

for an exploration of one of the most challenging problems facing modern science: the morality of a scientist presenting an unwary world with a gift that is capable of both great good and great evil.

As she contemplated the idea that was to become her finest work of art, the Prometheus legend must have seemed especially meaningful to Mary Shelley: after all, she had spent her entire life in the company of intellectual titans. She was the daughter of William Godwin, the radical philosopher who had attacked the repressions of European government with his *Inquiry Concerning Political Justice*, the uncompromising novelist who had portrayed the vicious inequalities of the British legal system with his *Caleb Williams*. She was the mistress (and later the wife) of Percy Bysshe Shelley, the radical student who had been expelled from Oxford for refusing to repudiate his *Necessity of Atheism*, the nonconformist poet who had probed with intensity and passion the perils of purely intellectual activity in his *Alastor*. She knew, then, something of the nobility and the fervor that moved men to attempt great changes in the world: but she knew much more than this about such attempts, and her additional knowledge was bitter. She knew that the general public regarded these brilliant men as devils, rather than demigods: Godwin had been denounced as infamous enough to sell both his daughters to Shelley for the sum of £1500, and Shelley had been denounced as libertine enough to acquiesce in this sort of bargain.⁴ She knew that, given the current pressures for political and social conformity, these rumors would be believed: men like Godwin and Shelley were held to be dangerous political innovators, creators of hateful doctrines, beasts capable of any evil. And she also knew that both Godwin and Shelley were smarting under the agony of knowing that they were powerless to stop the process by which their personal reputations were being slowly torn to ribbons. The Titan's generosity to all mankind, his betrayal by one he had aided, his agony on his rock, all this must have been quite familiar to the girl who sat down to write her first novel at Geneva in the summer of 1816.

The family forces that drew Mary Shelley to the Prometheus legend were also, in all probability, the forces that motivated her to cast her modern Prometheus in the role of a scientist. From Godwin, she acquired that grasp of empirical rationality that was the chief characteristic of those remarkable philosophers, the eighteenth-century British empiricists. As a child, she indulged in the precocious activity of writing lectures on government for her little brother;⁵ as a maturing adolescent, she indulged in the precocious activity of reading the scientifically-oriented philosophy of Kant:⁶ and her intellectual

development was such that even the normally phlegmatic Godwin was moved to comment, in a letter to a friend, that "her desire for knowledge is great, and her perseverance in everything she undertakes [is] almost invincible".⁷ From Shelley, she learned to associate scientific research with the romance of creative activity. Shelley was fascinated by electricity: it was an elemental force, beautiful and dangerous, and it was the plaything of the physical scientist. As a boy at Eton, he received a severe shock from an electrostatic generator; but this failed to discourage him, for he shortly thereafter placed his life in jeopardy by attempting to duplicate Franklin's famous experiment with a kite in an electric storm. As a student at Oxford, he was consistently pre-occupied with chemistry, probing the relationship between that science and electricity.⁸ Throughout his adult life, he voraciously read any author who dealt with any aspect of electricity: Franz Anton Mesmer on "animal magnetism", Erasmus Darwin on electro-chemistry, Sir Humphrey Davy on galvanism. Driven by his enthusiasm, he imposed his interest in science on all who were close to him, and Mary could not have escaped receiving her share, even if she had been so inclined. Indeed, with such a zealous mentor, she could hardly avoid evolving her own personal attitudes towards science. Thus, on the evening at Geneva in 1816, while she listened to her lover and Lord Byron discuss the possibility of generating life in the laboratory, she was intellectually equipped to commence her amazing exploration of scientific creativity.

