

Frankenstein and Slave Narrative: Race, Revulsion and Radical Revolution

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One of the great joys of reading *Frankenstein* is in discovering the sheer number of ways that its central themes can fruitfully be understood. A particularly rich vein concerns the subject of those who live as outcasts, unseen and unheard, giving us feminist interpretations as well as class and race based accounts of the story.¹ In this chapter, I offer one such approach. I argue that the novel can be seen as having the form of a slave narrative structured within a classical republican framework. Ultimately, the message is bleak. The treatment of the slave – the oppressed outsider – is unsustainable but cannot now be stopped. The only outcome can be a violent and chaotic revolution. I do not say that Mary Shelley advocated or even accepted this as a course of action – there is, I believe, evidence that she resisted it – only that it is where her analysis leads. Nevertheless, there is hope in this message since only then can we rebuild a society on more virtuous, equitable and communitarian grounds.

My argument has three parts. In the first section, I consider the strong resonance that the novel has with slave narrative. This has been noted before on a number of occasions.²

¹ See variously, Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: The Women's Press, 1978); Joyce Zonana, "They Will Prove the Truth of My Tale': Safie's Letters as the Feminist Core of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*", *Journal of Narrative Technique*, 21: 2 (1991): 170-84; and Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*, London: Routledge, 1990, for feminist readings; Allan Lloyd Smith, "'This Thing of Darkness': Racial Discourse in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*", *Gothic Studies* 6: 2 (2004): 208-222; Elizabeth Young, *Black Frankenstein: The Making of an American Metaphor* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); Patrick Bratlinger, "Race and *Frankenstein*", in *The Cambridge Companion to Frankenstein*, ed. Andrew Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 128-42, for readings through the lens of race.

² See for example, Lloyd Smith, "Thing of Darkness"; John Bugg, "Master of their language: Education and Exile in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*", *Huntington Library Quarterly* 68: 4 (2005): 655-666; Young, *Black Frankenstein*; Jill Lepore, "The Strange and Twisted Life of 'Frankenstein': After two hundred years, are we ready for the truth about Mary Shelley's novel?", *Life and Letters*, February 12 & 19, 2018 Issue.

Given the social context in which Shelley wrote, the influence of the discourse of slavery is not surprising. The abolition of the British slave trade had only just happened ten years earlier (1807), and it would be another fifteen until there was full emancipation in the colonies (1833). Race and slavery were, as a result, very topical subjects when Shelley was writing. Shelley, like her parents, was deeply moved by the abolitionist cause. She read its literature, as we see from her diaries and, as is often noted, she and her husband Percy Bysshe Shelley boycotted sugar products because they were produced by slave labour.³ Shelley does not, however, merely rehearse or follow the standard ideas and arguments of her time. Instead she works perceptively and innovatively within the logic of the master and slave dynamic, showing how their fates are bound up with one another, and the way in which the depravity of the one corrupts the virtue of the other. My point of comparison in considering the structure of slave narrative is that of Frederick Douglass. I do this in part because his work is so well known. Shelley, of course, could not have known anything about Douglass's thought at the time since he was likely only born in 1818, the year the novel first appeared. However, in grappling with the build-up to and aftermath of the American Civil War, Douglass was confronted by many of the same forces and phenomena that Shelley identifies, and his analysis has, at times, a striking similarity to hers.

The concept of slavery in the nineteenth century was complex and nuanced, invoking not only the phenomenon and institution of transatlantic chattel slavery but also a tradition of classical republican political thought, particularly of the neo-Roman kind in which servitude was understood in terms of dependence or domination.⁴ The term slave had broad meaning

³ Miranda Seymour, *Mary Shelley* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 138; Lloyd Smith, "Thing of Darkness", 209.

⁴ The republican conception of freedom is most commonly associated today with the work of Quentin Skinner, in a historical context (*Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)), and Philip Pettit, for a more contemporary formulation (*On the People's Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)). My own version that I attribute to Wollstonecraft and Douglass, amongst others, owes much to Skinner's and Pettit's work although it departs from their respective analyses in several significant points. For full accounts, see Alan Coffee, "Mary Wollstonecraft, Freedom and the Enduring Power of Social Domination", *European Journal of Political Theory* 12: 2 (2013): 116-35; "Freedom as Independence: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Grand Blessing of Life", *Hypatia* 29: 4 (2014): 908-924; "A Radical Revolution in Thought: Frederick Douglass on the Slave's Perspective on

and represented the opposite of freedom, which was in turn analysed in terms of two further ideals, equality and virtue. This republican framework was infused throughout abolitionist literature and debate at the time, and we find it later in Douglass's thought. It was also central to the ideas and philosophy of Shelley's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft. Shelley herself makes extensive use of republican themes in her next published novel, *Valperga, or the Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca* (1823), which is set in the context of the wars between the republican and imperialist city states of renaissance Italy and is constructed around several of the republican themes that I will outline below, including freedom as independence, equality, and virtue.⁵ In this chapter, however, I shall only discuss Shelley's republicanism as it appears in *Frankenstein*.

In Section II, I offer an analysis of the underlying notion of slavery in the novel within a republican framework. More specifically, I argue that Shelley's use of the republican logic of freedom and slavery has much in common with the particular republican principles worked out by Mary Wollstonecraft.⁶ I do not say that Shelley derived these from her mother, but only note the similarity of their analyses.

In the final part of my argument, in Section III, I show how Shelley develops the master-slave dynamic, taking it to its terrifying conclusion. The masters create the slaves but do so by employing the values and norms of their society. There are, then, three parties to the relationship, none of which can free themselves of the others. On republican grounds, a free society must be an egalitarian one in which the citizens are virtuous – respecting of its institutions and mutually accepting of each other as legitimate and equal fellow citizens – if it is to be stable and sustainable. The dehumanising effect of slavery always disrupts the delicate balance that must exist between freedom, equality and virtue. Shelley picks up on the

Republican Freedom" in *Radical Republicanism: Recovering the Tradition's Popular Heritage*, ed. Bruno Leipold, Karma Nabulsi and Stuart White, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2020, forthcoming).

