

Shelley's *Frankenstein* as a Book of Love and Despair

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**Shun-liang Chao,**

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**Abstract:** Influenced by Enlightenment *philosophes* like Rousseau and Smith, Romantic writers, such as Coleridge and Percy Shelley, celebrate the sublime power of sympathetic love to merge the self and the other (be it human or inhuman) into a wondrous whole, thereby precluding the dangers of solitude and solipsism. Not all Romantic writers, however, share the same sanguine view of love. In *Frankenstein*, for instance, Mary Shelley offers an alternative to the optimistic perspective on the capacity of (mutual) sympathy. She shapes the novel into tales of bitter solitude, one caused by the lack of sympathetic understanding between Victor and nature, between the Monster and the De Laceys, and between the Monster and his father Victor. In these mutual relations, I argue, Shelley evokes elements of Enlightenment/Romantic love, only to revoke its sublime power and furthermore turn it into despair. Rather than the Romantic joy of transcendent plenitude, the novel is shrouded in Gothic despair, the outright negation of redemption.

## Shun-liang CHAO

### Shelley's *Frankenstein* as a Book of Love and Despair

In her seminal book *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (1988), Anne Mellor maintains that Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) effectively finds an echo in its readers because the novel, "perhaps for the first time in Western literature," speaks directly to and about the deepest and most intense anxiety of pregnancy and parenting, the fear of whether "I would still love my child if it is born deformed" (11). Indeed, *Frankenstein*, a novel that James Chandler regards as "modernity's highest-profile treatment of monstrosity" (243), exposes to sight the natural fear of monstrous pregnancy that would plague men and, especially, women. I would suggest, however, that the deepest anxiety has to do less with the fear of physical deformity (as Mellor describes it) than with the fear of the limit of love, an issue that relentlessly confronts readers with the existential angst that constantly occurs in the mutual relationships of human beings in the family and, notably, society: "Would I still love the other if s/he is so much different from me?", or indeed, "How far would I go in loving the other as myself?"

Love, in the form of sympathy, lies at the very heart of Romantic ideology. In "A Defence of Poetry" (written in 1821), for example, Percy Shelley equates poetic and moral sensitivities through sympathetic love: "The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our nature, and an identification of ourselves with the [morally] beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, . . . must put himself in the place of another and of many others; . . . The great instrument of moral good is the imagination" (682). First, by love, Percy means a love of what is different from, rather than what is akin to, us. Second, by "the imagination," Percy does not refer to the creative imagination as we know it but to the sympathetic imagination, a moral quality which Enlightenment *philosophes* such as David Hume, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Adam Smith consider not only as a natural faculty but as an answer to the issue of otherness in human society. Following in the footsteps of these *philosophes*, Romantic writers believe in the sublime power of sympathy to transport or even annihilate the self to identify or unite with the other, be it human or inhuman, and thereby enable the self to escape from the dangers of solitude and isolation (Bate 132; Engell 149). In his long prophetic poem "Religious Musings" (1794), for instance, S. T. Coleridge celebrates love as "Truth of subliming import" and glorifies its sublime power to bring all things into "one wondrous whole" (15-6).

Not all Romantic writers, however, share the same sanguine view of the sublime power of sympathetic love. Mary Shelley, for instance, fashions *Frankenstein* into tales of bitter solitude, one caused by the lack of sympathetic understanding between Victor and nature, between the Monster and the De Laceys, and between the Monster and his father Victor. I do not intend to explicate why sympathy fails in the novel as critics like David Marshall and Janis McLarren Caldwell have done. Marshall maintains that the Monster resembles humans too uncannily to arouse their fellow feeling (208), whereas, for Caldwell, Victor and humankind at large in the novel fail to sympathize with the Monster exactly because he is physiologically different from them (38). Instead, I would like to examine the ways in which in the aforesaid attempts at sympathetic understanding, Shelley evokes elements of Enlightenment/Romantic love, only to expose its limitations, or indeed turn it into despair. In what follows, I shall first tease out the Enlightenment/Romantic extolment of love to generate an intellectual context within which I situate my discussion of how Shelley offers an alternative to the optimistic perspective on the capacity of (mutual) sympathy. Shelley, as we shall see, strips the novel of the Romantic joy of transcendent plenitude and enshrouds it with Gothic despair, the complete negation of moral redemption.

