

On Reading Love in *Frankenstein* and the *Song of Songs*

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Abstract

This essay draws together the *Song of Songs* and Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* in order to engage in a comparative reading, one text alongside the other. The theoretical frame that holds this rereading is Cixous's school of poetic thinking-writing: écriture féminine. The contribution this essay makes to studies of the *Song of Songs* is in its problematising of divine love and critical emphasis on its mortality within a discursive and eclectic world of texts, primarily *Frankenstein*, but also, *Paradise Lost*, *Genesis*, *The Book of Promethea*, and *Philosophy of the Boudoir*.

Key Words: *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley, Cixous

Introduction

One rainy summer in 1816, in a house by a lake, Mary Godwin, the 19-year-old lover of poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, conceived what would become the subject of her remarkable novel, *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus* (See Sampson, 2018 and Shelley, 2018/1818). The company during that extraordinary summer included George Gordon (Lord Byron) and his personal physician, John Polidori, who were staying at Villa Diodati. Late one evening, after reading a French anthology of German ghost stories called *Fantasmagoriana*, the company would challenge each other to write their own. It was by this chance that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was born. Shelley's novel tells a gothic tragedy about a young scientist and his creature, and the consequences of that creation on his life, loved ones and the creature himself.

This writing takes a creative, critical and comparative route between Mary Shelley's 1818 text of *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*¹, and the text of the *Song of Songs*. At first reflection one might question the value of reading one disparate

¹ Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus*, the 1818 text, is arranged in 3 volumes. The novel is framed by a series of letters from Arctic explorer, Robert Walton to his sister Margaret, which form the introduction and conclusion. The body of the novel is narrated to Robert Walton by Victor Frankenstein, a privileged young Genevese scholar and scientist, whom Robert Walton has rescued from the Arctic ice. Victor goes on to recount at first his idyllic childhood and then his love affair with science that led him to create and animate a man-creature whom he would almost immediately abandon. Alienated and ostracised, the creature struggles to make sense of his existence. Eventually he will follow Victor across the Alps to his family home in Geneva. Shelley has the creature narrate his own experience to Victor by a campfire as a focus in volume II. Victor's failure to resolve his responsibilities to the creature he has created leads to violence, death and hopeless despair. The creature vows to ensure Victor has a taste of the abject loneliness and suffering which he has been dealt, and one by one he reaves Victor of his loved ones.

text with an ancient, sacred other, separated as these texts are by time, space, language and genre. Yet, it is the premise of this writing that such discourse between texts can realize novel insights, so that an old and well-read text might be reanimated on the platform of the other and speak again into the contemporary discursive space. In this instance I pose the character “Promethea” as heroine, and as foil to the Prometheus of *Frankenstein*, weaving this figure into the ghost of the woman of the Song of the Songs. I reread locales in the Song of Songs through this thematic lens, invoking as part of the bricolage “dehiscence” (see also Klangwisan, Forthcoming) as a poetic stylistic in the Song of Songs. The notion of dehiscence (the poor closing of a wound) resonates with Frankenstein’s ghoulish reconstruction of the body in parts, one that finds an eerie trace in the Song of Song’s body poetry. Mary Shelley’s compelling storytelling about loneliness, the loss of one’s soul, and the failure of love can thus reinscribe the Song of Songs, making new meaning in the creature’s shadow. Both texts explored here travel riveting arcs with elements of adoration, abandonment, violence and despair presented in beautiful and ghastly ways.

In terms of methodology and genre, this writing is influenced by the distinctive thinking-poetic of Hélène Cixous. *Écriture féminine* offers among other things, a way of moving freely and subtly between contrasting texts in order to elucidate new portents, resonances and possibilities (For further on écriture féminine, see Hélène Cixous 1993). Calling forth Cixous’s *Le Livre de Promethea* (Cixous 1983) as a threshold text and third interlocutor, a hypothetical textual garden is created where Mary Shelley’s creature and the woman of the Song of Songs encounter each other. In this liminal space, that is, Promethea’s garden, thematic lines in the Song of Songs are creatively reanimated and merged with Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, creating implicit, uncanny effects. Italicized poetic breaks in this writing act as gateways into this liminal space, incarnating the voice of Promethea. These creative interludes both disrupt and open the space inviting the reader inside.

