Monstrous Maternity: The Archaic Mother in *Frankenstein*

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Abstract: The eighteenth and nineteenth century literary Gothic worked in clear opposition to classical sensibilities, yet the archetypes of myth remain at the heart of the genre's development. In particular, figures aligned with the idea of the archaic mother, such as the bible's Eve or the Greek goddess Gaia, represent a kind of divinity that Gothic mothers necessarily defy. The most pronounced of these is Victor of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, who, like these mythic mothers, creates an entirely new kind of life. However, Victor represents a gendered and moral inversion of classical divinity when he corrupts the act of creation by raising the dead, and this unnatural reflection reorients Gothic genre distinctions around the mythic maternal dynamic.

Keywords: Gothic, *Frankenstein*, maternal, myth, Shelley

While early notions of the relationship between femininity and evil are evident—that women are the source from which it stems—such classical and Judeo-Christian accounts have become so integrated into western thought that they establish the basis of institutional norms and cultural practices from which feminist critique has drawn. This essay seeks to link those archetypal similarities to the literary gothic genre that emerged in eighteenth and nineteenth century England and its many deliberate departures from classical sensibilities. At this time, the gothic female body bore a clear relationship to the women of antiquity, but the emerging genre's strong conventions called for certain distortions of these established figures. The gothic is a genre of reversals and excesses, of depths and disguises, and of blurred lines between opposing forces and concepts. It follows that many gothic women represent the duality between the virgin (the woman of grace) and the fallen woman (one "tainted" by sexuality), a dynamic that hinges on the crux of Eve's narrative. This trope often meshes with the story of Mary as well, as glorification of the Madonna over her perceived opposite of the "whore" depends on the memory of the original sin but states it in clearer terms.

The gothic female body encompasses these contradictions, as argued convincingly by Marie Mulvey-Roberts. She draws attention to Eve's origin as a part of the body of a man: "As a departure from the male, the very notion of the female body has proved troublesome," and the gothic woman's body remains a relentless source of turmoil (Mulvey-Roberts 107). The genre, in fact, often turns the life-giving properties of these bodies into the root of evil, an extension of the sexual sin into its progeny. Gothic mothers often meet tragedy as a result of their own reproduction, so that when they do not represent evil by way of temptation, these forces work their way out of the feminine body by way of the monstrous birth. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* boasts one of the most recognizable monstrous births in gothic fiction, as well as the hallmark tragedies that follow, but before examining Shelley's vision of the archaic mother, it is necessary to establish the figure's basis in antiquity.

The Archaic Mother in Myth and Religion

According to Hesiod's *Theogony*, the major poem outlining the genealogy of the Greek gods and narratives surrounding their creation, the original state of the universe was Chaos. Gaia was the first

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interruption to this empty space, and she is the source from which most other gods, goddesses, structures, and concepts emanate, in effect the original mother. The title translates literally as "the birth of the gods," implying the physicality of feminine reproduction in its very name. As Gaia serves to represent the planet Earth as both a physical being and a conscious force, so do the other early gods and goddesses represent places, emotions, and abstract notions. Alongside Gaia sprang forth Tartarus, the underworld to serve as her opposite or other, who both conflicts with and is contained within the belly of the earth. Gaia then produced Ouranos, the sky, who descended to fit neatly against the earth's contours. Apollodorus notes their equidistance from its surface, describing Tartarus as "a gloomy place in Hades as far distant from earth as earth is distant from the sky" (Apollodorus 1.1). Eros, or the force of desire on Earth also appeared alongside these mother and father figures, and from these ideas the Greek mythos, as relayed by a number of poets and oral storytellers, gained its narrative genesis (Trzaskoma et al. 130).

