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A Physiological Approach to *Frankenstein*: A Variation on the Gothic Sublime❖

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the way in which Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818) illuminates the physiological dimension of the sublime experience and its profound impact on the subject. *Frankenstein*'s creature presents provocative implications of how the unruly physiological functions of the body can defamiliarize the Enlightenment understanding of an ideal human being anchored in rationalism. My perspective adds to the aesthetics of the sublime, specifically the postmodern ideas of dissonance and immanence demonstrated by the creature's signs of bodily unruliness, from instincts of self-preservation to carnal desires, which cause the spiritual effects of shock and horror in the creator. I argue that not only does Shelley provide a lens through which to perceive the defamiliarized world where the modern subject consistently encounters the unknown other as represented by the creature, but she also kindles a new kind of sympathy that can be enacted through the compromise of the self and the other's disruptive physiological responses. In this respect, this paper employs the notion of the "physiological sublime" to explore Shelley's incorporation of the sublime into the physiological dimension of interpersonal relations, and on the manifestation of sympathy as arising from the subject's acknowledgment of their own physiological otherness as it develops through direct encounters with the other.

KEYWORDS: *Frankenstein*, the Gothic, physiology, the Sublime, dissonance, other

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I. Romanticism, the Gothic, and the Sublime

As a renowned proto-Gothic novel, *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* [1] has been frequently discussed within its historical and philosophical context, specifically regarding its relation to Romanticism and its representation of the sublime effect. In Romanticism, the purported ideal poetic self is not swept away by intense feelings of fear and anxiety, but, due to the primacy of one's higher faculty of reason, aspires to the heights of aesthetic-moral sensibility. In a similar vein, the Gothic, which became established as a genre in the late eighteenth century, is also invested in the Romantic vista of pristine nature as a reflection of the protagonist's moral sensibility in struggles with perilous social experiences. This resonates with the contemporary philosopher Immanuel Kant's discussion of aesthetics in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), which explains a subject's experience of the sublime as having an aspiration to reach beyond oneself in order to ultimately arrive at an ethical state. [2] Aligning with Enlightenment rhetoric, and incorporating eighteenth-century theories of the sublime, Gothic novelists romanticize their protagonists as being capable of retreating not only from the world outside but also from their corporeal conditions, which results in their gaining access to intellectual reasoning.[3]

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[1] Hereafter abbreviated as *Frankenstein*.

[2] Kant's theory of the sublime is a practical approach to his notion of the "categorical imperative" or "the fundamental principle of morality" that every rational agent must conform to (Johnson and Cureton). Here, I would like to project the possibility that the eighteenth-century sublime with its emphasis on the rational overcoming of fear could be conflated with "romantic" transcendence. To be sure, many critics stress that romantic transcendence is of a different nature than Kantian supersensibility. For example, Philip Shaw explains that "in what amounts to a completion of the Kantian schema, with its emphasis on the unknowable or hidden grounds of reason, Romantic poetry seeks to bring the supersensible back into the realm of sensuous representation" (92). However, I argue that Kant as he discusses the sublime in his third critique, begins to turn his attention to the subject's response to the experience that is not in accordance with the knowledge. To put it differently, although Kant's theory of the sublime seems to go beyond the physiological dimension by underlining reason's triumph over terror-like displeasure, it nevertheless appeals to human sensory perception, since feeling, like knowledge, is substantial to the subject when building one's understanding of the world.

[3] Consider, for example, Ann Radcliffe's heroine Ellena in *The Italian, or the Confessional of the Black Penitents* (1797), who is enraptured in her fantasy-like moments of self-reflection where "her spirits" separated from her body are "gradually revived and elevated by the grandeur of the images [of landscapes] around her" (61) to the extent that her view of her own "misery" in the social realm becomes dwarfish. On the other hand, Mary Shelley is skeptical about the success of these double alienations that are cherished in such novels loaded with moral lessons. In this paper, I argue that Shelley keenly observes the sites of human relationships in which subjects encounter someone other than themselves and express shock at the recognition that bodily urges and desires readily overthrow human reason.

Employing the conventions of the Gothic sublime, *Frankenstein*'s beginning portrays Victor Frankenstein as a self-exiled Romantic poet who intends to seek a haven in nature. Some criticism of the novel, accordingly, has revolved around its compliance with Romanticism which highlights the struggle of the self to transcend human finitude. For instance, Harold Bloom claims that Mary Shelley depicts the "Romantic mythology of the self" as the focal point of her novel (246). Mary Poovey also points out that, as a female author, Shelley is divorced from opportunities for "self-assertion" during her time, but indirectly moves forward through the portrayal of male characters who resemble Romantic poets (332-33). Such interpretations highlight the disembodiment of the protagonist's vision, which is withdrawn from the topsy-turvy world as an epistemological maneuver to suppress the psycho-physiological aspects of a human being in favor of the rationalist construction of selfhood developed by the Enlightenment project.

It would confuse us, then, that theorists of the eighteenth-century sublime, including Kant, as well as Edmund Burke in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), are on the one hand heightening people's interest in feelings by considering "terror" as "the technology of the sublime" (Mishra 30), while on the other hand endeavoring to suppress and control bodily feelings and emotional responses with the proper function of the mind. According to Burke, sudden encounters with disproportional, unharmonious, and ugly objects produce "an unnatural tension and certain violent emotions of the nerves" in the subject's body, to the extent that they paralyze the rational capacity of the subject and thereby are considered unpleasant experiences (107).[4] Here, it is crucial to note that Burke's theory of the sublime presupposes a rigid demarcation between the subject and the object, or the self and the other, and identifies the latter as the source of fear.

