Shelleyan Monsters: The Figure of Percy Shelley in Mary Shelley's
Frankenstein and Peter Ackroyd's *The Casebook of Victor
Frankenstein*.

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This dissertation is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of

Masters in the Department of English

at the

University of the Western Cape

UNIVERSITY *of the*

WESTERN CAPE

Supervisor: Dr A. Birch

November 2015

Keywords

- Enlightenment

- Romanticism

- Prometheus Unbound

- Peter Ackroyd

- The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein

- Percy Shelley

- Mary Shelley

- Frankenstein

- Doubling

- Biography

Abstract

This thesis will examine the representation of the figure of Percy Shelley in the text of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). My hypothesis is that Percy Shelley represents to Mary Shelley a figure who embodies the contrasting and more startling aspects of both the Romantic Movement and the Enlightenment era. This I will demonstrate through a close examination of the text of *Frankenstein* and through an exploration of the figure of Percy Shelley as he is represented in the novel. The representation of Shelley is most marked in the figures of Victor and the Creature, but is not exclusively confined to them. The thesis will attempt to show that Victor and the Creature can be read as figures for the Enlightenment and the Romantic movements respectively. As several critics have noted, these fictional protagonists also represent the divergent elements of Percy Shelley's own divided personality, as he was both a dedicated man of science and a radical Romantic poet. He is a figure who exemplifies the contrasting notions of the archetypal Enlightenment man, while simultaneously embodying the Romantic resistance to some aspects of that zeitgeist.

Lately, there has been a resurgence of interest in the novel by contemporary authors, biographers and playwrights, who have responded to it in a range of literary forms. I will pay particular attention to Peter Ackroyd's, *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* (2011), which shows that the questions *Frankenstein* poses to the reader are still with us today. I suggest that this is one of the main impulses behind this recent resurgence of interest in Mary Shelley's novel. In particular, my thesis will explore the idea that the question of knowledge itself, and the scientific and moral limits which may apply to it, has a renewed urgency in early 21st century literature. In *Frankenstein* this is a central theme and is related to the figure of the "modern Prometheus", which was the subtitle of *Frankenstein*, and which points to the ambitious figure who wishes to advance his own knowledge at all costs. I will consider this point by exploring the ways in which the tensions embodied by Percy Shelley and raised by the original novel are addressed in these contemporary texts. The renewed interest in these questions suggests that they remain pressing in our time, and continue to haunt us in our current society, not unlike the Creature in the novel.

Declaration

I declare that "SHELLEYAN MONSTERS: THE FIGURE OF PERCY SHELLEY IN MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN* AND PETER ACKROYD'S *THE CASEBOOK OF VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN*" is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have utilized or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

WIHAN VAN WYK   November 2015

Signed: _____   Date: _____

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Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been written without the tireless support and guidance of my supervisor, Dr. Alannah Birch. Her enthusiasm, direction and willingness to help were truly invaluable. I would also like to thank Stephanie Brandt, for putting aside hours of editing time to correct the mistakes of a tired mind. Lastly, I extend a thank you to all the staff of the English Department who are always ready to extend a helping hand.

Dedication

To my parents, Abrie and Zelma van Wyk, whose endless support not only helped me through university, but got me there in the first place.

To Zinta, my sister, for being willing to sit and read out obnoxiously long quotes, and always being there to cheer me up.

To Stephanie Brandt, for lighting my way when times were dark. This is for you.

Contents

Introduction

This thesis will explore the figure of Percy Shelley as manifested in the novel *Frankenstein*, and in certain contemporary literary texts. Romantic literature and Enlightenment ideas have long been considered stark opposites by students of the Romantic period, but more recent research shows that they are much more complementary than was previously thought. The traditional picture is painted of Romantic literature and art in opposition to Enlightenment ideals, and often as constituting a direct attack on these ideas. Examples of this are to be found everywhere: Thomas De Quincey's anti-rationalism, William Blake's attacks on the ideas of 18th century art and philosophy and Wordsworth's challenge to 18th century poetry and diction are just a few examples (Brown 35). From these, and many other examples, Romantic literature and Enlightenment thought have thus been polarised to such an extent that it has become difficult to analyse these subjects objectively and it is easy to present them as mutually opposed. A closer look will demonstrate that these two seemingly opposed sets of ideas are in fact much closer and are, in many respects, even complementary. This thesis will demonstrate this by examining the Romantic period and looking in particular at the important figure of Percy Shelley.

In this thesis, I will argue that through the figure of Shelley the link between the apparently contradictory ideas of these literary periods can be traced. I will show that Shelley, while being one of the most iconic Romantic poets, is also a great enthusiast of science and philosophy, which are the cornerstones of the Enlightenment era. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* I would argue, is extremely important in this regard. I will endeavour to demonstrate that her embodiment of Shelley within a number of the novel's characters, but most prominently in both Victor Frankenstein and the Creature, is integral to the above-mentioned dichotomy. The portrayal of Shelley in *Frankenstein* exemplifies this seemingly paradoxical mix of Romantic and Enlightenment concepts within a single figure.

Frankenstein was published in 1818, which falls within an important and interesting historical period. It was written during the time where Enlightenment ideals were the zeitgeist of the day, but this was far from being the only ideology present. The influence of Romanticism was spreading rapidly throughout Britain, and with this came a growing distrust of the ideals of the Enlightenment. This was a period of rapid change and development. As Curran notes: "The forty years in Great Britain from 1785 to 1825, the period generally construed as the age of Romanticism, saw a crucial transition between an Enlightenment world view and the values of modern, industrial society" (Curran xi). During this period, the social upheavals related to both the American and French Revolutions were threatening to transform society. In Britain, the rule of King George the Third also evoked similar protests from the British public; however his government's reactions to these were swift and brutal. *Frankenstein* appeared in the aftermath of these events, and was thus heavily influenced by them. It can be argued that the French Revolution was the most significant historical event relevant to the writing of the novel: it was originally a noble undertaking that quickly became a travesty of its original ideals. It was inspired by ideals such as liberty, freedom, human rights, and other progressive sentiments characteristic of the Enlightenment; their realisation would finally have meant the end of centuries of monarchy and theocracy. After its initial success, the revolution quickly soured as the monarchy and the church lost power. This was followed by a period of anarchy as the Jacobins rose to power, and quickly installed a new tyranny, followed by 'the reign of terror' in which thousands were executed by guillotine. This was followed by a succession of dictatorships that started with the Jacobins and ended with Napoleon. As a result, many of the early Romantics had to rethink their initial ideas and assumptions. Many Romantic thinkers, and especially those found among the first generation of British Romantics, were initially attracted to the original ideals of the revolution; most early Romantic writers and artists were great supporters of the revolution before it turned on itself. As a novel that emerged in the aftermath of these upheavals, *Frankenstein* is very much a product of its age, and the influences of both Romanticism as a movement, and the Enlightenment age, are an undeniable presence throughout the novel.

The Enlightenment has been credited with making many contributions to modern society. Some of these include advancing the sciences, promoting human rights, and greatly lifting the hold of religious and monarchical tyranny. At the same time, it has also been accused of perpetrating many evils, both during its time, and especially in 20th century critiques:

> [The Enlightenment] has been held responsible for the French Revolution, for totalitarianism, and for the view that nature is simply an object to be dominated, manipulated, and exploited. It has been implicated in one way or another in European imperialism and the most aggressive aspects of capitalism… It is said that its passion for rights and liberties have unleashed a destructive individualism that undermines any sense of community, yet it has also been argued that its assumption that human nature is infinitely malleable has provided intellectual inspiration for attempts by totalitarian states to eradicate all forms of individuality from their subjects. (Schmidt 1)

These are some of the accusations levelled against the Enlightenment, but it is clear that despite these reflections, it remains a period that is often misunderstood. The above-mentioned virtues and vices made the Enlightenment a very controversial period, sparking debate about its nature, both during its time and in the centuries that followed. The famous question, 'What is Enlightenment', was first posed during the period, and the debate continued into the 21ˢᵗ century (Schmidt 2). In 1783, Johann Friederich Zollner published a paper questioning the advisability of civil marriage ceremonies, and within it he asked the question, "What is the Enlightenment". This sparked a variety of responses within the next year as the *Berkinische Monatsschrift,* published responses from both Immanuel Kant and Moses Mendehlssohn. Other authors would join the debate, which continuously grew over the next decade. A classic definition of the Enlightenment from this period, was that of Emmanuel Kant:

> Enlightenment is mankind's exit from its self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to make use of one's own understanding without the guidance of another. Self-incurred is this inability if its cause lies not in lack of understanding but rather in the lack of the resolution and the courage to use it without the guidance of another. *Sapere Aude!* Have the courage to use your own understanding! Thus is the motto of enlightenment. (Kant 58)

In the above quote, Kant posited the idea that human civilisation has now reached a point where people could start to think for themselves, not needing others to do this for them anymore. This led to Kant's most famous contribution to this debate: the introduction of the concepts of the public and private use of reason. This is the idea that in the public arena people are allowed to question, critique and debate ideas freely, as long as they still fulfil their societal responsibilities. His famous example is that of a clergyman, who must follow and preach the doctrines of the church where he is employed, although he may publicly come to disagree with them, and perhaps even attempt to improve them through rational discourse. A further debate during this period concerned whether Enlightenment ideas necessarily lead

to violent revolution, as recent events in France tended to suggest. Contradictory ideas on this question were put forward by other thinkers of the day. Johan Heinrich Tieftrunk, one of Kant's earlier disciples, stated that enlightenment merely meant that people were starting to think for themselves, and held the view that the Enlightenment in its true essence did not cause revolution:

> How can one regard enlightenment as the cause of the atrocious actions, disgraceful deeds instigated by political upheaval…. [H]ad [France] been truly enlightened – [it] would either never have begun its revolution or else certainly have carried it out better. (Tieftrunk 218-219)

He went on to state that it is rather poor governance, and centuries of built-up frustration in the populace that lead to a revolution. Thus, in the above quote he reinforces the view that revolutions are not caused by enlightenment thinking itself: true enlightenment thinking would actually prevent irrational actions such as violent revolutions.

20th century thought on the Enlightenment and its virtues and vices is similarly divided. It is often times opposed to the general idea of Enlightenment. Bittner's article, "What is Enlightenment", sums up some of the most frequently mentioned arguments against Enlightenment thought:

> The reasons against the Enlightenment follow one pattern: reducing the high to the low, enlightenment deprives us of something vital. Ideas differ about what that is. Enlightenment is variously said to dissolve our fundamental values; to obliterate any genuine commitment and so to render all actions arbitrary; to disorientate our life and turn it into a meaningless jumble. (Bittner 353)

This is one of the common critiques of Enlightenment thought and art. It is an argument first made in the 18th century, and one that is still relevant today. It is a similar to the argument that the Romantics raised against the Enlightenment. The argument poses the idea that human beings have the need to be dictated to by some form of higher authority, be it religious or otherwise; this provides purpose to their existence and governs their actions. The Romantics, being sceptical of traditional forms of higher authority, often went as far as re-inventing higher authority, and thus through them, this concept often found expression through ideas such as the sublime, esotericism, nature, and of course, art and poetry. For them, and many other critics of the Enlightenment, the reformation of society through reason and the scientific method was too constricting. Horkheimer expresses this critique, commenting that: "Eventually, mythology, as the adequate expression of man's relationship with nature,

vanished and mechanics and physics took its place. Nature lost every vestige of vital independent existence, all value of its own. It became dead matter – a heap of things" (Horkheimer 361). Thus, from this perspective, the Enlightenment extinguished our sense of the sacred, and with it, all our reverence and respect. Bittner responds to this argument as follows:

> The Romantics indeed claimed that the prosaic world of Enlightenment, leaving us nothing to divine, to revere, to adore, is a world of tedium; but there is little reason to accept their charge. Why should not the ordinary things that Enlightenment favors fill our hearts as much … The fear of boredom from Enlightenment appears, rather, to be a mere hangover from intoxication with the higher (Bittner *What is Enlightenment?* 353).

Indeed, modern society feels that it has lost touch with the mysteries of the sublime; there is a sense that the Enlightenment and science have robbed the universe of its mystery and splendour, and societies around the world are now bearing the consequences of this loss. However, there is a contemporary argument that challenges this view and demonstrates that with the advent of modern science, exactly the opposite must indeed be the case:

> [Keats] believed that Newton had destroyed all the poetry of the rainbow by reducing it to the prismatic colours. Keats could hardly have been more wrong, and my aim is to guide all who are tempted by a similar view towards the opposite conclusion. Science is, or ought to be, the inspiration for great poetry… Newton's unweaving of the rainbow led on to spectroscopy, which has proved the key to much of what we know today about the cosmos. And the heart of any poet worthy of the title Romantic could not fail to leap up if he beheld the universe of Einstein, Hubble and Hawking. (Dawkins 4)

This, I would argue, is a view that is supported by Shelley's work, as this thesis will endeavour to show. His work was rather taken up with the wonders of science, and his poetry was often directly influenced by both the natural world and the scientific discoveries of the day, managing to find the sublime within them while still working within an enlightenment framework.

Historically, Romanticism has always been hard to define, especially with regard to British Romanticism. This, I would argue, is predominantly for two reasons. The first would be the movement's ability to create and nurture such an array of significant artists and writers. The Romantic period managed to yield a great number of influential literary figures within a limited historical period. It produced a variety of iconic figures, ranging from poets and

novelists to essayists and important social critics (Butler 1). Secondly, as Marilyn Butler points out in her book, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (1981), the name "Romanticism" was bestowed on the movement and its contributors anachronistically. I would propose that none of these writers, poets or thinkers thought of themselves as part of a fixed movement with specific ideals within their lifetimes. Many were very individualistic, expressing a broad range of themes and subject matter in their work. This contributes to the difficulty of finding a definition that encompasses all of Romanticism's representatives – a notorious historical problem in the study of Romanticism. As a result, many scholars in the field have resorted to definitions that tended to over-generalize. This is a practice I will attempt to avoid in this thesis. A well-rounded and generally sound definition of Romanticism is provided by Margaret Drabble:

> A literary movement, and profound shift in sensibility, which took place in Britain and throughout Europe roughly between 1770 and 1884. Intellectually it marked a violent reaction to the Enlightenment. Politically it was inspired by the revolutions in France and America… Emotionally it expresses an extreme assertion of the self and the value of individual experience… The stylistic keynote of Romanticism, and its watchword is Imagination. (Drabble cited in Day 1)

On many levels the above definition gives a good general overview of what the movement represents as a whole. However when one is working with controversial subjects such as the relation of the Romantic movement to Enlightenment philosophy and thought, one has to be careful of generalizations. Historically, Romanticism has always been considered a counter-movement to the Enlightenment, which has been painted as an age that valued logic, reason and rationality, with a strong need to understand the world scientifically. The Romantic thinkers, on the other hand, are shown to emphasise emotion, passion, and to often relish mystery and the unknown. William Flemming (1978) frames this view by commenting that:

> The slogan of the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment had been Descartes' declaration: 'I think; therefore I am'… For the Romantics Descartes' dictum became 'I feel; therefore I am.'… So in the romantic rebellion, artists exalted emotion over intellect, mystery over reason, passion over restraint. (Flemming 511)

While this is applicable to many facets of Romanticism, it does not serve well as an all-encompassing interpretation. More recent research suggests, for instance, that Romanticism and the Enlightenment are much more complementary than was previously thought:

For the truth is that the facts are contradictory. It is a truism, on the one hand, that the Romantics rebelled against their predecessors… a common intellectual enemy was Newtonian rationalism, whose desiccated narrowness was attacked by Blake, by Keats (in "Lamia"), and, with otherwise uncharacteristic savagery, by Goethe… The evidence for the Romantic attack on Enlightenment lies everywhere at hand. (Curran 35)
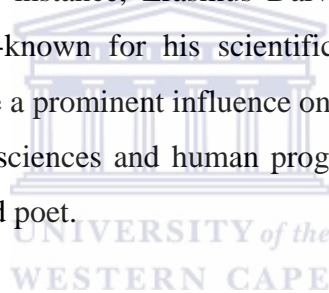
This demonstrates the traditional view of Romanticism and its supposed relationship with the Enlightenment, but Curran goes on to demonstrate how this supposed opposition is false:

Writers like Morse and Peckham and Virgil Nemoianu have shown how many Enlightenment values have persisted despite the changed atmosphere of the nineteenth century. Voltaire's ideal of tolerance continues in the writings of the Schlegels, of Shelley… Popean satire is not only reborn in Byron but also strongly colors Blake's prophecies and leaves traces in some of Shelley's work and even a few in Keats's. Neoclassicism, which was a formative element in the Enlightenment, remained a powerful if variable current in Goethe (who translated two of Voltaire's tragedies). … The first objection to the simple view of Romanticism as rejection of the Enlightenment is that it delivers a woefully impoverished picture of what was actually written by major figures in the decades after 1800. (Curran 36-37)

These comments show how Enlightenment sentiments continued to influence Romantic writers despite the many differences that arose between them on a core level. The distinction between these two periods is not as clear-cut or simple as has been accepted by past Romantic scholars. This thesis will explore this in relation to Shelley specifically.

Many Romantic figures are much more complex than simplistic generalisations will allow; they often champion both science and Romantic philosophy. The first wave of British Romanticism encompassed figures such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Blake who rose to prominence roughly during the year of 1798; these figures were initially very taken with the revolution in France and were vocal supporters of it. British Romanticism managed to acquire momentum and grew in popularity after Wordsworth and Coleridge published their compilation of poetry, *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). The second wave of British Romantics included Lord Byron (George Gordon), Percy Shelley, John Keats, and Mary Shelley. They were much more removed from the revolution, and were merely observers of its aftermath and of the effects of its failure on Britain and its people. As McGann comments: "The French revolution was no more than a betrayed memory for the

later Romantics, the spirit of whose age was very different from the one in which Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge produced their most significant work" (McGann 111). The second generation would end up drawing heavily on the first and would slowly grow both in fame and infamy. The Enlightenment and its practices and sentiments had a strong influence on the second generation of Romantics and on their work. This generation was generally not so dismissive of the Enlightenment as their predecessors, and many could be considered as figures of the Enlightenment themselves. A good example of this would be the discussions held by the Shelley circle at the Villa Diodati. Subjects such as the infamous Vitalist debate and Galvanism along with the science and philosophy of the day were often discussed. John Keats himself was a medical student, and would have been familiar with many of the scientific practices of the period. The Romantics lived in a time before the sharp division of disciplines that is so prevalent in our society. As a result they rarely discriminated in their studies; and in this period we often find a mixture of apparently contradictory disciplines, such as poetry and science. For instance, Erasmus Darwin was a famous and influential scientist, but he was also well-known for his scientific poetry, that combined the two disciplines. As a result he became a prominent influence on Shelley, who also endeavoured to capture his fascination with the sciences and human progress in his work, and was greatly inspired by this older scientist and poet.

This then takes us back to the importance of the figure of Percy Shelley. Within him, we seem to find a paradox that rises above the polarising generalisations that so stubbornly cling to this age, especially in literary studies. The seemingly contradictory aspects of Shelley's personality that fill the pages of both *Frankenstein* and his many biographies demonstrate to us a particularly potent unifying force present within the poet. He is a notable example of a figure who has managed to embody the most important and striking elements and features of aspects of both the Enlightenment and the Romantic man. This I will argue is perhaps one of the most important and enduring, yet at the same time most overlooked, aspects of this significant poetic figure.

Percy Shelley has long been considered one of the most successful and iconic of the British Romantic poets. However this has not always been the case as the rise in his reputation has been difficult. His early and unexpected death in 1822 unfortunately happened before he

could find a dedicated base of readers. Poetically, he was finally outgrowing the juvenility present in many of his early works, specifically in his early prose such as *Zastrozzi* (1810) and *St Irvyne* (1811*)*. In the last two years of his life he seemingly started to find his voice, and as a result started producing what would later be recognised as his great works, such as *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), *A Defence of Poetry* (1821), and *The Triumph of Life* (1822). One finds the presence of the ostensibly contradictory notions of Romanticism and the Enlightenment in most of the poet's work, as demonstrated by Curran:

> *Queen Mab* is a veritable encyclopaedia of the central ideas of the French and English Enlightenment, and, as recent scholarship suggests, Shelley never deserted these sceptical ideals for any Romantic Monism or historicisms. He did indeed displace his hopes into an ideal future, as the New Historicists suggest, but then so did his early mentor [William] Godwin… (Curran 97)

Shelley incorporated these ideas into his work, resulting in it becoming a repository for the knowledge of the age. He never rejected the ideas of the Enlightenment for a purely Romantic view; rather he combined the two, thereby demonstrating their complementary features. His love of science and philosophy is one example, while his belief in human rights and his wish for societal change, coinciding closely with the original ideas of the French revolution, and inspired by thinkers such as Thomas Paine, and philosophers such as Voltaire and William Godwin, is another example. Godwin was in fact a particularly important influence on the young poet, primarily as a result of what is considered his greatest work, *Political Justice* (1793). Curran suggests that, "Godwin made the perfect theorist for intellectuals, and his work had a great influence on young liberals of the 1790s, including the first generation of Romantics… By the time Shelley was eagerly studying *Political Justice* the elder poets had transferred their allegiance to Burke" (Curran 65-66). Edmund Burke, a philosopher of the period, also expressed ideas of liberty, although his approach was much more conservative than William Godwin's. Shelley's atheism can be seen as another example of Enlightenment influence, as this period was crucial for defining the place and purpose of religion, both in society and individual life, and calling it into question. Above all, Shelley can be described as an example of the 'Kantian man' as set out in Emmanuel Kant's essay, "What is Enlightenment" (1784). In his essay, Kant claims that the defining element of the Enlightenment age is that people were starting to think for themselves, and as a result, were placing less trust in traditional institutions. He then goes on to give a few examples of situations where people are afraid to use their own understanding, "...If I have a book which

provides meaning for me, a spiritual adviser who has a conscience for me, a doctor who will judge my diet for me, and so forth, surely I do not need to trouble myself. I do not need to think…" (Kant 132). One of Shelley's most notable characteristics is his constant questioning of authority. He spent most of his life questioning the purpose of government and religion, while at the same time, participating in radical lifestyle choices such as vegetarianism and his idea of free love. Clearly these are choices he made on his own terms, not allowing such institutions or even familial structures to dictate to him. As a result, Shelley embodies Kant's ideal of what an enlightenment man should be.

During his lifetime Shelley never managed to reach the heights of literary celebrity that he yearned for. Throughout the years, his attempts to publish and reach out to potential readers resulted in repeated public rejection. He did not die in obscurity though, as his works were known by both by his fellow poets and by many of the critics of his day. This is a point Frederick Pottle makes clear in his essay, "The Case of Shelley":

> It is abundantly clear that in his own brief lifetime Shelley was not ignored by the critics; he was regarded as a poet of great but misguided powers. This attitude did not give way to one of complete approval, but continued to characterize much of the most respected criticism of the century down almost to its end. The classic statement of the position is perhaps that of Wordsworth, made only five years after Shelley's death: 'Shelley is one of the best artists of us all: I mean in workmanship of style.' This is high praise from a man whose praise in such matters counts. (Pottle 593)

That Wordsworth refers to Shelley as an *artist* and not a poet is telling. The above extract suggests that this alludes to Wordsworth's critique that Shelley's faults do not appear to lie in his craftsmanship, but rather in his subject matter. Many of the esteemed critics of the day who commented on his works held a similar opinion:

> [Mathew Arnold and Leslie Stephen] were essentially in agreement as to the nature of Shelley's defects. Those defects, they said, were unreality and unsubstantiality. To Arnold, Shelley was a beautiful and ineffectual angel; to Stephen, Shelley's poetry was too often the rainbow-colored mist into which the stagnant pool of Godwin's paradoxes had been transmuted. (Pottle 593)

Most of Shelley's critics seem to agree that the poet had considerable potential. It was not his skill as a lyrical poet that was at fault, but rather his subject matter. This I would argue, explains why both the critics of his day, and the later resurgence of critics in the early 20th century, could neither identify with nor accept his work. Shelley's work and the subsequent

figure of the poet that would be generated as a result, only took shape and gained importance posthumously. After his death in 1822, his readership remained limited, and studies of his work and his reputation remained rather stagnant between the 1820s and 1870s. His dedicated widow, Mary Shelley, attempted to edit and republish a collection of his works in 1823, but it was soon withdrawn at the insistence of Sir Timothy Shelley. In 1839 after the death of his father, Mary finally edited and re-published a collection of his work with additional notes by herself. By now, Mary had republished *Frankenstein* under her own name in the 1831 edition, and had become a recognised and respected author in her own right. The republication of this volume would arguably become one of the events that finally ignited interest in Shelley's poetry. Mary, in many ways, became his first true scholar. This event, dubbed "The Shelley Renaissance" of the eighteen-seventies, marked the start of Shelley becoming recognised for his poetry, and led to his canonisation as a major English poet. Harris Chewning comments:

> The Shelley renaissance of the eighteen-seventies is an occurrence well known to students of nineteenth-century literature. During that decade and the years following, Shelley scholars became intensely active and produced a flood of editions, biographies, and critical studies, clarifying the text, enlarging the canon, and extending the world's knowledge of the poet. (Chewning 81)

This was spurred on greatly by the interest that the literary scholar William Michael Rossetti took in the poet after he received one of Mary's edited editions of Shelley's works as a gift. He published a memoir of Shelley's life, which was included in his 1870s publication of Shelley's work. Rossetti continued to write about Shelley afterwards, and became one of the most prestigious Shelley scholars from this period as well as the chair of the Committee when the Shelley Society was formed in 1886 (Chewning 92). As Shelley scholarship grew substantially during this period, so did the number of both admirers (known as Shelleyans) and detractors, whose apparent distaste for the poet ranged from mild to passionate:

> Poe, Melville, George Henry Lewes, Swinburne, and Francis Thompson were ardent Shelleyans, Browning an ardent Shelleyan who later admitted some qualifications. Lamb, Hazlitt, Carlyle, Kingsley, and Mark Twain were violent anti-Shelleyans; the admiration of Emerson, Tennyson, and William Morris was less than hearty. (Pottle 593)

Clearly by the end of the 19th century, Shelley's reputation had grown: from an admittedly talented but soon to be forgotten poet, he became a figure who divided some of the greatest

literary minds of the time by inspiring either great admiration or intense disdain. What was very clear though, was that Shelley's influence and importance as a poet was growing at an immense rate, and by the end of the 19th century, he was recognised as one of the major poets of the English language. For the next twenty-five years, his reputation and status continued to rise until its peak in the early 20th century, and his prestigious following also seemed to grow with every year, "The period from about 1895 to 1920 marked the highest point of the tide of Shelley's reputation… Two of the most distinguished practitioners of literature during that time, Hardy and Shaw, were out-and-out Shelleyans: men who not only respected Shelley's art but who also found his ideas congenial" (Pottle 597). This then was a continuing trend in the early 20th century, when his reputation once again came under attack. This time his critics not only attacked his subject matter, but questioned his abilities as a poet. This trend started around the 1910s to the 1920s, and was associated with neo-classical ideas about literature:

> The rise of the New Humanists marked the turn of the tide. Paul Elmer More's essay on Shelley appeared in 1910, but it is my impression that the water-line did not begin visibly to retreat until the publication of Irving Babbitt's *Rousseau and Romanticism* in 1919. From that time to this the reputation of Shelley has continued steadily to ebb. (Pottle 598)

Building up to the 1920s, there was a sharp increase in the criticism of Shelley and Romanticism in general as the proponents of modernism seem to have taken a particularly harsh view on the subject. With reference to Babbitt's essay, Richard Jones notes that "*Rousseau and Romanticism*… owing to its severe strictures on the Romantic poets and to his attributing most of the evils of the present day to Rousseau, caused a flurry of opposition" (Jones 396). Babbitt's work and his general critique of the Romantics and their contemporaries was soon popularised and this opinion gained momentum both in literary and later academic circles. Jones defines the Humanist position in relation to the Romantic one as the following:

> Both science and romanticism expect to find truth in the flux, the one through uncontrolled reason, the other through uncontrolled emotion and imagination, but, say the humanists, the key to truth lies in the will to refrain… [Language] must not reside in the emotional or naturalistic element in man, but must be principles placed above this element, in accordance with which all thought and conduct should be controlled. For this reason the humanists are sternly opposed to that romantic individualism both in life and art which makes the individual a law unto himself. (Jones 400-402)

Thus, the Humanists critiqued the Romantics in two respects. The first of these was their reliance on what the humanists saw as an excess of feeling and emotion, and their lack of restraint during the creative process. The second major critique was the claim that the Romantics were removed from reality and that this posed a potential risk when searching for truth. The rise of New Humanism marked the start of this particular trend: many of the literary critics of the day, and even some of the great writers and poets of the period, seemed to rally against Shelley specifically:

> It is very important to realize that the present revolt from Shelley was not academic in origin, but was a revolt of practitioners of literature. It is not necessary to name the significant modern writers who are anti-Shelleyan; one had better save time and say that they all are. And the more significant modern academic criticism, as I have said, took its lead from the practitioners, and is remarkably like that of the practitioners… and indicates a wish on the part of modern critics, not to eliminate Shelley utterly from the role of English poets, but to reduce his stature, to turn him from a major into a minor poet. (Pottle 598-599)

The attempts to relegate Shelley from a major to a minor poet make it quite clear that this was an attack on both his subject matter and lyrical ability and it would not cease until Shelley was no longer acknowledged as a significant poetical figure. The relegation of such an important Romantic representative seemed to be a crucial attempt by the New Humanists to expose and dismiss what they considered was both an ineffective and dangerous movement.

There are two main problems that modernist interpreters seemed to have with Shelley, besides the moral implications of his life. The first of these is his excessive idealism. This is a sentiment one could hardly blame the writers and critics of the 20th century for exhibiting. The pessimistic landscape they inhabited, with the wounds of the First World War still fresh, was far removed from the world Shelley was trying to envision and create. The second was the modernist writers' quest to raise writing to the level of a science. The modernists sought an objective language, in contrast to Shelley's own, which so frequently draws on the emotional. Shelley's poetry then directly counteracts these attempts to intellectualise language as a purely logical endeavour: "[m]odern critics repudiate the dualism of the nineteenth century and test all poetry by a unitary standard….To Dr. Leavis or Mr. Tate, Shelley is not a great artist dealing with an unfortunate subject-matter; he is a bungler, a bad craftsman, and therefore a bad poet" (Pottle 598). Where in the past, Shelley's subject matter was always the most harshly critiqued aspect of his work, his lyrical brilliance was

acknowledged almost universally. However viewed through the modernist lens, his poetic style made his work appear ineffective, and was directly opposed to the vision that the modernists had for the future of literature and literary criticism.

Percy Shelley's revival in contemporary film and literature is another development that is of particular interest to Shelley scholars. Since the 1980s there has been a marked increase in both fictional and biographical works regarding the poet. In film during the late 1980s both Ken Russell's *Gothic* (1986) and Ivan Passer's *A Haunted Summer* (1988) recreate Shelley and his circle. Both films deal with Shelley's summer visit to the Villa Diodati, and both fictionalise the events of that summer that are believed to have sparked the conception of *Frankenstein*; both are interested in the development of the characters surrounding these events, particularly Shelley and Byron, with the latter often portrayed antagonistically. There were also two novels published in 2002 that deal with the figure of Shelley namely Allan Mallinson's *A Call to Arms*, and Julian Rathbone's *A Very English Agent.* Both of these novels fictionalise Shelley, so that his character becomes an integral part of the plot. Another modern fictionalisation of Shelley can be found in Peter Ackroyd's, *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* (2011). This novel is particularly important to this thesis as it is the subject of Chapter 3. This novel also displays a keen interest in the character of Shelley, and the insistent need to recreate and insert him into fictionalised accounts. This insistence on the revival of Shelley marks his importance as a poetical figure, not only in English literature, but in popular culture as a whole. In most of these revivals, we also see that his story is often intertwined with that of *Frankenstein*. Whether viewed as tied to the novel's conception, or as an entirely re-imagined version of the original, this indicates that Shelley is seen as closely connected to Mary Shelley's novel making her just as important to the study, as Shelley himself.

