MONSTROSY AS VITALITY: AFFIRMING MARY SHELLEY’S VISIONARY CONCEPTION OF CREATION FROM FRANKENSTEIN (1818) TO DANNY BOYLE’S THEATRICAL ADAPTATION (2011)

by

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Abstract

For nearly two hundred years, the story of Victor Frankenstein and his unnamed creation has never been put to rest – although Mary Shelley’s tale has been condensed to reductive simplicity and misinterpreted in a vast number of ways, it has nonetheless been kept alive. Like the Creature – the composite being who is given life within *Frankenstein* – Shelley’s novel possesses an unnatural life, a peculiar vitality that has ensured its survival despite its many configurations and disfigurations over the past two centuries. Shelley’s use of the epithet “hideous progeny” in her 1831 introduction to *Frankenstein* likens her literary creation to the ugly Creature within the pages of her novel through an allusion to childbirth. In so doing, she weaves together the roles of author, mother, and creator, thus hinting at not only the composite nature of her novel and Frankenstein’s ugly creation, but also of creation itself. Shelley therefore refashions monstrosity as something made up of several pieces and embraces this composite interpretation of monstrosity in her visionary conception of creation. This thesis argues that Mary Shelley’s ideas and practices of creation that depend upon and produce composite monstrosity in the plot and in the creation of her novel account for the story’s overall vitality. More importantly, it anticipates our twenty-first century acceptance and celebration of composite creativity as shown through both the relation between the characters in the story and the interrelationships between Shelley’s novel and Danny Boyle’s 2011 theatrical adaptation.
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For Matthew

If I could grasp that secret spark of life discovered by Victor Frankenstein, I would harness it to bring you back in a heartbeat.

You are and will always be missed and loved by so many.
Note on the Text

Throughout this thesis, I will primarily refer to “Mary Shelley” simply as “Shelley.” While I have found that it is more common among academic works to refer to her as “Mary Shelley” and her husband simply as “Shelley,” this thesis focuses on her work rather than his, therefore she is the only Shelley to whom I am referring unless stated otherwise. Additionally, any use of language that evokes the body – such as a body of work, the fleshing out of a story, one thing bleeding into another, the heart of the matter, going out on a limb, etc. – is entirely intentional given the focus on the patchwork construction of the Creature’s body.
Introduction

In the 1831 introduction to Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s revised edition of
*Frankenstein*, she refers to her novel as her “hideous progeny” (351), drawing an immediate parallel between her literary creation and the deformed monster contained within her tale. By attracting attention to the hideousness of her novel and the Creature, it seems as if Shelley adheres to the more common description of a monster that focuses on horror and ugliness. The epithet of “hideous progeny,” however, does so much more – it simultaneously likens her literary creation to a child as well as to Frankenstein’s unsightly creation. With those two words, Shelley fashions a fusion of authorship and motherhood, and blends literary and scientific creation with childbirth. She thus hints that monstrosity is always a possibility during the act of artistic, scientific, and biological creation. The earliest definition of “monster” refers to a creature that is “part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms” (OED) and Mary Shelley expands on this idea of monstrosity as something more composite than ugly in her novel. In *Frankenstein*, Shelley expresses her monstrous vision of creation when a man creates life out of an assemblage of organs, limbs, and bits of flesh – human and animal. Like Shelley, Victor Frankenstein employs composite methods of creation; however, unlike his author, he does not acknowledge the composite nature of his process – seeing himself instead as a solitary creator. Frankenstein ignores the hybrid quality of his methods and then rejects his unnamed composite creation. This hostile relationship between solitary, selfish creator and a composite, hybrid creation produces several other tensions within Shelley’s novel that carry over nearly two centuries later into Danny Boyle's 2011 stage adaptation of *Frankenstein*. Boyle’s two leads alternate between the
roles of Frankenstein and the Creature every other performance, which complicates and
associates the roles of creator and creation, making both of them (individually and
collectively) composite and monstrous. This thesis argues that Mary Shelley’s ideas and
practices of creation that depend upon and produce amalgamate monstrosity in the plot
and in the creation of her novel account for the story’s overall vitality. More importantly,
it anticipates our twenty-first century acceptance and celebration of composite creativity
as shown through both the relation between the characters in the story and the complex
interrelationship between Shelley and Boyle’s creative works.

The first chapter of this thesis, entitled “Gestation,” will focus on the creator-
creation relationship between Mary Shelley and Frankenstein. She purposefully
highlights the patchwork construction of her “hideous progeny” and thus articulates an
early prototype of intertextuality – a form of composite monstrosity that undermines the
Romantic notion of purely original creation, for it embraces interdependent creation.

“The conception is powerful,” writes Hugh Reginald Haweis in an 1818 review of
Frankenstein, “but the execution very unequal” (200). Many echoed his sentiments in
similar reviews calling Shelley’s novel “disjointed and irregular” and the execution of it
“imperfect” (Anonymous 191). These unfavourable assessments of Shelley’s novel
emphasize the stilted, uneven feel and format of her prose that is made up of three
different narrative voices as well as quotations and references to dozens of other writers
and their works. Just like Frankenstein’s creation, Shelley’s literary creation is a
monstrous amalgam that draws from several sources. Drawing primarily from critics
such as David Ketterer, Anne K. Mellor, and Katherine C. Hill-Miller for key ideas
concerning Shelley’s life, influences, and writing processes, as well as Graham Allen,
Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva for theoretical context regarding the implications of intertextuality, this chapter will argue that the creator-creation relationship between Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein* reimagines amalgamation as something creative that challenges the Romantic concept of entirely original creation while anticipating and embracing the concept of intertextuality.

The second chapter of this thesis, entitled “Birth,” will delve into the creator-creation relationship between Frankenstein and the Creature and focus on Mary Shelley’s visionary feminist critique of a male act of creation that circumvents any hint of the maternal by refusing to acknowledge its composite nature. Victor Frankenstein proudly ignores the clearly hybrid methods and results of his work (i.e. his merging of science and alchemy and the fragmented nature of his creation) and, due to his pride, excludes and disrespects female influences in his creative processes. When he carries out his exclusionary vision and subsequently rejects the composite result, Shelley punishes the scientist for his act of creation that uses but does not celebrate composite methods and exposes the consequences of his usurpation of motherhood. In contrast to her titular character, Shelley fashions the amalgamate and sympathetic figure of the Creature who blends masculine physiology with a feminine voice – a balanced and self-aware model of composite monstrosity who is judged as monstrous by those who cannot accept his plural nature. Drawing on critics who read Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as a feminist horror story such as Barbara Johnson, Ellen Moers, and Mary Poovey and using works by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir as theoretical context, this chapter will build upon the intertextual basis of “Gestation” and argue that the creator-creation relationship at the heart of Shelley’s modern birth myth
illuminates a forward-thinking feminist critique by incorporating and respecting both male and female influences, and by reimagining composite monstrosity as something creatively progressive.

The third and final chapter of this thesis, entitled “Afterbirth,” will focus on the creator-creation relationship between Mary Shelley’s text and Danny Boyle’s 2011 theatrical adaptation of *Frankenstein* to demonstrate how Shelley’s composite conception of monstrosity is alive and well in the twenty-first century. Boyle’s celebrated adaptation not only incorporates and celebrates Shelley’s concept of amalgamate monstrosity by interweaving intertextual as well as feminist undertones, but also works in tandem with her vision of creation, celebrating the composite result of his composite methods of creation. While Frankenstein rejects his amalgamate creation, Boyle embraces the multiplicity of possibilities presented by hybrid monstrosity and, in so doing, assures his creative success by producing a play that speaks to the vitality of Shelley’s story and reaffirms her forward-thinking vision. Drawing from critics Chris Baldick for his exploration of *Frankenstein* as a modern myth that undergoes several reimaginings and Ralph Willingham for his study of theatrical adaptations of *Frankenstein*, this chapter will also use works by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin for theoretical context focused on the concept of remediation. Due to the composite nature of Shelley’s novel, the story is bursting with tensions – tensions between creator and creation, author and text, masculine and feminine – however, because Shelley embraces the potential these tensions born of monstrous creation introduce, she imbues *Frankenstein* with an endless vitality. Boyle seizes on this vitality by grappling with these tensions and producing an adaptation that demonstrates how Shelley’s affirmative embodiment of composite
monstrosity remains relevant in the twenty-first century. This conclusive chapter will argue that the creator-creation relationship between Danny Boyle and his theatrical adaptation of *Frankenstein* validates the visionary quality of Mary Shelley’s model of creation by preserving and extending a nearly two-hundred year old tale that anticipates and realizes the vitality of our monstrously composite world.
Chapter I: Gestation

gestation, *n. /dʒeɪˈsteɪʃən/ Latin
3. The action or process of carrying young; the condition of being carried in the womb during the period between conception and birth. (OED)
We are still living with the Romantically idealized notion of purely original authorship. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley lived through the time when this school of thought was at its most prevalent among the era’s most celebrated writers, including her husband Percy Shelley as well as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and John Keats to name a few. Many of them articulated their ideas on what it means to be a creative genius and to harness the power of the imagination. Percy Shelley elevates the figure of the poet to something akin to a god in his “A Defence of Poetry,” writing that “[p]oetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge … It is at the same time the root and blossom of all other systems of thought; it is that from which all spring” (609) therefore making poets into “the unacknowledged legislators of the World” (613). According to Percy Shelley, the power of poetry and of the poet lies in originality of thought – poetry is at the heart of everything and thus anticipates all. Percy Shelley also asserts that poetry is that which sustains the imagination – a power used to synthesize – by writing that “[p]oetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight” (596). He thus conceptualizes poetry as something so completely original that it not only feeds, but also regenerates the creative and unifying entity of the imagination.

Percy Shelley’s contemporaries also viewed poetry in a similar way. In William Wordsworth’s Preface to his Lyrical Ballads, he describes his work as a new “class of Poetry” (223) and explains that “all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (225). He expands on this statement by explaining that this spontaneity is produced “by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits” – in other words, surrendering to the power of inspiration (225). Accordingly, Wordsworth’s
definition of a poet is a tall order. In his opinion, a poet is a man who feels “habitually
impelled to create [these delights] where he does not find them” (227). His ideal poet
therefore possesses the capability of creating something entirely new, something that was
never there before. Wordsworth’s ideal poet is also in possession of “an ability of
conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those
produced by real events,” meaning that he is able to self-generate passions, or inspiration
(227). The ability to experience inspiration divorced from real events implies that the
results of Wordsworth’s ideal poet’s inspiration are unprecedented and formed without
the influence of anything pre-existing in the world. Wordsworth’s conception of a poet
therefore echoes that of Percy Shelley’s, for they both espouse the view that the work of a
poetic genius is marked by originality – something created completely anew.

Wordsworth’s sometimes friend and colleague, Samuel Taylor Coleridge,
disagreed with several of Wordsworth’s views expressed in the Preface to the Lyrical
Ballads; however, they expressed similar views on the topic of creative genius and
originality. According to Henry Coleridge in his Table Talk – a book that turns snippets
of conversation from Samuel Taylor Coleridge into quotations – Coleridge is said to have
claimed: “A poet ought not to pick nature’s pocket. Examine nature accurately, but write
from recollections; and trust more to your imagination than to your memory” (455). In
this piece of advice, Coleridge asserts that a poet should borrow as little as possible from
the realities of nature – a poet’s main influence should stem from the imagination rather
than from memories of things drawn from life. In some of Coleridge’s later works, he
moves away from giving advice to poets and attempts to define the lofty exemplar of a
poetic genius. According to Coleridge in his Biographia Literaria: “The poet, described
in ideal perfection … diffuses a tone, and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination” (451; original emphasis). This description of poetic genius echoes Percy Shelley’s powerful claim that poets are “the unacknowledged legislators of the World” (613), for both Coleridge and Percy Shelley imagine their ideal poets as figures of authority who, with their influential words, can command the souls and ethics of the world. Coleridge diverges, however, from Wordsworth’s ideal of the perfect poet and adheres to Percy Shelley’s vision in the above quotation when he brings the concept of unity into his definition of a poetic genius. He writes that his ideal poet blends and fuses (Coleridge’s emphasis) all mental faculties and thus, through this act of synthesis, simultaneously commands and produces the power of the imagination. Like Percy Shelley, Coleridge imagines the imagination as synthetic in nature and operation. Coleridge’s choice to identify unity as an important function of the poetic genius and to generate synthesis through imagination is thus notable. In several of his other writings, Coleridge continues to attribute the talent of achieving unity to poetic genius. In his Biographia Literaria, he writes: “[G]ood sense is the body of poetic genius, fancy, its drapery, motion its life, and imagination the soul that is everywhere, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole” (451). Once again, Coleridge claims that imagination, the soul of the poetic genius, produces unity. With the unifying power of the imagination at the core of the poetic genius, poets are thus able to produce unity and harmony with their work – forming everything into what Coleridge calls “one graceful and intelligent whole.”
Percy Shelley and Coleridge were not alone in conceptualizing the imagination and its importance to the poetic genius in this way. In fact, their conception of the unifying and all-encompassing power of the imagination was inherited, but challenged years later by John Keats. In several of his letters to various friends and family members, Keats contemplated the meaning of the imagination and often waxed lyrical on its importance. In a letter to Benjamin Bailey, Keats writes of the “authenticity of the Imagination” and how he is “certain of nothing but of … the truth of the imagination – What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth – whether it existed before or not” (848). Keats thus resists Coleridge’s connection between imagination and unity and instead claims that whatever the mind imagines is undeniably authentic and true. He elaborates upon this conception of the imagination by alluding to the Biblical story of Adam and Eve: “The Imagination may be compared to Adam’s dream – he awoke and found it truth” (848). Referring to the scene in which Adam exercises creative power and dreams of a female companion, only to awake the next morning to find Eve beside him, Keats uses this example to cement his assertion that imagination produces truth – in Adam’s case, tangible truth. Not only does Keats expand on Coleridge’s vision of the creative and truthful power of imagination, but he also takes on Coleridge’s conception of the all-encompassing poetic genius. In a letter to his friend Richard Woodhouse that discusses poetical character – something akin to Coleridge’s poetic genius – Keats writes that this character is “not itself – it has no self – it is every thing and nothing – it has no character” (854). As Coleridge writes of the imagination – and, by extension, the poetic genius – it composes every part of every aspect of poetic genius, which in turn creates anything and everything. Keats imagines the very same thing of his poetical character –
the power of his poetical character lies in the fact that it has no character. It is a chameleon-like force that fashions the poet into an omnipotent, near-godlike presence. Keats’ idea of the poetical character as somewhat of a blank slate – a malleable, fluid notion that encompasses and hence unifies everything – echoes Coleridge’s unifying imagination, which also takes everything it touches and encompasses it all together to form a comparable blank slate.

Clearly, these Romantic ideas of authorship, genius, and creativity have stayed within the collective consciousness and still hold sway today. As Linda Hutcheon remarks in *A Theory of Adaptation*, “the (post-) Romantic valuing of the original creation and of the originating creative genius … is clearly one source of the denigration of adapters and adaptations” (4). As observed by Hutcheon, adaptations are belittled in the twenty-first century and this no doubt stems from the Romantic conception of creative genius in which the genius in question creates something totally original and devoid of any outside influence. Hutcheon blames our (post-) Romantic era for the general disdain with which several critics treat adaptations – generally considered to be “unoriginal” reformulations of previous works, or ideas. Although strands of the Romantic ideal of authorship – solitary and independent – still run through the critical cloth of the twenty-first century, a number of theorists recognize that the Romantic ideal is not (nor has it never been) real. The poststructuralist concept of intertextuality, a term coined by French theorist Julia Kristeva in the mid-1960s, undermines the Romantic ideal of a completely original literary work. In his book dedicated to the study of intertextuality, Graham Allen explains Kristeva’s conceptualization of intertextual creation thus:
No longer the product of an author’s original thoughts, and no longer perceived as referential in function, the literary work is viewed not as the container of meaning but as a space in which a potentially vast number of relations coalesce. A site of words and sentences shadowed by multiple potentialities of meaning, the literary work can not only be understood in a comparative way, the reader moving outwards from the work’s apparent structure into the relations it possesses with other works and other linguistic structures. (Allen 12)

This shift in the perception of the originality of an author, or a literary work, destroys the Romantic ideal, for intertextuality implies that no idea – let alone an entire literary work – is an original one.

Mary Shelley understood this and her awareness of this fact is clearly embodied in *Frankenstein*. In Shelley’s most famous novel, she demonstrates a keen understanding of the fact that the nature of authorship is a much more complex notion than the simplistic (and unattainable) one espoused by her contemporaries. Just like Frankenstein’s creation, Shelley’s literary creation is a monstrous amalgam that draws from several sources. She purposefully highlights the patchwork construction of her novel and, in so doing, illuminates the intertextual nature of her creative process. This chapter will therefore argue that the creator-creation relationship between Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein* reimagines monstrous amalgamation as creative, valid, and vital.

In her introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, Shelley does not assume an authoritative tone when writing about her literary creation – instead she portrays herself simply as the one who has decided to piece together a story made up of various
influences. Not only does Shelley refer dismissively to her introduction as nothing more than “an appendage to a former production” – a clever play on words that likens her novel to the assemblage of appendages that make up the Creature contained within her story – but she also tries her utmost to downplay her importance and avoid credit for a totally original creation (347). As Maggie Kilgour notes:

The effect of this preface is to diminish Shelley’s control over her own text: early critics saw her as simply the passive vessel or transparent medium for the ideas of other. Recent critics have tended to see this self-representation as a part of Shelley’s ambivalence about authorship and authority. In her preface and dedication, she is careful to position herself as a created being, dependent upon and grateful towards others, who avoids satanic defiance of parental authority. (192)

Shelley does indeed, as Kilgour writes, position herself as a created being in her preface, going on to tell her readers that, if it had not been for her husband’s urging that she “prove [her]self worthy of [her] parentage,” she most likely would not have continued to write as a grown woman (348). As for the idea for *Frankenstein*, Shelley shifts much of the attention away from herself and relates to her readers the major events beyond her control that contributed toward the sparking of the idea for her novel. This humility contrasts beautifully with the self-celebration of her male contemporaries and thus hints at her alternate view of creation.

The competition to write the best horror story that emerged between Shelley, Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, and John Polidori on a dreary evening whilst on vacation in Geneva is among one of the most famous origin stories in literary history and has
something of a mythic quality about it now. In the days following the announcement of the competition, Shelley, the only woman among them, “busied [her]self to think of a story, - a story to rival those which had excited [them] to this task,” but she continuously felt “that blank incapability of invention which is the greatest misery of authorship” (349). Instead of the Wordsworthian poet who is able to self-generate inspiration, Shelley avows herself to be unable to conjure up inspiration within herself – instead, “dull Nothing replie[d] to [her] anxious invocations” (349). Whilst trying to come up with an idea, she sat as “a devout but nearly silent listener” to many of the conversations between Byron and her husband – casting herself as a passive receiver of ideas – and, on the evening of their conversation that involved the concept of life and whether or not it could ever be created, creativity struck.

