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“Spontaneous Overflow of Powerful Feelings:”  
Romantic Imagery in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*



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Aos meus pais, acima de tudo, e a minha família, que sempre me apoiou;

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Aos meus amigos, que me aturaram nesses dois anos;

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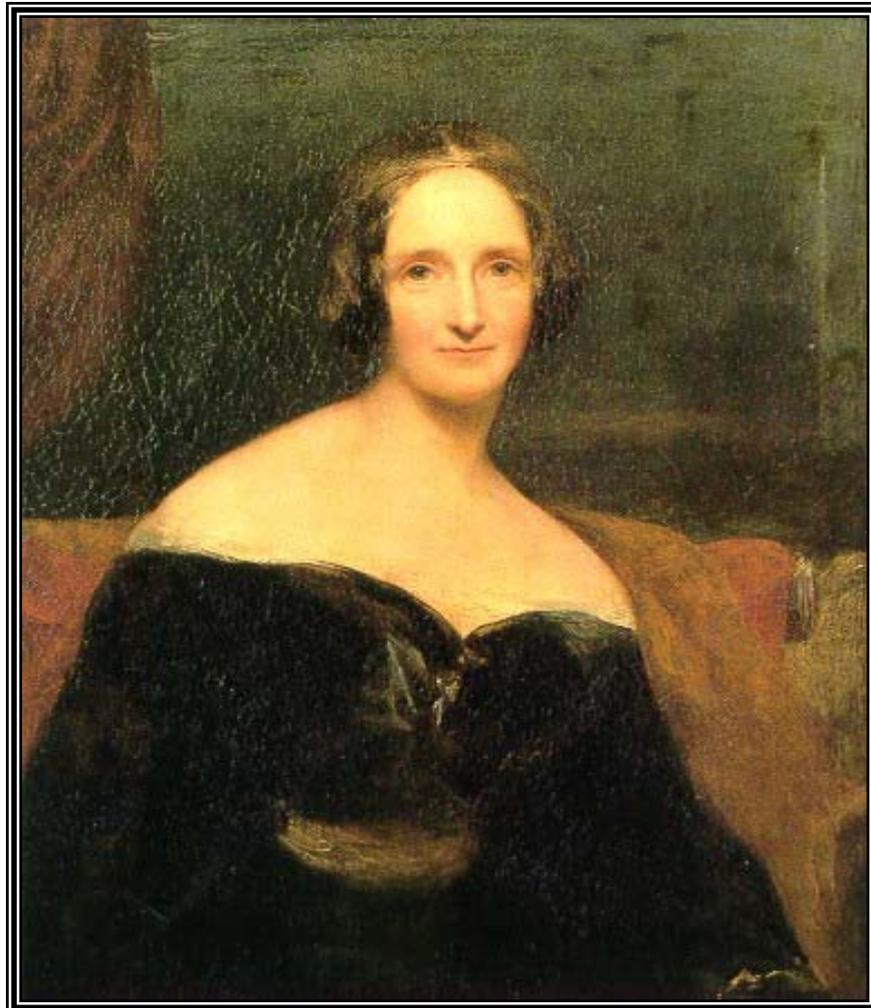
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***And now, once again, I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper. I have an affection for it, for it was the offspring of happy days, when death and grief were but words which found no true echoes in my heart. Its several pages speak of many a walk, many a drive and many a conversation, when I was not alone and my companion was one who, in this world, I shall never see more.***

Mary Shelley, "Author's Introduction to the Standard Novels Edition of *Frankenstein*".

## RESUMO

A literatura romântica inglesa se constituiu basicamente de poesia, pois foi produzida em uma época em que ficção em prosa era vista como mero entretenimento. Alguns romancistas, excepcionalmente, são rotulados como “românticos”, mas Mary Shelley não aparece entre eles. Durante mais de um século, sua obra permaneceu restrita às sessões dos livros que tratam da exótica literatura gótica. A presente dissertação argumenta que a crítica literária não tem reconhecido a óbvia relação de *Frankenstein* com o romantismo inglês. Para evidenciar tal envolvimento, será apresentada uma análise do conjunto de imagens do romance que busque revelar os elementos românticos ali contidos. A análise se baseia, principalmente, nas idéias de Northrop Frye a respeito da natureza e função de imagens na literatura. O conceito de intertextualidade também será utilizado como ferramenta para a análise da inserção de imagens no romance e da inserção do romance no contexto do romantismo inglês. O trabalho é dividido em três partes. A primeira explora as relações de *Frankenstein* com a vida de Mary Shelley e com o romantismo inglês. A segunda expõe a base teórica em que esta dissertação se apóia. A última apresenta a minha leitura da teia de imagens do romance. Ao final, espero poder validar a tese proposta: que *Frankenstein* incorpora os valores estéticos e filosóficos do romantismo e merece, portanto, ser situado no seu devido lugar no cânone literário inglês como o representante legítimo do romantismo em prosa.

**Palavras-chave:** Literatura inglesa, Crítica literária, Mary Shelley, Romantismo, Imagens.

## ABSTRACT

Romantic English literature – written at a time when prose fiction was predominantly a medium for sheer entertainment – is rooted in poetry. One or two novelists may exceptionally be granted the adjective “Romantic”, but Mary Shelley is not ranked among them. For centuries, her work has been restricted to that section in handbooks reserved for exotic Gothic literature. This thesis argues that literary criticism has failed to recognize *Frankenstein’s* obvious relation with the movement. The argument will be fostered by a brief look at such handbooks, and developed through the analysis of the imagery of the novel, so as to trace the Romantic elements there contained. The analysis relies mainly on the frame developed by Northrop Frye concerning the nature and function of imagery in literature. The concept of intertextuality will also be useful as a tool to account for the insertion of images in the novel, and for the novel’s insertion within the Romantic context. The work is divided into three parts. The first contextualizes the main issues set forth by *Frankenstein*, establishing connections with the life of the author and with the Romantic movement. The second exposes the theoretical basis on which the thesis is grounded. The last presents my reading of the novel’s web of images. In the end, I hope to validate the thesis proposed, that *Frankenstein* embodies the aesthetic and philosophical assessments of the English Romantic agenda, and therefore deserves to be situated in its due place in the English Literary canon as the legitimate representative of Romanticism in prose form.

**Key-words:** English literature, Literary criticism, Mary Shelley, Romanticism, Imagery.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is with much vividness and “acute mental vision” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:9) that I remember my walking through the stands of the 2002 edition of the Porto Alegre Books Fair. When I left the fair with a packet in my hands, I was not aware of the weight of the book I was carrying, a 1994 edition of *Frankenstein*. “My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:8-9) while I anticipated the great entertainment it would be to read a horror story about that famous, hideous monster. For I have always been fond of gothic tales, stories of fantasy and mystery, the occult, with the secrets of supernatural and magical forces. I, too, wished to learn “the secrets of heaven and earth” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:36). What a shock it was, therefore, to discover that the novel I had bought went so far beyond my idea of what a gothic novel could contain. It was somehow a picture of my own identity I found in there, at the heart of darkness, and that was enough to change the way I viewed myself.

Two years later, as I started structuring this thesis about that book, two things were clear. First: *Frankenstein* did not interest me so much as a Gothic novel as it did as a Romantic work. Second: as I knew now, the best movement for me to approach the text was to depart from the strong emotional impression I had felt and start a slow and progressive, process of

recognition, understanding and rationalization. The phrase I quote in the title, “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”<sup>1</sup>, from Wordsworth’s Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, is a good explanation of how I initially interpreted *Frankenstein*. Therefore, I intend, in this work, to trace the literary devices that have produced these feelings.

To investigate *Frankenstein*’s critical fortune is to plunge into troubled waters. Paradoxical as it may seem, the more interpretations the story arouses, the less consensus about it the critics achieve come to. Ever since its first publication, scholars and reviewers have said the most different and controversial things about the novel. *Frankenstein* seems to be one of those instances of art that are more easily felt than rationalized upon. It is like a mist that involves us, but that we cannot grasp. Based on this perception, and after having read so many different articles, from the most varied kinds of schools, about the novel, I finally decided to go in search of one of the approaches that proved able to cope with the “mist” in *Frankenstein*, that was capable to address the ‘elements’ (term I use only for lack of a better one) Mary Shelley had amalgamated in her text. I devoted myself to studying these elements through history, philosophy, mythology and poetry, to begin with, and I soon realized they were actually the structural backbone of the novel, the pillars of its fictional universe.

It was only when I got to the reading of Northrop Frye’s texts that I realized these ‘elements’ could be called ‘images.’ *Frankenstein* was filled

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<sup>1</sup> WORDSWORTH, William. “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*” First published in 1802. Access on 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2005. Available at: <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~jenglish/Courses/Spring2001/040/preface1802.html>  
All further references to this text are from this edition. They are abbreviated PLB and incorporated to the text.

with powerful, strong, disturbing images that I was going to investigate. This discovery set the tone and direction of my study. As I proceeded, I became aware of two unifying principles working upon the images: first, they are all somehow linked to one another and interfere with one another in a way that an image may allude to others in or outside the novel; second, they are very much in accordance with the philosophical and aesthetical agenda of the group of European artists that we now refer to as being the members of the Romantic Movement.

The genesis of *Frankenstein* is associated with the days spent by the Shelley clan at the Villa Diodati, the summer house rented by Lord Byron in Switzerland. Oddly enough, Mary Shelley's closeness to Byron and Shelley, the icons of English Romanticism, seems to have pushed her and her work away from the annals of Romantic Literature. The silence about Mary Shelley in the chapters of English literature that deal with Romanticism is noteworthy. After a four month-long extensive investigation of every compendium of English literature and every handbook about Romanticism I could get my hands on, I can guarantee that Sir Walter Scott is often considered a Romantic author, that even Jane Austen is sometimes considered a Romantic author, but that Mary Shelley is not. Here and there we find two or three sentences about *Frankenstein* in the further space granted to Gothic literature and other sub-genres, but nothing that indicated I was dealing with a Romantic novel of, at least, some importance. I was surprised to discover that even works that focused specifically on the Romantic Movement do not mention *Frankenstein*. Some works got to point

of referring to Mary Shelley only as William Godwin's daughter, or Percy Shelley's wife, without even mentioning her as also being a novelist<sup>2</sup>.

I mention this because it conveys a very good idea of how *Frankenstein* has been treated in the history of English Literature. And it opens the way to the main objective of my thesis, that is – through the analysis of the structure of the novel's imagery – to argue my reader into accepting to situate *Frankenstein* in what I consider its due place in English Romanticism, for I believe that this novel is committed to formulate in prose the views of the movement that are so skillfully displayed in verse by the poetry of Byron, Shelley, Coleridge or Wordsworth.

Some terms and expressions should be referred to here in the Introduction so that we may avoid the potential risk of misunderstandings. The first remark to be made refers to the fact that my thesis approaches *Frankenstein* as a Romantic construct rather than as a Gothic piece of literature. Or, in other words, the Gothic characteristics of the novel will be addressed incidentally as one of its several Romantic traits. The term "Romantic," capitalized, refers to the English Romantic Movement, and relates mainly to the prose and verse literature produced in England from 1798 to 1832. The first date marks the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, which is often considered to be the founding text in English Romanticism for its new aesthetic and philosophical proposal. The second date marks the death

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of works that do not make any reference either to *Frankenstein* or Mary Shelley are: 1) AERS, David; COOK, Jonathan; PUNTER, David. *Romanticism & Ideology – Studies in English Writing 1765 – 1830*. London, Boston and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981; 2) BATTENHOUSE, H. M. *English Romantic Writers*. Florida: Barron's , 1958; 3) REED, Arden (ed.) *Romanticism and Language*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1984.

of Sir Walter Scott. By then, Keats, Shelley and Byron were dead and Wordsworth and Coleridge, the leading Romantics, had ceased writing. English Romanticism was thus forced into a perhaps premature ending.

In the course of the history of literary criticism, the term 'Romanticism' has had basically three meanings: 1) a general characteristic in art opposed to Classicism, which can be found at almost any time in history; 2) a feature of Medieval literature, often called 'romance-like' and 3) a specific literary and, in a broader sense, artistic movement that happened mainly in Europe from the end of the eighteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century, at different times in each country, being Germany, England and France the countries in which it was felt more strongly. In this thesis, I am exclusively concerned with the third meaning of the term and my focus will be given to the development of the Romantic school in England

The author of *Frankenstein* will be invariably referred to as "Mary Shelley," to avoid confusion with the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, first owner of the famous family name, who will be referred to either by his full name or by the use of the single word "Shelley." The being created by Frankenstein will be called Creature, with a capital letter, since it has no other proper name. Whenever I spell creature with a small letter, I mean any creature and not the specific character in the novel. Dr. Frankenstein, on the contrary, will be referred to by one of his names or by creator, with a small letter. To avoid confusion, the pronoun "he" refers to Victor and "it" to the Creature. Finally, the terms "image" and "imagery," are to be taken in the sense attributed by Northrop Frye in *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1957).

Supporting the critical and theoretical assumptions of this thesis are basically two branches, one dealing with the nature and function of imagery and of intertextuality, and another dealing with *Frankenstein's* critical fortune and with Romanticism.

My analysis of how Mary Shelley makes use of imagery to convey meaning to *Frankenstein* will be based on Northrop Frye's studies, specially on his "Theory of Symbols", which is part of *Anatomy of Criticism*. I will also rely on another work in which he treats literary images: *Fables of Identity* (1963), a collection of essays in which the theory Frye outlines in the *Anatomy of Criticism* can be seen in practice<sup>3</sup>.

To accompany Frye's theory, I find it useful to employ the notion of intertextuality as a device to account for the way in which images are inserted in *Frankenstein*, and investigate how they interact with one another. The concept of intertextuality will also assist my idea that the novel is intrinsically connected with the Romantic Movement. Although Northrop Frye does not use the term, the idea is central to his thinking and, thus, I believe the use of it will make explicit a belief that in Frye's work appears only implicitly. This, I hope, will add to the meaning of such expressions used by Frye as "conceptual framework", "literary field" and "order of words". The concept of intertextuality I refer to is the one developed by Julia Kristeva in 1969 out of her studies of the contributions of Yuri Tynianov, Mikhail Bakhtin and Roland Barthes.

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<sup>3</sup> For practical reasons, along this work, I may refer to *Anatomy of Criticism* and to *Fables of Identity* as *Anatomy* and *Fables*, respectively.

For my attempt at a critical commentary on English Romanticism, I rely mainly on studies by René Wellek, Northrop Frye and Morse Peckham, critics whose works emphasize the new aesthetic and philosophical proposal of the movement. Wellek's *A History of Modern Criticism* provides a skilful historicization of the thought of the most influential Romantic theoreticians in Europe. And his article "The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History" clears up much of the imprecision around the term Romanticism and points to the features that make it a somewhat unified literary movement. Peckham's "Towards a Theory of Romanticism" provides an account of the historical changes in taste, science and philosophy that enabled the movement to flourish in Europe.

Because *Frankenstein* is a novel that relies strongly on biographical data, I find it useful to contextualize the novel not only in history but also in its author's life. Miranda Seymour's recently published *Mary Shelley* (2000) is the biography I will rely on. This work has the particular advantage of situating Mary Shelley's life in the context of late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as well as in the context of the lives of the people who were closest to her, many of which contributed, even if indirectly, to the construction of several characters in *Frankenstein*. In addition, Seymour's book brings a detailed account of the novel's critical fortune and comments on the other works written by Mary Shelley.

With the help of these tools borrowed from different areas of literary theory and criticism, I attempt to demonstrate that *Frankenstein* is structured upon a web of intertextual images coming from several fields of the 'humanities', as Northrop Frye would call it, such as history, philosophy

and mythology. Out of such an interdisciplinary conjunction, the images, in a play of doubles and triples, interact and interfere with one another, making ambiguity a pervading trait in the novel. Due to this peculiarity, it is difficult to accomplish an organized and sequential analysis of images one by one. It is often necessary to refer back to images already mentioned or to anticipate comments about those not yet studied. Similarly, images can contain other images within them (such as the image of the Creature contains those of Adam and Satan) and, at the same time, interfere with the signification of one another.

This work is an argumentative thesis, presented in three chapters. The first chapter is divided into two sessions. The first offers a concise view of the important events in Mary Shelley's life that may, somehow, be reflected in her novel. The second session consists of an examination of the English Romantic Movement, the background against which, in chapter three, I examine *Frankenstein's* cluster of images.

The second chapter, with a brief introduction and two sessions, exposes the theoretical basis behind this thesis. The introduction comments on how English literary criticism has dealt with Romantic prose and on the most important critics and theoreticians whose studies have contributed to the development of this work. The first session of chapter two briefly examines the most relevant influences operating in the writing of *Frankenstein* as well as a very small portion of the most relevant artistic production it has influenced. The session is intended to function as a contextualization of the main issues the novel puts forth. It deals with intertexts that lead to *Frankenstein* and with intertexts that develop out of it.

The second session presents the theory of Northrop Frye, followed by Kristeva's notion of intertextuality, explaining how I intend to relate them.

The last chapter brings my analysis of the novel's structure of imagery. Here I scrutinize the way in which images refer to other images in and out of the text, in an intertextual interface, and how they embody the feeling and thinking of English Romanticism. I intend to demonstrate, in this chapter, that many of the images created by Mary Shelley are common to the movement and to other contemporary poets and, in that sense that they are universal, archetypal, and Romantic.

In the end of the work, I hope to validate the thesis that the images presented in *Frankenstein* grant it the right to be placed among the great Romantic novels of the English canon. And, since it is a work about images, I have collected some to present in the annexes: images of places visited by Mary Shelley before or while she was writing *Frankenstein*, and that are described in it; and other relevant images that bear some kind of intertextual relations to the novel.

The technical norms employed in this work conform to the ABNT rules, except for the issues of punctuation and other details that would hinder the reading of the English text. In such moments, I followed the MLA parameters instead.

I guess a word about the difficulties I faced during this research is not out of place here. Although *Frankenstein* is currently accepted as part of the canon, and Mary Shelley a celebrated author, they have not found their place within academic study in Brazil. A survey through libraries of Brazilian Universities quickly confirms that: the lack of qualified material is

discouraging. The small quantity of academic studies by Brazilian authors available in libraries is also surprising. The majority of the works about *Frankenstein* come from Europe and the United States. The absence of studies about *Frankenstein* in Brazil seems to me emblematic of the inappropriate treatment I argue the novel has had along literary history.

In her Introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley tells her readers that she was often asked how such a young girl came to think of such a hideous story. So many forms of prejudice seem to be implicit here: the fact that she was a woman and women were not supposed to write books; the fact that she wrote prose in an age of poetry; the creed, sometimes alluded to, that her husband was the real artist behind the creation of *Frankenstein*. But, most of all, this report tells us the novel possesses aesthetic and literary values its contemporaries did not know how to deal with. This is what I propose to investigate, trying to clear up, as much as possible, the shadow which such prejudice has thrown upon *Frankenstein*.



## 1 CONTEXTUALISING

### 1.1 Mary Shelley, the Author of *Frankenstein*

*A cold heart? Have I a cold heart? But none need envy the icy regions this heart encircles. And, at least, the tears are hot!*

Mary Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley*

The contribution of Russian Formalism has taught us what harm can be done when critics rely too strongly on the biography of the author of a given work of art. The rise of literary theory, in the beginning of the twentieth century, proposes a radical shift in interpretation, causing the moral, historical or biographical approaches to submit to the “immanent study”<sup>4</sup> of the artistic phenomena, which, in the case of literature, focuses basically on the (written and oral) text, putting an end to the merely impressionistic interpretations common at the time. Mary Shelley and her two famous literary companions, Byron and Shelley, are themselves instances of the damage provoked when the reading public concludes that only filth and immorality can come from a filthy and immoral author.

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<sup>4</sup> TYNIANOV, Iuri. “On Literary Evolution”. First published in 1927. Access on 8<sup>th</sup>, June, 2005. Available at Courses. Essex. <http://courses.essex.ac.uk/lt/lt204/evolution.htm>

Since then, critics have tended to restrict the use of biographical information to the aspects that might prove useful tools available for the interpretation of a literary work. Thus, the brief summary of Mary Shelley's life included here stands as a means to contextualize and elucidate elements and episodes that belong in *Frankenstein* – which has sometimes been called an autobiographical novel (See, for instance, SCHOENE-HARWOOD, 2000:9 and BALDICK, 1987:36). My aim is to highlight events that can shed some light on *Frankenstein* and on the personality of its author.

Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley was born in London, on 30<sup>th</sup> August 1797, the daughter of two prominent and polemical thinkers of the time: Mary Wollstonecraft – the avant-guard feminist who wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792)<sup>5</sup> and William Godwin – the political philosopher author of *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness* (1793)<sup>6</sup>.

One of the strongest events in Mary Shelley's life, and one whose effects can be felt in her first novel, was the death of her mother. A few hours after having given birth to Mary Shelley, her mother fell ill. A retained placenta caused her generalized inflammation and great pain so that, within ten days, she died. His wife's death was a terrible blow to William Godwin, who was left alone to take care of two children: Mary Shelley, the newly born baby, and Fanny Imlay, his wife's daughter by her first husband, Gilbert Imlay.

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<sup>5</sup> Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, access on 20.06.2005, is available at <http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/wollstonecraft/woman-contents.html>

<sup>6</sup> Godwin's *Political Justice* is available at the *Anarchy Archives: An Online Research Center on the History and Theory of Anarchism*. Access on 19<sup>th</sup> February, 2006. [http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist\\_Archives/godwin/PJfrontpiece.html](http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/godwin/PJfrontpiece.html)

Miranda Seymour (2000: 29), in her updated biography of Mary Shelley, observes that “for a man who resolutely opposed the comforting notion of an afterlife, the loss was absolute”. The figure of Mary Wollstonecraft, however, was far from absent from her daughter’s life.

Her [Mary Shelley’s] mother was spoken of with a love amounting to veneration by her father and by the women whose comforting arms embraced her. The mother she knew was the warm-eyed lady who smiled from the wall in her father’s study, whose grave she was taken to visit when she was still too small to understand quite what death meant. (Seymour, 2000:33)

But these were not the only ways through which Mary Shelley’s mother was present in her life. Less than one year after the death of his wife, in January 1798, Godwin published the *Memoirs of the Author of ‘The Rights of Woman’*, in which he made no attempt to conceal any facts that could be derogatory to the image of his deceased wife. Miranda Seymour informs us that Mary Shelley did not read the *Memoirs* until she was a young person, but that she did read her mother’s other works, like *Lessons*, which were initially written to Fanny and then altered to fit her second child, whom she expected to be a boy and is, hence, called William in the book. Mary Shelley also started reading *Original Stories* “even before she could puzzle out the words” (SEYMOUR, 2000:43). This was a collection of tales with illustrations commissioned from William Blake, not yet widely known at that time. When Mary Shelley was seventeen years old, she was already acquainted with the philosophical and political writings of her parents.

Like most of Mary Shelley’s work, her first novel relies strongly on biographical fact. The death of her mother is dramatized in the novel through the theme of motherlessness. There is an impressive number of

motherless characters in *Frankenstein*: to start with, the two main families – Frankenstein and De Lacey – lack a mother. Sophie and Elizabeth are also motherless. In the case of Elizabeth, she became an orphan thrice: her first family entrusted her care to a second family that again delegated the responsibility towards her to a third one. When Elizabeth seemed to have found her place within a family, her third “mother” died. Moreover, there is no reference in the text to Henry Clerval’s mother and, although we do not know whether she is alive or dead, it is as if she were really dead due to her absence. The only character who has a mother is Justine. However, hers is not the ideal mother: she does not exactly love Justine and does not treat her as well as her other children. She only wishes to have her daughter close to her when she is nearly dying. The only real mother in the story is a flawed one. Victor’s Creature – needless to say – seems to be motherlessness objectified and several scholars have discussed to what extent the Creature’s search for his creator represents the quest for the father or for the mother. Curiously enough, the book seems to be motherless too, as it was published anonymously.

Because of the intense intellectual life of her parents, Mary Shelley was familiar with many prominent figures of the English cultural scene of the time. Within her mother’s circle of relationships were names like Thomas Paine, William Blake and Henry Fuseli. Among Godwin’s friends were Thomas Holcroft, Charles Lamb, Samuel Coleridge and Percy Bysshe Shelley, whose first and brief meeting with Mary Shelley was on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1812. They only met again and started a relationship in 1814. In that same year, on July 28<sup>th</sup>, the couple, together with Mary Shelley’s stepsister,

Jane [who liked to call herself 'Claire'] Clairmont eloped to France, and then to Switzerland. After a few days in Brunnen, Lake of Lucerne, complete lack of money forced them back to England, to where they arrived on September 13<sup>th</sup>, 1814. The region of the Lake of Lucerne is mentioned by Mary Shelley in *Frankenstein*.

An event that was to mark Mary Shelley's life deeply happened on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1816: she gave birth to a premature daughter who died on March 6<sup>th</sup>. The entry for her Journal on March 19<sup>th</sup> says: "Dream that my little baby came to life again; that it had only been cold, and that we rubbed it before the fire, and it lived"<sup>7</sup>. Two things occur to me that relate this entry to her first novel: 1) Like Dr. Frankenstein, she wishes to be "capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter" (SHELLEY, 1994:50). 2) The way in which her baby is restored to life is analogous to the way in which some one tries to restore Henry Clerval when the Creature kills him: "they put it into a bed and rubbed it, and Daniel went to the town for an apothecary, but life was quite gone" (SHELLEY, 1994:170). These are only two among the many passages in the novel that display images that find an echo in the life of the author.

It was not during their first elopement in 1814, as it is many times thought, that the Shelleys and Claire spent the summer at Lord Byron's Villa Diodati. The famous episode of the contest from which *Frankenstein* originated only happened two years later, in June 1816. The event has been almost as prolific as the novel in giving rise to speculations and

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in LEVINE, G., KNOEPFLMACHER, U.C. (editors) *The Endurance of Frankenstein*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979, p. xviii

interpretations: it has been the object of works of literature, films and investigations made by scholars trying to account for the many possible sources Mary Shelley might have had for writing.

It is undeniable that the period the Shelleys spent with Lord Byron impressed Mary Shelley to the point of imprinting clear, deep marks on her novel. However, all the investigations that have been carried on by both biographers and scholars are not enough to disclose everything that happened during those days, and especially during those nights, in a way that some episodes remain uncertain. In her Introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley implies that most of her sources date from those times: she mentions the German ghost stories they read, the competition proposed by Lord Byron, his and Percy Shelley's talks about science, electricity and galvanism, and a dream she had. The text is full of emotion, and seems more of a romanticized narration than an objective account of the facts: there is no word, for example, about the fact that Claire Clairmont, Mary and Percy Shelley had visited, in 1815, a region of Germany where the ruins of Castle Frankenstein (picture Appendix B, p. 198) lay. Curiously enough, Frankenstein and Clerval's trip down the Rhine echoes the Shelleys' visit to the region with vivid descriptions of it and of its surroundings as they were at the time. There is no word either about several thinkers whose ideas she clearly makes use of, such as Rousseau, Locke, or her own parents.

It is in this Introduction that Mary Shelley tells about the contest proposed by Lord Byron and about how he and Shelley daily enquired her

whether she had already thought what story she would write. This pressure apparently caused the dream she claims to have been the initial inspiration for writing. It is described thus:

I saw – with shut eyes but acute mental vision – I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half-vital motion. Frightful must it be, for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. (...) He sleeps; but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold, the horrid thing stands at his bed side, opening his curtains and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes. I opened mine in terror. The idea so possessed my mind that a thrill of fear ran through me, and I wished to exchange the ghastly image of my fancy for the realities around. (Mary Shelley, 1994:9)

It is on this passage of the Introduction, and not on chapter five of *Frankenstein*, that most films base their accounts of the scene of the creation of the Monster. The passage provides a sort of other version of the image of creation, and in this sense, the passage is not an appendix to, but a part of the novel.

The year 1816 was remarkable for Mary Shelley. On January 24<sup>th</sup>, her son William was born. It was a comfort for both parents to have another child to cherish after the one they had lost. On May 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Shelleys and Claire, for the second time, left London for Switzerland where they remained up to August 29<sup>th</sup>. On October 9<sup>th</sup>, Mary's half sister, Fanny Imlay, commits suicide. It was during this year that the Shelleys and Claire spent the summer with Lord Byron. But, differently from what is commonly thought, they did not stay at his Villa Diodati (Picture Appendix E, p.201). They

rented a smaller house nearby called Campagne Chapuis, to which Mary Shelley often referred as Montalègre<sup>8</sup>.

The events of those days and the scenery of the region impressed her deeply. She claims to have found inspiration for her novel in the atmosphere of the meetings at the Villa Diodati to which Claire Clairmont and John William Polidori were also present. The area seems to have provided Mary Shelley with several ideas for the settings of her novel.

The vividness of the descriptions of places are emblematic of the impact the scenery caused Mary Shelley. Almost every single place described in the text was known to her. The scenery which seems to have most impressed her was the surroundings of Villa Diodati, on the south shore of Lake Léman, in Geneva. The city impressed her so much that she made it the home place of the Frankenstein family and made her protagonist “by birth a Genevese” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:30). A brief look at a map of the region shows names of places familiar to the readers of *Frankenstein*: a little to the south of Geneva is Plainpalais, the place in which the Creature commits its first murder. When Victor goes home to see his family after the loss of William, he “remained two days in Lausanne” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:71), which is on the north shore of the Lake Léman. To the Northeast are the Mounts Jura and to the Southwest is Mont Blanc, both of which fascinated and inspired Mary and Percy Shelley. The view of the valley of Chamounix (where Mont Blanc and the Mer de Glace are set) inspired Shelley to write his celebrated poem “Mont Blanc”, which is a good example of the strong significance of nature, not only to *Frankenstein* and to his own

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<sup>8</sup> Radu Florescu (1999:101) comments on the ‘inaccuracy of names’ regarding this house.

poetry, but to the Romantic Movement in general. Besides that, the place was also chosen as the scenery for the mythical first meeting of creature and creator.

Two other events in Mary Shelley's life are of much importance to her first novel. The first is Byron's proposal in 1816 that each visitor at the Villa Diodati should write a ghost story. Mary Shelley claims to have found inspiration for the theme in Byron and Shelley's conversation about the possibility of the generation of life. For her, who had lost her mother and, more recently, her first child, this theme must have been of much interest. The idea of bringing back to life the beloved people she had lost must have influenced her psychology. Byron's and Shelley's talks clearly reflect the enthusiasm of the time with the new scientific discoveries that were being made and links the novel even more deeply to its historical context.

The second fact of importance to the novel is a trip made by Mary, Percy Shelley and Claire Clairmont down the Rhine river in 1815 and which is echoed by the trip Frankenstein and Clerval undertake in chapter eighteen. In the region the Shelleys visited, lay the ruins of a Castle Frankenstein, where an alchemist named Konrad Dippel once lived. Because he was born in the castle, he often signed his name as 'Frankensteina', meaning 'from Frankenstein'. Dippel carried on several alchemical experiments. Among them, he claimed to have discovered "the cause of generation and life" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:50) and the philosopher's stone, with which he said he made a kind of elixir of life. What he had actually made was a liquid with blood and bones that was considered by physicians of that time to be able to cure illnesses. This syrup was the basis for the

Prussic Acid with which John Polidori, one of the members of the Villa Diodati's famous group, committed suicide. Astonishing coincidences such as this seem to recur in Mary Shelley's life.<sup>9</sup>

The summer of 1816 proved particularly prolific to the English Romantic Movement. It was on those days that Lord Byron finished the third canto of *Childe Harold* and wrote his poem "The prisoner of Chillon" (a picture of the Castle of Chillon is in Appendix C, page 199); Shelley wrote the celebrated poem "Mont Blanc"; Polidori wrote *The Vampyre*, possibly the model for Bram Stoker's *Dracula*; and Mary Shelley started writing *Frankenstein*.

