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Introduction

Mary Shelley well knew that books can make good companions. In the Preface to *Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1840, 1842, and 1843*, she writes: "I have found it a pleasant thing while travelling to have in the carriage the works of those who have passed through the same country . . . If alone, they serve as society; if with others, they suggest matter for conversation" (*NSW* VIII 65). With this "if," Shelley gives us two images of her life: first, a lonely, widowed life of reading and writing, isolation and anxiety; and second, a convivial life of adventurous friendship. It was Shelley's way to live both lives at once. In Italy, in the tight embrace of the Shelley circle, she withdrew after losing two children to the vagaries of an itinerant, expatriate life. Soon her dejection was compounded by marital estrangement and by 1822, she was left a widow. After she returned to England in 1823, however, her long widowhood was punctuated by enduring friendships, a proposal of marriage, nights at the theatre and opera, endless correspondence with editors and publishers, and two continental journeys taken with her beloved son and his Cambridge friends. In one of the great ironies of the era, the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, two visionaries of social renovation, invented in *Frankenstein* the loneliest character in the English novel. But this is no more ironic, perhaps, than that Shelley conceived her great novel of loneliness in a writer's game, among the flamboyant companions of her youth.

According to a study of the early 1990s,[1] more than half of all students of Romanticism read *Frankenstein*; since then, the novel has also become a staple in courses as different as "The Gothic," "The Nineteenth-Century Novel," "Women's Literature," and "The Post-Human." Both of the leading undergraduate anthologies – Norton and Longman's – offer *Frankenstein* either between their covers or in a package deal. The momentum generated by critical interest in *Frankenstein* has finally propelled several of Shelley's other novels into affordable paperback editions, among them, *Valperga*, *The Last Man* (both in multiple editions), *Lodore*, and *Matilda;* paperbacks of

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Betty T. Bennett and Charles E. Robinson's *Mary Shelley Reader* as well as Robinson's *Collected Tales and Stories* are at our fingertips. In our research libraries are the eight hefty volumes of Nora Crook, Pamela Clemit, and Bennett's edition of the *Novels and Selected Works of Mary Shelley*, as are the four volumes of Crook's edition of *Mary Shelley's Literary Lives and Other Writings*. Now, it seems, Mary Shelley is writing for the screen; on the Internet Movie Database (http://www.imdb.com), she receives a writing credit on some forty-four films which, as I argue in chapter 4, hardly reflects the influence of *Frankenstein* on cinema. Shelley Jackson's *Frankenstein*-pastiche, *Patchwork Girl*, is widely considered the first hypertext "classic." Today, whether she is found between staid cloth covers, in paperback, on the screen or in cyberspace, Mary Shelley is everywhere, and clearly the time is right for her to have a Cambridge Companion.

For most students, Mary Shelley is either represented by a single work or read in relation to Percy Bysshe Shelley, Byron, and the so-called Satanic school of British Romanticism. These essays, however, read Mary Shelley on her own account as a figure who survived all manner of upheaval, personal, political, and professional, to produce an oeuvre of bracing intelligence and wide cultural sweep. Having written the century's most blistering critique of Romantic egotism in *Frankenstein*, she unsettles familiar literary-historical periods. Her career, along with those of L.E.L. (Letitia Elizabeth Landon) and Felicia Hemans, demands that we pause over the critically neglected 1820s and 1830s as a distinct period; these writers, rather than moving ever more surely toward psychological realism, the hallmark of the Victorian novel, take the novel and the lyric to sensational and extreme destinies. Also like Landon and Hemans, Shelley refused to isolate Britain from the Continent; she shares with them a distinctive worldliness that informs their writing long after the end of the Revolutionary-Napoleonic period. Thus, this book places her achievement in a multiplicity of contexts: the Enlightenment novel of ideas; British Jacobinism; Romantic lyricism; Scott and the historical novel; Romantic and early Victorian women writers; and the nineteenth-century struggle between national movements and imperial powers.

