearying force of fire – and that bit deep into  
 The heart within the thunderer's breast, provoking rage in him  
 When among human beings he saw the far-seen fire's gleam. (566-69)

For this disobedience, Zeus punishes Prometheus severely:

With breakless, grievous chains he bound Prometheus, then drove  
 Those chains into a pillar's midst so that he couldn't move,  
 And set a broad-winged eagle on the wily one: it flew  
 Down to eat his deathless liver, which always nightly grew  
 Back from what the broad-winged bird that day had swallowed down.  
 But mighty Herakles, at length, trim-legged Alkmene's son,  
 Destroyed it, thereby driving off that foul affliction,  
 Freeing the son of Iapetos from the miseries he had known – (521-28)

To punish man, Zeus sends the first woman, Pandora, to Epimetheus. She brings with her a jar filled with all sorts of evils that are released when she opens the lid.<sup>13</sup> Then, man starts to

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<sup>13</sup> For more details, see Hesiod's *Works and Days*.

experience all kinds of sicknesses and evils. Although this last episode is seldom remembered as part of the myth, its relevance cannot be denied since it shows that man is also punished because of Prometheus's theft.

Together with *Theogony*, other two versions of the myth are often remembered, the first is Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, a play written in the fifth century, and the second is Apollodorus' *Library*.<sup>14</sup> Aeschylus depicts Prometheus' punishment with more details than Hesiod, but he does not mention Prometheus's family members, or relates the Titan to Pandora. The first scene shows Kratos and Hephaestus taking Prometheus to mount Caucasus where he will be chained for stealing fire from Zeus. In this play, Prometheus is not only the fire-bringer, he also provides man with knowledge: "they were witless before and I made them have sense and endowed them with reason" (443-44). Prometheus has taught man how to write, domesticate animals, and use plants as medicine. Thus, the rising of human intelligence and art is explicitly attributed to Prometheus whereas these things are only symbolically represented by fire in Hesiod's text. Another important difference is that in *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus's name is more meaningful; as the one who foresees things, Prometheus predicts his being released by Io's son, a descendant from Zeus, which does not happen in *Theogony*. However, the major difference between Hesiod's and Aeschylus's texts is Prometheus' character. In *Theogony*, Prometheus is a trickster whose punishment is due to his disrespect to Zeus. In contrast, in *Prometheus Bound*, the Titan is a rebel who confronts Zeus' tyranny for the sake of man. Aeschylus' portrayal of Prometheus hints at a political context that is not mentioned by Hesiod.

The third recurrent version of the myth, Apollodorus' *Library*, presents a concise account on Prometheus. Dated around the second century B.C., this compendium of Greek

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<sup>14</sup> Although Hesiod's *Theogony* was chosen as the main reference to the myth of Prometheus, other references will be analyzed in this chapter so that a more nuanced meaning of the myth is grasped.

mythology portrays Prometheus as the creator of man and attributes his punishment to the fire theft like in the other versions:

Prometheus moulded men out of water and earth and gave them also fire, which, unknown to Zeus, he had hidden in a stalk of fennel. But when Zeus learned of it, he ordered Hephaestus to nail his body to Mount Caucasus, which is a Scythian mountain. On it Prometheus was nailed and kept bound for many years. Every day an eagle swooped on him and devoured the lobes of his liver, which grew by night. That was the penalty that Prometheus paid for the theft of fire until Hercules afterwards released him. . . . (Book 1 Chapter 7)

Different from *Theogony*, Apollodorus' text starts Prometheus' story by acknowledging him as the creator of mankind. It is also relevant to highlight that Prometheus' personality is not described in the same way. Whereas Apollodorus depicts the Titan as a devoted creator, Hesiod portrays Prometheus as a trickster who insists on affronting Zeus. It is noticeable that there are some differences between Hesiod's text and Apollodorus', but, taking into consideration Lévi-Strauss's idea that every version of the myth is part of the myth ("The Structural" 435), both are constituent parts of the same story. They help us understand the myth of Prometheus as a whole. Therefore, these two aspects of Prometheus, the creator and the fire-bringer, constitute a useful source for the Romantic writers who found in Prometheus a symbol of human endurance and freedom.

Based on these characteristics, it is possible to classify Prometheus into: first, Prometheus *plasticator*, the creator of mankind, and second, Prometheus *pyrphoros*, the fire-bringer.<sup>15</sup> Prometheus *plasticator* is described in Apollodorus' *Library*, but is omitted in *Theogony* and *Prometheus Bound*. Although the creation of mankind is not attributed to Prometheus in these two works, his being portrayed as a caring figure enables us to

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<sup>15</sup> See Anne Mellor's "Promethean Politics" for more information.

acknowledge him as the protector of mankind. As for Prometheus *pyrphoros*, the fire he steals from Zeus is an important element in all three stories and in many subsequent ones. On the literal level, fire stands for survival; it guarantees men's food, warmth and protection against wild animals. Symbolically, fire has a great deal of meanings, such as "the spirit of technology, forbidden knowledge, the conscious intellect, political power, and the artistic inspiration" (Dougherty 3). These multiple representations are possible because the myth of Prometheus "offers the poet a wealth of themes and questions about the human experience to be elaborated, extended, questioned, even overturned" (Dougherty 10). Indeed, Prometheus is constantly alluded to in literary works, especially during Romanticism, the period in which the myth seems to have found its apogee.

Originated in Germany and England in the 1790s, Romanticism spread around Europe during the first half of the nineteenth century (Baldick, *The Concise Dictionary* 222). Romantic writers rejected the tradition of imitating the classics mechanically and sought original ways to express themselves. They praised "creativity, imagination, and freedom" (Dougherty 91). The changes did not occur only in the literary style. Romanticism was also influenced by the liberating discourse of the French Revolution that spread during this period. Embodying ideas of innovation and resistance, Prometheus becomes a hero among the Romantics. As Carol Dougherty claims, "Whether as a symbol of rebellion against tyrannical authority, the benefactor of mankind, or the very image of human suffering, Prometheus was central to the human political experience of the Romantic period" (97). Many writers, such as Goethe, Lord Byron, and the Shelleys, built their characters to resemble Prometheus or to reenact his deeds.

Best known for *Faust* and *The Sorrows of Werther*, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was also inspired by the myth of Prometheus. Whereas the English poets preferred Prometheus, the rebellious fire-bringer, Goethe focused his poem on Prometheus the creator. In the poem

dedicated to the Titan, Goethe depicts a defiant Prometheus, “. . . forged into a Man, / by almighty Time, / And eternal Fate” (42-45). Always ironic and resentful, Prometheus accuses Zeus of neglect: “Who helped me / Against the Titans’ might? / Who saved me from Death, / From Slavery?” (28-31), which culminates with his lack of respect towards the Almighty: “Shall I honour you? What for?” It is under this circumstance that Prometheus creates man in his own image:

A people to be like me,  
 To suffer, to weep,  
 To enjoy and to delight themselves,  
 And to not attend to you –  
 As I. (53-57)

Goethe’s Prometheus has unresolved issues with his own creator, which he passes on to his creations. His bad feeling toward Zeus becomes a barrier between man and the gods. Apart from being the creator of mankind, Prometheus represented, for Goethe, the rising of creativity and intellectuality. He “found in the rebellious nature and creative power of Prometheus a powerful model for his own artistic and personal autonomy” (Dougherty 93). Moreover, Goethe, as Dougherty observes, imprints in some of his works aspects usually attributed to Prometheus, especially in *Faust*, a novel in which its protagonists seek to acquire godlike knowledge (92-93).

Another poet who resorts to Prometheus in his writings is Lord Byron. According to Carol Dougherty, “at least seventeen allusions to Prometheus” can be found in his works (97). One of these works is the poem dedicated to the Titan, which portrays Prometheus as a suffering hero. The poem starts with the speaker questioning Prometheus if his sacrifice is worth the pain:

Titan! to whose immortal eyes

The sufferings of mortality,  
 Seen in their sad reality,  
 Were not as things that gods despise;  
 What was thy pity's recompense? (1-5)

The speaker continues his speech whereas the Titan does not say a word, which highlights his incapacity to release himself from his current condition. At this point, it is hard not to relate Byron's Prometheus to Christ. Both have done good to man, but received just bad things in return. Besides, both are seen as martyrs and examples of selflessness. However, different from Christ, whose sacrifice saves man, Prometheus' suffering does not guarantee man's well-being. In some lines below this passage, the speaker recognizes that man's destiny is not different from Prometheus' for both are condemned to suffer:

Thou art a symbol and a sign  
 To Mortals of their fate and force;  
 Like thee, Man is in part divine,  
 A troubled stream from a pure source;  
 And Man in portions can foresee  
 His own funereal destiny;  
 His wretchedness, and his resistance. (44-50)

In these lines, Prometheus is shown to be the symbol of suffering and endurance, which seems to be the inevitable fate of both the Titan and man. The melancholy tone of the poem remains until its end when the speaker concludes that the only way to escape suffering is death. Byron's portrayal of Prometheus is very different from Percy Shelley's. Whereas Byron's Prometheus is weak and helpless, Shelley's Prometheus manages to release himself from the chains that have held him for three thousand years.

Published in 1820, *Prometheus Unbound*, which depicts the Titan's release from his punishment, is Percy Shelley's sequel to Aeschylus' play *Prometheus Bound*. In his preface, Shelley claims that "Prometheus is, as it were, the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends." Despite being severely punished, Shelley's Prometheus does not nurture anger against his oppressor, as he declares,

Disdain! Ah no! I pity thee. What ruin  
Will hunt thee undefended through wide Heaven!  
How will thy soul, cloven to its depth with terror,  
Gape like a hell within! I speak in grief,  
Not exultation, for I hate no more. (Act I, 53-57)

In this lyric drama, "Prometheus stands as the symbol for passive resistance, forgiveness, and love" (Dougherty 103). Contrary to what would be expected, the Titan does not seek to take revenge on Jupiter, the Roman equivalent of Zeus, which emphasizes the pure intention of the character.

Also in the preface, Shelley compares Prometheus to another famous rebellious figure that was also considered a hero "by many Romantic writers" (Tropp 15):

Prometheus is, in my judgment, a more poetical character than Satan, because, in addition to courage, and majesty, and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force, he is susceptible of being described as exempt from the taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandizement, which, in the hero of *Paradise Lost*, interfere with the interest.

Not only Shelley, but also Blake thought of Satan as "an admirable rebel, a Prometheus gone wrong" (Tropp 15). They both rebel against Heaven, but only Prometheus' transgression is

justified by his good intentions. Satan, on the other hand, tries to depose God so that he could reach his goals.

Regardless of the example, Hesiod's, Byron's or Shelley's, every poem mentioned represents Prometheus as an outstanding figure devoted to his creature and incapable of inflicting any harm even on his own oppressor. However, in 1818, Mary Shelley published the first edition of a novel in which Prometheus was no longer a Titan. In *Frankenstein*, Prometheus is represented by a man subject to all the plight of a common human being. The next section contains an extensive analysis of Victor as the modern, and mortal, Prometheus.

### 2.3. Frankenstein as the Modern Prometheus

In her preface to the third edition, released in 1831, Mary Shelley claims that “Every thing must have a beginning . . . and that beginning must be linked to something that went before” (195). She believes that “invention . . . does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos” (195). These statements help us understand her decision to subtitle her novel after Prometheus, since they corroborate the idea that

Mythic paradigms provide the reader or spectator with a series of familiar reference points and a set of expectations which the novelist, artist, director, playwright, composer, or poet can rely upon as an instructive shorthand, while simultaneously exploiting, twisting, and relocating them in newly creative ways, and in newly resonant contexts. (Sanders 81)

When Mary Shelley introduces her novel by referring to Prometheus, she invokes the already established meaning of this myth and inserts *Frankenstein* into the tradition of creation myths. By placing the Titan's name in the subtitle, rather than the title itself, she informs her reader that her novel is not another extension of that myth, as Percy Shelley had done in *Prometheus Unbound*. Instead, her novel is a “modern” adaptation of the myth, more suitable

to her contemporary audience than the ancient one. Thus, the reader is prepared to read her story having as a starting point the myth of Prometheus, but aware of the changes s/he is about to encounter.