The point of departure of my analysis is that, although Gothic works by Shelley's contemporaries are "above all about the creation of fear" (Heiland 5), this negative feeling refers to the fear of the other and is in no way directed

[4] In his view, the sublime is "the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" since pain surpasses pleasure in its operation of the sensible body (Burke 34). Beginning from physiological principles that examine nerves as the "efficient cause" of feelings, Burke distinguishes the sublime from the beautiful in this way: whereas the beautiful is built on pleasure, the sublime is built on terror which produces "an unnatural tension and certain violent emotions of the nerves" (107).

towards the self, specifically the otherness within the self.[5] *Frankenstein* is a unique and historically valuable text because, rather than portraying the creature as a pure evil, Shelley draws our attention to the modern subject's constant encounters with the other as the exact moment when the subject disturbingly recognizes the dissonance inherent in oneself. Most notably, in order to keep intact the idealistic view of human nature as rational, Victor is shown to pursue scientific-mechanical reasoning which ignites his interest in exorcising all physical traits that do not comply with the ideal of physiological perfection. Yet, despite the creature's rosy prospects in helping Victor to achieve this goal, the signs of bodily unruliness, from instincts of self-preservation to carnal desires, cause the spiritual effects of shock and horror in Victor, the creator.

This paper's definition of the physiological sublime lays emphasis on the terror evoked by encounters with the other and its potential to alter the subject's outlook on bodily urges and desires even as the subject abhors any acceptance of them as inextricable parts of one's self. To some extent, as Vanessa L. Ryan has argued, "Burke's physiological version of the sublime involves a critique of reason" (266), thereby standing in opposition to Kant's assertion of the transcendentality of reason. Burke instead suggests experiencing "the subject's sense of limitation" and acknowledging "the ultimate value of that experience within social and ethical contexts" (266). Ryan concludes that, since Burke's physiological approach finds the sensible being's vulnerability upon affliction, the sublime can be renegotiated as "a benevolent impulse," a definite stimulus to feel "sympathy" for and help people in "misery" (277). On this account, however, the stage of shock and horror in the experience of the sublime is minimized.

While giving credit to Burke's interest in the operation of nerves as the basis of my notion of the physiological sublime, I place Burke's argument alongside Kant's because both are engrossed in romanticizing the effect of the sublime. Furthermore, I stress that their effort to suppress any irrational terror stemming from the subject's response to the experience is doomed to failure. This is because the subsequent change of emotions occurring within the subject

[5] As a corollary, the Gothic sublimity in *Frankenstein* has been incessantly remarked upon by numerous critics such as Peter Brooks, Barbara Freeman, and Vijay Mishra. For instance, Freeman claims that the birth of the creature is the eruption of "terror," "monstrosity," "passion," and "fanatism" (23). Likewise, when the prevailing critical works touch upon the appearance of the creature, they assess it only as a quality of a nonhuman being, a cause of fear of the other.

is essential in building one's understanding of a world that is oftentimes chaotic. Notwithstanding its volatility, Burke and Kant's ideas appeal to human sensory perception, and thereby cannot disregard the fact that feeling is integral to human subjectivity and a comprehension of society founded upon embodied interactions. In this sense, it would be remiss to fail to acknowledge that eighteenth-century aesthetics, despite their firm demarcation of the body and the mind, ultimately mark a pivotal turn towards the object of knowledge, which is shifted from the observed object to the physiological subject, the observer. Thus, in my view, it is important to note that the disinhibition of unsettling modes of feeling, such as fear and anxiety, results in various ramifications for different human subjects, as exemplified by the cases of Victor and Walton in this novel.

In proving that the advocation of transcendental effects that resort to reason is deeply problematic, I take note of how twentieth-century postmodern thinkers unearth physical senses that are belittled and somehow excluded from the Romantic sublime. Specifically, Gilles Deleuze asserts that the sublime effect is "an effect of sensation rather than of reason, and of immanence rather than of transcendence" (Shaw 188). Deleuze notes precisely how the chasm between the ideal and real is experienced through a bodily being's nerves, as in the arousal of strong emotions exemplified by fear and anxiety. In short, "[postmodernism] no longer seeks to temper this feeling [sublimity] through reference to a higher faculty" (Shaw 167). Rather, "it aims to maintain the shock of the sublime so as to prevent the ascendancy of the rational over the real" (Hamilton, qtd. in Shaw 168). Focusing on the physical senses immanent in human beings, postmodern philosophers are disillusioned by the classic sublime's emphasis on the transcendental realm, and instead accentuate the irreducible rift between the signifier (image) and the signified (experience), which bodily beings negotiate in everyday life.

Indeed, some critical analyses have underscored a close link between *Frankenstein*'s sublime and the postmodern skeptical turn toward representations of monolithic and universal truths. Vijay Mishra is in line with this argument since he brings to light how the sublime in Gothic works "questions the power of reason and destabilizes the centrality of the ego in Kant's formulation" (38). Specifically, the Gothic subject, such as *Frankenstein*'s creature, whose ego is not as "supremely confident, [or] overpowering" as the Romantic ego, is provided a field in which to speak out

against Victor's main narration, thereby problematizing the ideal of self-transcendence (38). However, in Mishra's attempt to connect the Gothic sublime and postmodern reflections on issues of representation, only narrative voices are considered as elements of interventions for dispelling myths of the enlightened rational self.