That night, when Shelley went to bed, she was not able to sleep and her “imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided [her],” producing images of the eerie scene that would become Victor Frankenstein’s creation of the Creature (350). Although Shelley describes the genesis of her idea as “unbidden” – conforming to a Wordsworthian or Coleridgean model of imagination and creative genius – she makes the connection between the substance of her dreams and the conversation between Byron and Percy Shelley earlier that evening, thus grounding her inspiration in a real-life event. In the scene that Shelley imagines, at nearly the same moment that the dream-Creature opens his “yellow, watery, but speculative eyes,” she “opened [hers] in terror” (351). This fascinating parallel that Shelley draws between herself and the Creature – their almost simultaneous opening of eyes – is rife with significance; this communal action not only blurs the lines between creator and created, but it also hints at the author’s identification
with the composite figure of the Creature. For, “[l]ike the text and its monster, the author presents herself as created through others: child of famous parents, wife to a famous husband, now mother of a famous text” (Kilgour 193). For instance, while Shelley won the horror story competition with her submission, she insists that it was then Percy Shelley who urged her to expand her originally short story into a novel and attributes its final form to her husband, also crediting him for the preface (351). Ultimately, after spending the majority of her introduction to crediting others for the origin and the completion of her novel, Shelley finishes by calling *Frankenstein* her “hideous progeny” (351), drawing an immediate and deliberate parallel between her literary creation and the composite figure of the creature contained within her tale.

Given the stilted structure of *Frankenstein* that was identified and commented on by a number of contemporary critics, the comparison Shelley draws between her novel and the Creature made up of an assemblage of organs, limbs, and bits of flesh seems rather deliberate – a clever mirroring of form and content. Several of Shelley’s contemporary critics missed her cleverness, however, and only saw the pieced-together structure of her novel as a sign of clumsiness and inexperience. “The subject is somewhat revolting, the treatment of it somewhat hideous,” wrote Hugh Reginald Haweis in an 1818 review of *Frankenstein*, “[t]he conception is powerful, but the execution very unequal” (200). Even Percy Shelley, the author’s husband, penned a review entitled “On *Frankenstein*” in which he comments on “some points of subordinate importance, which prove that it is the author’s first attempt” (185). To be fair, Percy’s review was written when his wife was choosing to remain anonymous and his unbiased opinion was most likely an attempt to help her conceal her identity. Nevertheless, he was not the only one
to remark upon the inexperience of *Frankenstein*’s author. Many echoed his sentiments in similar reviews that called Shelley’s novel “disjointed and irregular” and the execution of it “imperfect, and bearing the marks of an unpractised hand” (Anonymous 191, 195). These unfavourable assessments of Shelley’s novel emphasize the stilted, uneven feel and format of her prose that is made up of three different narrative voices, quotations from and references to dozens of other writers and their works, and bits and pieces of the author’s personal life.

In fact, one of Shelley’s earliest critics, John Croker of the *Quarterly Review*, wrote scathingly of her novel in January 1818, exclaiming with the aid of some choice adverbs that his

taste and our judgment alike revolt at this kind of writing … – it inculcates no lesson of conduct, manners, or morality; it cannot mend, and will not even amuse its readers, unless their taste have been deplorably vitiated – it fatigues the feelings without interesting the understanding; it gratuitously harasses the heart, and wantonly adds to the store, already too great, or painful sensations. (190)

In an unwittingly visionary move, however, Croker calls *Frankenstein* “a tissue of horrible and disgusting absurdity” earlier in his review (189). The use of the word “tissue” is of particular interest here simply because it suggests a number of revealing connotations. As Roland Barthes argues in *Image-Music-Text*, the word “text” originally indicated the word “tissue,” meaning that it is full of different threads woven together to create something in which there is plurality (159). “The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture, the writer can only imitate a gesture that
is always anterior, never original,” writes Barthes. “His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them” (146-7). The notion of text as tissue is an intertextual one, for it claims that all writing draws from the threads of works previous, making all texts into something continuous and thus constantly in-progress. While intertextuality is typically considered a twentieth-century perception, Mary Shelley articulates a double-edged conceptualization of intertextuality in the form of her novel – an amalgamation of textual tissue – and the novel’s central creation, the Creature – an amalgamation of human and animal tissue.

Frankenstein is made up of three different narrative voices beginning with Robert Walton, moving on to Victor Frankenstein, then to the Creature, shifting back again to Frankenstein, and finishing with Walton. Although the Creature’s narrative is only allotted one section of the tale in comparison to his narrative counterparts who are allotted two, his story is central both in the plot and location within the novel, making it the focal point and the middle of Shelley’s work. Katherine C. Hill-Miller remarks that one of the most fascinating aspects of Frankenstein is how Shelley unreservedly describes the Creature’s violence and malice, but succeeds in characterizing him as sympathetic. She attributes this feat to Shelley “allowing the creature to describe his suffering at great length and by placing the creature’s own narrative at the structural center of the novel” (75). Placed at the heart of the story, the Creature’s tale encourages the reader to sympathize and empathize with Frankenstein’s creation despite his hideous appearance. She thus also subtly urges the reader to sympathize with the Creature’s monstrously composite nature. The centrality of his narrative also relegates Walton and Frankenstein to bookends, as their accounts prop up that of the Creature’s, hence
diminishing their authorial importance and sympathetic potential in contrast to his. In this way, Shelley asserts that monstrosity is (quite literally) the central tenet of her text and inherently highlights the monstrous construction of *Frankenstein*.

Not only is Shelley’s novel made up of three different narrative voices, but, at first glance, each narrator embodies a different role in the writing process: Walton the writer, Frankenstein the editor, and the Creature the reader. Walton writes the entire story, Frankenstein edits Walton’s work before his death, and the Creature learns to read and gains the majority of his knowledge from books. However, this neat and tidy delineation does not effectively describe the complexity of Shelley’s creation. As David Ketterer observes in his *Frankenstein’s Creation: The Book, The Monster, and Human Reality*, Mary Shelley’s novel is “itself a very mixed narrative bag” (9) and this is indeed true, for while it appears easy to assign specific tasks to each narrator, some roles overlap. Walton, of course, puts pen to paper and writes down everyone’s account (including the indirect account of the Creature as told through his creator); however, he is also a reader. Walton confides in his opening letters that he has always been “passionately fond of reading” and that, when he was young, he “became a poet and for one year lived in a Paradise of [his] own creation” (52). He imagined his poetic works elevating his name to the “temple where the names of Homer and Shakespeare are consecrated”; however, he admits that he was a failure and that he bore the disappointment heavily (52). Walton is thus not only a writer as well as a reader, but he is also a failed writer, a failed poet. It can also be inferred that since Walton is in charge of the story – he frames the entire narrative – he also holds much editorial control and would have been able to either keep or remove Frankenstein’s revisions to his notes.
Near the end of Shelley’s novel, Frankenstein memorably asks to see Walton’s notes on his tale and “correct[s] and augment[s] them in many places; but principally in giving the life and spirit to the conversation he held with his enemy” (210). He explains his behaviour to Walton thusly: “Since you have preserved my narrations,” said he, “I would not that a mutilated one should go down to posterity” (210). The act of editing is an act of control and it is telling that it is principally Frankenstein’s conversation with his “failed” creation that is the focus of his edits. His use of the word “mutilated” in reference to Walton’s narrative is particularly revealing, for it brings to mind the hideous appearance of the Creature. Like Walton, Frankenstein is also a failed writer – his creation does not turn out the way he wants and, as it is a living thing, he is unable to edit or improve it. In fact, Frankenstein often likens himself to an “author” throughout the narrative in reference to his act of creation. He calls himself “the author of unalterable evils” (112) and “the miserable origin and author” (119) of the Creature. On top of being an editor as well as an author, Frankenstein is also a reader. Just as Walton filled his childhood with books, so did Frankenstein. He avows that he “read and studied the wild fancies” of Paracelsus and Albertus Magnus as a child and calls himself their “disciple” (69). Also like Walton, whose dreams of being a poet inspired by the poems he devoured as a child are dashed, Frankenstein’s dream of being an alchemist inspired by the books he devoured as a child suffers a similar fate. Walton and Frankenstein’s relationships with reading follow a parallel path and they are thus fellow writers, editors, and readers.

The Creature is the ultimate reader. He learns to read with the indirect help of the De Laceys, gains much of his knowledge of the world from books, and treats all humans as texts – things that he prefers to observe rather than interact with. Since the basis of
much of his education is from novels, the Creature also learns to conceptualize his surroundings and himself in literary terms, often identifying with fictional characters rather than people. “Like Adam, I was created apparently united by no link to any other being in existence,” says the Creature; however, “[m]any times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition; for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me” (Shelley 143-4). As expressed in this quotation, the Creature feels a deep connection to Milton’s Satan in *Paradise Lost*, thus displaying his literary conception of the world and himself. In addition to Milton’s epic poem, the Creature reads another creation myth. In his hovel, the Creature discovers some of Frankenstein’s papers in the pocket of a dress taken from his laboratory in Ingolstadt. The Creature learns of the details of his origins and speaks of them thus:

> Every thing is related in [Frankenstein’s papers] which bears reference to my accursed origin; the whole detail of that series of disgusting circumstances which produced it is set in view; the minutest description of my odious and loathsome person is given, in language which painted your own horrors, and rendered mine ineffaceable. I sickened as I read. (144).

The Creature learns of his birth and of his “father” from a reader’s perspective – through writing. Like a reader, the Creature spends his entire existence on the outside looking in – he is othered from the stories he reads within the pages of a book and the stories he sees unfolding in the tangible world around him.

Like Walton and Frankenstein, however, the Creature simply cannot fit within one role. Like his creator, the Creature also calls himself an author when he threatens to become “the author of [Frankenstein’s] own speedy ruin” (Shelley 120) and through his
acts of revenge, he thus attempts to become the writer of his creator’s destruction. At the end of the novel, the Creature also attempts to fill an editorial role by speaking directly to Walton instead of through Frankenstein. Walton informs the reader that when Frankenstein took his notes to revise, he spent the majority of his time “correcting and augmenting” his interactions with the Creature, most likely painting a more unflattering picture of his creation in order to elevate his narrative. By directly addressing Walton (and subsequently being the last person to speak within the novel), the Creature asserts editorial control over his portrayal. The Creature says to Walton: “You, who call Frankenstein your friend, seem to have a knowledge of my crimes and his misfortunes. But, in the detail which he gave you of them, he could not sum up the hours and months of misery which I endured” (219). In an act of editing, the Creature points out Frankenstein’s unreliability due to his biases and speaks for himself to Walton, the principal writer of the story. The Creature thus, like his narratorial counterparts, cannot be confined to simply one role – his actions bleed into the roles of writer and editor as well as reader.

Therefore, while Walton, Frankenstein, and the Creature each seemingly occupy their own role, these roles cannot be contained and overlap. They cannot be clearly delineated from one another and, in this way, Shelley’s three narrators embody her intertextual approach to authorship – like each of the three main narrative voices in Frankenstein, her work does not wholly stand apart from others, but participates in several greater literary conversations with its ideas, tropes, and allusions that intersect with other works and voices. The fusion of these three characters and parts of the writing process also work toward describing the multi-faceted role that Mary Shelley herself
occupied. Shelley is the writer, editor, and reader of *Frankenstein* and thus represents an interesting intersection of each role in the writing process. Naturally, she is the writer of her novel. Like Walton, it is ultimately she who relates every detail of the story. Like Frankenstein, it is ultimately she who is the author of the Creature. And like the Creature, it is ultimately she who is the author of both his and Frankenstein’s destruction. Naturally, she is also the editor of her novel. She first published *Frankenstein* in 1818; however, a second edition was published in 1823 and a third and final edition in 1831. The various changes between editions are distinct examples of her editorial power.

Shelley is also, of course, the reader of her novel. It is plain that *Frankenstein* was written by a reader. In fact, according to Joyce Carol Oates, Shelley’s work is “one of the most self-consciously literary ‘novels’ ever written” (68). The literary quality that Joyce identifies no doubt stems from the numerous references to and quotations from various other works contained within *Frankenstein*. As evidenced by the multiplicity of other works mentioned within the novel, Shelley was an avid reader – she came from a literary family and was a part of a literary circle of friends. As a child, she was “given access to her father’s excellent library of old English authors” and her father, William Godwin, “taught her that the proper way to study was to read two or three books simultaneously, a habit of reading that both he and she kept up throughout their lives” (Mellor 11). As evidenced by this anecdote, reading remained an essential and definitive aspect of Shelley’s existence throughout her life. Mary Shelley played the role of a reader during the creation of *Frankenstein*, for her husband Percy Shelley was involved in the creation of the manuscript (though the extent of his contribution is uncertain) as she wrote and this necessitates that she digest his additions from a reader’s perspective.
Shelley’s roles, consequently, cannot be neatly confined. As suggested by Barbara Johnson, *Frankenstein* is “the story of the experience of writing *Frankenstein*” and the way in which Shelley’s roles bleed together like those of her three narrators seems to confirm this suggestion (248). She is the writer of *Frankenstein*, but as previously mentioned, her husband Percy Shelley also assumed that role during the creation of her novel. Although it is estimated that Percy Shelley only contributed between four and five thousand words in all to Shelley’s novel with his revisions and augmentations, the presence of his voice – albeit minor – loosens the totality of Shelley’s authorial control over her novel (McDonald and Scherf 38). As mentioned earlier, when Shelley gives her account of writing *Frankenstein* in the introduction to her 1831 edition, she often downplays her authorship of the novel. She writes that Percy Shelley “was from the first, very anxious that I should prove myself worthy of my parentage” (348).¹ She goes on to explain how it was he who pushed her to write as often as possible “not so much with the idea that [she] could produce any thing worthy of notice, but that he might himself judge how far [she] possessed the promise of better things hereafter” (348). In so doing, Shelley attributes both her passion for as well as the quality of her writing to Percy Shelley and his judgment. She also credits her husband for urging her to develop her initial idea for *Frankenstein* “at greater length, asserting that, had it not been for Percy Shelley’s incitement, *Frankenstein* “would never have taken the form in which it was

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¹ Percy Shelley was a great admirer of William Godwin, Mary Shelley’s father, and he no doubt principally had Godwin in mind when he incited his wife to prove herself worthy of her parentage. Shelley’s mother, of course, was Mary Wollstonecraft, the proto-feminist writer who suffered much backlash after her death due to Godwin’s miscalculated attempt to honour her memory with his *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Although heartfelt, Godwin’s *Memoirs* was brutally honest about all of Wollstonecraft’s “scandalous” life – including her affairs, illegitimate child, and suicide attempt. The piece was poorly received and only succeeded in tarnishing her memory.
presented to the world” (351). Shelley also makes it clear to her readers that it was Percy Shelley who wrote the preface to her original 1818 edition of *Frankenstein*: “As far as I can recall,” she writes, “it was entirely written by him” (351). In so doing, she knowingly relegates some of her authorial control to her husband by acknowledging his contributions to her work.

Shelley is also the editor of *Frankenstein*, but, as previously mentioned, her husband Percy Shelley took on that responsibility from time to time as well. During the writing process of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley would give “finished chapters to Percy to edit and augment, just as Walton gave his journal to Frankenstein to correct” (Mellor 59). This description of Mary and Percy Shelley’s writer-editor relationship during the creation of *Frankenstein* draws the obvious parallel between them and the characters of Walton and Frankenstein, putting Shelley in the role of Walton and Percy in the role of the overbearing Frankenstein. While Percy Shelley’s modifications amount to about five or six changes per page of Shelley’s manuscript (the Creature’s narrative remaining mostly untouched), the majority of them were mostly focused on word choice.

According to Charles E. Robinson who studied the *Frankenstein* manuscripts in-depth and wrote two brilliant archival studies on them, Percy Shelley contributed somewhere between 4,000 and 5,000 words to Mary Shelley’s 72,000 word novel (McDonald and Scherf 38). Although Mellor remains relatively unbiased in regard to Percy Shelley and his potential controlling nature, she is unreservedly unimpressed with his actual contributions to *Frankenstein*. “He typically changed her simple Anglo-Saxon diction and straightforward or colloquial sentence structures into their more refined, complex, and Latinate equivalents,” writes Anne K. Mellor. “He is thus in large part responsible
for the stilted, ornate, putatively Ciceronian prose style about which many readers have complained” (59-60). As mentioned earlier in the chapter, many of Frankenstein’s critics focused on the clumsiness of Shelley’s writing; however, Mellor attributes much of the novel’s stilted style to Shelley’s husband. In Mellor’s biography of Mary Shelley, she compares an excerpt from Frankenstein in which Victor muses on his fascination with the supernatural that was first written by Mary Shelley and then rewritten by Percy Shelley. This is Shelley’s original:

Nor were these my only visions. The raising of ghosts or devils was also a favorite pursuit and if I never saw any I attributed it rather to my own inexperience and mistakes than want of skill in my instructors. (Mellor 60)

And this is the same passage, but with Percy Shelley’s edits:

Nor were these my only visions. The raising of ghosts or devils was a promise liberally accorded by my favorite authors, the fulfillment of which I most eagerly sought; and if my incantations were always unsuccessful, I attributed the failure rather to my own inexperience and mistake, than to a want of skill or fidelity in my instructors. (Mellor 60; emphasis on changes added)

Percy Shelley’s revision of Mary Shelley’s prose is distinctly denser and almost laughably verbose in comparison to his wife’s clearer and more succinct original phrasing. The extent of Percy Shelley’s edits within a copy of Frankenstein varies by edition; however, several of his various editorial touches remain present in every text of Frankenstein. His edits are now firmly embedded within the text and are so interwoven with Shelley’s prose that it is often difficult to pick out the strands that are purely Percy.
Of course, since the publication of *Frankenstein*, it has been edited several times over the past two hundred years since it first appeared in print; therefore, Mary Shelley’s role as editor has become even more diluted over the passage of time.