As it is broadly known, her first idea for the novel came up after a nightmare in which she dreamt about “the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling towards the thing he had put together” (*Frankenstein* 196). Departing from this idea, she wrote her novel using the Prometheus myth, among other sources, to support her story. In the Titan she found the image of a creator who, in contrast with Victor, is a constant protector. By setting a pattern, Shelley enables her readers to understand the gravity of Victor’s acts. However, it is the departure from the “original” that makes her novel a unique work. Through *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley develops the two main aspects of the myth, Prometheus *plasticator* (the creator) and Prometheus *pyrphoros* (the fire-bringer).

As a representation of Prometheus *plasticator*, Victor Frankenstein creates a new being through science, reinforcing the Romantic exaltation of imagination and intellectuality. His studies begin when he first reads one of Cornelius Agrippa’s works. Henceforth, he continues his study on natural philosophy by reading not only Agrippa but also Paracelsus and Albertus Magnus. Victor “enter[s] with the greatest diligence into the search of the philosopher’s stone and the elixir of life” (23) because he wants to achieve what these men have promised in theory but have not accomplished in practice. Soon, Victor opts to focus his study on the latter matter since he is more interested in the glory of defeating death than acquiring wealth for himself, as he wonders: “what glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!” (23). By enabling man to overcome death “Victor Frankenstein,” according to Anne Mellor, “is himself participating in the mythopoeic vision that inspired the first generation of Romantic poets and thinkers,” such as William Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Godwin, and

Percy Shelley (“Promethean Politics” 70). They believed that “the right use of reason and imagination could annihilate not only social injustice and human evil but even . . . the consciousness of human finitude and death itself” (Mellor 70). By using science to mold his creature, Frankenstein praises man’s creativity over divine power, which becomes the first contrast between the modern and the ancient Prometheus.

Initially, Victor wants to discover the principles of life for a humbled reason, but after he accomplishes it, his desire changes, as he states: “A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs” (36). Then, Victor forgets his wish to help man overcome death, and starts assembling a new being so that he can be acclaimed his creator. Anne Mellor explains,

Mary Shelley clearly perceived the inherent danger in a Promethean revolutionary ideology: commitment to an abstract good can justify an emotional detachment from present human relationships and family obligations, a willingness to sacrifice the living to a cause whose final consequences cannot be fully controlled, and an obsession with realizing a dream that too often masks an egotistical wish for personal power. (86)

Victor’s experiments deprive him of the company of his beloved ones, and, throughout the novel, there are moments when he leaves them again to seek the creature. His obsessive pursuit of knowledge, and, later on, of the creature prevents him from seeing that he has put his needs before everyone else’s. Always driven by selfishness, Victor neglects not only his family, but also his creature.

Victor’s interest in the principle of life and death is “purely theoretical” (Hustis 849); he is more interested in the process of creation than the product itself. After his work is completed, Victor avoids the creature and the moral responsibility over him. For Hustis,

Shelley's novel "explores the ethics of a male creator's relationship to his progeny by questioning the extent to which he incurs an obligation for the well-being and happiness of that creation by virtue of the creative act itself" (846). This may explain why Victor denies his support and company to the creature, but agrees to make a mate for him. Frankenstein enjoys the role of a creator, but despises the role of a father. Carol Dougherty points out that "the novel raises enduring Promethean questions about the dangers of unbridled scientific research and the limitations of the creative process – what are the moral issues involved when mankind metaphorically steals fire and usurps the divine power of creation?" (111). The novel certainly exalts man for his intellectual capacities, but it also calls attention to the responsibility that should follow creativity; Victor's successful experiment is overshadowed by his neglect of his creature.

Different from Apollodorus' Prometheus, who molds man from water and earth, Victor Frankenstein molds his creature out of the pieces of the corpses he finds in charnel houses, dissecting rooms, and slaughterhouses (36-7). He devotes his time and health to "the creation of a new human being" (35), who is, for the sake of the procedure, "eight feet in height, and proportionably [sic] large" (36). Not once does Victor consider the hardship the creature would endure to fit in society. At first, Victor admires his creation for its proportion and beauty, but, as soon as the creature is alive, Victor's eyes open to see the seriousness of the situation: "I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart" (39). The creature's appearance causes such repulsion in Victor that he cannot stand looking at his creation. How can Victor sympathize with such a horrible creature? Frankenstein is unable to take care of the creature

because his hideous face reminds him of his mistake, so he flees from his laboratory and leaves the creature unattended.

According to Hustis, “what is lost when responsible creativity is conceived of solely in terms of justice and a purportedly objective ethic of fairness is precisely what is the most crucial element of this myth, namely, Promethean pity” (849). Prometheus puts man’s need before his own, which does not happen in *Frankenstein*. Victor’s inability to support his creature is also due to his lack of pity towards his creation. While the ancient Prometheus is driven by pity and compassion to help man and, later, to endure his own punishment, the modern Prometheus has a cold heart, devoid of selfless feelings. Modernity has brought superficiality and individualism. Frankenstein’s belief that he is disobliged to support the creature becomes his greatest fallacy. The novel shows that “creativity can never be conceived of as a singular train of thought or a solitary impulse. . . . creation is always an associative or nurturing act” (Hustis 835). Undoubtedly, the main difference between *Frankenstein* and ancient versions of the myth, such as *Theogony* and *Prometheus Bound*, is that the Prometheus represented in the novel is unable to recognize “an offspring’s need for sustained guidance, influence, pity, and support from its creator” (Hustis 845). While in *Theogony*, the Titan provides man with fire, and, similarly, in *Prometheus Bound* the Titan guarantees man’s intellectual improvement, Victor fails to supply his creature with basic items, such as food and shelter, and more important ones, parenting and intellectual instruction.

As a representation of Prometheus *pyrphoros*, Victor succeeds in stealing fire from the gods, that is, the spark of life used to animate the creature, but he does not fulfill his role completely for he fails to hand fire to his creature, in both literal and symbolic sense. The creature finds it by himself, as he reveals: “One day, when I was oppressed by cold, I found a fire which had been left by some wandering beggars, and was overcome with delight at the

warmth I experienced from it” (81). Then, the creature learns the dangers of fire when he tries to touch it (81). He finds out how it works in order to keep it on longer, and learns that it improves the flavor of meat and nuts (82). Although Frankenstein is not the fire bringer in the two situations in which the creature encounters fire, the first in the woods and the second in the hut, in both moments fire is left by a man who has used it as a tool to provide warmth and food for himself. Therefore, in *Frankenstein* fire is not the product of a theft, it is rather an unintentional gift given by men who, in the novel, possess the ability to generate and handle fire.

While in the woods, the creature also experiences cold and hunger and learns how to provide food and shelter for himself. He feels all sorts of emotions which he cannot deal with, such as “pain and pleasure” (85). Afterwards, he finds out the beauty of music by listening to the cottagers singing at night (86). He learns the powerful sensation of love. He sees the cottagers with pity and kindness and helps them by picking up wood logs so that Felix can stay in the company of his family. After seeing Felix and Agatha giving food to their father when they had none for themselves (88), the creature stops stealing food from their house, which is an act of love. He is able to love although he is not taught to. Parents are the first teachers of a child; they instruct them how to eat, walk, speak, and behave. Even though the creature did not have the present figure of a father, he is able to learn all those things. Of course, he would not learn all this literally by himself, but he is able to learn it by observing the cottagers.

Unable to speak at first, the creature learns French, his first language, together with Safie. As he himself notices, “I might more speedily master the language; and I may boast that I improved more rapidly than the Arabian, who understood very little, and conversed in broken accents, whilst I comprehended and could imitate almost every word that was spoken” (95). After learning how to speak, he starts to learn the “science of letters” (95). In the ancient

myth of Prometheus the gift of fire has good and bad effects upon man. Likewise, the creature perceives that although knowledge enables him to communicate with others, it brings him misery. Both Felix's instructions and the books he reads afterwards open the creature's view of the world and show him how man is evil. "Every increase in consciousness is an increase in despair" (Bloom, Introduction 9); the more he learns about man, the more he feels bad about himself. He recognizes that he is more wretched than a slave, for despite having no money, he does not have any parent or siblings. He does not even understand how he has come to life (96-7). In this sense, fire, as a symbol of knowledge, also causes bad effects on the creature.

Other two moments when fire assumes a negative connotation are, first, his act of revenge over the De Lacey's family, and, second, his hellish death in the farthest lands of the North Pole. After the creature's frustrated attempt to get acquainted with the cottagers, they abandon their house in fear of seeing the creature again. Then, he "lighted the dry branch of a tree, and danced with fury around the devoted cottage." The creature tells that "The wind fanned the fire, and the cottage was quickly enveloped by the flames, which clung to it, and licked it with their forked and destroying tongues" (113). Here fire becomes a weapon which consumes the house and every possibility of peace between man and the creature. It is after this scene that he decides to find his creator in order to ask him for a suitable mate. In addition, fire is the main element in the creature's foreshadowing of his death, as he describes: I "shall seek the most northern extreme of the globe; I shall collect my funeral pile, and consume to ashes this miserable frame" (190). It is ironic how the same element that represents Victor's ability to put life into an inanimate body becomes the weapon that will extinguish the creature's life. In the novel, fire means life and death in different moments.

In sum, the modern Prometheus inherits all the flaws that define the human condition. Victor is selfish and blind by his thirst for glory. In comparison with the ancient version of

the myth, Victor is a failure as a provider and protector. His great accomplishment of creating a new being is obscured by his complete neglect of his creature; Victor stands out not for his greatness, but for his deficiencies. Therefore, the myth of Prometheus is an important source for Shelley's novel for it helps the reader understand Victor and his unstable relationship with his creature. In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley "reconfigures, recontextualizes, and thus modernizes the myth of Prometheus" (Hustis 845), which makes the novel not a mere repetition of the ancient myth, but a complete new myth in itself, which will be discussed in chapter four. In the next chapter, the Christian myth of creation will be analyzed through John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, for it corroborates with this discussion on responsible creativity. In addition, *Paradise Lost*, in contrast with the myth of Prometheus, enables the creature to have a voice and draw his own conclusions about himself and his creator.

### 3. Echoes of *Paradise Lost* in *Frankenstein*

A must-read book for the Romantics, *Paradise Lost* was a common reference in education, political agenda, and social and religious debates.<sup>16</sup> According to Lucy Newlyn, “Novelists, male and female alike, turned to [*Paradise Lost*] as a model for the structure of their narratives and for the delineation of their characters. They knew they could rely on the immediacy and effectiveness of its popular appeal to bring home any moral point they themselves wished to convey” (19). One of them is Mary Shelley, who read *Paradise Lost* a couple of times before and after the first publication of *Frankenstein*.<sup>17</sup> Her novel can be read as an adaptation of *Paradise Lost*, for Shelley reinterprets the epic making it relevant to her contemporaries by updating the epic to the nineteenth context. Shelley appropriates Miltonic characters, themes and methods to write her version of the Fall in a world deprived of God, or any other divine being, which is more suitable to her contemporary readers since the Romantics were surrounded by revolutionary ideas from the French revolution, and they were bound to question political and divine authorities.<sup>18</sup>

The first element to be analyzed is the narrative. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton retells the story of the fall and the creation of the world based on the book of Genesis. Milton’s voice is apparent through the epic narrator, for he sometimes comments on personal issues, such as his blindness. In *Frankenstein*, Walton tells Victor’s story together with his own accounts of his trip to the North Pole. The epic narrator and Walton influence the readers’ understanding of the stories, for they determine how readers receive and process the information on events and characters. Since the first books of *Paradise Lost* begin in Hell, the reader would tend to be seduced by Satan’s rhetoric. However, when Raphael reports the story of the battle in Heaven, the reader gets to know why Satan is banished. Then the reader has the chance to

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<sup>16</sup> See Lucy Newlyn (19) for more information.

<sup>17</sup> Mary Shelley read *Paradise Lost* first between 1815 and 1816, and from 1819 to 1820 (Curran, “Mary Shelley’s Reading”).

<sup>18</sup> See Brent Robida’s “Romantic Atheism and Blasphemy” for further information.

adjust his opinion on Satan. By listening to Satan's speech first, some readers may think that Satan is unfairly punished by an authoritarian god. However, when the readers know God's side of the story, they can ponder whether Satan's rebellion is right or wrong, and, aware of the whole story, readers are able to draw their own conclusions.

