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**FAMILY RESEMBLANCES: INTERTEXTUAL
DIALOGUE BETWEEN FATHER AND DAUGHTER
NOVELISTS IN GODWIN'S *ST. LEON* AND
SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN***

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The importance of struggling with another's discourse, its influence in the history of an individual's coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous. One's own discourse and one's own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other's discourse.

Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel"

A brief survey of literary history in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries yields several prominent examples of "intertextual dialogue": Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791), the collaborations of Goethe with Schiller in the journals *Die Horen* (1795-97) and *Musenalmann* (1796-1800) and with Wieland in *Taschenbuch auf das Jahr 1804*, and Coleridge's controversial appropriations of German sources in *Biographia Literaria* (1817). Dialogue in these texts reflects a process fraught with more complexity than the term usually implies, since the emergence of each text presupposed a struggle with more authoritative discourse. There are enough additional examples, such as the Schlegel-Tieck translation of Shakespeare (1797-1801, 1810), Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), and Eckermann's *Gesprache mit Goethe* (1836-48), to suggest that intertextual dialogue is one of the paradigmatic modes of Romanticism. These examples also illustrate Mikhail Bakhtin's characterization of literary history as an arena of "struggle constantly being waged...against various kinds and degrees of authority": the young Schiller and the amanuensis Eckermann with Goethe, Boswell with the "Great Cham," Coleridge with Kant and Schelling, and Schlegel and Tieck with Shakespeare.¹

For Bakhtin the generic locus of this struggle is the novel and an intertextual dialogue that exemplifies the struggle to achieve individuated discourse during the Romantic Period is configured by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818) and William Godwin's *St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century* (1799). The intertextual ligatures connecting these texts have previously been acknowledged, but never fully revealed.² The present discussion is built on this previously unvisited site and is intended to satisfy two

objectives: first, to suggest that *St. Leon* is the primary precursor text with which Mary engaged in intertextual dialogue during the composition of *Frankenstein*; and secondly, as a re-writing of Godwin's novel, *Frankenstein* illustrates the dialogic progression from Mary's appropriation of her father's discourse to the emergence of her own authorial originality. Seen from this perspective the novel functions as an allegory of its author's education and literary apprenticeship. Moreover, intertextual dialogue between *Frankenstein* and *St. Leon* imposes a slight modification on Harold Bloom's paradigm of influence. Here, and in some of the examples named above, the "strong precursor" with whom the "ephebe" grapples is not a poet of the past but a contemporary. As the product of intertextual dialogue, Mary's novel embodies the female child's quest for independence from patriarchal authority, but the act of asserting her independence is made problematic in this case by the fact that her "strong precursor" is not merely a contemporary but her own father. Partially orphaned and then alienated by a stepmother whom she saw as a rival for her father's attention, Mary's attachment to her father was perhaps also afflicted by a trace of culpability for her mother's death in childbirth.³

II.

Following Wollstonecraft's death in 1797, Godwin was left to care for their infant daughter and the three-year old Fanny Imlay. At this time he began to work on *St. Leon*, and the new novel, which anticipates the interest in history and the documentary accuracy of his *Life of Chaucer* (1803) and *History of the Commonwealth of England* (1824-28), examines what Godwin described a few years before as "the evils which arise out of the present system of civilized society," and he considered the novel's publication an effort to "disengage the minds of men from prepossession, and launch them upon the sea of moral and political inquiry."⁴ Thus *St. Leon* resumes the critique of "things as they are" that commenced with *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) and was continued in *Caleb Williams* (1794) and, like the previous novel, *St. Leon* was intended to make Godwin's political teachings more widely accessible. In particular the new novel reveals the extent to which Godwin's views on marriage had been modified under the tutelage of Wollstonecraft; in fact, even friendly critics charged that he had recanted his revolutionary views on relationships between the sexes. He concedes this point in the novel's Preface: "I apprehend domestic and private affections inseparable from the nature of

man, and from what may be styled the culture of the heart, and am fully persuaded that they are not incompatible with a profound and active sense of justice in the mind that cherishes them."⁵ Scattered throughout the text, variations of this view contradict Godwin's memorable description of marriage given in Book VIII of *Political Justice* (1793) as "the worst of all monopolies."⁶ And yet, the revised argument presented in *St. Leon*, which accommodates bourgeois family life, is yet another example of the intertextual dialogue conducted between *Political Justice* and Godwin's prose fiction: the later texts suggest modifications to the ideology set down in the philosophical treatise.