The poem, however, questions the maternal authority invested in this initial goddess in subsequent manners of reproduction. Yurie Hong argues that scenes like Kronus' consuming his children and Zeus swallowing a pregnant Metis only to expel their child himself (a point I'll return to) are male god's attempts to "appropriate birth" (Hong 6). She writes, "Hesiod selectively activates and suppresses both positive and negative connotations of childbirth as a way to characterize the amount of control men do or do not have over their own existence" (Hong 2). One such method for this suppression is to devalue the process by which a birth occurs in order to redistribute credit for that birth between the sexes. In such distorted scenes of childbearing, the male figure must first consume an existing child or the woman carrying it so that he may expel it from his own body in a misshapen act of creation. This masculine desire for reproductive control evolves throughout Hesiod's account of creation, later manifesting in the creation of the Wife.

Jenny Strauss Clay writes at length about the figure of the first Wife, "who establishes forever the status of mankind between god and beast through the human institution of marriage, and defines for all time the coordinates of the human condition" (Clay 109). The woman created for man—Pandora, in Hesiod's account—is intertwined with the concept of marriage because a reproductive force physically separate from the male power had to, at least figuratively, become one with him. In this way the human status dictated by woman is once again seized by the masculine. Clay expands on her previous point, stating

> "Hesiod radically disassociates fertility, maternity, and nurture, which, after all, are the driving forces behind cosmogony, from both the Woman/Wife and Pandora. Neither one can simply be considered the Greek Eve, if we mean by that solely the female of the species. Both are artificial creatures, made rather than born, and bring in their wake marriage, the family and its continuity, the human concern for generating and feeding legitimate children" (Clay 119-20).

That the Wife is a male construction, both as a physical form in myth and as representation of the socially constructed institution of marriage, strips her of the original maternal authority of Gaia, who emanates all life. Hesiod's Wife instead pins this authority to the husband, as any offspring's legitimacy is tied to the woman's relationship, or oneness, with man. Caroline Lopez-Ruiz describes Zeus swallowing the pregnant Metis as "the swallowing of a divinity or part of a divinity by another in order to consolidate power[...] in order to prevent the birth of a successor and always have her moral guidance" (Lopez-Ruiz 142). Not only does Zeus absorb her maternal abilities, but also her godhood and consciousness to guide him. He devours her physically (taking on her pregnancy), spiritually (compounding his divinity with hers), and mentally (making use of her intelligence), so that they are, in every sense, married. The figure of the Wife who is synonymous with the concept of marriage is the complete embodiment of this structure: to be bound to a man in Hesiod's narrative is to be consumed in a confusion of the sexes, something the novel in the following section will complicate.

Much of the *Theogony* tracks the numerous relations and offspring between following generations of Gaia's family tree but maintains Zeus as one of its primary focal points. As Zeus ultimately

becomes the progenitor of most other recognizable Greek mythic figures, the *Theogony* narrates his rise to power as a permanent ruler of the gods as well as the production of his many children. Some of these children result from coupling with women, but even though he did so unnaturally, Zeus was also able to produce offspring from his own body. After swallowing Metis to avoid a successor, Athena sprang from his head. Marilyn B. Arthur notes of this birth that it serves to legitimize the patriarchy, since Athena's strength and wisdom were as that of her father, who by her creation elevates his own ability beyond sex (Arthur 63). Throughout this long series of events, Zeus comes to perform a function similar to the Hebrew bible's God: the masculine ruler of all of creation. The main difference is, of course, that by the time Zeus came into being most of creation was already established, Gaia's first burst of creation a constant presence. In contrast to the Hebrew God, Zeus did not create what he rules. At its core, despite the fraught roles of marriage and reproduction between the sexes, the primary creative force for the Greeks was necessarily feminine.

The placement of the Earth mother within the construction of Christianity is much humbler than Gaia's, but the two are nevertheless intertwined. A masculine god creates the earth, heavens, underworld, and all that inhabit them. Much like early Greek gods and goddesses, Adam and Eve are the first conscious personalities to emerge after the creation of the earth; however, they are explicitly separate from divinity. Though they reside within the garden of paradise, these first humans are forbidden from the fruit that symbolizes, among other things, enlightenment, or a kind of knowledge their creator reserves for himself. This forbidden knowledge is simultaneously sexual in nature, as in acquiring it Adam and Eve become aware of their nakedness, and of the power of creation, as in the discovery of sex will naturally lead to reproduction. Adam and Eve's fall from divine grace is paradoxically the moment they, specifically Eve, assume the divine ability to produce life. As Eve was the first to taste the fruit, this ability is cursed for her: "unto the woman [God] said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children" (KJV Bible, Gen. 3.16). The Bible's first woman learns that with enlightenment comes suffering in the act of creation.