In 1818, the Shelleys moved to Italy in search of a more congenial weather for Percy Shelley's health. From then on, Mary Shelley's life was to be marked by the pain of losing many of her most cherished relations: within seven years everyone present at the Vila Diodati, except Mary and Claire, was dead. Her daughter Clara, born in 1817, died in 1818. William, the child to whom Mary Shelley had been most attached, died one year later, the same year in which Percy Florence, her only child to survive her, was born. After three years of apparent peace, in 1822, a miscarriage nearly costs her life and Shelley drowns in the Gulf of Spezia, a loss from which she would never completely recover. In the same year, Allegra, Claire Clairmont's daughter by Byron, died in a convent in Bagna-Cavallo, in Italy. Polidori, who had become her friend, committed suicide in 1820 and Lord Byron dies of a kind of fever in Greece in 1824.

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<sup>9</sup> FLORESCU (2000: 66-92) comments on this episode of Mary Shelley's life.

All this made death very present in Mary Shelley's life and the pain for the loss of beloved relations may have brought with it the feeling of guilt. Mary Shelley knew that her mother had died in giving birth to her, that Harriet Shelley had committed suicide because her husband had deserted her, that Fanny Imlay killed herself because she felt so miserable and lonely, and that the miscarriages she had had killed her children inside her. Of course, she could hardly have done anything to prevent these incidents, but the probability that she felt indirectly guilty and saw herself as a monster exists. Schoene-Harwood comments on the widespread belief that "Mary Shelley [w]as a badly traumatised female who, debilitated by biographical and historical circumstance, appears to write exclusively for therapeutic reasons" (SCHOENE-HARWOOD, 2000:10). Of course this is exaggeration and the word "exclusively" spoils the idea. For a person who was born and raised among literary celebrities, writing should have been a very natural activity. In any case, the themes of death and loneliness are as present in Mary Shelley's life as they are in *Frankenstein* and in Romantic poetry in general.

The death of her friends and the feeling of guilt led Mary Shelley to intense loneliness in such a way that her life seemed to be a series of several Romantic images. The images of death, guilt (both direct and indirect) and loneliness recur in English Romantic poetry and in *Frankenstein*. The high number of deaths in the novel seems to echo the high number of deaths in her own life. Besides, her main character, Victor, is a person tormented by the pangs of guilt: "A thousand times rather would I have confessed myself guilty of the crime ascribed to Justine" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:78).

Loneliness, one of Romanticism's favourite themes, provides the novel with beautiful and sad images. Actually, it plays a crucial role in the story because, would it not torment the Creature bitterly, its violent potency might never have been released and the structure of offence, revolution and revenge that supports the novel would crumble. But images of Romantic loneliness, of man secluded from society and having nature for his only companion, are some of the most impressive:

Often, after the rest of the family had retired for the night, I took the boat and passed many hours upon the water. Sometimes, with my sails set, I was carried by the wind; and sometimes, after rowing into the middle of the lake, I left the boat pursue its own course and gave way to my own miserable reflections. I was often tempted, when all was at peace around me, and I the only thing that wandered in a scene so beautiful and heavenly..." (Mary Shelley, 1994:87)

The way images are inserted in *Frankenstein* and play with one another is far from being rational. As it happens with the image created by the passage above, it is hard to ascertain whether they are borrowed from Romantic poetry, the author's biography or the historical context. An account of these images, therefore, might not follow a rational and linear path.

Rationality, indeed, does not seem to be the best way to deal with the turbulence of Mary Shelley's life, which is clearly reflected in *Frankenstein*. At the age of twenty-seven, Mary Shelley had lost her mother, her half sister, her husband, four children and some close friends. Despite so many distressing events and lack of money she managed to make her living as a writer and to provide for her only surviving child.

Despite the amount of works Mary Shelley published during her lifetime, she lived most of the time in great financial difficulties. This was made even worse when Sir<sup>10</sup> Timothy Shelley (her father-in-law) prevented her from publishing either a biography of Shelley or his poems and even tried to keep her from using the name “Shelley” in her publications.

Sir Timothy initially refused to recognize Percy Florence as his grandson and, after Shelley’s death, only gave Mary Shelley an allowance with which she could hardly send her son to school. Her situation was only improved by his death in 1844. Unfortunately, Mary Shelley did not have much time to profit from her husband’s heritage, for she died only seven years after Sir Timothy.

The years that followed Shelley’s death were particularly difficult for her. She had to provide not only for herself and her son, but also for her father, whose financial failure and debts increased constantly. By the time of his death on April 07<sup>th</sup> 1836, William Godwin was almost entirely dependent on his daughter. But the struggle for money was not her only occupation: Mary Shelley was engaged in clearing her deceased husband’s reputation from any derogatory stain. The idealized image of the romantic, generous, almost feminine and angel-like poet we sometimes have of him is partly due to her efforts in portraying him thus. Her other main concern was to see Percy Florence happy in life, and she seemed to be pleased when he decided to marry Mrs. Jane St John, a twenty-four year-old widow. Mary Shelley and

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<sup>10</sup> The biographies I have consulted, either of Shelley or of Mary Shelley, refer to his father as Sir and to Mary Shelley’s daughter-in-law as Lady without providing further details of the origin of their titles. Percy Shelley was never referred to as Sir because his father, who possessed the title, outlived him. After Sir Timothy Shelley’s death, the title belonged to Percy Florence Shelley, the only child by Percy and Mary Shelley to reach adult age. Percy Florence’s wife was, therefore, called Lady Shelley.

her daughter-in-law eventually became very close friends. After Mary Shelley's death, Lady Shelley busied herself in doing to Mary Shelley's image what she had done to Shelley's.

Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley can be said to personify the dichotomy expressed in Mary Poovey's title *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*. From very early in childhood, Mary Shelley showed an intellectual independence and an anti-conventional behaviour that permitted her to elope with a married man and to become a professional writer. She extended to her life all the artistic liberty of the Romantic writer she was, creating her own laws and living regardless of many social conventions, although not unconnected to them. However, a succession of disastrous events, lack of money, and social seclusion led her, towards the end of her youth, to behave less like a revolutionary. Although she never gave up writing, at the end of her life, Mary Shelley somewhat gave in to the standards of the proper lady of the time. Her efforts in trying to clear up her husband's name from any possible social stain, and in securing a safe conventional marriage for her son was, I believe, a way of avoiding the suffering of prejudice she lived so intensely. This ambiguous, but not unexplained, shift in her behaviour evokes her mother's attempt at suicide, when the radical thinker, Mary Wollstonecraft, tried to kill herself after she was abandoned by Gilbert Imlay, an attitude representative of how intensely emotional these women were.

For a novel that relies on biographical data as intensely as *Frankenstein* does, this account of the author's life shall provide the work with a useful context. However, one more reason leads me to include it here. As Mary Shelley's first novel became increasingly popular, several versions

and adaptations of the story appeared. Today, those versions are known even by people who have never read the book. It follows that what these people know is a basic plot-structure: a man makes a creature, the creature turns evil, it runs amok. This is what I call “the myth of Frankenstein”, which originated out of Mary Shelley’s novel, but is not necessarily identical with it. Something very similar has occurred with the story of Mary Shelley’s life. It has been so much diffused that facts and rumours often blend. For that reason, what the general reader usually knows is a sort of version of her life. This section provides a reliable account of the relationships between Mary Shelley’s life and work.

*Frankenstein* makes use of elements borrowed from the author’s biography in a very irrational way. These elements are often mingled with others borrowed from several different contexts: Romanticism, mythology and philosophy, for instance. It was when the reading of Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* taught me to call these elements images that I eventually devised a way to deal with *Frankenstein*’s “overflow of powerful feelings” (WORDSWORTH, PLB).

## 1.2 The English Romantic Movement

*Thou art a symbol and a sign  
To Mortals of their fate and force;  
Like thee, Man is in part divine,  
A troubled stream from a pure source;*  
“Prometheus”, by Lord Byron

In dealing with Romanticism, two major difficulties arise: one is the contradictoriness inherent to the movement, and the other concerns

terminology; both difficulties are intrinsically linked. The certain vagueness with which the term 'Romanticism' has sometimes been treated in literary criticism arises, I believe, from the fact that the movement brings forth some contradictory statements.

In this topic, I intend to provide an outline of the English Romantic Movement that will stand as the background of the analysis of *Frankenstein* I present in chapter three. I briefly comment on its differences from the preceding period and on the historical conditions that helped produce it. I aim at critically describing the movement's concerns and the character of its literature in a way to achieve a satisfactory definition of the period and grant a precise treatment to the term. In order to do that, I will rely mainly on studies by René Wellek, Northrop Frye and Morse Peckham, critics whose concern is to approach Romanticism in terms of its aesthetic and philosophical innovations, its peculiar view of life and art and its literary achievements.

Today, it is consensual that the literary period now called English Romanticism appeared as a reaction against the literary standards of neoclassicism and that the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* is its founding manifesto in England. In the Preface, Wordsworth preaches the need for a more imaginative approach to nature, and exposes the poetical principle of the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"(WORDSWORTH, PLB)<sup>11</sup>. He proposes a radical change in poetical language, which, he claims, should be

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<sup>11</sup> The preface written by Wordsworth for the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) was a short one, which did not occasion much repercussion. The text which became celebrated as the founding document of English Romanticism is the preface he wrote for the second edition (1800). In 1815, Wordsworth added some alterations to the preface in the form of an extra text called "Essay Supplementary to the Preface". The edition of the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that I refer to and make use of here is the second.

“alive with metaphors and figures” (WORDSWORTH, PLB) and rustic as the language of common people. Paradoxically, he claims to find inspiration in Edmund Spenser and John Milton, masters of perfection in the use of sophisticated language. In his criticism, he violently rejects neoclassical diction, but, according to René Wellek, “Wordsworth himself uses many devices against which he objected (...) and even many instances of eighteenth century types of periphrasis can be found in his poems” (WELLEK, 1955b:132). Later on, he realised the slight discrepancy between his theories and his practice and revised many of his ideas in additions to *Lyrical Ballads* as his “Essay Supplementary to the Preface”, added in 1815. He did not give up his idea of poetry as expression of feelings though, and continued to believe that a poet must “give proof that he himself has been moved”<sup>12</sup> by what he writes. It is symptomatic of the contradictoriness inherent to the Romantic Movement as a whole that

Wordsworth actually ends in good neoclassicism when he requires the general language of humanity. (...) At first sight Wordsworth sounds like a naturalist defending the imitation of folk ballads and rustic speech; or at least as a primitivist of the same sort as Herder, favouring simple passionate “nature poetry and condemning “art” and the artificial. But actually Wordsworth assimilates Spenser, Milton, Chaucer, and Shakespeare to his concept of “nature” without making them over into primitives, as the Germans for a certain period tried to do. (Wellek, 1955b:134,136)

Exercising the same paradox is Wordsworth’s friend Samuel Coleridge, the co-author of *Lyrical Ballads*. The *Ballads* intended to show “the two cardinal points of poetry: the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature and the power of giving

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in WELLEK, 1955b, p. 137.

the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination” (COLERIDGE, BL.)<sup>13</sup>. This explanation from his *Biographia Literaria* shows how Coleridge shares the concepts of both Wordsworth and (later) Shelley about poetry, and is concerned with the shift in poetic practice which is taking shape at the time. One of the most important theorists writing in English during the Romantic period, it is Coleridge that introduces in England the work of the German Romantic theorists, specially the brothers Schlegel. His great contribution is his theorising of issues of much importance for the English Romanticism, namely, the reconciliation of opposites, the definition of imagination (much in accordance with Wordsworth and Shelley), the notion of the organic whole and the distinction between symbol and metaphor (according to WELLEK, 1955b). Coleridge’s criticism has often been accused of being a mere translation from German writers as Schelling and the Schlegels, but I will take Wellek’s (1955b) position that, although his indebtedness to the German Romantics is undeniable, his criticism is still of great value.

In his description of the poet’s role, Coleridge seems slightly inclined towards a moral bias when he says a poet must have good sense and be a good and religious man. He claims “an undevout poet is mad, is an impossibility”<sup>14</sup>, which seems, in my view, a non-romantic premise.

The most striking example of Romanticism’s ambivalence, though, is Lord Byron. He overtly despises the poetry of Wordsworth and praises that of

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<sup>13</sup> The edition of *Biographia Literaria* I make use of is available at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext04/bioli10.txt> Access on 7th May, 2005. All further references to this text are from this edition. They will be abbreviated BL and will be incorporated to the text.

<sup>14</sup> COLERIDGE, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria*. IN: Wellek, 1955b, p. 162.

Pope, whom he thought should be the “national poet of mankind”<sup>15</sup>. It seems remarkable that the poet often remembered as the wildest and most romantic of all English writers, the creator of such poetic personae as Childe Harold, Manfred and Don Juan, declares himself resolutely in favour of neoclassical patterns. One of his most recent biographers, Fiona MacCarthy, says that

Byron’s angry defence, in *English Bards*, of the traditional literary values of Dryden, Pope and such contemporary poets as Thomas Campbell and Samuel Rogers against fashionable hacks and ill-equipped reviewers, brought him his first glimmerings of serious success. (MacCarthy, 2003:85)

It is known that none of the Romantics knew that they were forming such a powerful literary aesthetic statement that would, decades later, be labelled as the Romantic Movement. However, it becomes evident from the reading of their work that they were aware of the change in literary fashion. Byron, although he wrote little critical or theoretical work, was certainly aware of this shift. And as he recognises his contribution to the changes, he surprisingly says, “I am ashamed of it”<sup>16</sup>.

But, in my view, the ultimate instance of this ambivalence is the predominance of the image of Prometheus in Romantic art throughout Europe. Being Romanticism a reaction against (neo)classicism, it is expected that images derived from classical Greek mythology ought not to be favoured. Yet, it was precisely during the Enlightenment and the period of Romanticism that the Titan became a vivid character in Western man’s culture. The Illuminists saw in it the symbol of scientific progress and of the

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<sup>15</sup> BYRON, George Gordon, Lord. *Letters and Journals*, ed. Lord Prothero (London, 1901), 559. Quoted in WELLEK, 1955b:123.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem.

search for knowledge, whereas, to the Romantics, Prometheus grew to signify the symbol of revolt against all kinds of oppression or misled authority. Prometheus seemed then to embody the spirit of the age.

Eighteenth and nineteenth century painting is full of representations of the Titan, and even Beethoven, an exponent of pre-Romantic music, composed inspired by the image of Prometheus. Its influence in the literature of the time has been tremendous: it is present in works by Voltaire, Goethe, Lord Byron and Shelley, whose *Prometheus Unbound* has been said to be his masterpiece. Of course such a powerful metaphor for the historical moment did not escape Mary Shelley. The implication of the novel's subtitle is to be discussed in chapter three.

After such observations, I come to the conclusion that it is peculiar of the English Romanticism that it often slips back into neoclassicism. That, I believe, happens because the artists of the time are not entirely and consciously free from neoclassical thought. Wellek states that

none of the English poets of the time, however, recognised himself as a romanticist or admitted the relevance of the debate [about the opposition classic/romantic] to his own time and country (Wellek, 1955b:110).

This is certainly true, but does not mean that they were not attentive to the changes occurring not only in art, but also in most spheres of society. It was the use of the term 'Romantic' that came later and not the awareness of change, even though they did not know exactly what this change consisted of. This, I believe is what Wellek means. Those contradictions, perhaps, arise from a difficulty in dealing with the turbulence of a particularly revolutionary

period as the years comprised between the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. Besides, it seems inappropriate to demand strict coherence from artists who lived in a moment when some of society's most cherished certainties were being shaken. The English Romantic Movement reflects, in its literary production, the ambiguity of a time when the word of order (or at least one of them) was transition: transition in artistic standards, in scientific conceptions, in moral values and in the way of viewing the world. The contradictions inherent to the English Romantic Movement are, thus, well justified.

Having said a word about the paradoxes of Romanticism, I now comment on its terminology and definition. As I stated in the opening lines of this section, the term 'Romanticism' has been treated somewhat vaguely by critics. Arthur Lovejoy<sup>17</sup> goes to the point of claiming that,

The word "romantic" has come to mean so many things that, by itself, it means nothing. It has ceased to perform the function of a verbal sign. When a man is asked ... to discuss romanticism, it is impossible to know what ideas or tendencies he is to talk about.<sup>18</sup>

Lovejoy's position is certainly radical, but the occasional laxity in the treatment of the term can be exemplified by the fact that although René Wellek, in *A History of Modern Criticism*, states that "what happened in the eighteenth century was not anything like a unified romantic or pre-romantic

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<sup>17</sup> LOVEJOY, Arthur O. "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms" IN: GLECKNER, Robert F; ENSCOE, Gerald. (Eds.) *Romanticism: Points of View*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1970. Wellek's "The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History", published in the same edition, aims at demonstrating the inaccuracy of Lovejoy's claims.

<sup>18</sup> LOVEJOY, Arthur O. "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms". IN: GLECKNER, Robert F; ENSCOE, Gerald. (Eds.) *Romanticism: Points of View*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1970, p. 66.

revolt" (1955b, p.25), in "Romanticism Re-examined"<sup>19</sup>, he says that "the consciousness of a specific change was universal at the time". This is symptomatic of the difficulty of dealing with the term Romanticism and of its occasional controversies. However, despite the looseness with which the term has sometimes been treated, renowned critics such as Northrop Frye and René Wellek himself indeed agree about the distinguishing features of the movement as well as about the aesthetic and philosophical shift in literature proposed by it.

Although there are no specific dates that accurately circumscribe the length of the Romantic Movement throughout Europe, Northrop Frye (1966:1) states that "Romanticism has a historical centre of gravity, which falls somewhere around the 1790-1830 period". This helps support my option of considering Romanticism in England as the period that goes from 1798 to 1832. There has been general agreement that the year of the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* stands as a suitable mark for the flourishing of romantic literature in England. Its preface exposes Wordsworth's revolutionary view that poetry should be plain and accessible to everyone and be written in the everyday language of the common man. This strongly contrasts with the hitherto current view of poetry so well exemplified by the correctness and lucidity of Alexander Pope's verse, whose *Essay on Criticism* (1711) is seen as a manifesto of the neoclassical principles of beauty and perfection. The date chosen to mark the decline of the movement is that of Sir Walter Scott's death. The only reason why I do not adopt Frye's

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<sup>19</sup> WELLEK, René. "Romanticism Re-examined" IN: FRYE, Northrop. *Romanticism Reconsidered*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1966, p.108.

suggestion (1830) is because it would exclude the publication of the third edition of *Frankenstein*, in 1831. This edition is particularly important because, for its publication, Mary Shelley adds a few alterations to the text which became, let us say, the official version of the novel; the 1818 text is hardly ever read outside academic circles. It was also for this edition that she wrote her famous “Author’s Introduction to the Standard Novels Edition” to explain how she had conceived of the story. The Introduction has become such an important text that Fred Botting (2002:2-3) sees it as a part of the novel

The effect of the account of the novel’s composition is to shift the significance of *Frankenstein* from a Gothic framework to one imbued with concerns that would come under the general heading of ‘Romanticism’, though the term, in 1816, had still to be invented. In this framework it is the Introduction’s and the novel’s concern with imagination, creative authority and the principle of life that form the main interest of critics. (...) To use Mary Shelley’s term, the Introduction provides an ‘appendage’ to the novel (p.5). It is an appendage, however, that works like a Derridean supplement since its adding of what the story lacks – origin, authority and meaning – does more than supply extra details.

When Botting says that the novel lacks origin and authority, he refers to Mary Shelley’s obscure sources and to the novel’s anonymous publication. I interpret his idea of the lack of meaning as a reference to nineteenth century readers’ and critics’ incapability of coming to terms with the novel’s revolutionary and subversive content. In any case, I have quoted this passage because it hints at the dialogue *Frankenstein* keeps with the literary movement that produced it, a dialogue that is not always evident. But, if I am to talk about Romanticism, I need to make clear what the emerging movement is founded upon. Frye (1966) argues that Romanticism

originated out of a revolutionary period, whose most significant symbol is the French Revolution, which was fostered by the intellectual ferment of the Enlightenment and by the enthusiasm of the American Revolution. William Hazlitt, in his *The Spirit of the Age*, also claims that the spirit of the Romantic age was very much influenced by the changes previous and subsequent to the French Revolution. This rebellious aspect of the movement can be felt in most poets and poems of the period, sometimes explicitly and sometimes through metaphor, symbolism or imagery. Wordsworth's very proposal of choosing for his poems "incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them throughout, as far as possible, in a selection of language really used by men" (WORDSWORTH, *PLB*) establishes a thematic and linguistic revolution in poetry, which implies a revolution in poetic imagery as well. But to say that Romantic literature is revolutionary does not suffice; we better comprehend the changes by observing that they are revolutionary in relation to the previous aesthetic conceptions of literature and literary creation. In the case of the English Romanticism, the previous concepts can be said to be those of the Age of Dryden and of the Age of Pope, in which the classical spirit in English literature reached one of its highest points. Under the influence of Roman and Greek classics, Dryden's and Pope's verse achieved excellence in balanced formalism and in correctness of detail, both of which relied on good taste and sense. The poetic genius of the age was seen as coming from reasonable, lucid and perfect formulations of the mind and expressed itself through grandiloquent language and elevated themes. Hence the shock caused by the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*. These conceptions also contrast

with Percy Shelley's view of imagination. For him "reason is the enumeration of quantities already known; imagination is the perception of the values of those quantities"<sup>20</sup>. He thus emphasises reason's passivity in face of imagination's activity and establishes one of Romanticism's key concepts: that of creative imagination.

As already observed, although the Romantics consciously reject the values of the previous period, they paradoxically do not reject the influence of Roman and Greek classics, as is evident from the great amount of 'odes' (originally a classical form) written by Keats and Shelley, from such titles as *Prometheus Unbound* and *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* and from Lord Byron's support to the cause of Greek independence from the Turks. Indeed, Byron would certainly have appreciated Joseph-Denis von Odevaere's painting *The Death of Byron* (see Appendix F, p. 202), which, two years after his death, shows the dead poet in a room with classical Greek decorations and wearing laurels.

Having said a word about the revolutionary aspect of Romanticism, I intend now to review René Wellek's account of the distinguishing peculiarities of the movement. In trying to demonstrate the factual mistake of Lovejoy's claim that 'Romanticism' means nothing, Wellek argues that the European Romantic Movement has a somewhat clear conceptual unity, which is given by a set of characteristics that can be traced in most Romantic poets. In "Romanticism Re-examined" he mentions Ronald Crane's demand for "literal proof" of the existence of these traits in every single

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<sup>20</sup> SHELLEY, Percy. *A Defense of Poetry*. IN: REIMAN, Donald; POWERS, Sharon (eds.) *Shelley's Poetry and Prose. Authoritative Texts and Criticism*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1977.

romantic poem to justify the said unity. In defence of the integrity of the term 'Romanticism', Wellek (p. 109) says that

This [Crane's demand] would imply a monolithic period such as could not be found in any time in history. In all my writings I have consistently argued for a period concept which allows for the survival of former ages and the anticipation of later ones. "Period" demands the dominance (but not the total tight dictatorial rule) of a set of norms which, in the case of Romanticism, are proved sufficiently by similar or analogous concepts of the *imagination, nature, symbol* and *myth*. (My emphasis)

The common treatment of imagination, nature, symbol and myth given by Romantic poets to their work suffices, so Wellek argues, to establish the Romantic Movement throughout Europe as a historical and literary period in its own right, with its distinctive features, principles and ideology. These are the categories through which I intend to provide my analysis of Romantic imagery in *Frankenstein* with some order and structural unity. These are the categories I shall investigate more deeply in my attempt to decipher the novel's web of images. However, these categories are not to be found loosely floating through Romanticism or through any given work. I want to argue here that they are organised by the unifying principle of organicism. This term was first theorised by A. W. Schlegel and was introduced in England by Samuel Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria*. The notion of organicism is considered by Morse Peckham<sup>21</sup> as resulting from a fundamental shift in European thought: a shift "from conceiving the cosmos as a static mechanism to conceiving it as a dynamic organism" (TTR, p. 235).

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<sup>21</sup> The text by Peckham I make use of is *Toward a Theory of Romanticism*, reprinted in GLECKNER, Robert F; ENSCOE, Gerald. (Eds.) *Romanticism: Points of View*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1970. Further references to this article are abbreviated TTR and are given in the text, the number of the page referring to Gleckner's and Enscoe's edition.

The implications of this change, so Peckham says, were tremendous. According to him, the conception of the cosmos as a static mechanism had dominated Western thought since the time of Plato and is very well represented by *The Great Chain of Being*<sup>22</sup>. The notion of the great chain of being implies that the world is a machine running perfectly, with each part executing its function and into which everything in the universe fits perfectly and exists independently. Peckham explains that the current metaphor then was that of a machine, a clock most of the times, and that within this paradigm,

You will think of everything in the universe as fitting perfectly into that machine. You will think that immutable laws govern the formation of every new part of that machine to ensure that it fits the machine's requirements. (...) you will judge the success of any individual thing according to its ability to fit into the working of that machine (...). Your values will be perfection, changelessness, uniformity, rationalism. (TTR, p. 236)

This seems to describe the character of neoclassical art, the literature of Dryden and Pope, the spirit of the neoclassical age. Now, in face of the cluster of revolutions that shook the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, this epistemological framework became worn out, cracked and was turned inside out. The image of the clock ceased to be representative of the system of thought of the time. The new metaphor, Peckham states, is that of a tree, in which the parts do not exist independently from the structure and from one another. In a tree, the leaves grow out of the branches, which have grown out of the trunk, which

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<sup>22</sup> Peckham refers to the book *The Great Chain of Being*, by Arthur Lovejoy, published in 1936. The book is a study of the history of the idea of the great chain of being. It is considered by Peckham "as a turning point in the development of literary scholarship" (TTR, p. 234).

has grown out of the roots and so on. The new form of conceiving the cosmos is a biological one; the mechanicals of the former system gives way to the dynamism of the new one. Peckham exemplifies the change by saying that “the first quality of an organism is that it is not something made, it is *being* made or growing. We have a philosophy of becoming, not a philosophy of being” (TTR, p. 236). Thus, one by one, the values of the new epistemological framework took the place of the former ones. As an organism grows, there is no space for perfection, because perfection is static. In a world that is alive with dynamism imperfection, change and novelty become positive concepts, and they leave no room for immutable laws. This immediately affects artistic production because without immutable laws the artist is free to imagine, to express his or her feelings and ultimately, to create. Without immutable laws, authority and repression become unacceptable; rebellion and transgression become laudable. Without immutable laws, one is free to “pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:46). This is the enthusiasm with which the English Romantic Movement comes forth.

The impact of this change did not escape Mary Shelley’s pen. In *Frankenstein*, the debate of mutability and immutability is explicit, its highest point being the insertion of Percy Shelley’s poem “Mutability” in the text. The poem ends much in accordance with the beliefs of the time and with the significance of the novel stating that “Nought may endure but mutability” (SHELLEY, 1994:94). The paradoxical implication of the poem is to be discussed in chapter three.

These changes, of course, did not happen suddenly. A shift in the modes of understanding poetic creation can be felt as early as 1759, with Edward Young's "Conjectures on Original Composition", which introduces in English criticism Schelegel's notion of the genius<sup>23</sup> and of organicism in poetic composition. Young's text emphasises that poetic creation relies rather on imaginative processes than on imitation, and establishes the idea that the genius, distinguished by his or her natural talent, creates unconsciously inspired by imagination. He defines two kinds of geniuses: Infantine and Adult:

An Adult Genius comes out of Nature's hand, as Pallas out of Jove's head, at full growth, and mature: Shakespeare's Genius was of that kind: On the contrary, Swift stumbled at the threshold, and set out for Distinction on feeble knees: His was an Infantine Genius; a Genius, which, like other infants, must be nursed, and educated, or it will come to naught.

His idea of the genius became emblematic of the image of the Romantic poet and gave rise to the notion, later expanded by Shelley's "A Defence of Poetry", that the "Genius has ever been supposed to partake of something Divine"<sup>24</sup>.

Young also mentions the idea of imagination's superiority over reason. In this, his thinking is akin to that of Rousseau, who put into practice the claim that writing should be guided more by feelings than by

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<sup>23</sup> The concept of genius has existed since Ancient Rome and has had several different meanings. During the Romantic Movement, in England, the term was given much emphasis. It came to characterize the Romantic artist. To be a genius, in the Romantic sense, means to have great powers of creative imagination. Both Schopenhauer and Kant have written about the term. In England, one of the first Romantic treatments of this idea was Edward Young's 1759 *Conjectures on Original Composition*. See bibliography: YOUNG, Edward. "Conjectures on Original Composition". First published in 1759. Access on 28.10.2005. Available at: <http://www.kalliope.org/digt.pl?longdid=young2000031901>

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, §103.

rationalistic reasoning. By opposing reason to emotion, both Young and Rousseau founded one of Romanticism's most distinguishable features, being Wordsworth's doctrine of the overflow of feelings in poetry a clear manifestation of Rousseau's claim that values are judged by emotion and not by reason. In his *The Social Contract* (1762), the philosopher presents revolutionary ideas that propose an inversion of the current political theory. He states that government originates from a kind of social pact between the individuals of a society and that laws should be in accordance with these individuals' general desire. Tyranny, therefore, promotes a break of this contract that grants the people the right to rebel. This claim, which had its ultimate expression in the French Revolution, is at the heart of *Prometheus Unbound*. The play portrays the rebellious Titan, identified with the oppressed masses, as a winner against Jove's tyrannical rule. But Rousseau's philosophy is felt more clearly in *Frankenstein*, which displays a compelling image of the Noble Savage. The influence of Rousseau's thinking in Mary Shelley's first novel can be traced deeper. In chapter two, I comment on the ambiguity regarding how she felt towards Rousseau, truly admiring his philosophy but never accepting the fact he had abandoned his children. This discussion about parental responsibility, which is implicit at the heart of *Frankenstein*, was already settled by the debate between Rousseau's *Emile*, published in 1762, and Mary Wollstonecraft's pamphlet *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*. Wollstonecraft developed the topic of the pamphlet in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, published 1792, which pleaded, among several other issues, for equality between sexes in education.

In the next chapter, I comment on the contribution of Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1690) to *Frankenstein*, especially to the account of the processes through which the Creature manages to make sense of the world around it. However, differently from Locke, who considered the right to property to be natural, Rousseau, in his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality Among Mankind* (1755), claims that it is the possession or not of property that marks social inequity. The reading of Volney makes the Creature realize that

The strange system of human society was explained to me. I heard of the division of property, of immense wealth and squalid poverty; of rank descent and noble blood. The words induced me to turn towards myself. I learned that the possessions most esteemed by your fellow creatures high and unsullied descent and riches. A man might be respected with only one of these advantages, but without either he was considered, except in rare instances, as a vagabond and a slave. [...]. And what was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant, but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. (Mary Shelley, 1994:115-116)

What the Creature is expressing here is his verification of Rousseau's and Volney's statements about property in his practical life.

The changes in literary fashion described here actually began to appear in English literature slightly before the Romantic Movement, with the rise of the gothic novel. It is usually agreed that Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764, marks the birth of the gothic novel as a recognizable sub genre in England. Gothic features, of course, have existed in literature long before that. Mario Praz mentions the existence of gothic traits in Shakespeare and other Elizabethan poets, and Anne Williams goes even farther and speaks of the presence of Gothic elements in *Beowulf*.

