

## Romantic Fiction

---

5 It was on a dreary night of November, that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.

10 How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. 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 luxuri-  
ances 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.

15 The different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature. I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room and continued a long time traversing my bed-  
chamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep. At length lassitude succeeded to the tumult I had before  
endured, and I threw myself on the bed in my clothes, endeavouring to seek a few moments of  
forgetfulness. But it was in vain: I slept indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. I thought I saw  
20 Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed; when,  
25 by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window-shutters, I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped and rushed down stairs. I took refuge in the court-yard belonging to the house  
30 which I inhabited; where I remained during the rest of the night, walking up and down in the greatest agitation, listening attentively, catching and fearing each sound as if it were to announce the approach of the demoniacal corpse to which I had so miserably given life.

35 Oh! no mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch. I had gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then; but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived.

40 I passed the night wretchedly. Sometimes my pulse beat so quickly and hardly, that I felt the palpitation of every artery; at others, I nearly sank to the ground through languor and extreme weakness. Mingled with this horror, I felt the bitterness of disappointment: dreams that had been my food and pleasant rest for so long a space, were now become a hell to me; and the change was so rapid, the overthrow so complete!

## Full Commentary

---



Joseph WRIGHT OF DERBY, *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump* (1768)

Painted fifty years before the 1818 version of Mary Shelley's most famous novel, *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air-Pump* (1768), in which Joseph Wright of Derby depicts an all too archetypal mad scientist demonstrating the creation of a vacuum to lookers-on of all stripes, exemplifies the dual nature of science at the outset of British industrialization. The alchemist-like scientist—who resembles the Victor Frankenstein features in many of the film adaptations of the novel—seems have complete control over the vital principles of life and death, while the spectators are torn between elated fascination and sheer terror, the scene being plunged into a chiaroscuro symbolic of the blurred frontier between creation and destruction

At the beginning of Volume I, Chapter IV of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, the protagonist and dramatized narrator, Victor Frankenstein, recounts the moment when he himself became a demiurgic figure, giving birth, quite literally, to the monster. The passage, characterized as it is by internal focalization, focuses on Victor's reaction to the creature's coming to life.

From captivation to sheer disgust and horror, it seems that Victor's feelings run the gamut of human emotion as he is faced with the sublimity of his own hubristic creation, giving an overall impression of chaos, disorder, and even confusion. This complete inversion is dramatized throughout the extract, just as the creature becomes alive and as Victor gradually grasps the possible moral implications of his actions. This reversal of fortune which Victor undergoes corresponds to a symbolic fall, whereas the monster seems

to go through an elevation of sorts at the same time. This paves the way for the construction of a dialectical relationship between Victor and the monster, since the latter is described as being both linked and opposed to his creator: at once a man-made object and an elemental force of nature, the monster gradually becomes a subject in his own right, in turn threatening Victor himself. The whole scene, therefore, is characterized by liminality: attraction and repulsion, life and death, light and darkness, dream and reality, the creator and the creature—everything is meant to underline the ambiguity and duality of this ungodly creation, perhaps as a way to illustrate Mary Shelley’s metatextual reflection on the nature of her own literary creation.

The following problem thus arises: to what extent does the confusion and terror of the first-person narrator, which is closely associated with the inversion of the relationship between creator and creature, lead to a sense of liminality that is evocative of the generic hybridity of the novel?

First, the growing confusion and panic of the narrator resulting from his transgression participate in the dramatization of the scene so as to lead to an almost melodramatic climax. Second, the inversion of the two characters’ original positions derives from the association between Victor Frankenstein’s fall with the monster’s elevation. Last, the dialectical confusion between creator and creature, associated with the liminal atmosphere in which the scene takes place, creates a sense of ambiguity which hints at the duality of Mary Shelley’s own creation.

Some of the Gothic elements present in the text, such as suspense and a hint of melodrama, associated with the psychological portrayal of Victor Frankenstein in the wake of the creation of the monster, give the impression that the text is permeated by an atmosphere of chaos and confusion.