The Enlightenment witnessed a surge of interest in the active role of sympathetic love in the moral nature of humankind as a reaction against Thomas Hobbes, who in *Leviathan* (1651) regards human nature as naturally evil and vicious: "the [natural] condition of Man is a condition of Warre of everyone against every one" (189). To rebut his dark view of human nature, Enlightenment *philosophes*, particularly moral sentimentalists such as David Hume, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Adam Smith, championed the optimistic belief that the altruistic side of human beings is naturally stronger than their egoistic, solipsistic side. In *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), for example, Hume maintains that the most remarkable quality of human nature rests on sympathy, the power to transport the self via the imagination to identify with others, "however different from, or even contrary to" us (316). Fostering the dominant role of sympathy in human nature, Hume elsewhere does not forget to highlight the danger of solitude, the lack of sympathetic identification: "Reduce a person to solitude, and he loses all enjoyment, except either of the sensual or speculative kind; and that because the movements of his heart are not forwarded by correspondent movements in his fellow-creatures" (*Enquiries* 220). In Hume, fellow feeling brings humankind inner, indispensable pleasure to the extent that if fellow feeling prevails, there will be no strangers (see Mullan 35).

By the same token, in his second Discourse (1755), Rousseau maintains that nature gifts humans with "the tender heart" by "pity," "a natural sentiment which, by moderating in each individual the activity of self-love, contributes to the mutual preservation of the entire species" (219, 86; see also Dupré 124). In Rousseau, self-love naturally grows into a love of others—while selfish love (*l'amour-propre*) excludes others—inasmuch as all social distinctions that impede the exercise of the sympathetic imagination will disappear when each individual is aware of the fact that all mortals, be they kings or peasants, are equally "subject to the misfortunes of life, to difficulties, ills, needs, pains of all sorts" (*Émile* 222; see also Nussbaum, *Political* 154).

Rousseau also materializes this idea in his only novel *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), an epistolary romance in which the three main characters Julie (an aristocrat), Saint-Preux (her middle-class tutor/lover), and Wolmar (a baron her father chooses for her as a husband) all progressively sublimate their selfish love and jealousy into social virtue and social sympathy—before Julie dies in a boating accident. Set at the foot of the Alps, this novel depicts mountains as "alluring" perhaps for the first time in human history (Beattie 121) and inspired Percy and Mary Shelley to visit the place during their visit to Lake Geneva in the summer of 1816. In a letter to Thomas Love Peacock, dated 12 July 1816, Percy marvels at "the divine beauty of Rousseau's imagination" after reading *Julie* (*Best Letters* 54) and remains in sympathy with Rousseau's ideas throughout his life; by contrast, Mary has mixed feelings towards him: while revering his genius, she reprimands as "[t]he distortion of intellect" his abandoning his wife and, particularly, his children to an orphanage ("Rousseau" 335, 358). Markedly, during their visit, Percy composed his poem "Mont Blanc" and Mary her novel *Frankenstein*, in which Victor and the Monster first meet vis-à-vis on the top of Montanvert. The two works stand in striking contrast to each other: the Alpine sublime in Percy epitomizes nature's egalitarian, philanthropic law (see Duffy 111-22) and yet in Mary the limits of mutual sympathy, a thread to which I shall return in the next section.

The Enlightenment belief in natural sympathy peaks in Smith, who, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), suggests that "[t]he mind [of even the greatest ruffian] has an innate power of sympathy. Interest in others often overrides our selfish impulses" (Engell 150). More importantly, he writes sanguinely of mutual sympathy: "As to love our neighbour as we love ourselves is the great law of Christianity, so it is the great precept of nature to love ourselves only as we love our neighbour, or what comes to the same thing, as our neighbour is capable of loving us" (Smith 30). This Christian doctrine, as we shall see, becomes an ironic contrast to the Monster's encounter with the De Laceys, his "human neighbours" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 109). It comes as no surprise that Smith, disputing Hobbes, concludes that "[o]ur sensibility to the feelings of others . . . is the very principle upon which that manhood is founded" (176). For Smith, the sympathetic imagination, an innate and vital faculty, makes possible a kind of social "mobility," a sentimental journey from egotism to altruism, and thereby serves as an antidote to self-centered seclusion (Chandler 172-3).

These Enlightenment thinkers thus clear the path for Romantic writers to trumpet natural sympathy as an answer to the issue of otherness and as the sublime power of the sympathetic imagination to merge the self "with another person, or with humanity, or with the cosmos as a whole" (Singer 286). In their discourses on sympathetic love, the identification with nature often serves as a moral condition for universal merging. For instance, William Wordsworth has "natural sympathy" in mind when stating in the "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" (1800) that the poet "considers man and nature are essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting qualities of nature" (606). In Book Eighth of *The Prelude* (1850), entitled "Love of Nature Leading to Love of Mankind," Wordsworth further highlights sympathetic love, "a sublime idea," as the moral basis for action and as the key to the blissful "union or communion" of all things (343), a thread that Coleridge and Percy Shelley elaborate more.

