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MARY SHELLEY'S CAREER DECISION

IN FRANKENSTEIN AND "TRANSFORMATION":

A BIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH

by

Linda F. King

B.A. (Honours English)

University of British Columbia, 1988

THEESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIIL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department

of English

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Mary Shelley's Career Decision in Frankenstein
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ABSTRACT

This thesis takes a biographical approach to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, and suggests that her novel reveals the careful process of consideration she gave to becoming a professional writer of serious literature. Through her three male narrators, the author interprets her heritage, herself, and her future, alluding on several occasions to Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Identifying with the Ancient Mariner, Walton and Victor represent Shelley’s view of her Ancient Mariner-like parents, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, and her husband, P. B. Shelley. She heeds their life stories just as Walton listens to Victor’s and just as the Wedding-Guest hears the Ancient Mariner’s. Shelley thereby attempts to understand the implications of transgressing social and moral codes so that she could avoid following in their fateful footsteps.

By 1831, after thirteen years of enduring financial hardship, difficulty in finding publishers for her works, and a dubious social reputation, Shelley revises and writes a modest introduction for her first successful novel both to facilitate her publishers’ demands as well as to reinforce her adherence to the social and moral codes; further, her revisions emphasize the insurmountable but pedagogical nature of fate. At the same time, she explicitly demonstrates in her moral short story "Transformation" (1831) her acquiescence to social and moral norms. So that she could still earn a living for herself and son through writing, Shelley implicitly defends her radical past by reinterpreting it.
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Introduction

Many critics interpret Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein; Or, The Modern Prometheus* as an autobiographical text. Marc A. Rubenstein, for example, construes *Frankenstein* as Mary Shelley’s search for her own mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Ellen Moers explains the novel in terms of a birth myth and the associated anxieties of motherhood itself as experienced by the adolescent Mary Shelley. P.D. Fleck reads *Frankenstein* as an attack against her husband, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and the Romantic ideals he held so strongly, whereas U.C. Knoepflmacher regards the novel as Mary’s aggression towards her father, William Godwin. Further, Lee Sterrenberg argues that *Frankenstein* is an anti-Godwin debate. It is a family complaint novel to Judith Weissman, and a commentary on the bourgeois family to Katherine Ellis. And Anne K. Mellor convincingly argues that *Frankenstein* subtly depicts the woman writer’s “anxiety of authorship.” That anxiety, this thesis argues, has been created not only by an oppressive patriarchy, but also by Mary’s deep and intensely personal knowledge and experience of the social receptions of her own family’s works, ideas, and personal lives.

This thesis takes a similar biographical approach to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* to suggest that the whole of the novel demonstrates the careful process of consideration she gives to becoming a professional writer of serious literature, and thereby becoming a “modern Prometheus” like her parents, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, and her future husband, P. B.
Shelley. The intertextual elements in the novel certainly support this reading. With her "fore-knowledge" (the meaning of the name Prometheus) of the reception of their lives and works and the impact on their own and their families' welfare, Shelley is well-equipped with the raw materials for her first novel. (Even though her name was Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin until December 30, 1816, the date of her marriage to P. B. Shelley, Mary Shelley will be referred to as Shelley throughout this thesis as this is her professional name.) The many references to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" direct the reader's attention to Victor's story as a warning, which can only make the listener--the Wedding-Guest/Walton/Shelley--"sadder" and "wiser" ("Rime of the Ancient Mariner" L625). In the voice of Walton, Shelley judiciously states, "I shall kill no albatross" (Frankenstein 69), and "I shall do nothing rash: you know me sufficiently to confide in my prudence and considerateness whenever the safety of others is committed to my care" (69). Shelley is conscious of the possible social consequences of her writing, both for herself and family, and her novel can be interpreted as "the story of the experience of writing Frankenstein" (Johnson 7), and its possible aftermath.

My first chapter identifies the biographical similarities between Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, P. B. Shelley and Shelley herself, and the transgressing Victor Frankenstein. Once these connections are made, we can see how Shelley has combined their experiences to form her version of an Ancient Mariner in the character of Victor Frankenstein. With Victor, she interprets
their lives in terms of Coleridge's archetypal transgressor and compelling storyteller. Like Victor, whose revolutionary attempt is followed by success then subsequent failure and resulting ruin, Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and P. B. Shelley each experienced adverse consequences for having attempted to share their intellectual activities with their societies. As a result of her unique personal background, Shelley realized that anything she wrote would be examined more vigorously for similar transgressions against the existing patriarchal order. Eventually, by 1831, Shelley transforms her writing from semi-autobiographical fiction to both conventionally moral fiction and astute but traditional non-fiction.

Chapter One also discusses some biographical similarities between Shelley and her character, Captain Robert Walton, the primary narrator of Frankenstein. Once this connection is made, Shelley's protective mask begins to be lifted. Like the sea-faring Walton who desires to be a grand benefactor of humanity, Shelley, through writing Frankenstein, confronts her own expectations—and those of her family and of P. B. Shelley—that she will distinguish herself in a literary career. With the addition of the Walton narrative frame, Shelley begins her own "voyage of discovery." Through numerous allusions to and parallels with Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Shelley casts Walton, and thereby casts herself, in the role of a Wedding-Guest, who is captivated by the harrowing tale of an archetypal transgressor against nature: for Walton, this is Victor
Frankenstein; for Shelley, it is a combination of herself, her parents, and her husband.

Chapter Two aligns the Creature with both the female writer as social critic and with her works. Like the Creature, the revolutionary woman writer and her work could ignite superficial fear rather than reflective reason, and consequently be perceived as a seditious threat to society rather than a tool for cultural progress. Therefore, Shelley employs certain self-defense narrative strategies. By 1831, the date of the revised Frankenstein, Shelley strengthens her defensive position with her introduction as well as some revisions to the text. That she feels she needs to strengthen her position by reassessing and rewriting her unconventional past reveals how her socio-economic circumstances as well as an increasingly repressive and conservative political climate affected her.

Her short story "Transformation" (1831), dealt with in my third chapter, also demonstrates this career transformation from a Romantic over-reacher to a Victorian "Proper Lady." This story, which also uses elements of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," dramatizes Shelley's career dilemma and its resolution. By equating self-assertion with pride and self-denigration with humility, I propose that Guido and his dwarf express Shelley's final catharsis of her desire to cultivate her genius. Since female literary creativity could be considered by adherents of patriarchy as selfish and unnatural, (as Robert Southey evaluated Charlotte Brontë's writing and women writers in general),¹ Shelley resurrects
her earlier Creature, symbolic of her creativity, in "Transformation" in order to kill it altogether. As Gilbert and Gubar have noted, "the mad character is sometimes created only to be destroyed" (78).

Similarly, Shelley transforms her writing ambitions and goals. Particularly after 1831, she writes more for financial survival and social acceptance than for artistic or social purposes as her mother, father, and husband had each done. Her two subsequent novels, Lodore (1835) and Falkner (1837), and a travelogue, Rambles in Germany and Italy (1844), further reflect her transformation into conservatism. With Frankenstein, Shelley had written her own story from the vantage point of a sea captain voyaging into the unknown, who listens, like Coleridge's Wedding-Guest, to Victor's and the Creature's stories, and then confronts the Creature, who disappears apparently to commit suicide. Shelley continued for many years to write, and in many ways, rewrite, her autobiography in her fictions. However, incest (Mathilda), heresy (Valperga), a devastating plague (The Last Man) and usurpation (Perkin Warbeck) replace her antagonizing Creature. Not until thirteen years after Frankenstein's first publication date of 1818, when Shelley writes her short story, "Transformation," does she allow reform and social acceptance of the protagonist to replace a lonely death. As a result, the protagonist is able to live within a patriarchal society and becomes known for his adherence to courtesy.

Even though Shelley became "the courteous one"--the socially acceptable woman--as Guido becomes "il Cortese"--the socially
acceptable man—her career path was an object for contemplation for many generations. Robert Browning noted in a letter to Elizabeth Barrett dated September 11, 1845, "The 'Mary dear' with the brown eyes, and Godwin's daughter and Shelley's wife...surely was something better once upon a time...." (Browning 196). That "something better," however, had suffered the social and financial dangers of the woman writer, and therefore eventually succumbed to the role of the Proper Lady. Shelley had restricted her creativity to achieve marketable morality so she could supplement the small income she received from her father-in-law, Sir Timothy Shelley. Instead of the revolutionary, innovative, socially critical, insightful work that her parents, husband, and she herself had done, she would pursue a professional writing career of conventional morality, thereby securing not only financial security but social acceptance as well.

One purpose of this study is to demonstrate how the woman writer's circumstances affect her ideology and literary output. As Virginia Woolf writes in her essay "Women and Fiction":

In dealing with women as writers, as much elasticity as possible is desirable; it is necessary to leave oneself room to deal with other things besides their works, so much has that work been influenced by conditions that have nothing to do with art. (Woolf 2: 141)

For Shelley, those "other things" included being the daughter of two famous literary parents and wife of a controversial poet, as well as a woman writer. Her "conditions" included repressive
social morality and financial instability. The fact that her only social transgressions—her elopement and her authorship—had such a controlling effect on her writing reveals the morality of her society. The kind of writing she turned to also suggests what kind of writing was socially acceptable and financially rewarding for a woman writer at that time. The fact that she experienced difficulty in securing commissioned writing assignments also exposes the degree of acceptance or tolerance of professional women writers by their potential employers. This difficulty suggests more than just discrimination: it also reveals how the international political climate may affect the reception of an intellectual and socially critical novel, poem, or essay; Shelley’s parents and husband provide manifest examples. The value of biographical criticism rests not only with its ability to suggest further thematic interpretations of the work, but also to enhance our understanding of the writer’s relationship to her world.
CHAPTER ONE:
THE "ANCIENT MARINERS"
AND FRANKENSTEIN: WILLIAM GODWIN, MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT, PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY AND MARY SHELLEY

Beyond the primary narrative level of a scientist who myopically creates and then despairingly seeks to destroy his Creature, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein; Or, The Modern Prometheus* provides ample room for many interpretations. The many critics of *Frankenstein* have noted its rich intertextuality, most prominently with Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, the legends of Prometheus, Rousseau’s writings, and also with the works of Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, and P. B. Shelley. Sandra M. Gilbert, for example, reads *Frankenstein* as a retelling of the "male cultural myth" (48), *Paradise Lost*, "to clarify its deepest meaning for [Mary Shelley]" (48). Wilfred Cude interprets *Frankenstein* as Shelley’s reworking of the Prometheus legend to explore "the morality of a scientist presenting an unwary world with a gift that is capable of both great good and great evil" (212-13). And James O’Rourke sees Shelley’s first novel as her personal critique of the abandoning father, primarily Rousseau, but also Godwin and P. B. Shelley. Largely autobiographical, it is in this respect comparable with the contemporary female novel of sensibility (Todd 107).