It is a regrettable truth that the significance of Mary Shelley's accomplishment in *Frankenstein* cannot be assessed without first dealing with a rather prevalent failure in critical response: the quite arbitrary classification of the novel as merely another Gothic romance. Ernest A. Baker sums up what he considers to be the essence of the work when he writes: "Mrs. Shelley certainly realized her longing to write a superlative ghost story".⁹ Edith Birkhead suggests that the work is most impressive when it most clearly manifests itself as the product of "an imagination naturally more attuned to the gruesome and fantastic".¹⁰ Devendra P. Varma believes the major contribution of the work to be that it "carried horror into the pseudo-scientific".¹¹ Even P. D. Fleck, who examines *Frankenstein* as a deliberate answer to the philosophy implicit in Shelley's *Alastor*, does not break completely free from this traditional approach: he emphasizes the gothic elements of the work, and concludes "it is not a great novel".¹² The critical assumption obviously underlying such commentary is that *Frankenstein* necessarily belongs in the Gothic sub-genre: it is simply one more horror story with no purpose beyond that of

light entertainment, and it must be evaluated in terms of its propensity to thrill the reader. This assumption is both inaccurate and misleading, because it directs any critical analysis of *Frankenstein* towards an incidental use of the trappings of Gothic machinery and away from a deliberate and thorough development of a complex social theme. The one fact that definitely differentiates Mary Shelley's minor masterpiece from every Gothic romance is that it consistently explores a question of great social importance: in that alone, it belongs far more in the tradition of novels like Godwin's *Caleb Williams* or Dickens' *Hard Times* than in the tradition of novels like Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* or Stoker's *Dracula*. This fact is drawn to our attention in the preface of 1818 with the following unequivocal declaration:

. . . I have not considered myself as merely weaving a series of supernatural terrors. The event on which the interest of the story depends is exempt from the disadvantages of a mere tale of spectres or enchantment. It was recommended by the novelty of the situations which it develops: and, however impossible as a physical fact, affords a point of view to the imagination of the delineation of human passions more comprehensive and commanding than any which the ordinary relations of interesting events can yield.¹³

Surely this is explicit enough. The merit of the novel, in the estimation of the author, does not lie in the Gothic elements involved in the creation of life: rather, it lies in the exploration of the situations which this creation produces. The unique point of view the novel offers is that of scientific creativity, and the human passions the novel delineates are those that arise out of the sustained moral conflict within the mind of the scientific creator: hence, the novel can be seen as one that evolves a serious social theme, the ethical implications of scientific research, and any critical commentary on the work should take this into account.

In order to direct full attention to the secular nature of its theme, the novel employs what must be considered its definitive departure from the Prometheus legend: the story takes place within the realm of the natural, rather than the realm of the supernatural. Both Victor Frankenstein and the monster, the two characters that dominate the work, are certainly not religious in any accepted sense of the term. Their struggle is with each other, not the gods: the tools they use and the weapons they wield are instruments of the earth, not of the heavens. Victor draws our attention to his freedom from the cruder concepts of the spiritual when he explains the principles that formed the basis of his early studies. "In my education, my father had

taken the greatest precautions that my mind should be impressed with no supernatural horrors".¹⁴ Victor implies that he has no conventional religious beliefs when he laments the death of little William. He advances the "consolation" that "the pang is over, his sufferings are at an end forever"; (71) but he does not advance the religious consolation that William's soul will live forever, and the omission seems deliberate. If this were not evidence enough, Victor confirms the fact that he has no conventional religious beliefs when he swears to revenge himself upon the monster. He swears, not by the gods of a religious man, but by the elements, the intuitions, and the passions of a man of this world. "By the sacred earth on which I kneel, by the shades that wander near me, by the deep and eternal grief that I feel, I swear" (193). A similar attitude towards the supernatural is characteristic of the monster. When he offers to leave Europe and live in permanent exile with a female monster yet unbuilt, he swears fidelity by his creator, the scientist Victor Frankenstein. "I swear to you, by the earth which I inhabit and by you that made me" (140). Quite unconscious of the blasphemy implicit in his oath, the monster continues to attest to his honesty by appealing to the forces of nature. "I swear . . . by the sun, and by the blue sky of heaven, and by the fire of love that burns my heart" (141). The critics who have considered this point have concluded that Mary Shelley is merely parroting Shelley's notorious atheism:¹⁵ however, there is a more satisfactory explanation of the matter. Mary Shelley is probing a problem of secular ethics: she confines her work to this world because her theme is of concern only to this world. Victor Frankenstein's research is primarily to benefit man. "What glory would attend the discovery if I could banish disease from the human frame and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!" (40) His sin is a sin against humanity. "I had unchained an enemy among them whose joy it was to shed their blood and revel in their groans" (176). His punishment is inflicted upon him by the monster, a product of his own scientific research. "The cup of life was poisoned forever, and although the sun shone upon me, as upon the happy and gay of heart, I saw around me nothing but a dense and frightful darkness, penetrated by no light but the glimmer of two eyes that glared upon me" (174). There is no suggestion from Captain Walton, from the monster, or even from Victor himself, that Victor is guilty of impiety when he probes for the secret of life: unlike the sin of Prometheus, Victor's sin involves only the creatures of this world.