⁵ On republican themes in *Valperga*, see also Michael Rossington, "Future Uncertain: The Republican Tradition and Its Destiny in *Valperga*" in *Mary Shelley in Her Times*, ed. Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 103-119 and Rieko Suzuki, "'A Romantic Truth of History': Gender in Mary Shelley's *Valperga* and Robert Browning's *Sordello*" in *La questione romantica, Nuova Serie* 1: 1 (2009), 56-68.

⁶ See especially Coffee "Enduring Power" and "Grand Blessing".

psychological effects at work, showing how the oppression and alienation involved develop into deeply entrenched prejudices and hatred that cloud people's ability to think rationally and so inhibit the ability and willingness of everybody involved – master, slave and the society that permits and enables this relationship – to step back from the situation or to alter their behaviour. Social structures reinforce this predicament and so no one can escape their reach. The two sides must, therefore, must destroy each other before there can be any hope of rebuilding.

I

There are several striking similarities between *Frankenstein* and a standard structure found in many slave narratives. Seeing the novel through this slave narrative framework gives a structure to the nature of the creature's grievances, against his creator and his society. The creature, like the slave, is thrown into a world where he exists without a knowledge of who he is or how he came to where he is. Though neither realise this at first, this is a brutal world that treats them like beasts and as objects of revulsion. In both cases, they can see a beautiful world full of happy people around them. Yet, though they may yearn to be part of that world, it is forever closed off to him. And creature and slave alike are blamed for the condition that others have created for them.

The structural similarities are not merely incidental resemblances with slave narratives but reflect essential aspects of the nature of slavery itself. This is significant since, just as we can see the tragedy of the creature's life through his condition as a slave, so we can anticipate the inevitable and unavoidable tragic outcome for society for its having slaves as his story unfolds. There are several similarities, we might consider. First, there is a protagonist that has no name and knows nothing about his origins, family or history; an initial period of sweet and blissful ignorance before being traumatically confronted with the brutal reality of his condition; a slave who serves his master silently and invisibly – “unseen and unknown” as the creature puts it – his existence unacknowledged, his work not appreciated.⁷ Secondly, both creature and slave share a yearning to join this blissful, divine society that they see (whose members, the creature describes, for example, as “superior beings”), all the while

⁷ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or Modern Prometheus* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 123.

knowing deep down that this is impossible.⁸ A third similarity is found in the central figure of the individual who educates himself, in particular by teaching himself to read, but where greater knowledge ultimately only adds to his sorrows. Finally, there is a moment of confrontation between slave and master in which the former emerges victorious, but where escape from bondage can never bring freedom or acceptance or peace and security because a slave is forever marked out as different, suspect and grotesque. Civilised society can never tolerate their presence amongst them, and so the former slave – whether emancipated or escaped – is exiled, forever to be reviled.

For each of the aspects described above, a parallel incident can be found in Frederick Douglass's autobiographies. It was, for example, no accident that he was born without a name of his own or a knowledge of his family history. Rather, Douglass argued that this was central to the nature of slavery. "The grand aim of slavery", Douglass tells us, is always and everywhere "to reduce man to a level with the brute".⁹ Having a family, on the other hand, is an essential feature of social and human life, for it is where we learn to form attachments, acquire culture, and develop our identity. In light of this, Douglass's master – likely also his father, but the same was "the case with masters generally – allowed no questions to be put to him by which a slave might learn his age".¹⁰ The essentially human capacity to want to know about our origins and to be connected to others through stable and enduring relationships have no more place in the plantation than on the farm, amongst slaves than amongst livestock. And so, where the creature laments "no father had watched my infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses", Douglass has the same experience.¹¹ His mother, like other slave women, "had many children, but no family".¹² He barely remembers her at all and had no knowledge at all of his father, who was likely his own

⁸ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 117. "I formed in my imagination a thousand pictures of presenting myself to them [the De Lacey family], and their reception of me. I imagined that they would be disgusted, until, by my gentle demeanour and conciliating words, I should first win their favour and afterwards their love" (117).

⁹ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage, My Freedom* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003), 32.

¹⁰ Douglass, *Bondage*, 30.

¹¹ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 124.

¹² Douglass, *Bondage*, 39.

master. "Slavery", Douglass concludes, "does away with fathers, as it does away with families".¹³

Like Frankenstein's creature, Douglass did not initially understand that he was a slave. In just the same way as any other child, the world was a joyful source of wonder for the young Douglass. "The first seven or eight years of the slave boy's life are about as full of sweet content" as those of his free counterpart, he tells us.¹⁴ Once again, this was not by chance and nor was it intended out of any kindness. Rather, it reflected the slaveholding community's complete lack of interest in Douglass as a human being. He was, after all, "only a rude little slave", as yet of no use and not worth taking the time to teach or discipline through reproach.¹⁵ No one bothers to tell a slave about his condition. It is left to a shocking, brutal moment to confront him with the shattering truth. In the case of Frankenstein's creature, his initial innocent joy of discovering the world in the wilderness having fled Victor's home is shattered, first, when he is chased away from a village by angry and frightened inhabitants and reinforced shortly afterwards, he first catches sight of his own reflection in a pool and is confronted with his own grotesque appearance.¹⁶ The turning point in Douglass's life came where he was abandoned alone at the old master's house, miles from the rural shack in which

¹³ Douglass, *Bondage*, 41. I do not mean to suggest here that Douglass had not been loved by his mother. Quite the contrary, she would make a twenty-four mile round trip on foot at night when her work was done to see him, when she could, even while he slept. Nevertheless, the result was that Douglass had only a "scanty" and fleeting memory of his mother and no deep feelings of attachment (42-3). In this respect, Douglass's story differs from the creature's. However, in their sense of alienation and abandonment, their experiences are parallel, as is their deep resentment of the society that can deprive them of parental love and the bonds of companionship. It is true that the knowledge Douglass had that he was "not only a child but *somebody's* child" (original italics, 45) was of immense importance to him. But such moments of realisation were rare and his abiding sense as a child growing up was of being alone and of trusting no one. In the end, the slave's experience is no less inhuman than that of the creature. As a child, Douglass was not allowed to visit his mother during her long, fatal illness. There could be no family gathering at her death, for, he concludes, rather than as a mother, "the bondwoman lives as a slave, and is left to die as a beast; often with fewer attentions than are paid to a favourite horse" (45).