In addition to the strands of Percy’s authorial voice in *Frankenstein*, the quotations Shelley includes from sources such as Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” Wordsworth’s “Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey,” and Percy Shelley’s “Mutability” are evidently words not sprung from her own mind and her authorship incidentally stumbles in those sections. Interestingly, Shelley makes no attempt to neatly interweave the excerpts from these poems into the body of her text. Instead, each outside poetic source is formatted as a block quotation and set apart from the flow of the narrative, incidentally *interrupting* the flow of the narrative. The majority of *Frankenstein* is written in prose, therefore, the transition into verse is momentarily jarring. Not only is the transition from text to block quotation and prose to verse jarring, but so is the shift in voice. Shelley’s authorial voice is clearly distinct from that of Milton’s or Coleridge’s and this shift is yet another that tears the reader out of the progression of the narrative. Shelley’s authorship – her format, form, and style – are thus all interrupted by these outside sources. The way that these poetic bits and pieces are made to stand apart from Shelley’s narrative clearly indicate that they are not written by her, thus adding another voice within *Frankenstein* other than Shelley’s and that of her husband. Shelley thus anticipates Kristeva’s idea that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (66). In constructing her novel in a clearly mosaic-like way, she draws attention to the intertextual nature of her novel.
Finally, Shelley is the first and foremost reader of *Frankenstein*, but she also (and quite obviously) shares this role with millions of others all over the world. Of course, Percy Shelley read her novel during the writing and editing process. However, it was also read and reacted to by several others at the time of its publication. Even Shelley’s distant father William Godwin, the man to whom *Frankenstein* is dedicated, read her work and “reacted positively to his daughter’s book,” saying that “*Frankenstein* was a fine thing: it was compressed, muscular, and firm; nothing relaxed and weak; no proud flesh” (Ketterer 10). Godwin’s positive reaction to *Frankenstein* is curious all on its own given the fact that he had estranged himself from his daughter since her elopement with the then-married Percy Shelley and rejected any subsequent attempts she made at renewed communication with him.\(^2\) His kind words on her novel, however, are doubly curious since he chooses to equate Shelley’s imperfect novel to a perfectly-made living thing – a comparison that reads as either ignorance or neglect. His attempt to impose unity upon his daughter’s literary creation brings to mind Coleridge’s articulation of seamless synthesis as a trait of poetic genius – a trait that Shelley does not include in her process or product of creation. She, like Kristeva, thus demonstrates that any “appearance of unity [within a text] is illusory” as Allen explains (36). As many other readers of *Frankenstein* pointed out in their early reviews, Shelley’s novel was “somewhat hideous,” and “very unequal” (Haweis 200). Even now, critics pick up on the unevenness of *Frankenstein*. “[F]or all its symmetry and concentric design, there is something unsatisfactory about the book’s construction,” remarks David Ketterer. “Much of the plot is absurdly contrived, melodramatic and coincidental; the language is

\(^2\) Godwin refused any and all contact with his daughter – even when Shelley gave birth to her second child whom she named William after her father (Mellor 47).
often stilted. Somehow the whole thing does not quite hang together” (10). Oates also chimes in on the ungainliness of *Frankenstein*:

[I]ts awkward form is the epistolary Gothic; its lyric descriptions of
natural scenes (the grandiose Valley of Chamounix in particular) spring from Romantic sources; its speeches and monologues echo both Shakespeare and Milton; and, should the author’s didactic intention not be clear enough, the demon-creature educates himself by studying three books of symbolic significance – Goethe’s *Sorrows of Young Werther*, Plutarch’s *Lives*, and Milton’s *Paradise Lost*… (68)

Oates identifies the clumsy structure of Shelley’s novel sutured together from conceits drawn from various literary movements, echoes of other great writers, and direct references to celebrated literary works. *Frankenstein* is a monstrous amalgam and Godwin thus miscalculates when he compares his daughter’s work to a seamless being. Shelley’s intention was not to write something “compressed, muscular, and firm,” but to give life to something akin to the titular character’s imperfect and composite creation – something that acknowledges that creation can never be purely original and/or seamless, for inspiration always stems from somewhere.

Mary Shelley’s conception of creation, as demonstrated through her construction of *Frankenstein*, thus anticipates and performs intertextual practices, for she, anticipates Kristeva and Roland Barthes, understood that creative genius is not measured by pure originality. In fact, as Shelley herself remarks in her introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*: “Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place, be afforded” (350). This
observation directly undermines her literary peers’ conceptions of creative genius, for
Shelley grasps the fact that creation cannot be built upon nothingness – it must draw from
and build upon the mass of ideas, texts, and works that came before. She, like Grant
Allen in his study on intertextuality, dares to ask:

If Romantic poets such as Blake, Wordsworth, Keats or P. B. Shelley
believed so passionately in the idea of the imagination, an idea which
ascribes uniqueness of vision to those possessed by or with it, why do they
all consistently return, by direct and indirect means, to Milton as a figure
of poetic authority? (130)

Unlike her Romantic contemporaries who masquerade under the pretense of pure
originality, Shelley is unafraid to acknowledge her influences (Milton, of course, being a
major one). She recognizes that writers “do not just select words from a language
system, they select plots, generic features, aspects of characters, images, ways of
narrating, even phrases and sentences from previous literary text and from literary
tradition” (Allen 11). As this quotation suggests, Shelley did far more than simply select
words to piece together the plot of Frankenstein. She incorporated strands of plots from
others works, overlapping character tropes and functions, styles of narration, and bits
plucked from the works of other writers – all to form her composite creation that
acknowledges its intertextual origins. “[Text is] woven entirely with citations,
references, echoes, cultural languages (what language is not?) antecedent or
contemporary, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony,” writes
Barthes, echoing Shelley’s affirmation that invention is only accomplished in chaos
(160). In a similar vein, Kristeva asserts that a text is “a permutation of texts” (36). With
*Frankenstein*, Shelley thus disproves the Romantic notion of authorship in which genius is measured by pure originality and imaginative unity – she instead creates an intertextual novel and an embodiment of intertextuality in the form of the Creature. Both succeed in reimagining the nature and implications of creation, influence, and self-awareness.
Chapter II: Birth

birth, *n.1* /bɜːθ/ Early Middle English

1. The bearing of offspring. Viewed as an act of the mother:
   a. Bringing forth, giving birth. Now chiefly ‘(several young) at a birth’.
   b. Conception or gestation. *Obs.*
   c. Viewed as a fact pertaining to the offspring: The fact of being born, nativity, beginning of individual existence, coming into the world. *to give birth to*: to bear, bring forth (offspring).

2. *Fig.* Of things: Origin, origination, commencement of existence, beginning.

3. 
   a. The product of bearing, that which is born; offspring, child, young (of animals). *arch.* (Cf. Afterbirth, *n.*)
   b. That which is borne in the womb; ‘fruit of the womb.’ *Obs.*
   d. *fig.* Of things: Product, creation, ‘offspring’. (OED)
As demonstrated in the previous chapter, *Frankenstein* is an example of Mary Shelley’s visionary understanding of creation through her conceptualization of intertextuality in both the structure of her novel and the figure of the Creature. She thus demonstrates an adherence to the earliest definition of “monstrosity,” which suggests something composite rather than simply hideous or horrifying. Another instance of Shelley’s reinterpretation of both monstrosity and the concept of creation – literary, scientific, and biological – is in the creator-creation relationship that she develops between Victor Frankenstein and the Creature. Through an intertextual weaving of Mary Wollstonecraft’s ideas into *Frankenstein*, Shelley produces a feminist critique of an act of creation in which a man circumvents any hint of the maternal by refusing to acknowledge the composite nature of his methods. Victor Frankenstein proudly ignores the clearly hybrid quality of his work (i.e., his merging of science and alchemy and the fragmented nature of his creation) and, in the midst of his pride, he enacts an experiment in which women are excluded from the creation of life. When he carries out this vision and subsequently rejects the composite result of his composite methods, Shelley punishes the scientist for his disrespect to female influences, his refusal to recognize the amalgamate nature of his process, and his spurning of the hybrid outcome of his efforts. In contrast to her titular character, Shelley fashions the composite and sympathetic figure of the Creature who blends masculine physiology with a feminine voice – a balanced and self-aware model of amalgamate monstrosity who fuses both masculinity and femininity. In Shelley’s allusions and references to Wollstonecraft and Milton to reinforce the Creature’s femininity, she also uses intertextuality as a strategy to reinforce his composite nature and feminist potential. Drawing on several prominent critics who read Mary
Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as a feminist horror story and works by Simone de Beauvoir as well as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar as theoretical context, this chapter will build upon the intertextual basis of “Gestation” and argue that the creator-creation relationship at the heart of Shelley’s modern birth myth illuminates her forward-thinking feminist critique that reimagines composite monstrosity as something that is creatively progressive when recognized, and feminized by incorporating and respecting both male and female influences. In the composite makeup of the Creature – with both masculine and feminine influences in him – he presents a figure full of tensions and thus full of vital potential.

Notwithstanding their differences in modes of authorship, Mary Shelley and Victor Frankenstein nonetheless share a crucial resemblance – they are both creators. In fact, as pointed out by Barbara Johnson in her essay “My Monster/My Self,” Shelley describes her inspiration for her novel in language similar to the description of Frankenstein’s experience of his pivotal breakthrough:

Mary’s discovery of the subject she would write about is described in almost exactly the same words as Frankenstein’s discovery of the principle of life: “Swift as light and as cheering was the idea that broke in upon me” [p. xi], writes Mary in her introduction, while Frankenstein says: “From the midst of this darkness a sudden light broke in upon me” [p. 51]. …

When Mary ends her introduction to the re-edition of her novel with the words: “And now, once again, I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper,” the reader begins to suspect that there may perhaps be meaningful parallels between Victor’s creation of his monster and Mary’s creation of her book. (247)
As this quotation illustrates, Shelley draws a parallel between herself and the titular character of her novel. The fact that she describes their bursts of inspiration in similar terms is particularly striking, for it bonds them as creators and connects their creative endeavours. Although they carry out their creative visions in dissimilar ways, Johnson’s observation draws attention to the fact that they experience inspiration in an almost identical fashion. A fine line, of course, must be drawn between Shelley’s and Frankenstein’s similar modes of creation and the opposite ways in which they perceive their modes of creation. In fact, Shelley and Frankenstein employ similar techniques in their attempts to realize their creative visions – they build their respective creations out of various influences as well as various parts. *Frankenstein* is constructed from inspirations stemming from Shelley’s literary contemporaries and predecessors while the Creature is constructed from inspiration stemming from Frankenstein’s alchemic and scientific contemporaries and predecessors. *Frankenstein* – albeit constructed from mostly original writing – is also made up of bits and pieces of other novels and poems while the Creature is constructed from bits and pieces of other humans and animals. If one is willing to see the body as text, then the Creature’s amalgamate composition is undoubtedly intertextual and it could thus be said that Shelley and Frankenstein thus employ composite and/or monstrous methods of creation that can be seen as intertextual. Despite clear parallels between Shelley and Frankenstein’s creative processes, their perceptions of their creative processes diverge significantly. While Shelley acknowledges and embraces the intertextual and composite nature of her method of creation, Frankenstein refuses to do so – he sees himself as a solitary creator despite the composite nature of his methods.
Despite the fact that he is the titular character of her novel, Shelley punishes Victor Frankenstein, her literary creation, for refusing to acknowledge the fact that his methods of creation are composite and for subsequently rejecting the composite result of his experiments. Not only does he ignore the possibility of female collaboration to create new life but he also seems to conveniently forget about the amalgamate nature of his endeavour. Even though his creation of life draws on scientific discoveries that came before his, combines alchemy with chemistry, mixes human parts with animal, and merges various bits of flesh, limbs, and organs, the young scientist sees himself and his act of creation as fiercely independent (Shelley 81). Like several of Shelley’s Romantic contemporaries, Frankenstein sets himself apart from his fellow creators, attributing his success only to himself. “I was surprised that among so many men of genius who had directed their inquiries towards the same science,” he remarks to Walton, “that I alone should be reserved to discover so astonishing a secret” (79). Although Frankenstein briefly recognizes other “men of genius,” he immediately dismisses them by casting himself as the only one to amount to anything. As he puts it, he alone has discovered the elusive spark of life. The inclusion of the word “alone” in Frankenstein’s narration adds a willingly solitary aspect to his character – he sets himself apart and, unlike his author, he is unwilling to acknowledge others who might have influenced his project. He not only refuses to recognize the impact of other scientists’ work upon his discovery, but he also sees his breakthrough as an act erasing all that came before. “The astonishment which I had at first experienced on this discovery soon gave place to delight and rapture,”

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3 While it can be argued that Frankenstein’s initial motivation is to preserve life rather than create it, Shelley quickly makes it clear that he wishes to create new life by assembling old parts into a new whole, producing a race of beings who will worship him as their sole creator: “A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me” (Shelley 80).
he exclaims. “But this discovery was so great and overwhelming, that all the steps by which I had been progressively led to it were obliterated, and I beheld only the result” (Shelley 79). In this passage, Frankenstein adopts a Coleridgean model of imagination in which everything is synthesized when he explicitly states that the sheer magnitude of his discovery erased – or, as he says more forcefully, “obliterated” – all of the work and research that came before his breakthrough. This implies that even if he did draw inspiration from other scientists, their direct and/or indirect contributions to his work have been arrogantly forgotten – blocked out by the shadow cast by his momentous discovery. In addition to separating himself from his scientific peers and predecessors, Victor also severs contact with the world around him – including his family and friends – further isolating himself. “The summer months passed while I was thus engaged, heart and soul, in one pursuit,” says Frankenstein. “And the same feelings which made me neglect the scenes around me caused me also to forget those friends who were so many miles absent, and whom I had not seen for so long a time” (81). This quotation emphasizes the extent to which he has alienated himself from his loved ones, for, although he is talking about his family – his father and cousin Elizabeth in particular – he refers to them simply as his “friends.” While Mary Shelley devotes much of her introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* acknowledging the family and friends (i.e., Percy Shelley, Byron, etc.) who inspired her literary creation and much of her novel recognizing the works that have influenced her (i.e. direct allusions to and quotations from Milton, Coleridge, etc.), Frankenstein emphatically separates himself as much as possible from others, refusing to embrace interdependency or acknowledge influence.
In Frankenstein’s exclusionary act of creation, he ignores one glaringly evident and important party in the process of biological creation: women. “Mary Shelley’s overreacher is different,” comments Ellen Moers, “Frankenstein’s exploration of the forbidden boundaries of human science does not cause the prolongation and extension of his own life, but the creation of a new one. He defies mortality not by living forever, but by giving birth” (220). As Moers articulates, despite the groundbreaking nature of his experiment, Frankenstein’s endeavour to create life is a biological capacity that women have possessed since the dawn of humankind. Therefore, as his experiment is undeniably a maternal and thus female one, his exclusion of the female sex in his endeavour is noteworthy. Everything involving his experiment is exclusively male – all of the scientists he mentions are male and his creation is male. As will be discussed later on in the chapter, Frankenstein cannot even bring himself to create a female companion for his original creation – he tears his feminine counterpart to pieces before she can be completed. In fact, Victor’s exclusion of the female sex in his process of creation is made even more glaring given the particular way in which the scientist’s condition during his experiment is put into words. As Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar note in their article entitled “Mary Shelley’s Monstrous Eve,” Shelley’s descriptions of Frankenstein and his physical state throughout his creation of the Creature are undeniably similar to that of a woman going through a pregnancy:

[A]fter much study of the “cause of generation and life,” after locking himself away from ordinary society … Victor Frankenstein has a baby. His “pregnancy” and childbirth are obviously manifested by the existence of the paradoxically huge being who emerges from his “workshop of filthy
creation,” but even the descriptive language of his creation myth is suggestive: “incredible labours,” “emaciated with confinement,” “a passing trance,” “oppressed by a slow fever,” nervous to a painful degree” (39-41, chap. 4), etc. (233)

As Gilbert and Gubar highlight, Shelley’s employment of the word “labour” – encompassed in the epithet “a work of inconceivable difficulty and labour” (80) when Victor describes the toil involved in his creation of a human being – seems laden with connotation. As Frankenstein is endeavouring to create life, Shelley’s use of the word “labour” brings to mind the feminine process of going into labour that precedes the natural process of creating life. Even in the midst of his creation of the female counterpart for the Creature, the scientist refers to his work as his “labour,” how it was “considerably advanced,” and how he “looked towards its completion with a tremulous and eager hope” (Shelley 173) – undeniably feminine terminology that is reminiscent of that used by an expectant mother. Victor casts himself as God – embracing a divine rather than biological model for creation – by attempting to create human beings without interdependency and without a female counterpart. Through the continuous references to labour – the biological method of creation – Shelley highlights how far Frankenstein’s efforts are from divine creation. Although Victor’s “workshop of filthy creation” (81) is an intensely masculine space, Shelley evokes a female presence by emphasizing the glaring lack of it. Even in spite of his trials and tribulations reminiscent of those experienced by a pregnant woman, Victor Frankenstein still does not acknowledge or include any female influences in his act of creation.
Not only does Frankenstein refuse to recognize female aspects of his experiment, but he also rejects and reviles several other forms of maternal and/or female influences – wanting to keep his creative processes as original as possible in the same proud and individualistic vein as Shelley’s Romantic contemporaries (as discussed in Chapter I). Throughout *Frankenstein*, the titular character disrespects several key feminine figures within the narrative. First and foremost, Victor Frankenstein characterizes Nature as female and makes it his mission to strip her of all her secrets. In fact, Frankenstein is not alone in his views on Nature. Victor’s mentor at university, M. Waldman, speaks of the feats of modern scientists as such: “They penetrate into the recesses of nature, and shew how she works in her hiding places” (Shelley 75). This statement not only characterizes Nature as feminine, but also casts her in the role of the passive victim. The language Waldman uses is reminiscent of a rape; he not only employs the verb “penetrate” to describe the way in which modern scientists approach Nature, but the epithet “her hiding places” carries a suggestive tone, especially when he talks of scientists exposing the inner working of those hiding places. Victor echoes his professor only a few pages further in *Frankenstein*, stating that he “pursued nature to her hiding places” (81), suggesting a blatant unconcern for nature and, implicitly, the female sex. Mellor notes:

When Victor Frankenstein identifies Nature as female – “I pursued to her hiding places” – he participates in a gendered construction of the universe whose ramifications are everywhere apparent in *Frankenstein*. His scientific penetration and technological exploitation of female nature … is only one dimension of a more general cultural encoding of the female as passive and possessable, the willing receptacle of male desire. (274)
As Mellor observes, the use of “pursued” once again implies a rape of the female nature – Victor chases her down in order to extract all he needs from her hiding places for his experiment. Waldman and Frankenstein’s characterization of Nature as a female entity to be penetrated and pursued for the secrets contained within her hiding places thus reduces her to something, as Mellor puts it, “passive and possessable.” In essence, “at every level Victor Frankenstein is engaged upon a rape of nature, a violent penetration and usurpation of the female’s “hiding places,” of the womb” (Mellor 281). After Victor tells Walton of his pursuit of Nature, he then relates his indifference to its beauty due to his focus on his experiment. “The summer months passed while I was thus engaged, heart and soul, in one pursuit,” says Frankenstein, “It was a most beautiful season; never did the fields bestow a more plentiful harvest, or the vines yield a more luxuriant vintage: but my eyes were insensible to the charms of nature” (Shelley 81). Therefore, as evidenced in this passage, Frankenstein is perfectly fine to violate Nature because he has neither respect nor reverence for her and her power. Additionally, he asserts his masculine superiority over the female Nature by appreciating her superficial beauty, but remaining resilient in the face of her charms, or her feminine wiles. Despite the overabundance of life and vibrancy he describes (Nature’s “plentiful harvest” and “luxuriant” vines), Frankenstein is “insensible to the charms of nature,” meaning that he is unaffected by her majesty as well as completely untouched by her ability to give birth to so much life.