Mary Shelley was born on the 30th August 1787 to renowned political philosopher William Godwin and his wife, Mary Wollstonecraft, the famous feminist and author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). Despite her mother's death soon after her birth, Mary's life would be marked by being the child of perhaps the most famous radical literary couple in 18th century Britain. William Godwin married again soon after his wife's death, seeking to escape the strenuous life of single fatherhood. He took his neighbour Mary Jane Clairmont to be his second wife; she already had two other children from her previous marriage, and together with Mary and Fanny Imlay, they formed the new Godwin household. As Mary grew up

among her siblings, she found herself feeling increasingly isolated and alone. Her stepmother had little time for her stepdaughter; although she was well looked after physically, Mrs Clairmont ignored any and all of Mary's other needs, offering no further form of support, as described by Anne Mellor:

> What sort of mother was Mrs. Godwin to her newly acquired step daughters? Mary Godwin clearly found her very difficult. Mrs. Godwin resented Mary's intense affection for Godwin… visitors to the Godwin household intensified Mrs. Godwin's jealousy by showing a special interest in Mary. (Mellor 8)

According to Mellor, Mrs Clairmont was jealous of Mary, not only for the affection she bore her father, but also because of the renown bestowed upon Mary as the result of her mother. As a result, the new Mrs Godwin made her life very difficult. Her growing isolation applied not only to her stepfamily, but also increasingly to her father. Mary greatly admired and idolized Godwin, and to an extent he recognized Mary as a girl with great talent and ability, but he grew distant from her as he withdrew from the family into his studies and his work. Despite her talents and potential, Mary never received a formal education. Muriel Spark gives us Godwin's response to the matter when once asked about it: "Your enquiries relate principally to the two daughters of Mary Wollstonecraft. They are neither of them brought up with an exclusive attention to the system and ideas of their mother" (Spark 14). This demonstrates that Godwin neglected Wollstonecraft's ideals for a young woman with regard to education; and opted to leave this important responsibility in the hands of the new Mrs Godwin instead. This lack of parental affection and the few moments she had with her father, started to mould the young girl into the author who would eventually provide the world with *Frankenstein*. Similar themes of parental abandonment and isolation abound in the novel, and within modern criticism it is now widely accepted that Mary's upbringing contributed greatly to the themes that would later filter into *Frankenstein*. Despite her lack of formal education, she was given access to her father's personal library, and was encouraged to read as much as she could. She was also fortunate to sit in at the meetings her father had with many of the prominent thinkers, philosophers and artists of the day as Mellor states:

> Mary would often listen quietly in a corner while Godwin carried on political, philosophical, scientific, or literary conversations with such visitors as William Wordsworth, Charles Lamb, Samuel Coleridge, Thomas Holcroft, John Johnson, Humphrey Davy… when Coleridge and Charles and Mary Lamb came to tea and supper, she heard Coleridge himself recite "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," an event she never forgot. (Mellor 11)

Thus her intellectual development was never stunted and it continued to grow and develop as the years went by. After a short period when she was sent away to live in Dundee, Scotland, with friends of Godwin, she returned to find that Percy Shelley, a young and idealistic aristocrat, was a regular visitor to Godwin's home. Shelley was a great admirer of Godwin's, and Shelley had been wanting to meet the older philosopher for quite some time. His marriage to his current wife, Harriet Westbrook, did not stop Shelley from becoming infatuated with the young Mary – and her with him: "To Mary, now a girl of seventeen, the continual appearance of Shelley at Skinner Street provided an entirely new experience" (Spark 19). After a short and secret courtship, they declared their love to each other at Mary's mother's gravestone. William Godwin did not approve of this development, and with scandal and disapproval at their heels, they eloped and left for France, taking Mary's half-sister, Claire Clairmont, with them. In France, Mary was put on a strict study schedule by Shelley, as the older (and published) author, took on the role of mentor. As a result, Mary became his literary student. She was only too willing to learn and kept a travel diary throughout their travels. It was during these travels that we find the first instances of the sublime landscapes that would be so strong an influence on her novel, as it is landscapes such as Mont Blanc that would both inspire her and provide a setting for *Frankenstein* at a later stage. However, their travels through France were cut short as their money started to run out, and they were forced to return to England.

On the 22 February 1815, Mary's first child was born. The child unfortunately did not survive. She recorded the following in her journal on March 5th, "Find my baby dead. Sent for Hogg. Talk. A miserable day" (Mellor 32). Shelley, at this point, was frequently absent with Claire, and this was a pattern that would continue through all her pregnancies, sparking the anxieties about paternal responsibility that can be read as themes in *Frankenstein*. Mellor suggests that "She would later represent Percy Shelley's lack of parental concern for his offspring in the fictional form of Victor Frankenstein's abandonment of his creature" (Mellor 32). It was not long before Mary was pregnant again. On 3 May 1816 she gave birth to a healthy baby boy, William, named after her father. Claire at this point started to pursue the famous Lord Byron with the intention of becoming his mistress; it would seem that she was successful, and managed to garner invitations for them all to go and stay at Byron's current

residence, the Villa Diodati in Geneva. With the health of their young child much improved, Mary and Shelley decided to go there for the summer.

Shelley and Byron quickly became friends, spending days together on the lake and retreating inside at night to continue their literary and philosophical discussions. Here they were joined by Dr Polidori, Byron's physician; Mary seemed to take on the role of silent listener and observer. They discussed many of the scientific and philosophical issues of the day, and at times, told ghost stories to pass the time. One night, Byron challenged them to a ghost story competition to see who could come up with the most terrifying tale. At first, the competition didn't yield much fruit as Byron and Shelley quickly grew tired of it. But Mary persevered, and eventually one night after a discussion on the topic of Galvanism, Mary conceived the basis of the idea that would eventually become *Frankenstein*; "One night after a discussion among Byron, Polidori and Shelley concerning Galvanism and Erasmus Darwin's success in causing a piece of vermicelli to move voluntarily, she fell into a reverie or waking dream" (Mellor 40). This dream, and the events that lead to it, were later discussed by Mary in the introduction to her 1831 edition of *Frankenstein,* as seen in the following extract:

> When I placed my head on my pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie… I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing that he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion (M. Shelley 169).

This was the famous dream that eventually led to the novel, *Frankenstein.* Initially, it started as a short story, and Shelley continued to motivate Mary to develop and elaborate her ideas over the next two years until the point when the novel was a published anonymously in 1818. Mary would to some extent, either consciously or unconsciously, fill the pages of her 'hideous progeny' with themes that originated in her own life, often stemming from past traumas and current anxieties. Mellor, highlighting ideas of childbirth and maternal responsibility, suggests that these ideas may have been influenced by the death of Mary's first child: "Mary Shelley had given birth to a baby girl eighteen months earlier, a baby whose death two weeks later produced a recurrent dream" (Mellor 40). In this recurrent dream she dreamt that she found her baby the next day, dead and cold, and she would then sit

next to the fire and rub it until it came back to life again. Mellor makes the point that this ties in with *Frankenstein*, arguing that "[o]nce again [Mary] was dreaming of re-animating a corpse by warming it with the 'spark of life'" (Mellor 40). With reference to the more recent birth of her son William, and her potential future pregnancies, Mellor argues that, "Mary Shelley's reverie unleashed her deepest subconscious anxieties, the natural but no less powerful anxieties of a very young, frequently pregnant woman" (Mellor 40). These are the natural anxieties of a young woman who was burdened with the responsibility of childbirth, exacerbated by the fact that she had already experienced the horror of losing a child; she had to deal with the likelihood that it might happen again. Responsibility is another prominent theme in her life that is found in the novel. This theme is embodied by Victor Frankenstein's abandonment of his creature, and his utter failure to be a parent in any sense of the word. Mellor argues that this is mirrored in her own life: she claims that Mary, "[h]aving felt rejected by her father emotionally when he married Mary Jane Clairmont and overtly when she eloped with Shelley, Mary had long repressed a hostility to Godwin" (Mellor 47). This anxiety does not stem solely from her own father and his actions, but also from the father of her own children. Having been largely absent during the short life of their first born, and having cared little for Mary after the death of their daughter, and with a history of abandoning his previous wife and their two children from his previous marriage, Mary's anxieties about Shelley's ability to be the paternal father figure to her children that she felt she never had, were slowly developing as well. The process of writing *Frankenstein* provided a space in which Mary could express and process the anxieties she had of Shelley as her intimate partner and father of her children.

By giving *Frankenstein* the subtitle, "The Modern Prometheus", Mary Shelley firmly grounds both the figure of the Promethean, and the theme of Promethean ambition, as being central to the novel. By doing this she not only created an entirely new Promethean myth, but also critiqued the Promethean figures that came before, as well as many of the Promethean tendencies that she identified in the Romantic movement and its adherents. Prometheus was a Greek god and the son of the Titan, Iapetus. He became famous for his rebellion against Zeus, and the harsh punishment he had to endure as a result: "He made mankind out of clay, and when Zeus oppressed them and deprived them of fire, he stole fire for them from heaven and taught them many arts" (Harvey 668). He was later punished by Zeus for his lack of loyalty to the gods, "Zeus, moreover, caused Prometheus to be chained to a rock on Mt

Causcasus, where during the day time a vulture fed on his liver, which was restored each succeeding night" (Harvey 668). Thus, he was doomed to be tormented for all eternity, but in the original Greek myth he was saved at a later stage by the hero, Hercules. In relation to the Enlightenment concerns of the day, the myth of Prometheus became very attractive: the demi-god soon became not only a figure for the rebel standing up against tyranny, but also the archetype for individuals who sought to transgress the bounds of authority, patriarchy, and traditional forms of power. This developed into a tradition of cautionary tales and myths passed on and adopted by each succeeding generation. Some such figures that were particularly influential to the Romantics are the alchemist Faust, who finds literary expression in the play by Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragic History of Doctor Faustus* (1604), and the play, *Faust* (1808), by Johann Wolfgang Goethe. The other most relevant and important Promethean figure would be John Milton's Satan, from his epic poem, *Paradise Lost* (1667).

Faust was an obscure historical figure whose life has subsequently been portrayed in a variety of plays, poems and even films in the late twentieth-century: "the subject of the great dramas of Marlowe and Goethe, [Faust] was a wandering conjurer, who lived in Germany about 1488-1541" (Harvey 294). Faust was a successful scholar who at one point grew bored with his existence and made a pact with the devil, selling his soul for unlimited knowledge. Keeping within the Promethean tradition, his ambition later catches up with him and he is punished as a result. This story is a cautionary tale warning people of the potential dangers of the pursuit of knowledge, and how it could drive one past certain natural boundaries. The second mythical archetype of the Promethean that was particularly influential for the Romantics, and particularly for Mary Shelley, was Milton's Satan. Satan, in Milton's epic poem, *Paradise Lost* (1667), is another Promethean figure in the sense that he challenges God, aspiring to achieve greatness, and to become an equal to the almighty. As a result, he is banished from heaven, along with a host of fallen angels. These are a few examples of the tradition that Mary Shelley firmly intended to place her novel in; she created from these figures an essentially "Modern Prometheus" myth, one that would serve to continue this cautionary tradition. Victor Frankenstein is a Promethean in every sense of the word, as through his studies he seeks, with an almost inexhaustible ambition, to discover the secret nature of life and death. Finally one night he stumbles upon this secret, opening almost endless possibilities. He explains his process of acquiring knowledge in the following way: "I paused, examining and analysing all the minutæ of causation, as exemplified in the change

from life to death, and death to life, until from the midst of this darkness a sudden light broke upon me" (M. Shelley 30). The light represents the knowledge of life and death that he had been searching for, and having stumbled upon it, this further ignites his ambition, as Mellor emphasises in her own reading of the text:

> Victor Frankenstein's quest is nothing less than the conquest of death itself. By acquiring the ability to "bestow animation on lifeless matter" and "renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption", Frankenstein in effect hopes to become God, the creator of life and the gratefully worshipped father of a new race of immortal beings. (Mellor 70)

Thus, Frankenstein is set up to be a Promethean figure that rivals and surpasses all the Promethean figures that came before him, for not only does he search for and attain this forbidden knowledge, stealing it from heaven so to speak, as did Faust and Prometheus, he also seeks to rival god and become a god himself, like Milton's Satan. This reading of *Frankenstein* emphasizes Promethean elements and sentiments in the Romantic project that Mary Shelley did not completely agree with, or thought of as either potent or dangerous. This reading of the Promethean figure in the text takes on an interesting turn when it is compared to the sentiments of early Romantic poets and thinkers, as well as many of the second-generation Romantics, who would have been her close friends and acquaintances. As previously stated, the Prometheus myth is one that many Romantics and prominent thinkers of the late 18th century and early 19th century could easily identify with, specifically those situated within British Romanticism. Prometheus's rebellion against the tyrannical Zeus and the order established by the gods to benefit mankind became a source of inspiration for the Romantics as they applied this metaphor to their own political situation. It quickly became a metaphor for rebellion against the tyrannical institutions of their own society – such as parliament, the monarchy, and monotheism. This identification can easily be seen in their work, and an abundance of texts would appear during this period that were attributed to Prometheus. Some examples of this would be Goethe's poem *Prometheus* (1789), Lord Byron's poem *Prometheus* (1816), Shelley's lyrical play, *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), and the painting *Prometheus Bound* by William Blake (to name but a few). Mellor reads this prominent theme in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as a critique of aspects of the Romantic vision, which Mary saw as either dangerous or counter-productive, as reflected in the following extract:

Victor Frankenstein is himself participating in the mythopoetic vision that inspired the first generation of Romantic poets and thinkers. William Blake has insisted that the human form can become divine through the exercise of mercy, pity, love and imagination: Coleridge had stated that human perception or the primary imagination is an "echo of the infinite I AM;" Wordsworth had argued that the "higher minds" of poets are "truly from the Deity;" while both Godwin and his disciple Percy Shelley had proclaimed that man is perfectible. (Mellor 70)

It would appear that the notions of immortality and perfectibility were a common theme running through the works and philosophies of the early Romantic thinkers, although in their form and applicability they range from Coleridge's theories of the infinite imagination to William Godwin's (and later, Percy Shelley's) more practical ideas of how to bring about the perfect society. It is important to note that many of these ideas can be closely tied in to the explicit Prometheanism of Victor Frankenstein. I will return to the theme of the Promethean poet and his works when I examine the life of Shelley in my first chapter, as I believe Mary Shelley's critique of the Romantics is closely tied to her own personal relationship with Shelley. Having identified these important unifying traits present within the character of her husband, I will focus specifically on how they are represented in the novel of *Frankenstein*. I will show that the figure of Percy Shelley is indeed present within the novel, and that his portrayal is closely tied to the novels' own exploration of the relationship between Romantic literature and Enlightenment thought. I believe this places the novel at the centre of scholarship on Shelley and the Romantic poets, as well as making it an important text in 19th century literary studies. This portrayal has the potential to contribute to an understanding of the relationship between Romanticism and the Enlightenment.

Chapter 1: The Figure of Percy Shelley

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In this chapter, my main discussion will revolve around the figure of Percy Shelley. My aim is to frame the biographical elements that will be essential to the rest of the thesis as well as to explore the importance of the figure of Percy Shelley, and examine its evolution from the 19ᵗʰ century until the present day. I will also be looking at some of Shelley's most important work in more detail, which includes his poetry, essays, and lyrical dramas. The first section of this chapter will also deal with a variety of biographical elements, which are relevant to my reading of the novel *Frankenstein* (1818) in the chapters to follow. In addition, I also wish to explore the literary figure of Percy Shelley and its manifestation in literary history, and the significance this holds for *Frankenstein* and other writing. The last subject that I will explore in this chapter is the role that science played within Shelley's poetry. Specifically I will be examining his lyrical drama, *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), as this is the best example of Shelley's use of science in his poetical works.

Percy Shelley was born at Field Place, England on the 4 August 1792, into a rich and influential family. He was the eldest son of Sir Timothy Shelley, who was a wealthy and influential member of parliament. His father was an upstanding member of society and parliament, and did what was needed to increase his family's wealth and influence. As Shelley was Timothy Shelley's eldest son and heir, his father wanted to groom him for a similar life – to be a fitting heir to his land, his titles, and to prepare him to take his seat in parliament. As a result, Shelley received a first-class education. He started his education under the tutelage of a local reverend and later attended Eton College, a place that would leave a definite impression on his character. I will explore biographical details from Percy Shelley's life, starting with his childhood at Field Place, because his experiences as a young man bear a striking resemblance to those of the fictional character of Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein.* This will help establish to what degree Victor Frankenstein and the Creature could have been derived from the figure of Percy Shelley.

As implied by the title of the first chapter of Richard Holmes's biography, *Shelley: The Pursuit*, "A Fire-Raiser", Shelley was a troublemaker from an early age, naturally mischievous, but at the same time ever curious. Many of the early incidents recorded by his sisters can in fact be seen as early forms of experimentation and exploration, which demonstrate Percy Shelley's natural curiosity regarding the unknown. This is demonstrated in Holmes's account:

> ...it was [Percy] that was always the leader, who alone had the arcane knowledge brought back from his lessons at the vicarage, from his moonlight rides around the woods…. he was fascinated by moonlight and candlelight, and fire very soon entered into his rituals as storyteller, ghost-raiser and alchemist. His sisters… were more and more drawn into his world of magic and supernatural horror…. Bysshe would take a fire-stove and fill it with some inflammable liquid and carry it flaming into the kitchen and to the back door; but discovery of this dangerous amusement soon put a stop to it. (Holmes *Pursuit*, 3)

Some distinctive features and themes arise from Shelley's early days, such as his fascination with the sublime and the supernatural, as well as the curiosity that drove him to experiment. The most interesting of these (already present in the above extract) is the description of him as a storyteller, ghost-raiser and an alchemist. This originates from the world he chose to explore as a child: Gothic books that were a staple of his own reading, and would leave their mark upon his imagination. In fact, the Gothic is what would start his foray into literature: his first attempts at prose were two Gothic romances, namely *Zostrozzi* (1810), and a year later, his second novel, *St Irvyne* (1811). The image of the alchemist can also be seen as a precursor to his scientific interests. Just as alchemy was a primitive form of science during its day, so was Percy Shelley's knowledge of science and natural philosophy rather rudimentary at this point, although similarly it would go on to grow and mature. Carl Grabo makes a similar point in his book, *A Newton among Poets: Shelley's Use of Science in Prometheus Unbound* (1930):

> Again in his boyhood – at an age not given – he endeavoured to cure his sister's chilblains by means of an electric battery… At Eton Shelley is said to have "passed much of his leisure in the study of the occult sciences, natural philosophy, and chemistry; his pocket money was spent on books 'relative to these pursuits, on chemical apparatus and materials,' and many of the books treated of magic and witchcraft". In his second letter to Godwin recounting his education and intellectual interests Shelley writes: "Ancient books of chemistry and magic were perused with an enthusiasm and wonder, almost amounting to belief". (Grabo 4-5)

It is clear then that his childhood fostered both his interest in the supernatural as well as his natural curiosity that would lead him to become an enlightened man of science; this complemented his natural tendency to question the order of things. His somewhat dangerous stunts can be interpreted as early forms of experimentation that were spurred on with the aim of discovery. At this point in his development, this unique combination of science and the supernatural was still in its infancy. It is also the one early characteristic that would prevail throughout his life, continuing to mature and develop later on, in his Oxford days. The image of the experimenting alchemist, the wizard in his cave, would follow him throughout his life.

Arguably though, it was his entrance into the school system that introduced him to one of his first clashes with society; this would ultimately set him on the path of the pariah poet that he eventually became. He entered Eton College in 1804 at the age of twelve, but he soon came to despise Eton. Despite being a good student and eager for knowledge, Shelley was tormented and bullied on an almost daily basis. Holmes states that, "[Shelley] was quickly recognized as an exceptional Latin scholar, and remarkably non-conformist, and the bullying from fellow students was extremely severe" (Holmes *Pursuit*, 19). Despite the negativity Shelley experienced from his fellow students and teachers at Eton, his love for both science and the supernatural continued to develop in this environment. Marilyn Butler demonstrates this in her introduction to the Oxford World Classics edition of *Frankenstein*, noting that "[Percy] Shelley became fascinated by the major scientific topics of the day, the solar system, microscopy, magnetism, and electricity. First at Eton, and afterwards at University College, Oxford, he was noted for his interest in chemical and electrical experiments" (Butler "Introduction", xiv). As previously mentioned, his interest in science was part of his development at Eton, and his alienation from the other students allowed both his imagination and his love for the supernatural to be stimulated simultaneously, as the extract below demonstrates:

> It was during the two years spent at Syon house, between 1802 and 1804, that Shelley first came to feel that in some sense society as a whole was a hostile force and something to be combatted… horror books, alchemy, ghost-raising, chemical and electrical experiments, astronomy and the delights of outrageous speculation all served their turn. With these he found he could make his own kind of freedom within the stone walls of the Syon house playground. (Holmes *Pursuit*, 13)

His rejection by the other students forced Shelley into his own world, a world that was clearly apart from theirs. He quickly discovered ways to escape from his reality when it did not suit him. This escape came in the form of literature: at this point it was his love for the Gothic and the supernatural that was most prominent. Aside from this, the real importance of this period in his development is the formation of another characteristic that would burn within him for the rest of his life; this was his inclination to try and combat whatever he saw as morally reprehensible, and with this came his tendency to clash with society itself and the structures set up within it. Although the personal aspect of his moral development is important, it is not the only influence to be considered. Shelley's idea of justice was derived from a long history of liberal political philosophy. This began with an important introduction he received during his short stay at Oxford University:

> Though he was there only a term and a half, Percy Shelley (1792–1822) received at Oxford an intellectual stimulus to which he responded for the remainder of his precocious and sadly arrested career. The stimulant was his first-term reading of British metaphysical and moral philosophy, in particular John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) and David Hume's *Essays*, *Moral and Political* (1741–42). (Bruhn 373 – 374)

These were some of the first writers that would influence and mould his political views. The most important single influence in this regard would later become William Godwin and his book, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793). This work so influenced Shelley's political ideas that he would later reach out to the older philosopher in an attempt to make contact with him.

As Shelley's approach to science matured, it is clear that his fascination with both empirical science and the supernatural grew at an equal rate. Since science as a discipline was still defining itself during this period, the lines between the two were not always as clear-cut as they seem to us today. His later friendship with William Lawrence also touches in remarkable ways on this aspect of his character. This friendship would help define his materialistic worldview, as Lawrence was perhaps one of the most famous materialists of the period. Alongside his interest in the Gothic and the imagination, Shelley also discovered his love for science at Eton, and his view of science was firmly defined during this period. According to Holmes, a travelling lecturer called Dr Adam Walker left a deep impression on Shelley. An

almost Faustian figure, travelling from town to town, Holmes describes Walker as a characteristic eighteenth-century 'Mad Doctor' and inventor. His unorthodox subject matter, which included astrology, magnetism, and the possibility of extra-terrestrial life, allowed Shelley to merge these two keen interests even more closely (*Pursuit* 16). The result was that he formed a unique view of science, as the following extract demonstrates:

> Shelley's attitude to science was never to be 'scientific' in the empirical sense, but speculative and imaginative. Chemistry, electricity and astronomy fused easily with alchemy, fire-worship, explosives and psychical investigations… Gunpowder devices and fire balloons were constructed in distant parts of the orchard, and his own and his sisters' clothes were constantly stained and burnt by acids and caustics. (*Pursuit* 16-17)

It is quite clear that Shelley's studies in science, as well as his views on the subject, were rather unorthodox, partially as a result of his instructors, but also because of his own developing worldview. Although the stereotype was not yet established at this time, the view many of his peers were to hold about him would not have been too far from the image we currently have of that 'mad doctor', brought on no doubt in part by his tutelage under Adam Walker. His interests stretched much further than this though, and it is around this period that he started reading extensively, thereby gaining access to a strange collection of authors that encouraged his ever-growing interest in the sciences. Of the many writers to influence him, some of the most important thinkers were Erasmus Darwin, Humphrey Davy, and even Isaac Newton (Grabo 6). These are especially important in terms of how his interest in science would eventually develop alongside his poetry. The influence of science on one of his major works, *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), will be discussed later in this thesis.

It is clear that Shelley was both an experimenter and a troublemaker from an early age. These traits continued to develop after his enrolment at Oxford University. Holmes cites a description of Shelley at Oxford by his close friend, Thomas Jefferson Hogg: "At Oxford, Hogg was to describe Shelley in his rooms as 'the chemist in his laboratory, the alchemist in his study, the wizard in his cave'" (*Pursuit* 16). This demonstrates that even at university, and despite the advancement of his scientific studies, this image of the alchemical wizard never seems to completely leave him. His enthusiasm for experiments peaked while he was studying at Oxford, "Shelley kept up his enthusiasm for chemical experiments. His rooms were littered with scientific instruments such as electrical machines and voltaic batteries, his

hands and clothes were stained with acids, and his guests would sometimes find their teacups half full of concentrated acid" (King-Hele 254-255). Despite this, for Shelley, Oxford remained a paradox. On the one hand, he discovered a new-found freedom and a range of intellectual pursuits to help him grow and develop. Oxford was a place where he could pursue his need for knowledge and experimentation without interruption, and it introduced him to like-minded individuals such as Thomas Jefferson Hogg. His new-found freedom was not unlimited though, and he quickly found Oxford restrictive, especially from a religious point of view. As Percy Shelley's temperament dictated, he soon started viewing this as yet another form of tyranny:

> For Shelley, intoxicated by the freedom which the university gave in comparison to Eton, and yet suffocated by the atmosphere of entrenched, comfortable and venal clerical *auctoritas,* Oxford rapidly took shape in his mind as a personal challenge, a fortress of superstition and mediocrity… it was a Bastille of the spirit. (*Pursuit* 39)

And it was a Bastille that he would soon come to challenge. At this point, the pattern that would define the rest of his life had already started to emerge, and he soon began to dream up ways to challenge this newly-discovered form of institutionalised religious tyranny. At this point in Shelley's life, he was a committed atheist with an ever-growing grievance against Christianity and the forces of unreason, as he saw them. This showed both in his writing and his personal conversations with Hogg. It grew to such an extent that even his family observed the change. His father noticed his son's strange behaviour, and being quite aware of the serious consequences of such a world-view, and the social stigma attached to atheism, tried to address it:

> Both Timothy and Mrs Shelley were only too aware of the social and political stigma of anything that smacked of – the dread word – 'atheism', especially in an intensely conservative and wholly theological institution like Oxford. Atheism implied immorality, social inferiority and unpatriotic behaviour all in one sweep; and during a time of war against the revolutionary forces in Europe, it also implied treachery, revolutionism and foreign degeneracy. (*Pursuit* 47)

Sir Timothy, having groomed Shelley to eventually take his place in parliament and inherit his lands and fortune, regarded Shelley's world-view as very dangerous indeed. At the same time though, he knew he had to act without antagonising him too much. He first tried to calmly debate with his son on the subject. After Shelley had stated his argument against theism, and showed his father that religion could be logically disproved, his father quickly

brushed his argument aside with the words, "I believe, because I do believe" (*Pursuit* 47). This predictably dogmatic statement angered Shelley, and did nothing to change his own mind, and as a result, his atheism progressed and developed. Unable to find many willing ears aside from those of his friend Hogg, he committed himself to making a statement and actively opposing the religious ideology, as he would with many other forms of orthodoxy throughout his short life. With a bit of help from Hogg and some enthusiastic writing, he finally developed the weapon he would wield against this force of religious orthodoxy. It manifested as the now infamous pamphlet entitled, *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811).

In this pamphlet, he challenged the logic and purpose of religion. He also directly attacked the so-called 'thinking man's' intellect for entertaining unfounded beliefs and supporting their accompanying institutions. Although this was his central argument, he did not merely seek to challenge religion's earthly roots; he sought to address and challenge the concept of the very existence of god. This he does systematically in the section entitled, *"There is No God"*. He then goes on to set up a standard for proof throughout the essay, while also making a case for Atheists, and why it is amoral to prosecute them for their views. In the end, he concludes: "Hence, it is evident that, having no proof from either of the three sources of conviction, the mind cannot believe the existence of a creative God" (P. Shelley *Prose* 5). It is interesting to note that he credits Hogg with the original argument. After the pamphlet was written, he sent it off to be published, but its journey was short and damning. It started on the shelves of a local bookshop and from there went straight to the desks of England's cardinals, as well as to the authorities of the university itself. The authorial source of this pamphlet soon reached these authorities, and after Shelley refused to deny authorship, he was expelled from Oxford. This effectively ended both his time at Oxford and his studies, scientific or otherwise, at the university. His only crime was being an outspoken sceptic and free-thinker.

Percy Shelley was soon to see the controversy and scandal that surrounded him as a part of his identity. It was exactly his tendency to align himself with controversial ideas and actions, along with his closely related poetic work, that led to his marginalised social standing, as my examination of *Queen Mab* (1813) will show.

After the whole Oxford debacle, Shelley lived the next few months relatively scandal-free in an attempt to sort out his damaged relationship with his father, and he struggled to create something substantial with his poetry. This continued until he met Harriet Westbrook. The youthful 16 year-old quickly intrigued Shelley, and they started corresponding through

letters. Shelley's next great scandal can be dated to the 25th of August, when he and Harriet eloped, with the help of her brother. Holmes captures this event as follows; "[They] slipped away from Chapel Street in a Hackney carriage, and spent the day hiding in coffee houses near Cannon Street" (*Pursuit* 77). Although initially Shelley wanted to take Harriet away on a free-love basis, the young girl's taste for scandal was more limited, and Shelley found himself unable to manage the elopement entirely on his terms. Thus, despite his misgivings about marriage, and his ideological objections to the practice, the two took out a marriage licence a mere three days after their elopement, and were effectively bound in matrimony.
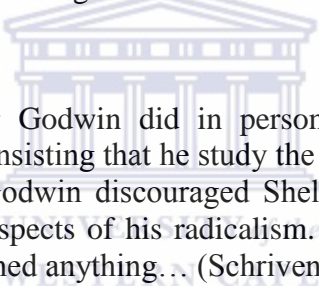
What followed was a strange period of feuding with his family, and the start of his career as a political activist. After a number of attempts at reconciliation with his father, the relationship broke down and Shelley was left penniless and unable to extract any further support from his father. Holmes sums up the extent of Shelley's deterioration and alienation in the eyes of his family as follows: "To his family Shelley appeared to have become a criminal lunatic without any interest in them except obtaining money. It should never be forgotten that his own father feared that Shelley might break into the house and assault them" (*Pursuit* 89). What followed was one of the most revolutionary and poetically productive periods of Percy Shelley's life. After his marriage to Harriet, Shelley managed to complete and publish his first significant work of literature, *Queen Mab*. The poem is about an insect queen that ruled her hive, and provided a metaphor for most of the themes and social issues that occupied Shelley's mind:

> [*Queen Mab's*] main targets, constantly expressed in abstract categories, are, in order of importance: established religion; political tyranny; the destructive forces of war and commerce; and the perversion of human love… What Shelley was preaching came to be understood by his friends, and by his enemies, as a vision of the good life built on atheism, free love, republicanism and vegetarianism. (*Pursuit* 201)

The topics addressed in the poem amount to a critique of British society of the day, its failings, its views on religion and marriage, and the effect of the intellectually passive mentality that he saw in many of his fellow countrymen. The view he demonstrates here resembles Kant's critique of the populace; namely that people no longer needed to think for themselves as they have others to do this for them. Shelley advocates this kind of intellectual autonomy fiercely, and he himself applies it constantly throughout his own life.

By the time Shelley became acquainted with William Godwin, he was set for another scandal. Shelley had been a long-time admirer of Godwin's political philosophies and work,

particularly as they are set out in his book, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. His elopement with Harriet Westbrook was already far behind him; at this point, the two were married with one child, and expecting another. Shelley was deeply affected by Godwin's writings, and by his rejection of many social institutions. Michael Schrivener explores this point in his book, *Radical Shelley* (1982), noting that "Godwin more than any other radical, influenced Shelley's philosophy… Shelley read more, and more often, [of Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft's work] than any other radical author; moreover, he incorporated more of their ideas than those of any other author" (Schrivener 8). After travelling the country, and supporting the revolution in Ireland, the Shelleys settled temporarily in London where Shelley sought out Godwin, and started a correspondence with him. He soon became friends with Godwin and his circle. For Shelley, this was an exciting time as he became part of an intellectual community nurtured by some very prominent thinkers. As far as Godwin himself was concerned, the man had less of an effect on him than his writings. By the time Percy Shelley met Godwin, Godwin had changed and had become a lot less radical, as seen in the following quote:

> Perhaps the only good thing Godwin did in person was to expand and deepen Shelley's literary interests by insisting that he study the great authors of Greece, Rome and Elizabethan England… Godwin discouraged Shelley's political enthusiasm and reinforced the most dubious aspects of his radicalism. If he had listened to Godwin, Shelley would not have published anything… (Schrivener 48)

Godwin acted, to a degree, as a philosophical mentor, who managed to enrich Shelley greatly, both through his works, and in a much more limited sense through their interactions. Yet despite his reverence for the older man, there came a point where, almost unbeknownst to Shelley, his influence would become detrimental to the poet's development. Not only did the older philosopher discourage his more active pursuits, but it became apparent that he viewed Shelley more as a source of income than anything else. Soon though, Shelley met and became acquainted with Mary Godwin, the daughter of Godwin and his late wife, the revered feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft. The two became close quite quickly, and despite Shelley's ties to his ever more distant wife, he declared his love for Mary at her mother's grave.

