"Master of their language": Education and Exile in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

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IN MAY 1789, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote a review of Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* that addressed contemporary debates about how ex-slaves would fit into the free society of the metropole. After glancing at the question of polygenesis, Wollstonecraft offers a subtly radical proposal: "It has been a favorite philosophic whim," she writes,

> to degrade the numerous nations, on whom the sun-beams more directly dart, below the common level of humanity, and hastily to conclude that nature... designed to stamp them with the mark of slavery. How they were shaded down, from the fresh color of northern rustics, to the sable hue seen on the African sands, is not our task to inquire.... we shall only observe, that if [the *Interesting Narrative* does] not exhibit extraordinary intellectual powers, sufficient to wipe off the stigma, yet the activity and ingenuity, which conspicuously appear in the character of Gustavus, place him on a par with the general mass of men, who fill the subordinate stations in a more civilized society than that which he was thrown into at his birth.[1]

Wollstonecraft makes no startling claims for Equiano's literary talent, but her tempered response contains the very rationale for supporting his entrance into British society. She reads the position of Equiano's body in the metropole in terms of his rhetorical style: it is nothing special, nor is it particularly unsuccessful; it is merely solid, workable, and honest.

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1. *The Analytic Review* (May 1789), 27–29.

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In this complex of bodies, language, and social organization we recognize the theoretical coordinates that Wollstonecraft would pursue at length in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in which slavery functions as an analogy for gender oppression. Wollstonecraft works this correspondence throughout the *Rights of Woman*, querying her readers, "Is one half of the human species, like the poor African slaves, to be subject to prejudices that brutalize them?"[2] This comparison between the legal and ideological subjugation of women in British society and the subjugation of Caribbean slaves has been discussed by Helen Thomas, Joan Baum, and others.[3] But there may be a more essential basis for the comparison: Wollstonecraft explores how perceived physical differences between men and women have been wrongly expanded into the central structuring principle for society. In the slave trade the principle is writ globally: it is the imperial effort to structure the world according to somatic difference, in this case skin color, that she identifies in her review of Equiano.

In the narrative written by her daughter, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Wollstonecraft's inquiries into the politics of biology are carried forward, but the language of race and slavery is foregrounded as *Frankenstein* explores the geopolitics of somatic difference. Shelley's novel has long been linked to questions of race and empire, from contemporary reviews that compared the Creature to Shakespeare's Caliban, to George Canning's evocation of the text in a 1824 House of Commons address on slavery in the British Caribbean, to James Whale's 1931 film adaptation, which staged the Creature's death against a flaming windmill in a scene that has been likened to the imagery of Ku Klux Klan lynchings.[4] Shelley's master-trope of physical difference has been read in terms of race by several scholars. Anne Mellor, for example, extending her earlier work on *Frankenstein* and contemporary science, has considered the significance of the emerging field of ethnography for Shelley's presentation of the Creature, while H. L. Malchow and Debbie Lee have studied the relays between Shelley's text and contemporary writing on race and slavery.[5] These readings have opened up a fresh interpretive landscape for studies of *Frankenstein*, most compellingly when they attend to Shelley's emphases on language, on literary culture, and on education. Indeed, Shelley does not merely draw from these discourses, but also studies the crucial relationship between language, alterity, and empire.

2. *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, ed. Carol H. Poston, 2d ed. (New York, 1988), 144–45.

3. See Helen Thomas, *Romanticism and Slave Narratives: Transatlantic Testimonies* (New York, 2000), 87; and Joan Baum, *Mind Forg'd Manacles: Slavery and the English Romantic Poets* (New Haven, Conn., 1994), 138–39.