Victor’s disinterest in Nature’s capacity to produce life stemming from his unremitting concentration on trying to produce life himself, at face value, seems contradictory. How can he be insensible to Nature when she is effortlessly accomplishing what he is striving so hard to achieve? As established, Frankenstein is
engaged in an exclusionary act of creation and has refused to acknowledge all maternal influences on his work. As he identifies Nature as female, it then becomes obvious why he is able to ignore her and her creative powers. Victor is not only indifferent toward Nature, but he also lacks any sort of attraction to the living and breathing, flesh-and-blood women in his life. For instance, he primarily seeks out and prizes the company of men as evidenced by his intense relationships with Robert Walton and Henry Clerval. Throughout the narrative, Shelley establishes Victor’s affection for Elizabeth, but he is not as attached or as attracted to her as he is to Henry Clerval, for example, who, according to Frankenstein, “called forth the better feelings of [his] heart” (Shelley 94). One of the tenderest sentiments he expresses in regard to Elizabeth is when Victor compares her to a “gay and playful … summer insect,” saying that he “loved to tend on her, as [he] should on a favourite animal” (66). Victor’s indifference toward Elizabeth even causes her to doubt his affection and confront him about his feelings. After Clerval’s death, Frankenstein receives a letter from his fiancé in which she asks him directly, “Do you not love another?” (191). Victor’s written reply does not include any assurances that he loves her. In fact, his response seems to try to dissuade her from marrying him, musing primarily on his unhappiness and his burdensome secret that he will only tell her after they are wed. Even when they are reunited, Frankenstein mentally remarks upon how he finds her less attractive than he did before he left. “She was thinner,” he thinks, “and had lost much of that heavenly vivacity that had before charmed me” (193). Victor’s grief when he learns of Clerval’s death is particularly acute, especially when contrasted with the way he reacts when he discovers the dead body of his own fiancé. When Frankenstein beholds Clerval’s corpse, he “gasp[s] for breath” and
throws himself on his friend’s body, exclaiming: “Have my murderous machinations deprived you also, my dearest Henry, of life? Two I have already destroyed” (Shelley 183). While Frankenstein recognizes that his actions have already deprived two other people of life, he counters this with an fragmented lament that implies that Clerval’s death is far more tragic than that of his brother William’s and of the innocent Justine’s: “[B]ut you, Clerval,” says Victor, “my friend, my benefactor –”. While Victor does envelop the dead Elizabeth in an embrace when he discovers her lifeless body, he does not speak to her in the same impassioned tone as he does to Clerval. Sadly, however, Elizabeth inspires the most passion in him when she is a corpse. Only in this instance does he treat her remotely the way he does Clerval, “rush[ing] toward her” and “embrac[ing] her with ardour” (198). He does not call her his “dearest,” nor does he imply, as he does with Clerval, that she is the most significant person in his life. Elizabeth’s murder follows Clerval’s and thus builds upon Frankenstein’s sorrow; however, the scene is not nearly as impactful.

As several other critics have noted, Victor Frankenstein’s passion for the lifeless Elizabeth seems to have deeper and far more sinister connotations – he seems to harbour a perverse desire and fascination for the dead and thus passive female body. Mellor comments on Victor’s reaction to Elizabeth’s corpse, astutely noting his penchant for feminine necrophilia:

Significantly, Elizabeth would not have been killed had Victor not sent her into their wedding bedroom alone… Victor most ardently desires his bride when he knows she is dead; the conflation with his earlier dream, when he thought to embrace the living Elizabeth but instead held in his
arms the corpse of his mother, signals Victor’s most profound erotic
desire, a necrophiliac and incestuous desire to possess the dead female, the
lost mother. (280)

The dream that Mellor references in the passage above, of course, occurs on the night that
Frankenstein successfully animates the Creature. Distraught by the horror of his creation,
he falls into a fitful sleep and dreams of his fiancé. “I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the
bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced
her,” says Frankenstein, “but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid
with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the
corpse of my dead mother in my arms” (Shelley 84). The transformation of Elizabeth
into a corpse – let alone the corpse of his dead mother – at the moment when he shows
romantic affection toward her hints at a fear of or revulsion for the living and breathing
members of the female sex. This scene also draws an interesting parallel between
Elizabeth, Frankenstein’s dead mother, and Frankenstein’s creation. When Elizabeth
transforms into the corpse of Victor’s mother, her lips grow “livid with the hue of death,”
meaning that they turn a dark blue, almost-black colour. On the page previous,
Frankenstein remarks upon the ugliness of his creation and his “straight black lips” (83).
The similarity between the Creature’s lips and those of Frankenstein’s dead mother hints
at a potential femininity in his creation and perhaps explains some of the sudden disgust
that Victor feels for him when he gives him life. This parallel also suggests that perhaps
some of Frankenstein’s aversion to the Creature stems from the fact that this composite
being with female traits mixed with male ones is alive as opposed to the dead body of his
mother that he embraced and kissed in his dreams. Victor’s dream that eroticizes the
lifeless body of his mother thus implies his desire to eliminate the maternal figure of the woman, paving the way for his exclusionary mindset regarding methods of creation.

Another instance in which Frankenstein displays emotion for the lifeless female form is when he destroys the female counterpart for the Creature. As Shelley indicates, Victor “[trembles] with passion” when he tears the inanimate body of his second creation to pieces, unceremoniously dismembering her (175). Victor certainly does not tremble with passion – or any kind of intense emotion – when he interacts with or thinks about the live Elizabeth. His expressions of passion, ardour, or physical and/or emotional affection only occur when the women in his life – his mother, Elizabeth, and the unfinished female creation – are dead. The lifeless female creature thus becomes a visual equivalent to the corpse of Frankenstein’s dead mother: when he destroys her, he expresses his own dread of the female and fear of the mother figure.

Victor not only feels an emotional – sometimes bordering on erotic – response to destroying his incomplete female creation, but, importantly, he also reneges on his promise to make a female counterpart for the Creature because he is afraid of both her capacity for self-determination and her potential sexuality. On a night near the completion of the female creation, Frankenstein begins to muse on the potential atrocities this new being could cause. Victor worries that “she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate, and, delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness” (Shelley 174). The thought of this female creation relishing in the same acts of destruction as his first creation begins to unsettle the scientist. Frankenstein then realizes that although he and the Creature made a pact that, once he had created a mate for him, the Creature and his newly-created counterpart would leave together and never
come into contact with civilization again, she – the female creation herself – has never agreed to it. “[A]nd she, who in all probability was to become a thinking and reasoning animal,” thinks Frankenstein, “might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation” (Shelley 174). The fact that she will most likely become a being capable of logical and rational thought and thus able to exercise agency and reject the deal made by Frankenstein and the Creature scares the scientist. “She also might turn with disgust from [the Creature] to the superior beauty of man,” Frankenstein thinks, continuing to ruminate upon the risk of animating his female creation, “she might quit him, and he be again alone, exasperated by the fresh provocation of being deserted by one of his own species” (174). Once again, the unfinished female creation’s potential to exercise agency and choose her own path – perhaps even one separate from the Creature – frightens Frankenstein. Above all, however, Victor Frankenstein is terrified of the female creation’s productive powers, her ability to produce life like her creator, and this is the final straw that prompts him to break his promise to the Creature. “Even if they were to leave Europe … yet one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children,” thinks Frankenstein, “and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth… Had I a right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations?” (174). In this pivotal passage, Frankenstein recognizes the most pressing danger inherent in animating a female creation – she, unlike his first creation, would possess the power to reproduce and give birth to, as he puts it, “a race of devils.” The final sentence of the above quotation is also especially significant, for Victor never questioned whether or not he had the right to give life to his first creation – instead,
he doubts his right to unnaturally create life when it means animating a female. Mellor astutely sums up Victor’s change of mind:

What does Victor Frankenstein truly fear, which causes him to end his creation of a female? First, he is afraid of an independent female will, afraid that his female creature will have desires and opinions that cannot be controlled by his male creature. … [S]he might refuse to comply with a social contract made before her birth by another person; she might assert her own integrity and the revolutionary right to determine her own existence. Moreover, those uninhibited female desires might be sadistic: Frankenstein imagines a female “ten thousand times” more evil than her mate, who would “delight” in murder for its own sake. … And finally, he is afraid of her reproductive powers, her capacity to generate an entire race of similar creatures. What Victor Frankenstein truly fears is female sexuality as such. A woman who is sexually liberated, free to choose her own life, her own sexual partner (by force, if necessary). (279)

Mellor’s analysis of Frankenstein’s reasons for destroying the female Creature is succinct and brilliant, illustrating his fear of female independence and the female ability to create life. In the end, “it is for [the female creation’s] resemblance to Eve that [Frankenstein] destroys her,” writes Margaret Homans in the same analytical vein as Mellor, “Also like Eve, who disobeys a prohibition agreed upon between Adam and God before her creation, she “might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation,” the demon’s promise to leave Europe” (149). In the destruction of the female creation, Frankenstein deprives the Creature of his Eve and violently asserts control over this
unfinished female body, destroying her by dismemberment, for he is unable to bear the thought of an independent maternal figure.

In summary, Victor Frankenstein makes the mistake of fiercely refusing to acknowledge the amalgamate nature of his act of creation (i.e. ignoring his fusion of alchemy and chemistry, scientific theories, and body parts out of pride) as well as any female influence on said act of creation – all despite his composite methods of creation and the composite result of his experiment. Like many of Mary Shelley’s male contemporaries discussed in the opening pages of the previous chapter, Frankenstein espouses an ex-nihilo, genius-based conception of creation despite his practice of methods that closely resembles his author’s intertextual ones. Thus, in an act similar to that of the Greek god Zeus, Frankenstein attempts to seize control over the female power of reproduction. Like Zeus who swallows his first wife, Metis, in order to give birth to their children himself, Victor metaphorically swallows the maternal ability to create life, robbing the female of her biological superiority over him to produce life. “By stealing the female’s control over reproduction, Frankenstein has eliminated the female’s primary biological function and source of cultural power,” Mellor writes. “Indeed, for the simple purpose of human survival, Frankenstein has eliminated the necessity to have females at all” (274). Hence, Frankenstein envisions a world without women and without a use for women as demonstrated by his experiment that yields a man – and the scientist does so by both ignoring all maternal influences and doing all in his power to circumvent these influences. “From a feminist viewpoint, Frankenstein is a book about what happens when a man tries to have a baby without a woman,” remarks Mellor in a brilliant distillation of Shelley’s novel (40). This statement rings especially true – particularly
when Shelley emphasizes the unnatural difficulties Victor encounters because he has chosen to create life without the aid of a woman. “I had worked for nearly two years,” Frankenstein informs Walton, “for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body” (Shelley 83). The amount of time that it takes Victor to create life – two years, twenty-four months – is over twice the natural amount of time that it takes a woman to bear a child. This extended gestation period points to the unnatural nature of his endeavour and the effects it has on his health points to the unwholesomeness of his project. With this detail, Shelley hints at the price Victor will pay because of his proud negligence toward the composite character of his experiment (particularly the maternal influences) and toward his monstrously amalgamate creation: the Creature.

Not only does he refuse to recognize the hybridity and the intertextual nature of his creative techniques, but Victor Frankenstein also makes the equally terrible mistake of rejecting his unnamed composite creation. Mary Shelley punishes the titular character of her novel for his refusal to acknowledge his amalgamate methods of creation that so closely resemble her own and for his rejection of the composite figure of the Creature that bears several resemblances to a woman and, oftentimes, Shelley herself. Shelley punishes Victor for his failure to recognize his composite mode of creation first through the first pivotal figure that he offends in *Frankenstein* – the female Nature. As discussed previously, Victor disrespects Nature – the entity he casts as female – in his blatant disregard for her secrets and his sense of entitlement to them when he embarks upon the creation of a being through the use of unnatural means. After his tampering with the natural order of things, Nature is no longer Victor Frankenstein’s friend and over the course of the narrative, Shelley – slowly but surely – escalates Nature’s acts of revenge.
Her retaliation begins mildly enough – at several points after the birth of the Creature, Frankenstein is often caught in the rain, souring his mood. On the day he meets the Creature for the first time after his creation “the rain poured down in torrents, and thick mists hid the summits of the mountains. [Frankenstein] rose early, but felt unusually melancholy,” the rain depressing him and rendering him miserable (Shelley 116). On the night of Elizabeth’s murder, it rains again. “Suddenly a heavy storm of rain descended,” says Frankenstein, “I had been calm during the day; but so soon as night obscured the shapes of objects, a thousand fears arose in my mind” (197). In both instances, the sudden rain produces a negative emotion within him – the first time, it elicits sadness and the second, it elicits fear. In addition, Nature always cedes the advantage to the Creature, who is far more in tune with and respectful of her. For example, on that day when Frankenstein encounters his creation on Mount Chamonix, they meet on a glacier – the terrain slippery, irregular, and unforgiving. Frankenstein admits that he has trouble navigating upon the surface, for although “[t]he field of ice is almost a league in width, [he] spent nearly two hours in crossing it” (117). The natural world gives an advantage to the Creature once more near the end of Frankenstein’s tale when he chooses to lure his creator to the harsh climate of the North. “Follow me,” writes the Creature to Frankenstein, “I seek the everlasting ices of the north, where you will feel the misery of cold and frost, to which I am impassive” (205). The Creature is aware of his advantage over his creator – he even carves this message into the bark of a tree, a material granted to him by Nature – and Victor suffers in this unforgiving environment. “Oh! how unlike it was to blue seas of the south!” he exclaims, “Covered with ice, it was only to be distinguished from land by its superior wildness and ruggedness” (206). As the Creature
recognizes, he is impervious to the harshness of Nature, protected even from her bleakest of conditions. Frankenstein, however, for one who claimed to have stripped Nature of all her secrets, proves to be weaker than her when subjected to the full extent of her power.

Nature not only hinders Frankenstein emotionally and physically, but she also makes a few choice attempts on his life and ultimately thwarts his plans to destroy the Creature. After Victor has ripped the Creature’s female counterpart to pieces, he tries to leave the island by boat. At first, the water is calm, but things change abruptly:

The wind was high, and the waves continually threatened the safety of my little skiff. I found that the wind was north-east, and must have driven me far from the coast from which I had embarked. I endeavoured to change my course, but quickly found that if I again made the attempt the boat would be instantly filled with water. ... I confess that I felt a few sensations of terror. ... I might be driven into the wide Atlantic, and feel all the tortures of starvation, or be swallowed up in the immeasurable waters that roared and buffeted around me. ... I looked on the heavens, which were covered by clouds that flew before the wind only to be replaced by others: I looked upon the sea, it was to be my grave. (179)

In this passage, Victor Frankenstein is at the complete mercy of Nature – he who boasted to have discovered all of her secrets and explored her hiding places is no longer the one in control. Shelley’s Nature reasserts her power over the overreaching scientist and proves herself to be a fierce, untamable, and fearsome entity – entirely different from the toothless, harmless, and beautiful Nature most often associated with Romantic Period stereotypes. In this passage, Shelley provides a brilliant piece of foreshadowing:
although Frankenstein does not perish immediately after the above quotation, he does indeed die at sea, aboard Captain Walton’s ship, at the end of the novel. The sea is indeed to be his grave. It is upon this final sea of ice that Nature exercises another delicious act of vengeance upon the man who slighted her. Just as Frankenstein is about to capture the Creature, Nature dashes his hopes. With a roar of the wind and sea, the ice beneath Victor’s feet splits, cutting him off from his creation, and sending him off on a drifting piece of ice, indeed preparing him for what he calls “a hideous death” (Shelley 208). Ultimately, Nature sides with the Creature – the poor result of Frankenstein’s machinations – and punishes the scientist for his transgression. “Nature’s revenge is absolute,” writes Mellor, “he who violates her sacred hiding places is destroyed” (283).

Mellor’s shrewd observation proves to be true particularly in the case of the Creature who, because of his respect for Nature, is rewarded by the female entity for his esteem. In their first encounter after his creation, the Creature informs Victor of his obligation to Nature – unlike Victor’s absence as a father figure, Nature provides a maternal one for the abandoned Creature. “The desert mountains and dreary caves of ices, which I only do not fear, are a dwelling to me, and the only one which man does not grudge,” says the Creature, “These bleak skies I hail, for they are kinder to me than your fellow-beings” (Shelley 119). The Creature not only identifies how he was able to make a home amidst one of Nature’s most inaccessible and bleak locations – the ice caves at the summit of Mount Chamonix – but he also recognizes Nature’s kindness in comparison to humans, praising her. From the Creature’s unconventional birth, he finds solace only in Nature, never in humankind; in fact, the Creature dedicates much of the beginning of his tale to his love and reverence for Nature. He talks of how Nature
nurtures him by assuaging his hunger and thirst, but he also speaks of his wonder in the face of so many natural wonders. The Creature describes his pleasure at a sunrise (121) and his delight at the sounds of birdsong (122). Shelley thus establishes Nature as the Creature’s only ally throughout the novel, binding the two together, and hinting at similarities between the two. Of course, while Nature is one of Victor Frankenstein’s primary destroyers, the Creature is the other. Nonetheless, some less obvious similarities run a bit deeper between the Creature and Nature – like a shared femininity. As Barbara Johnson points out, Shelley’s novel seems to sidestep the concept of femininity altogether what with its three dynamic male narrators and flat female character relegated to the sidelines. “At first sight, it would seem that Frankenstein is much more striking for its avoidance of the question of femininity than for its insight into it” (Johnson 248).

Importantly, Johnson uses the phrase “[a]t first sight” to describe Frankenstein’s disregard for feminine issues, implying that upon further inspection, the very opposite proves to be true. As discussed already, Shelley includes a particularly damning account of Victor Frankenstein’s circumvention of the maternal and fleshes out a powerful female character in the figure of Nature. In contrast to his creator who dismisses anything monstrously composite, the Creature presents a self-aware amalgamate being who fuses a masculine body with feminine issues and a feminist voice.

Not only does the Creature identify with and bond with the feminine figure of Nature, but he also bears a strong resemblance to his female author, Mary Shelley. Like Shelley, the Creature learns about his creator through his writing as Shelley did with her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, who died of septicemia after giving birth to her daughter. While Shelley grew to know her mother through her written works – among them, A
*Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, which proved to be a large influence on *Frankenstein* – the Creature also only truly met his creator, Victor Frankenstein, through writing. Hidden in the hovel near the De Lacey family, the Creature learns of his origins through Frankenstein’s journals: “Soon after my arrival in the hovel, I discovered some papers in the pocket of the dress which I had taken from your laboratory,” the Creature recounts to his creator. “At first I had neglected them; but now that I was able to decipher the characters in which they were written, I began to study them with diligence. It was your journal of the four months that preceded my creation” (Shelley 144). This similar mode of interaction with their creators creates an interesting link between Shelley and her composite creation. While the Creature, of course, gets to meet his creator in person – unlike Shelley – this does not change the fact that Victor Frankenstein continues to be an absent parent in the way that William Godwin, Mary Shelley’s father, chose to be. “Endlessly studying her mother’s works and her father’s, Mary Shelley may be said to have “read” her family and to have been related to her reading,” write Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, “for books appear to have functioned as her surrogate parents, pages and words standing in for flesh and blood” (227-8). Similar to his female author, the Creature reads his own family, creating surrogate parents and role models in characters drawn from books and poems – professing to identify the most with Milton’s Satan, the angel cast out of Heaven. Shelley and her creation also share parallel reading lists. The Creature is a self-educated being who teaches himself how to read and goes on to devour several books that correspond with the ones Shelley read in the years leading up to the writing of her novel. “In fact, it is his intellectual similarity to his authoress (rather than
his “author”) which first suggests that Victor Frankenstein’s male monster may really be a female in disguise,” write Gilbert and Gubar,

Certainly the books which educate him – *Werter*, Plutarch’s *Lives*, and *Paradise Lost* – are not only books Mary has herself read in 1815, the year before she wrote *Frankenstein*, but they also typify just the literary categories she thought it necessary to study: the contemporary novel of sensibility, the serious history of Western civilization, and the highly cultivated epic poem. As specific, moreover, each must have seemed to her to embody lessons a female author (or monster) must learn about a male-dominated society. (237)

Therefore, Shelley chooses to give the Creature the same education as herself, cementing lessons about the patriarchal society in which they through her choice of reading material.⁴ All books are penned by men and boast male protagonists with weak female characters that are often relegated to the sidelines of the narrative. Despite the fact that the Creature is physiologically male and has already admitted to identifying with the male Satan, he, like Shelley, might also have identified with the female characters who are often othered and relegated to the sidelines.