¹⁴ Douglass, *Bondage*, 34.

¹⁵ Douglass, *Bondage*, 34.

¹⁶ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 108 and 116.

he grew up, by his beloved grandmother who had not told him what was happening or even said goodbye. This moment represented a turning point in Douglass's life that changed him forever. It was, he said, his "first introduction to the realities of slavery".¹⁷ While he would later learn how his grandmother acted from kindness and had no choice, his ability to trust others was irreversibly destroyed.

While the blow of realising that one is a slave is crushing, it does not extinguish hope. There follows a period of intense and insatiable desire to learn about the world. The slave is, of course, shut out from the world and so can only learn by stealth, observing everything from the outside, ever listening in secretly, watching it all intently, but all the time unnoticed. Frankenstein's creature does this while in hiding, of course, taking care not to give his presence away while the slave remains in full view even if he is no less invisible for that. Sadly, the more they understand, the deeper their pain and the greater their resentment. "Every increase of knowledge", Douglass says, "especially respecting the free states, added something to the almost intolerable burden of the thought – 'I am a slave for life'",¹⁸ adding that it "filled me with a burning hatred of slavery, increased my suffering, and left me without the means of breaking away from my bondage".¹⁹ The creature echoes this, "increase of knowledge only discovered to me more clearly what a wretched outcast I was. I cherished hope, it is true; but it vanished when I beheld my person reflected".²⁰ In the end, there can be no escape from slavery. The slave is always marked out as both different and revolting. As a free black man in the North, Douglass would still be beaten if he refused to travel in the Jim Crow car, or expected to dine separately from his white hosts.²¹ So, too, Frankenstein's creature is permanently shut out from human company. "Accursed creator!" he rages at Victor, "Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust?".²² In the end, this tension results in the moment of confrontation between slave and master. This is in part a genuine liberation, because it represents a point of self-realisation and self-assertion that are essential aspects of breaking the psychological hold that slavery exerts. But

¹⁷ Douglass, *Bondage*, 40.

¹⁸ Douglass, *Bondage*, 116 (emphasis removed).

¹⁹ Douglass, *Bondage*, 69.

²⁰ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 133.

²¹ Douglass, *Bondage*, 294-6.

²² Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 133.

self-recognition of one's status as a free agent is only half the battle. To be free, others must come to recognise you, too. And that will never happen, as we shall see in the final section.

Before we move on to consider the master-slave dynamic more closely, it is worth briefly noting that there is another slave in Shelley's story, one whose reception by the other characters and resulting options are very different from the creature's. This is Safie.²³ She is a slave in several senses, not least simply in virtue of being a woman without social standing or political rights of her own outside of the protection of a man, a point emphasised repeatedly by Wollstonecraft.²⁴ Wollstonecraft used the structure and framework of slavery as a key diagnostic device in her analysis of the subjection and oppression of women in general, as Shelley was aware.²⁵ Women, Wollstonecraft explained, must "act according to the will of another fallible being, and submit, right or wrong, to power", which is the very definition of servitude.²⁶

While all European women were slaves in Wollstonecraft's eyes, there was a deeper sense in which that condition applied particularly to Ottoman women.²⁷ Safie was from Turkey and so she was perceived to be even more of a slave than a European woman because

²³ For alternative discussions of the importance of the story of Safie, though not grounded in the theme of slavery, see Zonana, "Safie's Letters" and Mellor, *Shelley: Her Life (118-20)*.

²⁴ That all women are slaves in virtue of their inescapable legal, social, and economic dependence on men is a prominent theme in Wollstonecraft's most famous work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and in her unfinished novel, *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman* (New York: Dover, 2005) where the lead character, Maria, summarises women's situation in this way, "a wife being as much a man's property as his horse, or his ass, she has nothing which she can call her own... The tender mother cannot lawfully snatch from the gripe of the gambling spendthrift, or beastly drunkard, unmindful of his offspring, the fortune which falls to her by chance; or (so flagrant is the injustice) what she earns by her own exertions. No; he can rob her with impunity, even to waste publicly on a courtesan; and the laws of her country – if women have a country – afford her no protection or redress" (80-81).

²⁵ Coffee, "Enduring Power" and "Grand Blessing".

²⁶ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014, ed. Eileen Hunt Botting), 74.

²⁷ Wollstonecraft follows Macaulay's summary, that "though the situation of women in modern Europe, ... when compared with that condition of abject slavery in which they have always been held in the east, may be considered as brilliant" (*Letters on Education, With Observations on Religious and Metaphysical Subjects*, London: C. Dilly, 1790, 131).

of the tighter social and religious codes of dependence and subservience which bound women there. Safie's mother was herself legally a bondswoman. She was, however, a Christian which was said to give her a sense of mental and spiritual freedom. To that extent, Safie's mother gave her the necessary grounding for freedom by bringing her up to think for herself in a manner "forbidden to the female followers of Mahomet".²⁸ Nevertheless, living in Turkey and being the daughter of a Muslim trader father, Safie had no prospect of living freely. We can see something of the complexities of attempting to live an independent life in the way that Safie is offered in marriage to Felix by her father as a reward for Felix's saving him. While Felix was, of course, "too delicate" to accept the offer, he nevertheless looked forward to receiving this prize.²⁹ Such was Safie's condition. As it happens, the attraction between Felix and Safie seems to have been mutual. But the fact remains that securing the patronage and protection of Felix was Safie's only means of escaping the stultifying subservient life she otherwise faced. This does not mean that she cannot take tough decisions, of course. Later on, when she chooses, against her father's will and at great personal risk, to stay in Europe with Felix rather than to return to Turkey, Safie shows an independent streak and strength of mind that belies her dependent condition.

Nevertheless, as Safie is taught the language and important aspects of her new culture from the literary classics by the De Laceys, we see a contrast in how she responds compared with the creature, who is watching and following her lessons as part of his own self-education. Whereas the creature grapples with what he reads, wrestling with new and strange ideas in order to make sense of his condition and the strange but unreachable world that he sees around him, we see no evidence of Safie questioning what she reads. The creature certainly learns more quickly, while Safie struggles with the language. But differences in their innate intelligence are not what is at work here. Safie has a path to social acceptance that the creature does not. She is a human being, she's attractive, and she's a woman. So whereas the creature is forever banished from human society, Safie the slave can be admitted. Her entrance will, however, be conditional. She will not be accepted as a citizen or a freeman, but only on condition that she conform to its rules and expectations. For a woman, that means being seen to accept what she is taught at face value, eager to learn from her master and

²⁸ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 127.