*Frankenstein* can also be read as Shelley’s personalized revision of Coleridge’s "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," a revision that shows her anxiety over the future direction of her literary
career. This revision affects the overall structure of Shelley's tightly organized novel in which Captain Robert Walton tells Victor Frankenstein's story which in turn tells the Creature's story. Walton is the listener, but also the storyteller. As the listener, Walton is like Coleridge's "Wedding-Guest" who listens to a tale of transgression. This represents Shelley's present position as an aspiring young writer ardently desiring to "prove [herself] worthy of [her] parentage and enrol [herself] on the page of fame" (1831 "Introduction" to Frankenstein 56). In this role, Walton also suggests Shelley's process of learning from the narratives of other lives. Victor as Ancient Mariner represents Shelley's projection of a future version of herself if she were not to internalize the examples, both personal and literary, of Godwin, Wollstonecraft and P. B. Shelley, each of whom experienced adverse reactions to their transgressions. The Creature subjectifies the objectified; in other words, the silent "albatross" is recreated and given a voice to denounce his victimization and to seek vengeance in Frankenstein. The relationship between Victor and the Creature is one between the violated emblem of nature and its violator. Within an allegorical framework, Shelley constructs a paradigm of the process and consequences of her writing, a paradigm that Mary Poovey sees as accentuating Shelley's "troubled, veiled exploration of the price she had already begun to fear such egotistical self-assertion might exact" (The Proper Lady 121).

As she writes in 1831 in the introduction to the third edition of her novel, "Every thing must have a beginning, to speak in
Sanchean phrase; and that beginning must be linked to something that went before" (Frankenstein 58). The beginning of Shelley's writing career is linked to the writing careers of Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and P. B. Shelley. "Invention...does not consist in creating out of a void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place, be afforded" (58). Shelley's "chaos" derives in part from her earlier family life and from her later experimental marriage with P. B. Shelley. Drawing from this experience and her extensive reading, Shelley gives form and order to her views on her heritage, life, and career through identifying a common recurring pattern, a pattern she finds metaphorically moralized in Coleridge's poem of

How a Ship, having first sailed to the Equator, was driven by storms to the cold Country towards the South Pole; how the Ancient Mariner cruelly and in contempt of the laws of hospitality killed a Seabird and how he was followed by many and strange Judgements: and in what manner he came back to his own Country. (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, prefatory note to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner")

On the evening of August 24, 1806, a nine year old Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin heard Samuel Taylor Coleridge recite his haunting poem, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (Mellor 11), which came to have a lasting effect on her, for "the image of the isolated, tormented old Mariner would haunt her own fiction, even as Coleridge's verses reverberate through Frankenstein and Falkner"
(Mellor 11) as well as in "Transformation." Not only the image of the Mariner, but also the poem's pattern of moral transgression, dire consequence, and re-telling of the tale can be found in *Frankenstein.* Shelley associates this pattern with the lives and careers of her literary family as well as with her own life. She composes Victor as a "communal image" (Todd 110) of this experience, and allegorizes their literary careers in an attempt to find direction for her own career and life.

Through writing, Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and P. B. Shelley each transgressed a social code just as the Ancient Mariner transgressed a moral code, and each suffered an earthly damnation as a direct result. Wexelblatt defines the nineteenth century concept of damnation as

a full commitment to the Unconscious, an abandonment of the duties and restraint along with the comforts and pleasant mediocrities of social life. To be damned is to desert one's ordained place in humanity, to ignore ethics, to make a deliberate leap outside the circle. (Wexelblatt 111)

For the Ancient Mariner, the "abandonment" of his moral duty to love "all things both great and small" (line 615) causes his damnation. He shoots the albatross, physically suffers alongside his crew, witnesses their deaths, is sentenced to endure a living death, and not until he blesses the water-snakes, indicative of his heartfelt return to his moral duty, can he gain some respite from his suffering. He is nevertheless destined forever to tell his story to others who need to learn from it, to inform and warn them
of the consequences of over-reaching one's moral and ethical duties.

This simplified pattern of transgression outlines the lives and careers of Shelley's parents and husband. Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, "abandoned" her "duties and restraint," according to conventional social codes, deserted her "ordained place in humanity," ignored patriarchal ethics, and made "a deliberate leap outside the circle" of conformity not only by living independently, travelling abroad without a male companion, having a child out of wedlock, and attempting suicide, but also by publishing her own views on education and on sexual politics in terms of the rights of both men and women in *Vindication of the Rights of Man* (1790) and in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). For this, Wollstonecraft was damned by her society, and she told her unrepentant defiant story in many of her works.

Wollstonecraft had shot more than just one "albatross." She wrote for both personal and financial reasons, but also for socio-political ends. Naively, she seems to have thought that writing was a vehicle for producing an important public effect even when that entailed exposing personal and psychological complexities that exceeded her interpretative powers. It is as if, by exposing these complexities, Wollstonecraft hoped to work through them to their underlying social and ideological causes. (Poovey *PMLA* 117)

After her first endeavour, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*
(1787), which "made little stir, and was not particularly original, but was a beginning" (Brody 11), and after having embarked on a teaching career, first by establishing a school at Newington Green, then by becoming a governess for the Kingsborough family, she confirmed her suspicions that the role of the cultivated Proper Lady was mere ornamentation and servitude. As Brody asserts, the Proper Lady's "self-indulgence, [her] insipid interests were for Wollstonecraft examples to flee from, and then, later to correct" (13). Her next work, Mary, A Fiction (1788), dramatizes a young woman's emerging awareness of degrading and inhibiting social forces, reflecting Wollstonecraft's own search for meaning and self-definition. Shelley recreates her mother's autobiographical style in Victor's account of his life for the same self-defining purposes:

by drawing a picture of my early days, I also record those events which led, by insensible steps, to my after tale of misery, for when I would account to myself for the birth of passion which afterwards ruled my destiny.... (Frankenstein 87)

Victor tries to define himself by identifying "those events" which made him who he is, thereby constructing his own personal mythology. Wollstonecraft's self-portrait in her fictions also achieve a self-defining effect.

Between 1788 and 1790, Wollstonecraft's understanding of the international political situation increased, and the situation changed and became more urgent: in 1790, she published her
passionate *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*, a powerful and fiery rebuttal to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution* (1790), which attacks the ideals of conservatives and liberal reformers. A natural outgrowth from her consideration of the rights of men and the lack thereof for women, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), a response to the French denial of universal education to women, developed many of its ideas from her previous works. Her iconoclastic position in this treatise had its sympathizers, but it had more enemies, both male and female. Like the Ancient Mariner's hostile crew, Wollstonecraft's "own contemporaries called her a 'shameless wanton,' a 'hyena in petticoats,' a 'philosophizing serpent,' or wrote jibing epigrams in the *Anti-Jacobin Review*:

'For Mary verily would wear the breeches
God help poor silly men from such usurping b----s'"

(Brody 7).

Wollstonecraft's twentieth century critics have been equally threatened by her views, some labelling her as "an archetypal castrating female, 'God's angry woman,' a man-hater" (7). Fortunately, with the rise of the feminist movement during the last twenty-five years, critics have been reassessing Wollstonecraft's greatest work -- and her minor works -- without the cultural bias common during the last two centuries.

Wollstonecraft broke another social rule when she and Gilbert Imlay had a child out of wedlock--Fanny. Wollstonecraft's subject matter after this becomes much more conventional for the female
writer. During a business trip to Scandinavia on behalf of Imlay, she recorded her travels in the series of unsent letters, which were published together in 1796 as *Letters Written During A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*. Finally, "the professional writer had regained her self-respect, and also found a new readership. The reviews were widespread and favourable" (Holmes, introduction to *A Short Residence* 36). This work endeared her to the hearts of many, and especially to William Godwin, who shortly afterwards became reacquainted with her. Wollstonecraft had written something socially acceptable and her social reputation had temporarily improved. Her daughter perhaps learned from Wollstonecraft’s life and career, that for a woman, writing something that is emotional rather than political could be socially redeeming, the key to breaking the albatross’ curse. After her last edition of *Frankenstein* (1831), Shelley also wrote a travelogue, *Rambles in Germany and Italy* (1844), which further ensured and protected her coveted status as a Victorian Proper Lady.

Shelley learned from the career of her living father as well as that of her dead mother. Godwin’s career was also that of a man who breaks the rules and pays for it. Like Victor, Godwin "ardently desired the acquisition of knowledge" (*Frankenstein* 93). He began his career as an unordained dissenting minister, but, as the Reverend Thomas Harmer concluded, "Godwin was far too independent in his thinking to be a satisfactory colleague" (St Clair 13). After just two years "in isolation at Stowmarket" where
he was minister, Godwin resigned. He studied philosophy and for many years wandered "disconcertedly in the no man's land between the strict Christianity of his upbringing and the near agnosticism of the age of reason" (15). In 1782, Godwin reverted to Socinianism, "a branch of Christianity which in the eighteenth century often served as a staging post for Christians who wanted to retain some belief in divine revelation yet felt bound to reject traditional dogma" (15). In his *Sketches of History in Six Sermons*, he interprets the figures in the Bible, including Jesus, as merely historical figures. He was quickly becoming unemployable as a minister because of his rationalist dissent. Like Victor who recalls that

Chance - or rather the evil influence, the Angel of Destruction, which asserted omnipotent sway over me from the moment I turned my reluctant steps from my father's door - led me first to M. Krempe, professor of natural philosophy. *(Frankenstein 94)*

Godwin reluctantly turned from patriarchal religion to politics and philosophy.

Godwin, like Wollstonecraft, became a teacher, but his theory of education, which promoted individual thought and challenged the existing patriarchy, combined with his reputation as a sceptic, undermined his ambitions and not enough students could be found (St Clair 16). Godwin then turned to political journalism and professional writing. He wrote reviews and novels before completing his most famous and influential work, *An Enquiry*
Concerning Political Justice and Its Influences on General Virtue and Happiness (1793). On February 14, 1793, amidst the French Revolution and France's and England's declaration of war on each other (68), this topical work went on sale and despite its high price sold well.

The contemporary response to Political Justice was largely commendatory, since it gave, as William St Clair notes, "form and expression to many ideas that were already in the air and reinforced them" (87). It also greatly influenced Wordsworth, Coleridge, and later P. B. Shelley. Godwin's friend Thomas Holcroft gave Political Justice a very favourable review in the Monthly, and although the Critical "was openly hostile," it still gave "a full and fair description" (86). According to Godwin's journal entry for May 25, 1793, where he states "Prosecution of Political Justice debated this week" (85), his famous work had provoked the monarchical government "to consider taking action to suppress the book" since it openly criticized the monarchy as being "unavoidably corrupt" (85). No such action was taken since the book was too expensive for working class readers whose possible response was the key issue in the seditious libel prosecutions of the period.

After Wollstonecraft's death, Godwin shot his biggest "albatross" by writing his honest and intendedly respectful Memoirs of the Author of the Vindication of the Rights of Woman. Its honesty did not serve either his reputation or hers. Ironically, their literary and social reputations were ruined when Godwin
published his intended immortalization of Wollstonecraft. After
the first edition of 1798, Godwin's Memoirs was attacked on moral
grounds. As Richard Holmes recounts,

Robert Southey accused Godwin of "a want of all feeling -
in stripping his dead wife naked." The European Magazine
described the work as "the history of a philosophical
wanton," and was sure that it would be read "with
detestation by everyone attached to the interests of
religion and morality; and with indignation by any one
who might feel any regard for the unhappy woman, whose
frailties should have been buried in oblivion." (Holmes, Memoirs 43)

Influenced by this storm of criticism, Godwin prepared a revised or
corrected second edition, which was published some months later.
What was intended to be a respectful and honest eulogy was regarded
by its readership as a shocking display of immorality. "It is fair
to say," remarks Holmes, "that most readers were appalled by the
Memoirs" (43).