Shelley and the Creature also have similar parents – they both grow up motherless and have negligent fathers. The detached and later strained relationship between father and daughter is detailed in several biographies of Shelley, most hinting at his misplaced resentment toward Mary for precipitating the death of his brilliant wife. Like the Creature, Shelley also makes several attempts at gaining the respect and acceptance of

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⁴ Additionally, including these works within the body of *Frankenstein* once again hearkens back to the chapter previous and its discussion of Shelley’s intertextual approach to creation.
her father – even going so far as to dedicate \textit{Frankenstein} to him even after years of neglect. Although the dedication of a novel about the consequences of being an absent father to an absent father could be construed as somewhat of an insult, it seems that Godwin did not take it as one given his glowing review of the novel (see Chapter 1).

Throughout \textit{Frankenstein}, the Creature never refers to Victor as his father – only ever his creator, or his author – but his attempts to create a bond and earn his respect are painfully obvious. Despite the Creature’s admission that “the spirit of vengeance enkindled in [his] heart” the closer he got to Frankenstein and his home after months of solitude and abuse (Shelley 152), he nonetheless does his best to show his creator that he is a learned being and is capable of reason (156-7). During his conversation with his creator, the Creature also pointedly asserts: “If any being felt emotions of benevolence towards me, I should return them an hundred and an hundred fold; for that one creature’s sake, I would make peace with the whole kind” (157). This statement, directed at Frankenstein, is hard not to construe as a plea for his love in particular – the love of his father, his creator. He cannot be talking of the female companion he is about to ask for because he talks of making peace “with the whole kind,” meaning the human race. Although his yearning for his creator’s love and acceptance is voiced in an extremely indirect manner, it is creating an opening for Frankenstein for which to reconsider his feelings toward his creation and care for him. Perhaps the best example of the Creature seeking Victor’s love and approval as a father figure is the night of his creation, when he appears above the scientist’s bed: “His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks… [O]ne hand was stretched out” (Shelley 84). This description of the Creature conjures up an image of a child attempting to attract the attention of a parent. The image
of inarticulate speech paired with the innocent grin and outstretched hand paints a picture of a harmless child attempting to reach out – literally and figuratively – to his creator, the first person he sees upon waking. Given Shelley’s estranged relationship with her own father, another parallel is drawn between her and the Creature, another being seeking the love and acceptance of the closest thing he has to a father: his irresponsible creator.

While Shelley’s relationship with her father is mirrored in the Creature’s relationship with Victor, it is Mary Shelley’s relationship with her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, and her writing that is particularly vital to the characterization of the Creature. Unlike Shelley’s blatant use of intertextuality throughout Frankenstein – what with her use of direct quotations lifted from other texts and direct references to other authors and works – her weaving of Wollstonecraft’s work within her own is subtler in its articulation through the person of the Creature. The use of Wollstonecraftean rhetoric, drawn particularly from her Vindication, within the Creature’s narrative is another way in which Shelley intertextually reinforces the Creature as a feminine figure. It almost seems inevitable that threads of Wollstonecraft’s feminist work would find their way into Frankenstein given that Shelley was reading her mother’s Vindication of the Rights of Woman as she was in the process of writing her novel (Johnson 249). Wollstonecraft’s ideas are scattered throughout Shelley’s work and are always voiced or demonstrated through the composite figure of the Creature – the being with the body of a man, but the plight and voice of a woman. As Mellor notes: “Mary Shelley, doubtless inspired by her mother’s A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, specifically portrays the consequences of a social construction of gender that values the male above the female” (274). For instance, Wollstonecraft’s critique of female education and self-education is prominent in
the Creature’s tale. “[W]omen,” writes Wollstonecraft, “generally speaking, receive only a disorderly kind of education, seldom attend to with that degree of exactness that men, who from their infancy are broken into method, observe” (499). This disorderly education that Wollstonecraft decries is characterized by observation – a woman’s education in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was not important enough for which to build a structured curriculum (unlike those assembled for a man’s education). Instead, women were left to absorb information wherever and however they could and provide for themselves what was often an incomplete self-education. The Creature is a self-educated being – through his distanced observation of the De Lacey family, he teaches himself how to speak, read, and write. He thus, as Wollstonecraft remarks, “acquire[s] more by sheer observation on real life” than he does by actively living life, for what the Creature learns is acquired “rather by snatches” (500). His education is thus flawed and he is at even more of a disadvantage than he already is due to his appearance – the fact that the Creature receives the same education as an eighteenth-century woman relegates him to the same othered position as his female contemporaries, his otherness exacerbated, of course, by his hideous appearance.

The Creature also reads a sentimental novel – Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* – which is something that Wollstonecraft highly discourages. She calls the reading of novels a “trifling employment” taken up by women because they are “denied all political privileges, and [are] not allowed … a civil existence” (486-7). Novels, in Wollstonecraft’s opinion, “foolishly and ridiculously [caricature] human nature” and, because of that, reason cannot be attained in reading them – they cultivate, “romantic sentiments” (491-2). In Wollstonecraftian logic, because of the Creature’s desultory
education, he is thus unable to achieve reason because he has never been given the opportunity of a structured education offered to most men. The Creature’s frustrated exclamation of “I intended to reason” (Shelley 157) after he loses his temper with Frankenstein is a perfect distillation of Wollstonecraft’s argument against the kind of education consigned to women in the eighteenth century – despite his best attempts to reason, he cannot because of his imperfect education acquired through “snatches.”

Another striking moment of seemingly Wollstonecraft-inspired sentiment in the Creature is when he declares that he will not submit himself to a position of “abject slavery” (Shelley 156). Throughout Vindication, Wollstonecraft likens the condition of women to one of slavery, writing comments in response to stereotypical and idealized descriptions of submissive women such as: “Is not the following portrait – the portrait of a house slave?” (260-2). The Creature’s refusal to play the role of the slave taps into a Wollstonecraftian vein in his attempt to break free from the shackles cast upon him by his otherness – otherness akin to female otherness. Although the Creature asserts that he will not submit himself to slavery, the comparison of his situation to that of a slave is made, drawing yet another parallel between himself and women. Wollstonecraft compares women to slaves; the Creature compares himself to a slave. Shelley was reading her mother’s Vindication as she wrote Frankenstein and the use of the word was thus hardly accidental.

The Creature’s resemblance to the other daughters within Frankenstein can also hardly be considered accidental. In addition to exemplifying many of Mary Wollstonecraft’s chief arguments regarding women, the Creature takes on many more feminine undertones when his situation is compared with the other female characters – all
daughters suffering from their relationships with their fathers – within her novel.

Katherine Hill-Miller writes of this link between the Creature and these women thusly:

If Frankenstein’s creature can be read as an embodiment of the female, it can also be read more specifically as representing the plight of the daughter. Shelley takes pains to underscore the similarities between the situation of the creature and the predicament of the other abandoned, rejected, or betrayed daughters with whom she populates the pages of *Frankenstein*. Although Frankenstein’s nameless creature is emphatically male, his circumstances have much more in common with daughters who appear in the novel than with the son. (67)

As Hill-Miller notes, the Creature can be convincingly read as a feminine representative, especially given the amount of parallels between Frankenstein’s creation and the other women in Shelley’s tale – particularly the characters of Caroline Beaufort (Victor’s mother), Elizabeth Lavenza (Victor’s cousin), and Safie (Felix De Lacey’s beloved). All of these women are made to suffer financially, socially, and emotionally because of decisions made by their respective fathers. Caroline Beaufort, despite her best efforts, is driven to poverty because of the poor financial decisions made by her father, leaving her destitute after his death, reduced to “an orphan and a beggar” (Shelley 65). After the death of her mother, Elizabeth Lavenza is given up by her father, sending her off to live with her uncle, Alphonse Frankenstein, because he does not want her to be subjected to the care of a stepmother – a flimsy excuse by any means (Shelley 65-6). Safie, the Arabian woman who falls in love with Felix De Lacey, escapes the clutches of her “tyrannical” father, but is then left to fend for herself without any help or sympathy from
him (Shelley 141). The Creature, of course, endures a fate similar to these three daughters – he, too, is orphaned by his “father” and is left to fend for himself, for better or for worse, suffering for his creator’s decisions. “Chief among the similarities is the fact that the creature is “an orphan and beggar” [like Caroline Beaufort],” comments Hill-Miller, “a condition to which, at some point in the novel, all the daughters in *Frankenstein* have been reduced by their fathers” (67). This insight could not be closer to the truth; the epithet with which Shelley describes Caroline Beaufort so early on in the novel – “an orphan and a beggar” – accurately describes all of the daughters contained within *Frankenstein* – even the Creature.

With the Creature as an embodiment of the female plight, his composite nature and Victor Frankenstein’s hatred of his amalgamate creation both take on an even deeper significance. In fact, Victor’s first moments with his creation speaks to his hatred tinged with whispers of misogyny. The scientist’s first description of the Creature focuses on individual features that emphasize his creation’s ugliness: “His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness,” recounts Frankenstein. “[T]hese luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips” (Shelley 83). This piece-by-piece description of the Creature’s horrid appearance subverts the Petrarchan poetic tradition of the blazon in which a woman’s beauty is told through a dissection of her features. “Victor’s perception here is a kind of parody of the blazon form of courtly love … in which the lover takes the object of his attention apart piece by succulent piece,” Kilgour explains. “The erotic model reinforces
the association of the monster throughout the text with not only nature but also women” (205). In fact, “[s]everal arguments can be made for reading Frankenstein’s “monster” as an embodiment of the female … and specifically as a daughter,” writes Hill-Miller,

For one thing, Frankenstein’s displacement of his own monstrous fears upon the head of his creature parallels and repeats the male cultural act that associates, by an act of projection, what Gilbert and Gubar have called “filthy materiality” with female otherness. (66)

As this quotation suggests, the Creature’s monstrous compositeness that includes his maleness and femaleness seems to twist his creator’s hatred for him into something darker – he, like so many other men, is disgusted by his creation because he is tinged with the monstrous otherness of femininity. Taking Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s argument from their seminal *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, they suggest that nineteenth-century female writers – such as Mary Shelley – often felt lost in the literary landscape because they had no foremothers to look to. Instead, when they wrote and attempted to forge a path for themselves amongst the masculinized practice of writing, they often felt diseased, or ill. In fact, Gilbert and Gubar paint a rather grotesque picture of femininity – one of “filthy materiality” as Hill-Miller reminds her readers. “[L]ike most women in patriarchal society, the woman writer does experience her gender as a painful obstacle, or even a debilitating inadequacy,” Gilbert and Gubar write. “Thus the loneliness of the female artist, her feelings of alienation from male predecessors coupled with her need for sister precursors and successors … – all these phenomena of “inferiorization” mark the woman writer’s struggle for artistic self-definition” (1930). In this passage, Gilbert and Gubar
describe the struggles of the woman writer – her loneliness, her sense of alienation, and her feelings of inferiority – and Shelley describes the struggles of the Creature in a similar way. He, too, is a lonely and alienated being who is consistently made to feel inferior. As a nineteenth-century female writer, Shelley no doubt, as Gilbert and Gubar explain, felt these very feelings and transferred them into the male figure of the Creature, so as to voice them in a way that did not overstep the boundaries of her gender role.

Gilbert and Gubar continue to press the matter further. When speaking about the anxiety accompanying female authorship that is handed down from one woman writer to the next, they note how this pattern “is in many ways the germ of a dis-ease or, at any rate, a disaffection, a disturbance, a distrust, that spread like a stain throughout the style and structure of much literature by women” (1931). This description of female author plagued with an anxious kind of sickness – something that “spread[s] like a stain,” bringing to mind a blood or ink stain seeping through flesh or cloth – fleshes out the grotesque self-image women writers had of themselves because of their desire to do something “monstrous” – to take up the pen and create like a man (non-biologically). According to Gilbert and Gubar, this warped self-image shifts over time. They identify a change in contemporary female authors; however, “only because their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century foremothers struggled in isolation that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness, obscurity that felt like paralysis to overcome the anxiety of authorship that was endemic to their literary subculture” (1931). The use of words like “illness,” “madness,” and “endemic” in reference to female authors echo, once again, the images of sickness mentioned above. Because of these images of sickness and horror, Gilbert and Gubar paint a portrait of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century female writers who think and
feel eerily similar to Mary Shelley’s patchwork creation: the Creature. When reading of his origins, the Creature articulates sentiments similar to Gilbert and Gubar – he views himself as a sort of diseased being and expresses disgust at his form:

[Victor Frankenstein] minutely described in these papers every step [he] took in the progress of [his] work; this history was mingled with accounts of domestic occurrences. ... Every thing is related in them which bears reference to my accursed origin; the whole detail of that series of disgusting circumstances which produced it is set in view; the minutest description of my odious and loathsome person is given, in language which painted [his] own horrors, and rendered mine ineffaceable. I sickened as I read. (Shelley 144)

The Creature’s admission to being physically sickened when reading about his creation, hearkens back to Gilbert and Gubar’s analysis of the woman writer – she feels her isolation and her difference so acutely that she feels as if she is the one who is sick, twisted, diseased. The Creature, thus, like the female writer described in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, is othered and made to feel grotesque in his own body. It is important, of course, that his situation runs parallel to a *female* writer rather than a *male* one despite his physiology. Gilbert and Gubar actually reference Shelley’s amalgamate creation directly, comparing him to a nineteenth-century female author (perhaps even his very own):

“Mary Shelley’s monster,” they write, “is ‘born’ without either a memory or a family history” (1937). Like the nineteenth-century female writers who felt as if they were cut off from literary tradition because they had no mothers to look up to, the Creature is also cut off from the world because he is alone – he has no mother and he technically does not
even have a father. As Gilbert and Gubar suggest with the quotation marks hugging the word “born,” the Creature is made without biological parents. He, like nineteenth-century female writers, has no one to emulate, or even support him. He is the only one of his kind and is thus the ultimate Other. Gilbert and Gubar warn their readers: “It is debilitating to be *any* woman in a society where women are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters” (1932). This statement, while not in direct reference to the Creature, might as well be. The Creature admits to identifying with Milton’s Satan – the angel who fell from Heaven straight to Hell – who is branded a monster immediately because he is not perfect. Like women who are automatically cast as monsters the minute they are not the perfect angels in the household, the Creature – similarly to Satan – is cast out from Heaven and plunged straight into Hell because he is a monstrous, composite Other and not a perfect, angelic being.

Although the Creature voices an affinity for Satan, he bears a strong resemblance to another character within *Paradise Lost*: Eve. This inclusion of references and allusions to Milton’s epic poem and the figure of Eve also reinforces the femininity of the Creature through Shelley’s ingenious intertextual practices. Like Eve who is shut out from the discussion between Adam and the angel Gabriel, the Creature is excluded from all human conversation and interaction and must gain his information through a secondary source (the reading of books). Although Eve will receive the information by

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5 In Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1951), she proposes that women are often made into indecipherable, mysterious beings in order to strip them of their humanity, thus making them into othered beings. “To pose Woman is to pose the absolute Other, without reciprocity, denying against all experience that she is a subject, a fellow human being” (De Beauvoir 1266). De Beauvoir’s concept of the female Other also ties in nicely with the Creature – adding even more feminine tinges to his character. He, like a woman, is othered throughout the entirety of Shelley’s *Frankenstein* because all are unwilling to see past his differences and register his humanity. In fact, in an essay on Shelley’s novel, Gilbert and Gubar call the Creature a being “of the second sex” (235), no doubt making a reference to the title of Beauvoir’s seminal feminist piece.
Gabriel through Adam, through human interaction, it is still secondhand – she is an “auditress” \textit{(PL VIII 51)} rather than a participant in the conversation. She, then, like the Creature, is set apart and relegated to a secondary position.\textsuperscript{6} In fact, the Creature vows to himself when he first discovers the De Lacey family that he will not reveal himself to them and, instead, “remain quietly in [his] hovel, watching, and endeavouring to discover the motives which influenced their actions” \textit{(Shelley 127)}. He, like Eve, chooses to listen quietly rather than interact directly with the beings these two characters perceive as superior. Additionally, the Creature, like Eve, snaps out of his passive reverence of his superiors and becomes envious of their advantages. “[W]hen I viewed the bliss of my protectors,” says the Creature, “the bitter gall of envy rose within me” \textit{(144)}. He attributes this sentiment to Satan as well, claiming that the fallen angel is “the fitter emblem of [his] condition” \textit{(144)}; however, Eve also experiences the same galling envy. In his temptation of Eve, the serpent wonders if it is envy that dwells in her “Heav’nly breast” \textit{(PL IX 730)}, compelling her to consume fruit from the tree of knowledge – knowledge from which she has been denied access by Adam, Gabriel, and God. Eve sees both reason and truth in the serpent’s words – “in her ears the sound / Yet rung of his persuasive words, impregned / With reason, to her seeming, and with truth” \textit{(PL IX 736-8)} – thus confirming the presence of envy within her and aligning her once again with the

\textsuperscript{6} Eve’s passive role in Adam and Gabriel’s conversation also brings to mind the Creature’s author, Mary Shelley, and her experience listening in on her husband’s conversations as described in the 1831 introduction her revised edition of \textit{Frankenstein}. “Many and long were the conversations between Lord Byron and Shelley, to which I was a devout but nearly silent listener,” she writes, “During one of these, various philosophical doctrines were discussed, and among others the nature of the principle of life, and whether there was any probability of its ever being discovered and communicated” \textit{(8)}. Shelley’s account of her role as a listener rather than a participant in her husband and Byron’s discussion aligns her with Eve who remains in the background when her husband is conversing with Gabriel (it is also suggested by Shelley that these conversations to which she was privy provided much inspiration for \textit{Frankenstein}).
Creature. Like the Creature, Milton asserts that Eve is created in a way that is different from both her creator and those around her. She resembles “less / His Image who made both” (PL 8. 543-4), meaning that she, unlike Adam, bears less of a resemblance to God, their fellow creator. Gilbert and Gubar comment on this passage in their article on *Frankenstein* and note: “In fact, to a sexually anxious reader, Eve’s body might, like Sin’s seem “horrid even from [its] very resemblance” to her husband’s a “filthy” or obscene version of the human divine form” (239). This comparison between Eve and Sin’s bodies – described by Milton as disturbingly other from the male characters in *Paradise Lost* – is insightful and once again parallels the situation of the Creature. “God in pity made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image,” the Creature informs Victor Frankenstein, “but my form is a filthy type of your’s, more horrid from its very resemblance” (144). This statement is telling and connects Frankenstein’s creation with the female figure of Eve and, in this case, Sin as well – his body is made out to be revolting because of its twisted likeness to his creator’s. Like Eve, he resembles less his creator, but, like Sin, is made even more horrid by his resemblance. Unwittingly, by identifying how it is *man* that God makes beautiful in his own image, the Creature subtly labels himself as something other than man in the above quotation – and, if not male, then why not female?

