

نگاهی نو به داستان فرانکن اشتاین اثری از مری شلی (ادبیات گوتیک زنان) (علمی - پژوهشی)

آنیئا لشکریان
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چکیده

«گوتیک» اصطلاح چندان دقیقی نیست ولی از قرن هجدهم که برای نامگذاری محصولات فرهنگی اروپا به کار رفت، در باره آن بحث بیشتری صورت گرفته است. آن دسته از آثار ادبی که «گوتیک» نام گرفته اند، اغلب باعث ایجاد نگرشهای متناقضی در دنیای در حال تغییر ادبیات گردیده اند. الن مورز (Ellen Moers) (1976) اولین کسی بود که اصطلاح «گوتیک» زنان را در کتاب خود «زنان ادیب» به کار برد. این کتاب به آن دسته از آثار گوتیک اشاره دارد که توسط زنان خلق شده است. تجزیه و تحلیل مورز از این گونه متون ادبی گوتیک فوق العاده تأثیر گذار بوده است. نگرش او در حقیقت بیان ضمنی ترس زنان از گرفتار شدن در درون خانه و استثمار جنسی آنان است، ترسی که در موقع زایمان نیز به طور موحشی تجربه شده است.

در ادبیات زنانه، منتقدان بر این باورند که گوتیک به عنوان یک سبک ادبی به کمک نویسندگان مؤنث آمده تا آنان بتوانند با سیری در ژرفای خویشتن، راه حلی برای تضاد های دامن گیر نویسندگان و قهرمانان زن پیدا کنند. این تضادها ریشه در موقعیت زنان در جوامع مرد سالار داشته و باعث محرومیت آنها از «قدرت و اعمال نفوذ» شده است.

رمان فرانکن اشتاین (Frankenstein) نمونه کاملاً جدیدی از گوتیک زنانه عرضه می کند. در این رمان ماری شلی (Mary Shelley) بدون استفاده از یک قهرمان زن و یا یک قربانی قابل توجه از رویکرد جدیدی در بیان وحشت در ادبیات استفاده کرده است. می توان گفت که در چارچوب گوتیک هر عنصری به نوعی به جسم زن اشاره می کند و این اشارات در حقیقت ذکری از درماندگی و ترسی است که هسته نظریه گوتیک را تشکیل می دهد.

این مقاله استفاده از مفهوم هیولابه عنوان نماد مسخ شدگی را که در رمان فرانک اشتاین به طور مجازی ترس گوتیکی از ناشناخته ها و عواقب ناشی از مواجهه با این غریبه ترسناک است مورد بحث قرار می دهد. همچنین کنکاشی از اثر ماری شلی از طریق ارزیابی آن با معیارهای ادبیات گوتیک ارائه خواهد شد. در طی این بررسی، هیولانه تنها نماد مسخ شدگی است بلکه تجاوز از مرز پنداشته های درونی و برونی رمان را نیز نمایان می سازد. با این حال، تعریف ماهیت هیولا به عهده خواننده گذاشته شده است. این مقاله با خودداری از بررسی روانکاوانه متن رمان، به نقش ویژه آن در ایجاد یک نوع ادبی و اهمیت تاریخی - اجتماعی آن می پردازد.

واژگان کلیدی:

گوتیک، گوتیک زنانه، مرد سالاری، فمینیسم، وحشت در ادبیات

Abstract

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“Gothic” is not a precise term but has been a controversial label since it began to be applied to cultural products in 18th-century Europe. Literary works that proclaimed themselves Gothic often registered these conflicting attitudes to a changing world. Ellen Moers first used the term 'Female Gothic' in *Literary Women* (1976) as the work that women writers have done in the Gothic mode. Moers' analysis of Female Gothic texts as a coded expression of women's fears of entrapment within the domestic and within the female body, most terrifyingly experienced in childbirth was extremely influential. Feminist critics argue that the Gothic as a form, has been employed and adapted by women writers to explore subterranean region of the self, to seek resolutions of conflicts which torment both writer and heroine, conflicts which have origin in women's role under patriarchy, the denial to them of 'power and action'.

Frankenstein represents an entirely new vision of the Female Gothic. Shelley brought a new sophistication to literary terror, and it did so without a heroine, without even an important victim. It can be argued that each element in the Gothic framework has, as its point of reference, the body. The body is the site of repression and the locus of the fear that forms the core of Gothic theory. Gothic trope of fear of the unknown and the consequences of the exposure of this frightening 'other' is explored in the text through the vehicle of the monster.