Developing such postmodern ideas of dissonance and immanence by further considering their inextricable link to the body, I would like to establish the notion of the physiological sublime as Shelley's tool for capturing and representing the multifaceted aspects of corporeality in *Frankenstein*. I aim to show how terror evoked by the other in this novel defies the Kantian impulse toward transcendence and functions as a means of furthering Burke's sublime as an embodied experience involving the subject's nervous system. The other's uncontrollable bodily expressions, almost too straightforward to endure, allude to the postmodern sublime, which "no longer seeks to temper this feeling [sublimity] through reference to a higher faculty" (Shaw 167). It is in this sense that the human experience must be reconciled with physicality.

The point that requires particular attention is how the physically induced sublime is brought to bear on the sociality of human relations, which are fraught with tensions and conflicts. By sociality, I am referring to the world of day-to-day experiences, wherein the unruly bodily needs and desires of Shelley's characters are unreservedly exposed. Such a setting is certainly different from what has been championed by classical theories of the sublime, which ideally postulate that the subject "must lead away from the realm of the social" to recognize the power of reason, which is separated from the body (Shaw 140). In this way, Shelley keenly captures the "physiological operations in our day-to-day actions, motivations and emotions" as crucial aspects of "embodied experience" (Hillman and Maude 7). Viewed in this context, Shelley's depiction of the physiological sublime cannot be subsumed under the eighteenth-century notion of the romantic sublime, which maintains that human corporeality serves only to underscore the transcendental effect.

Therefore, I propose to analyze *Frankenstein*'s creature as an archetype that evokes the defamiliarization of the body and, ultimately, bespeaks the other who poses a substantial threat to the formation of the subject's identity. Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy offers a conceptual backdrop to viewing the other as an embodied being, since he notes that "the Other's body" is "the reef of solipsism" (247). The other (the creature) appearing in front of the

subject (Victor and Walton) breaks down the solipsistic world in which the self and its consciousness exist alone and arouses the most intense physiological response, namely fear, in the subject. As I will further elaborate on in the pages to follow, my reading of the creature as an embodied other helps us turn our attention to the social realm in this novel and benefits our understanding of the interwoven relation between the subject and the other. I will first examine the dramatic moment when Victor detects the voluntary movement of his creation, which overrides his mechanical understanding of the body, as the utmost experience of the physiological sublime. Next, I will claim that Shelley's elucidation of the realm of human relationships as a space where subjects engage with unknown others is evinced by a striking parallel drawn between the creature and the mob at Justine's trial. Finally, by paying attention to two contrasting encounters, specifically Walton's encounter with Victor at the beginning and with the creature at the end of the novel, I will highlight the subversive effect of the physiological sublime, wherein the body emerges as a means by which the subject builds a more flexible relationship with the other. It is in this context that I attempt to show how the sublime in *Frankenstein* is incorporated into the physiological dimension of interpersonal relations. Tracing this variation on the Gothic sublime, with which Shelley plays, we may conclude that *Frankenstein* intriguingly anticipates postmodern discussions of the sublime in the late twentieth century, whereby its effect shifts from the disembodied, metaphysical realm to the corporeal, empirical world.

II. The Unbridgeable Rift between the Ideal and the Real

(I). The Rise of Physiology in the Nineteenth Century and the Discovery of Unruly Human Bodies

In the preface to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, Shelley delineates the unsettling genesis of her novel, which blurs the boundary between dreams and reality:

> I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion. Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavor to

> mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handy-work, horror-stricken. He would hope that, left to itself, the slight spark of life which he had communicated would fade; that this thing, which had received such imperfect animation, would subside into dead matter . . . . (196)

Though the artist has achieved the "success" that he longed for, what follows is a scathing assessment of it as an "imperfect animation," which induces a sense of bewilderment in him. Upon realizing that "the hideous phantasm of a man" does not operate mechanically but disquietingly manifests "signs of life" that go beyond his control, the artist, struck with horror, desperately hopes his creation will "subside into dead matter."

Whereas proportional, harmonious, and beautiful objects evoke pleasure, the crude viscerality exposed by the "hideous phantasm" in Shelley's dream arouses fear, to the extent that it overwhelms the beholder. Such a sudden eruptive moment of fear stems from the incongruity between expectation and reality, which captures the peculiar dimension of perceptual or epistemological crisis in the Gothic that is often considered sublime. What is unique is how this sense of crisis in *Frankenstein* unearths the human body as the site of sublime terror, which moves beyond the limits of knowledge.