From the very beginning of the chapter, the scene is characterized by the extreme distress and bewilderment of the protagonist. Victor goes through an emotional crescendo, as demonstrated by his experiencing a form of “anxiety that almost amounted to agony” (l. 1-2). This expression of radical terror through a hyperbole is offset by the use of the modalizing adverb “almost”, indicating that the narrator is about to be thrown off the edge of sanity. It just so happens that, through two telling analepses, Victor’s work on the creation of the monster is also referred to in astonishingly hyperbolic terms: “I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation” (l. 14) and “the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form” (l. 6-7). Not only do those hyperboles point to the hubristic nature of the project he undertook<sup>1</sup>, but they also hint at the mounting tension leading to the climactic ending of the passage. This very tension is created here by the dramatization of the opening lines of the excerpt thanks to the lengthy sentences of the first paragraph (l. 1-5). The main clauses, in which Victor deals with his own perceptions and actions (‘I beheld’, l. 1; ‘I collected... [so] that I might infuse’, l. 2; ‘I saw’, l. 4), are delayed until the very end of the sentence to raise the reader’s expectations—or even create suspense proper—as he or she awaits the actual exploration of Victor’s reaction.

As suspense builds up, the reader therefore awaits the tipping point of the extract, the “catastrophe” (l. 10) mentioned by Victor himself. Everything in the passage seems to allude to Victor Frankenstein’s going too far, crossing a line that should not have been crossed—the same line that is typographically included in the text thanks to the dash in line 8 (“Beautiful!—Great God!”). Even the time at which the scene takes place, “one in the morning” (l. 3) is symbolic of his overstepping a boundary: midnight, a symbolic limit, is already behind him and a new phase has already begun. This transition is perhaps best exemplified by the highly suspenseful anaphora in lines 12 to 14 (“I had...” repeated four times), with the transition from the distant past to the episode narrated in this passage, from cause to result, being marked very clearly by the introduction of the adversative conjunction “but” (l. 14) and the shift in tenses (from past perfect to simple past). Hence, throughout the second part of the text, the narrator emphasizes the transformation of “lassitude” into “tumult” (l. 17), of reality into “dreams” (l. 19), of ugliness into monstrosity (through the

---

<sup>1</sup> The implicit comparison between Victor Frankenstein and Prometheus, whose name is mentioned in the subtitle of the book, is to be noted since “ardour” (l. 14) comes from the Latin *ardor*, meaning “flame”—a reference, no doubt, to the titan who created humanity and stole fire from the gods to give it to humankind.

reference to Dante in l. 35-36). More than a simple transition, however, this rising tension amounts to an actual contrast between the past and the present, as evidenced by the binary structure of the last sentence of the anaphoric series: “now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and the breathless horror and disgust filled my heart” (l. 14-15). Thanks to the term-by-term opposition between the words present in the two halves of the sentence (“beauty” vs. “horror and disgust”, the “dream” vs. a “breathless” reality, “vanished” vs. “filled”), Victor is presented as having moved from one state of being to another when he reached the aforementioned turning point.

All this goes to explain why, once this symbolic line has been crossed, the scene is characterized by frantic movement. Victor is indeed taken over by a sense of urgency and horror, which is conveyed in the text by a series of verbs evoking “agitation” (l. 30) such as “rushed” (l. 16), “threw myself” (l. 18), “started” (l. 23) or “escaped and rushed” (l. 28). Every inch of his body is contaminated by this unrelenting restlessness, since even his “teeth” (l. 24) and his “pulse” (l. 37) are affected by this continuous intensification of movement resulting from the growing fear experienced by Victor. This series of verbs in the simple past conveys a form of radicalization, creating the impression of a chaotic unfolding of events. This process, which also marks Victor’s certainty about what he himself is doing, is to be opposed to the modalization found in other sentences and expressed by the use of qualifying structures (“I thought I saw”, l. 19, “I thought that I held”, l. 22 and “as if it were to announce”, l. 31), modal auxiliaries (“He might have spoken”, l. 27-28), quantifiers (“some inarticulate sounds”, l. 27), and even an epanorthosis (“if eyes they may be called”, l. 26): more than blurring the frontier between dream and fiction, this modal register, which derives from the emphasis on sensorial impressions, expresses the doubts of the narrator concerning everything that is happening around him. The narrator’s confusion and agitation are taken one step further by the introduction of superlative forms “the wildest dreams”, l. 19 and “the greatest agitation”, l. 30), as well as other intensifiers such as quantifiers (“every limb became convulsed”, l. 24 and “the palpitation of every artery”, l. 38) and adverbs (“my pulse beat so quickly and hardly” l. 37), leading quite naturally to the climax at the very end of the extract.

