Shelley's Suicidal Sublime

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'And I am Death, the destroyer of all; and among future good fortunes,
(I am) that which is the best. Among women (I am) Fame, Prosperity,
Speech, Memory, Intelligence, Fortitude and Forbearance'

– *Bhagavad Gita,* 10.34

A leap inside Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Alastor* shows the reader that the Poem, despite its Wordsworthian allusions being well-chalked out by both literary chroniclers and critics, remains, under all circumstances, a great creation of Individual might and sublimity, as adduced by his biographers as early as 1887.[1]It is probably easier to show Shelley's rejection of the so-called 'life instinct' in much of his prose too, a notable example of which can be found in his well-received *A Philosophical View of Reform* (posthumously published in 1920), where he intelligently shows where and why the life instinct, being bound in Earthly limitations, can never escape moderate to high levels of corruption.[2] A finer poetic version of this rejection can be found in *Epipsychidion* (p. 1821) – finer in appreciation of Shelley's endeavour to maintain philosophical dispositions in verse. In lines such as

> Thou living form
> Among the dead! Thou star above the storm! (Jonathan and Jessica Wordsworth ed., pp. 716, ll. 27-28)

And

> She met me, stranger, upon life's rough way,
> And lured me towards sweet death – (ibid., pp. 717, ll. 72-73)

Followed finally by the exceptional passage that begins with

> True love never yet
> Was thus constrained. It overleaps all fence –
> Like lightning, with invisible violence
> Piercing its continents; like Heaven's free breath,
> Which he who grasps can hold not; like Death,
> Who rides upon a thought, and makes his way
> Through temple, tower, and palace, and the array
> Of arms. (ibid., pp. 724, ll. 397-404)

One cannot help noticing Shelley's slow transition from the identification of the lady as a dead person walking; she is mathematically sublimated with the dimensions of a "star" as opposed to a dynamical, unstable "storm", residing "above" – giving one of the earliest impressions of a Sublime hierarchy where the Mathematical is bound to take its

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place above the Dynamic – a line of thought reserved for a different purpose. This is one way in which Shelley dissociates 'life-instinct' in a metaphorical manner within two verse lines only – from the living inanimate to the metaphorical inanimate. In the next, the admission is clear – the female figure detoxifies the horrors of a sublime death. In an effort to "sweeten" death, she leads him to the beautification of sublime death which, ideologically speaking, would be so rough that it would have to be disguised within a 'holy lie' – a Nietzschean phrase with multiple connotations. Hence, the preservation of 'life-instinct' works itself out in Shelley by introducing beauty within the limitless possibilities of suffering in a sublime death, making it mildly tolerable. In the third quote, it is worked out more subtly. While suggesting that "True Love" is like "Heaven's free breath" which once taken hold of cannot be held on to, Shelley points at two significant instances: first, if "True Love" has to be metaphorically compared with "Heaven's free breath", it *ought* to contain within itself all the agencies that true love in 'life-instincts' cannot engulf; if this admission is made, then the theoretical conception of "True love" within the metaphor "Heaven's free breath" becomes pure admiration (hence Sublime) since nobody who grasps it can hold on to it, partially because the Sublime is an aesthetic concept, and mostly because holding on to the infinite, the limitless and the great is nearly impossible for an indefinite amount of time. Shelley's mature understanding mixes both agents in verse but makes it a point to communicate the true implications of his theory. The commitment towards an ideal 'death-instinct' flavoured with 'life-instinct' becomes an excellent platform for Sigmund Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* where he gives a pseudo-scientific version of the properties of each tendency.[3]My purpose in this brief essay, post this short overview, is to explore a few limited dimensions of Shelleys' (Percy Bysshe and Mary Shelley) poetical theory with regards to the Sublime: If the death-instinct were to be admixed with the life-instinct, is this dilution acceptable to the death-instinct which is aware that its revelation is destined to go unrealized? If this were to be the case, does it result in the death-instinct annihilating itself as retribution for its own 'lack' for pure pursuit of admiration? Knowing that self-annihilation is never sublime, what is the best way of circumventing the life-instinct in order to continue preserving the 'holy lie' of the 'Death-instinct'?