Before proceeding to an analysis of the relationship between creator and creation, it is worth-while to examine the part played by Captain Robert

Walton in the novel. As several critics have observed, he is not necessary to the narrative structure of the work:¹⁶ therefore, if he is considered only a character "introduced merely for the purpose of recounting Frankenstein's story",¹⁷ it is logical enough to conclude that "the epistular convention" in which he figures extensively "has a clumsy lack of conviction".¹⁸ However, this sort of criticism overlooks the fact that Walton serves a vital function in conveying to us the theme of the novel. Although an experienced sailor, a competent explorer, and an enthusiastic amateur scientist, Walton is both poetic and sensitive: his one regret in life is his "failure" to obtain "a niche in the temple where the names of Homer and Shakespeare are consecrated" (16). Precisely because he is so endowed, Walton is the ideal character to allow us to see Victor Frankenstein in a more balanced manner. Burdened with self-imposed guilt, Frankenstein depicts himself as a murderer, a despicable wretch. "I am not mad . . . the sun and the heavens, who have viewed my operations, can bear witness of my truth. I am the assassin of those most innocent victims; they died by my machinations" (177). But Walton and Frankenstein are very much alike in temperament and tastes: thus, Walton can report with sympathy and comprehension Frankenstein's noble character, thereby permitting us to reconsider the charges which Frankenstein hurls against himself. Moreover, Walton is a scientist: consequently, he is objective enough to see the merits of Frankenstein's project, despite the fact that Frankenstein himself denounces his own curiosity with vehemence and sorrow. "Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow" (52). Walton's section of the narrative encloses the rest: first and last, we are exposed to an impartial view of Victor and his monster, and this view is vital to us when we attempt to ascertain the morality of Victor's creative activity.

It is through Walton that we are introduced to Victor as a Promethean figure. He is a man capable of gratitude. "If anyone performs an act of kindness towards him or does him any the most trifling service, his whole countenance is lighted up, as it were, with a beam of benevolence and sweetness that I never saw equalled" (24). He is a man of imagination and sensitivity. "Even broken in spirit as he is, no one can feel more deeply than he does the beauties of nature. The starry sky, the sea, and every sight afforded by these wonderful regions seem still to have the power of elevating his soul from earth" (27). He is a man of extreme intellect, one who possesses

"an intuitive discernment, a quick but never-failing power of judgment, a penetration into the cause of things, unequalled for clearness and precision" (28). The man Walton describes is one who, by virtue of his temperament and powers of mind, seems fitted to accomplish the ultimate creative achievement: and everything Walton suggests is subsequently confirmed by the narrative itself. Victor insists that he is of a predominantly scientific turn of mind; and yet, as his friendship with the literary Clerval indicates, his impulse towards scientific creativity is essentially poetic. He admits that he was first won for science when he read the fantastic speculations of Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Albertus Magnus. He confesses that the matter-of-fact attitude of M. Krempe led him to conclude that he would be "required to exchange chimeras of boundless grandeur for realities of little worth" (46), and he admits that he almost abandoned the discipline of science in his disappointment. But the enticing depiction of modern science that he encounters in M. Waldman's lecture rekindles his enthusiasm, and the romantic side of his nature appears in the grandeur of his aspirations. "More, far more, will I achieve; treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation" (47). Poet, philosopher, benefactor, and creator: Victor Frankenstein is all of these at once, and thus the scientist emerges as the modern Prometheus.