The overall design and thematic patterns of *St. Leon* are replicated typologically in *Frankenstein*. At the center is a presentation of the "education" of the protagonist Reginald de St. Leon alternately via chivalry and alchemy. (Alchemy, it is implied, is analogous to chivalry; both are anachronistic social and scientific paradigms.) The latter is perceived initially by the protagonist as a possible vehicle by which he might simultaneously serve mankind and seek atonement for his betrayal of the chivalric code. Reginald's travels embody an ironic inversion of the classical *Bildungsreise*; his education is based on disillusioning rather than instructive experiences. And, anticipating the trajectory of the Monster's experience, rather than the popular gratitude he expects in response to his benevolent actions, suffering and destruction seem ineluctably to follow in his wake and he is rejected precisely by those whom he had intended to help. As a result, he is hunted down by such adversaries as his son Charles and his erstwhile friend, Bethlem Gabor. Reginald's fate is shared by Victor and the Monster (who alternately serve as each other's prey), and parallels to all three characters are found in the tragic situation of Oedipus. Sophocles's tragedy, *St. Leon*, and *Frankenstein* are all myths of misguided benevolence in which hubristic transgression of social, religious, and epistemological conventions is punished by exile from human society. Mary also suffers ostracism from her family following her elopement—an intolerable act of hubristic rebellion against her father's authority—and her elopement coincides with a new phase of authorship independent of her father's influence. And yet her new status as an author connects her more closely than ever to her precursors Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and Shelley as a critic of "things as they are."

Following his disillusioning experience of the brutalities of war in the Italian campaigns of Francis I, Reginald finds himself ill-equipped

to function in civilian society. Precisely because he is publicly celebrated as a paragon of chivalry who no longer believes in its values, Godwin presents his fall from grace as symptomatic of a culture in decline. Thus chivalry, Burke's shibboleth in *The Reflections on the Revolution in France* and Godwin's target in *Caleb Williams*, is exposed as already otiose even during its supposed heyday. A living anachronism driven to gambling, Reginald forfeits his family's honor and fortune. Flying from France in disgrace, he settles his family near Lake Geneva. The idyllic scene is reminiscent of the De Lacey's cottage in the forest where Mary's Monster finds refuge.

The appearance of a mysterious interloper, Zampieri, violates the intimacy of the family circle and awakens Reginald's dormant ambition. The stranger offers to share the mystery of the philosopher's stone and the *elixir vitae* but only on condition that Reginald agree in advance not to share this secret with anyone, not even Marguerite, his high-minded wife. Her character is an idealized portrait of Mary Wollstonecraft and serves as the model for all the noble female characters in *Frankenstein*—Caroline, Agatha, Safie, Justine, and Victor's cousin, childhood companion, and fiancée, Elizabeth Lavenza. Reginald's first impulse is to refuse Zampieri's offer, insisting that his "heart was formed by nature for social ties...and I will not now consent to any thing that shall infringe on the happiness of my soul." (II, 7) Zampieri responds by striking at Reginald's Achilles' heel; as a true knight and the flower of French chivalry he desires to serve once again as an agent of justice and public welfare. "Feeble and effeminate mortal! Was ever a great discovery prosecuted, or an important benefit conferred upon the human race, by him who was incapable of standing, and thinking, and feeling, alone?" (II, 7-8) The esoteric skills are imparted and immediately Reginald experiences a complete resurrection of his former pride and ambition. His transformation parallels Victor's metamorphosis following the creation of his hideous offspring, but as the bearer of a monstrous secret he embarks on an odyssey "hated by mankind, hunted from the face of the earth, pursued by atrocious calumny, without country, without a roof, without a friend." (II, 9)

While Reginald's and Victor's horrible inner transformation is comparable, the knowledge engendering such change in the psyche of the protagonists is different and must be distinguished. In contrast to the "new science" of natural philosophy that engenders Victor's act of hubris, Godwin's protagonist, Reginald de St. Leon, pursues the arcane arts of alchemy, but they are both afflicted by a mania for illicit knowledge that Chris Baldick has called "epistemophilia."⁷ Knowledge

per se is, however, not the crucial issue; it is rather the specific character of the knowledge they seek. Awakened by the writings of Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Albertus Magnus, alchemy is also Victor's first intellectual passion and he confesses to Walton that if only he had been content to study "the more rational theory of chemistry which had resulted from modern discoveries" it is possible "that the train of my ideas would never have received the fatal impulse that led to my ruin." The following passage, with its self-analysis and confessional tone, might just as easily have been spoken by Godwin's protagonist:

My dreams were therefore undisturbed by reality; and I entered with the greatest diligence into the search of the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life. But the latter obtained my most undivided attention: wealth was an inferior object; but what glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish disease from the human frame, and render men invulnerable to any but a violent death.⁸