²⁹ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 126.

tutor but not to question it.³⁰ We do not know anything about Safie's inner state of mind, of course. What we do know, however, is that she has made the decision not to return to Turkey which means that she remains dependent on the De Lacey family. Whether she questions or challenges what she learns or not, she cannot afford to be seen to do anything other than to repeat it and internalise the ideas and attitudes expected of her.

II

Frankenstein does not only use the form of a slave narrative; it also employs one of the key analytical frameworks that was often found in slave and abolitionist literature, one derived from republican political theory. I use the term 'republican' in a restricted sense here, referring only to the use of its central notion of freedom understood as independence from arbitrary forms of controlling power. This was a widely used concept in the early nineteenth century. It had been extensively used in the pro-revolutionary thought of the American,

³⁰In making this argument, I do not mean to diminish the character of Safie or to suggest that Shelley suggests any weakness of mind or spirit in her. On the contrary, Safie clearly demonstrates important qualities of resolve and intellect. Indeed, commentators such as Anne Mellor have suggested that Safie "is the incarnation of Mary Wollstonecraft in the novel" on account of these aspects of her character (*Shelley: Her Life*, 118). In addition, we should also note that the creature himself identifies with Safie to the extent that he makes copies of her letters and attaches great importance both to these letters and to the tale of Safie which he relates to Victor (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 126. See also Jeanne Britton, "Novelistic Sympathy in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*", *Studies in Romanticism* 48: 1 (2009): 3-22). My point is, rather, that Safie is a slave in the senses outlined above. Social conditions do not permit her to make use of her qualities and talents as a matter of right and on equal terms with men. And so, while the creature can identify with Safie's experiences up to this point, she faces a situation that is foreclosed to him. Being a woman, she can be admitted into society but it is on strict terms. She must conform to a rigid pattern that does not include those qualities of intellect and independence of spirit and mind. It is no surprise, then, that Safie does not display those qualities in her lessons with the De Laceys. She does not have that luxury. What her inner thoughts are on the materials she reads, however, we are not told. This is, perhaps, not surprising, given the immense dangers faced by women who fail to maintain the standard stereotype of the docile, dutiful woman (this point is examined at length by Wollstonecraft and, especially by Catharine Macaulay before her (*Letters on Education*, see especially letters 13 and 14 of Part 1, on "Coquetry" and "Male Rakes". See also Alan Coffee, "Catharine Macaulay's Republican Conception of Social and Political Liberty", *Political Studies* 65: 4 (2017): 844-59)).

French and Haitian Revolutions, and this had given republican ideals a particular poignancy in abolitionist circles where the liberation of the slaves was regarded as a continuation of these earlier rebellions. The republican framework was also used extensively by Mary Wollstonecraft, not only for showing that women were slaves (to men) but also as a tool for diagnosing the resulting effect on society and for attempting to outline a path to emancipation.³¹

Republican theory is constructed around the opposition between freedom and slavery. To be free is to be an independent agent, one who is recognised as having the capacity and standing to act on one's own account un beholden to anyone else. Citizens on this account were free, assuming the right political conditions were met. They were full members of society, and entitled to its privileges which are protected by rights. Anyone not recognised or protected in this way, was deemed to be a slave. To be a slave, then, did not mean that one was necessarily in chains or worked on a plantation. Historically, the subjects of an arbitrary monarch were counted as slaves, a use which was very common during the French Revolution. Shelley uses the term slave in this more generic sense when she has the creature sum up his understanding of human values, deducing that without either noble birth or wealth, a man is reduced to the standing of being a "vagabond and a slave".³² Freedom, in this sense, is a social condition. The freeman, or citizen, is a member of a political community in which the ruling power over him is not arbitrary – subject to the capricious prejudices and whims of others – but rather is rational and constrained to reflect the common good of all the other free members of society. In order to have a free society of this sort, two ingredients are necessary – equality and virtue.

In principle, republican citizens are equals. They all have the same standing under a law that protects each of their rights and freedoms to the same extent. A republic is a society without hierarchy. The citizens should be substantially materially equal, too. Large concentrations of wealth are considered subverting of the fabric and spirit of a republic since

³¹ On Wollstonecraft's republicanism, see the respective contributions by Susan James, Lena Halldenius, Philip Pettit, Alan Coffee, and Sandrine Bergès in Sandrine Bergès and Alan Coffee, eds., *The Social and Political Philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

³² Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 132.

this can lead to some citizens becoming dependent on others, where dependent is synonymous with unfreedom and servitude. So, Geneva's "republican institutions", are described by Victor as having produced "simpler and happier manners than" in the "great monarchies that surround it", adding that "there was less distinction between the ... classes" and that the "lower orders" were "neither so poor nor so despised".³³ Victor concludes that "a servant in Geneva does not mean the same thing as in France and England... and does not include the idea of ignorance and a sacrifice of the dignity of a human being".³⁴ Republics accord an equality of status and standing on all their citizens. Equality, however, is not sufficient to maintain a free republic. The citizens must also adopt and internalise certain forms of behaviour, or virtues. They must be self-controlled and govern their conduct rationally, which includes a respect for the moral law. They must also sacrifice their private interest for the common good which is in everyone's interests. The importance of virtue is emphasised throughout the novel, taking a special prominence in the passages dedicated to Safie's education and the creature's observations of the character of the De Laceys. Safie's mother, for example, had brought her up to display the rational virtues, teaching "her to aspire to higher powers of intellect and an independence of spirit".³⁵ As such, and like both the creature and Douglass, she became ill suited to the servile life of the Turkish harem. Virtue fits a person for freedom rather than bondage. The creature himself, is greatly impressed by the ideas of virtue that he hears about in Felix's reading aloud of Volney's *Ruins of Empires* and sets about emulating these. He sees these characteristics displayed in the lives of the De Laceys and convinces himself that, surely, they would after all accept him. The creature recounts, "when I contemplated the virtues of the cottagers, their amiable and benevolent dispositions, I persuaded myself that when they should become acquainted with my admiration of their virtues, they would... overlook my personal deformity".³⁶ It is a forlorn

³³ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 66.