In his prophetic poem "Religious Musings" (1794), Coleridge glorifies the sublime power of sympathetic love on a cosmic community: "'Tis the sublime of man, / Our noontide majesty, to know ourselves / Parts and proportions of the one wondrous whole / This fraternizes man, this constitutes / Our charities and bearings" (16, ll. 26-27). For Coleridge, this "vast family of [fraternal] love" represents an ideal that underlies whatever humankind can achieve, as he concludes the poem with an exultant image of the speaker, who, charged with sublime thoughts, raises his mind heaven-ward: "Soaring aloft I breathe the empyreal air / Of Love, omnific, omnipresent Love" (21, 23). Four years later, Coleridge materialized such a belief in his longest major poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798), to which Mary Shelley alludes (perhaps skeptically) in her novel. In the poem, the Mariner initially alienates himself from natural and social communities by killing an albatross, a hubristic act that leads to his agony of solitude: "Alone, alone, all, all alone, / Alone on a wide wide sea! / And never a saint took pity on / My soul in agony" (56).

The Mariner's moment of despair nevertheless turns out to be the poem's greatest moment of a positive transcendence. The Mariner gains divine favor by sympathizing with "a thousand thousand slimy things": "O happy living things! no tongue / Their beauty might declare: / A spring of love gushed from my heart, / And I blessed them unaware: / Sure my kind saint took pity on me, / And I blessed them unaware" (Part IV, 57). Here the Mariner encounters the sublime, unspeakable beauty of "a thousand thousand slimy things." Their sublime beauty is so irresistible as to move the Mariner to bless them "unaware," a redemptive act that releases the albatross from his neck and reintegrates him into natural and then social communities, thereby investing the poem (and the listener, the Wedding Guest) with moral consolation. The poem, like "Religious Musings," ends with the Mariner as a triumphant subject that overcomes his existential anxiety and is enveloped in transcendent plenitude: the Mariner "walk[s] together to the kirk, / And all together pray, / While each to this great Father bends, / Old men, and babes, and loving friends, / And youths and maidens gay" (67; see also Voller 107-8). With this wholesome picture of communal feeling, Coleridge endorses the sublime power of sympathetic love to save one from the danger of solipsistic impulse or the displeasure of solitude. For Coleridge, love is not a selfish desire but a moral faculty to sympathize, to mingle, as he asks rhetorically in his 7th lecture on Shakespeare (1811-12): "In everything the blending of the similar with the dissimilar is the secret of all pure delight. Who shall dare to stand alone, and vaunt himself, in himself, sufficient?" (*Coleridge's Writings* 150).

Coleridge's celebration of sympathetic union finds an echo in Percy Shelley, who, as we have seen, advertises sympathetic love as "the great instrument of moral good" (682) in "A Defence of Poetry," written three years after *Frankenstein*. Moreover, in "Love's Philosophy" (1820), he suggests that the propensity for solitude or solipsism is unnatural if not immoral. At first sight, "Love's Philosophy" is a love poem in which the speaker requests a kiss from the one s/he adores. Upon closer examination, however, this poem promotes a universal, natural law that "no man is an island" or indeed the immanence of mutual sympathy between all things in the world: "Nothing in the world is single / All things by a law divine / In one spirit meet and mingle" (446, ll. 5-7). In fact, between 1815 and 1818, when casting new light on Jesus Christ's teachings with Rousseau's idea of the noble savage, Percy already went so far as to champion the Christian "wisdom of universal love" and "benefits of mutual love" as the key to erasing the distinctions of various sorts between humankind (*Shelley on Love* 82-86).

Percy embodies more fully his passion for sympathetic identification and aspiration towards universal benevolence in *Prometheus Unbound*, published in the same year as "Love's Philosophy" and considered as the most ambitious poem of English Romanticism. In this lyrical drama, with Jupiter, "the tyrant of the world," falling from power, Prometheus, who "wishes no living thing to suffer pain" (293, 242), dissolves all law and sets the human mind free, a triumph of philanthropy which the Earth sings of most sublimely towards the end of the poem as follows:

Man, oh, not men! a chain of linkèd thought,  
Of love and might to be divided not,  
Compelling the elements with adamant stress;  
    As the sun rules, even with a tyrant's gaze,  
    The unquiet republic of the maze  
Of planets, struggling fierce towards heaven's free wilderness

Man, one harmonious soul of many a soul,  
Whose nature is its own divine control,  
Where all things flow to all, as rivers to the sea;  
    Familiar acts are beautiful through love;  
    Labour, and pain, and grief, in life's green grove  
Sport like tame beasts, none knew how gentle they could be! (307)

Here humankind is restored to the state of nature, "Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless" (294), and united into "one harmonious soul" without human society lapsing into a scale of domination and subjection. As Harold Bloom writes cogently of this passage: "Here, as in *Defence of Poetry*, the [sympathetic] Imagination achieves again its Blakean eminence as the great agency of moral good in the universe" (321).

