

Keeping the Monster at a Distance: Artificial Humanity and Victimary Otherness (Frankenstein and the Problem of Modern Science, Part 3 of 3)

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Introduction

1 In Part One of this study, our task was to construct a notion of originary science that would help us to account for the power of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) as the textual source of the mythical mad scientist who plays God by creating the artificial human. An idea of originary science was crystallized in its definition as "the sign deployed in a mode of minimal desacralization and maximal exchangeability," within the context of ritual substitution of one valuable central object for another. In Part Two, we discovered that Mary Shelley's character Victor Frankenstein as a representative of modern science at its least prudent and most dangerous reversed the religious spirit of humility before the community inherent to originary science: Frankenstein's technological experiment in making an artificial human demonstrates scientific representation in the mode of maximal desacralization and minimal exchangeability. Nevertheless, we argued, in his desire to know the object, Frankenstein is characteristically, legitimately modern. If we recognize Mary Shelley's grasp of the event structure of scientific revelation, then we will avoid an oversimplifying moral condemnation of Frankenstein's failure to foresee the effects of the Creature's animation into moving ugliness. In this final Part Three, our focus will be on the career of the Monster, specifically on the two "creation scenes" analogous to the paradoxical animation of the Monster we analyzed last time: first, the creation scene of the Monster's failure to integrate into the DeLacey family; second, the creation scene of the abortive destruction of the Monster's female

companion. More exactly, these are mock-creation scenes. Only when Frankenstein animates the Monster is the “creation” literally successful. Self-creation for the Monster, damned to fail to enter human society and damned to fail to extort a mate from Frankenstein, must be ironically failed creation. Given that the mad scientist as only human will always fail to create (God-like) the human from purely cosmological materials, it is all the more to be expected that the artificial human will be condemned to the same impossibility. He cannot make what his maker could not.

2 We pursue the thesis in Part Three that, while sympathizing with the Monster in his misery, succumbing to the temptation to make of him mostly a “human” victim of Frankenstein’s will ironically “dehumanizes” him even more than Frankenstein himself always already has. The interactions of Victor and his Monster present a demonic parody of the Divine-human interaction in the moment of human origin as hypothesized by generative anthropology: instead of God opening up the human to the historical future by seeming the victimary object of scenic resentment and then being the sacred first Person of originary memory, a mad scientist playing God closes off the possibility of any economically satisfying future for the artificial human he has created. The power of Shelley’s myth lies in its intuition of the necessary evil of economic “violence”: our species identity is one with our ethical identity, but our ethical identity cannot exclude the risks involved with the discovery and invention of new objects, the cognitive risks of experimentation and technological application.

3 Frankenstein’s Monster is double in that he represents both the victimary status of the central cosmological object and the violent freedom of the human subject. As a figure of the abused cosmological object, the Monster speaks to us in the voice of all of non-human Nature that we “victimize” in perpetuating our species, the voice of that which we must consume (and must reject as our non-human Other as we consume it) if we are to survive as a species. In that, the Monster might be taken as an apt symbol for all human victims, a symbol for persecuted people or humans victimized by accidents of fate such as birth defects and hereditary diseases; and a symbol even for animal victims and our ecological home taken as a personified single object. The artificial human as victim of mad science symbolizes the allegedly victimized objects of all scientific representation in general. On the other hand, meanwhile, as a figure of the violent freedom of the human subject, the Monster speaks to us in the voice of a vengeful threat, the voice of an Other who demands a certain recognition, but a recognition frustratingly impossible for us as humans to give—unless, of course, we wish to risk species annihilation and dissolve the category of the human altogether. Although Frankenstein’s Monster, as we shall see, is not free to participate in the human economy of the exchange of valuable things, what freedom the Monster does have, he uses finally in part to wreak a

morally suspect revenge on innocent bystanders in a kind of early romantic terrorism. The strangeness of the artificial human ought to compel us to resist reducing him to the figure of a specific political cause: the potency of the artificial human as a symbol consists precisely in its resistance to ontological assimilation to the real human. The artificial human functions as a symbol, not a mere simile subservient to political illustration. It is in his legitimization of personal revenge that the Monster loses his moral purity and victimary uniqueness.

On the Ugliness of the Monster

4 Let us recall (as we established in Part Two) that an analysis of the novel which moves in a literalizing direction, one that respects the objective difference between Frankenstein the maker and the living thing he makes, depends on our registering the universality of the repulsion inspired by the Monster and experienced equally by all the characters in the fictional world that Mary Shelley creates. The way that all humans in the novel “instinctively” flee the Monster, shocked and terrified by his hideousness, externally verifies his not-being-human. Those of us weaned on the many cinematic Frankenstein monsters, from Boris Karloff’s inarticulate giant to Robert DeNiro’s scarred outcast, need to expel such images from our heads. We need especially to erase from our minds (if possible) the square-headed, grrrr-ing, robotic giant with bolts in its neck immortalized by Karloff. For Mary Shelley’s Monster, the original, is neither a cartoon figure nor finally a human figure; there is nothing laughable about him, nor is there anything embraceable about him. The enigmatic, mummy-skinned, corpse-eyed figure that Mary Shelley proposes for our reflection, if we take some time to linger over him as she describes him, and to listen to his tale, will prove terrifyingly different from us. We look unwillingly upon a Monster who seems, paradoxically, human in all respects except the face that prohibits our interior conviction of equality with him. If we are not afraid, we are not paying attention to the text. Our fright depends upon the proximity of the Monster to us: *except for his ugliness, he might pass for human.* He has the resentment, desire, guilt, linguistic capacity, esthetic taste, religious yearning, erotic appetite, and economic capacity expected in a healthy human person. But the Monster manifests himself as not one of us.

5 Let us take a quick inventory of the Monster’s reports of his hostile contact with humans (setting aside those especially violent confrontations ending in the murder of Ernest, the framing of Justine the servant girl, the murder of Victor’s friend Henry Clerval, and the murder of Victor’s wife, Elizabeth). Having been abandoned by his maker, having stumbled into the forest and gradually gotten control of his sense perceptions, long before he has even learned to make fire or to speak, the Monster enters a small hut where an Old Man is getting his breakfast: “He turned on hearing a noise; and, perceiving me, shrieked loudly, and, quitting the hut, ran across the

fields with a speed of which his debilitated form hardly appeared capable" (2.3.132).⁽¹⁾ His first meeting with a human consists almost wholly of the flight of the other and nothing else, no meeting at all. Next, the untutored creature is driven from a panic-stricken country village as a scapegoat: "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, grievously bruised by stones and many other kind of missile weapons, I escaped to the open country" (2.3.132). When the Monster first perceives his disfigured face in a mirror of still water, he reports a sensation diametrically opposed to that contained in the equivalent moment of the Narcissus myth. He cannot love, but must hate his own reflection: "but how was I terrified . . . ! At first, I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the Monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification. Alas! I did not yet entirely know the fatal effects of this miserable deformity" (2.4.139). We shall consider in more detail below the way that he hopes against all probability that his ugliness will not destroy his chances at social participation, as he prepares himself for his crucial interview with the senior member of the DeLacey family: "I cherished hope, it is true; but it vanished, when I beheld my person reflected in water, or my shadow in the moon-shine, even as that frail image and inconstant shade" (2.7.156). After his first murder, the killing of the boy Ernest Frankenstein, the Monster contemplates a miniature portrait of Victor's late mother that Ernest had been wearing around his neck. At this irreversible juncture—he has just sacrificed his moral innocence to the indulgence of a romantic delusion about the political efficacy of revenge—his resentment rapidly matures. The Monster identifies in his recollection the ground of that resentment explicitly as one of erotic deprivation: "I remembered that I was forever deprived of the delights that such beautiful creatures [as this human woman] could bestow; and that she whose resemblance I contemplated would, in regarding me, have changed that air of divine benignity to one expressive of disgust and affright" (2.8.167). I have presented this inventory of narrative instances to marshal resources against a temptation to which much criticism has succumbed: the temptation to discount the ontological implications of the universality of the human response to the Monster's ugliness (e.g., Goodall 33; Bowerbank 426; Graham 67; Ziolkowski 43).⁽²⁾ Our position resembles that of Thomas Dutoit when he writes: "the Monster's face is opaque, a barrier to communication. It is impossible to see *through* the Monster's face because it is impossible even to sustain a look *at* the Monster's face. It is a face that is too horrible for human eyes" (853).

6 The corroborating report by Robert Walton of his confrontation with the Monster following the death of Victor Frankenstein contains the most extended description of the Monster's face. Elsewhere in the text we have already learned that the

Monster has white teeth, thin black lips, and the opaque, clouded eyes of a corpse; we know that the arteries and blood vessels beneath his skin are visible; eight feet tall, he was sewn together from various body parts, animal flesh conjoined to the human.⁽³⁾ Frankenstein made him huge because from a technical point of view it was easier to work with big rather than small anatomical parts. Walton has told us that Frankenstein died only hours ago; now it is midnight on Walton's ice-bound ship; he has been writing to his sister; he hears a cry and returns to Victor's cabin. The account of the meeting that occurs there, written upon return to his cabin, constitutes the only instance of "writing to the moment" in the entire text.

Over him [the dead Victor Frankenstein] hung a form which I cannot find words to describe; gigantic in stature, yet uncouth and distorted in its proportions. As he hung over the coffin, his face was concealed by long locks of ragged hair; but one vast hand was extended, in colour and apparent texture like that of a mummy. When he heard the sound of my approach, he ceased to utter exclamations of grief and horror, and sprung towards the window. Never did I behold a vision so horrible as his face, of such loathsome, yet appalling hideousness. I shut my eyes involuntarily, and endeavoured to recollect what were my duties with regard to this destroyer. I called on him to stay.

