

Monstrosity in the Enlightenment's Utopian Projects of Frankenstein and the French Revolution*

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1. Introduction

This essay seeks to juxtapose close readings of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* (1818) and Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) with a distant reading of the cultural formation of the Enlightenment. *Frankenstein* is “the foundational text of the science fiction genre” (Page 71) or “the origin of species” of science fiction, to use Brian Aldiss's term. Burke's political pamphlet epitomizes the anti-French conservative reaction to the French Revolution. It seems improbable that the two texts would be comparable;

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but they both attack the abuse and misuse of human reason. To be precise, central to both is a critique of scientific and political experiments with the aim of producing a better kind of creature and society, respectively. In *Frankenstein*, the Republic of Geneva serves to connect Shelley's novel to Burke's pamphlet, serving as the fictional realization of a political entity that is not a monarchy. Republicanism is one of the ideas of social reform behind the French Revolution; it also undoubtedly connects to Victor Frankenstein's place of birth, Geneva. Both Shelley and Burke aim to understand the French Revolution and republican government in terms of monstrosity. For Burke, the French Revolution was a political attempt to transform a monarchical government into a republic while regressing to another *ancien régime*. Victor Frankenstein conducts a scientific experiment to reform society by inventing a new species, which turns out to be a monster. Victor's creation of the monster is equivalent to experimentation with evolution theory on an individual level, while the French Revolution is its political counterpart on a collective level.

Despite benevolent intentions to bring bliss to humankind, both of these utopian projects have monstrous results on the individual and collective levels. For this reason, Shelley and Burke equally critique the precarious performance of human reason that made possible these scientific and political experiments. Both writers expose skepticism about the Enlightenment belief, grounded in evolution and revolution, in the progress of individual and society. This skepticism is predicated on the monstrosity that constitutes the execution of a scientific hypothesis and political principles. The failed scientific experiment and political movement entail monstrosity which both Burke's and Shelley's texts criticize as a fundamental violation of nature. Yet their rhetoric of monstrosity differs: the former emphasizes the violence of collective power in initiating liberty on a national scale and subverting monarchical sovereignty; the latter

foregrounds the hideous appearance of a creature manufactured by an individual scientist. However, apart from this shared allegation of monstrosity, Burke and Shelley diverge: the former mercilessly attacks the monstrosity of the French pursuit of liberty, whereas the latter is compassionate toward the monster while criticizing as monstrous the brutal circumstances that cause the creature to be neglected and driven to violence. In other words, Shelley presents a paradoxical perspective of the monster: she describes it in a sympathetic tone, while its defining trait remains its unbearable ugliness to the eye of the beholder, regardless of the good intentions that initially prompted this scientific experiment. Burke, on the other hand, appropriates the word “monster” in his effort to underscore the moral flaws of the French Revolution and its infringement on nature, by upsetting the existing monarchy and implementing a republic.

We will first account for the concepts of the Enlightenment, evolution, and revolution in conjunction with the contemporary culture. Then we will examine Burke’s analysis of the French Revolution in terms of the idea that monstrosity is inherent in republicanism. Finally, we will explore the way in which Shelley appropriates evolutionary theory in representing the Enlightenment ideal of progress, focusing mainly on the individual scientist’s invention of a new species superior to the human race. This comparative investigation of both Shelley’s and Burke’s works will suggest that the temporal disparity between 1790 and 1818, the years in which *Reflections* and *Frankenstein* were respectively published, testifies to the persistence of a critical mind wary of any attempt at radical reform, individual and social alike.

2. The Enlightenment, Evolution, and Revolution

The Enlightenment is generally understood as the idea of man's liberation from his subservient state and the achievement of social change and improvement through reason. In his 1784 article, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" Immanuel Kant defines Enlightenment as "man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another" (54). Responding to the emergence of barbarism in the Holocaust in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno explicitly articulate their disenchantment with the understanding of the Enlightenment as "the advance of thought" "aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters" (1), which in fact causes a relapse into "the oblivious instrumentalization of science" (xv) entrenched in the development of modern society. Howard Williams maintains that Horkheimer and Adorno "misrepresent the historical Enlightenment" and reduce it to "a unified movement that had one central theme," or "one monopolistic reason," disregarding the uncertainty and incompleteness that characterized it (641-42). However, for Kant, human reason does not remain absolutely authoritative in theoretical terms but "only in the context of practical or moral philosophy" (Williams 643). Williams states this point succinctly: "Reason's total authority is sanctioned within the limits posed by the categorical imperative" in Kant's critical philosophy (643). While Horkheimer and Adorno attribute "an overwhelming logical force that removed everything from its path" to the Enlightenment (Williams 644), Kant compellingly states that enlightenment begins with an individual's courage to use his or her own reason without external influences ("Answer" 54). Moreover, unlike Horkheimer and Adorno, who argue that the process of enlightenment victimizes individuals, Kant "emphasizes most