With the publication of The Posthumous Works of Mary
Wollstonecraft (1798) along with Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel
Maria; Or, The Wrongs of Woman which quickly followed the Memoirs,
Godwin had

further increased the burden upon his and
Wollstonecraft's daughter, who grew up idolizing her dead
mother and at the same time keenly aware of the social
opprobrium and personal costs suffered by any woman who
openly espoused the causes of sexual freedom, radical democracy, or women's rights. (Mellor 3-4)

Godwin suffered the resulting social ostracism. The verities of his own Political Justice and Wollstonecraft's two Vindications were sorely undermined since Godwin had not only proved himself and his wife to be "morally destitute," according to the conventions of the period, in their private lives, but then had the seeming audacity to disseminate that information to the public. Conservative readers of the Memoirs "saw that the revelations of the Memoirs could be used to attack, and finally (as they thought) put to flight the whole monstrous regiments of feminists, freethinkers and radical reformers" (Holmes Memoirs 45). The Memoirs damaged not only Godwin but also his children, financially and socially.

Portions of the magazine reviews of Godwin's Memoirs illustrate how what St Clair delimits as merely "one of the British public's ridiculous fits of morality" (185) can blind society to the merits of Godwin's honest and progressive literary approach to biography. As Holmes asserts, "there was no precedent for biography of this kind. Godwin's candour and plain-speaking about his wife filled them with horrid fascination" (Holmes Memoirs 43). Readers and critics focused only on the alleged immoral sections; the larger context of the work went mostly unnoticed. The May 1798 issue of the Monthly Review not only accuses Godwin of a grave indiscretion, but also implies his madness: "The extreme eccentricity of Mr. Godwin's sentiments will account for this
conduct. Virtue and vice are weighed by him in a balance of his own" (44). An act of intellectual integrity was received as a transgression against the traditional moral standards and then he was diagnosed as an eccentric, a gentler word for madman. His daughter well understood how non-conformity could be equated with immorality and madness as evidenced in both Frankenstein and "Transformation." The same reviewer continues: "[Godwin] neither looks to marriage with respect, nor to suicide with horror" (44). Apparently, for societal sanction, there could be no other sane way to regard marriage and suicide. Because Godwin does not moralize and rail against the past actions of his wife, his critics, who believed that literature should educate its readers morally, regarded Memoirs as a seditious violation of the patriarchal moral and social codes. Godwin’s daughter knew the price he and his family continued to pay for this.

The most scathing attack came naturally from The Anti-Jacobin Review, which used Godwin’s Memoirs as fodder for the assault on Jacobin beliefs in general. Holmes asserts that The Anti-Jacobin launched a general attack "on the immorality of everything Mary Wollstonecraft was supposed to represent, from independent sexual behaviour and the formal education of young women, to disrespect for parental authority and non-payment of creditors" (45). As a result, not only was Wollstonecraft’s contribution to social criticism severely sabotaged, but Godwin’s popularity as a political philosopher and credibility as a contemporary biographer were also greatly undermined, so much so that he eventually turned
to publishing children's books under a different name for financial survival.

Because of the damming reception of Godwin's Memoirs, Mary Wollstonecraft had become "too romantic and too dangerous a figure" (46) to include in any work which hoped for critical acclaim. Godwin's Memoirs was excluded from Mary Hays' Dictionary of Female Biography (1803), and Mary Wollstonecraft was ignored in Matilda Betham's Dictionary of Celebrated Women (1804). The only way to regard Wollstonecraft was not through an intellectual exploration of her ideas in A Vindication of the Rights of Women, but by acquiescence to the patriarchy's vilification of her, either by a continued condemnation and moral outrage, or by refusing to acknowledge her works altogether.

After the horrified reaction to Memoirs, Godwin's philosophical wings were clipped, and he was careful about writing anything so blatantly against "the conventions of the age" (48) again. The reading public had become disgusted with philosophy in general and publishers were not interested in any more works like the threatening Political Justice, which was quickly being regarded as the work of an immoral Jacobin who threatened the political, economic, and social orders. Godwin wrote a defence of his ideas in Political Justice, originally as a rebuttal to the jibes of one Dr. Parr. "The Reply to Parr," a pamphlet, "is one of the best things that Godwin ever wrote" (220), but it was not included "after the prefaces to the three formal editions" of Political Justice as 'Defence of the Enquiry concerning Political Justice'"
as Godwin had specified "in a note for his literary executors" (220), for possibly two reasons: if his "Defence" were not disputed, the reading public might again embrace Godwin's threatening ideas; and, if his executors had published Godwin's "Defence," then that would also risk reawakening the scandals associated with his name after his death, just as the Memoirs did for Wollstonecraft. Godwin's earning potential deeply suffered, and financial hardship continued to plague him and his family for the rest of his life. His enduring financial hardship also overshadowed his literary achievements and reputation, and his works were neglected well past his lifetime and into the next century as well.

There was one reader, however, who was far from reluctant to read Godwin's *Political Justice* and his socio-political novels such as *Caleb Williams* and *St. Leon*—Percy Bysshe Shelley. P. B. Shelley had devoured *Political Justice*, and became a devout believer and ardent practitioner of many of its principles. Like Godwin, he began his writing career as a political thinker; however, his first political writing, the pamphlet "The Necessity of Atheism," had distressing results: he had been expelled from Oxford after having been there for only six months. Like Godwin, he also had an unrestrained passion for reforming the world, but unlike Godwin, he attempted to make the ideal real by planning to set up a Utopian community in Ireland based on Godwin's principles, until Godwin forewarned him of the inherent dangers and wisely stopped his plans.
P. B. Shelley nevertheless continued with the same political motives to renovate society by writing "Queen Mab," which as David Perkins explains,

declares that Necessity rules the world and will gradually usher in a happier time. Kings, priests, religion, and commerce are pernicious and must perish. Women will be emancipated, love will be tender and true; man will become vegetarian and hence healthy and gentle; and the earth will shift its position. (Perkins 952)

P. B. Shelley, like Godwin, moved against the overwhelming current of conservatism and tradition. Like Godwin after he published the Memoirs, he was perceived more as a devil than a demi-god by his society for his atheist and non-conformist work (Cude 213). As a result, his subsequent works had a very small audience. His many political poems written in 1819, for instance "The Mask of Anarchy" and "Song to the Men of England" among others, were not published in his lifetime, and although Prometheus Unbound was published within his lifetime, its political insights were expressed in the form of a difficult play, which meant it went largely unnoticed and unread by the public. His wife knew firsthand during the time of writing Frankenstein that non-conforming views or works would go unpublished, and hence be non-commercial. She also knew how the author's private life could negatively affect his or her literary career.

The very name "Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley" associated her with three radicals. She also shot her own "albatross," not by
writing overtly anti-patriarchal or non-traditional literature, but by defying both conventional morality and her father by eloping to France with the already married P. B. Shelley. After their elopement, Shelley ironically was disowned by Godwin, and her society saw her as a fallen and even sold woman; it had been rumoured, for example, that "Godwin had sold his daughters to Shelley, one for £800, the other for £700" (St Clair 363). As Poovey notes, Shelley not only was forced to respond to the general ideological configuration that pitted a model of acquiescence against whatever aggressive desires a young woman might have; she also had to deal with competing psychological, familial, and public claims about who and what she was. (Poovey PMLA 116)

Shelley would often visit "her mother's grave in St. Pancras Churchyard, where she would read her mother's works and seek solace from nature and her mother's spirit" (Mellor 20), and she continued her studies of Godwin and Wollstonecraft after her elopement. Her extensive reading constitutes what Sandra M. Gilbert calls Shelley's "bibliogenesis" (50). From reading Wollstonecraft's works and especially Godwin's Memoirs and its reviews, Shelley could view her mother as an "Ancient Mariner" who openly defied propriety by writing and living by her feminist ideology, and thereby having shot her "albatross" underwent its curse. She could similarly view Godwin as Ancient Mariner-like. After having written the Memoirs, and thereby having violated the reading
public's sense of decorum, Godwin suffered attacks on his character which hindered his career and reputation.

As Wollstonecraft and Godwin had done, Shelley and P. B. Shelley also studied the various responses to the French Revolution, the arguments of Thomas Paine, the anti-Jacobins, including Edmund Burke, Abbé Barruel, John Adolphus, and the anonymous *French Revolutionary Plutarch* (Sterrenberg 153). Perhaps they considered themselves to be younger versions of Godwin and Wollstonecraft. Certainly P. B. Shelley was eager to put his ideals into practice, and no doubt Shelley was enamoured by his defiant poetry and lofty ideals for humanity. However, the young Shelley, unlike her husband, was "not immune to public opinion [nor] oblivious to conventional propriety" (Poovey *PMLA* 341), and not until after her elopement did she fully realize that she had followed in the same fateful steps as her mother. At this point of moral crisis, Shelley through writing *Frankenstein* began her search for self-definition so that she could avoid the pitfalls that her mother had endured and that her father continued to suffer because of their careers and social or moral non-conformity.

Shelley knew of her parents' personal, social, and financial suffering and she as a "Wedding-Guest," a witness, could view not only Godwin and Wollstonecraft as intellectual Ancient Mariners, but also P. B. Shelley who was increasingly alienating himself from her. It is unsurprising that she creates Victor Frankenstein, "the Modern Prometheus," in the images of her views of Wollstonecraft, Godwin, P. B. Shelley, and herself. Victor, speaking to Walton in
the first person, combines the superior intellect, the challenge to non-traditional views of social organization, and the resulting inordinate suffering of Wollstonecraft, Godwin, P. B. Shelley, and Shelley herself. Victor, because of his strong desire for knowledge, isolates himself from his family to pursue his individualistic interests and desire for honour and glory, just as Shelley's husband and father both retreated from normal social relationships in their intellectual pursuits. In this light, Kate Ferguson Ellis and P. D. Fleck interpret Frankenstein as Shelley's attack on romanticism, particularly her husband's pursuit of ideal worlds that, when mated with resistant reality, breed chaos. The retreat of these two men from their families, as well as her quarrels with William Godwin, seem to be the basis for Shelley's gradual disillusionment with radical philosophy and her growing ambivalence towards her "early flamboyantly experimental life with Percy" (Scott 173), which nevertheless increased her knowledge of the world in which she lived.

In Frankenstein, using the long-familiar story of the Ancient Mariner, Shelley begins to explore the creative and professional life of the writer. Central to this novel is the concept of the closeness of life and death. Just as the fate of the Ancient Mariner is determined by his careless action and then controlled by the "Night-mare LIFE-IN-DEATH" woman, Victor's fate is similarly determined by his Creature, a life in death figure since he is an assemblage of dead body parts imbued with supernatural life. The "Night-mare LIFE-IN-DEATH" "winneth the Mariner" (Coleridge 1193),
just as social ostracism brings death into the lives of transgressing authors—Victor, Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and P. B. Shelley. Their written works achieve a certain life in death quality, too, since they have the capacity to live on after the death of the author.

The sense of pursuit that runs through *Frankenstein* links it with "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," and also with Shelley's own difficult life. After Victor authors his "hideous progeny," he again identifies with Coleridge's poem. Victor compares how he had felt immediately after this act and his abandonment of his Creature:

> Like one, that on a lonesome road
> Doth walk in fear and dread,
> And having once turned around walks on,
> And turns no more his head;
> Because he knows, a frightful fiend
> Doth close behind him tread. (*Frankenstein* 107)

This particular passage had a tremendous effect on P. B. Shelley, who had "armed himself with pistols" (St Clair 379), believing he was being stalked by one Robert Leeson, "a member of a prominent 'loyalist' Anglo-Irish family who was mounting his own anti-Jacobin terror" (379). P. B. Shelley thought he saw his assassin lurking in Dublin, Dover, and again in Pisa in 1821. With his imagination, with his love for Godwin's novels, particularly *Caleb Williams* and its theme of relentless pursuit of an innocent, and "in the oppressive atmosphere of anti-Jacobinism it was easy to see enemies
at every street corner" (379). His fear guaranteed that he and his family would keep travelling just as Victor's fear ensured that he would live his life being pursued and pursuing.

