



Elements of Horror, Grotesque Bodies, and the Fragmentation of Identity in Mark Shelley's *Frankenstein*

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Abstract

Gothic books emphasise the occult and the strange. Old buildings (especially castles or apartments with secret passageways), dungeons, or towers serve as the backdrop for the enigmatic events in Gothic literature. Obviously, ghost stories are a well-known form of Gothic fiction. In addition, distant locales that appear strange to the reader serve as part of the setting of a Gothic tale. Even the idea of resurrecting the dead is horrifying. Mark Shelley makes full use of this literary trick to heighten the eerie sentiments generated by Frankenstein in the reader. The idea of resurrecting the dead would have caused the typical reader to recoil in horror and unbelief.

Horror fiction is full of scary things that make you feel lost, scared, and out of control. This type of writing makes the reader feel a wide range of emotions, such as fear, stress, and anxiety, as well as pity, joy, and relief, because the natural order is being put back in place after a time of horror and pain. This combination of pleasant and negative emotions generates an automatic need for more. Hence, during the period of its inception, specifically with the initiation of Romantic age, horror fiction was regarded as appealing and entertaining element and that received a great audience.

In the Gothic novel, the characters appear to bridge the gap between the mortal and supernatural realms. Dracula exists as both a human and the undead, shifting effortlessly between the two worlds to achieve his goals. Similarly, the *Frankenstein* monster appears to have some form of connection with his creator, as it follows Victor wherever he goes. Victor matches the monster's incredible, superhuman speed as they pursue it towards the North Pole. So, Mary Shelley blends a number of elements to produce an unforgettable Gothic tale.

Those passages cause one to cringe at the mere thought. They inspire both curiosity and a delicious sense of danger and dread. In fact, fear is one of the most intense emotions a human can experience. Murder, monstrous

brutality, supernatural and mysterious occurrences, unsafe and eerie locations, scientific experiments, and bizarre beings such as split selves, monsters, vampires, and ghosts are just a few of the things that disrupt the natural order and represent imaginative and realistic dangers.

Frankenstein is not the first Gothic novel written. In contrast, this novel is a collection of Romantic and Gothic motifs woven into a single, fascinating narrative. By the time Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*, several books with Gothic elements had already been published, although the genre had only existed since 1754. The earliest Gothic horror novel was *The Castle of Otranto*, written in 1754 by Horace Walpole. Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, published in 1847, was perhaps the final novel written in this style. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1794) by Ann Radcliffe, *The Monk* (1796) by Matthew G. Lewis, and *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) by Charles Maturin are examples of novels written between 1754 and 1847 that feature the Gothic horror story as a primary narrative technique.

Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* revolutionised the horror fiction genre, which is still popular today. Mary lived from 1797 to 1851. She was the daughter of the famous author William Godwin and the feminist author Mary Wollstonecraft and the wife of

one of the prominent English Romantic poets, Percy Bysshe Shelley. It focuses on supernatural occurrences, scientific peril, persecution, deformed humans, the sublime, and fear. It's the result of a competition between her and her friends to write a horror romance and a terrifying nightmare.

Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus by Mary Shelley fits between the Enlightenment and Romanticism movements, with a focus on the Romantic movement. As was already said, *Frankenstein* has many Gothic elements, some of which will be explained in more detail here. The fear of incest stems from the fact that it is a disgraceful offence against culture and the natural and social orders. Moreover, incestuous actions and thoughts are the manifestation of prohibited and concealed desires. Once a hidden and unspoken taboo, it is now a prevalent motif in horror fiction. The theme of incest appears immediately at the beginning of Victor *Frankenstein's* tale. Elizabeth, his intended wife, is raised as the daughter of his parents and, hence, as his sister, but is referred to as his cousin. When he recounts the history of his family, he describes how close they are and how she is the "lovely and cherished companion of all his pursuits and pleasures." "No phrase, no expression could capture the nature of his relationship with her—his more than sister, for she was to be his only until death," he writes at the end.