strongly the individual's own culpability for his or her lack of enlightenment" (Williams 645). Kant is well aware that "it is difficult for each separate individual to work his way out of the immaturity which has become almost second nature to him" ("Answer" 54). This immaturity would be an impediment to enlightenment without an individual's determination to overcome his own intellectual laziness. As Williams points out, Kant's notion of enlightenment helps critique Horkheimer and Adorno's dialectical understanding of the Enlightenment; it pursues the possibility of criticizing enlightenment itself inclusively, as opposed to the latter's conclusive dialectic. Kant's critical philosophy presupposes the very limitations of reason, even when it fulfills its most positive task, that is, that of redeeming reason from becoming its own enemy when it is abused as an instrument to oppress the other, human and inhuman alike. Therefore, the monstrous aspects of human reason result from the lack of reason's self-criticism. Nonetheless, Kant remains positive about the possibility of enlightenment, which is achieved slowly but surely only through the combined effort of individuals.

At the heart of the Enlightenment and its vicissitudes is knowledge as an epitome of human rationality. From the above discussion of the implications of enlightenment, Burke's and Shelley's works can be linked to Horkheimer and Adorno's explanation of enlightenment as human mastery over nature and other human beings, which "turns against the thinking subject itself" (Adorno 20). For Burke, the French Revolution, as the embodiment of rationality, betrays hubris, which hinges on Victor's self-confidence in discovering "the cause of generation and life" (Shelley 30). Victor's ambition implicates the achievement of modern natural philosophers, who "have indeed performed miracles" and "acquired new and almost unlimited powers" according to Professor Waldman (28). In this regard, Adorno and Horkheimer's denunciation of "the oblivious

instrumentalization of science” (xv) as the main character of the Enlightenment to conquer nature and other humans is pertinent to our understanding of Victor’s experiment. Victor apparently identifies scientific knowledge as the main cause of his self-destruction when he narrates his life story to Captain Robert Walton. Victor sees in Walton the reflection of his former self, which was driven to break with nature and domestic happiness through uncontrollable curiosity accompanied by benevolent ambition. In the context of radicalism, Victor’s invention of a creature represents William Godwin’s idea of regenerating life through “social engineering, not sexual intercourse,” as manifested in *An Inquiry Concerning the Principle of Political Justice* (Sterrenburg 148). More importantly, Shelley illustrates the failure of her father’s speculations about the infinite perfectibility of individuals through reason with no assistance from any social institutions.

Neither collective nor individual radical practices for reforming society are sufficient unless practitioners are conscious of the limits of theory and its execution. An individual who aspires to a better society is likely to attain freedom and enlightenment only insofar as he or she uses reason publically, not privately, as Kant observes (“Answer” 55). Public use of one’s reason necessitates interaction with the public through the medium of writing and open discussion. Endorsed by Kant and the other Enlightenment thinkers, the “public sphere,” what Jürgen Habermas calls, alone constitutes “a scene of communication freed from the constraints of courtly hierarchy and a priori thinking” (Bender 39). Thus, the public sphere conditions “the ideals of impartial knowledge” in that “a public science could thrive in which lectures and demonstrations in coffeehouses and other sites would take place on a continuum with formal proceedings and in which descriptive techniques for making scientific experiments vividly present in published form could develop” (Bender 39–40). Isolated

in his library, Victor lacks this precise kind of public discussion and intellectual atmosphere. Above all, his knowledge is not tested among scientists.

Correlating republicanism with radicalism in the Enlightenment period, Mark Philp contends that, before the revolutionary Terror in France, the British and other Europeans tended to regard “English” and “enlightened” as “synonyms,” precisely because of the precedent of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 (457–58). In the early years of the French Revolution, both radicals and reactionaries largely considered “the reform movement in Britain, and the French and American revolutions, as the culmination of republicanism and Enlightenment” (Philp 457). Enlightenment optimism about social reform and progress is grounded in rationalism that has been forcefully proven and manifested through forms of social change and technological advancement. According to Philp, this idea of progress pertains to “a view of change as potentially innovative, based on an improved understanding of the workings of the world derived from philosophical speculation and scientific study” (464). Both philosophical and scientific hypotheses have yet to prove their applicability.