Masao Miyoshi observes that "in *Frankenstein* the main vehicle of Gothic fantasy is no longer the conventional supernatural" such as alchemy; instead it is the "new science" which, as a result of the protagonist's misapplication, vitiated its claims to being "a humane pursuit by demonstrating its possible monstrous results." Mary reveals in her appropriation and revision of her father's novel that "science," the definitive Enlightenment pursuit, "can generate a totally new species of terror. If scientific man is a kind of God, his scientific method becomes a new supernaturalism, a contemporary witchdoctoring of frightening potential."⁹ But clearly, what Reginald and Victor have most in common is the abuse of their respective sciences. Both novels present the distortion and perversion of procreation as a misapplication of science, old and new, and the process leading to Shelley's emergence as a novelist corresponds to Reginald's application of alchemy and *Frankenstein's* exploitation of the "new science," since all three processes presuppose the transgression of nature, authority and the social order.

The enormous destructive potential of Reginald's and Victor's secret powers condemns them to the remorseless isolation experienced by all those who possess the Midas touch, starting with Godwin himself, whose influence as a philosopher appears under the guise of alchemy and science in both novels.¹⁰ If Reginald's powers are shared

with others the laws of nature will be violated, thus posing a threat to the whole basis of human civilization. "Exhaustless wealth, if communicated to all men, would be but an exhaustless heap of pebbles and dust; and nature will not admit her everlasting laws to be so abrogated, as they would be by rendering the whole race of sublunary man immortal." (II, 103) In this way Reginald's concerns over the potential misuse of his powers anticipate Victor's principled refusal to create a female companion for his creature. It is important to note that altruism dominates the following passage and not, as Anne K. Mellor insists,¹¹ fear of female sexuality or the conscious drive to "usurp" the female principle in procreation:

I was now about to form another being of whose dispositions I was alike ignorant; she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness. He had sworn to quit the neighborhood of man and hide himself in deserts; but she had not; and she, who in all probability was to become a thinking and reasoning animal, might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation...Even if they were to leave Europe and inhabit the deserts of the new world, yet one of the first results of those sympathies for which the demon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror. Had I a right for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations? (122-3)

The use of his illicit powers increases Reginald's sense of isolation, and his lament resonates with his counterpart's in *Frankenstein*: "Man was not born to live alone. He is linked to his brethren by a thousand ties; and, when those ties are broken, he ceases from all genuine existence." (III, 97) But rather than put an end to his wretched wanderings, Reginald, after employing the *elixir vitae* in order to make good his escape from the Spanish Inquisition, "panted for something to contend with and something to conquer. My senses unfolded themselves to all the curiosity of remark; my thoughts seemed capable of industry unwearied, and investigation the most constant and invincible. Ambition revived in my bosom...I desired to perform something...that I might see the world start at and applaud." (III, 284)

Illustrating Godwin's prowess in the historical travel mode made popular by Radcliffe and Lewis, Reginald crosses Europe and finds his

desired new field of action in Hungary. Ravaged by war, famine, and grinding servitude under the Turks, the inhabitants of this nation seem ready for a savior, and Reginald seizes the chance to atone for the death of his wife and the breakup of his family in some supreme act of charity and benevolence. However, rather than endearing himself to his Hungarian hosts, the gold he creates in order to buy wheat undermines the nation's markets, creates runaway inflation, and increases the suffering of the people. Once again the use of alchemy has been shown to disrupt the laws of nature and society and to alienate the protagonist still further from the human circle. Reginald's ostracism marks him (as another member of the band of Romantic outcasts: the Ancient Mariner, Childe Harold, Prometheus, and his literary double, Victor Frankenstein). Transgression is the natural consequence of hubris, and it is punished by exile from one's native culture. Mary suffers ostracism from her family as a result of transgressing her father's will and the hubris of elopement is equated with the exercise of her procreative powers and her emergence as the author of her own literary texts. This is the same pattern of creation/transgression/isolation replicated in *St. Leon* and *Frankenstein*. Release from this condition is achieved only in confession or by acts of unselfish caring that lead to absolution. But such deliverance is denied to Reginald and Victor. Even though the Monster reads Victor's laboratory notes, his scientific method is never disclosed to others. Similarly, Reginald keeps his promise to Zampieri and the secret of the philosopher's stone is never revealed to the reader. Indeed, the entire first-person narrative in *St. Leon* forms a series of complex circumlocutions corresponding to the evasive actions and disguises that Reginald requires to preserve his secret at all costs. Instead of genuine communication, Godwin's protagonist offers what he admits is only "the semblance of communication and the unburdening of the mind" simply because he recognizes it is of the essence of being human "insatiably [to thirst] for a confidant [sic] and a friend." (II, 103) Reginald's faux confession functions merely as auto-therapy, and his sufferings, while offering an admonition to the reader, are not redeemed. He is doomed to continue his wanderings without respite.