Through the creation of suspense and the all too melodramatic emphasis on Victor’s experience of utter terror, the reader understands—through this casting of the narrative in a Gothic mode—that the climax occurring at the end of the passage is the result of a process of growing emotionality which reaches a peak as a result of Victor’s transgression. The next question to be answered, therefore, is that of the nature of the “catastrophe” (l. 6) or “overthrow” (l. 40) experienced by Victor.

Against the backdrop of confusion and terror, Victor Frankenstein and the monster seem to follow opposite trajectories: while the narrator is falling, the monster seems to be elevated.

The initial situation is that of Victor Frankenstein standing over the monster (“the lifeless thing... lay at my feet”, l. 3). Yet, by the end of the extract, Victor has fallen off the edge and been thrown into a living “hell” (l. 40)—he has gone from dominator to dominated. What Victor goes through in this passage is an actual “accident” (l. 12)—a word that refers, etymologically, to a fall<sup>2</sup>. The possibility of such a descent into “hell” (l. 40) was mentioned at the beginning of the passage through the use of the word “catastrophe” (l. 6): in Greek, *καταστροφή* means “complete reversal of what was expected”, which describes Victor’s experience perfectly, as underlined by the almost cyclical structure of the passage, which is framed by the reference to a “catastrophe” at the beginning, and by the words “change” (l. 40) and “overthrow” (l. 40) at the very end. This reversal is mirrored in Victor’s own actions and movements, as he “nearly sank to the ground” (l. 38). He seems to fall deeper and deeper as the narrative unfolds, ultimately reaching this “hell” (l. 40) he alludes to at the end of the excerpt. It thus appears this fall is more metaphysical than merely physical, since this progressive decline is presented as the direct result “the accomplishment of [his] toils” (l. 1). It is to be

---

<sup>2</sup> In Latin, *cadere* means “to fall”.

reminded that, in *Genesis* 3:23, work is presented as the result of the Fall of man<sup>3</sup>; thus, Victor's creation can but be questionable and hubristic since he has metaphorically re-enacted God's creation of man by indulging in an activity which is the direct consequence of the original sin. By using "the instruments of life" (l. 2) and trying to "infuse a spark of being" (l. 2) into the monster, he has symbolically tried to supplant the Creator by using science<sup>4</sup>, a blasphemous act tantamount to that which led to the biblical Fall and which results in Victor's damnation. Because of this process, Victor seems to lose agency and become a mere spectator (and an imperfect spectator at that<sup>5</sup>). After crossing the symbolic line mentioned above, he seems to lose all forms of physical ability, as shown by the emphasis on his failed attempts to act (e.g., "But it was in vain", l. 19). As Victor gropes his intellectual way to the discovery of the monster's coming to life, he can no longer be the grammatical subject of the actions by the end of the paragraph, as shown by the change in focus from Victor himself to the creature (it breathed hard... , l. 5).