Moreover, the scenes in which Victor, horror-stricken by his encounters with the creature, plunges into a state of shock take precedence over the portrayals of how he takes delight in the ennobling lift of nature. If Cartesian epistemology's attempts to sever reason from the human body serve to envision ideal scenarios of human experiences, Shelley decisively and dramatically depicts their exact reversal through the disclosure of uncontrollable bodily reactions when Victor confronts the unexpected result of his experiment, that is, the creature. This lends support to the view that, through *Frankenstein*, Shelley "self-reflexively interrogates the so-called romantic ideology" (Hansen 578). The purportedly integrated self's appreciation of the grandeur of nature collapses, since Victor's first encounter with the living creature reveals a markedly different phase of the sublime experience, one which is fraught with danger:

> I perceived, as the shape came nearer, (sight tremendous and abhorred!) that it was the wretch whom I had created. I trembled with rage and horror, resolving to wait his approach, and then close with him in mortal combat. He approached; his countenance bespoke bitter anguish, combined with disdain and malignity, while its unearthly ugliness rendered it almost too horrible for human eyes. (Shelley 76)

In a testament to "the return of the botched social world that philosophical idealism would seek to negate" (Shaw 140), "the wretch whom [he] had created" hinders Victor's self-absorption. The abrupt shock of coming across physiological otherness as embodied through the creature's physicality suggests a discomfiting plunge into the depths of a selfhood that is full of doubts and insecurities. In stark contrast to his Romantic aspirations, the recurrent appearance of the other interminably reminds Victor of the unknowable dimensions of physicality and thereby halts his spiritual uplift.

The sublime effect of physiological shock and horror in *Frankenstein* is a meaningful departure from the Romantic legacy of Gothic fiction which invokes the transcendental heights of sublime emotions. In calling attention to the volatile and contingent bodily reactions between the subject and the other, Shelley's methods of addressing the sublime give prominence to the nerves that respond to external stimuli rather than the so-called rational mind. In other words, Shelley notes the way in which physiological responses tend to transgress the norms of human reason as defined by the Enlightenment tradition, since the transcendental aspirations of the Romantic self are undercut by instincts and urges irreducible at the physiological level.

It is in this context that I suggest the development of physiology as a field of study in the early nineteenth century as an instrumental backdrop to Shelley's designation of the physical senses as the *sine qua non* in such dramatic experiences as the sublime. The scientific turn in the rediscovery of the human body is that "our physiological apparatus is again and again shown to be defective, inconsistent, prey to illusion, and, in a crucial manner, susceptible to external procedures of manipulation and stimulation that have the essential capacity to produce *experience for the subject*" (Crary 82). Scholars such as Alan Richardson observe nineteenth-century neuroscience and physiology as stirring scientific fields, which help to rediscover the body as more than just the

seat of consciousness. Similarly, Shelley Trower argues that the "romantic mind" has been largely interpreted as a pursuit of "transcend[ing] the material body and mind, [and reaching] an ideal or spiritual realm," but from the angle of physiology, it is more or less an "embodied" human property (14). In a nutshell, physiology plays a central role in establishing that nerves are involved in both thinking and feeling, which were regarded as functions of the mind and the body, respectively, under Cartesian dualism.

It is therefore important that Shelley manages to instill a sense of reality in Victor's sudden repulsion from his creation, a drastic emotional stage that deserves critical attention. In interpreting Victor's altered attitude towards his creation, a number of scholars make arguments that resort to accusing Victor of irrationality and immorality, but they have not paid enough attention to the sense of reality that the shifts in his emotions harbor. Though Ellen Moers draws an interesting parallel between Victor's changed attitude towards the creature soon after its animation and post-partum depression by noting that Victor "defies mortality not by living forever, but by giving birth" (322), her argument culminates in blaming Victor for his lack of moral responsibility. Yet, she proposes an interesting point of reference by which we may recognize Victor's task as an "artificial creation": "the motif of revulsion against newborn life, and the drama of guilt, dread, and flight surrounding birth and its consequences," that is "the trauma of the afterbirth" (320-21). Sharply contrasted against birth through a maternal body that is mutable and volatile, Victor's "artificial creation" aims at realizing "a utopian world in which matter has been totally conquered by mind" (Kilgour 194). Here, what is noteworthy is that the mechanics of his creation are based on a mechanical understanding of the body. Victor adamantly believes that if he connects muscle to muscle, vessel to vessel, and nerve to nerve in careful accordance with the "branches of natural philosophy which relate to physiology" (Shelley 33), all the different parts will coalesce together, ultimately forming a whole being that is undistracted by external stimuli.

On the other hand, the explicit indication of Victor's psycho-physiological state reveals that his own identity is caught in a double-bind. This pinpoints the irony behind his contempt for the bodily unruliness of the creature. In portraying Victor as consumed by his work of "animat[ing] the lifeless clay," Shelley discloses his inability to control "a resistless, and almost frantic impulse" (36). Underlying Victor's unconscious is a "drive" pushing morals

aside and defying "the Other," which in this case refers to social law and order.[6] As his passions overmaster him, Victor becomes a slave of his own work and betrays his long-held ideal that "[one] in perfection ought always to preserve a calm and peaceful mind, and never to allow *passion* or a transitory *desire* to disturb his tranquility" (37; emphasis added). In this respect, Victor's transcendental aspiration cannot be subsumed under the category of the so-called "Romantic mind," which is in touch with venturing beyond the external world. It traumatically announces the shift from a disembodied mind to embodied urges in the confrontation of human finitude, which unexpectedly sheds a light on "the impossibility of transcendence" and "the irreducibility of material difference" (Shaw 8). Upon realizing that the physiological complexity of "a fragmented body composed of separate organic systems, subject to the opacity of the sensory organs and dominated by involuntary reflex activity" (Crary 76) cannot be reduced according to his demands, Victor feels completely distant from his once beloved creation and shrieks with utter terror:

> How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips. (Shelley 34)

Here, we see a glaring contradiction where Shelley is asking for the reader's participation. To be sure, Victor had been thinking that his inanimate creature looked fine, as "[h]is limbs were in proportion" and all the selected "features" were "beautiful." It would be far-fetched, then, to point out the ugliness of the creature as the sole reason for Victor's shift in attitude—from delight to horror—towards his creation. The emphasis on Victor's effort to select good

[6] Here, I am mentioning the jouissance of the (capitalized) Other discussed by Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek. In their discussion, the Other refers to the symbolic order as well as social laws and systems of order. Previously, I have used Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of the Other so as to read the creature as an embodied being interrupting solipsism.

body parts and put them together provides us with resources for raising several questions: If the creature looked beautiful, then how can it be so repulsive all of a sudden? Do the details amount to an image of a monstrous creature?

What is at stake in this scene is the abrupt realization of the creature as an entity fraught with a "perverse and unresolved confusion of antitheses" (Kilgour 198), which ultimately arouses fear in Victor, whose expectation of the creation is deeply embedded in idealism. By "antitheses," I mean the gap between form and content, designed principle and reality, which leads us to face the reality of physical creation that is utterly disastrous to humans. In other words, it is not the creature's sheer ugliness that causes repulsion in Victor, but the disturbing revelation of the close-knit relations between the antitheses of the mind and the body that the creature manifests. It suspends the sense of coherence, uniformity, and harmony which entertained Victor during the process of creation. Though he endeavored to remove himself from the subjective nature of the body as conditioned by physiology, the resulting creation strips Victor of any hope of creating an aesthetic being that is not mired in autonomy or unruliness of physicality.

Moreover, among all the disturbing and chaotic physical attributes marked out by the creature, his carnal desire is the very last thing that Victor expected. As Judith Halberstam claims, nineteenth-century literature, in its formulation of negative allegory, otherizes female sexuality as one of the most representative aspects of monstrosity and consistently sidelines women from fulfilling their carnal desires: "The female monster represents, in a way, the symbolic and generative power of monstrosity itself, and particularly of a monstrosity linked to femininity, female sexuality, and female powers of reproduction" (50). In *Frankenstein*, the creature's craving for companionship, accompanied by the excruciating experience of being cast out from the human village, is the decisive momentum for the construction of the female creature as well as an allusion to sexuality. Coming to the full realization that he will always be considered a menacing other to all human beings, the creature makes a request to his creator, Victor, for a companion, who "must be of the same species, and have the same defects" as himself (Shelley 118).

Unexpectedly, this sincere request from the creature spells out the issue of deviant sexuality, because in Victor's point of view, the creature's animalistic instinct to reproduce invokes a direct threat to the survival of mankind. Though Victor promises to create a female creature, by the last minutes of the creation

process his tingle of apprehension about the capacity for reproduction the pair of creatures would have devolves to a state in which "all compassion has been transformed into mistrustful fear" (Halberstam 45). To justify his fear, Victor comes up with a strategic maneuver, that is, the otherization of the creature as belonging to a "race of devils" endangering "the very existence of the species of man" (Shelley 138):

> [Y]et one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror. Had I a right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations? (138)

Slandering the sexuality of the creature as a sort of malignant virus to be eradicated from the earth, Victor asserts his control over the female creature's body through the exercise of an unrestrained violence: "I thought with a sensation of madness on my promise of creating another like to him, and, trembling with passion, tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged" (139). At this moment, the female creature is degraded into a mere lifeless "thing" and brutally "tor[n] to pieces" by Victor, who is now almost indistinguishable from the monster to whom he refers (139). Only after the nightmarish climax of his madness has passed does Victor realize the grotesqueness of his behavior as he perceives "[t]he remains of the half-finished creature" as "the living flesh of a human being" (142). In hindsight, it becomes evident that what unnerves Victor is the uncontrollability of his own rage, which prompts him to destroy the human-like creature.

The destruction of the female creature culminates in not only shifting our perception of the female protagonist, Elizabeth, from a moral allegory to a sexual being, but also obstructing the possibility of representing her sexuality throughout the novel. At this point, Shelley strikingly presents how unsatisfied carnal desire drives the creature to intimidate Victor by saying, "I shall be with you on your wedding night" (140), which clearly presages sexual threats to Elizabeth:

> Shall each man . . . find a wife for his bosom, and each beast have his mate, and I be alone? I had feelings of affection, and they were requited by detestation and scorn. Man, you may hate; but beware! Your hours will pass in dread and misery, and soon the bolt will fall which must ravish from you your happiness for ever. Are you to be happy, while I grovel in the intensity of my wretchedness? You can blast my other passions; but revenge remains—revenge, henceforth dearer than light or food! (140)