With the advent of Romanticism, the psychology of the human mind became an increasingly explored subject. In horror fiction, the typical antagonists are doubles, split selves, and other monsters whose madness and evil stem from an internal battle. They generally have twisted, unnatural, repressed desires and urges and struggle with insurmountable mental difficulties, which is why they are considered unpredictable, malevolent, and diabolical. Due to the fact that most psychopaths resemble normal individuals, they instill a reasonable level of terror in the general population. *Frankenstein* is a Gothic novel because it tells the story of Victor *Frankenstein's* sad creature through mystery, secrecy, and disturbing psychology. Gothic started as a literary style in the 1750s. In *Frankenstein*, Victor's process for making the monster is only vaguely described. Lines like "Who shall understand the horrors of my secret toil?" make the story scarier by forcing the reader to imagine what Victor must have done. The majority of the action occurs at night and under unexplained circumstances.

At the same time, *Frankenstein* challenges some Gothic literary norms. In contrast to classic Gothic supernatural aspects such as ghosts or vampires, the origins of the monster are deliberate and not mysterious. The book's mystery is not where the monster originated, but what he desires. *Frankenstein* is also set in roughly the same time

period in which it was written, although classic Gothic literature is nearly invariably set in the past. While many Gothic novels imply that ignorance and restrictive conventions led to horrible events in the past, *Frankenstein* suggests that excessive knowledge and a focus on innovation may also lead to horror. Gothic novels are characterised by spooky castles, foreboding portents, mystery, and tension. Appropriately, the monster takes its first breath on a "dreary November night." Victor builds his monster in an isolated laboratory in Ingolstadt, but the second "monster" is initiated in a barren region of Scotland. Elizabeth is murdered on a stormy night, the ideal setting for a murder mystery. The supernatural occurrence of *Frankenstein's* creation is one of the elements used by the author to establish the Gothic genre. The atmosphere surrounding the creation is sinister. In addition, the creation of the monster results in Shelley's use of another Gothic feature, Victor's overwrought emotion. The rain and lack of tights are metaphors for grief and misery; the metonymies contribute to the scene's gloominess. The gloomy dream, a common element in Gothic tales, foreshadows the brutal murder of Victor's true love by the monster. November, a month of melancholy and gloominess, represents the beginning of winter, a season of isolation and cold. The rain pattered dismally against the window glass, and the candle was nearly extinguished. Victor has a dream in which Elizabeth is well and walking. "When I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they began to turn livid with the colour of death." The supernatural incident, prophetic dream, exaggerated emotion, and metonymy of gloom and horror combine to create *Frankenstein's* frightening and moving story. In addition, the author uses gothic characteristics such as the gloomy atmosphere and the supernatural being to instill a sense of dread. Ugliness is the major gothic topic in the tale.

The creature in *Frankenstein* is described as ugly and hideous; his eyes, if they might be called eyes, were focused on me. His mouth was open, and he muttered incoherent sounds while a grin creased his face. Darkness is another Gothic element prevalent in this tale. *Frankenstein* is dominated by a sense of darkness and dread. In chapter five, darkness and rain surround Victor. He is compelled to flee because of the severe rain and ambiguity. He recalls, "I felt compelled to hurry despite being drenched by the rain that fell from a gloomy sky." In addition, the rainy, utterly dark location foreshadows the protagonist's demise: "I recognised dimly that I was destined to become the most miserable of human beings." The author employs aspects of Gothic fiction, such as wet and stormy weather, gloom, and obscurity, to heighten the suspense for readers and establish the creature's look. The element of haunting is vital to the plot.