The sixteen chapters in the *Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley* are divided into three parts. Part I, "The author of *Frankenstein*," brings readers face to face with the novel *Frankenstein* as well as its "hideous progeny" in literary theory, film, and popular culture. In chapter 1, "Making a 'monster': an introduction to *Frankenstein*," Anne K. Mellor offers a feminist orientation to the novel, its complex narrative structure, and its textual history. Mellor concludes by looking closely at Mary Shelley's informed critique of the cutting-edge science of her day. Next, in "*Frankenstein*, *Matilda*, and the legacies of Godwin and Wollstonecraft," Pamela Clemit examines Shelley's

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conflicted attitudes toward the intellectual inheritance of her illustrious parents. In both *Frankenstein* and *Matilda*, a novella about father–daughter incest, Clemit finds the power and passion of revolutionary idealism even as these forces wreak havoc on the lives of Shelley's characters.

The legacy of *Frankenstein* in the nineteenth century is still debated. As William St. Clair points out, the stage adaptations had a far wider influence than the novel: "Every single night one of the Frankenstein plays was performed, it brought a version of the story to more men and women than the book had in ten or twenty years."[2] And the melodramatic versions encountered in theatres typically honed the story on a sharply moral blade. Thus popularized, as St. Clair argues, the myth of Frankenstein became a conservative caricature of a progressive novel, an alarmist cliché. On the other hand, Chris Baldick's important book, *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing*, argues that in numerous literary works of the Victorian period, the Frankenstein myth "turns repeatedly upon these new problems of an age in which humanity seizes responsibility for re-creating the world, for violently reshaping its natural environment and its inherited social and political forms, for remaking itself."[3] In the twentieth century, the Frankenstein myth has been just as malleable, alternately a monitory fable, an allegory of alienation, an ontology of "the other." Chapters 3 through 5 take up the fate of *Frankenstein* in the twentieth century and beyond. First, Diane Long Hoeveler traces the deep impact of *Frankenstein* on feminism and literary and cultural studies, surveying the literature on *Frankenstein* from Ellen Moers's landmark essay in *Literary Women* (1976) to recent invocations of the novel in disability studies, queer theory, and cultural studies. "*Frankenstein* and film," chapter 4, asks what cinema may have to show us about Shelley's Creature – in particular, the expressionist animation sequences of James Whale's *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein*. This chapter then considers three films that demote the animation sequence in order to show us a decidedly different face of the "monster." Next, Jay Clayton's "*Frankenstein*'s futurity: replicants and robots" takes stock of recent allusions to the Frankenstein myth in treatments of robots, cyborgs, and replicants. In readings of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, Shelley Jackson's hypertext *Patchwork Girl*, and Steven Spielberg's *AI: Artificial Intelligence*, Clayton notes that these writings are far less monitory than earlier twentieth-century uses of the myth.

Part 2, "Fictions and myths," connects "The author of *Frankenstein*" with her subsequent fiction, some of it equally bold, heterodox, and experimental. In his essay on Shelley's *Valperga*, Stuart Curran examines Shelley's counterpoint between the "public" and "private" histories of her two protagonists: the historical Castruccio Castracani and Euthanasia, the fictional Countess

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of Valperga. Although Euthanasia's democratic, feminist alternative falls to Castruccio's cruel ambition, Curran conveys the "radical force" with which *Valperga* confronted its contemporary reviewers. In Shelley's next novel, *The Last Man*, she undertakes an even broader survey of political systems, from imperialism to republicanism, theocracy to anarchy. In chapter 7, Kari E. Lokke finds this novel balancing a sweeping social criticism with a pessimistic view of the human psyche. Pessimistic; but not nihilistic, for Lokke claims that the novel ultimately affirms the redemptive capacities of art. Shelley's historicism again becomes the focus in chapter 8 on *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck; A Romance*. Deidre Lynch argues that Shelley eschews Scott's "vision of national history as a smooth synthesis of differences"; moreover, Perkin, as a pretender to the English throne, becomes a crux through which Shelley asks what "counts" as history. In chapter 9, Kate Ferguson Ellis considers Shelley's high claims for her last novel, *Falkner*. Ellis argues that Shelley at last delivers a female character who, unlike the heroines of *Lodore* and *Matilda*, manages to derail the agendas of dominant men, placing in their stead an ideal of "feminine fosterage." Writing on Shelley's contributions to the gift-book annuals in chapter 10, Charlotte Sussman finds a "gendered intersection of the human form and the commodity form," in which wasting women become the grim sign of their attenuated value in the marriage market. As Judith Pascoe argues in chapter 11, transformation and loss are also central themes of Shelley's two mythological plays, *Proserpine* and *Midas*. Pascoe reads them not as closet drama, but as works that "approach the stage," showing us how Shelley, like the playwright Joanna Baillie, uses the resources of theatre to probe the inner lives of her characters.