³⁴ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 66.

³⁵ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 127.

³⁶ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 133. The choice of the *Ruins of Empire*, by Constantin François de Chassebœuf, comte de Volney, as the instructional matter for the creature is telling since it is an exemplary republican text in the tradition that I have outlined. Especially fascinating is that its use foreshadows Frederick Douglass's own self-education from the *Columbian Orator*, itself a collection of classical roman and republican speeches.

hope, of course. But having had his eyes opened, there is no going back for him. He cannot accept the servile life.

Freedom, equality and virtue as values co-exist in a delicate harmony. If any one of these values is lacking, or even if it is severely inhibited, this is said by republicans to have a corrosive knock-on effect on the other two, ‘corrupting’ them and spreading this corruption relentlessly and often irrevocably through society.³⁷ If individuals have too little power, they will be dependent on others. They are unequal and this will corrupt their virtue. This is the condition of the slave. But those with too much power will also become corrupted since they are then in the position of being dominators over others. Neither slave nor master can afford to consider the common good before their own since their minds are now focused on either ensuring their own survival or protecting their personal advantage. Significantly, the corrupting effects are not confined to those directly implicated in relationships of dependence but others are dragged in as they either come into contact with the corrupted individuals or become complicit in their relationship. Historically, slave societies – built as they are on inequality and hierarchy – were said to become thoroughly riddled with corruption. It was this pervasive internal corruption that led to the downfall, for example, of the French state following the revolution. This was also the effect of patriarchy, in Wollstonecraft’s analysis. Master and slave, husband and wife, were both implicated and degraded by their corrupting relationship in equal measure. A further implication is that in order to prop up and maintain such an oppressive arrangement, a system deeply internalised prejudices emerge justifying the status quo. It becomes impossible for individuals to think outside of its confines, so firm is its grip.

We can see an example of how deceptive can be the grip of entrenched prejudices through the case of the De Laceys. This family would appear to be fine exemplars of civic virtue. They study and endorse the principles of liberty, equity and benevolence contained in the great instructional literature. They also live by these principles, opposing institutions of

³⁷ I discuss the relationship between equality, virtue and independence, and the potential for corruption, in detail in “Enduring Power” and “Independence as Relational Freedom” in *Women Philosophers on Autonomy*, Sandrine Bergès and Alberto Siani, eds., London: Routledge (2018), 94-111. This account has a long history in republican thinking, extending back to the Roman sources. It is especially prominent in Wollstonecraft’s work.

oppression and injustice, even at great personal cost to the point of political exile and poverty. Even in their own reduced circumstances, they remain generous and concerned to help those less fortunate (“the poor that stopped at their door were never driven away”).³⁸ At the same time, however, they can only apply these attitudes and values towards those recognisably of their own kind and where the deepest fabric of their society is not threatened. The creature falls outside of the range of acceptable beings that they (or anyone in human society) can comprehend. When they are confronted with him, where “they ought to see a feeling and kind friend” instead, as the creature predicts, “they behold only a detestable monster”.³⁹ The principles of virtue that the De Lacey’s have internalised, then, only go so deep and sit alongside the pervasive social prejudices of disgust and revulsion at those that fall on the outside.⁴⁰

III

Within this cycle of mutual corruption, the lives of masters and slaves are inextricably woven together. Neither can escape the other, and not even the master can be truly said to be free. Tellingly, in the novel, the word “slave” is used more often to refer to Victor than to the creature. He may have created his monster, but he has lost control of both himself and his creation. Victor is a slave to his passion, to his prejudices and to a situation that he cannot escape.⁴¹ I should emphasise here that in republican theory, and in Wollstonecraft’s work

³⁸ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 134.

³⁹ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 136.

⁴⁰ Here one is put in mind of Steve Biko’s assessment of the virtue of ‘white liberals’ in South Africa during the apartheid era. On his account, these activists genuinely endorsed liberal principles. Their commitment, however, was shallower than they realised. While on the face of things, the white liberal strove to bring about the end of the oppressive regime, “at the back of his mind is a constant reminder that he is quite comfortable as things stand”, adding that “he feels quite secure under the protection offered by [the current system] and subconsciously shuns the idea of a change” (Steve Biko, “Black Souls in White Skins?” in *I Write what I Like*, Harlow: Heinemann (1978), 22). What the white liberals and the De Lacey’s have in common is that both endorse and pursue a set of ideals that they cannot quite imagine fully extending to incorporate the excluded other groups. Without realising it, they retain the pervasive prejudices and revulsions of their broader society, even as they believe they reject these.

⁴¹ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 29.

especially, to be a slave to passion and prejudice is a very real form of bondage that is structurally identical to being a slave to a master since one is under the arbitrary power of forces that one cannot control.⁴² Victor's bondage goes much deeper than just the prison of his mind, however. He is locked into a struggle that he cannot win as events spin out of his control. Victor refers to his own relationship with the creature as one of slavery, while the creature agrees, addressing him as "slave" and notes that while Victor may have created him, he is the master now.⁴³

The mutual grip on both emotional and physical power over the other between Victor and the creature is, again, evocative of Douglass's analysis. No one, Douglass argues, is free in slave society. As the power of the slaveholders rises, black Americans may have the worst of it, but white citizens merely serve, on Douglass's account, as their miserable watch dogs.⁴⁴ Slaveholders create slaves through their institutions and their actions. But in so doing, they create a prison for themselves. After what they have done to their slaves, the slaveholders can never take their eye off their victims for even a second. "Conscious of the injustice and wrong they are every hour perpetrating", Douglass adds, "and knowing what they themselves would do if made the victims of such wrongs, they are looking out for the first signs of the dread retribution of justice" (1992, 2002).⁴⁵ They can never relax, for "slavery never sleeps or slumbers".⁴⁶ In this context, I should point out, Douglass is actually talking about how the slaveholders know that their slaves are intelligent and human, just like them. He is not discussing slaves wreaking vengeance so much as describing the terms of the never ending struggle in which the slaveholders and their slaves are locked.⁴⁷

⁴² Coffee, "Enduring Power", 123-8.