On Reading Love in *Frankenstein* and the Song of Songs

“Promethea has awakened in me dreams extinguished for thousands of years; sometimes one catches on fire even through so many icy layers...Promethea has rekindled dreams of fire in me, dreams of abysses, they are terribly dangerous dreams: as long as they are dreams alone, as long as one dreams alone” (Cixous 1991, 24).

I call the woman of the Song of Songs “Promethea,” in memory of the Titan god of fire. I find her signature in any number of gardens of creation. I might find her in the grave also, the other ghastly garden of creation that is a touchstone in Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. In the Song of Songs, Promethea, like her Greek brother, Prometheus, plays with fire. She is found where passion burns like Sheol and love’s “darts are darts of fire, / A blazing flame” (8:6). Promethea blazes like the luminaries, shining “like the dawn,/ Beautiful as the moon, / Radiant as the sun” (6:10). In Greek

primordial memory, the “Prometheus” of Shelley’s novel, created men from clay, together with his own brother. Prometheus stands in the eyes of Byron and Percy Shelley as a worthy symbol of rebellion—a rebellion against the gods.² The character of Victor Frankenstein himself will define himself by this myth, and fire as a sigil appears everywhere in Mary Shelley’s text (Johnson 2014, 20). Prometheus is the fire bringer, who opens the world to the entangled poles of creation and destruction, fated to be the father of the human race. In Aeschylus’ version of the story of Prometheus, *Prometheus Bound*, the daily suffering of Prometheus is on gratuitous display (Aeschylus 2009). Promethea suffers too. While Prometheus is an object of pity, chained to a cliff, exposed to the elements and at the mercy of Zeus’ eagle as punishment for stealing fire, in this same place Promethea’s personal agonies have turned since the very beginning.

Memories of Genesis pervade both Shelley’s novel and the Song of Songs.³ The ageless trope of the biblical creation of man lies deeply curled in Mary Shelley’s imaginary. The creation of ‘adam’ is at once cosmic and domestic, intimate and portentous: “And the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen 2:7 JPS). The Song of Songs finds its own lovers in another garden while Shelley’s creature is a blighted mockery of Adam and this knowledge twists the creature in agitated despair:

Like Adam, I was created apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with, and acquire knowledge from beings of a superior nature: but I was wretched, helpless, and alone. Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition; for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me (Shelley 2018, 121).

It is a strange and bitter love with which Frankenstein’s creature bears his creator. It is also a passionate love that will carry this desolate Adam over hills like a stag (2:8), presenting him peering in through windows like a voyeur (2:9), that will have him in bed with Frankenstein’s bride in a violent and passionate parody of a

² Mary Shelley’s concern with Prometheus was undoubtedly reinforced by her associates. Percy Shelley’s own interest in the Prometheus myth which he adapted in the closet drama *Prometheus Unbound* which draws certain inspiration from John Milton’s ode to the biblical creation of man, *Paradise Lost*: “With fear and self-contempt and barren hope;/ Whilst me, who am thy foe, eyeless in hate” (Bysshe Shelley 2017, page no), but also George Gordon, Mary Shelley’s associate that extraordinary rainy summer, will be celebrated for his poetic work on Prometheus: “... to thee the strife was given/ Between the suffering and the will,/ Which torture where they cannot kill;/ And the inexorable Heaven,/ And the deaf tyranny of Fate,/ The ruling principle of Hate,/ Which for its pleasure doth create/ The things it may annihilate” (Shelley 1818, 245).