The present paper explores the monster as a symbol of transformation within Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and seeks insights into the novel by assessing it in the light of the Gothic tradition. Throughout the course, not only does the monster offer transformation, but also the transgression of the boundaries upon which assumptions both within and without the novel is made. The very definition of what is monstrous becomes undefined and open to speculation. The paper moves away from the psychoanalytical readings of the text to its particular contribution to the development of the genre and its social and historical significance.

Key Words:

Gothic Female Gothic Patriarchy Feminist Critics literary terror

Re-reading Body Politics and Birth Myth in Mary Shelley's Female Gothic: *Frankenstein*

“Gothic” is not a precise term but has been a controversial label since it began to be applied to cultural products in 18th-century Europe. As such it appeared in the context of the conflict, around the middle of the 18th century, between the political and cultural establishment and an up and coming middle class clamoring for greater political power. Essentially a polemical term, the word “gothic” was used by both advocates of change championing the ideals of the enlightenment and its opponents, who tried to preserve established institutions. Literary works, that proclaimed themselves Gothic or had the label Gothic stuck on them, often registered these conflicting attitudes to a changing world.

As both sides in these conflicts made use of the label “gothic”, conflicting and contradictory meanings became associated with the term that continue to animate debates about the Gothic. Thus it could be variously interpreted as a conservative backlash against the forces of change and the enlightenment or as liberation of the imagination and a model for aesthetic innovation. It could be reviled as pandering to sensationalist popular tastes and superstitions or credited with the power to challenge established political and moral orders.

Well aware of the breadth of field of Gothic studies, David Punter's 1980 publication, *The Literature of the Terror* is arguably perhaps the best critical introduction to the field of Gothic studies. Regarding the literature as “at all points connected to dream” (ix), he argues that the Gothic investigates the depths and the heights of inner experience. While it allows us to see our own abjection, it also allows us to play out a fantasized transcendence of the limits of the body.

Much Gothic has been written by women. Ellen Moers first used the term 'Female Gothic' in *Literary women* (1976) as the work that women writers have done in a literary mode that, since the eighteenth century we have called “the Gothic”. A definition of the Gothic was, she admitted, less easily stated, except that it has to do with fear. Moers’ analysis of Female Gothic texts as a coded expression of women’s fears of entrapment within the domestic and within the female body, most terrifyingly experienced in childbirth was extremely influential. It not only engendered a body of critical work which focused on the ways in which the Female Gothic articulated women’s dissatisfactions with patriarchal society and addressed the problematic position of the maternal within that society, but placed the Gothic at the center of the female tradition. In recent years, scholars of Gothic have explored new ways of reading the genre as a subversive expression of the feminine 'other'. As Vincent (1988) puts it, the Gothic is a literary representation of our innermost fears. What we fear so much is ourselves.....Those selves within us which seem to dominate our waking lives are often the victims in our dreams. The pleasure seeking self, representing the suppression which the conscious self has enforced in the waking hours punishes the self in dream. The achieving self recognizes that there is that within her that can destroy her (Vincent: 155).

Juliann Fleenor (1983) views the Female Gothic in terms of schizophrenia and self division .Fleenor maintains that good and evil are located within the female self, and identity is both fixed and shifting as the heroine attempts to establish her identity. This

is the standpoint from which a number of critics have examined the Female Gothic. Fleenor also observes that for women writers the women and her struggle to survive in a patriarchal world where power and action are defined in patriarchal terms are at the centre of the Gothic. Gothic elements in women's writing were also discussed by Elaine Showalter in her parallel work *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) It is followed by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's seminal *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) which argued convincingly that the terrifying figure of the madwoman, which appears repeatedly in Victorian novels by women is a vehicle for women writer's own rage and frustration at the constraints imposed on her both as woman and writer. It may be a device employed by the writer to project aspects of her heroine's nature which her conscious self endeavors to suppress. Feminist critics hence argue that the Gothic as a form, which includes much else besides the Gothic figure of the madwoman, has been employed and adapted by women writers to explore subterranean region of the self, to seek resolutions of conflicts which torment both writer and heroine, conflicts which have origin in women's role under patriarchy, the denial to them of 'power and action'. *Frankenstein* represents an entirely new vision of the Female Gothic. Shelley brought a new sophistication to literary terror, and it did so without a heroine, without even an important victim. A novel in which the two principle characters are male has been read as a powerful feminist statement both at the personal and the more general levels.