Prevented from satisfying his carnal desires as well as from having his own companion, the creature's envy of Victor's exclusive happiness instigates his revenge. Such destructive feelings of jealousy incite the creature to commit serial killing and even more horrendously, feel extremely joyful in the midst of these heinous crimes. This dovetails with Slavoj Žižek's discussion of the jouissance of the Other. Succinctly put, Jacques Lacan "deconstruct[s] the arrogant subject of Enlightenment rationalism" by "pursuing the truth of desire even when this means violating sociocultural norms of proper behavior" (Ruti 123). Drawing on Lacan's argument, Žižek moves onto highlighting "the desire of the Other beyond fantasy" that the subject yearns for (132). The creature's "envy" and "bitter indignation" towards Victor's—the Other's—exclusive "enjoyment in feelings and passion" provokes a "thirst for vengeance" in the creature and instigates his transgression of moral disciplines and social laws (Shelley 188). The "paradoxical, deviant, erratic, eccentric, even scandalous character of desire" (Lacan 286), namely, jouissance, is manifested to an extreme level through the cruel ravaging of Elizabeth in the battle between the creator and the creature, as seen through the eyes of Victor:

> [S]uddenly I heard a shrill and dreadful scream. It came from the room into which Elizabeth had retired. As I heard it, the whole truth rushed into my mind, my arms dropped, the motion of every muscle and fiber was suspended; I could feel the blood trickling in my veins, and tingling in the extremities of my limbs. . . . Why am I here to relate the destruction of the best hope, and the purest creature of earth. She was there, lifeless and inanimate, thrown across the bed, her head hanging down, and her pale and distorted features half covered by her hair. Every where I turn I see the same

> figure—her bloodless arms and relaxed form flung by the murderer on its bridal bier. (Shelley 165)

The explicit description of Elizabeth's dead body, which resembles a typical description of a violated woman, suggests that, in a deviation from his other victims, she may have been sexually assaulted by the creature. "The figure of a woman lying on her back, her head thrown back, her arms flung loosely toward the floor" is certainly evocative of the aftermath of this kind of attack (Mishra 222). Through the gory, graphic, shudder-inducing description of Elizabeth's dead body, Shelley scathingly reprimands any attempts to exterminate sexuality, as well as other repressed instincts and desires, from the list of qualities belonging to the human subject.

Likewise, Shelley shrewdly sees through the disturbance inside of a human being that cannot be suppressed by reason. In artificially creating the creature, and later, in destroying the half-finished female creature, the narrative indicates the disruptive fissures immanent in human individuals through Victor's unstable and volatile psyche. The dissonance is, of course, unfamiliar even to Victor himself, yet implies the subversion of idealism as explicitly demonstrated by means of the creature's body, which is fraught with discord. Though his act of creation was concocted as a transcendental aspiration, it is important to grasp the visceral energy in Victor's audacity which ironically signals "the impossibility of transcendence" and "the irreducibility of material difference" (Shaw 8). In this way, Victor's enormous effort to exorcise bodily unruliness from an exemplary human being largely fails due to the impossibility of severing the mind from the body. Yet, despite the unbridgeable rift between the ideal and the real which offers such shocking experiences of the sublime to him, Victor persists in distancing bodily disjunctions from humanity, specifically through the destruction of his monstrous pair of creations.

(II). The Metonymic Association between the Mob and Volatile Modern Society

In drawing a striking parallel between the mob and the creature, Shelley discloses the physiological aspects of the body which infringe upon the coherence and cohesion that characterize the disembodied human subject. The descriptions of disruptive bodily reactions within Victor recounted above and

the social collective correspond to a specific scientific discovery of the nineteenth century: that "[t]he nerves were . . . revealed to have an organic intentionality" in sustaining one's life "which was in many cases primary and more crucial to the subject's functioning than mental consciousness" (Hillman and Maude 199). It is important to note that Shelley's rupture with the eighteenth-century sublime's idealization of the human consciousness originates from the uninhibited terror that produces "an unnatural tension and certain violent emotions of the nerves" (Burke 107). By hinting at physiological conditions of the human body, Shelley renounces the transcendental and even heroic gestures towards the supersensual realm and brings the tension-ridden realm of human relations to the surface, thereby locating her characters as well as her readers in a tumultuous modern society.

Shelley builds up a picture of a quarrelsome society in her novel, most notably through the provocative scenes in which a mob, devoured by fear, readily executes the innocent Justine during her trial. The bodily unruliness of the creature recounted earlier crosses over into the social realm and is sampled from the anxiety-ridden reactions of the crowd who are swayed with the primal instinct for self-preservation. Here, I specifically use the term "metonymy" which "talk[s] about some part of an object as if it represents the whole thing" (Roberts 138), since the crowd consists of impulsive individuals and clearly represents a chaotic and capricious society. Nowhere is the ideal image of the human, firmly anchored in rationalism, more strikingly disillusioned than the moment when thousands of people, shuddering at the thought of being the next victim of a heinous crime, join in the denunciation of Justine:

> [Justine was] far more dreadfully murdered, with every aggravation of infamy that could make the murder memorable in horror. . . . [She was] gazed on and execrated by thousands; for all the kindness . . . was obliterated in the minds of the spectators by the imagination of the enormity she was supposed to have committed. (Shelley 61)

Despite the apparent possibility of her innocence, people treat Justine no differently than a threatening other based on ill-conceived logic: though one might be innocent, one is compelled to plead guilty to the alleged crime unless decisive evidence is procured to prove one's innocence. Fully believing that

whoever jeopardizes their supposedly harmonious society must be eliminated, the mob readily accuses and executes Justine in order to soothe the sudden apprehensions of crime looming over their society instead of pursuing justice. It is no coincidence that the confessor, on behalf of the members of society, coerces Justine into making a false confession, having "threatened and menaced, until [she] almost began to think that [she] was the monster that he said [she] was" (66). Elizabeth's remark about the crowd is an accurate diagnosis of an almost instinctive urge that does not fit into the ideal image of selfhood:

> On the miserable death of Justine Moritz, I no longer see the world and its works as they before appeared to me. Before, I looked upon the accounts of vice and injustice, that I read in books or heard from others, as tales of ancient days, or imaginary evils; at least they were remote, and more familiar to reason than to the imagination; but now misery has come home, and men appear to me as monsters thirsting for each other's blood. (71)

The metaphoric analogy that this massive group of people is made up of "monsters thirsting for each other's blood" blatantly testifies against the elimination of bodily urges from the list of essential qualities of a human being. The shocking psychological impact of the confrontation with the mob, whose sense of security is maintained at the expense of innocent lives, is amplified because it is none other than Elizabeth, a symbol of amicable family and community, who displays this "antisentimental view of human nature" (Halberstam 37). Through the defamiliarization of human beings as monsters, *Frankenstein* "renounces the ethics of sensibility," which is expected to be enacted by a sensible human being, but is here "no longer the spring of action and the benchmark of worth" (Bour 821, 824).

At the same time, Elizabeth's keen insight into "men" expands to "the world" through the mob, which functions as a metonymic reference to a modern society that is as sensitive as a sensory apparatus. A crowd is, in a nutshell, the naked reality of humanity that not only perceives evil in the world but admits to the potential evil within itself. The vexatious facets of the crowd, or, more precisely, their human sensory apparatuses displace the chaotic social realm that is a far cry from the congenial and harmonious community Elizabeth once

envisaged. The disclosure of a fragmented body, wherein each part plays apart, is metonymically associated with a baffling yet realistic picture of society, imbued with tension and anxiety toward the other, who both physically and mentally intrudes upon the subject. This metonymic association between the mob and disorderly modern society usurps the authority of the intellect championed by ideal subjects in civil society.

III. The Realization of Physiological Otherness as Dissonance within Ourselves

While Walton feels a strong hostility towards the creature as described in Victor's narrative, it is surprising to note that he, as a new listener of the creature's own story, ceases to be reliant on Victor's perspective. Functioning as the novel's focal point, Walton's encounter with the other—the creature—at the end stands in contrast to his peculiar attachment to his mirror image—Victor—at the beginning.[7] Contrary to the menacing creature, Victor, who Walton thinks "must have been a noble creature," seems to be serene and charming enough to arouse "sympathy and compassion" in him (Shelley 15). However, as Jeffrey Berman argues, it is no exaggeration to say that Victor is a "Modern Narcissus," full of "self-love," and that "*Frankenstein* warns . . . of the dangers of surface perception and solipsism" (58-59). This reading, with which I concur, positions Walton as a subject of debate. The fact that Walton is blindly enthralled by Victor, even to the extent that he unquestioningly believes Victor's narrative, testifies to Shelley's critical view of Walton.

Attention should be given to the outstanding fact that Walton becomes aware of otherness as shared by both his selfhood and the other through his direct encounter with the creature, whereas he only sees his solipsistic image in Victor. If Victor, until his last moment, stigmatizes the creature as an enemy, a demon, or a monstrous other, a new realization and understanding of the creature hinges on Walton's physiological approach towards the other. In other words, only by confronting the other can Walton gain an opportunity to

[7] Many critics have taken notice of the similarity between Victor and Walton. Walton, as Victor's "double," seems to share his solipsistic ideas. For George Levine, Walton can be assessed as an "incipient Frankenstein" in that he is also "isolated from the rest of mankind by his ambition" (312). Andrew Smith also finds that Walton, like Victor, is an "idealist" who perceives the North Pole as a "paradise" as it is far from the social realm (79). In short, Walton's encounter with Victor evinces that "it is only in the strange world that the familiar can be recovered in the form of a mirror image of the self" (Kilgour 197).

acknowledge the physiological otherness that is within himself. Through the replacement of the creature's manifestation of his dissonance with the narrative of the once "supremely confident, overpowering" Victor's, Shelley "questions the power of reason and destabilizes the centrality of the ego in Kant's formulation" and highlights the body as a site upon which the subject builds a more flexible relationship with the other (Mishra 38).

Undoubtedly, what comes into Walton's sight at first is the creature's face, characterized by "such loathsome, yet appalling hideousness" (Shelley 187). However, what is more shocking than the creature's appearance is his blunt confession that he felt "exultation" and "hellish triumph" after he murdered William,[8] and that he "was not miserable" when he killed Elizabeth,[9] which suggests that the subject is already "split," thereby dismantling any idealistic ideas of human nature (Shelley 117, 188; Bennett and Royle 181). The creature's indulgence in his "thirst for vengeance" (Shelley 188) leads him to transgress moral disciplines and experience extreme joy in the midst of serial killings, which marks the climax of the physiological sublime:

> [W]hen I discovered that he, the author at once of my existence and of its unspeakable torments, dared to hope for happiness; that while he accumulated wretchedness and despair upon me he sought his own enjoyment in feelings and passions from the indulgence of which I was for ever barred, then impotent envy and bitter indignation filled me with an insatiable thirst for vengeance, I recollected my threat, and resolved that it should be accomplished. I knew that I was preparing for myself a deadly torture; but I was the slave, not the master of an impulse, which I detested, yet could not disobey. (188)