Perhaps the most obvious connection between the Creature and Eve is their practically identical scenes of discovery, differentiated only by their reactions. They both see themselves for the first time in a pool of water, thus registering their physical appearance for the first time in the exact same way yet reacting in opposite manners. While Eve reacts with pleasure to her own reflection – a monstrous streak of vanity – the
Creature reacts with disgust to his monstrous appearance. Milton describes Eve’s scene of discovery as one of tranquility and beauty:

I thither went
With unexperienced thought, and laid me down
On the green bank, to look into the clear
Smooth lake, that to me seemed another sky.
As I bent down to look, just opposite
A shape within the watery gleam appeared,
Bending to look on me: I started back,
It started back; but pleased I soon returned,
Pleased it returned as soon with answering looks
Of sympathy and love: There I had fixed
Mine eyes till now, and pined with vain desire,
Had not a voice thus warned me; ‘What thou seest,
‘What there thou seest, fair Creature, is thyself.’ (PL IV 456-68)

Eve’s realization that it is indeed she who is staring back at her from the pool of water is one of pleasure – she is content with her appearance and looks at herself with “sympathy and love” (465). Mary Shelley paints an entirely different yet parallel scene of discovery for the Creature. “[B]ut how I was terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool!” exclaims the Creature,

At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of
despondence and mortification. Alas! I did not yet entirely know the fatal effects of this miserable deformity. (Shelley 130)

It seems painfully clear – especially given the multitude of intertextual allusions to *Paradise Lost* in *Frankenstein* – that Shelley wrote this passage as a reimagining of Eve’s first look at herself in that “clear smooth lake” (458-9). Both Eve and the Creature at first do not understand that it is their own reflections that they are seeing; however, their responses to their physical appearance are clearly opposite. As stated earlier, Eve feels pleasure at her reflection while the Creature feels mortification. Gilbert and Gubar have two different takes on this scene in *Frankenstein*: on the one hand, they see it as Shelley correcting Milton’s characterization of Eve and, on the other, they also see it as Shelley augmenting Milton’s characterization of Eve. “In one sense, this is a corrective to Milton’s blindness about Eve. Having been created second, inferior, a mere rib, how could she possibly, this passage implies, have seemed anything but monstrous to herself?” ask Gilbert and Gubar (239). Gilbert and Gubar therefore cast the Creature in the reimagined role of Eve, the truthful version of Milton’s scene of self-discovery. “In another sense, however, the scene supplements Milton’s description of Eve’s introduction to herself,” continue Gilbert and Gubar, “for ironically, though her reflection in “the clear / Smooth Lake” is as beautiful as the monster’s is ugly, the self-absorption that Eve’s confessed passion for her own image signals is plainly meant by Milton to seem morally ugly (239). They not only interpret this scene as a corrective to, but also as an augmentation upon Milton’s. Although Eve sees herself as beautiful and the Creature as hideous – opposites – there is parallel monstrosity in both discoveries and this is brought out by Shelley’s take on the scene. While the Creature’s monstrosity is on the surface,
Eve’s is interiorized – according to Gilbert and Gubar, Milton meant to make Eve’s vanity a monstrous trait and it is Shelley’s reimagining of this scene that illustrates this. Therefore, with this particular scene in addition to the Creature’s other resemblances to Eve, Shelley intensifies her implications of a feminine aspect to her monstrous creation despite his male physiognomy. As Margaret Homans writes of the Creature in Shelley’s *Frankenstein*: “That the demon is a revision of Eve, of emanations, and of the object of Romantic desire, is confirmed by its female attributes” (140).

Bearing all of this in mind, the Creature is hence an intensely intertextual and composite figure. Not only is he made up of various limbs, organs, and bits of flesh, but he is also a mix of femininity and masculinity. Although he is physiologically male, he also contains fragments of his female author’s life and opinions, is respectful of and respected by the female Nature, expresses and demonstrates feminist views espoused by Mary Wollstonecraft, and bears a strong resemblance to the daughters found within *Frankenstein* as well as to Milton’s Eve. The Creature can also be seen as a feminine figure through later theoretical lenses – notably those of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar as well as Simone de Beauvoir. The Creature’s amalgamate complexity thus hearkens back once again to the earliest definition of “monstrosity” – something composite rather than ugly – thus building on Mary Shelley’s creative vision as explored in Chapter I. Shelley consistently presents the Creature as a sympathetic character and arguably gives him the most important space in the book – the centre in which he relates his pivotal tale that both acknowledges and attempts to reconcile the consequences of his composite nature. It thus is made quite clear that it is with the hybrid figure of the Creature that Shelley sides, which speaks to her visionary mode of creation that adopts and embraces
Shelley elevates the monstrous figure of the Creature even further when contrasted with his creator, Victor Frankenstein – the man who has the gall to use composite practices of creation but then ignores them as well as the result of his experiment. As opposed to the Creature who recognizes his amalgamate nature and who is at peace with the female influences in the world and inside himself, Frankenstein denies the compositeness of his methods and vehemently excludes and disrespects female influences in his act of creation. In response to Victor’s streak of masculine pride reminiscent of many of her Romantic male contemporaries, Shelley punishes him for his transgression against composite and female modes of creation through the hybrid figure of the Creature who embodies both the feminine and the masculine. Mary Shelley’s chastisement of Victor Frankenstein and her sympathies for the vital figure of the Creature – presented through a visionary feminist critique of the male usurpation of creation and motherhood – thus presents composite monstrosity via the Creature as something that is progressive when it is recognized, but also when it is feminized, incorporating and valuing both male and female influences.
Chapter III: Afterbirth

afterbirth, n. Brit. /ˈɑːftəθ/ , /ˈɑːftəθ/ , U.S. /ˈæftərˌbɛθ/
1.
   a. The placenta and remains of the fetal membranes, which are normally expelled from the uterus after the delivery of the fetus; = Secundine n. 1. Cf. earlier Afterburden n. 1.
   b. fig. Something that is produced or issued along with or after another.
2. A person who is born after another; one who is born later; (with pl. concord) a group of such people considered collectively. Also fig.: a later version of something. (OED)
While the previous two chapters have focused primarily on the visionary quality of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, this conclusive chapter will examine the way in which Shelley’s forward-thinking conceptualization of creation takes shape in Danny Boyle’s 2011 theatrical adaptation of *Frankenstein*. The first chapter explored Shelley’s intertextual mode of creation – as evidenced by her introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, the structure of her novel, and the amalgamate figure of the Creature – and how she subverts the Romantic notion of creation embraced by her contemporaries. In so doing, Shelley reimagines the concept of monstrosity, returning to the roots of the word that first suggested something composite rather than hideous. The second chapter expanded upon this notion of composite creation and explored how Shelley articulates a visionary feminist critique of Victor Frankenstein and his choice to ignore both his composite methods of creation and the composite result of this experiment, sympathizing instead with the Creature. Melding not only various bits of flesh, but also a masculine physiology with a feminine voice, the Creature is presented by Shelley as a progressive figure, demonstrating once again how she sees value and vitality in composite monstrosity. This third and final chapter will weave together the threads explored in the previous ones in order to demonstrate the aforementioned vitality of Shelley’s story by illustrating how her forward-thinking vision of creation manifests itself in Boyle’s project. Boyle’s critically acclaimed adaptation not only embraces Shelley’s concept of amalgamate monstrosity by interweaving intertextual as well as feminist undertones, but Boyle also works in tandem with her vision of creation in order to illustrate how her aesthetic vision of life in compositeness is alive and well in the twenty-first century. In respecting the creator-creation relationship between Mary Shelley and
her text, Danny Boyle’s 2011 theatrical adaptation of *Frankenstein* taps into the vitality of Shelley’s composite conception of monstrosity and demonstrates its persistent relevance. While *Frankenstein* rejects his amalgamate creation, Boyle embraces the multiplicity of possibilities presented by hybrid monstrosity and, in so doing, assures his creative success by celebrating the composite result of his composite methods. Drawing from critics Chris Baldick for his exploration of *Frankenstein* as a modern myth that undergoes several reimaginings and Ralph Willingham for his study of theatrical adaptations of *Frankenstein*, this chapter will also use the theories of Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin to illuminate this relationship between Shelley and Boyle via their concept of remediation. This chapter will argue that the creator-creation relationship between Danny Boyle and his theatrical adaptation of *Frankenstein* illustrates the visionary quality of Mary Shelley’s model of creation; in echoing and remediating Shelley’s theories and practices, Boyle’s production not only realizes and extends her self-reflexive ideas regarding creativity and authorship, but also demonstrates that such preoccupations are not anachronistic, but more current than ever. In addition and perhaps more importantly, Boyle taps into the fact that our twenty-first century world, given its inherently composite aspects, is more ready for Shelley’s visionary ideas.

It should come as no surprise that Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* was adapted in 2011 as an immensely successful theatrical production – Shelley’s story has endured a multiplicity of adaptations and reimaginings since its publication nearly two hundred years ago. Some of these rearticulations of Shelley’s work have been truer to her vision than others of course; however, the tale of creator and creation has become iconic, pervading the cultural imagination since the story’s publication in 1818. “The story of
Frankenstein and his monster enjoys a status which appears to literary criticism as an anomaly, a scandal: it is a modern myth,” writes Chris Baldick in the opening of his book, *In Frankenstein’s Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing*. Such a thing, he goes on to say, should very well be impossible when taking the traditional definition of myth into consideration. “Myth is, so the argument goes, exclusively a product of pre-literate cultures, from which the alienated and fragmented modern world of money, books politics, and above all, scientific rationality is by definition cut off” (Baldick 1). Myths should thus belong to a time before books, paper, and printing presses, hence recognizing that mythic forms of storytelling and composition, are unlike the homogenous, standardized, stable, and highly controlled methods that have emerged from print culture practices. Myths live on through allusion and, although Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* was written in a literary age, it possesses a mythic status in the same league as Greek and Roman myths. “The vitality of myths lies precisely in their capacity for change, their adaptability and openness to new combinations of meaning,” writes Baldick. “That series of adaptations, allusions, accretions, analogues, parodies, and plain misreadings which follow upon Mary Shelley’s novel is not just a supplementary component of the myth; it is the myth” (4). Shelley’s novel – full of tensions between author and text, masculine and feminine, and creator and creation – is ripe for interpretation. Given its composite construction – employing intertextual practices and exploring the tensions of gender – *Frankenstein’s* mythic quality steams from its fluidity and adaptability, illustrating the vitality of Shelley’s creation. In its adaptability, however, lies the potential for misinterpretation, deformation, and misunderstanding. Shelley’s story has been told and re-told in a variety
of media – theatre, music, and film just to name a few – and, if misreadings also contribute to the process of mythmaking, then Shelley’s tale most definitely deserves the title of myth. An exponential number of misreadings of Frankenstein have occurred since its publication. In fact, just five years after Shelley published the first edition of her novel, a theatrical adaptation penned by Richard Brinsley Peake entitled Presumption; or the Fate of Frankenstein appeared in 1823 and presented the first of many misreadings. In Peake’s melodramatic play, he discards much of Shelley’s intelligent nuances and philosophical concerns and fills the story instead with schmaltzy songs and cheap thrills. Worst of all, however, Peake – like so many others to follow – robs the Creature of a voice: he was transformed into a grunting mute who clumsily blunders his way through the play. This trend continued in the years to come, especially when burlesque adaptations cropped up. Ralph Willingham writes:

Burlesques of Shelley’s novel continued throughout the [nineteenth] century, but in none of them did the Creature appear as Shelley had conceived it. This long series of theatrical distortions permanently twisted public perception of Shelley’s Creature from an intelligent being in search of its destiny, into a pathetic, brutish killer. (15)

As this quotation from Willingham illustrates, Shelley’s story quickly ascended to mythical status; however, what good is the status of myth when the version propagated is a misinterpretation?

The Frankenstein myth continued to flourish in the twentieth century – particularly with the advent of the famous 1931 film starring Boris Karloff as the Creature – as more adaptations that had less to do with Shelley’s novel surfaced and
embedded themselves in popular culture. The misguided tendency to reduce Victor to nothing more than a “mad scientist” and to call the Creature – and not his creator – “Frankenstein,” imagining him as an inarticulate being with bolts protruding from his neck is natural nowadays, as it is the version of the *Frankenstein* myth that is the most widely circulated. “At the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century, the myth of Frankenstein resonated with vitality in the imaginations of the British and American public,” writes Susan Tyler Hitchcock in her *Frankenstein: A Cultural History*, “The word “Frankenstein” evoked a cluster of ideas that required little familiarity with the original novel” (119). Despite the iconic status of the myth – simply the mention of the name “Frankenstein,” conjures up the well-known image of an overreaching scientist and his uncontrollable creation – it is hardly Shelley’s story anymore. Like the Creature contained within the novel, Shelley’s story underwent a number of misjudgments and misinterpretations. As Willingham notes:

> Despite its motion-picture legacy, *Frankenstein* is not a mad-scientist horror thriller about grave-robbing, buzzing electrodes in a thunderstorm, and mindless murders. It is a modern version of the Prometheus myth, the fires of the scientific and industrial revolutions unleashed upon a humanity unprepared to use them wisely. *Frankenstein’s* stature as a literary classic lies in its intriguing hypothesis: What if science endowed humanity with the creative power of God? Shelley’s scientist, bent on making a superhuman, succeeds only in making a replica of his own flawed, tormented self. Frankenstein’s loathing rejection of his handiwork prompted a line of existential speculation that has continued to the present.
Does humanity suffer, as Frankenstein’s Creature suffers, because God is
disgusted with His creatures and has turned his back on them? (137)

This quotation highlights the complexity of Shelley’s novel and underlines the way in
which Frankenstein’s mythic status has cast a shadow over the richness of the original
story. Despite the fact that the copious number of adaptations of Shelley’s novel has
indeed kept the story alive for nearly two centuries, they have been reductive. Whereas
Shelley’s novel and her Creature both represent a complexity that is not monstrous, the
interpretative reimaginings of the Creature ever since have introduced monstrosity via
ugly simplicity. In consistently stripping the Creature of his voice, the propagators of the
Frankenstein myth have not only erased Shelley’s forward-thinking feminist critique, but
they have also simplified the Creature’s monstrosity to something simply ugly rather than
composite and full of potential. Unable to express himself, he is simplified and stripped
of the layers that contribute toward his composite nature. Additionally, the mythic
simplification of Shelley’s plot – narrowing the focus to the murderous actions of the
Creature and Victor’s mad genius – discards the cacophony of narrative voices in
Frankenstein and forgets the intertextual references to Milton, Coleridge, and others. In
order to become a myth, a story must carry only a “skeleton story,” writes Baldick; in
fact, “[t]he process of myth-making violates the multiplicity and interplay of meanings
which the novel’s narrative complexity sustains,” instead it “sets its radically
foreshortened story free to attract new narrative or interpretative elaborations around it”
(3). This foreshortening of Shelley’s original story may allow it to attain the mythic
status that Baldick discusses, but it also strips Frankenstein of its composite nature that
articulates Shelley’s conception of intertextual creation and reduces the hybrid figure of
the Creature – initially composed of a masculine physiology and feminine voice – to a silent version of his original self, unable to say a thing about Shelley’s feminist vision.

As the twentieth century drew to a close and transitioned into the twenty-first, the *Frankenstein* myth was still in full swing: “At the turn of the twenty-first century, Frankenstein’s monster was a myth, a legend, an icon – and a hot property,” writes Hitchcock, “The character had such universal appeal (or repugnance) that just one or two physical features could evoke the character and his entire story” (305). Although the simplified version of Mary Shelley’s novel was still the most well known in popular culture, things had changed on the literary landscape in terms of academic and theoretical work on Shelley’s text. For years, scholars had considered *Frankenstein* no more than “strictly a pulp novel”; however, helped along by convergence of popular and scholarly interest in *Frankenstein* in the twentieth century (and particularly bolstered by the rise of feminism from the 1960s onward), more attention was paid to Shelley’s literary creation (Hitchcock 272, 279). Throughout the later half of the twentieth century, works by scholars such as Ellen Moers, George Levine, and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar on *Frankenstein* helped to elevate Shelley’s novel to a text of true literary value separate from the simplified *Frankenstein* myth embedded in popular culture (Hitchcock 281-5). Needless to say, much has changed and continues to do so. The concepts of intertextuality and feminism – unnamed and hence visionary notions in Mary Shelley’s time – are now key literary terms and theoretical lenses in our postmodern age. In fact, these concepts have continued to evolve in tandem with society: with the advent of new technology and media, intertextuality has branched into what Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin call “remediation” and we are currently in the era of third-wave
feminism. We live in a monstrously composite age – a world in which we are surrounded by variety of media that are composed of multiple interfaces, images, fonts, screens, applications, pixels, and so on. The technology we use is made up of several parts of past forms of technology; the films we watch remediate or adapt stories drawn from life, novels, plays, video games, and so on; the language we use is constantly in flux, plucking words from other languages and repurposing them. Work similar to Victor Frankenstein’s is used in hospitals – people can be made up of different parts due to organ transplants, prosthetic limbs, or skin grafts. The gendered barrier between the sexes that Wollstonecraft denounced and Shelley explored in *Frankenstein* is now slightly less defined and continues to erode – compositeness in sex (i.e. intersex), gender (i.e. androgyny), and sexual orientation (i.e. bisexuality) continue to gain acceptance in the twenty-first century. In this monstrously composite world, Mary Shelley’s conception of creation – something that can never be entirely original and recognizes both feminine and masculine influences – is no longer visionary, but current.

Danny Boyle’s 2011 theatrical adaptation of *Frankenstein* feels current precisely because he decides to challenge the mythic version of *Frankenstein* and adhere instead to Mary Shelley’s original novel, drawing on her visionary ideas for inspiration. In his weaving together of various influences, Boyle emulates Shelley by creating a monstrously composite production that lives and thrives because it – like the persistent figure of the Creature – is made up of so many different parts. Boyle and Shelley both suture together ideas, words, and images to create a vibrant creation. The idea for a theatrical adaptation of *Frankenstein* began germinating in the 1990s between Boyle and playwright Nick Dear and only began coming together in the late 2000s. In an interview
with Boyle and Dear, their interviewer acknowledges that despite the numerous adaptations of *Frankenstein* that have come before, they manage to do something special for Shelley’s text: they “breathe life into seemingly dead tissue … liberating *Frankenstein* from the long shadow of Boris Karloff” (National Theatre 2011). With the mention of Karloff, the interviewer nods to both the simplistic myth surrounding *Frankenstein* and the fact that the Creature has consistently been silenced. While Boyle’s adaptation of Shelley’s novel is not the definitive adaptation of her text, it is certainly an effective step in recognizing and affirming Shelley’s daring vision of creation.

Directed by Danny Boyle (of *Slumdog Millionaire* and *127 Hours* fame) with a script penned by Nick Dear, *Frankenstein* premiered at the Royal National Theatre in London on the fifth of February in 2011. With Boyle – known for his bold and colourful style – at the directorial helm, this newest theatrical production already promised to be inventive. When two lead actors were cast to alternate between the parts of Victor Frankenstein and the Creature, however, Boyle’s production went from inventive to perceptive. Benedict Cumberbatch and Johnny Lee Miller were cast to share the roles of the creator and the created – to learn both parts and then alternate between them night after night. Already, with this decision to split the characters of Frankenstein and the Creature between two different actors, Boyle pays homage to Shelley’s articulation of compositeness and intertextuality within *Frankenstein*. Boyle, like Baldick, picks up on how, in Shelley’s novel, “the creature and the creator tend to merge their identities” (Baldick 31). The decision to double-cast each role and merge Frankenstein and the Creature makes each into an amalgamate monstrosity, both actors admitting to parts of their portrayal of one character bleeding into the other. “Well, I’ve started to do this –
and I noticed that you started yesterday – that bits of my Creature go into Victor,” says Lee Miller to Cumberbatch who nods along in agreement. “My Creature, he has a stammer and a stutter slightly, and I have some of that come into Victor at the end,” continues Lee Miller in explanation (“Creating Frankenstein” 2011). They are thus not two neatly separate wholes. In this way, Boyle makes the Creature and Frankenstein into composite beings, exacerbating the tension between creator and creation.