The 1990^s have witnessed the move of the Female Gothic from the margins into the mainstream. The most recent developments in the field are the return to historicist readings. E.S. Clergy's *Women's Gothic: From Clara Reeves to Mary Shelley* (2000) is a valuable new reading of women's Gothic texts graded in original historical contextualization. Clergy counters the common pictures of women writers in the Romantic Period as operating under unfavorable conditions of restraint, concealment and self-censorship. Her title signals a move away from the psychoanalytic readings of these texts as parables of family relations within patriarchy typically associated with the "Female Gothic". Instead, she argues that their key concerns are 'the legitimation of visionary imagination in women writers, methods of representing the passions, the issues of arousing the reader, and the profit motive'. As a literary genre Gothic has had an almost immeasurable impact and influence on the twentieth and twenty-first century imagination, most especially, in the field of popular culture. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* aims its particular contribution to the development of the genre and its social and historical significance.

The present paper explores the monster as a symbol of transformation within Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and seeks insights into the novel by assessing it in the light of the Gothic tradition. Throughout the course, not only does the monster offer transformation, but also the transgression of the boundaries upon which assumptions both within and without the novel is made. The very definition of what is monstrous becomes undefined and open to speculation.

It can be argued that each element in the Gothic framework has, as its point of reference, the body. The body is the site of repression and the locus of the fear that forms the core of Gothic theory. It is also part of the Gothic narrative which can transform to become monstrous and which forms the crossroads of the boundaries which are transgressed. It is this focus on the body which makes the Gothic such a powerful influence on modern texts, shifting the focus from issues of power and control, to the site of the exercise of that power and control: the human body, more especially, the female body The Gothic unveils the bodies and exposes the unconscious and hidden

elements which play upon these physical spaces Undoubtedly, Gothic fiction is a technology of subjectivity, one which produces the deviant subjectivities opposite which the normal, the healthy and the pure can be known. Within Gothic novels... multiple interpretations are embedded in the text and part of the experience of horror comes from the realization that meaning itself runs riot. Gothic novels produce a symbol for this interpretative mayhem in the body of the monster. (Halberstam199 This uncertainty and ambiguity is also central to the (mis-) understanding of the Gothic monster in Shelley's fiction. It accounts for the unavailability of certainty as to which character(s) are indeed monsters,- Mary Shelley, Victor Frankenstein, or the monstrous Creature- and which are in the process of transgressing that boundary of otherness in order to question it further.

The importance of the monster figure in the text cannot be underestimated, since its very inclusion is the key to the structure of the text as a whole, providing the fear and the terror, but also the element of duplicity which brings the plot alive. The lack of insight into any kind of 'truth' with regard to which side of the 'good' and 'evil' dichotomy each character lies is due in large part to the multiplicity of interpretations. The figure of the monster also makes the claim to provide boundaries, to allow us access to certainty through our understanding of this type of deviance. However, at the same time as monstrosity seems to create a boundary within which we can begin to ascertain meaning, it is simultaneously transgressing and subverting that very value code within which we have begun to ascribe definition and build understanding. However, the application of concrete terms when dealing with the monster is difficult since:

The body that scares and appalls changes over time, as do the individual characteristics that add up to monstrosity, as do the preferred interpretations of that monstrosity. Within the traits that make a body monstrous-that is frightening or ugly, abnormal or disgusting-we may read the difference between an other and a self, a pervert and a normal person, a foreigner and a native (Halberstam:8).

Yet some of the monsters discussed are neither ugly nor disgusting, yet fit into the categories of monstrosity which operate in different ways to contribute to a definition of 'monster'. There are as many characteristics of monstrosity as there are individual ideas of what is horrific. As individuals we define our own monsters in relation to our selves and the boundaries we wish to create and operate within.