⁴³ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 157, 158, 172.

⁴⁴ Frederick Douglass, "The Present and Future of the Colored Race in America" in *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, ed. Philip Foner, 5 vols., vol. 3 (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 355.

⁴⁵ Douglass, *Bondage*, 202.

⁴⁶ Frederick Douglass, "Farewell Speech to the British People" in Foner, *Life and Writings* vol. 1, 215.

⁴⁷ At a theoretical level, slavery and freedom are engaged in a battle to the death. One way of life must defeat the other (liberty, Douglass argues, "must either cut the throat of slavery or slavery would cut the throat of liberty" (quoted in John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men*:

This is a struggle made that has been made entirely by the slaveholders, or at least by the society that has resulted from the practice of slaveholding, because the white population simply can never accept a free black population who would become their social and political equals. This combination of fear of what their creations will do to them in retribution, greed for what they can gain from their exploitation, and the deeply internalised social prejudices that reinforce in their minds the rightness of their domination produce an unshakable commitment to perpetuate their exclusion even to the point of death. Of the slaveholders, Douglass writes, “there they stand, sworn before God and the universe, that the slave shall continue a slave or die”.⁴⁸ This attitude is reflected in Victor’s own firm resolution not to aid but to hunt his creation, to which the creature responds with his own reciprocal vows for revenge, “a deep and deadly revenge, such as would alone compensate for the outrages and anguish I had endured”.⁴⁹

So, what should we make of the creature’s destructive power and intent? It is not hard to find potential sources of inspiration that Shelley may have had in mind. Memories of the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror that followed were fresh. Critics of a republican persuasion had applied the same framework as I have invoked above to understand that rebellion, not least Mary Wollstonecraft in her letters from her time in France and in her subsequent Girondist-inspired *History of the French Revolution* (1794).⁵⁰ There had also been the more recent instance of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) which had terrified the public in Europe and the United States, and which had been the subject of intense debate with respect to the cause of abolition. In both the French and Haitian cases, republican theory anticipated the extent and ferocity of the violence and reprisals which were understood to be directly attributable to the weight and duration of the oppression that preceded them. The corruption starts with the nobility but then spreads throughout society, dulling the sensitivity of everyone to reason, virtue and self-restraint. “The rich”, Wollstonecraft observes, “have for ages tyrannized over the poor, teaching them how to act when possessed of power, and

Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 21).

⁴⁸ Foner, *Life and Writings*, vol. 1, 208.

⁴⁹ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 143.

⁵⁰ Mary Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution; and the Effect it has produced in Europe* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1794).

now must feel the consequence” for the “people are rendered ferocious by misery”.⁵¹ It is only natural, Wollstonecraft argues, that the poor and the servant classes will eventually discover by natural reason the injustice of their condition and will rise up to overthrow their oppressors. To the extent that they have been brutalised, they will respond with the same intensity. In the end, this process cannot be stopped, or even short-circuited. While she is optimistic that society can be restored, she notes that “things must have time to find their level”.⁵²

Abstract theoretical explanations for social unrest aside, there was in the public’s mind a deep and ever-present fear of slaves exacting their vengeance on their unwitting masters. In reality, the fear of slave reprisals was vastly overblown. Violent rebellions, while they did occur, were rare and leaders such as Douglass almost always urged caution and restraint when discussing the right of slaves to resist or escape.⁵³ The public’s fear, however, had little to do with the probability of insurrection. Rather, it stemmed from the knowledge of the

⁵¹ Wollstonecraft, *French Revolution*, 72

⁵² Wollstonecraft, *French Revolution*, 73.

⁵³ Slave rebellions were by no means uncommon. David Geggus lists, for example, 180 rebellions or conspiracies from across the Americas in the period 1776-1848 (a period generally characterised as the Age of Revolution in Europe and the Americas), with the peak in activity coming in the 1790s. Some rebellions were considerable in size. Even setting aside the case of Haiti, Geggus identifies seven or eight others in the West Indies that involved at least 1,000 slaves (with the Jamaican Christmas rebellion of 1831 comprising in excess of 18,000 slaves. In the U.S., the largest revolt was the German Coast uprising of 1811 in which around 100 slaves were mobilised) (David Geggus, “Slave Rebellion During the Age of Revolution”, in *Curaçao in the Age of Revolutions, 1795-1800*, Wim Klooster and Gert Oostindie, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 23-56).

Nevertheless, the reporting of these events was often sparse and rebellions were often little heard about by the wider white populations. In part, this may have been deliberate suppression so as not to alarm the public, or it may have reflected the stereotype that Africans were not sophisticated or courageous enough to carry out such operations. This did not stop the popular imagination developing a dreadful fear of slave revolts and what might happen. In reality, however, where particular revolts were known about, the reverse impression was created with the discipline and restraint shown by the rebels actually increasing sympathy for their cause (39). See also *Who abolished slavery? Slave revolts and abolitionism: A debate with João Pedro Marques*, Seymour Drescher and Pieter Emmer, eds. (New York: Berghahn, 2010).

injustice of the slave system that everyone in society participated in, directly or indirectly. People could imagine the rage that they themselves would feel if the circumstances were reversed, and expressing a Hobbesian logic that was common in the abolition debates from the 1790s onwards, they accepted that the slaves had every right to attempt to destroy them. Slaves were outside the social compact and were therefore in a state of war with their oppressors, a war in which anything was permitted. Social prejudices developed and took root concerning the fitness of former slaves to be allowed to live amongst the free population. This was often stoked and enflamed by the pro-slavery lobby to whip up fear of what would happen after emancipation, just as the popular contemporary fear of migrants and asylum seekers can be exaggerated by those with a vested interest. These arguments were endlessly repeated, and even tacitly accepted by some white abolitionists themselves. Douglass notes how this prejudice was spread with a mixture of false concern for the slaves, while at the same time stoking fear: “what will you do with them? they can’t take care of themselves... they would not work; they would become a burden upon the State, and a blot upon society; they’d cut their master’s throats; ... they would necessarily become vagrants, paupers and criminals, overrunning all our alms houses, jails and prisons”.⁵⁴

One interpretation of Shelley’s portrayal of such a violent monster bent on revenge for the wrongs he has suffered is that it is evidence of her gradualism regarding the abolition of slavery.⁵⁵ While this may be a superficially attractive view, it belies the subtlety of both Shelly’s thought and of the text. The term ‘gradualism’ in this context is itself a confusing one. In its most popular sense, gradualism referred to the protracted and managed emancipation of slaves over time rather than their immediate release without any planning or measures for the integration of freedmen into society. In another sense, however, immediatism may refer not principally to proximity in time but to a lack of mediation by other processes or agents in the realising of emancipation. Here the contrast with the gradualists is not in the latter’s cautious pragmatism towards abolition but in their belief that this aim can, and will

⁵⁴ Frederick Douglass, “What shall be done with the Slaves if Emancipated?” in Foner, *Life and Writings*, vol. 3, 188.