4. Several reviewers made this comparison to Caliban, including Walter Scott, who wrote that the Creature "learns the use of the language, and other accomplishments, much more successfully than Caliban"; "Remarks on *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus; a Novel*," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 2 (1818): 613–20. George Canning drew on Shelley's novel in his comments on the "Amelioration of the Condition of the Slave Population in the West Indies," delivered in the House of Commons on 16 March 1824; *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 10 (1824): 1103. On the political resonances of the fire imagery in Whale's film, see Paul O'Flinn, "Production and Reproduction: The Case of *Frankenstein*," in *Frankenstein*, ed. Fred Botting (New York, 1995), 21–47.

5. H. L. Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford, Calif., 1996); Anne K. Mellor, "*Frankenstein*, Racial Science, and the Yellow Peril," *Nineteenth Century Contexts* 23 (2001): 1–28; Debbie Lee, *Slavery and the Romantic Imagination* (Philadelphia, 2002).

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My interpretive map will be Shelley's concern with education, especially the engagement of *Frankenstein* with race and empire in two of its narratives of education: the education of the Creature and the (other) education of Victor Frankenstein. In the manuscript of *Frankenstein,* Shelley links education and the state in a passage that slipped from the text sometime before the novel's publication in 1818 (see figure 1). The passage comes as Victor Frankenstein and Henry Clerval approach Oxford:

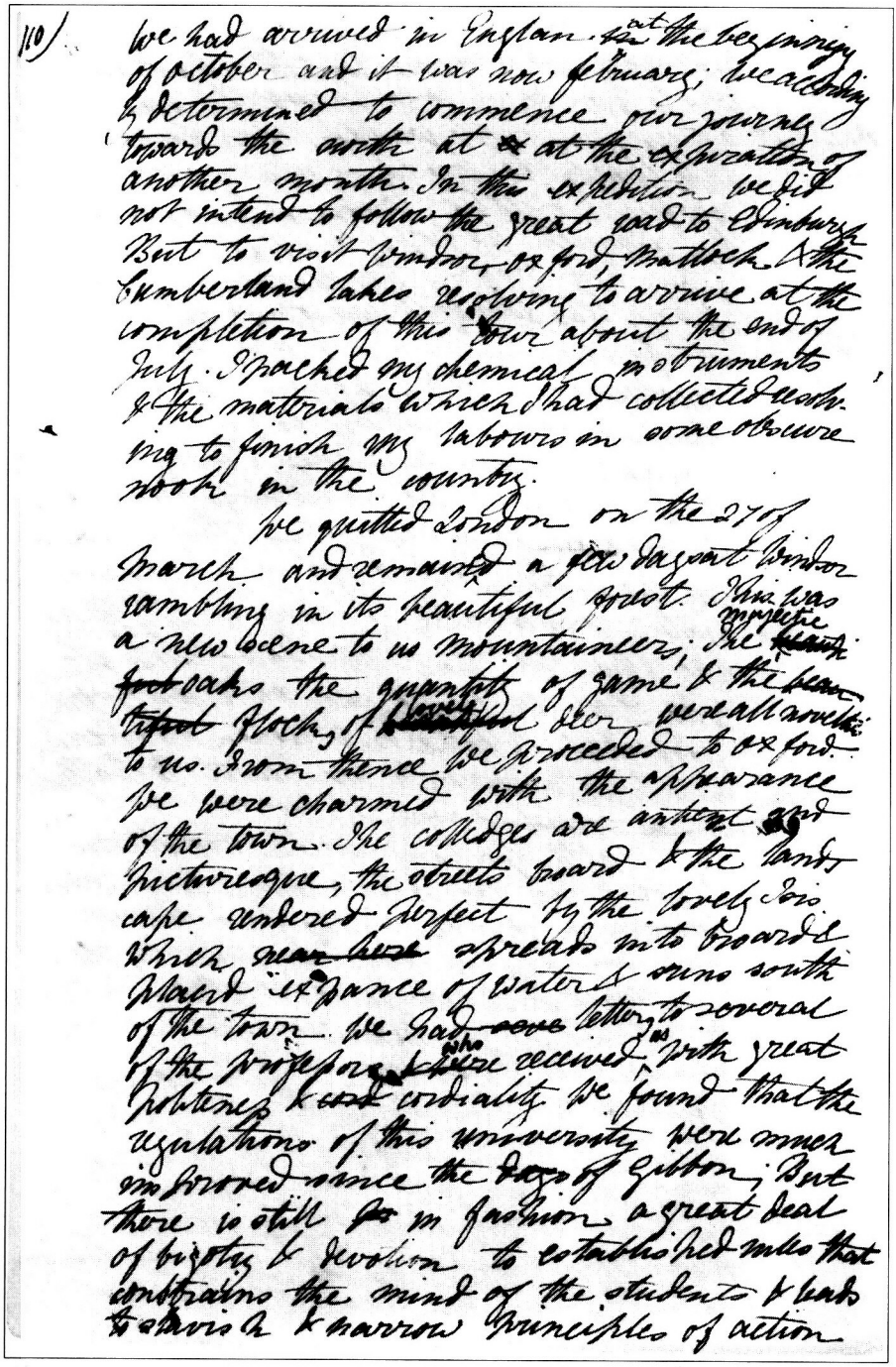
> We were charmed with the appearance
> of the town. The colledges are antient and
> picturesque, the streets broard & the lands
> cape rendered perfect by the lovely Isis.
> which ~~near hear~~ spreads into broard &
> placid expance of water & runs south
> of the town. We had ~~seve~~ letters to several
> who us
> of the professors ~~& were~~ received with great
> ^
> politeness & ~~cord~~ cordiality. We found that the
> regulations of this university were much
> improved since the days of Gibbon; But
> there is still {?pr} in fashion a great deal
> of bigotry & devotion to established rules that
> constrains the mind of the students & leads
> to slavish and narrow principles of action.[6]