He paused, looking on me with wonder; and, again turning towards the lifeless form of his creator, he seemed to forget my presence, and every feature seemed instigated by the wildest rage of some uncontrollable passion. (240)

Walton is unique in the world of the novel for being the only human *without* violent intent to call on the Monster to "stay": that explains the Monster's responding to his gesture of reciprocity by "looking on [Walton] with wonder." Although showing courage and kindness in a way nobody else has, Walton must struggle with the overwhelming feeling of repulsion at the "horrible" face, its "loathsome . . . appalling hideousness." The struggle at this moment between involuntary, instinctive repulsion and calculated, rational "duty" is identical to that Victor experienced when forcing himself to consider with justice the Monster's demand of the making of a female companion (2.9.171). There is something fabulously excessive in the ugliness of the Monster, as if the fearsomeness of the originary sparagmos somehow has concretized bodily in the un-presentable face of this one mythic figure, a face on which more than once "every feature seem[s] instigated by the wildest rage of some uncontrollable passion."⁽⁴⁾

7 The ugliness is almost enough to make us forget that Victor Frankenstein himself

as a scientist fully intended the creation of a *human* being. Yet paradoxically, despite the hideousness to which Mr. Walton bears witness, despite the Monster's barely contained "rage" of "uncontrollable passion"—which may hint at a residue of animality transferred to the Monster because of the animal flesh that contributes to his organic being⁽⁵⁾—of all the artificial humans we meet in retellings of the myth of the scientist playing God the creator, none is more human *from the beginning* than this unsurpassable romantic abortion of Mary Shelley. Her Monster is, except for his ugliness, more planned as a full human being than any of his literary descendants. A comparison with some of them illuminates the significance of the difference. Take, for example, the hybrid beast people of H. G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. The Beast People are coerced into taking up human posture. They must be taught to speak human language and taught to chant "the Law" by violence of hypnosis; the Monster seeks language and moral reciprocity "naturally" on his own. The Beast People never learn to use fire (unlike the Monster), nor do they engage in economic production or exchange, outside of performing the forced labor Moreau extracts from them. When, after their murder of Dr. Moreau, they revert "naturally" to their animal shapes, losing speech and civility, the Beast People neither suffer nor protest. They *never wanted membership in the human community in the first place*: they were happy beasts. But the Monster desires such membership precisely because it is all he lacks as a would-be human. Whereas Moreau's beast people are therefore tortured *into* a forcible half-humanity in the beginning, Frankenstein's Monster is tortured in being cast *out of human* community from the beginning.

8 Take, for a second example, the robots of Karel Capek's modernist drama, *R.U.R.* (*Rossum's Universal Robots*). In total opposition to the Monster's ugliness, the perfection of the robots' cosmetic resemblance to humans is deceptively imperceptible: Capek's android automata look identical to humans such that it can be impossible in some cases to tell them apart from us. But the androids are not designed to behave like humans or to demonstrate the human intentionality that the Monster possesses. On the contrary, the engineers at the Rossum robot factory intend their androids to lack emotion, lack esthetic judgment, lack economic desire, erotic appetite and the capacity to reproduce sexually. The robots' becoming "human" interferes with plans as an undesired contingency, a result of secret tinkering with the original engineering design by a rogue member of the scientific team. For a third example, look to the human clones engineered for organ transplants in Michael Bay's recent blockbuster action movie *The Island*. Although the clones are physiologically human, their memories are restrictively programmed and their desires engineered in Huxleyan *Brave New World* fashion such that they remain perpetual pre-pubescents, never experiencing adult sexual desire. The first clone to ask questions and to desire some form of escape from his restrictive environment, Nelson 6 Echo (played by Ewan MacGregor), gets called by his managerial enemy a "defective product." Nelson 6 Echo is defective ironically in

that his brain is growing into full humanness: he has memories, dreams, which seem to be genetic residue from his human counterpart out in the real world, the owner of the “insurance policy” that he concretizes. His acquisition of rebellious curiosity makes him a problem for the corporate villains running the clone factory. One could add other examples, but these suffice. The point is that in most versions of the Frankenstein myth, the artificial human begins to become human *by a course of events not intended by the maker, by accident*. But in Mary Shelley’s original source text, Victor Frankenstein *intends* the creation of a human; furthermore, Victor Frankenstein (unlike Dr. Moreau and the Rossum father and son) *succeeds*--except that the test creature is so ugly that his economic potential must be wasted. He cannot engage in economic exchange with other humans because they cannot bear to look upon him.

The Mock-Creation Scene of Failed Integration

9 It can never be emphasized enough that before the Monster confronts his maker and tells his tale, before Frankenstein himself is called to account, the Monster is rejected by humanity in the wider sense. He is rejected by people who know nothing of Frankenstein and have nothing to do with Frankenstein. Mary Shelley therefore hints that the reader, one of the “ordinary” people, would reject the Monster just as Victor does. The Monster confronts the DeLacey family and they reject him with theatrical violence. We are justified in calling the Monster’s interactions with the DeLacey family a “mock-creation scene” rivalrous to the paradoxical animation scene presided over by Victor Frankenstein and the manufactured body at least because, as many critics have noticed, Mary Shelley is carrying out an hypothetical imaginary narrative, a “thought experiment,” in which a human-like creature is brought forward to the boundary of social interaction without having been given any human care. The Creature has no “primary caregiver,” no mother or father, neither ape-parent like Tarzan nor wolf-parent like the feral child. Timothy Morton has alluded to the fact that Mary Shelley was “fascinated by one of anthropology’s founding myths, that of ‘first contact’ between humans from different cultures taking place upon a supposedly neutral ground” (264). Morton astutely suggests that Mary Shelley’s narrative is a “thought-experiment in which the Creature’s cultural environment is severely attenuated, a kind of laboratory condition: at one point, it is just a kennel, a pile of books, and an adjacent household” (264). Those suggestions go along with our notion that in his self-promoting attempts to bring about the situation that would permit the actualization of his potential for human exchange, the Monster executes his own creation scene—a tragic fiasco of failed integration. The scene has, as did Victor Frankenstein’s moment of animation scene, powerful resonances with the hypothetical originary event of generative anthropology.

10 The Monster's ugliness is an unintended consequence of the experiment; Victor's failure to foresee results in intense, unrelieved and irredeemable suffering for the Monster. When we retrace his solitary efforts in learning mobility, food gathering, self-preservation, language, and when we reflect on the gentle benevolence of his bringing firewood and clearing snow to lighten Felix DeLacey's workload, we ought to perceive the contrast between his hopeful desire to belong to human society and Victor's despairing obsession with separating himself from it. The Monster's acting upon his wish to belong can confirm, however, only the impossibility of his ever succeeding: one who "deserves" to become human cannot become human. His maker has made it impossible. His non-humanity is a matter not of economic deprivation, of not getting the food and warmth necessary for physiological survival; it is, more significantly, a matter of being deprived altogether of access to a position of participation on the scene of human economic exchange. The Monster is not permitted to produce anything of human value for which he might receive an equivalent good in exchange.

11 We recall the completion of the originary event in the sparagmos and the exchange of things, the exchange of portions of the scared object: without some exchange of valuable things, there is no human scene; the human exchange of signs must complete itself in the exchange of things valuable to humans: "one cannot satisfy a hungry man with a picture of a steak" (Gans, *Originary* 119). The Monster is damned to experiencing the sociality of the human sign without ever wholly consuming a sacralized portion of the valuable object to which it might refer, precisely because as an *artificial human*, the completeness of his participation on the human scene is ruled out. Criticism has perhaps not sufficiently registered the significance attributed to the *economic* dimension of human activity in the vision of the human that Mary Shelley propounds in the Frankenstein myth. The prohibition against the Monster's ever exercising the freedom to exchange *things* in reciprocity with "real" humans structures his fundamental deprivation. He can look but he cannot touch; he can watch the human family eating dinner from outside but he will never be invited inside. He can still "get by" on his own; but he does not want to stay on his own. Tragically, the delusion that his ugliness might somehow be discounted, set aside, compensated for, overcome, nourishes his "good desire" to integrate with the DeLacey family. His delusion is the same one that his victimary defenders to this day hang onto.[\(6\)](#) Furthermore, the Monster's interactions with kind Old Man DeLacey (kind only because blind) reach their catastrophic end *not* at the point alone when the young man Felix intervenes brutally but also at the point when the Monster is asked who he is-when he is about to be required to tell his whole story. The telling of his whole story would have been disastrously alienating even for the blind man. The telling of his whole story would have required him to horrify the blind man even without inflicting upon him the visual experience of his external ugliness.

12 If we step back from the text a little, we will notice that the Monster's elaborate, patient, highly self-conscious preparations leading up to his conversation with the blind man are preparations far more suspenseful and interesting than any of those contained in Victor's account of his experiment. The visual apparatus of the electrocution into life of the Creature outdoes in spectacular interest the humble image of the Monster and old man sitting in chairs beside a fire. But the reader, as distinct from the moviegoer, engages much more intimately with the Monster's gradual approach to his interview with DeLacey than with Victor's design of the animation test. The Monster's preparations are excruciating for us because we know in advance he will fail.

13 One of Mary Shelley's intellectual models for the physiological and biological basis of the Creature's mental formation may be found in Condillac's *Treatise on Sensations*. As the Monster moves about the forest, having been abandoned by Victor, he learns to distinguish shapes and sounds, forms and perceptions. He recalls that earliest stage of conscious life as an experience of being something like an abandoned infant grotesquely trapped in a big adult body: "I was a poor, helpless, miserable wretch; I knew, and could distinguish, nothing; but, feeling pain invade me on all sides, I sat down and wept" (2.3.129). One difference between Mary Shelley's hypothetical scene of originary human language acquisition and that imagined by Condillac is that her creature is *not paired* with another of his kind. With its very intuition that mimesis works in human competition and sharing, the motif of the "passion" shared by Condillac's two isolated children who begin to interpret each other's signifying gestures, as Gans points out, suggests Condillac's own grasp of the necessity of mimetic paradox as the generative precondition of the first human ostensive sign.⁽⁷⁾ Frankenstein's Monster, by contrast, occupies a scene bereft of companionate interaction. Like a feral child, he engages in reciprocal exchange with no one. The situation in which he acquires human language has him observe from a distance other creatures who speak: he eavesdrops on the DeLacey family through a hole in their cottage wall, slowly but gradually associating words with things (2.4.137-38). He learns language much more quickly when the Arabian Safie, the lover of Felix DeLacey, joins the family and herself gets taught English as a second language: "Presently I found, by the frequent recurrence of one sound which the stranger repeated after them, that she was endeavouring to learn their language; and the idea instantly occurred to me, that I should make use of the same instructions to the same end" (2.5.143). The Creature remembers himself as such a keen student that he felt the vanity of mimetic competition, regardless of his competitor being unaware of his very existence: "My days were spent in close attention, that I might more speedily master the language; and I may boast that I improved more rapidly than the Arabian, who understood very little, and conversed in broken accents, whilst I comprehended and could imitate almost every word that was spoken" (2.5.144).

Next, Mary Shelley places an abandoned sack containing three books in the Creature's path, which he takes up and—here the threadbare plot contrivance collapses into total incredibility—learns to read without any assistance. The texts are Plutarch's *Lives*, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. The Creature's sense of interiority is produced more powerfully by the experience of eavesdropping on conversation combined with reading than by eavesdropping alone.

14 But why does the Monster wish so self-consciously to acquire language? What is the point of learning language? He wishes to belong to a community: he wishes to belong to others. There is Mary Shelley's intuition of the fundamentally non-instrumental, mimetic nature of the human sign. The human sign as a thing exchanged intends the object of appetite as that which can be shared in the exchange of things; it intends the object as a significant thing with a potential economic value. The Monster does not want simply to stay alive, to survive as an animal, to feed and clothe and shelter himself. He hungers for the transcendental effect of sociality, which itself can never be "consumed" but only experienced as an effect of the mimetic interactivity of economic exchange. The Monster wants to participate in the human economy of the exchange of things as the guarantee of his belonging to the human community, even if only "marginally."