Enraptured by the glories that he thinks await him, Victor plunges into his studies with a great deal of zest. He commits himself to an academic program that would discourage most lesser men: not only does he propose to master chemistry, but also "every branch of natural philosophy, including mathematics" (48). He expresses the unique appeal of scientific research in a manner that would win the endorsement of many a twentieth-century scientist. "In other studies you go as far as others have gone before you, and there is nothing more to know; but in a scientific pursuit there is continual food for discovery and wonder" (49-50). So blinded is he by his own intellectual advancement that he overlooks the fact that he is playing with incredibly dangerous forces: he designs and assembles a being that is, potentially at least, a fearfully efficient killer. "As the minuteness of the parts formed a great hindrance to my speed, I resolved, contrary to my first intention, to make the being of gigantic stature, that is to say, about eight feet in height, and proportionally large" (52). Totally absorbed in the technical requirements of his creation, Frankenstein remains blissfully unaware of the menace it might become; but Mary Shelley does not allow us to share his lack of knowledge. Throughout the novel, she utilizes the awesome majesty of lightning as a

symbol of the powers which the scientist explores. It is a bolt of lightning that first directs the imagination of the young Victor Frankenstein towards the marvels of modern science:

As I stood at the door, on a sudden I beheld a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak which stood about twenty yards from our house; and so soon as the dazzling light vanished, the oak had disappeared, and nothing remained but a blasted stump. When we visited it the next morning, we found the tree shattered in a singular manner. It was not splintered by the shock, but entirely reduced to thin ribbons of wood. I never beheld anything so utterly destroyed (40).

The event is both beautiful and terrible, and it is prophetic in significance. The young Victor only appreciates the beauty: it remains for the more mature Victor, torn by the destructive fury of the forces he had unleashed in his creation, to understand the terror. Shattered by the deaths of little William and Justine, he laments: "I am a blasted tree; the bolt has entered my soul; and I felt then that I should survive to exhibit what I shall soon cease to be—a miserable specimen of wretched humanity, pitiable to others and intolerable to myself" (153). For Victor, symbol and fact are merged in the macabre episode of his wedding night. A storm blows up: his wife is brutally murdered: the murderous creature, "running with the swiftness of lightning" (187), escapes by plunging into the lake: and Victor remains behind to mourn, blasted in mind and soul. Victor's tale, taken only in these terms, is a stark warning to the scientist who would be a modern Prometheus.

However, Mary Shelley does not allow us to take Victor's tale only in these terms. We should not forget that the bestowal of life itself was the first and most prominent of the gifts of Prometheus to the human race:¹⁹ by aspiring to become the "creator and source" of "a new species" containing "many happy and excellent natures" (52), Victor is following in the footsteps of the noble Titan. And the being he creates, even after he has committed all of his vicious crimes, is still very much a thing of wonder. As Walton's continual groping after the secret of the creature's construction serves to remind us, Victor's monster is the ultimate creation: he is life itself, life created by man. He is, in essence, what the great artist Pygmalion once dared to dream of: the work of art that actually lives. Mary Shelley forces us to recognize this when she makes the monster a basically good creation. Despite the loathsome materials that went into his construction, despite the powers inherent in his huge frame, and despite the revolting nature of his physical appearance, the monster is a creature of ability and benevolence. Thrown