In *Billion Year Spree*, Aldiss claims that “the basic impulse of science fiction is as much evolutionary as technological” and “the evolutionary revolution and the Industrial Revolution occurred in the same period of time” (29). Likewise, Hunter maintains that evolution and revolution were reciprocally defined in Shelley’s contemporary culture: “The evolutionary theory that grew out of the Enlightenment dovetailed with the political philosophy of social liberals because both were based on a progressive drive for improvement and refinement” (137). In the Author’s Introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, Shelley makes it clear that the conversation between her husband Percy and Lord Byron about Erasmus Darwin’s scientific experiment on the principle of life inspired her novel

(171). Considering this context, Allan K. Hunter also points out that Shelley responds to Erasmus Darwin's evolutionary theory, expostulated in *Zoonomia* (1794), *The Botanic Garden, or, Loves of the Plants* (1795), and *The Temple of Nature* (1803), and imagines the possibility of an individual furthering the evolution of the species through human agency (134). Besides Darwin, Anne K. Mellor adds two more scientists to the discussion: Humphrey Davy and Luigi Galvani (17).¹⁾ Bearing in mind the contemporary culture, Hunter analyzes "the narrative conflict [of *Frankenstein*] as an examination of the tensions between various kinds of science and political reform associated with their appeal to scientific laws of development" (135). In view of this, Shelley's text reflects the contemporary arena in which radicalism and conservatism are contested, projecting "a creature that was a product of Enlightenment materialism, without the morality formed from familial connections or a regulating religious philosophy" (Hunter 135). Furthermore, according to Hunter, "evolution theory at the turn of the nineteenth century was not a single, coherent concept" but a broad spectrum of natural philosophers, speculators and "polymaths" (135). Unlike the theory presented in Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) that denies divine intercession and any purposeful direction in evolution, Erasmus Darwin's theory of evolution is firmly grounded in the Enlightenment ideology. It affirms that "all nature

1) Humphrey Davy was the first president of the Royal Society of Science. He wrote a pamphlet, *A Discourse, Introductory to a Course of Lectures on Chemistry* (1802), and a textbook, *Elements of Chemical Philosophy* (1812), both works Mary Shelley read while working on the manuscript of *Frankenstein*. Luigi Galvani, Erasmus Darwin's nephew and assistant, inspired Mary Shelley because he "attempted to prove that electricity was the life force by reanimating dead frogs with electrical charges" (Mellor 18). Mellor clarifies that Shelley "derived her portrait of Professor Waldman" from Davy's works and that Victor's use of the spark of life in engineering the creature originated in Galvani's experiments (18). The feminist critique of science that Mellor takes has enormously contributed to the discussion of *Frankenstein* and needs a separate space for research.

exists in a state of perpetual improvement by laws” governed by “the great cause of causes,” namely, God the Creator (ibid.). Despite the evolutionary theory’s affinity with religiosity, the contemporary reception of evolution still intertwined it with radicalism. Hence, the regicide of the French monarch and the Reign of Terror prevented British conservatives from recognizing anything positive in the radicalism associated with French revolutionaries and their sympathizers. Accordingly, for Burke, new artificial institutions, such as a republican government, have become unreliable artifacts that distanced from evolution; they prove effective and stable only in that they are inherited traditions, just like the British constitutional monarchy.

3. Monstrosity of Abstract Reason and the Revolution in Burke’s *Reflections*

In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*,²⁾ published on November 1, 1790, Burke critiques not only the violent materialization of the French revolutionaries’ pursuit of liberty but also the theoretical ground of the Revolution, that is, human reason (Ferguson 613). Well before the Reign of Terror (September 5, 1793 – July 28, 1794), Burke predicted the regicide of early 1793 and the enormously brutal trajectory of the French Revolution. Although most British intellectuals hailed “the new liberty of

2) Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) provoked radical thinkers to publish aggressive responses: Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), and *A Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (1794); Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Men* (1791) and *Rights of Man: Part the Second* (1792); James Mackintosh’s *Vindiciae Gallicae* (1791); and William Godwin’s *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793).