The decision to have two actors interpreting the same roles also brings to mind an intertextual mindset – the possibilities for interpretation and re-interpretation are numerous and not only did Cumberbatch and Miller play off of one another, but they also took bits from their portrayals of Victor and incorporated them into their portrayals of the Creature (and vice-versa). “They built on each other,” says Boyle of Cumberbatch and Miller, “they borrowed from each other, and they’ve inspired each other at other times as well” (National Theatre 2011). This highly intertextual description of Cumberbatch and Miller’s method of sharing two roles echoes a Kristevan rejection of unity. In her Desire in Language, Kristeva writes of language in a text possessing a dual nature and how anything determined or defined is impossible given the “infinity of pairings and combinations” possible in any language (69). This emphasizes, as Allen puts it, “the doubleness or dialogic quality of words and utterances” in order to combat “society’s desire to repress plurality” (42). By making the decision to have two actors alternate between the roles of creator and creation, Boyle makes the characters of Frankenstein and the Creature into texts in the Barthesian sense – they are tissues composed of many threads and thus potential sites for plurality. Boyle thus destabilizes the roles of creator and creation in his adaptation of Frankenstein, just as Mary Shelley did in the writing of
her novel; not only is she the creator of the world in which Victor and his creation live, but she also – as made clear in the second chapter – identifies with Frankenstein’s creation, thus fusing creator and created. Shelley understood herself, her novel, and the act of creation as intertextual – pieced together from various influences, ideas, and memories – and Boyle picks up on this in his decision to render Frankenstein and the Creature even more composite by splitting the parts between the two actors and then having them alternate the roles – destabilizing them as well as the characters they play.

Boyle’s play also embraces a form of intertextuality born of the transition into the twenty-first century and our postmodern society: remediation. Remediation – or the practice of incorporating one medium into another – is a term coined by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in their 1999 book entitled *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. In their book, Bolter and Grusin describe the way in which our world – constantly flooded with ever-evolving and ever-multiplying forms of new media – continues to meld media together, attempting to make things as seamless, or transparent as possible. This is made impossible, however, as the means through which we attempt to make things seamless is by adding more and more layers to it. “Televised news programs feature multiple video streams, split-screen displays, composites of graphics and text,” write Bolter and Grusin, “a welter of media that is somehow meant to make the news more perspicuous” (6). The world that they describe – the world we live in – is monstrously composite. It is remedial in its incorporation of different media into one another just as Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is intertextual in its incorporations of different works into her own, for, as Bolter and Grusin note: “Remediation did not begin with the introduction of digital media” (11). As evidenced by Shelley’s novel – a text drawing from both literary
and visual sources – remediation is not exclusive to our digital age. Bolter and Grusin go on to emphasize the composite nature of twenty-first century culture:

In current interfaces, windows multiply on the screen: it is not unusual for sophisticated users to have ten or more overlapping or nested windows open at one time. The multiple representations inside the windows … create a heterogeneous space, as they compete for the viewer’s attention. Icons, menus, and toolbars add further layers of visual and verbal meaning. (32)

This multiplicity of meaning created by overlaps and intersections in media hearkens back to the multiplicity of meanings Barthes called for in his articulation of intertextuality – thus heterogeneity over homogeneity.

This composite view of creating meaning echoes Shelley’s in the penning of Frankenstein and Boyle in the staging of his 2011 theatrical adaptation of her novel. Boyle employs remediation in his production by incorporating a variety of media, creating his own hybrid creation like Shelley and Frankenstein himself. Not only does Boyle employ the medium of the stage, but he also sutures together other media to the body of the play such as dance, music, sound, and light. His choice of music, in particular, highlights the remedial tone of his production. Boyle recruited the British electronic group Underworld – a musical group with whom he has collaborated before – to score his twenty-first century adaptation of Frankenstein and the musical landscape that they create is, like the Creature, intensely composite. Their score is a fusing of a multiplicity of instrumentals, voices, quotations from the Bible, snippets of song, and sounds – multiplying the forms of mediation in order to try to “reproduce the rich
sensorium of human experience” (Bolter and Grusin 34). This “rich sensorium” of the score is emphasized especially when played during the performance, for it adds a visual component to the soundscape. Among the sounds used are those of a babbling brook and chirping birds set against a backdrop of harmonizing voices when the Creature discovers nature for the first time. The score to Boyle’s *Frankenstein* is an exercise in remediation, for it repurposes many of the noises and lines from the play and adds them to their original music. Underworld’s soundtrack – like Shelley’s novel and the central figure of the Creature – is composite and achieves a level of eerie beauty because of its monstrously composite nature. Additionally, Boyle remediates the medium of text – Mary Shelley’s text – through the act of adaptation, by representing her words through the media of theatre, dance, music, light, costume, and so on. As Bolter and Grusin note astutely: “[T]o create is to rearrange existing forms” (39). They thus, like Shelley, believe that creation can never be entirely original, for it does not stem from a void – it comes from a piecing together of various sources, inspirations, ideas, and mediums to give life. Unlike Coleridge’s ideal of the unifying power of the imagination as seen in the first chapter, Shelley envisions diversification over simplification, thus positioning herself as antithetical to the many aesthetic theories of her time. In so doing, Shelley positions the misunderstood Creature at the heart of her novel – he who embodies her composite vision of vital creation – as not monstrous at all, but ahead of his time. Boyle demonstrates his adherence to this vision of creation in his 2011 *Frankenstein* by presenting his audience with a play that is a conglomerate of media, all stitched together to form an amalgamate and fascinating result full of meaning. In so doing, he confirms Shelley’s unique aesthetic ideas that anticipated and perhaps calibrated our current
understanding of creation. In fact, critics described Boyle’s rendering of Shelley’s novel much in the way that critics received *Frankenstein* in the nineteenth century. In a review by Christopher Hart in *The Sunday Times*, he states that Boyle’s adaptation is a “flawed, episodic but at times majestic piece of work” (n. pag). In so doing, Hart draws a parallel between Shelley’s imperfect novel and Boyle’s imperfect play – like the composite figure of the Creature at the centre of their respective works, their respective creations (one literary, the other theatrical) are imperfect, thus they are different from and perhaps more intelligent than Victor for embracing their composite result.

In a move similar to Shelley’s in her 1831 introduction, Boyle is careful to illustrate how the notion of a sole creator of a theatrical creation is impossible – theatre is created interdependently and thus in a composite manner. The nature of creativity in a theatrical production is collaborative, for it takes far more people than a director to create a play. All cast and crew must work together – forming a composite body like the Creature’s – and embrace this interdependent mode of creation to produce something new and vital. Boyle’s choice to adapt Shelley’s *Frankenstein* into a theatrical production is a move toward her vision of composite creation. In an interview on the National Theatre stage with playwright Dear, Boyle is asked about a previous comment of his in which he states that he believes theatre to be more of an actor’s and writer’s medium while film is more of a director’s medium. He agrees wholeheartedly with an enthusiastic “Oh, totally!” to which the interviewer commends him, calling him very modest. Boyle shakes his head at this and answers:

No, it’s not. It’s the truth – and I remembered it actually when it happened on this. And I remembered it very vividly from working in the theatre

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before, which is that you are intensely important to the actors throughout rehearsal. And then as soon as they get in front of an audience – it doesn’t matter how much they like you – they kind of just push you away. And every time you give them a “No,” they say, “Um… Well, that’s interesting. With respect!” Because the dynamic is that dynamic – it’s that sense of communication. And when you have storytellers – and Johnny Lee Miller and Benedict Cumberbatch are the most amazing, natural storytellers – and you find that connection with a storyteller like Nick [Dear] inhabiting a play like Frankenstein. And as a director you have the fortune to be associated with it. You can show off with a couple of bits, but basically that dynamic is what it’s about. It’s about the actors being here. This space particularly [he gestures around him to indicate the stage] is true for it. (2011)

Like Shelley, Boyle does not assume an authoritative tone when talking about his theatrical creation – he casts himself instead as more of a guiding figure by emphasizing a communicative rather than imposing relationship between himself and the actors, downplaying his importance in the final product. According to Boyle, the play belongs to those surrounding him – Dear, Miller, Cumberbatch, and others – just as Shelley chooses to defer much of her power as the writer of Frankenstein by citing the multiplicity of influences surrounding her that went into the final product (her husband, Percy, being a prime example). In Boyle’s description of the relationship between director and actors he evokes the dynamic between a parent and child. While he is important in the early stages – the rehearsals – he is eventually pushed away when the
play reaches maturity – when it is time to present it to an audience. Like Shelley and unlike Victor, he conflates the roles of creator and parent by sitting back once his creation has been completed and allows his hideous progeny to simply go forth and prosper (Shelley 351). In indicating the space of the stage as being crucial to that dynamic between director and actor, Boyle indirectly makes a connection between the stage and the page, for both are spaces in which the creator is overshadowed by her or his creation. He thus adheres to Shelley’s composite view of creation in that he sees the final product as a collective effort – he could not have put this play together alone just as Shelley could not have penned *Frankenstein* without inspiration drawn from her parents, her husband, and her literary contemporaries and idols. While the creator is important, however, she or he is just one of the many pieces. Shelley and Boyle both acknowledge that creation is intertextual in that it is monstrously composite and thus vital – being comprised of multiple and varied pieces imbues a creation with potential and possibility, hence animating this amalgamate with a long life because of the richness of its composition of ideas, influences, images, words, and so on.

Another way in which Boyle (in tandem with Dear) respects and celebrates Shelley’s visionary articulation of creation via an intertextual approach is in his incorporation of some of the various sources from which she drew inspiration and then stitched into *Frankenstein*. As *Paradise Lost* is the most prominent intertextual presence in Shelley’s novel, it is the most prominent intertextual presence in Boyle’s play. Milton’s epic poem is central to the Creature’s development in the novel and in the 2011 theatrical adaptation – he quotes from Milton’s text frequently in Dear’s script, just as he does in the novel, effectually weaving in other works just as Mary Shelley did in order to
make her work composite, like the central figure of the Creature. In Dear’s script, the Creature quotes from *Paradise Lost* by memory in his first meeting with his creator, Victor Frankenstein, and astonishes him in a humorous scene.

**Creature** ‘Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,

Said then the lost Archangel, this the seat

That we must change from Heaven, this mournful gloom

For that celestial light?’

**Victor** (astonished) That’s *Paradise Lost*! You’ve read *Paradise Lost*?

**Creature** I liked it. (Dear 39)

This exchange is not only an enormous departure from the typical portrayal of the Creature in other adaptations because he is given a voice (an educated and literate one at that), but also because his composite nature is emphasized on a mental as well as a physical level. By including Shelley’s idea of having the Creature quote from and identify with Milton’s work, Boyle highlights how the Creature is not only made up of various parts, but also various influences (much like Shelley herself). *Paradise Lost* shapes the Creature’s way of thinking and conceptualizing the world around him – as does his reading of other works. “I have been reading Plutarch. *The Lives of Emperors*,” says the Creature in Dear’s script and while *Paradise Lost* and *The Lives of Emperors* are the only two works cited directly by the Creature in the 2011 adaptation, he still articulates how other books have influenced him (22). “[W]ith all that I read, all that I learn, I discover how much I do not know,” he laments, “Ideas batter me like hailstones. Questions but no answers. Who am I? Where am I from? Do I have a family?” (Dear 22). As highlighted in the first chapter, Shelley was a reader – ideas no doubt battered
her, too, like hailstones – and made the Creature into a reader as well. This connection between Shelley and the Creature not only underlines his compositeness in terms of gender – he is composed of parts of his female creator as well as physiologically male parts – but it also speaks to the composite nature of his intellect. The Creature, like Shelley, is bursting with ideas absorbed through books and hence rife with tensions – as he says, the more he learns, the more he feels that he does not know. This pull between knowledge and ignorance speaks to one of the many tensions contained within the composite body of the Creature – however, these tensions should be seen as room for possibility and vitality. Because of the composite nature of the Creature and Shelley’s novel, her work is imbued with a multiplicity of tensions and questions that keep the tale of creator and creation fresh. In underlining the literary and articulate side to the Creature, Boyle and Dear showcase his multifaceted mind made up of various influences and hence demonstrate Shelley’s visionary understanding of creation and illustrates the vitality of her tale.

Boyle also acknowledges a subtler moment of intertextuality in Shelley’s novel in his theatrical adaptation, thus suturing together various ideas and allusions to form his own hideous progeny. In the programme for the 2011 *Frankenstein* play, pages from Boyle’s director scrapbook are included, upon which Henry Fuseli’s famous 1781 painting *The Nightmare* is featured. The scene in which the Creature rapes and then murders Elizabeth in the theatrical adaptation is staged almost exactly like the Fuseli painting – after the Creature snaps her neck, Elizabeth lies in her white nightgown, splayed across the bed, with the Creature looming over her. As Maryanne C. Ward notes,
there are several similarities between Fuseli’s famous painting and the way in which the murder of Elizabeth is described in *Frankenstein*:

The melodramatic position of the body was, and is, a Gothic cliché, so that the pose alone really is not sufficient to suggest a direct influence. But the monster in the window pointing to the body is undoubtedly a reference to the painting. … In Fuseli’s original drawing a monster (an incubus) is crouched above the woman on the bed. … In the novel Mary Shelley has merely moved the monster from the bed to the window. The creature’s almost playful pointing and the grin in Mary Shelley’s description of the murder are not characteristic of the isolated and tormented monster elsewhere in the novel, but are certainly in keeping with Fuseli’s incubus. … Shelley’s monster grins only with pleasure, first by the bedside of his creator and then again when he observes Frankenstein at work creating a mate for him. (21)

Shelley was, no doubt, also inspired by this famous painting in her description of Elizabeth’s death in her novel. In fact, Mary Shelley’s mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, had an affair with Fuseli and, later in her life, Shelley worked with her father to get her mother’s love letters back from the Fuseli family. Shelley was thus well aware of the artist and his work (Ward 22). Shelley spliced together references to textual as well as visual works in her novel to create the composite result, which Boyle also does nearly two hundred years later. “One of the things I always try to do,” he says, “(and people can contribute to it, actors can contribute to it, and if you go around the dressing rooms, they’ve got their own images up to inspire them each night) is that you try to create a sort
of visual vocabulary for the play as well to inspire people” (National Theatre 2011).
Boyle’s desire to create what he calls a “visual vocabulary” plays directly into what
Shelley does by subtly evoking the famous scene from Fuseli’s painting in her novel –
Boyle embraces an intertextual model for his play and creates a vocabulary and thus a
plurality of threads for the audience to recognize and then enrich their viewing and
understanding of the story. Reviewer Christopher Hart cites the moment when the
Creature greets his first sunrise as a moment laden with intertextual influences: “[T]he
Creature’s primal, jerky little dance of joy before the rising sun, with the birds ascending
is deeply touching, loaded with echoes of Blake, Milton and, above all, Adam and Eve in
the Garden of Eden” (n. pag). In his weaving together of various influences, Boyle – like
Shelley – creates a monstrously composite final product that lives and thrives precisely
because it is made up of so many different parts – ideas, words, and images all sewn
together to create a vibrant creation.

Not only does Boyle’s adaptation respect Mary Shelley’s vision of composite
creation on an intertextual level, but also on a feminist one – albeit a feminist one that
deviates from Shelley’s and is thus rife with tensions. Strangely, though, Boyle claims
that there is no feminist bent to Shelley’s novel: “Obviously the modern age has tried to
attach feminism to [Frankenstein],” he says, “and I remember Nick [Dear] tried that a
couple of times and you could feel that it didn’t work really, that it was imposing
something on it. She chose to write it in a different way” (National Theatre 2011).
While Boyle asserts that there are no feminist undertones to be found in Shelley’s novel,
his adaptation suggests otherwise. Perhaps Boyle and Dear picked up on her subtle
feminist critique unconsciously and enhanced what is already there, or perhaps it is so
Fig. 1 – The page from Danny Boyle’s director’s scrapbook that features Fuseli’s painting (Frankenstein Programme 18).
woven into the fabric of *Frankenstein* and the tale of the Creature that it was incorporated without even realizing. Either way, Shelley’s feminist undertones explored in the second chapter of this thesis are present albeit complicated in Boyle’s 2011 *Frankenstein* – Boyle emphasizes some of Shelley’s feminist undertones seen in her novel, but heightens the tensions between the feminine and the masculine in the composite form of the Creature. For example, the play begins with a nearly too-obvious acknowledgement of maternal creation: the stage is barren save for a large, upright structure shaped very much like a womb. Round and made from translucent material of a fleshy colour, the womblike structure is the focal point of the stage and is stitched together from various pieces of fabric. Its appearance is deliberately composite – in fact, it mirrors the state of the being contained within it. Suspended within the unnatural womb is the figure of the Creature who, as the play begins, awakens and begins to writhe within his fleshy incubator. Although the womblike structure is made to be unnatural – emphasized by the patched-together look of the set piece – it is clearly a nod to female mode of creation that Frankenstein is usurping in his quest to create life *without* the help of a woman.

Boyle articulates Shelley’s condemnation of the scientist’s refusal to acknowledge his composite methods and rejection of his composite result by clearly illustrating Frankenstein’s hubris with the opening scene. The play opens with Victor absent from the stage when the Creature comes to life – varying from Shelley’s novel – and exacerbates how he is not only ignoring his composite methods, but also the composite result. His dismissal of the composite is hence made metaphorically clear with this opening scene. Additionally, the womblike structure brings to mind the natural, feminine way of creating life and, when juxtaposed with Victor’s unnatural way, it highlights
Fig. 2 – A close-up view of the womb-like structure from which the Creature is birthed (*Frankenstein* Programme 2).
Frankenstein’s disrespect of the maternal. Even though he uses maternal influences within his process of composite creation, he vocally spurns them, refusing to acknowledge them in an even more heavy-handed way than in the novel:

Elizabeth  But if you wanted to create life –

Victor  That’s it, that’s exactly what I wanted!

Elizabeth  Why not just give me a child? We could have married years ago!

Victor  No, no, that’s not the –

Elizabeth  Because that is how we create life, Victor – that is the usual way!

Victor  I am talking about science.  (Dear 67-8)

In response to Elizabeth’s inquiries as to why he would not even consider a natural way of creating life, Frankenstein immediately dismisses her ideas about giving her a child, qualifying his process scientific, implying that it is something purely masculine in which a woman’s power to create life is inconsequential. Earlier in the play, Victor clearly delineates science as a man’s domain. When Elizabeth asks to come with him to Scotland and about his experiments, he brushes her off by saying that his research is “beyond a woman’s scope” and that the conditions in which he works are “no situation for a woman” (Dear 47, 48). Boyle and Dear thus accentuate Shelley’s condemnation of Victor who employs feminine and composite methods of creation and thereafter refuses to acknowledge them – proudly seeing himself as a solitary creator.