The first humans' association with the earth is less a deviation from Greek myth than it appears on the surface. They and their creative abilities are not sourced directly from it as Greek gods are from Gaia, but they are of its material, dust from the sacred—but not characterized—earth passing through a creator's hands to form first the man, then the woman from the man. This construction of Eve from the rib of Adam calls to mind Arthur's earlier point about Zeus and Athena. A woman emerging from a man serves as a narrative tool to undercut women's creative abilities, and though the Bible refers to Eve as "the mother of all living," through this birth Adam is awarded a distorted maternal authority that by its maternal coding renders femininity and birth the source of power all the same (KJV Bible Gen. 3:20). Nevertheless, this plunges the gendered origin point of humanity into conflict, since despite the assertion that the first woman came from the first man, Adam is of the material of the earth: "till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (KJV Bible, Gen. 3:19). The material of the earth, while not a personality, is at least gendered in the King James translation of the Bible, as seen in God's accusation of Cain for the murder of Abel:

> "the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth" (KJV Bible, Gen. 3:10-12).

Here the earth is personified first by the image of a mouth, which is for all intents and purposes the inversion of a birth canal, a consumptive rather than productive orifice to absorb the very first death. This is followed by a punishment; the body of the earth, referred to by feminine pronouns and the nurturing source of food and life, will no longer sustain the body of a killer even if he is descended from her own matter. While Eve is mother to all, her matriarchal authority is both a result of her fall from divinity to earthliness and wholly distinct from the Bible's Earth as an entity of her own.

Although both Eve and Gaia serve as the first mothers in their respective narratives, Eve in fact bears greater resemblance to two different figures from classical myth. Prometheus, who created or played a part in creating humanity with clay, sought to protect them with the gift of fire, a gesture akin to the gift (or curse) of knowledge Eve receives from the tree. While the snake in the Bible's garden is easy to read as a mirror of Prometheus, Eve also plays an active role in the acquisition of this knowledge rather than serving as the passive recipient. Zeus behaves similarly to God as well, and, angered by the uplifting of humanity, conspires to unleash havoc on them in return. He does so by gifting a jar to Pandora alongside the warning never to open it. Pandora's curiosity, like Eve's, causes her to give in to the temptation of the unknown represented by this vessel. When Pandora opens this container despite warnings not to, some few thousand evils pour out into the world of mankind who had formerly "lived off the land without any trouble, no hard work," causing them, like the Bible's early human race, to suffer (Hesiod 112).

This persistence of the woman fallen from grace as the source of evil in the world, recognizable also as the "fallen woman" who is shamed for premarital sex or assault, amplifies the sexual tones of the creation myth. For both Pandora and Eve, the object of divine knowledge is also one of carnal knowledge represented by a sexed object. The rounded fruit Eve gives to Adam is reminiscent of a breast, and Pandora's box or jar, depending on the translation, suggests the space of a womb. Justin Glenn writes of this symbolism

> "the image of Pandora opening her jar is the exact equivalent of Eve offering Adam her fruit. It functions on at least one level as a sinister, symbolic, distorted representation of the sexual act. It is sinister because society has a deep-seated suspicion of sex; it is symbolic and distorted because society usually tries to disguise its suspicions and prejudices, and is rarely willing to treat sex frankly" (Glenn 185).