France” (90) as a desirable part of the quest for “the principles of the glorious Revolution” of 1688, Burke could not tolerate “liberty in the abstract” displayed “in all nakedness and solitude of metaphysical abstraction,” particularly “as it stands stripped of every relation” (86, 90). In his writing, Burke personifies the French Revolution as a being stripped of the clothes necessary to prove its civility; in other words, the Revolution discloses its own savageness. Above all, he evaluates the Revolution in France as a “monstrous tragic-comic scene” (92). His ultimate goal is to warn the British not to “ape” the French model (111). A personal letter to a very young French gentleman who mistakenly thought the author condoned the French Revolution, *Reflections* is Burke’s nationalistic validation of British culture, constitution, and custom, a protection against any French principles that might invade Britain. For Burke, “the very idea of fabrication of a new government” is morally corrupt and threatening to the national character of England (117). Frances Ferguson notes that the importance of Burke’s work lies not in “its indictment of French revolutionaries and their international supporters abroad”; rather, it rests on the text’s illustration of “Burke’s considerable rhetorical skills” “to write a spirited defence of the customs and institutions of his native country” (612). Ferguson characterizes Burke’s *Reflections* as a strong vindication of “the notion of social and political culture as a conservative force”; culture is not something one can choose but something given by an individual’s “society,” constituted by “ongoing institutions such as the Anglican Church or a legal system organized around the ancient English constitution of unwritten laws” (611). In sum, contrasting France with England, Burke provides “a highly articulated conservative patriotism” and “ardently defended the national, the local and the customary” (Ferguson 612).

Shaken by the unprecedented event of the Revolution, Burke testifies to

his emotional investment in that singular moment in history. In the French Revolution, he locates “a great crisis, not of the affairs of France alone, but of all Europe, perhaps of more than Europe” for its unnaturalness; he continues, “[e]very thing seems *out of nature* in this strange chaos of levity and ferocity, and of all sorts of crimes jumbled together with all sorts of follies” (92 emphasis mine). Struck by what happened in France and anticipating its catastrophic effects, Burke bears witness to “the most absurd and ridiculous” (111) in the destruction of nature. To keep such monstrous violence from spreading, Burke appeals to the laws of nature. He diagnoses the French Revolution not merely as a crime but as chaos and an anomaly. Seeing the French Revolution as unmistakably “a revolution in sentiments, manners, and moral opinions” (175), Burke entirely rejects the event precisely because of its violation of nature. To Burke, “following nature” seems to be the only way to conserve liberty permanently (119).

Burke is convinced that monarchy and the establishment are respected and inherited for posterity and to perpetuate peace and tradition. In observing events in France up until 1790, Burke describes the revolution as “this monstrous tragic-comic scene” because he perceives “the most opposite passions” (92), which leads him to foresee the possibility of abolishing monarchy. Burke, who would describe monstrosity in a manner similar to Chris Baldick (14), attacks the French Revolution as the materialization of monstrosity, specifically in that it dismembers the body politic, the king being equivalent to a head in an organic human body and the people being the body parts. Regarding the historical configuration of monstrosity, Baldick points out that, in earlier usages, the term monster has connotations that are “not physiological but moral,” thus quite different from the modern usage, in which a monster is “something frighteningly unnatural or of huge dimensions” (10). Hence, the monster or monstrosity

might accompany the figure of “the freak or lunatic” that must “reveal visibly the results of vice, folly, and unreason, as a warning (Latin, *monere*: to warn) to erring humanity” in contrast to “the reasonable God” (Baldick 10). Baldick’s analysis of monstrosity is vital to Burke’s rhetorical strategy in attacking the French Revolution and radical philosophy in that, for Burke, the Revolution is an incarnation of “evil” (60). In dominant theological interpretations of the monster, appearance primarily determines monstrosity as a phenomenon that serves to “reveal the will of God” (Baldick 10). In the Age of Reason, the monster connotes a violation of nature, which is combined with political discourse in accusing *philosophes* and Jacobins (and their English sympathizers) of making an unnatural and ungrateful attempt to decapitate the monarch, the head of society’s organic body. As a result, regicide, which is illegitimate and criminal, provides a sufficient reason for Burke to oppose the Revolution as “the worst of usurpations, an usurpation on the prerogatives of nature” (138). According to Baldick, “[t]he representation of fearful transgression in the figure of physical deformity” points to a deviation from nature, or desacralization of the body politic (14).

On the other hand, adopting tropes of organism and family, Burke characterizes England as a state constituted by an organic form of “family affections” (85, 120). His idea of organic society serves to reinforce his assertion of “the sacredness of an hereditary principle of succession” (105) in the British constitution. For Burke, reason, on the basis of which institutions are constructed, is not supreme; instead reason is insufficient in securing liberty without the help of “inheritance” (120). Burke asserts that inherited “institutions,” though artificial, prevent “the fallible and feeble contrivances of our reason” from corrupting the British “liberties” that have continued and will continue to be transferred from the ancestors to future generations (120). Cultural continuity is an essential factor that

Burke takes into account in affirming the genuine values that would distinguish the people of England from the French revolutionaries in an attempt to improve society. Burke's anxiety stems from the possibility that English people might imitate the French model. For Burke, a drastic departure from tradition is contingent upon the impossibility of cultural and social institutions being established by a wholly innovative group of individuals.