³ Phyllis Trible’s use of Gen 2-3 as a “hermeneutical key” with regards to the Song of Songs is a critical backdrop here (Trible 1978, 144-165). I develop this idea further in Klangwisan 2014.

wedding night (1:16). If the *Song of Songs* is love's celebration, *Frankenstein* is love's interment. But it may also be the case that these stories of love in negative and positive foil are not so removed. Hate is nearer to love than we think. Envy is entwined with desire (Landy 2011, 226). Passion is sometimes a crime, thus for Victor Frankenstein, "Everywhere I turn I see the same figure—her bloodless arms and relaxed form flung by the murderer on its bridal bier" (Shelley 2018, 189). Love and hatred continue to joust at the icy end of the world,⁴ but from Promethea comes this warning: "I adjure you,/ O maidens of Jerusalem,/ By gazelles or by hinds of the field:/ Do not wake or rouse Love" (3:5). This gambit signals a moment of escape from "the little cage," a small cause for Promethea that is no less significant than "cosmic devastation" (Cixous 1996, 176).

"How close I came to not being alive. To not being born. A matter of one day ... The hour I was born a poet died ... How close I came to not being me, to not being who I was born. How close I came to being only the vague shadow of who I am ... I heard a sobbing in your breast, sobs of wonder, because what a birth it is to awaken!" (Cixous 1996, 176)"

The feminine is an almost invisible or supplementary party in the primeval phallocentric creation scenes, as phallocentric as *Frankenstein*. Sexual difference is elemental in each of these texts. In the Greek myth of Prometheus, Hephaestus would counter by creating the woman Pandora as a punishment to human men. In the Garden of Eden, Eve appears as the more profane creation (Cixous 1996, 74), made up of an extraneous body part from the sleeping Adam. The *Song of Songs* draws from the symbolism of the Garden of Eden and sexual difference as a critical and organising metafield. The Song's resonant presentation of Eden's imagery arrives with country vistas, wild animals and visceral preponderance of fruit along with all the twos: and interplay of male and female bodies, an interweaving of male and female voice. Promethea's own voice welcomes the reader: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth" (1:2). Masculine and feminine consort here, "taking each other's measure and finding each other marvellously equal," but it is only in the poem that she is truly freer than men (Cixous 1996, 34).

In *Frankenstein*, Shelley's own battles against the misogyny of her time are entangled with her complicitous affection for John Milton and *Paradise Lost* so that, for some, it is only in the fits of inchoate and monstrous rage laid bare in her writing where her true struggle comes to light.⁵ *Frankenstein* is a story of hell that loosely and yet with macabre detail patterns itself on heaven. The creatures of this hell are obscene simulacra, all of them. Frankenstein's creature is grotesque, yet crowned with improbably beautiful pearly-white teeth and glorious flowing black hair

⁴ Gilbert and Gubar 2000, 637: "Shelley did manage to still the monster's suffering and Frankenstein's and her own by transporting all three from the fires of filthy creation back to the ice and silence of the Pole."

⁵ Gilbert and Gubar 2000, 45: "[A]pparently docile way[s] of coping with Miltonic misogyny may conceal fantasies of equality that occasionally erupt in monstrous images of rage."

(Shelley 2018, 45). The birth of this creature is a “horror story of maternity” that takes place after an obscene labour that is in the very navel of the novel (Gilbert and Gubar 2000, 585). In the birthing of Mary Shelley’s gothic fiction she brings her own shocking tale to life, this creative expression of what is apparently a symptom of her own private hell. The being of woman is alienated from history and decomposed by the tenements of childbirth and blood, a scene replayed again and again in the ghastly modernity of a man’s world, a tangible taste of the curse of Eve. Gilbert implies of Frankenstein’s creature: “that one of the anxious fantasies his narrative helps Mary Shelley covertly examine is the fearful tale of a female fall from a lost paradise of art, speech, and autonomy into a hell of sexuality, silence, and filthy materiality” (Gilbert and Gubar 2000, 585). Mary Shelley lost her mother to childbirth, and she lost three of her four children by Percy Bysshe Shelley to the vicissitudes of poverty and sickness. Her hard-won sexual freedom that had resulted in this dystopian experience of the world had come with exotic costs. The appeal of Milton’s dark verse is thus understandable. “Thus, though the woman writer who chooses this means of coping with her difficult heritage may express her anger more openly ... concealing female secrets within male-devised genres” (Gilbert and Gubar 2000, 585).