Although the majority of the novels written from 1764 to about 1800 are of minor importance today, gothic fiction, as the literature emerging from a peculiar moment of cultural transition, had a very significant historical function, which was

The discovery of passion, the rehabilitation of the extra-rational. [...] In the novel it was the function of Gothic to open horizons beyond social patterns, rational decisions, and institutionally approved emotions; in a word, to enlarge the sense of reality and its impact on the human being. It became then a great liberator of feeling. It acknowledged the non-rational – in the world of things and events, occasionally in the realm of the transcendental, ultimately and most persistently in the depths of the human being. (Heilman, p. 131)

Thus, it is not improper, although it is certainly uncommon, to say that Gothic fiction (at least in England, where it was produced more intensely) stood as a kind of forerunner of the Romantic Movement, anticipating some of the issues and principles the Movement would rework with more sophisticated and artistic achievements. According to Anne Williams (1995), the affinities of Gothic fiction with the Romantic Movement had been denied by a biased view of literature, on the part of conservative critics, that dominated the first three quarters of the twentieth century, and considered the Gothic as popular prose fiction and Romanticism as great poetry. Williams mentions F. R. Leavis, Ian Watt and Wayne Booth as instances of this critical view, and argues that their critical work has been of much importance in establishing Realism as a standard of values in literature and keeping Gothic fiction away from what was, in their times, regarded as fine literature. In her book *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (1995), Anne Williams demonstrates how indistinguishably Gothic and

Romantic traits appear in works that have sometimes been identified strictly with one or other tendency, such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho* or *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. In her chapter “Pope as Gothic ‘Novelist’”, Williams claims that “Pope’s *Eloisa to Abelard* (1717) is the “mother” of *Otranto*” (p. 50). Her book is a very competent demonstration of the claim that “Gothic and Romantic are not two but one” (p.1).

By briefly showing how deep historical and artistic changes gradually manifested themselves in the Romantic literature, I have demonstrated that it has indeed its unifying principles and that its unity is the more authentic because it does not emerge out of clear consciousness. Instead, it happens naturally and independently from any particular creed or artist’s effort. Romanticism emerges organically out of its own history and society. The ambiguities I have considered inherent to Romanticism, far from disclaiming its legitimacy as a literary movement, add complexity and artistic strength to one of the most polemical periods in the history of Western literature.



## 2 THEORETICAL BASIS

*Modern literary critics recognize no disciplinary barriers,  
either as to subject matter or as to methods.*

**Hayden White**, *Tropics of Discourse*

The theoretical basis behind this work is, like the web of images in *Frankenstein*, composed of several threads. This chapter aims at reviewing some of English literary criticism concerning Romantic prose and the main issues set forth by *Frankenstein*. It also surveys Northrop Frye's concept of image and Julia Kristeva's idea of intertextuality and explains how I deal with them.

An important part of contextualizing *Frankenstein* within the Romantic Movement is to observe the treatment given to prose works of the period. In *The English Novel*, Walter Allen, in showing the similarities between Charlotte Brontë and Lord Byron, argues that "*Jane Eyre* is the first romantic novel in English" (1975:189). My work will have achieved all of its goals if it demonstrates that *Frankenstein* is the first Romantic novel in English and the most outstanding to have been written within the Romantic Movement. Brontë writes at a time when the so-called English Romantic Movement had already come to an end and Mary Shelley writes from the very heart of the movement, with feelings as turbulent as those that gave rise to

it. That certainly does not mean *Jane Eyre* cannot be Romantic or that it is less Romantic than *Frankenstein*. Allen surely has a point in claiming Brontë's Romanticism. What I want to argue is that the first Romantic English novel is *Frankenstein*.

The fact that most of the Romantic production in England consists of poetry becomes a problem when one wants to analyse a novel on the grounds of its Romantic features. Almost the totality of critical and theoretical work on Romanticism focuses on poetry; the analyses and interpretations of images and symbols are derived from and exemplified with poems. The fact that Northrop Frye (1966:11) thinks "Romanticism is difficult to adapt to the novel" means that critical accounts that may shed light on how Romanticism deals with images and symbols have to be looked at with certain caution: before reading any of these critical assumptions into *Frankenstein* I mean to realize whether, or to what extent, the shift of genre may invalid or alter them. One of the few critics who does not focus exclusively on poetry when working with images and symbols is precisely Northrop Frye. This is one of the reasons that justify my choice of basing my research upon his studies.

Perhaps because an amazing majority of the literary production of the period consists of poetry, *Frankenstein*, as a literary work of art, may have remained hidden by the shadow of the great poets of the time. Moreover, the works in prose contemporary to *Frankenstein* are not imbued with the values of Romanticism, at least not to the extent that Mary Shelley's novel is. To exemplify my assumption: in 1818, the year of its publication, Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* and Thomas Love Peacock's

*Nightmare Abbey* were also published. Their ironic use of the gothic fashion indicated that the form, closely related to Romanticism, was in decline. However, Romanticism itself was at its highest: Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron and Keats were alive and writing and yet, none of the three novels mentioned can be classified as Romantic, in the sense of presenting the aesthetic characteristics of the movement. A survey through compendiums of English Literature, besides disclosing an astonishing silence about Mary Shelley's novel, also reveals that the most remembered novelists of the Romantic period are Jane Austen and Walter Scott, none of which wrote novels representative of the revolutionary and imaginative spirit of Romanticism. Jane Austen, through her sharp analysis of human behaviour is closer to the Neoclassic tradition than to the Romantic literature of Percy Shelley and Lord Byron. Thornley (1973:115) observes that "though Jane Austen wrote her books in troubled years which included the French Revolution, her novels are calm pictures of society life". About her contribution to the English novel, he says that "Jane Austen brought the novel of family life to its highest point of perfection. Her works were untouched by the ugliness of the outside world; she kept the action to scenes familiar to her through her own experience". About Scott's relation to the Romantic Movement, Walter Pater claims that "the term *romantic* has been used much too vaguely, in various accidental senses. The sense in which Scott is called a romantic writer is chiefly this"<sup>25</sup>. We can thus notice that both novelists wrote during the Romantic period but their work does not display the movement's most characteristic features.

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<sup>25</sup> PATER, Walter. "On Classical and Romantic" IN: GLECKNER, Robert F; ENSCOE, Gerald. (Eds.) *Romanticism: Points of View*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1970.

It seems to me that literary criticism has not been able to deal successfully with prose in the context of the English Romantic Movement, and especially with *Frankenstein*. It has not often been said that the prose works of the period are not Romantic. And I do not refer to Austen and Scott only: writers such as Thomas de Quincey, Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt are often mentioned as Romantic writers. None of them, though, wrote their prose works in accordance with the shifts in literary fashion that dominated the artistic production of the time and yet, they are often remembered. It strikes me that the novel that was really written within this paradigm is not<sup>26</sup>. If we exclude critical works dedicated exclusively to *Frankenstein* (which did not start appearing before the second half of the twentieth century), compendiums, outlines and surveys of English literature hardly ever mention the name of Mary Shelley. And when they do, it is usually a few lines under headings as inappropriate as “Lesser Novelists”, “Gothic Romance” or “The Novel of Doctrine”. The inadequacy in the treatment of the author and her most famous novel reaches its most absurdist moment in *English Romantic Writers*, by H.M. Battenhouse, which mentions Mary Shelley exclusively as the wife of Percy Shelley and does not say a word about her being a writer, much less about her being the author of a world famous novel. It brings, though, fourteen pages about Walter Scott

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<sup>26</sup> John Burgess Wilson, in *English Literature*, argues that these writers wrote criticism and not literary texts. In the chapter called “The Romantics”, he says: “The most significant prose of the Romantic writers is not to be found in fiction. Four important writers normally grouped together are Charles Lamb (1775-1834), William Hazlitt (1778-1830), Leigh Hunt (1784-1859) and Thomas de Quincey. They specialised in literary criticism.” (1961:230) Furthermore, Shelley, Wordsworth and Coleridge also wrote criticism and a kind that can be called Romantic, in the sense that it focuses on the artistic values put in practice by their poetry and by the poetry of many of their contemporaries.

and seven about Jane Austen. It is this improper treatment I intend to diagnose and reassess in this work.

I intend to do this by looking at the images present in *Frankenstein* and here I make use of Northrop Frye's concept of image. In order to emphasize the intertextual nature of these images, I rely on Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality.

The two sections that follow develop these ideas. The first exposes the main intertexts going in and coming out of *Frankenstein* as well as a short account of the novel's critical fortune. The second exposes Frye's "Theory of Symbols", in which he defines the term "image", followed by Kristeva's idea about how texts interact with each other.

Miranda Seymour's *Mary Shelley*, published in 2000, is the biography of Mary Shelley I rely on. Besides being one of the most recent biographies, it contextualizes Mary Shelley's life in the broader picture of the lives of her parents and within the historical moment they all lived. It also brings valuable information on the critical fortune of Mary Shelley's works and a short account of the current academic view on them.

For the discussion about the English Romantic Movement, René Wellek, Morse Peckham and Northrop Frye provide most of my theoretical and critical apparatus. The three critics understand the Romantic period as a recognisable literary movement in its own right that keeps constant dialogue with the periods preceding and following it. They are concerned with demonstrating how Romanticism differs from these movements and what the unifying aesthetic and philosophic characteristics that distinguish

it are. For this purpose, the three critics plunge into the socio-historical context they believe has helped shape the movement.

## **2.1 *Frankenstein's* Insertion in Western Cultural and Literary Tradition**

*The novel is the highest example of subtle inter-relatedness that man has discovered. Everything is true in its own time, place, circumstance, and untrue outside of its own place, time, circumstance. If you try to nail anything down, in the novel, either it kills the novel, or the novel gets up and walks away with the nail.*

**D.H. Lawrence**, *Morality and the Novel*

The name 'Frankenstein' has now become a word most people know. It is frequently used today to refer to any experience that might run out of the control of its performers or to anything considered violent, frightening and of horrible appearance. It has become an element of Western culture that is deeply rooted in popular imagination. In Jungian terms, it can be said to belong to the Collective Unconscious of our Western society. The novel, once considered of bad taste, is now part of our cultural tradition. Trying to account for its insertion in Western culture as a myth of modernity, I came to think of it as a simultaneously converging and diverging centre. *Frankenstein* became such a vivid modern myth because it is a novel for whose composition a number of elements were amalgamated (history, philosophy, biography and several other texts) in a way that it originated a great amount of cultural production (literary criticism, films and books). Its functioning as a converging and diverging centre, as I claim, made it circle through most spheres of society and thus the story became popularised.

Most of modern society's concerns are somehow represented in *Frankenstein*. Thus, it provided a powerful metaphor for subsequent artistic production. In this contextualizing chapter, I intend to offer a quick survey of the elements that influenced the writing of the novel as well as of a small portion of the immense production it has occasioned.

Roland Barthes' claim that "the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture"<sup>27</sup> offers a good description of what I understand of *Frankenstein*. The mosaic or patchwork-like structure of the text, often compared to the Creature's composition out of several bits and pieces, has been called its "textual monstrosity"<sup>28</sup>.

Philosophy is also an important facet of *Frankenstein*. One of Mary Shelley's most admired philosophers was the French inspirer of many of the ideals of the Romantic Movement: Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Mary even contributed an essay on him to Reverend Dionysius Lardner's *Lives of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of France* (1839) in which some ideas that were developed in *Frankenstein* are presented, such as the notion that one's major obligation is to cater for one's children. Rousseau's ideas had a strong appeal to Mary Shelley and the use of the concept of the noble savage is manifest in her novel, where Victor Frankenstein's Creature is portrayed as being naturally good, but made corrupt by its contact with human society. Although she truly admired Rousseau's philosophy, she did not know exactly how to deal with the fact that the philosopher had abandoned several illegitimate children. Based on that, James O'Rourke

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<sup>27</sup> BARTHES, Roland. "The Death of the Author" IN: WALDER, Dennis. *Literature in the Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

<sup>28</sup> Baldick (1987), Botting (2002) and Schoene-Harwood (2000) have commented on *Frankenstein's* textual monstrosity.

suggests, in a 1989 essay<sup>29</sup>, that *Frankenstein* may contain a critique of the philosopher's irresponsibility towards his offspring.

*Frankenstein* has also been interpreted as a critique of William Godwin's philosophy<sup>30</sup>. The work that gave Godwin his reputation as an anarchist philosopher, *The Enquiry concerning Political Justice and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness* (1793), exposes Mary Shelley's father's belief in man's perfectibility and in the powers of pure reason. These ideas had wide circulation among the English intellectuals of the time and Godwin's rejection of all forms of tyranny inspired many of the Romantic poets, especially Percy Shelley.

In *Political Justice*, Godwin states his belief that

All control of man by man was more or less intolerable, and the day would come when each man, doing what seem right in his own eyes, would also be doing what is in fact best for the community, because all will be guided by the principles of pure reason.<sup>31</sup>

Godwin's utopian hopes for the regeneration of mankind through reason are dramatized in Victor Frankenstein. The fact that what he creates turns out to be a deformed creature, unfit for society, has led critics such as Lee Sterremburg to identify, in the myriad of intertexts that converge to the image of Victor, a critique of Godwin's philosophy.

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<sup>29</sup> O'ROURKE, James. "Nothing more unnatural: Mary Shelley's Revision of Rousseau". IN: SCHOENE-HARWOOD, Berthold (Editor). *Mary Shelley. Frankenstein. A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*. Cambridge: Icon Books, 2000.

<sup>30</sup> For such interpretations see, for instance, STERREMBURG, Lee. "Mary Shelley's Monster: Politics and Psyche in *Frankenstein*." IN: LEVINE, G., KNOEPFLMACHER, U.C. (eds) *The Endurance of Frankenstein*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979, pp. 143-171.

<sup>31</sup> GODWIN, William. *An Enquiry concerning Political Justice and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness*. Available at: [http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist\\_Archives/godwin/PJfrontpiece.html](http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/godwin/PJfrontpiece.html)

Another important philosopher whose ideas Mary Shelley admires, who is known as the father of the Empiricism, is John Locke. She kept reading and rereading Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* while she was writing *Frankenstein*. Several descriptions of the monster's mental processes in developing his knowledge of language, of culture and of the physical world around him (the cold, the food, the ambiguous effects of the fire) may have been inspired by this essay. One trait of *Frankenstein* clearly inspired by Locke's Empiricism is the concept of the *tabula rasa*, or the blank slate. According to Empiricism, practical experience is the only means of having knowledge written down on that slate. This fits the condition of Frankenstein's Creature, born completely ignorant of itself and of the world around it. It is only through experience that it can learn how "to distinguish between the operations of my various senses" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:98). It also takes the Creature much experience to discover who (or what) it is, how it was conceived, how the nature and the society to which it belongs work. Several passages of the book are good examples of the Empiricist doctrine, such as the one in which the Creature learns the antithetical effects of fire.

One day, when I was oppressed by cold, I found a fire which had been left by some wandering beggars, and was overcome with delight at the warmth *I experienced* from it. In my joy I thrust my hand into the live embers, but quickly drew it out again with a cry of pain. How strange, *I thought*, that the same cause should produce such opposite effects. *I examined the materials* of the fire, and to my joy *found* it to be composed of wood. I quickly collected some branches, but they were wet and would not burn. I was pained at this and sat still *watching the operation* of the fire. The wet wood which I had placed near the heat dried and itself became inflamed. *I reflected on this*, and by touching the various branches, *discovered the cause ...* (Italics mine). (Mary Shelley, 1994:100)

The passage above exemplifies the Empiricist ideas and the words in italics reinforce the Empiricist process of acquiring knowledge, as found throughout the Creature's narration.

In writing *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley constructed an intricate web of intertextual allusions that link her text not only to the Romantic Movement (through allusions to Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley) but also to the literary tradition as a whole. The subtitle – *or the Modern Prometheus* – points to Greek mythology, which contrasts with the direction to which *Paradise Lost*<sup>32</sup> points to, the direction of the Judeo-Christian tradition. These two traditions, very much dealt with by most Romantic writers, are intricately fused in Victor and in the Creature: the title and the subtitle both refer to Victor, but most of the references to *PL* refer to the Creature. If we consider *Frankenstein* and *Paradise Lost*, we will observe a similar process happening with the protagonists. It has often been observed that Milton's great hero is actually Satan, and not God, much of Romantic Satanism being the direct influence of Milton's hero. Similarly, in popular usage, when people say "Frankenstein", they usually refer to the Creature and not to the original owner of the name and protagonist of the novel. Indeed the Creature often appears as the protagonist of the story. Both Satan and the Creature are foregrounded and end up being more prominent than the alleged protagonists. But why is that? Both Milton and Mary Shelley seem to be unconsciously aware of a new order taking shape. A new order in religion, in the case of Milton, and a new order in society and literature, in the case of Mary Shelley. These themes, however, are still seen as taboos and it is not

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<sup>32</sup> For practical reasons, I will sometimes refer to *Paradise Lost* as *PL*.

easy to talk about them. Yet, Milton and Mary Shelley, great artists as they were, cannot omit their perception of these events, even if they are to appear in disguise in their work. The intensity of feelings stirred by the suggestion of a new order makes the images that represent it leap from the second to the first plane.

Both characters, Dr. Victor Frankenstein and his Creature, enact and exchange several roles, ranging from Prometheus to Adam. Both creator and Creature, for their rebelliousness, show promethean features. Victor himself behaves like Adam and Eve when he tries to partake in the hidden secrets of his father by eating the fruit of knowledge. The epigraph to *Frankenstein's* first edition – a speech from *Paradise Lost* by Adam in which he asks God why he had been created – is good food for thought about the exchange of roles between the two protagonists: it initially implies the analogy between Adam and the Creature, and between Victor and God. Exactly in this implication, the epigraph clashes with the subtitle, the images of God and Prometheus proving incompatible. This is symptomatic of how problematic it is to try to pursue linear rational analogies when dealing with *Frankenstein*, because the work keeps escaping our traditional metaphysical, logical, rational tools. Symbols attributed to gender (such as the case with the Adam/Eve imagery, or seeing Victor as a father/mother figure) or any other kind of analogy point by point within *Frankenstein* are hard to sustain due to the elaborate net of intertextuality created by Mary Shelley, which fuses in the characters images as diverse as those mentioned, and still others, like

Rousseau's noble savage and the Wandering Jew<sup>33</sup>, for instance. As I intend to comment more thoughtfully in chapter three, the images of Prometheus, God and Adam may also function as symbols of historical and literary issues the novel deals with. Moreover, the references to Greek mythology and to Milton, high points in the English Romantic scene, help link the novel to the tradition of British literature.

One of the most famous papers about the intertextual relations between *Frankenstein* and *Paradise Lost* is Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's "Horror's Twin: Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve". It stresses the parallels between both works to the point of claiming that *Frankenstein* is a version of Milton's epic that preserves the latter's misogynistic character. The text goes deep into analysing the similarities and differences between both works, but fails to recognise the revolutionary and critical position of Mary Shelley's novel. I believe that the story of a life created without the participation of the feminine element, and the fact that the female creature never comes to life, far from being misogynistic, can be read as a complaint about women's role and treatment in society. This opposition of male and female is a recurrent image in the novel.

Having commented on what went into the novel, now a word about what has come out of it.

The first appropriations of *Frankenstein* were made by the theatre. As early as 1823, five versions of the novel had been successfully staged. An interesting fact related by Miranda Seymour gives us the dimension of the

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<sup>33</sup> The Wandering Jew, a popular character in Western mythology, is said to have yelled at Christ while he was on his way to the Calvary bearing the cross. The Jew was condemned to wander on the face of the Earth in solitude forever. I comment on the intertextuality of this myth and *Frankenstein* in chapter three.

success of *Frankenstein* at the time. She says that Mary Shelley was informed “that placard-bearers had been marching through London, urging playgoers not to attend to ‘the Monstruous Drama,’ founded on the improper work called “Frankenstein”... This subject is pregnant with mischief.” Then, in a footnote, Seymour explains that “this was probably a publicity stunt arranged by S.A. Arnold, who owned the Lyceum, also called the English Opera House” to provoke the curiosity of the public. (both quotations SEYMOUR, 2000:334)

The first play, *Presumption, or the Fate of Frankenstein* (1823, directed by Richard Brinsley Peake and starring T.P. Cooke as the creature), was watched by Mary Shelley in its fourth week at the Lyceum in London. Miranda Seymour (2000:334) tells that “the cheap seats in the pit were only half-filled, but nobody left until the drama ended, a sure sign of success in the days when theatregoers seldom stayed for more than an act.”

The play was staged in 1826 in France and, by this year, several other adaptations of *Frankenstein* had already been staged. Actually, it was in the years between 1818 and 1830 that England witnessed the birth of the myth of Frankenstein, which, it is necessary to understand, does not coincide completely with the text written by Mary Shelley.

It was by this time that the story had become independent of its author and even of the book itself.

By 1830, the Creature was being referred to as Frankenstein; by 1840, it had evolved into a symbol for anything perceived as dangerous and out of control. A *Punch* cartoon of 1843 showed a ferocious apelike figure, clearly bent on damaging

anything or anyone crossing its path. The caption was 'The Irish Frankenstein'. (Seymour, 2000:335)

All this popularity was probably due to the theatre, which played an important part in the spread of *Frankenstein* throughout Europe. It is interesting to observe that *Frankenstein* started to impress deeply the public by the visual appeal disclosed in theatrical presentations. This shows that much of the novel's plea is actually contained in the images it sets forth. This came to be confirmed by the cinema, one century later. The name "Frankenstein", I believe, conveys to the general public basic images: the image of the laboratory, of the lonely and obsessed scientist and, most of all, the image of a terrific creature.

The twentieth century, with its new technology, fostered a new form of art which was particularly suitable to Mary Shelley's novel: the cinema. The first film was made in 1910 by the Edison Stock Company. It lasted about ten minutes and is now lost. The same happened to the second production – *Life Without Soul* (1915), filmed by the Ocean Film Corporation of New York. Comparing both films, Radu Florescu (1999:190) notes that "this [latter] version portrayed the Creature as a more sympathetic figure," but explains that "even less material seems to have survived concerning this production".

It was in 1931 that the image most people today associate with Frankenstein's Creature was created. The film *Frankenstein*, produced by Universal Studios, directed by James Whale and based on a play by Peggy Webling proved an outstanding achievement. Staring Boris Karloff as the Creature, the movie contributed an image to the incipient myth. This may be considered more a film about the myth of Frankenstein than one about Mary

Shelley's novel itself and, perhaps because of that, it became so astonishingly famous: it contained the elements already familiar to the public from plays, reviews, articles and hearsay and also presented an image which, although hideous and monster-like, was realistic enough to be credited with a convincing aspect. Most films produced from then on were inspired by Karloff's face and the ones which were not took the risk of creating such a fake image that, instead of causing horror, they offered the public a pathetic portrayal of the Creature.

Professor Radu Florescu (1999:190) explains the process by which the face we know today was made:

Jack C. Pierce, Universal's make up artist extraordinaire, was given the awesome task of creating the look of the monster. He researched in morgues and mortuaries and studied medical texts. Pierce used undertaker's wax and created new make-up application techniques to fulfil his vision of what a man stitched together from dead bodies and resurrected might look like.

The film was so remarkably successful that, from 1931 to 1948, Universal Studios produced the amazing number of eight films, at a time the resources available for filming were quite limited. After the last production by Universal in 1948, it was the time for Hammer Films to come up with adaptations of Mary Shelley's text. The company produced *The Curse of Frankenstein* in 1957, directed by Terence Fisher and starring Christopher Lee as the Creature: it was the first colour filming of the novel and another great success. Fisher and Lee became as famous as Whale and Karloff and from then on almost every year saw the production of a new film. The years 1965, 1972, 1974 and 1985 witnessed three *Frankenstein* adaptations each

and, in 1984, four productions were made. Up to 1995, more than eighty pellicles based on Mary Shelley's novel or in the summer of 1816 had been filmed in all Europe, in The United States and even in Latin America and Japan. *Frankenstein* had been canonised.

In dealing with the history of *Frankenstein* and of its canonisation, one important distinction needs to be made, that between the novel and the myth. Burgess states that *Frankenstein* gave "a new word to the language" and that it went "from humble fiction to universal myth" (1961:212). Indeed several scholars have somehow made the same assertion: Chris Baldick (1987:1) thinks it has become "a modern myth", even though the words modern and myth may seem antithetic. Similarly, Schoene-Harwood (2000:10) sees *Frankenstein* as "modernity's most poignant and topical myth". But what exactly are we talking about when we refer to the "myth of Frankenstein"? This myth is not Mary Shelley's novel, but one more of its offspring. It is the story of Frankenstein as it became popularly known through its several adaptations, especially those made by the cinema. Those adaptations were not mere repetitions of the novel's plot; they were creative and only freely inspired by it and introduced or skipped several elements of the original story. Because they became very successful, they were largely talked about and the story (or stories) was passed on through word of mouth and was thus crystallized, with all the differences and similarities it has with the novel. It was perhaps this form of diffusion, associated with the power of the image of the Monster, the reason why it took on the name of its creator. The confusion of the names reveals how strong the image of the Creature is: when a novel has the name of a character for its title, we usually assume

that this character is the protagonist. That is the case with *Jane Eyre*, *Oliver Twist*, *Robinson Crusoe* and several others. So being Mary Shelley's novel entitled *Frankenstein*, we are invited to see Victor Frankenstein as the protagonist. But the Creature's having usurped his creator's name points to the fact that its image became perhaps more appealing than that of Victor. It also hints at how central the image of doppelganger is to the novel. We have thus two things: 1) the novel *Frankenstein*, written by Mary Shelley, whose protagonist is Victor and 2) the myth of Frankenstein, popularized by the novel's several interpretations, whose protagonist is the Creature. In this thesis, I am going to work with Mary Shelley's novel and not with the popularized myth, although I may occasionally refer to it.

In parallel with this cinematic boom I comment above, *Frankenstein* exerted its influence in literature. Many great novels (not only English) have clearly alluded to or been influenced by it. Chris Baldick's *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity and Nineteenth-Century Writing*, published in 1987, is symptomatic of that and traces the recurrence of the *Frankenstein* theme in works of writers such as Dickens, Hawthorne, Melville and Mrs. Gaskell. Florescu (1999:168) argues that "the novel did help to shape the imagination of two of the greatest novelists of that time – Emily Brontë and Herman Melville" and, indeed, the intertextual relation of *Frankenstein* with *Wuthering Heights* and *Moby Dick* has often been examined. The theme of *Doppelganger*, explored in the relationship between Captain Ahab and Moby Dick, who similarly to the pair Victor/Creature, take turns acting the roles of pursuer and pursued, functions in a strikingly analogous way in both novels. The same can be said of Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll*

and *Mr. Hyde*, which also draws on the theme of a scientist that lets his double run amok from him. George Levine in his essay “The Ambiguous Heritage of *Frankenstein*”<sup>34</sup> analyses Mary Shelley’s influence in the writing of *Wuthering Heights*, *Great Expectations*, *Middlemarch* and other less known works. According to him, the common point between Mary Shelley’s and Brontë’s novels is their narrative structure; he considers both novels as nineteenth-century highest achievements in terms of the elaboration of complex narrative frames and observes that, besides producing a kind of mirror effect with the stories it frames, this narrative structure, in both novels “juxtaposes the demonic with the domestic” (LEVINE, AHF, p. 19). The domesticity of Walton’s affectionate letters to his sister and of Lockwood’s new cosy home shockingly contrasts with the demonic behaviour of Victor and his Creature and with Heathcliff’s destructive character. One point, however, sets the novels apart: the language.

While *Wuthering Heights* achieves, in its prose and wonderful control and transcendence of Gothic traditions, an unequivocal greatness and maturity, *Frankenstein* remains in nightmare and constantly threatens to lapse into absurdity. In *Wuthering Heights* everything is dramatically embodied, and the language is precise and free from the merely assertive emotionalism of the Gothic tradition. In *Frankenstein* there is far more telling and talking, far less dramatic realisation. One of the surest signs of the frailty of the language is the frequency with which Victor fails to describe his feelings. (...) Although the “psychology” of *Frankenstein* is impressive, the book has no language for the internal processes of the mind. (...) this weakness of the language is the other side of the psychological intensity of sharply perceived images. (Levine, “AHF”, p. 19)

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<sup>34</sup> LEVINE, George. “The Ambiguous Heritage of *Frankenstein*”. IN: LEVINE, G. and U. C. KNOEPFLMACHER. (eds.) *The Endurance of Frankenstein. Essays on Mary Shelley’s Novel*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979. The following references to this essay will be abbreviated AHF and will be given in the text.

Levine then proceeds to highlight echoes of Mary Shelley's text in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, emphasising that the latter consciously meant to imply the analogy not only through the construction of the characters, but also by alluding directly to Victor and to the Creature. He points to aspects of both Victor and his Creature portrayed in Magwitch, who creates a gentleman, Pip, that eventually runs away from him, leaving him in solitude. Through an autobiographical narrative, Magwitch relates how he also becomes evil through social seclusion and injustice in a way that readers are led to feel for him a kind of sympathy akin to that felt for Mary Shelley's Monster.

Curiously, Levine demonstrates that "even in the central achievement of the Victorian novel, *Middlemarch*, the *Frankenstein* metaphor emerges" (LEVINE AHF, p. 23). He sees in Lydgate another modern Prometheus, a want-to-be scientist that, as Victor, has much of his personal life forgotten in name of his quest, a quest that leads to unhappiness.

Several other novels could be discussed here: Balzac's *The Quest of the Absolute*, Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Sharer*, which starts with "a man in a dog sled on an ice floe in the frozen Arctic, who pauses to look up at the captain of a ship" and asks him to be informed what direction the ship is going before being rescued. (LEVINE, AHF, p. 25). Charles Dickens's *The Haunted Man*, George Eliot's *The Lifted Veil*, D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* and even Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* could all be examined as containing traits of *Frankenstein*, or at least sharing the same preoccupations concerning the individual's search for identity and the quest for knowledge.

However there is still another set of books and films that deserve notice – the ones inspired by the legendary summer of 1816, which has also been an inspiration for films.

These books popularised a new literary typology: they are half-history, half-fiction and mix these two elements so as to explore hypothesis and possibilities that have caused polemic repercussion but have never been completely explained. In *Haunted Summer* and *As Piedosas*, for instance, Mary Shelley and her friends are fictionalised and passages of their diaries and letters are inserted in the texts. These literary devices cause an effect of reality, which involves the reader and completely blurs the distinction between fact and fiction.

Ann Edwards' *Haunted Summer*, published in 1972 – whose fictional narrator incorporates the *persona* of Mary Shelley – brings a mixture of biographical facts, fiction and passages from the diaries and letters of Mary Shelley, Shelley and Byron. The homonymous film it inspired (released in 1988 and directed by Ivan Passar) contains further allusions to other artists and traits of the Romantic Movement.

The most celebrated summer in English history also engendered titles like Federico Andahazi's *As Piedosas*. In an extraordinary inversion of perspectives, Andahazi goes farther than most novelists and recounts the story of the summer through the perspective of John Polidori. The book also problematises the act of artistic creation and thus keeps a dialogue with the Romantic discussion of the issue of inspiration versus conscious work that was of chief relevance at Mary Shelley's time, and is discussed in Thomas

Love Peacock's *The Four Ages of Poetry* and in Percy Shelley's *A Defense of Poetry*.

Finally, the movie *Gothic*, released in 1986 and directed by Ken Russel, deserves to be mentioned for its extremely Romantic view of the night in which Mary Shelley says to have conceived her idea of *Frankenstein*. In the movie, biographical facts and passages from the diaries and letters of the people involved mingle with the nightmare and summoning of evil spirits. The director's gothic interpretation of the episode, at moments, reaches beyond the edge of the gothic and falls into the grotesque. The movie presents an intricate web of symbols and allusions, and suggests an original parallel between Lord Byron's friends' summoning of their inner demons, Mary Shelley's conception of her "hideous progeny" and Victor Frankenstein's creation of a being who seems to come out of himself.

More recently, when the view of Victor's Creature as an evil monster seemed too common place, a more friendly image of it started being diffused in films and in several products for children. Amazing as it may seem, the Creature was transformed into a benevolent monster (usually with Karloff's face in green) and started appearing in cartoons, comics, television series and even in clothes.

This is the result of a long process: first, the book became independent from its creator, then the image of Victor Frankenstein turned into that of the archetypal mad scientist – and, finally, his Creature became independent from both creators – Victor Frankenstein and Mary Shelley.

This widespread popularisation of the story has had, in my view, mainly two effects. The first is non-literary: it has occasioned sometimes simplistic and reductive interpretations, but leads to original and surprising appropriations of the theme that well deserve serious study on the part of anthropologists and scholars in the field of human sciences. The second is the consequent rediscovery of Mary Shelley's works. Today, her letters and diaries are being edited and some of her novels can be found in paperback editions. Her work as a short-story and travel writer is not easily available, but is certainly recognised as of importance. "Mary's literary standing is now such that any work by her, however slight, is of interest to those scholars who regard her as a major figure in the Romantic canon" (SEYMOUR, 2000:559).