When it became apparent that Godwin did not approve of this development at all, another elopement was inevitable, and before long they were off to France, taking Mary's stepsister, Claire Clairmont along for good measure. These events are significant as they illuminate important aspects of Percy Shelley's character. They demonstrate his willingness to abandon

not only his wife and children, but also to sever his relationship with Godwin to be with Mary. Although initially Mary may have enjoyed his devotion and his willingness to abandon his wife and children would be the eventual cause of much of her insecurity later in their relationship. This highlights another aspect of Shelley's philosophical views, especially with regard to his views on love and institutions such as marriage. Being an avid reader of Godwin and Wollstonecraft, Shelley was never in favour of the institution of marriage. Despite this, he would marry Harriet Westbrook, and later Mary Shelley. There is strong evidence that during his marriage to Mary, he had other lovers, and he often tried to persuade her to sleep with other men, such as Thomas Jefferson Hogg. Shelley truly believed one could intimately love more than one person, and that love for an individual would not diminish as it spread further. This is demonstrated in one of his later poems, *Epipsychdion* (1821): "True Love in this differs from gold and clay/That to divide is not to take away. Love is like understanding, that grows bright/Gazing on many truths; 'tis like thy light" (P. Shelley *Poems*, 415, lines 160-164). Within these lines Shelley expresses his free love philosophy. In his view true love does not diminish in potency if it is shared, unlike physical objects such as gold or clay. Although this was a well formulated and consistent view that he held through much of his life, and undoubtedly a view that he practised, it also contributed to Mary's anxiety, an anxiety that would last throughout their relationship. Not only did she live in fear that he would not be faithful to her, she also feared that he would abandon her and their children for someone else at some point, just as he had done with his previous wife.[1] Thus the theme of abandonment and responsibility in her novel was first conceived in relation to Percy Shelley.

The next important life events were the two children conceived by Shelley and Mary. The first, a daughter named Clara, was born prematurely and died as a result. Their second child, a boy named William, named after Godwin, was born in January 1816. At first he seemed to be doing well, and in the summer of that year the couple was invited by Lord Byron to spend the summer in his chateau, The Villa Diodati, in Switzerland. With William stable, the couple decided to accept Byron's invitation. The Villa Diodati is the villa where the famous ghost story contest took place that set off the events that eventually planted the idea of the novel, *Frankenstein,* in Mary's mind. The information we have today can be found in the diaries and

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[1] An example of such anxiety is given by Mellor, "Her real source of anxiety surfaced in the next paragraph, "Pray is Clary with you? For I have enquired several times & no letters" (Mellor 35). This quote comes from a letter that Mary wrote to Shelley while he was away for a few weeks visiting Sir Thomas Peacock at Marlow. While Claire was supposed to be in London, Mary feared Shelley secretly wrote to her to meet him while he was away.

journals of the variety of individuals who were present, such as Dr John William Polidori; it can even be found in Mary's own journal. There is strong evidence to suggest that Mary's initial idea for the novel was inspired either directly or subconsciously by the discussions that took place during this summer holiday. The discussions between Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, and Polidori extended across a variety of subjects, but the most striking with regard to *Frankenstein* were the discussions regarding science, and specifically, the possibility of re-animating the dead through the use of electricity. The subject of galvanism was crucial to this discussion, as the following extract from Mary's Introduction to the 1831 edition of the novel demonstrates:

> Many and long were the conversations between Lord Byron and Shelley to which I was a devout but merely silent listener. During one of these, various philosophical doctrines were discussed, and among others the nature of the principle of life, and whether there were any probability of it ever being discovered and communicated. They talked of the experiments of Dr. Darwin… who preserved a piece of vermicelli in a glass case, till by some extraordinary means it began to move with voluntary motion. Not thus, after all, would life be given. Perhaps a corpse would be reanimated; galvanism had given token of such things: perhaps the component parts of a creature might be manufactured, brought together, and imbued with vital warmth. (M. Shelley 171-172)

This account shows how science, Enlightenment philosophy and superstition recur as topics of conversation among the Shelley circle. In the above extract Mary mentions a variety of important scientific concepts of the day, such as the experiments of Erasmus Darwin and the theories of Luigi Galvani.[2] These discussions would then relate to their habit of telling each other ghost stories by night, and eventually Byron's proposing the ghost story contest gave Mary the tools she needed to come up with the idea behind *Frankenstein.* Galvanism[3] was a subject that Shelley had been interested in for some time. Shelley's friendship with William Lawrence, a staunch materialist and notable scientist of the day, began after Lawrence was hired as his physician. During this period, Lawrence was engaged in some public debates with the revered John Abernethy, who was also Lawrence's former mentor. Their debates concerned different views on the composition of human life: "It was Lawrence who would rekindle one of the most disturbing scientific debates of the Romantic period" and stir up this controversy that became known as the Vitalism Debate in 1816-1820" (Holmes *Age of*

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[2] "Galvani, Luigi (1737-98), of Bologna, the discoverer of electricity produced by chemical action. It is said that his wife first observed the convulsive movement in the muscle of frogs when brought into contact with two different metals. Hence 'galvanic' 'Galvanism'" (Harvey 320).

[3] Galvanism at the time was thought to possess the potential to bring the dead matter back to life. This was mainly deduced from Galvani's experiments, where the introduction of electricity to muscle caused it to contract and move again.

Wonder 307). The idea behind Vitalism is that living things are different from non-living entities because they contain some vital spark, some undetectable presence often equated with magnetism. It is easy to see why this view caused so much tension among the proponents of materialism,[4] as they viewed the world through a strictly empiricist lens. Lawrence defended his views defiantly, and most notably in his infamous book*, The Natural History of Man* (1819), and these views would go on to influence Shelley greatly, both intellectually and poetically, as Shelley himself was aligned to the materialist position. This debate, and the many discussions that would follow, would not only become important for Shelley's own development, but would prove crucial to Mary's as well, and ultimately influence her novel. It would give her the novel idea of taking speculative ideas to their logical conclusions – a practice that would eventually lead to the creation of an entirely new genre called Science Fiction. Frankenstein does end up creating his creature through a combination of sciences, and these were at the forefront of the discussions at which Mary was a passive observer, but definitely an eager listener. Her description of her dream, as found in the Introduction of the 1931 edition of the novel, is as follows:

> Night waned upon this talk, and even the witching hour had gone by, before we retired to rest. When I placed my head on my pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that rose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie. I saw – with shut eyes – but acute mental vision, – I saw the pale student of the unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion. Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. (M. Shelley 172)

The iconic description given by Mary Shelley herself has through the years contributed greatly to the archetype of the 'mad scientist', as its imagery suggests the scientist delving into forbidden territory. Words and phrases such as the "pale student", and working "unbidden" on the "hideous phantasm of a man" would serve to shock and amaze the popular imagination: they were adopted, almost a century later, by Hollywood, and gave rise to the Frankenstein phenomenon found in popular culture today. I would like to suggest a route of enquiry, which I will pursue throughout the rest of this chapter. I suggest the following parallels between the extract and Shelley: firstly, the above quote is one of the rare, physical descriptions that we find of Victor Frankenstein, as the novel itself makes almost no mention

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[4] "The opinion that nothing exists except matter and its movements" (Harvey 526)

of his physical appearance. Mary Shelley described her "acute mental vision" of "the pale student of the unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together" (M. Shelley 172). Limited as it is, this does give us a glimpse of a figure that is not too far removed from Shelley himself, as a pale youth who was devoted to his work. This description of "the student of the unhallowed arts" immediately takes on an entirely different dimension. The ambiguity in the above language, not clearly defining the "student" as a scientist, or his "art" as specifically a science, allows us to easily fit Percy Shelley into the above description. His own work and endeavours would easily have fitted into the category of "unhallowed art" during his day, if one takes into consideration his frequent challenges to the status quo, and his especially harsh criticism of religion. So the following becomes especially relevant: "supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world" (M. Shelley 172). Shelley was well known for such mockery, to the extent that he was expelled from Oxford, and his own poetry addressed similar themes. Lastly, I suggest that Mary is continuing Shelley's poetical tradition through the protagonist of her own novel, and I will explore this further in this chapter. Shelley's poetry is filled with young, pale youths on a quest of some sort, usually searching for either an individual or a form of knowledge that remains just out of their reach. Chernaik points to "the recurrent figure of the frail Poet, pale of hue and weak of limb, consecrated to his youthful vision of Beauty but incapable of realizing or recreating it" which is present in Shelley's work (Chernaik 566). This also describes both Shelley and Victor Frankenstein as imagined in Mary Shelley's introduction. This figure is prevalent in much of Shelley's poetry. A good example is the visionary in his poem *Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude* (1816):

> The career of the Visionary in 'Alastor' illustrates the dangers of imaginative questing… In his quest, the Visionary traces civilization back through ancient Greece, Jerusalem, and Babylon, arriving finally at the birthplace of humanity in the Indian Caucasus, where he reaches an impasse. Although he has drunk "deep of the fountain of knowledge," he is "still insatiate." (Fraistat 164-165)

The visionary eventually goes as far as to die (willingly) in his quest to satiate his thirst for knowledge, yet he never manages to attain a state of fulfilment. His quest thus remains incomplete. The difference, I would argue, is that in Mary Shelley's tale her pale student actually manages to acquire the knowledge he sought after, and even manages to use it. The crucial difference is that the student's attainment of his sought-after goal ultimately becomes the source of his horror.

The last biographical element of Percy Shelley's life that I wish to discuss is his death. Percy Shelley's last few months were spent on the Gulf of Spezia in Italy, residing in a shore-built residence called Casa Magni. Here Shelley and Mary intended to spend their summer with their entourage which consisted primarily of Claire Clairmont and Edward and Jane Williams (*Pursuit* 712-713). Although this was supposed to be a relaxing summer retreat, misfortune followed them throughout. This started with Claire when she discovered that the daughter she had with Lord Byron had died recently as a result of typhoid fever (*Pursuit* 712). Their physical living conditions at Casa Magni were also rather primitive. This was clear in their day-to-day living, where at times living at Casa Magni felt more like camping. Even the arrangements for acts as simple as bathing were primitive, and they had to bath in the sea (*Pursuit* 712). The excessive summer heat also made things almost unbearable at times, none of this helped Mary's situation as she was again pregnant. These conditions resulted in her becoming ill and this, combined with Shelley's neglect of her, soon contributed to another miscarriage.[5] This time it not only cost her the life of another child, but almost her own as well. Holmes reports that, "At 8 o'clock on the morning of the 16th of June, Mary's illness did finally result in a bad miscarriage. She bled profusely, and when Shelley sent for a doctor and for ice, nobody came to the remote house for seven hours" (*Pursuit* 724). Shelley managed to save her by putting her in an icy tub until the bleeding stopped, but the trauma left her weak and unable to walk for a few days. It wasn't long before he left her again, preferring to spend his days on the boat with Jane and Edward. On one such occasion, they crossed the gulf to Pisa, with the intention of meeting up with Lord Byron and Leigh Hunt. It was on their return from this trip that they were caught in a sudden summer storm, and their boat, dubbed "The Don Juan", went under, taking Shelley, Edward and Charles Vivian, the boat boy, under with it:

> One of the Italian captains reported having sighted the Don Juan in heavy seas…
> Seeing that they could not long contend with such tremendous waves [he] bore down
> upon them and offered to take them on board. A shrill voice which is supposed to have
> been Shelley's, was distinctively heard to say "No"… One of the gentlemen
> (Williams it is believed) was seen to make an effort lowering the sails – his
> companion seized his arm as if in anger. The Don Juan went down in the Gulf of
> Spezia, some ten miles west of Viareggio, under full sail. (Holmes *Pursuit* 729)

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[5] Richard Holmes recounts Shelley's treatment of Mary during this period in his biographical play, *To The Tempest Given*, "Shelley: Mary is at present about three months advanced in pregnancy… Holmes: Shelley's refusal to adapt his mode of life to Mary's needs at Casa Magni suggests a much deeper marital discord, from which the sea side life with Edward and Jane Williams was a kind of escape." (Holmes *Sidetracks* 289).

In the above extract, we find Shelley consciously indulging himself in a situation that would end his life. Richard Holmes also hints at this in his radio play, *To the Tempest Given*. This account implies Shelley's attraction to his own death wish or Thanatos. *The Oxford Dictionary of Psychology* describes the term as follows: "In Psychoanalysis, the unconscious drive towards dissolution and death, initially turned inwards towards oneself and tending to self-destruction" (Coleman 762). There is evidence to suggest that towards the end of Shelley's life he was increasingly entertaining ideas of this sort. Another example of this would be his request to Edward John Trelawny to send him a lethal dose of prussic acid. To Trelawney, Shelley "explained that he had no intention for suicide at present" but added that, "'it would be a comfort to me to hold in my possession that golden key to the chamber of perpetual rest'" (Holmes *Pursuit* 725). Whether his death was an accident or an unconscious indulgence of his own death wish, he managed to complete his own story in a very similar fashion to the figures in his own works. Just like the visionary in *Alastor,* he searched for knowledge throughout his short life, and he too in the end embraced death. An interesting parallel arises here between Shelley and Victor Frankenstein. As in the climactic end of the novel we find Victor chasing the Creature to the North Pole and, at the same time, also rushing towards his own death:

> They were dead, and I lived; their murderer also lived, and to destroy him I must drag out my own weary existence… I swear to pursue the daemon, who caused this misery, until he or I shall perish in mortal conflict. For this purpose I shall preserve my life. (M. Shelley 140)

In the above quote we find Victor making a promise that he will exact revenge on the Creature for the murder of his family members or die in the attempt. In addition, we find a clear desire expressed that his own existence should come to an end as well. Essentially, Victor's pursuit of the Creature becomes a pursuit of his own death and, as with Percy Shelley, there is a strong indication of the presence of Thanatos. He has a marked need not only to put an end to the Creature, but also to end to his own painful existence. At this point it is literally just the long, painful pursuit of the Creature that is keeping him alive; this is his sole remaining purpose, and like Shelley, he too will die before he manages to achieve this goal.

Although Shelley has become an iconic literary figure, and is still generally accepted as one of the major poets in the English language, his rise has been precarious. He has transcended the position of a mere historical figure, and now finds himself occupying a space somewhere

between the historical and the mythical. I am going to examine the figure of Percy Shelley, and show how it has changed and been formed through the history of literary criticism. At the time of Shelley's death in July 1822, he had failed in his quest for poetic glory. Although not completely obscure, when he died he had a very limited readership, and critics were generally scornful. As Pottle suggests in his essay, "The Case of Shelley", "It is abundantly clear that in his own brief lifetime Shelley was not ignored by the critics; he was regarded as a poet of great but misguided powers" (Pottle 593). His poetic ability was rarely questioned; it was rather his subject matter, and to a degree, his personal life that seemed to attract most criticism. As the following shows, "To the earliest critics Shelley was a monster of immorality and impiety; to the later (even to many who did not care much for his poetry) he was an angel, a pure unearthly spirit. And a remarkable paradox emerges" (Pottle 594).

This paradox refers to the transformation that Shelley's figure experienced during the Victorian period, when the poet was almost deified as the Victorians attempted to rehabilitate him through selective reading and interpretation of both his poetry and character. This was motivated at first by his surviving relatives, the Shelleys, especially Lady Jane Shelley, who contributed greatly to the Shelley archives. She saw the opportunity and the advantage of having a famous and respected Romantic in the family, and did much in an attempt to restore the poet's character and public image. Much has been made of this restoration of Shelley's character. Some accounts even go as far as claiming Mary Shelley and Lady Jane Shelley forged letters in order to discredit Harriet and improve Shelley's image. These are clearly serious charges, but the evidence for them is lacking. Eventually this led to the "Shelley Renaissance" which happened roughly around the 1870s: "During that decade and the years following, Shelley scholars became intensely active and produced a flood of editions, biographies, and critical studies, clarifying the text, enlarging the canon, and extending the world's knowledge of the poet" (Chewning 81). His reputation seemed to have reached a peak roughly between 1895 and 1920. Some of the most respected authors of this period were 'Shelleyans', such as Thomas Hardy and George Bernard Shaw (Pottle 597). Roughly around the period of the 1920s, there was a sharp increase in the negative criticism of Shelley, as the purveyors of modernism seem to have had a taken a harsh view of the poet, even going as far as attempting to relegate Shelley from "a major to a minor poet". This indicates that this was an attack both on his worth as a poet and on his character. It was clearly not only an attack on his poetic ability, although this also came under scrutiny. It would be interesting to draw on

the novel *Frankenstein's* own journey as a work of literature and compare it to Shelley's history, but that is an exercise beyond the scope of this work.

The resurgence of interest in Shelley, both academically and in contemporary fictional texts can be seen in examples that include, but are not limited to, Ken Russell's film, *Gothic* (1986) and Ivan Passer's *Haunted Summer* (1988). Percy Shelley also appears as a fictional character in Allan Mallinson's novel, *A Call to Arms* (2002*)*, and in Julian Rathbone's novel published in the same year, *A Very English Agent* (2002). More recent works includes Richard Holmes's radio play, *To the Tempest Given* (2004), which concerns the last few weeks of Shelley's life, Nick Dear's recent stage adaptation, *Frankenstein (*2011*)* and Peter Ackroyd's, *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* (2011). This latter text entails the rewriting of *Frankenstein* through a historical metafictional lens, and will be the focus of Chapter 3. This revival of interest in Shelley, predominantly as a fictional character in the late 20th century, is of particular interest. The figure of Shelley in literature seems to endure with stubborn persistence: despite its troubled history, he still manages to occupy a prominent role in popular culture more than 180 years after his death. The key to the fascination that still surrounds Shelley is the paradoxical nature of his character. In Shelley, we find both the archetype of the Enlightenment man, and the seemingly contrasting view of the revolutionary Romantic poet.

In Chapter 2, I will explore in detail the paradox that results from contrasting notions of Shelley's figure. The way Shelley is received during a specific time period depends very much on the political atmosphere of that particular literary-historical age. For instance, while he was still alive, he was generally received as monstrous, as his writings were considered to be contrary to the sentiments of the 19th-century public[6], and this happened again during the 1920s. This was completely contrary to the Victorians' reading of the poet as they accepted him as this ethereal being, the darling poet of their age. In our current period it is much more difficult to place his admirers and critics, an outcome that is perhaps very much a result of the many years of Shelley scholarship and the biographies we now have at our disposal. We can now look back and see the problems and misconceptions that have arisen in the past, as well as the legitimate critique Shelley has attracted. I would suggest that this is perhaps one of the reasons why the figure of Percy Shelley is now slowly starting to cross the boundaries

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[6] A good example of this would be the public response to his first significant poem. Holmes notes that: "*Queen Mab's* reputation was of course quite otherwise in the established press. A middle-of-the-road periodical, the *Investigator* of 1822, summed up the feelings of 'unmingled horror and disgust' at that 'most execrable publication' to which Byron's *Cain* was 'a homily'" (Holmes "Pursuit" 210).

between biography and fiction. Having now thoroughly established Shelley as a notable poet, and having laid out this rich history of interpretation, he is now open to be appropriated and viewed through the lens of metafictional historiography. As we shall see later in Chapter 3, there is still much creative potential within the fictional form of Percy Shelley.

The ideas surrounding literary figures are usually dynamic and linked to specific moments in literary history which dictate how they are viewed. Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than with Shelley. Fred Botting describes how the author's image has been portrayed, and how we are fooled into believing it is a stable and static representation. I am going to use this to examine the ideas that have been formed of the historical Shelley:

> The Figure of the author is nonetheless crucial to many reading positions and, fundamental to traditional conceptions of writing and reading, it is essential to most forms of criticism. Yet the author is far from an essence, a universal given, a fixed and stable entity in and for itself. As Michael Foucault observes in a paper proposing the question 'What is an author?', the author is a cultural phenomenon… subject to historical transformations. (Botting 18)

The figure of Shelley is constantly evolving and has transformed and changed within the particular society in which it found itself. His figure was moulded according to either the praise or the criticism to which it was subjected. This is how the jaded and ostracized Percy Shelley of the early 19th century found himself almost canonized a few decades later when the Victorians found another purpose for this romantic figure. Naturally, this also implies that the figure of Shelley is not static, but remains subject to change within our current society; as we have seen, during the period of the 1920s up until the 1950s, there was a general decline in how students of literature viewed the poet. The result of this though is not completely negative: I am going to make the case that this has actually allowed another dimension to be added to Shelley's figure, one that extends into the realm of the mythical.

The result of the fluidity of his figure is that it has given rise to a variety of Percy Shelleys that still permeate the literary air. For a comprehensive analysis, I am going to divide the types of the figure of Percy Shelley into three categories. Firstly there is the historical Percy Shelley which we have discussed in the biographical section above. Secondly, there is the fictional Percy Shelley: we now commonly find him in a variety of forms as they appear in popular culture, as mentioned previously. The final and perhaps the most intriguing of the three is a figure I will call 'the mythical Percy Shelley'. My argument assumes that Shelley has transcended the historical, and has since his death started to exist in a different space

altogether. Echoes of this figure, I will argue, can be found in *Frankenstein*, but the best examples of this can be found in the myths that arose after the poet's death.

The figure of the poet is a common theme that pervades most of Percy Shelley's writings and work. Chernaik makes this point in his essay, *The Figure of the Poet in Shelley:*

> If there is, a single image which draws together the most problematic aspects of Shelley's art, it is the recurrent figure of the frail Poet, pale of hue and weak of limb, consecrated to his youthful vision of Beauty but incapable of realizing or recreating it, driven at last to death by unassuageable desire for he knows not what. (Chernaik 566)

This is a figure that emerges in most of his works in one form or another. A good example would be the visionary in *Alastor or the Spirit of Solitude* (1815). It would also be useful to keep in mind Mary's description of her own future protagonist when exploring this figure. The poet manifests as a beautiful yet frail youth, often isolated and always searching for, but never attaining, his vision of beauty and perfection. Despite this theme of the quest that is prevalent through many of Shelley's poetical works, the figure often comes very close to achieving his goal, only for it to be taken from his grasp, resulting in failure. There is a school of thought that insists much of Shelley's poetry can also be read as autobiographical in nature, based on events and experiences in his own life. Chernaik himself makes this assertion in his article:

> His literary associations vary from poem to poem, but the unsympathetic reader (and most readers at the present time fall into this camp), noting the resemblances between the fictional heroes of Alastor and The Revolt of Islam, and the "idealized" self-portraits of Adonais and Epipsychidion, inevitably takes each appearance of the Poet to be inflated autobiography, the romantic self-projection of a poet whose actual frailty is only too well established by contemporary accounts of his susceptibility to fainting fits, nervous seizures, visions and hallucinations. (Chernaik 566)

The point Chernaik is making above is that there is an uncanny resemblance between these poet figures and Shelley himself. The descriptions seem to mirror the poet, as he was also a frail youth, prone to nervous fits, and with unpredictable emotional fluctuations. Chernaik then illustrates how many of the poet's poems can actually be read into Shelley's own life. This is clear in the above extract, as he refers to the imagery used in these poems to describe the poet figure as reflecting 'idealized', and even inflated, self-portraits. This extends even further, as many of the poems do more than just recreate the hero in the poem in his image; some even make use of biographical events, as demonstrated below:

> The critical events of Shelley's life furnish the substance not only of the self-portraits but of the fictional narratives. His abortive attempts to liberate the surprised peasantry of Ireland and Wales are reconstituted in the heroic struggles of Laon and Lionel; his

unhappy marriage to Harriet and his difficult relationship with Mary provide the outlines of the self-portrait in *Epipsychidion*; and his physical suffering, his persecution by the law, his exile abroad, his lack of audience, are traced in several of the portraits, most memorably in *Adonais*. (Chernaik 566)

Chernaik argues that the scenarios in his poetry are often subtle depictions of events and people in his own life. One can draw the conclusion that Shelley wrote predominantly about himself, thus the ideal of the exiled, wandering poet in search of higher meaning to be found within his works is based on either himself or an ideal image of himself to which he was trying to aspire. Masao Myoshi makes a similar point in his book, *The Divided Self* (1969), when talking about the biographical implications of Shelley and his work:

> [T]he Shelleyan self reaches so intensely for the ideal that nothing can sway it, nothing distracts it from its goal. Furthermore, because the ideal is distant and necessarily elusive, the yearning for it is bound to frustration. Where the Byronic hero pulverized his being in the face of choice, the Shelleyan hero overreaches himself and ends by being sacrificed at the stake of his ideal just at the moment of achievement, when it presents itself as a sheer illusion. Without the ideal, the self is unthinkable; with it, unrealizable. Significantly then, the ideal appears in his poem as a vision or an epipsyche (a "soul within the soul"), and the climax of meeting one's double, death, is the always impending doom of the Shelleyan hero. (Myoshi 67)

As we shall see later when we discuss the events surrounding his death, and in particular Holmes account of this event in, *To The Tempest Given*, we will find that Shelley either consciously or unconsciously strove to the same ideals as his speakers and in the end met a very similar end as he also meets his double and falls short in realizing his ambitions, chasing these unrealizable ideals. The picture that is drawn of Shelley in the works of his many critics, both contemporary and historical, is in many ways a product of his own hand, although perhaps not a deliberate one. This idealisation of the poet became part of his identity and allowed him to aspire to the poetic heights that he reached. On the other hand, the idealisation of the poet is not one that would function well in reality, and as one can conclude from Shelley's own experiences he was often someone who did not cope well with the demands of life. Poetry often served as an escape for him, a safe haven to flee to when the troubles of this world threatened to overwhelm him.[7]

This point could be further developed by analysing, *Alastor or The Spirit of Solitude* (1815). This is arguably one of the best examples of both Shelley's mode of poetry and of the

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[7] Shortly after Mary's traumatic miscarriage at Casa Magni, for example, when the Don Juan went in for repairs, "Shelley no longer had the release of sailing… he stayed at Casa Magni writing letters to Trelawny and John Gisborne, and working intermittently on his poem" (Holmes *Pursuit* 725).

commonly recurring symbols within many of his works, as well as being a good example of a poem that appears to be very much a romanticised self-portrait. In the poem, we find a young poet on a quest to seek out the secrets of the natural world and find some form of true knowledge: "When early youth had past, he left/ His cold fireside and alienated home/ To seek strange truths in undiscovered lands" (P. Shelley "Alastor" 17, lines 74-77). Here the visionary sets off on a long journey of exploration. He finally finds this knowledge embodied in the form of a fair maiden who visits him in a dream. Suddenly his goal is within his grasp: "The Poet, wandering on, through Arabie/ And Persia, and the wild Carmanian waste…/ He dreamed a veiled maid/   Sate near him, talking in low solemn tones./ Her voice was like the voice of his own soul/… Knowledge and truth and virtue were her theme/And lofty hopes of divine liberty" (P. Shelley "Alastor" 18, lines 140-159). Here the 'veiled maid' appears to him in a dream, bringing with her the potential for the knowledge that he seeks, but as he is about to realise his quest, the dream suddenly ends and he feels it slip from his hand, as dreams often do. Desperate and disappointed, he wonders if he would be able to find this maiden again, and her gift of knowledge. Neil Fraistait comments:

> The Narrator recognizes that for the Visionary to seek his love "Beyond the realms of dream" is to "[overleap] the bounds," to search within the natural world for that which is "Lost, lost, for ever lost, / In the wide pathless desert of dim sleep" (lines 206, 207, 209-210). Death becomes the last desperate hope for such a quester: "Does the dark gate of death / Conduct to thy mysterious paradise, / O Sleep?" asks the Visionary, who willingly dies to discover the answer (lines 211-213). Frustrated by the natural world, seduced by his imagination, the Visionary demonstrates how, through radical self-reflexiveness, the imaginative quester can be reduced to a spectral shadow. (Fraistat 166)

So the visionary in the poem willingly embraces death and ends his life with the hope that he will find the answer to his quest on the other side of death's veil. This idea that death holds some form of answer was not uncommon with Shelley and is partly responsible for his fascination with the Gothic. This could also be an explanation for Shelley's own drive towards Thanatos. As demonstrated above, his poetry was very autobiographical, and his death seems to have followed a similar pattern. The above then serves as one example of the autobiographical nature of many of his poems and how often speaker could be associated with Shelley himself, both in habits and in sentiments expressed.

In his essay, *A Defence of Poetry* (1821), Shelley attempted to make a case for the beneficial impact of poetry, both on individuals and on society as a whole, and in it he also commented on the process that surrounds the creation of his art, as seen through the

faculties of the artist. In the first part of this essay, he attempts to define the nature of both poetry and the poet. Heavily influenced by Samuel Taylor Coleridge's theory of the imagination, Shelley makes the case that mental actions in humans are made up of two separate, but linked processes. The first is the conscious thought produced by one's reason, which is based on logic and logical discourses. He argues, "[Reason] may be considered as mind contemplating the relations borne by one thought to another, however produced" (P. Shelley *Prose* 75). He compares the poet in this regard to an Aeolian lyre or harp, as he does in his famous poem, *Ode to the West Wind*, in which the speaker asks of the wind to "Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is/What if my leaves are falling like its own!/ The tumult of the mighty harmonies" (Shelley *Poetry* 57; lines 58-60). Here we can see one possible interpretation for the wind, is that it is likened to reason and the poet to the lyre. As the wind plays through an Aeolian harp, so reason plays through the poet, producing the subject matter that would influence and help define his work. As with the Aeolian harp, the poet often has limited control over this process, hereby being more a vehicle for these truths than an active formulator of them.

The second, and for Shelley, the more important aspect of the poet's mind was the imagination. Its function was to bring harmony to the melodies produced by reason. For Shelley the imagination is "a principle within the human being, and perhaps all sentient beings, which acts otherwise than in the lyre, and produces not melody alone, but harmony by an internal adjustment of the sounds and motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them" (P. Shelley *Prose* 76). This is then the central process that would form and produce the poetry which the poet would ultimately write. It is the process that allows the poet to surpass the mundane and reach the higher truths to which he would aspire. Reason might influence all his rational and logical processes, and even define what themes would permeate his poetry, but the imagination is what ultimately puts it into poetic form and allows it to tap into the infinite. This idea of the two-step process that accompanies the intellectual process that surrounds the creation of art, specifically poetry, is similar in many ways to the earlier ideas of Samuel Taylor Coleridge on the same subject. In the 'Defence' Shelley argues that:

> [P]oets, or those who imagine and express this indestructible order, are not only the authors of language and of music, of the dance, and architecture, and statuary, and painting: they are the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life (P. Shelley *Prose* 79)

In the above quote, we can see Shelley is making the point that poets are not only important with regard to the arts, but are fundamental to the very fabric of society. Clearly then Shelley saw poetry in quite a broad sense, both in its form and in its purpose. For Shelley, it was not just an art form that is applicable to the writer and the reader, but it is relevant and present in all facets of civilization, and especially in the institutions that govern society, and it determines the future. For Shelley, the imagination contains the beginnings of all knowledge, and it is thus a doorway to higher truths. He claims, "It creates new materials of knowledge, and power, and pleasure" (P. Shelley *Prose* 110), and as we have already ascertained from the discussion of the imagination and the poetical faculty above, it provides the basis of all knowledge (P. Shelley *Prose* 110). This would include all types of knowledge, ranging from the social to the scientific. The scientific specifically plays an interesting role, as Shelley considered the imagination that governed the poetical no different from the imagination that regulates the scientific. During Shelley's lifetime, there were no clearly defined academic disciplines, as we have today. Science was still called 'natural philosophy'; the arts and sciences were not deemed polar opposites as we experience them today. Like Shelley, there were many individuals that dabbled in both, as well as in many other disciplines. During this time, the idea of the 'Renaissance man' or a man of multiple disciplines had not yet entirely been lost. We will explore Shelley's combined interest in the sciences and poetry later in the discussion of his lyrical play, *Prometheus Unbound* (1820). The result of this now rather orthodox view of these disciplines is that their roles and potential were yet to be securely defined, and for Shelley poetry had almost limitless possibilities. Keeping in mind Shelley's original intention in the above extract, it is clear that he saw poetry as having the potential to be not only a revolutionary tool for change in society, but actually as a tool for government as well:

> The most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the awakening of great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution, is poetry. At such periods there is an accumulation of power of communicating and receiving intense and impassioned conceptions respecting man and nature. The persons in whom this power resides may often, as far as regards many portions of their nature, have little apparent correspondence with the spirit of good of which they are ministers… Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world. (P. Shelley *Prose* 117-118)

The above extract demonstrates this point well. Shelley makes the case that the politicians and leaders of the age often lack the tools or the understanding to effect the changes that are necessary. At the same time he emphasises that often most of the truly great changes that happen in society come from the poets, or other "great people that have been awakened". Thus, poets

have the ability to shape and form the society of the future, and to better their current society, and to continue to improve it in the future – all through the medium of the poetical mind.