In this regard, Kant's elaboration of republicanism offers a theoretical frame that applies both to Burke's understanding of the French Revolution and Shelley's representation of Victor Frankenstein. Even before the French Revolution, Kant explicitly disagreed with the actualization of revolution: "A revolution may put an end to autocratic despotism and to rapacious or power-seeking oppression, but it will never produce a true reform in ways of thinking" ("Answer" 55). In the wake of a revolution, Kant anticipates "new prejudices, like the one they replaced, will serve as a leash to control the great unthinking mass" (ibid.). While observing the development of universal and disinterested sympathy with the Revolution in France, Kant maintains that "The occurrence in question is not, however, a phenomenon of revolution, but ... of the evolution of a constitution governed by natural right" ("Contest" 184). For Kant, violent struggles to create a new republic are not desirable, since a republican constitution "is incapable of bellicosity" regardless of an actual form of government (ibid.). As David Bromwich points out, Burke's *Reflections* provides "a defence of gradual rather than violent change" (25). The citizen of Geneva is registered as an ambivalent marker of republican civic society that produces the most appropriate form of government for obtaining justice and yet undermines that very virtue by executing Justine without paying attention to valid evidence: Victor's monstrous creature. This miscarriage of justice demonstrates the difficulty of practicing republicanism

effectively (Kant, “Perpetual Peace” 112). In a sense, Burke’s advocacy of the British constitutional monarchy seems to be the perfect political approach to overcoming the inevitable gap between republican ideals and political practices, as Kant asserts in “The Contest of Faculties” (“Contest” 184). Then, it is evident that reforming society and the human species can be justified only by relying on the laws of nature for Burke, Kant, and Shelley despite their disagreement. The Enlightenment idea of reason is tested in the French Revolution as well as in the fictional representation of *Frankenstein*. In so doing, the capacity of human reason and the Enlightenment belief in infinite progress on this basis can be challenged through self-criticism, which constitutes the core of enlightenment.

4. Monstrosity of Science and Republicanism in Shelley’s *Frankenstein*

In the Preface to the 1818 edition, Percy Bysshe Shelley clarifies the influence of Erasmus Darwin, Charles Darwin’s grandfather, on his wife’s first novel (5). According to Marilyn Butler, all of the three “serious” reviews of *Frankenstein* in 1818 paid attention to “favourite projects and passions of the times” (302). The “projects” here allude to contemporary science in the novel, including “electricity and magnetism, vivisection and Polar exploration” (302–3). Victor derives his experiment from accumulated knowledge about evolution and galvanism in addition to anatomy. Electricity, which strikes Victor in a scene depicting the demolition of an oak (23), plays dual roles as a power that is “both life-giving and utterly destructive” (Paulson 549). The “fire,” which doubly functions as conveying happiness and destruction, is a rich allegory for the monster. As the monster’s first experience of fire strongly implies,

it is fire that connects the monster with the French Revolution in that “the same cause should produce such opposite effects” (69). Fire, “light in its higher incarnation,” is characterized, from Burke’s perspective, as the loss of temperance, to the monster’s “enlightenment-oriented master” (Paulson 550).

The determination of both Victor and his interlocutor, Captain Walton, to bring an earthly paradise to humankind is not far from the revolutionaries’ plan to construct a new paradigm for politics. Victor’s crucial aim in “the relation of [his] misfortunes” is to dissuade Captain Walton from completing the North Pole exploration, despite the latter’s aim to acquire knowledge and bestow “the inestimable benefit” “on all humankind to the last generation” (17, 8). If Walton is eager to be a naïve explorer to *terra incognita*, Victor aspires to become a creator of an entirely novel species. Victor’s experiment is not totally altruistic and disinterested but, rather, self-centered in the sense that he desires to be blessed by his offspring for “many happy and excellent natures” (32). Put differently, narcissistic self-reflexivity taints his commitment to the creation of a new human being, as made evident in his conviction that “[n]o father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve their’s” (32). Victor’s “vainglorious and self-serving motivation” (Li 146) reminds us of Burke’s condemnation of the French revolutionaries for the self-interest of their ostensibly philanthropic act. “A spirit of innovation,” which motivates Victor to invent a human being without recourse to the laws of nature, “is generally the result of a selfish temper and confined views,” to borrow the words Burke uses to describe the revolution (119).