To sum up, Romantic love, as we have seen, champions the omnipresence of sympathetic love and its capacity to keep the self away from the danger and suffering of solitude or solipsism, or rather to transcend the boundaries between the self and the other in such a way as to attain the joy of universal

merging. Romantic love, so to speak, is marked by a positive transcendence that is predominantly benign, a triumphant subject that feeds on divine plenitude.

Mary Shelley, I suggest, does not share with Romantic writers including Percy Shelley (whom she married in 1816) the rosy view of the power of sympathy to shake off solitude so as to merge joyfully with the other. It is true that, like Coleridge in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Shelley in *Frankenstein* reveals the peril of solipsistic obsession in relation to the absence of sympathy. She by no means, however, romanticizes the capability of sympathy, let alone mutual sympathy.

The three main characters all suffer from solitude, or lack of sympathetic friendship. Walton and Victor reduce themselves to solitude in the novel because they are driven by hubris to pursue (in)human grandeur in such a way as to lose their sympathy for the pain of, respectively, the sailors and the Monster. While setting out to explore the unknown polar regions of unsurpassed wonder and beauty, Walton feels solitary like the lonely "Ancient Mariner" drifting on the sea and writes to his sister Margaret Saville in a woeful tone: "I have one want which I have never yet been able to satisfy. . . . I have no friend Margaret: when I am glowing with the enthusiasm of success, there will be none to participate my joy; if I am assailed by disappointment, no one will endeavour to sustain me in dejection" (*Frankenstein* 21, 19). By the same token, Victor, refusing to obey his father's prohibition, pursues dark science to equip himself with the divine power to bestow life upon inanimate bodies, a demonic ambition that results directly or indirectly in the death of his father, brother, fiancé, and best friend: he mournfully tells Walton towards the end of the novel that "it was during sleep alone that I could taste joy . . . for in sleep I saw my friends, my wife, and my beloved country" (214). Simply put, in Victor, as in Walton, one notices their selfish impulses to isolate themselves from the human community.

Nonetheless, in the case of the Monster, Shelley paints a different picture that not only throws into question the power of sympathetic transport to end solitude but turns sympathetic love into a source of suffering. Indeed, the Monster's case is different from Victor's and Walton's. While Victor and Walton can choose to have friendship whenever they would like to, the Monster cannot although endowed with a loving heart: because of physical monstrosity, he is outright rejected from human society by the De Lacey family, his "human neighbours" whom he dearly loves, and cannot even create a society of his own in South America with a female monster that he futilely requests his creator Frankenstein to produce. As "the loneliest character in the English novel" (Schor 1), the Monster is thrust into "a forced solitude" so much that he considers himself even more miserable than Satan and wishes to "shake off all thought and feeling" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 147, 120) to return to the time before words. Seen in this light, to say that *Frankenstein* celebrates solitude and its concomitant irresponsible freedom as Frances Ferguson describes it (105, 122) is to ignore the desperate need of sympathetic love that agonizes the three main characters, notably the Monster.

Admittedly, Shelley in *Frankenstein* takes issue with Romantic love by depriving the novel of sympathetic understanding and redemption. Throughout the novel, sympathetic communion is urgently needed and yet absent between Victor and nature, between the Monster and his "human neighbours," and between the Monster and his father Victor. Sympathetic friendship exists only between Victor and Clerval and between Victor and Walton, a kind of sympathy which nevertheless does not lead to moral redemption that can fill up the void of existential anxiety the novel opens up. More precisely, between them is a sympathetic communion based on similitude rather than on difference: sympathizing with what is dissimilar or foreign constitutes the gist of Romantic love as seen in Coleridge and Percy Shelley. The novel, as we shall see, does not end with the birth of the triumphant subject as seen in the aforesaid works dominated by Romantic love; instead, it is marked by Gothic despair, the outright negation of transcendence.

In Romantic love, sympathetic identification with nature serves as a moral condition for universal merging. For example, in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," as we remember, the Mariner is morally re-connected to social community and metaphysical certitude through his praise of the sublime beauty of watery snakes in great number. Markedly, in *Frankenstein*, Shelley invokes this moral engagement with nature through Victor, only to reveal its limitations. Born and raised in Geneva, the homeland of Rousseau, Victor attends a university in Ingolstadt, where he sequestered himself in his laboratory to carry out his scientific project so much so as to wear out his body and mind. While his efforts eventually pay off, his success in his project does not bring him joy; instead, the sight of the living Monster plunges him into the sickness of disgust and horror. He compares himself to the Ancient Mariner, chased by the Polar Spirit: "Like one who, on a lonely road, / Doth walk in fear and dread . . . / Because he knows a frightful fiend / Doth close behind him tread" (59).