into a world full of strange sensations, he advances rapidly from the confusion of an infant to the sophistications of a civilized being. His strength and his agility manifest themselves as he fumbles for the basic necessities of life. His curiosity and his intelligence manifest themselves as he learns about such complex phenomena as clothes, fire, language, and literature. His extreme sensitivity manifests itself from the day he gains life, primarily in his truly pathetic search for companionship and understanding. In fact, by comparison with the human beings of the novel, the monster must be acknowledged a potentially superior being. Unlike man, he is not a predator. He lives on nuts, berries, roots, and milk, and he shuns meat and wine: he can, with justice, boast to his creator: "I do not destroy the lamb and the kid to glut my appetite" (139). Unlike man, he is naturally moral. When he learns that his seizure of food is a form of theft, he renounces the method and forages for roots in the forest; when he learns that the De Lacey family is poor, he helps them by doing much of their manual labour. Unlike man, he is grateful for anything remotely resembling a favour. His gratitude to the De Lacey family for simply existing in his vicinity forms a stark contrast with the Turkish merchant's ingratitude to the same family for arranging his escape from prison and death. Unlike man, he is capable of benevolence under the most trying of circumstances. His rescue of the drowning girl after humanity has so firmly rejected him forms a stark contrast with the callous indifference of the Irish nurse assigned to look after a suffering man she suspects of being a murderer. The monster has every right to exclaim: "Shall I respect man when he condemns me? Let him live with me in the interchange of kindness, and instead of injury I will bestow every benefit upon him with tears of gratitude at his acceptance" (138). In the noble qualities of the monster, Mary Shelley suggests a truth about the scientific creation: in spite of its ultimate effect on mankind, even the scientific creation turned monster is commendable in conception and laudable when completed.

The novel's portrayal of the monster forces the reader to ask: "Given the merit of this being, why does he turn from benevolence to bloodshed?" The answer to this question touches upon the fundamental issue in the ethics of scientific creativity. It is clear that Victor Frankenstein must share the guilt of the monster's crimes—but not by virtue of the fact that he created the monster. His intention of finding the secret of longevity was humane, his procedure was dictated by technical considerations, and his project was initially quite successful: therefore, it would be unjust to reproach him either for undertaking or for completing the experiment. Nevertheless, he must bear

part of the burden of the monster's crimes because he refused to accept the responsibilities that accompanied his success.²⁰ Weakened with fatigue, he turned in revulsion from the creature he had made. "I had gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then, but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived" (57). Victor's action, carried out in a moment of human frailty, is certainly understandable: and yet, it sets in motion the sequence of bloody events that follow. Thrown entirely on his own resources, without an education and without the aid of a sympathetic human, the monster struggles in vain to introduce himself peacefully into society. For this reason, guilty though he is of his initial crimes, the monster is entitled to reproach his creator:

Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us. You purpose to kill me. How dare you sport thus with life? Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind (95).

For this reason, convinced though he is that his action will save mankind, Victor still feels a tinge of remorse as he smashes the mate he had promised the monster he would build. "The remains of the half-finished creature, whom I had destroyed, lay scattered on the floor, and I almost felt as if I had mangled the living flesh of a human being" (162-3). At the moment of his own death, Victor clings to the idea that his actions were dictated solely by the brutality of the monster, but the novel does not invite us to accept this exonerating view. It is true that Victor's motives were generally quite blameless: however, it is equally true that his human nature betrayed him when he needed it most, and this made him guilty of a grave sin of omission.

Since she is very careful to depict the precise nature of Victor's sin, Mary Shelley takes similar pains to demonstrate that his sin plays a relatively minor role in turning the monster into a killer. It is Victor, the scientist, who builds a creature of great strength: but it is man, the social animal, who forces that creature to use his strength for murder. Throughout the novel, the human being is guilty of mistrust and brutality to such an extent that the monster is driven in self-defense to adopt these attitudes as well. From the moment of his clumsy and naive confrontation with Victor to the moment of his planned and impassioned confrontation with the De Lacey family, the monster endures with stoic resignation an unremitting stream of abuse and blows. He acknowledges that he is revoltingly ugly, for his encounter with the reflecting surface of the pool of water leaves him little option. "At first