The creature is prevented from satisfying his carnal desires as well as from having his own companion, as recalled in the scene of Elizabeth's murder that marks the creature's "envy" and "bitter indignation" towards Victor's exclusive "enjoyment in feelings and passion." In sum, the jouissance of the Other—the name-of-the-father—represented by Victor fittingly discloses the "paradoxical,

[8] "I gazed on my victim, and my heart swelled with exultation and hellish triumph: clapping my hands, I exclaimed, 'I, too, can create desolation; my enemy is not impregnable; this death will carry despair to him, and a thousand other miseries shall torment and destroy him'" (Shelley 117).
[9] "Yet when she died!—nay, then I was not miserable" (Shelley 188).

deviant, erratic, eccentric, even scandalous character of desire" (Lacan 286) through the creature's envy towards his creator.

Although we may not absolve the creature of his heinous crimes, I intend to focus on the enormity of jouissance as a tool employed by Shelley in order to underscore the dissonance immanent in the human body. The creature has always been deprived of the opportunity to control his impulses and feelings through contact with others. Prohibited from all the relationships he desired, the creature, left alone, cannot control his deep sense of wrath and despair.[10] The discord in the creature is subtly evinced by these remarks, which are imbued with this unresolved tension:

> Was there no injustice in this? Am I to be thought the only criminal, when all human kind sinned against me? Why do you not hate Felix, who drove his friend from his door with contumely? Why do you not execrate the rustic who sought to destroy the savior of his child? Nay, these are virtuous and immaculate beings! I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on. Even now my blood boils at the recollection of this injustice. (Shelley 189-90)

Even Felix, arguably the most amiable person the creature observes, is instinctively wary of the other approaching his family. As also seen in the previous example of Justine's trial, the creature's narrative provides a realistic yet disturbing picture of modern society, consonant with a sensitive sensory apparatus that is scattered and even depraved. This creates a distinct resonance with Shelley's perspective towards moral sensibility that much discussion about the ending of *Frankenstein* has dismissed.[11] As Maggie Kilgour notes, "[w]riting the conclusion of her own text, Shelley does not give us a big bang that would close the text neatly with a morally and aesthetically satisfying

[10] "But now vice has degraded me beneath the meanest animal. . . . When I call over the frightful catalogue of my deeds, I cannot believe that I am he whose thoughts were once filled with sublime and transcendent visions of the beauty and the majesty of goodness. But it is even so; the fallen angel becomes a malignant devil. Yet even that enemy of God and man had friends and associates in his desolation; I am quite alone" (Shelley 189).

[11] Approaching sympathy psychologically, Adam Smith argues that people are capable of understanding others' pleasure and pain through imagination (qtd. in Ellis 12). Because of sympathy, people help those in pain and bring pleasure to them. Recent critics like Jeanne M. Britton, Criscillia Benford, and James C. Hatch have examined *Frankenstein* as a novel highlighting the role of sensibility with moral and political implications.

struggle between deadly antagonists" (212). Shelley rather broaches the topic of the creature's impulses and feelings through his own expressions, which are almost too straightforward to endure, to the point that they allude to the postmodern ideas of dissonance and immanence that encapsulate the multifaceted aspects of corporeality.

Therefore, though their encounters with the other—the creature—frustrate both Walton and Victor with the explicitness of the human physiological body, this frustration leads each man to markedly different results: Victor otherizes the creature so as to consolidate his sense of self, whereas Walton embraces the otherness by realizing that it is embodied in both the creature and himself. This very moment of encountering the creature, according to Walton, can be summed up as a "wonderful catastrophe" (Shelley 186), an expression tinged with ambivalence. It is indeed a "catastrophe" since he must concede that all nonideal physical attributes cannot be otherized. And yet, it is also "wonderful" because Walton can affirm himself as he is in the sensuous realm through becoming open to the other's physiological attributes. Considering that a vicious cycle of vengeance is cut off by Walton, we may conclude that before everything else, such as thoughts and values measured through reference to reason, becoming attuned to each other's physical senses is of the utmost importance.

IV. Conclusion

I suggest that *Frankenstein* employs physiology as a significant underpinning to the trajectory of the seemingly mutually exclusive theories of the sublime, from the eighteenth-century classic sublime to the late twentieth-century postmodern sublime, at the intersections of science and aesthetics that emerge in Shelley's era. In this framework of the physiological sublime, I explored the way in which Shelley realistically depicts a volatile modern society wherein sympathy arises not from abstract human reason but from the subject's acknowledgment of their own physiological otherness as obtained through direct encounters with the other. Through the disinhibition of unsettling modes of feelings such as fear and anxiety, as well as the revelation of its various ramifications for different human subjects, Shelley's variation on the Gothic sublime ultimately foregrounds the sensuous characteristics of individuals and their society, insuppressible even under Cartesian

epistemology. In hopes of kindling a new kind of sympathy, which can be enacted through the compromise of the self and the other's disruptive physiological responses, Shelley provides a lens through which to perceive the de-familiarized world where the modern subject consistently encounters the unknown other. In conclusion, I appraise Shelley's methods of addressing the physiological sublime, not only as distinctively singular for a writer of her time, but also for their potential to alter the subject's outlook on bodily urges and desires even as the subject abhors any acceptance of them as inextricable parts of one's own self.

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