⁵⁵ See Lepore, “Strange and Twisted Life” and Marie Mulvey-Roberts, *Dangerous Bodies: Historicising the Gothic Corporeal* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 54-64.

eventually, be brought about successfully through the outworking of various broader factors such as the progress of history, the triumph of reason, the purposes of God or the fundamentals of the market which will reward free labour.⁵⁶ Gradualism in this latter sense need not necessarily refer solely to the question of abolition but was likely part of a wider attitude towards largescale political reform and profound social restructuring. While the two senses are not often clearly distinguished in the historic literature, it is worth bearing both in mind when using the term. Either way, gradualism the default view amongst abolitionists until the 1830s in both Europe and the United States. This is not, of course, to deny that there were those who did not acknowledge the natural or God-given right to freedom of the slaves before that time. However, memories were fresh of the violent and chaotic upheavals in France and Haiti in the 1790s which dampened the public mood for radical action.

Against this background, it is reasonable to suppose that Mary Shelley shared the prevailing gradualist thinking of the time. Certainly, her husband Percy was a strong advocate of gradual and non-violent reform rather than immediate and revolutionary change. In the preface to *The Revolt of Islam*, for example, which was written at the same time as *Frankenstein*, he uses the language of slavery to make this point, though it is the French Revolution that he has in mind. He argues that that it is only to be expected that those who had been slaves “for centuries were incapable of conducting themselves with the wisdom and tranquillity of freemen so soon as some of their fetters were partially loosened”.⁵⁷ He would develop these thoughts further over the next couple of years in *A Philosophical View of Reform*.⁵⁸ Shelley herself would seem to have endorsed the same position. In 1824, the future British Prime Minister George Canning, himself a gradualist about abolition, likened the sudden release of slaves who were not ready for their freedom to raising “up a creature

⁵⁶ David Brion Davis, “The Emergence of Immediatism in British and American Antislavery Thought”, *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 49: 2 (1962): 209-230.

⁵⁷ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck (eds.), Volume 1, (New York: Scribners, 1926-30), 241. He asks just below, “Can he who the day before was a trampled slave suddenly become liberal-minded, forbearing, and independent?”

⁵⁸ “A Philosophical View of Reform” (1820) in Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Major Works*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 636-673.

resembling the splendid fiction of a recent romance; the hero of which constructs a human form, with all the corporeal capabilities of man” but without a perception of right and wrong.⁵⁹ Canning concluded that the creator then “recoils from the monster which he has made”, realising the magnitude of the power for harm that he has unleashed. Shelley knew of this reference, which she considered to have been a ‘pleasing’ compliment.⁶⁰

Based on Shelley’s reaction, some commentators have read into the Frankenstein story a concession to conservatism on Shelley’s part, or taken it that Shelley is playing both sides of the pro- and anti-slavery debate.⁶¹ Such a view, I think, fails to do justice to the richness of the text, no matter what her political leanings might have been. *Frankenstein* was written during a period in which public faith in the processes outlined above to bring about the end of slavery as an institution was waning, not least because it relied implicitly on the capacity of the slaveholders to come to understand and accept abolition as being in their enlightened self-interest. It was apparent from the increasingly aggressive and tenacious behaviour of the planters and colonists that this was not going to be the case.⁶² In this context, while gradualism may have made theoretical sense it was becoming apparent that it could not deliver the desired results.

We find just such an argument in Wollstonecraft’s analysis of the French Revolution which was written during the years of the Terror. If you want to avoid upheaval and bloodshed then social and political reform should follow rational and scientific principles as far as they

⁵⁹ George Canning, Hansard Archives, “Amelioration of the condition of the slave population in the west indies”, HC Deb 16 March 1824 vol 10 cc1091-198 (1103).

<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1824/mar/16/amelioration-of-the-condition-of-the>.

⁶⁰ Marie Mulvey-Roberts, *Dangerous Bodies*, 57.

⁶¹ For a balanced discussion of Shelley’s politics in the novel, see Andriana Cracium, “Frankenstein’s Politics”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Frankenstein*, ed. Andrew Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 84-100.

⁶² Davis writes, for example, that “from 1823 to 1832 the British Caribbean planters violently attacked the government’s efforts to meliorate slavery. They not only devised schemes to nullify effective reform but threatened to secede from the empire and seek protection from the United States” (“Emergence”, 219).

are known and change must be gradual both to give people time to lose their prejudices and to make any necessary adjustments to the proposed reforms in light of the new facts.⁶³ “The revolutions of states”, she argues, “ought to be gradual; for during violent or material changes it is not so much the wisdom of measures, as the popularity they acquire by being adapted to the foibles of the great body of the community, which gives them success”.⁶⁴ Ideally, the oppressors must lose their prejudices, the oppressed must be given the time and opportunities to acquire the skills and resources they would need, and the relevant social and political institutions were adapted accordingly. In the rest of this section, I set out Wollstonecraft’s position, suggesting that Shelley’s own account shares the same insights and follows the same overall structure.