But that is the result of a very long process. Long was the period during which Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein* were left aside from accounts of English literature. Resuming my complaint about the fact that Mary Shelley has been for so long excluded from works which study specifically the Romantic period, during which she lived and wrote, and which she helped to shape, I now mention some of these works.

Oliver Elton's *A Survey of English Literature – Volume II – (1780-1830)*, first published in 1912, is concerned exactly with studying the period in which *Frankenstein* was written, but not a word is mentioned about it. *Literature and Life in England*, published in 1943 by Dudley Miles and Robert Pooley, does not take Mary Shelley into consideration either. Their chapter entitled "Prose during the Romantic Revolt" mentions Jane Austen, Sir Walter Scott, Charles Lamb and Thomas de Quincey as the only

important prose writers of the period. Also, Thornley's acclaimed *An Outline of English Literature*, despite its chapters called "Nineteenth-century Novelists" and "Other Nineteenth-century Prose", does not refer to *Frankenstein* or its author.

Gilbert Highet's great analysis of the Greco-Roman influence in European literature *The Classical Tradition*, first published in 1949, does not take *Frankenstein* into consideration, despite the allusion to the Greco-Roman tradition in the novel's subtitle. Thomson's *The Classical Background of English Literature*, first published one year earlier, also ignores the reference to classical mythology given in the subtitle.

*The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*, by George Sampson, was first published in 1941. It brings a surprisingly lucid ten-line paragraph about Mary Shelley, although this comes under the heading "Lesser Novelists". It mentions the usual misapplication of Frankenstein's name to his creature, and the fact that the novel was believed to have been written by Percy Shelley. Against this claim, the author says that Mary Shelley's second novel, *The Last Man*, "shows the same kind of power – suggestive of H. G. Wells – of making the impossible seem rational, by basing it upon the logic of science" (p.553), (my emphasis). Albert Baugh's *A Literary History of England*, first published in 1967, does not show the same understanding. It dedicates a small paragraph to Mary Shelley in the chapter "Gothic Romance and the Novel of Doctrine". It is an eight-line paragraph which mentions the gothic and technological elements in *Frankenstein* and two other novels (*The Last Man* and *Lodore*) by an author named 'Mrs. Shelley'.

This is symptomatic of the treatment the novel had received hitherto: it had been considered a gothic romance, such as *The Castle of Otranto* or *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, works that are remembered today only for their historical importance in the development of gothic fiction. Sometimes, *Frankenstein* was criticized for being a mere moral fable, with the sole purpose of teaching a conservative doctrine against technological progress.<sup>35</sup> But it is not fair to cast such a reductive, quick, easy, uncommitted comment, and leave it as it is. If the traditional fables are characterized by presenting a moral, it could be said that *Frankenstein* is characterized by contradicting the moral it presents: Victor advises Walton to “seek happiness in tranquillity”, not to exceed his limitations and to learn from his example only to conclude that “yet another may succeed” (Both quotations from SHELLEY, 1994:210).

Two important studies of Romanticism also left Mary Shelley and her novel aside: *Romanticism & Language*, a book of essays edited by Arden Reed in 1984 and *Romanticism & Ideology: Studies in English Writing 1765-1830*, by David Aers, Jonathan Cook and David Punter, published in 1981.

*Frankenstein's* critical fortune started changing only by the second half of twentieth century, with the rise of Feminist Literary Criticism, whose roots may be linked to Mary Shelley's mother, who claimed the rights of women even before the terms 'feminism' or 'feminist' had been created. According to Schoenne-Harwood (2000), “in many respects it could be said that it was literary women's studies which initiated the process of scholarly reassessment that eventually resulted in the canonization of [Mary] Shelley's

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<sup>35</sup> For such interpretations see, for instance, SCHOENE-HARWOOD, 2000, p.10.

novel". One of the first important texts about it was Muriel Spark's *Child of Light*, published only in 1951, but it was not until 1977, with the publication of *Literary Women*, the classic study by Ellen Moers, who read *Frankenstein* as a birth myth, that Mary Shelley's first novel was given its proper importance and value. Two years later, another important interpretation of the novel appeared: Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, considered Mary Shelley's novel as a "version of the misogynistic story implicit in *Paradise Lost*"<sup>36</sup>.

Since then, many instigating studies have been released, and Mary Shelley's letters, travel books, diaries and journals have also been published. Moreover, the other works written by her can already be found, not without some difficulty, though.

Although the graphic of Mary Shelley's and of *Frankenstein's* critical fortune is constantly rising in the academic world, her first novel has frequently been misunderstood by the public in general, who, excited by some films about the theme, still see in it the daring creation of a monster. Miranda Seymour's conclusion seems to me to grant the novel its due significance,

The making of the Creature, so enthralling to film directors, concerned Mary Shelley less than the idea of parental alienation from a manufactured child, a laboratory product. The story at the heart of *Frankenstein* is of a monstrously selfish experiment, monstrous because Victor, having made a living, loving son for himself (we remember how the creature reaches towards him) rejects it. Love is the message at the heart of [Mary] Shelley's

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<sup>36</sup> GILBERT, Sandra M. "Horror's Twin: Mary Shelley's Monstruous Eve". IN: GILBERT, Sandra M; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.

novel; only when her creature is denied affection does he become a monster and turn on the species which gave him life in its image. (Seymour, 2000:560)

The fact that *Frankenstein* rises above its several interpretations makes clear what D. H. Lawrence means when he says, “the novel gets up and walks away with the nail”. The way Mary Shelley combines literature, history, philosophy and “powerful feelings” in a single story show how “subtle interrelatedness” is established in her novel. *Frankenstein* has walked away with all the nails of critical and theoretical fads.

## 2.2 A Conceptual and Intertextual Framework

*Une texte peut toujours en lire un autre, et ainsi de suite jusqu'à la fin des texts. Celui-ci n'échape pas à la règle: il l'expose et s'y expose. Lira bien qui lira le dernier.*

**Gérard Genette**, *Palimpsestes*

The idea of studying the images out of which Mary Shelley composed *Frankenstein* came to me before I was acquainted with Northrop Frye's concern with imagery in literature. In fact, in my vocabulary, I could not find a word to name the elements within the novel that caught my attention. Thus, once I resolved to undertake a critical survey of these elements in *Frankenstein*, I set out to search for an appropriate theoretical ground on which to base my studies. The term “image” initially led me to what has been recently called “studies of the imaginary”. Gilbert Durand is one of the leading scholars in the area, so I started by reading his *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary* (1997). However, I soon noticed that his idea of

“image” respected an anthropological, psychological and sociological investigation, whereas what I had in mind was something more concrete, something that could account for the aesthetic literary representation of the specific images of a specific work. For instance, when I consider the image of Prometheus, I am concerned with how Mary Shelley represents this image in her novel, what possible meanings are attributed to it, and how this image interacts with others in the same novel. I thought that the word “imaginary” was not as appropriate to my intentions as the word “imagery”, meaning the set of images of a given context: Romantic imagery, nature imagery, or the imagery in *Frankenstein*. I eventually found a match for the definition of image I had in mind in Herman Northrop Frye’s best known work, *Anatomy of Criticism*.

Fourteen years have gone by since Frye’s death in 1991, a crucial period after the death of a scholar to determine whether his contribution is to fade or to be appropriated into literary criticism. Steven Marx states that “a recent survey of 950 journals reveals that he remains the eighth most frequently cited author in the field of Arts and Humanities, in a company that includes Aristotle, Shakespeare and Freud”<sup>37</sup>. This is a considerable remark which expresses how influential his work has been.

Northrop Frye is a very peculiar writer. His educational background was Methodist and he was ordained a Minister of The United Church of Canada. His religious upbringing did not result only in his keen interest in

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<sup>37</sup> MARX, Steven. “Northrop Frye’s Bible”. Published in *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion (JAAR)* Winter 1994. Cal Poly University. Available at <http://cla.calpoly.edu/~smarx/Publications/frye.html>. Access on 20th September, 2005.

the relations between the Bible and literature but also in the formation of some of his basic ideas about the structure of literature. In an interview given to David Cayley, Frye tries to account for the Methodist influence upon his thinking,

I think Methodism is an approach to Christianity that puts a very heavy emphasis on the quality of experience. That is one reason why I've always tended to think in terms of, first, a myth that repeats itself over and over again through time, and, second, the experience which is the response to it. Nothing that happens in history is unique. Everything is part of turning cycles or mythical repetition. Everything in experience is unique. I think it was because of this emphasis on the uniqueness of experience I acquired so early that I realized the other half of this was the mythological pattern. (Cayley, 1992:39-40)

In this passage, Frye exposes, in very general terms the bulk of his thought about the structure of literature. Frye was involved enough with religion to be ordained a clergyman and this was, perhaps, why he identified himself so deeply with William Blake, from whom he says to have learned everything (CAYLEY, 1992:74). In his *On Education*, Frye explains that Blake had the same religious assumptions with which he had been brought up but that Blake turned them completely inside out, in a way that was revealing to Frye. With the poet, he came to discover that the force up in the sky was Satan instead of God and that all forms of tyranny and repression were Satanic. He concluded that religion must then preach the emancipation of man. Northrop Frye, like William Blake, was something of a visionary. Frye tells us that he had a first vision when working on Blake's *Milton* and that vision revealed him much of what he was later going to develop in *Fearful Symmetry* (1947) and in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). He describes the vision

as the “feeling of an enormous number of things making sense that had been scattered and unrelated before. In other words, it was a mythological framework taking hold” (CAYLEY, 1992:47). This was the main Blakean contribution to the development of his thinking. Frye, like Blake, came to believe that he “must Create a System, or be enslaved by another Man’s,”<sup>38</sup> and this he put into practice in his criticism. Frye does not write within the context of any particular critical or theoretical movement, but he shares various principles with Structuralism. Instead, he developed his own critical and theoretical assumptions from his literary experience but also from his personal life, as is evident from the passage quoted above.

Frye’s first book to be published was *Fearful Symmetry*, a study of William Blake. He had the idea for the book when he was still an undergraduate student. His initial intention was to break down William Blake’s symbolical code and to elicit the mythological framework the poet had created and within which he wrote. Frye tells us that he rewrote the entire book five times. It was so long and complex, he had so much material, that he realized he had actually two books. So, after around ten years of work, he picked up what was really about Blake and published it in 1947 as *Fearful Symmetry*. The title is not only a phrase from a Blakean poem; it serves as an epithet both to the structure of Blake’s poetry and to the scope of Frye’s first book.

The material that was not included in *Fearful Symmetry* was developed and reworked for another ten years until it was published in 1957 as

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<sup>38</sup> BLAKE, William. *Jerusalem*. IN: ERDMAN, David V. (ed) *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965, p. 151.

*Anatomy of Criticism*. The book, which gave Frye his reputation as a worldwide-known critic, is a monumental study of literary genres, general plots, themes and symbols recurrent in literature. It provides an overview of Frye's theory of literature in four parts, or essays, as he calls them. The second essay is his "Theory of Symbols", in which Frye explains what a symbol is and how it functions in literature. According to him, a symbol can operate in four levels. In the second, the formal level, I found the definition of image I was looking for. But to understand his concept of image, it is first important to know what Frye believes a symbol to be. A symbol is one basic literary unit, and signs, archetypes and images are all aspects of a symbol, which he defines as "any unit of any work of literature which can be isolated for critical attention, in general restricted to the smaller units, such as words, phrases, images, etc." (FRYE, 1957:367). In Frye's view, then, the symbol functions within four levels in each of which it receives a specific treatment: the first level is the literal and descriptive one. In it symbols are motifs or signs. In its second level, the formal one, a symbol is best called an image and, in the mythical level, an archetype. The last level in which a symbol operates is the anagogic, in which it is a monad, or, in other words, a kind of microcosm of all literature.

Frye's system in his "Theory of Symbols" is adapted from the medieval four level scheme of interpreting the Bible (Biblical Exegesis) in terms of its literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical significance. According to Frye, the achievement of this scheme, which was borrowed from theology and applied to the study of literature as early as in the Middle Ages, is that it testifies

that “a work of literary art contains a variety or sequence of meanings” (FRYE, 1957:72).

Fredric Jameson, in *The Political Unconscious*, provides us with a critical view of the medieval scheme and with an account of Frye’s recreation of it. Jameson assumes that interpretation is “an essentially allegorical act, which consists of rewriting a given text in terms of a particular interpretative master code” (1982:10) and that this system had an ideological function in the Middle Ages: to rewrite the Old Testament (viewed as historical fact in the first or literal level of interpretation) in terms of the New, that is, the life of Jesus. The New Testament, in this process, works as an allegorical master code that must govern the rewriting of the Old Testament. What happens in this procedure is a reductive movement from the collective (the story of the people of Israel in the Old Testament) to the individual (the life of Jesus in the New Testament). This reduction is, however, reversed by the plunging in two further levels: the third or moral level and the fourth or anagogical. The moral level, so Jameson argues, can deal with the bondage of the people of Israel in Egypt and their coming liberty from the conversion to Christianity. But it is only in the anagogical level that a text can be most deeply interpreted. In it the destiny of the people of Israel comes to symbolise the destiny of the human kind as a whole and the deliverance from Egypt comes to represent Christ’s second coming, which humanity still waits for.

The historical or collective dimension is thus attained once again by way of the detour of the sacrifice of Christ and the drama of the individual believer; but from the story of a particular earthly people it has been transformed into universal history and the destiny of humankind as a whole. (Jameson, 1982:31)

In his "Theory of Symbols", Northrop Frye recreates the medieval four levels as four "phases". By phases, he means the kind of emphasis that is given to the critical treatment of a symbol, the aspect of a symbol which is studied. Of course these phases do not operate completely independently: each one opens the way to the next. The first, the literal and descriptive phase, deals with the verbal structure and with the context of words in this structure. Here each word is a symbol with a centripetal and a centrifugal function: in the former, the symbol works as a unit of the verbal construct – that Frye calls a motif – and in the latter, the symbol works as a sign which points to real referents outside the text. Frye's second phase, the formal, in which the symbol is called image, is the one I am most interested in. Fredric Jameson thinks this phase marks "the shift to something like a phenomenological awareness of content as image, of the work's vocation to convey a symbolic structure or symbolic world" (1982:71), which only happens through the verbal construction identified in the literal and descriptive first phase. Next, when we pass onto Frye's third phase, the mythical or archetypal, we reach a deeper realm of reading. Only then, Jameson argues, interpretation really occurs. Before, in the first and second phases, we remain within particular features of particular works. We examine signs and motifs in their centrifugal and centripetal behaviour respectively, decipher the texture of the verbal structure and the patterns of imagery of a text. All these movements release the deeper third and fourth phases. On the third, we move from particular works to the whole universe of literature, with its archetypes.

Frye's concept of archetype must not be confused with Jung's. To Frye, an archetype is "a symbol, usually an image, which recurs often enough in literature to be recognisable as an element of one's literary experience as a whole". (1957:365) Jung's concern is psychological, whereas Frye's concern is directed to literary representation. On the anagogic fourth phase, "the concepts of desire and society make their appearance" (JAMESON, 1982:71). Frye's idea of desire differs from that postulated by Freud and developed by Lacan out of the studies of the French Hegelians in the collective aspect invested to it. To him, desire "is the energy that leads the human society to develop its own form" (1957:106). And the form of society, according to Frye, is civilization. Thus, interpretation in the anagogic level discloses "the total dream of men and (...) the thought of a human mind which is at the circumference and not at the centre of its reality" (1957:119).

I have not defined yet the main term I will make use of: image. Frye succinctly defines it as "a symbol in its aspect as a formal unit of art with a natural content" (1957:366). The statement is so clear and explicit that it becomes of difficult comprehension. If we remember that, according to Frye, we deal with images in the second phase of interpretation, the formal one, we will remember that Jameson, as I mentioned above, in trying to account for Frye's system, talks of the formal phase as disclosing "an awareness of content as image" (1982:71). This brings forth an issue that has been widely discussed since the time of Aristotle: that of content and form. Actually, literary theory has oscillated between these two poles. The beginning of literary theory as we understand it today, with Russian Formalism, was mainly concerned with form and regarded content as of secondary

importance. Towards the end of the twentieth century, with the rise of Feminism in the 60's and Post-Colonialism in the 80's, the emphasis tended more to content, although critics of neither school reject the importance of form.

As I have mentioned in previous chapters, *Frankenstein* has reached the status of a modern myth. The concept of myth I will adopt here is that of Northrop Frye. He believes that “myth is and has always been an integral element of literature” (1963:21) and, therefore, deals with myths from the point of view of the literary critic and not from that of the anthropologist, the psychologist, the cultural critic or any other professional. Although he may occasionally resort to these fields of studies, he seeks to understand myths in terms of their function within literature. A myth for Frye,

In its literary context [...] means, first of all, *mythos*, plot, narrative, or in general the sequential ordering of words. As all verbal structures have some kind of sequence, even if, like telephone books, they are not read that way, all verbal structures are mythical in this primary sense (1982:31, Frye's italics).

Myth and literature, in Frye's view, are inevitably connected. One of the functions of literature, he says, is exactly to keep representing the myths of a society. In this, when I use the term myth, I refer to Frye's dictum that myth is plot, a story. Of course not all stories will be called myths. As Frye himself states, a myth is

A story in which some of the chief characters are Gods or other beings larger in power than humanity. Very seldom it is located in history: its actions take place in a world above or prior to ordinary time, *in illo tempore*, in Mircea Eliade's phrase. (*Fables*, 1963:30)

But, it is not considering this definition *Frankenstein* is seen as a myth for this definition relates to classical myths. *Frankenstein*, as a modern myth is laicised. It is in the cultural function of myths that is found in Mary Shelley's novel. Like *Frankenstein*, ancient myths

Illustrate what primarily concerns their society. They help to explain certain features in that society's religion, laws, social structure, environment, history or cosmology. [...] They are told to meet the imaginative needs of the community, so far as structures in words can meet those needs. (*The Secular Scripture*, 1975:6)

This is the sense in which I agree to call Mary Shelley's first novel a myth.

Northrop Frye writes in a moment when Structuralism represents a strong tendency both in Europe and in the United States<sup>39</sup> and, therefore, much of his thinking can be called Structuralist. Donald Riccomini, when discussing the differences and the similarities between Frye's system and Structuralism, explains that for both "system is an essential element. And in each case the system derives from a model. For Frye the model is mythic, the archetype; for the Structuralists the model is linguistic, based on Saussure".<sup>40</sup>

Form appears, for Frye, not only as containing but also as revealing content. When talking about form and content in *The Secular Scripture*, Frye claims that "in literature, however, the art is the form, and the nature which

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<sup>39</sup> *Anatomy of Criticism* was first published in 1947. The rise of Structuralism happened around 1960, with the translation of Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* to English in 1959.

<sup>40</sup> RICCOMINI, Donald R. "Northrop Frye and Structuralism" IN: *University of Toronto Quarterly*. Toronto. Vol. 49, n. 1 (fall 1979), p. 33-47. I spell 'Structuralism' and its derivatives with a capital letter whenever it refers to the Structuralist movement of literary criticism. Here I preserve Riccomini's spelling.

the art imitates is the content, so in literature art imitates nature by containing it internally” (1975:35).

The way Northrop Frye conceives of literature is of particular interest to this thesis and implies the way he conceives of literary criticism. He exposes his views on these topics in the “Polemical Introduction” to *Anatomy of Criticism*. Frye believes that “the difficulty often felt in ‘teaching literature’ arises from the fact that it cannot be done: the criticism of literature is all that can be directly taught” (1957:11). This statement stands as a good preamble to Frye’s notions of literature and criticism. His “Polemical Introduction” starts with a brief survey of the role of the critic in society. Frye rejects the beliefs, frequently alluded to, that the critic is an *artist manqué* and that a writer should be the ultimate critic of his own work, beliefs that are incompatible with the nature and function of criticism. The critic, according to Frye, stands as a mediator between art and the public, thus working as “the pioneer of education and the shaper of cultural tradition” (*Anatomy*, 1957:4).

In order to make sense of this characterization of the critic, it is necessary to have in mind that Frye sees criticism as an organized body of knowledge which is about literature but independent of it. That is why the critic cannot be an *artist manqué*, because he does not work in the same field the artist does. Within criticism, the critic is as independent as the poet is within poetry, for instance. Frye claims for the necessity of distinguishing literature from its systematic study, which is criticism. It is in this sense he claims that criticism can be taught while literature cannot. Frye’s statement

that “criticism can talk and all the arts are dumb” (*Anatomy*, 1957:4), despite revealing his notion of the critic as mediator between art and public, emphasises that literature and criticism are not one.

The way Frye conceives of literature is similar to the way T.S. Eliot conceives of it. Both thinkers entirely reject the view of literature as a heap of individual works existing independently. The notion of “an ideal order”<sup>41</sup>, in Eliot’s phrase, is the base on which Frye developed the whole of his thinking. Because all existing literary works somehow interact with each other forming “not a piled aggregate of works, but an order of words” (*Anatomy*, 1957:17), criticism must be scientific in order to account for the processes that enable this interaction. In accordance with his claim of criticism’s independence, Frye believes that the critic must derive his working principles from literature itself, in the same way astronomers derive theirs from astronomy and physicians, from physics. Frye’s famous phrase, which I take for the title of this chapter, is that criticism “must be an examination of literature in terms of a conceptual framework derivable from an inductive survey of the literary field” (*Anatomy*, 1957:7).

The word “inductive”, Frye explains, implies the scientific method criticism must employ to deal with how literary works unite themselves to form the “order of words” (*Anatomy*, 1957:17) which is literature. This view of literature and its criticism is structured upon an idea which Frye never really named textually, but which is implicit in every single text by Frye I

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<sup>41</sup> ELIOT, Thomas Stearns. “Tradition and Individual Talent” IN: BRADLY, Sculley; BEATTY, Richmond; LONG, E. Hudson (eds) *The American Tradition in Literature*. Volume 2. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, Inc, 1967, p. 1270.

have read. The scholar who theorised about this idea and made it explicit was Julia Kristeva: her notion of intertextuality develops within a post-structuralist paradigm what in Frye was simply assumed.

A reading of the images in *Frankenstein* would be incomplete without an examination of how intertextuality is the principle that governs their insertion in the novel. Indeed, a survey of the story of the novel's composition, and even of Mary Shelley's life, seems to elicit the intertextual character of *Frankenstein*.

In her childhood, Mary Shelley lived the drama of having her mother dying at giving birth to her, whose contact with Mary Wollstonecraft was through her writings, which she read over and over since an early age. Living with William Godwin, she was acquainted with his circle of friends, to which writers as Percy Shelley and Samuel Coleridge belonged. One of the famous episodes of her childhood is her hiding behind a sofa to secretly listen to Coleridge reading his poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* aloud to her father and his friends. The effect of the reading was to be felt years afterwards. When she married Percy Shelley she became part of another circle of literary personalities such as Lord Byron, Leigh Hunt and Charles Lamb.

In her 1831 Introduction to *Frankenstein*, she writes that

it is not singular that, as the daughter of two persons of distinguished literary celebrity, I should very early in life have thought of writing. As a child I scribbled; and my favourite pastime during the hours given me for recreation was to 'write stories' (Mary Shelley, 1994:5).

It becomes thus evident that reading and writing were activities familiar to her since very early. Indeed it is known through her diaries and letters that even as a teenager she was already acquainted with the philosophical and political writings of her parents and that, by the age of eighteen, she was already widely read in English, Latin and Greek literature, as well as in history and philosophy.

That vast range of literary knowledge enabled her to construct an ambiguous and intricate web of intertextual references and allusions in her first novel, whose construction, under the light of poststructuralist theories, can well be understood through Barthes' idea that

A text is (...) a multidimensional space, in which a variety of writings (...) blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture... the writer can only imitate a gesture (...). His only power is to mix things, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any of them.<sup>42</sup>

*Frankenstein* directly refers to books like Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Plutarch's *Lives* and alludes to myths and images recurrent in Western culture. Departing from Julia Kristeva's ideas about intertextuality stated in "Word, Dialogue and Novel"<sup>43</sup>, I wish to attempt a working definition of the term for the purposes of this thesis. This definition is the grounds on which I refer to how intertextual relations work in *Frankenstein* and how, instead of clarifying the roles of the

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<sup>42</sup> The version of Barthes' "The Death of the Author" used for this work was reprinted in: WALDER, Dennis. *Literature in the Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

<sup>43</sup> Kristeva's article was originally published in KRISTEVA, Julia. *Σημειωτική. Recherches pour une sémanalyse*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969, p. 82-112. The version of the text used here was reprinted in KRISTEVA, Julia. *Desire in Language. A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, p. 64-91. The text in Portuguese can be found in KRISTEVA, Julia. *Semiótica do Romance*. Lisboa: Arcádia, 1978, p. 69-99.

two main characters, they add to the ambiguity and indeterminacy which is inherent to their signification.

The concept of intertextuality is one of difficult definition. Although the term was created by Kristeva only in 1969, its seeds are present in literary theory and criticism since the so-called Russian Formalism through Iuri Tynianov's "On Literary Evolution"<sup>44</sup>. In this text, diverging from the anti-historicist position of most of the Formalists, he asserts the necessity of studying literary works in their contexts due to the "interrelationship" (TYNIANOV, OLE) they have with the system to which they belong. The Russian Formalists develop a kind of "immanent study" (TYNIANOV, OLE) of literary facts, which focused exclusively in the text, without considering features or elements that moved beyond it. This movement is exactly what Tynianov proposes when he asks: "Is the so-called "immanent" study of a work as a system possible without comparing it to the general literary system?" (TYNIANOV, OLE). His answer is that "isolated study is impossible" and this is because "one cannot study literary phenomena outside of their interrelationships" (TYNIANOV, OLE).

Another scholar whose thinking is important to the comprehension of Kristeva's notion of intertextuality is that of Mikhail Bakhtin: his theory presents a new understanding of language. As Gary Morson and Caryl Emerson explain, "he was hostile to all "instantiation" models (...) which understand particular acts (parole) as mere instantiations of timeless norms

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<sup>44</sup> Juri Tynianov's "On Literary Evolution" was first published in 1927. The version used for the present work is available at <http://courses.essex.ac.uk/lt/lt204/evolution.htm> – access on 08<sup>th</sup>, June. References to this work will be abbreviated OLE and will be given on the text.

(langue)”<sup>45</sup>. Instead, he develops a dynamic view of language, considering it, especially in its appropriation by literature, not as presenting a single meaning, but as consisting of an intermixture of texts and of a “dialogue” of several voices. His ideas about the dialogic nature of language and the double-voiced character of words developed the notion (today largely agreed upon) that in the discourse of the novel, several voices interact.

Following the path of these two outstanding scholars and within the poststructuralist paradigm, Julia Kristeva authored the term *intertextuality*, using it to refer to the process of construction of literary texts, a process that, according to her, does not focus exclusively in the writing but is also partly determined by the reading, through which various texts are incorporated, modified and updated by the new text. The term thrived in literary theory and as it was incorporated to the thought of other theoreticians, it gained new and broader meanings. Another important scholar who also theorised about the presence of texts within other texts was Gerard Genette. In his work *Palimpsestes: La Littérature au Second Degré*, he developed an analogous concept: the one of *transtextuality*, of which intertextuality appears as a variant along with paratextuality, metatextuality, hipertextuality, and architextuality; a complex theoretical nomenclature that I do not intend to examine here. Harold Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence* is also based on the concept of intertextuality: he asserts the existence of a kind of oedipal rivalry among poets of different generations in which the younger ones try to eliminate from their works all traits that could be

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<sup>45</sup> MORSON, Gary Saul; EMERSON, Caryl. “Bakhtin, M.M.” Available at JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY. Guide to Literary Theory. Access on 25<sup>th</sup>, May, 2005. ([http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/hopkins\\_guide\\_to\\_literary\\_theory/bakhtin.html](http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/hopkins_guide_to_literary_theory/bakhtin.html))

identified as influences from the older ones in order to affirm their talent and originality. Bloom states that this effort to achieve total originality is fruitless and results in a ‘misreading’ of influence, which is repressed instead of suppressed.

But let me focus on Julia Kristeva’s notion. In the essay already mentioned, “Word, Dialogue and Novel”, she claims that the poetic<sup>46</sup> language functions within three dimensions which are interconnected with each other: 1) the writing subject, 2) the addressee and 3) previous texts. These dimensions are articulated in two axes: 1) *a horizontal axis* in which the literary language is shared by both writers and readers and 2) *a vertical axis*, which links a text to a previous or synchronic literary corpus (KRISTEVA, 1980:66). It becomes thus evident that Kristeva conceives intertextuality as inherent to the process of literary construction and signification and to the role of both writers and readers.

Jonathan Culler (2001:114) explains that intertextuality is a “designation of its [a text’s] participation in the discursive space of a culture: the relationship between a text and the various languages or signifying practices of a culture”. The problem of this definition is that it is so broad that it becomes almost impossible to work with it in dealing with a given text for one cannot know and have read the whole literary production of Western culture, for instance. Thus it is necessary to narrow down and try to define the term in order to make it more tangible and coherent with the kind of study I propose to undertake here. So, accepting Barthes’ idea that texts are a “tissue of quotations” and taking Kristeva’s claim that “previous texts” play

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<sup>46</sup> ‘Poetic’ here is used in a broader sense to mean ‘literary’.

a crucial role in the production and signification of new texts a bit more literally than she intended it to be taken, in this thesis, I conceive *intertextuality* as a relation that a text B establishes with a previous text A in a way to appropriate, imitate, transform or subvert any of its traits. The concept will be understood not as a mere textual reference, but as the process by which a text B reworks signifying units, images or structures present in a text A.

One of the most acclaimed and best articulated texts dealing with intertextuality in *Frankenstein*, which examines its relation with *Paradise Lost*, is Gilbert and Gubar's "Horror's Twin: Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve", published in *The Madwoman in the Attic*. It starts by noting that the literary imagination of women writers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries suffers under the strong pressure of John Milton's patriarchal and misogynistic poetry. According to the authors, these writers respond to this literary heritage in basically two ways: "on the one hand, the option of apparently docile submission to male myths, [...] and on the other hand the option of secret study aimed toward the achievement of equality"<sup>47</sup>. The central argument of the critique is that Mary Shelley took the submissive attitude in her rewriting of Milton's poem, differently from what Emily Brontë did in *Wuthering Heights*. The authors claim that while Shelley rewrote *Paradise Lost* "so as to clarify its meaning", Brontë rewrote it "so as to make it a more accurate mirror of female experience". (Gilbert and Gubar, p. 220).

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<sup>47</sup> GUBAR, Susan. "Horror's Twin: Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve" IN: GILBERT, Sandra M; GUBAR, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984, p. 219. I shall refer to this text as "Horror's Twin"; further references will be given in the text.

Thus it is corollary to the idea of Mary Shelley's submissive interpretation of Milton's epic that "*Frankenstein* is a version of the misogynistic story implicit in *Paradise Lost*" (p. 224). The implications of this statement and a critique of it based on the novel's other intertexts will be discussed in chapter three.



### 3 ROMANTIC IMAGERY IN *FRANKENSTEIN*

*Thy thoughts have created a creature in thee; and he whose intense thinking thus makes him a Prometheus; a vulture feeds upon that heart forever; that vulture the very creature he creates.*

Hermann Melville, *Moby Dick*

When asked whether his critical theory was Romantic, Northrop Frye said “Oh, it’s entirely Romantic, yes”<sup>48</sup>. The same can be said of my way of dealing with *Frankenstein* and, precisely because of this, I felt inclined to explore its “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (PLB). Because I am dealing with a Romantic novel, and with a Romantic theorist, the tendency of this chapter is to highlight the feeling expressed in the images to be analysed. Lest the methodology become un-academic, I turn to René Wellek’s definition of the features that make Romanticism a unified literary movement: the treatment of imagination, nature, symbol and myth.