Part 3, "Professional personae," surveys Shelley's impressive career as a professional writer. In chapter 12, Susan J. Wolfson tells us how Mary Shelley as editor constructed, "[b]y fragments and wholes . . . 'Percy Bysshe Shelley.'" While Sir Timothy Shelley sought to efface his son's name from the public domain, Mary Shelley's several editions indelibly reinscribed it, shaping the poet's reception – and her own, as the poet's best reader – for decades. Next, Betty T. Bennett, editor of the three-volume *Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, claims that Shelley used the letter genre "not only to bridge public and private concerns, but to link them in bold, original ways." In chapter 13, Bennett shows how gleanings from Shelley's letters become charged symbols in her later publications. Public and private meet also in Shelley's six volumes of biographical essays, originally written for Dionysius Lardner's *Cabinet Encylopaedia*. Greg Kucich, in chapter 14, shows how Shelley, along with several other women biographers and historians of her era, "escalat[ed] . . . sentimental and private elements into the center of historical consciousness." While Kucich and other contributors assess the implicit

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politics of Shelley's writings, Jeanne Moskal's chapter on the travel writing shows how the explicit liberal ideals of her *History of a Six Weeks' Tour* (a youthful collaboration with Percy Bysshe Shelley) are sustained more than thirty-five years later in *Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1840, 1842 and 1843*, albeit in the narrower sphere of Italian nationalism. Finally, Timothy Morton gives us Mary Shelley not only as a novelist, essayist, and re-viewer, but also as a sophisticated theorist of culture. In a fresh view of Shelley's achievement, Morton finds her imagining a neutral space for the discourse of culture, one free of both the incursions of egotism and those of prejudice.

Since controversies continue to swirl around Mary Shelley's oeuvre, they swirl, too, among these essays. We find varied responses to the following questions: What are the limits of Shelley's liberalism? Of her feminism? How can she be alternately a proponent of the incursive ego and its most ferocious critic? Is she a social visionary, like her parents, or a bitter satirist, for whom humanity is incapable of rising above its own imperial drive for power? Why is it so difficult, finally, to capture *Frankenstein*'s philosophical orientation? Is it moral? ethical? epistemological? political? Why, having written *Matilda*, did she refuse to write about the incestuous Cenci? How do we account for the mixed mode of her novels, so acutely attuned to the realpolitik of post-Napoleonic Europe, but so deeply claimed by romance? And why, if Shelley's skeptical historicism is so trenchant, so consistent from novel to novel, life to life, is she still best known as a Gothic sensationalist?

Finally, how will posterity encounter her? In the children's section of my local public library are two biographies of Mary Shelley. The first, *Shelley's Mary* by Margaret Leighton, dates itself; though published in the heyday of women's liberation, 1973, here "Mary" remains in every sense *Shelley's*. Indeed, Percy Bysshe Shelley drowns on page 189, and Mary Shelley lasts only another thirty-odd pages to nurse his surviving poems. On the jacket, a demure young woman with sausage curls, posing sideways, gazes off to our right, clutching a nameless tome with long, graceful fingers. *My book*, she seems to say through clenched teeth; *mine*. The alluring young woman portrayed on the cover of Joan Kane Nichol's recent biography, at first glance, appears strikingly similar: we see the same regency neckline, the curls, the sideways pose. Only now it is 1998 and she looks us square in the eye; she has the pouty, pink mouth of a teen gymnast and sports blue eye-shadow. Apparently we have interrupted her, for, with a flourish of a feather pen, she has just committed a single word to a vellum page: *Frankenstein*. Even so, the book's title – *Mary Shelley, Frankenstein's Creator* – has her once again possessed, once again *his*.