Shelley's *Alastor* begins with a revelation of a Poet-narrator whose life, having begun in loneliness, ends in an un-discoursed isolation, or so it seems at first:

> There was a Poet whose untimely tomb
> No human hands with pious reverence reared,
> But the charmed eddies of autumnal winds
> Built o'er his mouldering bones a pyramid
> Of mouldering leaves in the waste wilderness: -
> … He lived, he died, he sung, in solitude. (Fraistat and Reiman ed. *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ll. 50-54, 60, p. 72)

Several elements in these aforementioned verse-lines are a straightforward product of what Shelley intended to do, stating it explicitly in his *Preface* to the poem.[4]It might not be difficult to aver why no human hands could rear him; as the *Preface* suggests through the use of mountain and sea metaphors towards the end, his death may have been a direct result of over-indulging in the sublime without the ethical consideration of societal beauty. A complete rejection of men in pursuit of an ideological illusion creates an un-rearing of those men for this 'Man', to put it in another way. He may have lived (i.e. engaged in beautiful and biological realities) and he may have sung (engaged in a form

of communication, either with fellow men or with fellow sublime-individuals who may have tried to create a community), but he annihilates himself "in solitude"; in the words of R.D. Havens, "morally he was a suicide" (1100). This is a strange proposition. Does Havens mean that suicide is moral too (besides other moral phenomenas), or does he imply that his immoral act, when judged by the moral court of justice, declares that "he was a suicide", meaning that the individual himself was living a suicide much before self-annihilation becomes a workable reality for him?

I digress at this point to an interpretation of suicide and its moral ramifications through the benevolent yet authoritarian philosopher whose influence would leave a mark on the literature of the high Romantics: Immanuel Kant. A careful reading of Section II from Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* provides, in my opinion, a perfect illustration of why the senses ought to kneel before a universal law in order to remain moral, or remain calumniated under the veil of immorality:

> *Morality* is thus the relation of actions to the autonomy of the will, that is, to a possible giving of universal law through its maxims. An action that can coexist with the autonomy of the will is *permitted*, one that does not accord with it is *forbidden*. (4:439, p.46, Tr. And ed. Mary Gregor)

If an act of suicide means an action meant to ameliorate life for an apparent lack of intellectual and sensual motive, Kant would leap at the word "apparent", demonstrating that the apparent does not often provide a faithful reflection of the universal which, despite contrasting claims, continues to be the sole "relation" of maxims with morality. If nothing but the apparent seems to obscure and in the process become real, the disease along with the patient had rather go into a moral exile than commit a moral crime by breaking the chain of which he is not the sole arbiter. Thus, to put it in Kantian perspective, it is forbidden because it is a legitimate attempt at destroying the categorical imperative instead of enforcing it; whereas deference, subversion or deconstruction of this imperative is permitted, destruction is not. When Shelley says in *Alastor*,

> Does the dark gate of death
> Conduct to thy mysterious Paradise,
> O Sleep? (ibid. p.75, ll. 211-13)

Kant would probably allow him to explore the intellectual/spiritual extremities of the question without allowing the violation of the categorical imperative by finding it through self-annihilation. The rhetoric, from a philosophical point of view, does not forbid speculation so long as its consciously "coexists" with Paradise and life while questioning after-life, somnambulism and the mystery of lifelessness (I carefully avoid the word "death" here). In the words of Michael J. Cholbi, "To treat suicide as an occasionally permissible hypothetical imperative, as Hume seems to, is to allow each individual's assessment of their present and future well-being to cancel out rational obligation" (168). As Kant would himself point it out in a lengthy passage from *The Metaphysics of Morals*, sublimity gets the short end of the stick as does morality, if committing suicide were to be permitted.[5] My concern in this digression does not end here. As I have shown in the note, Kant's "sublime moral disposition" does not terminate – to prove this, one must revert back to the 'Analytic of the Sublime' in Kant's *Critique of Judgement* in order to realise two fundamental methods of objection to self-annihilation. In §29:273, Kant says, "Every affection of the STRENUOUS TYPE (such that is, as excites the consciousness of our power of overcoming every resistance is *aesthetically sublime*, e.g. anger, even desperation (*the rage of forlorn hope but not faint-hearted despair*)" (Tr. James Creed Meredith,