Conversely, as Victor examines and, later, thinks about his creation, the monster becomes an actual being, even in Victor's eyes. From the 'inanimate body' (l. 13) or 'lifeless thing' (l. 3) he refers to using the singular neuter pronoun IT (l. 5), the creature gradually becomes a 'wretch' (lines 6, 25 and 34) and, in turn, a gendered 'being' (l. 14), as evidenced by the use of masculine determiners ('his', l. 7 ff.) and pronouns ('he', l. 24 ff.) in the rest of the text. Even the literal meaning of such an epithet as 'wretch' evolves thanks to a semantic syllepsis: originally a despicable thing (in l. 6, for instance), the creature becomes a 'miserable monster' (l. 25) that is to be pitied by the narrator. It seems, therefore, that the creature goes from incomplete object to fully-fledged subject in Victor's narrative. In fact, Victor's fall coincides with the monster's symbolic elevation: the monster follows a diametrically opposed path to Victor Frankenstein's, as evidenced by a term-by-term opposition of the two characters. While Victor is "unable to" (l. 15 and 17) act, the monster is "capable of motion" (l. 35); Victor "rushe[s] down stairs" (l. 28-29), just as the monster "h[olds] up the curtain" (l. 26). Even though it was originally the monster that "lay" at Victor's feet (l. 3), the situation is ultimately inverted as Victor "thr[ows] [him]self on the bed" (l. 18). The monster's eyes are "fixed" (l. 26) on Victor, hinting at the possibility of clear vision, whereas Victor Frankenstein's own senses betray him. Metaphorically, through the association of the colour and rotundity of the moon ("the dim and yellow light of the moon", l. 24-25) with the monster's "dull yellow eye" (l. 5), the monster reaches the ultimate form of elevation and becomes an elemental force of nature.<sup>6</sup> Although Victor Frankenstein tried to limit the monster's energy when he created him by "delineat[ing]" (l. 6) and "form[ing]" (l. 7 and 9) him, he expands to the point that he cannot be contained by any form or delineation. His skin cannot hide the potentiality that his body represents or contains: "His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath" (l. 8). Therefore, rather than being enclosed or finite, his body "open[s]" (l. 5 and 27) gradually and his first grunt has nothing to do whatsoever with the kind of form imposed by the mind on thought through language ("some inarticulate sounds", l. 27; the determiner SOME reinforces the idea of indeterminacy)<sup>7</sup>. That is why, by referring to himself as a "mortal" (l. 33) and comparing the monster to various supernatural beings<sup>8</sup> ("mummy... endowed with animation", l. 33 and a "demoniacal corpse", l. 31), the monster symbolically becomes a sort of immortal demon, or at least a being that goes beyond humanity ("could not be so hideous", l. 33-34) or even beyond human imagination ("a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived", l. 35-36). In both cases, emphasis is laid on Victor Frankenstein's—and by

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 3:23 (NIV): "So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken".

<sup>4</sup> The words "instruments" (l. 2) and "spark" (l. 2) are evocative of the developments of science in Mary Shelley's time. For instance, the "spark" (l. 2) could be a reference to the development of galvanism in the late eighteenth century. The description of the convulsions of the monster is reminiscent of scientific experiments conducted on the executed criminal George Forster a mere fifteen years before Mary Shelley's novel was published.

<sup>5</sup> See I, C.

<sup>6</sup> Nature itself seems to be complicit in the monster's elevation, since the alliterative phrase "rain patter[ing] against the panes" (l. 3-4) echoes the monster's first breath ("it breathed hard", l. 5) or first heartbeats. Likewise, and not unlike the monster himself, "the dim and yellow light of the moon... forced its way through the window-shutters" (l. 24-25).

<sup>7</sup> It might be relevant, since the scene deals with the birth of the monster, to refer to the Latin etymology of the word "infant": it comes from the Latin *infans*, meaning "he who does not speak".

<sup>8</sup> The intrusion of the supernatural in an otherwise relatively realistic narrative is one of the characteristics of the Gothic.

extension, any man's—impossibility to comprehend the nature of the being he created (thanks to the negative use of the modal CAN)—hence the creature's eventual domination over his creator.<sup>9</sup>

This ironical inversion<sup>10</sup>, however, does not lead to a complete opposition of the two characters. On the contrary, because of the monster's metaphorical expansion and elevation, Victor Frankenstein seems to be contaminated by the creature because of his fascination for the monster, thus raising the question of the liminality which underpins the whole passage.

The dialectical relationship which binds creator and creature together, as well as the indeterminacy which pervades the extract, create a profound sense of ambiguity and hybridity, thus mirroring the construction of the novel itself.