The sense of guilt similarly links the two texts. When Victor explains how he had felt about his pending marriage to Elizabeth, he rhetorically asks Walton, "Could I enter into a festival with this deadly weight yet hanging round my neck and bowing me to the ground?" (emphasis added 197). Victor not only identifies with the Ancient Mariner, but also interprets his actions as matching the guilt of the Ancient Mariner. Victor's guilt and his punishment suggests Shelley's sensitivity to the transgression of the code and her sense of inevitable punishment and social ostracism.

When Mary began writing Frankenstein, deaths and estrangements followed her. Like the Ancient Mariner and Victor, Shelley was losing her family, her crew: after her elopement in the summer of 1814, Godwin was estranged from her, refusing to see her or correspond with her until her eventual marriage; P. B. Shelley was beginning to withdraw from her, spending more time with her stepsister Claire Clairmont, and even encouraging a liaison between Shelley and his friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg in the winter of 1815; her infant child died in 1815; and, her half-sister Fanny committed suicide on October 9, 1816. When Shelley began writing Frankenstein in June 1816, finishing by May 1817, she no doubt felt akin to the ancient Mariner:

   Alone, alone, all, all alone,
   Alone on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony. ("Rime of the Ancient Mariner" 1232-5)
The Ancient Mariner is driven to tell and re-tell his story in an
effort to deal with his isolation. Shelley continues to write to
define the problem, to exorcise her suffering, and to find
direction; her isolation, as Margaret Lund asserts, actually helped
Shelley "to become an author" (Lund 253), but at the same time,
strengthened her sense of the multiple dangers of authorship.

After having drafted the story of Victor first, Shelley was
"urged...to develope [sic] the idea at greater length"
(Frankenstein 60) by P. B. Shelley. Shelley then created Captain
Robert Walton to frame her original story and characterized him as
someone embarking on a similar journey to Victor's, therefore as
someone who both wants and needs to hear the consequences of
Victor's transgression. Although some critics, for example Lucy
Rosetti and Edith Birkhead, have asserted that Walton "is not
necessary to the narrative structure of the work" (Cude 217) and
Wilfred Cude believes that Walton merely enables the reader to see
Victor "in a more balanced manner" (Cude 217), Walton's narrative
frame has been valued for its "moral web" (Goldberg 28), for
establishing its "dreamscape" (Joseph 99), for its "narrative
strategy" (Poovey PMLA 340), which "undermines the certainties of
religious delusion" (Baldick 44) and for resembling a "confessional
narrative structure" akin to the structure used by the earlier
repentant ex-radicals (Sterrenberg 144). A previously unnoticed
feature is that Walton's narrative frame also parallels and
reinforces not only "the theme of Promethean over-reaching" (Hume 285), but also establishes the didactic role of the central narratives by providing a listener, and strengthens the parallel with the Ancient Mariner by providing a Wedding-Guest figure.

Through Walton, Shelley situates herself at the periphery of Victor's story, just as she was situated at the periphery of the lives of her parents and husband. Informed by the "albatross" legacies--the vulnerability caused by their breaking taboos--of the careers and lives of her parents and husband as well as the aftermath of her own indiscretion of travelling to Europe with an already married P. B. Shelley in 1814, Shelley characterizes Walton as the spellbound "Wedding-Guest" to Victor's supernatural "rime." Victor's "thin hand raised in animation," like the Ancient Mariner's "skinny hand" (1 225) captivates Walton, and throughout Victor's tale, Walton's "looks" (Frankenstein 103), like the Wedding-Guest's fearful interjections, make Victor continue his horrific tale of guilt and suffering.

While the Wedding-Guest hears the Mariner's rime before he can participate in the celebration of a social union, Walton hears Victor's story before he is able to continue on his asocial course. Walton functions as the young Shelley who eagerly seeks for discoveries but who also cautiously considers the fate of her familial "Victors." The very act of writing Frankenstein marks the hopeful, undaunted yet cautious embarkation on Shelley's "voyage of discovery" (74), and a large part of that journey includes both lamenting and idolizing the fate of Wollstonecraft, Godwin, P. B.
Shelley, just as Walton laments and idolizes Victor Frankenstein. Walton writes to his sister in England, Margaret (Walton) Saville, of his past, of his present journey, and of the story of Victor Frankenstein and his Creature, which helps him to determine his future. As the initials of Walton's addressee are the same as Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's, Shelley seems to be writing "to an audience of one, herself" (Mellor 54), about her past, her present undertaking of writing her first novel, and of the lives of Wollstonecraft, Godwin, P. B. Shelley, and her own life, which help her to define herself and to determine her future career choice. The doubling extends to the divided author herself. As Barbara Johnson has noted, Frankenstein is "the story of the experience of writing Frankenstein" (7), complete with Shelley's projections of its reception and her society's response to her authorship. Initially writing to and for herself, Shelley, like many female writers of her century, undertakes a "quest for self-definition" (Gilbert & Gubar Madwoman 76). As the daughter of literary parents and the wife of a poet, she has great expectations for herself, just as Walton and Victor have for themselves in Frankenstein. Shelley writes in her 1831 introduction that "it is not singular that, as the daughter of two persons of distinguished literary celebrity, I should very early in life have thought of writing" (55). Walton's high esteem of Victor, whom he deems to be "noble and godlike" (Frankenstein 253), suggests Shelley's desire to emulate her parents and husband, but also to avoid the pitfalls of their careers. The letters Walton writes to his anxious sister
suggest that he is aware of his dangers, but nevertheless feels strongly compelled to undertake his voyage. "There is something at work in my soul which I do not understand," writes Walton, and further details that "something" as "a love for the marvellous" and "a belief in the marvellous...which hurries [him] out of the common pathways of men" (70).

In this way, Walton reveres "the celebrated poets of our country," and seeks a similar path to fame, glory, and power. Although Walton tells his sister that he "shall shoot no albatross" (69), he nevertheless follows a similar course to Victor, to Wollstonecraft, to Godwin, to P. B. Shelley, and to the Ancient Mariner. For Walton is not only parallel with the Wedding-Guest, but also with the Ancient Mariner before he shoots the albatross. For example, just as the Ancient Mariner seeks the south pole, Walton seeks the "country of eternal light" (Frankenstein 63) at the north pole. Just as the Mariner’s ship is engulfed in the ice immediately before he shoots the albatross, Walton’s ship also is surrounded by ice immediately before he sees Victor’s "albatross," the Creature, in the frozen distance, suggestive of how Shelley may have seen her family’s past in perspective of her future.

Walton represents the career position of the young Mary Shelley at the time of writing Frankenstein. His past is strikingly similar to hers. When she writes that Walton’s "education was neglected yet [he] was passionately fond of reading" (64), she writes of her own education. She, too, was an avid, passionate reader, but like most girls of the period, she had no
formal education. Walton’s "regret which [he] had felt, as a child, on learning that [his] father’s dying injunction had forbidden [his] uncle to allow [him] to embark in a seafaring life" (64) is shared by Shelley in that a patriarchy had forbidden women to be trained as intellectual explorers. Her resentment of the father’s role in his offspring’s education permeates not only her presentation of Walton, but the other two narrators as well, Victor and his Creature. Despite her lack of a formal education, Shelley had access to her father’s literary friends, most notably among them Samuel Taylor Coleridge. She also read extensively from Godwin’s “excellent library of old English authors” (Mellor 11), and demonstrated her writing abilities when she was just eleven years old with “a thirty-nine quatrain expansion of Charles Dibdin’s five stanza song, ‘Mounseer Nongtongpaw’” (10), which was published in 1808 for the Godwin Company’s Juvenile Library and reprinted in 1830. Even though Shelley had shown herself to be a talented, precocious student, Godwin "agreed with his wife that she required no formal education" (8).

When Shelley reached adolescence, Godwin increasingly withdrew from her. Shelley was reaching the age when girls were encouraged more to teach than to be taught. She would write weekly lectures in the style of Coleridge and lessons for her younger half-brother William, who was later sent "both to Charterhouse and Dr. Burney’s School at Greenwich" (12), the school where her older step-brother Charles was also sent (St Clair 297). Mrs. Godwin ensured her own daughter’s education as Claire was sent to a boarding school in
Margate (Mellor 13) and another boarding school in Walham Green (Gittings 9), but is remembered by Shelley to have said that "'Mary could stay at home and mend the stockings’" (Mellor 13). By comparison with the education of her siblings, it would seem that Shelley's formal education was certainly neglected. Robert Gittings suggests that Shelley did not attend a boarding school for financial reasons; yet Godwin did find enough money for the formal academic education of his sons. U. C. Knoepflmacher suggests that Shelley "deeply resented" Godwin for her not being "little William," as Wollstonecraft and Godwin referred to the unborn Shelley, for Godwin's sexist decision not to educate their daughter formally, and in general "for his imperfect attempts at moulding Mary Wollstonecraft's two daughters" (Knoepflmacher 91).

Like Shelley, Walton also regrets his self-education which left him "more illiterate than many schoolboys of fifteen" (68). Shelley's self-view can be seen when Walton acknowledges that he has thought more and...[his] daydreams are more extended and magnificent, but [that] they want (as the painters call it) keeping; and [he] greatly need[s] a friend who would have sense enough not to despise me as romantic, and affection enough for me to endeavour to regulate my mind. (68)

Shelley realizes that her imagination, her rich inner life, needs to find a way to survive and to be nurtured, and writes in order to question or expound on her true nature and role in society. She derives meaning for her life through writing. Like Shelley, both
Walton and Victor are unhappy with their worlds, and therefore seek new ones. However, Shelley alone considers the possible consequences of her actions.

Peter Dale Scott agrees with Sterrenberg, Poovey, and Knoepflmacher that Frankenstein is the story of Shelley's childhood resentment of William Godwin and as "an implicit critique of her father's political ideas" (Scott 172). Shelley respected and was devoted to her father's pursuit of truth for the enlightenment of humanity; for this, Shelley had "a romantic attachment to [her] father" (Letter to Maria Gisborne, October 30, 1834). However, Shelley also resented her father's unintended sacrifices that were made in that noble pursuit. Mary Poovey writes that in Shelley's later novels, "there seems to be ample justification for...smoldering resentment against the father" (Poovey The Proper Lady 165). According to Knoepflmacher, Shelley writes Frankenstein to do more than just exorcise her "aggression" towards him; it expresses her desire to "kill" him for making her a potential monster (105), and for his paternal injunctions, like Walton's father's, against leaving familiar grounds to discover new ones. This attitude, of course, inhibited Shelley's high artistic ambitions; this inhibition is reflected in the change in Walton's goals to discover the earthly instead of the ethereal. Walton reminds his sister of "how heavily [he] bore the disappointment" (64) of not succeeding in his first hopes.