From Northrop Frye’s essay “The Drunken Boat: The Revolutionary Element in Romanticism” (1966), I select one more feature of the movement:

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<sup>48</sup> Quoted in STINGLE, Richard. “Northrop Frye”. Available at Johns Hopkins University. Guide to Literary Theory. Access on July 01<sup>st</sup>, 2005. ([www.pressjhu.edu/books/hopkins\\_guide\\_to\\_literary\\_theory/frye.html](http://www.pressjhu.edu/books/hopkins_guide_to_literary_theory/frye.html))

revolution. These are, then, the five categories that will guide my investigation of the images in *Frankenstein*.

The initial idea was to subdivide the chapter into five sub-sections, examining each of these categories of imagery separately. However, even to my surprise, I soon found out that the traits are so closely intertwined that the separation would mutilate them, harming what A. W. Schlegel and Coleridge refer to as the principle of organicism in a work of art. This probably occurs, I believe, because we are examining images, and images stand on a level that reaches beneath verbalisation. This is precisely what accounts for the powerful impression *Frankenstein* leaves on its readers, a strong impression that escapes rationalization. In brief, breaking this chapter into sub-items would harm the inter-connections among the images. This forced me to give up being analytic and didactic so as to pursue my attempt to reach what is, ultimately, unreachable. Thus, to preserve the interplay of images, this third chapter has no divisions: I could not find a way of separating inter-connected images without harming the integrity of the whole they form.

For all that, this chapter will often resemble a technique developed by modernist writers out of the aesthetic freedom they inherited from the Romantics: the stream of consciousness. I will, however, indicate to the reader what image, or cluster of images, generates my comments.

Northrop Frye (1966: vi) states that “the Romantic Movement found itself in a revolutionary age, of which the French Revolution was the central symbol”. Therefore, it seems appropriate to start this analysis by accounting

for the several ways the image of revolution appears in Mary Shelley's first novel.

I believe it could be said that revolution and/or rebellion seem to function in the novel as a force (although not the only) that impels the characters to act. The very subtitle of *Frankenstein* alludes to Prometheus, a name that stands as the very image of rebelliousness for Romanticism. However, there seems to be a moment, a turning point in the novel, from which revolution is released and this is the moment of creation. Before that, images of revolution do not exist, or are very rare. When Victor gives life to his Creature, a crisis is established, which manifests itself in various forms, the most common being those of revenge and rebellion. The very act of giving life, in Victor's case, is a manifestation of rebelliousness. Several words have been used to characterise Victor's act. On the back cover of my edition of *Frankenstein*, he is said to have "played God"; Mary Shelley, in her 1831 Introduction, sees his act as a "human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world" (1994:9). Literary critic George Levine (1979:10) indicates Victor's connection with Faust and calls his deed "an obsessive search for knowledge". All these explanations are embedded in a Christian framework of interpretation, stressed by the intertextual relations between *Frankenstein* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which sees Victor as a kind of Adam, or even as a kind of Eve, the children who wants to partake the secrets of their father and, ultimately, rebel against him by eating the forbidden fruit. I mention Eve as an image that interacts with the image of Frankenstein because there is much femaleness in him. He tries to usurp the feminine prerogative of engendering life. He is father and mother

to his Creature. One of the first critics of *Frankenstein* to realize that was Ellen Moers in her famous article “Female Gothic”. This awareness called her attention to the novel’s mythic status and her statement that

*Frankenstein* seems to be distinctly a woman’s mythmaking on the subject of birth precisely because its emphasis is not upon what precedes birth, not upon birth itself, but upon what follows birth: the trauma of after birth. (Moers, p.81)

On the other hand, there are commentators such as Jean-Jacques Lecercle (1991) that have claimed Victor’s creation to be a manifestation of *hubris*, an act of pride through which a man tries to exceed his human limits. This kind of reading points to the pre-Christian context of Greek mythology also made coherent by the novel, this time through the analogy with the myth of Prometheus. These two traditions, Christian and Greek, will permeate the story and often blend, interfering with each other.

Feminist criticism first dealt with *Frankenstein* in 1977, when Ellen Moers claimed it to be a birth-myth. Moers’ study shed light on the hitherto unnoticed mythic potential of Mary Shelley’s first novel. It was also the first study to point out how much the novel dealt with the issue of motherhood. Later studies have seen in Victor’s deed a critique of male-authored science and even a problematization of the role of women writers in the nineteenth century. In a displacement of Freudian psychology, Victor has been seen as suffering from a kind of womb envy<sup>49</sup> and as the usurper of woman’s

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<sup>49</sup> An example of this kind of study is Anne Mellor’s “Possessing Nature: The Female in *Frankenstein*”, first published in 1988 in *Romanticism and Feminism*, a collection of critical essays edited by her. The version of this text that I use was reprinted in SCHOENE-HARWOOD, Berthold (ed.). *Mary Shelley. Frankenstein. A Reader’s Guide to Essential Criticism*. Cambridge: Icon Books, 2000.

prerogative to gestation. In face of these various interpretations, to ascertain whose privilege Victor usurped is a matter of point of view. As my concern here refers to the revolutionary aspect of Romanticism, I observe the parallel between Victor's achievement and the purpose of the movement, which is the wish for imaginative creation. Such a wish is itself revolutionary in comparison with the rationalistic conception of literary creation which dominates the period previous to Romanticism.

Another image of revolution sketched out by Mary Shelley in the text is that of a storm. And here images of revolution and nature cluster together. Indeed, revolution, as an image and also as one of the themes explored in *Frankenstein* appears in several levels: in the characters' actions, in nature, and even as one of the central manoeuvres of the plot, being the act of creation a powerful metaphor for revolution both on the part on Victor, who threatens nature, and on the part of the Creature, who becomes a rebel.

When Frankenstein goes home to Geneva, after his brother William's death, and finds the city gates already closed, he decides to cross Lake Léman to visit Plainpalais, the scene of the crime. He observes that,

The storm appeared to approach rapidly; and, on landing, I ascended a low hill, that I might observe its progress. It advanced; the heavens were clouded, and I soon felt the rain coming slowly in large drops, but its violence quickly increased. I quitted my seat and walked on, although the darkness and storm increased every minute and the thunder burst with a terrific crash over my head. (Mary Shelley, 1994:72)

The turbulence of the weather matches well his turbulent feelings. It was also during a storm, "a dreary night of November" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:55) that Victor gave life to his Creature. It was because of a storm that

he became so interested in the powers of electricity, which helped him make his glorious discovery. The image of storms must convey to him several turbulent feelings. It seems, however, to be more deeply linked with the event that will soon happen. It seems to prepare the scenery for the first appearance of the Creature, which will, indeed, be as a terrific crash over Victor's head. But what happens in this scene is only a glimpse of what will come. It is not the real encounter yet: Victor sees his Creature at some distance and instantly assumes that it is the real murderer of his brother. The sight functions as the impulse that generates in the creator the feeling of revenge against his own work. From then on, Victor is committed to take revenge and initiates a mad hunt for the Creature, which will prove to be the accomplishment of a process of self-destruction. The thought that "the fiend lurked in my heart" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:89) more than anywhere else is, perhaps, what makes the thirst for revenge all the more despairing. Of course there are several feelings other than revenge behind the quest Creature and creator undertake after each other. The Creature's insatiable need for love and for companionship comes before its sense of justice is offended. There is also Victor's sense of responsibility. At the same time that he wishes to kill his family's destroyer, he knows how much of the guilt is his own. His feelings towards the Creature have moments of ambiguity. When the Creature finishes its tale, a nervous Victor states that

The latter part of his [the Creature's] tale had kindled anew in me the anger that had died away when he narrated his peaceful life among the cottagers, and as he said this I could no longer suppress the rage that burned within me (Mary Shelley, 1994:140).

And when the Creature once again demands the creation of a companion, Victor recognizes his emotion: “I was moved [...] I felt there was some justice in his argument” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:141).

The mythical encounter between the creator and the Creature eventually takes place in chapter ten. The image of the meeting is difficult to place within one of the five categories I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. It shares features of all them, I would say. It is, at the same time, revolutionary, mythical and symbolic of things I will still comment. It is a moment of Victor’s interaction with nature and the imaginative centre of the novel.

In chapter ten, no storm announces the event, but supernatural forces seem to direct Victor Frankenstein to the precise spot where he will have to face his “own spirit let loose from the grave” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:74). In an access of despair for the loss of his brother and for the death of Justine, Victor decides to wander around the regions so familiar to him from his childhood and goes, apparently unconsciously, to the valley of Chamounix. It is a long journey, as he himself calls it, in search of peace of mind. Victor “sought in the magnificence [of nature], the eternity of such scenes, to forget myself and my ephemeral, because human, sorrows” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:90). But the force that impels him to proceed and the impetus with which he overcomes the several obstacles imposed on him by nature can reveal the hidden purpose of the journey. Jack Tresidder, in his *Dictionary of Symbols* states that “in psychology the journey symbolises both aspiration or longing and the quest for self-discovery” (1998:112). Indeed, the need for this quest seems to be what makes Victor “endure extreme fatigue both of body

and of mind” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:91) to arrive at the summit of Montanvert, in the area of Mont Blanc and the Mer de Glace. The same quest is also carried on by the monster, earlier when it goes to Geneva after its “father”, and later when it attracts Victor to the Arctic region. And, although we are not offered the perspective of the Creature at the moment previous to the encounter, we could safely say that its quest is simultaneous with that of Victor: they search equilibrium in each other. “All doubles once sundered are more threatening in their thrust toward reunification than in all the edginess of their unnatural divorce” (SEDGWICK, 1986:118). This obstinate search and the statement by Eve Sedgwick inevitably point to another issue of much recurrence in Romanticism: the theme of the double.

As George Levine states, Mary Shelley was probably conscious of making use of the double, since it was common to the Gothic and Romantic tradition in which she was writing (AHF, p.15). Pierre Brunel (1988) explains that, although the theme of the double can be traced since the time of the most ancient Western mythologies, its apotheosis in literature happened during the nineteenth-century Romanticism. The term then popularised was *Doppelgänger*, which he claims to have been authored by Jean-Paul Richter in 1796. It means literally “celui qui marche à côté, le compagnon de route”<sup>50</sup> (BRUNEL, 1988:492). This definition immediately reminds me of the lines in Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, that Victor uses to describe his panic when he is walking in the streets of Ingolstadt the morning after he has given life to his Creature: “Because he knows a frightful fiend / Doth close behind him tread” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:57).

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<sup>50</sup> “The one who walks next to, a journey companion.” (Translation mine)

In tracing instances of the double in Western literature, Pierre Brunel points to cases as those of *Gilgamesh* and Plautus's *Amphitruo*. In these early examples, Brunel claims, the identity of the individual that faces his double is never questioned or shaken and the double has a merely temporary existence. When this existence comes to an end, the original individual, which had been doubled, not only recovers any occasionally lost prerogative, but also has his identity reiterated. (BRUNEL, 1988:500). It is interesting to observe that in *Frankenstein*, a novel marked by the Romantic reformulation of the issues of identity, what happens is exactly the opposite, at least when we think of Victor Frankenstein and his Creature. The double Victor releases out of himself has a short-lived existence, but certainly not a momentary one. And its function is not to reaffirm its creator's identity but, instead, to put it into question and to reveal what he vainly tries to suppress.

However, in analysing pairs of doubles, Frankenstein's relationship with Walton is far different from his relationship with his Creature. If we assume that Frankenstein can be seen as a double Walton releases out of his intense wish to have a friend, we can observe how unlike the roles played by the doubles are.

*Frankenstein's* three narrators can be seen as a tripartite character, as a triple image. The three layers of narration echo three layers of their identity, as well as the three layers of the self according to Freud. As the most external layer, the superego, is Robert Walton, representing an acceptable social and moral behaviour. The most internal layer, the id, is dramatized in the Creature. Its passion and violence contrast with Walton's

sense of domesticity, represented by his relationship with his sister. Victor Frankenstein, the intermediate layer, is the ego torn between the two forces. This structure is a mark of most gothic narratives, especially those written after *Frankenstein*. Such is the case of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, for instance.

The way in which personalities appear almost irreconcilably fragmented, made up of several images, in *Frankenstein*, is a sign of the novel's modernity. In fact, I see it as an insight into modernity. The changes in people's sense of identity that started to happen at the end of the eighteenth-century, and are a mark of the nineteenth, are symbolized by the fluidity of the characters' personalities. This seems to me to be one of the reasons why it was so difficult for the reading public in 1818 (and is still difficult for twenty-first century readers) to come to terms with *Frankenstein*. The uncertainty around identity that characterized Mary Shelley's time is problematized throughout the novel, never explicitly, always symbolically in a way that it reaches readers' unconscious almost like a subliminal message. What follows, in the next five or six pages, is an analysis of how *Frankenstein* deals with symbols of identity.

Considering Frankenstein as the double of Walton, and the Creature as the double of Frankenstein, it is possible to say that both doubles emerge from the same cause: an obsessed wish for glory and achievement. Walton pretends to want a friend to overcome his solitude, but what he really wants, and ends up materializing in Victor, is an 'other' of himself, an equal, to put his mad schemes into practice. Similarly, what Victor finds when he pursues his plans up to the end, is that the horror he has thus produced is an aspect

of himself. And here the differences start to appear: Victor's existence as Walton's double is temporary, as Brunel observes to be the case in *Gilgamesh* and *Amphitruo*. I would not say Walton's identity is reaffirmed with his double's withdrawal, but I would say that Walton escapes destruction for having used his double to realize his plans. Once he is given a double who performs his daring ideas for him, it is the double who is going to suffer the consequences and not him. After Victor's death, Walton can return home safe and sound, although perhaps disappointed, and having learned the moralistic lesson that rebellion is not worth it. At the end of the novel, of the three transgressors, Walton, Frankenstein and the Creature, only Walton is spared from punishment, perhaps because he gave up his daring pursuits. It is in this sense, I believe, that, if *Frankenstein* really presents a moral lesson, then it contradicts the lesson at the end by having Victor admitting he has failed but affirming that "yet another may succeed" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:210). This is a clear mark of the Romantic ambiguity I mentioned in the second part of chapter one. Mary Shelley, in the years around the writing of *Frankenstein*, was full of revolutionary and imaginative ideas. But the conservative and rationalistic society in which she lived, although shaken by changes, did not permit her to advocate these ideas explicitly.

But if Walton has found a scapegoat in his double, the case is not the same with Victor because, I believe, the double he has created is of a different kind. Whereas Walton generates an 'other' of himself to perform what is too hideous for him, Victor materialises a part of himself. Victor and his Creature are, therefore, not independent from each other.

The archetypal image of the double, as the term obviously implies, is formed of two poles<sup>51</sup> and, therefore, readers tend to identify Victor and his Creature as the two sides of the double. However, in *Frankenstein*, the theme expands itself far beyond the three narrators and often ends up manifesting itself as three or four fold images. It is certainly coherent to say that the Creature represents an aspect of Victor's personality but if we consider the characters Robert Walton and Henry Clerval in terms of their function as units of the narrative, or *mythos*, to use Frye's terminology, we can say that they serve to complement Victor's personality. If the Creature appears as its creator's dark counterpart, his *doppelganger*, Clerval performs the opposite task: while the Creature represents, among several other things, the result of obsessed and unlimited search for knowledge, Clerval appears as the moderate student, "the poet figure in the Wordsworthian<sup>52</sup> mold"<sup>53</sup>. In the same way as Victor, "he was a boy of singular talent and fancy. He loved enterprise, hardship, and even danger for its own sake" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:36). But unlike his friend, Clerval does not abandon himself to the wish for glory. In this sense, he is not a Romantic for he can contain his

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<sup>51</sup> Typical instances are Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Poe's short story "William Wilson", Hoffman's *The Sand Man* and Dostoevski's *The Doppelganger*, to name but a few.

<sup>52</sup> For Wordsworth, the Poet (he spells it with capital letter) is a person with a special faculty. His definition of the Poet is as follows: "He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; *a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe*, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them." (WORDSWORTH, W. PLB. Available at <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~jenglish/Courses/Spring2001/040/preface1802.html> Access on 30th June, 2005. The words in italics could apply to Henry Clerval and help to support Brooks' comparison of Clerval with Wordsworth's idea of the poet.

<sup>53</sup> BROOKS, Peter. "'Godlike Science/Unhallowed Arts': Language, Nature, and Monstrosity". IN: LEVINE, G., KNOEPFLMACHER, U.C. (editors) *The Endurance of Frankenstein*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979, p. 206. Further references to this article will be abbreviated LNM and will be given in the text.

emotions. By making use of the image of Clerval, Mary Shelley displays the same contradiction Lord Byron expresses in his praise of Alexander Pope: a Romantic admiring a neoclassic.

Whereas Victor is concerned with “what glory would attend the discovery” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:39) of the secret he pursued,

Clerval occupied himself [...] with the moral relation of things. The busy stage of life, the virtues of heroes, and the actions of men were his theme; and his hope and his dream was to become one among those whose names are recorded in story as the gallant and adventurous benefactors of our species. (Mary Shelley, 1994:36)

Clerval seems to epitomize the intellectual and psychological self-control that Victor lacks. This contrast of disposition appears more evidently in the novel when Clerval goes to Ingolstadt, arriving there soon after the Creature has been given life. Amid the nervousness and anxiety Victor is experiencing, the sight of his friend brings him “calm and serene joy” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:58). Clerval’s death by the hands of the Creature may symbolise Victor’s rendition to the evil and self-destructive side of his nature. Of course, here, we would be considering the image of Victor as the transgressing mad scientist and as the divided self that struggles with his double. But if we think of the image of Victor as a symbol of creative imagination or of the Romantic poet, as I will comment below, his act of transgression would be far from evil. It would, instead, represent the Romantic aim *par excellence*.

The relationship between Victor and Walton seems a little more complex. Their project is analogous: to achieve what none has yet achieved, Victor in science and Walton in navigation. Both seem willing to do whatever

it takes to reach their intents, Victor dedicates himself obsessively to his studies, half-abandons his family and searches to uncover deep mysteries; Walton also discards his family, represented by his sister, and risks his life and the life of his crew by insisting in proceeding on a journey which may cause their death, as he well knows. Determination, curiosity, wish for self-fulfilment, and even pride, seem to be the values that direct their behaviour. Accordingly, they meet exactly when one most needs the other, that is, when Walton is in anxious want of a friend and Frankenstein in desperate need of someone to transmit his experience to. Because they have similar aspirations, they can understand one another: Walton admires Victor's courage and enterprise and Victor understands Walton's wish to proceed with his journey towards the North Pole, even considering the risk it represents, "Surrounded by mountains of ice which admit of no escape and threaten every moment to crush my vessel" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:205). Only a man like Victor, who shares Walton's obstinacy to the point of acting as his double, would have incited the crew to advance regardless of the peril.

The identification between Victor and Walton is so intense that it leads Cleonice Mourão to see in the Creature the image of Walton's demonic wishes.

But to face the Creature was something so terrible to him that he had to create an 'alter ego' to mediate the encounter.<sup>54</sup> The Creature, in this sense, embodies Walton's mad schemes, which, terrific as they were to him,

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<sup>54</sup> MOURÃO, Cleonice Paes Barreto. "A Face Diabólica do Anjo". In: Encontro Nacional da Anpoll (2. : 1987 : Rio de Janeiro). A Mulher na Literatura. Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 1990. Vol. 1, p. 182-192, p. 188.

had to be performed not by his double, which would be very much closely related to him, but by the Creature.

Frankenstein, Walton, Clerval and the Creature appear as one fragmented character. According to George Levine,

They can be seen, indeed, as fragments of a mind in conflict with itself, extremes unreconciled, striving to make themselves a whole. Ambition and passivity, hate and love, the need to procreate and the need to destroy are seen, in *Frankenstein*, as symbiotic: the destruction of one is, through various narrative strategies, the destruction of the other. (AHF, p.16)

Levine's last statement, that the destruction of one is the destruction of the other, can only be applied to the case of Victor and his Creature since his relationship with Walton is of a different kind. In it, as I have already remarked, Victor's destruction means Walton's salvation. But, because Victor and the Creature are not independent from each other, their lives follow exactly the same path. What one wishes to do to the other, he actually does to himself. Victor's obsession to destroy his Creature is turned against him and, in this sense, one's destruction has to be the other's. As two irreconcilable, yet twin, counterparts, there is no possible solution for their conflict, except death. Only death can end the cycle of offence, revenge and devastation performed by them.

The Romantic symbiosis that unites Victor and the Creature results, as Brunel explains, from a process of re-significance of the themes of the double and personal identity that started to occur at the end of the eighteenth century,

L'émergence du sentiment d'une authentique altérité, d'une vision romantique du moi, apparaît conditionnée par la composante historique et politique (la révolution française) et par la philosophie idéaliste: [...] De la doctrine de la science (1794) Fichte. Dans une époque de bouleversement politique où les hiérarchies basculent, où l'autorité de l'Etat et de l'Eglise sont remises en question, la problématique de l'identité personnelle devient cruciale. L'idéalisme philosophique sert de support métaphysique à la théorie du moi double.<sup>55</sup> (Brunel, 1955 :504-505)

The English Romantics were very much influenced by German philosophy. Fichte's notion of the ego's consciousness of itself helped formulate the idea of the divided-self. Along with the atmosphere of the French Revolution deeply shaking society's certainties and values throughout Europe, Fichte's idealistic thinking helped develop new conceptions of identity, in a time when the sense of unity and fixity were gradually being discredited.

Although the image of the divided self is clearly given in the portrayal of Victor and his Creature, Walton and Clerval add complexity and ambivalence to the pair. Whereas the Creature functions as Victor's ghostly counterpart, Clerval is the side of Victor that "cleaves to nature in a Wordsworthian child-like love and trust" (LNM, p. 216). Walton is the one who is going to live the life that emerges from the death of Creature and creator, which terminates a cycle of revenge and destruction, re-establishing life. As none of those who died during the circle can be restored, this life is

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<sup>55</sup> "The emergence of the feeling of authentic alterity, of a Romantic vision of the self, appears conditioned by the historical and political component (the French Revolution) and by idealistic philosophy: [...] *The Science of Knowledge* (1794). At a time of political upheavals, when hierarchies are shaken, when the State's and the Church's authorities are put into question, the problematic of personal identity becomes crucial. The idealistic philosophy stands as a metaphysical support to the theory of the double self." (Translation mine)

bestowed upon Walton, who chooses to return from the Arctic while it is still time.

As the main male characters (Frankenstein, his Creature, Walton and Clerval) can be seen as forming a whole, so can the female characters, when interpreted as fragments. The seclusion of male and female spheres in Mary Shelley's novel is clear. When narrating the events of his childhood, Victor explains to Walton that "While my companion [Elizabeth] *contemplated* with a serious and *satisfied* spirit the magnificent *appearance* of things, I delighted in *investigating* their *causes*" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:35, italics mine). The words I marked in italics are emblematic of the play between passivity and activity which female and male characters represent: while Elizabeth passively contemplates appearances, Victor actively investigates causes. The same can be said of most characters: Walton is the explorer, his sister the passive receiver of his letters. Her only contact with adventure happens through the accounts of her brother.

Women are recurrently portrayed, in the novel, as depending on their fathers, brothers or husbands for support. Thus Caroline Beaufort and Elizabeth Lavenza are both rescued from poverty by Alphonse Frankenstein, just like Safie is rescued from an unhappy fate by Felix. Justine Moritz, who does not have a male relative to protect her, dies defenceless. Feminist critics such as Ellen Moers, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have seen in this form of representation of women an instance of the displacement and silencing of the female voice. They have observed the extent of the repression women are submitted to in *Frankenstein*. They certainly have a point, and, by noticing the treatment of women in the text, they call attention to an

important link of the novel with its historical context: among the several issues dramatized in the novel is the role of women in contemporary society, either as mothers, daughters, sisters or writers. Unlike Gilbert and Gubar, who see *Frankenstein* as “a version of the misogynistic story implicit in *Paradise Lost*” (“Horror’s Twin”, p. 224), I believe it proposes a deconstruction of stereotyped and male-authored representations of women. This may sound rather idealistic, but a concept by Northrop Frye will help elucidate my point. In *The Great Code*, Frye exposes his idea of the “implicit metaphor, which is produced by the juxtaposition of images only” (1982:56), that is, does not contain a predication in the word “is”. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, for Frye, a metaphor is “a relation between two symbols” (1947:366). When that relation is expressed by simple juxtaposition of two or more images without the word “is” or any equivalent, it generates an implicit meaning, which is not in any of the images and yet emerges of their relation. Thus, Mary Shelley finds a subtle, because feminine, way of rebelling against masculine dominance by juxtaposing the image of passive, silenced and repressed women to the image of self-destructive and degraded men. She opposes the image of domesticity, the female world, to the image of the search for scientific knowledge. But what emerges out of these juxtapositions is precisely the monstrous and the demonic. Victor’s act of generating life without the female principle cannot be explained only as an act of misogyny. Much more than this, it can be seen as a critique of male-authored science and a critique of the displacement of the female voice, so well represented by *Frankenstein’s* anonymous publication and by the destruction of the female

Monster. That can be one of the reasons why the result of the male-authored creation turns out to be demonic instead of divine.

U. C. Knoepfelmacher seems to confirm this argument when he comments on the only male protagonist who did not have a tragic end in the novel:

The only surviving male speaker of the novel, Walton, possesses what the Monster lacks and Frankenstein denies, an internalised female complementary principle. Walton begins his account through self-justificatory letters to a female ego-ideal, his sister Margareth Saville [...]. The memory of this [...] woman [...] helps him resist Frankenstein's destructive (and self-destructive) course. [...] In a skilful addition to the 1831 version, Mary Shelley has Walton remind his sister that a "youth passed in solitude" was offset by "my best years spent under your gentle and feminine tutelage."<sup>56</sup>

Mary Shelley, however, overcomes the displacement of the female voice by means of one of the most important devices of the Romantic Movement: literary creative imagination. And here I start to examine images related to imagination.

The notion of creative imagination was certainly not invented by the Romantics. As a matter of fact, Aristotle's claim that art is 'mimesis' has set an ever-lasting discussion: that concerning reason and imagination. However, the Aristotelian postulate of poetry as imitation of real life makes it difficult to account for the existence of supernatural and fantastic elements in poetry. M. H. Abrams explains that "a prime source of the concept of 'the

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<sup>56</sup> U. C. Knoepfelmacher. "Thoughts on the Aggression of Daughters" IN: LEVINE, G., KNOEPFLMACHER, U.C. (editors) *The Endurance of Frankenstein*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979, p. 107. Further references to this article will be abbreviated TAD and will be incorporated to the text.

creative imagination' [...] was the endeavour to account for fantastic poetic characters" (1971:275).

The conceptions of art as imitation and art as imagination, discussed since the time of Ancient Greece, have oscillated in relevance throughout the history of literature. Each literary period has emphasised one or other conception about the nature of art, and has tended to see it more as imitation or more as imagination according to its philosophical, religious and aesthetical principles. One of the periods in which the notion of creative imagination was particularly relevant was the Renaissance. Shakespeare's works, for instance, were peopled with imaginary and fantastic beings, and his imaginative power has received much praise in criticism. In the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth-centuries, with the progress that scientific knowledge witnessed with the works of thinkers as Descartes and Newton, there was a general tendency "to import into the physical realm the explanatory scheme of physical science, and so to extend the victories of mechanics from matter to mind" (ABRAMS, 1971:159). Literary invention was then, especially within the English empirical tradition, conceived as a mechanical process (the image of the creation in *Frankenstein* can be seen as an allusion to the excitement of Mary Shelley's time with discoveries relating to mechanics and electricity). But with Romanticism, a revival of some Renaissance values, which was already being felt since the second half of the eighteenth century, occurred.

The English Romantics were enthusiastic with the idea of creative imagination: Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley, to mention only major

poets, theorised about it. Abrams provides us with an explanation of why the concept of creative imagination had such a crucial importance for the Romantics. According to the author, before the rise of Romanticism, the assumed concept of poetry was that it consisted of an imitation of the real world, which complicated the treatment of supernatural, fantastic or imaginary elements in poetry. But the second half of the eighteenth-century witnessed several forms of revolution. One of the revolutions in the literary field culminated in “the replacement of the metaphor of the poem as imitation, a ‘mirror of nature’, by that of the poem as heterocosm, ‘a second nature’, created by the poet in an act analogous to God’s creation of the world” (ABRAMS, 1971:272). The idea of the poet’s divinity (here expressed in the analogy with God) has also been present in literature since the time of Aristotle, or even before that. Suffice it to say that Homer always wrote inspired and guided by the Muse. Jean-Pierre Vernant, when commenting on Detienne’s *Les Maîtres de Verité dans la Grece Archaique*, explains that, in Ancient Greece, the poet or herald, along with the king and the diviner, had a special privilege: through his summon of the Muse, he has direct access to the world of beyond and is able to perceive the invisible and to tell past, present and future (VERNANT, 2001:285). Shelley, in “A Defence of Poetry”, expresses the same thought: “a Poet participates in the eternal, the *infinito*, and the one; as far as relates to his conceptions, time and place and number are not”<sup>57</sup>. Thus is the analogy of the poet with God implied.

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<sup>57</sup> <sup>57</sup> SHELLEY, Percy Bysshe. “A Defence of Poetry”. IN: REIMAN, Donald; POWERS, Sharon (eds.) *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose. Authoritative Texts and Criticism*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1977, p. 483. I shall refer to this text as “Defense” and further references to it will be included in the text, the number of the page referring to Reiman’s and Powers’ edition.

Shelley's "A Defence of Poetry" offers one of the keenest Romantic manifestos about poetry and about the relation between reason and imagination. He wrote the text in 1821 as a reply to an essay by his friend Thomas Love Peacock entitled "The Four Ages of Poetry"<sup>58</sup>. Peacock claimed that, in nineteenth century England, the age of poetry had come to an end, and urged intelligent men to cease wasting their time writing poetry. Shelley's reply is a passionate and Romantic account of the powers of poetic imagination and of the role of poets as "the unacknowledged legislators of the world" ("Defence", p. 508). In his "Defence", Shelley emphasises imagination's activity against reason's passivity. He states that "Reason is to Imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance" ("Defence", p. 480). And this was, indeed, very much in accordance with how most Romantics dealt with imagination and poetic creation in their writings.

The extent to which Mary Shelley was aware of and also enthusiastic with the idea of creative imagination can be given by her 1831 Introduction to *Frankenstein* and by the construction of her protagonist. When she relates, in the Introduction, how she came to conceive the initial idea for writing her first novel, she explains that "my imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:9). Mary Shelley thus attributes the vividness of imagery in her novel to imagination. Indeed the vibrancy with which she describes

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<sup>58</sup> Available at <http://www.thomaslovepeacock.net/FourAges.html> Access on 20th April, 2005.

scenery may come from the real impressions the sight of those places may have caused on her imagination. In her artistic expression of these and other feelings, by having Victor “infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:55) he has produced, Mary Shelley makes him symbolise the very ideal of the Romantic Movement which is, as George Levine puts it, “the aspiration to divine creative activity” (AHF, 1979:9).

In chapter two of *Frankenstein*, Victor tells Walton about the keen interest with which he had read the works of Cornelius Agrippa and the disappointment he felt when his father revealed him the failure of Agrippa’s theories. He says that if his father had explained to him, carefully, that the alchemist’s ideas had been overcome by modern scientists, he would “have thrown Agrippa aside and have contended my imagination, warmed as it was, by returning with greater ardour to my former studies” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:38). Here, although he apparently blames his father for the destructive course his scientific career assumed, he is actually revealing that he was also guided and possessed by his imagination, just as Mary Shelley claims to have been. The same happens when Dr. Frankenstein discovers the secret of life: “I doubted at first whether I should attempt the creation of a being like myself, or one of simpler organization; but my imagination was too much exalted by my first success” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:51). Walton and Clerval, weighty counterparts of Victor’s, are also described as possessing great imaginative powers. When reporting the events of his childhood, Victor gives the following account of Clerval’s literary preferences,

He was deeply read in books of chivalry and romance. He composed heroic songs and began to write many a tale of enchantment and knightly adventure. He tried to make us act in plays and to enter into masquerades, in which the characters were drawn from the heroes of Roncesvalles, of the /round Table of King Arthur, and the chivalrous train who shed their blood to redeem the holy sepulchre from the hands of the infidels. (Mary Shelley, 1994:36)

All the kinds of texts Clerval is said to be most fond of – tales, romances, legends – are those generally considered the most imaginative. In the case of Walton, the strength of his imagination is usually revealed by his intense curiosity. In sailing to the Arctic, he hopes he “shall satiate my ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of the world never before visited, and may tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:14). Implicit in this passage is imagination’s power to foster curiosity: Walton knows nothing about the place he seeks, but he imagines and this is the force that makes him proceed. In some ways his plan is similar to Victor’s, who wishes to uncover a mystery no man has been capable of uncovering. One character’s curiosity finds echo in the other’s.