All of us who write about Mary Shelley have sought to free her from possession, both by her poet-husband and by her "hideous progeny," along

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with its ghoulish spawn of images. Yet in wanting to give her back to the public and on to posterity, we risk possessing her anew. Whether taken up for feminist politics and theory, for liberalism, for alarmism about reproductive technology, or to champion the post-human, Mary Shelley is finally not ours, to speak and write for us; not ours to hand down to those who follow. Now that virtually all her published works are widely available, Mary Shelley can at last speak for herself. This is a good thing for us, her readers, or any companion, to bear in mind.[4]

NOTES

1 Harriet Kramer Linkin, "The Current Canon in British Romantics Studies," *College English* 53.5 (1991), 548–70.
2 William St. Clair, *MST* 52.
3 Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 5.
4 A recent discovery suggests that we may have more to learn; a fragment from the mid-1840s thought to be Shelley's own fiction has been identified by Nora Crook as Shelley's translation of a portion of *Cecil*, a novel by Ida von Hahn-Hahn, known in her day as the "German George Sand." Not only was Shelley's German better than she claimed, but she found Hahn-Hahn's themes – "surrogate parenting, female education, maternal attachment" – to resonate with those of her own novels of the 1830s, *Lodore* and *Falkner*. See Nora Crook, "Germanizing in Chester Square: Mary Shelley, *Cecil*, and Ida von Hahn-Hahn," *TLS*, June 6, 2003, p. 14.

I

"THE AUTHOR OF *FRANKENSTEIN*"

1

ANNE K. MELLOR

Making a "monster": an introduction to *Frankenstein*

Mary Shelley's waking nightmare on June 16, 1816, gave birth to one of the most powerful horror stories of Western civilization. *Frankenstein* can claim the status of a myth so profoundly resonant in its implications that it has become, at least in its barest outline, a trope of everyday life. The condemners of genetically modified meats and vegetables now refer to them as "Frankenfoods," and the debates concerning the morality of cloning or stem cell engineering constantly invoke the cautionary example of Frankenstein's monster. Nor is the monster-myth cited only in regard to the biological sciences; critics of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons alike often make use of this monitory figure. Of course, both the media and the average person in the street have frequently and mistakenly assigned the name of Frankenstein not to the maker of the monster but to his creature. But as we shall see, this "mistake" actually derives from a crucial intuition about the relationship between them. *Frankenstein* is our culture's most penetrating literary analysis of the psychology of modern "scientific" man, of the dangers inherent in scientific research, and of the horrifying but predictable consequences of an uncontrolled technological exploitation of nature and the female.

Let us begin, then, with the question of origins: why did the eighteen-year-old Mary Shelley give birth to this particular idea on this particular night? How did it come about that she produced so prescient, powerful, and enduring a myth? In attempting to answer these questions, we must also take into account the various ways in which Mary Shelley responded to the philosophical ideas and literary influences of her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, and her father, William Godwin; these particular influences are taken up at length in the following chapter. But as we shall see, in *Frankenstein,* Shelley also turns a skeptical eye on the Enlightenment celebration of science and technology and, no less critically, on her husband, the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, and their friend, Lord Byron.

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Origins of the text

From the feminist perspective which has dominated discussions of *Franken-stein* in the last decade (see chapter 3), this is first and foremost a book about what happens when a man tries to procreate without a woman. As such, the novel is profoundly concerned with natural as opposed to un-natural modes of production and reproduction. In Shelley's introduction to the revised 1831 edition, she tells a story, of how she, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Byron, and Byron's doctor, William Polidori, after reading ghost stories to-gether one rainy evening near Geneva in June, 1816, agreed each to write a thrilling horror story; how she tried for days to think of a story, but failed; and finally, how on June 15, after hearing Byron and her husband discussing experiments concerning "the principle of life," she fell into a waking dream in which she saw "the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together" (*F* 1831, Intro. 55). In this reverie, she felt the terror *he* felt as the hideous corpse he had reanimated with a "spark of life" stood beside his bed, "looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes" (*F* 1831, Intro. 55).