By transferring the torture to his 'beloved' Victor Frankenstein has preserved his 'sense of self' by ending the threat to his body. However, he has lost more in the process, being transformed into a monstrous entity capable of such a lack of humanity. His boundaries have been breached and his humanity called into question. He is willing to sacrifice anyone but himself, he professes to love and yet he is capable of such disregard for the sanctity when faced with the choice of his own. In a novel obsessed with lies, secrets and surfaces, Frankenstein is shown as the ultimate deceiver, able to cover his true self in the mask of the rebellious hero until the denouement when this mask is threatened. He is transformed into a monster capable only of the basic emotion of self preservation. But the irony is that in attempting to preserve his sense of self bound up in his body, actually exposes what has been beneath the surface all along. The gothic trope of fear of the unknown and the consequences of the exposure of this frightening 'other' is explored in the text through the vehicle of the monster. The notion of boundaries is explored and functions to reveal many repressed monsters in the texts. By focusing upon the body as the locus of fear, Shelley's novel suggests that it is people

(or at least bodies) who terrify people, not ghosts or gods, devils or monks, windswept castles or labyrinthine monasteries. The architecture of fear in this story is replaced by physiognomy, the landscape of fear is replaced by sutured skin, the conniving villain is replaced by an antihero and his monstrous creation. (Halberstam: 28)

Mary Shelley certainly, did not write a Gothic story in which we have, say, a young heroine pursued by an evil, glowering man à la Mrs. Radcliff. She was not interested in such fright. Horror is something else, and she knew first hand what that was, it was somehow tied up into what she experienced as a woman- all the dread, fear, guilt, depression and excitement of being a woman and a writer in a patriarchal world. The marvel of her story is not that she successfully articulated her feelings but that she captured so well the shared anxieties of her sex.

While a multitude of women in the mid to late-nineteenth century brought suffrage to the forefront of society as a means to equal rights, many others involved in women's movement realized that political enfranchisement alone would not bring women to an equitable socioeconomic footing with men. Key impediments to women's equality were patriarchal ideologies and pronouncements which encumbered women's bodies, adversely affecting their physical and mental health, simultaneously relegating middle- and upper-class white women to an inferior status. Male-controlled realms such as fashion, publishing, medicine, psychiatry, and education collectively encouraged society to embrace "sick-making" conventions such as, enforced invalidism, and skewed notions of female anatomy which in effect imprisoned nineteenth century English women within their bodies. Consequently, to encumber women's body is to encumber her mind. Then, as today, women activists found misogynist ideologies so detrimental to women's survival that there was no recourse but to encounter them.

German theorist and theologian Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendal aptly notes in her 1955 text, *I Am My Body*, that, historically, "Women's bodies are the places where conflicts become unmistakably evident" (Moltmann-Wendal: 9). In a burgeoning industrialized patriarchy, women were judged solely as a sex rather than as persons constituting one half of humanity.

Contemporary historian Ben Barker-Benfield suggests that men's fear and hostility toward the female body motivated them to create gendered constructs to demonstrate that women because of the very nature of their bodies and minds, were inherently weak (Showalter: 95). To relegate women to an inferior status and to label them as the "weaker sex" reduced women's threat to masculinity. Feminists argue that gothic tales explore how a patriarchal culture represses and buries images of the maternal. They further argue that the horror stories enable women writers to evade the marriage plots which dominated the earlier Radcliffian Female Gothic, meaning that they could offer a more radical critique of male power, violence and predatory sexuality than was possible in either the realist, or indeed Gothic, novel.

It is, also, the model of experience embraced by Mary Shelley, who wrote in pointedly gender-specific terms in 1828 that "my sex has precluded all idea of my fulfilling public employments" (Behrendt: 1995). For modern readers her comment hints painfully both at the enculturated tendency of many women of the time -and today -to perpetuate women's oppression by discouraging public roles and at a narrowed and more biologically based rationalization of reserve on women's part.

Mary Shelley fought against domestication of death which imprisoned women as sex and which was expressed in virtually every sphere. For example, in the literary realm, the domestication of death became so pervasive, physically and intellectually,

that women's embodiment became doubly circumscribed. Despite men's attempts to imprison women as sex, Shelley and others chose to fight for liberty and equality, thereby rejecting death intellectual or otherwise.