According to Jerrold E. Hogle, "the ghosts associated with the Gothic often come from antique settings." Victor is pursued by his modern accomplishments amid magnificent but outdated environments, such as the North and the Lonely Island. *Frankenstein* is set in continental Europe, particularly Switzerland and Germany, where the majority of Shelley's readers have never been. In addition, the inclusion of chase sequences across the Arctic transports us even further from England into uncharted territory for the majority of readers. In the Gothic novel, the protagonists appear to bridge the mortal and supernatural realms. For example, Dracula lives as both a normal person and the undead, travelling effortlessly between both worlds to achieve his goals. So, Mary Shelley blends numerous elements to produce an unforgettable Gothic book. Ultimately, the Gothic takes death on an intriguing path. By combining human and ghostly bodily parts, Victor creates a "monster" that is part human and part spirit. His invention haunts the living like a tormented ghost. Even though Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* from the early 1800s has a lot of Gothic elements, it can't be called a Gothic novel. Shelley uses a variety of literary techniques to set up the themes that make *Frankenstein* a Gothic novel. The gothic, a subgenre of romantic literature characterised by terror and passionate love, was born in the middle of the eighteenth century as "black romanticism." According to the definition provided by Cambridge Dictionary, in addition to "mysterious, wicked, obscure, despair, and sorrow," the colour dark or black is also associated with the supernatural (especially the devil).

According to *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole (1717–1797), gothic is primarily defined as terror, mystery, supernature, misery, death, or a familial curse. Horace did not, however, mention sublimity. The connection between the gothic and the sublime begins with Morris's (299–319) observation that sublimity was a common and significant aspect of gothic fiction. Nadal (2000, pp. 373–387) also discusses the gothic sublime as "longing for plenitude, infinity, even transcendence—opposed by self-destructive urges" and "the Gothic—negative, oceanic—sublimes," which blends Kant's idea of the sublime and Mishra's theory of the gothic sublime (1994, pp. 19, 225). Tuite (141–55) demonstrates that *Frankenstein's* monstrosity is a unique Gothic monstrosity. However, LI (2004, pp. 68–96) cites Thomson's contention that the grotesque has a dual psychological effect in that it both liberates or disarms and induces anxiety. Mary Shelley elaborates a bit on *Frankenstein's* experiments with the monster; however, it is not difficult to see that *Frankenstein's* experiment of removing organs from corpses in the cemetery in order to create a monster was indeed macabre. The depiction of this operation strengthens the

novel's mystique and quaintness, which not only fills the reader with a sudden sense of dread but also lifts it to the sublime. The effective use of first-person narration heightens the horror of the story because the grotesque tale is narrated by the characters as if it were a genuine experience rather than a work of fiction, which corresponds well with the definition of "gothic" given above. Yet, intelligent readers will quickly doubt the "credibility." There is a tension between first-person narration and the reader's perception, which enhances the novel's bizarreness and inspires the reader's imagination, as well as enriches the novel's theme and imparts it with significant artistic appeal and power. *Frankenstein* has three narrators: Victor, Captain Walton, and the monster himself. All of the narrative enhances the story's credibility.

Shelley (2011), such grotesque situations have two psychological effects: they both release, disarm, and induce dread (LI, 2004, p. 68). *Frankenstein's* attempt to create a creature by harvesting organs from cemetery corpses is a gruesome one, despite his desire to contribute to science. As a result, the novel *Frankenstein* is loaded with mystery and strangeness, which causes readers to be terrified and fascinated about what will occur next. In particular, when readers discover that Victor abandons the "deformed child" on whom he has spent two years because he is unexpectedly hideous, they cannot help but feel pity for the unfortunate "child" who was reluctantly brought into this world, elevating this Gothic novel to a sublime level by evoking a powerful emotion. "Giving birth to a child" is a typical occurrence in family life. In this novel, however, it is the male protagonist who gives birth to a "kid" and then abandons it. According to the definitions of gothic and sublime, the story teeters on the edge of both reality and unreality and evokes feelings of danger and dread in the readership. There is tension between the novel and reality, and this tension heightens the grotesque, inspires the reader's imagination, accentuates the novel's theme, and gives it Gothic artistic value.