Because experience always informs one's perception of reality, Shelley could foresee the possible consequences of her own literary
over-reaching. Although she might want to emulate her mother, father, and husband, she would be much more sensitive to the risks to her social and financial well-being. Walton writes that he has "no ambition to lose [his] life on the post-road between St. Petersburg and Archangel" (65) just as Shelley has no ambition to lose her social life on the road between inspiration and publication. The very names of the points on Walton's course suggest that Shelley believed that the artist's journey to enlightenment, to self-discovery, is a chilling, transcendent experience. Walton has presumably left his native England, for example, and begins to chronicle his journey while in St. Petersburgh, a northern city named after Saint Peter, the angel at Heaven's gate. Sandra M. Gilbert has noted "the allegorical names of the places [Walton] leaves" (53). He takes the "post-road" to Archangel, a seaport on Dvina Bay, the road all correspondence takes to and from that city, whose name literally and significantly means a chief angelic messenger of God. The existence of a "post-road" possibly acknowledges the works of previous philosophical explorers; in other words, various authors and especially poets before her would have metaphorically travelled this same road between heaven and earth. This divine setting is Shelley's backdrop for her metaphorical journey towards enlightenment, which results in her self-knowledge and provides direction for her professional writing career.

After writing Frankenstein, Shelley alters her career goals, just as Walton is ultimately deflected from his original plans by
the narratives he hears. Although Walton exercises caution in his pursuit, and realizes the dangers for himself and his crew in his voyage, just as Shelley does for herself and her family in her voyage of self-discovery, Walton nevertheless still engages in the pursuit; Shelley similarly writes her novel and several more after that. Walton still ardently desires to continue his quest even though his crew has become reluctant to risk their lives for this non-commercial enterprise. Shelley still desires to tell her story, to continue her quest for self-definition, direction and purpose in life, and to risk her social life for this potentially non-commercial enterprise.

Like Shelley, Walton believes that if he succeeds in his goal, "many, many months, perhaps years, will pass before [Margaret Saville] and [he] may meet" (Frankenstein 68). If Shelley succeeds in her goal of self-discovery and serious authorship, then she will have no need to find refuge in the persona represented here by the stay-at-home married lady, Margaret Saville. Once there in her "country of eternal light," Shelley like Walton would unfold the answers to many questions. However, Walton also writes that "if [he] fails, [Mrs. Saville] will see [him] again soon, or never" (66). Walton would either return home immediately or perhaps live abroad in shame or even kill himself. If Shelley fails with her writing, she too would either return to the condition of the proper lady or live abroad to prevent ridicule and ostracism, or even share the same fate as her half-sister Fanny Imlay had inflicted
upon herself just weeks after Shelley and Percy returned from the Mer de Glace at Chamonix in the fall of 1816, while Shelley was writing Frankenstein.

Although Walton fails to discover "a land surpassing in wonders and in beauty every region hitherto discovered on the habitable globe" (Frankenstein 63), he nevertheless finds "eternal light" (63) in Victor's story of unrestrained, asocial ambition, a story that suggests that knowledge is best left undiscovered when sought to satiate pride and the appetite for power or glory, and especially when it threatens the order and safety of the world. Like Shelley, Walton does not accept this willingly, but is forced by his crew, the majority, to submit to their plea for safety. Like Walton faced with the prospect of ruin, Shelley feels compelled to tell her collective tale to warn herself of the fate awaiting moral transgressors, and to turn, however reluctantly, her writing career to more conventional waters. She comes to realize, as George Levine writes, that "either way one turns, to a defective society or a rampant individualism, there is no peace without the sort of frustrated compromise Walton makes and that the Victorian novel will insist on" (Levine 14).

Therefore, Walton grudgingly turns his ship around, and submits to the power of the majority that has curtailed his individual will. Over the following decade,

Mary Shelley began to use her literary career both to defend her behaviour and, more significantly to so characterize it that it would need no defense; in other
words, she sought to make her behaviour conform to conventional expectations of what a woman should be.

(Poovey PMLA 116)

Shelley continued to write but with a heightened awareness of the dangers. This awareness may have inhibited her writing as each novel or short story chronologically descends further from the moral ambivalence of Frankenstein towards a more constraining but safer conservatism.

The following chapter suggests how her socio-economics and the political climate necessitated her self-protective narrative strategies in the 1818 edition, and how it later prompted her in 1831 to revise her text and almost apologize for its very existence. The next chapter also equates the Creature with Shelley's self-view as an author and how her literary output in a society that would not readily herald female literary creativity and achievement could make her and her work "monsters."
CHAPTER TWO:
FROM ANCIENT MARINER TO PROPER LADY:
STEP ONE: MARY SHELLEY'S "INTRODUCTION"
AND REVISIONS TO THE 1831 EDITION OF FRANKENSTEIN

Mary Shelley had always been, as she later writes in her Journal entry for October 21, 1838, "much of a self-examiner" (2: 204). Her resulting personal mythology has, as suggested in the last chapter, certain parallels with Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," parallels apparent in much of her fiction. In Frankenstein, Walton (like Victor) refers directly to this poem, and he functions as both a Wedding-Guest to Victor's rime as well as a potential Ancient Mariner. Victor describes how he felt after his transgression also in direct terms of this poem, and he acts as an Ancient Mariner who tells his tale to someone who needs to hear it -- Walton. By examining Walton, Victor, as well as the Creature, the critic can see how Shelley casts her current writing self as Walton, Victor as a composite of Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and P.B. Shelley, a composite who serves as a warning from the past, and the Creature as a possible future writing self. In other words, Shelley portrays herself and her work as a social outcast because she knew from both the lives and careers of her family as well as from her experiences with patriarchal culture that she was pursuing a career and life that could very likely lead her to increased isolation, poverty, and despair. If she wanted to pursue writing professionally, she would have to compromise her goals.
This chapter suggests that Shelley's decision to pursue a professional writing career that would be more conservative, conforming to gender expectations, and be therefore more financially stable and socially secure for herself and her young son, was heavily influenced by biographical events, particularly her lack of financial stability, and also by her socio-political climate. Shelley's future "monsters" or writings would be more proportionate to those around them if she were to transform herself from an Ancient Mariner who tells his own spiritual story to a Proper Lady who tells the secular lives of others.

After writing the first edition of Frankenstein, Shelley continued to endure periods of depression. Her bouts of melancholia intensified with each death of a loved one. By 1831, she would look back on the suicide of her half-sister Fanny, the deaths of four of her five children, her husband, most of her close friends, most notably Lord Byron and Edward Williams, and of Byron and Claire's four year old daughter, Allegra. She would also remember the breach in 1827 of her friendship with her beloved Jane Williams, and the rejection of herself and her son, Percy, by her father-in-law, Sir Timothy Shelley. Shelley writes in her Journal that she "never prayed so heartily for death as now" (March 1824), a sentiment she felt often over the following years. On September 17, 1826, she confesses, "I strive to study, I strive to write, but I cannot live without loving and being loved, without sympathy; if this is denied to me, I must die! Would that the hour would come!" (Journal 2. 198). On the occasion of another friend's death, she
writes in her *Journal* on January 9, 1830: "I see all those I love die around me, while I lament." Shelley attributes her melancholy to the "unfortunate" events "that took place now eleven years ago," and rhetorically asks John Howard Payne in a letter dated June 1825, "when will reflection on the happy, unfortunate past cease to have that effect [melancholy] on me" (Bennett 494).

Shelley's melancholy further isolated her from society. In her December 3, 1826 *Journal* entry, she writes:

> At the age of seven-and-twenty, in the busy metropolis of native England, I find myself alone. The struggle is hard that can give rise to misanthropy in one, like me, attached to my fellow-creatures. Yet now, did not the memory of those matchless lost ones redeem their race, I should learn to hate men, who are strong only to oppress, moral only to insult. (*Journal* 2: 197)

Shelley's reclusive life was unhappily endured, and she could not completely break her solitude because of her intensifying misanthropy; however, she could temporarily relieve her suffering through her self-explorative writing.

When Shelley "was enjoying a remission from her depression in January 1831" (Gittings 145), her transformation from the role of Ancient Mariner to the traditional role of the Proper Lady was rapidly accelerated, and she dramatized this process in her short story, aptly titled "Transformation." Whereas the Ancient Mariner and Victor Frankenstein would welcome death to alleviate their solitary, relentless suffering, Guido the protagonist of
"Transformation," struggles to survive. He risks his life in his return to Juliet, and once there, adapts to social demands, not just for his own survival, but also for the safety and happiness of the one he loves. These implications of this story will be discussed in the next chapter.

Shelley's parallel fight for survival has similar roots in love and a sense of obligation. Her son had now reached the age where choice of school and the availability of tuition would affect his future life. Shelley began to write more for money than for art, and she evidently knew that to become marketable, she had to write what a publisher would want from a female writer, "an amusing not a profound book" (letter to John Murray, August 9, 1830); she recognized what would sell within an increasingly conservative society, ironically moving towards a time of reform. Up to this point, she had continued to write serious novels, even though she fully knew that publishers wanted and paid well for "amusing & light writing" (letter to Leigh Hunt, August 18-19, 1823).

Between 1818 and 1831, the years between the first and third editions of Frankenstein, and between the first Frankenstein and "Transformation," Shelley wrote many short stories and articles for the London Magazine, the Westminster Review, and the Keepsake. She also wrote four more semi-autobiographical novels during this time: Mathilda (written in 1819 but not published until 1959), Valperga (1823), The Last Man (1826), and Perkin Warbeck (1830), which are, as Mary Poovey notes, "riddled with competing tendencies because they simultaneously fulfill and punish her desire for self-
expression" (Poovey PMLA 332). These "competing tendencies" are finally resolved in her 1831 introduction and revisions to the third edition of Frankenstein. Shelley not only revises Frankenstein in ways which show her new-found resignation to her situation as an unalterable fate, but also redramatizes Frankenstein in her short story "Transformation" to demonstrate and to comment on her acquiescence and adherence to the patriarchal social, political, and moral codes. She thereby proves her willingness and ability to write with conventional didacticism, something publishers seemed to expect and demand from female authors. This short story, the 1831 revisions, and the new introduction to Frankenstein mark the completion of the career transformation of Mary Shelley from the autobiographical to a self-effacing mode—from Ancient Mariner to Proper Lady.

In her 1831 introduction to the third edition of Frankenstein, Shelley is careful first to cite the reason why she has written this introduction: she was apparently asked by "the publishers of the Standard Novels," to give "some account or origin of the story" ("Introduction" 55), and how she "then a young girl, came to think of and dilate upon so very hideous an idea" (55). She carefully establishes that she is merely responding to a professional request, and not independently asserting herself. Shelley informs her readers that her intent in writing the novel had been quite innocent: she had merely responded to her male companions' literary challenge to write a ghost story that would "speak to the mysterious fears of our nature and awaken thrilling horror -- one
to make the reader dread to look round, to curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart" (57-8). She avoided the suggestion that writing this novel was an outlet for her creativity and that she was in pursuit of any particular moral truth as her male counterparts could have easily and expectedly done. She establishes herself as a conventionally passive female.

But certainly, the question of how she "came to think of and dilate upon so very hideous an idea" (55) takes on special significance since her gender and her book’s subject matter were incongruous in the minds of conventional publishers and readers; *Frankenstein* was a misfit among the acceptable categories for the published works of women. Although some women did write gothic novels, Shelley’s hideous subject matter and its potential for representing current trends and universal themes create a novel that is not merely sensational but also has socio-philosophical implications. Shelley daringly goes beyond stimulating just the physical senses; she seeks the sublime, not the beautiful.