An image of imagination in *Frankenstein* that has become famous, and which filmmakers have often recreated with enthusiasm, is that of Victor’s office, where he constructed his Creature and which he calls “my workshop of filthy creation”. This is located “in a solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house, and separated from the other apartments by a gallery and staircase” (Both quotations from MARY SHELLEY, 1994:52). Stairs, as Tressider (1998:191) explains, are “symbols of progress towards enlightenment [...] used to symbolize the marked difference between earthly and spiritual plans”. His workshop is then the domain of spiritualism, and,

by analogy, of unconsciousness and imagination. In a manner analogous to that of the Romantic artist, Frankenstein creates in solitude, aided only by his imaginative powers.

Thus, through his creative act, Victor represents the image of the Romantic notion of creative imagination, and is therefore identified with the Romantic poet. And the Romantic poet, also through his creative act, as mentioned above, is identified with God. But Victor, as literally presented in the novel, is neither poet nor God: he is a scientist. Seen from a variety of points of view, the image of Victor Frankenstein appears as a cluster of metaphors<sup>59</sup>, in the sense that he seems to function, within the bricolage-like structure of the novel, as a point in which several images are juxtaposed. The images of poet, scientist and God are not the only ones represented by the character: I will still comment on how he incorporates other images and exchanges roles with the Creature.

Anne Williams states that “*Frankenstein* materialises creativity” (1995:178), but there is a complicating factor in Victor’s act of creation: although he “had selected his features as beautiful” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:55), the Creature turned out monstrous. In this, *Frankenstein* can be said to be a novel that dramatizes, among other things, the Romantic Movement. Victor’s act of creation symbolizes the process of Romantic artistic composition. But why then does Victor’s creation turn monstrous? Had he come up with a perfect creature, he would be immediately identified with the poet whose imagination produces beautiful and harmonious poetry. But the monstrosity of his creation hints at the satanic aspect of much of

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<sup>59</sup> Here I refer to Northrop Frye’s definition of metaphor as juxtaposition of images.

Romantic production. At this point of the novel, its composition as a “tissue of quotations”<sup>60</sup> can be observed in practice. The fact that the Creature turns out hideous, and runs amok from his creator, points to the existence of other intertexts acting upon the composition of the characters. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, William Blake notes that “the reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true poet and of the Devils party without knowing it”<sup>61</sup>. This led readers, including Percy Shelley, to see in Milton’s Satan a more perfect artistic creation than Milton’s God. Knowing that Milton was one of the most significant influences that helped shape Mary Shelley’s artistic imagination, it is not inappropriate to believe that something similar happens to her. Frankenstein’s Creature is also (Like Milton’s Satan) more fascinating than its creator and becomes dominant to the point of stealing its creator’s name. The result of Mary Shelley’s imaginative process is similar to Milton’s: their protagonists are less appealing than their protagonists’ creations. When Percy Shelley says that

we want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know;  
we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we  
want the poetry of life: our calculations have outrun conception; we  
have eaten more than we can digest” (SHELLEY, “A Defence of  
Poetry”, p.502)

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<sup>60</sup> BARTHES, Roland. “The Death of the Author”. IN: WALDER, Dennis. (ed) *Literature in the Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

<sup>61</sup> BLAKE, William. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. IN: ERDMAN, David V. (ed) *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965.

he is expressing an opinion similar to Blake's, that the artist can be of the Devil's party and not know it. In artistic creation, as implied by such interpretation of Mary Shelley's and Milton's works, the writer's creative imagination reveals on whose side he or she is, independently of their conscious will.

Of course Milton's work is not the only intertext that can be read in Victor's demonic creation. There are also, as I already mentioned, the conscience of the development of contemporary science, a possible critique of the silencing of women's voice and an expression of Mary Shelley's own anxieties concerning childbirth and motherhood. There is also an incipient but growing interest in the grotesque that comes from the gothic novels and reaches one of its highest points in Victor Hugo's "Preface to *Cromwell*" (1827).

As the experience of giving birth was always a traumatic one in her life, and as she may have felt somehow responsible for the death of her mother at giving birth to her, it is not surprising that she should talk about relationship between child and parent in her first novel. These are issues that busied her imagination and found their way through poetic expression. The image of the creation of the Monster, besides being the highest instance of the use of the Romantic idea of creative imagination, also opens the way to an investigation of another essentially Romantic trait in *Frankenstein*: the use of myth. In the first part of chapter two, I mentioned the fact that *Frankenstein* has often been considered a myth by recent literary criticism and proposed the important distinction between Mary Shelley's novel and

the popularised myth of Frankenstein. A similar differentiation must be made here: the fact that *Frankenstein* is called a myth has little to do with the way it makes use of myths in its fictional universe. The myths of Adam and Eve, of Prometheus, of Faust, and others I will still mention, are further threads in the web of images and of intertextual references that form the structure of the novel.

The concept of myth I adopt in this work is that of Northrop Frye: a myth is a story, a plot, through which society represents and understands itself. *Frankenstein*, like other literary works such as *Robinson Crusoe*, for instance, have only reached the status of a myth because they perform this function.

The Romantic Movement is marked by a revival of national myths<sup>62</sup> and of folklore, which resulted from the sense of nationalism aroused by the American and the French Revolutions. This feature of Romanticism is felt most strongly in Germany, where it probably originated. Ian Watt observes that “Herder persuaded intellectuals that myth was a creative product of the *Volk*, an authentic expression of the latent imaginative powers of humanity” (WATT: 1997:193). He also informs us of a letter written by Lessing in 1756, “which attacked the French-inspired drama of the time and proclaimed the need for something more national, more folkish. Lessing had ended his letter with an exemplary specimen – a scene he wrote, along Shakespearean lines, on the subject of Faust” (1997:194). This feeling manifested itself in different

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<sup>62</sup> The *Webster's Dictionary* registers the first use of the word ‘myth’ in English in 1830. Although the word was not used when Romanticism emerged, the sense of recovering popular and classic myths was general. The fact is probably due to the feeling of transition that marked this historical moment. The same can be said about the fact that the Romantics were only called thus years later. In both cases, the word not being used does not imply the inexistence of the consciousness of the fact.

degrees and forms in each country. In Britain, it is clearly represented by the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott. But, as I have already commented, the sense of Romanticism I make use in this work does not apply to Scott. Among the writers I have been treating as Romantics, a taste for Greek and Roman mythology can be observed in Lord Byron and Percy Shelley, for instance. However, when the English Romantics turned to their national past, they turned to writers such as Shakespeare and Milton, the great pillars of English poetry, whose work is deeply rooted in England's history and traditions. The cult of Milton is more intensely present in William Blake, by far the most important writer whose work manifested the change in literary fashion in eighteenth century England. Both Blake and Shelley comment on the greatness of Milton and Shelley followed Shakespeare's steps in the theatre. *Frankenstein's* indebtedness to Milton is explicit and, what is more interesting, the novel replies to Milton rather differently from most contemporary poets. Mary Shelley's is a feminine (and I would not say feminist) reply to Milton's patriarchal poetry. To speak of the direct influence of Shakespeare in Mary Shelley's work is more difficult. Chris Baldick (1987) notes that the notion of monstrosity, objectified by Mary Shelley in *Frankenstein's* Creature, entered English literature through Shakespeare. The intertextuality, then, would be established more through the inheritance of an idea than through textual references. This is an instance of what Julia Kristeva calls the vertical axis that articulates the literary system, understood as authors, readers and texts. This axis, she claims, is what establishes a text's relation with the previous and contemporary literary production.

What can really be observed is that, in some of her subsequent novels, Mary Shelley often quotes lines from Shakespeare. In her *The Last Man* (1826), for instance, she quotes lines from *Romeo and Juliet*, from *Twelfth Night* and from Sonnet 29. In his study of the notion of monstrosity, Baldick finds that much of the sense that can be attributed to the concept in *Frankenstein* is already present in Shakespeare. For both authors, monstrosity appears as “an illustration of a particular vice or transgression. Monstrosity [...] is less a matter of physiological prodigies and freaks than a way of defining moral aberrations” (BALDICK, 1981:11). The novelty in Mary Shelley’s treatment of the idea is that the vices shown forth by monstrosity are not so much those of the monstrous Creature as those of the creator.

The way Mary Shelley responds to Romanticism’s recreation of myths is, let us say, multi-cultural. She resorts not only to classical mythology but also the greatest writers of the English tradition and to the most significant myths of the Western culture, such as Faust, the Wandering Jew and the Bible. In composing her characters with aspects of several myths from several traditions, Mary Shelley acts as a bricoleur and makes intertextuality the shaping principle in *Frankenstein*. Surely the most important intertextual relation to be analysed is that of *Frankenstein* with John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*<sup>63</sup>. The parallel between the two texts is made so clear that it culminates with the insertion of *PL* into the novel’s plot, when the Creature finds the book in a forest and reads it literally, as a historical fact. However, the subtitle Mary Shelley gave to her first novel complicates the affiliation of *Frankenstein* to *PL*.

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<sup>63</sup> In this work, I am going to refer to Milton’s text by *PL* from now on.

In the second section of the first chapter of this thesis, I comment on how ambiguous the influence of classical Greek and Roman mythology on English Romantic writers seems to me. Mary and Percy Shelley, in particular, were great admirers of this period of literature. Mary Shelley studied Greek language for a while and Percy Shelley translated several pieces of Greek literature and was himself much influenced by it in his poetry. The most evident example of this influence is his *Prometheus Unbound*, written soon after the publication of *Frankenstein* and published in 1820. The fact that the play was published only two years after *Frankenstein* implies that the myth of Prometheus was a common topic of conversation between Mary and Percy Shelley and that, probably, the works were written almost simultaneously. The play is often considered to be Shelley's masterpiece, and exemplifies not only the importance of the myth of Prometheus to the Romantics, but also the influence that classic Greco-Roman art had on English artists of the time. The preface to the play praises Prometheus's rebellious personality and his threatening attitude towards Zeus, illustrating Shelley's admiration towards the titan:

The only imaginary being resembling in any degree Prometheus, is Satan; and Prometheus is, in my judgement, a more poetical character than Satan, because, in addition to courage, and majesty and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force, he is susceptible of being described as exempt from the taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandisement, which, in the hero of *Paradise Lost*, interfere with the interest.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> SHELLEY, Percy Bysshe. "Preface to Prometheus Unbound" IN: SHELLEY, Percy Bysshe. Shelley's poems. Volume Two. Longer Poems, Plays and Translations. London and New York: J.M DENT & SONS, 1953.

Besides presenting Shelley's personal interpretation of the Titan, the passage exemplifies what Prometheus came to signify from Romanticism onwards: he became the perfect symbol of rebellion against established authority, be it religious, political, social or of any kind. Gilbert Highet (1951: 360–2), attempts to explain what Greek art meant to the artists of the time. According to him, besides representing “beauty and nobility in poetry, in art, in philosophy, and in life”, which he considers quite obvious, Greek art and mythology also signified “freedom from perverse and artificial and tyrannical rules”; in politics, “freedom from oppression, and in particular republicanism” and in religion, “opposition to Christianity”. Although the Romantics were not against religion, they clearly rebelled against the strict rules established by the church.

As implied by the passage quoted above, Shelley viewed the titan not only as rebellious but as virtuous too, “exempt from the taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and ... personal aggrandisement.” The Prometheus he most admired was, in fact, the one portrayed by Aeschylus in his *Prometheus Bound*, to which Shelley's drama proposes to be a sequel. In Aeschylus's play, the titan appears as a humanist, meaning a benefactor of mankind, one who defies supreme authority with the sole purpose of aiding man. This portrayal of Prometheus makes it hard to understand exactly why Mary Shelley called her protagonist a “modern Prometheus”, for Victor Frankenstein is certainly not exempt from ambition, very interested in “what glory would attend the discovery” and flattered by the idea that “so much has been done ... more, far more will I achieve” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:39,46).

M. K. Joseph, in his introduction to a 1987 edition of *Frankenstein*, says that

Before 1816 Shelley seems to have been unaware of the potent symbolic significance of the myth; it was Byron, to whom Prometheus had been a familiar figure ever since he translated a portion of Aeschylus while still a schoolboy at Harrow, who opened his eyes to its potentialities during that summer at Geneva. That it was discussed at the time can be inferred from the results: Byron's poem "Prometheus", written in July 1816; his *Manfred*, with its Promethean hero, begun in September; and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, in part a reply to *Manfred*, begun later in 1818. But Mary Shelley was first in the field with her "Modern Prometheus", and she alone seized on the vital significance of making Prometheus the creator rather than, as in Byron and Shelley, the suffering champion of mankind. In doing so, she linked the myth with certain current scientific theories which suggested that the "divine spark" of life might be electrical or quasi-electrical in nature.<sup>65</sup>

Several scholars have attempted to explain the analogy implied by the title and have noted the difficulty in establishing a punctual comparison between the two characters, Prometheus and Victor, for if they have similarities, they also do have many differences. In a 1981 essay, Theodore Ziolkowski attempts to explain the ambivalence in the novel's title<sup>66</sup>. Initially, he points out similarities: Victor's interest in electricity ("a spark of being") and its use in the animation of his creature are analogous to Prometheus's theft of the fire from the gods. Victor's building the body of the monster resembles the version of the Promethean myth in which he moulds a body from clay, creating thus the human kind. Besides that, both characters are punished for their deeds. According to Ziolkowski, the analogy ends here, because, as the comparison proceeds, several differences will be found.

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<sup>65</sup> JOSEPH, M. K. Introduction. In: SHELLEY, Mary. *Frankenstein*. Oxford: OUP, 1987, (pp. vi-vii).

<sup>66</sup> ZIOLKOWSKI, Theodore. "Science, Frankenstein and Myth". IN: SCHOENE-HARWOOD, Berthold. (ed.) *Mary Shelley. Frankenstein. A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*. Cambridge: Icon Books, 2000. The following references to this essay will be abbreviated "SFM" and will be given in the text, the number of the page referring to Harwood's edition.

“Unlike Frankenstein, however, Prometheus never succumbs to his punishment” (SFM, p.61).

Ziolkowski correctly observes that Victor Frankenstein, unlike the Greek titan in Shelley’s view, is full of vices, and concludes that in spite of making use of the Greco-Roman tradition, Mary Shelly incorporates the Judeo-Christian Biblical tradition into her novel, for her scientist seems a mixture of Prometheus and the Biblical Adam.

One interesting peculiarity in the myth of Prometheus explained by Jean Pierre Vernant (2002) is that it is intrinsically connected with the origin of woman in Greek mythology. Vernant observes that, in Hesiod’s *Teogony*, men and gods lived together in a harmonic world until, as a punishment to Prometheus for having deceived Zeus and stolen the divine fire, Zeus sent Pandora – the first woman – to Earth. Unlike the mythological Prometheus, who was (even if indirectly) responsible for the creation of woman, Mary Shelley’s modern Prometheus actually destroys his project of a woman. In Greek mythology, before Pandora was sent, men lived without women and were born from the Earth. Thus, the myth of Prometheus is not only connected with the origin of women but also with the origin of feminine motherhood. It is very difficult to know if, or to what extent, Mary Shelley had this in mind; what is known is that the issue of motherlessness is very present in *Frankenstein* and that, through her mother’s works, Mary Shelley was aware of the discussion concerning women’s rights and roles in society, in a way that Prometheus could perhaps represent to her more than it represented to the other Romantic artists of the time.

*Frankenstein's* first edition opened with the epigraph from *PL* which can provide a good starting point for an analysis of how both books interrelate:

Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay  
To mould me man? Did I solicit thee  
From darkness to promote me?  
(MILTON, 1952:264)

This passage, from Canto X of Milton's poem, is part of Adam's speech, when he addresses God, his maker. This beginning invites the reader to see in the Creature and in Victor, respectively, instances of these two images, the Creature/Adam that was moulded man by Victor/God. As in *PL*, the creator deserts its creature, who is left alone to struggle for life in the world. However, this inter-relation does not suffice for, at least, two reasons, which I have already referred to: 1) other texts and myths are also incorporated to the novel in a such a way as to interfere with its signification; 2) both Victor and his Creature enact and exchange several roles and, therefore, none of them can be identified with any single character from any other book or myth. This appears directly in a speech by the Creature in which he oscillates between the use of the image of Adam or Satan to describe himself:

Like Adam, I was apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other aspect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the special care of his Creator; (...). Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem for my condition, for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me. (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:125)

In this perspective, Victor appears as God, but if we hasten to interpret him thus, how can we account for the novel's subtitle (*the Modern Prometheus*)?

The necessity of this question (and of many others which arise in the course of the analysis) shows how intertextuality adds ambiguity to *Frankenstein*. Certainly, it is not improper to identify Victor with God, but it is vital to have in mind that the analogy is not enough to understand the character.

The fragmented way in which the characters appear in *Frankenstein* and the highly complex interplay of images, myths and fragments seem to be marks of the novel's discussion with the previous and subsequent literary and historical contexts. On the one hand, the chaotic aesthetic representation in *Frankenstein* can be seen as a reaction against the rational and perfect way in which neoclassic art understood man. On the other hand, it can be said to point at the artistic and philosophic developments of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Not only *Frankenstein*, of course, but the Romantic Movement open the way for more explicit representations of the fragmentation and complexity of modern man and modern world, like Modernism and Chaos Theory, for instance.

The reference to Prometheus, unlike that to *PL*, alludes to a mythic character with a vast range of signification and not to a single, specific text. What Prometheus is Mary Shelley talking about? The question often asked by readers and critics can never be answered, only speculated about. The identification of Frankenstein with Ovid's Prometheus again refers to him as the image of the creator. But here is a crucial point: the notion of a

creator/God is incompatible with the notion of a creator/Prometheus because the images of Prometheus and God are unable to coexist – the centre of Aeschylus' play is exactly the conflict between the Titan and Zeus; yet they are fused in the same personage.

Until here, I have examined images related to the Greco-Roman and Christian traditions, but Mary Shelley's work of mythical *bricolage* reaches beyond that. The next set of images I want to examine is derived from European and British literature. The image of Faust, for instance, has often been identified as one of the units that form the whole of the character Victor Frankenstein. The myth of Faust goes through a long trajectory before it reaches the European Romantic Movement. Its recreations and adaptations have been almost as various as those of *Frankenstein*. The first text in English literature to deal with the theme is Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*, published in 1604. Marlowe probably knew the story from oral accounts and from Johann Spies's *Historia von D. Johann Fausten*, known as the *Faustbuch*, published in 1587. This, according to Ian Watt (1997) was the first book about Faust, a real historical person. But the myth achieved its highest point of popularity during the Romantic Period, in Goethe's *Faust*, often considered his masterpiece. Goethe's reasons for writing a book based on this story go beyond admiration and fascination for the theme. He was engaged in the proposal of promoting a revival of popular culture, folklore and national myths. The story of Faust, besides being originated in the popular oral tradition, had the advantage of being originally German.

Because the versions of the story are so numerous and because the image of Faust contains a very broad range of significations, it is difficult to pursue the analogy between Faust and Frankenstein. It is certainly not the case of an intertextual relation or allusion to one specific literary work, as it occurs with the references to *Paradise Lost*. Rather it seems to me to hint at the theme of the search for knowledge and to beckon to the Romantic tradition of using myths put in practice in Mary Shelley's writing.

Goethe's *Faust* is a long poem published in two parts. The first, published in 1808, was probably known to Mary Shelley; the second was written in 1832, long after she had written her first novel. In *Myths of Modern Individualism*, Ian Watt comments on the difference, both of content and of style, in the two parts. The first book portrays a Faust that can be compared with Frankenstein. Both are outstanding students and both dare to exceed their own limits in their search, not only for knowledge, but also for self-realisation. But while Victor is severely punished in the end, Goethe's Faust is saved, and this implies they are placed in very different fictional universes, Victor in one marked by repression and Faust in one where liberty and transgression are acceptable. It might seem easier to approach Mary Shelley's hero to Marlowe's *Faustus*. Marlowe's Dr. Faustus and Victor Frankenstein are scientists fascinated with alchemy and interested in the occult sciences, and both will do anything to achieve unbound knowledge. Ultimately, both pay with their lives for breaking the established limits of nature. Although Victor demonstrates Faustian curiosity, ambition and wish for glory, Chris Baldick (1987:41-42) observes an essential difference between both characters:

It is tempting to jump from the continuing significance of the Faust myth in Western culture to the hasty conclusion that all modern stories of transgression are derivatives of it, but to do it with *Frankenstein* would be to obscure a vital feature of the novel's modernity. (...) If Frankenstein is any kind of Faust, he is a Faust without a Mephisto, that is, hardly a Faust at all.

As Baldick's statement reveals, although there may be striking parallels between both characters, one must not forget that several other intertexts and images are amalgamated in *Frankenstein*, and any single instance of intertextuality makes interpretations superficial, if other aspects of the character are neglected. This is the key to *Frankenstein's* modernity, as Baldick points out. But the images of Faust and of Frankenstein are certainly linked by the theme of individuality. Both symbolise the individual who, by his own means, no matter if politically correct or not, through lonely and hard work, finds a way to defy the oppression of authority (religious, social, academic) and to fight for the liberty of pursuing whatever goal he wishes to pursue: in that, both characters can be considered Romantic. Neither of them is exempt from pride, and none wishes to favour anyone besides himself. Also, both seem to be individualistic representations of the desires and fears of their societies. They differ from ordinary individuals in the bold disposition that enables them to achieve what others have wished to try but did not dare, or, eventually, gave up. Naturally, they must suffer the consequences of their deeds. Ian Watt says of Faust that he must not be seen as

the martyr of individualism but as its scapegoat. During a period of great ideological tension, he became the symbolic figure upon whom were projected the fears of the anarchic and individualistic tendencies of the Renaissance and the Reformation (1997:46).

Something similar can be said of Victor Frankenstein, but what Frankenstein ultimately epitomises is the turbulence of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In this perspective, he functions as a metaphor of his society's anxieties concerning the achievements of the Enlightenment and the French and Industrial revolutions, namely, the general enthusiasm with the civilising power of knowledge, the increasing faith in man's intellectual strength, the consequences of the advancement of science and the apprehension concerning the appearance of powerful machines that execute man's work with advantage, and the defiance of political and religious authority.

Faust and Frankenstein seem to be representative of two different historical moments of individualism. Ian Watt (1997) situates the rise of the notion of individualism in the beginning of the seventeenth century. Before that, he explains, man was only conscious of himself as part of a group, be it a nation, a race, or a family.

The issues of identity and individuality are clearly dramatised in Victor's Creature. Much of its suffering arises exactly from the fact that it is unable to relate itself to any such groups. The story of Faust, as presented by Marlowe, appears at the moment when the idea of individualism is starting to establish itself in European thought. Marlowe's and Spies's Faust, not having any established relationship with any other person, be it family, friends or a wife, are representative of this. Ian Watt observes that Faust is only related to his male servant and that this serves to enhance his self-importance.

Victor Frankenstein is the product of a society which is already conscious of individualism, and appears at a time when the idea acquired particular significance: the Romantic Movement. In the novel, Dr. Frankenstein continuously seeks for solitude: when he is working in the making of the Monster, when he is grieved by the death of his brother, when he attempts the creation of a female Creature, just to mention some instances. Indeed, social seclusion, either voluntary or forced, is one of the themes the novel approaches. The Creature, needless to say, seems to be the image proper of forced social seclusion. The De Lacey family are another instance; they were forced to leave their country and friends to hide in Germany. Solitude is one theme that seems to have surrounded Mary Shelley's life. Suffice it to remember that her most significant childhood memories concern the lonely hours spent by her mother's grave.

Solitude is also an important feature in two images, the Romantic Poet and the Mad Scientist, both related to Victor Frankenstein. As Baldick points out, Victor cannot be explained solely through the analogy with Faust, but that does not mean the analogy is not there. Victor seems a modern Faust in a modern society, where individualism is already widely accepted. His wishes, as well as his anxieties concerning those wishes, dominate him. Faust, in his society's rising individualism, exposed only himself to damnation. But Victor's social environment is quite different: in it the individual, being conscious of himself, is also conscious of himself as a member of his group. In this aspect, Victor's crime can be called social – he has set a destructive force free in the world, whereas Faust has not.

Following Kristeva's idea that all texts are related with their previous or synchronic literary corpus in mind, I prefer to conclude, with George Levine, (1979:9) that "the aspiration to divine creative activity (akin to Romantic notions about the poet) places Victor Frankenstein in the tradition of Faustian overreachers". Both personages are linked by a similar way of viewing the world, but to establish a direct intertextual reference seems to me to be inappropriate.

Another Romantic image that Mary Shelley incorporates to her novel, and which I also consider to be a thematic instance instead of an allusive intertextuality, is that of Rousseau's noble savage. The Creature seems to be the artistic epitome of Rousseau's idea. The summer of 1816 plays an important role, not only in Mary Shelley's description of scenery, but also in her readings of Rousseau. It was not by mere chance that the Shelleys and Lord Byron spent the 1816 summer in Geneva, as it is not by mere chance either that Frankenstein is, just like Rousseau, "by birth a Genevese" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:30). In Geneva, the group sought the atmosphere that had inspired the philosopher. Mary Shelley's ambiguous feelings concerning Rousseau can be traced in the characterisation of the Creature, and even in its speech. In Rousseauian fashion, the Creature tells Victor that its "spirits were elevated by the enchanting appearance of nature" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:111) and relates how it initially lived in harmony with nature, which provided him with food, water and warmth. It is when it desires to participate in society that it becomes acquainted with man's cruelty, and turns into a cruel monster. The image of solitude and social seclusion appears again to justify the Creature's deed,

I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy and I shall again be virtuous. (...) Believe me, Frankenstein, I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity; but am I not alone, miserably alone? You, my creator, abhor me; what hope can I gather from your fellow creatures, who owe me nothing? (Mary Shelley, 1994:96)

It is possible to identify, at least, three different ideas interconnected in this passage: 1) the idea of Rousseau's natural man; 2) Mary Shelley's claim for parental responsibility towards children, an issue that concerns her much and 3) Mary Shelley's discourse against social seclusion.

The social seclusion, which is so poignant to the Creature, was also experienced, at least in some degree, by Mary Shelley. She was stigmatised as the child of an unlawful union between an anarchist and a divorced radical. She was also the woman who eloped with a married Percy Shelley and wrote a horror story. For that, many people, even some of her friends, turned away from her. However, it is not for this that the theme of social seclusion has a special significance for *Frankenstein*. Its crucial importance is that it represents a Romantic obsession, which appears in the image of solitude. The Romantic character, either hero or villain, tends to be compellingly solitary. If we think of all the myths I have claimed to be intertextually related to Mary Shelley's novel, we notice two main constants among them: first, they are all stories that acquired special relevance and popularity during Romanticism, when they were reworked by several artists; second, they all portray a solitary protagonist. The case of Adam and Eve may be seen as the exception, even though I interpret them as a solitary couple.

The reason why myths of solitary protagonists – *Frankenstein* among them – were of great appeal to Romantic artists may have been the notion of

individuality, which emerged in the middle of the eighteenth century out of the ideas of Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham<sup>67</sup>. By the time the Romantic Movement took shape, around 1798 in England, the idea of individuality had already been assimilated, at least partly, by English society and manifestations of it started appearing in its artistic production. Another myth of the western culture which reflects this conscience of the individual and which was also of appeal to Romantic writers is that of the Wandering Jew. Its traces, as expected, are to be found in *Frankenstein*.

The protagonist of the story is a Jewish man who refused to help Jesus while he was on his way to the Calvary, bearing the Cross. As a punishment, the Jew was condemned to wander endlessly on the face of the Earth. The story dates back to the Middle Ages and, as Pierre Brunel explains, along its history, several new episodes were added to the narrative in a way that the original story was greatly modified. The similarities between the stories do not make themselves evident immediately. But if we look at the myth of the Wandering Jew as “a story pattern”, in the words of Northrop Frye, we can recognize in it the son who outrages the father, Jesus, and receives a longer-than-life punishment. Victor Frankenstein’s story can be said to follow a similar pattern.

The Romantic Movement was not concerned with the religious background of the story, but with the tragicity of the character’s destiny instead. The Romantic melancholy alienation from the world and the feeling

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<sup>67</sup> “Individualism”. Britannica Concise Encyclopedia. 2005. Encyclopædia Britannica Premium. Acesso em 6 de dezembro de 2005. <http://www.britannica.com/ebc/article-9367920>

of revolt against any possible form of authority were symbolized by the solitary and damned meanderings of the Wandering Jew.

Le Juif Errant exprime dans les Ballades une nostalgie, une solitude, une insécurité qui transforment sa silhouette didactique de pénitent chroniqueur, et que va s'approprier le premier romantisme, quitte à délaissier les termes initiaux du châtimeur. Voilà donc un héros légendaire qui, enrichi sur le plan psychologique et idéologique, propose les linéaments favorables à l'élaboration d'un mythe spécifique dans la mesure où il rassemble en lui un certain nombre de questions fondamentales : un homme outrage un Dieu et se trouve tragiquement condamné à attendre ou à marcher jusqu'à la fin de temps. (BRUNELL, 1988:892)<sup>68</sup>

The identification of Mary Shelley's novel with the story of the Wandering Jew appears at two points: there is the already mentioned defiance of a kind of superior authority, be it God's or nature's, but, most of all, I believe, there are the Creature's solitary rambles. Victor's Creature too wanders alone and shunned by all who meet it, as if it were guilty of a hideous crime. But differently from the Wandering Jew, the Creature had, until then, committed no crime. Later on in the novel it will indeed become guilty of terrible wrongs. But this mutation serves to translate two Romantic ideas: 1) the idea, expressed by the philosophy of both Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, that if you treat someone badly he will become evil; 2) the notion of mutability, that translated the feeling of insecurity and changes that dominated the time of the Romantic Movement. Both ideas are inseparably linked with the atmosphere of revolution witnessed by late eighteenth and early nineteenth century English society.

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<sup>68</sup> The Wandering Jew expresses, in the Ballads, a sense of longing, of solitude and insecurity that transform his didactic silhouette of a penitent chronicler and of which the first romanticism will appropriate, even if it neglects the initial terms of the punishment. Here is a legendary hero, which enriched psychologically and ideologically, proposes favourable lineaments to the elaboration of a specific myth that represents in it a certain number of fundamental questions: a man outrages a God and finds himself tragically condemned to wait or to wander up to the end of days. (Translation mine)

Mary Wollstonecraft's statement that "People are rendered ferocious by Misery"<sup>69</sup> is clearly objectified in the image of the Creature. The idea is in accordance with what Jean-Jacques Rousseau's highly influential image of the noble savage expresses. And Romantic poetry was also sensible to this claim;

And thou hast sought in starry eyes  
Beams that were never meant for thine,  
Another's wealth: - tame sacrifice  
To a fond faith! Still dost thou pine?  
Still dost thou hope that greeting hands,  
Voice, looks, or lips, may answer thy demands?<sup>70</sup>

The text of *Frankenstein* is full of restatements of this idea. The Creature often says things like "let him [man] live with me in the interchange of kindness, and instead of injury I would bestow every benefit upon him with tears of gratitude at his acceptance" (SHELLEY, 1994:140). But as the Creature's thrusts towards social interaction are constantly responded with rejection, Wollstonecraft's statement shows itself implacable. Its most explicit expression is through the insertion of Shelley's poem "Mutability" in the text of the novel. The poem treats of a subject that is at the core of English society's concerns at the time and, consequently, at the core of *Frankenstein* too: the unstable character of human life and feelings. The poem has four stanzas, of which the two last are quoted by Mary in pages 93 and 94:

We rest; a dream has power to poison sleep.