15 Meanwhile, the Monster becomes an economic producer whose "gifts" to Felix will never be reciprocated. In secret, he works for the DeLacey family, gathering firewood and doing nighttime work in their fields. Among the first words he distinguishes are those that describe the cottagers' gratitude for his secret acts of benevolence on their behalf: "I afterward found that these labors, performed by an invisible hand, greatly astonished them; and once or twice I heard them, on these occasions, utter the words, *good spirit, wonderful*; but I did not then understand the signification of those terms" (2.4.140). In his being this "invisible hand" helping out the poverty-embarrassed DeLaceys, the Creature's growing acquisition of language is accompanied by a growing desire for economic participation. In this, Mary Shelley draws a contrast between the "good" fantasy, the socially-oriented fantasy of communal belonging of the Monster, and the isolationist, unimaginative obsession of Victor in his anti-social laboratory, whose "evil" fantasy cuts him off from human exchange. The mad scientist dreams only of creating the cosmological object alone, creating his own "species" as did God in omnipotence and omniscience; the artificial human dreams of belonging to the very species that his maker finds dissatisfying. Victor during his experiments must work with great intensity to de-humanize his intellect, forcibly to expel scenic intuition, whereas the Monster by contrast must work to humanize his raw mind, must struggle with determined patience to try to enter the human scene.

16 We may elaborate on this contrast by saying that Victor is sufficiently “evil” to despise the human in such a way that he believes in the desirability of creating a substitute for it, whereas the Monster is sufficiently good—even in goodness sustained by delusion—to worship the human in such a way that he believes in belonging to it, even against all odds. Here he describes the humble DeLacey family:

I looked upon them as superior beings, who would be the arbiters of my future destiny. I formed in my imagination a thousand pictures of presenting myself to them, and their reception of me. I imagined that they would be disgusted, until, by my gentle demeanor and conciliatory words, I should first win their favour, and afterwards their love. (2.4.140)

Retrospectively, the Monster mocks the vanity of his belief that his ugliness could ever have been effaced by his acts of generosity (his potential economic value) or by his use of human language (his minimal sacred equality as user of language): “I formed in my imagination . . . I imagined.” He had put his hope in language alone: he wanted to win human favor and human love by *his words*; his words are opposed to that ugliness which he fears will disgust the friends he would make. The use of human language comes up against the barrier of the non-human ugliness that separates him as a “marked” artificial being from the real humans with whom he wishes to participate in exchange. But while the Monster as creative agent puts his deluded faith in the *minimal* form of human representation, language, by contrast, as we have seen, the mad scientist puts his faith in a *maximal* form of representation: in laboratory science with its equipment, devices, instruments, literature, its heavy expensive cultural overhead. It is a powerful clue that after the Monster is animated, Frankenstein hates those “chemical instruments” that embody the aspirations of scientific representation; he hates packing up and unpacking them, concrete reminders of his delusion: “Ever since the fatal night, the end of my labours, and the beginning of my misfortunes, I had conceived a violent antipathy even to the name of natural science. When I was otherwise quite restored to health, the sight of a chemical instrument would renew all the agony of my nervous symptoms” (1.5.95). This difference between minimal linguistic representation and maximal institutional (scientific) representation also contributes to our vicarious temptation to cast the Monster as wholly good and the modern scientist as wholly bad. The Monster’s moral innocence is seconded by the primitive simplicity of his cultural resources.[\(8\)](#)

17 Readers sympathetic to his plight experience growing dread as the Monster approaches the crucial interview: “The more I saw of them, the greater became my

desire to claim their protection and kindness; my heart yearned to be loved and known by these amiable creatures; to see their sweet looks turned towards me with affection, was the utmost limit of my ambition. I dared not think that they would turn from me with disdain and horror. (2.7.156-57). His ineradicable ugliness—the absence of esthetic value, the presence of anti-erotic disfiguration—is the reality that will smash his fantasy to useless bits. The delusion persists: “I dared not think.” A variation of the initial scene of his creation is enacted: as Frankenstein spurned him at the moment of his “birth,” so will the DeLacey family, including the Old Man, spurn and abandon him.

18 The crisis occurs when the Monster makes his abortive attempt to gain a first human friend in an interview with the blind man. When the Creature does enter the DeLacey cottage, with the younger family members absent and the grandfather alone, his interview is fraught with a sense of finality and irreversibility. Here are the kindest words ever spoken by a human to the Monster: “If you will unreservedly confide to me the particulars of your tale, I perhaps may be of use in undeceiving them. I am blind, and cannot judge of your countenance, but there is something in your words which persuades me that you are sincere. I am poor, and in exile; but it will afford me true pleasure to be in any way serviceable to a human creature” (2.7.159). But the Monster is already aware that he will almost certainly not pass as a *human* creature. The Old Man asks the question that brings the verbal exchange to the point of ostensive crisis: “May I know the names and residence of those friends?” When the Monster gives the names and residence, he must say “you and your family” and “here in this place.” His polite circumlocutionary deception, his softened hypothesizing of a fictional situation happening there to them, will be collapsed into the real and concrete. The Monster’s *discourse* will be converted into *dialogue*; the ostensive presence will be tested for its immediate verifiability. Are you my friend? *Here and now*? The tragic mistiming of Felix’s return to the scene does not cause the failure of the Monster’s integration. Rather, the Monster fails before Felix returns: his “firmness” dissolves and words fail him.

I struggled vainly for firmness sufficient to answer him, but the effort destroyed all my remaining strength; I sank on the chair, and sobbed aloud. At that moment I heard the steps of my younger protectors. I had not a moment to lose; but, seizing the hand of the Old Man, I cried, “Now is the time!—save and protect me! You and your family are the friends whom I seek. Do not desert me in the hour of trial!”

“Great God!” exclaimed the Old Man, “who are you?”

At that instant the cottage door opened, and Felix, Safie, and Agatha

entered (2.7.160)

Although the blind grandfather cannot see the Creature's ugliness, Shelley hints, the sobs—their pre-verbal violence, their bottomless depth—form an auditory perceptual substitute. The sobs of the Monster signify that he *recognizes the necessary fictionality, the real impossibility of his social integration* even before the return of Felix and the Monster's hopeless (and arguably absurd) decision to play the victim and not fight back against Felix.⁽⁹⁾ The Monster's hideous ugliness is to human sight what his inconsolable sobbing is to human hearing: Old DeLacey is expressing horrified shock when he cries ““Great God!”” Furthermore, the question that the Old Man asks—*who are you?*—is the very question that the Creature may not answer without horrifying the interlocutor by telling the tale of his artificial, non-human origin. The Creature has already asked it of himself many times, the most painful question of all: “And what was I? Of my creator and creation I was absolutely ignorant; but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. I was, besides, endowed with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; I was not even of the same nature as man” (2.5.145). Again: “From my earliest remembrance I had been as I then was in height and proportion. I had never yet seen a being resembling me, or who claimed any intercourse with me. What was I? The question again recurred, to be answered only with groans” (2.5.147). And again: “My person was hideous, and my stature gigantic: what did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination? These questions continually recurred, but I was unable to solve them” (2.7.153). The Monster has no answers to these questions, because the figure of the mad scientist playing God—the only “answer” to the question of his cosmological origin—can never satisfy him or legitimate his participation in the human economy. The conversation with his human fantasy friend must end there or soon thereafter, regardless of the return of the predictably outraged Felix, a standard hero of little interest.

19 Old DeLacey's cry of “Great God!” belongs to a set of such cries. The exclamation appears many times in the novel; in fact, the uses of the expression “Great God!” throughout *Frankenstein* amount to a curious theological residue in Mary Shelley's atheistic discourse. It qualifies as one of the linguistic phenomena that Gans has analyzed as the “rhetoric of God”: nonbelievers (and believers) calling on God on appropriate occasions not in the mode of prayer but in the mode of unself-conscious recall of the originary sacred center that equalizes us as humans and links the one who exclaims to the naming of God on the originary scene. In *Frankenstein*, the phrase “Great God!” is deployed by Victor Frankenstein himself, by Walton, and by others, always at a moment of crisis in which the ostensive force of the Creature's hideous body is being verbally countered. Thomas Dutoit in his deconstructive analysis of *Frankenstein* has noted this ostensive force of each use

of the phrase.(10) All this supports my proposal that the blind man does not need to see the Creature's ugliness inasmuch as he can hear the cause of the Creature's despair in the Creature's sobs. The Monster has learned the hard lesson that his Ugliness cannot be undone or overcome.

20 From here, it is a short distance to the Monster's despairing vow to take revenge on his human creator and to force an alternative, the creation of a mate, a second member of his "species." The DeLacey family leaves the neighborhood, never to return. The Monster decides to find Victor Frankenstein, whose scientific journal just happened to be in the pocket of the coat he put on when as a giant-sized mental infant he was stumbling away from Victor's laboratory (another threadbare plot device connected to the motif of reading material) (2.7.155). The Monster decides to put to his creator an ultimatum: since human society is impossible for him, he must have created for him a mate, a second female Monster to be his companion: "I am alone, and miserable; man will not associate with me; but one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of the same species, and have the same defects. This being you must create" (2.8.168). And that ultimatum leads to the third and final creation scene of the novel.

Ultimatum and Abortion: Frankenstein Playing the Savior

21 The difference between Victor's involuntary construction of the second Monster (the proposed female companion) and his original construction of the Monster to whose story we listen is, to a reader sympathetic to the Monster, one of the deeper sources of ironic pleasure in the text. We witness Frankenstein doing *under duress* the very same thing he did *voluntarily* in the first case: "During my first experiment, a kind of enthusiastic frenzy had blinded me to the horror of my employment; my mind was intently fixed on the sequel of my labour, and my eyes were shut to the horror of my proceedings. But now I went to it in cold blood, and my heart often sickened at the work of my hands" (3.2.189).(11) When the Monster confronts him on the Mer de Glace, following the murder of Ernest and the framing of Justine, during a family holiday in which Victor's baffled father and fiancée are hoping to pull him from his habitual gloom, Victor chafes and resists and complains and moans for many reasons. But we ought to place the mimetic reason first: it is the character of the mad scientist playing God to possess an Olympian violence of temperament that can never bear with good grace a position of inferiority to anyone else. Given that the mad scientist resents the presence of the Divine as the basis of human interactivity, it is all the more to be expected that he will resent the necessity of interaction with other humans, and even more to be expected that he will resent being compelled to interact with the artificial human he has made.