Shelley considers the horror of man’s pursuit of knowledge of the intangible spirit from a scientific point of view, and then logically extends this horror to the grotesque: she merges the natural with the supernatural world--Victor learns the secret of creation. Wolfgang Kayser’s theory on the grotesque can be applied to *Frankenstein*. Victor’s very desire to usurp the power of creation from both women and God "is a play with the absurd" (Kayser 185). Moreover, Shelley objectifies "the ghostly 'It'" (185)--Victor creates the Creature, an act which invokes and
unleashes "the demonic aspects of the world" (188). She characterizes both Victor and the Creature as unable to orient themselves in the physical universe (185), and so both exist within an "estranged world" (184). She stages both Victor's and the Creature's decline into madness, the ultimate stage of disorientation. Finally, she dramatizes Victor's fearful attempts to subdue and then obsessively to destroy the monster, and his failure. As a result, both Victor and the Creature wish for death, as life has become too horrible to endure: "The grotesque instills fear of life rather than fear of death" (185). Shelley's story is more than just a flight into gothicism; it is an ascent into the grotesque.

Such grand pursuits of the sublime within the grotesque belonged solely in the male domain for literary creation. Shelley did not accept this limitation, nor the inhibiting conditions of female authorship, nor the humble anonymity in the second edition of Frankenstein in 1823. These past actions could be judged as manifestations of her earlier socio-philosophical transgression and also of what could be interpreted as an earlier unfeminine pride rather than of conformist feminine humility. Shelley therefore seizes the opportunity to write a veiled apologetic defence in her preface to the third edition, to explain and to justify but not wholly to reject, her "hideous progeny" ("Introduction" 60), and also to characterize herself as the conforming Proper Lady for pressing social and financial reasons.

To avoid the harsh labels thrust upon her mother's character
by a display of feminine virtues, Shelley modestly writes in her introduction that her husband's mind was to be considered as "far more cultivated" (56), and that the reason she was the only one to meet Byron's challenge to write a story was merely because "the illustrious poets" were "annoyed by the platitudes of prose" and so they "speedily relinquished their uncongenial task" of inventing "the machinery of a story" (57). It would have been unacceptable for Shelley to have testified that she had beaten these men at their own game. She further positions herself as "a close imitator - rather doing as others had done than putting down the suggestions of [her] own mind" (55), implying that she was a mere vassal to the ideas of Byron and P. B. Shelley in conversations where she "was a devout but nearly silent listener" (58). As Margaret Homans writes, part of Shelley's characteristic defence strategy is "to appear to be a docile wife and 'devout listener' to the conversations of important men" (116). In effect, she implies that the received seed of her story then germinated in her dream, and she bore the words of it the very next day, "making only a transcript of the grim terrors of [her] waking dream" ("Introduction" 59). This reflects her earlier attempt at disclaiming responsibility within Frankenstein by having Margaret Saville as the silent recipient or bearer of the male word. By 1831, Shelley strengthens her disclaimer in her introduction, for in the ideology of postromantic culture, it is part of a woman's duty to transcribe and give form to men's words, just as it is her duty to give form to their desire, or
birth to their seed, no matter how ambivalently men may view the results of such projects. (Homans 115)

Shelley continues to promote her cultural conformity not only by subordinating herself as a prose writer to "the illustrious poets," and not only by disclaiming any originality in her work: Shelley justifies her very act of writing at all as a social act. She explains that she originally wrote as a child not for fame but for her own pleasure as well as to entertain her "childhood's companion and friend" ("Introduction" 55). Then Shelley claims she wrote as an adolescent to please her husband. Shelley reasons that without her husband's encouragement, the novel would not have been written, for to write a novel on her own initiative would imply that she desired fame and also that she would be unacceptably bold enough to assert her ideas. Shelley pleads that she is "very averse to bringing myself forward in print" (55) which of course befits the Proper Lady's expected modesty, humility, and silence. She is careful to imply that she never has boldly, proudly, nor independently asserted her opinions, nor does she seek fame. She justifies her extensive reading as necessary for her "communication" with her husband, and thereby qualifies what she fears her increasingly conservative society would deem unacceptable for a Proper Lady—knowledge and individual will. Her earlier transgression of the culturally imposed boundaries for female authorship could be considered less threatening if it were done in order to please her demanding husband rather than to satisfy her own appetites for fame, self-exploration and the search for truth.
within herself.

Literary achievement for a woman would be at odds with the norms of a society in which "a woman conforms to the conventional feminine model of propriety, that she be self-effacing and supportive, devoted to a family rather than to a career" (Poovey PMLA 332). Female authorship could easily be aligned to monstrosity by a society which had a strong tradition of maintaining strict gender roles. As Mellor explains, "the very act of female authorship could be seen as an unnatural act, a perversion that arouses both anxiety and hostility in the male reader" (56). As Anne McWhirr notes, the independent and educated woman writer threatened the stability of the patriarchal family (76), the very base of their social organization. To destroy this would be a monstrous social and seditious crime. The independent and educated woman, like the Creature, becomes a monster because she could not be re-admitted into patriarchal organization. Shelley's status as a serious writer could be perceived as social transgression.

Clearly, the 1831 introduction, as Homans has also noted, takes pains to distance itself from the novel, and it aims to bring the writing of the novel further within the fold of the conventional domestic life Shelley retrospectively substitutes for the radically disruptive life she in fact led. (113)

By emphasizing the qualities appropriate for the role of the Proper Lady, Shelley continues her character defence in the introduction
by indicating that even though her husband desired her to attain "literary reputation," she still "did nothing" because of her time-consuming duties of motherhood and "the cares of a family" (56). To instruct or to delight was an acceptable writing goal for women only if they could still manage to fulfill their domestic role as the family's primary caregiver. In both the introduction as well as in the novel, Shelley emphasizes "the tension she feels between the self-denying offices of domestic activity and the self-assertiveness essential to artistic creation" (Poovey PMLA 343).

Shelley relieves this tension when she permits her artistic creativity to subsume temporarily her domestic duties, yet in giving birth to her self-as-author, Mary Shelley is here able to conceive only a monster: she is the author-of-horror, perhaps even what Percy Shelley called Victor Frankenstein, "the author of unalterable evils." (Mellor 55)

Her self-characterization as the Creature who is benevolent but then becomes a mistreated and neglected murderer suggests both Shelley's insecurity about writing in a culture "which assigns linguistic and social authority to men" (56) as well as her capacity to destroy that culture. She assembles the Creature as someone who not only threatens to annihilate the family, but who also is seen as a grave threat to human existence. Like Shelley, if the Creature were to correspond by writing, he no doubt would have been quite acceptable to his moral readers; the blind De Lacey accepts his words presumably because he is unable to be prejudiced
by the Creature's monstrous appearance. This acceptance is short-lived: when Felix enters the cottage and sees the Creature's monstrosity, he desperately assaults him because he equates difference with evil. As Dussinger and Levine assert, the Creature's arguments are rational and persuasive but they exist within an irrational and dangerous world (39).

In terms of Shelley's society, her monstrosity would be her "otherness," her femaleness, which, because she is a formidable author, would be deemed demonic (Victor calls his Creature a "daemon"). James Twitchell defines a "daemon" as "life 'other' than human" (47)--in this case, other than traditionally manly or womanly. Shelley's literary achievement could be perceived as monstrous. Just as the Creature's physicality determines his destiny, so too does the woman writer's. She would face the same prejudice as the Creature does, and she would risk a similar ostracism and hostility.

Unsurprisingly, Shelley's first edition of Frankenstein was published anonymously, and not until the second edition in 1823 by which time it sold very well did she dare identify her authorship. Shelley may have been testing the critics' responses to Godwin by dedicating it to him, and the result was mostly negative since these critics assumed the author to be Godwin's best-known literary disciple, P. B. Shelley (Hindle 8). Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley had two very convincing reasons not to identify herself as the author of Frankenstein: she was the daughter of Godwin and Wollstonecraft, wife of P. B. Shelley, as well as a non-traditional
female author of an unconventional novel. By the time she started her career, many women had achieved success as writers; however, this tradition evidently was not enough to support and protect Shelley in her artistic endeavours as she employs certain narrative strategies to conceal her female voice.

One of these strategies consists of the novel's multiple framing. Walton writes to his sister about the life story of Victor Frankenstein which includes the story of the Creature which includes the story of the De Lacey family. This narrative structure serves to distance the subject matter further away from its author. Contemporary male Romantic writers were exempt from the need to conceal the very fact that they possessed creativity and genius, unlike their female peers. So that Shelley could not be held responsible for any definitive moral position or accused of unfeminine self-assertion, she creates three narrators. The triple narrative enhances the novel's moral ambiguity as the line between the protagonist and antagonist could then be blurred. Three narrators also enable Shelley to give two views of the creative act and to encourage the reader to sympathize with each view, thereby following her husband's aesthetics as expressed in his "Defence of Poetry" by strengthening and stimulating the reader's moral sense through a sympathetic participation with, in this case, each narrator's story and position. Shelley also uses what Poovey calls the "strategy of indirection" (157). By this, Poovey suggests that Shelley's readers would be less inclined to identify her voice if her narrators are male. Like Coleridge who also employs in
"Christabel" this same narrative strategy by speaking through two female characters to deflect attention from himself, Shelley directs the attention away from herself, thereby concealing her identity and increasing her safety from charges of immodesty, self-assertion, or allegiance with any of her narrators' viewpoints.

By 1831, Shelley continues to distance herself from her radical heritage and from her early unconventional novel not only with an apologetic introduction and strategic narrative strategies for self-defence, but also with significant thematic revisions to her 1818 text of Frankenstein that she does not acknowledge as being significant. Shelley deliberately misrepresents the intent behind some of her revisions, as she writes at the end of her introduction:

I will add but one word as to the alterations I have made. They are principally of style. I have changed no portion of the story nor introduced any new ideas or circumstances. I have mended the language where it was so bald as to interfere with the interest of the narrative; and these changes occur almost exclusively in the beginning of the first volume. Throughout they are entirely confined to such parts as are mere adjuncts to the story, leaving the core and substance of it untouched. (60)

However, as Marilyn Butler states, "her alterations were acts of damage-limitation rather than a reassertion of authority" (14). Butler interprets the 1831 edition of Frankenstein as a "neutered"
version of the 1818 text to circumvent "possible charges of materialism and blasphemy" (12) because her novel loosely dramatized "the vitalist debate" (1814-19) on the nature of the soul. Indeed, the novel was "neutered," but it underwent more than emasculation: Shelley feminized or transexualized it.

According to Butler's research, Shelley's revisions introduce the concept of fate whereas the original text expressed her earlier belief in individual choice and self-determination. She portrays Victor in the 1831 edition as a helpless pawn of destiny instead of a moral agent responsible for his own acts, whereas the 1818 text allows Victor to choose his destiny. A pre-determined and unchangeable fate, not individual will nor unrestrained passion, now controls Victor, relieving him of any responsibility for his actions. For example, in chapter three of Frankenstein, in the 1831 edition, there are three references to destiny. This doctrine of divine control and submission is appropriate in considering Shelley's acceptance of prescribed gender roles: fate controls behaviour.

Suggesting in 1831 that she now feels that humanity and nature are both "machines manipulated by external forces" (Mellor 173), Shelley implies that she, like Victor, had not chosen her own destiny, but had merely endured a painful pre-determined fate, and that her resignation to the status quo was inevitable. The revisions as discussed by Butler may be interpreted as suggestive that she had resigned herself to forces greater than her own individual will. As she reveals in a letter to her close friend
Jane Williams Hogg in August, 1827,

The power of Destiny I feel every day pressing more & more on me, & I yield myself a slave to it, in all except my moods of mind, which I endeavour to make independent of her, & thus to wreathe a chaplet, where all is not cypress, in spite of the Eumenides.