Like in *Paradise Lost*, the way Shelley organizes her novel causes the readers to adjust their opinion on Frankenstein and his creature as the narrative point of view changes. The reader is distracted by Walton's first letters to his sister, which are not closely related to the main narrative. Then Frankenstein tells the story from his point of view. At this point, readers tend to sympathize with Victor. He seems to be an honest man looking for ways to help humanity. Nevertheless, as soon as the creature starts his tale, most readers may adjust their opinion on Victor and shift their sympathy to the creature. This frame-structured narrative echoes the method of giving alternatives used in *Paradise Lost*, which "impl[ies] a subtle amplification of Miltonic indeterminacy" (Newlyn 86). Milton provides the readers with several alternatives, such as Satan or God, predestination or free will, good or evil, paradise or hell within. Then the readers decide which one they will support. In the same manner, Shelley provides her readers with many alternatives: the novel echoes two creation myths (the Christian and the Greek versions), Victor and his creature try out different personae from *Paradise Lost*,<sup>19</sup> there are three distinct points of view (Walton's, Victor's, and the creature's), and, to her first readers, the indeterminacy also surrounded the author of the novel.

The second method used by Shelley that resembles *Paradise Lost* is to introduce the theme of the story before the text itself. In the epic, Milton states that he intends to "justify the ways of God to men" (Book I, 26), and he provides short summaries before each book. Thus his readers are aware of the objective and the topic of the epic before advancing their

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<sup>19</sup> This point will be developed further on in this chapter.

reading. In like manner, Shelley condenses the theme of her novel in the first pages. By alluding to Prometheus and *Paradise Lost*, she prepares her readers for what is to come. Moreover, the themes of both works hint at some moral lessons. *Paradise Lost* and *Frankenstein* can be read as a *bildung*,<sup>20</sup> teaching their readers the dangers of uncontrolled ambition. Whereas the epic enables its readers to, metaphorically, re-enact the fall, Shelley's novel calls their attention to the responsibility that comes with creativity. By retelling the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden, Milton shows that although the external paradise is lost, a paradise within can be found outside Eden if one does not seek higher power or knowledge, but one “. . . only add[s] / Deeds to [one's] knowledge answerable, add[s] faith, / Add[s] virtue, patience, temperance, add[s] love” (Book XII, 581-83) so that one can find a happy state despite the violence and unfairness of the world described by Michael in books XI and XII. Ironically, both Victor and the creature do not reach paradise, physically or metaphorically. Eden and the paradise within have never existed for them. What both creator and creature encounter is the eternal hell within. Indeed, the whole story shows their journey into this state. Julie Sanders explains that “a myth is never transported wholesale into its new context, it undergoes its own metamorphoses in the process” (64). Mary Shelley revisits *Paradise Lost* while including new elements to the issue of the fall and the search of paradise. Her novel shows that most of the time paradise is out of reach.

Whenever a myth or a literary work is alluded to, it is subject to modifications, and this “difference always causes repetition to deviate” (Derrida, *Paper Machine* 136). According to Jacques Derrida, “there is no incompatibility between repetition and the novelty of what is different” (136); repetition implies reinterpretation which, consequently, causes a rupture. Derrida classifies this process as *iterability* which is an example of *différance* for it comprehends both “the same and the other,” the so-called original and its new form. It is also

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<sup>20</sup> According to David Mikics, “*Bildung*, often translated as ‘education,’ means in German the development of the self through knowledge” (40).

related to *inheritance* which, as Derrida affirms, “consist[s] in remaining faithful to that which one receives . . . while also breaking with any figure of that which is received” (95). *Frankenstein* expands the intertextual processes of quotations and allusions. It goes beyond imitation, for it becomes a different product. Shelley uses *Paradise Lost*’s themes and archetypes to set a pattern, but she ruptures with them when she portrays characters who inevitably become Satan-like figures. Besides, her characters are already outside paradise from the beginning of the novel. Therefore, it is possible to affirm that *Frankenstein* is an extension of the world described by Michael in books XI and XII, a world without God where men are left “to their own polluted ways” (XII, 110). This chapter presents the relation between *Frankenstein* and *Paradise Lost* from the novel’s epigraph to its outcome.

### 3.1. The Epigraph

Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay

To mould me man, did I solicit thee

From darkness to promote me

*Paradise Lost* X, 743-45

These verses extracted from Milton’s epic come right after the subtitle to Mary Shelley’s novel. Before the text itself, Shelley provides the readers with two myths whose stories are intertwined by theme. Therefore, the subtitle and the epigraph function as an introduction to the novel; they remind the readers of two ancient myths of creation that together constitute the base of *Frankenstein*. As an adaptation of the myth of Prometheus, the novel is dependent on the reader’s previous knowledge of the myth since the novel does not mention Prometheus again after the subtitle. Therefore, if the reader does not know Prometheus’ story, the subtitle loses its function. On the other hand, the references to

*Paradise Lost* are so well tied to the novel that a reader can understand them even though s/he has never read the epic. The creature himself reads *Paradise Lost* and explains to Victor how they are related to the characters of the epic. His analysis of the epic makes all the readers aware of the epic's themes and characters. Surely, the readers who are familiar with Milton's epic are likely to identify other point of references besides the ones explained by the creature, and, therefore, they experience the novel differently. From the epigraph to the creature's outcome, *Frankenstein* is filled with *Paradise Lost*'s themes and archetypes. Moreover, it is among one of the books read by the creature. In the epigraph Mary Shelley makes the first reference to *Paradise Lost* and sets a contrast with the subtitle that refers to Victor. The epigraph "foreshadows the antagonism between creator and creature that will boost the narrative" (Jeha 15).<sup>21</sup> By referring to both creator and creature before the text itself, Shelley highlights the idea that every story has two sides and invites the reader to know Victor and the creature's stories.

Taken from one of Adam's speech, the statement of the epigraph shows Adam's frustration over his Maker and the burden he feels for having fallen. After his disobedience, Adam tries to understand why God would create him, give him a task too hard to be accomplished, and, afterwards, convict him to death. Besides, Adam feels terrible for being responsible for the misery of all humankind. He is overwhelmed by doubts and anxiety, feelings which he has never experienced before. Although his worries are understandable, his complaint is not valid, for God has provided him with means to resist the temptation. Adam neglects God's instruction and disobeys Him even after Raphael's warning. When the creature reads *Paradise Lost*, he understands Adam's complaint, for he has the same doubts and feeling.

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<sup>21</sup> This is my translation of the following quotation: "prenuncia o antagonismo entre criador e criatura que vai impulsionar a narrativa" (Jeha 15).

Being the first of his kind, the creature has a lot of questions about his origin: “Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come?” (104), but different from Adam, the creature was alone in the world, as he observes: “But where were my friends and relations? No father had watched my infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses; or if they had, all my past life was now a blot, a blind vacancy in which I distinguished nothing” (97). He is unable to understand his condition until he reads about Adam. By establishing a parallel between himself and Adam, the creature comprehends his condition and his relationship with his creator:

Like Adam, I was created apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other aspect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with, and acquire knowledge from beings of superior nature. (105)

Different from Adam, who, after all, is in a beautiful garden filled with fruits and animals, and in the company of Eve, the creature has never had any support from his creator. Since the first moments of his life, the creature struggles to have food and shelter. He felt hunger, cold, and loneliness, things that Adam has never had to endure.

Being a wanderer in the world, the creature dreams of reaching paradise, that is, in his case, to be accepted and loved, as he complains: “no Eve soothed my sorrows, or shared my thoughts; I was alone. I remembered Adam’s supplication to his Creator; but where was mine? he [sic] had abandoned me, and, in the bitterness of my heart, I cursed him” (106). When the creature realizes that his needs could only be fulfilled by his creator, he goes after Victor in order to demand a companion. Then the creature has the opportunity to ask Victor why he has created him: “Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust?” (105). His question shows not only his wish to understand his origin, but his

revolt against his creator. During his speech, the creature uses *Paradise Lost*'s archetypes in order to make Victor understand his questioning: "God in pity made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid from its very resemblance" (105). The creature realizes that his horrendous appearance is the product of Victor's lack of pity towards him. Indeed, Victor has not created the creature to be like man, and he has not worried about the creature. The only moment in which Victor shows some kindness towards the creature is when he agrees to make a female creature. However, Victor soon changes his mind and destroys the second being. This episode is an example of the unstable relationship between Victor and the creature.

Mary Shelley uses Adam's words in the epigraph, but in the end of the novel the creature raises his own questions: "I desired love and fellowship, and I was still spurned. Was there no injustice in this? Am I to be thought the only criminal, when all human kind sinned against me? Why do not hate Felix, who drove his friend from his door with contumely? Why do not execrate the rustic who sought to destroy the saviour of his child?" (189). The creature cannot understand why he is the only one to be condemned when many other men have faults. The creature does not understand that his monstrous nature prevents him from being like a common man. As Julio Jeha explains, monsters "symbolize a warning or a punishment for some transgression of a code – for an evil that has been committed" (20).<sup>22</sup> Monsters were "exhibitions of moral vices: they were to be seen and not heard. For the readers of *Frankenstein*, though, as for the blind De Lacey, the visibility of the monster means nothing and his eloquence means everything for his identity" (Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow* 45). His appearance does not influence the judgment of those who cannot see him. Baldick affirms that "The monster's most convincingly human characteristic is of course his power of speech" (45); it distinguishes him from the traditional idea of a monster and allows readers to

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<sup>22</sup> This is my translation of the following quotation: "simbolizam um aviso ou um castigo por alguma transgressão de um código – por um mal cometido" (20).

sympathize with him. His discourse compels his creator and the readers' attention, proving that the creature is not a bestial monster. The creature's ability to speak guarantees his right to be listened to.

### 3.2. Frankenstein Playing God

In *Frankenstein*, Victor plays the role of two ancient creators, the first is Prometheus, and the second is Milton's God. Before Victor becomes a representation of God, he first resembles Eve for his desire to possess godlike power. In *Paradise Lost*, God expressly forbids Adam and Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge so that they would not die. However, the first couple disobeys God and eats the fruit. They do not die instantly, but they are banished from the Garden to the wilderness of the world. Thenceforth they are subject to injuries, miseries, and death. Likewise, Frankenstein wishes to possess a kind of knowledge never experienced by any human being. Indeed, as his father advises him, he should not have spent so much time studying obsolete theories. His disobedience brought misery and death to him and his whole family. As Victor's rising to the status of creator is an act driven by his ambition, he becomes a mock version of Milton's God, for he fails to fulfill his role as the provider of the creature he has given life to.

This comparison between Victor and the first couple helps us understand how illegitimate his power is. Being a man, Victor would never be entitled to create a new species; he lacks the power and the knowledge of the Miltonic God. As every Christian knows, what distinguishes God from every other being is his three main attributes: he is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton's God possesses all these features. Although there are (a) few moments in which God leaves Heaven, he can see everything from there: "From the pure empyrean where he sits / High throned above all highth, bent down his eye, / His own works and their works at once to view" (Book III, 57-9). As Belial recognizes

in his speech, it is impossible to hide anything from God: “. . . for what can force or guile / With him, or who deceive his mind, whose eye / Views all things at one view?” (Book II, 188-90). God is able to see not only the present but also the past and the future (Book III, 77-9).

He sees every step Satan takes, and He knows beforehand that Satan would deceive man:

Not far off Heav'n, in the precincts of light,  
Directly towards the new-created world,  
And man there placed, with purpose to assay  
If him by force he can destroy, or worse,  
By some false guile pervert; and shall pervert. (Book III, 88-92)

Then God arranges to save man through the sacrifice of his Son, who volunteers to die in man's place. In addition, God sends Raphael to remind Adam of his command and to warn him of the dangers that surround him. It is true that God could have sent his angels to protect Adam and Eve from Satan. He surely has the power to do so. However, God opts to give man the right to choose. He wants to be willingly adored by his creatures. Besides, he knows that his relationship with man would be harmed, but not destroyed. Man would still be able to find a paradise within through the Son. In the aftermath, man would be saved, Satan would be punished again, and God would reign forever.