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<sup>69</sup> WOLLSTONECRAFT, Mary. Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution. (1794). Quoted in BALDICK, Chris. In *Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing*. Oxford: Oxford University, 1987, p. 22.

<sup>70</sup> SHELLEY, Percy Bysshe. "To \_\_\_\_\_" IN: SHELLEY, Percy Bysshe. *Shelley's poems. Volume One. Lyrics & shorter poems*. London: J.M DENT & SONS LTD, 1953, p. 158.

We rise; one wand'ring thought pollutes the day.  
 We feel, conceive, or reason; laugh or weep.  
 Embrace fond woe, or cast our cares away;

It is the same: for, be it joy or sorrow,  
 The path of its departure still is free.  
 Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow;  
 Nought may endure but mutability!

In the paragraphs that precede the poem, the image of mutability is discussed and appears as an insoluble contradiction: Victor speaks of nature as submitted to “the silent working of immutable laws” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:92) and, at the same time, acknowledges that “If our impulses were confined to hunger, thirst, and desire, we might be nearly free; but we are moved by every wind that blows” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:93).

The theme of mutability is not only maintained by textual references to it; it extends itself to vivid images and takes part in *Frankenstein's* plot. The image of creation, probably the one with the strongest metaphorical power in the text, provides a compelling image of mutability and of the feeling it produces. The moment of the creation marked for Victor Frankenstein the fulfilment of a project which had become the sole purpose of his life and to which he dedicated himself entirely. But because “the different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:55), Victor saw his dream immediately turn into his worst nightmare. During two years, states an astonished Frankenstein, he had worked hard

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 and 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. (SHELLEY, 1994:55)

The insertion of Shelley's poem in the text of the novel seems to me to have the role of reconciling these opposing feelings. However, the Romantic paradigm in which *Frankenstein* is inserted does not make the synthesis possible and the attempt to reconcile mutability and immutability in the poem ends in an insoluble paradox: the only thing in human nature which is immutable is, precisely, mutability.

The image of mutability is not to be discussed by itself, though. It is part of a major image, one that has had much importance in all western literature, since the time of the *Iliad*, and acquired special relevance during the Romantic Movement: the image of nature. By the time *Frankenstein* was written the feeling of change was constant in several spheres of society. Human knowledge about nature was also changing and, consequently, so was the way man comprehended nature and his place within it. As I have constantly been stating throughout this work, the English Romantic Movement was marked by a cluster of revolutions and *Frankenstein* carries this mark with it in several aspects: in its plot (by the actions of the characters), in its aesthetic form (by expressing the values of Romanticism in a form other than poetry and by establishing a new genre, later called science-fiction) and in its treatment of nature.

One difficulty of working with the concept of nature in a novel is that the vast majority of critical and theoretical studies about nature in eighteenth and nineteenth century English literature focuses on poetry. However, the artistic and philosophic framework in which *Frankenstein* was written was the same in which the romantic poets wrote. Their concerns,

doubts and feelings in regard to nature were essentially the same in a way that many of the observations of poetry scholars can be useful to this work.

The term nature, by the nineteenth century, was invested with a variety of meanings and looked at from a variety of points of view: scientific, artistic, religious, metaphysic and philosophical, for instance. A clear and complete definition of the term is, therefore, difficult to arrive at. According to Joseph Warren Beach, nature, in general terms, is understood as

The “beauteous forms” of the external world, as distinguished from man and his works. Nature is the “common countenance of earth and sky”; it is “all that we behold from this green earth”. It is, to begin with, whatever delights the eye with its beauty and animation, whatever charms the fancy and distracts the mind. (BEACH, 1956:32).<sup>71</sup>

Nineteenth century poets, however, “were fond of personifying Nature – or the virtually equivalent Earth – using the term as an abstraction so as to cover not merely the individual phenomena but also the principle that was supposed to underlie them all” (BEACH, 1956:4). Considering the English Romantic literature, then, we notice that the term nature was generally understood as the natural landscape of the countryside, as opposed to the city, and also as the organism which produces this landscape and to which man belongs.

It is also something of a challenge to account for how artists understood and worked with the relation between nature and literature in English Romanticism. The traditional view of this relation, postulated by Aristotle, that art is an imitation of nature, has a long and complex course in

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<sup>71</sup> The phrases marked by inverted commas are extracts from Wordsworth’s poems: “Tintern Abbey”, “The Prelude” and “Tintern Abbey”, respectively.

the history of ideas. One of the most significant texts in eighteenth-century English literature, Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism* (1711), conforms to this idea. Pope proposes that "The *Art* is best which most resembles *Her*"<sup>72</sup>. "Her", of course, refers to nature, which "With Spirits feeds, with Vigour fills the whole,/Each Motion guides, and ev'ry Nerve sustains;/*It self* unseen, but in th' *Effects*, remains" (POPE, 1961:248).

In this perspective, a good work of art is that which reflects nature. The highest instance of this achievement is classical Greek literature, which not only imitates nature but is constructed in conformity to its rules: "Those RULES of old *discover'd*, not *devis'ed*,/Are *Nature* still, but *Nature Methodiz'd*;/*Nature* like *Liberty*, is best restrain'd/By the same Laws which first *herself* ordain'd" (POPE, 1961:249). Pope's endorsement of the classical aesthetic treatment of nature is such that he advises his readers to "Learn hence for Ancient *Rules* a just Esteem;/To copy *Nature* is to copy *Them*" (POPE, 1961:255). Although the *Essay* has room for ambiguity, postulating the necessity of rational rules but acknowledging the existence of irrational processes in poetic creation, by claiming that "all were desp'rate Sots and Fools,/Who durst depart from *Aristotle's* Rules" (POPE, 1961:270), Pope is expressing the taste that dominated literature in the eighteenth-century. The laws of the ancients appear in the *Essay* to be identical with those of the nature their literature reflects.

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<sup>72</sup> POPE, Alexander. *Pastoral Poetry and An Essay on Criticism*. London: Methuen, 1961, p.247. All further references to *An Essay on Criticism* will be taken from this edition. I will here preserve Pope's spelling and italics.

*An Essay on Criticism* also hints at a theme which was at the centre of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries concern: the relation between nature and God. One of the most acclaimed passages of the *Essay* is

“First follow NATURE, and your Judgement frame  
By her just Standard, which is still the same:  
*Unerring Nature*, still divinely bright,  
One *clear, unchang’d*, and *Universal Light*,  
Life, Force, and Beauty, must to all impart,  
At once the *Source*, and *End*, and *Test of Art*.”

If we observe what qualities the *Essay* attributes to nature, we find them to be the same usually attributed to God. When nature is portrayed as unerring, divine and universal, and claimed to function as source and end, the analogy with God becomes manifest, God, here, understood as “the divine “principle” immanent in the universe” (BEACH, 1956:4). Joseph Warren Beach explains that several eighteenth and nineteenth century English writers conceived of God as such a principle instead of as the one who created the whole universe uniquely out of his powers and governs it at his free will. The universe, in this perspective is seen as “harmonious, and taken in large, benevolent towards man and other sensitive creatures” (1956:4). Needless to say, exceptions are always to be found. Such seems to be the case of William Blake, whose peculiar views of religion and nature differed, in general terms, from both his predecessors and his successors.

Pope’s *Essay* is emblematic of a tendency in neoclassic literature which grew mainly out of the enlightened view of religion and of the growing scientific knowledge: the desire to link the laws and forms of physical nature to the those of the cosmos. What the poem reveals of “neoclassical thought about Nature is the conception of a cosmos which, in its order and regularity

and harmony, reflects the order and harmony in the Divine Mind of its Creator”<sup>73</sup>. Indeed the two most relevant elements involved in the nineteenth-century concept of nature are science and religion. Both the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution instigated man to look differently at the world he lives in. The notion of God as the Almighty Creator was questioned and deemed improbable by rationalistic thinking. It followed that, since the traditional concept God had been shaken, so were concepts related to it, like the idea of sin, of hell and of man’s due obedience to the laws of the church, for example. Certainly, not all thinkers were against religion; actually what was being strongly refuted at the time was the manipulating authority of the church rather than religion itself. Science, however, did not supply answers to all the questions that a religious framework of thought, such as Catholicism, for example, tried to account for, even if not satisfactorily to everyone. Thus, alternative forms of religion, such as deism, for instance, were developed. As science progressed, man’s awe at the perfect system the cosmos seemed to form and science’s incapability of accounting for its origin came to point to the evidence of a divine “first cause”, or “first impulse” which would be the source of the whole system, humanity included.

Apparently antithetical, the religious and scientific views are fused in much of Romanticism’s nature poetry. There are

The scientific notion of regular and universal laws, [and] the religious notion of divine providence. These two notions were fused into one by the metaphysical notion – equally supported by contemporary religion and science – of natural phenomena as

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<sup>73</sup> POPE, Alexander. *Pastoral Poetry and An Essay on Criticism*. (Edited by AUDRA, E. and WILLIAMS, A.) London: Methuen, 1961, p. 219.

purposive in action and adapted to one another and to the general designs of the cosmos. (BEACH, 1956:5)

The idea of a universe purposively made to man, which gained strength with the advancement of science, and the freedom from religious conventions enabled man to see himself as an integral part of the cosmos, and, as such, he felt free to explore “the beautiful forms of the external world” and the organism of the cosmos, as nature was then generally conceived. Thence came the Romantic feeling of harmony with nature. However, approached more specifically, the term gains vaster and more complex significations and reveals itself immersed in the ambiguity suggested by the confluence of religious and scientific thinking.

In literature, the traditional ideas expressed by Pope’s *Essay on Criticism* were still of appeal to artists but they contrasted directly with Wordsworth’s revolutionary views of nature and of literary creation. Wordsworth’s ideas in *Lyrical Ballads* are, at least in part, the result of the change in artistic taste that was being felt in England since about the middle of the eighteenth-century. While Pope claims that artistic creation must follow the rules of nature and of the ancients strictly, Wordsworth claims for liberty. The intellectual and revolutionary ferment of the time made it very difficult for the Romantics to subject their literary works to neoclassical rules. “The spirit of the age”, as William Hazlitt put it, manifested in the artistic production its fascination with imagination, its desire to experiment with new forms and new metaphors. All the conflicting tendencies of thought that were flourishing at the time are present in most Romantic writers and are, at least partly, responsible for the ambiguous character of the

movement I mention in chapter one. The contradiction expressed by the ideas of Pope and Wordsworth persists throughout English Romanticism. W. K. Wimsatt, in his article “The Structure of Romantic Nature Poetry” says that;

Students of romantic nature poetry have had a great deal to tell us about the philosophic components of this poetry: the specific blend of deistic theology, Newtonian physics, and pantheistic naturalism which pervades the Wordsworthian landscape in the period of “Tintern Abbey”, the theism which sounds in the “Eolian Harp” of Coleridge, the conflict between French atheism and Platonic idealism which even in *Prometheus Unbound* Shelley was not able to resolve<sup>74</sup>.

The passage shows how much ambiguity is involved in the Romantic concept of nature and the different trends of thought that form its web of significances. The influence the three poets mentioned by Wimsatt have exerted on *Frankenstein* has already been mentioned and is made evident by the fact that the three of them have passages of their poems quoted in the novel. In the same way the composition of the characters and the use of myth, for instance, are marked by the ambiguous presence of various intertexts, sometimes contradicting, so is the concept of nature expressed by Mary Shelley in her first novel.

Nature, as it appears in *Frankenstein*, performs more the role of a structural element than that of mere background. It interferes directly in the mood and actions of the characters, and has indeed much similitude with Wordsworthian landscape. The different movements of scenery accompany the narrative structure: as a frame, there is the icy regions of the north pole; within, the bucolic scenes of Victor’s childhood, the environs of Geneva and

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<sup>74</sup> WIMSATT, W.K. “The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery” IN: GLECKNER, Robert F; ENSCOE, Gerald. (Eds.) *Romanticism: Points of View*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1970.

the scenes of his life as a student of natural philosophy; at the heart of the novel (the Creature's narration and parts of Victor's descriptions of his rambles in forests and cold mountains) the wild nature, which gives vent to wild feelings. Nature is the Romantic image most intensely dealt with in *Frankenstein*. It seems to function as the form that organizes all the other images I have hitherto studied here.

In Walton's frame narrative, the natural scenery is dominated by ice. Despite the desolation usually conveyed by such an atmosphere, the icy regions of the North Pole, in Walton's letters, is depicted as dangerous and threatening. He often relates how he finds himself "encompassed by peril and ignorant whether I am ever doomed to see again dear England [...]. I am surrounded by mountains of ice that admit of no escape and threaten every moment to crush my vessel" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:205). It is in this atmosphere of menace and desolation that the story opens and closes. In this atmosphere, too, the two-fold main character (Victor/Creature) appears for the first and last time. For each apparition of the Creature throughout the novel, nature carefully prepares and shows itself as violent, rebellious (as I have mentioned in the beginning of this chapter) and threatening. The Monster's first apparition in the narrative occurs in the following context: Walton's ship had been in imminent danger of destruction, surrounded by ice and enveloped by a thick fog. When the fog cleared away, captain and crew realized they were encircled by "vast and irregular plains of ice, which seemed to have no end". (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:32). Just when they were beginning to get too anxious about their situation;

A strange sight suddenly attracted our attention and diverted our solicitude from our own situations. We perceived a low carriage, fixed on a sledge and drawn by dogs, pass on towards the north, at the distance of half a mile; a being which had the shape of a human, but apparently of gigantic stature, sat in the sledge and guided the dogs. We watched the rapid progress of the traveller with our telescopes until he was lost among the distant inequalities of the ice. (Mary Shelley, 1994:23)

So terrible is the sight of the Creature that nature prepares a hostile and gloomy environment for it. The clearing away of the fog seems designed purposely to disclose a terrific element of nature, functioning as the opening of the curtains in a theatre.

The Creature's next apparition is announced by the murder of little William and takes place in Geneva, where he had gone in search of his creator. When Victor departs from Ingolstadt to Geneva, he relates the turbulent feelings that possess him;

My journey was very melancholy. At first I wished to hurry on, for I longed to console and sympathize with my loved and sorrowing friends; but when I drew near my native town I slackened my progress. I could hardly sustain the multitude of feelings that crowded into my mind. (...) I dared not advance, dreading a thousand nameless evils that made me tremble, although I was unable to define them. (SHELLEY, 1994:71)

Frankenstein, up to this point, has no idea of the cause of William's death, but he senses the presence of his doppelgänger, and by implication, the evils that will result of the presence. When he reaches Geneva, nature greets him violently with a storm. Excited with the tempest Victor "clasped [his] hands and exclaimed aloud, 'William, dear angel! This is thy funeral, this thy dirge!'" (SHELLEY, 1994:73). In Romantic fashion, he addresses his late brother, now a spirit of nature. But, once more, nature responds

monstrously. Frankenstein's invocation of his brother reveals his Creature to him, as if to accuse him of the murder.

As I said these words, I perceived in the gloom a figure which stole from behind a clump of trees near me; I stood fixed, gazing intently; I could not be mistaken. A flash of lightning illuminated the object and discovered its shape plainly to me; its gigantic stature, and the deformity of its aspect, more hideous than belongs to humanity, instantly informed me that it was the wretch, the filthy daemon to whom I had given life. (...) The figure passed me quickly and I lost it in the gloom (SHELLEY, 1994:73)

The second appearance of the Creature is almost identical to the first: as the clearing away of the fog functions as the opening of curtains in a theatre, in the passage above, the Creature once again emerges out of nature's bosom. A clump of trees stands as its backstage and a flash of lightning indicates the beginning of its performance. But this second apparition is, just like the first, a preparation for the moment when the Creature will have to be heard and faced. In the same way nature prepares itself to show the Creature, it also acts to conceal it, either in the gloom, in the ice or in the distance.

The Romantic idea of man existing as an integral part of the organism of nature is implicit in the two passages I quoted above. The Creature, in this perspective, is clearly an element of nature and Victor acts as if he were able to receive emanations of feelings from his native town and from the presence it guards. But Victor's relation with nature cannot be of harmony, as it used to be in his childhood when he contemplated with delight "the majestic and wondrous scenes [...] – the sublime shapes of the mountains, the changes of the seasons, [...] the silence of winter, and the life and turbulence of our Alpine summers" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:35).

In Victor's narrative, an almost obsessive emphasis on his desire to "penetrate into the recesses of nature and show how she works in her hiding-places" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:46) can be observed. From the first page of chapter one, when he starts telling his story, to the last of chapter four, before he relates the creation of the Monster, expressions similar to this are used six times<sup>75</sup>. Victor even acknowledges that "curiosity, earnest research to learn the hidden laws of nature, gladness akin to rapture, as they were unfolded to me, are among the earliest sensations I can remember" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:35). His act of creation, with its polemical symbolism, can be looked at from several points of view. From that of Romanticism, it may be interpreted as a violation of the laws of nature. When he "pursued nature to her hiding-places" and "animate[d] the lifeless clay" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:52), he broke nature's laws and, therefore, could not live harmoniously with it anymore, although he continues to be an integral part of it. That is why his relation with it is, after the creation, one of fear, as is evident from the extract of Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* quoted in chapter five:

Like one, that on a lonesome road  
Doth walk in fear and dread,  
And having once turned round walks on,  
And turns no more his head;  
Because he knows a frightful fiend  
Doth close behind him tread.

In approaching Geneva after William's death, Victor beholds the comforting natural scenes of his childhood with different feelings towards it. He exclaims

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<sup>75</sup> Chapters one to four form a whole of twenty-four pages.

Dear Mountains! My own beautiful lake! How do you welcome your wanderer? Your summits are clear; the sky and lake are blue and placid. Is this to prognosticate peace or to mock at my unhappiness? (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:72).

The same nature that had, up to the moment of the creation, been comforting and securing, has become sinisterly ambiguous, capable of mocking at Victor's misery. Nature, as Frankenstein's Creature, has turned monstrous to him. But while the Creature takes revenge against several people, nature only rebels against Frankenstein. That is why the extract of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" quoted in chapter eighteen refers to Clerval's feelings, and not to Victor's, as did Shelley's "Mutability" and Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner".

The sounding cataract  
 Haunted him like a passion: the tall rock,  
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,  
 Their colours and their forms, were then to him  
 An appetite; a feeling and a love,  
 That had no need of remoter charm,  
 By thought supplied, or any interest  
 Unborrow'd from the eye.

The tone of this poem is evidently different from the tone of the other poems quoted. Mary Shelley can only quote a poem that talks of a "him" that finds enough pleasure in nature not to need his imagination to make it more charming because she makes it refer to Clerval and to his feelings towards nature. Henry Clerval, "a being formed in the very nature of poetry" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:151), as one of Victor's doubles, experiences the Romantic interaction with nature for which Victor is not fit anymore.

Victor Frankenstein, it is true, has an ambivalent relation with nature. On the one hand, he is indeed a Romantic man, who delights in the

contemplation of nature and feels elevated by its beauties. Through him, the Romantic notion that “nature (whatever this word means) is a refining and purifying influence” (BEACH, 1956:31) is made manifest. On the other hand, though, he is a scientist, and one that has lived through the seventeenth-century Scientific Revolution and is presently experiencing the enthusiasm of contemporary science. Fascinated by the discoveries recently made, and eager to perform many others, Frankenstein has gone from romantically contemplating nature to scientifically exploring and violating it. In this sense, he may well represent the enlightened man, who have been taught by scientific progress not to fear nature anymore. These men, “the most learned philosophers” (...) had partially unveiled the face of Nature, but her immortal lineaments were still a wonder and a mystery” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:38). The sole purpose for which Frankenstein worked, “to unfold the deepest mysteries of creation” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:47), somewhat solved the mystery. But monstrosity was revealed to the daring scientist. In an anti-Romantic attitude, Victor is unable to understand that the horrible can be sublime.

Since then, because he is not fit for harmony with nature anymore, only monstrosity will be disclosed to him whenever he summons nature, or its elements, or its spirits. This was what happened when he tried “to animate the lifeless clay” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:52), when he invoked the name of his late brother and, most of all, in two crucial moments of the relationship between creator and Creature: the first, when Victor first talks to his Creature, and the second, when he decides to hunt it.

Summoning nature or its elements or addressing them is a common way through which Romantic heroes experience a harmonious interaction with nature. Thus Percy Shelley starts his “Ode to the West Wind”

“O Wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn’s being,  
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead  
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,  
(...)  
Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;  
Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh, hear!”<sup>76</sup>

But the speaker does not always address nature with admiration and reverence. Pain and suffering are also experienced, usually by those heroes that have exceeded human limits. Such is the case of Prometheus. In *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley has the Titan exclaim

No change, no pause, no hope! Yet I endure.  
I ask the Earth, have not the mountains felt?  
I ask yon Heaven, the all-beholding Sun,  
Has it not seen? The Sea, in storm or calm,  
Heaven’s ever-changing Shadow, spread below,  
Have its deaf waves not heard my agony?  
Ah, me! Alas, pain, pain ever, for ever!<sup>77</sup>

In the case of *Frankenstein*, whenever nature is invoked, the answer, as in the second apparition of the Creature, is immediate. Peter Brooks notices that “it may be apparent that the call upon nature the Preserver – the moral support and guardian of man – produces instead the Destroyer, the monstrous, what Frankenstein calls “my own vampire”<sup>78</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> SHELLEY, Percy Bysshe. “Ode to the West Wind”. IN: SHELLEY, Percy Bysshe. *Shelley’s poems. Volume One. Lyrics & shorter poems*. London: J.M DENT & SONS LTD, 1953.

<sup>77</sup> SHELLEY, Percy Bysshe. *Shelley’s poems. Volume Two. Longer Poems, Plays and Translations*. London: J.M DENT & SONS, 1953, p. 149.

<sup>78</sup> BROOKS, Peter. “Godlike Science/Unhallowed Arts’: Language, Nature, and Monstrosity” IN: LEVINE, G., KNOEPFLMACHER, U.C. (eds) *The Endurance of Frankenstein*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979.

The active role of nature is clearly observed when Frankenstein first meets his Creature. Upset by the death of his brother, he decided to search for consolation in the region of Mont Blanc and roam through the area until he reached Mer de Glace, on top of the mountain. “The ascent is precipitous, but the path is cut into continual and short windings, [...]. It is a scene terrifically desolate” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:93). As I comment in the beginning of this chapter, Victor faces several natural obstacles and employs much effort to be able to reach the spot he wishes to visit. The determination he shows in so doing may reveal that he is being impelled by some kind of natural force that directs him to the exact place where he will have to face and to listen to his doppelganger. Arriving at the Mer de Glace, “my heart, which was before sorrowful, now swelled with something like joy” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:94). This “something like joy”, probably provoked by the magnificence of the scenery, makes Frankenstein feel excited and confident enough to summon the spirits of nature to console him: “Wandering spirits, if indeed ye wander, and do not rest in your narrow beds, allow me this faint happiness, or take me, as your companion, away from the joys of life” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:94).

Nature seems (throughout the novel, but especially in this passage) to raise an accusing finger against Frankenstein. It will neither allow him happiness nor let him repose in their narrow beds. Instead it will throw back at his face the offence with which he has injured it. The sight, and more, the intercourse with his Creature is to him a punishment more severe than death. Face to face with “the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care [he] had endeavoured to form” (SHELLEY, 1994:55), he will have to assume

his responsibilities towards it. Nature's reply to Victor's summons is a powerful and threatening image of his Creature, such as he had not yet seen

As I said this I suddenly beheld the figure of a man, at some distance, advancing towards me with superhuman speed. He bounded over the crevices in the ice, among which I had walked with caution: his stature, also, as he approached seemed to exceed that of man. I was troubled (...) I perceived, as the shape came nearer (sight tremendous and abhorred) that it was the wretch whom I had created. (Mary Shelley, 1994:94)

As the Creature reasons with Frankenstein, its eloquence and erudition become evident. The Creature, which had been, up to this moment, characterized as monstrous, reveals itself to be humble and good instead. One of the Creature's most famous speeches, a reference to *Paradise Lost*, shows how it feels regarding his creator: "I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:96).

This short passage functions as a restatement of novel's epigraph: the Creature/Adam addresses Frankenstein/God hoping to find consolation in a father figure. Thus Victor passes from the role of Romantic hero to that of enlightened scientist and, eventually, to the role of God. This exchange of roles is as circular as the narrative structure and Victor will, therefore, make the movement back. In hunting the Creature, he performs the role of the scientist trying to repair the wrong done by his experiment. When his obsession leads him to death, he resembles the Romantic hero again.

In the Creature's narrative we have one of the most vivid and Romantic descriptions of nature and of how man may live in pleasant interaction with it. In this part of the novel, the several images with which Mary Shelley composed the character are left in the background and the image of

Rousseau's noble savage is given prominence. Differently from Adam, to whom the Creature had previously compared itself, the Creature was not born in a world purposely made for it. Even though both were abandoned by their creators, Adam was acquainted with his own body and with the world around him. The Creature came to existence completely ignorant of itself and of its environment. One of the first things he relates to Victor is that;

A strange multiplicity of sensations seized me, and I saw, felt, heard, and smelt at the same time; and it was, indeed, a long time before I learned to distinguish between the operations of my various senses. (...) I was a poor, helpless, miserable wretch; I knew and could distinguish nothing; but feeling pain invaded me on all sides, I sat down and wept. (Mary Shelley, 1994:98)

The way in which Rousseau philosophised about the essence of man and about his relation with nature and society was highly appealing to the Romantics and so was the sensibility he transmitted through his writings. In an age marked by the dominance of reason and by the enthusiasm with science, both in arts and in philosophy, Rousseau was concerned with understanding man and his behaviour in the world. He was not the first to theorise about the state of nature or the origin and character of civil society, but his philosophy was indeed innovative in adding feeling to the rationalist views of eighteenth-century thought and in passionately worshiping nature. The Romantic idea of man living in harmonious interaction with nature is marked by the influence of Rousseau's thinking. The passage above is an instance of how man in the natural state apprehends the world successfully through his senses. Although the Creature feels miserable, it gradually learns how to interact with nature

I lay by the side of a brook resting from my fatigue, until I felt tormented by hunger and thirst. This roused me from my nearly dormant state, and I ate some berries which I found hanging on the trees or lying on the ground. I slacked my thirst at the brook, and then lying down, was overcome by sleep. (Mary Shelley, 1994:98)

That the Creature is, to a great extent, modelled after the image of Rousseau's natural man is evident. On his second *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality among Men*, Rousseau defines the two principles which are prior to reason and which characterize man in his natural state: the instinct of self-preservation and abhorrence to the suffering of other creatures.<sup>79</sup> The passage above shows how the Creature searches nature for his self-preservation, how it learns to use its senses to survive more comfortably in the world that surrounds it. Its abhorrence to suffering, the feeling of piety, is made evident in several passages. When the Creature is sheltered next to the De Lacey's cottage, it pities them for their poverty and for the hard work they are forced to do in order to survive. When the Creature realizes that the family's self-preservation depends on the result of their work, it quits stealing food from their home and starts picking up wood for their fire. Its sole purpose is to help.

The way in which the Creature delights in contemplating nature is also emblematic of the natural man. When, at the end of the winter, it decides to employ its time in learning the human language, it cheerfully tells Victor

The pleasant and genial warmth of spring greatly altered the aspect of the earth. (...) The birds sang in more cheerful notes, and the leaves began to bud forth on the trees. Happy, happy earth! Fit habitation for gods, which, so short a time before, was bleak, damp, and unwholesome. My spirits were elevated by the enchanting

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<sup>79</sup> ROUSSEAU, Jean-Jacques. *Discours sur l'Origine et les Fondements de l'Inégalité parmi les Hommes*. IN : ROUSSEAU, Jean-Jacques. *Oeuvres Complètes*. Vol 2 Paris: Seuil, 1967, p. 210.

appearance of nature; the past was blotted from my memory, the present was tranquil, and the future gilded by bright rays of hope and anticipations of joy. (Mary Shelley, 1994:111)

In the same way as Victor in his happy days, the Creature, here, appears as an element of nature and harmoniously interacts with it. The changes in nature's appearance occasions similar changes in the Creature's mood and feelings. But the same ambiguity caused by the effect of the complex way Mary Shelley composed Victor is present in the Creature. Although, at first, it seems to be the typical representation of man in a natural state, it is interesting to observe that it expresses notions that only came to exist, in Rousseau's view, with the establishment of civil society, namely: the need for social interaction and more, the need for love. One of the several ambiguous aspects of the Creature is that it mingles typical features of the natural and of the civilized man. It is the clash of the Romantic with the enlightened points of view dramatized in Mary Shelley's novel. The same delight the Creature experiences from the contemplation of wild nature, it experiences from the contemplation of civil society. When it first arrives at a village and enters a hut, the owner flees at the sight of the Creature. However, despite the pain of being thus feared and judged, it relates its wonder at the comfort derivable from men's modifications of nature

I was enchanted by the appearance of the hut; here the snow and rain could not penetrate; the ground was dry; and it presented to me then as exquisite and divine a retreat as Pandemonium appeared to the daemons of hell after their sufferings in the lake of fire. (...) How miraculous did this appear! The huts, the neater cottages, and stately houses engaged my admiration by turns. The vegetables in the gardens, the milk and cheese that I saw placed at the window of some of the cottages, allured my appetite. (Mary Shelley, 1994:101)

This passage is in sharp contrast with the previous one: whereas, in the latter, the Creature appears in interaction with nature, here it is clearly praising civil society and the advantages it can offer. Of course it is here concerned with feelings and with the acquirement of affective relationships rather than with the acquirement of power or of wealth. In any case, the natural man, according to Rousseau, although capable of piety, was exempt from such feelings as loneliness and want of love and recognition.

Since the beginning of the Creature's narration we observe how it scrutinizes nature in the same way its creator had done before. Although it seems guided by feelings only, the Creature apprehends much of the world through reason, sometimes through quasi-scientific methods. The way it engages in learning human language, for instance, is essentially rationalistic. All of its learning process consists of observing, reflecting about the new data and then testing it. By observing the family, the Creature first discovers that "these people possessed a method of communicating their experience and feelings to one another by articulate sounds. (...) and I ardently desired to become acquainted with it." (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:108). His initial attempts at so doing, however, were all unsuccessful.

The Creature was scientific enough in its analysis of the De Lacey's language to discover the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign and the difficulties it causes: "the words they uttered, not having any apparent connection with visible objects, I was unable to discover any clue by which I could unravel the mystery of their reference" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:108). This difficulty was only overcome "by great application" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:108). Also by great application, the Creature came to realize that

language could also be written (when Felix read) and that other languages existed (when Safie spoke). The Creature's progress in language learning is accompanied by a change in nature: as the Creature advances in its objectives the Earth becomes greener and happier, as if to greet the success of one of its children.

From the moment the Creature has learned human language, both spoken and written, it leaves its natural state completely. That does not mean, however, that it had ever lived completely in it, for, as I said above, it is involved in ambiguity. Even Rousseau, in his writing, does not state that man has ever lived completely in a state of nature. But the acquirement of language marks the Creature's entrance into civil society. Its concerns are now, more than before, those of the civilized man. It eventually becomes acquainted with the system of society and with the nature of man through art and history. These perform the same role its senses once did alone: that of apprehending the world in which it lives. Through its readings, the Creature becomes entirely conscious of its situation in civil society or else, it learns that it is excluded from it, although inside it.