p. 125). The first objection pertains to a universal resistance, transcending the maximum limits of any sensual passion that seeks to imprison the faculty for intellectual and spiritual moderation. This resistance is devised on the categorical imperative of sublime absolutism that dissociates passions at crucial moments of emotional maturity in order to forbid a diabolic passion from envenoming, or in a practical sense, colonizing the higher faculties of the mind, leading the person to self-annihilation. Strenuousness, I surmise, must also help in reshuffling emotional bafflement if the superstructure constituting spirit and intellect can preserve a centrist position on this problem. The other quote from §29:274 invites a different position on the same issue, albeit with a far larger agenda in action:

But even the impetuous movements of the mind – be they allied under the name of edification with the ideas of religion, or, as pertaining merely to culture, with ideas involving a social interest – no matter what tension of the imagination they may produce, can in no way claim to the honour of a *sublime* presentation, if they do not leave behind them a temper of mind which, though it be only indirectly, has an influence upon the consciousness of the mind's strength and resoluteness in respect of that which carries with it pure intellectual finality (the supersensible). (p. 126)

The second fundamental element has more clarity than the first's role of absolute resistance to desperation; it argues for the *telos* of resistance – not as a primary motif, but as a secondary one to "intellectual finality", understood in terms of a categorical imperative with regards to sublime disposition. The other interesting aspect of this quote is Kant's suggestion that resistance must create an indirect impression upon the observer, the accomplishment of which is possible when the universal law is executed to perfection, and the observer can unearth the dispositions of the mind that circumvents self-annihilation. The supersensible, in simpler words, requires the sensible; the "body [has an] essential role in morality: it is the *condition* for the noumenal self's *presence* in the world, and without it we could exercise neither our noumenal nor our phenomenal freedom in instantiating moral values and acquiring virtue" (Seidler, 450). To sum up, any temperament for self-annihilation during a sublime endeavour must be repressed in full conscience of the universal law; it can be done by dis-engaging with its superstructure, so long as one condition is not betrayed: annihilation itself. If the Sublime were to be offered significant resistance, the subject is bound to sink to a lower level of conscience, the inevitable result of which is a *drive* for self-annihilation, for the sublime can no longer achieve "intellectual finality". In that case, is there some way, or manner to create an illusion that the Sublime ideology continues to live on – that its death, although real, lives on as a 'holy lie'?

I revert back to Shelley's *Alastor*. From moving through the sublime realms both ideal and natural, Shelley is enamoured by an Arab maiden who does him "love", or should one say damage?

> From duties and repose to tend his steps:-
> Enamoured, yet not daring for deep awe
> To speak her love: - and watched his nightly sleep. (p. 74, ll. 133-35)

Observe that the maiden, while serving repast to her so-called Master, is frightfully aware of the sublime (read limitless and infinite) pursuit; this is why it requires "daring" for her to approach the subject more than the man. The awe emerges from her admiration of the man, much like Delilah's awe for Samson, and it makes her realize that his powerful and "deep" death instinct must be seduced into a 'life-instinct' without infuriating him – hence the hesitation to "speak her love", knowing that his pursuit of admiration would

backfire if she attempted to dilute it with love, almost to the point of reckless vengeance. Thus, love approaches admiration in the manner of Satan approaching a sleeping Eve in the guise of a snake – more in the form of a dreamy reality – an illusion. Sadly (yet pleasurably), the scheme manages to vex the Poet and the death-instinct is abandoned for the life-instinct soon after:

> He reared his shuddering limbs and quelled
> His gasping breath, and spread his arms to meet
> Her panting bosom…she drew back a while,
> Then, yielding to the irresistible joy,
> With frantic gesture and short breathless cry
> Folded his frame in her dissolving arms. (p. 75, ll. 183-88)

Notice that the seduction of the subject of "deep awe" is completed by love; life-instinct manages to shake off his sublime slumber, and it embraces the principles of love without realizing the ramifications of the act. A counter-feeling develops in the love-subject too; it must yield to the overwhelming sublimity of the subject. Although it gives birth to what Shelley calls "irresistible joy", it seems to me to give rise to what could properly be denoted as guilty pleasure, for the simple reason that the unconscious 'life-instinct' does not easily yield to the consciously pursued 'death instinct' of the poet-subject. The proof of this is the literal disappearance of the maiden without any substantial damage to her, whereas the Poet-subject waits to undergo a massive transformation in several stages – something that Frederick Kirchhoff rightfully calls "not ironic but augmentative" (111). What happens next is fairly predictable as the Poet, now seriously blinded by love, loses track of sublimity altogether, and his self-destructive strategies begin to emerge:

> And what am I that I should linger here,
> With voice far sweeter than the dying notes,
> Spirit more vast than thine, frame more attuned
> To beauty, wasting these surpassing powers
> In the deaf air, to the blind earth, and heaven
> That echoes not my thoughts? (p. 77, ll. 285-90)

Outlining his complaint within a theoretical framework, Shelley, like Samson, has gained a substantial amount of love through the dissipation of almost all powers of admiration vis-à-vis the sublime; his submission results in nostalgic grandeurs which are no match for the true pursuit of the sublime now annihilated through contamination with the 'life-instinct' brought him by the Arab maiden. Shelley strategizes the path *he* will take as an act of repentance for relinquishing his sublimity:

> A restless impulse urged him to embark
> And meet lone Death on the drear ocean's waste; (p. 78, ll. 304-5)

With the death cry that

> "I have beheld
> The path of thy departure. Sleep and death
> Shall not divide us long!" (p. 79, ll. 366-68)

And

> By love, or dream, or god, or mightier Death
> He sought in Nature's dearest haunt, some bank,
> Her cradle, and his sepulchre. (p. 80, ll. 428-30)

I would credit Edward Strickland and Tilottama Rajan with excellent analyses of the deeper theme of *Alastor*.[6]However, I shall present a different version of Shelley's suicidal sublime through the discourse that I have tried to construct so far: The Poet-narrator's single minded pursuit of admiration for the apocalyptic (also known as the Sublime) causes an intellectual and spiritual exhaustion, taking advantage of which the life-instinct, in the form of the Arab maiden, takes possession of and permanently modifies the objectives of Shelley's original death-instinct. Love, having successfully contaminated the sublime, disappears, leaving the sublime with two survivalist options – the first one that Shelley takes involves the annihilation of the body that became the vessel for contamination, thus ending the already-ended sublime pursuit more abruptly than it should, creating an abject where self-annihilation cannot be memorialized in any manner due to forced destruction of the physical vessel without letting go of the original objective that the sublime must be preserved at any cost – even at the cost of ideological illusions, which I have elsewhere called the 'Holy Lie", hinting at a pseudo-factual fact that can be successfully paraded to the masses by padding it with essential truth value acquired through sources that may be mythico-actional, mythico-anecdotal and so on. Those institutions promoting a 'Holy lie' must remain faithful to their ideological commitment to these useful half-truths, drawing a fine line between metaphysics on one hand and dogmas (fed by religious bigotry, fanaticism and inhibitions) on the other. Sacredness is maintained by appraising the validity of a long-drawn or far-fetched truth. Here begins Shelley's second adventure against the anxieties of the same question through *Frankenstein* (1818), which I shall very briefly analyse to convey the hypothesis underneath my line of thought.