III.

Written when Mary was only nineteen, *Frankenstein* is among the most enduring icons of Romanticism, and in recent years it has attracted as much attention from critics as any text in the canon. As the only daughter of Godwin and Wollstonecraft's ill-fated union, Mary was "nursed and fed with a love of glory. To be something great and

good was the precept given me by my father.”¹² Emily Sunstein dismisses as inaccurate the assumption still accepted by some that Mary received no systematic education prior to falling under the influence of Shelley. “Living with Godwin was an education; she loved leaning; he encouraged her, and gave her the background Wollstonecraft had not had and regretted having missed.”¹³ Years later Jane (later Claire) Clairmont corroborated her step-sister’s account of the tenor and routine of their Godwinian education:

All the family worked hard, learning and studying: we all took the liveliest interest in the great questions of the day—common topics, gossiping, scandal, found no entrance in our circle, for we had been brought up by Mr. Godwin to think it was the greatest misfortune to be fond of the world, or worldly pleasures or of luxury or money; and that there was no greater happiness than to think well of those around us. and to delight in being useful or pleasing to them.¹⁴

Godwin described the spirit that governed Mary’s education in this way: “I am anxious that she should be brought up like a philosopher even like a Cynic. It will add greatly to the strength and worth of her character.”¹⁵ Her father’s choice of a second wife was only the first of devastating paternal rebuffs she suffered; the other was his reaction to her elopement with the older married poet, which may be seen as an effort to establish independence from Godwin’s control over her discourse.¹⁶ As the precocious child grew into a young woman and emerged as an author, her fathers’ texts provided the authoritative discourse with which she contended in an effort to establish her own distinctive voice. Her earliest literary efforts were, of course, published by the Juvenile Library, her step-mother’s publishing venture, and Mellor suggests that there is “a peculiar symbolic resonance” in the loss of Mary’s early writings which were “accidentally” left behind at a Parisian hotel: “Mary’s first impulse in her new life with the poet Shelley was to establish her own literary credentials, to assert her own voice, and to assume a ‘role’ as his intellectual companion and equal.”¹⁷ But at least initially she merely exchanged one male tutor for another; it was only with her emergence as an author that she attained liberation from both father and husband.

While a number of candidates for Mary’s precursor text are named or cited in the novel, including Milton, Plutarch, and Goethe, *St. Leon* is the “adult” text for which *Frankenstein* serves as a reduction,

translation, and revision. Its author combined the functions of Mary's father and mother as well as her chief teacher and her chief literary "precursor," and yet the most striking structural and thematic correspondences between *Frankenstein* and *St. Leon* arise from the urgency of her efforts to mediate her Godwinian education by re-writing one of its canonical texts. In a modification of the Russian linguist I. M. Lotman's model of the "reception" and "appropriation" of adult texts by children, Michael Holquist suggests that "not only do children thus limit the scripts of the playlets their parents enact with them; they also limit the size of the cast. That is, for children all possible players in the world's drama are reduced to the characters experienced in the family culture."¹⁸ Barbara Johnson has written that "*Frankenstein*...can be read as the story of the experience of writing *Frankenstein*," but actually the writing of *Frankenstein* is about the re-writing of *St. Leon*.¹⁹ This accounts for the parallels between *St. Leon* and *Frankenstein* with respect to their dramatic personae. The model for *St. Leon*'s family is, of course, Godwin's own deceased first wife, daughters, and step-son; and in *Frankenstein* Mary sustains this pattern, less as a way of exorcising an Electra complex by gender substitution (in this sense Victor and Alphonse Frankenstein can be seen as surrogates for Shelley and Godwin; Elizabeth is Fanny Imlay's double) than as a means of completing her literary education. As such, education assumes the form, initially, of appropriating parental speech patterns and narratives. Once this step is successfully completed the child moves on to the second stage in the process of *Bildung*, the articulation and creation of her own discourse.

Bakhtin used the term "novel" to denote "whatever force is at work within a given literary system to reveal the limits and the artificial constraints of that system. According to this view, literary systems are comprised of canons and 'novelization' is fundamentally anticanonical."²⁰ This characterization applies to both *St. Leon* and *Frankenstein*, since each work is a militantly anti-canonical, composite literary form that explores the outer boundaries of the novel's possibilities as a genre and combines, appropriates, and fuses other narrative sub-genres, including Gothic, travel and sentimental fiction. Bakhtin argues that the content and images of the novel are therefore "profoundly double-voiced and double-linguaged" because they "seek to objectivize the struggle with all types of internally persuasive discourse that had at one time held sway over the author."²¹ One such sub-genre exhibited in *Frankenstein* that illustrates this process is the

Bildungsroman, in which the process of intertextual dialogue has been fused with the dialectic of education.