The meaning of monstrosity in *Frankenstein* is complicated, as Frankenstein’s creature not merely frustrates the creator’s selfish desire for self-glorification as a father of his offspring but also proves the relationship between ugly appearance and vice, both of which are imposed

upon him, although he voluntarily commits crimes. Considering the reactionary rhetoric Burke adopts when attacking “the utopian principles of Godwin and Wollstonecraft” as the begetting of the monster, a gravedigger and transgressor of death, it is ironic that Shelley’s portrait of Victor contributes to reinforcing “a standard conservative trope” (Sterrenburg 147). As Sterrenburg observes, Shelley’s “growing detachment from radicalism” endorsed by her parents and husband is “apparent” in her first novel (143–44). Notably, Sterrenburg perceives conservatism in *Frankenstein* and Shelley’s later works, and recognizes a shift in Shelley’s focus from a collective to an individual attempt to reform society. Nonetheless, Sterrenburg simplifies the transition from external forces to subjective and psychological initiative within Victor and his creature. Although his point on the individualization and internalization of radicalism is acceptable, isolating Victor and excluding external forces from his experiment does not exempt Victor and his creature from the devastating consequences of this lonely experiment on the principle of life, consequences that include the deaths of William, Justine, Clerval, Elizabeth, Alphonso, and Victor himself.

Critiquing her parents and husband, Shelley distances herself from them. Moreover, beginning around 1816, after the Napoleonic wars, she becomes undeniably disenchanted with radicalism and thus conservatism begins to tinge her views. The calamitous consequences of the French Revolution lead to the September Massacre, regicide, Reign of Terror, and emergence of another despotic leader, Napoleon. “In a crescendo of destruction,” Ronald Paulson aptly argues, *Frankenstein* could be seen “as an allegory of the French Revolution, the attempt to recreate man and the disillusionment and terror that followed” (545–46). According to Paulson, it is striking that *Frankenstein* and the French Revolution are “unnaturally created by reason rather than love in the instinctive relationships of the Burkean

family” (545). By comparing Mary Shelley’s first novel to a destructive political force, Paulson takes rationalism as the main explanation for the monstrous power that swept through France and the entirety of Europe after Napoleon emerged and then pursued his imperial wars (1803–1815). Through this comparison, Paulson implies that the natural relationship and affection of a Burkean concept of a social organism might have prevented the monster from strolling on the streets of Europe and conquering and ravaging other European countries. Both Frankenstein’s creation and the French Revolution gradually present the ugly and violent trajectory characteristic of monstrosity. In both cases, the laws of nature and social relations have apparently been violated. Victor manufactures a new species with the help of modern science and anatomy and yet excludes the female body from the reproductive process. Victor abandons his creator, who consequently transforms into a monster when he murders Victor’s family members and friend. For Burke, the French Revolution is monstrous in the sense that it breaks apart old ties and natural relations within the familial construct of a nation led by a monarch, essentially dismembering the monarchy and the nation state.

As a link between Burke and Shelley’s texts, Geneva is crucial, since it is regarded as an ideal political model of republicanism free from tyranny and despotism (40). The Republic of Geneva is portrayed in accordance with Kant’s notion of “the republican constitution,” which “is the only one which does complete justice to the rights of man” (“Perpetual Peace” 112). Yet Kant continues to stress that “it is also the most difficult to establish, and even more so to preserve” (*ibid.*). The example of Geneva can be used to prove Kant’s statement. On the one hand, Victor, as the combined product of Geneva and Germany, underscores the impossibility of identifying an individual with his background. On the other hand, he suggests the gap between a politically ideal institution and a singularly

ambitious scientist. Nonetheless, Victor's invention of a creature is analogous to a collective experiment on politics in that both attempt radical re-formation, one of a new species and the other of a community. In short, Victor violates as many laws of justice as of nature, since his transgression of nature—that is, his refusal to be a father to his own creation (along with the exclusion of female involvement in the creation process)—results in the unfortunate deaths of William and Justine.

Justine's case reveals the way in which justice is fulfilled in Geneva on two levels. First, the redemption of Justine from an unhappy domestic environment signifies the prevailing approach to justice and morality taken in Geneva. The Frankensteins' delivery of Justine from her unjust mother, who treats her badly and favors the other children who will die as if as a punishment for their mother, is the kind of symbolic act of justice for which Geneva stands. Justine's mother and Geneva contrast each other conspicuously, as shown in Elizabeth's pride in the republican government:

The republic institutions of our country have produced simpler and happier manners than those which prevail in the great monarchies that surround it. Hence there is less distinction between the several classes of its inhabitants; and the lower orders being neither so poor nor so despised, their manners are more refined and moral. (40)

Despite the prevalence of equality in Geneva, a class distinction still separates Justine from the other Frankenstein family members. Yet the family's philanthropic treatment and education of her gives an exemplary picture of Genevan citizens. Whether by virtue of her nature or this education, Elizabeth describes her as “the most grateful little creature in the world” (40). Justine is indebted to the Frankensteins for a patronizing presentation of justice, the kind provided by a noble and affluent family

and representative of Geneva's social affections. These particular circumstances cause Justine, accused of murdering of William, to be considered an ungrateful servant to her patron family.