As Burke said, not all pain and pleasure will cause sublimity, and horror is the main part of sublimity. But the horror caused by sublime objects is different from the horror caused by putting people's lives in danger: "When pleasure or pain press too closely, they are incapable of giving any pleasure and are simply terrible; but at certain distances and with certain changes, they can be, and they are delightful, as we experience every day" (Burke, 1998, p. 3). Burke argues that of the passions we show others, sympathy is the strongest, as it allows us to engage in their concerns (Burke, 1998, pp. 41–45). The terror created by the substantial threat simply produces suffering, whereas the terror caused by the magnificent object transforms agony into pleasure. The most essential reason why danger can

provide pleasure, according to Burke, is that it is not a serious threat, and sympathy also helps. Sympathy determines the literary impact of tragedy. When pleasure or pain are too close, they are incapable of providing pleasure and are only horrifying; nevertheless, at certain distances and with specific alterations, they are capable of providing pleasure and are delightful (ZHU, 1979, p. 238). It indicates that the sublime arises when we experience danger from a safe distance, knowing that we are secure from actual harm.

As a result, there are many reasons why the majestic item's terror could turn into pleasure, including a reduced perception of risk. This point of view implies the concept of psychological distance. In *Frankenstein*, the monster tortures *Frankenstein* and continually threatens him rather than killing his "father" directly; thus, this behaviour drives him primarily insane, and this drastic change in mood is a prime example of the gothic sublime. For cruel vengeance, he sequentially murders *Frankenstein's* younger brother William, his servant and adopted daughter Justine, his friend Henry, and his wife Elizabeth, and he physically and psychologically tortures *Frankenstein* and his family, which is also the cause of *Frankenstein's* father's death. During his slaughtering, the monster sometimes informs Victor of his plan; for instance, he tells Victor, "I shall be with you on your wedding-night" (Shelley, 2011, p. 259), but sometimes he executes his plan without notice, and he acts like an intelligent man who succeeds in imputing someone's death to others; for example, he kills William and then places William's picture locket necklace in Justine's pocket. All of these torment Victor, who cannot live or die under these conditions. Consequently, the fear reaches its pinnacle. In the meantime, Victor finally declines to construct a female partner for the monster out of fear that they would have monster children, posing a threat to humans. This novel's conclusion is ambiguous; it is unclear whether the monster actually commits suicide by self-immolation. Will he continue taking vengeance on humans? Will he be able to procreate with a human following facial plastic surgery? Or, will he develop new skills and create a female monster on his own? No responses are available for these questions. However, his extraordinary strength terrifies humans. Evidently, this lingering uncertainty is the Gothic sublime.

From the beginning of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley portrayed Victor *Frankenstein* as a wanderer. He abandons his family and embarks on a journey to get more information. He feels he has uncovered the secret to life through his quest. By using the deceased's body parts, he builds the monster. But the novel's true traveller is the doctor's monster. The doctor first mentions his monster in a letter to Mrs. Saville, in which he describes his talk with a stranger he met on the boat and his memories of the

creature: "Would you smile at my enthusiasm for this wandering diver?" (12 Shelley)

In this novel, the *Frankenstein* monster is portrayed more as a traveller than as *Frankenstein* himself. The monster desires to adopt a more human lifestyle, so he attempts to acquire their language and mannerisms. "My mind was more active, and I yearned to understand the motivations and emotions of these beautiful creatures" (Shelley 80). While the monster wanders and searches for a new life, he acquires as much fresh information about the world as possible so that he will not be shunned or attacked by society for being different. Unfortunately, the monster fails, and his desire for fresh information fails, causing him to seek vengeance. By breaking the monster's innocence, he embarks on a road of destruction and vengeance. "For the first time, vengeance and wrath flooded my heart, and I made no effort to suppress them" (Shelley 99).