The composition of *Frankenstein* may, in fact, be compared to the manner in which children learn to appropriate adult speech for themselves and the means by which a writer distinguishes his/her voice from those of precursors and literary authority figures. The first process is analogous to translation in that it involves assimilation, rearrangement, a certain amount of necessary distortion, and simplification of the parental discourse adopted by the child as models in developing his or her own voice and speech patterns. Lotman describes language acquisition as a mediating process combining translation, appropriation, and reconfiguration:

The child's contact with the world of adults is constantly imposed on him by the subordinated position of his world in the general hierarchy of the culture of adults. However this contact itself is possible only as an act of translation. How can such translation be accomplished?...[T]he child establishes a correspondence between some texts familiar and comprehensible to him in 'his' language and the texts of 'adults'....In such a translation—of one whole text by another whole text—the child discovers an extraordinary abundance of 'superfluous' words in 'adult' texts. The act of translation is accompanied by a semantic reduction of the text....The child reduces the semantic model obtained from [the language of adults] in such a way that translation into his own language of the texts flowing from without is possible.²²

The child's mediation of adult discourse thus may be likened to the reception of literary texts belonging to a foreign culture. In *Les voix du silence* (1951) Andre Malraux describes the process of cultural interaction in terms of a "conquest," an "annexation," a "possession" of the "foreign," of that which is culturally other, and Bakhtin characterizes the impact of another's discourse upon the writer as dialectical opposition between self and other involving, first, the recognition of difference followed by the struggle for individuation or originality:

When someone else's ideological discourse is internally persuasive for us and acknowledged by us, entirely different possibilities open up. Such discourse is of decisive significance in the evolution of an individual's

consciousness: consciousness awakens to independent ideological life precisely in a world of alien discourses surrounding it, and from which it cannot initially separate itself....One's own discourse is gradually and slowly wrought out of other's words that have been acknowledged and assimilated, and the boundaries are at first scarcely perceptible....When such influences are laid bare, the half-concealed life lived by another's discourse is revealed within the new context of the given author. When an influence is deep and productive, there is no external imitation, no simple act of reproduction but rather a further creative development of another's discourse in a new context and under new conditions.²³

In its mythical treatment of the necessity to struggle against even the most beloved presence in one's life, Mary's novel also reflects the centrality to Romanticism of Germaine de Stael's maxim: "Force of mind is developed only by attacking power."

The Monster's acquisition of speech, reading skills, and, most importantly, the capacity to generate texts symbolically replicates Mary's education as a struggle with another's discourse. Within her narrative this process approximates the Lotman/Bakhtin paradigm according to which the Monster learns, first, by appropriating the discourse of the De Laceys and of the books he finds in the "leathern portmanteau"—Milton, Plutarch, and Goethe—and, secondly in articulating its own individuated discourse.²⁴ In the Godwin household the categories of parents and authors were conflated and the circle of family friends included prominent literary and cultural figures who were familiar to the children.²⁵ Mary's, and by extension, the Monster's obsession with language reflects their shared struggle to gain command of a medium in which to express their own thoughts in the midst of many authoritative models of discourse: "By degrees I made a discovery of still greater moment. I found that these people possessed a method of communicating their experience and feelings to one another by articulate sounds....This was indeed a godlike science, and I ardently desired to become acquainted with it." (83) There is a remarkable parallel between the Monster's language acquisition through a process of eavesdropping on the De Laceys and the famous anecdote of Mary and the other Godwin children hiding behind the sofa in order to listen to Coleridge's reading of the "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." How many countless times was this scene replicated over the years during visits by Wordsworth, Lamb, and Holcroft? An interesting irony

disclosed in the dialogic process is that the Monster acquires and demonstrates a command over language that far surpasses the eloquence of any other figure in the novel. Indeed, the source of his eventual domination of Victor is, ironically, not his superhuman strength, but his greater rhetorical power. It is also an irony of literary history that in securing her authorial identity with the endurance of *Frankenstein* Mary surpassed the success enjoyed by *St. Leon*, her primary precursor text, which Byron considered superior to *Caleb Williams*. And while *Frankenstein* continues to generate literary, such as Brian Aldiss's *Frankenstein Unbound*, and cinematic spinoffs at a dizzying rate, Godwin's novel is available today only in an antiquarian reprint.