Since Frankenstein lacks these divine attributes, he fails over and over again. His first mistake is to abandon his creature and leave him unprotected and unattended. The creature confesses that he would be a better being if man could accept him, but, how would man love “a thing such as Dante could not have conceived” (40)? Not even his creator wants to keep any ties with him. Thus, as George Levine affirms, Victor's greatest transgression is his neglect of his creature for it leads the creature to revolt against his own creator (10). Being

responsible for the creature, Victor is partially guilty of the creature's crimes. He is the only one that knows about the creature's existence, and, therefore, the only one capable of stopping him. Victor himself recognizes his fault when, during his ravings, he confesses that he is "the murderer of William, of Justine, and of Clerval" (148). To a certain extent, Victor is partially guilty of the deaths of William, Clerval, and Elizabeth, and even guiltier of Justine's. The first three characters are victims of the creature's rage, but Victor could have stopped the execution of poor Justine. He knows she is innocent, but his reputation seems to be more valuable than her life, and he decides to remain silent.

Another murder that could have been avoided was Elizabeth's. After the destruction of the female creature, the male creature promises to revenge: "I shall be with you on your wedding-night" (140). Victor misunderstands the threat and thinks that the creature wants to kill him. When Victor leaves Elizabeth in the bedroom to seek the creature, he appears and kills his last victim, Victor's wife. Despite the warning, Victor fails to protect her. He does not even understand the creature's words. He is a fraud as a god representative. It is true that Victor has the power to generate life, but he fails to have all the other divine features. He does not foresee any of the murders, he does not witness any of the attacks, and he is completely powerless to stop the creature.

Another relevant difference between Milton's God and Frankenstein involves the process of creation. In Book VII, Raphael tells Adam how God created the Earth and man. From line 243 on, all things are made through the word of God. On the first day He says "Let there be light," and there it is. And it repeats for six more days; God commands and things spring up out of nowhere. This is the power of God. However, something different happens when He creates man. On the sixth day, God says to his Son: "Let us make now man in our image, man / In our similitude" (VII, 519-21). As Raphael tells Adam, God himself

formed thee, Adam, thee O man

Dust of the ground, and in thy nostrils breathed  
 The breath of life; in his own image he  
 Created thee, in the image of God. (VII, 524-26)

The verbs “formed” and “breathed” are crucial to understand God’s love towards man. For six days, everything has been made after God’s command, but God used his hands to create man; he formed Adam from dust like an artist sculpting his masterpiece,

a creature who not prone  
 And brute as other creatures, but endued  
 With sanctity of reason, might erect  
 His stature, and upright with front serene  
 Govern the rest, self-knowing, and from thence  
 Magnanimous to correspond with Heav’n. (VII, 506-11)

After having given form to Adam, God breathed life into him. This makes Adam different from all the other creatures. Adam is created in the image of God so that he could “adore / And worship God supreme” (VII, 514-15). Adam is above all creatures for he would govern them, and only he has access to God. This beautiful account of the creation of man in *Paradise Lost* differs from Frankenstein’s carelessness toward the being he creates.

In *Paradise Lost*, Milton describes in detail God’s preparation to receive his creature. He is not only a creator, but he is also a provider. In contrast, Victor does not prepare the world to welcome the creature. Neither does Victor support him afterwards. Frankenstein does not care about his creature. He forms the creature out of dead corpses, a “filthy” image of man. His size and appearance scare people away, making it difficult for him to be accepted. In addition, Victor’s abandoning the creature differs him from Prometheus and Milton’s God, who are both protective figures. In fact, Victor chases the creature to the end of the North Pole in an attempt to kill him.

Although Victor represents a god-like figure in the beginning of the novel, Victor is in fact a creature; therefore, he is subject to failing. Taking into consideration that Victor is sometimes like Adam, it is expected that he learns something from his mistake. Nevertheless, in his last conversation with Walton, Victor does not express any kind of regret. Victor recognizes his experiment as a mistake, but he does not confess his neglect towards the creature: “In a fit of enthusiastic madness I created a rational creature, and was bound towards him, to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being” (185). For Victor, he has done everything he could to support his creation, which is quite surprising. At the end of the novel, readers know that Victor’s statement does not depict the reality. In the same conversation, Frankenstein advises Walton to pursue an average life, but, soon after that, he contradicts himself: “Seek happiness in tranquillity [sic], and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries. Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed” (186). As miserable as Victor is in his deathbed, he does not regret sacrificing his life in the name of science. Disregarding how much this experiment has cost him, Victor hopes another will do what he can no longer accomplish. His last words emphasize the fact that Victor is no longer a god-like figure.

### 3.3. The Creature’s Reading of *Paradise Lost*

During his education, the creature listens to Felix’s reading of Volney’s *Ruins of Empires* and reads three more books: Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Plutarch’s *Lives*, and Goethe’s *Sorrows of Werther*. According to Gilbert and Gubar, Mary Shelley chooses these works for they “typify just the literary categories she thought it necessary to study: the contemporary novel of sensibility, the serious history of Western civilization, and the highly cultivated epic poem” (237). These books are crucial elements in the creature’s coming-of-age process. In

the woods, he learns about practical things, but it is through those books that the creature starts to understand society in general. Although all the works the creature listens to or reads contribute to his understanding of the human condition and his own place in the world, it is correct to affirm that *Paradise Lost* is the most instructive to the creature. It is not only a reference book for him. Milton's epic becomes the narrative in which the creature mirrors his life.

While secretly taking lessons with Safie, the creature listens to Volney's *Ruins of Empires*, his first geography and history class. In *Ruins*, Volney questions the power of "the government of ancient and modern empires" and "the role of religion in sustaining them" (Shelley 257). Susan Hitchcock explains that "Volney blames religion for much of history's discord and suffering" (48). Through *Ruins*, the creature learns about "manners, governments, and religions of the different nations of the earth" (Shelley 95). Moreover, he gets to know that man can be noble and vile at the same time. This narration incites in him questions about man's character:

Was man, indeed, at once so powerful, so virtuous, and magnificent, yet so vicious and base? He appeared at one time a mere scion of the evil principle, and at another as all that can be conceived of noble and godlike. To be a great and virtuous man appeared the highest honour that can befall a sensitive being; to be base and vicious, as many on record have been, appeared the lowest degradation. (95)

It is with this work, not with *Paradise Lost*, that the creature learns the double nature of a man's character. No human being is completely good or evil. Therefore, *Ruins* prepares the creature to the works he actually reads, especially *Paradise Lost*. In chapter five of *Ruins of Empires*, the narrator describes man in his natural state:

Formed naked in body and in mind, man at first found himself thrown, as it were by chance, on a rough and savage land: an orphan, abandoned by the unknown power which had produced him, he saw not by his side beings descended from heaven to warn him of those wants which arise only from his senses, nor to instruct him in those duties which spring only from his wants. Like to other animals, without experience of the past, without foresight of the future, he wandered in the bosom of the forest, guided only and governed by the affections of his nature. By the pain of hunger, he was led to seek food and provide for his subsistence; by the inclemency of the air, he was urged to cover his body, and he made him clothes; by the attraction of a powerful pleasure, he approached a being like himself, and he perpetuated his kind.

(Volney)

This description is different from Milton's account on man's first experiences. However, this passage seems to depict the beginning of the creature's life. He is abandoned by his creator, he does not receive any instruction from Victor or any other man, and he does not know about his past. Apart from a few differences, this description fits the creature well. Then, a question arises: why does the creature attach more importance to *Paradise Lost* than to *Ruins*? The answer is simple: The creature's life experience is confirmed by Volney's *Ruins*, but *Paradise Lost* sets a contrast. When the creature reads the epic, he sees that the relationship between creature and creator can be good. *Paradise Lost* shows that not all the creators neglect their creations. Above all, it gives the creature hope to find happiness.

The creature's first reading is *Sorrows of Werther*, whose protagonist is the first character with whom the creature identifies. According to Gilbert and Gubar, this book is "a sort of Romantic conduct book" (237) for it teaches the creature "about 'gentle and domestic manners,' and about 'lofty sentiments'" (237). In his analysis, the creature observes that

“Werter [sic] [is] himself a more divine being than [he] had never beheld” (103). Whereas *Ruins of Empires* urges the creature to ponder about man, this second work leads him to think about himself in relation to man, as he reveals: “I found myself similar, yet at the same time strangely unlike the beings concerning whom I read, and to whose conversation I was a listener. I sympathized with, and partly understood them, but I was unformed in mind; I was dependent on none, and related to none” (103-4). It is after this reading that the questions about his origin arise.

The next reading, Plutarch’s *Lives*, does not affect the creature’s emotion like Goethe’s work. Instead it teaches him to admire heroes by telling the history of ancient empires, as the creature asserts, “Plutarch taught me high thoughts; he elevated me above the wretched sphere of my own reflections, to admire and love the heroes of past ages” (104). Once again, the creature experiences the distinction between good and evil through his reading, he explains: “I felt the great ardour for virtue rise within me, and abhorrence for vice, as far as I understood the signification of those terms” (104). Every time the creature reads a book, he exercises his notion of virtue and vice.

The last book is not different from the others to the extent that it gives the creature the opportunity to practice his ability to identify good and evil. However, it differs from them for it raises not only questions, but it also provides answers. The creature declares that “*Paradise Lost* excited different and far deeper emotions” (104). Having learnt to admire heroes through his previous readings, the creature speaks in awe of “God warring with his creatures” (104). Newlyn claims that “*Paradise Lost* is the monster’s Bible: he reads it ‘as a true History’ . . . and it teaches him the values by which he measures both himself and his creator” (136). The creature identifies with Adam for the nature of their creation, but he recognizes in Satan some of his own features. Newlyn also observes that as “The monster sees Adam and Satan as alternatives [,] The reader, encouraged by sustained allusive patterns, sees them as both

opposite and complementary” (86). It is understandable to have both personae represented in the creature. After all, *Frankenstein*, being a story about man, shows that a person can be good and evil in different moments of his life. Coincidentally or not, it is after his reading *Paradise Lost* that he decides to read the papers he has found in his pockets. Then he finds out about the process of his creation and the name of his maker.

In *Surprised by Sin*, Stanley Fish argues that *Paradise Lost*'s reader is “the poem’s centre of reference and also its subject” (1). According to Fish, Milton re-creates “in the mind of the reader the drama of the fall, to make him fall” so that he becomes aware “of his position and responsibilities as a fallen man” (1). Thus it is “the poet’s version of what the theologian calls a ‘good temptation’” (40), that is, the epic gives the readers the opportunity to symbolically fall and redeem themselves. When the creature reads *Paradise Lost*, he performs the role of this target reader, for he identifies with *Paradise Lost*'s character. However, he does not redeem himself from his fall. He rather uses the epic to define his own personality, which is the most important function of the physical presence of the epic in the novel. *Paradise Lost* helps the creature to understand who he really is. It teaches him that it does not matter who has created him, he is free to choose who he wants to be. First he attempts to be good to conquer the heart of the cottagers, but, as he fails, he gives up and tries something new.

#### 3.4. The Creature’s Looking in the Mirror

Most of the comparisons between *Paradise Lost*'s characters and the novel’s involve God, Satan, and Adam on one side, and Frankenstein and the creature on the other. Apart from the feminist critics, such as Anne Mellor, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar, few writers give much importance to the representation of Eve in *Frankenstein*. In “Making a Monster,” Mellor discusses the novel from a feminist perspective, but she also includes biographical and

psychological analyses. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar analyze Shelley's novel by setting parallels between Eve and *Frankenstein's* characters. However, there is just one episode in the novel in which Eve cannot be replaced by another Miltonic character: the moment when the creature sees himself reflected in the pond. This episode echoes Eve's admiring herself in book IV. Thus, this section is dedicated to the analysis of this scene and its importance to the characterization of the creature.

As Gilbert and Gubar explains, "women have seen themselves (because they have been seen) as monstrous, vile, degraded creatures, second-comers, and emblems of filthy materiality, even though they have also been traditionally defined as superior spiritual beings, angels, better halves" (240). Based on this double image of women, Gilbert and Gubar argue that the creature's scene functions as "a corrective to Milton's blindness about Eve" (240). According to Gilbert and Gubar, Eve is beautiful in the epic, but in the novel she is represented by the creature and through him she shows her outer self; inside she is as monstrous as the creature. Although these ideas corroborate our understanding, focusing on the female gender is not relevant for this discussion. Therefore, the analysis of this scene will be more general. The most pertinent element here is the creature's ugliness that differentiates him from Eve.