22 By the time that the Monster has made his ultimatum and demanded that Victor

construct for him a female companion, he has proved his superiority to the scientist: ethical superiority, physiological superiority. For the reader, too, the Monster is superior, his tale infinitely more engaging (despite his ugliness) than that of Victor alone. Who among us does not find the middle part of the Mary Shelley's book the most enjoyable part to read? Even in the misery of his solitary damnation, the outcast is more "interesting" than the self-excusing, fuming figure Victor makes. The creator has been outdone in a big way by the creation; the creator in this case simply cannot bear the superiority of his creation. This inability, upon reflection, may remind us that the absolute afigural transcendence of the God of the Mosaic Revelation makes the strong opposite of the infuriated immanence of Victor as the human playing God but now having to "deal with" his creature. Henceforth, cornered by his creature, Frankenstein writhes, curses, faints, hates, swears revenge, calls on spirits, gets depressed, mystifies his family, explains nothing to them, curses, weeps, stares at the floor, lies in the boat in the middle of lake like Rousseau, staring at the sky, self-centralizing with a vengeance. But "everybody knows," to quote a phrase from a song by Leonard Cohen: everybody knows by this point that Frankenstein has lost the fight, that Frankenstein of Geneva and the University of Ingolstadt, to use an uncompromising epithet popular among the market-wise young people of North America these days, is "a loser."[\(12\)](#)

23 In terms of originary analysis, the major dialogue between Victor and the Monster that concludes with the ultimatum shocks the mad scientist with the form of memory exercised in the first place by the originary scientist: the originary memory of the scene of representation. In this confrontation, the mad scientist who played God is called to account, presented with the demand that he make amends for the evil done. The dead central object intended by the materialist cosmological imagination, once animated, reveals itself now as, unexpectedly, a Thing ironically outside and beyond the control of the cosmological imagination. Whatever result Frankenstein intended, the unintended consequence obtrudes itself upon him, cannot be escaped. The ethical and anthropological as embodied paradoxically by the non-human Monster now reveal themselves as modes of understanding more meaningful than the atheistically cosmological mode of understanding that the mad scientist playing God forgetfully privileged. This opposition between ethical demand and cosmological reductionism is boldly figured forth in the Monster's "standing up" to Victor, despite his ugliness: the cosmological fact of his ugliness is overpowered (for the moment) by the ethical claim he makes as a human-like creature.[\(13\)](#)

Glancing at the consequences of Victor's mechanistic materialism and his failure to acknowledge the category errors in his project, we become conscious of the brutal way in which there is far more to the "secret of life" than the technique by which one might engineer the initial animation of an unanimated corpse.[\(14\)](#) Human life, to be human, requires social interactivity and scenic belonging: the human taken as an anthropological category is not identical to the human taken as a biological

category or, as for Frankenstein, a chemical category. (“Biology” as a discipline named as such would not emerge until the nineteenth century). In keeping with his status as the original mad scientist, Victor Frankenstein would be on the side of those scientific rhetoricians in our era who nod toward the residual mystery attached to the question of the cosmological origin of natural life only with grudging resentment.[\(15\)](#)

24 We attended above to the suspense generated by the Monster’s preparations for his mock-creation interview scene with Old DeLacey. Let us consider likewise the stunning thoroughness of the dramatic reversals Mary Shelley stages in the preparation for the second Monster-construction scene. When the Monster tells Victor his story in the middle of the book, the once-all-powerful creator must sit like a punished child and *listen, listen* to the life story of the “child” he abandoned. The once-dead, now-animated central “object” demonstrates its bizarre marginal freedom, its subjectivity, in language. By now, the Monster has given up helping people in secret or openly; he travels alone at night, fearful of human beings despite his physical strength-fearful presumably because he feels their rejection as spiritually painful (2.8.164). By now, the Monster has only one plan, one proposal to make. Sitting Victor down to force him to listen means demonstrating to Victor that to treat the potentially human as mere unanimated matter with the ontological status of the cosmological object alone, as Victor did, is to do evil. The last time they “met,” they were not “meeting” at all: the Monster had been first a mass of dead flesh prepared for testing in a chemical experiment and then (briefly) a disgusting moving thing to be avoided at all costs. Now, mad scientist and artificial human are really “meeting,” and this Creature is telling his story, explaining his condition, proposing a truce for peaceful co-existence.

25 Meanwhile, Frankenstein hates to reciprocate the conversational gestures of the Monster because in doing so he can only be confessing that his (previously) cosmological imagination has now been forced into a position in which it must serve the ethical. Every tiny concession Frankenstein makes to the Monster implies a confession, a confession that he was “wrong” to have abandoned his experiment at the moment of its success, if not to have contemplated the technological achievement at all. Frankenstein’s fear of the Monster’s ugliness is only human; but the “only-human” condition of the human playing God captures the essential wrongness of the situation. The human scientist by playing God has created an impossible situation in which to be human necessarily means to reject the artificial near-human who arguably “deserves” to be included in the human community. Nor does Frankenstein willingly situate himself in the situation he himself created; he is always wriggling, writhing, evasively shrugging, side-stepping. Frankenstein would rather be tortured (and torture himself) than confess having done any “wrong.” The mad scientist hates to admit that he is mad, hates to concede he was ever

misguided. His refusal of the possibility of repentance, his utter inability to distinguish between being humbled and being humiliated is a symptom of his madness. By sheer force of will, he ignores all the evidence that might lead him toward spiritual conversion, or simply taking a little blame.[\(16\)](#) In the words of Pamela Clemit, his “self-justifying confessional narrative collapses into unwitting self-condemnation” (34).

26 The event structure of scientific revelation entails that we lose our freedom to blame God (or another inexplicably supernatural agency) for that which we discover and invent; it entails the unspectacular truth that freedom generates responsibility. But Victor Frankenstein refuses responsibility. For it is one thing to admit one was mistaken because the consequences of one’s actions have caused suffering *to oneself*; it is another thing to apologize to one’s victim. Victor exercises eloquence in the elaboration of *his own* sufferings, but he never even remotely contemplates an apology to his victim. I have insisted that we as readers may not claim to be capable of having done any better than Frankenstein in our “instinctive” responses to the Monster’s hideousness, whether before or after the animation. I have argued that Frankenstein could not have foreseen the animated ugliness before animation, that he must have been repelled by the animated creature in its living hideousness. Without disowning either assertion, I would argue as well, however, that Frankenstein after the event is certainly free to interpret the event of the scientific revelation that his actions in near-total isolation brought about as his “responsibility.” The scientific revelation differs from the religious or divine revelation in that ethically, we are no longer free to blame God for revealing that which has been revealed. Such are the consequences of inhabiting a universe hypothetically emptied of all traces of the idea of God, the kind of universe Victor claims to inhabit when he brings to life the Monster. The objective-minded scientist may not, without ethical inconsistency, engineer the conditions for passive Nature to reveal herself and then refuse in splendid obliviousness (obliviousness to the scene of human representation) to claim responsibility for having actively roused Nature from “her” passive state. The scientific revelation reveals a truth about nature, but a truth revealed *by* humans, and therefore a humanly invented or discovered truth, as opposed to a divinely revealed truth. It is not that we can make of the cosmological object alone whatever we wish; it is that the only cosmological objects revealed to us are revealed to us on the human scene of scientific representation. Orignary, modern, or mad, all scientific representation is representation performed by humans. The cosmological object intended by science will always have ethical implications for the human community, implications attached to the desacralization and exchangeability of real objects, implications for goodness and beauty, consumption and production. In his exchanges with the Monster he has made, Frankenstein absurdly attempts to occupy a position of blameless innocence absolutely above the production of such implications. We

ought to feel free to be appalled by the vanity of his attempts.

27 Victor's excuses take the form of those of the drunken driving street racer who, having hit and killed a harmless pedestrian and then run, claims that he is not responsible because he was drunk. It is not illegitimate to demand the mad scientist take responsibility for his paradoxically deliberate madness, just as we demand such a hit-and-run drunk driver take responsibility for his paradoxically deliberate irresponsibility in creating the conditions for his "accidental" murderousness. We noted in Part One that partial defenses of Victor Frankenstein privilege his status as scientist. True, Frankenstein is morally defensible in a minimal way *only* as a scientist. The defenses take forms roughly analogous to the drunk driver defense: Victor was noble up until the "failure of nerve" he suffered at the moment of animation (Vasbinder), or noble until the Calvinism-induced "moral panic" that attacked him at the moment of animation (Goodall), or noble until the failure of nerve that incapacitated him in that event (Ziolkowski). But the nervous breakdown, moral panic, and failure of nerve arguments themselves signify the mutually reinforcing cosmological impossibility and moral scandal of the human playing God in the mode of *being* God, of maximal desacralization and minimal exchangeability. Each argument is better subsumed by the minimal God-human and cosmological-anthropological oppositions that have been our focus. Originary guilt is the disposition that might even be said to incline us toward thematization of originary memory as *the memory of the difference* between the whole, untouchable sacred object of infinite inaccessibility and the dismembered, consumable, economic object of exchangeable value. Victor's whole experiment required of him, as we have seen, the forceful expulsion of originary guilt from his deliberately self-dehumanized mind.[\(17\)](#)

28 In a desolate outpost on the Orkney Islands of West Scotland, Victor has managed against his will to stitch together the anatomical parts for the Monster's female companion. All along throughout this journey to Scotland and during the preparatory procedures, he has been tormented by self-consciousness and disgust. Mary Shelley's punitive irony should not be missed: all the thinking Victor did *not do* in the first case, having emptied his mind of ethical consideration and esthetic intuition, is thinking that he is forced to do in this second case. Under the Monster's extortionist thumb, he is forced to be disgusted by the very things—blood, corpses, anatomical reconstruction, solitude—about which he had forced himself in the first creation *not* to feel any disgust, a disgust that might well have stopped him. The original construction was rushed, thoughtless, lubricated by enthusiasm, propelled by a desire to know the experimental outcome whatever the cost, to know the cosmological object alone; by contrast, this time it is slowed down, painfully thought-heavy, clogged by reluctance, obstructed by a total distaste for scientific practice itself. In fact, Victor becomes (ironically) superstitious and given to pagan

magical invocations recited in vehement desperation.[\(18\)](#) We should register the severity of the situational reversal by which Mary Shelley humiliates her *modern* Prometheus, one lacking Promethean forethought, at this point. Victor in the Orkneys resembles the ancient Prometheus on his rock; he is having his liver gnawed daily by the eagle of disgusted self-consciousness, the very self-awareness that he lacked in his concentration on the “object alone” the first time around. Another way of reading the twist is to say that Victor is playing God *against his will* this time; he is forced to make God-like decisions that he does not wish to make. He no longer wishes to be the Supernatural Bio-ethicist that he should have tried to be during the first experiment.