A further instance of Mary's identification with the Monster is found in their similar responses to maternal deprivation.²⁶ Victor and Reginald are also motherless, and for both this loss is exacerbated by the deaths of other loved ones. Mellor has described *Frankenstein* as an analysis of "the failure of the family, the damage wrought when the mother—or a nurturant parental love—is absent."²⁷ This is also the central theme of *St. Leon*, which is, as already suggested, a transparent redaction of the Godwin family experience, and Mary's treatment of the orphan's agony of the Monster illustrates Freud's view that "missing someone who is loved and longed for is the key to an understanding of anxiety."²⁸ By virtue of a kind of sorcery akin to alchemy, Mary and the Monster seem to have been formed by a hermaphroditic father, who combines both the male and female principles of generation and whose powers of multiplication correspond to the recondite powers of the philosopher's stone. As a descriptive term "hermaphroditic" is preferable to William Veeder's "androgynous," since androgyny refers only to proclivity or "sexual character," while hermaphroditism actually has reference to actual sexual nature or capacity.²⁹ Victor's ability to create life from inanimate matter and Reginald's multiple rebirths by means of the *elixir vitae* are methods of creating life that circumvent the female body but not the mammal principle. In a thinly veiled disguise for Godwin's relationship to Mary and her half-sister Fanny, Reginald outlives his wife and appropriates the maternal role in his relationship to his daughters. The life-giving powers exhibited by Victor and Reginald correspond to Mary's own birth in which the maternal principle was eliminated in Wollstonecraft's death. Through their traumatic births and status as orphans the Monster stands revealed as her fictive other.

The main narrative and thematic vehicle in both novels, the perversion or misuse of science, old and new, is, in fact, a distortion of

procreation, and the bridge between alchemy and natural philosophy is the discovery of the means of creating or perpetuating life by a subtraction of the female principle from procreation. And ironically, the stain of mortality is removed from persons *not of woman born*. The elimination of the female principle in procreation invites Mary's critique of the monstrosity of neglectful parenting. Testifying to the power of environmental conditioning in childhood, both motherless protagonists reveal themselves to be neglectful parents in their own right. And Victor's feckless record as the "parent" of the offspring of his scientific labors is symbolic of the neglectful male parents in Mary's personal life—Godwin and Shelley. Victor rationalizes the abandonment of his child on grounds not usually associated with maternalism, that is, aesthetic criteria, insisting "that no mortal could support the horror of that countenance"; even a "mummy endowed with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch." (43) There are strong parallels here to Godwin's "monstrous" behavior as a parent, for we know that he not only opposed Mary's decision to elope with Shelley, but he also refused to claim or identify the body of Fanny Godwin following her suicide on October 9, 1816. (Like her half-sister, this doubly-orphaned young woman had, in her father's view, indelibly stained the family's honor.) The novel also provides subversive commentary on the egregious behavior of other parents in the Shelley circle: Claire Clairmont, Byron, Percy, and even Mary herself. Byron gained custody of his daughter Allegra only to have her placed in a convent where she died of neglect. The frenetic wanderlust (and the woeful traveling conditions they endured) of the Shelleys may be directly implicated in the deaths of their children Clara I (March 6, 1815), Clara II (September 24, 1818), and William (June 7, 1819). Perhaps of all acts the most reprehensible was Shelley's abandonment of his wife and children when he eloped with Mary. In what can only be reckoned a display of astonishing insensitivity, they were then married less than three weeks after Harriet—pregnant at the time—drowned herself in the Serpentine. Considering this monstrous record of neglect, which clearly contravened the teachings of Godwin by which the Shelleys claimed to be fashioning their lives, the Chancery judgment delivered on March 17, 1817 denying Shelley custody of his children could have come as no surprise and, respecting the moral universe of both *St. Leon* and *Frankenstein*, was certainly justified.³⁰