In Book IV, Eve tells Adam about her impressions when she first awakes. She sees flowers, the green grass, and the blue sky. She also notices a lake through which she sees herself for the first time:

As I bent down to look, I started back,  
 It started back, but pleased I soon returned,  
 Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks  
 Of sympathy and love; there I had fixed  
 Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,

Had not a voice thus warned me, 'What thou seest,  
 What there thou seest fair creature is thyself. (IV, 460-68)

This scene shows Eve's childlike innocence; she acts like a child discovering the things around her. Moreover, it evokes the myth of Narcissus while setting a contrast with it. Like Narcissus, Eve is bewitched by her beauty, but, contrary to him, she is awaked from this trance. As Peter Brooks claims, "Narcissism is here a temptation to which Eve, immediately enamoured of her own image, would succumb, pining 'with vain desire,' were it not for the intervention of a divine voice that commands her to set aside this moment of primary narcissism in favour of sexual difference" (206). God urges Eve to accept Adam, the one "Whose image thou art, him thou shall enjoy" (IV, 472). God gives Eve an alternative by showing her someone she should love apart from herself. When Eve sees Adam for the first time she thinks he is "less fair, / Less winning soft, less amiably mild, / Than that smooth wat'ry image" (IV, 478-80), and she attempts to return to that image, but Adam stops her. He explains to her that she is part of his flesh and bone: "Part of my soul I seek thee, and thee claim / My other half" (IV, 487-88). When Adam holds her hand, Eve understands "How beauty is excelled by manly grace / And wisdom, which alone is truly fair" (IV, 490-91). Eve redirects her desire to Adam when she finds in him something more desirable than her beauty: his wisdom.

In contrast, the creature, who admires the cottagers for "their grace, beauty, and delicate complexions" (90), gets shocked by the deformity of his appearance, as he reveals: "At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification" (90). The creature's repeatedly moving backward and forward emphasizes his confusion and disbelief. He does not recognize himself in the reflection. Like Eve, he takes some time to understand the image

reflected in the water. Whereas Eve recognizes beauty and sympathy, the creature encounters ugliness and hopelessness. The creature's experience, Brooks observes, is "anti-narcissistic, convincing the Monster that he is, indeed, a monster, thus in no conceivable system an object of desire" (207). Different from Eve and Narcissus, the creature is not attracted by his own image. He feels miserable and terrified for his appearance does not resemble the beautiful form of a man.

In "Making a 'monster': an Introduction to *Frankenstein*," Anne Mellor explains that "knowing oneself (cognition) is a matter of seeing oneself reflected in a mirror; in other words, that cognition is always a secondary, derivative perception or image of oneself" (20). For this reason, the creature does not believe at first that what he sees is himself. It does not match his previous perception of whom he is. Mellor also points out that the characters despise the creature because they "assume that his outer appearance is a valid index to his inner nature" (20). The only exception is the old De Lacey. Different from the other characters, his perception of the creature is not influenced by visual factors. He is able to sympathize with the creature, for he only listens to him (Mellor 20). Likewise, readers have "a rare opportunity to judge the creature through the ear, not the eye" (21), which enables them to sympathize with him.

The creature's repulsive appearance can be understood in two ways. First it may be a symptom of "his social illegitimacy, his bastardy, his namelessness" (Gilbert and Gubar 241). As Martin Tropp notices, the creature is "even more horrible" than "the classic monsters of legend"; he "falls somewhere between life and death" (14). His appearance expresses the unnatural form of his conception. It "reveal[s] visibly the results of vice, folly, and unreason" (Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow* 12). The second way of interpreting his deformity is closely related to Frankenstein. According to George Levine, the creature is Frankenstein's double, which highlights the creature's namelessness (168). Levine affirms that "The

civilized man or woman contains within the self a monstrous, destructive, and self-destructive energy” (15). After Frankenstein gives life to the creature, he becomes “a disintegrated being” (Spark 95). Victor himself has recognized the creature as part of his “divided self” (Levine 15): “I considered the being whom I had cast among mankind, and endowed with the will and power to effect purposes of horror, such as the deed which he had now done, nearly in the light of my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to me” (57). Frankenstein feels responsible for the creature’s crimes. In the same manner, the creature leaves some food behind so that Victor does not die. Besides, the creature’s decision to die after Frankenstein’s death emphasizes the fact that they are dependent on each other.

Hence, Frankenstein and his creature are “complementary and antithetical beings” (Spark 92). After the creature is born, Frankenstein loses part of his intellectual skills, and he becomes “indecisive and remorseful” (Spark 95). To exemplify this, Spark mentions Frankenstein’s agreement to make a female creature. After pondering over the future of the couple of creatures (Shelley 138), Victor changes his mind and destroys her. When Frankenstein is involved in the process of creation, he exercises his intellect, but when he is not working, he cannot think objectively. On the other hand, “The monster is at once more intellectual and more emotional than his maker” (Bloom, Introduction 4). After the creature becomes literate, he starts to raise his intellect through his reading. He knows exactly what he wants and manages to get it. He wants a companion, he talks to Frankenstein; he wants revenge, he kills another person. When he looks into the mirror, the creature sees how different he is from man, but this disappointment does not prevent him from trying to approach the cottagers. The creature’s ugliness raises a barrier between himself and the other characters, but his intellectual skills surpass his deformity when the creature speaks.

### 3.5. Falling into Hell

By the end of the novel, both Victor and the creature become Satan-like figures. This constant shift in the characters' personality shows their journey into hell. In *Paradise Lost* Satan soliloquizes, "The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n" (I, 254-55), that is, what one thinks determines how one lives. Living in Hell, for example, is for Satan a better option than living in Heaven, since he prefers "to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n" (I, 263). When Satan comments on Heaven and Hell as being alternatives, he means that it does not matter if one is in Heaven, or Paradise, when one does not belong in it. It is this sense of displacement that leads Victor and the creature out of Heaven to Hell. Although these places are mentioned in *Frankenstein*, there is no Heaven, Hell, or Paradise in the novel. They represent the metaphorical state of the characters' minds. Heaven represents their happy state, Hell symbolizes their fallen condition, and Paradise hints at a holy grail, something impossible to be achieved. As there is no god in *Frankenstein*, there is no devil or demon either. According to Chris Baldick, the absence of a temper is "the factor that most clearly marks the story's distance from Milton" (*In Frankenstein's Shadow* 41). This section contains the analysis of Frankenstein and his creature as representatives of Milton's Satan and their fall into Hell.

In his household Victor has experienced joy, but it does not satisfy him. In his early years, he occupies his mind with his studies, and everything else becomes less important to him. After Victor concludes his experiment, he starts falling from Heaven. He sees his family dying, his sorrow increases, and he becomes miserable. Frankenstein recognizes his resemblance with Satan days before his death, while pondering about his journey, he states: "like the archangel who aspired to omnipotence, I am chained in an eternal hell" (180). Two things are important in this sentence. First, Victor's recognition that he has become a Satan figure for his pursuit of godlike knowledge and power. The second is his understanding that

his new condition is irreversible. Once in hell, he cannot leave it and regain paradise. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan goes through the same process. After he gets envious of the Son's anointment, his whole personality starts to change. Even being "the first Archangel, great in power, / In favor and pre-eminence" (V, 660-61), Satan rebels against God. Thus, he becomes the first to sin against the Almighty. As a symbolic state of mind, hell starts to exist in the moment Satan lets evil fill him up. Then hell becomes Satan himself, as Milton comments in Book IV, "from the bottom stir / The Hell within Him, for within him Hell / He brings" (19-21). For this reason, Satan becomes the Miltonic persona that best represents Victor's final condition.

Nevertheless, a glow of Frankenstein's early days remains until the end of his life, as Walton comments: "What a glorious creature must he have been in the days of his prosperity, when he is thus noble and godlike in ruin. He seems to feel his own worth, and the greatness of his fall" (179). Walton's speech shows Frankenstein's decay, but it does not fail in portraying him as a good person. Although Frankenstein is symbolically in hell, his days in Heaven are still memorable. Likewise, in *Paradise Lost*, Milton's description of Satan also gives the impression that Satan is still "glorious," though fallen:

he above the rest  
 In shape and gesture proudly eminent  
 Stood like a tow'r; his form had yet not lost  
 All her original brightness, nor appeared  
 Less than Archangel ruined. . . . (I, 591-93)

Here, the epic narrator makes the same kind of comment Walton does. Being the narrators, they can see the whole picture and draw their own conclusions about the events. Another passage of the epic that supports the comparison between Satan and Victor is the moment when Satan himself ponders about his current condition:

how I hate thy beams

That bring to my remembrance from what state

I fell, how glorious once above thy sphere;

Till pride and worse ambition threw me down. (IV, 37-40)

His speech suits Frankenstein well since he also experiences glory before the fall. When Frankenstein ponders about his old days, he seems to regret having wasted his life because of his ambition and advises Walton to pursue an average life.

As for the creature, his process of becoming a Satan figure starts much before Frankenstein's. Indeed it seems to be a more rational process than Victor's. The creature's first satanic deed is the destruction of the De Lacey's cottage. He puts it on fire and dances around it in a trance of rage and passion. Afterwards he starts committing crimes so that he could hurt Frankenstein. Moreover, the choice of the victims resembles Milton's Satan. Unable to destroy his maker, the creature turns his attack to Frankenstein's family and friends, following Satan's strategy to harm the first couple instead of God. In book II, Satan proposes:

though Heav'n be shut,

And Heav'n's high arbitrator sit secure

In his own strength, this place may lie exposed

The utmost border of his kingdom, left

To their defense who hold it . . . . (II, 358-62)

Satan knows it is impossible to defeat God, so he learns about God's creatures to make them sin against God. Adam and Eve have never heard about Satan or his demons before, even so they become Satan's victims. Likewise, the creature's victims have nothing to do with the motive of his rage, as he confesses, "I have murdered the lovely and helpless; I have strangled the innocent as they slept, and grasped to death his throat who never injured me or

any other living thing” (190). Despite knowing that, the creature insists on his murders, for they tie Victor to him. Besides punishing Victor, the creature makes it impossible for Victor to forget him.

The creature strongly believes that he would be a better person if man were not so harsh on him. The creature imagines himself as an Adam figure but he cannot stand in that position for a long time. He says, “My heart was fashioned to be susceptible of love and sympathy; and, when wrenched by misery to vice and hatred, it did not endure the violence of the change without torture” (188). The evil that springs in the creature is, according to Lucy Newlyn, the “product of circumstances acting on the individual” (135). On the psychological level, the creature’s “innate capacity for love is thwarted at every stage by his creator, who made him ugly, then rejected him and denied his needs” (135). As for the social level, the creature’s hideousness prevents him from being accepted; the man in the hut (Shelley 83), the De Lacey family (110), and Walton (187) despise him because they are scared of the monster that the creature appears to be. Thus, the creature becomes an example of John Locke’s theory on the mind being a *tabula rasa*. Locke claims that a man’s mind is first empty and, therefore, able to learn anything. The character of a man is molded according to his experiences in society.

Locke’s theory is similar to Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s idea that “nothing is more gentle than he [man] in his primitive state” (Rousseau 119), but when man becomes “sociable,” he becomes “wicked” (Rousseau 113). As Julio Jeha observes, “the monster created by Frankenstein . . . [shows] that man is born good and he behaves in accordance with the way he is treated by his parents and society” (13).<sup>23</sup> The creature is born with an empty mind; therefore, he is able to learn good and evil, but, after his incident in the cottage, the creature renders himself to evil, he claims, “Evil thenceforth became my good” (188). His statement

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<sup>23</sup> This is my translation of the quotation that follows: “o monstro criado por Frankenstein . . . [mostra] que o ser humano nasce bom e se comporta conforme é tratado pelos pais e pela sociedade” (Jeha 13).

mirrors Satan's speech when he affirms: "all good to me is lost; / Evil be thou my good" (IV, 109-10). The creature's close identification with Satan leads him to incorporate Satan's words into his own speech. Both Satan and the creature have experienced good feelings before choosing to be evil, as the creature soliloquizes: "When I call over the frightful catalogue of my deeds, I cannot believe that I am he whose thoughts were once filled with sublime and transcendant [sic] visions of the beauty and the majesty of goodness. But it is even so; the fallen angel becomes a malignant devil" (189). When the creature assumes the role of Satan, Frankenstein's use of the words "demon" and "devil" to refer to his creature becomes more acceptable.