In his study of inequality among men, Rousseau distinguishes two kinds of inequality: a natural and a moral kind. When the Creature first sees his image I reflected in water, in an anti-narcissistic reaction, it realizes that it is negatively marked by natural inequality;

How was I terrified when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! 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 am indeed the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification. (Mary Shelley, 1994:109)

After the knowledge the Creature has acquired from its readings and from the observation of the De Lacey, it comes to understand that it also marked by a moral difference;

While I listened to the instructions which Felix bestowed upon the Arabian, the strange system of human society was explained to me. I heard of the division of property, of immense wealth and squalid poverty; of rank, descent, and noble blood. The words induced me to turn towards myself. I learned that the possessions most esteemed by your fellow creatures were high and unsullied descent united with riches. (...) And what was I? Of my creator I was absolutely ignorant, but I knew I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. (Mary Shelley, 1994:116)

Aware that it is pungently different from man and will not, therefore, find companions to rescue it from utter solitude, the Creature summons all its courage and reveals itself to the old blind De Lacey. When it is driven away by Felix, tormented by the worst offence it has hitherto suffered, the Creature's relation with nature changes dramatically. If, initially, it resembled the noble savage, living in harmony with nature, delighting in the contemplation of its beautiful forms and experiencing elevated feelings when in contact with them, now it resembles more a force of nature, and a destructive one. The image of the noble savage gives way to the image of Satan and of revolution. Echoing the passage from Canto X of *Paradise Lost* that Mary Shelley chose for the epigraph of her novel's first edition, the Creature exclaims: "cursed, cursed creator! Why did I live? Why, in that instant, did I not extinguish the spark of existence which you had so wantonly bestowed?" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:131) The Creature's speech, although similar to Adam's in content, is very different from it in tone. It is more violent and expresses more hate at the arbitrariness of creation and at

the misery of life. The difference in the character of the two speeches point to the fact that the Monster, at that moment, is modelled more according to the image of Satan than to that of Adam.

The identification is suggested by the Creature when it affirms that “I, like the arch-fiend, bore a hell within me” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:131). Also like the arch-fiend, the Monster is thirsty for revenge. To satiate its thirst, it will call forth all the cruelty taught it by humans: its victims will all be innocent. It will only destroy Frankenstein after it has destroyed everything that is dear to him and after it has left him as miserable as itself. In so doing, the Creature also offends nature, it also commits the crime of excess, just like Victor had done. Consequently, it will also become unfit for harmonious interaction with nature. The Creature eventually realizes that;

the labours I endured were no longer to be alleviated by the bright sun or gentle breezes of spring: all joy was but a mockery which insulted my desolate state and made me feel more plainly that I was not made for the enjoyment of pleasure (Mary Shelley, 1994:136)

After both Creature and creator choose revenge for the purpose of their lives, the text moves back to the scenery where it had started and the narrative closes its circular structure. The desolation of the Arctic dominates the novel again. However, the scenery of ice we have at the end presents an ambiguous difference: the image of ice appears in contrast with the image of fire.

The image of fire appears as such only in the last scene, but it is referred to two other times: at the moment of creation, when Victor infuses a “spark” of life into the Creature, and in the subtitle, through the reference to Prometheus. As one of the four elements, the symbolism attached to the

image of fire is too vast. In *Frankenstein* it is undeniably associated to the power of electricity and the energy of life. Victor infused into his Creature “a spark of being” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:55), but he was a scientist, a natural philosopher, and one very enthusiastic with the powers of electricity. It was indeed speculated by scientists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as Luigi Galvani, whether electricity alone could restore life to dead bodies.

In the last scene, surrounded by ice, in a place where death may easily be found, the Creature decides to die by fire. In this case, the image of fire comes to signify exactly the opposite of what it meant before. Thus, the end of a cycle is implied in this: fire initiated the Creature’s life, fire would terminate it. Considering the way the images of fire and ice are placed within *Frankenstein’s* narrative structure, we observe how they represent the Romantic idea of the fusion of opposites.<sup>80</sup> At the beginning of the novel, the dominant image is that of ice. This dominance establishes the oppressive and death-like atmosphere in which Walton is presented to the reader. But Walton brings the vividness of fire within him, and, through his ardent wish to find a friend, the modern Prometheus is brought to scene. Fire dominates now. The reader is presented to Frankenstein and his fiery excesses, to the scientific keenness for electricity, to the modern theft of the fire and, eventually, to the Creature and its fiery impetus.

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<sup>80</sup> The Romantic idea of the reconciliation of opposites, although significant in *Frankenstein*, appears as a minor theme. The two most evident images of this idea are the creation of the monster, trying to reconcile life and death, the natural and the super natural and the dream Victor has shortly after the creation. Besides life and death, the dream is an attempt to reconcile opposing feelings such as love and hate, lust and disgust.

The last scene performs the reconciliation of the two images. Andrew Griffin thinks the Creature's suicide by fire in an icy region functions as "a Romantic synthesis"<sup>81</sup>. The image of the suicide is the counterpoint of the image of creation, and, as such, it ends the cycle of life/death, offence/destruction and love/hate, which started with the creation. Accordingly, the Creature's last apparition is analogous to the first. Once more nature, having disclosed the Monster, manages to conceal it again: "he sprang from the cabin window when he said this, upon the ice raft which lay close to the vessel. He was soon borne away by the waves and lost in darkness and distance" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:215).

Nature in *Frankenstein*, as in much of English Romantic literature, is much more than a poetic image. The poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats is overflowing with invocations and personifications of nature. Northrop Frye would have said that personified nature is an archetype of literature, due to the frequency with which it appears. But, more than that, I believe it has achieved the rank of a recurrent character, and a complex one. In *Frankenstein*, it has the power of delighting, exciting, frustrating and even condemning other characters. It is not a thing to be only admired; it is to be sensed, feared and revealed. As a structural element, nature seems to me to function as the frame that organizes the other images.

All the images I have examined here are intrinsically linked to each other. To look at them separately is, therefore, a difficult task. The

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<sup>81</sup> GRIFFIN, Andrew. "Fire and Ice in Frankenstein". IN: LEVINE, G., KNOEPFLMACHER, U.C. (eds) *The Endurance of Frankenstein*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979, p. 51.

complexity and fluidity of their significance has, perhaps, made this work seem confused or disorganized. The quantity of turbulent feelings contained by these images, as well as by the whole story of *Frankenstein's* conception and composition, and the objectivity of academic research do not always work harmoniously together. However, the reconciliation of opposites is a Romantic pursuit.

*Frankenstein* has often been said to be a minor novel in the English literary tradition. I argue, with George Levine, that it is “the most important minor novel in English” (AHF, p.3) and one of the texts in prose most representative of the English Romantic Movement.

Although full of ambiguities, the images I have analysed are those which had much appeal to the major Romantic poets. The myths Mary Shelley makes use of, the doubts, feelings and even the people she represents in her first novel are those which were at the heart of the Romantic's concerns. Although indebted to the literary tradition that preceded it and anticipating the one that followed it, no other novel written in England from the end of the eighteenth up to the beginning of the nineteenth century engaged with so much passion and art in the Romantic proposal. *Frankenstein* establishes such a dialogue with its previous or synchronic literary corpus (KRISTEVA, 1980:66) that makes it one of the finest representative of the period during which it was produced.

I conclude this chapter with the words by Harold Bloom on this subject

What makes *Frankenstein* an important book, though it is only a strong, flawed and frequently clumsy novel is that it vividly projects a version of the Romantic mythology of the self, found, among other places, in Blake's *Book of Urizen*, Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* and Byron's *Manfred*. It lacks the sophistication and imaginative complexity of such works but precisely because of that *Frankenstein* affords a unique introduction to the archetypal world of Romantics<sup>82</sup>



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<sup>82</sup> BLOOM, Harold. "Frankenstein or the New Prometheus". *Partisan Review*, 32 (1965), 611-18, p.613.

## CONCLUSION

A variant of the question so often asked Mary Shelley, “How I, then a young girl, came to think of and to dilate upon so very hideous an idea” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:5) has been asked me as well: how I, a young girl, came to be so interested and so much involved with so very hideous a novel. Even now, after swimming through the meanders of *Frankenstein* for two years, this remains a difficult question to answer. Still, some of the conclusions I reach lead to the fact that what makes this novel so intense and perennial is that it provides us with a very poignant dramatization of man’s strife to adapt to society.

The confused feelings I have towards myself, the strangeness with which I experience the world and the difficulty I often find with self-expression are potentialized in the novel. That *Frankenstein* has had a similar appeal to many readers is evident from the great number of artistic and literary offsprings it has originated. The way it represents the deepest human feelings, concerns and doubts has made of it a Romantic work of art with enduring significance. Precisely because of that, *Frankenstein* has been called a modern myth, because it incorporates a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” to a story, precisely the feelings that have been haunting

man from ancient times, and continue to hide at the core of modern man's concerns.

The image of creation, for instance, is an archetypical representation of ancient and modern concerns. The themes of life and death, needless to say, are perennial human worries. The possibility of restoring life to the dead, or of creating life, has obsessed human imagination for centuries, and this discussion has probably never been so up to date as it is today. Three very recent issues of the widely known magazine *Super Interessante* are "When does life begin?" (Nov, 2005), "Does God exist?" (Dec, 2005) and "When does life end?" (Dec, 2005). *Frankenstein*, in many ways, consists of a Romantic dramatisation of these three questions. Victor directly refers to the issue of when life really begins and ends when he states that "To examine the causes of life, we must first have recourse to death" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994, 49) and although the novel is not concerned directly with God, there are a few references to His power of creation in the text, including one by the author herself in the Introduction: "Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:9). The introduction of *Paradise Lost* in the novel, read as true history by the Creature, and the structural similarities between both texts, also point to a context in which the presence of God is implied<sup>83</sup>.

It is in the image of the Creature, though, that I find a poignant representation of human feelings and a desperate effort to comprehend the

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<sup>83</sup> Although the Romantics rejected the rules imposed on society by the Church, and although Shelley was an atheist, the Romantics did not altogether reject the notion of a superior force. In *Frankenstein*, the role of God is, by several artistic devices, transferred to nature.

nature of man and of society. In the image of the Creature, we find the embodiment of primitive human concerns, such as the struggle for life and for the satisfaction of physical needs, and the most sophisticated question human philosophy has ever been able to make: "What was I?" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:117).

It is interesting that Victor is also primarily concerned with a very sophisticated and bold philosophical enquiry, "Whence (...) did the principle of life proceed?" (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:49). However, Victor's search bears one significant difference: it is not provoked by pain. Whereas the Creature is moved by despair to seek relief from his sufferings, Victor is moved by curiosity. Of course, he does not remain exempt from pain throughout the story. By the end, his feelings are mixed with his Creature's and, as in most gothic frameworks, their deaths, through narrative strategies, enables Walton to remain alive.

Human curiosity, which has been responsible for both progress and destruction, is another archetypical image dealt with in the novel. In *Frankenstein*, the concept of curiosity reflects the clash of Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman traditions. In both traditions, human beings are warned by their gods about the dangers of curiosity, and in either case man succumbs to curiosity, to be later punished. *Frankenstein* makes direct reference to this image in the two traditions. Prometheus was moved much by the same feeling that impelled Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit, the pleasure of making an experiment. One may argue that Prometheus did not steal the fire to favour himself. This is indeed the position taken by Shelley when he states, in the preface to his drama *Prometheus Unbound*, that the

titan is exempt from ambition. However, if we remember that in Aeschylus' play, Prometheus praises himself as the benefactor of mankind and creator of all human arts, we sense, once again, a taste of ambition behind the transgression that has caused the ultimate punishment. Victor, like Adam, experiences a strong sense of remorse after eating the forbidden fruit of knowledge.

The myriad of images of transgression represented or just alluded to in *Frankenstein* is a reflection of the revolutionary spirit of Romanticism. Impelled by the motto of the Enlightenment, "Dare to know", The Romantics have reacted against the oppression imposed on freethinking by many social institutions. They objected to the notion imposed by the church that "God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies"<sup>84</sup>. They also objected to scientific rationalism and to the contemporary feeling that the universe was about to be explained by the progress of science. Independently from biased points of view, the Romantics gave vent to their imagination. They were free to search for knowledge out of the restrictions of church or science. The Romantic search for knowledge that *Frankenstein* so vividly portrays is echoed by other Romantic texts. This image is also called forth, for instance, in Lord Byron's *Manfred*, as stated by Goldberg:

Mrs. Shelley's book is paralleled most significantly,(...) by her own contemporaries. In Byron's *Manfred* (1817), for example an analogous 'quest of hidden knowledge' leads the hero increasingly toward a 'solitude ... peopled with the Furies.' Manfred's avowed flaw ('though I wore the form,/I had no sympathy with breathing

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<sup>84</sup> BLAKE, William. "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell". IN: ERDMAN, David V. (ed) *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965, p.33.

flesh') rises from the same ethical assumptions implicit in the guilt-ridden consciousness of Victor Frankenstein.<sup>85</sup>

Shelley's *Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude*, a poem which has several traits in common with *Frankenstein*, also works on the same image. In the preface, Shelley offers the reader his view of the youth who figures in the poem,

He drinks deep of the fountains of knowledge, and is till insatiate. The magnificence and beauty of the external world sinks profoundly into the frame of his conceptions, and affords to their modifications a variety not to be exhausted.<sup>86</sup>

The frequency with which images of transgression, revolution, solitude and obsessed quest for knowledge (which are essentially similar) appear in Romantic texts point, mainly, to two factors: 1) the claim of scholars such as Arthur Lovejoy that the Romantic Movement has few or no distinguishing and unifying characteristics is arguable; 2) the Romantic writers relied very much on their historical and social context and, through their imaginative powers, turned the concerns of their times into poetic images.

Much has been said, along this work, about how the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were shaken by a whirl of revolutions. Revolutions are necessarily the result of a transgression and, once freed from what they rebelled against, people are at liberty to search for the knowledge that had been hitherto kept from them.

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<sup>85</sup> GOLDBERG, M. A. "Moral and Myth in Mrs. Shelley's *Frankenstein*", *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 8 (1959). IN: SCHOENE-HARWOOD, Berthold (ed.). *Mary Shelley. Frankenstein. A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*. Cambridge: Icon Books, 2000, p. 24.

<sup>86</sup> SHELLEY, Percy Bysshe. *Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude*. IN: SHELLEY, Percy Bysshe. *Shelley's poems. Volume One. Lyrics & shorter poems*. London: J.M DENT & SONS LTD, 1953, p. 162.

The French Revolution, one of the most exciting transgressions that modern<sup>87</sup> Europe has witnessed, along with the faith in human potential promoted by the Enlightenment, excited English society to break the limits it no longer felt obliged to respect. Without them, thirst for knowledge and for novelty came naturally. The Industrial and Scientific Revolutions were the historical consequences of this process. In the midst of this turmoil, we find early nineteenth-century man, lost in face of the uncertainties of his times, but eager to go farther. Frightened by his own hideous discoveries about human nature, this man seeks isolation from the society that has corrupted him and his fellow beings. This is the Romantic man. For some reason, he does not fit the world he lives in. He searches for an answer to his displacement, but the understanding he wishes to acquire seems unattainable. Yet, he finds within himself the only means by which answers can be procured: his imagination.

*Frankenstein* captures this man and scrutinizes his soul and his mind. It brings everything to light and to public notice, the good and bad features of this man and his world. Ambiguities and contradictions, a swirl of feelings and of discoveries are disclosed in the novel. Mary Shelley's imaginative powers filled her first novel with images she borrowed from her social and historical context and also from the works of her contemporaries. *Frankenstein* has much of Shelley's humanism and enthusiasm about science. At the same time, it also has much of the Byronic gloom and sensuality. The cult of supernatural forces that we find in Coleridge and the

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<sup>87</sup> By 'modern' I mean post-medieval Europe.

most sincere and affectionate contemplation of nature that characterises much of Wordsworth's poetry are also found in *Frankenstein*.

It is in this sense that I claim Mary Shelley's first novel to be a fine representative in prose of the English Romantic Movement. Although the works of Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen are often quoted among the great English Romantic works, *Frankenstein* displays such a complete arsenal of Romantic images as is not often found in prose works of the period.

The fact that the greatest English Romantics did not write prose and that French Romanticism, for instance, produced great Romantic prose writers such as Alexandre Dumas, Victor Hugo and Gui de Maupassant, may have made English literary criticism find it necessary to search their Romantic literature for a great novelist. Because *Frankenstein* was such a polemical and audacious novel, the name of Mary Shelley was rejected and those of Walter Scott and Austen chosen instead.

It is very difficult to ascertain why *Frankenstein* was received with so much uneasiness in its first publication. However, the investigation I have made concerning the novel's composition, context and critical fortune points to some evidence. Mary Shelley seemed to oppose all possible standards of behaviour imposed by the society of her time. This is felt both in her life and in her literary practice. She was the daughter of an unlawful union between an anarchist and a feminist. And, to make matters worse, her mother had had another daughter from another unlawful union. At the age of 16, Mary Shelley eloped with a married man, and one who had been expelled from University for writing a pamphlet in favour of atheism. The suicides of her half-sister, Fanny Imlay, and of Shelley's first wife, Harriet Shelley, seemed

to accuse her and might have made her feel as monstrous as the Creature in her novel. These facts have certainly made Mary Shelley seem very loathsome to the conservative English society. And, of course, all those traumatic experiences left deep strong marks on her psychology, marks that would later be artistically represented in *Frankenstein*.

Besides that, Mary Shelley never seemed to have behaved as a “proper lady”<sup>88</sup>. She was a woman writing at a time when literary writing was predominantly a masculine field. And she was a woman writing about man’s business, such as science and acquirement of knowledge. If even Byron and Shelley were criticised by society for following their ideals, it was all the worse for Mary Shelley who was not well accepted even by some intellectuals who recognised Shelley and Byron as great poets but were not prepared to accept her behaviour. Women were not supposed to write books and writers such as Mary Shelley and Jane Austen are exceptions. However, more meaningful than the events of her personal life are the peculiar features of her “hideous progeny” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:10). *Frankenstein*, as many events in the author’s life, was a scandal because it broke so many rules. It is a prose work written at a time when the literary production consisted mostly of poetry. It was identified with contemporary gothic romances but its preface attempts to place the novel in the great tradition of Homer, Shakespeare and Milton, which no other gothic story had dared do before. Moreover, it presents that revolutionary and poignant content I have mentioned above. All these factors complicated *Frankenstein*’s reception.

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<sup>88</sup> Here I refer to Mary Poovey’s work *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*. See chapter 1.1, page 32-33.

Northrop Frye works on a notion that may help us understand more of the possible reasons for *Frankenstein's* rejection. He distinguishes between two kinds of prose works: the novel and the romance. Novels are works that deal with human beings and their behaviour within a stable social environment. Their conventions are similar to those of the comedies of manners, and Jane Austen's novels are an emblematic example. Romances, to Frye, are more revolutionary than the novel, they follow conventions that approach the fantastic tales and deal with characters within their subjectivity. A good representative of this sub-genre is Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. Romance, so Frye argues, has existed since the times of ancient Greece (*The Secular Scripture*, p. 4), whereas the novel is a displacement of it (*Anatomy of Criticism*, p.188)

At the time of *Frankenstein's* publication, the novel was becoming a firm tradition in English literature, a tradition established by outstanding male authors such as Henry Fielding (1707-1754), Samuel Richardson (1689-1761) and Laurence Sterne (1713-1768). On the other hand, gothic romances, such as the works of Ann Radcliffe and Horace Walpole, were regarded as mere entertainment, not as art. *Frankenstein* had to undergo a slow, difficult trajectory from rejection and invisibility, into being accepted as gothic entertainment and, very recently, as a piece of literature. In spite of having so much in common with gothic romances, *Frankenstein* is essentially different from them. Still, its reliance on imagination and its displays of passion and fury kept it from being treated as a novel. The preface is written by Percy Shelley as an attempt to link the novel to canonical literature. The very fact that the novel is written in an epistolary

form, in the fashion of Richardson's *Pamela*, indicates an effort, even if unconscious, to write a novel that would follow the accepted standards of the time. But Mary Shelley was a Romantic, although – like all the other leading authors in the Romantic movement – she was not fully aware of that. From the mixture of her possible commitment to the English tradition of realistic novels and her unconscious Romantic bend, an aberration was created: a Romantic work in prose, a romance with a high standard of literary quality. But literary critics contemporary to Mary Shelley did not know how to deal with that.

As Northrop Frye explains, “in the twentieth century, romance got a new lease of fashion after the mid-fifties, with the success of Tolkien and the rise of what is generally called science fiction” (FRYE, 1975:4). Feminist critics rescued *Frankenstein* from obscurity at a time when literary criticism had already acquired the proper tools to handle such a work. Thus was Wordsworth's claim that a poet creates the taste by which he will be appreciated confirmed.

Curiously enough, the same feature responsible for the rejection of the novel – its “textual monstrosity” – is today responsible for much critical attention devoted to it. As I have tried to demonstrate along this work, *Frankenstein*, very much as the Creature it introduces, is created out of several bits and pieces stitched together. This intriguing analogy between the character and the book is not mine; it is Mary Shelley's. When she referred to her first novel as “my hideous progeny,” (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:10), the author, probably unconsciously, called attention to the striking similarities between them. Both are motherless, since *Frankenstein* was published

anonymously. Both were spurned when they appeared in public and both have outlived their creators. Both character and book cause uneasy reactions from society: the Creature for its physical monstrosity and the book for its textual monstrosity.

The way images and references are inserted in *Frankenstein* is chaotic. Images as contradictory as those of Rousseau's noble savage, Adam, and the French Revolution, cluster around the same character. The profusion of intertextual references covers a significant portion of Western literature and links the novel to what has been called the canon. Traditions as diverse as those of Aeschylus, Dante<sup>89</sup> and Goethe, for instance, are reconciled through the insertion, in *Frankenstein*, of images borrowed from their works.

The intricacy with which the novel's "tissue of quotations"<sup>90</sup> is woven is responsible for the ambiguity of the images. Because of the interplay of rationality and irrationality the novel displays, this work may have followed a rather similar path. Whereas some things can rationally be interpreted, viz. that the image of Victor Frankenstein is, at least in part, an image of the Romantic ideal of creative imagination, others remain unaccounted for and cannot be ascertained by rationalism. Such is the case of knowing if *Frankenstein* praises or criticises science.

It is undeniable that *Frankenstein* preserves traits of the neo-classic and realistic tradition in literature, and that it precedes it and anticipates traits of the Victorian tradition that will follow it. It cannot, as any good work

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<sup>89</sup> Mary Shelley associates the image of the Creature to the fantastic images created by Dante in the *Divine Comedy* in chapter five: "when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as not even Dante could have conceived." (MARY SHELLEY, 1994:56)

<sup>90</sup> BARTHES, Roland. "The Death of the Author" IN: WALDER, Dennis. *Literature in the Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

of literature, be said to be *entirely* atuned to the agenda of the Romantic Movement. But we must remember that the same applies to each of the Romantic icons, starting with Lord Byron himself. Besides, the Romantic Movement is contradictory in its essence, and none of its protagonists were aware of the new fashion they were shaping. For all that, I understand that *Frankenstein* is all the more of a Romantic construct, and should be raised to its due position as the greatest Romantic prose work written in England in the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.



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## APPENDIX A – Works by Mary Shelley

(Based on *Mary Shelley*, by Miranda Seymour)

### ✦ Novels:

#### 1. ***Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*. Lackington, 1818.**

Certainly Mary Shelley's most famous work. It has been the inspiration for several films, plays, cartoons and books. The novel dramatizes modern society with so much vividness and has become so widely known that critics often refer to it as a modern myth.

#### 2. ***Valperga; or The Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca*. Whittaker, 1823.**

This novel tells the story of Castruccio Castracani, a medieval ruler of Bagni di Lucca, where the Shelleys spent the summer in 1818. Castruccio fascinated Mary Shelley for his democratic aspirations. The novel accounts for the ambiguity of such aspirations when contrasted with the protagonist's thirst for acquisition. Like Victor Frankenstein, his ambition causes the loss of those he loves. Not escaping the biographic tone that underlies most of Mary Shelley's writings, the character Countess Euthanasia "is an embodiment of Percy Shelley's political ideals" (SEYMOUR, 2000:252) and Beatrice of Ferrara resembles the author in several aspects.

#### 3. ***The Last Man*. Colburn, 1826.**

Mary Shelley's best-known work after *Frankenstein*, this is a futuristic novel which shows England as a republic and tells the story of how the world is devastated by a plague until but one man wanders alone on the face of the Earth. The character Lord Raymond is clearly modelled after Lord Byron and the characters Adrian, Second Earl of Windsor and Lionel Verney, after Shelley. Like Frankenstein, Verney displays much ambition for recognition. He eventually becomes the last man on Earth.

Lionel Verney's sister, Perdita, lives in a cottage in the middle of the woods and stands as an image of the Romantic man living in harmony with nature.

#### 4. ***The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck, A Romance*. Colburn and Bentley, 1830.**

This is based on a self-declared Duke of York with whom Mary Shelley became acquainted through Godwin's *History of England*.

#### 5. ***Lodore*. Bentley, 1835.**

In this novel, Mary Shelley "challenges masculine authority over children" (SEYMOUR, 2000:433). The character Ethel portrays Mary Shelley's own

situation when divided between Godwin and Shelley and the protagonist Cornelia Lodore also contains strong autobiographical traits. Miranda Seymour (2000:433) claims that “the main theme of *Lodore* is love in all its forms”, which could perhaps be said of most of Mary Shelley’s work.

#### **6. *Falkner: A novel.* Saunders & Otley**

This was the last novel Mary Shelley published during her lifetime. It gave rise to some unsympathetic critiques based on the grounds that it advertised the crimes of adultery and murder. Elizabeth Raby, Falkner’s daughter, first appears in the novel at the age of six crying by her mother’s tomb, a scene that echoes scenes of Mary Shelly’s own childhood.

#### **7. *Matilda.* Written 1819-20. First published by University of Carolina Press, 1959.**

This is an autobiographical novel discussing the relationship of father and daughter, written in 1819, but posthumously published only in 1959.

#### **✦ Plays:**

These are plays Mary Shelley wrote under the enthusiasm for and influence from classical Greek literature.

1. “*Proserpine, a Mythological Drama in Two Acts*”, *The Winter’s Wreath*, 1831.
2. “*Midas!*”, *Proserpine & Midas*, ed. André Henri Koszul (Humphrey Milford), 1922.

#### **✦ Short Stories:**

1. *Mary Shelley: Collected Tales and Stories.* Ed. Charles E. Robinson (Johns Hopkins University Press), 1976.

This a collection of short stories Mary Shelley wrote at different times of her life. It contains her best-known tale, “The Mortal Immortal”, which shares *Frankenstein’s* concern with life and death. It tells the story of an alchemist’s assistant that drinks from the elixir of life.

2. *Maurice, or The Fisher’s Cot.* Ed. Claire Tomalin. First Published 1998.

This is a short story Mary Shelley had written for a girl she had met when living in Italy, before Shelley’s death, and which had been lost. It was published by Claire Tomalin only in 1998. Miranda Seymour (2000) notes that the fact that public interest was intensely roused by the discovery of a new text by Mary Shelley shows how much scholar interest on her has grown.

✧ **Travel Works:**

1. ***History of a Six Weeks' Tour through a Part of France, Switzerland, Germany and Holland: With Letters Descriptive of a Sail round the Lake of Geneva, and of the Glaciers of Chamouni.* Hookman & Ollier, 1817. (Written with Percy Shelley)**

This is a travel book which tells the events of her 1814 elopement with Shelley to those countries and which contains vivid descriptions of the places they visited. Passages of this book provided much of Mary Shelley's ideas for the setting of *Frankenstein*.

2. ***Rambles in Germany and Italy, in 1840, 1842 and 1843.* Moxon, 1844.**

This is an account of her travels with her son Percy Florence and his wife. In 1840, 42 and 43, after several years of fixed residence in England, Mary Shelley revisited many of the places she had been to with Shelley. The *Rambles* presents her mature view of those places and of the happy times of her youth she spent there.

✧ **Editorial Work:**

1. ***Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley.* John & Henry Leigh Hunt, 1824.**
2. ***The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley.* Moxon, 1839.**
3. ***Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments, By Percy Bysshe Shelley.* Moxon 1840 and 1841.**

After Shelley's death, Mary Shelley was left alone to provide for herself and her son. Sir Timothy Shelley, her father-in-law, would not only deny her financial help but would also try to keep her from publishing a biography of Shelley. She decided, then, to publish annotated editions of her husband's works, in which she managed to work very much on the relation of his poems with both his and her life. It was with much difficulty that she eventually came to publish these three works.

✧ **Biographical Essays:**

1. ***Lives of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of Italy, Spain and Portugal.* (Part of Rev. Dionysus Lardner's *Cabinet Cyclopaedia*). Longman, 1835 and 1837.**

To this work, Mary Shelley wrote essays on several thinkers as Petrarch, Boccaccio, Machiavelli, Metastasio, Goldoni, Alfieri, Monti and Foscolo. She contributed almost fifty essays to this edition (SEYMOUR, 2000:434).

**2. *Lives of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of France.* (Part of Rev. Dionysus Lardner's *Cabinet Cyclopaedia*). Longman, 1839.**

It was to this work that Mary Shelley worked on the life of Rousseau. The extensive essay she wrote reveals her ambiguous feelings towards the philosopher. While she praises the sensibility of his philosophical enquires, she expresses her indignation for the way he abandoned his illegitimate children.

**APPENDIX B – Castle Frankenstein**

Castle Frankenstein as it was in 2001. The Shelleys and Claire Clairmont probably visited the Castle in 1815 during their boat trip down the Rhine. The diaries of Mary Shelley and Clair Clairmont present different accounts of those days.

The passage in *Frankenstein* that relates Victor's and Clerval's trip to the same place is based on Mary Shelley's diaries and impressions of the region.

**APPENDIX C – Castle Chillon**

The group assembled at the Villa Diodati in 1816, during one of their tours of the lake, visited the Castle Chillon, where Lord Byron is said to have written his poem “The Prisoner of Chillon” in one night.

It should be remarked that the mountains that so much impressed the group can be seen behind the Castle.

## APPENDIX D – Mont Blanc

Erro!



Mont Blanc could be seen from the Villa Diodati on sunny days. Byron, Polidori, the Shelleys and Claire made a tour of the mountain from July 21<sup>st</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> in 1816. The impression it caused them can be observed not only in *Frankenstein*, but also in Shelley's poem "Mont Blanc".

## APPENDIX E – Villa Diodati



A view of the Villa Diodati as it was in 1816. There are rumours that Lord Byron rented the house because John Milton, Voltaire and Rousseau had stayed years before.

At a website of the University of Valencia is the following information: “Lord Byron alquiló la Villa Diodati a las orillas del Lago Ginebra, donde *John Milton*, el autor de *Paradise Lost*, había estado de visita en 1600. *Rousseau* and *Voltaire* también residieron en estas orillas. Mary consideraba el lugar culturalmente sagrado.”

Found at: <http://mural.uv.es/magilcas/Elveranode1816.html>  
Access on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

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**APPENDIX F – Odevaere's *Lord Byron on his Death-Bed***

This painting by Joseph-Denis Odevaere dates from 1826, two years after Lord Byron's death. It is very representative of the ambiguity I have mentioned as inherent to the Romantic Movement. Lord Byron, one of the icons of Romanticism, is shown wearing Greek clothes and in a room with Greek decoration.

The painting is, of course, a reference to the poet's death in Greece and depicts him as one who died gloriously fighting for the country's liberty. The ambiguity remains, though, in the fact that one of the greatest Romantics is an admirer of classic literary standards.

This painting is now at the Groeninge Museum in Bruges, Belgium.

**APPENDIX G – Russell’s *Creator meets Created on the Mer de Glace***

Elsie Russell painted his image of the meeting between Frankenstein and his Creature in 1995.

As Carl Hackert, his imagination was impressed by the Mer the Glace, scene of the meeting. However, unlike Hackert, who represents the desolation of the place with the white of the snow, Russell represents it with the dark of the night.

**APPENDIX H – Fuseli's *The Nightmare***

The painting that appears in the films *Gothic* and *Haunted Summer* as having impressed Mary Shelley's imagination is Fuseli's representation of the relation between love and death, of Gothicism and of the supernatural.