Second, Justine calls into question Geneva's judicial system. Despite the ideal republicanism of Geneva, Justine is not able to defend her innocence; instead, she is intimidated into making a false confession, which reflects the social injustice of the flawed legal system. Coerced to confess falsely to murdering William, Justine comes "to think that [she] was the monster that [priest] said [she] was" (56). This leads to the unjust execution of Justine, who belongs to an underprivileged class, after having been rescued from poverty and abuse by the benevolent Frankensteins. Justice loses its ideal status, becoming merely an instrument for maintaining the underlying structure and society's privileged members, when Victor evades his responsibility despite witnessing "this wretched mockery of justice" (52). Rushing out of the court in which Justine's trial unfolds, Victor thinks, "The torture of the accused did not equal mine; she was sustained by innocence, but the fangs of remorse tore my bosom, and would not forgo their hold" (54). Victor becomes engrossed in his own "heart-sickening despair" (55) and is unwilling to correct the unjust verdict and to attest to Justine's innocence. Victor's resolution not to confess his guilt for creating the actual murderer, that is, the monster, is nothing other than self-justification. He claims to be suffering "living torture" (52), which in fact cannot compare with Justine's inglorious death. In response to Justine's miserable death, Elizabeth sees her fellow citizens emerging "as monsters thirsting for each other's blood" (61). Most prominently, the trial proceedings make clear the apogee of injustice in the republic of Geneva, as Justine's condemned death facilitates the justice of the republic. Justine's death is perceived as the appropriate legal punishment for the ingratitude that she is presumed to have shown. As an underclass woman

of Geneva, Justine reveals the failures of sympathy and justice.

Ceaselessly desiring a sympathizing friend, Victor does not make any effort to show sympathy toward Justine or his creation. While the beholder does not take the monster's hospitality at face value, Victor's hostility is unjustly explained as his reluctance to be associated with the monster. In fact, it is Shelley's critique of the contemporary science of evolution following Erasmus Darwin that lies behind her moral judgment of this dehumanized incarnation of idealistic science. The idea, abstracted from concrete human relations, is actualized in its extreme form, as demonstrated in the French Revolution. This historical event never remains a mere example, since Shelley descended from the union of the most radical social reformers of the time, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft.³⁾ Focusing on the revelation of the violent potential of utopian ideals, she criticizes the legacy of her parents, specifically the corruptibility of their firm belief in the capacity of reason. If human equals mortal, Victor's original rationale for transcending human vulnerability is incompatible with the human condition. This means Victor's project manifestly challenges nature. The natural philosophy he avidly endorses by reproducing a human being with no involvement of a woman is so unnatural that it results in a monster that assumedly has no emotion, but indeed "has fully human feelings" (Baldick 8).

3) Paulson explains that the other books that Mary reread while working on *Frankenstein* include her mother's *Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (1794). Furthermore, he argues that Mary Shelley was influenced greatly by Mary Wollstonecraft, who clearly concluded, after "writing about this 'revolution, the most important that has ever been recorded in the annals of man'," that "its cruelties were the consequences of the *ancien régime*" (Paulson 546). It is also compelling to note the political treatise of her father, William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), was among the influential works Shelley referenced in composing *Frankenstein*. As radical Enlightenment thinkers, both Wollstonecraft and Godwin advocated radical social change and improvement on the basis of the human faculty of reason.

To a certain extent, Victor is less human and more monstrous than his creature. Faced with Victor's hateful reception of him, the monster reproaches his creator, saying, "Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind" (65). This first speech by the monster expresses his irreparable grief, which results from the orphan-hood he experiences when Victor, at once his father and mother, forsakes him at the moment of his nativity. Victor's abandonment of the creature reminds us of Justine's mother's abuse of her. For the creature, the problem to confront is not his own ugliness but Victor's denial of obligation. It is on the grounds of morality that the monster shames Victor for his audacious experiment with human life. It is likely that despite his ugly appearance, the monster is superior to his creator in terms of morality, strength, and feelings.