Shelley envisions the poet very much as a Promethean figure, not unlike the scientist or even the alchemist. Ultimately, for Shelley, these figures share the same goal: to create a better understanding of the universe through the pursuit of higher knowledge and then to enact positive change upon their surroundings. This can be seen in the following extract from his essay, which shows the language Shelley uses to describe the purpose of the poet:

> For he not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and the fruit of latest time… A poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one; as far as it relates to his conceptions, time and place and number are not. (P. Shelley *Prose* 79)

Here Shelley is making the case that poets are able to view the world in a clearer fashion, and through this gain a unique perspective on their society and what its future holds. Shelley, the poet, is able to contribute to any aspect of civilisation, and one could argue that he even viewed this as crucial if society were to move forward. The poet for him is both the instigator that discovers knowledge, and the active force that would apply it. As it is made clear in the above quote, he sees the poet as having the ability to view both the present and foresee the future with a clarity that is not necessarily found in individuals from other disciplines. The poet has the ability to be a force for change, capable of both destruction and creation, utilising either where they are deemed necessary, revolutionizing society, while at the same time allowing a better society to spring from the ashes of the old. This theme is most prominent in *Prometheus Unbound*. For Shelley, then, the poet in many ways even transcends the capabilities of the scientist or alchemist, for while they are confined to the material plane, the poet is open to the eternal. In many ways then, the poet as an archetype is the most Promethean figure of them all, as he himself functions within the realm of the divine.

Prometheus Unbound (1820), is considered one of Shelley's greatest works, but also one of his most ambiguous ones. The play has some interesting links with and shared themes with *Frankenstein*. While the most obvious is perhaps the theme of the Promethean over-reacher, this is far from being the only shared theme. Some of these shared themes would be the myth of creation present in both works, as well as the relationship between the creator and his creations. The themes of suffering, the use of power and the quest for liberty are also

common to both works. As far as the theme of Promethean ambition goes, *Frankenstein* deals with the ultimate result of such endeavours, while Percy Shelley's text is a re-imagining of the original Greek myth. In *Prometheus Unbound,* the protagonist is Prometheus himself: throughout the drama, he has to deal with his own imprisonment and find a way to escape and overcome it. Shelley started on the drama in 1818, the year that *Frankenstein* was published. Moreover Mary and Percy Shelley had a habit of sharing and discussing literary and philosophical ideas. Holmes notes that leading up the period where *Frankenstein* was written the two had been discussing ideas relevant to the novel: "When Mary eloped with Shelley to France and Switzerland in 1814, their shared journal indicates that they were already discussing notions of creating artificial life" (Holmes *Age of Wonder* 326). I wish to demonstrate two important points through the examination of *Prometheus Unbound.* The first is to further emphasise exactly how far Shelley's enthusiasm and knowledge of the sciences stretched. More importantly, I intend to show how this interest in the sciences influenced his poetical ability and subject matter, and how he managed to blend the sciences into his poetry. I will argue that through these interests, Shelley created works that were far more rational and complex than the modernists gave him credit for.

As mentioned, *Prometheus Unbound* deals with the figure of Prometheus from Greek myth. The play begins where Prometheus has been imprisoned by Jupiter and subjected to daily torture, to continue eternally. This is his punishment for refusing to help Jupiter attain ultimate godhood. He has been tortured for centuries and the drama starts where he is about to find a way to free himself. In the first act, Prometheus realises that the only way for him to become unbound again, and ultimately defeat Jupiter, is to change his manner of thinking, and discard his vengeful nature. He realises a cycle of vengeance is something that perpetuates itself and that it will ultimately cause Jupiter's own downfall, as revenge is his usual practice. In contrast, Prometheus himself must adopt pure love as his own practice, as this is only way to bring an end to the cycle of violence. I suggest that the figure of Prometheus should be read as an image of the poet. Duerksen suggests a similar approach in his article, *Shelley's Prometheus: Destroyer and Preserver*, in which he proposes that Shelley's protagonist personifies the creative soul of mankind, the highest potentiality of the human intellect (Duerksen 626). Prometheus then represents Shelley's idea of the pure and powerful force of the imagination. He has the potential within him to dethrone the tyrant, but at this point in the play he is still too jaded in his ways of thinking, and as the following

quotation illustrates, for him to realise the need to approach his situation from an entirely different angle:

> Prometheus has himself adopted as his vengeful response to Jupiter's despotism a calculating power principle based on violence. Before he can be prepared to reanimate and preserve the imaginative creativity implicit in his reunion with Asia, Prometheus must recognize the need to destroy within himself the calculation-violence-power complex that has for so long motivated him. (Duerksen 626)

This violent power complex represents the cycle of power that is prevalent throughout human history, one of which Percy Shelley is very aware. In his own life, Shelley identified a similar system to that of Jupiter in the form of the British government, and the recent outcome of the French Revolution would also have been a fresh example of the cyclical nature of violent revolution. As a result, an important theme of *Prometheus Unbound* is that it is not necessarily a change of intention that idealists and revolutionaries demand, but rather a change of method: revolution through love instead of through more violence. This I would argue is the most prominent allegorical trope at work in the play. Prometheus represents a figure that has the immense potential to enact change in his world, primarily through the use of imaginative creativity; he is a revolutionary figure beyond all measure. Yet in order for him to be successful, and to improve the state of the world, he first needs to take himself out of this cycle of violence – or else he will simply end up replacing the tyranny which he seeks to abolish. It is a common trend that violent revolution rarely transitions into a peaceful democratic society, but usually generates more violence and tyranny. A good example of this is the rise of the Jacobins after the abolition of feudal rule in 1792.

Prometheus seeks to dethrone Jupiter, the reigning king of the gods, and end his tyranny over the rest of creation. By so doing, he will become a preserver instead of a destroyer, and will bring about his union with Asia, his estranged wife, and through this usher in a more natural state of existence. Once free of tyranny, they will be able to pursue the true purpose of their lives. Emphatically, the drama shows that individuals, organizations, nations, and indeed mankind, are misguided in their materialistic search for life by means of self-interested power and honour (Deurksen 627). Shelley believed that the governmental system of 18th century England tied people to fixed destinies over which they had no control, which helped preserve the status quo. My argument is that the drama becomes a metaphor for the poet-revolutionary, who, like Prometheus, has the potential to change and improve society through the work of his imagination. Just like the poet figure I described in the previous section, Prometheus is hampered in this quest by the tyranny of the world he resides in, but with the right perception

he will be able to defeat it, not through conflict, but through reason and love, thus avoiding perpetuating the cycle. The poet-revolutionary then becomes an explicitly Promethean figure as he strives for higher knowledge in attempting this undertaking: he wishes to uproot the powers that be and cast them aside in order to establish himself and others like him as a new and purer order achieved through intellectual beauty. It is here that the sentiments expressed in *The Defence of Poetry* once again become relevant, and also where Shelley's statement that, "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (P. Shelley *Prose* 197) can once again come into focus. This appears to be a consistent theme running between these two works of Shelley. *Prometheus Unbound* is a fictional work that attempts to apply the philosophies set out in "the Defence".

Prometheus Unbound is a complex poetical drama that is filled with a combination of philosophical, scientific and societal imagery. Shelley's scientific influences were numerous and extensive, stretching over many scientific disciplines. Some of his most prominent influences were Erasmus Darwin, William Herschel, Luigi Galvani, Humphrey Davy, William Lawrence and even extending as far back as Isaac Newton. Carl Grabo also mentions the work of Father Giambatista Beccaria, citing his essays as potential sources for Shelley's own knowledge (Grabo 118). Grabo makes the point that Erasmus Darwin, a scientist and a poet, might have especially influenced Shelley's style of poetry. Darwin himself had a habit of writing poetry infused with scientific imagery, the most well-known of his works being *The Botanical Garden* (1792). Holmes points out that Shelley's first major poem, *Queen Mab,* is written very much in this tradition: "The vogue for attaching explanatory prose notes, both historical and scientific, to epic poems had been popularised by Erasmus Darwin… and then admiringly imitated by the twenty-year old Shelley in *Queen Mab*" (Holmes *Age of Wonder* 344). Holmes then points out that this style of poetry ran into difficulties as science developed, as it became harder to convincingly portray the science of the day in poetical form. He ends by adding that *Prometheus Unbound* is arguably the last successful attempt at combining science and poetry in this manner. In the following section, I will explore Shelley's attempt to incorporate scientific theory and ideas into *Prometheus Unbound*.

This first section I will examine comes from Act 2 Scene 4, and is a hymn to man's scientific exploits, and a celebration both of the progress men have made, and of what Shelley still expected to come. In this first quote, Prometheus is depicted as a figure of the Enlightenment as he brings fire to humanity: "And he tamed fire which, like some beast of prey/ Most

terrible, but lovely, played beneath/ the frown of man/ and tortured to his will/ Iron and gold, the slaves and signs of power" (P. Shelley *Prometheus* II. IV. 66-69). Throughout this section we get a description of humanity's rise from its initial primitive state and of the progress of our civilization, from the discovery of fire, through to our ability to manipulate materials, to our ability to speak and write. In the above quote we see that Prometheus is given the status of fire-bringer, and as in the original myth we can see how his taming fire and giving it to man quickly gave rise to man's civilization: we received the ability to control the elements that we have come to associate with power and success, namely gold and iron. He is also credited with giving men the ability to speak and think, "He gave man speech, and speech created thought/Which is the measure of the universe" (P. Shelley *Prometheus* II. IV. 72-73). The ability to think and develop intellectually allowed man to engage with the world around them, to utilise and accumulate knowledge. This would eventually lead to scientific progress, enabling man to measure the universe. The next line states, "And science struck the thrones of earth and heaven/ which shook, but fell not" (P. Shelley *Prometheus* II. IV. 74-75). This line is a clear foreshadowing of Promethean ambition in a general sense. As science developed, it would naturally challenge religious dogma and other superstitions, dismantling and disproving them as it developed. This was a prominent characteristic of Shelley's age, where many of the superstitions of the past either fell away completely or were greatly diminished. Here Prometheus acknowledges that through the action of giving fire to man, and inadvertently also knowledge, he is directly responsible for this. In the next line, both human progress, and man's growing abilities to preserve life are acknowledged:

> And human hands first mimicked and then mocked/ With moulded limbs more lovely than its own/ The human form, till marble grew divine…/ He told the hidden power of herbs and springs/ And disease drank and slept. Death grew like sleep. (P. Shelley *Prometheus* II. IV. 8-86)

The first line of the above extract seems to echo *Frankenstein*. Here we have a description of the initial process of early scientific development. It mimics the superstitions of the age, and this is a clear allusion to alchemy, mankind's first attempts at experimentation, which gave rise to the later mastery of chemistry. After this point, the mimicry of superstition and the divine stopped and man's own abilities ascended. With further development, humankind's abilities matched and eventually surpassed those of the divine. An example of this is the allusion to medicine in the quote above: Shelley describes man's mastery of herbs, although at this point, this had evolved into a much more complex science than this simple image

suggests. This allusion to medicine would, for Shelley, have been the rapid advance that occurred during the renaissance and the Enlightenment in terms of human understanding of biology and medicine, thus allowing humans, for the first time, to truly start to understand these concepts, and thus, lead to what we now know as modern medicine. Here the poem is making the point that through the evolution of medicine humans are slowly overcoming disease, and will perhaps one day be able to overcome death itself, hence, 'death grew like sleep', thereby coming to resemble a familiar and unthreatening condition. New scientific ideas, such as Galvanism, held great promise in Shelley's day. The next few lines in the poem demonstrates Shelley drawing directly on the science of the day from a single specific source:

He taught the implicated orbits woven/ Of the wide wandering stars, and how the sun/ Changed its lair, and by what secret spell/ The pale moon is transformed, when her broad eye/ Gazes not on the interlunar sea. (P. Shelley *Prometheus* II. IV. 86-91)

This is drawn from the works of William Herschel, the 18th century astronomer and composer, famous for his discovery of Uranus and for developing the Herschelian telescope. Herschel was also the first person to publish a paper demonstrating that our galaxy is actually not a single isolated galaxy, and that we are part of the Milky Way; there are thus innumerable galaxies surrounding our own (Holmes *Age of Wonder* 203-205). Shelley read this work and these ideas are incorporated into the above extract. This was not the first time Shelley utilised Herschel's ideas: he used Herschel's theory to construct an argument against religion, as Holmes points out: "Shelley used Herschel's vision of an open-ended solar system, and an unimaginably expanded universe, to attack religious belief" (Holmes *Age of Wonder* 391). Herschel's discoveries represented the latest knowledge in the field of astronomy, and having studied it, Shelley saw it fit to incorporate it into his own work. The above extract begins by telling us that what follows will be knowledge of how the universe is set up or 'woven'. This is followed by a description of the "wide wandering stars", which is an allusion to Herschel's idea of an expanding universe. Perhaps one of the most telling aspects is the image of the sun changing "its lair". Before Herschel, the common conception would have been that there is only one galaxy and the sun is the centre of this, a fixed immovable object, around which the rest of existence slowly circles. This idea was disproved after the discovery of the Milky Way and other galaxies. It would have been plain that

although the sun is fixed in relation to our solar system, and we revolve around it, the sun is also moving around the greater centre of the universe, and it is indeed not fixed. Thus, it "changes its lair" by having proven to be a non-stationary object.

In the following section, I am going to examine another example of Shelley drawing on specific scientific sources of his day and utilising these almost directly in *Prometheus Unbound*. The extract I will be examining is found in Act 3 Scene 4 of the play. At this point, Jupiter has just been defeated; Prometheus has regained his freedom and has been reunited with his wife, Asia. In the extract below, we find a description of the love that the spirits bear Asia, but I will argue that we are witnessing a scientific description of an everyday natural process:

IONE
Sister, it is not earthly; how it glides
Under the leaves! how on its head there burns
A light, like a green star, whose emerald beams
Are twined with its fair hair! how, as it moves,
The splendor drops in flakes upon the grass!
Knowest thou it?   5

PANTHEA
It is the delicate spirit
That guides the earth through heaven. From afar
The populous constellations call that light
The loveliest of the planets; and sometimes
It floats along the spray of the salt sea,   10
Or makes its chariot of a foggy cloud,
Or walks through fields or cities while men sleep,
Or o'er the mountain tops, or down the rivers,
Or through the green waste wilderness, as now,
Wondering at all it sees. Before Jove reigned
It loved our sister Asia, and it came
Each leisure hour to drink the liquid light
Out of her eyes, for which it said it thirsted
As one bit by a dipsas, and with her
It made its childish confidence, and told her   20
All it had known or seen, for it saw much,
Yet idly reasoned what it saw; and called her,
For whence it sprung it knew not, nor do I,
Mother, dear mother.
        (P. Shelley *Prometheus* III. IV. 1-24)

Grabo makes his case for the scientific knowledge present in the poem. He argues that the Spirit of the earth that returns to Asia in the above extract is indeed potentially electric in nature (Grabo 126-127). This is important because the spirit returns to Asia, which is the poem's representation of the traditional idea of mother-nature, or of the earth itself. The above extract then acquires a different range of possibilities when viewed through this lens, as this image serves as Shelley's representation of Beccaria's theory of atmospheric electricity:[8]

> Asia is the wife of Prometheus, to be reunited with him at the day of his liberation, typifying the mystical union of man and nature… It suffices, however in this instance to point out that the conception of atmospheric electricity as the child of the earth and as returning to its mother is strictly in harmony with Beccaria's thesis that atmospheric electricity is drawn from the earth by the sun in water vapour and returned to its source in rain, dew, frost, and lightning. The next few lines fully support this interpretation:
>
> May I then play beside thee the long noons,
> When work is none in the bright silent air?
> (P. Shelley *Prometheus* 3.4.II.28-9)
>
> At noon, according to Beccaria, the atmospheric electricity having reached the point of saturation is quiescent provided the day is serene and windless. (Grabo 129)

This then demonstrates how the extract from *Prometheus Unbound* alludes to this theory of atmospheric electricity. Grabo argues that just as the spirit returns to Asia around noon when the air is 'silent', so atmospheric electricity also returns to the earth at the warmest time of the day when the air is clear and free of disruption. Thus, the imagery in the play becomes an allegory for the natural process described above. If this by itself seems a bit unconvincing (it could easily be a mere coincidence) it should be noted that Shelley does not stop there. Grabo goes on to discuss how the Spirit of the Earth returned to Asia to 'play' and thus is rejuvenated (Grabo 131). The specific lines Grabo is referring to here are, "Each leisure hour to drink the liquid light/ Out of her eyes, for which it said it thirsted" (P. Shelley *Prometheus* 3.4.II). Grabo points out that this provides a very specific meaning if it is read in relation to

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[8] Grabo sums up Beccaria's theory as follows, "Beccaria's investigations have to do with the degree of electricity in the atmosphere under all atmospheric conditions… The atmospheric electricity during serene weather is virtually always of the excessive or positive kind. Drawn with the water vapour from the earth by the sun, the electricity ceases to be active, having reached its maximum about midday. At the close of the day it declines… and at dawn has wholly returned to the earth or persists in the atmosphere to but a slight degree." (Grabo 120-121).

the theory of atmospheric electricity: "The atmospheric electricity derives from, renews itself from the earth" (Grabo 131). So just as the spirit returns to Asia, and replenishes itself, so the electricity is renewed in a similar fashion. So in the poem, Asia does indeed have life-giving power, with which others can replenish themselves. In this case, these life-giving powers would be electricity, as this is what she returns to the spirit, as well as what the earth contributes (in Beccaria's theory of atmospheric electricity). During this period electricity was thought to be closely associated with life[9], so the suggestion that electricity is a life-giving force is not surprising at all.

The idea that electricity itself is a possible life force was gaining popularity at the time, predominantly as a result of the experiments and demonstrations of Luigi Galvani and his theory of Galvanism. This was a theory that was very important, not only to Percy Shelley, but to the whole Shelley circle, as it was frequently discussed; it is also one of the cornerstones of the science present in *Frankenstein.* This takes a prominent place in *Prometheus Unbound,* especially in the form of a life-restoring force. There are two examples of these restorative abilities that Asia seems to possess in the text: "… I wandered once/ With Asia, drinking life from her loved eyes" (P. Shelley *Prometheus* 1.1.II.122-123) and "On eyes from which he kindled it anew/ With love, which is as fire, sweet daughter mine/ For such is that within thine own" (P. Shelley *Prometheus* 3.3.II.148-152). The examples occur in Act 1 and Act 3 respectively. In both cases, Prometheus is speaking and describing this experience. This introduces another life-giving element: love, and its overwhelming transformative powers, is a core theme of the poem; as Grabo argues, "[t]he identification of love with electricity is clear." (Grabo 132). The re-animating powers of electricity and the transformative powers of love are also intrinsically linked to Asia, as she plays a vital part in the poem, in the process of Prometheus's redemption. Asia's link to these elements becomes an allusion to the life-giving property that electricity was presumed to possess at this time:

> The identification of love, energy, and the spirit of animation in Shelley's imagery need not be further stressed. I believe it to be self-evident. Nor is it without scientific justification in the speculations of Newton and Erasmus Darwin as I had previously shown. (Grabo 133)

The speculations about diverse life-giving elements, specifically in the theories of Galvanism and Vitalism, are expressed in the poetry cited above. Galvani's Vitality-electricity theory and its precursors had fascinated Shelley from a young age, and he had frequently

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[9] See Luigi Galvani's theory of Galvanism on page 31.

experimented with this in his youth.[10] These were legitimate scientific theories of their day that caused much controversy and debate. Their presence in the poetry of Shelley serves to demonstrate not only his knowledge of the field; it also shows that he was not only a passive receiver of such information, but that he incorporated it into his poetry. Although this theory was in general disrepute by the time that Shelley started writing *Prometheus Unbound* in 1819, Grabo points out that because of the nature of Shelley's reading and travelling, it is hard to establish exactly how up to date his scientific readings were. It is also possible that his imagination was excited by scientific theories which the more conservative scientist might have distrusted (Grabo 135). The above two examples from within a single scene of *Prometheus Unbound* point to the extent to which Shelley was not only interested and well-read in the scientific discourses of the day; they also show how he actually infused his poetry with science, thereby widely expanding its scope. This poem in particular shows the importance and influence of so-called Enlightenment scientific ideas on the development of his radical "Romantic" poetry.

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[10] Grabo also refers to Shelley's fascination with electricity from a young age and his desire to experiment with it. "Experimental use of Galvanism and electricity in the treatment of diseases seems to have been more or less prevalent in Shelley's time. One of Shelley's boyish experiments was the use of electricity for his sister's chilblains." (Grabo 135)

Chapter 2: The Presence of Percy Shelley in *Frankenstein*

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Romantic thought and the scientific ideals of the Enlightenment age have long been considered as representing contrasting world-views. Although Romanticism arose in many respects out of the Enlightenment period, it is a product of it as well as a reaction to it. The Enlightenment age championed reason, science and empiricism. M.H. Abrams sums this up in the following extract, "The common element was the trust in man's reason as adequate to solve all important problems and to establish all the essential norms in life, together with the belief that the application of reason was rapidly dissipating the darkness of superstition, prejudice and barbarity" (Abrams 48). Romanticism, on the other hand, made the case for the imagination, the unknown, and at times, even the supernatural. In this sense, it has many parallels to the Gothic genre that flourished in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and was in itself a reaction to the Enlightenment literature of the day; indeed there are many respects in which Gothic and Romantic literature seem to overlap. As a novel, *Frankenstein* is a good example of such an overlap. As Robert D. Hume argues, "Gothic and Romantic writers are concerned with ultimate questions and lack of faith in the adequacy of reason or religious faith to make comprehensible the paradoxes of human existence" (Hume 289). This demonstrates the growing discontent that many in this age felt, not only for religion, and its attempts to account for the world, but also for the Enlightenment and its reliance on reason to do the same. Many Romantics felt that although the Enlightenment's scientific achievements and methods were invaluable in understanding our world, it was also insufficient on its own. Their seeming pre-occupation with a return to the medieval and the supernatural, and their insistence on the importance of non-empirical concepts like the imagination, are symptoms of their discontent. Coleridge goes to great lengths to produce a theory of the imagination in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817). He, and other Romantics, such as Wordsworth, and later John Keats, placed great emphasis on the poets' feelings as opposed to their reason, and at times delved into the realms of the supernatural (Abrams 106-107); thus it is the imagination that served as a vehicle to transcend the seeming limitations of the human condition (Hume 289).

In this chapter, I am going to focus predominantly on a close analysis of *Frankenstein*, showing that Percy Shelley occupies a significant place in Mary Shelley's work. My

argument will deal both with Victor Frankenstein and the Creature he created, as both characters are integral to the argument of the thesis. As I have tried to demonstrate so far in my introduction and first chapter, Victor Frankenstein is a figure of the Enlightenment in the strongest sense of the word. He is scientific and methodical, and he believes that his passion, the pursuit of science, is a worthy endeavour as his experiments will benefit not only himself, but ultimately the whole of mankind. Frankenstein describes his original goals as follows:

> Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me…. I might in process of time (although I now found it impossible) renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption. (M. Shelley 32)

Despite his ambitions, it is clear that his original intentions were benevolent. He sought to shine a light on the darkness of death, this being a fitting, although not too subtle, metaphor for the Enlightenment itself. Aside from this, he also sought to create an entirely new species, and one can see in the quote that he intended his creation to be good-natured. Lastly, his ultimate goal was to remove death from this world entirely, and thus his work was intended to be of great benefit to mankind. Moreover, he intends to create an entirely new species. Thus he is not only resurrecting a man, but trying to create something unique by his own hand. Clearly, his goals were more ambitious than merely eliminating death from the world. It can be argued that he sought to improve humanity by speeding up the evolution of the human species, or, to rephrase this in a more conservative manner, to improve on god's design. It must be kept in mind that, admirable as this may sound to our modern sentiments which value progress above all else, to the conservative pre-Victorian mind, this would have been a prospect that was morally reprehensible. All of this, then, he endeavoured to do primarily through science. In keeping with the Promethean metaphor, an analogy could be drawn to the fire from the original myth: science could be used to build a civilization or to burn it down. It is then up to the user to determine its moral agency, as was the case with the fire that Prometheus bestowed on humans. To give humans the power of civilization was the right thing to do from his perspective; what they did with this power was in the end left completely up to them.

Victor Frankenstein has become an archetype for the Enlightenment man, who champions science and reason in the popular imagination. This would be further emphasized and pushed to the extreme as he became a caricature of the over-ambitious, or even mad scientist in the

centuries that followed. This interpretation of him was quickly adopted by popular culture, and almost 200 years later has still not been exhausted. Victor is far from a static character though. The following quote shows Victor's perspective as he starts to shed his superstitions and discovers the potential of chemistry:

> The modern masters promise very little; they know that metals cannot be transmuted, and that the elixir of life is a chimera. But these philosophers, whose hands seem only made to dabble in dirt, and their eyes to pour over the microscope or crucible, have indeed performed miracles. They penetrate into the recesses of nature, and show how she works in her hiding-places. They ascend into the heavens; they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows. (M. Shelley 28)

This is a description by Professor Waldman, Victor's professor at the University of Ingolstadt, who served as a great inspiration to the young scientist, and was instrumental in changing his attitude towards the new sciences. He would later adopt Waldman's views on these matters, and this would define not only his view of the sciences, but also the direction and form that his studies would take, leading eventually to his creation of the Creature. The explicit sexual metaphor in the language used in the description of the scientist's studies of the natural world was a popular Enlightenment convention. The word "penetrate" suggests a phallic intrusion, and the use of the word "she" to describe the natural world feminizes it. Sandra Harding addresses this specific convention in her book, *The Science Question in Feminism* (1986):

> Evelyn Fox Keller points out that it is not just a few scientists and philosophers who project a defensive masculinity into their activities. Even though the scientist is perceived as super-masculine… both images can be found in early thinkers: 'Let us establish a chaste and lawful marriage between Mind and Nature,' thereby providing the prescription for the birth of the new science. (Harding 121)

Harding infers that Bacon started this convention by attributing the language of marriage to this endeavour of discovery. She then goes on to describe how this type of language, which is connected to power and masculinity, led to an androcentric view of the sciences, and the sexual metaphor of the male scientist uncovering, penetrating or dominating the now feminised nature, became the language of the age. This is evident in the above extract from *Frankenstein*. The relevance here lies in the idea of the overly masculine Enlightenment scientist. He relies in many ways upon this identity of the explorer, and all morality is

suspended, and his actions justified by this endeavour of limitless exploration; as Small comments, "Nature is still for Frankenstein a feminine embodiment, to be 'pursued to her hiding places'" (Small 115). These scientific endeavours are then justified at all costs. The extremes that scientists might go to are warranted purely by the process of discovery, as this in itself is seen as an ultimate good.

The above extract from *Frankenstein* suggests the almost limitless potential of science, in which the primary restriction on a scientist's work would be the strength of his own ambition. It offers a romanticised view of science. This can be seen in the following extract, where the author deliberately invokes the sublime to describe the greatest achievements of scientists so far: "They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows" (M. Shelley 28). Mankind's sheer technological advancement and new-found reliance on technology in our current age are testimony to this, and to the greatness of this "art". Yet, this is also where the cautionary element in *Frankenstein* comes into play, and why the novel is still so relevant to our current age, while much of the other literature of the time has lost its resonance. A popular reading of *Frankenstein* is that of a cautionary tale, one that warns against the dangers of ambition, and warns us against the dangers of irresponsible scientific invention, especially if it is combined with excessive ambition. After Victor initially infuses the body of the Creature with life, this theme starts to echo throughout the story as the Creature turns out quite differently from what Victor originally intended it to be. He sought to create the perfect creature, beautiful and superior to your average human, and it is only after this fails to come to fruition that he realises the potential horror he has brought into this world:

> How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form… 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 it, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. (M. Shelley 34)

Ironically, after his success, his ambitions begin to falter – even though he was successful in his endeavour to restore life to an inanimate body. However, it turned out quite differently from his original intent, as the original beauty of his vision quickly faded, and only the horror of his actual creation remained. His creation then comes to represent a failure of his

ambitions, instead of the marvel of modern science that he originally imagined. The true catastrophe, however, occurs not at time of the Creature's animation, but rather when Victor abandons it. The implication is that scientists should not be afraid to push their art further, but should take responsibility for their creations and discoveries. The responsibility that comes with creating life is one of the primary themes of the novel, and I will show how it is intrinsically connected to Percy Shelley, and how he may be the main source of this theme.

The parallels that exist between the development of Victor Frankenstein and Percy Shelley are important to the novel. Like Shelley, Victor has an unorthodox education which he acquired primarily through self-study. The most obvious of these similarities is his education in the alchemical authors; this would eventually evolve to a passionate reverence for science, as demonstrated by the following extract: "I chanced to find a volume of the works of Cornelius Agrippa. I opened it with apathy; the theory which he attempts to demonstrate and the wonderful facts which he relates soon changed this feeling into enthusiasm" (M. Shelley 20). Victor's initial interest in the sciences was sparked by alchemy and authors such as Cornelius Agrippa;[11] this is fitting as alchemy itself was the precursor of modern science. Shelley's and Victor's intellectual development then mirrors the historical development of science and rationality. Historically, science also took its infant steps with alchemy and slowly refuted superstition as it developed and became more advanced. By mere chance though, Victor's reading went unchecked, and he delved further into his study of alchemy:

> My dreams were therefor undisturbed by reality; and I entered with the greatest diligence into the search for the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life... nor were these my only visions. The raising of ghouls or devils was a promise liberally accorded to my favourite authors, the fulfilment of which I most eagerly sought (M. Shelley 22).

By contrast to Victor, Shelley's childhood never lacked in any respect. His studies never went unchecked for too long, and it never lacked any form of education. Despite this, the supernatural would continue to interest him. His access to education helped shape his lifelong fascination with science. From his days in Eton, he was mentored by the revered Doctor James Lind. As D.G. King-Hele illustrates in his essay, "Shelley and Science", this fascination with science from his early school days actually enriched his poetical capabilities as he started to infuse his poetry with scientific imagery (King-Hele 253). In *Frankenstein*, Victor's attraction to alchemy lay not only in the 'scientific' aspects of it, but also in the

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[11] "A scholar and writer of occult sciences. He wrote 'De Occulta Philosophia libri tres' (1529) and 'De Vanitate Scientiarum' (1530) and argued against the persecution of witches." (Harvey 11)

realms of the paranormal, as the following extract demonstrates: "The raising of ghouls or devils was a promise liberally accorded by my favourite authors, the fulfilment of which I most eagerly sought" (M. Shelley 22). This interest in both alchemy and the supernatural form a strong parallel to Shelley's own early development, as both captured Shelley's interest as demonstrated in my first chapter. Aside from the formal education that his father arranged for him through tutelage from a local reverend, Percy Shelley spent many hours reading and studying alchemical authors, and stimulating his imagination through novels and books. He was especially enthusiastic about books of the Gothic variety; "… he was fascinated by moonlight and candlelight, and fire very soon entered into his rituals as storyteller, ghost-raiser and alchemist" (Holmes *Pursuit* 3). The fictional Victor and the biographical Percy Shelley, in this regard, seem not far removed from each other.