As a result of this confusion, both Pandora and Eve's defining moments become a source of ongoing conflict between divine enlightenment and the human curse. This tension also serves as an early reference point for ongoing literary preoccupation and frustration with the female body. Erich Neumann comments on the central symbol of femininity as the vessel, tracing the transition of logic from woman to body to vessel to world:

> "We begin with the territory of the belly, which most strikingly represents the elementary containing character of the vessel; to it belongs the womb as symbol of the entrance into this region. The lowest level of this belly zone is the underworld that is contained in the 'belly' or 'womb' of the earth. To this world belong not only the subterranean darkness as hell and night but also symbols as chasm, cave, abyss, valley, depths, which in innumerable rites and myths play the part of the earth womb that demands to be fructified" (Neumann 44).

To say that the original sin is a demonization of sex that places the blame for temptation to such "evil" on women is nothing new. These myths vilify the natural aspect of the woman, the body from which creation and its unknowns pour forth into the world, and become the world. They indicate the ongoing contradiction that motherhood is sacred but the act from which it results is evil, despite the fact that both events occur inside of the female body. This point of contention is not only central to the classical maternal archetypes but provides the basis for the gothic genre's reinvention of maternal symbolism.

Frankenstein's Monstrous Mother

One of the most prominent instances of gothic motherhood, in fact, is in a novel populated mostly by men, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein: Or, the Modern Prometheus*. Its title character, Victor Frankenstein, is a student who becomes obsessed with discovering the scientific process by which he may replicate the spark of life. The text's inciting incident occurs when, working over the grotesque form of collected body parts sewn together into one human shape, he achieves this goal. The creature that emerges from Victor's experiments bears no conscious resemblance to the humans whose parts make up his own body. Rather, he is as a newborn in a monstrous adult body. Victor describes the scene of

his construction: "With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet" (Shelley 42). Here Victor suffers an almost agonizing labor before bringing his new form to life using "instruments" that the text does not elaborate on any further than the term itself. This vague allusion to the "instruments of life," in a birth scene, can represent nothing other than the feminine reproductive system. Once this labor is complete and Victor's creature coaxed into the world of the living, he narrates "by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs," the language turning suddenly harsh alongside the reality of what he's accomplished (Shelley 42). This scene at once imitates the work of the maternal body to bring forth life—in a form Victor selected specifically to be beautiful—as well as the grotesque nature of birth. Following the separation of mother (Victor) and child (the creature) the child becomes alien and in this case disturbing to the parent.

It is also important to note in this excerpt the inanimate body's position at Victor's feet, rather than on an operating table as it is normally depicted in illustrations and film, such as *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994). That the creator must reach toward the ground to infuse his offspring with life is reminiscent of both the biblical God who built humanity from the dust of the earth and Prometheus, who molded them from clay and uplifted them with the gifts of fire and knowledge. Shelley makes this connection clear in her subtitle referencing the Greek god, (*a Modern Prometheus*) as well as the creature's argument later in the text that instead of being cast off from humanity he should've been as Adam, the first of his kind (Shelley 169). Victor's association with these classical figures coupled with his maternal tendencies throughout the text (both as the creator of the monstrous and as a monstrous parent in the denial of his child) positions him not only as a mother but as an archaic mother. His monstrosity within this role then serves as a defining factor for the genre; he is an archaic mother inverted on the level of gender as well as his rejection of maternity itself.

It is not only the primal scene of the creature's birth that indicates the maternal theme at work in *Frankenstein*, but nearly every element of the book. Marc A. Rubenstein suggests that even the structure of Shelley's novel, which consists of layers of perspective all organized concentrically around the core narrative, is itself of womblike design (Rubenstein 173). This structure reinforces the notion that motherhood is at the core of any and all conflict in the narrative. Beginning with a series of letters that an Arctic explorer, Walton, writes to his sister, the primary layer comes in the voice of a man who feels drawn to great purpose on his expedition. While stuck in the ice, Walton and his team first witness Victor's creature passing them by, unaware of the nature of the character, and later discover an ill Victor Frankenstein who Walton decides to take in and nurse toward health. In a way this purpose he sought to find on untracked territory is the novel's core narrative, and he nurtures Victor and his telling of that story almost as a parent would, waiting patiently during the days Victor cannot speak and then protecting him from the crew's prying curiosity. Through Walton, the first narrative layer coaxes the next into being.