The creature differs from Satan in one aspect: While Satan takes the high road and becomes hell himself (IV, 75), the creature experiences a mixture of regret and pleasure. He does not become completely evil, as it would be expected. After killing Clerval, the creature pities Frankenstein for the loss of his dear friend (188). In contrast, he does not repent for killing Elizabeth. She probably reminds him of Frankenstein's destroying his mate, which explains the creature's satisfaction while killing her. The creature, like Victor and Satan, also has a moment to think about his deeds. It happens after Frankenstein's death, and it echoes a passage in *Paradise Lost* in which Satan admits,

Ah wherefore! He deserved no such return  
 From me, whom he created what I was  
 In that bright eminence, and with his good  
 Upbraided none; nor was his service hard. (IV, 42-45)

It is not possible to affirm if Satan repents for his rebellion, but he is certainly confused about his situation. Sometimes he boasts about being the king of Hell, and others he seems to miss Heaven and the presence of God. The same happens with the creature. He is a monster driven by revenge, for instance, when he sets fire on the cottage. However, there are moments in

which he shows some kindness. After seeing Frankenstein's dead body, he says, "Oh, Frankenstein! generous and self-devoted being! what does it avail that I now ask thee to pardon me?" (187). His statement shows that he has never intended to kill his creator, and it sets a contrast with Victor's last speech in which Victor excuses himself and puts all the blame on the creature. In contrast, the creature humbly recognizes his guilt and asks for forgiveness. It is in moments like these that the creature becomes "*more human than his creator*" (Bloom, Introduction 4), for he does not hesitate to show his emotions.

After Frankenstein's death, the creature considers to take his life: "Polluted by crimes and torn by the bitterest remorse, where can I find rest but in death?" (190). Then he envisages his end: "I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly, and exult in the agony of torturing flames. The light of that conflagration will fade away; my ashes will be swept into the sea by the winds" (191). In a poetic tone, the creature describes his outcome that is not much different from Satan's. *Frankenstein* culminates with Victor's death and the creature's promise to leave the world of man. In contrast, *Paradise Lost* has a more optimistic outcome. In the end of the epic Adam and Eve leave Eden, but they may still find a paradise within.

Shelley's novel inherits a range of characteristics from its predecessors, that is, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the Prometheus myth. It is due to them that *Frankenstein* has become a secular counterpart of these sacred creation myths. Mary Shelley's portrayal of a creator who is destroyed by his creature has become one of the most known myths since the nineteenth century. The following chapter contains an analysis of *Frankenstein* as a secular creation myth, and it provides an overview of its afterlife.

#### 4. *Frankenstein*: The Creation of a Myth

As it is shown in the previous chapters, the myth of Prometheus and Milton's *Paradise Lost* are important references in *Frankenstein* because they provide Mary Shelley's novel with archetypes and themes through which Shelley builds her novel. While echoing these creation myths, *Frankenstein* deviates from the traditional idea that only divine beings can create life. Not only does Frankenstein create a new being, but he is also destroyed by it. Thus, *Frankenstein* inherits something of the old tradition while leaving its own mark, that is, the two main characters, Victor and the creature, who are the fruit of Mary Shelley's imagination. This is the watershed that separates the novel from its predecessors and allows Shelley's story to perpetuate as a myth on its own.

Apart from the theoretical discussion on the Frankenstein myth, this chapter provides some examples of the manifestation of Frankenstein as a myth in popular culture in the twenty and the twenty-first centuries. The only example that does not belong to these centuries is given because it is the first adaptation of the novel, and it was seen by the author herself (Hitchcock 81). Besides Richard Peake's *Presumption*, there are five adaptations: J. Searle Dawley's *Frankenstein* (1910), James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931) and *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994), and Tim Burton's *Frankenweenie* (2012); three sequels: Brian Aldiss' novel *Frankenstein Unbound* (1973), Shelley Jackson's hypertext *Patchwork Girl* (1994), and Stuart Beattie's film *I, Frankenstein* (2014); and one allusion in a TV series called *Once Upon a Time*, created by Edward Kitsis and Adam Horowitz. This selection is a comprehensive portion of the variety of possibilities to interpret the Frankenstein myth, which is not always told as in the novel or related to Mary Shelley. This chapter also presents a brief introduction to Julie Sanders' and Linda Hutcheon's ideas on adaptation since most of the works chosen to exemplify the

Frankenstein myth do not belong to literature, but to different other media, such as cinema and theatre.

Before considering the examples, it is useful to discuss the notion of myth presented by Chris Baldick in his work *In Frankenstein's Shadow*. Baldick acknowledges that Mary Shelley's novel has become "a modern, and specifically Romantic, 'myth of myth'" (1). He explains that myths prevail in our contemporary society because they are constantly "alluded to, thereby finding fresh contexts and applications" (3). *Frankenstein*, though not an ancient story, is a myth because "The vitality of myths lies precisely in their capacity for change, their adaptability and openness to new combinations of meaning" (Baldick 4). Following Lévi-Strauss's idea that any version of the myth constitutes the myth itself, Baldick claims that all the "adaptations, allusions, accretions, analogues, parodies, and plain misreadings which [follow] upon Mary Shelley's novel is not just a supplementary component of the myth; it is the myth" (4). Baldick compares Mary Shelley's text, "an elaborate framework of concentric narratives . . . filled out with digressions, dialogues, scenic descriptions, and minor characters" (3) to the myth which may be summarized in only one sentence: Frankenstein creates a new being, "out of bits of corpses," who revolts against his creator (3). This process "violates the multiplicity and interplay of meanings which the novel's narrative complexity sustains" (3). The myth narrows down the narrative to the problematic relation of Frankenstein and the creature, despising other relevant elements of the novel. This oversimplification of the plot should not be considered as prejudicial since it is part of the adaptive process, and it allows the myth to fit in a range of media, and, consequently, to reach a larger audience.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* has become popular because it is recurrently adapted to plays, movies, and TV programs. According to George Levine, the modernity<sup>24</sup> of

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<sup>24</sup> By modernity, Levine means to be up-to-date and in accordance with our time.

*Frankenstein* is due to “its transformation of fantasy and traditional Christian and pagan myths into unremitting secularity” (6-7); that is, *Frankenstein* is “a secular myth” (4) because its setting and characters are confined to our world; there is no god or other divine beings in *Frankenstein*. In his analysis of the novel’s heritage, Levine does not use the term “myth” very often. Instead he proposes to read *Frankenstein* as “a metaphor for our own cultural crises” (3) because it shows “the fundamental dualisms, the social, moral, political and metaphysical crises of Western history since the French Revolution” (4). *Frankenstein* as a metaphor represents “the image of human aspiration in a technological and scientific world” and “the failure of that aspiration” (30). This aspiration has haunted humankind for ages. Men are constantly looking for new discoveries. As Shelley hints at the scientific development of her times, i.e., alchemy, many moviemakers use technological advances in their adaptations. Since science is always seeking to overcome itself, the Frankenstein metaphor has become a permanent warning.

In “*Frankenstein’s* Fallen Angel,” Joyce Carol Oates acknowledges *Frankenstein* as a “cultural myth” (548), and explains that Frankenstein is not currently associated with Prometheus because the former means much more to our society than the latter (548). According to Oates, many fictional characters, such as “Dracula, Sherlock Holmes, Alice (in Wonderland),” and Frankenstein himself, have become detached from their authors to be part of “a collective cultural consciousness” (548); “they have become communal creations” (549). Indeed, most moviegoers who are acquainted with the Frankenstein metaphor<sup>25</sup> have in mind the monster created by Boris Karloff rather than Mary Shelley’s novel, and the same process happens with the other literary characters she mentions. “The more potent the archetype evoked by a work of literature, the more readily its specific form slips free of the time-bound *personal* work” (Oates 549). It is due to the frequent film adaptations that these

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<sup>25</sup> Oates uses the word “metaphor” to designate the meaning implied by the expression “a Frankenstein monster” used to talk about an invention or idea that may destroy its creator.

characters are part of people's imagination. They keep reviving in their audience's mind the stories of these remarkable characters.

Regarding adaptation, it is primarily "a transpositional practice" (Sanders 18), for it comprehends a transposition into another medium (a novel into film) or genre (a poem into a novel). Film adaptations usually call the audience's attention to the fact that they are based on literary works since they "enrich and deepen our understanding of the new cultural product" (Sanders 22). It is important to emphasize that an adaptation is not a word-by-word transposition, since "the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation" (Hutcheon 8). As any repetition causes changes, it is impossible to replicate another work. The product of a repetition is always a new product.

According to Julie Sanders, adaptation is a term that implies echoes, allusions, versions, and borrowings. However, to avoid misunderstanding, the word adaptation will be used in this chapter to refer to the movies and plays that are retellings of Frankenstein's creation of a monster. For the other works, the terms allusion and sequel are more adequate. Many movies, for instance, are named after Frankenstein or cast him as a character, but they do not retell Mary Shelley's story. Instead they take the novel for granted and offer a continuation to the story. Even though these movies are not close adaptations of *Frankenstein*, they surely help maintain the myth alive.

Despite being related to literary texts, movie adaptations are usually seen as inferior by some of the academic critics and the journalist reviewers (Hutcheon 2). It happens because the audience tries to find in adaptations a faithful repetition of literary works. Nevertheless, "proximity or fidelity to the adapted text should [not] be the criterion of judgment or the focus of analysis" (Hutcheon 6). Although an adaptation relies on a known plot, it is a completely different work. Adaptations are, as Linda Hutcheon explains,

“paralimpsestuous”<sup>26</sup> works” (6); they are haunted or shadowed by literary texts. When adapters recreate a literary work, they add another layer of meaning, using “the same tools that storytellers have always used: they actualize or concretize ideas; they make simplifying selections, but also amplify and extrapolate; they make analogies; they critique or show their respect, and so on” (3). In other words, repetition implies reinterpretation, and it should not be seen as a negative effect. Whereas similarities to literary texts enhance an adaptation, the differences make an old story look new or enable it to reach another portion of the audience.

Indeed, film adaptations corroborate literature because they remind the viewers of a certain work of literature that otherwise would be forgotten by the general public. Many times new editions of a literary work are prepared when its film adaptation is released (Hutcheon 30). As movies reach more people than books (Hutcheon 5), the stories portrayed in the cinema are more famous than the stories that are not. Having books adapted to movies is a constant practice in the twenty-first century. To name a few recent examples, there are J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series, Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* saga, and J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. Adaptation is a two-way process in which both cinema and literature profit from it.

Visual media makes the audience feel closer to a character by giving an illusion of reality. To watch a movie or a play is like witnessing the story as it were actually happening in front of the audience’s eyes. Most of the professionals who have produced the story of Frankenstein in a visual medium usually focus on the image of the creature. They concentrate on an aspect of the novel that Mary Shelley left undefined. When reading the novel, readers experience the creature’s ugliness through the repulsive reaction of the characters, which is an important element of the movies as well. However, the moviemakers of Frankenstein films have the advantage of showing the creature, after all, “a monster . . . exists to be looked at,

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<sup>26</sup> According to Baldick, palimpsest is “a manuscript written on a surface from which an earlier text has been partly or wholly erased . . . the term is sometimes applied to a literary work that has more than one ‘layer’ or level of meaning” (*The Concise* 181).

shown off, viewed as in a circus sideshow” (Brooks 199). As Shelley does not explore the description of the creature in the novel, they can develop this element according to their own imagination.