Mary (and Percy) Shelley's *Frankenstein* catches up with the forcefully sublimated narrative of *Alastor* towards the end of Volume III, where Victor makes his final attempts at destroying what he had created, with the improper philosophical bent of mind that made him imagine that creations *may* be destroyed. In other words, the need to destroy the existence of an ideological perversity is an attempt to overturn the 'Holy-lie' which is the motto of civilization, undoubtedly. Frankenstein can be understood to be the monstrous death-instinct that Victor is chasing in this life, or die in the process of capturing it. It must be stated in the beginning that Victor Frankenstein and the monster are not different beings; one was a manifestation of the monstrosity of the dynamical sublime (the death instinct that teases towards elusive infinities through acts of ferocity), while the creator tried reconciling with the death-instinct by negotiating with acts entirely precluded from life-instincts. The similarity between both of them, put in an alternative fashion, is the difference between contaminated deathlessness and pure Deathlessness, represented by the sustainability of the monster in extreme temperatures. When the fiend says,

> I seek the everlasting ices of the North, where you will feel the misery of cold and frost, to which I am impassive (p. 214, Int. Charlotte Gordon)

The polemic of his "seeking" is advantageous for the readers in the beginning itself; seeking the poles is tantamount to seeking an intellectual isolation drawn from extremities, and spiritual isolation from an ocean of contaminated 'life instincts', forever stuck in the cycle of birth and death. It must be usefully interpreted like this: "I, the undying, the everlasting death instinct, will draw my human creator who must forever fail yet negotiate with me for a sustainable life-instinct within, and must die so that the death instinct created profits in promoting its own version of infinity".[7] What is expected next is a confession by Victor of the impossibility of negotiation (used here in the sense of a deferred agreement, involving two parties, both unsuitable for permanent balance within

themselves or with each other, being a committed product to their ideological certainties) – where the creation must continue without the creator, no matter how fearful and unsympathetic towards the instinct for life:

During these last days I have been occupied in examining my past conduct; nor do I find it blameable. In a fit of enthusiastic madness I created a rational creature, and was bound towards him, to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being… (ibid., pp. 225-26)[8]

To create is to court the death-instinct; courting makes the Creator act Godly which is always ruinous, as Freud points out in *The Future of an Illusion*.[9] As Shelley himself explains, it was executed in a fit of madness fed with enthusiasm, both being powerful identifiers of the Sublime of which is created a rationale – that is, an idea, and the bearer of an ideology which is bound to strip the creator of its leash and escape with its instinct before the Creator can ever catch up with his creation. This is the final explanation for monstrosity escaping far into the extremities of nature, whereas Victor is laid to rest at the end.

What then is the reliable version of Shelleys' Suicidal Sublime, if I may conclude my thesis? Through *Frankenstein*, P.B. Shelley confronts the death-instinct but does not annihilate himself in the same manner as he did in *Alastor*. Instead of death by suicide, the Sublime escapes into the grey area between supreme isolation and natural annihilation. It is an intelligent and infinite deferment of death altogether where the manner of death is rendered elusive completely, creating the necessary ideological illusion that the Sublime, no longer knowable, must be infinite, for there are no ways left to explore the extremities, the natural limits which are stretched by a successful application of the death-instinct. The contaminated (life and death instinct admixed) dies, and the pure death-instinct – inhuman, monstrous and awe inspiring for its resolution in maintaining a fiendish distance from civilization gives proper shape to the Shelleys' Suicidal Sublime. The 'Holy-lie' lives on.

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Notes

[1] I shall cite just one example to prove my point, since more is not necessarily better. In *Shelley*, John Addington Symonds does not shy away from demonstrating that "*Alastor* has great autobiographical value. Mrs Shelley affirms that it was written under the expectation of speedy death, and under the sense of disappointment, consequent upon the misfortunes of his early life. This accounts for the somewhat unhealthy vein of sentiment which threads the wilderness of its sublime descriptions" (BooksWay Reprint, 2013) p. 86. Symonds was able to see in 1878, and subsequently in 1887 that there is, in midst the autobiographical element, a disturbing bewilderment that destabilizes the Shelleyan Sublime, if I may put it so. This fracture was conceptual, and Symonds does not get around to asking where the problem lay.