After constructing the monster, Dr. *Frankenstein* compares it to a terrifying November night. "I saw, by the light of the moon, the demon at the casement," Dr. *Frankenstein* says in the scene that chronicles the creation of the monster, foreshadowing additional evil to come in the novel (Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*). This sentence indicates that the reader will constantly associate the creature with darkness and evil. Mary Shelley also uses desolate settings to emphasise the monster's isolation and loneliness from the human race. The monster's statement that "desert mountains and bleak glaciers are my sanctuary" reveals his isolation. I have travelled here for many days; the ice caverns that I do not fear are my home, and they are the only ones that men do not resent (Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*).

Gloom is a crucial aspect of *Frankenstein*. The Gothic is never a straightforward horror narrative, and *Frankenstein* is a Gothic tale in every manner. Gothic fiction is typically set in exotic locations that "aim to isolate the horrors from the reader's world." (Punter Byron, 26) In the case of *Frankenstein*, the story takes place in a variety of foreign towns and breathtaking locations, including Geneva, the Alps, and the North. This relates to what Balbao Pithan says: "Spanish, French, and Italian situations suit beautifully the aims intended by authors who depict sublime alpine vistas, the Catholic Church, and Inquisition issues, not to mention the added intensity provided by foreign localities and character names" (Baltao Pithan 12). In the novel, the significance of nature and the concept of the sublime are mentioned throughout the entire story via Victor *Frankenstein's* eyes: "I discovered more clearly the black sides of Jura and the dazzling peak of Mount Blanc; I grieved like a child, "Lovely mountains! My own gorgeous lake! How do you greet your visitors? "Your peaks are pristine, and the sky and lake are blue and tranquil." "Is this

a prediction of peace or a jab at my unhappiness?" (Shelley 81). As previously said, Mary Shelley depicts both the beautiful and sublime parts of nature.

As Carter defines them, Sublime experiences, "...are excessive ones, in which we encounter the mighty, the terrible and the awesome. Gothic, it is clear, is intended to give us the experience of the sublime." (Carter 266) Victor *Frankenstein* describes how nature improves his mood. "I remained in Lausanne for two days in this agonising state of mind. I contemplated the lake: its waters were quiet, its surroundings were tranquil, and the snowy mountains, "the palaces of nature," had not altered. Gradually, the tranquil and heavenly scene healed me, and I carried on to Geneva. (Shelley, p. 81)

In a separate instance of narrative, Victor discusses how nature can alter his emotions. "The sea, or more accurately, a gigantic river of ice, ran between its dependent mountains, whose lofty peaks loomed over its recesses." Its icy, sparkling peaks glistened in the sunlight above the clouds. My previously sorrowful heart was suddenly filled with something resembling joy. (Schelling 112) His experience with the sublime and amazing sublime makes him happy, and he explains, in several moments of the story, how powerful he believes nature to be: "When I was content, inanimate nature bestowed upon me the most exquisite pleasures." I was thrilled with delight by a tranquil sky and lush landscapes. The present season was certainly lovely; spring flowers bloomed in the hedgerows, while summer flowers were already in bud; and I was unaffected by ideas that, in past years, had been an insurmountable load, despite my efforts to shake them off. (Shelley 77) Mary Shelley has a striking resemblance to pantheism due to her repetitious and exhaustive descriptions of nature. As said previously, the sublime is also present when one encounters the dreadful. "Gothic writers gave nature the power of destruction in addition to the ability of healing," Carter writes. *Frankenstein* is filled with nature's terrible realism. Several storms occur throughout the narrative, notably the night the monster comes to life. (Carter 266) During Victor's journey to his brother's funeral, the reader is treated with an example of this use of nature: "However, as I drew closer to home, grief and terror once more seized me." Also, darkness surrounded me, and when I could barely see the black mountains, I felt even more despondent. "The image appeared to be a large and dim scene of evil, and I vaguely foresaw that I was destined to become the most despicable of humans." (Shelley 82) In this portion of his speech, Victor conveys his apprehension at a time in the voyage when he cannot see the usual mountains. He writes, "The storm appeared to be approaching quickly, so upon landing I climbed a low hill to witness its progression." It progressed; the sky became cloudy, and I soon felt the rain