Shelley, like the isolated Victor, eventually abated her suffering by conforming to conventional boundaries. She revised the third edition in ways which make it more traditionally didactic. The nature of these revisions as established by such critics as Butler and Mellor strongly support my argument concerning a new professional stance. As Chris Baldick notes, Shelley "strengthened the cautionary element of the novel to the point where it could be read as an 'improving' work" (61). Walton's journey, for example, representative of Shelley's own voyage of self-discovery, becomes much more akin to Victor's fateful career in the 1831 edition. She sees Walton, who is apparently herself in 1818, much more clearly and objectively in 1831, and significantly shows him to be "a far more deluded explorer than he was in 1818" (61). Again, the commentary on the contrasts between the two editions suggest a change in Shelley's view of her own life. By 1831, Shelley no doubt felt this way about her earlier hopes for her writing career.

Reflecting on the beginnings of her career, Shelley also changes Alphonse Frankenstein's neglect of his son Victor's education, which parallels Godwin's neglect of his daughter's
education. According to Mellor's research, no longer in the 1831 edition is Victor's education a result of his father's misguidance, but rather of an unalterable fate which must lead Victor down an unconventional educational path. By 1831, Shelley may have come to consider the neglect and censorship of her own education as also part of her unalterable fate which must also lead her down an unconventional educational path, one that takes her to a place where she will submit to her own creative forces, unleash her creation which will be received as a monster, and become unfit for human society unless she reforms her persona. Because of prejudice, she became like her Creature in that she endured a similar loneliness, victimization, misery, and resulting misanthropy as her Creature does also because of prejudice. Moreover, by 1831, Shelley may have considered criticism of the father to be imprudent, at least. If her book can be seen as a creature, then Shelley sought to domesticate or reform it so it would be socially acceptable, by making it less threatening and more traditionally didactic, thereby making its author more socially acceptable as well.
CHAPTER THREE:
FROM ANCIENT MARINER TO PROPER LADY:
STEP TWO: "TRANSFORMATION"

The same changes in attitude shown in the 1831 revisions to the text of *Frankenstein* appear in "Transformation" (1831). Female self-expression and self-assertion contradicted the humility and silence of femininity as constructed in the period, and could be deemed as expressions of sinful pride. Because self-assertion or pride led Shelley to the printed word, the printed word must therefore be sinful as well. With "Transformation," Shelley demonstrates how pride goes before a fall: pride leads to Guido’s transgression and disrespect for patriarchy which in turn leads him to isolation, poverty, and then madness. Unlike Victor’s "guiding spirit" (*Frankenstein* 249), Guido's "guardian angel" ("Transformation" 898) saves him from self-destruction by inducing a psychological sciamachy between his humility (Guido in the dwarf’s body) and his personified pride (the dwarf in Guido’s body), and Guido emerges the victor; however he is forever wounded and his "person a little bent" (898).

"Transformation" serves as a loose re-creation and re-vision of *Frankenstein* to demonstrate to Shelley herself and to her potential employers her new acquiescence and adherence to the patriarchal codes. In *Frankenstein*, a huge "creature" represents the myopic pride of an over-eager over-reacher; in "Transformation," that same desperate, myopic pride is associated
with a dwarf. Not only is the dwarf a diminutive version of the Creature, but his strength is also less than superhuman, unlike the gigantic Creature, so that the protagonist can overpower him. As a result, Guido can reform; Shelley can and does reconcile her "competing tendencies."

"Transformation" indirectly assures Shelley’s publishers that her writing would henceforth be improving and moral. This short story establishes that transgression brings "little sympathy from your fellow creatures" (Journal 2:195), and that conformity delivers social and financial returns. Shelley, forced by patriarchal economics and certainly emotional pressures as well, is prepared to produce conventionally moral works not only to legitimize her past, present, and future writing career, but also more pragmatically to secure her and her son’s social and financial welfare. The reader witnesses this contract with propriety in "Transformation" through the "strange, supernatural and necromantic adventure" of Guido.

Written for the popular magazine The Keepsake, "Transformation" tells how Guido became known as "Guido Il Cortese" to all his "friends and fellow-citizens" ("Transformation" 898). He tells the story of his arrogant, self-indulgent, uncontrollable youth, which leads him to the brink of madness when he meets a hideous supernatural dwarf who borrows his body supposedly for three days in exchange for a sea-chest of treasures. However, the dwarf does not return on the designated day, and Guido quickly realizes that the dwarf has gone to reclaim with feigned humility
his angelic Juliet. Upon realizing the dwarf’s intentions, Guido in the body of the dwarf confronts his antagonist, whereon they stab each other. Guido ultimately regains his own body, scarred but happily rid of the dwarf and becomes a changed man with his beloved Juliet at his bedside. The lesson Guido learns is that one must regulate pride to attain success and happiness because an "excess of fiendly pride" (885) can control one to the point of ruin and wretchedness.

Guido begins his tale by quoting a significant passage from "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." This choice of epigraph recalls Shelley’s earlier need to tell her own story for both personal relief and social absolution and support:

Forthwith this frame of mine was wrench’d
With a woeful agony,
Which forced me to begin my tale;
And then it [left] set me free.

Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns:
And til my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns. (l 578-585)

Like Guido, who feels equally compelled to confess his transgressions in hopes to win acceptance and to forewarn others, Shelley craves to tell her own "ghastly tale" in hopes of sympathy, redemption, and perhaps even a renewal of her vitality. Although Shelley finds comfort in re-writing her story, her pain quickly
returns when she does not receive the sympathy she seems so
desperately to need. In her Journal entry of September 3, 1824,
Shelley writes that "Composition is delightful, but if you do not
expect the sympathy of your fellow creatures in what you write, the
pleasure of writing is of short duration."

Behind the persona of Guido is Mary Shelley, not surprising
for an author whose earlier writings are also essentially
autobiographical. Guido had described his childhood in phrases
that strikingly match with her own: "I was born with the most
imperious, haughty, tameless spirit, with which ever mortal was
gifted" ("Transformation" 886); Godwin describes Shelley’s
character as "singularly bold, somewhat imperious, and active of
mind" (Mellor 13). Guido’s "imperious, haughty, tameless spirit,"
would seem to be undesirable, yet Shelley subtly uses the word
"gifted," which implies quite the contrary. Particularly for a
woman during this era, such imperiousness was certainly not
enviable nor tamelessness a gift. Shelley seemed to have believed
that her frustrated genius was part of her painful fate; however,
she proceeds with a story not of social criticism but of conformist
morality that demonstrates that such gifts without self-control and
respect for patriarchal restrictions lead to self-indulgence, moral
decadence, loneliness, and ruin. Shelley sought to join rather
than to denounce her society to increase her chances for paid
publication.

Like Shelley, Guido also was an uncontrollable, "arrogant and
self-willed" child ("Transformation" 887). Guido obeyed only his
father, just as Shelley obeyed only her father. However, Guido's father died when he was seventeen years old, the same age as Shelley when Godwin disowned her for disobeying him by going abroad and living with the married Shelley. Just as the Ancient Mariner disregards God, just as Victor mocks "the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world" ("Introduction" 59), just as Guido spurns the patriarchal Torella, Shelley had defied Godwin's will in 1814, and he disowned her. In her fictions and in the Coleridgean fiction that inspired her and the biblical fiction that lies beyond that, each transgressor sins against the patriarch, and in the tradition of the oracular Mariner, each suffers a divinely induced madness which will either reform or destroy the transgressor. The choice becomes either to live within patriarchy or to die by it.

Like the seventeen year old Shelley, Victor, Walton, and Guido also refuse blind obedience to authority, and the result of this transgression is a fictional shipwreck. When the boat that Guido sees in the distance is destroyed and sinks, he experiences a physically threatening mental breakdown, just as Victor does after he washes ashore in Ireland and refers to his emotional state as "a shattered wreck" (Frankenstein 227). When Guido is "alone—friendless; with nor sword at [his] side, nor ducat in [his] purse" ("Transformation" 890), he wanders "along the sea-shore, a whirlwind of passion possessing and tearing [his] soul" (890). Although Guido realizes both his problem and the realistic solution of humility, pride still rules him, so his mental breakdown and necessary moral reconstitution become inevitable if he is to
A fiend possessed my soul, irritating it to madness. I felt the voice of conscience within me; but if I yielded to it for a brief interval, it was only to be a moment after torn, as by a whirlwind, away -- borne along on the stream of desperate rage -- the plaything of the storms engendered by pride. (889)

He continues to wander "along the rocky shore, which grew at each step wilder and more desolate" (890). The storm of his madness begins to brew. Shelley reveals Guido's emotional upheaval through the "dissonant roar" of the sea, which the dwarf has the power to stop. If pride is the cause of these storms, then humility is the solution for their cessation. The storms stop when the dwarf commands them to do so; therefore, the dwarf must represent the diminutive, "misshapen," "squinting," "distorted," "deformed" (891) state of Guido's soul. When finally his "way was almost barred by an abrupt promontory, now rendered nearly impracticable by fragments fallen from the cliff" (890), the storm begins, and the shipwreck occurs. Within this headland setting, Guido encounters the dwarf.

The dwarf clears away the storm, calling it "hoary One" as if he has been witness to these tedious storms before. Guido then tells his tale, and the dwarf responds by laughing: "the rocks echoed back the sound: hell seemed yelling around me" (892). This "hell" is Guido's madness. When the dwarf offers to exchange his treasures for Guido's body, Guido agrees, explaining that "it
seemed madness to refuse" (893). Shelley dramatizes the doppelgänger process much more vividly in "Transformation" than she does in *Frankenstein*, perhaps to amplify the pain of change but also the possibility of adaptability. Because no one but Guido sees the dwarf, we can assume that Guido and the dwarf are the same person, that Guido undergoes an internal struggle with an imagined double--the dwarf. This conflict results in Guido’s necessary character reformation so that he will be able to live happily and securely within his society.

When Guido tries to explain what has happened, Juliet "thought [him] raving, as well she might, and yet it was some time before [he] could prevail on [himself] to admit that the Guido whose penitence had won her back for me was myself" (897). Like the "angelic" spirits animating the dead bodies of the Ancient Mariner’s crewmates, Guido’s dwarf also is a "good rather than evil spirit, sent by [his] guardian angel" (898), just as Victor Frankenstein, too, believes that "a spirit of good followed and directed [his] steps" (*Frankenstein* 247), though Victor does not realize that this "spirit of good" is not necessarily his Creature. Through their deadly sins of pride and consequent madness, Victor and Guido each believe that a benevolent spirit redeems them. Guido, for example, further postulates that his dwarf’s purpose was "to show [him] the folly and misery of pride" ("Transformation" 898). And Victor, too, believes his pursuit of the Creature, his "pilgrimage" (*Frankenstein* 247), is to atone for his deadly sin of pride. Through supernatural intervention, each learns what
"pilgrimage" *(Frankenstein 247)*, is to atone for his deadly sin of pride. Through supernatural intervention, each learns what Coleridge’s mariner finally understands: when one is ruled by pride, trying to live beyond one’s nature, then one becomes alienated from human society: at this point, one either dies miserably as Victor does, or reforms, as Guido does morally.