With a provocative reference to Britain's prophet of imperial collapse, Edward Gibbon, Shelley reveals an oppressive traditionalism at Oxford that severely constrains the minds and actions of its students, said to be "slavish."

Throughout the novel, Shelley's interest in the relationship between education and the state is reticulated with implications for race and empire. The Creature's narrative of his education, for example, unfolds from a personal realization of alterity to a contemplation of race and power. Finding haven in a hut attached to the De Laceys' cottage, the Creature begins to feel an affective attachment to the family: "when they

6. I have followed Charles Robinson's transcription of the manuscript passage; see *The Frankenstein Notebooks: A Facsimile Edition of Mary Shelley's Manuscript Novel, 1816–17,* ed. Charles E. Robinson (New York, 1996), B.47v; 456. There is no clear explanation for the passage's removal, which Robinson dates to 20–28 October 1817, during which time Shelley traveled with William Godwin to Hampden's monument, but Robinson is uncertain about whether Shelley or Percy was responsible for the elision, noting that on 22 October Shelley "possibly" recorded "her and/or PBS's altered remarks about Oxford" (*Frankenstein Notebooks,* A.xc). Robinson also notes that on 28 October Percy informed the publishers of the first edition, Lackington & Co., that the recent "considerable alterations" represented the final time that the printers would be troubled by extensive changes (A.xc). Shelley's reference to Edward Gibbon's expulsion from Oxford in 1753 (after his conversion to Roman Catholicism) may contain a displaced reference to the expulsion of Percy Shelley and Thomas Hogg in 1811 for their pamphlet on atheism.

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We had arrived in England at the beginning of October and it was now February, I accordingly determined to commence our journey towards the north at ~~the~~ at the expiration of another month. In this expedition we did not intend to follow the great road to Edinburgh But to visit London, Oxford, Matlock & the Cumberland lakes resolving to arrive at the completion of this tour about the end of July. I packed my chemical instruments & the materials which I had collected wishing to finish my labours in some obscure nook in the country.