falling in enormous drops, but its intensity rose rapidly (Shelley 82). After describing the weather, he discovers something that has a terrible impact on him: the monster he created is the murderer who killed his younger brother, William. Therefore, it must be acknowledged that in Gothic literature, nature and the sublime possess an incredible force that may be both destructive and restorative. The concept of nature is juxtaposed with the artificiality that causes chaos. According to David Punter, the emergence of the Gothic novel coincided with the transformation of society's fundamental foundations by industrialization (Punter Byron 20). During the time period of Gothic literature, Britain was contending with the technological and scientific breakthroughs of the Industrial Revolution as well as the circulation of concepts and principles from the French Revolution, which were perceived as a threat. These historical events had a significant impact on England's intellectual, political, social, and creative environments. The scientific, industrial, and intellectual advancements of the 18th century inspired a number of authors who saw them as a departure from nature. About Shelley's novel, Punter asserts, "*Frankenstein* can be viewed as establishing for the first time the preoccupation that characterises Gothic's confrontation with science and industry over the subsequent centuries: the disruption of established concepts of the human." (Byron 21, punter).

According to Yue-ting Chen, "he is questioning God in a majestic atmosphere, and this horror and fear aspect is certainly gothic." (Chen 253) The fact that the novel's protagonist rejects religious beliefs is not divorced from its historical context, as "with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, people's minds had been gradually turning from religion to science as a better way to explain phenomena that had previously been covered in mysticism" (Balbao Pithan 119). Victor *Frankenstein* is portrayed as an agnostic scientist. In several passages of the novel, he is also characterised as a cold, emotionless individual: "All men despise the wretched; how, therefore, must I be hated, who am more miserable than all living things!" Yet you, my maker, despise and reject me, thy creation, to whom you are tied by links that can only be severed by the extinction of one of us. "Remember that I am your creation; I should be your Adam, but instead I am the fallen angel." (Shelley, Sonnet 113), This description of the creator, coupled with Adam's reference, conforms to the notion of Victor as a person who is distant from accepted religious values, and "the lack of religious consciousness (although one can never discard the possibility of religious implication through its very absence) allowed Victor to challenge God's privilege as Creator, thereby transforming the novel into a cautionary tale about the dangers of unchecked scientific progress." (Balbao Pithan 122).

Proshanta Sarkar asserts, "Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is the very powerful glass through which we can see how society alienates people due to certain features that typically do not satisfy the desired and determined taste of society" (Sarkar 1). Because Victor's intended scientific breakthrough would have revolutionised civilization, he is aware that his project must be kept secret. The hidden nature of the endeavour contributes to the novel's Gothic mood, which exposes the reader to suspense and then terror. In the story, the scariest things happen when a person is cut off from the rest of society. As previously explained, the "typical Gothic scientist" (Punter Byron 20) builds the monster while unsupervised and without guidance. In the novel, Victor *Frankenstein* epitomises the concept of alienation, as do other characters such as the monster. Yet the creature does not want social isolation; he desires friends, a family, and a father-and-son relationship with Victor. Only when he feels rejected and alone does he become evil. "Among the countless people, there was no one who would sympathise with or help me; and should I feel compassion for my enemies?" No, from that moment on, I declared eternal war against the species and, above all, against him who had created me and cast me into this intolerable torment. (Shelley, 673) The wedding-day event is another instance of alienation that contributes to disorder. Elizabeth comments throughout the day, "What a lovely day! How joyful and tranquil the entire natural world appears! (Shelley 238).

In Gothic literature, the monster of *Frankenstein* is depicted as a wanderer. *Frankenstein* created the creature to demonstrate that ancient and modern science can be used to generate life. The creature made from the limbs of the dead is left to find a place in society. On his quest for knowledge, this dark monster, surrounded by acts of destruction and vengeance, is driven out of society for distorting the entirety of nature. The settings of Gothic novels evoke a feeling of dread and panic in the reader. Frequently, the settings of gothic tales consist of spooky old castles and derelict buildings located far from human society.