The design points to a kind of tension between the novel and the life of the author as well, and offers an explanation for how they may contextualize each other. Rubenstein writes that as Shelley had not only lost a child before beginning work on the text, but lost her mother in the event of her own birth, "It is as though to be involved in creation, let alone take the initiative in it, is to participate in a two-sided struggle where one party must die" (Rubenstein 192). Victor in fact echoes this sentiment a number of times over the course of the narrative after discovering his creation has become violent, lamenting, "alas, I had turned loose into the world a depraved wretch, whose delight was in carnage and misery" (Shelley 77). Later he comes to terms with his responsibility for the actions of his offspring: "I must pursue and destroy the being to whom I gave existence; then my lot on earth will be fulfilled, and I may die" (Shelley 313). From the scene of the creature's birth to Victor's resolution to kill it—one that goes unfulfilled—the roles of parent and child are continually intertwined with those of life and death, and by extension heaven and hell.

Sandra M. Gilbert thinks of *Frankenstein* as a story of hell in the sense of "hell as a dark parody of heaven, hell's creations as monstrous imitations of heaven's creations, and hellish femaleness as a grotesque parody of heavenly maleness" (Gilbert 48). This reading reinforces the idea of gothic constructs as distorted mirrors to classical narratives but incorporates femininity as the foundation of this binary in Shelley's novel. The creature's birth is an unnatural imitation of the primal scene in the construction of life from flesh of other once-living bodies that is actively rotting and therefore abject in both its otherness and its uncleanliness. Here it is important to recall Neumann's point about conceptions of the space of the womb: "All the basic vital functions occur in this vessel-body schema, whose "inside" is an unknown[...] in all creative function, from the elimination of waste and the emission of seed to the giving forth of breath and the word, something is 'born' out of it" (Neumann 39). While in a traditional birth a child is constructed behind the opaque walls of the womb, Frankenstein's figurative womb, his laboratory, is open to the reader even if his process is not. The broadest feminine body here, the room around them, has no face, no voice, and is only the container through which such a hell as the creature, as his father/mother considers him to be, enters the world. In this birth Victor serves both the male role—his invasion of the womb-space with corpses, the materials he will use to create—and the female role—the physical dissembling, reassembling, and animating those materials. This scene tracks the transition from masculinity in Victor's intellectual pursuits, the divinity Gilbert references which also correlates with the masculine creative God, to the grotesquery of femininity when within the space of a transformative womb he himself becomes an unnatural mother. In *Frankenstein* it is this moment of conversion from masculine to feminine that solidifies the narrative in gothic conventions and a disturbed echo of antiquity. If, as Neumann stated, the womb is identifiable as a kind of underworld, the series of reversals within Victor's less-than-sacred creative space are the hellish imitation of Creation.

After Victor animates his creature, the two remain briefly in the same space, Victor trying to sleep to calm himself after seeing what he's done. It is in the altered reality of his dream during this time that he's forced to realize the true nature of his meddling with the natural process of life. He narrates, "I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. I started from my sleep with horror" (Shelley 44). The image of Victor's own dead mother encapsulates his act of corrupted lifegiving, his own source of life appearing to him as lifeless as the bodies with which he constructed his creature. When Victor wakes, abhorred at the vision, he states "by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window-shutters, I beheld the wretch, the miserable monster whom I had created" (Shelley 44). His mother, who represents his own natural avenue to life, not only appears dead and covered with worms, the consumptive element of the grave that he reached into to create, but is replaced by the evidence of Victor's disturbed maternity. Now under the dull light of night-time, rather than the original bright spark that set him toward creation, Frankenstein's creature is her inverse, her reflection in the gothic mirror that is Victor. Her appearance is the last echo of the rightful womb-space, set towards decay within the series of them her son has made.