Despite the impression the reader might have that Victor Frankenstein is utterly disgusted by the monster he created, he seems to be animated by a sort of morbid fascination for and even a form of sexual attraction to the monster. The description of the monster's "hair" and "teeth" (l. 9) is uncannily meliorative, as evidenced by the use of such adjectives as "lustrous" and "pearly" (l. 9), which both hint at the unnatural beauty of the monster. Through the word "flowing" (l. 9), the narrator even seems to suggest a form a sensuality<sup>11</sup> which is revealed in the dream Victor Frankenstein recounts in lines 19 to 23. In the dream sequence, the creature seems to contaminate Victor Frankenstein's future wife—a way, no doubt, to foreshadow Elizabeth's murder. Indeed, following the monster's birth, the "bloom of health" (l. 20) which initially characterizes Elizabeth is turned into "the hue of death" (l. 21) as Victor kisses her. The paronomasia linking "health" to "death" through the rhyme echoes the monster's own situation, since he is caught life and death<sup>12</sup>, and thus links Elizabeth's fate with the monster's. Victor's possible sexual attraction for his creation, which arises from the clear association between Elizabeth [E] and the monster [M], can be justified by the various echoes in their respective descriptions: "lips" [M] (l.11) / "lips" [E] (l. 21), "features" [M] (l. 7) / "features" [E] (l. 21), "corpse" [M] (l. 31) / "corpse" [E] (l. 22)<sup>13</sup>. In the dream, therefore, it seems that the monster and Elizabeth are inextricably linked to present the possibility of Victor's unsettling attraction to the monster; but the interweaving of the references to the various characters goes even further, as evidenced by the chiasmic organisation of some of the references to sight: "I beheld [the monster]" (l. 1), "I saw [the monster]" (l. 4), "I thought I saw Elizabeth" (l. 19), "I saw the grave-worms" (l. 22-23), "I beheld [the monster]" (l. 25). Because of Victor Frankenstein's confusion, not only does the monster penetrate his dream and distort Elizabeth's image, but he also becomes, metaphorically, the "grave-worms" (l. 23), the all too phallic<sup>14</sup> symbol of Victor Frankenstein's execution of Mother Nature<sup>15</sup>. When it comes to the monster, therefore, Victor seems to be caught between complete repulsion and fatal attraction.

As a result of this alternation between fascination and disgust, Victor and his creation are brought closer and closer, which might ultimately explain why the monster appears to be the mirror image of Victor

<sup>9</sup> It could even be argued that the "straight" (l. 11) line of classicism Victor Frankenstein had envisioned is in the process of being replaced by the "winkle[s]" (l. 27) and "folds" (l. 23) of the baroque, an artistic style associated with grandeur and exuberance.

<sup>10</sup> The irony is underlined in a very subtle way by such expressions as "walking up and down" (l. 30), the prepositions evoking the inverted trajectories of the two characters, or the impression Victor Frankenstein has that the monster might ultimately "detain" (l. 28) him.

<sup>11</sup> It is noteworthy that he should mention the monster's "luxuriances" (l. 9) since he had used the same word to describe Elizabeth's imagination in Chapter I ("Her imagination was luxuriant", p. 20 in the Norton edition).

<sup>12</sup> Although the word "death" occurs only once, in line 21, at the very centre of the passage, the word "life" occurs five times in one form or another ("life" in lines 2, 12, 13 and 32; "lifeless" in l. 3) forming a sort of leitmotiv. The phrase "lifeless thing" (l. 3), where "dead thing" might have been expected, is significant: in the whole passage death is only seen through the prism of life.

<sup>13</sup> Another piece of evidence could be the phrase "I had selected his features as beautiful" (l. 7-8), since Edmund Burke associates the aesthetic notion of "the beautiful" with feminine characteristics in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757).

<sup>14</sup> Once again, through the alliteration in /f/ ("the folds of the flannel", l. 23), the horrible sensuality of the scene is underlined despite the narrator's best efforts to reject his creation.

<sup>15</sup> Another reading of the dream sequence could either refer to the almost incestuous relationship between Victor and Elizabeth, or to Victor's mother's death, which is a direct consequence of Elizabeth's coming down with scarlet fever, since this experience probably leads Victor to create the monster.