Despite the gendered constructs which dictated and enforced domesticated death and its resulting physical, intellectual and mental weakness upon nineteenth century women, virtually imprisoning her both body and mind, women such as Mary Shelley and others resisted the cage of fashion and convention, encouraging emancipation for others, so that all could behold a view and place in society. Increasingly, criticism approaches *Frankenstein* as an instance of feminist polemic, for it qualifies, and completes prevailing masculine assumptions, becoming 'a vindication of imagination of woman' the fictive sequel to Mary Wollstonecraft's path breaking polemic. Whereas Wollstonecraft aimed to liberate woman by transcending sexual identity through the exercise of reason, Mary Shelley in *Frankenstein* explores the inescapable bodily imperatives of being a woman. In crucial ways Mary Shelley rejects the ideals of *A Vindication to the Rights of Woman*, working in *Frankenstein* not so much to rehabilitate as more deeply to investigate the feminine. Unlike her mother she cannot imagine a life without gender. She places emphasis upon the body-the material facts of sex -and the way this physical difference distinguishes men from women. Shelley quietly indicts a feminism that denies what she takes to be the imperatives of the body. Her assessment of the feminine derives fundamentally from the life of the body. For Shelley body is fate, all idealizing cultural and personal, liberal and feminist, mask more profound-and irrational-imperatives. Frankenstein's creature, rational and compassionate as he is, finds himself trapped in a body that inspires disgust. He even experiences this reaction himself, when he sees his own reflection for the first time:

.....How was I terrified when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I 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 (109).

Shelley is careful to situate the monster's revulsion prior to his acquisition of language, diminishing the possibility that it originates in purely cultural assumptions. In fact the monster sees language as a means of rationally transcending the fate his body inflicts. But once having learned to speak, the monster learns also that no language can cover his bodily deformity. In *Frankenstein*, Shelley takes up the fate of the body and its uneasy assimilation to social norms, a task that forces her to swerve away from the "liberal feminism" of her mother toward a more essentialist position based in bodily imperatives.

This is not to say that she has no interest in feminist issues, the status of women in patriarchal society, for instance, or the civilized dissociation of a masculine public world from a feminine domestic one. A critique of these oppressive circumstances runs throughout her narrative and gives it the social urgency that feminists have recently begun to recover. Anne K. Mellor (1988), for instance, argues cogently that Victor Frankenstein represents a patriarchal society that uses technologies of Science and Laws of the polis to manipulate control and repress women. The monster demonstrates openly the implied imperatives of corporeal life: there can be no transcendence of sex, no rationalist utopia oblivious to the body. All social orders are sublimations of an irreducibly bodily existence. A liberal feminism that restricts itself to the rational analysis of enculturated norms does not plumb the depths of human being. Beneath the

feminism of *Frankenstein* is to be found a subtler meditation upon human suffering and the way it shapes social distinctions of morality and gender. Frankenstein's monster can be viewed as the embodiment of fantasy of aggression against women, a fantasy that sustains the oppressive order of patriarchal culture and ensures, if necessary by murder, the subordination of the female. Frankenstein hides feminine dilemmas within the male creature whose monstrosity parallels that of the female body when seen through patriarchal eyes. If the monster's body determines its fate, it also presents the social order that reviles it with a fearsome image of impurity. His appearance calls up an archaic horror of the defiled which can be related to the impurity of the female realm of generation and birthing. This is symbolized both by Frankenstein's workshop and by his necrophilic dream after the monster's animation. The monster possesses "a figure hideously deformed and loathsome" (115) that make him "an object for the scorn and horror of mankind" (136). In his hideousness he is an outcast, excluded from all human communities. Hence, the monster's pathos as he ponders his own existence as a being defiled: "Was I then a monster, a blot upon earth, from which all men fled and whom all men disowned?" (115), such a fate is impervious from an external, not an internal casualty. Is the monster's misery wholly the result of its creator's egoistic or masculine presumptions? He is bitter about his own existence"..... an "abortion to be spurned at, kicked, and trampled on" (219). As Mellor reminds us it is a piece of bodily orientation of her whole symbolism for the monster- a term that places the problem of defilement in a specifically biologically and sexual-context. Shelley reduces suffering to the body, but this time to emphasize its symbolic origin. Shelley locates the objective cause of the monster's suffering in the domain of sexuality-specifically female sexuality- which appears, if the monster's complaint is credible, to be the paradigm of defilement. The monster's defilement results, not from his mere creation (he was never really born) but from his 'asexual' creation by a solitary male who usurps woman's generative powers. The monster is an ugly botch because he incarnates a male fantasy of creative autonomy.