The Frankenstein moviemakers urge the audience “to face the monster’s physical repulsiveness, which he can never deny or escape,” and “rethink his monstrosity in terms of visualization” (Heffernan 136). They try “to ensure that the inner self or ‘essential being’ of the monstrous-looking creature will likewise be monstrous, will validate the simplest notion of what a monster is: one whose malformed body proclaims the viciousness of his or her soul” (Heffernan 147). By doing this, many of them deny the creature the ability to speak, limiting his communication to groans, body expressions, and actions. On the other hand, the creature in the novel, “far from expressing himself in grunts and gestures, speaks and reasons with the highest elegance, logic and persuasiveness” (Brooks 202). By portraying an intellectual monster, Shelley develops the dichotomy between the creature’s inner and outer self. Although his fate is determined by his ugliness, Shelley does not deny the creature the hope of trying to be good. In addition, she shows that if one overlooks the creature’s ugliness, one can listen to his tale and sympathize with him. The blind man in the cottage, Victor, and the captain are the characters who actually get to talk with the creature despite his hideousness. Apart from them, the readers are bound to sympathize with the creature as well since they do not have to stare at the monster.

In contrast, “this contradiction between the verbal and the visual” (Brooks 202) is lost in some adaptations. As James A. W. Heffernan explains, “the creature’s longing to communicate in words – his desire to be heard – is no more urgent than his longing to be *looked* at with desire, with something other than fear and loathing” (137). To that extent, the creature’s silence, in some movies, is surpassed by the opportunity to express himself through his body, showing that he can be accepted without saying a word. It is a clear

counterpoint between the novel and the visual adaptations that suppress the creature's voice. The novel shows that the creature's eloquence compensate for his fearsome appearance whereas some adaptations suggest that his rhetoric is not a determinant factor. So, what is it? Why does the creature excite so much sympathy? The answer is simple. The monster is usually portrayed in a way that leads the audience to pity him. Readers and moviegoers tend to sympathize with the creature because they know he is a victim of Victor's urge to create a new being without any concern to the creature. It is, of course, not possible to generalize this statement since the audience's response can vary in many ways. Even though both the creature and Victor are equally important characters in the novel, the attention is usually directed to the creature in subsequent manifestations of the myth. In popular culture, the creature has inherited the name of his creator and made the name Frankenstein known inside and outside literature, after all, without the creature there would be no story to tell.

All things considered, it is time to overview the legacy of the Frankenstein myth. One of the first adaptations of *Frankenstein* to the theater was *Presumption, or the Fate of Frankenstein* by Richard Brinsley Peake. It debuted in London in 1823, and Mary Shelley herself watched this play.<sup>27</sup> In that year the second edition of the novel came out bringing in its cover the name of the author, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. As soon as the audience saw the play bill, they were probably surprised by the blank left right after Thomas Cooke's name. It was not a mistake. Peake did not give a name to the creature, or write any other word to refer to him (Hitchcock 84), which highlights the creature's namelessness. Peake is responsible for a couple of changes in the plot that has remained for a long time. First, he "began the line of bumbling assistants" (Hitchcock 83) by including Fritz in his play. Second, Peake denied the creature the ability to speak. Instead the creature expresses himself through groans and gestures. Peake's decision to portray a speechless creature has influenced many

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<sup>27</sup> See Susan Hitchcock pages 81-86 for further information on the play.

subsequent adaptations. After *Presumption*, many other plays about Shelley's novel sprang up inside and outside London.<sup>28</sup> Frankenstein stage adaptations "had penetrated the public imagination and had become a story told, retold, and reinterpreted" (Hitchcock 93) before the second half of the nineteenth century.

In March, 1910, the Edison Film Company released *Frankenstein*, a black and white silent movie directed by J. Searle Dawley. It may be a coincidence that the company of the inventor of electricity was responsible for the production of the oldest known Frankenstein film version, but, ironically, electricity is not used to explain the monster's creation. Instead, its viewers witnessed the creature spring up from a cauldron, in a wizard-like fashion, while Frankenstein was watching it through a hole. Back then, the production of a movie was very simple, and there were not many special effects. Even so, the movie has a remarkable scene that shows the double aspect of creator and the creature. After the caption informs that evil is overcome by love, the creature sees himself reflected in the mirror. Suddenly he disappears, but his reflection stands there for a while until it vanishes, and Frankenstein's image is reflected in the mirror. This scene highlights the double aspect of creature and creator and reassures the idea that the creature is a product of Victor's mind. After the creature is gone, Frankenstein can go back to his wife.

In 1931, the most famous Frankenstein adaptation was released; "It had so wide and powerful an influence that ever since, renditions of the story have either depended on, ricocheted off, or actively defended against associations with it" (Hitchcock 138). It was directed by James Whale, and Boris Karloff was the actor who played the creature. The movie follows some features of previous adaptations. Like in *Presumption*, the creature is unable to speak. Instead he uses gestures, face expressions, and groans. Besides, the movie restored the role of the assistant and gave him a good deal of responsibility over the evil of

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<sup>28</sup> See Hitchcock page 101 for details.

the creature. Fritz's stealing the brain of a criminal, instead of an ordinary one, determines the evil nature of the creature. Another feature borrowed from a previous adaptation is the names of the scientist and his friend Henry. In 1927 Hamilton Dean and Peggy Webling exchanged the names of those characters in their play on *Frankenstein*. Nevertheless, the greatest difference between the 1931 film and Shelley's novel is the survival of Elizabeth and Frankenstein.

Before this film, the appearance of the creature changed from one adaptation to another. Thereafter, the creature is usually presented with "high forehead, flattop head, sunken cheeks, neck bolts, oversize limbs and undersized clothing, a lumbering gait, grunts and groans for speech" (Hitchcock 152). The monster, designed by Jack Pierre, the makeup artist, has become the most famous visual representation of the monster, setting a pattern for movies to come. Another element that is often repeated is the laboratory paraphernalia. Many other adaptations of or allusions to the Frankenstein myth follow the 1931 setting, the method of using electricity, and the famous phrase "It's alive" said by Frankenstein as soon as the creature comes to life.

In 1935, James Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein* was released in the cinema. It is the sequel of the 1931 movie that contains other elements from the novel. The 1935 movie definitely creates a stronger link with Mary Shelley's novel than the 1931 film. It acknowledges that it is an adaptation inspired by the novel written by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley.<sup>29</sup> The first scene shows Mary, Percy, and Byron talking about her story. Byron wonders how a lovely woman would think of a terrible monster, after all, "she is an angel" as Percy recognizes. After Byron's summary of the story, which is in fact the 1931 movie, Mary says that it was just the beginning and continues her tale. The creature has not died, and now he wants companionship. He tries to be accepted, but everyone is scared away by his

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<sup>29</sup> In the 1931 movie, the name Mary Shelley is substituted for Mrs. Percy B. Shelley, hiding Mary behind her husband's famous authorship.

ugliness. Just an old blind man accepts him. The creature starts to learn some words and finds in the old man a friend. Although this part is not in the novel, it gives a new interpretation to the time in which the creature lives in the De Lacey's cottage. Moreover, it shows the creature's ability to speak. Another allusion is the creature's seeing himself reflected in a pond; like in the novel, the creature does not like what he sees.

The focus of this movie is the female creature. Before it starts, the name of the actress who plays the bride of the creature is not revealed on the cast list. In the end, it turns out that the bride is portrayed by the same actress who plays Mary Shelley, Elsa Lanchester. The same lovely woman becomes the terrible monster. Although in the novel the female creature is not completed, in this film she comes to life. Her appearance is not as horrendous as the male creature, but her hissing and facial expressions are as beast-like as the creature's groans. When she sees the creature, she rejects him, which is one of Frankenstein's fears in the novel: "She also might turn with disgust from him to the superior beauty of man; she might quit him, and he be again alone" (Shelley 138). In the end, both creatures die, and Frankenstein, once more, survives. All things considered, this movie shows the moral lesson of the story more explicitly, and tackles the angel/monster dichotomy used by Gilbert and Gubar to analyze the novel. Together *Frankenstein* (1931) and *Bride of Frankenstein* compose a reasonable account of the story of Frankenstein and his creature for they show Henry's (Victor) neglect of his creature and the creature's struggle to be accepted, which is one of the main issues of the novel.

In 1994, *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, directed by Kenneth Branagh, reached the cinema. Among the films mentioned in this chapter, it is the one that resembles the novel the most, for it starts somewhere in the Arctic and shows Captain Walton's meeting Frankenstein in its first scene. It follows the narrative structure of the novel by having Victor tell his story to Walton. Like other movies, the creation of the monster is explained by the use of

electricity. However, Branagh changes the meaning of Victor's experiment when he relates it with Caroline, who dies after giving birth to William. Regardless of Branagh's intention, for the moviegoers who are acquainted with Mary Shelley's life, it is certainly a strong reference to the author of the novel. After his mother's death, Victor decides to find a way to stop death. He goes to the University of Ingolstadt where he finds Mr. Waldman, a professor who helps Victor develop his studies. Ironically, Mr. Waldman's brain becomes a constituent part of the creature's body, together with the body of the criminal who kills Mr. Waldman.

An interesting difference is related to Justine's death. In the film, Justine dies almost immediately after her arrest. Different from the novel, there is no trial. The villagers take her from prison and hang her. Besides, Victor just knows that the creature is the real murderer of his brother after Justine's death, which releases him from being morally guilty. It changes the way the audience sees Victor because it disregards his selfishness. Nevertheless, it is not the only great change. *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* also alters the outcome of the female creature. Frankenstein gives up finishing her because he refuses the creature's suggestion to use Justine's corpse. However, after Elizabeth's death, Victor resumes his work. He joins Elizabeth's head with Justine's corpse. After her rebirth, Victor dances with her as they used to in their youth. The revival of Elizabeth as the female creature is a shocking element, but it seems to be a necessary change. The 1994 audience was already intimate with the story, and this new outcome sheds new light on Victor's supposed madness. Despite his initial refusal, Victor profanes Justine's corpse in order to have his bride back. However, his happiness does not last much. The creature arrives claiming for his bride. Both creator and creature struggle to have her, but she opts to kill herself. She rejects both the creature who resembles a man, and the man who is like a monster inside. What happens next is very similar to the novel; the only change is that the creature's final promise is finally seen by the audience. He dies in a torch of fire together with Victor's body.

Throughout the twenty and the twenty-first centuries, *Frankenstein* has been part of horror and comedy adaptations and allusions. Although it was initially considered a story for adults, nowadays it is part of children's world as well. In 2012 Tim Burton released *Frankenweenie*, a remake of the 1984 film by the same name. It portrays Victor Frankenstein as a boy who decides to bring his dog, Sparky, back to life after it is run over. As Victor uses electricity to restore life into his dog, Sparky can be charged through the bolts in his necks. Like in the novel, the movie calls the audience's attention to the dangers of irresponsible creativity. Victor reanimates Sparky for it has been his only friend. However, his schoolmates repeat Victor's experiment just to win a science fair. As a result, their creations become monsters that destroy everything around them. It is true that apart from the name and the experiment this animation does not contain any other element of Shelley's story. Indeed, it inherits more characteristics of James Whale's first movies: the laboratory, the kites, and the black and white style. Nevertheless, this re-vision of the story reaches children in a way that the other movies probably would not. Burton adapts the story to a child's world by making the young audience understand Victor's urge to do his experiment. In this manner, *Frankenweenie* becomes an important contributor to the Frankenstein myth for it conquers another portion of the audience.

Not all the references to *Frankenstein* can be considered adaptations. Many works that allude to *Frankenstein* offer a sequel to Mary Shelley's story. As Chris Baldick claims, "*Frankenstein* created a living myth because it contained more fruitful possibilities in its story" (*In Frankenstein's Shadow* 3), and many authors opt to explore one element of the story. One of these authors is Brian Aldiss, who wrote *Frankenstein Unbound* (1973) as a response to Mary Shelley's novel. The story starts in 2020, when war and nuclear experiments have damaged the barrier among past, present, and future. When sudden disruption occurs, people are transported to another time and place. This strange experience

happens with Joseph Bodenland, a retired man who lives in the United States. He travels to Geneva to the year of 1816. There he meets Percy and Mary Shelley, Lord Byron, Victor Frankenstein, and his creatures. Bodenland uses his knowledge on the novel to persuade Victor to save Justine from death, but, unfortunately, Bodenland does not succeed. Bodenland meets Victor once more while the latter is working on the female creature. Different from Mary Shelley's novel, the she-monster comes alive. Then Bodenland struggles to stop Victor from creating more monsters, and the couple of creatures from fleeing. He succeeds eventually.<sup>30</sup> As in the movies, this story reinforces the idea that the monster is an immortal creature; he will be constantly revived in order to generate more stories. Although this novel changes the outcome of Shelley's story, it shows that Shelley has not only impacted her audience with her novel, but also with her life. She was a remarkable person, and her work is filled with biographic content. To talk about Frankenstein is to talk about Shelley's conflict as a woman in the eighteenth century. By including Mary Shelley as a character and going back to her context, Brian Aldiss recognizes her importance as a writer and reminds the audience that Frankenstein is not only a cinematic character, but he is a character in literature as well.