Trauma, according to Caruth, requires integration for both the purposes of testifying and treatment. On the other hand, the transition of trauma into a narrative memory that allows the story to be verbalized, conveyed, and incorporated into one's own and others' knowledge of the past may result in the loss of both the precision and the force that characterise traumatic recollection. Although understanding the traumas of disease, war, and political breakdown in terms of Gothic narratives and settings helps Shelley's characters reconstruct their identities and integrate themselves into a newly defined community of sufferers, their transformation of physical, psychological, and

emotional affliction into "soothing sublime fictions" (200), a type of "narrative memory," through their imaginative engagement with Gothic landscapes is frequent. (37) The relationship between sublime horror and the theatre, and specifically tragedy, reveals the incapacity of the sublime to articulate physical agony. Radcliffe's usage of *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* as major examples of sublime terror openly links tragedy and the Gothic, and critics acknowledge the theater's effect on early Gothic literature. (38) Clery, for instance, examines in depth the influence of the Drury Lane Theatre, and specifically Sarah Siddons's famous depiction of Lady Macbeth, on Romantic women writers of Gothic literature, with specific reference to Radcliffe's description of fear. (39) Nevertheless, the theatre is a place where, as Steven Bruhm correctly observes, "the imagination takes on flesh, a flesh that lives, breathes, and is subject to political forces, oppressions, and sorrows." (40) So, Lionel's encounter at the Drury Lane Theatre should serve as the ultimate imagined manifestation of his trauma. In many ways, the theater's aesthetics match Burke's, confronting Lionel with obscure objects of creatively uplifting terror:

The cavern shape the theatre adopted, the rattling rocks, the brilliance of the fire, the hazy shades that occasionally crossed the scene, and the music in tune with all witch-like fantasies allowed the imagination to run wild without fear of criticism or rebuke from reason or the emotions. In addition, seeing and performing tragedies fosters empathy and a sense of community. During the Drury Lane scene, Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor believes, "theatrical space, including stage and audience, becomes universal as reality itself appears to become true tragedy." "At this moment, English citizens briefly gain a national identity." 42 According to Lionel, "a stab of unbridled sadness shook every heart, and a cry of despair echoed from every mouth." I had become enthralled by Rosse's [the actor's] terrors and had become a common sensation (283). Lionel's "absorption" in "the global feeling" is congruent with Burke and Radcliffe's conceptions of the aesthetics of horror, in which "the mind is completely filled with its object." (43) In *Gothic Bodies: The Politics of Pain in Romantic Fiction*, Bruhm writes that "Burke envisions an almost boundless imagination that can form community" and that "Terror situates us in the social world, the outer world" in Radcliffe's work. Hence, (44) the sublime moment in the theatre contributes to the social solidarity of the audience, a community that suffers.

But Shelley's characters have trouble with the aesthetic of sublime fear because it is based on putting the mind above the body. This "preserves," in Clery's words, "the difference between horror and agony" (45) and maintains what Bruhm calls the "aesthetic distance" from the reality of suffering required for the development of the

sublime. When Lionel is "engulfed by" the Macbeth performance and the "universal sensation" of the theatre (283), he is detached from his body, the site of his trauma. Later in the novel, Lionel recognises terror's inadequacy as an expression of his anguish when he cries, "Farewell to the well-trodden stage; a truer tragedy is being portrayed on the world's vast stage that puts to shame imitation sadness" (322). Lionel abandons the formerly "soothing" sublime fictions (200) of horror, tragedy, and Gothic identity when he realises their inability to express the "truer tragedy" (322) of real-world suffering.