[2] According to Shelley, "Modern society is thus an engine assumed to be for useful purposes, whose force is by a system of subtle mechanism augmented to the highest pitch, but which, instead of grinding corn or raising water acts against itself and is perpetually wearing away or breaking to pieces the wheels of which it is composed" (Introduction by T.W. Rolleston, OUP, 1920), p. 11. The use of "perpetually" sets the life-instinct into a whirlwind of circumlocutory life-instincts, each so entangled that the overall form gives an illusion of perpetuity in a very systematic, continual, driven, grammatically structured discourse-driven entity.

[3] "They [sexual instincts] are conservative in the same sense as the other instincts in that they bring back earlier states of living substance; but they are conservative to a higher degree in that they are peculiarly resistant to external influences; and they are conservative too in another sense in that they preserve life itself for a comparatively long period. They are the true life instincts. They operate against the purpose of the other instincts, which leads, by reason of their function, to death; and this fact indicates that there is an opposition whose importance was long ago recognized by the theory of the neuroses" (James Strachey ed. and tr., W.W. Norton reprint, 1975), p. 34. This credit-hawking by Freud does not bode well with Harold Bloom who, in *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, correctly elicits that "psychoanalysis, after all, is only a speculation, rather than a science, a philosophy, or even a religion" (HUP, 1991) p. 146. What Bloom appreciates in Freud is the study that neither instinct is ever entirely predominant – that subservience of one to the other is not the same as surrender – that "the psyche is at civil war, but what it wars with, in itself, is the injustice of outwardness, the defensive disorderings of the drives, the unnecessary sufferings that rob us of the freedom that yet can be our time" (154). Perhaps this is Shelley's "Heaven's free breath", revealed yet unrealized.

[4] "He images to himself the Being whom he loves. Conversant with speculations of the sublimest and most perfect natures, the vision in which he embodies his own imaginations unites all of the wonderful, or wise, or beautiful, which the poet, the philosopher, or the lover could depicture" (69). What is relieving here is that the Poet himself able to see the sublimity in his Poem, a degree of erudition allowing him to perceive it – something that Keats could not in his 'Sublime' odes. There is another interesting aspect in his *Preface*. The Norton edition records Shelley writing that "Blasted by his disappointment, he descends to an early grave" (ibid) while Jonathan and Jessica Wordsworth, in *The Penguin Book of Romantic Poetry*, substitute "descends" for "sinks" (p. 87), among other minor changes. Whereas it does not seem to impress any radical change on the readers' mind, I speculate that there is a slight change of imagery; one moves from a mountain metaphor to a sea metaphor. Although both imageries are decidedly sublime, the idea of death in pursuit of a sublime and its essential failure through annihilation of illusionary ideological motives sets the tone for Shelley's suicidal sublime even before the poem proper begins. Norman Thurston's analysis of Shelley's *Preface* in "Author, Narrator, and Hero in Shelley's "Alastor" addresses the nature of his resentment well-enough: "If *Alastor* cost him the pains of introspection, and if introspection served only to aggravate the pains of subjectivity, he may have been unwilling to expose his feelings once again when he came to write the *Preface*. Possibly he was content to enter a moral criticism of the Poet's loneliness – and let it go at that" (130). Published in *Studies in Romanticism*, 14:2 (1975): pp. 119-131. 10.2307/25599965.