29 Frankenstein pauses before he animates the companion female Monster. He reports to Walton in considerable reflective detail a series of five ethical considerations, a “train of reflection” (3.3.190) that made him hesitate before fulfilling the promise that the Monster extorted. Victor believes that he is running a risk incurred by not knowing in advance the Creature’s innate psychology: “I was now about to form another being, of whose dispositions I was alike ignorant; she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate” (3.3.190). We may well accuse Victor of self-serving memory alteration inasmuch as “alike ignorant” falsely suggests he in fact considered the possible “dispositions” of the first monster in advance, when in fact he did no such advance planning. Regardless, the risk now is a real one: the female creature will be her own self. Second, in a closely related move, Frankenstein now foresees the possibility that the female companion might refuse to be bound by promises made by the male Monster, contracts made without her consent. In meditating on purely *potential* beings in this manner, Frankenstein is doing what David Heyd calls “genethics” and is confronting “pure genesis” problems, asking the kinds of questions that the imagined Biblical God in Genesis must have asked before creating humankind. If one chooses to make a person under certain conditions, what consequences follow from the choice, given those conditions? The condition here is that of the female companion being bound by a promise that she herself did not make. Frankenstein correctly supposes this might be a moral problem: “He has sworn to quit the neighborhood of man, and hide himself in deserts; but she had not; and she, who in all probability was to become a thinking and reasonable animal, might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation” (3.3.190). Those bioethicists who worry about the conditions for the first human clone (for example) take up such considerations: “but *she* had not” (emphasis added) reminds us of the ethical equivalent of the worry that the first human clone might wish that *others* had decided not to clone her, because clone-being might seem burdened with an excess of unfreedom.[\(19\)](#) Victor is correct to worry that the condition of absolute solitude to which the male Monster has agreed is, in fact, an extraordinarily restrictive one.

30 Third, Victor imagines a scenario opposite to the Monster's imaginary scene of conjugal bliss and mutual affection: "They might even hate each other; the Creature who already lived loathed his own deformity, and might he not conceive an abhorrence when it came before his eyes in the female form?" (3.3.190). This hypothetical scenario might seem to be cynical special pleading, but we must give Frankenstein credit again for imagining the *freedom* of the female companion, and indeed, of the male Monster himself, to respond-as humans are free to do-in hate. Love is the deferral of resentment, but there can never be any cosmological guarantee that resentment will be deferred in a particular human situation. Once more, Victor fully imagines the very freedom of the artificial human that he *failed to begin to imagine* in the first case: the freedom of the artificial human.

31 A fourth consideration spells out the possible consequences of a separation between the monsters: "She might also turn with disgust from him to the superior beauty of man; she might quit him, and he is again alone, exasperated by the fresh provocation of being deserted by one of his own species" (3.3.190). The Monster might be resentful if the free female companion leaves him, abandons him; he would then have motivation anyway to destroy Victor's family in vengeance for his dissatisfaction, making the scientist's attempts at blackmailer accommodation pointless and useless after all. Notice the systematic quality of Victor's ethical considerations. He is performing cost-benefit calculations, thinking in the fashion of William Godwin, the coolly rational philosopher father of Mary Shelley; indeed, he is thinking like a contemporary bioethicist.

32 However, the fifth and final ethical consideration decides Frankenstein against completing the deal. In this crucial consideration, species identity is one with ethical identity and cognitive capacity.

Even if they were to leave Europe and inhabit the deserts of the new world, yet one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted, would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated on the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror. Had I a right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations? I had before been moved by the sophisms of the being I had created; I had been struck senseless by his fiendish threats; but now, for the first time, the wickedness of my promise burst upon me; I shuddered to think that future ages might curse me as their pest, whose selfishness had not hesitated to buy its own peace at the price perhaps of the existence of the whole human race. (3.3.190)

We recall here Frankenstein's original dream of the "species" that would "bless" him as its "creator." (20) Now, in this much more emotionally detached projection, we are as far as possible from that underthought dream. The perverse irony here is that Victor positions himself as the pre-emptive self-sacrificial savior of the whole human race, when the need for such saving never would have arisen had he alone in the first place not done the evil that created the necessity. This perverse irony attaches paradoxically to the most "moral" decision Victor makes. Our claim for the decisive weight of this fifth consideration is supported by the fact that it alone is repeated by Frankenstein twice later.

33 The first repetition occurs after the murder of Henry Clerval, the Monster's first act of vengeance following Victor's abortion-destruction of the female companion. Victor has been rescued from jail (the Monster also managed to frame him for the murder of Clerval) by his father Alphonse. He has been raving to his father in delusional fevers about being himself "guilty" for the deaths of Ernest, Justine, and Henry: "'A thousand times would I have shed my own blood, drop by drop, to have saved their lives; but I could not, my father, indeed I could not sacrifice the whole human race'" (3.5.209). With the figure of "shed... blood" and the sacramental overtones in "drop by drop" and the verb "sacrifice" in the context of his heroically saving "the whole human race," the unwitting substitution of Victor himself for the figure of Christ is no stretch. Mary Shelley has Victor follow the report of that memory with the more mundane memory: "The conclusion of this speech convinced my father that my ideas were deranged, and he instantly changed the subject of our conversation, and endeavoured to alter the course of my thoughts" (3.5.209). She does not want us to miss the joke: Victor in claiming messianic centrality and so "playing God" has gone so far in his delusional ravings that even his unflappable father appears to feel some embarrassment. On the second occasion in which he remembers having acted (so he believes) as pre-emptive savior of the whole human race, Victor is making his last death-bed statements to Walton, having decided his life's conduct has not been blameworthy: "In a fit of enthusiastic madness, I created a rational creature, and was bound towards him, to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being" (238). In a stunning but typical ellipsis, Victor says nothing about the fact that he did nothing in his power to assure that well-being *in the first place*. He leaves out any mention of the things he did not do in his "experimental frenzy." He slides instead to the next sentence, to remark on the one thing he *deliberately* chose not to do, the animation of the companion creature. The sins of unthinking omission in the first step are ignored; the purported saintliness of the grand gesture of deliberate omission in the second case is highlighted, because having performed it satisfies his self-centralizing vanity: "This was my duty; but there was another still paramount to that. My duties to my fellow-creatures had greater claims on my attention, because they included a greater proportion of happiness or misery. Urged by this view, I refused, and did right in refusing, to

create a companion for the first creature" (238). The irreconcilability of these duties may be for Frankenstein a source of death-bed moral self-approval. For the Monster, the irreconcilability is the cause of irredeemable uniqueness and aloneness.

34 The question of alternative courses of action remains: was there any other way Frankenstein might have protected his friends and family from the threatened vengeance of the Monster? It would not be hostile to Frankenstein's own set of considerations for us to consider briefly the thought that his suicide could have solved the problem of the Monster's blackmail. The topic of suicide forms part of the novel's victimary rhetoric: Victor and the Monster both profess powerful wishes for self-annihilation from time to time. Suicide would shut the whole dance of death down in a flash. Absent Victor, the Monster would have no reason to make other humans suffer: the Monster takes his vengeful pleasure most sweetly in the pain of Victor alone, who made him ugly. The possibility of an efficient, pre-emptive suicide that would protect Elizabeth and Henry and all the others never occurs to Victor because his rhetoric of desire for self-annihilation is bogus. Charles Schug has perceived the damage done to the "savior" defense by Victor's never owning up to the unglamorously *limited* scope of the Monster's human targets: "for all practical purposes, Victor has failed his second duty as well as his first: once the Monster has eliminated all of the people Frankenstein held dear he is no longer a threat to 'beings of [Frankenstein's] own species.' The Monster chooses from the very beginning to wreak revenge *on his creator, not humankind at large*. Frankenstein's real duty was to William and Clerval and Elizabeth, not to his 'species' in general" (616) [emphasis added]. Like any full-blown first-generation romantic, Frankenstein will never exchange indulgence in the luxury of self-staged suffering for obedience to the human necessity of the deferral of resentment.[\(21\)](#) A calculated suicide, although it might have disarmed the Monster and saved his family and friends from becoming collateral damage, would, however, have also put an end to the resentment on which Frankenstein himself thrives. He appears incapable of experiencing any pleasure in the esthetic deferral of his resentment. As Richard Van Oort writes, "But Frankenstein's death is hardly a 'tragedy' in the traditional sense; we are neither horrified nor cathartically purged by it. . . . We are more likely frustrated by Frankenstein's massive ego. Not even death seems to bring humility to this egocentric character." Frankenstein never regrets having destroyed the female companion, just as he never internalizes any responsibility for the suffering of the Monster that he made first.

35 The moment of the abortive destruction of the female Monster, after the animation of the Monster itself, is perhaps the most graphically horrific moment in the novel. The hallucinatory tendency of the text's surface demonstrates itself in the Monster's tendency to appear at the worst possible moments for Frankenstein; he appears again now, his face appearing in the window of the makeshift Orkney

island laboratory, immediately following the mental activity that constituted Victor's fifth ethical consideration of saving the whole human race from the apocalyptic threat of a rival species. The hideous face of the Monster, the ugliness, seems to tip the scales of ethical judgment for Victor: "As I looked on him... I thought with a sensation of madness on my promise of creating another like to him, and, trembling with passion, tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged. The wretch now saw me destroy the Creature on whose future existence he depended for happiness, and, with a howl of devilish despair and revenge, withdrew" (3.3.191). In another macabre scene staged that same night, Frankenstein must row a boat out onto the water and drop overboard the dismembered parts of the aborted companion thing. For once, he does not merely mope like Rousseau in the middle of the lake, but does some heavy lifting. Notice again the concentration in the one mad figure of Frankenstein alone that which should be in reality a shared activity, the sparagmos, the tearing apart of the object: Frankenstein's is a criminal, solitary, non-communal rendering of the thing. The sober, self-aware deliberation in his disposal of the body parts (3.3.197) contrasts with the feverish, fearful all-night pacing in the courtyard that followed the animation of the original male Monster (1.4.86).