We quitted London on the 27th March and remained a few days at London rambling in its beautiful parts. This was a new scene to us mountaineers. The magnificent ~~forests~~ oaks the ~~quantity~~ of game & the ~~fine~~ ~~stock~~ flocks of ~~fallow~~ deer were all novelties to us. From thence we proceeded to Oxford. We were charmed with the appearance of the town. The colleges are ancient and picturesque, the streets broad & the surrounding country ~~rendered~~ rendered perfect by the lovely Isis which ~~meanders~~ spreads into a broad & placid expanse of water a mile south of the town. We had ~~some~~ letters to several of the professors ~~here~~ who received us with great politeness & ~~civility~~ cordiality. We found that the regulations of this university were much improved since the days of Gibbon. But there is still ~~too~~ in fashion a great deal of bigotry & devotion to established rules that ~~confine~~ confines the mind of the students & leads to a ~~narrow~~ narrow principles of action

FIGURE 1. Bodleian Library, [Abinger] Dep. c. 534/1, fol. 47v. Courtesy of the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

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were unhappy, I felt depressed; when they rejoiced, I sympathized in their joys."[7] This affective identification is soon complicated as the Creature begins to perceive a power imbalance between himself and the De Laceys, a sense of inferiority that emerges as he becomes aware of his physical difference. As Mellor has noted, this difference is racialized from the Creature's first appearance in the text: he enters the novel as Walton and his fellow sailors track him through telescopes, and Walton describes the spectacular image he sees as not "European," but "a savage inhabitant of some undiscovered island" (p. 14).[8] Walton's binary, European/savage, is taken up again in the Creature's own narrative, but well before his reflections Walton gives us the coordinates. This vague geography of "some undiscovered island" is appropriate, as the Creature is described according to no particular model. The well-known passage on the "accomplishment of [Frankenstein's] toils" begins with the opening of "a dull yellow eye," and then expands into a striking blazon. The Creature has "yellow skin," "lustrous black, and flowing hair," "watery eyes" in "dun white sockets," and "straight black lips" (pp. 39–41). In the manuscript Shelley described both the Creature's "sockets" and his skin as "dun," then decided to make the Creature's skin "yellow," perhaps more clearly to indicate a difference in skin color.[9]

Reading the description of the Creature we might, with Joseph Lew, sense an Indian descent, or agree with Mellor's suggestion that "most of Mary Shelley's nineteenth-century readers would immediately have recognized the Creature as a member of the Mongolian race."[10] But the exact referent of the Creature's difference is less important than the basic fact of alterity: as the Creature learns to read and speak, he also learns that his body will condition the terms of his existence, and that this same principle rules the imperial arena. The Creature's realization of somatic difference follows close upon his first exposure to language. In a Lacanian reading of *Frankenstein,* Peter Brooks has argued that the Creature realizes that to enter human society he must move beyond the imaginary order and master the terms of the symbolic order—language.[11] Yet such mastery is a cruel delusion, for, as Brooks puts it, not only has language "failed to gain [the Creature] entry into the 'chain of existence and events,' but has rather made him fully aware of his unique and accursed origin" (p. 211). If, as Brooks proposes, "the Monster needs language to compensate for a deficient nature" (p. 210), Shelley shows that language itself is the site of the Creature's alterity, a terrible irony that the contemporary discourse of slave narratives will amplify.

7. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus,* ed. Susan Wolfson (New York, 2003), 88; cited below in the text.

8. Mellor, "Racial Science," 2.

9. Shelley, *Frankenstein Notebooks,* A.21r; 1.96–97.

10. Joseph Lew, "The Deceptive Other: Mary Shelley's Critique of Orientalism in *Frankenstein,*" *Studies in Romanticism* 30.2 (1991): 273; Mellor, "Racial Science," 2.

11. Peter Brooks, "'Godlike Science / Unhallowed Arts': Language, Nature, and Monstrosity," George Levine and U. C. Knoepflmacher, eds., *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel* (Berkeley, Calif., 1979), 205–20; cited below in the text.