Shelley, therefore, suggests that madness is providential. In *Frankenstein*, a monster is created from Victor’s madness, and in "Transformation," Guido’s madness spawns a dwarf. That these creatures are born as a result of transgressions reveals Shelley’s belief in a mysteriously divine pedagogy, that "we are sent here to educate ourselves, and that self-denial, and disappointment, and self-control, are a part of our education" *(Hindle 11)*. Even though the young Shelley may have shared her husband’s atheism, the mature Shelley of 1831 maintained a personally based spiritualism, and believed that the only salvation from moral transgression is through a divinely induced madness, with or without monsters and prodigies, that will either save or destroy the transgressor.

Baldick notes that "theological interpretation of monsters and prodigies goes back to Augustine, who argued in his *De Civitate Dei* that monsters reveal the will of God" *(10)*. For Walton, Guido, and Shelley herself, the "will of God" seems to be for each to resign themselves to the cares of their crews, their families, their respected places in their society. Bearing his less than triumphant return to civilization as an "injustice" *(Frankenstein 255)*, Walton nevertheless shows his disappointment and unrelenting
sufficiently oppressed to accept her allotted role as a Proper Lady in nineteenth century society. However, still pressed by financial and social necessity, Shelley eventually reconsiders her career goals, and just as she must return defeatedly in her hopes to continue writing serious novels, Guido must return defeated in his hopes to be "free, independent," and learns to question his motives in these hopes ("Transformation" 886). Unlike Walton, Guido accepts his patriarchal limitations, and views his ordeal and transformation as being "for the best" (898) since he is now not only Juliet's protector, but also "a fonder and more faithful husband" (898). Similarly, Shelley's eventual transformation enables her to protect her young son from both poverty and social ridicule. Guido becomes better suited from experience to fulfill his social station, reflecting Shelley's adjustment to fulfill her role within patriarchy as a result of experience. Rejection by publishers, malicious gossip, poverty, and a string of untimely deaths radically transformed Shelley's attitudes.

By 1831, Shelley demonstrates her Proper Lady persona by writing "Transformation" as a re-creation and re-vision of *Frankenstein* with the same Ancient Mariner archetype figuring as the main character; however, this time, the protagonist reforms and lives happily ever after. Instead of allowing Guido to die miserably alone on the desolate beach, Shelley allows him to reconcile his "competing tendencies" (Poovey *PMLA* 332). Whereas Victor cannot return to society, Guido can and does, and the moral is clearly didactic. Both Guido and Shelley are pressed by
economics to consider dramatic changes. Like Guido, Shelley secured her social and financial survival by ceding to the patriarchy's demands for and expectations of a female writer.

As a result of merging her desire to write with her need to conform in order to become financially stable as well as free from controversy, Shelley hopes to be rewarded with money and love, just as Guido, by turning from pride to humility, is rewarded with financial, emotional, and social sustenance. Shelley allows calm resolve and respect to replace the woefulness of her narrator, a marked contrast with Victor's fate, which reflects, at long last, a significant change to the ending of her Ancient Mariner pattern, a transformation which reflects her own success (or failure) at living within patriarchy rather than abandoning and being destroyed by it. Whereas Victor does not learn to submit to societal forces Guido does. Even though the chronicles of Walton, Victor, and the Creature, the text of Frankenstein itself, immortalize the perils of uncontrolled pride and reveal Walton's and Shelley's awareness of the "apt moral" Victor hopes that Walton will deduce -- to regulate his pride and to foresee its personal and social effects -- neither seem to accept it. Thirteen years after Frankenstein, a combination of Victor and Walton emerges in Guido, who learns from experience the agony of being bereft of family and friends, but unlike Victor and Walton, willingly accepts social controls. Like Shelley, never again will Guido risk losing love and fellowship, so he fulfills the role of a proper gentleman and becomes known as the sincere "Guido Il Cortese."
Like the Ancient Mariner who is doomed to retell his own story of transgression and learning indefinitely, Shelley retells her story until her professional transformation is completed in 1831. Even though by the end of Frankenstein, Shelley seems to know what would be the safest route for her writing career to take, her "monstrous" pride arguably re-emerges in the forms of a paternal suicide (Mathilda), a heretic (Valperga), a devastating plague (The Last Man), and a usurper (Perkin Warbeck). In both her life and her writing, Shelley marked in 1831 the transformation from the lonely suffering Ancient Mariner to the Proper Lady by changing her subject matter and its treatment. Her subsequent novels and short stories are designed mostly to conform to her publishers' demands so that her writing would sell, yet she was not completely free from the prejudice of her publishers. In a letter to the publisher John Murray, Shelley writes:

I am so sorry that I have not been able to arrange writing for your Library -- or for any other publication of yours -- If I were quite sure of a subject that would please you, I would take my chance and try -- As it is I fear that my debt must stand over till better times -- but be assured that I will never forget it. (Letters 121, December 29, 1830).

Shelley needed to write not only for emotional solace but for an income as well, but John Murray was not too eager to take his chances with the daughter of Godwin and Wollstonecraft, the widow of P. B. Shelley, and the author of Frankenstein. Although Shelley had undergone her own "Transformation," she could not immediately
transform her circumstances.
CONCLUSION:

"GOD KNOWS HOW IT WILL ALL END"

Through an increasingly focussed apperception, Shelley at first defined her career aspirations and fears in the 1818 version of *Frankenstein*, and then conclusively assimilated her own life and career into a larger set of familial experiences. Through this apperception, Shelley realized that the career path she was on could lead to possible social and financial ruin. She therefore internalizes Coleridge's couplet: "Tranquility thou better name/Than all the family of fame" (*Letters*, vol.2, 196). To ensure her tranquility, Shelley eventually accepted that she needed to write only what the publishers might accept.

When considered together, Victor, Walton, the Creature, and Guido reveal the different stages in the development of Shelley's concept of herself as a professional author. Finally daunted by seemingly relentless personal tragedies and enduring financial hardship, Shelley reassessed her career path. On the basis of her realization that most financially successful women writers wrote conventionally moral, didactic prose, Shelley writes the apologetic introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, and also makes revisions to the text which attempt "most explicitly to bring her writing in line with women's domestic vocation" (Homans 153).

Correspondingly, her writing topics change. By 1830, Shelley was full of new topics she wanted to explore, though she had trouble trying to persuade publishers to commission any of them. Spark notes her topics were "tactlessly comprehensive in range,"
among them a

"Life of Mahomet," "Conquests of Mexico and Peru," a
"History of Manners and Literature in England from Queen
Anne to the French Revolution," "Lives of Celebrated
Women," a "History of Chivalry," and no less than a
"History of the Earth in its Earlier State." It was no
wonder that the publishers could not find sufficient
confidence to commission a work from a writer whose
interests seems so diffuse. (Spark 122)

Far from being "tactlessly comprehensive in range," Shelley’s
suggested topics conform to the demands of a female writer. For
example, Shelley explains that the "life of Mahomet" would permit
"novelty," that the "Conquests of History and Peru" would be a
marketable "continuation to a Life of Columbus," and that the
"History of Manners and Literature in England from Queen Anne to
the French Revolution" affords "scope and novelty and amusement,"
(letter to John Murray, August 9, 1830). In fact, Shelley
anticipates her obstacles and rarely loses the opportunity to
convince her potential publishers that she would not obtrude "any
opinions," that she would be "conscientiously accurate," and that
she would write so as not to "fail on the score of amusement, which
is one of the necessary adjuncts" (letter to John Murray II,
September 8, 1830).

Spark’s comment on Shelley’s trouble in obtaining writing work
ignores these concerns for marketability and gender discrimination,
as well as Shelley’s unavoidable associations with the reputations
of Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and P. B. Shelley. Publishers would not risk scandal in particularly conservative times. Shelley comments in a letter to Edward John Trelawney on December 30, 1830 that "the burnings -- the alarms -- the absorbing politics of the day render booksellers almost averse to publishing at all -- God knows how it will all end..." (Letters 120). Naturally, Shelley refused to be publicly connected to any "radical" group. She knew the personal price of opposition. Although she understandably would not openly align herself with those groups advocating the rights of women, she nevertheless befriended and encouraged some of those who did, namely the pioneer feminist, Frances Wright.

Why did Shelley's genius cease to develop past the level achieved in Frankenstein? For as Robert Browning wrote to Elizabeth Barrett in September 1845, the daughter of Godwin and Wollstonecraft and wife of P. B. Shelley, the author of Frankenstein, "surely was something better once upon a time" (Browning I: 196). Browning recognized Shelley's genius and wondered why it had not flourished in more of her works. The reason, certainly, is not because she altogether lacked genius as Robert Pitman maintains in "The Man Who Brought Fame to a Poet's Wife." Nor was it because she was far more indebted to P. B. Shelley than she conceded in her 1831 introduction as P. D. Fleck and Robert Kiely each suggest. Nor was it completely, as Walter Edwin Peck supposes, that the death of P. B. Shelley had "numbed ...her genius and left her desolate" (196). Specific events in Shelley's life combined with her difficulty in obtaining publishers
for her works and the oppressive socio-political climate in which she lived revealed to the struggling writer that market forces determine the artist's output: Shelley learned that her supply must meet the publishers' demands and not agitate an increasingly nervous government paranoid with delusions of sedition and revolution; Shelley also learned that serious female authorship signifies the breakdown of that order which the government revered. Therefore, for the safety of the press owners, the publishers' demands of women writers were much more constraining than they were for men writers.

After "Transformation," Shelley began the safe enterprise of writing the two volumes of Lives of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of France, and contributed to Lardner's Cabinet Cyclopaedia, which proved a "profitable experience" (Spark 151). She also wrote another novel, Lodore, (1835), in which "social compromise overreached itself" (126). Yet it was published and was financially successful, presumably because morality was at its heart. At last, Shelley found some degree of comfort, social acceptance, and financial stability as a result of her career decision to transform herself from an Ancient Mariner to a Proper Lady. In examining her professional development, we see a life and career that implies the same message as Virginia Woolf's fictional Judith Shakespeare; we see an instance of how the woman writer's world can stifle the complete germination of female creativity and genius, how she is held back to mediocrity so that not only her role and person but her works as well would be subordinate to the
authority of men, the base of England's social, political, economic, and moral order.
NOTES


2. For the purposes of my argument, I give only a simplified reading of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

3. Shelley also was self-educated. Godwin did not act as a guide for his daughter's reading, but more as a censor; for example, "when Godwin sent Anthony Collins's book on rationalism to Charles Clairmont in May 1811, he expressly forbade Mary to read it" (Mellor 12). Clearly, Godwin's injunction discouraged Shelley from embarking on intellectual pursuits, just as Walton relates that his "father's dying injunction had forbidden [his] uncle to allow [him] to embark in a seafaring life" (*Frankenstein* 64).

4. While writing *Frankenstein* in 1816-17, Shelley had to divide her time between creating and the cares of her family--Claire Clairmont, P. B. Shelley, and most importantly, her newborn son, William. She fully realized the magnitude of her writing enterprise as Walton writes of his impending journey as "a long and difficult voyage, the emergencies of which will demand all my fortitude" (65). The cares of a mother are similar to a ship's captain. Like Shelley, he is "required not only to raise the spirits of others, but sometimes to sustain [his] own, when theirs are failing" (65). Shelley writes in her "Introduction" that "travelling, and the cares of a family, occupied my time; and study, in the way of
reading and improving my ideas in communication with [P. B. Shelley's] far more cultivated mind, was all of literary employment that engaged my attention" ("Introduction" 56). These activities are also Walton's; he must care for his crew's welfare while on his "voyage of discovery" (74).
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