After experiencing the world, the monster gradually begins to foster a misanthropic attitude, even though he initially had philanthropic feelings. The monster's ill-treatment causes him to engage in self-analysis and transform his identity from Victor's Adam into Satan "as the fitter emblem of [his] condition" (87), due to the lack of proper affection, individual and social alike. The monster narrates his own experiences of injustice logically: "I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous" (66). Clearly, the monster experiences socialization as degeneration, although originally his "heart was fashioned to be susceptible of love and sympathy; and, when wrenched by misery to vice and hatred, it did not endure the violence of the change without torture" (153). The creature tells the story of his growth, or, more precisely, his becoming monstrous. As Peter Brooks notes, Shelley's compassion for "a deformed and menacing creature," whom she gives the ability to "speak and reason with the highest elegance, logic, and persuasiveness" (207), challenges the assumption that eyes are a dominant

sense organ. Shelley suggests the power of “a godlike science” (75), which is language the creature secretly learns from the de Lacey, “for it is language alone that may compensate for a deficient, monstrous nature” (Brooks 207). Through language, the creature presents to Victor the possibility of redeeming himself by expressing parental affection.

5. Conclusion

A utopian impulse constitutes (and is hence constituted in) both Shelley's novel and the historical context that contributed to its production, namely, the French Revolution and the Enlightenment. The disastrous aspects of the French Revolution can be seen as supporting the premise that utopia is a hypothetical dream society. Victor's invention of a creature and its consequences are monstrous; what's more, Victor gradually becomes monstrous as his creation. Shelley critiques Victor's transgression of nature and for the most part agrees with Burke's interpretation of the French Revolution as a monstrous tragic-comedy. Benign intentions to regenerate humankind by no means prevent individual scientific and collective political practices of Enlightenment utopian projects from causing ideals to degenerate to monstrous effect. Although it is true that the French Revolution decisively contributed to the historical progress of democracy, it also ultimately makes adopting a guarded perspective on the antagonism that accompanies radical reform movements compelling. Therefore, Burke's work offers “a warning against a political enthusiasm that might make even so moral-minded a cause as the spread of human rights a pretext for usurpation and conquest” (Bromwich 29). The Enlightenment, evolution, and revolution are interrelated with ideas about the inevitability of change and optimism about infinite progress; yet they

retain negative effects within their positive aspects. Insofar as the theories of enlightenment, evolution, and revolution do not sufficiently acknowledge their limitations and self-destructiveness, each ultimately undermines the values that led to its inception and its ensuing development. Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Burke's *Reflections* are two examples which demonstrate the limitations of the Enlightenment's utopian projects on the basis of human rationality; both of them bear witness to the critical spirit integral to enlightenment in Kant's terms.

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Abstract

Monstrosity in the Enlightenment's Utopian Projects of Frankenstein and the French Revolution

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This essay argues that Frankenstein and the French Revolution correspondingly present the limitations of evolution and revolution, both of which are grounded in the Enlightenment belief in the capacity of reason. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* focus on individual scientific and collective political experiments on better kinds of creatures and societies, respectively. The Republic of Geneva, the hometown of Victor Frankenstein in Shelley's novel, plays the role of connecting Shelley's work to Burke's in terms of the fictional realization of a political entity other than a monarchy. As part of fulfilling the infinite progress of human history, the French Revolution planned to establish a republican government and it succeeded until the emergence of Napoleon. Then, Geneva seems to perfect an ideal political model of republicanism free from tyranny and despotism. The creation of a new species and the formation of a new government reflect utopian projects to bring bliss to humankind. However, both the individual and collective approaches to utopian projects have monstrous results. Monstrosity hinges both upon Shelley's and Burke's critique of failed Enlightenment projects made manifest in the violation of nature, which occurred in the French Revolution and in Victor's effort to procreate with no female engagement. What's worse, Victor's creature acts as the catalyst to reveal the apogee of social injustice prevalent in Geneva, as shown in Justine's trial. In particular,

her innocence is sacrificed for the sake of one of the privileged members of Geneva, namely, Victor Frankenstein. For this reason, the Republic of Geneva apparently demonstrates the limits of its founding principle of republicanism; it remains a partial achievement. Despite Shelley's sympathetic treatment of the monster, both Shelley and Burke share conservatism that is critical of radical attempts to reform society on account of mere reason. Therefore, Shelley critiques Victor's transgression of nature and for the most part agrees with Burke's interpretation of the French Revolution as a monstrous tragic-comedy. Insofar as the theories of enlightenment, evolution, and revolution do not sufficiently acknowledge their limitations and self-destructiveness, each ultimately undermines the values that led to its inception and its ensuing development. Shelley's novel and Burke's work are two examples that demonstrate the very possibility and limits of the Enlightenment's utopian projects on the basis of human rationality; both of them bear witness to the critical spirit integral to enlightenment in Kant's terms.

Key Words: Enlightenment(계몽), evolution(진화), Frankenstein(프랑켄슈타인), French Revolution(프랑스혁명), monstrosity(괴물성), republicanism(공화주의), utopia(유토피아)

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