A related point has to do with the Vitalist connection within the novel, especially with regard to Percy Shelley's friendship with William Lawrence. Lawrence was a physician and also a Professor of Anatomy at the Royal College of Surgeons. A staunch materialist, Lawrence and Shelley quickly became friends after Lawrence became Shelley's primary physician, treating him for a variety of ills, including his nervous conditions. Lawrence's challenge to John Abernethy's theory of Vitalism, and the ensuing debate heightened Shelley and Lawrence's friendship; "It was Lawrence who would rekindle one of the most disturbing scientific debates of the Romantic period, and stir up a controversy that became known as the Vitalism Debate in 1816-1820" (Holmes *Age of Wonder* 307). The idea behind Vitalism is that living things are different from non-living entities because they contain some vital spark, some undetectable presence often equated with magnetism, and vital to life. Anti-materialists would argue that this spark was indeed the physical manifestation of the soul, and they claimed the theory to be scientific proof of its existence. Although it is an idea that is now universally rejected by mainstream science, in the late 18th century, it caused heated and divisive debates in Britain as well as in Europe. Lawrence became infamous during this period, as he opposed this idea and advocated a materialist view in his approach to science, expressed in his book, *The Natural History of Man* (1819). This public debate, in combination with Lawrence and Shelley's friendship, would have a great influence on the young poet. Not only was it a topic that aligned with one of his many interests, but it was also an idea that supported his own atheistic worldview. Their many discussions would leave a lasting impression not only on Shelley, but also on Mary Shelley, and ultimately, on her novel as well:

Mary's brilliance was to see that these weighty and often alarming ideas could be given highly suggestive, imaginative and even playful form… She would develop exactly what William Lawrence dismissed in his lectures as a 'hypothesis or fiction'. Indeed it was to be an utterly new form of fiction – the science fiction novel. Mary plunged instinctively into the most extreme implications of Vitalism. In effect, she would take up where Aldini had been forced to leave off. She would pursue the controversial – and possibly blasphemous – idea that vitality, like electricity, might be used to reanimate a dead human being. But she would go further, much further. She would imagine an experiment in which an entirely new human being was 'created' from dead matter. *She would imagine a surgical operation, a corpse dissection, in reverse.* (Holmes *Age of Wonder* 327)

By exploring these topics within her novel, Mary not only managed to engage with one of the most controversial and public issues of her day, she managed to find an entirely new form of fiction: taking seemingly probable scientific ideas and following them to their logical conclusions would become the hallmark of the science fiction genre. Victor Frankenstein creates his creature through a combination of sciences, the most predominant being the anatomical, with Vitalist ideas remaining at the forefront. This adds yet another layer of Shelley's influence to the final product. In the above section, I argue that both Victor and Shelley can be seen as staunch Enlightenment figures, and that Shelley can easily be read as prefiguring Victor, as Mary Shelley was undoubtedly influenced by both him and the people that he surrounded himself with. These conversations, and the scientific and often iconoclastic nature of many of them, must have seemed extremely interesting, but also perhaps dangerous, to the young woman – not that any case could have been made for her ignorance or naivety. After all, at this point in her life, she had received a better education than most. Godwin made sure she was educated and well-read, and having spent much time within her father's circle, she had the good fortune to meet many of the greatest poets, thinkers and revolutionaries of the age. In addition her own life story was already filled with tragedy. Mary and Percy's first-born child was born pre-maturely in 1815, and died**.** This, in combination with her substantial education and intelligence suggests an emotional maturity that far exceeds that of the average nineteen-year old girl. Ideas of the day about Galvanism, the possibility of scientific reanimation, and the Vitalist debate, at its height while Mary was writing her novel, were all subjects of discussion at the Villa Diodati during the summer of 1816. I would go further and state that at the same time Mary could not help but link the faults she found with these ideas to those, often very parallel faults, that she found in Shelley. After all, for Victor to take shape in her mind through Shelley's Enlightenment vision, in combination with her own personal trauma and experience of death, would lead logically to her conceiving the idea that would culminate in *Frankenstein.*

Up until now, I have examined some of the more striking and important Enlightenment-centred similarities between the figures of Victor and Shelley, and I have discussed how they resonate continuously in both the pages of the novel and in the many biographies that Shelley's life has inspired thus far. In the following section, I will look at some more specific similarities that range from the very important to the curious. I have clearly demonstrated that Percy Shelley was indeed a rational thinker and a man of the Enlightenment, who grounded much of his thinking in the science and philosophy of the day. Yet, it is interesting to look more closely at the circumstances of some of the lesser known, yet striking similarities. Up to this point, we have dealt with the part that Percy Shelley played in the novel's conception, both in the event that inspired it as well as the subject matter that influenced it. Christopher Small reminds us that it was to an extent both Lord Byron and Shelley who were directly responsible for the novel existing in the first place: "It was Byron who suggested that everyone in the party at Geneva should 'write a ghost story'. It was the conversation between Byron and Shelley about the 'principle of life' that gave Mary her starting point" (Small 100). Yet, Shelley's influence did not stop there. Small shows how supportive he was in assisting Mary Shelley, while at the same time, emphasising how he kept his professional distance from the work to ensure its originality:

> [Percy Shelley] gave her the continued stimulus that (if Godwin was right) she needed, and helped her at every point up to and including the negotiation with publishers and provision of the original anonymous Preface… The actual writing was done mostly when Shelley was not there…he spoke of *Frankenstein* as 'the fruits of his absence'. (Small 100-101)

Small argues that Victor Frankenstein must have been to some degree a deliberate portrayal of Percy Shelley. He points to the fact that Shelley had used 'Victor' as a pseudonym to publish his earlier writings (Small 101). Even after he finally abandoned it and used his own name, it does not quite disappear. Instead the name Victor was absorbed into his later work, especially his poetry, taking on the form of the word 'victory'. This is a recurring word and theme. He argues that, "Almost every one of what may… be called his 'political' poems includes at some point aspiration towards or invocation of 'Victory'. It is the last word of *Prometheus Unbound*, and it sounds, though more ambiguously, all through *Hellas*" (Small 101). This shows that not only the name, but also the word itself became an important part of Percy Shelley's being, and was almost absorbed into his identity; in the hands of Mary Shelley, it perhaps became a somewhat ironic critique of her protagonist and his enterprise as

she christened him with the name, Victor. Even more, can it then be read as a critique of her husband, from whom it clearly derives. Victor and Shelley shared a strange ambivalence regarding victory, aside from the shared name. This is revealed in the fact that both tended simultaneously to succeed and fail in their individual enterprises. Victor manages to restore life to dead matter, achieving his initial goal to an extent, until his creation turns on him and murders most of his family. Shelley, on the other hand, wrote many great poetical works that would fix his place among the major poets of English literature, but in his own life he failed to achieve the level of recognition he sought and died a rather obscure figure, not widely read, very much a victim of his own work and subject matter.

Small further states that one cannot compare the physical characteristics of Victor and Shelley: as a character in the novel, there is hardly any physical description to define Victor Frankenstein, and in a way he is a character without a body. Despite this, Small makes the case that Victor can at the very least be seen as a Shelleyan ideal:

> If he is not Shelley he is a dream of Shelley, and one [Shelley] would not be averse to dreaming himself, as an improvement, up to a point, on experience. Frankenstein, like Shelley, is an ardent and high spirited youth, of early promise and "vehement passion." (Small 102)

The point here would be that, like Victor, Shelley also demonstrated enormous potential from an early age, and this is only matched by the intense passion he put into his pursuits, whether it be his poetic, scientific or social enterprises. Small describes many other striking similarities between the two, such as Shelley's childhood upbringing, which took place in a loving, caring, and supportive household, with the exception of his "tyrannical father". Victor has an adopted sister, Elizabeth, whom he later marries, and who coincidentally shares the same name as Shelley's own favourite sister and mother (Small 102-103). Perhaps the most important parallel between the two would be their mutual thirst for knowledge, as the following shows: "Shelley, like Victor Frankenstein, has an early passion to learn 'the secrets of heaven and earth'; one may say in both the drive was inherent" (Small 104). Small goes on to remind us that it is the interest in magic and alchemy that originally sparked their pursuit of discovery, and led to their fascination with the sciences, and in many ways this is the starting point that sets both individuals on their own specific journeys. Frankenstein's journey started when he discussed his plan to pursue his studies in science with Professor Waldman: "He heard with attention my little narration concerning my studies, and smiled at the names of Cornelius Agrippa and Paracelsus, but without the contempt that M. Krempe exhibited… his lecture had removed my prejudices against modern chemists; and I, at the same time,

requested his advice concerning the books I ought to procure" (M. Shelley 28). This extract demonstrates the moment when Victor makes his transition from the more arcane arts of alchemy to the more worldly art that was modern 18th century chemistry. Small continues with a description of the range of Frankenstein's interests: "whether it was the outward substance of things, or the inner spirit of nature and the mysterious soul of man that occupied me, still my enquiries were directed to the metaphysical or, in its highest sense, the physical secrets of the world" (Small 104). He ends his article by stating that Victor's voice in the above quote might be Shelley speaking, and I agree. Here we see a range of interests that transcends mere materialist pursuits. Shelley was interested in much more than just physical science; early forms of psychology and metaphysics were among his interests. These are all topics that were the subjects of many of his own more philosophical essays, such as *On Love* (1818)*, Speculations on Metaphysics* (1814) and *A Defence of Poetry* (1821), to name a few.

I wish to make one last comparison, this time centred more on the conception of the novel in its purest form: the dream Mary had at the Villa Diodati in 1816 that led to the novel's initial conception. Below is an extract from her description of the dream found in the Introduction to the third edition of the novel, published in 1831:

> I saw – with shut eyes, but acute mental vision, – I saw the pale student of the unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion. Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handy-work, horror-stricken. He would hope that, left to itself, the slight spark of life that he had communicated would fade (M. Shelley 172)

This vivid imagery depicts not only the general outline of the novel's story, but the way this "pale student of the unhallowed arts" sets the events of the novel into motion. Since it is absent from the final product, her description here of the pale student is the only physical description that we ever find of Victor himself, and it conjures up such a vivid image of the historical figure of Shelley. If 'unhallowed arts' here refers to the science of the day as it appears in the novel, there would have been a strong movement, predominantly religious, that would have condemned much of the 18th century medical practices, and would have labelled them very similarly. Considering Mary's ultimate critique of Victor's Promethean act, it is clear that at least to some extent she agrees with such an interpretation. My last suggestion is that perhaps she is referring here to the portrait of Shelley as an artist. His poetry and the

critique it delivers of religion and the traditional state structure could also, during this period, be described as 'unhallowed', and as a result, much of the poverty and suffering they had experienced contributed to his alienation from family and society. Shelley not only challenged the state and earthly authority, but by being an atheist, he challenged the celestial as well, and in this sense, through his poetry, he challenged the divine and tried to replace it. This very much resembles Victor's own endeavour to revive the dead and improve upon god's design. The following quote from Mary Shelley's initial inspiration for the novel demonstrates how closely related Victor's ambitions are to Shelley's own: "Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handy work, horror-stricken" (M. Shelley 172). Her use of the word "artist" here, instead of student, doctor, or natural philosopher, is particularly telling: this does not limit the subject of the above quotation specifically to the scientific community, but to the practitioner of any discipline whose ambition becomes specifically Promethean in the above sense. This Promethean critique that Mary directs towards Percy Shelley through the embodiment of his figure in the novel, can be applied to the entire Romantic movement, as I have mentioned in my introduction, although it is more specifically directed towards those Romantics that were close to her:

> Mary Shelley specifically associated her Prometheus with the Romantic poets that she knew personally… Above all, Mary Shelley associated her modern Prometheus with Percy Shelley, who had already announced his desire to compose an epic rebuttal to Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* when he reread the play in 1816. (Mellor 71-72)

As I have already discussed, the figure of Prometheus was a popular image during the period: Lord Byron's poem, *Prometheus* (1816), which he wrote during the same period that Mary wrote *Frankenstein,* is perhaps the best example of this. Undoubtedly, Shelley was the most prominent figure that she associated with Prometheus and Promethean ambition. As the above quote demonstrates, he was similarly fascinated with the figure of Prometheus and what it came to represent, and being a prominent Romantic, he was closely tied to the movement's ideas and ambitions. Although Mary shared many of these ideas and sentiments,

she also saw the possible dangers[12] in them, hence the criticism of them found within her own novel:

> Victor Frankenstein is himself participating in the mythopoetic vision that inspired the first generation of Romantic poets and thinkers. William Blake has insisted that the human form can become divine through the exercise of mercy, pity, love and imagination: Coleridge had stated that human perception or the primary imagination is an "echo of the infinite I AM;" Wordsworth had argued that the "higher minds" of poets are "truly from the Deity;" while both Godwin and his disciple Percy Shelley had proclaimed that man is perfectible. (Mellor 70)

The ideas of human perfectibility and the ability to ascend to an almost godlike state were common to many of the thinkers and poets of the day. For Mary Shelley this became much more personal, as these literary, philosophical, and intellectual elements were the very bedrock on which their relationship was built. Undoubtedly, then, this aspect of Shelley's interests and personality also spilled over into their marriage, causing Mary great anxiety:

> Victor Frankenstein embodies certain elements of Percy Shelley's temperament and character that had begun to trouble Mary Shelley… The Percy Shelley that Mary knew and loved lived in a world of abstract ideas; his actions were primarily motivated by theoretical principles, the quest for perfect beauty, love, freedom, goodness. While Mary endorsed and shared these goals, she had come to suspect in Percy's case they sometimes masked an emotional narcissism. (Mellor 73)

This suggested lack of feeling could be what Shelley was trying to compensate for. Shelley seemed to almost inhabit a different realm from their shared reality at times, as he explored these ideas and tried to envision them. But the real-life consequences of this were varied and often led to the neglect of Mary and their children. Just like the figures in his poems, this quest for ideals would continue and become all the more self- destructive as it intensified, as Mary undoubtedly witnessed. It reached such an extent that her eventual expression of these feelings within *Frankenstein* transcends the character of Victor himself. Mellor argues that she created another character that embodied all the good elements that she still saw and cherished within Shelley. These are embodied in Henry Clerval, Victor's loyal friend:

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[12] The dangers of Romantic idealism, according to Mellor, were to be found at an individual level, for "...as *Frankenstein* suggests it is a very dangerous fantasy. Hidden behind Godwin's and Percy Shelley's dream of human perfectibility and immortality is a rampant egoism, the cardinal sin of the satanic Prometheus… Mary Shelley had seen just how self-indulgent this self-image of the poet saviour could be" (Mellor 79). She then goes on to mention the consequences of this self-indulgent philosophy for the Romantic writers and philosophers who engaged with it. The most prominent of these, in relation to her, would be Godwin who withdrew from his family in pursuit of his writing career, and Percy Shelley, who abandoned his previous wife and children in his quest for intellectual beauty.

By splitting her husband into two characters, Mary Shelley registered her perception of a profound contradiction in Percy's personality as well as her intense ambivalence towards the man she loved. Clerval, in whom Victor Frankenstein recognizes "the image of my former self... inquisitive, and anxious to gain experience and instruction", (155-6), posseses a "refined mind" (39), a passionate love of natural beauty, a fascination with languages and literature, and above all a capacity for empathy. (Mellor 74)

Mellor goes on to point out further similarities Clerval shares with Shelley. Some of these include the fact that he is also a poet who wrote romances when he was younger and becomes the positive archetype of the Romantic poet in the novel (Mellor 74). Together, Victor Frankenstein and Henry Clerval form an ideal picture of the Percy Shelley that Mary fell in love with initially, but as the novel progresses it suggests a much darker turn of events for her characters. As Mellor writes, "the murder of Clerval annihilates the most positive dimensions of Percy Shelley in the novel, leaving Victor Frankenstein as the image of all that Mary Shelley most feared in both her husband and in the Romantic project that he served" (Mellor 75). Thus it is Victor's endeavour and his creation of the Creature that finally leads to his own downfall as well as to the death of his loyal friend. Perhaps the eventual consequences and tragic end to Victor's endeavours are Mary's most telling criticism, both of her husband, and of the Romantic Movement.

In many ways, the novel seems to almost anticipate psychoanalytic theories before they had been established. Badalamenti seeks to unravel the novel's origin by trying to examine Mary's possible psychological state at different stages of the novel's development. He makes use of psychoanalysis,[13] and more specifically of the idea of "substitution", stating that:

[Substitution] brings some relief of a cathartic nature but rarely resolves underlying issues. It is a familiar of poets, authors and the gifted in general, most of whom tend to use it unconsciously, just as Mary Shelley did. This paper proposes that Mary Shelley's story was a substitute expression of deeply troubling feelings of hurt arising from Percy Shelley's many violations of their relationship. (Badalamenti 420)

Substitution refers to the psychological defence mechanism defined as follows: "In psychoanalysis, a defence mechanism whereby an unattainable or unacceptable instinctual object or emotion is replaced by one that is more accessible or tolerable, resulting in

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[13] Psychoanalysis: "A theory of mental structure and function, consisting of loosely connected set of concepts and propositions… based on the writings of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), its distinctive character residing in the emphasis that Freud placed on unconscious mental processes and the various mental mechanisms people use to repress them" (Colman 617)

substitute formation" (Colman 742). In effect, he then argues that Mary Shelley's repressed feelings of personal trauma that stem not only from her relationship with Percy Shelley, but also from the death of her mother, her failed relationship with her father, and the death of her first–born, are substituted into the novel, where they find expression within the pages through the characters and events. William Veeder makes a similar point in his essay, "The Negative Oedipus", in which he examines the possible psychoanalytic origins of both Mary and Shelley's work. In the following quote he focuses specifically on Shelley and *Frankenstein*:

> Percy's relationship with Frankenstein is still more intricate. Recognizing that her husband's obsessions with father and self-creation were contributing to the deterioration of their marriage, Mary represents these obsessions (among many others, including her own) in Victor Frankenstein--partly to vent in art the anger which would have further damaged the marriage, and partly to show Percy before it was too late the errors of his ways. (Veeder 366-367)

Veeder thus re-affirms Badalamenti's point that Mary's anger and frustration at Shelley manifests throughout the novel, and finds expression through substitution. Thus it is not only in Victor, but throughout the entire novel, that the connection is made between her life and the story. Veeder argues that one can find traces of her father in the novel, as well as with the themes of abandonment and responsibility connected as closely to him as to Shelley, but the focus remains on the latter. Veeder elaborates on the reason for her investment in Shelley in the following: "Mary abandons herself to Percy with the most orthodox completeness. 'Perhaps [I] will one day have a father, till then be everything to me love' Mary remains deeply concerned with Godwin, but she makes Percy her god, investing 'everything' in him and expecting as much in return" (Veeder 372). The lack of return on this investment and the eventual failure to create the nurturing family home she had always longed for is of course the very basis for the sense of betrayal that would cause her frustrations to develop. If we follow this psychoanalytic perspective on the novel, we find startling evidence that the figure of Victor is based on Percy Shelley. This I will argue through an examination of the relationship between Victor and his father. Veeder notes:

> Critics in recent years have found oedipal tensions in the Victor-Alphonse relationship. They note that the son is hurt by his father's belittling Agrippa; that Victor consequently fears to share with Alphonse his new readings in alchemy and his later experiments in monster-making; that Victor feels exiled from the family when he is sent to Ingolstadt. (Veeder 374)

Victor's sense of betrayal by his father, who in essence only wanted the best for him, could be compared to Shelley and Timothy Shelley's situation. The reason for this is that Shelley felt isolated and abandoned by his father as his work itself was belittled and disregarded. This

ranged from his first attempts at writing romances at an early age, to after his death, when Timothy Shelley barred Mary from publishing a collection of his works. What is more interesting to note in this regard is Mary's portrayal of Shelley's relationship with his father, and his fixation on it. Throughout Shelley's life, one can sense a desire that Shelley wanted to replace his father with himself altogether, thereby removing the necessity to be a son, and the limitations this brought for him. This can be seen both in his earlier works and later in *Prometheus Unbound*, which, Veeder argues, may be read as a response to Mary:

> [Shelley's] determination is proclaimed, quite amazingly, on the title pages of his first two books of verse. Original *Poetry* is authored by Victor (Percy) and Cazire (Elizabeth Shelley); *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson* is "edited" by John Fitzvictor [Percy as well]. Victor and Fitzvictor. What Shelley desired ultimately is not what [The Revolt of] Islam idealized, not that place upon the wheel of time which allows to both son and father the dignity of all roles from birth to death… Shelley desires to become his own father because as Victor-Fitzvictor he can sire himself. How this promises immortality is dramatized in *Prometheus Unbound*. Demogorgon is eternal… he is not threatened by age. This son who kills the father lives forever. Demogorgon who descends as Killer-Son with Jupiter in act 2 emerges by himself as Eternity in act 4. He is no longer "son" because he no longer has a father. (Veeder 379-380)

He thus argues that Shelley's works reveal his unconscious desire to replace his father. The first evidence of this is his early use of the pseudonyms Victor and Fitzvictor, Fitz meaning 'son of'. Thus, Shelley becomes both the son and the father, eliminating the need for his own father. The second example is found in his much later work, *Prometheus Unbound,* where Gorgon literally becomes immortal after has he murdered his father-god Jupiter. Veeder relates this back to *Frankenstein*, commenting that "[a]lthough Frankenstein's desire to become Fitz-victor is achieved partially by giving birth to himself as a monster, he remains a son so long as he, like Demogorgon, has a father. Alphonse [Victor's father] must die" (Veeder 380). And of course, he finally does. The Creature's murderous rampage that kills a great portion of the Frankenstein family eventually does take its toll on the father, and he dies of excessive grief, which is created by the Creature's decimation of his family, a responsibility that in the end lies with Victor. Thus, both the Creature and Victor are responsible for the death of their fathers. The manner of his death serves a purpose as it creates a distance between Alphonse's death and Victor, eliminating the potential guilt and protecting Victor from potential punishment from his own conscience. His patricidal desires thus remain sufficiently insulated not to cause himself any more unnecessary stress or

suffering. The obsession with fathers is a prominent theme that inhabits both Mary and Shelley's life in different ways, and as a result, it is in no way surprising that it makes its way into the novel. This obsession in the novel then becomes a critique of Shelley through Victor, in the form of his own fixation on his relationship with his father. This is clearly an obsession that affected Mary and Shelley's marriage, and was a great source of personal trauma for Percy Shelley, demonstrated by the fact that it is a recurring motif in his own works, *Prometheus Unbound* being one example. What is even more noteworthy is that this almost patricidal need ties in strongly with the Promethean themes.

The last comparison that I wish to make between Victor Frankenstein and Percy Shelley lies at the very core of both the novel, and of the two figures in question. This is the concept of the Promethean figure. Victor Frankenstein became etched into the popular imagination by becoming a cautionary tale about Promethean ambition. Even the novel's pre-text, *The Modern Prometheus,* foreshadows the fact that the 18th century scientist became the torchbearer for the concept, taking it with ease out of the hands of Faust, Prospero, and the many other literary Prometheans who came before him. Indeed, the figure of the Promethean, and what he stood for, was an archetype that was praised and admired during the 18th century, especially among the Romantics. Of these precursors perhaps the most relevant to the Romantic authors was Milton's Satan from *Paradise Lost* (1667). This specific Promethean is quite important to the novel, as this is one of the books that the Creature reads that helps to shape his understanding of the world. And, as his world view is shaped, or arguably distorted, by society, he finds that Satan himself is not necessarily a figure of admiration, but one that he can identify with, as can be seen in the following comment: "Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition; for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me" (M. Shelley 87). In this quote, the monster explains how he finds Satan a more attractive figure to identify with than Adam, and how in many ways his situation is almost worse than that of the famous Arch-Devil, as he still had his fellow devils that were cast out with him, while the Creature was completely alone. The greatest Promethean within *Frankenstein* is not the Creature though, but Victor, who sought to create life and triumph over death, as I have explained earlier. Indeed, one does not need to delve far into *Frankenstein* before the Promethean ambitions of its protagonist become evident, as is demonstrated in the following extract:

> When I found so astonishing a power placed within my hands, I hesitated a long time concerning the manner in which I should employ it. Although I possessed the capacity

of bestowing animation, yet to prepare a frame for the reception of it, with all its intricacies of fibres, muscles, and veins, still remain a work of inconceivable difficulty and labour. I doubted at first whether I should attempt the creation of a being like myself or one of simpler organisation; but my imagination was too much exalted by my first success to permit me to doubt of my ability to give life to an animal as complex and wonderful as man. (M. Shelley 31)

From this it becomes clear that, through his studies, Victor Frankenstein has managed to stumble upon some great secret of creation that he is careful not to share with the listener and readers of his story. As this is the secret for bestowing animation on dead or lifeless objects, it is clearly a power of Promethean dimensions, as it is a power possessed by Prometheus in certain versions of the myth, as well as a power reserved for the god in the Judeo-Christian world view. An example of this Promethean tradition in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* would be when Victor initially discovers the secrets of life and death: "until from the midst of this darkness a sudden light broke in upon me – a light so brilliant and wondrous, yet so simple" (M. Shelley 30). This I would propose as my first link to Percy Shelley as this tradition of the Promethean figure, who is usually on a quest in search of a higher truth of some sort, is very common in his poetry. Usually, the figure would come to the brink of being enlightened, only for this to be retracted, crushing his hopes of fulfilling his journey.[14] Mary Shelley drew upon this tradition, which was widely used by her husband for self-description, to describe the manner in which her protagonist comes upon the secrets of life and death.

Victor's description of the imagination in the above extract is of a force that gives him power and confidence in his own abilities, and also a force that inspires his ambitions and persuades him to go straight to work on a human being, despite the immense difficulty inherent in this task. He tells us, "but my imagination was too much exalted by my first success to permit me to doubt of my ability to give life to an animal as complex and wonderful as man" (M. Shelley 31). He then credits his ability and achievements directly to this force of the imagination he describes, clearly a force that is very real, and it seems if used correctly, potentially quite powerful. In accordance with the strong romantic tradition in which the imagination is seen as a powerful creative force, Shelley went as far as creating his own theory of the imagination which is roughly based on the theory of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, but further adapted and expanded. Coleridge proposed that there were two facets to the imagination:

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[14]See chapter 1 for a full exploration of this tradition.

> Coleridge's notion of the imagination consisted of two specific structures which he identified as the primary and secondary, "This he declared was nothing less than the echo of God's own act of creation… closely allied to this was the 'secondary' artistic form from whence springs the highest manifestations of art, music and poetry". (Moore and Strachan 127 -128)

The primary imagination, it would seem, is the source of creativity and, according to Abrams, is something all humans experience to some extent; the secondary imagination has the power to mould perceived reality and make it into something wondrous through some medium of genius, such as poetry (Abrams 282-283). I would suggest that this mode is not limited merely to the arts, but could be applicable to a genius in any field, including that of science. Shelley not only builds on these concepts, but also changes and adds to them to form his own original notion:

> Shelley meant what Coleridge, following the Germans, had called the understanding and, as its aesthetic counterpart, the fancy; by imagination Shelley meant what Coleridge distinguished as reason in its coadunative aesthetic manifestation, imagination… From the very first paragraph, the "Defence" distinguishes the activities of reason and imagination, indicating that both their processes, analytic versus synthetic, and their objects, abstractions versus sensations, are entirely different (White 322-323)

Shelley thus sharply distinguishes between the effects and eventual products of both 'reason' and the 'imagination', although he reiterates the active importance of both; like Coleridge, he emphasises the importance and potential of the imagination. Thus, for the Romantics, the imagination was not only a thing of idle fancy or an experience wholly disconnected from reality. It had the same potential to exact change and to create as the divine. So the perception of the imagination was transformed from a merely passive form of escape to an active agent with the ability to enact real world change. This can then be seen as having laid much of the groundwork for Shelley's influential essay, "A Defence of Poetry", in 1821, wherein he claimed poets were the unacknowledged legislators of the world. Shelley sets out to do a variety of things in the above-mentioned essay, aside from merely defending poetry's place in society, although this is the primary goal of his essay. He starts the essay off by defining the imagination and showing how it differs from reason:

> According to one mode of regarding those two classes of mental action, which are called reason and imagination, the former may be considered as mind contemplating the relations borne by one thought to another, however produced, and the latter, as mind acting upon those thoughts so as to color them with its own light, and composing from them, as from elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity. (P. Shelley *Prose* 167)

The fact that Shelley starts his discussion by making a distinction between reason and the imagination highlights the importance of these two terms. White points out that this distinction was commonplace within the empirical philosophy of the time: the main difference between the two is that the first consists of knowledge gained through observation, and the second derives from knowledge that is arrived at through the use of logic (White 320). So in a sense, knowledge is perceived as what can physically be observed through the senses, as opposed to what can be discerned through the use of one's mental faculties. Shelley stresses in his essay that reason is incapable of bestowing all knowledge on us as it is limited. On the other hand, the imagination is in fact an important aspect of the pursuit of knowledge. White comments that "Peacock's vision of rational scientific progress was quite simply untenable, and Shelley's purpose in the 'Defence' is to point out just that by defining the limits of reason in scientific matters, and showing how the scientific knowledge of man and the world is dependent on imaginative activity" (White 320). Shelley's argument then starts to make explicit that the use of the imagination should be an important aspect of the scientific process: knowledge itself does not necessarily denote progress, but its utilisation is just as important. A warning about this blindness is present even in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound,* as demonstrated by White:

> We might take time to note that this failure is exemplified by Shelley's Prometheus before he recognizes his error. A figure who traditionally stands for human knowledge and power, he comes to represent in Shelley's poem the Enlightenment's misguided conception of scientific progress… With his initially blind faith in knowledge and skill, Prometheus did not foresee the disastrous consequences of scientific power uninstructed by imagination and feeling. Thus it is not enough that the imagination connects one object with another. That synthetic operation which yields scientific knowledge must be accompanied by another which links the objects of experience with the internal world of moral sensitivity. (White 325)

What White refers to in the above quotation is Shelley's own concern that if left without some form of moral sensitivity, scientific progress can lead to disastrous results, a fact people of the 20th and 21st century are aware of by now, having experienced the horrors of the First and Second World Wars, both of which successfully utilised science as a means of achieving destruction. Shelley would then in so many words suggest that the imagination, and specifically its use through poetry, could serve as such a moral guide.

Prometheus Unbound presents a similar warning to the one that is present in Mary Shelley's novel. This warning is then in effect echoed in Percy Shelley's lyrical drama that was

completed and published a mere two years after *Frankenstein.* Victor's endeavour fails, despite his making obvious use of the imagination in conjunction with his reason. In the following quote, Victor is spurred on by his imagination, demonstrating its power: "My imagination was too much exalted by my first success to permit me to doubt of my ability to give life to an animal as complex and wonderful as man" (M. Shelley 31). In the quote, we see clear evidence of the presence of the imagination as it plays a vital part in the process which gives Victor Frankenstein the confidence that he needs to attempt his project. Clearly, there is a critical difference in the views of Shelley and Mary Shelley on the topic of the imagination. In *The Defence of Poetry,* Shelley creates a perception that, without the imagination, science functions without a moral compass, and despite valid scientific knowledge being present, this can be damaging to progress. Thus, the imagination plays a vital part in securing the success of the process, while also functioning as a moral compass. In *Frankenstein* we see that the warning against Promethean ambition rings true despite all Shelley's necessities being present, thus, Victor's experiments still turn out for the worse, despite the imagination being a core part of the process.