From a womb housed in a womb now made known, the creature emerges and embodies a number of classical figures invoked in the novel, just as Victor does. The most apparent of these roles is that of Prometheus, whom Shelley deconstructs amongst her characters in order to complicate his presence. Victor invents a new kind of life the way Prometheus did humanity and accordingly invests him with a kind of intelligence. Gradually, though, the creature takes on the roles of Prometheus and humanity simultaneously as he educates, or enlightens, himself about the world. The scene during which he recounts the discovery of his senses first implies this shift: "By degrees, I remember, a stronger light pressed upon my nerves, so that I was obliged to shut my eyes. Darkness then came over me, and troubled me; but hardly had I felt this when, by opening my eyes, as I now suppose, the light poured in on me again" (Shelley 121). The light of sensory existence is at first overwhelming for the creature, but he finds himself equally disturbed by the dark. Light and dark, the elementary

representation of good and evil or heaven and hell, serve as the first indication of the creature's awareness. The scene presents him with a kind of false agency; he may choose to exist either in the light or the dark when he chooses to open or close his eyes, but neither experience is pleasant or safe. Of choosing to open his eyes, the creature remarks "The light became more and more oppressive to me" (Shelley 121). While he makes the choice to see, and therefore learn and experience, he is Prometheus gifting fire as well as humanity accepting the flame.

This scene offers one of many parallels between Victor and his creature that serve both to align them and differentiate their core motives. Early in Victor's narrative, he describes witnessing a tree struck by lightning near his home and subsequently learning about electricity as a young child. A lecturer explains modern chemistry to him, saying

> "these philosophers, whose hands seem only made to dabble in dirt, and their eyes to pore over the microscope or crucible, have indeed performed miracles. They penetrate into the recesses of nature, and show how she works in her hiding-places. They ascend into the heavens" (Shelley 26).

This lecturer heavily foreshadows the creature's imagining: Victor's reaching down to "dabble in the dirt" or, as he himself puts it, "[dabble] among the unhallowed damps of the grave," that he hopes will result in miraculous discovery and achieving a kind of godhood in his creation of a new intelligence (Shelley 37). Here the soil of a graveyard replaces the clay into which Prometheus infuses life, and this supposed "ascent to the heavens" the teacher describes is subject to the gothic reversal of the classical and results instead in a personal devil of Victor's own making. Victor's interest in this relationship between natural and unnatural culminates in his construction of the creature, his Promethean moment of enlightenment. However, that image of lightning doesn't reemerge to animate the creature in the text the way it often does on screen (e.g. James Whale's 1931 *Frankenstein*), where filmmakers fuse the spark of Victor's natural awareness with the moment he chooses to defy nature. The novel's lightning strike as such marks the genesis of his interest in the powers of nature and the ways he may discover to manipulate them, in essence a spark of enlightenment similar to that of the creature's when he first opens his eyes in the sun, but it also marks the birth of a tragedy.

Where Victor and his creation diverge in regards to their respective enlightenings is in the act of looking. The moment the creature opens his eyes foretells his relationship with the world for the rest of the book. Unlike Victor, who sees what he has created and dissociates from it, falling into a long illness during which he ignores the fact entirely, the monster gazes upon and interacts with the world in all its monstrosity. He enlightens himself by learning language from a family he spies on until they shun him for his appearance, he saves a girl from drowning only to be driven away again, and finally, when he's driven to kill, he does so because he has seen humanity's monstrosity and judged them for it. He succumbs to no spells of silence or dishonestly, but views himself as a monster as much as he rightfully views his parent as one. The spark of intellect that begins in Victor's childhood eventually passes him over and comes to rest in the creature just as the narrative transitions to his voice.