36 Despite all these considerations unfavorable to the mad scientist, it must be said that to condemn Frankenstein for not trusting the Monster or for not "sympathizing" sufficiently with him to complete the creation of the mate is nonetheless an oversimplification. The formal barrier which it required some work to tease out in our analysis of the event-structure of the animation is even more palpable at this final crisis. We understand that Frankenstein's tearing-apart of the mate condemns the Monster to eternal solitude; our "sympathy" for him is therefore solicited. But it also damns Frankenstein himself to being nothing but the scientist he was when he animated the first Monster. Meanwhile, as Charles Schug suggests, "While the Monster gains sympathy, he does not establish unimpeachable credibility" (618). We sense that Frankenstein has never considered more carefully than he has in this instance the possible ethical consequences of an action; our intuition of the rightness of our reluctance to see the companion creature animated is confirmed in an identification with Frankenstein having become ethically reflective, however belatedly, inefficiently, and "unfairly." Mary Shelley shows a certain ironic wisdom in making fear of the Monster's sexually reproductive capacity the long-term, propositional or hypothetical form of our ostensive fear of his ugliness. We might sentimentally pity him in his solitude, but pragmatic common sense forces us to acknowledge that risking the possibility of sharing the planet with a whole population of his kind is not a desirable plan of action.[\(22\)](#)

37 We ought to fear the risk. We must keep the Monster at a distance. We must let him go, to never come back. Our previous fascination with the unhealthy "secret of life" in Frankenstein's experimental asexual reproduction is here dispelled by a

fresh confirmation of the priority of the healthy “secret of life,” as expressed in old-fashioned human sexually creative coupling. One recalls, as once more David Heyd in his discussion of “pure genesis problems” in genetics does, that the very first commandment of the Biblical God of Genesis for the newly created human being was not a commandment but a blessing placing economic value on human existence itself: “Be fruitful and multiply.” Nor are we wrong to fear the violence of the Monster. We cannot justify the Monster’s murder of Ernest and his framing of Justine, those acts which, committed before the ultimatum, cast a heat over it that understandably flames up easily into Victor’s resentment. The assertion that the Monster can be trusted to do no further harm if Victor complies and creates the mate would have been much more believable if the Monster had not exercised such violence in the name of “vengeance”: “no amount of misery can justify his murdering [Ernest] and his framing of Justine, a totally innocent bystander” (Schug 610). It would have made a great difference if the Monster’s request to Victor could have been cast in the form of a request rather than extortion. That originary thinking affirms the necessity of human resentment of the sacred center does not entail that originary thinking posits the legitimacy of an ethic of resentful extortionist revenge. The murder of Ernest and the framing of Justine are the key to the unity of Victor and his creation: neither mad scientist nor Monster is willing to assume responsibility for the death of these innocents. Mad scientist and Monster ultimately become one in their massive moral indifference to the wider human society: here we touch borders with the doppelganger approach from which we distanced ourselves in Part Two.

38 The Monster gains nothing and loses much moral credibility in his killing of Ernest and framing of Justine. The necessary evil of the violence required for human self-protection is one thing; the luxury of the violence performed to satisfy revenge is another. It may be easy to understand revenge, but it ought to be difficult to justify it.[\(23\)](#) The romanticism of the textual surface of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is at its most tedious in its excessive reliance on this overblown rhetoric of revenge, a rhetoric which both Monster and mad scientist maker enjoy without reservation. One of the implications of generative anthropology’s notion that “the inalienably reciprocal structure of linguistic communication lies at the core of our humanity” (*Signs* 151) might be that linguistic exchange is almost always to be preferred to the exchange of physically violent gestures, from gestures of the individually formed human fist to those of the collectively threatened military weapon. The victimary interpreters of *Frankenstein*, who side with the Monster against Victor, can do so only at the expense of legitimating an ethic of victimary revenge, and expelling from consideration, as well, that core of properly scientific courage that gives Victor a certain modern identity in which we have to claim a share, and which we may disown only by taking on instead a regressive moralizing piety disrespectful of the uniqueness of the structure of modern scientific revelation.

Mad Science and the Politicization of “Victims” of Science

39 The tragedy of the fantastic artificial human is precisely that he or she will not be human. We must keep the Monster at a distance. Victimary interpretations may sacrifice Victor to the Monster only by devaluing the unique power of modern scientific knowledge and by denying the risks inherent in the event-structure of scientific revelation. That which is revealed in the animation of the Monster does not need to be revealed a second time in the creation of his proposed mate: Victor is “right” to condemn the Monster to his solitary oneness. The ironic minimal “goodness” of Victor counts as an unintended consequence of his experiment. It is an ironic good that in playing God, he reveals (despite himself, to be sure) the structure of scientific revelation. Besides, he is already paying much of the cost of the consequences for us by providing such a valuable bad example. Do we need to beat him up any more than the Monster already has?

40 I will not be lingering, then, over the secondary revenges that follow the abortive destruction of the mate, including the murders of Henry Clerval and Elizabeth—who “exist fictionally on a sort of literary death row” (the apt phrase is Richard Van Oort’s). Nor will I analyse Victor’s brushes with the ineffectual law: the trial of Victor for murder (he is framed as Justine was framed) and his absurdly belated attempt, after the killing of his wife, to convince a Genevan magistrate of the Monster’s existence and rouse a posse to hunt it down and kill it. Nor will I reflect at length on the passages leading the Monster and Victor up to the North Pole. Paul Sherwin’s rendition of the absurd race of the “infernal couple” (Flahaut’s phrase) toward mutual self-destruction, although inflected by the allegorizing approach we have not taken, may cover that material for us: “As a recognizable human world recedes and the Creature becomes a progressively more entralling superpower, Frankenstein joins in the frenetic dance of death that impels these mutually fascinated antagonists across the waste places of the earth. By now wholly the Creature’s creature, [Frankenstein] must be considered a florid psychotic, pursuing the naked form of his desire in a fantastic nowhere that is his own” (886). It is sufficient for our purposes to have registered that in the ethical reflections that Victor Frankenstein performs just prior to the tearing apart of the never-to-be-animated female monster, we witness the birth of a discourse something like that of bioethics a century and a half before the discipline proper is born in the Western world—one more testimony to the prophetic insight of Mary Shelley’s founding myth.

41 I have acknowledged more than once that the abject Monster deserves our sympathy. To remove from the whole text the moral ground of its victimary rhetoric is a surgery too drastic, in my view, to be worth the benefit of the historical distance thus gained. Feminist criticism has found the Monster’s story full of possibilities for meaningful comparison with the arbitrarily imposed sufferings of women, more

particularly those of Mary Shelley herself and the women of her time (see Mellor; Jacobus; Moers; Graham). *Frankenstein* has been put to service in disability studies: “therapists, social workers and educators have used film versions of *Frankenstein* to stimulate discussion among the disabled” (Hoeveler 59). Other studies have shown the ways that the mythic Monster has been appropriated by conservative forces to satirize mob-sized democratic resentment and to mobilize fear of such putative entities as the monstrously rebellious Irish and the masses of the monstrously angry poor (Sterrenburg). Somewhat in the way that the effect of the esthetic can not be coerced, the arbitrary restriction of the possibilities for historical politicization of materials in this modern myth cannot succeed. These various appropriations of the figure of the Monster, from different political wings, may all be to the good. Just as Mary Shelley had the insight to represent in memorable images the power of modern science to do evil, she had the intuition to imagine the extremity of the situation of the victims of modern science at its most aggressively atheistic and amoral.

42 It is to be expected that inasmuch as scientific knowledge is successfully disenchanted and demystifying the cosmos, there will follow a commodification and politicizing of the “causes” of human suffering in body and mind-making resentments into exchangeable commodities (Fleming and Carroll).[\(24\)](#) Forms of suffering that were endowed with sacred significance in the context of a cosmology which included a God to give them direction and transcendental, otherworldly value were to lose their sacred purpose under pressure of “chemistry” and related forces; but we might wonder whether at least something of what was lost in sacred value would not be recuperated in market value. In a wholly “secular” world, elected legislators or military dictators, the political usurpers of sacred centrality, will be compelled to “play God,” inasmuch as they will be expected to do the work of making the meaning that God once made-legislating the institutional means to circulate the resentments created by what are taken to be institutionally caused forms of human suffering. It is no wonder that the assassination of a President or Prime Minister can only be experienced as a sacrificial crisis: the office cannot help but be sacred in democratic society. But the Monster’s suffering cannot be reduced to the inspiration of a political cause. His resentment is legitimate (paradoxically) precisely to the extent that it is not-human.

43 There is a potential for harm in exchanges of resentful accusations such as those in which the Monster and his mad scientist maker dizzyingly engage. Likewise, the modern economies of accusation and apology, outcry and reform, are seldom free from destructive hostility and self-righteousness. There is harm in the politicization of victimization, certainly, when a minimum of ethical civility is not respected—especially when we see jettisoned in self-righteous victimary frenzies the anthropological truth that utopian resentment aiming toward the imposition from

above of a fixed state of originary morality inevitably creates its own monsters. It creates monsters to rival the first Monsters who created the now-politicized victims. It has been my argument in this three-part study that to cast Frankenstein's Monster himself as a figure of such utopian resentment is a little perverse or inappropriate given that Mary Shelley's whole original point is that *the Monster represents no human group at all*.

44 The Monster is forcibly prevented from ever entering human society. The conversion of the manifest rhetoric of the Monster into a metaphorical victimary politics does not respect the conspicuous deletions of content by which Mary Shelley discourages us from making such a conversion. Those deletions are to be experienced via the lack of any explicit connection between the Monster and a specific human party, cause, camp, or agenda: the absence of the content itself invites us to let the Monster be himself, his own unique thing. Our eagerness—and we may all feel it—to ignore those deletions tells us more about our own resentments than it tells us about the anthropological wisdom implicit in Shelley's text, made visible by originary analysis.

45 I have argued instead that *the Monster's resentment is uniquely legitimate inasmuch as it is uniquely non-human*. To Walton at the end of the novel he declares: "Once I falsely hoped to meet with beings, who, pardoning my outward form, would love me" (242). It seems worthwhile to insist that the Monster is not one of us, even as we fully own that his never having been loved even a little is a terrible thing, a tragic result. The Monster is never embraced by another affectionate body, not once. The Monster is correct when he says he is worse off than Satan in *Paradise Lost*, that Satan had friends.⁽²⁵⁾ Even Victor Frankenstein (like Satan) had friends whom he was free to neglect and free to keep in the dark about the Monster's dangerous proximity. If there is something that tempts us to ridicule such cries of self-pity, the temptation is there because the Monster was never human in the first place; but equally, there is something horrifying in such cries, because the Monster was almost human in the first place. Esther Schor may well be accurate in naming him "the loneliest character in the English novel" (1) and describing the novel as "the century's most blistering critique of Romantic egotism" (2).

46 In all three parts of this study, I have been arguing that Mary Shelley's first novel is most memorable for its mythic content. The textual source of the modern myth she created yields its meanings most forcefully when interpreted, by means of originary analysis, as the dramatization of the necessary evil of the human playing God in modern market society, where the visible authority of science (as opposed to religion) both must be acknowledged and is bound to be resented. In the agonistic conflict between Frankenstein and his Monster, we will understand more if we

resent less. We understand more if we give up an exclusively moralizing condemnation of the mad scientist and instead identify ourselves with a minimal core of legitimate desire in *Frankenstein*, while also disassociating ourselves from the otherness of the Monster that might wrongly be taken to justify his violence against innocent bystanders. I have tried to demonstrate that the novel dramatizes with gusto the clash between two fantasies. At one pole, we witness an ill-advised modern scientific atheism that attempts to evacuate its cosmological imagination of “ethical” considerations, reducing the human to terms limited to chemical, mechanical, or instrumental categories (*Frankenstein*). At the other pole (the Monster’s contemporary defenders), we witness a victimary romanticism that loses legitimacy when it legitimates non-negotiable revenge, when it disowns the debt owed by modern market society to scientific revelation, and when it shows contempt for faith in “objective” scientific truth as the ultimate horizon of the exchange in scientific ideas (the knowable) and economic goods (the desirable). Does Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* really contain all these implications? Originary analysis helps explain its tremendous lasting power as a modern myth.