Victor is, however, marginalized in Dear’s script and in Boyle’s play. While Shelley’s novel belongs mostly to Frankenstein, the 2011 theatrical adaptation belongs to
the Creature, pushing the titular character to the sidelines of the action. The play opens, for instance, with the Creature alone on stage – Victor is nowhere to be seen and only enters ten to fifteen minutes later after the Creature has held the attention of the audience by himself. In a sequence that condenses the formative years of childhood into about a quarter of an hour – the Creature teaches himself how to use his fingers and his hands and teaches himself to stand, walk, and eventually run – it establishes the self-taught creation and not the creator as the main focus. When Victor enters after the Creature has tired from his first steps, he is shocked to see that his creation is alive and stammers out a few lines about it keeping away from him and obeying him before fleeing the stage. Victor does not reappear until about twenty-some scenes later; therefore the audience continues to bond with the Creature. Boyle and Dear thus attempt to garner sympathy for the composite being of the Creature much in the same way as Shelley did in her novel. While Shelley makes the Creature the literal centre of her novel by inserting his tale into the middle of *Frankenstein*, Boyle and Dear make the Creature the centre and circumference of their play by telling the story mostly from his point of view. In dedicating the play to the Creature’s perspective, Boyle and Dear give Shelley’s monstrous creation – a being with a masculine physiological and feminine mentality – his voice back as well as the chance to tell his side of the story, an opportunity the numerous adaptations before Boyle’s have denied him. “We do it partly as a counter to almost all the movies, of which there are many, which usually deny the Creature a voice,” says Dear, when asked about his and Boyle’s reasons for wanting to do an adaptation, “He’s usually called ‘the Monster’ and doesn’t do anything except grunt – and that’s not faithful to Mary Shelley” (National Theatre 2011). Boyle chimes in on the same point in
a different interview. “[T]he story had never been told from the point of view of the Creature. And it creates this wonderful dynamic at the beginning of the play, which is that you do not participate through the eyes of the scientist,” says Boyle, “but you see it from the point of view of the Creature. And that creates – especially in theatre – that wonderful empathy that you can sense it, what it’s like to be born” (National Theatre 2011). As Dear and Boyle both articulate, the focus of their production is the Creature – on the voice and the story that Mary Shelley gave him and wanted to be told.

In giving the Creature his voice back – after so many years of silent portrayals of him as a grunting, groaning, inarticulate monster – Boyle and Dear give Shelley her voice back as well. As argued in the second chapter, Shelley stitched many pieces of herself into the character of the Creature and used him to vocalize many feminine plights and feminist ideas, therefore, in silencing the Creature, adaptors of Shelley’s novel have silenced Shelley herself. “The monster’s most convincingly human characteristic is of course his power of speech. Since much of the myth’s subsequent history revolves around this point, it is worth dwelling upon,” insists Baldick. “The decision to give the monster an articulate voice is Mary Shelley’s most important subversion of the category of monstrosity” (45). Boyle and Dear particularly explore this subversion of monstrosity in the first conversation that takes place between creator and creation. When the Creature and Frankenstein meet and converse for the first time in Dear’s script, Victor’s delivery of the line “It speaks!” is described as “stunned” (37). This stage direction is no doubt an acknowledgement of the numerous portrayals of the Creature that have depicted him as a mute and blundering figure, incapable of the speech Shelley and Dear attribute to him. In this first conversation, the Creature quotes Paradise Lost and vows to reason with Victor.
in order to present his wish for Frankenstein to build him a female companion. “I will not torture you,” says the Creature, “I will reason with you. Isn’t that what we do? Have a dialogue?” (Dear 40). Within the same conversation, the Creature is also sure to remind his creator that he is “capable of logic” (Dear 41). In exalting logic and reason – just as Mary Wollstonecraft does in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* – Dear includes Shelley’s use of one of her mother’s key feminist arguments in *Frankenstein*. Also, in response to Victor’s assertion that he is his creation’s master, the Creature reminds him: “A master has duties – you left me to die! I am not a slave. I am free” (Dear 41). In refusing to play the role of the slave, the Creature echoes Wollstonecraft once more – she compares women to slaves in her *Vindications* – and confidently asserts his composite monstrosity as something that cannot be contained or controlled.

Wollstonecraft urges her female readers to throw off the patriarchal yoke of slavery through mastery of reason and, in Dear’s script, the Creature attempts to do exactly that. Intentionally or not, Dear infuses the Creature’s dialogue with inflections of Wollstonecraft. “Mary Shelley gives it to us on a plate: the central forty pages or so of the book is the Creature telling us his story – what happened in his life, how he’s arrived at this position,” explains Dear. “So I’ve done nothing really but serve back up the volley that Mary Shelley knocked over the net” (National Theatre 2011). As Dear states, his intention is to not just be faithful to Mary Shelley, but to essentially repeat exactly everything that she says. Therefore, Shelley’s feminist undertones are so firmly embedded in the voice of the Creature that Dear cannot help but incorporate those feminist elements into his script.
While both of the actors who portray the Creature give fine performances, it is Cumberbatch’s interpretation that more effectively delves into Shelley’s feminist undertones. By virtue of Miller’s broad and solid physique, he comes across as a more masculine Creature on a physical level. Miller also chooses to portray the Creature as more aggressive and more menacing – he speaks loudly and retains a speech impediment throughout his performance. As Libby Purves describes Miller in her review for The Times as “animalistic, physically expressive, plaintive, primitive” (n. pag), while Michael Billington describes him in his review for The Guardian as “menac[ing]” and “[s]tickier than Cumberbatch” (n. pag). Cumberbatch, in contrast to Miller, is physically slighter – his body marred by sutures is wiry and graceful, therefore marking him as the more effeminate of the two. Cumberbatch’s performance as the Creature is also more articulate than Miller’s – he picks up on Shelley’s characterization of the Creature as a highly literate and rational being. He, unlike Miller, loses his early speech impediment and is a convincing mental opponent to his creator. “Cumberbatch’s Creature is unforgettable,” writes Billington, “[T]here is also an epic grandeur about Cumberbatch. As he quotes Paradise Lost, his voice savours every syllable of Milton’s words… It is an astonishing performance” (n. pag). Christopher Hart deems Cumberbatch’s performance “cerebral” (n. pag) while Purves calls it “more graceful, girlish almost” (n. pag). Adhering closely to Shelley’s conceptualization of the Creature, Cumberbatch infuses her composite creation with the intelligence and subtle femininity that she made central to her monstrous character. The fact that Purves picks up on the hints of femininity in Cumberbatch’s Creature denotes the feminist undertones woven throughout Shelley’s Frankenstein – particularly in the central figure of the Creature. The casting of the
masculine Miller to offset the more feminine Cumberbatch speaks to Boyle’s emphasizing of the tensions between the masculine and the feminine in the Creature, illustrating his composite nature as more of an equal balance between the genders. With one stereotypically masculine Creature and another more feminine one, Boyle highlights the gendered tensions within Shelley’s original composite figure of the Creature and explores them in his adaptation – striving for more of a duality in the Creature. While Shelley emphasizes the more feminine side of the Creature in her novel, Boyle decides to increase the tension between the masculine and the feminine in his casting of the Creature, emphasizing this tensions in this composite aspect of Frankenstein’s creation.

Another way in which Boyle and Dear acknowledge yet complicate Shelley’s portrayal of the Creature as a feminine figure is in his immediate bond with Elizabeth in the 2011 production. Despite the fact that Shelley never records the interaction between Elizabeth and the Creature in her novel, Dear and Boyle make it clear that Elizabeth and the Creature find kindred spirits in one another – they only speak for about ten minutes, but it is clear that they connect on a level that neither of them has with Victor. “If you had a child, and it looked like me, would you abandon it?” the Creature asks Elizabeth. “I’d never abandon a child,” she answers. “Are you sure?” he presses. “I’m sure,” she replies. “No matter how repulsive?” he continues. “I’m sure!” she affirms (Dear 70). In this (somewhat heavy-handed) exchange in Dear’s script, he highlights the Creature’s respect for the maternal and Elizabeth’s superiority to Victor as a parent and creator. Later in their conversation, Elizabeth vows to be a friend to the Creature, sympathizing with his plight. After he sits on the bed and promises not to hurt her – citing his education and hence his ability to tell right from wrong – Elizabeth compliments him:
Fig. 3 – Cumberbatch as the Creature and Miller as Victor Frankenstein (Photo by: Catherine Ashmore).
Fig. 4 – Miller as the Creature and Cumberbatch as Victor Frankenstein (Photo by: Catherine Ashmore).
Elizabeth Incredible. You are quite extraordinary, do you know that?

Creature Me?

Elizabeth Yes, you.

*He reaches out to take her hand. She takes it and he leads her to the bed.*

*They sit side by side.*

Creature Perhaps I am a genius, too?

Elizabeth *(laughs)* Perhaps you are.

This warm exchange is the only moment in the play where the Creature is shown a shred of human kindness from someone who has seen and accepts his physical appearance.

The way in which Naomie Harris plays Elizabeth in this scene speaks to how her character has a far more natural rapport with the Creature than with Victor – she laughs with the Creature and seems to be comfortable with him soon after she gets to know him. There seems to be a mutual understanding between the Creature and Elizabeth – they are treated similarly within the play by Frankenstein, who dismisses them both, and are frustrated with their lives. When the Creature breaks his promise not to harm Elizabeth as punishment for Victor breaking his promise to his creation, the Creature thanks Elizabeth for trying to understand his plight and apologizing. “Tonight I have met someone – perfect,” he says. “Thank you for trying to understand. But [Victor] broke his promise; so I break mine. I am truly sorry, Elizabeth” *(Dear 71).* Cumberbatch’s particular portrayal of this moment is incredibly powerful, for his regret is palpable. His voice wobbles, full of tears, when he delivers the line and it is clear that he does not want to enact the revenge he has set himself to carry out. In accentuating the Creature’s agony
at the thought of raping and then killing the woman he has just met, Cumberbatch highlights the depth of the connection his Creature develops with Elizabeth.

This moment in the play is, however, obviously a problematic one. To have the Creature deviate from Shelley’s novel and not only kill, but also rape Elizabeth – a female figure – is an act that aligns the character more with his creator, Victor Frankenstein. As explored in the second chapter, Frankenstein’s attitude toward and violations of the female Nature and the female Creature are akin to rape. Thus, in having the Creature expressly rape Elizabeth in Dear’s script – directly violating a female body on-stage – Boyle complicates the Creature’s connection to and partial embodiment of the feminine throughout the play by having him carry out such a masculine act of suppression and aggression. Of course, this moment is complicated particularly by Cumberbatch’s agonized portrayal of this moment – enhancing the Creature’s unwillingness to perform this act. While Cumberbatch’s Creature gets little satisfaction from the rape, Miller’s Creature is vocal about the pleasure he derives from the act, once again emphasizing the stereotypically masculine side of his portrayal of the Creature.

However, after violating and then murdering Elizabeth – Victor looking on in a stupor the entire time – the Creature shouts in his creator’s face, “Now I am a man!” (Dear 72). This line is a particularly damning one, for it echoes Shelley’s critique of Victor’s exclusionary mindset in regard to creation, implying that to be a man, one must desecrate and disrespect the female. Dear and Boyle’s choice to have the Creature classify the violent and destructive act of rape as masculine is a nod to Shelley’s feminist undertones explored in the novel. To have the Creature carry out this stereotypically masculine act and then condemn the masculinity of it is a contradictory move – reminiscent of his
creator’s employment and hubristic dismissal of composite methods as well as subsequent rejection of the composite result – and highlights the tension between the masculinity and the femininity of the Creature in this scene. The association of rape with masculinity speaks to Shelley’s feminist concerns within her novel and it seems as if Boyle attempts – albeit problematically – to balance out the gendered tensions within the composite Creature by having him volley between feminine sympathies and masculine acts of destruction. The fact that they have the Creature associate ruinous and devastating actions with the masculine is telling, however, his association with the feminine is seen as beneficial and positive (i.e. his conversation with Elizabeth about maternal love and friendship). Therefore, although Dear and Boyle claim to see feminism as an imposition on Shelley’s text and despite their problematic portrayal of these feminine elements within the Creature balanced with the masculine, Shelley’s feminist argument for a composite being who balances both male and female influences from her novel bleeds into the 2011 theatrical adaptation. As theatre reviewer Billington notes: “Dear and Boyle highlight the feminist critique of male usurpation of divinity that lurks in Shelley’s text” (n. pag). Hence, intentionally or unintentionally, Dear and Boyle’s production of *Frankenstein* picks up on the feminist threads woven throughout Shelley’s novel and displays them through the composite figure of the Creature – tensions crackling between the male and female.

In conclusion, Danny Boyle and Nick Dear validate Mary Shelley’s visionary conception of monstrous creation – an act of creation imbued with vitality that embraces and celebrates compositeness – articulated in her 1818 *Frankenstein* in their 2011 theatrical adaptation of the same name. Not only do they challenge the false myth
surrounding the story of Frankenstein and his creation built up over centuries following the publication of Shelley’s novel that has silenced the composite Creature – denying both its feminine aspects and falsely affirming its monstrosity borne from the same ignorant attitude that Victor imposes on his creation – but they do so in a way that respects her story by expounding upon her forward-thinking (now contemporary) views on creation, thus demonstrating the vital quality of Shelley’s understanding and execution of creation. Boyle and Dear incorporate Shelley’s early articulation and understanding of intertextuality by demonstrating how her composite methods are natural in the twenty-first century: not only is there an acceptance of intertextuality and now remediation, but the composite being of the Creature is brought to the fore in an act that reinforces a re-reading of the character’s composite nature as not something monstrous, but “natural” in our modern world. Although Boyle and Dear assert that they were unable to see feminism in Shelley’s novel, the subtle undercurrents of feminism – dissimulated in the physiologically male Creature – that run through Frankenstein manifest themselves in a problematic fashion in the twenty-first century adaptation. Not only is the Creature made into a composite being rife with tensions between masculinity and femininity, but Victor Frankenstein is also condemned for his refusal to acknowledge the female aspect to creation. Boyle’s exploration of these tensions within Shelley’s novel – those between creator and creation, and between male and female – on the twenty-first century stage demonstrate the persistent vitality of the story. Without these tensions borne of a celebration of compositeness, Shelley’s Frankenstein would have ceased long ago to fascinate, to question, to complicate, to engage. “[T]o Mary Shelley herself, the book appeared as a monster,” writes Chris Baldick of Frankenstein,
She had unwittingly endowed it with a quality even more monstrously ungovernable than the deadly strength, size, and agility given to his creation by Frankenstein: an abundant excess of meanings which the novel cannot stably accommodate, a surplus of significance which overruns the enclosure of the novel’s form to attract new and competing mythic revisions. (33)

This multiplicity of meaning has been explored for nearly two centuries following *Frankenstein*’s publication in the early nineteenth century. As Baldick notes, Shelley’s novel was monstrous to her because of its composite creation, made up of an excess of meanings and significance. The richness of Shelley’s novel continues to be explored today because it is so current – Mary Shelley’s visionary conception of creation transitions seamlessly into the twenty-first century not only because we have come to understand compositeness not as something monstrous, but as something vital. As Christopher Hart writes in his review of the 2011 play: “The story of Dr. Frankenstein and his flawed, majestic Creature is one of the greatest of all modern myths – perhaps the greatest. As the years go by, the achievement of the teenage Mary Shelley seems ever more extraordinary and contemporary” (n. pag). Boyle comments upon the vitality of Shelley’s story as well in the short film that precedes the live broadcast of the play: “What’s extraordinary about working on [Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*], is that you realize it’s timeless. It will be here a long time after we’re all gone because it swims into focus depending on different issues” (National Theatre 2011; original emphasis). When Shelley gave life to *Frankenstein*, she – unlike the creator within her novel – fully acknowledged her composite methods and embraced the composite result. In so doing,
she animated a story made up of various parts – all crackling with tensions – that has proved itself to be inextinguishably vital.
Conclusion

Mary Shelley’s hideous progeny certainly did as its author bade in the introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, for it certainly went forth and prospered (351). For nearly two hundred years, the story of Victor Frankenstein and his unnamed creation has never been put to rest – although Shelley’s tale has been condensed to reductive simplicity and misinterpreted in a vast number of ways, it has nonetheless been kept alive. Like the Creature – the composite being who is given life within *Frankenstein* – Shelley’s novel possesses an unnatural life, a peculiar vitality that has ensured its survival despite its many configurations and disfigurations over the past two centuries. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Shelley’s use of the epithet “hideous progeny” in her 1831 introduction to *Frankenstein* likens her literary creation to the ugly Creature within the pages of her novel through an allusion to childbirth. In so doing, she weaves together the roles of author, mother, and creator, thus hinting at not only the composite nature of her novel and Frankenstein’s ugly creation, but also of creation itself. Shelley therefore refashions monstrosity as something made up of several pieces and embraces this composite interpretation of monstrosity in her visionary conception of creation. And in this monstrously composite vision of creation there is a wealth of potential and vitality.

Due to the composite nature of Shelley’s novel, the story is bursting with tensions – tensions between author and text, masculine and feminine, creator and creation – however, as Shelley embraces the potential these tensions born of monstrous creation introduce, she imbues *Frankenstein* with endless possibilities and life. Shelley embraces these tensions between creator and creation in her intertextual and thus composite approach and understanding of creation, undermining the traditional Romantic notion of
singular authorship. She constructs *Frankenstein* in the same way that Frankenstein constructs the Creature – she does so by piecing her novel together, bit by bit, from various inspirations, influences, ideas, and quotations from other writers. She embraces an interdependent method of creation and celebrates the monstrous result – *Frankenstein* is composite, full of potential interpretations, and full of vitality. We, the readers and interpreters of her text, are left to grapple with these tensions and always produce slightly different results – weaving the threads together in a variety of potential ways.

Shelley also embraces the tensions wrought between the masculine and the feminine in her composite rendering of the Creature – a figure she writes with a feminist voice that expresses issues stemming from an eighteenth-century feminine education, but who also balances this with a masculine physiology. This tension between the masculine and the feminine adds another hybrid aspect to the Creature and, in embracing this figure who fuses attributes from both sexes, Shelley celebrates the product of composite creation and creates a mythic character who proves to be full of life. In contrast to his creator, Victor Frankenstein, who disregards all female influences and who spurns his composite creation – even going so far as to disregard his composite methods of creation by deeming himself a Romantic, solitary creator – the Creature presents a promising amalgam of masculine and feminine traits, demonstrating the vital potential of monstrous compositeness. The Creature illustrates the promise of Shelley’s vision of vitality borne of composite creation; in his blending of male physiology and a feminine mind as well as plight, the Creature demonstrates the possibilities of valuing and embracing his amalgamate nature as opposed to Frankenstein who is punished for scorning his own interdependent methods of creation and the composite result of those methods.
The tensions between creator and creation are explored and celebrated in Danny Boyle’s 2011 theatrical adaptation of *Frankenstein* by not only incorporating Shelley’s intertextual and feminist approaches to composite creation, but by emphasizing and problematizing them, thus demonstrating the vitality of her amalgamate creation. By incorporating various textual and visual influences as well as highlighting various intertextual references made in Shelley’s original novel, Boyle affirmatively brings the composite construction of Shelley’s novel to the stage through a variety of media, transitioning her monstrous creation easily into the twenty-first century. Additionally, Boyle casts two very different actors to alternate between the roles of Victor Frankenstein and the Creature, suggesting not only a composite tension between the role of creator and creation, but also a tension between masculine and feminine influences in the figure of the Creature. The 2011 theatrical adaptation of *Frankenstein* explores these tensions within Shelley’s text by depicting the Creature as a figure torn between the feminine and the masculine – a fact furthered by the casting of Johnny Lee Miller and Benedict Cumberbatch who emphasize a different physical and emotional facet of the Creature. In Boyle’s celebration of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and his embracing of her visionary conception of monstrously composite creation, the vitality of Shelley’s story is illustrated and confirmed nearly two hundred years after its conception.

And perhaps this is the secret that Mary Shelley comprehends and that she trusts Victor Frankenstein to enact but misunderstand: the secret to vitality – to *life* – lies in embracing composite methods of creation and subsequently celebrating the composite result.
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