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Within this discourse Henry Louis Gates Jr. has traced what he refers to as the "Trope of the Talking Book" through a number of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century narratives, including those of James Gronniosaw and Olaudah Equiano.[12] Like Shelley's Creature, these writers record their wonder at first beholding a scene of reading. "When I first saw [my master] read," recalls Gronniosaw,

> I was never so surprised in my life, as when I saw the book talk to my master.... I wished it would do so with me.... I followed him to the place where he put the book,... and when nobody saw me, I opened it, and put my ear down close upon it,... but I was very sorry, and greatly disappointed, when I found that it would not speak. This thought immediately presented itself to me, that every body and every thing despised me because I was black.[13]

So, too, Equiano:

> I had often seen my master and Dick employed in reading; and I had a great curiosity to talk to the books, as I thought they did.... for that purpose I have often taken up a book, and have talked to it, and then put my ears to it, when alone, in hopes it would answer me; and I have been very much concerned when I found it remained silent.[14]

Unlike Gronniosaw, Equiano does not at first seem to link his sense of difference to his inability to "talk" to the book. His scene of recognition—of seeing himself as "inferior" because of physical appearance—comes from a comparison of bodies:

> [W]hen [my English friend's] mother washed her face it looked very rosy; but when she washed mine it did not look so: I therefore tried oftentimes myself if I could not by washing make my face of the same color as my little play-mate Mary, but it was all in vain; and I now began to be mortified in the difference in our complexions. (P. 84)

Thus mortified, Equiano is determined to be reborn into white society. He recalls that he began to regard white people as "superior to us; and therefore I had the stronger desire to resemble them; to imbibe their spirit, and imitate their manners; I therefore embraced every occasion of improvement" (p. 93). This is Equiano's dream of acceptance, as he reveals a deep desire to become a part of British society through literacy. But as Gates points out, Equiano's grammar registers the irony that this acceptance is

12. Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York, 1988).

13. Ibid., 136.

14. Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself*, ed. Angelo Costanzo (New York, 2001), 83; cited below in the text.

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precluded by the very means meant to effect it: the shift in tense in the Talking Book passage—from simple past to present perfect—signals his awareness that his position in the Western cultural order will always be defined by alterity, a subtle inscription of the alienation Gronniosaw articulated more directly in his own use of the Talking Book trope.[15]

For Gronniosaw and Equiano the trope of the Talking Book dramatizes above all the narrator's education regarding his difference. These narratives illuminate Shelley's presentation of the Creature's education, first of all in the Creature's description of his encounter with the scenes of reading in the De Lacey cottage:

> [R]eading had puzzled me extremely at first; but, by degrees, I discovered that [Felix] uttered many of the same sounds when he read as when he talked. I conjectured, therefore, that he found on the paper signs for speech which he understood, and I ardently longed to comprehend these also; but how was that possible, when I did not even understand the sounds for which they stood as signs? I improved, however, sensibly in this science, but not sufficiently to follow up any kind of conversation, although I applied my whole mind to the endeavor. (P. 89)

Longing to be accepted into the world he sees and romances through the crack in the De Laceys' wall, the Creature believes that literacy is the key:

> I easily perceived that, although I eagerly longed to discover myself to the cottagers, I ought not to make that attempt until I had first become master of their language; which knowledge might enable me to make them overlook the deformity of my figure. (P. 89)

It is the utmost of poignancies that Shelley follows the passage on education with the Creature's realization of his own monstrosity, when he observes his reflection in a "transparent pool" (p. 89). Because the Creature has this realization directly after the passage on education, it seems that he has learned both language and the very system that names him monstrous. Shelley's diction establishes this link, as the Creature laments the "deformity" of his "figure," and identifies his own space within the symbolic order as "a filthy type" (p. 104). By acquiring literacy he only becomes more familiar, as did Gronniosaw and Equiano, with the terms of his own alterity. And this tragic realization will deepen: "Alas! I did not yet entirely know the fatal effects of this miserable deformity," the Creature reports to Victor. It is not until Shelley brings the Creature's education into the imperial realm that he will fully understand the "effects" of his alterity (p. 89).

15. Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 157.

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It is no coincidence that the relationship between bodies and empires has a place on Felix De Lacey's syllabus, and as part of his curriculum, the Creature gains a wider education in the centrality of physical difference in imperial history. The Creature comes to view the De Laceys "as superior beings, who would be the arbiters of [his] future destiny" (p. 90). As Felix reads to Safie from Volney's *Ruins of Empire*, the Creature acquires a kind of imperial literacy: "I heard of the slothful Asiatics; of the stupendous genius and mental activity of the Grecians" (p. 94). The Creature then learns that this ideology of superiority—the "genius" Occident, the "slothful" Orient— supports European imperial expansion, a program of violence and domination: "I heard of the discovery of the American hemisphere, and wept with Safie over the hapless fate of its original inhabitants" (p. 94). The Creature has difficulty understanding how human relationships could be based upon systematized racial violence: "These wonderful narrations inspired me with strange feelings. Was man, indeed, at once so powerful, so virtuous, and magnificent, yet so vicious and base?" (p. 94). D. L. Macdonald and Kathleen Scherf have wondered about Shelley's use of Volney: "Some of the things the monster claims to have learned from Volney are dealt with only cursorily in the *Ruins*; presumably Felix's explanations were more ample."[16] But I think the Creature's focus on what he learned about race and imperial expansion is precisely Shelley's point: this is what the Creature remembers. In his resistant reading of Volney the periphery has moved to the center.

The Creature's growing understanding of the relationship between bodies and empires gestures toward a vast archive of theories of racial supremacy and geographical possession. David Hume's survey of the globe, for example, celebrates the inborn prowess of the white race, and equates the accomplishments of one Jamaican with the chatter of a parrot who "speaks a few words plainly":

> I am apt to suspect the Negroes, and in general all the other species of men (there are four or five different kinds), to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white.... Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction betwixt these breeds of men. Not to mention our colonies, there are Negroe slaves dispersed all over Europe, of which none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity, tho' low people, without education, will start up amongst us, and distinguish themselves in every profession. In Jamaica indeed they talk of one negro as a man of parts and learning, but 'tis likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly.[17]

16. D. L. MacDonald and Kathleen Scherf, "Introduction," *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*, 2d ed. (New York, 2001), 25.

17. David Hume, "Of National Characters," in *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. T. H. Green and T. Grose, vol. 1 (London, 1875), 252.

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Such arguments were of course used to justify both slavery and the dispossession of indigenous populations. In a journal entry, for example, Ralph Waldo Emerson ruminated upon a statement put to him by Sarah Clarke: "S. C. said, 'the Indians perish because there is no place for them.' That is the very fact of their inferiority. There is always a place for the superior."[18]

This is the discursive field within which Shelley sets the Creature's developing sense of his own abject place in the world. In the frame of Occidental mythology, the creature aligns himself with Safie as they both react tearfully to the story of imperial expansion into the Americas. It is immediately following this disturbing tutorial on race and empire, as Malchow points out, that the Creature first utters the word "slave."[19] The Creature says he has learned that without "high and unsullied descent united with riches" one is "a vagabond and a slave, doomed to waste his powers for the profit of the chosen few." The Creature deduces his position within such a taxonomy: "And what was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant; but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property" (p. 95). He recognizes, moreover, that he himself *is* property. Echoing the race-specific laws governing homicide on Caribbean plantations, the Creature rages at Frankenstein: "You, my creator, would tear me to pieces, and triumph.... You would not call it murder." Now that the Creature has learned to assert his right to exist, Frankenstein would rather destroy him than recognize him as an individual being. The Creature's only recourse, like the slave's, is rebellion: "mine shall not be the submission of abject slavery." And his only means for gaining recognition is destruction. "If I cannot inspire love," the Creature tells Frankenstein, "I will cause fear... I will work at your destruction" (p. 117).