In my initial argument, I set out to show how the two main characters in Frankenstein could come to represent conflicting aspects of Percy Shelley's own personality. In the above section, I have illustrated how Victor Frankenstein represents the scientific and Enlightenment ideals that Percy Shelley subscribed to, and that aside from this there are many key similarities between the two that are intentional. In the following section, I am going to concentrate on the other important figure in *Frankenstein*, the Creature. I will demonstrate how the Creature can be read as a representation of Percy Shelley's more unconventional side, an embodiment of his Romantic and Gothic ideals, and perhaps even a critique of them. Mladen Dolar reads the Creature as an archetype for the Romantic age in his essay, "I Shall be with you on your Wedding Night". He does this first by comparing Victor Frankenstein to another Enlightenment figure, the French constructor of automatons, Jacques de Vaucanson (Dolar 17). Vaucanson was the creator of a very famous flute player, as well as a mechanical duck that could allegedly digest its food, with an artificial stomach that mimicked the real thing. Dolar points out that Vaucanson was at some point probably not far from creating a speaking being, and in an age where the mechanical world view was dominant, this was not so far removed from creating a seemingly living and sentient entity, or so at least it would have seemed to the people of that period. This would also not have seemed too far removed from what the protagonist in *Frankenstein* is doing; essentially

trying to create life from dead matter, be it flesh or metal. Dolar then expands on his point by showing the reader that for Promethean actions like these, there must surely be consequences:

> The emergence of this limit of the Enlightenment is then open to a variety of interpretations. The religious one is closest to hand: Frankenstein, who interferes with God's business, has to be punished for his presumption and his rebellion against the divine order, the presumption and the rebellion of the Enlightenment itself, which has gone too far. (Dolar 18)

One possible interpretation shows how certain strands of Enlightenment thought sought to meddle in divine affairs, as Victor did, and for that a price had be paid. In Victor's case, this price was the lives of his family, and ultimately, his own. Dolar then argues that, like the Romantic movement, the Creature is also a product of the Enlightenment, and in many ways also came into being as a response to it:

> But there is an opposite, romantic interpretation, a positive view of the monster, which not only exhibits a compassion for the inherent goodness of his nature betrayed by society, but also admires the sublimity of his horrible outlook -- he appears against a background of spectacular natural scenery (Mont Blanc, the Arctics), along with its unfathomable wildness, being thus the embodiment of this other nature. Not the one written in mathematical language and that functions like clockwork, a mechanism, but the one that was lost with this mechanical scientific view of nature, the one that became the lost object of scientific endeavour and that can only be present as that effort to represent the unrepresentable, the Kantian definition of the sublime. (Dolar 18-19)

The Creature is clearly a Romantic figure, not only because of the sublimity of its looks, but also because it is a figure that rebels against the Enlightenment on a fundamental level. Not only does its existence cause its creator to doubt and question his previous certainty about his 'art', but his very existence challenges the ambitions of the Enlightenment man, and questions when science pushes the boundaries too far. The Creature might have started out as a creation of science, and certainly one of mathematics, anatomy, biology, and chemistry, all of which played a part in its conception at the hands of Victor. However, the end product was so far removed from Victor's original intention, so far from the perfect being he wished to create, that the Creature's very existence becomes a rebellion against the means of its creation. As for the Creature's portrayal, he is constantly seen within the spectacular and

sublime scenery of natural land: the mountains and forests, both in the frozen landscapes of the Swiss Alps, and later, the North Pole:

> …and above it Mont Blanc rose in awful majesty. I remained in the recesses of the rock, gazing on this wonderful and stupendous scene… Their icy and glittering peaks shone in the sunlight over the clouds. My heart, which was before sorrowful, now swelled with something like joy… as I said this, I suddenly beheld the figure of a man, at some distance, advancing towards me at superhuman speed. (M. Shelley 65)

In the previous quote, we see the Creature within the spectacular natural landscape. This scene is particularly interesting, as it happens just before the climactic confrontation between creator and creation. It also gives us an example of Victor's own fascination with the sublime, and how it is contrasted with the Creature. It is both the Creature's choice of meeting place, as well its description above, that associates it strongly with the sublime. Dolar points out that this signifies the presence of another nature, a wilder and more primal urge not found in the clockwork creations of Vaucanson, and definitely not expected by Victor as he was toiling away in his laboratory. His rebellion against the Enlightenment is then found at the core of his being, as he rejects the mechanical view of nature for one entirely different. The eventual product seems to be much closer to that of Rousseau's Natural man, a creature thoroughly removed from any aspect of the Enlightenment, as James O'Rourke comments:

> The two traits that Rousseau attributes to the human animal in a pre-civilized state are self-preservation and compassion. As he says in the Second Discourse, he finds "two principles prior to reason, one of them interesting us in our own welfare and preservation, and the other exciting a natural repugnance at seeing any other sensible being, and particularly any of our own species, suffer pain or death." These traits can easily be discovered in Mary Shelley's monster. (O'Rourke 549)

Essentially, the Creature did not enter the world with a completely blank slate: the two notions above, of compassion and self-preservation, were already ingrained into its being; these are things that it did not have to learn. O'Rourke goes on to give the example of the Creature's interaction with the De Laceys as the best example of these two instincts in action. First we see the Creature, hungry and confused, taking from the food stores of the De Lacey's to sate its own appetite. Later when it realises it's causing the De Lacey's harm, the Creature stops itself from doing this and chooses to rather live off what the forest can provide it. It says, "I had been accustomed, during the night to steal a part of their store for my own consumption, but when I found that in doing this I inflicted pain on the cottagers, I abstained,

and satisfied myself with berries, nuts, and roots, which I gathered from the neighbouring wood" (M. Shelley 74). In the above quote, the Creature demonstrates these two traits of Rousseau's natural man quite clearly. O'Rourke elaborates on this by commenting that "[t]his is the best argument for the original goodness of the monster, for in this case the two primal Rousseauean instincts collide, and the monster chooses to exercise compassion even as it conflicts with his own self-preservation" (O'Rourke 550). Mary Shelley was well read on Rousseau by the time she wrote her own novel, and no doubt her representation of the Creature in terms of his idea of the natural man is a deliberate portrayal of the Creature in a primitive state. This would have been both to explore its development along the lines of the theory of Rousseau, and to deliberately remove the Creature from the Enlightenment space where it was conceived, thus creating a powerful and very fitting contrast.

The fact that the Creature is based on Rousseau's 'natural man' can clearly be seen in its initial experiences. Starting out innocent and benign, the Creature revels in its initial stages of life, despite suffering from hunger and the cold. These initial obstacles he soon learns to overcome. The first really negative experience for the Creature only occurs when it first comes into contact with humanity; this sets it on a path that would warp and change it into an eventual killer. This is demonstrated throughout the novel, but the following section is significant, as this is the Creature's first encounter with society as well as his first rejection by it:

> [B]ut I had hardly placed my foot within the door, before the children shrieked, and one of the women fainted. The whole village was roused; some fled, some attacked me, until I was grievously bruised by stones and many other kinds of missiles weapons, I escaped to the open country, and fearfully took refuge in a low hovel, quite bare, making a wretched appearance after the palaces I had beheld in the village. (M. Shelley 70-71)

In the above extract, the Creature was still freshly created and ignorant of the world and how it worked. Abandoned by its creator, it wandered through the world and managed to stumble into a village where it was met with horror and hostility. As the above extract demonstrates, the Creature was branded an outcast by society as it did not conform to what society expected of it. In the Creature's case, this would be its physical appearance. It then flees until it finds a home that is suited for it, a place that contrasts with the 'palaces' it beheld in the village. As the novel progresses from this point onwards, the Creature slowly starts to realise that the

reason for its rejection, both by the village people and its creator, is because of its horrendous appearance, as the following extract demonstrates:

> Cursed creator! Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust? God in pity made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image, but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid from its resemblance… Increase of my knowledge only discovered to me more clearly what a wretched outcast I was. I cherished hope, it is true, but it vanished when I beheld my person reflected in the water. (M. Shelley 88)

In the above extract, we find the Creature contemplating its existence, and what consequences its appearance might hold for it. The Creature fears that he is doomed to a life of exile. At the same time though, it cannot help but have a glimmer of hope that if it develops its knowledge enough, it will be able to sway others to see beyond its exterior. Basically, if it educates itself and masters society's tools, such as speech, reading and writing, it would eventually find its place in society. The Creature's own development seems to mirror the development of the very society in which it desires to belong, as Richard Holmes elaborates:

> From this moment the Creature evolves rapidly through all the primitive stages of man. Mary's account is almost anthropological, reminiscent of Bank's account of the Tahitians. First, he learns to use fire, to cook, to read. Then he studies European history and civilization, through the works of Plutarch, Milton and Goethe. Secretly listening to the cottagers in the woods, he learns conceptual ideas such as warfare, slavery, tyranny. His conscience is aroused, and his sense of justice. But above all, he discovers the need for companionship, sympathy and affection. And this is the one thing he cannot find, because he is so monstrously ugly. (Holmes *Age of Wonder* 332)

While the Creature essentially started life as a "tabula rasa" or blank slate, slowly the world around it started to mould its intellect and personality. Through this representation of its development, there is a strong case to be made that it becomes a symbol of the human condition: it is the eventual cruelty it experiences that turns it into a monstrous being capable of murder. This equates closely to the theories of Godwin and Shelley, who believed it is the way society is formed and operates that perpetuates a cycle of violence and misery within humanity. As we know from the novel, it is originally the association of moral evil with the Creature's grotesque appearance that led to its rejection and excommunication from human society. This bears similarities to Percy Shelley's experiences, as he was alienated from society for his "immoral" ideas. His life and death in exile are well documented as are his multiple attempts to break free of it and reach an audience that would accept and admire his

work. His printed works such as *Queen Mab* (1813), *Alastor* (1815), and *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) caused continuous controversy because of the subject matter that these works dared to address, and as a result he was shunned not only by society, as mentioned, but by his family, and most significantly of all, by the literary audiences he repeatedly tried to reach in his lifetime. Disowned by his family and written off by polite society as a whole, he was forced to make a living on its fringes, continually followed by debt and controversy. Just like the Creature in the novel, he was branded an outcast; Shelley represented what British society wanted to repress and ignore at the time. In his case, this was the imminent need for radical social reform, and the clear evidence of the failure of common society, along with the critique of religion.

I have discussed the importance that the figure of Percy Shelley has in relation to both Victor and the Creature, and how his character might have shaped their own development. A common theme in *Frankenstein* is that of doubling as throughout the course of the novel Victor and the Creature serve as doubles to each other. I will argue that Percy Shelley also contributes to this through his influence on them, as he is intricately bound to this doubling, and one can argue that he even takes part in it himself. Mary K. Patterson Thornburg's, *The Monster and the Mirror: Gender and the Sentimental/Gothic Myth in Frankenstein* (1984) documents and defines the phenomenon of the "Sentimental/Gothic myth", not only in *Frankenstein*, but also in other relevant and influential Gothic texts of the era. She describes the duality of the myth as "a desperate struggle to control the unconscious forces of human emotion, to make psychic reality consistent with practical, ostensibly rational, human purposes" (Thornburg 38). This would refer to the seeming struggle that erupted in literature during the Victorian and pre-Victorian periods, when the sentimental sought to uphold a certain societal standard, while the Gothic seemed to haunt this endeavour at every possible turn:

> The Gothic in fiction is concerned with elements that have probably always been regarded as demonic: Chaos, murder, despair, death and the dead. It is also, because of the nature of the divided myth, about those things that the overt side of the myth attempts to deny… The Gothic villain is everything the sentimental hero has rejected; the Gothic dark woman or villainess is everything the sentimental heroine must not be. (Thornburg 39)

Thus, the Gothic would come to represent everything polite society would either deny or ignore, and the Gothic itself would become a mirror image of these sentimental ideals. According to Thornburg:

> Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is one sense an anti-sentimental novel; that is, it is a novel in which the sentimental tradition is consciously invoked so that its flaws may be ironically revealed. The values espoused by the characters in *Frankenstein* are espoused by the sentimental tradition, the characters themselves are drawn according to that convention, and the settings and situations are in a great part typical of the sentimental novel. (Thornburg 63)

By being the protagonist, Victor Frankenstein takes up the role of the sentimental hero within the text, embodying the traits of yet untamed, excessive masculinity as well. As Thornburg comments, "[t]he ideal hero of sentimental literature, the potentially perfect embodiment of masculinity, in general appears as protagonist only before his perfect masculinity is accomplished" (Thornburg 75). His struggle to reach this state generally becomes the main plot of the novel, as it is in *Frankenstein*. The difference is that Victor manages to metaphorically transfer his 'Gothic' qualities to the Creature but he does not expel them, as they continue to haunt him. The Creature then eventually kills Victor's wife, on their wedding night, and this prevents his masculinity from being tamed by the feminine, and this causes his eventual downfall, as he climactically chases the Creature to the North Pole, trying to exact revenge in this hyper-masculine fashion. Failing in his task to become domesticated, Victor thus becomes irredeemable, up until the point where he dies.

One aspect of the "Sentimental/Gothic" myth that I wish to explore in more detail is the phenomenon of the double, a literary tool which makes its appearance throughout literary history, with roots going back to Ancient Greece. It is not until the pre-Victorian period of *Frankenstein's* publication that it was taken up as a literary tool, and then shortly after, popularised during the Victorian period, becoming not only a common, but also an immensely important device in this specific context. The double or the doppelganger is a prominent theme in *Frankenstein,* with far-reaching consequences that I will seek to demonstrate and explore in the following section. There is a case to be made for it being a real aspect of Percy Shelley's own life and personality; if so, it would eventually feed into Mary Shelley's novel as well. If Victor Frankenstein and the Creature are each other's doubles, or doppelgangers, then Percy Shelley in many ways becomes a third figure in this duality, figuratively standing somewhere between the two. The double has been an important phenomenon throughout Western literary history, and both Victorian literature and Victorian-age psychology would eventually incorporate and explore this theme, advancing it. *Frankenstein* seems to anticipate much of Freudian theory decades before it was established and the theory of the double is yet another example of this. In Sigmund Freud's article *The*

Uncanny he addresses this idea of the double within literature, and its striking resemblance to the phenomenon of the double in *Frankenstein:*

> The theme of the 'double' has been very thoroughly treated by Otto Rank (1914). He has gone into the connections which the 'double' has with reflections in mirrors, with shadows, with guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and with the fear of death; but he also lets in a flood of light on the surprising evolution of the idea. For the 'double' was originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an 'energetic denial of the power of death,' as Rank says; and probably the 'immortal' soul was the first 'double' of the body. (Freud 9)

The above extract then shows that the tradition of the double is related to the yearning for immortality. The idea that the concept of the "soul" evolved to combat the fear of death is particularly interesting. Victor's original motive was to "renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption" (M Shelley 32), and eventually banish death completely from the world. His creature initially was a surrogate for this idea, with the hope that this medical advancement would eventually lead to the immortalization of the human race, or at least, an improved replacement for them. What follows though, is the antithesis of this ideal, as the creature becomes hostile and starts to kill Victor's family and friends, eventually leading to the death of his own creator. The creature fulfils exactly the duality of the double as described by Freud, "Such ideas, however, have sprung from the soil of unbounded self-love… But when this stage has been surmounted, the 'double' reverses its aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death" (Freud 9). Having started his narcissistic project of creating a new race of creatures, and having demonstrated a lack a clear responsibility that follows such a project, the creature turns on Frankenstein, thus becoming a 'harbinger of death'. This completes this cycle of the double.

In her book, Thornburg outlines a theory of doubling that sets out to define not only *Frankenstein*, but many other Gothic novels of the day. As I suggested above, it becomes clear that this theory of doubling is not only applicable to Mary's novel, but also to Percy Shelley's own life, as he shows strong traits of what would be considered both a Gothic villain and a sentimental hero. The theme of doubling has a variety of functions, both within *Frankenstein* and within the greater Shelley legend. For instance, it makes explicit the tension within the rational mind and reveals what it excludes, what we would today perhaps regard as

the "unconscious" (as this would be described by Freud a few decades later). In this way, the novel seems to anticipate Freudian theory, and I will try and demonstrate how it anticipates the rise to popularity that the theme of doubling would undergo in the Victorian age in novels such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), to name but a few. Thornburg describes two methods of doubling:

> A distinction is sometimes made between two types or modes of doppelganger, the Double by Duplication and the Double by Division…. Both modes of doubling seem to operate in the literary use of this concept; for example, Jekyll and Hyde would appear to be Double by Division, having both originated in the undivided character of Jekyll, whereas Poe's narrator and Wilson are apparently Doubles by Duplication, having encountered each other for the first time at school and having been born. (Thornburg 56)

In my reading of the novel, I would suggest that the situation found in it would coincide with Double by Division. Even though the Creature in its final form is a completely separate creation from Victor, the Creature ultimately stems from Victor, and it becomes his Gothic, darker, socially unacceptable side made manifest and that is set loose upon the world and causes havoc. The Creature also embodies everything that its creator is not, thus this contrast also sets up this division. The Creature is not born, and is also not originally autonomous from Victor. It is reliant on its creator, and only after it is abandoned is it forced to start fending for itself and to search for its own identity. It is also definitely not a duplicate of its creator, even though this was perhaps close to Victor's original plans. Victor originally set out to create a perfect creature, which he would be proud to display, and that would be bound to him and hail him as its creator: "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me" (M. Shelley 32). His final creation, on the other hand, ends up being the opposite of what he wished to create, a horrid monstrosity, instead of a new species that improves upon humanity itself. As a result, the Creature is an almost perfect Gothic contrast to the Enlightenment and sentimental values that initially drove his endeavour. Similarly to Jekyll and Hyde then, we have two figures in the story, one that upholds the traditional sentimental values, both in conduct and action, and the other which is a manifestation of the Gothic, and embodies all the emotions, actions, thoughts and themes the other half would not even dare to dream. Thornburg then goes on to discuss what she sees as the primary purpose of this specific form of doubling:

[T]he concept seems in general to represent division, at least as it functions symbolically in Gothic literature, as it is usually shown by conflicting actions motives, or natures exhibited by the set of doubles, implying conflicts in the original character that can be expressed only by a division of that character into two or more personae… [It] seems to represent an attempt to explain psychological division within an individual as perceived by others or even by that individual. (Thornburg 56)

I propose two possible readings where the significance of the above quotation would come into play. The first is the possibility that Victor consciously sets out to create this beautiful and almost ideal creature that would call him master, but unconsciously pours all his own repressed and unacceptable characteristics into it, perhaps as a way of ridding himself of his unacceptable Gothic side. The result is a creature whose external appearance dooms him to become a "romantic rebel", one whose very being seems to contradict the Enlightenment ideals and motivations behind his creation. This would at least be a potential psychological profile of Victor's unconscious motives when creating the Creature and, considering the novels frequent allusions to early ideas of the unconscious, and other psychological terms, this is perhaps not such a strange possibility as at first it might seem. The second reading relates to Percy Shelley, and this is where I would argue that the third figure in this traditional duality comes into play.

This is the figure of the double in dreams and visions. It was not an uncommon occurrence during this period for individuals, and specifically artists and poets, to be visited by their doubles in dreams, or for others to spot their doubles even during waking life. There are many examples of this happening, especially among the Shelley circle. Perhaps one of the more famous examples of these is when Jane Williams 'saw' Percy Shelley's double shortly before his death. According to Thornburg, the romantic artists of this period gave much credit to these phenomena and regarded them as part of the artistic process when they occurred (Thornburg 57). Mary Shelley's own inspiration for *Frankenstein* stemmed from this process of dreams and visions, as the famous Introduction to the 1831 third edition of the novel points out (M. Shelley 169). Thornburg makes the point that Mary Shelley's very conception of *Frankenstein* is itself a form of doubling in this regard (Thornburg 57). The significance of this process is explained in the following extract from her book:

[E]very figure in a dream is, in a sense, a double of the dreamer; and above all that idea of the double, once introduced to the artistic consciousness of the time, was bound to reinforce itself, become more available as it became more familiar. (Thornburg 57)

The figures within the unconscious are expressed within authors' dreams and fantasies. One could argue that the figure of Percy Shelley becomes a double in its own right, as it is reflected in the initial dream of Mary Shelley, and eventually transposed into her novel, thus becoming doubled by Victor and the Creature. I would also argue that unlike Victor and the Creature's relation to each other, his relation to them could be regarded as Double by Duplication, as they are clearly separate entities that spring from Mary's mind, and are thus detached from him. This is a point that will be addressed again in Chapter 3 when I examine Ackroyd's historiographical novel, *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein.* In the novel, Shelley meets Victor, and the above event is portrayed almost to the letter as the two mirror each other, thus conforming to the above definition. That aside, for every aspect shown so far which demonstrates Victor and the Creature mirroring each other, there is the added complication of Shelley's figure in them both. Thornburg uses an example from her own work to make this point:

> A well-known example of the metaphor's use is the appearance, in Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound', of phantasms and spirits that are explained to Prometheus by The Earth as "the shadows of all forms that think and live… Dreams and the light imaginings of men" (I, lines 198, 200). The double, as Shelley describes it here, may either be "terrible" or "sublime"; it may be the shade of a living person or a supernatural being, or it may be an imagined or idealized form. Shelley's conception of the double is surely related to his own dividedness, his pursuit, as Christopher Small in *Ariel Like a Harpy* argues it, of the Ariel ideal, while he is in turn pursued by his Caliban shadow. (Thornburg 57)

Percy Shelley then becomes the mirror for the two main characters in *Frankenstein*. Not only is he the stimulus that initially results in their being conceived, but there is ample evidence to suggest that they have been entirely moulded around him. As they mirror each other as doubles, Shelley stands on the side mirroring both again in turn. Whatever the initial reason Mary had for working Percy Shelley into her text, be it to try and communicate her fears and frustrations to him, or subconsciously, as a form of expression, his presence remains undeniable, and moves through the story with Victor and his creation every step of the way. Thus in a way, *Frankenstein* becomes a historiographical novel, integrating both biography and history concealed within the fiction. Chapter 3 deals specifically with this genre, and demonstrates how modern interpretations have identified the presence of Percy Shelley, both within *Frankenstein,* and in many other contemporary novels.

Chapter 3: Peter Ackroyd and the Contemporary Manifestation of Shelley

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In this chapter, I will be exploring the contemporary manifestations of the figure of Percy Shelley in selected recent literature. Shelley has emerged, either as a biographical or a fictional character, or a combination of the two, in a number of recent texts, and this chapter will examine this with a particular focus on Peter Ackroyd's recent novel, *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* (2009). I will also refer to Richard Holmes's *To The Tempest Given* (2000)*,* which is a radio play based on the events that took place in the last few weeks of Shelley's life. I suggest that Peter Ackroyd's novel offers an important contemporary version of Shelley, as it represents not only a retelling of Mary Shelley's original novel, but also a continued portrayal of the Shelley myth, as well as a new interpretation of many of the key ideas of Romanticism. Peter Ackroyd accomplishes this by including the fictional character, Victor Frankenstein, and the historical person of Shelley, in one novel. In *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein,* we find Victor heading to England to pursue his studies and his ambitions to raise life from the dead. While he is at Oxford he meets Shelley, and they quickly become friends. In the course of the novel, the protagonist goes on to meet some of the most influential Romantics, thinkers and other important figures of the day, including Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, Lord Byron, John William Polidori, William Godwin, Percy Shelley and even the original novel's author herself, Mary Shelley. In line with the plot of the original novel, it at first appears that Victor will be successful in his endeavours, and his creation soon comes to life, only to begin tormenting its creator. In its attempts to exact its revenge on its creator, it goes on a killing spree, slaughtering many innocent people in the process. By the end of the novel, and with the assistance of an inquisitive William Polidori, a historical figure, Lord Byron's physician, the reader discovers that Victor is in reality an unreliable narrator, as both his success and the resulting creature are merely mental delusions; it appears that Victor himself, or at least some hidden aspect of his personality, is responsible for the deaths that occur throughout the novel, and not some physical manifestation of his ambition as in the original novel by Mary Shelley.

Ackroyd's novel includes the key elements of the original novel: a Promethean over-reacher in the form of the narrator and protagonist, an intelligent and introspective creature that is raised from the dead to mirror and haunt its creator, and a rich sense of Gothic and Romantic influences. *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein,* however, is a work of historical metafiction, which borrows characters both from Mary Shelley's original novel, *Frankenstein*, as well as from her social world and places them within the same fictional space. Linda Hutcheon defines the term "historiographical metafiction" as follows:

> The term postmodernism, when used in fiction, should, by analogy, best be reserved to describe fiction that is at once metafictional *and* historical in its echoes of the texts and contexts of the past. In order to distinguish this paradoxical beast from traditional historical fiction, I would like to label it 'historiographic metafiction.' (Hutcheon 3).

The genre of historiographical metafiction is one that Ackroyd has spent most of his career writing and developing. According to Susana Onega, "Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* (1985) and *Chatterton* (1987) may be described as accomplished examples of historiographic metafiction, the kind of self-conscious, heavily parodic and experimental historical novels that, according to Linda Hutcheon, are the only kind of fiction that fulfils the contradictory poetics of postmodernism" (Onega 1). One example of this contradictory poetics is the post-modern idea that history and biography are subjective instead of objective, and are thus, another type of fiction. What is useful about the historiographic metafictional approach is that it can go much further than traditional archival research ever could. The reworking of a historical or fictional text can open it up to address philosophical problems through fiction. Onega then goes on to elaborate on the important purpose of this specific genre, a point that Hutcheon herself raises as well: "For Hutcheon, whereas metafiction is a late modernist phenomenon, the combination of metafiction and history produces a new effect: the levelling of history and literature to the same status of human construct, evincing a similar linguistic nature" (Onega 1). Thus, through this medium, history and fiction are both acknowledged as mere subjective creations. In Onega's view, Ackroyd's use of this narrative tool is evident in most of his fictional and biographical writings, especially in the two novels mentioned above, and although her study was published before Ackroyd's latest novel, it remains just as relevant as Ackroyd remains faithful to his use of historiographical metafiction, and one could argue that he develops his use of this even further. *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* then continues with this literary tradition and further expands upon its use. Petr Chalupský makes a similar point: "Ackroyd's variation of this genre employs, apart from the eponymous thematisation of the writing process itself, many of the typical postmodernist

narrative techniques such as intertextuality, generic hybridity, blurring of the borderline between fiction and historiography by mixing fictitious characters and events with real ones, and open or otherwise inconclusive endings" (Chalupský, 20). Aside from his obvious use of historiographic metafiction, Ackroyd also makes use of a variety of other postmodern narrative techniques, essentially grounding the novel firmly within the postmodern tradition. I will suggest that Ackroyd uses these techniques and the nature of metafictional biography to explore the ideas expressed in the original *Frankenstein* that are still relevant to contemporary society.

Antonio Gonzalez raises another important point regarding Ackroyd's views on his writings: "one should bear in mind that for Ackroyd the barrier of genre is a fallacy, a kind of deceitful 'truth universally acknowledged' which has nothing to do with the real meaning and projection of literary text" (Gonzalez 218). A similar point arises in Susanna Onega's interview with Peter Ackroyd in 1995. When questioned about how he views the different genres in which he writes (mainly poetry, fiction and biography), he responded, "I don't think of biographies and fictions as being separate activities. For me, they are part of the same undertaking" (Onega and Ackroyd 6). Ackroyd has a similar view of history, as the following quote demonstrates:

> Ackroyd's narrative permanently balances between imaginary stories and reality, or, more precisely, between fiction and historically-proven facts, since he understands history as an immense inter-textual web and as such it can be traced and partially restored through its miscellaneous written records. Pastiche, parody and intertextuality thus represent crucial devices of his narrative repertory. (Chalupsky 21)

Thus, for Ackroyd, biography and history need not necessarily be completely accurate, as the most arduously recorded historical text is in the end merely a subjective account, and even that aside, its true value is not necessarily to be found in its supposed accuracy. Ackroyd shows this by going as far as to deliberately alter historical facts in many of his works in order to illustrate a philosophical, rather than a historical, "truth". Chalupsky points out that Ackroyd intertwines a variety of genres in *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*, of which the most prominent are those of crime, the occult, mystery and the Gothic (Chalupsky 23). His use of the Gothic is especially clear: "*The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein,* represents yet a different attempt at exploiting the genre since it offers an imaginative rendering of a Gothic myth that combines a highly subjective confession with a contemporary

historiographic perspective" (Chalupsky 24). In this chapter, I will focus specifically on this historiographic metafictional perspective, and Ackroyd's use of this throughout the novel, especially with regard to the figure of Shelley.

The importance of the figure of Percy Shelley's within the novel is emphasized right from the start as both the reader and Victor are introduced to Shelley, known by his middle name, Bysshe. This happens as early as page three in the novel, when they meet at their shared college at Oxford. Victor explains that it "was at Oxford that I first met Bysshe. We both arrived at our college on the same day" (Ackroyd 3). The narrator, Victor, then proceeds to describe their first meeting, and it is quite striking that they already share very similar interests, as we find out in their first exchange. Victor notes, "Of course he noticed my accent at once. 'You admire the German tales of terror?' 'I do. But I am not German. I am by birth Genevese' 'The nurse of liberty! Of Rousseau and Voltaire! Why, [Victor], have you come to the home of tyranny and oppression?'"(Ackroyd 3). Here we find that Ackroyd's Victor Frankenstein also has a love for Gothic tales, just like the original Shelley, and the quote also hints at the fact that Victor will soon be enticed by Bysshe's radicalism. Indeed, it is not until after his creature's creation that his zest for the political and his belief in the positive potential of human society begins to fade. Another point of particular interest is the fact that Ackroyd refashions Geneva from an established conservative polity into a centre for radical thought and thinkers. Geneva's own history is complex as it is perhaps a combination of the two. It was at one point a centre for the Reformation, but at the same time it spawned its own conservative elements, as Thornburg also notes:

> Geneva, [was] traditionally associated with the Reformation and with republican enlightenment, but described by Madame de Staël's biographer, J. Christopher Herold, as a "society… tightly closed" whose government had "by the eighteenth century fallen into the hands of a jealous oligarchy" and where a "rigid class system" and stiff necked Puritan morality dominated its citizens' lives. (Thornburg 72)

Geneva as a society reflected a combination of radical and conservative elements. Jean Jacques Rousseau, a prominent philosopher and radical thinker of that time, especially noted for his influence on the French revolution, was born in Geneva and, as one can see in the preface of his famous essay *Discourse on Inequality* (1755), that his reverence for his country of birth did not fade. At the same time, he wished to address the many societal issues that concerned him:

I should have wished to be born in a country in which the interest of the Sovereign and that of the people must be single and identical; to the end that all the movements of the machine might tend always to the general happiness. And as this could not be the case, unless the Sovereign and the people were one and the same person, it follows that I should have wished to be born under a democratic government, wisely tempered. (Rousseau 1)

In the rest of the Preface addressed to the lords of Geneva, he goes on to highlight the many social advantages that the Republic of Geneva has, while subtly preparing them for his discourse which is to follow. This further reveals both the radical and conservative elements that were inherent in this society at the time. Traces of the traditional conservative status of Geneva can even be found in *Frankenstein*, embodied in the character of Victor's father. Victor tells us that, "My ancestors had been for many years counsellors and syndics; and my father had filled several public situations with honour and reputation" (M. Shelley 17-18). This points towards a traditional and conservative society, and is in contrast to the portrayal of Geneva found in *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*. In the eyes of the utterly repressed Shelley, the Genevese might have seemed much less restricted than the British populace during the same period. Ackroyd highlights the apparent difference between 19th century Britain and the country of Victor's origins, or at least the character Bysshe's perception of this difference: "I [Victor] had not heard such sentiments before, having been accustomed to think of England as a source of political freedoms, and Bysshe laughed at my surprise. 'You have not lived among us for long, I take it?' (Ackroyd 3). I suggest that the above section does two things. The first is to assist in introducing Shelley's character by showing us his well-known disdain for the role of government in his day, and secondly, to introduce the politically radical side of his character. This is an important aspect of his character in the novel, as it is one of the major biographical elements that Ackroyd exploits. The second function of this section is to introduce yet another apparent parallel between this Shelley and Victor in the novel. Here Victor develops his own political radicalism, which he initially adopts from Shelley. This is opposed to the original Victor Frankenstein, who has little time for politics or any other distractions for that matter, commenting that "natural philosophy, and particularly chemistry, in the most comprehensive sense of the term, became nearly my sole occupation" (M. Shelley 29). This remains true both before and after the creation of his Creature, as after he formed it and it begins to haunt him; its destruction quickly becomes his next preoccupation. In Ackroyd's novel, Victor seems to mirror Shelley's qualities more or

less for the first half of the novel, until his primarily optimistic view is abandoned for a more pessimistic one shortly after the creation of his creature. He then slowly starts to suffer under the stress which that event causes him, as I will discuss later.