It’s not a far cry from the text of Shelley’s *Frankenstein* to the scene of Genesis and the garden of Eden and the vicissitudes of Eve, cursed to travail with pregnancies (Gen 3:16). It is not the Bible’s, but John Milton’s vision of the world and its dark materials. In fact, Milton’s *Paradise Lost* reads as if narrated by the Shelley’s creature: “A Universe of death which God by curse / Created evil, for evil only good, / Where all life dies, death lives, and nature breeds, / Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things/ Abominable, unutterable and worse” (Milton 2020, 43). All three of Shelley’s main characters in *Frankenstein* are searching for meaning in a meaningless world,⁶ and the three narrators are “in each case speaking into a mirror of his own transgression” (Johnson 2014, 17). These male characters have an impetuous and arrogant desire to recreate themselves, a representation of their own image, a being like them in reflection. This is original sin in Shelley’s novel. The three male autobiographies embedded in the novel explore the “necessity of choosing between symbiosis and separation, between the mother and the autonomous self” (Johnson 2014, 18).

The curious appearance of birth scenes in the Song of Songs fetishize creation, and it is Promethea, not Prometheus who is responsible for new life: “Under the apple tree I roused you; / It was there your mother conceived you, / There she who bore you conceived you” (8:5). In the Song the invitation is given to come into the world of the (m)other: “I would lead you, / I would bring you / To the house of my mother, / Of her who taught me” (8:2). Birth is utopian in the Song.

⁶ Gilbert and Gubar 2000, 594. Barbara Johnson in her celebrated essay “My monster/myself” finds in the novel the suggestion that, “a woman’s desire to write and a man’s desire to give birth would both be capable only of producing monsters” (Johnson 2014, 23).

The poem seems oblivious to the danger of birth which has invariably been for so many women through history like “cutting bloody butter,” with “terrible sadness,” in chambers shrouded with bleak sorrow (Cixous 1996, 79). How many women have felt in astonishment, their blood leave them, bodies faithless and faithful, in glazed pain, pouring out (Cixous 1996, 79)?

“I wake and blink my eyes. They’re salty, crusted at the rims. My lashes, clotted, and I strained to open them, and it is like sandpaper on my cornea. And then I become aware of the pain. There is agony in every part of what must be my body. Each uncontrollable shudder that takes me brings a discordant keening jag as if his scalpel draws deep cuts along every broken nerve. I’m shorting out, an electrical fire. Every part of my body is a phantom limb clutching and spasming. I am literally in pieces, with nothing but butcher’s string holding me together. That, and the memory of you.”⁷

There are a series of cuts on the body of the Song of Songs. As if Frankenstein is at work on the text of the poem, words trapped in the attic like frightened starlings. The beloved other is on the table. The scene is ripe with associations to blood, birth and death. The body is routinely dissected and reconstituted. The remnants of this vivisection are a series of rough sutures on the Song of Songs that is identifiable even in the structural body of the poetry. These wounds are dehiscent. The matrix of interconnections and disconnections open and re-open. The apparent transplants and amputations occupy a rhythmically interrupted cadence (Landy 2011, 242). The Song performs leaving and cleaving within its skeletal structure. This executes a curious interplay of opposing energies. What is the possibility that these sutures in the poetry might be intentional acts of beautiful violence by the ancient poet? “Disjunction pervades every level of the poem … violent conjunction of scenes is reflected in the clash of disparate images,” and yet at the same time, it creates a whole, a unity that is beyond it and within it (Landy 2011, 30). Is this love, or is this despair? The Song of Songs is not nearly so quixotic as the reader might suppose. It is darker, more divided. What a monstrous creature it is with all its incongruous parts (Landy 2011, 32). The text is the child of desire that arrives after a strange birth. Does the Song of Songs thus trace the inevitable failure of love?

It was on a dreary night of November, that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow

⁷ My own verse, with reference to Cixous 1996, 65. “Tu me fais toutes les douleurs. Et chaque douleur est un bonheur. Les amertumes que tu infiltres dans mon sang sont si douces.” (Cixous 1983, 80).

eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs (Shelley 2018, 45).