If they cannot adequately imagine their experiences in terms of engaging geographical spaces and the sensation of terror, Shelley's characters turn to their own bodies as the sites and signs of their distress and to horror, as defined by Radcliffe, as an alternative to a terror characterised by aesthetic distance and imaginative elevation. In fact, a portion of the Drury Lane scene's effect is not attributable to the theater's aesthetic or dramatic skill but rather to the actor's more visceral representation of pain, characterised by his corporeality and his genuine, felt horror: He was a subpar actor, but reality has elevated him to greatness. Each syllable was uttered with difficulty; his face was etched with genuine misery; his eyes shifted from abrupt horror to a dreadful fixation on the ground. (282-3).

This paradoxical, isolating enclosure of transgressive and porous bodies gives Shelley's characters a split sense of who they are, making them feel like they are both subject and object. Shelley used mirror imagery to make it hard to tell where her characters' bodies and identities ended and where they began. "Relation to one's own body... frequently finds its symbolic form in a privileged visual moment: self-reflection in the mirror," writes Brooks. (59) At pivotal scenes of *The Last Man*, mirrors emphasise the protagonists' loss of identity as their bodies both define and alter them into something unrecognisable. Although neither Perdita nor Lionel suffer from war or sickness in these situations, their emotional traumas are written on their bodies, and their meetings with their transformed bodies in the mirror highlight their liminality.

The mirror is initially conceived as a technique for stabilising identity and re-establishing rational and affective family bonds. Raymond, for instance, asserts that he will reunite with Perdita when she admits she still loves him: "Give her a mirror in which she can see herself; and, when she has mastered the necessary but difficult science of self-knowledge, she will quickly return to me her forgiveness, her kind thoughts, and her love." (154) Perdita's glance into the glass, however, rather than allowing her to "know herself" (154), divides her and

obscures the connection between her inner mental turmoil and her body:

She stood in front of a large mirror, gazing at her reflected image. Her light and graceful dress, the jewels that studded her hair and encircled her beautiful arms and neck, her small feet shod in satin, and her profuse and glossy tresses were to her clouded brow and gloomy countenance as a beautiful frame to a picture of a dark storm. Farewell, Perdita! Farewell, poor girl! Never again will you see yourself as you do now. I reside on a desolate plain, which is vast and without end and produces neither fruit nor flowers; in the centre is a single rock to which Perdita is chained, and thou beholdest the desolate plain stretching far away. (135)

Through these interactions with mirrors, Shelley's characters come to see themselves as living in the chasm between uplifting, creative, sublime terror and suffocating, freezing, visceral horror. Towards the conclusion of the novel, the landscape preserves both the sublimely Gothic "mingled light and darkness" of Constantinople (200) and the horrifying grotesqueness of "the earth's deep intestines" (376). After Lionel's shipwreck, for instance, he is struck by the ocean's "abysses" (444) and the "bounded" and "clipped" vision of the seascape from the shore (445), an image that evokes both the immensity of sublime awe and the confines of grotesque horror. Eventually, Lionel places himself within a terrain that induces vertigo through its "giddy height" and "empty space" (463) and duplicates the isolation of the Romantic grotesque through its tangible restrictions: "I was girded, walled in, and vaulted over by sevenfold barriers of solitude" (464). These images mirror the characteristics of the suffering bodies of Shelley's characters, which are alive and elevated by feeling but also constrained by their physical limitations. The Gothic aesthetic categories of imagining dread and chilling horror eventually merge in Shelley's attempt to convey the total experience of her afflicted characters, as they write their anguish on their bodies and project it onto the environment.

Thus, *The Last Man* expresses pain in potentially contradictory ways: as terror, which heightens sensation, elevates the imagination, and creates a sympathetic community; and as horror, which freezes the body and isolates the individual while revealing the body's transgressive permeability and susceptibility to infection and mortality. Moreover, the physical experiences of sublime fear, Romantic grotesque isolation and transgression, and ambiguous, fragmenting subjectivity are strengthened by their replication in a vertiginous, opaque, visceral, and confined landscape. Afflicted bodies and material landscapes that mimic the plague victims' spinning

uncertainty become locations of pain and the most effective means of portraying the terrible and horrifying experiences of war, political upheaval, household decay, and disease in the novel.

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