Many of Shelley's other personal habits that Ackroyd also attributes to his Victor cannot be found within Mary Shelley's original novel. Some examples of these would include his use of laudanum (Ackroyd 139), a form of opium that was quite commonly used by many Romantics, and a habit that also becomes progressively worse as the novel progresses. One could argue this was also a habit that increased his own personal instability, as he couples drug use with an already unstable mind. Another example that is also quite striking is his constructing a personal laboratory in his Oxford chambers, which bears a striking resemblance to the infamous laboratory that Shelley constructed within his Oxford chamber. In the following quote, Victor notes Shelley's living quarters for the first time: "I observed the carpet had already been stained and scorched on several places, which instinctively I ascribed to scientific experiments. He noticed my glance and laughed… 'Sal ammoniac,' he said. 'Come see my laboratory'" (Ackroyd 5). The rather obvious suggestion found in this scene is that Victor was inspired and influenced by Shelley, and that Shelley was inadvertently influencing Victor. I would suggest that Ackroyd must have been aware of some of the striking similarities that Victor shares with the biographical Percy Shelley, as I have demonstrated in my earlier chapters, and here he is using his own fiction to draw attention to this fact. He stays true to his own literary tradition of historiographical meta-fiction, and in combination with his own biographical knowledge, he plays with these similarities within the confines of his own created history.

The novel often uses the two figures to draw similarities and contrasts not unlike those drawn by Mary Shelley in the original text between Victor and the Creature. There are many similarities between the two characters, as discussed in the previous paragraph, and they can be seen as mirror images of each other in certain respects. This starts to change, building up to the point where Victor successfully creates the Creature, and then there is a particularly strong shift. Shortly hereafter, his personality starts to darken, which creates a sharp contrast between him and Shelley. The first and most striking example of this is the contrast which becomes apparent when Victor's work is juxtaposed with Harriet's pregnancy. This is demonstrated in the following quote when Shelley comments, with reference to his pregnant

wife, that "'she is well. She is thriving.' He laughed. 'She is swelling in the most peculiar manner.' 'Do you mean -?' He nodded. 'Very well done, Bysshe!' I am not the one to be congratulated. It is the woman who carries the burden. But I must confess to some pride in creating life'" (Ackroyd 115). This scene takes place shortly after Victor has experienced his first real success in his experiments, and the image of natural life, contrasted with his own experiments with the dead, creates a powerful contrast between the two characters. The fact that Shelley refers to Harriet's pregnancy as him 'creating life' foregrounds this contrast between their creations. This point is further emphasized at a slightly later stage after Victor has successfully created the Creature and Harriet has given birth to Shelley's first child. Victor comments, "She had more vitality and assurance than I remembered, assisted no doubt by the infant she was carrying in her arms. 'This is Eliza,' she said. 'Eliza Ianthe.' 'Not the first of my productions, Victor, but the finest.' There was so wide a difference between Bysshe's creation and my own, that I felt like weeping" (Ackroyd 139). In the above quote, we find Victor becoming emotional when he first sees Shelley's new-born daughter. It is not the sentimentality of the moment that provokes this response, but rather the contrast present in this scene. At this point, both Victor and Shelley have brought life into the world, Shelley in the form of his daughter and Victor in the form of the Creature. Here Ackroyd is playing with the contrast between their two creations quite explicitly, and it is clear that Victor feels remorseful about his own creation. Shelley's happiness forms a further contrast to Victor's excessive emotional response to the idea of his own creation. This contrast between life and death, between natural birth and his own creation, is both explicit and obvious. Shelley refers to his daughter as one of his 'productions', immediately comparing her to his poetry, thus raising her to the level of one of the products of his genius. This represents yet another layer of success that is contrasted to Victor's ultimate failure, as his own attempt to produce a product of genius was a complete failure. This is significant in relation to Victor's own quest to become a 'man of genius', as will be explored later. Ackroyd, I believe, derived a concrete theme from Shelley's life and from the original novel: the joys and sorrows of childbirth are contrasted in his own novel with the unnatural birth of Victor's own apparent 'child'. As I have shown in my previous chapters, several critics suggest that Mary Shelley's preoccupation with maternity and childbearing in *Frankenstein* could stem from her husband's own lack of support, both while she was pregnant and after the deaths of her children, not to mention his complete abandonment of the children he initially had with Harriet.

Here the first parallel with Richard Holmes's *To the Tempest Given* becomes apparent. As this is a biographical play based on the last few days of Shelley's life, it documents not only the strange events that led up to his death, but also the poverty and squalor in which Shelley, his wife, and their travelling party lived during this final period at Casa Magni. In the following quote from the play, we have the testimony of Edward Williams, where Shelley apparently sees the ghost of a child playing among the waves:

> Williams: After tea while walking with Shelley on the terrace and observing the effect of moonlight on the waters, he complained of being unusually nervous, and stopping short he grasped me violently by the arm and stared steadily on the white surf… He recovered after some time, and declared that he saw, as plainly as then he saw me, a naked child rise from the sea, clap its hands as if in joy and smiling at him. (Holmes *Sidetracks* 288)

In the play itself, Holmes continues to analyse Williams's account, and draws some possible conclusions as to what could have contributed to such a vision by the poet. He states, "Williams put the vision itself down to Shelley's ever wandering and lively imagination; to which one might add a dose of laudanum" (Holmes *Sidetracks* 288). This might have been what lay at the root of the vision, though Holmes provides a variety of other possibilities. The first of these that he puts forward is the recent death of Allegra, Claire Clairmont's child with Lord Byron, a death which Shelley himself felt deeply guilty about as he had left the child in the care of Byron, who had neglected the child and shirked the responsibility of raising her himself. She eventually died from typhus fever. Holmes goes on to point out that several of Shelley's own children could also have been the source of such hauntings:

> As Byron said pointedly, Shelley's manner of life killed off children very effectively. His first child by Mary had died after a pre-mature birth; his little daughter Clara had died from travel sickness in Venice; his favourite son, little Willmouse, had died of fever in Rome. His surviving son was frail, and Mary was again suffering from an uncomfortable pregnancy… (Holmes *Sidetracks* 288-289)

Shelley's neglect and the demanding lifestyle he enforced both on Mary, while she was pregnant, as well as the young and often sickly surviving children, took its toll on his family. Up until this point, Shelley and Mary had lost three children, with another soon to follow. The play depicts yet another traumatizing miscarriage, which not only kills the foetus, but almost costs Mary her own life. The image of the ghostly child calling from the waves, could have been the embodiment of any of the children beckoning to Shelley, or perhaps all of them

embodied in this one, seemingly calling him into the sea, a manifestation of his own guilt and sadness and also explicitly a feature of the uncanny. Freud defines the circumstances needed for the uncanny to arise in real life as the following:

> An uncanny experience occurs either when infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed. Finally, we must not let our predilection for smooth solutions and lucid exposition blind us to the fact that these two classes of uncanny experience are not always sharply distinguishable. (Freud 17)

I suggest that the encounters, recorded in *To The Tempest Given,* with the child and with the figure of Shelley's own double can be read as manifestations of the presence of the uncanny in Shelley's own life. The child could be interpreted as a manifestation of the guilt of the many children under his care that had died due to the lack of necessary care and attention. Shelley partly blamed himself for the deaths of Allegra, the child of Byron and Claire Clairmont, and of his own children who had suffered and died due to his lifestyle. The play makes Shelley's guilt in regards to both Allegra and the other children very clear:

> He himself felt bitterly guilty at ever letting Byron take custody of the child… but there were other children Shelley might have been haunted by, in connection to his wife. As Byron said pointedly, Shelley's manner of life killed of children very effectively. His first child by Mary died after a premature birth; his little daughter Clara had died from travel sickness in Venice; his favourite son, little Willmouse, had died of fever in Rome. (Holmes *Sidetracks* 288)

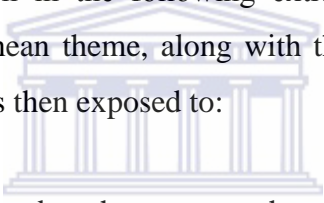His confrontation with his own double at a later stage in the radio play is another example of this:

> Mary: He had seen the figure of himself, which met him as he walked on the terrace, and said to him – How long do you mean to be content?

> Holmes: 'How long do you mean to be content?' Shelley had now seen his own double, his doppelganger, challenging him about what he would do at Casa Magni. Shelley knew that in many magical and occult traditions, the meeting of one's double was an omen of imminent death. (Holmes *Sidetracks* 309)

This occurrence illustrates Shelley's unconscious compulsion towards death or Thanatos. For Freud, the uncanny manifests in response to a combination of repressed infantile complexes and primitive beliefs. Shelley takes these apparitions at face value, and lets them actively

influence both his actions and decision making. At the same time, this vision also foreshadowed his impending death shortly after. I will demonstrate that this was probably equally likely to be a case of self-fulfilling prophecy, instead of any type of actual supernatural occurrence.

The novel deals explicitly with the theme of the imagination, a key idea for the first generation of Romantics, notably for Coleridge who devised a theory of the imagination. Second generation Romantics were also concerned with this theme, and Shelley set out to formulate his own theory on the subject, as I have discussed in previous chapters. *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* contains numerous references to this key theme throughout the novel. There are two specific scenes in the novel where I find it to be the most striking. As with Shelley himself, the theme's importance is highlighted by the fact that it is introduced early in the novel, and it is also introduced to us through Shelley's explanation to Ackroyd's Victor. It can be seen in the following extract, where Bysshe addresses the protagonist, showing the Promethean theme, along with the Shelleyan fascination with the imagination. This is what Victor is then exposed to:

> I had thought [Bysshe] all fire, but there were other elements in his constitution –
> Fluent, pliant, fertile, like the water around us. On these expeditions he would often
> declaim to me the poetry of Coleridge on the powers of the imagination, "The poet
> dreams of that which the scientist deems impossible," he told me. "Once it is
> envisaged, then it is made true." He knelt down to examine a small flower, the name
> of which I did not know. "It is magnificent to aspire beyond the reach of common
> man." (Ackroyd 6)

Here Shelley is specifically invoking Coleridge's idea of the imagination. He is also playing with the Promethean ideals of reaching above natural man's capabilities and seeking power and knowledge that would otherwise be inaccessible. This is illustrated in the above extract when Shelley hints at the transcendent and almost forbidden powers of poetry, and just after this, glorifies this attempt to reach beyond the abilities of the everyday. This relates to what I proposed in my first chapter regarding Shelley, that through his poetry he aspires to become, and to some degree succeeds in becoming, a Promethean figure in his own right. In this way, Victor's laboratory can be seen as a metaphor for Shelley's writing table, perhaps, as both have uses that aspire towards similar Promethean goals. This is another example of the doubling of the two figures, which I will discuss in more detail at a later stage. It is in this

context that I have proposed the idea of the Promethean imagination, and it is exactly that which is being invoked in the above paragraph. The above extract from *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* I believe echoes a similar, if not identical, sentiment as Shelley in this section clearly wishes to transcend the commonplace through poetry. He states that with the power of the imagination one can go much further than the scientist would ever dream is possible. This is exactly what Victor Frankenstein aspires to (and manages to) achieve in both the original text, and to some degree, in Ackroyd's retelling. To aspire to such heights could cause one to tread on forbidden ground that is traditionally reserved for the divine. This point is further emphasized by the discussion of alchemists in the following few lines where they are compared to poets, "Who knows? Who can tell? The great poets of the past were philosophers or alchemists. Or magicians. They cast off the vesture of the body, and in their pursuits, became pure spirit" (Ackroyd 6). The imagery used in this line invokes one of the oldest archetypes of the Promethean over-reacher, that of the medieval alchemist, who sold his soul for forbidden knowledge. This archetype was made famous by the character Faust, "the subject of the great dramas of Marlowe and Goethe, [who] was a wandering conjurer, who lived in Germany about 1488-1541" (Harvey 294). Faust was a figure the Romantics would also have been well acquainted with, and he remains one of the best-known archetypes of the Promethean figure. I suggest that it is the imagination, as discussed in the above extract, which serves as a driving force for Victor's success; it is both the motivation and the means that lead him to his ultimate goal of creating life.

In these early stages of the story, it is initially Shelley who seems to plant these Promethean seeds in Victor's mind. The result of Shelley's influence upon Victor at this stage, and later on, cannot be denied. In fact, it could be argued that without Shelley's introduction to Coleridge and the imagination at this early stage, Victor would never have had cause to attend the scene that follows. I propose that the laboratory of the scientist becomes a metaphor for the writing table of the poet in the above context as they both aspire to the same goal. Shelley and Victor, both Promethean figures in Ackroyd's text, differ only in the mode with which they convey and manipulate their knowledge, one being a scientist and the other a poet. My suggestion is that Ackroyd explicitly links the process of scientific experimentation to that of writing through his own novel, and his own writing places the practices of both Victor and Shelley on an equal footing. Thus, he accords just as much power and influence to the poet's writing as a force for experimentation and agency in the world as he does to the scientist.

This then leads us to the question of primacy of textuality, in the given text. Ackroyd has himself stated in interviews that he does not readily distinguish between genres, and sees his works of fiction and biography as essentially falling into the same category. This becomes clear in his treatment of these genres as his fiction is often full of historical or semi-historical events, and he has been known to work fictional events into his biographies as well, such as with his award winning biography, *Dickens* (1990), which blurs the lines of genre even more. What this would then seem to suggest is that Ackroyd is trying to make a case for the power and agency of the writer by returning his readers to a time when poets like Shelley argued that the poet should actually be a significant figure in society, and should be viewed as equal to the more modern figure of the scientist, in respect of both influence and agency. Ackroyd's own experiment starts to unfold as we delve deeper into his novel. Like Victor, Ackroyd is trying to bring these characters back to life in his own way by combining fiction and biography to open up another world of textual possibilities.

In the second section from *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* which deals with the imagination, Victor attends a lecture on poetry by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In this section, he specifically relays his own theories to both the protagonist and to the reader. A similar scene appears in the original novel, where Frankenstein attends a lecture by Professor Waldman, and is seemingly inspired to pursue his own studies and ambitions with renewed vigour:

> "The ancient teachers of this science," said [Waldman], "promised impossibilities, and performed nothing. The modern masters promise very little; they know that metals cannot be transmuted, and that the elixir of life is a chimera. But these philosophers, whose hands seem only made to dabble in dirt, and their eyes to pour over the microscope or crucible, have indeed performed miracles"… Thus ended a memorable day to me; it decided my future destiny. (M. Shelley 27-28)

In the above quote, Victor is for the first time strongly influenced by a specific figure and his ideas; these inspire him so much that they influence the direction of his studies, and leave a lasting impression that will eventually lead to the creation of the Creature. Professor Waldman in *Frankenstein* strongly embodies the figure of the Enlightenment man, the man of science, and as a result, contributes to Victor's attaining his goal for his project. He also manages to contribute to Victor's identity as he aspires to become more like the figure he

looks up to. This scene also serves as a coming-of-age ritual for the young scientist as it disabuses him of his attachment to the alchemists of old, and attracts him to those with more modern materialist views such as his own – he claims this as his primary field of work. A scene from *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* seems to echo this lecture in the original novel, but Professor Waldman is supplanted by the figure of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a figure synonymous with Romanticism, as lecturer. In this section, there are some striking parallels between the work of the poet and that of Victor himself, who seems greatly affected by the lecture:

> He spoke of language possessing an organic rather than a mechanical form; he extolled its active agency, as an instrument of the imagination, and declared that "Man creates the world in which he lives". I noted down one sentiment in particular that interested me immensely. "Newton," he said, "claimed that his theories were created by experiment and observation. Not so. They were created by his mind and imagination." Coleridge no longer seemed weary, and in the fire of his utterance his countenance had become ennobled; he spoke very freely, with sibilance that was strangely appealing, and he used his gestures to great effect. "Under the impress of the imagination," he went on, "Nature is instinct with passion and with change. It is altered – it is moved – by human perception." (Ackroyd 73-74)

The first line of the quote refers to Coleridge's own development during the period when he formed his theory and rejected David Hume's more mechanical view of the mind. This suggests his debt to the theories of the German philosopher, Emmanuel Kant. Before examining Coleridge's theory of the imagination, which is obviously crucial to the above extract, the thesis will examine the strange claims regarding the above extract which Ackroyd's Coleridge goes into great detail to make. He states that Newton was wrong, that theories are not only created by experiment and observation, but are also shaped by the mind and the imagination. I suggest that in the above extract, Ackroyd is specifically using the lecture by Coleridge to correct the overly materialistic view of the past, and interject a more modern perception. Thus where in *Frankenstein* Waldman is 'correcting' the influence of magic and alchemy on Victor, here Ackroyd is 'correcting' the views that extreme materialism and the mechanical worldview have left upon our post-Enlightenment societies, and he is doing this in light of new information we now have at our disposal, thanks to the discoveries and advances of the 20th and 21st centuries. One example is Einstein's theory of relativity, which, since its conception, has become a cornerstone of modern physics, and has forever shaped the way we see our universe. Bertrand Russell explains that, "It is a curious fact – of which relativity is not the only illustration – that, as reasoning improves, its claims to the power of proving facts grows less and less" (Russell 224). This is one of many

philosophical consequences of the theory of relativity; another is that, "What we know about the physical world, I repeat, is much more abstract than was formerly supposed" (Russell 226). Thus, I would argue that the novel seeks to challenge the traditional methods of science, which is to say the traditional 'Enlightenment' science of Newton. I would argue that in the above extract Ackroyd's text seeks to re-assert the importance of the imagination, and even the artistic aspects of the mind, to this process. Clair Newbold examines the type of intelligence present within two of the foremost modernists of the 20th century, Albert Einstein and Pablo Picasso:

> Albert Einstein and Pablo Picasso represent the height of turn-of-the-century European modernism. They possessed an astounding similarity in the quality of their thought: one was a physicist who thought like an artist, the other an artist whose best work encompasses the principles of quantum physics. (Newbold 153)

Both these figures influenced the view of their disciplines during their lives, and they shared surprising similarities, despite the apparent difference in their professions. Einstein's approach to his work was very different from what we imagine the process of science to be today, a process completely removed from the artistic imagination, and Einstein's is actually much closer to the imaginative process of the artist as given in the original extract from Ackroyd's novel:

> [T]he emphasis on visual thinking among German-speaking scientists was common and wide-spread. It is because of this visual capacity of Einstein's that he was able to develop his Gedanken, or "thought" experiments, from which his famous formulae were born … In one swipe, Einstein sees pieces and the whole together. He analyzes and synthesizes simultaneously. In essence, this is an artistic way of thinking. (Newbold 153)

His way of viewing his work was not that of a cold mechanical scientist, but much closer to that of an artist: first envisioning it in his mind and allowing his imagination to influence this process as much as was necessary. Returning to Coleridge's lecture in *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*, the lecture becomes as much a quest to inspire the readers, to alter their way of thinking about the boundaries of science and the artistic imagination, as it serves as an inspiration for Victor in his own acceptance of the scientific endeavour on which he is about to embark.

The first line of the quote from *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* refers to the influences on the development of Coleridge's theory: "He spoke of language possessing an organic

rather than a mechanical form; he extolled its active agency, as an instrument of the imagination" (Ackroyd 73). This shows his rejection of the mechanistic views proposed by the British empiricist tradition, especially by John Locke and David Hume (Wedberg 3). By the end of the 18th century, many of these ideas had been challenged by the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, after he published his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). Wedberg suggests that "Kant's critique of reason set off a reaction against the mechanistic worldview and empiricist epistemology, and indeed against the entire philosophy of the Enlightenment" (Wedberg 4-5). This is the philosophical world view that generated much of German Romanticism, and this would indeed be the work Coleridge drew from for his own theories and speculation. Coleridge's theory proposed that the imagination had been divided into two functioning parts, namely the primary and the secondary imagination:

> The primary imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former… differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. (Coleridge xvii)

M.H. Abrams observes that this specific passage by Coleridge has puzzled and irritated many scholars through the years mainly on account of the seeming ambiguity of its language. Abrams explains this view of the imagination as follows: "This creative process is reflected in the primary imagination by which all individual minds develop out into their perception of this universe, and it is echoed again in the secondary, or re-creative imagination which is possessed only by the poet of genius" (Abrams 283). What this means is that all individuals develop the first part of the imagination, the primary imagination, which consists of the basic process by which all human beings are capable of picturing an image in their minds. The secondary imagination, on the other hand, is a much rarer faculty, and it reflects and echoes the content of the primary imagination, reforming and re-imagining it. This faculty is only found among the poets of genius. Ackroyd to an extent is playing with Coleridge's musings on the imagination. He adopts Coleridge's organic view of the imagination, and makes a clear distinction between this and the mechanical view of the mind that was the dominant view of the time. He then applies this to a figure of science, namely Isaac Newton, a man considered to be the father of modern science, and very much the antithesis of a 'Romantic'. As a result, he is a figure who is in many ways far removed from the image of the 'Romantic man'. Newton then becomes one of these 'men of genius', making it clear that the secondary imagination is not only given to writers or poets, but to all men of a certain mental calibre,

and thus, to someone like Victor Frankenstein as well. As is evident in the above extract, this resonates particularly strongly with Ackroyd's Victor. The extract alludes to the fact that a man of genius would have the power to affect through his imagination a real change in the world. "Nature is instinct with passion and with change. It is altered – it is moved – by human perception." (Ackroyd 73-74). This relates to Shelley's claim that "poets are the legislators of the world" in his essay, "A Defence of Poetry", which is his response to Plato's critique that they are mere purveyors of chaos and uncertainty. Poets and other men of genius can then, in fact, exact real world change as is Victor's original ambition. He is hindered, on the other hand, by his lack of this "instinct with passion", and it is something he sorely craves. Despite his greatest efforts, he still manages to fall short in terms of his own attempts at creation. As he experiments, it is not his imagination that manages to effect change in nature, but rather his perception that becomes warped and distorted; the more he loses touch with reality, the more his ability to exact change in the world diminishes until there is almost nothing left. There is thus a vast difference between the realm of fantasy and distorted perception compared to that of the active imagination, which can be a great source of power if used correctly.

The Promethean imagination is also invoked by Coleridge in this section, as shown in the following quotation: "'The primary imagination', Coleridge said, 'I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a representation in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation.' So men could become like gods. Was this his meaning? What can be imagined, can be formed into the image of truth" (Ackroyd 75). Here we find Ackroyd making use of a mixture of Promethean ideas and imagery that he intertwines with those of Coleridge. This strategy implies either that Coleridge initially had such endeavours in mind when he spoke about the imagination, or it is the protagonist's interpretation of Coleridge's words, applied to his own situation. This implied reference then becomes more explicit, as shortly after the lecture, Victor refers to John Milton's *Paradise Lost* in a passing discussion with a fellow student. Victor comments that "'[t]he imagination is the strongest possible power. Do you not recall that Adam dreamed, and that when he awoke he found it truth?' In the same narrative, Victor, there is a warning against the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.' 'Are we to be prevented from reaching up to the branch? Surely not'" (Ackroyd 75). The above quote is from the scene after Coleridge's lecture, and Victor is conversing with a student of theology who also attended it. The two then continue to discuss what they had just heard. Victor's response is particularly revealing: whereas the student of theology naturally

heeds the warning of the bible – to be wary of forbidden knowledge – we find Victor yearns for it as it is such knowledge that will enable him to achieve what he desires.

It is thus easy for Victor to argue that if the knowledge is at hand, one must reach for it. The reference to *Paradise Lost* serves a number of purposes. The first is to echo once again the theme of Promethean knowledge and the traditional warnings against such inadvisable endeavours; secondly, it acknowledges the Romantic roots of the scene, as Milton was one of most prominent influences on the Romantics; this is not to forget the direct influence of his epic poem on *Frankenstein*. This is quite evident from the very beginning as the epigraph from the first page cites Satan in Milton's epic asking, "Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay/ To mould me man? Did I solicit thee/ From Darkness to promote me?" (M. Shelley 3). This epigraph foreshadows the Creature's identification with Milton's Satan; this happens soon after he acquires the ability to read (he acquires a copy of *Paradise Lost*). *Frankenstein* is filled with references to Milton's epic poem, and the fact that the poem appears within the novel is merely one example of this. Leslie Tannenbaum expands on the likely reasons why *Paradise Lost* was so influential on the novel:

> The presence of this dialogue is hardly surprising and was perhaps inevitable, given the Miltonic associations of the Villa Diodati, where the novel was conceived; given Shelley's reading of *Paradise Lost* aloud and Mary's own reading of the epic during the gestation of her novel; and, most importantly, given the novel's concern with Promethean rebellion and the problem of evil in a world apparently devoid of divine agency. (Tannenbaum 101)

In the above quote, Tannenbaum is clearly referring to the influence that Milton already had among the Romantics: his text was admired and his character of Satan elevated from that of a rebel to an almost noble Promethean, rebelling against a tyrannical god. This theme undoubtedly entered into Mary's novel through the influence provided by *Paradise Lost*, becoming in a way a retelling of that tale in her own context. "*Frankenstein* makes ironic use of Miltonic myth to define the terms in which Miltonic themes have been transposed" (Tannenbaum 112). Thus, I would suggest it becomes a re-interpretation of Milton's original story, with a Prometheus from a different time and place.

The combination of Coleridge's theories with Promethean themes ignites Victor's response to the new information he has just received in the lecture. As a result, he is greatly inspired and motivated to return to his studies and pursue his ambitions:

I was greatly encouraged by his words, since I pursued my own researches with the firm conviction that all life was one and the same spirit of existence breathed through all created forms... Coleridge's valedictory words, on the shaping role of the imagination, had aroused my enthusiasm to such a pitch that I could think of nothing else. I mixed myself a hot collation of rum and milk, a legacy from my days in Chamonix, and then retired to bed with a fixed determination to rise early and to pitch myself into my studies. (Ackroyd 75-76)

This signifies a turning point for Ackroyd's Victor. Here, he is inspired by Coleridge's words as they fill him with conviction and stimulate his own imagination. He leaves Coleridge's lecture greatly inspired, and ready to work even harder to bring his own endeavours to fruition. The above section then becomes a parody of the original scene in *Frankenstein* in which the lecture motivates Frankenstein to greater endeavour, but with only the lecturer and the subject matter changing. This notion of the imagination directly influences Victor as he longs to partake in the 'eternal act of creation'. Where the Victor Frankenstein of the original is inspired by Waldman and the materialist scientific principles that he champions, Ackroyd's Victor is more inspired by Romantic notions, which serves to blur the line between the Romantic and the Enlightenment man more and more into the single figure of the man of genius. Victor sees the two as on a par with each other and wishes only to be counted among one of those great men. For him, a scientific figure such as Isaac Newton or a great poet such as Milton or Shakespeare, and their creations and achievements, are one and the same.

The scene in which Victor attends the lecture by Coleridge, and as a result, acquires this burst of enthusiasm and the momentum that will carry him through his grim project, is one of the most important examples of Ackroyd's use of meta-historiography and intertextuality in the novel. After Victor settles down for the evening, he has an experience that is strikingly similar to the famous dream that Mary Shelley had during her stay at Villa Diodati, which led to the conception of *Frankenstein*:

It is as if imagination had become my guide, leading me forward in a direction of which I had no possible control. As I lay in my bed in Oxford I saw Elizabeth, as she would have been had she still been in life; there were pictures of my father climbing steadily, along the side of a vast glacier that threatened to overwhelm him; there were pictures of Bysshe, fleeing across an open plain with a girl in his arms. And then, most tremendous of all, I saw myself kneeling by the bed of some gigantic shadowy form. This bed was my bed, and the shape was stretched out upon it. Yet I could not be sure of its nature. Then it began to show signs of life, and to stir with an uneasy, half-vital motion. (Ackroyd 76)

Here Victor allows the imagination 'to be his guide', to show him these different visions. This dream is then a direct result of the initial influence that Bysshe bestowed upon Victor, and of his subsequent attendance of Coleridge's lecture as described in the above section. The scene bears a striking similarity to Mary Shelley's vision of the "student of the unhallowed arts" kneeling beside his creation, which led to the conception of the original novel. The similarity in use of imagery of the Creature stretched out and its creator kneeling beside it, and the specific use of words such as the "guide of the imagination", and the use of direct quotes from Mary's description of her dream, such as the Creature stirring with a "half vital motion'', makes it quite clear that it is no coincidence and that Ackroyd is intentionally drawing on Mary's original dream. I suggest that Ackroyd deliberately echoes Mary's original dream in this section to focus upon the parallels found between the original author and Ackroyd's protagonist. In my reading, I would argue that Ackroyd attempts to raise Victor to the status of creator that Mary Shelley enjoys. Just as she was inspired to create her own "hideous progeny", so Victor is enabled to finish his own work through the stimulus provided by the lecture on the imagination.

There is another scene in *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* that suggests a shared link between Mary and Victor in the novel. This is a scene that appears at a later stage in the novel: Mary Shelley in the novel sees the Creature at her bedroom window right before another murder occurs. She tells Victor, "'I dreamed that I saw a phantom by the window. It was a dream. I am certain of it. There was a face'" (Ackroyd 193). This causes quite a stir in their household, but is quickly dismissed. The next morning Victor and Bysshe's company discover the murdered corpse of Martha, one of the servants, in the river close by their residence. Shortly afterwards Victor and Mary discuss this event again and she reveals the following, "'You mean someone killed her?' 'I believe so. Yes' 'I knew it. I knew it when I saw her in the weeds.' 'What made you suspect it?' I was eager to hear her account touching, as it might, on my own secret. 'The face at the window,' she replied. 'It was no dream. No phantasm. I am sure of it now'" (Ackroyd 198). Where Mary initially suspected the face she saw the previous night to have been a dream, after the murder of a member of the household staff she realises that it was in fact real, and it was highly likely that this was the face of the perpetrator. Mary then goes on to give a description of the face that is identical to the one that Victor gives when he initially restores life to the monster, "It seemed crumpled, creased rather, like a sheet of paper hastily thrown away" (Ackroyd 198). This description is similar to Victor's initial description where the face of the monster is compared to crumpled paper.

This creature is the link between Mary and Victor, and the description of his face alludes to the nature of this link. This is signified by the reference to paper, as this is the most prominent material of the writer and artist. This event is made more profoundly peculiar, because we find out later that Victor's experiment was a tremendous failure, and that the resulting creature was nothing but a mere manifestation of his own psychotic delusions. The fact that Mary Shelley is the only other character in the novel that has some insight into the protagonist's delusion suggests that Ackroyd gives Mary access into Victor's mind as she is allowed a rare glimpse of Victor's insanity, before even the reader truly knows that it exists. This is Ackroyd's way of acknowledging her as the original creator of the Creature without bending his own narrative too much; on the other hand, he might be drawing yet another parallel between these two distinctive types of authors.

In Ackroyd's created universe, Mary Shelley has no novel in which she can project her distraught and conflicted feelings about Shelley. I suggest that this is her way of acknowledging their presence in this parallel work. With Victor, on the other hand, the situation becomes slightly more complex. Because of the lack of a literal creature in Ackroyd's novel, this Victor is forced to take on the role of both his Enlightenment and Gothic sides as he has no outward presence on which to project his unacceptable Gothic urges. Thus under this strain his psyche is split,[15] and he alone assumes the role of both. Victor in this novel then takes on both the role of the Enlightenment man and the role of the rejected creature, and thus becomes the only figure on which the Mary of this world can project her grievances – to the extent that they manifest physically to her in the form of Victor's monstrous side. This idea of her frustrated attempts at expression is further emphasized in the scene that takes place the next morning after the frightful events of the previous night. Here we find that Victor explaining that he could never be a writer, as his words fail him. Mary replies that she has words, and proceeds to set out her idea of a story that would become the novel *Frankenstein*. Her frightful vision in this scene is Ackroyd's version of the original dream that would inspire *Frankenstein*. When she starts to explain her tale, she is suddenly rudely interrupted by Byron:

> "I have words," she said. "I have thought of a story... A sequence of images rose before me unbidden-" "I know the sensation," Bysshe said. "In the first of them some

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[15] "In psychoanalysis, the coexistence within the ego of two attitudes towards external reality, functioning side by side without influencing each other, one taking reality into account and the other one disavowing reality." (Colman 723)

pale student of unhallowed arts was kneeling beside a man stretched out, but yet it was not a man at all -". At this moment Byron entered the room. (Ackroyd 253)

Thus, the novel gives some recognition to her as the original author even though in Ackroyd's universe this tale never gets to be written by Mary, at least not as far as we are told. The original ideas that sparked *Frankenstein* are all present in the above extract as she even uses many of the same words and phrases that she used in her description of her original dream in the form of the "unbidden images" and "the student of the unhallowed arts and his creation". Here her ideas are never articulated further than in the above interruption by Byron, and as a result, never expressed in the form of writing. This incident invokes 20th century literary theory; specifically, Roland Barthes's proclamation of the death of the author, and the idea that authors do not 'own' their stories because once they are written and released into the world, they are opened up to a range of interpretations beyond the author's intentions. Catherine Belsey explains:

> Thus the author's autonomy is to some degree illusory. In one sense the author determines the nature of the story: he or she decides what happens. In another sense, however, this decision is itself determined by the constraints of the narrative, or by what Barthes calls the interest… of the story. (Belsey 98)

This I would argue is what is demonstrated in the above scene from Ackroyd's novel. Here we find Mary repeatedly frustrated in her attempts to tell a story which originally belonged to her, and in the end she is thwarted and never brings it to life. This demonstrates the illusory nature of her authorial autonomy. In Ackroyd's novel, Mary is still viewed as the original author, both by the readers and by Ackroyd himself, and he pays sufficient homage to this fact, as I have demonstrated above. But in Ackroyd's novel, her power over her story is completely taken from her, and as in the original *Frankenstein,* her hideous progeny also takes on a life of its own, living independently of the author, as embodied in Ackroyd's Victor Frankenstein. Thus, in her description of her novel in the 1831 introduction, she describes *Frankenstein* as her "hideous progeny" that had taken on a life of its own since the moment she brought it into the world. This is an idea that Ackroyd has taken and incorporated into his use of intertextuality within his novel: Mary's "hideous progeny" literally becomes a part of her own world in Ackroyd's universe, and both Mary and Shelley become important elements in this new story. In Roland Barthes' description of the death of the author, the interpretations of a text should not be limited to the author's imposed reading alone, but should be able to take on a life of their own. *Frankenstein* is a prime example of an

evolving text, as throughout its almost two hundred year history it has been rewritten or remade in a variety of mediums and re-interpreted countless times.