[5] "Since he must regard himself not only as a person generally but also as a *man*, that is, as a person who has duties his own reason lays upon him, his insignificance as a *human animal* may not infringe upon his consciousness of his dignity as a *rational man*, and he should not disavow the moral self-esteem of such a being, that is, he should pursue his end, which is in itself a duty, not abjectly, not in a *servile spirit* as if he were seeking a favour, not disavowing his dignity, but always with consciousness of his sublime moral disposition (which is already contained in the concept of virtue). And this *self-esteem* is a duty of man to himself" (231). See *TMM*, Part I. (On Duties to Oneself as Such) of 'Doctrine of the Elements of Ethics', Chapter II, 'On Servility' §11:435, p. 230. Introduction and Tr. Mary Gregor. CUP, 1991.

[6] "Most fundamentally, it delineates an anti-mimetic myth of poesis as progressive disincarnation, exclusion from the poetic consciousness of all that is not of its own imagination, a myth that involves us in a series of epistemological inversions in which nature is perceived alternately as projection, a spectre, a void, and finally an apocalyptic complex of all three" (150). This is a near perfect analysis, except for the fact that it stops here, which is a serious problem in assessing the direction *a* sublime will take in order to maintain its pedagogical illusion of infinity, something that I have undertaken to perform in this essay. Published in *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 33 (1984): pp. 148-160. https://www.jstor.org/stable/30212932. In 'Narrative and Identity in *Alastor*', Rajan comments that "Lyric is not so much the antitype of narrative as a sublimation maintained only by the absence of narrative" (95). Why this is can be traced to two factors – first, sublimity

requires an actionless action; if the sublime were to move, its sublimity is generally incapable of moving with it; second, Shelley's lyric is deliberately narrated in a Miltonic manner that has been severely critiqued by Samuel Johnson in *Lives of the Poets*. That Shelley used the lyric as an excuse to versify Sublimity should not come as a genuine shock – a concept of proceeding through contradictions that I shall elaborate in a different essay. Published in *The New Shelley: Later Twentieth-Century Views*, edited by G. Kim Blank (Palgrave Macmillan, 1991).

[7] Joyce Carol Oates sees this interpretation, unbeknownst to Mary and Percy, but especially Percy because the idea behind it is very Alastoresque towards the end: "On the surface, Frankenstein's behaviour is preposterous, even idiotic, for he seems blind to the fact that is apparent to any reader – that he has loosed a fearful power into the world, whether it strikes his eye as aesthetically pleasing or not, he must take the responsibility for it" (546). This is still an oversimplification, but correct nevertheless. See "Frankenstein's Fallen Angel", published in *Critical Inquiry* 10:3 (1984): pp. 543-554. https://doi.org/10.1086/448261

[8] An excellent analysis is made by Frances Ferguson in "The Nuclear Sublime". Apart from the distinction that the monster is a creation and not an invention (8), she opines that "While the sublime courts the feeling of overextension as a version of individual freedom, the social world of the beautiful recoils at the way the notion of individual freedom seems stretched too thin to accommodate its various claimants" (8). This is primarily the difference between the sublime (the preponderating death instinct) and the beautiful (the life-instinct). This tug of war continues between the Creator who wanted to create a death instinct and the created instinct which is too horrifyingly deathly to look at, and is willing to annihilate the creator by forcing him through inhuman extremities while carefully avoiding murder and self-annihilation. Published in *Diacritics* 14:2 (1984): pp. 4-10. 10.2307/464754

[9] "If men are taught that there is no almighty and all-just God, no divine world-order and no future life, they will feel exempt from all obligation to obey the precepts of civilization. Everyone will, without inhibition or fear, follow his asocial, egoistic instincts and seek to exercise his power; Chaos, which we have banished through many thousand years of the work of civilization, will come again" (James Strachey ed., W.W. Norton and Company, 1961), p. 34. That Victor Frankenstein plays God is also a rejection of God, if understood properly. God having become a 'play' is problematic to reconcile with, even for the one playing God; hence, the collapse of world order in the hands of unregulated creation, here the illusive and ideological sublime given shape, which is infinitely detrimental for having to realize that ideology is the end of everything including ideology.

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