The Song of Songs takes to raising life. Promethea and her lover are in a constant play of re-animation, “conjuring” the other up, bringing the other into being, and playing God (Exum 2005, 6). Where in the creation myths of Eden and Prometheus the forming of a man is a concrete act, the Song’s portrayal of this same materiality is continually in flux. Promethea “calls her lover forth through her poetic powers of representation only to let him disappear so that she can conjure him up again” (Exum 2005, 6), not only galvanising the lover’s body but galvanising his very words. Like Freud’s game of *fort/da* with his grandson (Freud 1920/2001, 18:15), Promethea reanimates her lover and makes him disappear from sight, or moves him from space to space, bringing him near (3:4) or putting him at arm’s length (5:4), or as far away as the horizon (2:17). It is speech that executes this miracle, not clay. Speech in this regard is desire clothed in metaphor. These incantations of the Song bring about “infinite deferral of presence” and a fictitious hold (Exum 2005, 7). In this, death is a foil, both directly in the climactic opposition of love and death in 8:5, but also the littler deaths such as the pain of absence, or the pain of immanence. It is this moment when Promethea feels as if she is dying: “Refresh me with apples, / For I am faint with love” (2:5). With this feint, she comes to life, shaking with the pleasure of it.

“Each part of you is beautiful my love, each part of you tears at me with its beauty. It tears at me until I cannot stand the thought of you going or the thought of you arriving. You are everything and nothing. You are the mirror of my secret dreams. I have made you the very image of my own most hideous self. This body, which finds itself embedded in this other body. That, and the fact that your skin barely stretches across your beautiful bones.”⁸

The iconic piece by piece descriptions of the lovers’ bodies in chapters 4-7 of the Song of Songs are usually understood in terms of the Arabic poetic equivalent, the *wasf*. This body poetry with all its estranged body parts has an uncanny effect on the reader (See Black 2009 for further on the grotesque body of the Song of Songs). “Ah, you are fair, my darling, / Ah, you are fair. / Your eyes are like doves / Behind your veil. / Your hair is like a flock of goats / Streaming down Mount Gilead. / Your teeth are like a flock of ewes / Climbing up from the washing pool” (4:1-4). These chains of descriptive signifiers draw attention to and detail body parts of the idealised subject of the poem, most often the female subject, linking these parts with disparate images that are as beautiful as they are discordant. The effect, as a whole, is at the same time gratuitous and excessive, provoking a “libidinal investment, an intense sexual charge invested in the whole range of items” (Boer 1999, 59).

⁸ My own verse.

Promethea herself “does not exist beyond half-and-half organs—threadbare lips, dove eyes, goat hair—that . . . readers, must connect and collate in order to make her a body” (Meredith 2013, 179). It is as if the lover has collected and selected her beautiful parts in the charnel house, and she, his. One could almost read back into the Song the resonance of Frankenstein’s own poignant despair at the terrible, final beauty of his creature:

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how to delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips (Shelley 2018, 45).

Promethea is equal part creator and executioner of the other (and vice versa) and this is not far from Frankenstein, the mad scientist (Lacan 2006).

But surely the text of the Song of Songs is on the side of the angels and not monsters.⁹ The beauty of its verse is opulent and profound. Its metaphor, imagery, metonymy and synesthesia are ornate and layered. The Song of Songs is a confection of sweet things. But the text’s wounds are stitched and then torn again, as the lovers’ bodies are stitched and torn again. These bodies are galvanised anew in each disparate scene. It is as if the lover in the poem assumes a Sadean position and declares, “I have the right to enjoy your body [in pieces]” (Nobis 2017, 170). Thus, not just the right to enjoy the body but the right to dismember and idealise each part, and then reconstitute the whole as love’s creator sees fit. Is this mad desire to cut the other in pieces driven by a terror of the whole?