The Creature offers one last initiative before he fulfills this guarantee. In language that shows his education in matters of race and geography, he asks Frankenstein to create a female companion to join him in exile—one as "hideous" as himself—so that he will find solace in a shared alterity, and he promises Frankenstein that he and his new partner will leave Europe for the "vast wilds of South America" (p. 118). Shelley's linking of the Creature's request with a plan of emigration evokes an idea that was central to the British and American treatment of freed slaves from the 1780s well into the middle decades of the nineteenth century.[20] Frankenstein agrees to the Creature's request: "I consent to your demand, on your solemn oath to quit Europe for ever, and every other place in the neighborhood of man" (p. 120). It is important that Shelley has Frankenstein suspend his relation of the Creature's narrative at this point and return to his own story, for it is another story of education, but this time it is Frankenstein who is forced to learn what it means to be an irrevocable exile—to be, in the Creature's words, "cut off from all the world" (p. 118).[21]

18. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*, ed. William H. Gilman, vol. 7 (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), 393.

19. Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race*, 29.

20. Ibid., 26.

21. Maureen N. McLane discusses Frankenstein as an "exile within Europe" in *Romanticism and the Human Sciences: Poetry, Population, and the Discourse of the Species* (Cambridge, 2000), 92.

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Following this agreement, Frankenstein begins his own story with three images that reveal the depth of his terror in terms of racial identity and physical integrity, and that anticipate the reversal of roles. First, he "listened to every blast of wind, as if it were a dull ugly siroc on its way to consume me" (p. 120), reading the "ugly" Sirocco wind of Africa into his surroundings in Switzerland. Frankenstein next offers a forecast of the threat posed by the coupling of male and female Creatures—which he later articulates directly (p. 135)—when he says that he "saw continually about [him] a multitude of filthy animals inflicting on [him] incessant torture" (p. 121). The third figure anticipates repeated references to shackles, language that Shelley will use to express Frankenstein's feelings of powerlessness: "The promise I had made to the daemon weighed upon my mind, like Dante's iron cowl on the heads of the hellish hypocrites" (p. 121). As if unable to release himself from this simile, Frankenstein goes on to name his relationship to the Creature as a condition of slavery on several occasions. He wishes, for example, that some unknown event might occur that would destroy the Creature, and thus "put an end to [his] slavery for ever" (p. 124). And he perceives the time after his promise as the "period during which [he] was the slave of [his] Creature" (p. 124). Like a slave, he is enchained: "For an instant I dared to shake off my chains, and look around me with a free and lofty spirit; but the iron had eaten into my flesh" (p. 131). And his language images the notorious Iron Muzzle as he expresses his apprehension about telling his story: "I had a feeling that I should be supposed mad, and this for ever chained my tongue, when I would have given the whole world to have confided the fatal secret" (p. 152).

At the same time, the Creature rises to power. Addressing Frankenstein as "Slave!" he tells him: "Remember that I have power.... You are my creator, but I am your master;—obey!" (p. 137). Shelley's inversion of "master" and "slave" engages an important aspect of contemporary abolitionist rhetoric, that in the master/slave relationship the master would necessarily become as degraded as the slave, shackled by moral "chains" as the slave was by iron ones.[22] The Creature actualizes this reversal: to exact his revenge, he first kills those closest to Frankenstein, and then forces Frankenstein to experience the exile he has suffered.

Frankenstein's entrance into exile is foreshadowed as he awakens in a boat off the coast of Ireland: "I had no compass with me, and was so little acquainted with the geography of this part of the world that the sun was of little benefit to me. I might be driven into the wide Atlantic, and feel all the tortures of starvation" (p. 140). This report forecasts Frankenstein's account of his aborted wedding night: "if for one in-

McLane raises the question of empire in her study, though her analysis of the taxonomic challenges posed by the Creature focuses on contemporary discourses of the human sciences and the importance of the concept of "the human" to Shelley's novel.