As he sinks into despondency, his old friend Henry Clerval unexpectedly comes from Switzerland to visit him and reminds him "to love the aspect of nature": "A selfish pursuit had cramped and narrowed me, until your [Henry's] gentleness and affection warmed and opened my senses; I became the same

happy creature who, a few years ago, loved and beloved by all, had no sorrow or care. When happy, inanimate nature had the power of bestowing on me the most delightful sensations. A serene sky and verdant fields filled me with ecstasy" (70). This passage reads like Victor's penance through which nature does offer him spiritual consolation, but only provisionally. Unlike in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," here Victor's moment of despair does not turn out to be the novel's greatest moment of positive transcendence.

In fact, a negative transcendence emerges as one of the greatest moments of despair in the novel when Victor tries again to redeem his soul through nature. After learning that his brother William has been murdered, Victor rushes back to Geneva to be with his family and painfully finds out that the Monster he created would have killed his brother. Pushed into guilt and woe, Victor decides to leave home and wander towards the valley of Chamonix at the foot of Mont Blanc with the hope that the sublime Alpine landscape could lift the weight upon his spirit. Incidentally, Shelley refers to *Frankenstein* for the first time in her journal when recording her journey to Montanvert with Percy through Chamonix on 25 July 1816 (*The Journals*, 118-19).

Before I go into what happens in Victor's search for transcendent consolation, I would like to describe briefly the moral history of the sublime. From Longinus onwards up to the Enlightenment, the sublime has a moral dimension. In Longinus, sublimity—with the arousal of "strong and inspired emotion"—serves to enable and ennoble the mind to travel beyond the boundaries of its capacity "towards the spiritual greatness of god" (147, 148). The Longinian tradition of divine elevation becomes Christianized as "the glory of Deity" (Nicolson 323) in the hands of Enlightenment intellectuals and literary critics. For example, John Dennis, the first theorist of the sublime in England, considers as the defining nature of sublimity "enthusiastic passions," amongst which "terror," or indeed, religious terror, is most vehement and thus most spiritually exalting (35-6). Likewise, for Lord Shaftesbury, sublime is what makes us aware of the presence of divinity in nature: "All Nature's wonders serve to excite and perfect this idea of their [divine] author. It is here he suffers us to see, and even converse with him, in a manner suitable to our frailty. How glorious is it to contemplate him, in this noblest works apparent to us, the system of the bigger world!" (74-5). In Shaftesbury, as in Dennis, the true source of the sublime lies in God Almighty.

It comes as no surprise, then, that grand mountains like Mont Blanc were regarded in Enlightenment Europe as the most majestic manifestation of God Almighty in nature. Evidently, Coleridge inherited this religious sublime when in 1802 he devoted a hymn to Mont Blanc at dawn seen from Chamonix: in Coleridge's eyes, the mountain's "wide torrents," "icy-falls," "enormous ravines," "sky-pointing peaks," and "avalanche" that plunges into the clouds are to tell the sky, the stars, and the rising sun that the earth in all its forms praises God ("Hymn: Before Sun-Rise" 119-20). The hymn would serve as the prime example of what Coleridge terms "the poetry of nature," one that unites the excitement of the reader's "sympathy" and the exercise of the poet's "imagination," "two cardinal points of poetry" that he and his neighbor Wordsworth frequently spoke about (*Biographia* Chapter XIV, 5).

Noticeably, the natural/religious sublime in the Enlightenment runs "by an ironic logic of the worse the better" (Laurence 57). In other words, the more awesome the might of God, the more overwhelming the mountains, the more traumatically we feel our own insignificance and limits, and the more we desire transcendent oneness with God. It is this natural/religious sublime to which Gothic sublimity runs counter. The former, as Jack Voller explains, requires the irony in order to transform physical powerlessness and emptiness "into metaphysical plenitude," whereas the latter does not "endorse—or even, in some cases, identify—a numinous or transcendent ordering principle consistently operative in the universe" (14). Likewise, Vijay Mishra highlights that the religious sublime transmutes religious terror "into a moral allegory; the daemonic is in some way tamed; life becomes livable; the subject is ethically responsible. None of these seems to hold for the Gothic subject [and for us as implied Gothic readers] for whom the sublime . . . inhabits 'pure daemon' in us" (291). In Mishra, as in Voller, the space of traumatic helplessness that sublimity opens up is occupied only by demonic horror from which one never recovers to feel morally or spiritually consoled. Gothic sublimity, so to speak, confronts us with the limits of the sublime power to mitigate the traumas of the modern human condition.