While a gradual and orderly transition of power in France would have been desirable in principle, Wollstonecraft is convinced that simply could never happen in practice. She gives several reasons, all rooted in the fact that the corruption of social virtue had gone too far for rational measures to have any chance of success. That, after all, was why France was in a state of crisis. France’s leaders were incapable of identifying the rational course of action. Even if the leaders been able to work out what would be strategically optimal, so intense was their hatred of, and contempt for, the poor, Wollstonecraft suggests, that they would have anyway sacrificed their own self-interest to spite them (“haughtily then disregarding the suggestions of humanity, and even prudence, they determined to subvert every thing, sooner than resign their privileges; and this tenacity will not appear astonishing, if we call to mind, that they considered the people as beasts of burden, and trod them under foot with the mud”).⁶⁵ Wollstonecraft’s analysis runs parallel to the way that Douglass describes the stubborn refusal of the members of slaveholding society to recognise and accept the slaves’ demands and rights to freedom, and it is the position that I attribute to Shelley. The internalised prejudices of European society – indeed of human society in general – are simply too deeply engrained

⁶³ Wollstonecraft, *French Revolution*, e.g. 69-71.

⁶⁴ Wollstonecraft, *French Revolution*, 356.

⁶⁵ Wollstonecraft, *French Revolution*, 138-9.

to willingly entertain an equal fellowship with those that it has cast out and come to see as both dangerous and repulsive.

It is not just the aristocracy that is affected by the dynamic of unequal power giving rise to social prejudice on Wollstonecraft's account. The poor, too, have become both numb to the wrongness of violence and enraged at the oppression they have suffered. "The rich, Wollstonecraft argues, "have for ages tyrannized over the poor, teaching them how to act when possessed of power, and now must feel the consequence. People are rendered ferocious by misery; and misanthropy is ever the offspring of discontent".⁶⁶ This, again, was part of the classical republican understanding of the predictable social effects of slavery. As in France, theory was seen to be reinforced in practice by the violent and chaotic events in the Haitian Revolution. The brutal response to his treatment of Frankenstein's creature, driven by both the example he is set and an understandable hatred, can be seen in the same light as an inevitable consequence of the structure of social relations from which he has no way out.

There is a third reason found in Wollstonecraft's analysis of the turmoil in France for why attempts at gradual revolution are doomed to fail. In the period of transition, when the iron grip of tyranny is loosed, but where the institutions that will govern freedom have not yet been established, there will always be a ready supply of ambitious, self-interested opportunists to take advantage of the chaos and to fan the flames of enmity for personal gain.⁶⁷ While we do not quite see this play out in the novel *Frankenstein*, Shelley provides a good example of just this phenomenon in *Valperga*. A reasonable and mutually acceptable plan for peace had been negotiated between Florence and Pisa, guaranteed by Robert of Naples, and Shelley stipulates that this plan would have succeeded but for the devious intervention of a mercenary, Ugucione. War was was trade, she tells us, and so he "looked

⁶⁶ Wollstonecraft, *French Revolution*, 70.

⁶⁷ Wollstonecraft, "Letter on the Present Character of the French Nation", in *Posthumous Works of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 2 volumes, volume 2 (London: Joseph Johnson, 1798), 120-24.

with dismay at the projected peace, and resolved to disturb it”.⁶⁸ In the scheme of things, Ugucione was merely a petty tyrant – one of a great many in the fractured and corrupt system – but his actions had catastrophic results for the whole region.

For these reasons, a gradual social revolution of the kind that could release the slaves into society as full and equal citizens with the willing acceptance of the population is not possible. The change, when it comes, must be immediate, it must be radical, and it must be wholesale. This is what Wollstonecraft has in mind when she concludes that freedom for women can only come from a “radical revolution in female manners”, meaning that the whole system of relations – political, legal, social, economic – with men must be remade.⁶⁹ If the process is drawn out – as has undoubtedly been the case with the women’s emergence from servitude – then progress will be stalled and postponed indefinitely. In most cases of revolution, the transition will also be violent. This was Wollstonecraft’s position on the events in France, it was the case in Haiti, and it would later be the view of Douglass regarding the end of American slavery.⁷⁰ I believe this is the logic of the position that Shelley sets out in *Frankenstein*.

IV

Shelley, then, is not in my view warning us against the folly of immediate emancipation by illustrating what the monsters that we have created will do to us. Just as with Wollstonecraft before her, we can distinguish between whatever personal views Shelley may have held about what the wisest course of action would be and the logic of her position which reveals that the rot has already set in too deeply and that the result of the corrupt, oppressive and socially exclusionary society that Europe had created was an inevitable mutually-assured destruction since neither party was either able or willing to set aside its own grievances or prejudices for the good of all. Victor Frankenstein is incapable of seeing his creation as a fellow person, as a rational and moral agent deserving of a place in society as an equal. Any rational attempt he

⁶⁸ Shelley, *Valperga, or the Life and Adventures of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 76.

⁶⁹ Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 224.

⁷⁰ Coffee, “Radical Revolution”.

makes at coming to terms with the creature's right to an existence of his own is immediately undone by revulsion at his appearance and for his origins, resentment for what has become of his own life, and rage at the creature's actions. And so, like the slaveholders in Douglass's analysis and the nobility in Wollstonecraft's, Victor is driven to pursue the creature even at the cost of his own destruction. And in each of these cases, if one party – whether Victor or an individual master or aristocrat – were to accept the victim's right to a peaceful co-existence, these negative and hostile attitudes were so widespread and so deeply entrenched throughout society that their stance could make no difference. Finally, on the victims' side the point of reasoning with their oppressors, hoping that they could be won round, and trusting in their integrity has long since passed.

The conclusion that both Wollstonecraft and Douglass reach is that the end to servitude can only come through a radical, wholesale revolution in which the whole way of thinking in the previous slave society are torn down and a new way of life is created collaboratively by all sections of society working together.⁷¹ In Wollstonecraft's case, this is the revolution in female manners that transforms the entirety of social relations between the sexes. Douglass in turn calls for "nothing less than a radical revolution in all the modes of thought which have flourished under the blighting slave system" such that "the whole fabric of Southern society" will have to be reconstructed.⁷² The process of rebuilding is, indeed, a gradual one that will take many generations. But first must come the revolution. In *Frankenstein* we have this process illustrated in compelling and vivid detail.

⁷¹ Coffee, "Enduring Power" and "Radical Revolution".

⁷² Frederick Douglass, "The Work of the Future" in Foner, *Life and Writings* vol. 3, 290-1.