As critic Ellen Moers pointed out in her classic essay on *Frankenstein* (1974),[1] only eighteen months earlier, Mary Shelley had given birth for the first time to a baby girl, a baby whose death two weeks later produced a recurring dream that she recorded in her journal: "Dream that my little baby came to life again – that it had only been cold & that we rubbed it by the fire & it lived – I awake & find no baby" (*J* 70). Six months before, on January 24, 1816, her second child, William, was born. She doubtless expected to be pregnant again in the near future, and indeed, she conceived her third child, Clara Everina, only six months later in December. Mary Shelley's reverie unleashed her deepest subconscious anxieties, the natural fears of a very young woman embarking on the processes of pregnancy, giving birth, and mothering. As many such newly pregnant women have asked, What if my child is born deformed, in Shelley's phrase, a "hideous" thing? Could I still love it, or would I wish it had never been born? What will happen if I cannot love it? Am I capable of raising a healthy, normal child? One reason Shelley's novel reverberates so strongly with its readers, especially its female readers, is that it articulates in unprecedented detail the most powerfully felt anxieties about pregnancy and parenting.

Mary Shelley's dream thus gives rise to a central theme of the novel: Victor Frankenstein's total failure as a parent. The moment his child is "born," Frankenstein rejects him in disgust, fleeing from his smiling embrace, and completely abandoning him. Victor's horror is caused both by his crea-ture's appearance – his yellow skin which "scarcely covered the work of

muscles and arteries underneath," his "shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips" (*F* I iv 34)[2] and by his tremendous size. For in an effort to simplify the process of creation, Frankenstein has chosen to work with larger-than-normal human and animal body parts, constructing a being who is of "gigantic stature, that is to say, about eight feet in height" (at a time when the average male was only 5′6″ tall) and "proportionably large" (*F* I iv 32). Never once has Frankenstein asked himself whether such a gigantic creature would wish to be created, or what his own responsibilities toward such a creature might be.

Mary Shelley's novel relentlessly tracks the consequences of such parental abandonment: Victor's unloved "child," after desperately seeking a home and family with the De Laceys and, later, with a mate, is rejected on both counts; Felix de Lacey flees in terror and Frankenstein cruelly reneges on his promise to create an Eve for this Adam. In time, the creature turns to violence and revenge, killing not only Victor's brother William but also his bride Elizabeth and his best friend Clerval. Here Shelley presciently reveals a now-familiar paradigm: the abused child who becomes an abusive, battering adult and parent; note that the creature's first victim, William Frankenstein, is a child that he had hoped to adopt as his own. That Shelley modeled this child both in name and appearance on her own son William suggests even deeper anxieties about herself as a mother.

"My hideous progeny"

Mary Shelley's anxiety surrounding birth and parenting also resonates in her representations of her own literary authority. In the 1831 Introduction, she refers to *Frankenstein* as her "hideous progeny" (*F* 1831, Intro. 56). This metaphor of book as baby suggests Shelley's anxieties about giving birth to her self-as-author. But Shelley's anxiety about her authorship did not derive from what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have famously called a female "anxiety of authorship," the fear of speaking in public in a literary culture that systematically denigrated women's writing.[3] Rather, her anxiety was produced by both Godwin's and Percy Shelley's expectation that she would become a writer like her mother. Alone among the participants in the ghost-story writing contest, she felt a compulsion to perform, but at the same time, as she later recalled, "that blank incapability of invention which is the greatest misery of authorship, when dull Nothing replies to our anxious invocations" (*F* 1831, Intro. 54); apparently, she feared the trauma of barrenness as much as the trauma of birth. As Barbara Johnson has trenchantly observed, *Frankenstein* is "the story of the experience of writing *Frankenstein*."[4] And since the book represents her authorial self, Mary Shelley dedicated it to