

created human being, a giant adult male in shape, who must swiftly recapitulate, and without the assistance of his terrified parent, the infantile and adolescent stages of human development. She even faces squarely the monster's sexual needs, for the denouement of the story hangs on his demand that Frankenstein create a female monster partner, and Frankenstein's refusal to do so.

But more than mundane is Mary Shelley's concern with the emotions surrounding the parent-child and child-parent relationship. Here her intention to underline the birth myth in *Frankenstein* becomes most evident, quite apart from biographical evidence about its author. She provides an unusual thickening of the background of the tale with familial fact and fantasy, from the very opening of the story in the letter a brother addresses to his sister of whom he is excessively fond, because they are both orphans. There is Frankenstein's relationship to his doting parents, and his semi-incestuous love for an abandoned orphan girl brought up as his sister. There is the first of the monster's murder victims, Frankenstein's infant brother (precisely drawn, even to his name, after Mary Shelley's baby); and the innocent young girl wrongly executed for the infant's murder, who is also a victim of what Mary Shelley calls that "strange perversity," a mother's hatred. (Justine accepts guilt with docility: "I almost began to think that I was the monster that my confessor said I was. . . .") The abundant material in *Frankenstein* about the abnormal, or monstrous, manifestations of the child-parent tie justifies as much as does its famous monster Mary Shelley's reference to the novel as "my hideous progeny."

What Mary Shelley actually did in *Frankenstein* was to transform the standard Romantic matter of incest, infanticide, and patricide into a phantasmagoria of the nursery. Nothing quite like it was done again in English literature until that Victorian novel by a woman, which we also place uneasily in the Gothic tradition: *Wuthering Heights*.

SANDRA M. GILBERT AND SUSAN GUBAR

Mary Shelley's Monstrous Eve†

*The nature of a Female Space is this: it shrinks the Organs
Of Life till they become Finite & Itself seems Infinite
And Satan vibrated in the immensity of the Space Limited
To those without but Infinite to those within . . .*

—William Blake

*The woman writes as if the Devil was in her; and that is the only condition
under which a woman ever writes anything worth reading.*

—Nathaniel Hawthorne, on Fanny Fern

*I probed Retrieveless things
My Duplicate—to borrow—
A Haggard Comfort springs*

*From the belief that Somewhere—
Within the Clutch of Thought—
There dwells one other Creature
Of Heavenly Love—forgot—*

*I plucked at our Partition
As One should pry the Walls—
Between Himself—and Horror's Twin—
Within Opposing Cells—†*
—Emily Dickinson

Many critics have noticed that *Frankenstein* (1818) is one of the key Romantic "readings" of *Paradise Lost*.¹ Significantly, however, as a woman's reading it is most especially the story of hell: hell as a dark body of heaven, hell's creations as monstrous imitations of heaven's creations, and hellish femaleness as a grotesque parody of heavenly femaleness. But of course the divagations of the parody merely return to reinforce the fearful reality of the original. For by parodying *Paradise Lost* in what may have begun as a secret, barely conscious attempt to subvert Milton, Shelley ended up telling, too, the central story of

† From *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) 213, 221–27, 230–41. Originally published in *Feminist Studies*. Reprinted with permission.

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† See, for instance, Harold Bloom, "Afterword," *Frankenstein* (New York and Toronto: New American Library, 1965), p. 214.