The next work is a quite unusual sequel to Mary Shelley's novel. In Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (1995), Mary Shelley is also a character.<sup>31</sup> After Victor gives up creating the female creature, Shelley herself finishes her. Shelley and the female creature become lovers later on. When they break up, the female creature goes to the United States, where she lives until she dies, that is, her body starts to decompose, in the 1990s. The most interesting element is undoubtedly the structure of the text, which may cause some strangeness in the most traditional readers. *Patchwork Girl* was written in Storyspace software and published by

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<sup>30</sup> For more details of Brian Aldiss' novel, see Patrick G. McLeod's "Frankenstein: Unbound and Otherwise."

<sup>31</sup> I want to inform that I have only access to fragments of this work because its CD-ROM is not available in Brazil. To write about it, I used Jay Clayton's "*Frankenstein's* Futurity: Replicants and Robots" and videos broadcast on YouTube in which Shelley Jackson explains her initial idea and reads parts of the text.

Eastgate Systems. It is a hypertext, a database system, composed of 323 lexias (the pop-up windows) that are joined together by 462 links (Clayton 116). The title page has six links (figure 1): a graveyard, a journal, a quilt, a story, broken accents, and sources. The readers travel through these links at random, but they can also guide their reading through a story map (figure 2) which contains basically the same links of the title page. Some links show pictures, others show texts. Each link opens more links, and so on. This method changes the way readers experience the text. As there is not a linear reading, each reader may have a different interpretation of the story because s/he reads the text in a different order.

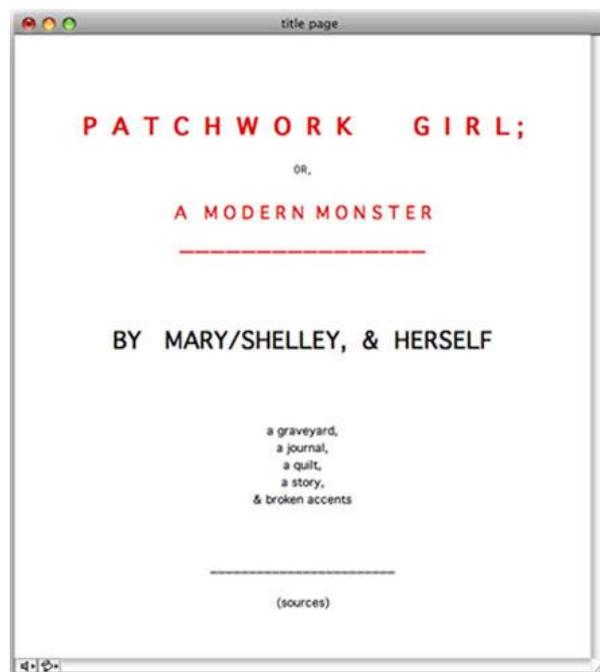


Figure 1: the title page of *Patchwork Girl*. Source: Vincler, John. "The Monstrous Body and the Manufactured Body in Late Age of Print: Material Strategies for Innovative Fiction in Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* and Steve Tomasula's *VAS: An Opera in Flatland*." *Dichtung-Digital*. N.p, n.d. Web. 07 Dec. 2015.

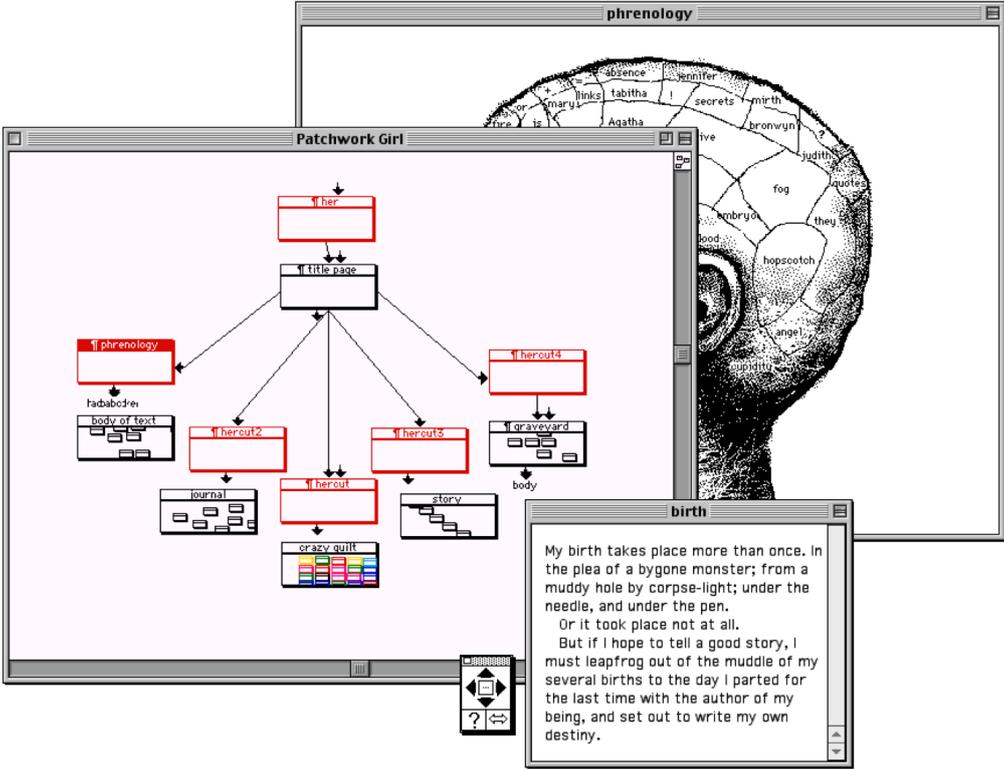


Figure 2: the story map and two examples of lexias. Source: Vincler, John. Patchwork Girl.

Elmcip. N.p, n.d. Web. 07 Dec. 2015.

As any other story, it has “numerous narrative characteristics, including characters, settings, flashbacks, recognition scenes, shifting points of view, and consecutive temporal sequences” (Clayton 92). For instance, the link “Story” tells the story of the female creature. The “Graveyard” section contains the stories of the parts that compose the body. The section “Journal” shifts the point of view to Mary Shelley, the character. It contains Shelley’s journal in which she tells how she makes the creature, and how she gets involved with her. The link “Quilt” contains quotations from other sources, such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and L. Frank Brum’s *Patchwork Girl of Oz*. In sum, Jackson explores Shelley’s idea of making a creature out of pieces by writing a story that is visually composed of several parts, and by developing the stories behind the main one.

As Marina Warner notices, Frankenstein and his creature “have leapt the boundaries of the novel itself into all kinds of retellings, periodic and straight,” (2) to the extent that

Mary Shelley may have never thought of. The most recent film on Frankenstein, released in 2014, is probably one of these examples. Stuart Beattie's *I, Frankenstein* is a film based on Kevin Greivoux's graphic novel by the same name. *I, Frankenstein* offers a sequel to *Frankenstein* as if it were an old legend that has never been proved. The film starts showing the creature in the graveyard burying Victor. Then he is surprised by demons who try to capture him. He is saved by gargoyles, which are the equivalents of angels in the film. They take the creature and Victor's diary to Leonore, the gargoyle queen, who explains to the creature the long battle between the gargoyles and the demons who want to destroy humankind. Leonore gives the creature a name eventually. His name is Adam, the first of his kind. After this meeting, Adam starts to pursue demons in order to kill them. In one of these occasions, the demon escapes and warns Naberius, the prince of the demons, of the creature's survival. Naberius, disguised as Wessex, sponsors a research on the reanimation of corpses. For centuries he has been searching for the creature and Victor's journal so that he could use revived bodies to bring back to life the demons that have been sent to hell, and he would finally win the war against the gargoyle and slave humankind forever.

Although the movie contains supernatural beings, it does not portray Adam as a monster. In fact, Adam is apparently a normal man. The only difference is the scars that cover his body and his superhuman strength. The creature is certainly less scary than the creatures in previous film adaptations of Shelley's novel. His being named after Adam is a relevant fact as well. Many moviegoers who have read the novel will probably remember the creature's identifying himself as an Adam figure. Although the movie appropriates Mary Shelley's characters and their famous conflict, it does not tackle the issues discussed in the novel, such as Victor's neglect of the creature and the creature's struggle to be accepted in society. Nevertheless, in the film, Adam has to choose which side to support: the good or the bad one. The film also questions whether or not the creature has a soul. In the end Adam

finds out that he has a soul, but it is not explained why he has acquired one. In sum, Beattie's film is so focused on the action features and special effects that it lacks content. Even so, it illustrates that *Frankenstein* has reached all kinds of audiences because it is flexible enough to be reinterpreted and reinvented.

The last example is neither an adaptation nor a sequel of the story. It is in fact an allusion. In 2011, ABC channel broadcast, for the first time, *Once Upon a Time*, a series, created by Edward Kitsis and Adam Horowitz, which portrays a postmodern version of the old fairy tales. All the characters from the Enchanted Forest were cursed, and, now they are in Storybrook, a fictional city in Maine. Most of the episodes in the first two seasons tell the story of a character from fairy tales. However, two of these episodes in the second season, screened on TV in 2012, are dedicated to a character that belongs to the literary and the cinematic worlds. The fifth episode, *The Doctor*, has as protagonist Dr. Whale, the doctor of the city. He goes to Regina, the mayor, demanding his return to his land. In an attempt to persuade her, he brings to life her fiancé. However, he is not the same anymore; he has become an uncontrolled monster. This present story is mixed with a flashback from the time they were all in the Enchanted Forest, where Dr. Whale first met Regina. Back then, they were known by different names. He was Victor Frankenstein, and she was the Evil Queen. It is through Regina that Frankenstein gets the heart that would stand his scientific procedure. As in many other allusions and adaptations to *Frankenstein*, this series appropriates Mary Shelley's characters and inserts them into a whole different context. The alterations are necessary to join Frankenstein's story with the fantastic world of fairy tales.

In the twelfth episode, *In the Name of the Brother*, the flashback returns to the time before Dr. Frankenstein knows Regina. It shows Victor in his homeland, a black and white world, together with his father and brother. One night, while Victor is stealing a corpse from a graveyard, his brother arrives and starts questioning Victor's methods. At this time, a guard

arrives and shoots at them. Victor's brother gets hurt and dies. From this moment on, Victor tries to restore life into the body of his brother. He eventually succeeds, but his brother becomes aggressive and, uncontrolled, kills his own father. In this episode Victor recognizes that he wants to make his name known forever, but, instead, his name is always remembered after a monster. To write these episodes, Kitsis and Horowitz appropriate Frankenstein story and movies. The main plot follows, to a certain extent, Mary Shelley's novel, but it contains elements from Whale's films as well. The black and white world, all the apparatus in Victor's laboratory, the lighting storm, and the assistant Igor are common elements of the Frankenstein movies.

This overview is very short in comparison with the numerous adaptations, sequels, and allusions to Frankenstein and his creature in literature, cinema, and TV. Even though many references to *Frankenstein* fail to associate themselves to the novel, Mary Shelley's presence haunts each one of them. As George Levine argues, "The tale survives the teller" (29), but this statement is only true to the extent that the name Frankenstein is more famous than the name Mary Shelley nowadays. It does not mean that Shelley is completely erased from the audience's mind. For those who have read her novel, Mary Shelley is always the source to which they turn back in order to understand new forms of experiencing the myth. Moreover, after each Frankenstein movie is released, more people are told or reminded about Mary Shelley's novel. Even though many important elements of the novel are lost in subsequent references, much of *Frankenstein's* success is due to Mary Shelley's decision to write her novel after two ancient myths of creation. *Paradise Lost* and the myth of Prometheus constitute a solid foundation for *Frankenstein*, allowing Shelley's novel to become part of a tradition. They provide Frankenstein with archetypes and themes that transformed Shelley's nightmare into one of the most remarkable myths of our times.

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