Here I would like to return to *Frankenstein*: as Victor arrives in the valley of Chamonix, the sublime and magnificent scenes of Mont Blanc do afford him "the greatest consolation" (96) he is capable of receiving so as to subdue and tranquilize his grief over the death of William. He then decides to ascend to the summit of Montanvert, wishing the mountaintop, the site closest to heaven, will fill him "with a sublime ecstasy, that [gives] wings to the soul." When physically and spiritually ascending the mountaintop, Victor says, "I remained in a recess of the rock, gazing on this wonderful and stupendous scene. The sea, or rather the vast river of ice, wound among its dependent mountains, whose aerial summits hung over its recesses. Their icy and glittering peaks shone in the sunlight over the clouds. My

heart, which was before sorrowful, now swelled with something like joy. . . . As I said this, I suddenly beheld the figure of a man, at some distance, advancing towards me with superhuman speed" (*Frankenstein* 98). At first, this passage immediately reminds us of the therapeutic journey into the Alps undertaken by Saint-Preux in Rousseau's *Julie* to pull himself out of a "state of languor": "by rising above the habitation of men," he says contently to Julie in Letter XXIII, "one leaves behind all base and earthly sentiments behind, and in proportion as one approaches ethereal spaces the soul contracts something of their inalterable purity" (63-4).

As we continue to read along, though, this passage turns out to be almost like a dramatic irony. At the mountaintop, what awaits Victor is not a transcendent oneness with divinity as seen in the natural/religious sublime but Gothic despair represented by the Monster whom he calls "the dæmon" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 99). With this Alpine experience, Victor expects to be elevated to the abode of divine sublimity, only to be led to the Monster's "hut upon the mountain" (101) to listen to his miserable account of his failed attempt to enter human society via the De Lacey family and to his longing for a female monster. In the hands of Rousseau and writers that follow him, the Alpine sublime since the Enlightenment has become the major European focal point for the pious configuration of natural grandeur (Beattie 120-4); one can therefore say that here Shelley evokes the Alpine sublime to revoke the conception of sympathetic identification with nature as a prelude to Romantic, universal love.

Gothic despair is further enhanced to frustrate the positive transcendence tied to Romantic love when the Monster tries in vain to gain sympathy from his "human neighbours," the De Lacey family. Thrown into the human world, the Monster mentally develops in the manner of Lockean sensationalism (from which Shaftesbury, Hume, Rousseau, and Smith derive their ideas of moral sympathy): his mind begins as a tabula rasa to be written on by observation and sensory experience. In his initial encounter with the world, his sensory experience gradually teaches him the functions of fire, food, housing, and so forth. Admittedly, the Monster lives in a nature-orientated world without anxiety and psychical pain; he has no objects other than the moon (a feminine symbol) to direct his libido towards as if he were in a mother's womb: "[n]o distinct ideas occupied my mind; all was confused. . . . the only object that I could distinguish was the bright moon, and I fixed my eyes on that with pleasure" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 103), says nostalgically the Monster.

This state of being free from anxiety begins to change when he encounters his the De Lacey family, who indirectly "cultivate" him in such a way as to inspire in him sympathetic attachment to them, an "eudaimonistic judgement" (in Nussbaum's terms) of them as an important part of his life goals (*Upheavals* 81-2; *Political* 144). Through a small chink in a hovel in which the Monster stays, he observes his human neighbors in a cottage: an old man has a benevolent countenance, a young man (Felix) has a graceful figure with brooding eyes, and a young woman (Agatha) has a sensitive heart and behaves tenderly; the youth help each other with housework while the old man plays a musical instrument "to produce sounds sweeter than the voice of the thrush or the nightingale" (108). Their gentle manners and "perfect forms" (114) entice the Monster's love for them so much that he stops stealing a part of their store and brings them firing to ease their suffering. His sympathetic identification with the De Lacey family would well illustrate the Humean and Smithian models of natural sympathy, the bright view of humanity that, as we shall see, Shelley later turns into an irony.

Indeed, the perfect forms and gentle manners of the De Lacey family is that which causes the Monster to desire (human love and relationships): "What chiefly struck me was the gentle manners of these people; and I longed to join them, but dared not" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 110; see also Chao 224). Thus begins his *primal* desire: he desires not merely to be recognized by the De Lacey family but, more importantly, to be the object of their desire, their love. The Monster, however, does not have the sufficient courage to present himself to his human neighbors because he is fully aware of his *primal* wound, his horrible deformity in contrast to their perfect forms: "I had admired the perfect forms of my cottagers—their grace, beauty, and delicate complexions: but how was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification" (114). The Monster's mirror image, as Peter Brooks cogently puts it, "becomes the negation of hope, severing the Monster from [being an object of another's] desire" (89). His terrifying image, however, does not preclude him from becoming a loving subject. The Monster sympathizes with the perfect forms of the De Lacey family so much as to idealize them as his "protectors" (121). Their perfect forms, so to speak, constitute for the Monster the promise of future wholeness, one that he desires to heal his primal wound of "nonbeing" or "nonexistence," that is, the extinction of individual selfhood associated with the negative experiences of "abandonment, powerlessness, and worthlessness" (Firman and Gila 16). In such idealization or overestimation, as we



shall see, lies the very danger of loving in that nobody can guarantee one's chosen love-object will return his/her love (equally): "The more one loves the more one suffers" (Nasio 20).