It is possible that terror is one of the constituents of relation between lovers, and this casts shadows (2:17, 4:6) in the midst of an exuberant text. The lovers have a kind of recognition of the other that “sets off” an echo (Lacan 2006). Promethea, who in equal parts must look and cannot look at this other she loves. Her beloved says: “turn away your eyes from me, / for they have overcome me” (6:5). Zizek paraphrasing Lacan and Rilke, writes: “beauty is the last veil that covers the horrible” (Žižek 1999: 221). But it is perhaps better in Rilke’s own words in *Duino Elegies*: “For beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror, / which we still are just

⁹ Johnson 2014, 638: “In this fierce, Miltonic world, Frankenstein says, the angel woman and the monster woman alike must die, if they are not dead already. And what is to be feared above all else is the reanimation of the dead, specifically of the maternal dead. Perhaps that is why a significant pun is embedded in the crucial birth scene (“It was on a dreary night of November”) that, according to Mary Shelley, rose “unbidden” from her imagination. Looking at the “demoniacal corpse to which I had so miserably given life.”

able to endure, / and we are so awed because it serenely disdains to annihilate us. / Every angel is terrifying.”¹⁰ Beauty and desire draw the other in and hold the other back, an angel and monster wrestling, and, in lieu of seeing the terrifying whole, the lovers entertain each other’s body in pieces. Desire feasts on this fantasy that does not equate to the sum total of the other and all their parts. It is as if what truly mattered between them, and the thing that wreaked the most destruction, was the mistaking of the ideal, the dream or the fantasy of the other, “... inconsistent and insubstantial composite of semblances around a Void” (Žižek 1999, 221). To find that, instead of an angel, one loves a monster, appalling “with its yellow skin barely covering its musculature” with strangely beautiful “flowing hair and pearly teeth,” and within the instant of apprehension of the beloved monster one faces the terrifying and lonely reality that it is in fact the monstrous self, one sees.

“And you, my love, how do I reach across the abyss to you. I try to reach out but with every step I’m separated from you. Who are you? What have you done to my body? I want to come close, and I want to flee. Only you can end this agony. Your sweetness torments me. I am held captive in your eyes, in your hair. Our eyes desiring, dilating, dancing, and darting away. Eyes torn from lids (Cixous 1996, 75).”¹¹

Love’s executioner in the Song of Songs might be reduced to no more than the instrument that slices, bent beneath pleasure’s law, which Lacan will say, “always fall short of its aim” (Lacan 2006, 652). Love is then an ouroboros that winds eternally between sex and death, pain and pleasure.¹² What does Promethea want? She is both beautiful and tragic, her beauty “the ultimate barrier that forbids access to a fundamental horror” (Lacan 2006, 654). The elements of the body are so deranged that they can never be reassembled. She is mimicking some kind of demand for death, some kind of demand for life, she and her lover strung between eros and the end. The two are both denying the reality behind their desire, in this collection of beautiful parts arranged in a field organised by a fantasy, the semblance of wholeness, yet always and already lacking. There is almost a sadistic turn in the Song where each lover “discharges the pain of existence onto the Other, but without seeing he himself turns into an ‘eternal object’” (Lacan 2006, 656). There is a yearning for redemption here and the illusion of the immortal soul that does not cease in desiring the desire of the other (Lacan 2006, 656). Such monstrous desire can’t possibly be the property of angels, but it lurks crouching in dreams. This desire is naked, slave to reverie, and does not cease with the death of the other, inviting a

¹⁰ Rilke 1998, 3. Gilbert and Gubar, on the woman as angel, remark: “As we argued earlier, women have seen themselves (because they have been seen) as monstrous, vile, degraded creatures, second-comers, and emblems of filthy materiality, even though they have also been traditionally defined as superior spiritual beings, angels, better halves. ‘Woman [is] a temple built over a sewer,’ said the Church father Tertullian, and Milton seems to see Eve as both temple and sewer, echoing that patristic misogyny” (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000, 627).

¹¹ My own verse drawn from Cixous 1983, 93: “quelle douleur de n’être que des yeux.”