While Moers reads the birth of the monster as a metaphor, as a distraught young, middle-class woman's anxiety-hidden personal statement about the horrors of failed motherhood, recent feminists interested less in female experience than in female authorship have also been critical of Moers' reduction of the text to biology. Barbara Johnson (1982) continues to interpret the novel as autobiography, but in her flight from biological determinations of femaleness, she tends to translate the "monster-in-the-text" and the "monstrous text" into abstract metaphors, into the figure of woman-as-monster or the "theory of autobiography as monstrosity".

In her survey of recent feminist criticism and theory, Margaret Homans(1987) has noted a major problem with Moers criticism in its tendency to present women's experiences as if they were universal, requiring only representation: consequently, it rarely attends to the ways in which these experiences have been historically and discursively constructed. In fact, Moers applies her own sexual mores to the creation of the novel in assuming that Mary Shelley shares her beliefs. Johnson's account of the novel as a "textual dramatization" of "the monstrous selfhood" is equally ahistorical and abstract in its claims concerning the nature of male and female autobiography. Mary Poovey (1980) and William Veeder (1986) do attempt to rethink in historical terms and the paper develops this line of thinking further to argue that Mary Shelley's decision to write a novel in which creation takes the form of a birth myth should not be seen, then as simply a form of personal therapy, a way of representing as Moers first argued,

maternal horror, nor is it simply an autobiographical depiction of the abstract notion of the self as monster. By drawing out the analogy between bodily and artistic reproduction, Shelley also found a way to argue for the importance of a domestic environment and a discipline of imagination in the creation of art. Agreeing with her mother that it was not women, but men who suffered most from excessive imaginations, from moral weaknesses, Mary Shelley turns the discourse on the management of pregnant woman back upon men, to argue that it is they who must learn to regulate their bodies and their idealizing fantasies. As William Veeder has suggested, Mary Shelly shares with nineteenth-Century “domestic” feminists the ideal of extending “feminine virtues” such as modesty to men, in order to “curb masculine excesses”. By making Victor “pregnant” with an idea, she is able to apply this complex discourse on the biological creation of monsters, on that had focused on female creation, to Romantic aesthetics. Part of Romantic woman writer’s predicament involves what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have called the “anxiety of authorship” -the woman writer's radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a ‘precursor’ the act of writing will isolate or destroy her. The problem is that the woman writer was working with only the bare thread of a literary heritage. Battling the powerful forces that everywhere reminded her of her cultural and intellectual marginality and the impropriety of her artistic aspirations-forces that fed timidity and submissiveness -the woman writer was very much like Mary Shelley’s creature. This gender-driven cultural stifling both of experience and of expression lies behind what Mary Jacobus(1968) among other’s sees go the themes of “dumbness and utterance” and of the powerful quest to fill an impossible desire.

Enlightenment identifies human nature with rationality minimizing the significance of the bodily existence. Liberal feminism observes that if individuals are rational in the required sense, then physical structure and appearance are unimportant. It is just such a feminism that Shelley sets out to critique in *Frankenstein*, for as we shall see; her assessment of the feminine derives fundamentally from the life of the body. Shelley’s perfect women- Elizabeth, Justine, Sophie, Agatha -remain biologically immaculate. They are insipid because they are not really characters at all, but symbols of a life yet uncontaminated by materiality.

But what about the other category of female character in *Frankenstein*, the mother, who with impressive celerity meets her death? This remarkable characteristic of Shelley's narrative has been noticed before, and explained as a symptom of Frankenstein's own need to perpetuate the death of the mother (and, indeed, of motherhood in general) in order to sustain his solipsistic and brutally masculine will to creative autonomy. Frankenstein thus becomes- as male creator- responsible for the deaths of all mothers in the novel, soliciting the feminist conclusion that the masculine imagination, at least in western tradition, is hostile to woman. While this reading remains true to the details of the narrative and uncovers a tension certainly present therein, it fails to consider the possibility that “maternal childbearing” is itself an ambiguous ideal. Marry Shelley's own life as child and mother bore ample witness to this paradox. It is not suggested that this biographical context accounts directly for the identification of death and motherhood in *Frankenstein*, but rather that it urges us to interrogate the fatal pattern for its psychological implications. What we will discover, is that Shelley represents motherhood as she does as much to evade its sinister imperatives as to criticize an androcentric theory of creation. It is interesting to note in this regard that Shelley’s revisions of her novel for republication in 1831 significantly enhance the