The Monster's sense of nonbeing increases considerably with his reading of the two texts he discovers by accident: Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Victor's laboratory journal of creating the Monster. *Paradise Lost* afflicts him with the pain of worthlessness and utter loneliness. The Monster identifies with Satan rather than Adam as "the fitter emblem of [his] condition": he himself is "wretched, helpless, and alone," whereas Adam is "guarded by the especial care of his Creator" and has Eve to soothe his sorrows and share his thoughts (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 129-30). On the other hand, the Monster considers Satan in fact more fortunate than himself as Satan has his fellow devils to admire him whilst he himself is "solitary and abhorred" (230). From Frankenstein's laboratory journal the Monster agonizingly realizes he has been hated and abandoned by his own creator since the day he was "born": "[B]reathless horror and disgust filled my [Frankenstein's] heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room" (131). The Monster cannot help but pine: "Ah, no! he pined like . . . / An infant orphaned of its Mother's care," to quote Shelley elsewhere ("The Death" 136, ll.13-4).

These two texts extremely threaten the Monster with the annihilation of selfhood and plunge him into the fear of nonexistence: "Increase of knowledge only discovered to me more clearly what a wretched outcast I was. I cherished hope, it is true; but it vanished, when I beheld my person reflected in water, or my shadow in the moonshine, even as that frail image and that inconstant shade. I endeavoured to crush these fears, and to fortify myself for the trial which in a few months I resolved to undergo" (*Frankenstein* 131). The trial the Monster determines to undergo is to become an object of desire, of love for the De Lacey family. Fully aware that his hideous look would frustrate his desire to be loved, he decides first to approach the blind patriarch De Lacey and, through him, to win the love of his children. To achieve this goal, he trusts in the Christian doctrine of universal neighborly love: "Could they turn from their door one, however monstrous, who solicited their compassion and friendship?" (130) asks the Monster, expecting that they will love their (monstrous) neighbor as themselves.

Initially, things seem to work in favor of the Monster's plan: "I am blind," says the old father, "and cannot judge of your countenance, but there is something in your words, which persuades me that you are sincere. I am poor, and an exile; but it will afford me true pleasure to be in any way serviceable to a human creature (italics mine)" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 134). Here paradoxically, or rather ironically, the blind old man sees the goodness in the Monster that other human beings with normal vision fail to see. The old man's kindness removes the Monster's fear of being driven away from human society, whereas the Monster, albeit mastering human language, fails to detect—or perhaps, unconsciously chooses to ignore—the old man's implication that it is to "a human creature" he would gladly offer help. Foreseeable, then, is the failure of the Monster—who cannot be categorized as "human" (at least physically speaking) in the natural order of things. The old man's sympathetic words raise the Monster from the desolate valley of solitude until other family members return and behold his inhuman deformity: Felix brutally strikes him, Agatha faints, and Safie flees. Here in Felix et al., as in Frankenstein, disgust, which "concerns the borders of the body," not only blocks the movement of the sympathetic imagination as Martha Nussbaum would describe it (*Upheavals* 202) but, worse still, changes the movement into violence.

It is fair to say that Shelley creates this disturbing scene to expose the limits of mutual sympathy. His "human neighbours" indirectly nurture him to sympathize and yet, ironically, outright reject his attempt to be sympathized and thereby enter the human community. One may wonder if an amiable family like the De Laceys still cannot open the door of sympathy for the Monster, who could possibly sympathize with him? With the case of the Monster, Shelley offers an alternative to the optimistic take on the capacity of (mutual) sympathy: Smith, as we remember, writes sanguinely of mutual sympathy, emphasizing that neighborly love is naturally mutual as seen in Christianity. One may well even venture to say that Shelley, joining Hobbes, paves the way for Freud to peel off the altruistic veneer of human civilization sustained by the Christian doctrine of mutual sympathy.

In the history of love, Freud ventures further than anyone else in illuminating love as a source of suffering. In his "Civilization and its Discontents" (1930), Freud points out three sources in the outside world that have the power to ruin our imagined pleasure and make us suffer: the violent forces of nature, aging, and the maladjustment of the mutual relationships in the family and society (86). Humankind has been able to come up with different ways of mitigating the destruction of the forces of nature as well as the pain of corporeal decay and dissolution. Nevertheless, when it comes to the third source of suffering, humankind has not been successful in negotiating the problems created by human relationships because human beings are essentially aggressive towards one another in such a way as to prove naive the Christian commandment "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Freud elsewhere explicates that human beings come together to create (Western) civilization not because we love our

fellowmen as brothers but because individually we are helpless in the face of the crushing forces of nature; in order to make our communal life possible and safe, religion is created (in the form of an illusion) to satisfy our (infantile) longing for (the protection of) the Father and at the same time to tame our asocial instincts by divine commandments—such as "Thou shalt not kill" and "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" ("Future" 21, 24, 37, 40).