22. In *History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament* (Wilmington, Del., 1816), Thomas Clarkson borrows from Newtonian science to emphasize this point: "if the unhappy slave is in an unfortunate situation, so is the tyrant who holds him. Action and reaction are equal to each other, as well in the moral as in the natural world" (p. 23).

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stant I had thought what might be the hellish intention of my fiendish adversary, I would rather have banished myself for ever from my Native country, and wandered a friendless outcast over the earth" (p. 157). In the final phase of Frankenstein's journey into exile, the grueling northward chase, master and slave become even more conflated. In a compelling reading, Malchow situates this episode within the context of Caribbean slavery, arguing that "in Frankenstein's futile chase" we might perceive "a displaced image of the white planter's exhausting...search for the runaway slave."[23] At the same time, however, Shelley makes it clear that Frankenstein and the Creature have switched positions in their power relationship: it is the Creature who guides Frankenstein in the northward journey. Stripping Frankenstein of family and friends and drawing him into exile, the Creature will soon complete his project of education.

While Malchow reads this pursuit within a specific historical context, the circulation of bodies through imperial networks was producing a widespread cultural concern with the figure of the refugee, and in particular the racialized refugee. William Wordsworth's sonnet, "September 1st, 1802," originally published as "The Banished Negroes," treats what the 1827 headnote describes as the "chasing of all Negroes from France by decree of Government."[24] In this poem Wordsworth describes "a fellow-Passenger who came / From Calais with us" (lines 1–2). The woman has been expelled from France, and though she is as "silent as a woman fearing blame," Wordsworth does learn the story of her exile: "She was a Negro Woman driv'n from France, / Rejected like all others of that race, / Not one of whom may now find footing there" (lines 10–12). Wordsworth's sonnet suggests that those of African descent who have been banished from France will find refuge in England, but we should note his decision to set the poem at the moment of transport: as the poem's original title indicates, what is most significant about the woman's condition is her loss of "footing," not the prospect of a new home. Banishment names her existential state.

This is the lesson that the Creature would teach Frankenstein, and because for the Creature exile has always been the unbearably painful condition of his own existence, this education is also the most brutal punishment of which he can conceive. Its completion not only entails drawing Frankenstein deeper and deeper into exile but also requires that Frankenstein read the language of his own exile. Thus we learn that the Creature guided Frankenstein through a series of inscriptions: "My reign is not yet over," and "Follow me; I seek the everlasting ices of the north, where you will feel the misery of cold and frost" (p. 168). Shelley does not have the Creature merely leave written messages, but specifies that he carves these inscriptions into nature: on the bark of trees, or "cut in stone" (p. 168). Cutting language into stone suggests a divinely sanctioned ordinance: through this gesture the Creature shows his mastery of a language that names Frankenstein's exile. From the Creature's early dreams of becoming the "Master of their language" in order to join the De Laceys' domestic circle, we have

23. Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race*, 49.

24. William Wordsworth, "September 1st, 1802." *Poems in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800–1807*, ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca, N.Y., 1983), 161–62.

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finally arrived at a profound reversal: the Creature inscribes as natural the decree of Frankenstein's exile.

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ABSTRACT

John Bugg studies the relationship between language, alterity, and empire in two of *Frankenstein*'s narratives of education: the education of the Creature, and the (other) education of Victor Frankenstein. That the Creature's realization of his alterity is consubstantial with his encounters with scenes of reading particularly evokes the "Trope of the Talking Book" passages of ex-slave writers James Gronniosaw and Olaudah Equiano. Shelley expands the Creature's education in his own alterity into a broader education in imperial history, so that the Creature begins to find community with the displaced victims of empire. It is this education in exile, Bugg argues, that also constitutes the Creature's revenge: he determines to have Frankenstein learn not only what it means to be "cut off from all the world," but also, like the Creature, to read the language that names his own exile.

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