role of Frankenstein's mother in the drama of his development. The mother, Caroline Beaufort, has no real existence in the 1818 edition because her sexual fertility assures her own fatality; Shelley softens this dim view of motherhood in revision by extensively developing the character of Caroline Beaufort. And the result, as Mary Poovey has skillfully shown, is to transform the ideological bias of the novel; where Frankenstein's mother was previously absent, her emphatic presence now initiates a Proto-Victorian Celebration of domesticity. Shelley adds an account of the genesis of the novel that severely qualifies its effort to accommodate the social norm of the nurturing mother. Certainly, the facts of Mary Shelley's life and text of the novel far surpass a single birth-myth interpretation, though birth is both a useful and a common metaphor for creativity. An awareness of an author's gender may well illuminate interpretation of that author, but gender privileged over all other aspects of analysis often leads to a single focal point that limits rather than amplifies interpretation. Given Mary Shelley's life, the birth metaphor seems particularly useful and suggestive. In itself, however, it is insufficient because Mary Shelley's work gives voice to many complicated theories and ideas, one of the most important among them the sociopolitical restructuring of the society. By reducing *Frankenstein* to a single theme, Mary Shelley's art appears unable to transcend her biological experiences. This approach, which sets limits on the human imagination, seems to continue Victorian social mores that attempted to interpret all women as domestic (whether 'angelic' or otherwise). Rather than expand that vision through a representation of the larger scope and equality of achievement due Mary Shelley and other female writers. For not only did a nineteenth century woman writer have to inhabit ancestral mansions or cottages) owned and built by men, she was also constricted and restricted by the in the Palaces of Art and House of Fiction male writers authored. In response to "Patriarchal Western Culture", a woman writer must transcend the extreme images of 'angel' and 'monster' which male authors have generated for her. Thus for Gilbert and Gubar, woman develop monolithic literary tradition of response to male texts in which "Jane Austen and Mary Shelley, to Emily Bronte and Emily Dickenson produced literary works that are in some sense palimpsest, works whose surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning" (Gilbert&Gubar:.73). But in the case of Mary Shelley, it is believed that just as with Moers, Gilbert and Gubar have redesigned and narrowed Mary Shelley to fit their premise, we must accept Mary Shelley either as unconsciously possessed by horrific experiences of the birth/deaths of her own children or as conscious of these horrific experiences but too fearful to write of them openly, and therefore forced to encoded expression. Gilbert and Gubar's interpretation relies on selecting data from Mary Shelley's life and novels that meet their prescribed agenda and omitting and misreading data that would seriously counter their narrow representation, which denies the complexity scope of Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein*.

The failure of much criticism to place Mary Shelley within her historical framework as a product of, and contributor to, Enlightenment, Romantic, and reform ideology; as an author who had the intellectual and emotional brilliance to analyze and conceptualize her own era and to envision the hazards of an industrialized Britain; and as one who condemned injustice to both women and men ironically removes her from the position she deserves: in the mainstream Romantic canon.

Can the prevalent mode of feminist criticism go beyond narrow agendas to see women's diversity rather than insist that women have only one and the same life experience? There are biological realities, but human intelligence allows us to recognize

similarities and distinctions. Certainly the world of literary studies is committed to understanding and interpreting such distinctions. We do not traditionally “presume” men’s writing. To “presume” a single woman’s writing leads to conclusions that are often both restrictive and invalid. To recognize the distinctiveness of writers as well as their art allows recognition of their individual struggle, circumstances, and art.

All writers have used their 'self-representational' texts as a therapeutic means of 'self' discovery, to exorcise past unpleasantness ,to' fix' the past and to create a significant personal present and a sense of 'truth' characterized by a self discovery. By engaging in Female gothic in which there are both elements of the real context, the fictionalized real and the fictional context, false constructs are challenged and disrupted by insecurity thereby creating the possibility for a realignment and recognition of the real, Since female Gothic is a major contribution to the recent developments in criticism centering on Romantic women's literature, this study effectively stimulates further research and criticism, broadening understanding of the diversity of the contribution of woman writers to new models of social identity and relations during the formation of Romantic nationalism and the modern liberal state.

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