With the appropriation and rewriting of *St. Leon* Mary attains independence, as a creator of texts, from both her father and her husband. For her husband she serves as an extension of her father; her

elopement and marriage to Shelley represent efforts on his part to attain consanguinity with her father, his great idol, through the instrumentality of her mind and body. At the same time, it reflects Shelley's attempt to usurp Godwin's role as his young wife's primary educator and literary precursor. We can see this as an attempted exclusionary gesture whose objective is to assume control over her continuing development as a writer. In *Frankenstein*, Mary therefore seeks to perform a double divestiture not only of "parental" influence, but also of authoritative discourse associated with both dominating literary figures in her life, her father and her husband. In this way the novel serves as a powerful reminder that literary texts function instrumentally. In Holquist's phrase, "they serve as a prosthesis of the mind. As such, they have a tutoring capacity that materially effects change by getting from one stage of development to another," and in its dual capacity as an enabling device and as a necessary stage in the dialectic of education leading to the attainment of a secure authorial identity, *Frankenstein* enacts for its author and protagonists a dual process of soul and voice formation.³¹ Emulating Reginald's and Victor's search for ideal companionship, empowering knowledge and opportunities for doing some action that is "great and good," the Monster's odyssey begins with the discovery that he lives in a hostile world and that he has been rejected by his "father" and denied the right to engender his own offspring. His odyssey or *Bildungsreise* ends with the murderous inversion of Godwinian altruism as he lashes out at Victor, destroying all those with whom he enjoys emotional intimacy in order to render his condition identical to his own. The rebellion of the Monster, which proceeds from inarticulate rage to the discovery of speech and the art of discourse, invites comparisons with Mary's efforts, first, to assimilate and, secondly, to overcome her father's authoritative discourse, a process which culminates in her marriage to Shelley and the nearly simultaneous inception of her novel.

Recognizing that even the most persuasive interpretation may fail to convince, I would hesitate to suggest that the genesis and development of Mary's novel is fully explained as the result of intertextual dialogue with Godwin's *St. Leon*. Neither would I reduce the text's function to mapping her development as a writer. But, as I have attempted to show, such an interpretation brings us closer to the novel's textual and psychological matrices and it delineates the central auto-therapeutic function of writing. Moreover, by adopting Bakhtin's dialogic framework we gain a more pronounced awareness of the struggle involved in moving beyond mere appropriation of another's

authoritative discourse to the production of discourse that is distinctly one's own. In contrast to those critics who have inserted *Frankenstein* into or extracted the novel from a patriarchal tradition, the preceding discussion should make it clear that I reject both alternatives. The tradition into which we should place *Frankenstein* is that which makes apparent its structure and language as empowering psychological scaffolding. Godwin's *St. Leon* provided Mary with a dialogic partner in the struggle for self-expression, and *Frankenstein* is a reflection of the will to articulate her own consciousness and to attain individuation apart from the discourse associated with the "strong precursors" in her personal and literary experience. What makes the intertextual dialogue forming *Frankenstein* of particular interest is that the authoritative discourse with which its young author contended was formed by the texts of her father, mother, and husband—a body of texts that she habitually and even ritually read at home and on her mother's grave in the St. Pancras churchyard. This is the tradition formed by *St. Leon*. From this perspective Mary's novel can be seen to replicate intertextual dialogue with a text that we can readily identify, *St. Leon*, and because of Shelley's filial relationship with its author, it is possible to extrapolate from this process of intertextual dialogue to her development and growth as a writer. The end result of this process is the acquisition and exercise of genuine cultural power.

NOTES

¹Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist; trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981), p. 345.

²Recent studies follow Burton R. Pollin, "Philosophical and Literary Sources of *Frankenstein*," *Comparative Literature* 17 (1965), 97-108, in citing *St. Leon* but not pursuing the extensive thematic and plot correspondences with *Frankenstein*. See Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 37; Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York and London: Routledge reprint, 1989), p. 85; and Emily Sunstein's magisterial *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1991, paperback edition), pp. 23-24.

³Emily Sunstein, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality*, 29, takes a neutral stance in the dispute over the character of the second Mrs. Godwin as compared to the first, and reminds the reader that Mary's singularly possessive attachment to her father was such that "no woman under Heaven, not even Mary Wollstonecraft had she descended from it, would have been

readily accepted as her father's consort by the four-year-old Mary Godwin."

⁴*The British Critic*, July 1795, p. 94.

⁵William Godwin, *St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century*, 4 volumes (London: Printed for G. G. & J. Robinson, R. Noble, printer, 1799), p. ix. All intra-textual references will be made to this edition.

⁶William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, (Third Edition, 1798), ed. by Isaac Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 762.

⁷Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 26. Even though Baldick argues that Mary's story "of the creation of a monster emerges from her parents' debate with Burke over the great monstrosity of the modern age, the French Revolution" (27) and he identifies Godwin as "novel's intellectual begetter" (29), he devotes no more than one page in his study to *St. Leon*. And while acknowledging the basic parallels between Victor's "natural philosophy" and Reginald's alchemy, he only considers Godwin's novel one among many sources for *Frankenstein*. Baldick adds up the numerous allusions to *Paradise Lost* in the text and deduces that Milton's epic is "by far the most important literary source" for Mary's novel (40).