Frankenstein [V] himself. Another chiasmic structure, meant to highlight the inextricable association of the two characters, is pregnant with meaning: “a convulsive motion agitated its limbs” [M] (l. 5) and “every limb became convulsed” [V] (l. 23). The dialectics of attraction and repulsion are solved, ironically enough, by the monster’s contaminating his creator. Victor and the monster, it seems, cannot really be separated, an idea confirmed by the various echoes between the words used to describe the two characters: “agitated” [M] (l. 5) / “agitation” [V] (l. 30), “miserable” [M] (l. 25) / “miserably” [V] (l. 32), “horrid” [M] (l. 10) / “horror” [V] (l. 15 and 23), “wretch” [M] (l. 6, 25 and 34) / “wretchedly” [V] (l. 37), and so on. This association between the two characters through a network of echoes shows that, different though they may appear to be, Victor and his monster are ultimately similar. For all that, this similarity is detrimental to Victor Frankenstein, being the result of his fall (and the monster’s elevation). As the monster starts “breath[ing]” (l. 5), Victor, paralysed by fear, is described as being “breathless” (l. 15). In other words, as the monster comes to life, Victor Frankenstein seems to suffer a symbolic death. As a consequence, the monster seems to be presented as the doppelgänger-like double<sup>16</sup> of his creator.

This mirror effect that links the characters while pitting them against each other is actually captured by the setting in which the scene takes place. The chiaroscuro created by “the glimmer of the half-extinguished light” (l. 4) parallels the situation of the monster himself, caught as he is between life and death. This symbolic indeterminacy of the atmosphere in which the narrated events unfold, being characterized by the presence of both light and darkness, mirrors the presentation of the characters as two opposed entities that complete each other. Both the setting and the characterization, therefore, partake of the creation of a blurred atmosphere and explains the Victor’s difficulty to differentiate between dream and reality. Although he is supposed to have woken up (“I started from my sleep”, l. 23), his blurred perceptions give the impression that he is still caught in a nightmarish world. There seems to be, as it were, a refusal to see and accept reality on Victor’s part, as underscored by his impossibility to trust his senses: “He might have spoken, but I did not hear” (l. 27-28). When it comes to aural sensations, in fact, Victor’s perceptive capabilities are doomed to fail him, even he relies on his senses actively: “listening attentively, catching and fearing each sound as if it were to announce the approach of the demoniacal corpse” (l. 30-31). The hypothetical clause (“as if...”), implying an imaginary situation, underlines that however hard Victor Frankenstein tries to rely on his sense of hearing, he cannot escape the unreality and indeterminacy of his dream-like experience. It should be no surprise, therefore, that Victor himself, because of his work on the creature, should be caught in such an interstitial space. The interplay between unicity and duality, as applied to Victor himself, is indeed encapsulated in the following sentence: “I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body” (l. 12-13). Victor being a creator in his own right, this playful reference to the unicity-duality of creation mirrors Mary Shelley’s own creative process, since the whole book is based on a series of echoes, of symmetries, especially on the narrative level. This might help cast a new light on Mary Shelley’s famous sentence describing her novel as her “hideous progeny”<sup>17</sup>: a female author, she gave birth to her very own monster, her book, and therefore to her own double – just as Victor himself did.

To conclude, the atmosphere of confusion, panic and general indeterminacy, which derives from the use of some of the most common features of the Gothic novel, enables Mary Shelley to draw Victor Frankenstein’s psychological portrait so as to underline his being gradually supplanted by the monster, who replaces him as the dominating figure. An exemplarily dual character, the monster’s symbolic control over his creator derives from a contamination which transforms him into Victor’s double, thus underlining the irreconcilable complementarity of the two characters. Dealing with the consequences of creation—and a birth-like creation at that—the passage crystallizes Mary Shelley’s stance towards her own work as she articulates a reflection on authorship with a literary affirmation of her female identity.

<sup>16</sup> Another Gothic topos.

<sup>17</sup> Introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*.

This sense of the characters becoming the two sides of the same coin, which binds Victor and the monster together for the rest of the novel, prefigures, in many ways, the success of the psychological Gothic, in which the protagonist usually explores his own maze-like psyche, only to be confronted to the repressed “monster” that lies within. Freudian analyses of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* have indeed interpreted the narratorial ambiguity associated with the structure of the framed narratives as the possibility that the monster might actually be the fictitious expression of Victor Frankenstein’s id. Consequently, *Frankenstein*, and more particularly the highly ambiguous relationship between Victor and the monster, could well foreshadow such late-19<sup>th</sup>-century literary works as R.L. Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886).