I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations" (108). Although he comprehends his handicap, the monster correctly concludes that it is not representative of his nature, and he innocently assumes that his benevolence will help him to win a place in human society. "I imagined that they would be disgusted, until, by my gentle demeanor and conciliating words, I should first win their favour and afterwards their love" (109). His illusions are not completely shattered until he attempts to show himself to the De Lacey family. Felix De Lacey, a generous and spirited youth, is so horrified that he falls upon the monster without saying a word. This rejection from one he has aided, coming as it does in addition to all his other rebuffs, moves the monster to a destructive fury: and yet, for the time being, he can only vent his rage upon property. "Anger returned, a rage of anger, and unable to injure anything human, I turned my fury towards inanimate objects" (132). After his destruction of the De Lacey cottage, the monster sets out for Geneva in order to find his creator. His travels through the forest allow him time to reflect, and his mood changes to one of gratitude for life. "Soft tears again bedewed my cheeks, and I even raised my humid eyes with thankfulness towards the blessed sun, which bestowed such joy upon me" (134). While in this mood, he returns to benevolence: he sees a girl fall into a swift river, and he uses his great strength to save her from certain death. As he is trying to revive her, a forester rewards him for his generosity by firing a musket ball into his shoulder. This is an overt act of war, and the monster treats it as such. Seething with hatred, he opens his own campaign by attempting to kidnap a boy as an ally. Unfortunately, the boy reveals that he is related to Victor Frankenstein, and the information enrages the monster. When the boy struggles and cries out for help, the infuriated monster loses control of himself for a moment, and involuntarily commits his first murder. "I grasped his throat to silence him, and in a moment he lay dead at my feet" 136. A long series of man-made cruelties thus culminates in death: with its almost instinctive hatred of the unknown, with its vicious misuse of a Promethean creation, the society of man unleashes horrors upon itself.

Having made a monster indeed of Victor's creation, the human social order shows that it is quite incapable of dealing with the resulting chaos. As Victor learns to his sorrow, the general public proves inflexible in the face of the inexplicable: rather than admit they are ignorant and helpless, men turn the weight of their institutions upon each other. The legal system

appears quite inadequate when a Genevan court accepts highly circumstantial evidence to condemn Justine Moritz to death for the murder of little William Frankenstein.²¹ The religious system appears almost grotesque when a Roman Catholic priest threatens to withhold absolution in order to force Justine to confess to a crime she did not commit. The medical system appears unnecessarily callous when an Irish doctor casually administers treatment to Victor because he is a man accused of murder. Nor can Victor do anything to change all this. He is powerless: human cynicism is too much for him. He knows, from the moment the monster runs free, that nobody would believe his story even if he were desperate enough to tell it. "I well knew that if any other had communicated such a relation to me, I should have looked upon it as the ravings of insanity" (74). There can be no doubt that Victor's assessment of his plight is perfectly correct. When he finally does tell his story to a magistrate, he is fortunate enough to command some degree of belief. But when he presses for effective police action, the magistrate's bureaucratic mentality asserts itself, and he disposes of Victor's request with all the skill of one adept at administrative evasion. "He had heard my story with that half kind of belief that is given to a tale of spirits and supernatural events; but when he was called upon to act officially in consequence, the whole tide of his incredulity returned" (190). Law, religion, medicine, and politics are weak reeds: they might be of some value, but human frailties make them hollow mockeries, all too often when they are needed most.

Given the complete range of ideas that Mary Shelley offers, it is not too difficult to determine the attitude of the novel towards Victor and his Promethean activities. There are three characters in the work who know the entire story: Captain Walton, Victor himself, and the monster. All three are agreed that Victor's aspirations are basically laudable. Both Walton and the monster are fascinated by the fact that Victor's experiment succeeded, and both seem to agree that it was a potentially benevolent act. Only Victor condemns his creativity: and even he, broken as he is by his hideous experience, concedes with his last words that his story should not deter others from an exploration of the unknown. "I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed" (206). Victor's one sin is a sin of omission, rather than a sin of commission: he fails to accept the responsibilities of his creativity, and for this he is fearfully punished. But the real villain of the work is all mankind, the social animal that blindly abuses his tools. This is the implication of the monster's protest: "Am I to be thought the only criminal, when all humankind sinned against me?" (210). As long as society is prepared to

debase the gifts of the modern Prometheus, it must be prepared to acknowledge its role in the destruction that invariably follows.