I suggest that Ackroyd's Victor fails as a creator, and that this is the primary cause of his psychotic existence in the second half of the novel. Up until now, I have explored in detail the protagonist's fascination with the imagination, and the seemingly unlimited power this force potentially has for the individual who manages to wield it. Victor seems to know that his talents lie within the realm of science and not in writing. The context of this extract is the now famous ghost story contest that took place among the members of the Shelley circle, and that gave rise to both Polidori's *The Vampire* (1819), and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818):

> I excused myself from the collective task. "I am not a poet," I told Bysshe. "I am not a writer of tales. I am a mere mechanic and experimenter. I cannot divine the secrets of the soul" "You criticize yourself unjustly," he replied. "The great experimenters are poets in their own way. They are travellers in unknown realms. They explore the limits of the world." "But not in words, Bysshe. That is where I will fail". (Ackroyd 252-253)

In the above quote, Victor explains why he would not be able to participate in the ghost story contest as words are not his primary creative medium. Before this extract, Victor contemplates whether he should tell them the story of his creation as an entry into the contest, but decides against it as he fears rejection: "I would seem to them an accursed thing, a manic or an outcast – it would not matter which" (Ackroyd 252). This is ironic, as we later find he is exactly that, a sufferer of psychological collapse, and that his apparent sanity is only maintained by the delusion that his experiments were successful. In responding to Victor's protestations, Bysshe's comments echo the biographical Shelley's actual essay, "In Defence of Poetry", which states clearly that there is little difference between the poet and the scientist, "The great experimenters are poets in their own way. They are travellers in unknown realms. They explore the limits of the world" (Ackroyd 253). This quote then seems to place Shelley and Victor on an equal level when it comes to exploring the secrets of existence through their creative faculties. However, this is not the case as we find out at the end of the novel that Victor's success was actually a fraud, and nothing but an extended exercise in self-delusion. He never created the monster successfully; it is a figment of his imagination.

Victor would not only fail as a writer, but as a scientist too. His failure to rise in his own field to the levels of creation we find among the Romantic poets is essentially the core reason for

his fabrication of the Creature in his mind. This can be fully seen in the following quote at the end of the novel, when for the first time his delusion is exposed, both to himself and the reader. This happens when Victor agrees to show the Creature to Polidori before he plans to finally destroy it:

> "Behold the creature. This is what I have made." "Where?" "Here. Before you." "There is no one here," he said. "Have you lost your wits? See here. Beside me. Here he sits." "There is nothing beside you, except an empty chair."… "You have lived in your imagination, Victor. You have dreamed all this. Invented it." "How so?" "Perhaps you wished to rival Bysshe. Or Byron. You had a longing for sublimity and power." (Ackroyd 295)

Dr Polidori correctly assesses the psychotic elements of Victor's now obvious sickness and delusion. As I stated previously, he created the Creature in his mind as a psychological defence mechanism after he failed to create it in reality, and it is exactly his aspiration to rival Shelley, Byron and any of the other creative greats that leads to this. Victor's longing for the creative power that repeatedly evades his grasp is his strongest link to Shelley, and also the reason for Ackroyd's contrasting portrayals of the two figures throughout the novel. This then brings us to the figure of the Creature that Victor creates in his mind. Until this point, Victor has been constantly striving to become a creator and a man of genius who can rival any of the Romantic greats. It is his personal ambition to become the Romantic alternative to the original Frankenstein, a man of science and the Enlightenment, but one who is thoroughly infused with the Romantic sentiments he has experienced up until this point.

This, I will argue, can be seen in the Creature that Victor tries to create, and which ultimately manifests in the character of Jack Keats, a character quite explicitly modelled on the well-known Romantic poet, John Keats. Keats is considered one of the most successful of the second-generation Romantics despite his early death. Shelley held Keats in very high esteem, and dedicated a poem to him on his death called *Adonais* (1821), which was a celebration of Keats's life and poetry. There are other similarities that point to the link between Jack and John Keats, aside from the shared surname. Both studied medicine and both battled with tuberculosis early in their lives. This makes it particularly significant that Victor meets and ends up resurrecting John Keats, who could in many ways be considered the ideal figure of the Romantic poet. Throughout his life he was frail, ethereal, and almost other-worldly. He was also a poetic genius who was more than able to capture the power of the imagination within his poetry. It is only as Victor's experiment fails in *The Casebook of Victor*

Frankenstein that this image of the poet becomes twisted and changed into something vile and destructive. The following quotation gives Victor's reaction to seeing the corpse of Keats for the first time:

> His was the most beautiful corpse I had ever seen. It seemed that the flush had not left the cheeks, and the mouth was curved in the semblance of a smile. The body itself was muscular and firmly knit… the chest and abdomen and thighs were perfectly formed. The legs were fine and muscular, the arms most elegantly proportioned. (Ackroyd 130)

This description of Jack Keats's body, which shows in detail what a perfect specimen he was, serves not only to create a contrast to the horror of his resurrection that is to follow, but also highlights once again how Jack Keats represents the perfect man and is the embodiment of everything that Victor aspired to. This then demonstrates how Victor's imminent failure will bring forth nothing but a jaded image of his vision of becoming a man of genius in his own right. Keats's resurrection then follows and, like the original monster, he turns from the vision of a perfect man to a horrid creature that instils fear in his creator: "in a moment the body in front of me had gone through all the stages of decomposition before being reclaimed and restored to life" (Ackroyd 131-132). This is a symbolic demonstration of what happens to Victor himself. As with the body of the Creature in front of him, Victor's image of himself subconsciously undergoes a similar process during the above event. After Victor fails to attain his goals in the above scene, he also fails to attain the status of a 'man of genius'. What remains after Victor's failure can also be seen as a mere corpse of the idealised 'man of genius' he aspired to become. What follows after the resurrection is in a way even more disturbing, and it emphasises the above point:

> His lips parted, and then there issued from his lips the strangest sequence of sounds I had ever heard: it was a rolling cascade of tones and pitches, but utterly discordant and repulsive. They were sounds from the depths, sounds which should have been muffled or stifled, but to my astonishment I realise he was attempting to sing. He was singing to me, while he continued to gaze upon me, and I stood in awe of him and I could not move. This was no longer Jack. This was something else. (Ackroyd 132)

In the above extract, we see the first act of the Creature after it has been freshly returned to life from death is its attempting to sing. Here the Creature seems to be mocking Victor and his endeavour. In the above quote, the first act of the Creature is to sit up and sing from the edge of death as it is freshly brought back from the grave. The result is a horrific parody of

one of John Keats's most successful and praised poems, *Ode to a Nightingale* (1819). In it, the nightingale sings from the midst of the darkness, which symbolises death and soothes the speaker's fear of what is to come. In the poem, the speaker comes to terms with his own mortality, and realises how it will finally be a blessing when he is taken from this world by death:

> Darkling I listen; and, for many a time,
> I have been half in love with easeful Death,
> Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
> To take into the air my quiet breath;
> Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
> To cease upon the midnight with no pain,

(Keats 6.50-56)

Thus, the poem becomes a meditation on death through poetry and writing, and this would be what carries on after the speaker has died, just as the nightingale would continue to sing long after the speaker in the poem is dead. The Creature parodies this poem by singing in the most grotesque manner possible, and his singing becomes a distorted version of the nightingale's song, singing literally from the edge of death. The effect is also reversed, as the Creature's grotesque singing brings no comfort to Victor, only more fear. I suggest that Victor's failure is emphasized by the use of John Keats and one of his greatest poems, as Victor's own efforts yield nothing more than a grotesque parody of what he sought to create. As with the original attempt, Ackroyd's Victor sought to create a perfect creature, and despite his efforts to acquire an almost perfect corpse, it becomes warped and twisted upon animation. This is another failure of Victor's imagination, clearly demonstrating he does not possess the potential to create perfection. Jack Keats becomes the monstrous revival of the poet, a twisted reflection of the man of genius that is to haunt Victor to the end of the novel, reminding him of his failure to aspire to his own ambitions.

It is important that we address the question of the Creature sufficiently, because at first glance it could appear to be a significant failure of Ackroyd's novel. David William Charnick addresses this problem in his essay, "Peter Ackroyd's Imaginary Projections". He notes critiques of the novel which argue that it is riddled with narrative failures, specifically the ending, which they regard as being a cheap ploy, an attempt to create an anti-climax (Charnick 52). Charnick's argument, on the other hand, stresses the opposite; he argues that

the novel is in fact building upon a continuous theme in Ackroyd's work concerning imaginary reality. Charnick comments that "these hostile accounts fail to point out a significant development in the narrative of a device at the heart of Ackroyd's presentation of imaginary reality. Dismissing the revelation of the Creature's true nature as an anti-climax, critics have failed to appreciate that this is in fact an instance of Ackroyd's development of the device of imaginary projection…" (Charnick 51). According to Charnick, the ending is in fact not an anti-climax, as this theme of imaginary projection is one that Ackroyd has been developing through his works for the last 26 years. It features prominently in many of his other works, such as Dan's projections in *Dan Leno and the Lime House Golem* (1994), the homunculus in *The House of Dr Dee* (1993), and the presence of Amy Dorrit in *The Great Fire of London* (1982), to give but a few examples. This, Charnick argues, reaches its fruition in *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* as a central theme represented in the form of the Creature in this specific novel (Charnick 64-65). Charnick points out similar themes of importance, in particular the failure of Victor's experiments as a catalyst for the Creature and the power of the imagination as an agent of its creation. He also proposes the method of a double as a psychological means of defence for Victor's own fragile psyche, arguing that "the creature represents Frankenstein's darker nature, as Edward Hyde represented that of Henry Jekyll, but is it (like Hyde) a physical transformation, or perhaps a device used by Frankenstein to rationalize his misdeeds?" (Charnick 53-54). In the end, when Dr Polidori discovers Victor alone in his empty laboratory, it quickly becomes apparent to us that he and the Creature were the same person throughout, and it is strongly suggested that Victor is the one responsible for the misdeeds and murders throughout the novel, and not his creation. The Creature then becomes a psychological defence against two potentially damaging truths. The first would be the utter failure of his project to create life, which would confirm Victor's standing as a man of genius, and the other is a protection against his darker side, as the Creature allows him to remain blissfully unaware of this aspect of himself, as is the case with Dr Jekyll in Stevenson's novella. Charnick then also makes the case that the delusion of the Creature is a result of the failure of Victor Frankenstein's own endeavours, but he continues arguing for the importance of the role of the imagination, and maintains this is central to understanding the events in the novel. He suggests the following:

> So active, then, is Frankenstein's imagination that his mind is primed for imaginary reality to assume ascendancy when presumably the electrification of Jack Keats's corpse fails: projection brings the creature to life as Frankenstein imagines it, not as it is. Polidori cannot appreciate the scale of Frankenstein's achievement in thus projecting the creature. (Charnick 65-66)

This seems then to give some purpose to the continuous emphasis placed on the imagination, as we have observed it thus far. Charnick makes the case that it is exactly the development and stimulation of Frankenstein's imagination up until this point that gives him the tools to bring the Creature to life, so to speak. It is after all Frankenstein's imagination in the end that gives life to his creation, and not the physical science he initially tried to utilize. It is thus also his imagination that protects him and his frail ego from his failures through the delusion of the successful creation of the Creature, and it is also this that protects him from the vision of his more sinister double that is released at the point of the Creature's attempted creation.

This double is ultimately his stark opposite, a double that seeks to fill the world with death instead of life. Here I am not referring to the imaginary creature, but rather a darker aspect of Frankenstein's own psyche, one that he is unaware of and one that starts hunting down and killing innocents, such as Harriet Westbrook, and later in the novel his faithful servant, Fred. This then makes it very similar to the situation found in Robert Louis Stevenson's, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). In this tale, Dr Jekyll also manages to create in himself a darker persona, which without his conscious knowledge would take over and go out and prey on innocents. Charnick also acknowledges that it is ultimately Victor's imagination that is the driving force behind his endeavours, as is demonstrated in the following quote:

> The active nature of Frankenstein's imagination is made clear in his energized reaction to the actor Nugent's portrayal of the character of Melmoth. Moreover, Frankenstein is struck by Coleridge's performance at a lecture at Oxford; the poet, initially enfeebled and labouring to deliver a set lecture, becomes enlivened by expounding extempore on the power of the imagination. (Charnick 65)

Throughout this chapter I make the case that Victor initially set out to create a living creature so he could realise his ambitions to become a 'man of genius', thus equalling or even surpassing those he admires, the great poets such as Shelley and Lord Byron. Charnick then makes the case in his essay that despite this initial endeavour being a complete failure, he does indeed enjoy a degree of unintended success through his creation of the imaginary creature:

> So active, then, is Frankenstein's imagination that his mind is primed for imaginary reality to assume ascendancy when presumably the electrification of Jack Keats's corpse fails: projection brings the creature to life as Frankenstein imagines it, not as it is... [Polidori] suggests that Frankenstein wanted to copy Shelley or Byron; indeed Frankenstein did seek to emulate Shelley, but his achievement is, within the narrative, far greater than the achievements of either Shelley or Byron. Shelley is portrayed as ineffectual: despite his radical attitudes, he is too unworldly to engage properly and his

dreams come to nothing. Byron is portrayed as loutish owing to his over compensation for his physical shortcomings, and he succeeds only in alienating those who are most loyal to him, Shelley and Polidori. (Charnick 65-66)

Within the narrative, then, it becomes an ironic twist that Victor finds a degree of success amidst his initial failure, as his imagination was able to perform a deed that would seek to rival those of the said poets, who should be the ones who deal with the works of the imagination. Ackroyd's Victor might not be able to write his genius down in words, and his attempts to push the boundaries of science might also have been just a horrific failure, but his genius still seeps through in the sheer strength of his imaginative power, no matter how horrific the consequences of this might initially be.

As already demonstrated, the theme of doubling is a common theme, both within the novel *Frankenstein*, and in the fiction of the nineteenth-century in general, especially in the Gothic genre. This theme, which has been prominent in the Gothic genre for the last two hundred years, is evident, too, in Ackroyd's late 20th century and early 21st century novel. As a contemporary novel, which plays with the original novel's themes and genres, it is not surprising that we find doubling a common narrative tool within it as well. In her book, *The Monster and the Mirror,* Mary K. Patterson Thornburg explains that:

> Both modes of doubling seem to operate in the literary use of this concept; for example, Jekyll and Hyde would appear to be Double by Division, having both originated in the undivided character of Jekyll, whereas Poe's narrator and Wilson are apparently Doubles by Duplication, having encountered each other for the first time at school and having been born. (Thornburg 56)

I have previously established that we are dealing with "double by division" with regard to Victor and the Creature. The Creature owes its existence to Victor, and he is more an aspect of Victor than a separate entity in many ways; this is also demonstrated by the fact that the Creature becomes Victor's Gothic antithesis as the novel progresses. This is a point that Thornburg makes in her analysis of Victor as the sentimental man:

> Frankenstein knows that in bringing the Monster to life, he is in effect rejecting it. The two acts are essentially one, for in creating the Monster he is creating himself as the perfect sentimental man, carving away from his conscious self the elements that are unacceptable to that role, externalizing them and denying them. His horror at the creature's first stirrings of life is thus not surprising. (Thornburg 79)

It is then in the act of creation that the splitting of Victor's ego happens. After the Monster's 'reanimation', Victor is forced to deal with his now manifested Gothic or unsentimental side. This would be a more unorthodox use of double by division, as in the 18th and 19th century the common practice of double by division would tend to fall more along the lines of a psychological division. Throughout *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein,* it appears to the reader as if we are dealing with an identical situation to the original. Thus, when we find out at the end of the novel that the Creature is not real, but only a manifestation of Victor's imagination, or a shard of his broken ego, the situation appears changed, although the literary device remains the same. What changes is that it takes on the more traditional form of this literary device, resembling almost exactly what one would find in Jekyll and Hyde, and many of the other Victorian gothic tales that make use of this formula. This more traditional form would tend to attribute the existence of the double to a psychological or supernatural manifestation, and not a physical manifestation, as we find in the original. This might seem disappointing on Ackroyd's part, as instead of giving us something new, he shapes it into something that is even more simplified than the original's use of the double. Double by division has been thoroughly exhausted to the point of becoming a cliché, and yet his utilisation of this literary device does not end with Victor and the Creature. This relates to the figure of Shelley within the text, as he functions as Victor's double as well. Unlike the Creature, I would argue that Shelley as Victor's double is a case of the double by duplication rather than double by division. As demonstrated in the above definition, the double by duplication is not seen as a fracture of the psyche in the sense that applies to the double by division, but the striking similarities and shared interests that Ackroyd so painstakingly gave to the two characters make the doubling all but subtle. Returning to Thornburg's theory, I would propose the reason for this doubling:

> However, the concept seems in general to represent division, at least as it functions symbolically in Gothic literature, as is usually shown by conflicting actions, motives or natures exhibited by the set of doubles, implying conflicts in the original character that can be expressed only by a division of that character into two or more personae… (Thornburg 56)

The Creature is the psychological manifestation of Victor's failure. It comes into being as a result of his inability to deal with his failure to realise his ambitions of becoming a genius in his own field, as Shelley and Byron were in their own. The more important manifestation of the above quotation would be found in the figure of Shelley in the novel, and in the doubling that is clearly present between him and Victor. I have mentioned the many significant

similarities between the two characters that Ackroyd has woven into the novel, most of them originating in Shelley's life. This is especially true for the first half of the novel, but this doubling between the two characters does not remain static throughout. It changes as Victor's character changes: while they started off as very similar, a breach between the two of them develops by the time Victor's creature starts tormenting and haunting its creator. This is evident in a scene such as in the above example where a stark contrast between the two "Creations" becomes evident, "There was so wide a difference between Bysshe's creation and my own, that I felt like weeping" (Ackroyd 139). Initially, their doubling lies in their similarities, but this changes and becomes a doubling of opposites, more like that of the original Victor and his creature. Shelley seems to retain his sentimental vision through most of the novel, and Victor slowly starts to slip away into the Gothic as madness starts to take its toll on his character. What this seems to demonstrate to us is yet another instance of Victor's failure to ascend to the kind of genius he sees in a figure such as Bysshe. This change in the mirroring of their two characters happens shortly after Victor's failed attempt to instil life into his creature. After the Creature runs off, Victor takes to wandering the streets, stating that, "I had never been more wretched – I, who had dreamed of renown, was no more than a wanderer in the streets of men" (Ackroyd 135). These do not sound like the words of a man who believes that he has just successfully instilled life into a corpse for the first time, defeating death, no matter how horrific the consequences might seem. Perhaps at the back of his mind Victor already knew of his failure, and this starts to plague him from this point. Shortly after this, in the same chapter, we find the scene (already discussed) where Bysshe and Harriet visit Victor to show them their child for the first time. This is the first time that Victor is not delighted to see Bysshe. He tells us, "[Fred] handed me a card on which Bysshe had scrawled me a note… We have something, or someone to show you. I prepared myself for their arrival as best I could. I took a spoonful of laudanum to calm myself… I had indeed found it a palliative for wounded nerves" (Ackroyd 138-139). It would seem that in these concluding pages of the chapter concerning the creation of his creature, Victor discovers that he is not able to mirror Bysshe's greatness as a creator or a man of genius, and as a result, the mirroring changes from reflection to something of a more contradictory nature. This seems to become progressively more so as the novel continues.

The theme of doubling between characters can also be found in Richard Holmes' biographical radio-play, *To the Tempest Given*. This play is based on actual historical events, and is composed using excerpts from the diaries of the characters living with the Shelley's at

the Casa Magni in the final weeks of Shelley's life. The play, and the events that occur within it, lead us to the understanding that Romantic literary themes had a profound place within the daily lives of the Shelleys, and the "real-life" manifestations of the double are particularly striking. In the play, we find Shelley being confronted by his own double shortly before his death, and Jane Williams also sees his double not long afterwards. As we will see, this is very similar to the cases found in the fictitious texts we have already dealt with. In her book, Mary K. Patterson Thornburg addresses this phenomenon and acknowledges that its appearance is not uncommon in history books, especially during this period:

> Shelley himself, especially given to hallucination by most accounts, had dreams and waking visions in which figures of his friends and of himself appeared as individuals' doubles. Jane Williams, apparently one of the least fanciful of the Shelley circle, saw Shelley's double a few weeks before his death. None of this is surprising when one reflects that dreams, like other imaginary experiences, were welcomed and taken seriously by artists of the period. (Thornburg 57)

Thornburg's account of the events that took place at Casa Magni reiterates not only the importance of the motif of the double in these events, but also its legitimacy outside the bounds of what is considered fiction. She even goes so far as to connect Frankenstein himself to the above phenomena, commenting that "if Victor Frankenstein and the Monster are doubles, then Mary Shelley's dream from which her novel grew was a similar instance… every figure in a dream is, in a sense, a double of the dreamer" (Thornburg 57). The following quote is the scene from the play where Shelley meets his own double:
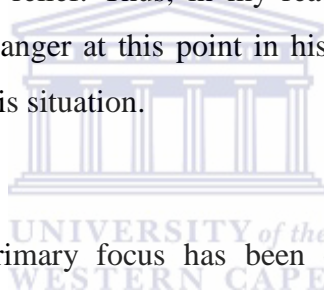
> (Nightmare)
>
> Shelley: … I got up, and went to my window that looks onto the terrace and the sea. And I saw the sea rushing in… Suddenly my vision changed, and I saw the figure of myself strangling Mary, so I rushed into her room, but I did not dare approach the bed…
>
>
> Mary: All of this was frightful enough, and talking it over the next morning he told me he had seen many visions lately. He had seen the figure of himself, which met him as he walked on the terrace, and said to him – How long do you mean to be content?
>
>
> Holmes: 'How long do you mean to be content? Shelley had now seen his own double, his doppelganger, challenging him about what he would do at Casa Magni. Shelley knew in many magical and occult traditions, the meeting with one's double was an omen of imminent death. (Holmes *Sidetracks* 308-309)

Shelley's double within the play functions in a very similar manner to all of the other doubles we have discussed up until this point. The double functions as an alter ego that drives Shelley out of the space of social comfort to that of enquiry. Not unlike the creature in *Frankenstein*, it forces Shelley into a direction he might not have considered without it. This can be seen in the single line of words that it speaks to Shelley, "How long do you mean to be content?" This can be interpreted as either a warning or a challenge. Clearly, neither Shelley nor Mary were happy in their current situation, and as a messenger, the double urges Shelley to take action, to do something to change his current situation. Hints of his unhappiness are scattered throughout the play. One of the most apparent is perhaps his dream in the above passage where he strangles Mary. In another section, he tries to procure a poison meant for himself from a friend, requesting it as if it were a favour. Here we witness the presence of Shelley's death drive again. Even though at this point Shelley might be sincere in the belief that he does not wish to commit suicide, having this option might calm the tension that the death-drive creates, thus bringing him some relief. Thus, in my reading of the play, I would like to suggest that meeting his doppelganger at this point in his life might have urged Shelley to indeed make a choice to change his situation.

Throughout this chapter, the primary focus has been on Ackroyd's reinterpretation of *Frankenstein*. Here however, I wish to focus on the aspect of Mary Shelley's novel that can be read as a critique of the Romantic writers' reflections on the limitations of both the Enlightenment era and the literary Romantic movement. This she does primarily by exploring different views of science and human nature in her novel. Peter Ackroyd, on the other hand, has his own set of concerns in returning to this novel. As a postmodern biographer, critic, journalist and author, he is interested in untangling the author's relationship to his or her novel, and setting the story free as a rewriting of both history and fiction. By doing this, he addresses issues that cannot be dealt with by traditional biography. Issues such as Shelley's state of mind and the trauma experienced by Mary as a result of Shelley's actions can be explored further through this medium. What Ackroyd also manages to do is to reinvigorate the debate between Romanticism and the Enlightenment, this time not in contrast to each other, but in contrast with Ackroyd's own society that believes such terms are now archaic and irrelevant. Ackroyd's view on the imagination in Coleridge's lecture demonstrates that not only is the artistic way of thinking relevant to modern science, but the ideas of Romanticism as a whole are far from irrelevant to our current situation. The legacies of both

Enlightenment science and Romantic imagination are the foundations of contemporary society, and more than ever before, should be regarded as complementary.

Conclusion

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This thesis has focussed on the figure of Percy Shelley within Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and the role that Percy Shelley still plays in contemporary fiction. I have shown that Percy Shelley was an important figure in the Romantic tradition, and an integral contributor to the Romantic Movement. At the same time, this thesis has demonstrated that Percy Shelley was an avid man of the Enlightenment, albeit in unorthodox ways. His Enlightenment views and interests not only shaped his character, but also the poetry that would go on to confirm his status as one of the major poets in English literature. This is a position he managed to acquire despite having a rather difficult posthumous rise to notability, as many sought to challenge the poet's work and his position within English literature. I have argued that the reason for this is his unorthodox nature, and the inherent contradictions within his personality which would eventually spill over into his poetry as well. The Promethean nature of Percy Shelley's work is of particular significance. *Prometheus Unbound*, I have argued, can be read as a metaphor for the role of the poet-revolutionary in society. Throughout his life, Shelley continuously challenged all forms of authority, and the subjects and speakers of his poetry, and even of his early fiction, often do the same. As I have demonstrated in this thesis, it is easy to find a biographical link between his own life and his work. The two often coincide thematically, and where they do not, his poetry often describes the ideals he himself could not attain, be these his search for beauty or his quest to create an ideal version of himself; he attempts to transcend his own human weakness and limitations through the poetic speakers in his poetry, as demonstrated by the analysis of *Alastor* and *Epipsychidion* in Chapter 1. As my analysis has shown, all of his speakers share biographical similarities to Shelley. Their idealism lies in their attempts to transcend their specific environments, a feat Shelley could not himself accomplish during his lifetime. This is also reflected in Shelley's poetry, as the darkness and the sense of failure that was present in his own life, as well as his later drive towards death, are common themes in his work.

I have also argued that these aspects of Percy Shelley played an important part in the conception of Mary Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein*. There is evidence to suggest that Mary Shelley borrowed not only from Percy Shelley's writing tradition, but also from his own life

and character, and infused aspects of himself and his work into her novel and characters. The Creature, Henry Clerval, and, most importantly, Victor Frankenstein, all have evident affinities to Percy Shelley. These can be seen in small biographical details, such as the shared name of Victor, to important life-changing events, such as Shelley's refusal to take responsibility for both his previous family, and to some extent, for the children he had with Mary. In this way, *Frankenstein* becomes a novel that has clear personal relevance for the author herself. The process of writing it could be seen as a way of dealing with the traumas and anxieties that were present in her life, such as her fear of abandonment by Shelley and his probable infidelity, as well as the loss of their first child. Percy Shelley's influence on the novel is substantial: he was an intellectual contributor as Mary's "mentor", who directed her reading and intellectual development, but he also had a more personal impact on the novel, to the extent that his personality and presence were powerful influences. Percy Shelley might not have been a direct contributor to the text itself as far as writing or creative input is concerned, but his presence in the novel can clearly be seen. In many ways, the figures within *Frankenstein* appear caricatured and one-dimensional. Mary Shelley simplified elements of Shelley's complex personality to devise her central protagonists in the novel. In this way she managed to extend Shelley's personal traits and his intellectual pursuits in order to explore a wide variety of themes and even philosophical questions, ranging from the question of the corrupting effect of society on human goodness to the ethical use of science. Almost two hundred years later these themes still have relevance.

As Chapter 3 argues, contemporary fiction still engages both with the figure of Shelley and with *Frankenstein*, as seen in Peter Ackroyd's *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*. In the novel, Ackroyd rewrites these figures as fictional characters. In so doing, he demonstrates how they seem to both mirror and contrast with each other in key sections of his novel as he links them to the actual persons important in both Mary Shelley's and Percy Shelley's lives. I have demonstrated how Ackroyd attributes Percy Shelley's own characteristics to Victor Frankenstein, and how Victor seemingly wishes to become like Shelley. However, like many of the speakers in Shelley's poetical tradition, Victor falls short of this goal, and soon thereafter falls into ruin. It is also evident in the novel that Shelley's influence upon Victor's character moulds him, and sets him on the path that eventually leads to the creation of the Creature, and ultimately, to his own destruction. The best example of this is when Victor attends Coleridge's lecture on the imagination on Shelley's recommendation. This event demonstrates the influence that the figure of Percy Shelley exerts over Victor. This I would

argue is Ackroyd's acknowledgement of the influence that Percy had over Mary's novel, inadvertently shaping it simply by being a significant figure within Mary's imagination and life.

Frankenstein is known for the number of possible interpretations it opens itself up to. In this thesis, I have attempted to contribute to the field by proposing and demonstrating that the figure of Percy Shelley can be read as a clear influence on both the story of and the character within the novel. I have explored Percy Shelley's recent revival in contemporary literature and demonstrated that contemporary writers still find Shelley a rich resource for fiction today. The reason for this, I would suggest, is primarily because of his varied nature, and his ability to pursue both Romantic and Enlightenment projects. This is equally true both for Shelley as a figure, as well as for his subject matter: we find his ideas and arguments as frequently revived as he is himself. The best example of this can be found in the lecture that Shelley allows Victor to attend in Ackroyd's novel. Here we find the supposedly antithetical forces of the Enlightenment interest in "reason" and the Romantic interest in the "imagination" being combined, pointing to a similar duality present in the figure of Percy Shelley himself. This lecture is not only critical for the advancement of the plot in *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*, but also for contemporary readers of the novel, as this is where Ackroyd brings together both Enlightenment and Romantic sentiments. Their combination is crucial to the advancement of both the plot and the novel's central Promethean theme. During this scene, Ackroyd makes his case for the imagination and shows how the values of the Romantics are as relevant to us today as the science and technology that surround us on a daily basis. As discussed in the third chapter, the figure of Albert Einstein is an iconic example for the 20th and 21st century reader, as representing an entirely different notion of genius. Here is a contemporary example of a figure in whom the imagination and the scientific processes are understood to be working together. It was a misconception of post-Romantic scholarship to suppose that that these terms are mutually exclusive. However, as a figure like Einstein reveals, imaginative and scientific processes are in fact complementary and should be viewed as such. Percy Shelley as a figure is an important representative of this insight. Shelley's embodiment of the full range of interests in the supernatural, the Gothic, and the Promethean force of poetry associated with the Romantic tradition, as well as his embodiment of the Enlightenment traditions of scientific "reason", justice and independence of thought, thus proves to be as relevant for Ackroyd's

contemporary fiction as it was for Mary Shelley and her novel. This remains equally relevant for us as 21st century readers, as clearly Percy Shelley and his works can still tell us much about the relationship between the poet and the scientist, and how both figures contribute to envisioning the future of our post-enlightenment society.

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