This shifting source of intellect from Victor to the creature is solidified a few pages into his story—which begins by revisiting his conception—when the creature discovers the remnants of a fire while he wanders in the cold. He reaches down to touch the heat source, but burns his hand in the embers. Instead of retreating, however, he studies the fire, collects wet branches, discovers that they must be dry to fuel it, and slowly restores the flame. The creature's long work of educating himself as a human being is thus reflective of this moment referencing Prometheus' gift, except here it is one the creature bestows upon himself. This confusion of roles between the creature and his creator affects them both up to the novel's conclusion. After witnessing Victor's death, winning the life-and-death competition that began with his conception, the creature talks of their connectedness: "he suffered not more in the consummation of the deed; ah! not the ten thousandth portion of the anguish that was mine during the lingering detail of its execution" (Shelley 326). Here he discusses the death of his parent as though it were a reversed birth—the consummation it achieved and the anguishing labor

he experienced in seeing his creator out of the world bears a striking resemblance to the exertions Victor underwent to bring him into it.

This reproduction of the inciting birth realizes Victor's maternal fears as they have persisted in one form or another over the course of the narrative, fears that align with Barbara Almond's studies on maternal anxiety around monstrous pregnancies and births. She writes, "the child imagined as monstrous is a reflection of the monster within the mother, that is, the fear that maternal aggression is in some form passed on to or put into the child, using the mechanism of projection" (Almond 54). This idea makes perfect sense of Victor and his creature's relationship, as a commonly accepted thesis is that in rejecting his child he created a murderer, and is himself monstrous. By extension, this logic amplifies the enmeshment of classical roles between the characters because not only does the creature, or the seed of his creation, at some point symbolically reside within Victor's body, but the monstrosity there transitioned inside the creature upon his birth. The lack of boundaries from body to body in this instance is a kind of psychological abjection to compliment the physical abjection of birth, and Victor's work within his impersonal, representative womb resulted as much in a violent ejection as it did a tether between his child and himself.

Their entanglement brings into focus the dual responsibility for the violence that ensued after Victor abandoned his creation, and the creature's dialogue following Victor's death expresses a keen awareness of that fact:

> "That is also my victim, [...] in his murder my crimes are consummated; the miserable series of my being is wound to its close! O Frankenstein! generous and self devoted being! what does it avail that I now ask thee to pardon me? I, who irretrievably destroyed thee by destroying all thou lovedst. Alas! he is cold; he may not answer me" (Shelley 325).

In this moment, creator and child are at once victim and detriment to each other. The creature simultaneously blames Victor for the events of his life and asks for forgiveness that he cannot receive from a corpse. This is at once the action of a frightened child and that of a sinner bargaining with God for the fate of his soul. However, the notion of a god as victim to his creation does not align with the Bible's intended belief structure. That god is all-seeing, all-knowing, all-powerful; by definition he can be a victim to no one. In the final sections of Shelley's novel, it is the feminine, maternal aspects of the relationship that allow for the vulnerability of connection between Victor and his creature.

What nearly all creation myths have in common is that, somewhere along the line, evil, or the monstrous forces in the world, emerge from the sacred. For the Greeks it was Zeus, the primary ruler of the gods who gave Pandora a box full of wrath; for the Hebrews it was the fruit of a sacred tree created by their god that brought the curse on humanity. In *Frankenstein*, this initial point of divinity appears in the invocation of the sacred narrative—a creation story—that is situated inside a sacred narrative structure: the many womblike layers inside which the novel's primary plot develops. While those divine narratives themselves in some ways sparked the conception of Shelley's novel, they also act as a container for the monsters she wrote and provide direction as to where they are located.

Gilbert posits that when Victor "locks himself into his workshop of filthy creation and gives birth by intellectual parturition to a giant monster" he recreates "the story of Eve's discovery not that she must fall but that, having been created female, she *is* fallen, femaleness and fallenness being essentially synonymous" (Gilbert 60). In constructing his own version of motherhood, Victor falls, and afterward maternity works in the background of Shelley's novel as the holy linchpin between male and female, life and death, and heaven and hell. Playing on a longstanding cultural fear of the maternal other and the mysteries of the generative womb, *Frankenstein*'s real monster is the subtextual, consumptive femininity lurking underneath every male character and narrative construction in the novel.

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