The true merit of Mary Shelley's analysis of scientific creativity is that it rejects the simplistic approach of an unqualified condemnation of the scientist whose creativity produces a monster. The novel demonstrates that the modern Prometheus is, in terms of imagination and creativity, one with the poet, the artist, and the philosopher. Because he is such a noble person, humanity admires him; and because humanity admires him, he strives to merit this admiration. Humanity's approbation thus makes every human a partner in the Promethean quest: the modern Prometheus represents the best in mankind, and we wish him well. It is true that the modern Prometheus is man rather than god. It is true that the modern Prometheus is capable of many errors, some of them quite serious in nature. However, Mary Shelley reminds us that the error of the scientist can only have dreadful consequences if the rest of society proves to be irresponsible. When Victor Frankenstein discovers the secret of life, the human race has longevity within its grasp. When Victor Frankenstein allows his creature to escape, the human race must find a way to deal with it. When Victor Frankenstein is punished for his weakness, other human beings die. And when Victor Frankenstein is forced to conclude that the world cannot utilize his discovery, the human race loses a precious gift. Mary Shelley does not let us lose sight of the fact that creativity is not just a matter between creator and creation: given the nature of man, it involves all of us. In an age that has witnessed the production of such double-edged tools as dynamite, nuclear fission, and Dichloro-Diphenyl-Trichloroethane, in an age that has witnessed the application of art to propaganda, in an age that has witnessed wars fought in the name of economic philosophy, we could do worse than ponder the ethical implications of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

NOTES

1. Aeschylus, *The Prometheus Bound*, trans. George Thomson (Cambridge, 1932), p. 57.
2. Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*", in *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (London, 1960), pp. 204-5.
3. George Gordon, Lord Byron, "Prometheus", in *Byron: Poetical Works* (London, 1967), p. 98.
4. Richard Church, *Mary Shelley* (London, 1928), p. 38.
5. R. Glynn Grylls, *Mary Shelley* (London, 1938), p. 17.

6. Grylls, p. 26.
7. As quoted in: Eileen Bigland, *Mary Shelley* (New York, 1959), p. 32.
8. Carl Grabo, *A Newton Among Poets* (Chapel Hill, 1930), pp. 6-13.
9. Ernest A. Baker, *The History of the English Novel* (New York, 1957), V, 218.
10. Edith Birkhead, *The Tale of Terror* (London, 1921), p. 159.
11. Devendra P. Varma, *The Gothic Flame* (London, 1957), p. 154.
12. P. D. Fleck, "Mary Shelley's Notes to Shelley's Poems and *Frankenstein*", *Studies in Romanticism*, VI (Summer, 1967), 253.
13. Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Preface to *Frankenstein*", *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck (London, 1965), VI, 259. It is true that Shelley is the author of this preface; nevertheless, by virtue of the fact that Mary allowed it to be printed as her preface, I am presuming that she regarded it as a statement that expressed the essential features of her work.
14. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (Toronto, 1965), p. 50. All subsequent references to *Frankenstein* will be to this edition, and the page number will be given in parentheses in the text of the essay.
15. See, for example, Muriel Spark, *Child of Light* (Hadleigh, 1951), p. 139.
16. See, for example, Lucy Rossetti, *Mrs. Shelley* (Folcraft, 1969), p. 101. The "long narrative by the dying man" is a form "which might with advantage have been avoided". For a more extended version of essentially the same view, see Birkhead, p. 161. Miss Birkhead insists that "if Mrs. Shelley had abandoned the awkward contrivance of putting the narrative into the form of a dying man's confession, reported verbatim in a series of letters, and had opened her story, as she apparently intended, at the point where Frankenstein, after weary years of research, succeeds in creating a living being, her novel would have gained in force and intensity".
17. Spark, p. 132.
18. Spark, p. 144.
19. Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (Harmondsworth, 1960, I, 34.
20. See: Harold Bloom, "Frankenstein, or the New Prometheus", *Partizan Review*, XXXII (1965), 614. Mr. Bloom argues that Victor, because he does not anticipate the emotional impact that the living monster has upon him, is "a moral idiot" at the instant of creation.
21. To those who consider the matter, Mary Shelley's treatment of Justine's trial might at first seem a little too unrealistic. However, as the history of Western jurisprudence aptly demonstrates, many people have been condemned to death on the basis of hysteria rather than evidence. For those familiar with the trial of Socrates in ancient Athens, or the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti in modern America, or the trials of innumerable victims in between, Mary Shelley's account will not seem unduly remote from the realm of the possible.