¹² “[P]ain has a longer cycle than pleasure in every respect” (Lacan 2006, 653).

kind of sacramental necrophilia (Lacan 2006, 658). The rule of law and the entombment of desire become the very same (Lacan 2006, 660). In *Frankenstein*, the creature is driven by this same tormented law of love:

For some days I haunted the spot where these scenes had taken place; sometimes wishing to see you, sometimes resolved to quit the world and its miseries for ever. At length I wandered towards these mountains, and have ranged through their immense recesses, consumed by a burning passion which you alone can gratify (Shelley 2018, 135).

It is a resonant movement from love to death. Promethea is tormented by the beauty of her lover, as he is of her, tormented by proximity to the possibility of the realisation of desire and its incipient death, a sharp and terminal fall. Love is continually sabotaged by a kind of futility and misalignment, and consequences that are proportionally anticlimactic—the lovers discover they have created in each other a creature with no soul. These newly created beings in the Song of Songs face the continual threat of abandonment, escape routes that end in dead ends and the wretched creature's never-ending replay of thwarted expectations. In the Song of Songs, Promethea is abandoned because it appears that, when she is out of sight of her lover, she is also out of mind. This vulnerability creates the conditions that lead to the assault of her body on a dark and lonely street (Song 5:7). Her lover will be at times reduced to a disembodied voyeur, a single eye, echoing Shelley's sad creature behind the wall, gazing through a split in the shuttered window and "peering through the lattice" (2:9):

I found that one of the windows of the cottage had formerly occupied a part of it, but the panes had been filled up with wood. In one of these was a small and almost imperceptible chink, through which the eye could just penetrate . . . It was a lovely sight, even to me, poor wretch! who had never beheld aught beautiful before . . . I felt sensations of a peculiar and overpowering nature: they were a mixture of pain and pleasure, such as I had never before experienced, either from hunger or cold, warmth or food; and I withdrew from the window, unable to bear these emotions (Shelley 2018, 98-99).

"When you went away, you left me nothing but the sun-bleached world. You did not even leave me a heart to bleed with. I found I was standing there with no body, and so no voice for calling you. Wait for me now. Now I see you, I see it all, it all comes to me, you hit me all at once, ten times I am struck by your hair, your body emits thousands of rays at me." (Cixous 1996, 129).

So why love? What comfort can Promethea offer the soul who walks love's paths? She is continually being born, strange and new. What immense universes exist

within her? There is no stasis, no familiar ground. There is no home here that the lover has not already corrupted with desire's illusions. Shelley's creature was once good and compassionate, but with the experience of abandonment and isolation, the spurning hatred of fellow-creatures left him murderous, then searching for refuge in desert mountains and dreary glaciers.¹³ To find Promethea, one must travel to Lebanon, climb Amarna's Peak, and then ascend also into Senir and Hermon, defying lions and leopards on the way.¹⁴ Promethea of the Song of Songs is in turn angel then demon, she plays monster, she is terrifying, awe-inspiring, merciless, bestowing and receiving both immeasurable pleasures and devastating pains. Love is this traitorous gift of fire, that once belonged only to gods. It is an immense fire, that vivifies even as it incinerates. Love is greater than the sum of its parts. It forms the most beautiful of all things monstrous. It plunges over mortal limits like a golden eagle, hovering viciously over the chest of each frail lover. It is something like that first rush of life from the mouth of creation. It leaves one bare of protections and burned by the sun. Death comes close, as does envy and hatred and despair (8:6). And yet the bliss of being carried beyond oneself, and to other shores, is worth all impediments, because only love has the power to bring life right into the midst of death, and to make one thirst for this peculiar suffering (Cixous 1996, 96).

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¹³ "How can I move thee? Will no entreaties cause thee to turn a favourable eye upon thy creature, who implores thy goodness and compassion. Believe me, Frankenstein: I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity: but am I not alone, miserably alone? You, my creator, abhor me; what hope can I gather from your fellow-creatures, who owe me nothing? they spurn and hate me. The desert mountains and dreary glaciers are my refuge" (Shelley 2018, 91).

¹⁴ "From Lebanon come with me; / From Lebanon, my bride, with me! / ... from Amana's peak, / From the peak of Senir and Hermon, / From the dens of lions, / From the hills of leopards" Song 4:8.

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