Freud maintains that love appears to be the only remedy for the suffering coming from social relationships, but this remedy is in fact precarious. For one thing, there is no guarantee that your neighbor will love you back when you love him/her. For another, not everyone is worthy of your love: "by the judgement of [your] reason," you love a neighbor or the other not so much because you find the goodness in him/her as because you love yourself in him/her, or rather your ideal self (*Ideal-Ich*) in him/her ("Civilization" 109-10). In other words, human love is not as unconditional, universal, and altruistic as the Christian doctrine promotes (see also "Group Psychology" 101). Therefore, if one believes in love as *the* way of regulating human relations, he has, Freud emphasizes, "made himself dependent in a most dangerous way on a portion of the external world, namely his chosen love-object, and exposed himself to extreme suffering if he should be rejected by that object or should lose it through unfaithfulness or death" ("Civilization" 101). That is to say, instead of fending off pain, love makes us suffer because there is no controlling the person who is the object of our love. Rather, love creates a desire in the form of a hole at the core of our being which we imagine the person can fill out; there is always, however, a gap between fantasy and reality either because s/he may very well dissatisfy, reject, or abandon us or simply because s/he, being human, can never fill the hole. This situation is exactly what happens to the Monster in his search for love from his human neighbors: his monstrous otherness shocks his neighbors away before they have an opportunity to love themselves in him.

The novel sinks the Monster's (and the reader's) despair even deeper when Victor denies the Monster his last hope for sympathetic companionship. In his mountaintop confrontation with Victor, the Monster implores Victor to create a female partner for him so as to satisfy his desire to be loved and escape from the "forced solitude," and together they will leave Europe for South America for good. The Monster tries further to persuade Victor with Smith's or Percy Shelley's logic of mutual sympathy: "If any being felt emotions of benevolence towards me, I should return them an hundred and an hundred fold" (M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* 145). Out of sympathy and guilt, Victor agrees to create a female companion for the Monster. He decides to move to Scotland—the homeland of Hume and Smith—to set up a laboratory and engage again in the dark scientific project.

As the project proceeds smoothly as planned, one evening he sits idly in his laboratory and a train of thought leads him to reflect on the effects of creating a female monster. He says, "I was now about to form another being, of which dispositions I was alike ignorant; she might become then thousand times more malignant than her mate, and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness. . . . [S]he, who in all probability was to become a thinking and reasoning animal, might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation. They might hate each other" (165). Here Victor reveals his Hobbesian conception of human nature as evil and aggressive, a disbelief in the moral nature of humanity that motivates him to drop his project and break his promise to the Monster. The Monster's last hope to be loved is therefore gone and so is the novel's moral redemption. Considered in this light, Scotland seems to be invoked by Shelley to cast a doubt on Hume's and Smith's notion of natural sympathy.

From this point onwards, the Monster turns into a serial killer and the novel into the mortal and moral war in the sublime ice and snow of the North between Victor and his creation or broadly between the self and the other. In the end, death becomes the only solution to their war and also the only consolation for both of them. After learning Victor dies of fatigue, the Monster, sad and solemn, reveals to Captain Walton his strong wish to find peace in death: "He sprung from the cabin-window, as he said this, upon the ice-raft which lay close to the vessel. He was soon borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance" (223). Thus Shelley closes the novel—without positive transcendence or triumphant subject but only Gothic despair.

In *Frankenstein*, Shelley, as we have seen, offers an alternative to the confidence of her Romantic colleagues in the sublime power of sympathetic love to transcend the differences between the self and the other and thereby mingle them into a wondrous unity. In the three encounters, notably those between the Monster and his human neighbors and between the Monster and Victor, Shelley brings forth elements of Enlightenment/Romantic love, only to unveil its limitations, or rather turn it into despair. Towards the end of the novel, the Monster deplorably says to Walton before expressing his desire to end his life and thus his psychical pain: "in what should I seek for sympathy? I am content to suffer alone, while my sufferings shall endure. . . . No guilt, no mischief, no malignity, no misery can be found comparable to mine" (221). The novel ends without a moral solution to the solitary and sorrowful quest

of Victor's motherless creation for human love: "Monstrosity," as Botting puts it, "has left the novel open, its frames broken: all boundaries are left in question, divided between the positions of Frankenstein and the monster" (105). We modern readers would know, though, the solution to monstrous otherness is love, *a*, if not *the*, defining nature of humanity that nevertheless often remains out of reach.

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