47 As heirs of this modern myth, we who study Shelley’s text will find that we hate to admit that we are like *Frankenstein*. If we already “believe in” modern science, then we may find it a little easier to admit we are a little like *Frankenstein*. All of us as humans believe in the primitive egalitarian morality of originary science, so it is easy to hate him from that standpoint. The more difficult task is perhaps a more urgent one. We might admit that, as modern people, we are like *Frankenstein* in that we want to know the truth about the natural object as it is in cosmological “objective” reality, without interference from God or gods or (even, at times) other people who get in the way for non-negotiable “faith community” reasons having nothing to do with the beneficial science we already have. “Religion” needs to remember the respect owed to “science”; that is, those of us who value the experience of the untouchable sacred object need to remember the respect owed to the pragmatic knowledge that brings consumable, exchangeable, and above all *historically new* objects to the scene of cultural exchange. The sacred has a history thanks only to science, to scientific change.

48 On the other hand, we hate to admit that we are like *Frankenstein* for the good reason that his error as mad scientist is an error that we know very well, given the revelations of Hiroshima and Auschwitz. *Frankenstein*’s mad science causes terrible dehumanizing damage: the desire for “objective” knowledge at its least wise indulges the delusion that it is humanly possible to reverse the priority of desire to cognition that anthropological wisdom would have us take into account.[\(26\)](#) One must always ask whether one really wants to know; we do ask the question, as individuals and as political collectivities. The defenders of the pursuit of scientific representation need to learn to concede (perhaps more rigorously and consistently)

that it is always only paradoxical representation, as subject to the paradoxical as any other form of human representation is.

49 The problem of modern science is that we hate to admit our submission to it, our debt to it, but we cannot do without it and only as fools deny the technological benefits it gives us. The temptation to side exclusively with the Monster aligns itself with the victimary temptation to believe that all scientists are on the way to becoming mad scientists—a resentfully immature, untenable belief. At the same time, we who study Shelley's text meet in the Monster a figure of seemingly infinite near-human suffering. And the novel's prophetic warning consists in the figure of amoral science that Frankenstein as massively misled mad scientist, isolated and antisocial and incapable, himself represents. As Pamela Clemit has suggested, if we classify *Frankenstein* as the “first futuristic novel”—and I think we ought to accept that as one of the viable classifications—then it follows that thanks to Mary Shelley, “science fiction was inaugurated as a warning, not a promise, about the world of tomorrow” (84). Frankenstein as mad scientist represents the conviction that modern science as mad science threatens to produce forms of evil that originary science respectful of the communally held sacred could never have dreamed of producing. A little reflection on the future possibilities of biochemical or nuclear warfare, ecological devastation, pharmacological stupefaction, and human genetic engineering, reminds us of these once-never-dreamed-of possibilities for human evil. But a modern world without nuclear weapons, without heavy human footprints on the “environment,” without drugs of any sort, without some measure of medically engineered reproductive autonomy—such a world would no longer be “modern.” Primitivist fantasy gets us nowhere.

50 Originary violence, without which we would have never acquired any knowledge of the concrete central object in the first place, takes the form of an enactment of a necessary evil. For the hopeful idealist attached to utopia (we are all such to some degree),⁽²⁷⁾ modern science will always seem at best only a necessary evil. At the other extreme, however, at the extreme of those events that generated the postmodern esthetic, we find ourselves asking a legitimate question: how can we ever hope to contain the necessary evil that we fear will undo us as human beings? The answer of this study is a modestly pragmatic one, but perhaps worth making explicit all the same. We can ground our hope for the human future in doing what our first ancestors in the economic distribution of the sparagmos did, and what Mary Shelley has done for us so well: we can ground our hope by *representing* the object and the scene on which it appears to ourselves, by keeping the object and the necessary evil it inspires on the scene of representation, so as not to lose sight of the anthropological wisdom that alone will contain any “dangerous” cosmological truth. In a word, we should be cultivating originary memory as the guardian of science, preserving the value of the scientifically knowable unity-with-omnicentricity

of “the human.” It is impossible to disentangle Victor Frankenstein’s mad desire to rival (desire to be) God the creator from his contemptuous rejection of the only-human. Because the Being of God and the human are coeval, we cannot do away with the one without doing away with the other.

Notes

1. As in Parts One and Two of the study, we are using Scherf and MacDonald’s Broadview edition of the early 1818 version of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Parenthetical references are to volume, chapter, and page numbers: for example, 2.3.132 means volume 2, chapter 3, page 132. [\(back\)](#)
2. In an otherwise fine study that defends Victor’s scientific ambitions by placing them in the pre-scientific context of a repressive Calvinist ideology that produced the tortures of the reprobate’s conscience, Jane Goodall succumbs to the temptation in a particularly striking fashion. She writes: “the novel itself may be suggesting that the Creature is a natural being with elevated moral and social instincts and that, apart from some *acute cosmetic problems*, the experiment of which he is the result has been a profound success” (33) [emphasis added]. On the one hand, as we saw in Part One, Goodall is quite correct to assert the “profound success” of Frankenstein’s experiment. But on the other hand, it is a factual error to reduce the Monster’s ugliness to “acute cosmetic problems.” No human surgeon could bear to look on the Monster long enough to perform the cosmetic surgery required. [\(back\)](#)
3. Victor’s memory of the Creature just after animation: “Beautiful! Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips” (1.4.85). [\(back\)](#)
4. I agree with Denise Gigante when she writes: “The Creature’s ugliness . . . constitutes a return of the repressed not linked to any particular childhood fixation. Instead the Creature appears as a return of what is universally repressed . . . the horror at the core of all existence” (567). One might propose in originary terms that the “horror” is the truth of the exclusivity of the *human* mediation of the originary violence of the sparagmos, which can never quite be recuperated by the knowledge of the object that we gain by means of its (violent) consumption and distribution. The finality of knowledge of the economic-desacralized object always risks seeming horrible when set against the paradoxical dissatisfaction of the “knowledge” of the esthetic object. Recall the structure of the esthetic effect, its oscillation between

imaginary possession and recognized inviolability of the central object: merely imaginary possession risks no disillusionment in the way that real possession does; violation risks an experience of “horror” that the mediated recognition of inviolability does not. Science, like economic exchange, requires real possession and the “violation” of the erstwhile sacred untouchable object. [\(back\)](#)

5. I have in mind the following remarks from Alan Richardson’s important scholarly work on the “brain science” informing Mary Shelley’s fanciful thought experiment: “In gathering components for his gigantic science project, Victor has had recourse to the ‘slaughterhouse’ as well as the dissecting room. His experiment transgresses the ‘wide chasm between man and the noblest animals’ insisted upon by Coleridge but inexorably narrowed by materialist and ‘corporeal’ thinkers from La Mettrie and Herder to Darwin and Lawrence” (162); “Yet the Creature turns all too readily from sociability to savagery, from humankindness to ferocious rage. . . . The reader is left to wonder whether Victor has ‘endowed’ his creation not only with human ‘perceptions and passions’ but with *bestial ones as well*” (162) [emphasis added]. [\(back\)](#)

6. Jay Clayton offers a useful summary of the pro-Monster tendency in postmodern criticism: “Today’s positive interpretations [1990] draw on an undercurrent in *Frankenstein*, to which feminist critics of the 1970s and 1980s first drew attention: the novel’s sympathy for the Creature. Contemporary advocates of AI emphasize many of the same things Shelley did: the emotional vulnerability of this new being, its abandonment in a hostile world, its sheer *creatureliness*. Turning its artificial origins from a liability to a virtue, writers and filmmakers focus on what humans owe to the things they create” (86). It is in the “turning its artificial origins from a liability to a virtue” that the victimary error initiates itself: the austere frustrating, ironic structure of the human playing God gets set aside for more accessible satisfactions in which the Monster can be taken to represent this or that victimized human group whose revenge against its persecutors is legitimate. [\(back\)](#)

7. “Let us note once more the relevance of Condillac’s reference to the Genesis story. This originary sensation is not based on sensation but on ‘needs.’ The association of the two children, not otherwise motivated, is cemented by their sharing of ‘passions.’ And however physical their ‘needs,’ Condillac describes their mutual assistance in mimetic terms: ‘He suffered in seeing his companion suffer.’ When he asserts that they act ‘by instinct alone,’ he refers of course to their prelinguistic, prereflective state, but this state is implicitly distinguished from similar states in animals by its proto-human mimeticism” (Gans, “Language Origin”). [\(back\)](#)

8. We might note in this regard that in proportion as the Monster becomes more

pathologically addicted to his revenge against Frankenstein, he becomes less “innocent” and more reliant on technological equipment. As Victor pursues him to the North Pole, the Monster learns how to manage dogs and a dog sled and takes up the technology of weapons: “A gigantic Monster, they said, had arrived the night before, armed with a gun and many pistols; putting to flight the inhabitants of a solitary cottage, through fear of his terrific appearance. He had carried off their store of winter food, and, placing it in a sledge, to draw which he had seized on a numerous drove of trained dogs, he had harnessed them, and the same night, to the joy of the horror-struck villagers, had pursued his journey across the sea in a direction that led to no land” (3.7.228). [\(back\)](#)

9. “Felix darted forward, and with supernatural force tore me from his father, to whose knees I clung: in a transport of fury, he dashed me to the ground, and struck me violently with a stick. I could have torn him limb from limb, as the lion rends the antelope. But my heart sunk within me as with bitter sickness, and I refrained” (2.7.160). [\(back\)](#)

10. Dutoit: “In *Frankenstein*, the numerous exclamations of ‘Great God!’ in response to whenever the Monster ‘shows’ itself all testify rhetorically to the relation between God, the Monster, and the face as trace. . . . In other words, ‘Great God!’ functions as *metonymic* naming of the Monster; ‘Great God!’ refers to an *attribute* (non-apparition of the face) of what it designates (the unnamable ‘Monster’)” (858). [\(back\)](#)

11. “I now also began to collect the materials necessary for my new creation, and this was to me like the torture of single drops of water continually falling on the head” (3.2.183). “I had now neglected my promise for some time, and I feared the effects of the daemon’s disappointment” (3.2.187). And then once Victor gets down to work, we read this (the whole quotation): “but, as I proceeded in my labour, it became every day more horrible and irksome to me. Sometimes I could not prevail on myself to enter my laboratory for several days; and at other times I toiled day and night in order to complete my work. It was indeed a filthy process in which I was engaged. During my first experiment, a kind of enthusiastic frenzy had blinded me to the horror of my employment; my mind was intently fixed on the sequel of my labour, and my eyes were shut to the horror of my proceedings. But now I went to it in cold blood, and my heart often sickened at the work of my hands” (3.2.189). [\(back\)](#)