⁸Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818 edition) in *The Mary Shelley Reader*, ed. Betty T. Bennett and Charles E. Robinson (New York: Oxford UP, 1990), p. 30. All intra-textual references will be made to this edition.

⁹Masao Miyoshi, *The Divided Self* (New York: New York UP, 1969), p.86.

¹⁰Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1976), p. 209, is persuaded that Mary's father "felt himself to be in possession of great and terrible secrets—the philosophy of *Political Justice*—which he could not use for the benefit of mankind, but which, on the contrary, made him an object of fear and loathing." Emily Sunstein, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality*, p. 20, notes that Godwin's contemporaries "compared him to a great, if failed, explorer on humanity's behalf—a Promethean paradigm that Mary Godwin would immortalize in her scientist, Frankenstein, whose confidant Walton, is a polar explorer."

¹¹"The Female in *Frankenstein*" in *Feminism and Romanticism*, ed. by Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988), p. 224.

¹²*Journals of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, Abinger MSS, 21 (October 1838), quoted in Emily Sunstein, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality*, p. 11.

¹³Emily Sunstein, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality*, pp. 38-39: "All the children were deeply influenced by him, but Mary was his star disciple, the most powerfully engaged and permanently affected, the one from whom he demanded and gave most. Her most felicitous, intimate, even thrilling intercourse with her father was that of pupil and teacher, and inordinate as her later tributes to him might seem, it was homage to mentorship that few fathers gave their daughters."

¹⁴*Journals of Claire Clairmont*, ed. M. K. and D. M. Stocking (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1968), p. 18.

¹⁵Letter to W. T. Baxter, June 8, 1812, *Shelley and His Circle 1773-1822*, ed. Keith Neill Cameron and Donald H. Reiman. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1961-73), pp. 3, 102.

¹⁶Evidence for Mary's idolization of her father is found in a letter: "until I met Shelley I may justly say that Godwin was my God." *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty T. Bonnet. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1980), pp. 1, 296.

¹⁷Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), p. 23.

¹⁸Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 82.

¹⁹Barbara Johnson. "My Monster/My Self," *Diacritics* 12 (1982), 8.

²⁰From the editor's introduction, Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, p. xxxi.

²¹Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, p. 348.

²²I. M. Lotman, "On the Reduction and Unfolding of Sign Systems (The Problem of "Freudianism and Semiotic Culturology")" in *Semiotics and Structuralism: Readings from the Soviet Union*, edited with an Introduction by Henryk Baran; trans. William Mandel, Henryk Baran, and A.J. Hollander (White Plains, N.Y.: International Arts and Sciences Press, Inc. 1976), p. 302.

²³Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Holquist, pp. 345, 347.

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²⁴All of these works figured prominently in Godwin's scheme of education for his children, but Goethe's *Werther* carries deep emotional associations for the Godwin family because Mary's father was reading it at the time of Wollstonecraft's death.

²⁵A small sampling of prominent visitors to the Godwin household includes Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hazlitt, Thomas Holcroft, Joseph Johnson, Samuel Rogers, John Flaxman, J. M. W. Turner, Maria Edgeworth, Helen Maria Williams, and Charlotte Smith.

²⁶Emily Sunstein, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality*, p. 33, reminds us that, despite the vogue for focusing on Wollstonecraft's absence in her daughter's life, Mary "may have been ambivalent about her motherlessness, which deprived her of tenderness but also of a rival for Godwin." Sunstein also notes that Victor and the Monster prefigure the motherless heroines of Mary's subsequent novels—Euthanasia in *Valperga* and Ethel Villiers and Fanny Derham in *Lodore*.

²⁷Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*, p. 39.

²⁸Sigmund Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, 1926, in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: The Hogarth Press), 20: pp. 136-137. John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss*, Vol. II, *Separation: Anxiety and Anger* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 4-5, author also of *Charles Darwin: A New Life* (New York: Norton, 1990), modifies Freud's late observations on grief and separation anxiety and suggests a possible cause of Mary's frequent bouts of anxiety during pregnancy: "States of anxiety and depression that occur during adult years, and also psychopathic conditions, can, it is held, be linked in a systematic way to the states of anxiety, despair, and detachment ...that are so readily engendered whenever a young child is separated for long from his mother figure, whenever he expects a separation, and when, as sometimes happens, he loses her altogether."

²⁹William Veeder, *Mary Shelley and Frankenstein—The Fate of Androgyny* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986).

³⁰See Chapter Six, "Deaths by Land and Sea," in Robert Gittings and Jo Manton, *Claire Clairmont and the Shelleys, 1798-1879* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992), pp. 66-73.

³¹Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*, p. 83.