12. This label, however crude, goes along with Victor’s own self-descriptions and Walton’s evaluations of his condition. Walton observes: “His limbs were nearly frozen, and his body dreadfully emaciated by fatigue and suffering. I never saw a man in so wretched a condition” (58) and calls him “a man on the brink of

destruction" (58). Victor regrets his course: "'But I-I have lost everything, and cannot begin life anew'" (61). Toward the end of his long narrative, he offers this metaphor: "But I am a blasted tree; the bolt has entered my soul; and I felt then . . . what I shall soon cease to be-a miserable spectacle of wrecked humanity, pitiable to others, and abhorrent to myself" (3.2.185). [\(back\)](#)

13. It overpowers even Victor Frankenstein himself, momentarily. Here he is remembering the reflections he made at the end of the Monster's story: "I was moved. I shuddered when I thought of the possible consequences of my consent; but I felt that there was some justice in his argument. His tale, and the feelings he now expressed, proved him to be a creature of fine sensations; and did I not, as maker, owe him all the portion of happiness that it was in my power to bestow?" (2.9.170). Reluctant as they are, these mental moves are the clearest Victor ever makes in the direction of pitying the Creature. [\(back\)](#)

14. I would encourage our noticing that recent theological reflection and recent philosophy of science are together persisting in reflection on the "hard" scientific question of the "origin of life." To a certain extent, the mystery Mary Shelley invoked with the phrase "secret of life" remains an enigma for biologists and philosophers of biology. Attempts to foreclose the discussion are premature even in scientific terms (which observation again implies no necessity for countermoves in the direction of creationism or "intelligent design"). The philosopher of biology John Dupre, in *Darwin's Legacy: What Evolution Means Today* (2003), concedes: "It is true that the ultimate origins of life, the transition from primeval slime to the first living cell, remain little understood" (61). At the same time he cautions us that this is no reason to reject evolution (for creationism or intelligent design): "The situation points to an important aspect of inference to the best explanation. The best explanation available may well be, and perhaps often is, sketchy and partial" (62). We might say that "What is the origin of life?" is to biology as "what is the origin of language?" is to anthropology: both questions that can be answered only with a hypothetical model, and in response to which the dominant models on the intellectual market (or in the case of the latter, the lack of models outside of generative anthropology) are still failing to satisfy expert and searching human minds. Also see David Berlinski, "On the Origins of Life" (2006), and "On the Origins of the Mind" (2004); see John F. Haught, *Is Nature Enough? Meaning and Truth in the Age of Science* (2006), esp. 55-76. [\(back\)](#)

15. Haynes writes: "Frankenstein also accepts uncritically the reductionist premise of the eighteenth-century mechanists, that an organism is no more than the sum of its parts. As heir to a mechanistic view of science, he has no sense of the extraordinary irony involved when he sets out to create a 'being like myself' from dead and inanimate components, ignoring the possible needs for any living or

spiritual elements" (94). [\(back\)](#)

16. For example, as he travels toward Scotland with his friend Henry, slowly moving toward the making of the female monster: "I felt as if I had committed some great crime, the consciousness of which haunted me. I was guiltless, but I had indeed drawn down a horrible curse upon my head, as mortal as that of a crime" (3.2.187). And Victor on his death-bed, speaking to Walton, expresses no self-blaming: "but I feel myself justified in desiring the death of my adversary. During these last days I have been occupied in examining my past conduct, nor do I find it blameable" (238). [\(back\)](#)

17. In his *Chronicle* on "Originy Guilt," Gans writes: "The 'secular' individual is forced to reconstitute for himself this historical connection [to originy guilt] that religious discourse provides as a ready-made package for the individual believer to assimilate to his own experience; whence the familiar *Angst* of modernity. Whence also the possibility of conceiving of an explicitly *minimal* reconstitution of the originy scene." I would add to this the implication that secular society also makes possible the atheism of those such as Victor whose "historical connection to the originy event," while never utterly severed, can be made so inaccessible as to permit the horrific indifference of the human playing God in the mode of being God that we are trying to describe. [\(back\)](#)

18. For example: "'And I call on you, spirits of the dead, and on you, wandering ministers of vengeance, to aid and conduct me in my work. Let the cursed and hellish monster drink deep of agony; let him feel the despair that now torments me'" (3.7.224). In the context of his pursuing the Monster northward: "a repast was prepared for me in the desert, that restored and inspired me. The fare was indeed coarse, such as the peasants of the country ate; but I may not doubt that it was set there by the spirits that I had invoked to aid me" (3.7.226). Walton reports to his sister: "he believes that, when in dreams he holds converse with his friends, and derives from that communion consolation for his miseries, or excitements to his vengeance, that they are not the creations of his fancy, but the real beings who visit him from the regions of a remote world" (3.232). Vasbinder points out that in this post-animation degeneration of psychological integrity, Victor does resort to an explicit borrowing from his alchemical masters that betrays a superficiality in his commitment to genuinely public, exchangeable modern scientific practice. A little too anxious to absolve Frankenstein of moral failing, Vasbinder argues that "after his scientifically trained mind has been virtually destroyed and replaced by an abject credulity" we witness Victor's collapse into a state in which he "imagines that his artificial man is a creation of the necromantic arts rather than the product of a logical science. In his confused and sick mind it becomes connected with magic"(54-55). [\(back\)](#)

19. Leon Kass: “First . . . any attempt to clone a human being would constitute an unethical experiment upon the resulting child-to-be. As the animal experiments (frog and sheep) indicate, there are grave risks of mishaps and deformities. Moreover, because of what cloning means, one cannot presume a future cloned child’s consent to be a clone, even a healthy one” (155-56). For a counter-argument, see Burley and Harris: “We maintain that unless it is shown convincingly that ‘living in the shadow’ [of the cloners’ design] is somehow both horrendous and more autonomy-compromising than the plethora of other widely accepted and permitted upbringings a child might be ‘forced’ to undergo, the liberal principle of freedom in matters relating to procreation overrides the concern about autonomy-related welfare deficits that will be suffered by clones” (244-45). The Monster’s deprivation is, well, a kind of “autonomy-related welfare deficit.” He did not “consent to be” a Monster before he was made. [\(back\)](#)

20. “No one can conceive the variety of feelings which bore me onwards, like a hurricane, in the first enthusiasm of success. 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” (1.3.81-82). [\(back\)](#)

21. I have in mind the following description by Gans of the unironic first-generation romantic: “The romantic hero has chosen to attract the center rather than remaining unnoticed on the periphery. We feel that this personage does not deserve to be a tragic hero because we cannot identify with this voluntary centrality. Whatever sufferings the romantic hero may endure are not the tragic result of the paradox of desire but the melodramatic object of a choice designed to guarantee martyrdom” (*Originary* 171). [\(back\)](#)

22. The Monster himself, echoing Satan in *Paradise Lost*, was rather uncompromising in his rhetoric even following the less “final” rejection of the DeLacey family: “There was none among the myriads of men that existed who would pity or assist me; and should I feel kindness towards my enemies? No: from that moment I declared everlasting war against the species, and, more than all, against him who had formed me, and sent me forth to this insupportable misery” (2.8.161). [\(back\)](#)

23. I have in mind here the memorably quizzical formulation of the Christian thinker Jacques Ellul, one of the more interesting rivals to René Girard in the camp of those who mix cultural theory with a respect for Biblical revelation: “I even say that it is not so much violence itself as justification of violence that is unacceptable to Christian faith” (149). [\(back\)](#)

24. Chris Fleming and John O'Carroll (2005) point out "the fact that this suffering has been democratized (modernism) and ironized and theorized (postmodernism). Yet a certain meaningful agonistic structure—the masochistic rivalry described by Girard perhaps—remains the same: the race is for victim status. It has, as Gans points out, made its sense in the marketplace, and now one can actually find lawyers whose entire business consists in no-fault claims of compensation for damages caused by past events, whether real or imaginary" (11). I would add only that we should connect these remarks to David Heyd's work on "playing God" in connection with *wrongful life* suits: the suit which claims damages from parents or medical professionals for having made one come into life. Job's lament—"Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night which said, 'A man-child is conceived'" (Job 3.3); "Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire?" (3.11)—has found legal incarnation, has become a marketable resentment. It is by analogy with this context that we should situate the self-imposed limits of the Monster's victimary rhetoric and the dignity of his blaming himself and complimenting the dead Victor. [\(back\)](#)

25. The Monster to Victor: "'God in pity made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of your's [sic], more horrid from its very resemblance. Satan had his companions, fellow-devils, to admire and encourage him; but I am solitary and detested'" (2.7.155). The Monster to Walton: "'Yet even the enemy of God and man had friends and associates in his desolation; I am quite alone'" (3.242). [\(back\)](#)

26. Daniel Cottom's remarks have a certain resonance here: "In the work of empirical experiment and observation, nature is penetrated by neutral equipment rather than by the desiring imagination. The new language of science, in other words, is the language of tools. It is a mechanical objectivity that mediates between man and nature, making man invisible in the midst of his own activity so that what was hitherto invisible in nature may be revealed. What Frankenstein discovers, however, is that this new language is also a product of the human imagination. Like Victor's creation and like Walton's exploration and correspondence, modern science in general is a representation of desire, not of knowledge. Science only serves to hide from man the fact that it is himself he continually rediscovers in nature and in the tools he interposes between himself and nature" (65). This comes close to the position I am taking. I would however, recast the "modern science is a representation of desire, not of knowledge" antithesis to read this way: "modern science is knowledge of the object detachable from the scene, but knowledge mediated by scenic desire." I would also distance myself from the cultural solipsism implicit in the final sentence: man certainly does rediscover only himself in nature, but discovers truths about nature that have nothing to do with man. The cosmological object alone is indifferent to the human. [\(back\)](#)

27. Gans has drawn a thick line between “utopian” thinking and the realistic practice of “hold[ing] out goals for the social order” as long as the goals are “dynamically conceived.” Thus the following passage from “The ‘Jewish Question’” in *Signs of Paradox* (1997): “The lesson of the Holocaust is not simply that we must abolish antisemitism or even ‘prejudice’ in general; what must be abandoned are all variants, including the Marxian-socialist variant, of the utopian model of total reconciliation, or universal harmony. This abandonment does not imply that it is no longer possible to hold out goals for the social order. But these goals must be dynamically conceived to admit the eternal persistence of difference and conflict” (166). I would submit that even the holding out of “dynamically conceived” goals will seem “utopian” in the soft sense of “against all probability” when the goal seems unlikely ever to be achieved. Given the apocalyptic gloom today so pervasively the result of environmental disaster-forecasting, the “utopian” attitude in this soft sense of resolutely “hopeful” is not unfitting as an antidote to a belief system that would condemn the human to self-destruction by convincing us all of the inevitability via ecological collapse of human annihilation. ([back](#))

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